

A Cultural/ Tourism Vision for Downtown Geneva

Geneva NY

July 2002

Hutton Associates Inc.
Ernest Hutton · Philip Morris

prepared for

Cultural Center Steering Committee

Client

Cultural Center Steering Committee

Carl Fribolin, *Chair*

Greg Lavin, Secretary

Phil Beckley

Paul Bringewatt

Don Cass

Alaine Espenscheid

Diane Ewing

Kevin Fahy

Murray Heaton

Chris Iversen

Dan Mossien

Victor Nelson

Rich Rising

Bob Schick

Kevin Schoonover

Mark Wenderlich

Associated Consultant

Mossien Architects PC

Rochester NY

Dan Mossien AIA, *Principal*

Credits

Hutton Associates Inc.
22 West 19 Street 9th Floor
New York NY 10011

Ernest W. Hutton, Jr. AICP Assoc AIA
Principal

Philip Morris
Associate

Stakeholder Interviews

The following individuals and organizations participated in the workshops and interviews held during the visioning process:

Economic Development

Geneva Economic Development:

Bonnie Palmer

Geneva Industrial Development Agency: *Board*

Jobs for Geneva: *Board*

Geneva Historical Society: *Charlie Bauder, □*

Geneva Chamber of Commerce: *Melanie Stepp,*

Ontario Co Economic Development:

Mike Manikowski

Ontario Co Tourism: *Valerie Knoblach,*

Geneva Business Improvement District:

Pam Thompson

Discover Finger Lakes: *Lynn Herzig,*

Area Bankers: *Tom Bowers, Tom Kime,*

Pete Mairs, Bob Schick □

Education

Hobart & William Smith Colleges:

President Mark Gearan, Vice President

Paul Bringewatt, Provost Pat Stranahan

Finger Lakes Community College:

President Daniel Hayes

Keuka College: *President Joseph Burke*

Geneva School District:

Superintendent Joseph Stoner

BOCES: *Superintendent Joseph Marinelli,*

Asst. R.J. Rapoza

Hobart & William Smith: *Drama Department:*
Pat Collins

Hobart & William Smith: *Dance Department:*

Donna Davenport

Keuka College: *Drama Department:*

Mark Wenderlich

Geneva Library: *Lindsay Ruth*

Geneva Boys and Girls Club: *John Kenny*

Geneva General Hospital: *Diane Ewing*

Arts

SOH/Ontario County Arts Council:

Charles and Gwen McCauslin,

Greg Barnard, Dorothy Mariner □

Wayne County Arts Council: *Larry Ann Evans*

Seneca County Arts Council: *Edith Delavan*

Midlakes Theater Experience: *Keith Childs*

Marcus Whitman Central School District/
ECO Program, Cummins Nature Center:

Keith Ettinger

Keith Ettinger

Geneva Theater Guild and Geneva Youth

Theater: *Eleanor Stearns*

Geneva Concerts: *Ford Weiskittel,*

Meg Heaton, Hilda Lam Collins

Martin Luther King Chorus: *Patti Blue*

Finger Lakes Symphony:

Mary Smith, Nancy Strelau

Finger Lakes Arts Grants:

Connie Fredericks-Malone

Downstairs Cabaret Theater: *Chris Kowalsky*

GEVA Theater of Rochester:

Charles Varin John Quinlivan

Garth Fagan Dance of New York and Rochester

Grady S. Bailey III

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 A Community Process 5

*2 Arts & Lake District:
A Development Process for
Downtown Geneva 7*

*2.1 A Community of Artists:
Culture as Part of Everyday Life 7*

*2.2 The Seneca Lakefront as
an Unclaimed Resource.....8*

*2.3 Art, Education, Recreation:
Key Elements of Economic Development 8*

2.4 A New District: Reknitting the Fabric.....9

*2.5 Building on Opportunity:
A Central and Strategic Location.....10*

*2.6 The Arts & Lake District Concept Plan:
Long-Term Vision/ Short-Term Actions.....14*

*The District Concept: Integrating
Cultural/ Educational Opportunities
with Economic Development
The Arts Anchor: Smith Opera House/ Arts Academy/
Cultural Center/ Childrens' Museum
The Lakefront Anchor: Open Space & Recreation/
Outdoor Events/ Hotel & Conference Center
Connecting Corridors and Downtown Development*

3. Implementation: How to Make it Happen 19

3.1 Public Policy: Zoning and Incentives 19
*Creating a District
Bringing Residential Development Downtown*

3.2 Short Term Actions 20
3.2 Organization and Public Involvement 20
*It Takes a Partnership
Arts & Lake District Coordinating Committee
Community Involvement and Volunteer Efforts*

4. Next Steps and Conclusion 23

List of Figures

1 Current Planning Process..... 6

2 Regional Context.....11

3 City Context.....13

4 Arts & Lake District Concept Plan.....16

5 It Takes a Partnership.....21

6 District Development Corporation.....22

*Foreword and Summary:
A Letter from the Consultants*

As a point of perspective, we have been observers of Geneva for nearly two decades. During our recent visit, two of the original trustees of the Smith Opera House remembered a consultant visit by Philip Morris in the early 1980's as the Opera House was suffering early growing pains. In addition, four years ago he examined cultural and tourism issues in the Finger Lakes region and spent time meeting with key cultural and community leaders around the long range opportunities of the region.

During these last decades, while suburban development, commercial sprawl and the internet have put great pressures on downtowns and urban fabrics, Geneva has done better than most small cities. Geneva has a downtown life: it has not lost its historic fabric; the colleges are stronger now than ever and important to the city's character and economy; the relationship to Seneca Lake is unique and an important part of the cityscape.

We were invited to look specifically at the development potential of the neighborhood around the Smith Opera House. This neighborhood, excluding the Opera House itself, has done less well than other parts of the downtown and has a number of significant properties that are abandoned or woefully underutilized. The invitation was to examine the opportunity and feasibility of establishing a cultural center adjacent to the Opera House that might build on its catalytic presence. Such a center would follow the architectural possibilities that had been imagined for the site by Dan Mossien based on discussions with local visionaries—ideas for new performance spaces and associated administrative space for cultural and not-for-profit groups.

We came to the community with what we knew both from past experience in Geneva and our own work elsewhere, a sense of the substantive efforts of community volunteers to come together around the question of a cultural center, and an understanding of the good faith investment by a number of players to pay for the work we were to undertake.

Our process followed a straightforward but participatory approach: touring and scanning the site and community; interviewing with the client and as many stakeholders as appropriate; and preparing our observations for draft consideration.

This process led us to some early observations. First, it was clear that while the Smith Opera House has been a successful regional magnet, its institutional development in the last decade has not been significant. The Opera House runs amazingly well given available staffing and resources, but those resources are not enough to allow considerations of growth. As we interviewed the cultural community (see our report), we were left with a similar impression with respect to Geneva itself-- there are a number of strong and interesting activities and programs in the community, but there are, in fact, more "new ideas" and dreams than there are existing activities constricted by inadequate space or facilities.

In other words, our first reaction was to say that there was not apparent at this time the organizational or programmatic demand sufficient to justify a substantive investment in new cultural center performance facilities.

At the same time, however, we started to take a broader look at the community and the resources that first attracted us years ago: deep citizen commitment; culture ingrained into everyday life; excellent public sector leadership; the downtown's infrastructure; and real but

unrealized character of the city symbolized by Seneca Lake. We questioned the community about the enormous divide between downtown and the lake caused by Route 5/ 20. We learned of the ongoing significant efforts to look at intelligent lakefront development We learned of the emerging work of the downtown Business Improvement District and of interest in new relationships with the colleges that could lead to new downtown activities.

As we took this broader look, we observed that the efforts of the community were highly divided— not in an adversarial way, but in a way that split many good efforts into too many different directions. This seemed to us to be part of the problem with the original focused study request. Could Geneva use culture as a catalyst for development? Looked at in a larger, downtown-wide sense, possibly it could—especially if combined with education and tourism initiatives, for which there was clear potential demand. But this would work only if there could be a more coordinated focus and strategy for the downtown’s development efforts than has existed in the past.

This thinking led us to what might be considered a surprising conclusion. Our report, instead of answering the original question, asked a broader and more critical question: what would be the best next step for the arts of the community in the context of its downtown?

Our recommendation is to look at Geneva’s major assets in a holistic way. Its culture is tied to its location. In the past, that connection was more obvious, as out the downtown’s back door, one could hear the splashing of the waves from the lake. Now, with the lake hundreds of feet farther away, we have to relink downtown and its cultural resources with its waterfront location. The “look and feel” of Geneva is both about its location on a major

inland body of water and its nicely scaled, largely intact architectural and artistic heritage. Could it be that using available resources to simultaneously focus on both of these assets would improve the opportunities for each? We think so.

To that end, we are recommending that downtown be redefined as an ‘Arts & Lake District’. This is not simply a matter of drawing a blue line around those areas and legally approving such a district. We think it goes deeper into merging existing efforts into a new empowered organization that can think and act and deliver on a more comprehensive approach—creating new relevant programs both around the Smith and on the waterfront, linking these efforts by crossing the Route 5/20 barrier in such a way that the glory of Geneva’s heritage can be united with its future as a focus for regional tourism.

Is there room in this vision for a cultural center? Absolutely— as part of a revitalized sense of the community’s opportunities and assets. Can education find a role in this newly defined sense of downtown? We cannot image how that would not happen. Can the Smith Opera House itself grow to be a greater attraction than it is today? Certainly— and especially as part of a broader community effort that can shoulder risk and broker relationships that the Smith cannot do alone.

* * * * *

Thirty years ago, Gian Carlo Menotti imaged a ‘music festival for the New World’ on an isolated peninsula outside of Charleston, South Carolina. He did not imagine, however, that the Mayor of Charleston would take this idea, and with Menotti’s help within 10 years create a downtown environment where the successful “Piccolo Spoleto” festival would use arts to focus

national and international attention on the heritage of the City of Charleston. Tied with its history and architecture, the arts have catalyzed Charleston and made it not just famous, but a great community in which to live and work.

That model represents what might be possible for Geneva:

- a thematic summer festival that takes advantage of the City's regional Finger Lakes location and seasonal tourism market;
- a new district plan and program that unites downtown and its lakefront, emphasizing reuses for historic architecture, such as upper floor housing, and new uses to reinforce current investments, such as a meeting and conference center;
- using this broad-based initiative to leverage a year-round community cultural and educational framework—an 'arts academy' and related performance or other activity spaces that take advantage of Smith Opera House facilities, Geneva's area colleges, its school system and youth programs, and the City's most important critical resource, its incredible civic spirit.

This report sets the stage for such an effort.

1. A Community Process: Defining a Vision

In January 2002, the Finger Lakes Cultural Committee, an ad hoc coalition of public, private and civic groups, including cultural and educational institutions, engaged the planning/ urban design firm of Hutton Associates, Inc.—Ernest Hutton, Principal, and Philip Morris, Associate. The City Industrial Development Agency and private sources provided the funding.

The charge was to develop a vision, based on community input, of how to leverage the energy of a proposed ‘cultural center’ to benefit the central area of the City of Geneva, the City as a whole, and the surrounding region. The process was to involve a wide spectrum of residents, businesspeople, education professionals and city officials in evaluating options for study area development.

The adjacent chart illustrates this intensive short-term work process, essentially a three-stage approach:

- Examination of issues and opportunities, including extensive meetings with community stakeholders, with immediate on-site consultant response, defining a long-term vision and short-term planning/ urban design priorities;
- Refinement of the approach in terms of additional program opportunities and further steps to implement the recommendations; and
- Documentation of results as a written vision plan/ suggested implementation strategy

This final product, encapsulated in this report and executive summary, defines what we have heard and outlines our recommendations for the future direction of

the planning and implementation process for the Center and associated projects.

These recommendations include the relationship between its location and linkages to other related facilities, its potential program and how it relates to associated cultural programs and economic development opportunities, who should be involved and how (organizations, people) and with what kind of organizational vehicle. They describe how we feel the project relates to other public or private projects—complementing existing projects and leveraging future initiatives.

This report represents that final step— a strategic vision plan for the site area and its context.. Based on the initial stakeholder outreach process, over 100 Geneva citizens have been involved in helping define issues and identify development potential. What is more, the organizations that many of those individuals represent involve in turn many hundreds more voices that can be engaged in making the potential into reality.

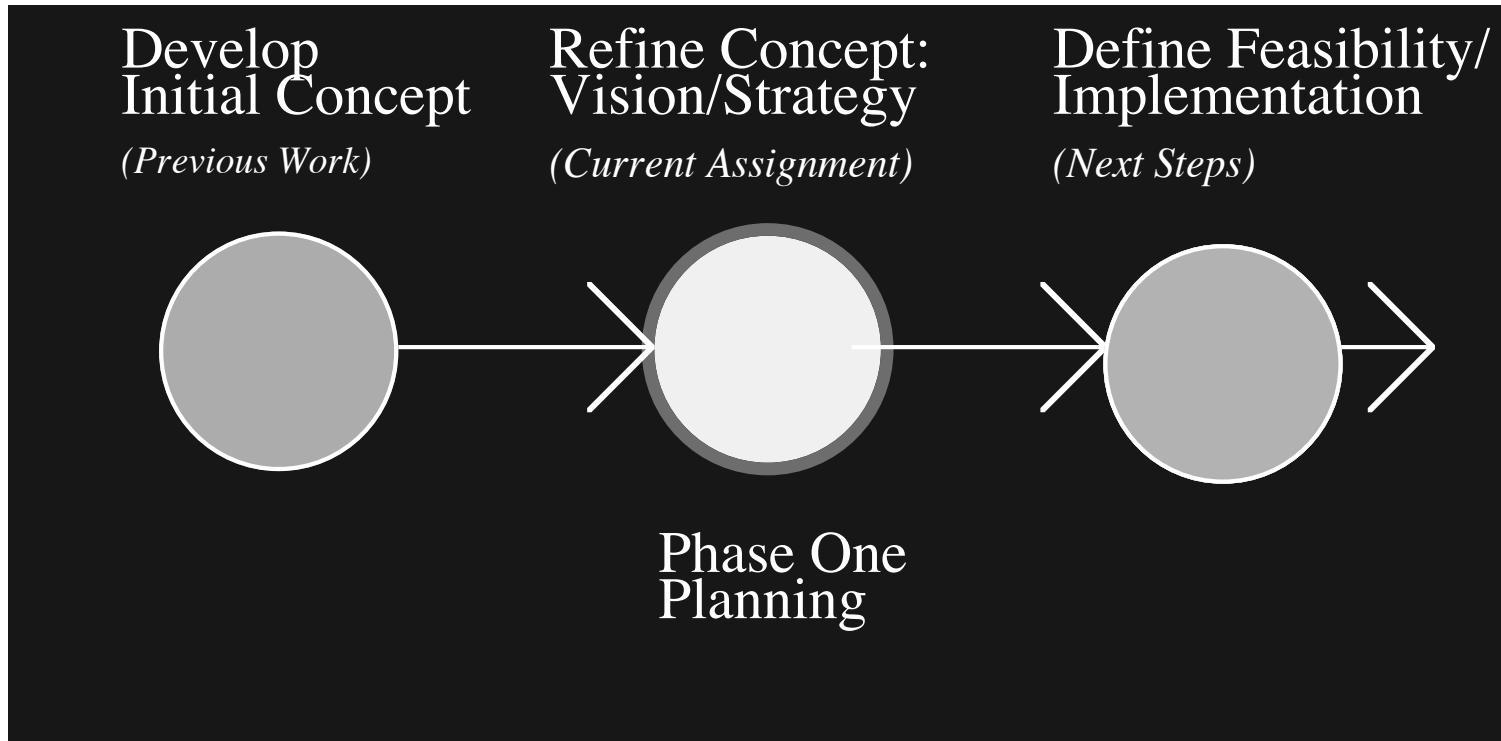
This stakeholder involvement has included a variety of different audiences:

- meetings with the project-specific advisory committee;
- individual ‘key person interviews’ and group workshops (some over meals) with administrative and teaching personnel from local colleges, businesspeople, representatives of civic groups and the Business Improvement District, and local city, county and regional staff and public officials;
- an evening dinner meeting with over 20 arts presenters, teachers, and administrators;
- a further evening meeting with over 50 additional public officials, not-for-profit groups, and other private interests;

- presentation of initial findings to the project advisory committee;
- a second trip to refine recommendations with key stakeholders and discuss implementation;
- consultation by phone and conference call with advisory committee participants;

- a third trip for a final presentation of conclusions and recommendations to the project committee and invited participants.

Next steps emphasize the need to broaden further the stakeholder involvement into wider public participation.



2. Geneva Context: An Important Regional Center

2.1 Geneva's Self-Image: A Tourism Gateway

Geneva's self-image—how it presents itself to the outside world and wants itself to be-- is best characterized by the self-image vividly described in the City's website (quoted below in its entirety):

Welcome to the Gateway to the Finger Lakes region. With its setting on beautiful Seneca Lake in the heart of central New York, the City of Geneva offers residents and visitors alike the opportunity to walk, bike, or simply sit to enjoy lake views that truly inspire.

You'll observe a downtown dedicated to its past with amenities for the present. Take the time to sit in a rare and historic "atmospheric opera house" for a unique experience, whether an off-Broadway show, a concert, or a current movie on one of the largest screens you'll find anywhere. Visit the splendid shops for fresh flowers, unusual gifts, antiques, and local memorabilia. Enjoy a unique eating experience in a comfortable restaurant, or outdoors at any of several sidewalk cafes. Stay at our spectacular lakefront hotel, with facilities and services for two or 200. The City of Geneva is also central to the exciting Finger Lakes wine country, rivaling California for quality and award-winning wines.

Steeped in the past with ties to the Erie Canal and glass manufacturing, there's a wealth of wonders for history buffs. The historic district containing rowhouses and a

first-class museum offers plenty to peruse. Walk through an historic home preserved for posterity. Browse diverse exhibits for a window to the past. Learn about glass, important in the past and a key industry in Geneva today. Read about Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman doctor in the United States, educated right here at Geneva Medical College. Now internationally known as Hobart and William Smith Colleges, it offers an outstanding liberal arts education.

Glance beyond the facades of wonderful old buildings and vital businesses and realize that Geneva has a committed populace that understands the need to preserve its past while building for its future. A dedicated City staff has created an inviting cityscape with brick-paved side- and crosswalks, enchanting old light fixtures, and clean streets. The lakefront bursts with trails, boat launches, and, oh, those views!! There are even great places to fish and Seneca Lake is well-known for its prize-winning trout. The lakefront is alive with the present and awaiting future excitement, including a tour boat, equipment rentals, and more festivals.

Geneva, with its nearly 14,000 residents, is equidistant from Rochester, Syracuse, and Ithaca, and offers opportunities not often found in a city its size. City government is progressive in its offerings of a full range of services and programs, supporting business, revitalization, and new development. With generous housing rehabilitation and homeownership programs, there's an exciting new spirit of community and improved neighborhoods. A well-capitalized loan fund and an active industrial development agency offer potential new and expanding businesses the help they need to succeed.

And Geneva has big business—Guardian Industries—a worldwide glass manufacturer; Zotos—the number three

haircare products manufacturer in the world; CCN-internationally known for its high-end office furniture; and more. With a shovel-ready industrial park and a bustling incubator facility offering flexible space, there's a place for everything and the help to get it there. A soon-to-be-realized agriculture and food technology research park at Geneva will offer land and space, and a valuable connection to Cornell University's Agricultural Experiment Station.

On top of all this, Geneva's location at the tip of beautiful Seneca Lake makes it an excellent origination point for the many wondrous attractions, educational opportunities, and fun-time destinations located throughout the Finger Lakes region---truly the Gateway to the Finger Lakes.

Whether a resident or a visitor, join those who already recognize the City of Geneva as a great place to live; to relax; to shop; to sample food and wine; to exercise the body and mind; to build a successful business. Where better to do all this than in a friendly lakefront city ready to welcome you!

How to build on this evocative self-image and realize the potential described in this description of the city is the challenge to which participants in our workshops continually referred.

2.2 Regional Location: Reinforcing Geneva within the 'Triangle'

Geneva, as shown in the adjacent map, occupies a key position in the larger Finger Lakes area and surrounding region.

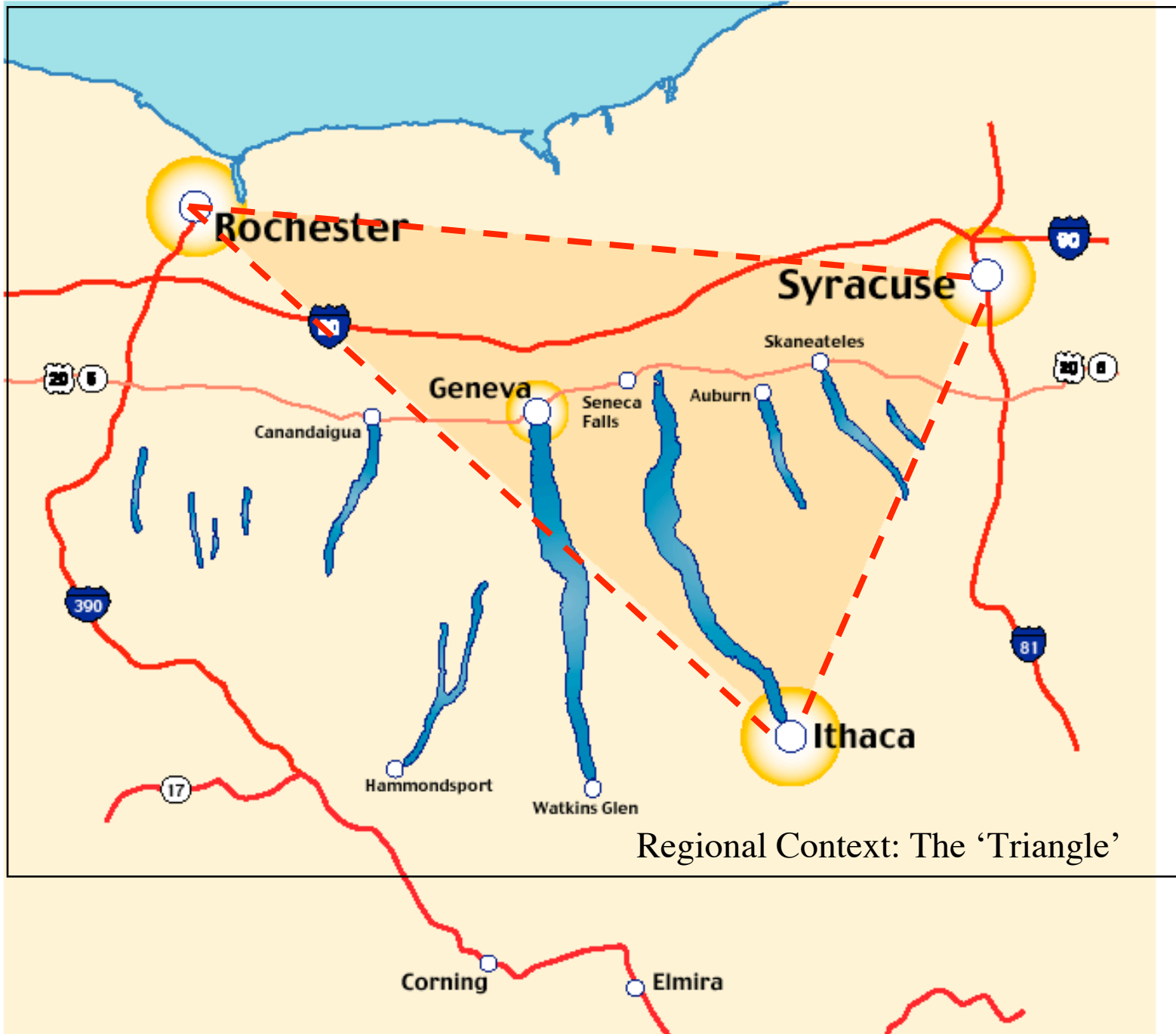
Bounded by what has been characterized as 'the Triangle'—the three anchor cities of Rochester, Syracuse, and Ithaca—Geneva is equidistant from each, and shares market demand and potential represented by their populations and interests.

At the same time, Geneva is in the center of the Finger Lakes area defined within the Triangle. Its proximity to the I-90 east-west interstate highway as well as various other state routes makes it a logical gateway to the Finger Lakes for tourists and businesses,

Of the three surrounding cities, Geneva probably has the strongest relationship to Rochester— its eastern suburbs extend into the Geneva orbit, and many of its arts organizations use Geneva as a satellite venue.

Syracuse also has a strong relationship to Geneva, although somewhat tempered by Syracuse's growth orientation to the east and intervening communities between the city and Geneva to the west. This relatively untapped market represents a further opportunity.

Ithaca, home of Cornell University and Ithaca College, has a strong arts tradition and represents fruitful partnership possibilities with Geneva's emerging arts community.



2.2 Downtown Context: Location and Surrounding Development

Anchors for Downtown Activity

Two major activity centers can serve as anchors for new downtown development, both of which are sites for arts and tourism development:

- *The emerging cultural area surrounding the Smith Opera House.*
The seminal Opera House revitalized an unutilized resource and set the stage for adjacent projects, including the proposed Finger Lakes Cultural Center and other adjacent activities.
- *The potential of the Seneca Lakefront.*
Once the active center for economic activity for downtown Geneva, the lakefront has been filled, separated by highway projects, and long ignored. Recent hotel development and recent ‘planning within the plan’ workshops have again captured the public imagination as to the lakefront’s development potential.

How these anchors are developed will define how downtown Geneva will emerge as a central activity center for the entire Finger Lakes region.

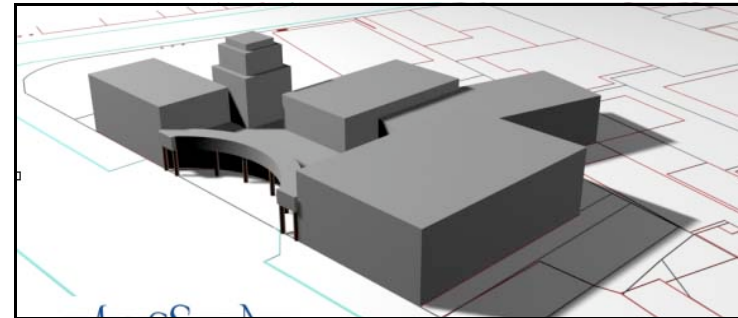
Downtown Framework

A closer look at Geneva’s downtown context reinforces the importance of the cultural area and the lakefront as its two most important tourism and development assets.

Paralleled by Exchange Street, Geneva’s Main Street bisects NYS Routes 5&20, the local east-west artery, and connects to Interstate 90 seven miles to the north. Historic neighborhoods surround downtown on the west, south and north. The lakefront takes up most of the eastern segment.

Key institutions flank the central core:□

- To the west of downtown, the Geneva Free Library is an important public facility. In addition to its book circulation function, it holds a variety of events, including readings and seminars. The library has expressed great interest in adding and coordinating its programs with a potential arts district.

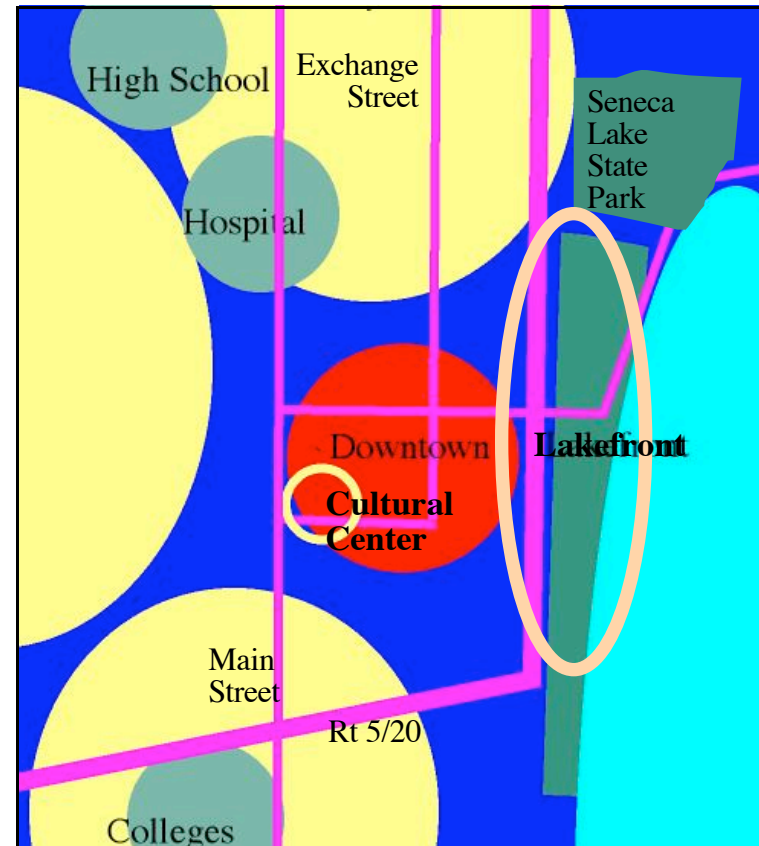


Mossein Associates

A Concept for the proposed Finger Lakes Cultural Center, to be located on Main Street around the corner from the Smith Opera House.

- Immediately diagonally across Seneca Street from the Smith Opera House, the Finger Lakes Community College has an in-city campus, complementing its more rural campus a half hour further to the west. At its Geneva location, the FLCC puts an emphasis on adult education (often with a direct vocational/ job training bent). It is also interested in participating in arts district.
- Hobart and William Smith Colleges to the south, is a largely self-contained campus but an institution which is keenly aware of its relationship to its community context. The College has an active drama and dance program focused mostly on content and performance and less on theatre crafts. On the College's 'wish list' is the desire for a performing arts center; it is assumed that it would be on-campus but the Colleges might consider components being located downtown.

In the foreseeable future, both theatre and dance faculty have expressed interest in downtown locations for classes and performances.
- The Finger Lakes Health hospital system and Geneva High School facilities (soon to be joined by a new junior high school) are located immediately north of downtown.



Downtown Context

3. Culture and Tourism as Development Catalysts for Downtown Geneva

3.1 A Community of Arts and Education: Culture as Part of Everyday Life

Geneva already is known as a center for music, visual arts and theatre in the Finger Lakes region, intimately linked to its outstanding cultural and educational institutions:

- *the Smith Opera House*, recently renovated as a beautiful 1500-seat legitimate theatre, is the host for a variety of musical, dramatic and film events (many presented by Geneva Concerts, the Geneva Theatre Guild or in conjunction with other local groups).
- *local Geneva School District* high school and middle school programs focus on performing and visual arts;
- *programs at Hobart and William Smith Colleges* give intensive training in fine arts and theatre and provide public performances and exhibits by guest artists.
- *other institutions such as Keuka College and the Finger Lakes Community College* have outstanding and expanding programs in technical theatre support, hospitality training and culinary arts.
- *the Geneva Historical Society*, with its four historic houses and main museum headquarters, is the institutional memory of Geneva, preserving and interpreting local landmarks and artifacts.
- *the Geneva Free Library*, in addition to serving as the main archival facility of the regional library system, sponsors readings and other cultural programs.
- *community-based programs* such as 'America's Promise' (initiated by the Finger Lakes Health

Systems Agency), helping Geneva's youth by linking social, cultural and educational institutions, focused on innovative new programs and management systems.

- *talented artists*, from impressionist Arthur Dove to contemporary craftspeople, have called Geneva home;
- *popular events* such as the 'Whale Watch' (initiated by Geneva Community Projects, Inc.) draw participants from the local area and the larger northeast region.

And the region itself has additional cultural attractions:

- *musical and dance groups*, including the Finger Lakes Symphony and the Garth Fagan Dance group;
- *outdoor concerts* at the 'shell' located on the Finger Lakes Community College campus, featuring the Rochester Philharmonic as well as larger popular music concerts ranging from rock to jazz;
- *other seasonal attractions*, such as racing at Watkins Glen and tours of Finger Lake wineries (the largest, most diverse community of wine producers in the Eastern United States-- the twenty-one wineries along the shores of Seneca Lake alone offer individual and unique expressions from one of America's finest wine districts);
- *innovative educational initiatives* such as the Midlakes School District's magnet high school theatre program, the middle school environmental program at the Cummings Nature Preserve, and the NYS BOCES program's participation in creative regional approaches to individual local issues and opportunities;
- *the nearby urban centers* of Rochester, Syracuse, and Ithaca, featuring plays, concerts, and museum or gallery exhibits as well as restaurants and night life.

The prevailing attitude, impressive to a first time visitor, is that the arts and education are an important part of the fabric of Geneva. However, the city has never taken advantage of its rich cultural heritage to its own long term benefit.

3.2 The Seneca Lakefront as an Unclaimed Resource

At the same time, Geneva has turned its back on its defining geographic feature, historic Seneca Lake. Photos of Geneva's 19th and early 20th century lakefront heritage may be seen in various public buildings—visions of steamboat cruises, piers filled with buildings and people, a downtown shoreline defined by adjacent buildings and urban life. Through a combination of unfortunate decisions over the last fifty years, the shoreline has been gradually filled, separated by highways, and finally almost forgotten—out of sight, out of mind.

In the late 1980s, a major community effort began to focus on the lakefront with the relocation of Routes 5&20, creating 60 acres of city-owned land. The opportunity to recapture the lakefront has been recognized. Construction of the waterfront hotel, landscaping of the state park, and staging of public events have all helped raise the consciousness, and jog the memory, of local citizens. Workshops and studies are now underway to define next steps. These work products need to be integrated with cultural planning in the context of downtown as a whole.

Only when the waterfront is relinked with downtown as a single integrated district, minimizing the highway barrier with magnets of activity and structured links back to other attractions, will Seneca Lake again be part of the city's identity and character.

3.3 Culture and Education: Key Elements of Tourism and Economic Development

Leveraging this arts and lakefront activity and vitality into economic development is the city's key opportunity—capturing the market of the estimated 1 million visitors a year who pass through the region, Geneva can use seasonal tourism as the boost to its local economy (as do other comparable centers such as Niagara-on-the-Lake), while using education as the means of providing year-round stability (such as Williamstown MA).

The development and promotion of regional attractions—performing and visual arts activities, events celebrating the City's lakefront heritage—can create the base for capturing this tourism market.

At the same time, education, a major Geneva industry, is a key component of this approach. A focus on youth—education and training as an investment in the future—can combine quality and creativity, traditional hallmarks of the arts, with an emphasis on new jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities.

In turn, this economic development activity can both support and be supported by an aggressive emphasis on recreation, education and the arts—developing skills and talent in support of cultural tourism, which will support new markets and new businesses for Geneva.

3.4. A Framework to Implement and Link Arts and Tourism Projects

Integrating Cultural/ Educational Opportunities with Economic Development

Defining downtown as a thematic district structured around Geneva's two major arts and tourism economic development projects—the Smith Opera House/ cultural center area and the Seneca Lakefront and hotel— will ensure that these activities operate in a mutually supportive and interactive way. Both projects attract a regional draw of attendees, a base of market demand that supports the economic sustainability not only of current facilities and local merchants, but will also make possible other cultural and educational activities and venues.

The adjacent concept plan describes these opportunities, some of which are new ideas growing out of this study, some of which are already in the planning stages:

1 Finger Lakes Cultural Center Performance Spaces

As the focus of the previous Cultural Center concept study, a complex of performance spaces is proposed as a new arts facility located on Main Street diagonally to the rear of the Smith Opera House. This concept, to be tested in subsequent work, is to house two performance spaces, a 150-seat chamber facility and a 300+ seat larger music/ theatre space.

Its location would help anchor this part of Main Street relative to William Hobart Smith Colleges to the south, the adjacent Library to the

west, and the High School/ Health Center complexes to the north.

It is not yet clear what are the right sizes or programs for these performance spaces—their detailed demand needs to be documented in the context of the Smith Opera House program, as part of the process resolving its remaining facility needs and potential, including additional backstage space, loading and theatrical infrastructure.

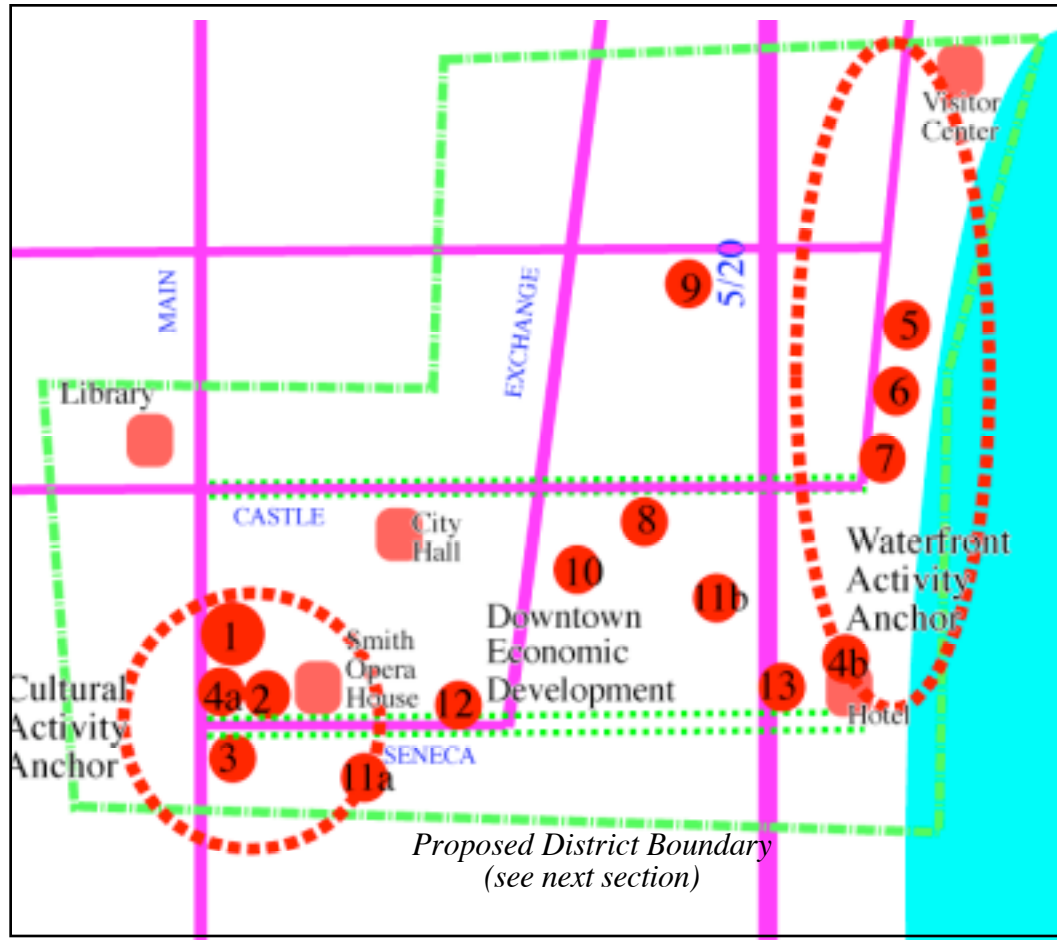
2 The Geneva Arts Academy

The Arts Academy (a concept which emerged from this study's workshop process) would be an intergenerational music, dance and arts educational facility with classroom spaces and practice spaces. There was great enthusiasm for this project among both potential users (the school system and local youth groups) and potential teachers (faculty from Hobart and William Smith Colleges and other artists and educators).

This new facility could possibly be housed in a renovation of the building immediately to the west of the Smith Opera House, linked to the Smith backstage as a living laboratory for theatre technical skills.

Students could range from separate populations of grade, high school and college students (with teaching by local Hobart William Smith or other college faculty, supplementing local schoolteachers).

- 1 Finger Lakes Cultural Center
- 2 Arts Academy
- 3 Children's Museum
- 4 Conference Center (Optional Sites a & b)
- 5 Seneca Shell
- 6 Discover the Finger Lakes Center
- 7 Lakefront Amenities: Shops, Parks, Restaurants, Marina



- 8 Dove Studio/ Historical Museum
- 9 Transportation Center
- 10 Upper floor residential lofts
- 11 Downtown devt sites: parking lots (a), rear facades by lakefront (b)
- 12 Streetscape/ pedestrian links to lake: Seneca and Castle Streets
- 13 5/20 Highway/ pedestrian improvements

Other possibilities include mentoring opportunities for local and visiting artists and programs for preschoolers (visual arts and basic musical orientation, using innovative rhythm instruction). Potential organizational partners, including BOCES, have expressed interest in participation, complementing rather than competing with other sponsored programs.

3 *Children’s Museum*

Long discussed as a needed addition to Geneva public institutions, the Children’s Museum would be a valuable social activity center for city families and a tourism destination for the surrounding region (including Rochester, Syracuse and Ithaca and beyond).

This exciting program could be located in a building such as the current (but possibly soon to be vacated) FLCC building at the southern corner of Main Street and Seneca

4 *Finger Lakes Conference Center*

A number of Geneva organizations and institutions need meeting space, and the hotel is crying out for space to feed a potential regional conference market. A new conference center facility could be adjacent to the proposed Cultural Center and utilize its small performance venues (4a)—or it could be seen as an adjunct to the hotel on the lakefront (4b).

The demand needs to be quantified in terms of a defined program and evaluated in terms of preferable locations.

5 *The Seneca Shell: Outdoor Event Venue*

Large concerts at the 15,000 seat bandshell now located at the Finger Lakes Community College create undesirable impacts to the campus atmosphere. Moving the shell or creating a new (possibly smaller) facility on the Seneca Lakefront can add another tourism destination to Geneva’s economic development agenda.

Concert performers should reflect the types of audiences desired, with a possibility of ‘themed’ multiple events a part of weekend ‘package’ deals. Promotion organizations such as American Landmark Festivals could manage a program of tourism-generating but artistically relevant attractions.

6 *‘Discover the Finger Lakes’ Center*

A major tourism-related interpretive center focused on Finger Lakes history, ecology and culture has long been proposed, but has never come to fruition. Geneva is the logical gateway venue for such a facility—easy to access, next to a downtown with needed support and services, with an attractive and available lakefront site. The Center can be the originating venue for wine, cultural and heritage tours of the region.

Local partners— the City, BOCES, colleges, other not-for-profits, wineries and other area businesses—are still interested in the concept, if (as with the Arts Academy) such a center can be designed to complement, not compete with, other programs under development. Creating such a center in the context of this plan can improve its chances of funding and success.

7 *Related Waterfront Activities*

Based on the creation of anchor attractions, additional waterfront amenities and activities—marina, shops and restaurants, related park space— become possible in the context of downtown cultural and tourism development.

Opportunities described in the recent waterfront planning workshops include tourism retail (wine showcases, other shops and boutiques, restaurants) and creation of new marina facilities and related water activities. A full season of events can include building on the popular Whale Watch but including other activities—from the farmers’ market to art shows, food tastings from local restaurants, or other initiatives.

8 *Arthur Dove Studio/ Geneva Historical Museum*

One of Geneva’s important local sons, painter Arthur Dove had his studio in the third floor space of an attractive downtown warehouse building. The Geneva Historical Museum, now housed in one of its collection of historic houses, lacks space to exhibit all of its collection.

Locating an expanded Museum in the Dove Building could provide an ideal facility and an additional tourism anchor for downtown.

9 *Downtown Transportation Center*

Current City plans for creating a transportation center, possibly in conjunction with a transit linkage and associated retail opportunities, is an additional downtown building block.

10 *Upper floor housing*

Downtown has a valuable untapped resource in its upper story spaces, especially along Exchange Street between Seneca and Canal. These spaces can provide residential development for a 24-hour people presence downtown, improving the economic stability of individual buildings and adding to the tax base for the City.

Capture and marketing of these spaces could take as a model recent work in Jamestown NY, in which consolidation of adjacent properties (or agreements with adjacent owners) was coupled with innovative ways to solve code and egress issues, such as sharing new fire stairs. The result in Geneva can be a supply of attractive loft units to match what seems to be a potential demand for such large flexible urban space on the part of college faculty and graduating students as well as singles, couples and empty nesters.

11 *Other downtown development sites*

Other potential building sites downtown should also be examined as opportunities for proactive development – especially along Seneca Street, where parking lots can if redeveloped provide the retail continuity and pedestrian ambiance needed to link the Smith Opera House/ cultural anchor to the lakefront.

At the same time, the neglected rear of downtown that turns its back on the lake can become an inviting waterfront façade if improvements can be made to the adjacent highway. Building over the existing parking lots without losing capacity can

provide opportunities for water-facing housing or office/ commercial uses.

12 *Street and Streetscape Improvements*

Another important way to create the needed links between the various downtown anchors is through additional public investment in street and streetscape improvements.

As proposed in the Mossien Associates phase one plans for the cultural center, Seneca Street can be attractively upgraded for both autos and pedestrians with a landscaped median, crosswalks, and improved paving.

These pedestrian improvements should be continued down the alley extension of Seneca Street to the lakefront hotel and other planned activities.

Canal Street and other downtown corridors leading to the lakefront should get similar attention.

13 *Highway Improvements*

Crossing the Route 5/ 20 highway is a special challenge that will require innovative solutions. Above- grade walkways are one approach, but often cause as many problems as they solve—people will resist going up and down two stories of stairs to cross a 50-foot-wide strip of asphalt, and the result will be continued segregation of one part of downtown from another.

“Traffic calming” along the highway is therefore a key approach. Geneva does not need 60 mph non-stop traffic dividing its downtown from its lakefront. As drivers enter an inhabited area, they should expect to slow down, stop at traffic lights, and behave in a subservient way to pedestrians who can then cross the highway at attractively designed crosswalks. This behavior can be made intuitive, painless and aesthetically pleasing to drivers through landscaping, paving, and signage as well as interesting adjacent development.

The landscape division of NYS DOT’s ‘scenic byway’ program deals with these issues of rural highways passing through urbanized areas, and has developed a number of interesting tools and techniques for achieving similar objectives.



Mossein Associates

With a new boulevarded median and landscaped pedestrian connections to the lakefront, Seneca Street can become an important corridor linking the Smith Opera House and cultural complex to lake-related facilities.



The lakefront is an opportunity site for events, activity space and tourism facilities as well as open space and marinas.



Crossing Route 5/20 is not a pleasant pedestrian experience. Thanks to the roadway, the lakefront and hotel are completely isolated from the downtown.

2.7 Reknitting the Fabric of Downtown: The Arts & Lake District

Based on this rich opportunity for cultural and tourism initiatives in the downtown and waterfront, the potential is clear for linking the Smith Opera House, Main Street, and related arts activities to the west, Exchange Street and Geneva's traditional downtown in the middle, and the Seneca Lakefront on the eastern edge.

A new 'Arts and Lake District' that incorporates these opportunities and linkages can direct community energy into balanced and purposeful implementation.

Planning and implementation of this district should emphasize the following factors:

- *The district should be comprehensive:*
It should use cultural and tourism programs and facilities to leverage progress on a wide variety of fronts:
 - economic development (with new audiences, an enhanced market for local merchants and increased revenues for the city),
 - education and training (with a focus on developing artistic quality and on creating related cultural and tourism jobs),
 - housing and neighborhood development (increasing opportunities for a true 24-hour mixed-use community),
 - transportation and infrastructure (not only for the auto but attractive and convenient pedestrian and transit access between downtown arts and businesses and the Seneca Lakefront.

- *The district should be balanced:*
It should focus on all of the above program areas simultaneously and with equal energy and enthusiasm.
- *The district must be interrelated:*
It must be internally connected, making sure that development proceeds according to an integrated approach, in which transportation improvements assist economic development and job training, or development of new housing and institutions is tied to education and training.
- *Its development must be strategic:*
Identified opportunities cannot be developed all at once. Decisions and actions must take place within a carefully planned and modulated strategy of short and long term phases. Initial steps must be calibrated to available funding and program availability, but should emphasize leveraging additional resources for later more ambitious initiatives.
- *The district must respond to its context:*
The Downtown Arts & Lake District must emphasize connections to its city-wide surroundings— to the Colleges, high schools, library and hospital, to adjacent neighborhoods, to regional transportation links and related programs.

The area has suffered for too long from isolation, brought about by physical barriers (such as the lakefront highway) or by economic barriers (lack of seed capital for entrepreneurial activity).

Using a themed district to bridge these barriers and break down this isolation can give Geneva a new local identity and regional mission.



3. Implementation: How to Make it Happen

Making the vision a reality means moving from plans to action. A number of steps can be taken immediately, but the stage also needs to be set for longer-term projects. Following is a description of the variety of activities that need to be set in motion.

3.1 Public Policy: Zoning and Incentives

The City can play a decisive role in establishing and implementing the Arts & Lake District. Now just a concept, the district can be made a reality by public actions taken to give structure to the proposed plan:

- establishing the zoning framework for District development through boundary definition, associated regulations, and design guidelines;
- taking on a proactive role through establishment of incentives, creation of infrastructure, and initiation of projects.

Zoning framework

The proposed zoning approach is to define the downtown area as an ‘overlay district,’ superimposing additional unifying development standards over the existing zoning. The District’s effective boundaries would be similar to downtown’s commonly-understood edges: entering from the north along Exchange Street at Railroad Place and incorporating both sides of Castle Street to the north, both sides of Main Street to the west, extending back to the

Lake along Elizabeth Blackwell Street, with the Seneca Lakefront itself as the eastern boundary.

Within the boundaries, existing as of right zones and allowable uses would remain, but the new district would also allow new uses and refined design standards. In addition to establishing a specific conceptual plan for desired development, against which proposals would be reviewed, district regulations should allow the following

- new uses such as upper-story loft housing for artists and associated mixed-use institutional (this would encourage the sort of live/ work housing proposed for Exchange Street). Incentives could include grant or loan programs to encourage code abatement, relaxation of ownership requirements to allow joint development, and/or artist-based tax allowances.
- additional open spaces, plazas and streetscape as an identified public benefit;
- linked access ways for pedestrians and/or autos, connecting different subareas;
- sharing of parking for adjacent uses, such as daytime retail or office and nighttime cultural/ restaurant.

Proactive Initiatives

The City can take the lead in promoting desired development on publicly- owned property, such as parking lots or lakefront land. Civic or not-for-profit groups can partner with the City to acquire sites or buildings for public benefit uses such as cultural facilities.

3.2 Short Term Actions

Three major projects, related to each of the three major sectors of the proposed Arts & Lake District, seem to have the potential of immediate action:

- The Arts Academy, in which currently defined needs, potential resources for meeting those needs, and a potential venue all exist in proximity to the Smith Opera House cultural focus and the relevant campuses of Hobart and William Smith Colleges and the evolving High School./ Middle School complex.
- Upper-story loft housing, for artists or other market rate tenants, which could enliven downtown and provide a needed diversity of housing types for the City and region.
- A series of cultural/ tourism events that can pair waterfront and downtown components in order to ‘cross the divide’ and begin to offer the look and feel of a unified district.
 - our meetings included a NYC promoter who expressed great support for an opera or vocal based outdoor waterfront festival: the ‘Seneca Summerfest’.
 - At least two Syracuse-based theatrical organizations expressed interest in summer activity at the Smith.

These activities could be both organizationally achievable and low in front-end costs; each should be pursued immediately for the summer of 2003.

In defining additional initiatives, invention is the key. Ideas might include:

- a ‘round the lake’ bike rally,
- a wine-based festival as a season kickoff,
- a regional youth theatre showcase and awards program,
- an exhibit of upstate landscape paintings à la the Hudson River school,
- a pumpkin festival,
- Sunday afternoon jazz on the lake (rain in the Smith),
- a film festival with a waterfront outdoor component.

Resources are always an issue, but the key resource is a good idea that can be seen as fun and will attract advocates. Planning sessions to encourage this kind of innovative thinking will themselves generate enthusiasm.



The growing Farmers’ Market could be an attractive short-term Lakefront attraction.

3.3 Organization and Public Involvement

Formalizing the relationship of the common interests identified in this planning and development strategy —public, civic and private sector stakeholders and community residents— will allow ongoing planning and development to occur within a framework of communication and cooperation.

Many of these common interests are currently embodied in the existing Smith Opera House board (the core of the ad hoc cultural center steering committee) and the Lakefront Revitalization Committee. Each of these volunteer organizations includes representation from the wide range of civic groups cited elsewhere in this report (with some members on both groups). Each defines a relationship to the City administration, which helps staff and promote each committee’s work.

At the same time, in the long term, other broader participation will be critical—county, state and federal government programs, local and regional banks, corporations and merchants (including the Chamber of Commerce and the Business Improvement District), and partners from civic, cultural and educational institutions—local colleges, the historic museum, arts organizations and foundation/ funding sources.



The Arts & Lake Development Corporation

It is therefore recommended that a new organization— the ‘Arts & Lake Development Corporation’ — be created as a mechanism for continuing planning and common action.

The adjacent graphic describes the various groups whose institutional participation will be important as part of this new ‘umbrella’ organization. These groups include the following entities:

- The Cultural Center Steering Committee (a special subcommittee of the Smith Opera House board), applying its skills and expertise on behalf of the local arts community;
- The Geneva Lakefront Committee, an active volunteer group recently charged with defining plans and strategies for the Seneca Lake waterfront;
- The City of Geneva, which through the City Manager, the Office of the Mayor, and the Departments of Planning and Economic Development must continue its role as catalyst and supporter;
- the Business Improvement District, which can with appropriate funding assistance from members and city sources take an entrepreneurial business approach to the maintenance and improvement of the District’s ‘physical plant’;
- Participating arts and educational organizations, which will provide the facilities and program content for the District’s cultural activities;
- market and not-for-profit developers and capital investment/ funding sources, who will provide the means to achieve this project’s challenging goals.



4. Next Steps and Conclusion

4.1 Summary: Immediate Next Steps

In order to take the project forward, a series of immediate steps should be taken:

1) *Organization*

- Establish Arts & Lake Development Corporation as not-for-profit implementation vehicle. Identify board, budget and staff needs.
- Coordinate with associated business and civic groups to develop integrated strategy.

2) *Market/ Program Feasibility:
Cultural/ Tourism Projects*

- Focus on venue, program and resource opportunities for the proposed Arts Academy.
- Identify issues and opportunities for artist housing in downtown upper floor space.
- Define potential for Seneca Summerfest lakefront festival: potential themes, size of audience, types of events.
- Prepare demand analysis of potential audience support for possible Opera House/ Cultural Center/ Seneca Shell venue sizes and event types: performance and exhibit space, for both summer season and during the year (20 year planning horizon). At the same time, interview event producers and presenters as to program potential: artistic capability and organizational capacity (both current and possible future growth).
- Revisit, analyze and refine previous proposals for Children's Museum and for Discover Finger Lakes Center

- Devise strategy for establishing Geneva as regional tourism staging center: winery tours, environmental attractions, cultural event as well as tourism services: food, lodging, support.
 - Define potential for conference facilities to serve educational, corporate, and convention market needs, using existing and potential new venues.
- 3) *Planning and Zoning*
- Expand, refine and adopt Arts & Lake District Strategic Plan as part of City Comprehensive Plan
 - Create Arts & Lake District as overlay district with zoning refinements, expanded review procedures, with detailed planning and design criteria and applicable incentives.
- 4) *Implementation/ Financing Resources*
- Define public, private and civic sources and uses of funds for public infrastructure and incentives
 - Developer contributions in return for benefits
 - Grants/ program funds available: arts facilities, programs/ streetscape/ retail incentives
 - City/ County bonding, capital budget potential
 - Foundation grants or civic organization participation and in-kind services
 - Private Bank/ corporation/ Chamber of Commerce support
 - Define market for artist housing by soliciting precommitment interest from potential participants
 - Examine potential for revolving loan program for private facades/ signage
 - public/ private participants
 - sources of initial capital
 - ground rules for use
 - criteria for qualification or selection

- 5) *Site Control and Project Initiation*
 - Control key properties through options, joint development agreements, City acquisition, or private purchase.
 - Partner with other private property owners to apply renovation programs and grants
 - Initiate mixed-use development: active ground-floor uses/ upper floor residential or other uses on key sites

- 6) *Stakeholder Involvement*
 - Involve Hobart & William Smith Colleges, Keuka College and Finger Lakes Community College in partnership with City for youth development, job training, adult education
 - Assist in formation of Regional Arts Council to help in structuring and funding arts programs and events in conjunction with local sponsors, producers and presenters
 - Use professional arts advisors to involve local artists, youth programs and community volunteers in streetscape/ art projects and events
 - Engage corporate and foundation/ not-for-profit sponsors in support of wide range of district programs and projects from arts to housing development.

- 7) *Create a 'Virtual District'*
 - Prior to actual district development, establish presence by creating website district—based on district plan, provide ability to click on/ access information, exhibits, interactive forums
 - Use website host of various educational and training programs for arts related activities (with links to various partner sites)

4.2 Conclusion

Geneva Arts & Lake District: A Center for Culture, Tourism and Economic Development

It is clear to the consultant team and to all the participants in this project to date that Geneva has incredible resources that have contributed significantly to its current health.

From the colleges, to the lake, to its summer attractions, to the Smith, Geneva's wealth is apparent. But it is not capturing a fair share of return on these assets. To capture this return will take a comprehensive sensibility that is massaged and molded for the next decade.

Our recommendations come with that long term perspective. Geneva's welcome focus on immediate needs is one of its positive attributes, but it needs to be careful that quality community service does not become so fragmented through smaller pressing tasks that larger opportunities are lost.

This 'see the forest through the trees' approach of simultaneous short and long term thinking and action will give leverage to every project so far imagined.

Certainly a revitalized building housing a theatre center or children's museum is a good thing. But even better is taking a simultaneous step to leverage a program that celebrates the Lake and integrates artists' housing into downtown.

Geneva has the necessary ingredients to achieve not only the good, but the better—and to move forward to the best.