

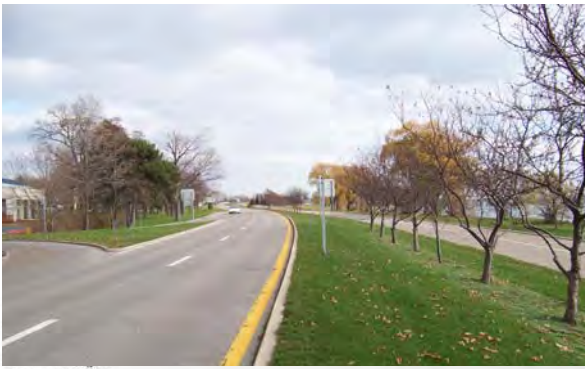
# NIAGARA FALLS STATE PARK ROBERT MOSES PARKWAY-SOUTH SEGMENT-“RIVERWAY”

## FINAL PROJECT SCOPING REPORT VOLUME 1 – MAIN REPORT & APPENDIX A

**Submitted to:**

**NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF PARKS, RECREATION  
AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

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**October 22, 2009**

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**USA Niagara Development  
Corporation**

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## PROJECT APPROVAL SHEET

(Pursuant to SAFETEA-LU Matrix)

- A. IPP Approval:** The project is ready to be added to the Regional Capital Program and project scoping can begin.  
The IPP was approved by: Gary V. Gottlieb 09/29/08  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Regional Planning and Program Manager
- B. Recommendation for Scope Approval** The project cost and schedule are consistent with the Regional Capital Program.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Capital Facilities Manager, NYSOPRHP
- C. Scope Approval:** The project cost and schedule are consistent with the Regional Capital Program.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Regional Director, NYSOPRHP
- \_\_\_\_\_  
Regional Director, NYSDOT

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS  
VOLUME I: MAIN REPORT AND APPENDIX A**

<b>1. PROJECT SCOPE .....</b>	<b>1-1</b>
1.1. Introduction .....	1-1
1.2. Purpose and Need .....	1-3
1.2.1. Where is the Project Located? .....	1-3
1.2.2. Why is the Project Needed? .....	1-3
1.2.3. What are the Objectives/Purposes of the Project? .....	1-4
1.3. What Alternatives Are Being Considered?.....	1-5
1.4. How will the Alternatives Affect the Environment? .....	1-6
1.5. Which Alternatives are Feasible? .....	1-6
1.6. What Are The Costs & Schedules? .....	1-7
1.7. Who Will Decide Which Alternative Will Be Selected And How Can I Be Involved in This Decision .....	1-7
<b>2. PROJECT CONTEXT .....</b>	<b>2-1</b>
2.1. Transportation Setting.....	2-1
2.1.1. Parkway Description and Conditions .....	2-1
2.1.2. Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Description and Conditions .....	2-2
2.2. Park Setting.....	2-3
2.2.1. Existing Conditions and Character.....	2-3
2.3. Historic Setting .....	2-5
2.3.1. Park History.....	2-5
2.4. Socioeconomic Setting.....	2-6
2.4.1. Park.....	2-6
2.4.2. Local and Regional Economic Setting .....	2-7
2.5. Environmental Setting.....	2-8
2.6. Local Plans for the Project Area .....	2-9
<b>3. ALTERNATIVES .....</b>	<b>3-1</b>
3.1. Description of Alternatives .....	3-1
3.2. Intersection Configurations .....	3-4
3.2.1. John B. Daly Boulevard .....	3-4
3.2.2. Other Connection Points.....	3-5
3.3. Evaluation of Alternatives .....	3-5
<b>4. SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR ALTERNATIVES.....</b>	<b>4-1</b>
4.1. NEPA and SEQRA Classification .....	4-1
4.2. Issues to be Studied.....	4-1
4.3. Social Issues .....	4-1
4.3.1. Land Use.....	4-2
4.3.2. Neighborhood Community Cohesion .....	4-2
4.3.3. Community Character .....	4-3
4.3.4. School Districts, Recreational Areas, and Places of Worship .....	4-3
4.3.5. Effect on Public Safety .....	4-3
4.3.6. Economic Issues.....	4-3
4.4. Environmental .....	4-5
4.5. Issues Not Present in Corridor .....	4-7

<b>LIST OF APPENDICES</b>	
A	Project Alternative Plans

## VOLUME II: APPENDICES B THROUGH G

<b>LIST OF APPENDICES</b>	
B	Transportation Conditions
C.	Bicycle and Pedestrian Conditions
D.	Existing Character Analysis
E.	Historical Considerations
F.	Socioeconomic Conditions
G.	Inventory of Environmental Conditions

# 1. PROJECT SCOPE

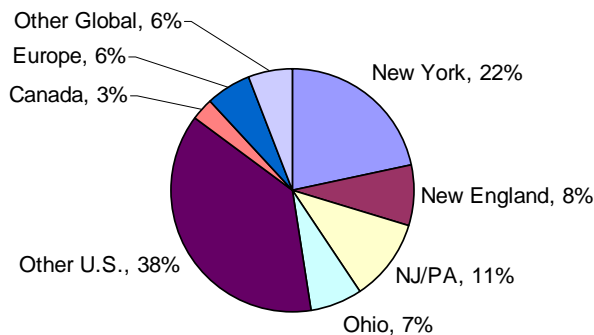
## 1.1. Introduction

The Niagara Falls State Park (“State Park”), adjacent to the Niagara Falls, is owned and operated by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP). Its history dates back to 1885 when the Niagara Reservation (later renamed) was established as the first state park in the United States. The park was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1966 and is also on the State and national Registers of Historic Places (S/NRHP). The State Park provides a natural setting and focal location where visitors from around the world come to experience the wonder and power of the waterfalls and related attractions.



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**Origins of Visitors to Niagara Falls State Park  
2004 OPRHP Visitor Survey**



The State Park hosts approximately 7.5-12 million visitors per year. In 2004, the OPRHP conducted a survey of visitors and found that 86% of park visitors are from the United States, but only 22% are from New York State (see graph below). In addition, over 75% of these visitors arrive by automobile.

Prior to the establishment of the State Park, the area around Niagara Falls was primarily an industrial area, utilizing the flow of water to power various mills. As early as 1869, Fredrick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux added their support to the effort to generate public interest in preserving Niagara Falls. These efforts culminated in the establishment of the Niagara Reservation in 1885 as the first State Park in the nation. The following year, the Commissioners of the State Reservation at Niagara requested that Olmsted and Vaux prepare a plan for the restoration of the scenery of Niagara Falls. The *General Plan for the Improvement of the Niagara Reservation* (“*General Plan*”) helped shape the development of the reservation over several decades. The *General Plan* included a scenic park entrance road through the length of the park called the Riverway.

In 1961 the Robert Moses Parkway (RMP) was completed, extending from the Grand Island North Bridges (Interstate 190) to Niagara Falls, then north along the Niagara Gorge to Fort Niagara and terminating at NYS Route 18 in the Town of Porter. One of only two State Parkways outside of the New York City metropolitan area, the RMP is classified as a “parkway” in the context of other OPRHP facilities, specifically a limited-access expressway for non-commercial vehicles that provide access to State Parks. Although as originally constructed, the RMP passed through the State Park to provide a link between I-190 and OPRHP facilities, it

does not contribute to the historic significance of the Park's National Register of Historic Landmark status (U.S. Department of the Interior, Keeper of the National Register, 1983).

In 1983, a Master Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement was completed for the park which recommended severing the RMP within the Park to improve waterfront access at Prospect Point vista. This decision was made as a result of the changing needs of the area and an increasing focus on maintaining the Olmstedian landscape and character, protecting the environment, and enhancing multi-modal access within the park. Thus, the RMP was divided into a South Segment, extending from Interstate 190 at the North Grand Island Bridges to the State Park Parking Lot No. 1, and a North Segment, extending from north of the Rainbow Bridge to the town of Porter near Four Mile State Park.

This project addresses a portion of the South Segment from Robert B. Daly Boulevard to the State Park Parking Lot No. 1. 90% of this project is located on designated historic state parkland, with the remaining portion of the project affecting other state-owned lands. The North Segment is not included in this project.



The RMP South Segment (Riverway) today operates as a two-lane, one-way westbound park entrance drive from John B. Daly Boulevard to Parking Lot No. 1 and the intersection with Niagara Street. The eastbound lanes are not contiguous, but serve as a one-lane, one-way interior park road with marked parallel parking and access to the riverfront trails. The eastbound lanes are connected to the westbound parkway with turnarounds at intervals. The eastbound lanes are not connected to Parking Lot No. 1.

In 2006, OPRHP entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the City of Niagara Falls, the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), and the USA Niagara Development Corporation to reconfigure the RMP between John B. Daly Boulevard and State Park Parking lot No. 1. This report serves to identify the initial project needs and objectives and alternatives meeting these objectives that are to be studied further in development of the project. The project will seek to reconfigure the RMP expressway type configuration within the park to one that is a low-speed scenic park access road, including removing the east-west grade separation between the City and the river. The reconfigured road will be designed to more closely follow the design intent and alignment of the historic “Riverway” park entry road. The project includes park enhancements along the corridor length; consideration of the historical context of the park; and improvements to bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, particularly with respect to provision of City access to the Park and Riverfront.

It is the intent of OPRHP to retain and restore the historic elements of the 1887 Olmsted-Vaux general plan to the greatest extent feasible in consideration of contemporary needs, conditions and requirements. In compliance with the agency’s mission, the project would look to incorporate design characteristics of that original design into the new setting.

The project will also seek to carefully consider the social, economic, and environmental settings surrounding the park and the adjacent City front. The project looks to enhance the park setting and City front access to further encourage tourism growth and its related positive synergies with the City, while protecting the unique historic features of the park and natural resources of the riverfront and falls.

## **1.2. Purpose and Need**

### **1.2.1. Where is the Project Located?**

The State Park is located in Western New York State on the north and east shore of the Niagara River between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. It is located on the south edge of the City of Niagara Falls in Niagara County.

The RMP South “Riverway” extends from John B. Daly Boulevard to Parking Lot No. 1 at the intersection with Niagara Street, a distance of 1.3 miles.

### **1.2.2. Why is the Project Needed?**

Upgrades and revisions to the transportation system in downtown Niagara Falls have diminished the necessity for an expressway through the park and much of the infrastructure associated with this portion of the parkway is now functionally obsolete. In addition, there has been increasing emphasis on non-motorized transportation and provision of pedestrian and bicycle access to the waterfront. Therefore, a properly scaled park access roadway with accommodations for non-motorized access is needed, along with ecological restoration of areas formerly occupied by the parkway.

### 1.2.3. What are the Objectives/Purposes of the Project?

The OPRHP intends to reinvest in the State Park through the complete physical reconstruction of the RMP South Segment from the John Daly Boulevard interchange to the main parking lot entrance, in partnership with the NYSDOT, the City of Niagara Falls and the USA Niagara Development Corporation. The project mission can be stated as follows:



*Build a road system sensitive to and in context with the spectacular wonder of the Upper Rapids and Niagara Falls. This undertaking should create an environment that increases opportunities for recreation and tourism, while respecting the original Olmsted and Vaux park design for access, viewing scenery, reflection, and the renewal of spirit, that is inspired by the beauty, power and majesty of this natural wonder.*

This Mission is planned to be achieved by following four key principals and their related goals and objectives: Improve the State Park; Improve the Park Interface with the City; Improve Access to the State Park and the City of Niagara Falls; and Open Economic Possibilities. These are further defined below.

#### Improve the State Park

- Provide a clear sense of arrival at a world-renowned destination.
- Welcome all visitors with appropriate arrival facilities and access to attractions.
- Create an appropriately scaled scenic park roadway that provides easy and direct access to State Park and the City for all visitors.
- Choreograph the roadway's scenic landscape to provide all users with a cohesive and continuous unfolding experience.
- Preserve and interpret historic Fredrick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux design features and principles within the roadway landscape.
- Protect existing aquatic and avian habitats associated with the Niagara River and Audubon-designated Important Bird Area so that indigenous wildlife remains a part of the park experience.

#### Improve the Park Interface with the City

- Create an integrated vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian circulation system that serves park patrons, local residents, regional users, and visitors from around the world.
- Design a park-city interface that facilitates the park's role as a focal point for City of Niagara Falls tourism.

- Improve visual and physical connections between the State Park and the City to enhance recreational and economic opportunities.

### Improve Access to the State Park and the City of Niagara Falls

- Reduce maintenance of the landscape and infrastructure through effective design.
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle access along the Niagara River.



### Open Economic Possibilities

- Create an environment that encourages visitors to enjoy the attractions of both the Park and the City.
- Enhance opportunities for appropriately-scaled uses in City neighborhoods adjoining the Riverway by enhancement of the riverfront setting.

### **1.3. What Alternatives Are Being Considered?**

Alternatives have been developed to address the project needs and objectives within the context of The State Park. These alternatives reflect consideration of transportation needs, park functionality, historical context, and the park's inter-relationship with the City of Niagara Falls.

#### **Alternative 1: No Build/Null Alternative**

The No-Build Alternative would involve keeping the RMP as it currently exists and operates. No improvements would be made. Maintenance activities would continue within the park and interchange.

#### **Alternative 2: Reconfigured Park Road on Existing Alignment**

This alternative would replace the RMP from the John B. Daly Boulevard Interchange to the State Park Parking Lot Number 1 with a two-lane, one-way (westbound) low-speed scenic roadway that would follow the existing RMP alignment.

#### **Alternative 3: Reconfigured Park Road Inspired by the Olmsted/Vaux Design**

This alternative would replace the RMP from the John B. Daly Boulevard Interchange to the State Park Parking Lot Number 1 with a two-lane, one-way (westbound) low speed scenic park road in the context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Olmsted/Vaux design principles.

#### 1.4. How will the Alternatives Affect the Environment?

The alternatives will be investigated during the preliminary engineering phase. Alternatives will be evaluated to determine their affect on the environment. The following key issues will be studied:

- Water-related resources
- Ecology and wildlife resources
- Visual resources (viewsheds)
- Cultural resources
- Presence of contaminated materials
- Preservation and restoration of the natural environment/scenery

The No-Build Alternative would not change the configuration of the parkway or the park. Therefore, the characteristics of the existing environment would not change.

For all build alternatives, park operations will be maintained to the maximum extent practicable. Vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic to and through the park would be maintained at all times. Contract provisions would be considered to encourage construction to occur primarily during the off-peak tourist season. Due to the proximity of the Buffalo Avenue residential area, construction operations, such as demolition, that are associated with high noise levels would be limited to daytime hours.

#### 1.5. Which Alternatives are Feasible?

Feasible alternatives are those that meet the project objectives, and would be evaluated during preliminary design. All feasible alternatives are under consideration. These include:

- Alternative 2: Reconfigured Park Road on Existing Alignment
- Alternative 3: Reconfigured Park Road Inspired by the Olmsted/Vaux Design

In addition, the No-Build Alternative 1 will be advanced to the preliminary design phase for comparative purposes.

A decision on the alternative to be advanced to construction will be made after full evaluation of each alternative's engineering, historic, social, economic, and environmental effects. These will be documented in a Design Approval Document for the project.

### 1.6. What Are The Costs & Schedules?

All feasible alternatives are under consideration. **Exhibit 1.5A** identifies a range or opinion of probable costs for each of the feasible alternatives based on the conceptual level of design.

<b>Exhibit 1.5A Project Costs (Escalated to 2011)</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Alternative 2</b>	<b>Alternative 3</b>
Construction	\$13 Million	\$15 Million

The project development process includes scoping, preliminary design, environmental assessment, design approval, final design, and construction. Project scoping is the stage at which the purposes, needs, objectives and goals for advancing the project are identified, what is to be accomplished, and what alternatives will be studied. During preliminary design, the alternatives established in scoping are further developed and their social, economic, and environmental effects are studied. These studies are summarized in a design approval document, and a preferred alternative design is recommended. Once an alternative is approved, then detailed plans would be developed for use in construction.

A summary of the key schedule dates is presented in **Exhibit 1.5B**.

<b>Exhibit 1.5B Project Schedule</b>	
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Date Expected</b>
Scoping Approval	Mid-2009
Design Approval	Spring 2010
Project Letting Date	2011
Construction Start	2011
Construction Complete	2012

### 1.7. Who Will Decide Which Alternative Will Be Selected And How Can I Be Involved in This Decision

OPRHP owns and has jurisdiction over state parkland and all State Parkways including the RMP and will select an alternative for implementation, after the Preliminary Engineering and Design Approval Document Phase. Input from the all affected parties is welcomed and is mandated by law to be solicited and considered at all preliminary stages of project development.

Initial Public Information Meetings were held to introduce the project, display project information, and receive public input. This input has been considered in the development of this scoping document.

Additional public input opportunities will be afforded during design development. **Exhibit 1.7** defines these events.

<b>Exhibit 1.7 Public Involvement Plan Schedule of Milestone Dates</b>	
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Date Occurred/Tentative</b>
Initial Public Information Meeting	December 8, 2008
Second Public Information Meeting – Presentation of Draft Alternatives	April 28, 2009
Additional Opportunities for Public Input	Fall 2009-Summer 2010
Current Project Letting date	2011

During any of these information meetings, and in a reasonable timeframe thereafter, you will have the opportunity to provide comments on the project. Comments may be given in writing at any time to the contact below.

For more information, please contact:

Salim Adler, State Park Planner  
NYSOPRHP  
Agency Bldg. 1, Empire State Plaza  
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salim.adler@oprhp.state.ny.us

please reference:

*Robert Moses Parkway, South Segment*

In your correspondence

## 2. PROJECT CONTEXT

Section 2 defines the context and setting of the State Park and the RMP. The sub-sections that follow describe the transportation setting (for both motorized and non-motorized travel), the Park setting, the Historic Setting, as well as the Socioeconomic and Environmental settings in the project area.

### 2.1. Transportation Setting

#### 2.1.1. Parkway Description and Conditions

The RMP was constructed in 1961, and was originally constructed as an expressway-style parkway for non-commercial traffic the connected parks and urban centers along the Niagara River. Construction of the four-lane parkway also utilized large quantities of excavated rock from the Niagara Power Project. In the 1980's, as part of the Niagara Reservation Master Plan/FEIS, the RMP was severed at the Rainbow Bridge to improve waterfront access at the Prospect Point vista. At that time, a portion of the parkway was removed in the area of Prospect Point and the eastbound lanes of the RMP along the rapids were closed to through traffic to reflect changes in the way the park was used.

The RMP between Robert B. Daly Boulevard and Parking Lot No. 1 currently operates as a two-lane, one-way westbound park entrance drive for automobiles. The eastbound lanes are connected to the westbound parkway at intervals and are used as a one-lane, one-way park road with marked parallel parking. Therefore, the roadways are functionally obsolete in that they are not being used for their original purpose (i.e., expressway segments).

Access to and from the City from the RMP is possible from several connection points:

- The interchange of RMP and John B. Daly Boulevard forms a high-capacity connection with the City. Two bridges carry the RMP over John B. Daly Boulevard, forming a grade separated interchange. These are referred to as BIN 1068141 and BIN 1068142. The westbound bridge is open to traffic. The eastbound bridge is closed to traffic. Both bridges are approximately 55 years old. At this interchange, westbound motorists can access the City via John B. Daly Boulevard and motorists from the City can enter the RMP going eastbound or westbound.
- At 4th Street, westbound motorists can make a right turn toward the City, and southbound motorists can enter the RMP westbound from the City by use of slip ramps.
- Just west of 1<sup>st</sup> Street, westbound motorists can access the City via old Main Street or Buffalo Avenue. The ramp to Buffalo Avenue provides access to the American Rapids Bridge to Goat Island to the south and 1<sup>st</sup> Street to the north.
- Approaching Old Falls Street, the RMP merges with Prospect Street, an at-grade one-way street. Once limited to pedestrian access, Old Falls Street is being reconstructed to restore vehicular access via a new intersection with Prospect Street opposite the State Park entrance. The connection between the RMP and Old Falls Street is currently being reconstructed.

- Just north of Old Falls Street, motorists may bear left to access Park Parking Lot No. 1, or bear right onto Prospect Street to enter the City. All traffic leaving the Park must exit through the City of the Niagara Falls. Motorists wishing to access the eastbound RMP may do so by taking Niagara Street to either Rainbow Boulevard or Buffalo Avenue, thence heading east to John B. Daly Boulevard.

Traffic volumes on the RMP vary significantly with seasonal tourism. During nine off-season months of the year, traffic volumes along the roadway are generally low and delays are minimal. During tourist season, the roadway can reach capacity during peak periods (more than 600 vehicles per hour) due to delays caused at decision points along the road. There is consistent traffic that tends to be City related using John B. Daly Boulevard, but this grows during the seasonal peaks to reflect the tourist segment. Traffic volumes and delays will be studied in detail during the preliminary design phase of the project.

The RMP generally parallels Niagara River and consists of a divided highway and landscaped median. It is constructed of concrete pavement. The pavement is essentially 55 years old and is past its useful life. Segments of pavement are heavily cracked, spalled, and separated from adjacent sections.



The RMP in its current configuration and condition provides a function, but does not provide a suitable Park Access Road. It is functionally obsolete, condition deficient, and not of the scale necessary for such a facility.

For a complete description of the existing transportation conditions, refer to [Appendix B](#).

### 2.1.2. Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Description and Conditions

The system of State Park pedestrian paths functions around the central hub/destination of the visitor's center and falls viewing area at Prospect Point. From here, paths radiating out of the hub connect to multi-use paths on the north and east ends of the park. Most of the paths are constructed of asphalt concrete, with some brick paved paths in the Prospect Point area. The paths vary in width, with the narrowest paths located in the easternmost portion of the park.

In addition to the system of paths, a trolley operates between Prospect Point and Goat Island. Near Prospect Point the trolley route utilizes and/or crosses the pedestrian paths.

The vast majority of the pedestrian traffic flows into the park at a few key locations on the west side of the study area. The State Park Parking Lot #1 is a primary generator of pedestrian traffic and most of the remaining pedestrians enter the park from Prospect Street near the Visitor's Center. Bicycle riding is not allowed within the Prospect Point area.

On the eastern side of the park, pedestrians and bicyclists access the park from parking spaces designated along the abandoned southern section of the RMP. Access is also available via a multi-use path that continues eastward beyond the park limits to the Grand Island Bridges. A bicycle trail also connects the city to the park at John B. Daly Boulevard. However, many other

potential connections to the City of Niagara Falls are severed by the existing travel lanes of the westbound RMP. Although the overall traffic flow is less in this area of the park, the ratio of bicyclists to pedestrians is much higher than the western side of the park where the Visitor's Center and central falls viewing area are located.

While pedestrian access within the park is accommodated fairly well, there are a number of potential conflicts and issues which should be addressed to improve the current conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists:

- The limitation in bicycle riding within the Prospect Point area of the park, while good practice given the configuration of the area, creates a gap in the Niagara River Greenway and limits its potential as a recreational corridor for visitors and local residents. There is no continuous system for bicycle access within the park.
- The system of paths is not connected to the City of Niagara Falls' street grid at frequent intervals, especially on the eastern sections of the project study area. This limits access for local residents.
- There are potential user conflicts in a number of areas. In particular, there are potential user conflict points with the trolley route within the park.
- There are localized instances where improvements are needed to make the system more accessible to all user groups.

The bicycle and pedestrian facilities do not provide a suitable non-motorized transportation facility. The bicycle facilities, where present, do not meet current standards for width and continuity. The facilities as a whole are not well connected to the city street grid and they lack appropriate signage directing users to key destinations.



For a complete description of bicycle and pedestrian conditions, refer to [Appendix C](#).

## 2.2. Park Setting

### 2.2.1. Existing Conditions and Character

The western half of the project area contains the primary gathering and viewing areas for Niagara Falls and associated visitor amenities. The eastern half of the project area generally serves as the transportation corridor to enter the State Park. The eastern half provides open views of the Niagara River, and the western half provides an intimate scale to view the falls including the Park visitor center, parking area and pedestrian trails.

The character of the State Park and RMP transitions from open lawn areas in the east to a wooded park setting in the west. The shoreline changes dramatically from east to west from a grassy open character to rock ledges closer to the falls. Existing topography is gently sloped in the eastern half and transitions to more steeply sloping areas in the mid-section and then rises to a prominent and sloping plateau on the western edge along the falls. The land area and associated parkland is comprised of a narrow width in the east and widens to provide a highly pedestrian oriented and spacious character adjacent to the falls and visitor center.

The proximity and affect of the City varies over the length of the project area. The eastern half of the park and RMP lies adjacent to John B. Daly Boulevard and industrial land uses. Residential and visitor accommodations are located adjacent to the center of the project area. The land uses adjacent to the State Park and RMP in the western half are primarily larger scale tourism operations and offices.

### Natural Resources

The upper Niagara River flows along the southern project boundary and may be viewed throughout the State Park. The west end of the park affords the view of Niagara Falls, with the northwest portion of the site providing views of the Niagara River Gorge. Natural resources within the project area include the parklands associated with the Park, which include predominately open land to the east and a woodland setting to the west. Generally, the land is level along the river and rises more significantly along the northern border with the City. The falls, river and associated shoreline are the primary natural features that draw visitors to the area.

### Physical Features

The primary physical features that shape the character and experience of the project area are the sloping land towards the river, mature parkland vegetation in the west, open areas in the east and the elegant park setting surrounding the falls and gorge. The western half of the project area contains numerous pedestrian trails that provide access along the river and to the viewing areas associated with the falls.

The RMP is a dominant feature within the Park and generally divides parklands and pedestrian routes. Access to Goat Island via the American Rapids Bridge is provided in the central portion of the project area. Closer to the falls, Goat Island may be accessed via the Goat Island Bridge, which is restricted to pedestrians. Landforms created by the RMP are also a significant feature within the eastern portion of the project area. The embankments create good views of the river from the roadway but also limit views of the river from adjacent city neighborhoods in addition to further limiting city-park pedestrian connections.

Generally this area of the State Park can be characterized as a linear experience that parallels the river. The physical layout and width of the park provide access to the river, falls, and parkland adjacent to the City. The landforms also rise from south to north and provide views to the river, mist that rises from the falls, the falls, the river gorge and the Canadian side of Niagara Falls.

### Parkland Features

Interspersed with the pedestrian and multi-use paths are other park amenities such as benches and period lighting. On the west end the State Park and RMP can be characterized as formally intentional, yet they provide a natural park setting. The eastern portion of the project area is more informal in both setting and provision for pedestrian amenities. Pedestrian orientation for visitors to key destinations is more prominent in the western portion, near the falls and visitor center.

## Views

Views within the project area vary significantly depending on the orientation and location of the visitor. Views in many directions include dramatic vistas of the river, gorge and falls.

- Views of the Niagara River, American Rapids, Goat Island and Horseshoe Falls are provided in the southwest portion of the of the project area.
- The western edge provides views of the Niagara River and Niagara Falls, Canada.
- Views to the north include Rainbow Bridge and Niagara River.
- Views in the eastern portion of the project area reveal scenes of the City of Niagara Falls, Seneca Niagara Casino, South Segment of the RMP and the State Park corridor.

## Opportunities and Challenges

The State Park has numerous opportunities to cull a defined sense of place, a consistent experience for its seasonal and permanent populations and to enhance the overall experience. In addition, the park has challenges related to roadway embankment impeding pedestrian access and width limitations.

For a complete description of the existing park conditions, refer to **Appendix D**.

## 2.3. Historic Setting

### 2.3.1. Park History

The land that is currently the State Park was not always reserved as such. During the 1800's mills began to be constructed on Bath (now Green) Island, taking advantage of the hydropower available on the Niagara River. In 1834, in the midst of this development, Rev. Andrew Reed and Rev. Thomas Mattheson identified that the scenery of Niagara Falls was of public value. Thus began the debate over the importance of perpetuating industrial and commercial uses versus conservation of the scenic beauty of the site. In 1869, landscape architects Fredrick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux began to contact individuals to address the destruction of the scenery at Niagara Falls and generate public interest in preserving the Falls. These efforts, in conjunction with others, culminated in the establishment of the Niagara Reservation in 1885 as the first State Park in the nation. The following year, the Commissioners of the State Reservation at Niagara requested that Olmsted and Vaux prepare a plan for the restoration of the scenery of Niagara Falls.

In 1887 Olmsted and Vaux compiled and presented the *General Plan for the Improvement of the Niagara Reservation (General Plan)* to the President of the Board of Commissioners of the State Reservation of Niagara. This report and accompanying plan

#### DRIVE ON THE MAINLAND – “RIVERWAY”

It will be seen from the drawing that the carriage road called **the Riverway is intended to be made from end to end of the Reservation. This is a necessity** and will stand instead of the old village street from which it varies in course only through the motive of keeping it, as a broad artificial object, and those moving upon it, as far from the shore and as much out of sight of Goat Island as possible, and in the substitution of continuous, long, curving outlines for the present discontinuous straight outlines with angular changes in direction. At points it is divided in order to avoid injury to a few promising trees of spontaneous growth.

helped shape the development of the reservation over several decades, as is evident in numerous plans and photographs. Within the *General Plan*, Olmsted and Vaux stated, “The conservation of the natural scenery at Niagara, [is] accepted as the primary purpose of the undertaking.” Other principal objectives on the plan were to “re-establish a permanently agreeable natural character” where the land had been utilized for industry, and “make a suitable provision of roads and walks, of platforms and seats, at the more important points of view, and of other accommodations, such as experience has shown to be necessary to decency and good order when large numbers of people come together.” Included in the general plan is a mainland drive named “Riverway”.

The *General Plan* implementation was partial, but structured and guided improvements were implemented throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Judging from the first orthographic aerial photograph of the site, taken in 1927, the *General Plan* was still the guiding document for the management of the reservation through the 1920s. As a result, the historic period for the early design spans from 1887 to 1927.

In the 1950’s construction began on three major projects within the Reservation – the RMP, the American Rapids Bridge and the Observation Tower. These projects represented a major departure from the *General Plan*. The RMP replaced the Riverway with an expressway-style parkway with internal landscape and views out toward the Niagara River and screening toward the city.

Despite the changes wrought by construction of the RMP, portions of the built Olmsted-Vaux plan remain through circulation alignments, vestiges of vegetation and remnants of small-scale elements. The overall general landscape patterns of today match the historic plan, through some changes are evident. The most obvious changes are the loss of unity between the parkway and adjacent park landscape, and a loss of cohesion between the eastern and western ends of the park.

Fredrick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux are important figures in the Park history for both advocating for the establishment of the park and developing the *General Plan*. In addition, their plan was of sufficient lasting value to be the guiding document for park improvements for over 50 years. Therefore, alternatives for improvements within the park need to consider the legacy and design principles these two landscape designers have established.

For a more complete analysis of how the existing conditions relate to the intended landscape character envisioned by Olmsted and Vaux, refer to [Appendix E](#).

## 2.4. Socioeconomic Setting

### 2.4.1. Park

The State Park serves as a local and regional recreational destination and an international tourist destination. As such, the site is an economic asset as well as a natural asset. The park attracts visitors from the City, the region, and the world, primarily during the summer months. In addition to the bicycle and pedestrian facilities discussed previously, the park offers attractions such as the Cave of the Winds and Maid of the Mist. In addition to these attractions, there is limited food service facilities within the park, similar to that provided at other state parks. Per State law, revenue from the concessionaire that runs the food services and concessions is

deposited in the state park infrastructure fund (PAR Title B, Section 3.09.2-d. The State law also allows for a “vehicle usage fee”, which at Niagara Falls State Park, is paid upon entry into parking lots within the park [PAR Title C, Section 33.5.1]).

Unlike larger state parks in more remote locations, The State Park does not offer campgrounds or other overnight accommodations and provides only limited food concessions. Instead, the park relies on businesses within the City of Niagara Falls to provide those services it does not offer. The customer at The State Park, in general, has different objectives than those that visit other state parks, and who may be interested in camping related activities. Hotel accommodations in the area serve customer requirements for lodging.

#### 2.4.2. Local and Regional Economic Setting

The City of Niagara Falls has lost much of its once-thriving industrial base in the last few decades. With the drop in manufacturing jobs, the City has also experienced a sharp decline in its population. Losses in the industrial sector have made tourism, always an important component of the Niagara Falls economy, the major economic driver of the community. Visitors to the State Park also spend money at businesses in the City of Niagara Falls, including hotels, restaurants, retail shops, and gas stations. These businesses in turn purchase goods and services from other businesses in the area, thereby supporting the broader regional economy. City residents also use the park, a major recreational and scenic asset for the community.

USA Niagara Development Corporation, a subsidiary of the Empire State Development Corporation, is responsible for supporting and promoting economic development in an area roughly defined by Niagara Street, John B. Daly Boulevard, and the Niagara River in the City of Niagara Falls. In 2002 they prepared a Development Strategy for revitalizing Downtown Niagara Falls. This strategy had 3 phases. Phase 1 targeted key buildings and sites for reactivation. Phase 2 focuses on attracting private investment and new development projects based on the successes in Phase 1. Phase 3 plans to capitalize on the new tourism spending in Phase 2 to complete major attractions. To date, planned improvements completed include the United Office Building Renovation, construction of the Seneca Niagara Casino, construction of a new conference center, and streetscape improvements on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Rainbow Boulevard, and Old Falls Street. One planned improvement not yet realized is a southern gateway to the city that would clearly establish a sense of arrival in Niagara Falls and establish a positive image from the outset. The reconfiguration of the RMP at John Daly Boulevard is identified as a cornerstone to this visual gateway.

The area between Buffalo Avenue and the north side of the park is one of Niagara Falls’ oldest neighborhoods, and contains many historic homes. USA Niagara, in partnership with the City of Niagara Falls is currently developing a Buffalo Avenue Heritage District Revitalization Strategy. This strategy is expected to capitalize on the historic qualities of this neighborhood, encourage historic restoration, enhance pedestrian connections to the park, and promote heritage tourism. This strategy assumes that views of the river from this neighborhood will be restored as part of the RMP reconfiguration.

For a more complete analysis of the social and economic setting, refer to [Appendix F](#).

## 2.5. Environmental Setting

The State Park is an important open space within the City of Niagara Falls. Adjacent and nearby properties comprise a mixed-used neighborhood with land uses ranging from medium density residential and commercial development to industrial and vacant. The Park is located within the NYS Coastal Area, a waterfront-related planning designation that requires projects to conform to the NYS Department of State policies for protection of the coastal resources.

The Niagara River is the primary water resource in the project study area. In addition to its obvious prominence at the Falls and the Upper Rapids along the Park shoreline and its use in electric power generation, the River is a valuable habitat for fish and other aquatic life, as well as a source of drinking water for several communities.

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) classifies the Niagara River as Class A-Special, indicating the best usages of the river are as a source of drinking water, swimming, boating, and fishing. The waters must be suitable for fish, shellfish, and wildlife propagation and survival. Class A waters are also designated by the State as Protected Waters, and any work within 50 feet of the top-of-bank requires a Part 608 Permit. The Niagara River is also regulated by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. If project work zones extend into the river below the ordinary high water level, a Section 404/401 permit would be required.

A visit to the project corridor found there to be no potential for federal or state wetlands on the site, as the site consists of hard fill and the shoreline is hard-armored with rip-rap.

The Niagara River ecology is comprised of both aquatic and terrestrial resources and includes The State Park and the project corridor. There are no natural vegetative cover types or ecological communities as recognized by the New York Natural Heritage Program's Ecological Communities of New York State (January 2002) within the project limits. The two communities found on the site are created and/or altered by humans: mowed lawn with trees; and cultural riverine. The USEPA identifies the Niagara River as an Area of Concern due to a long history of shoreline development that has severely affected the native fish and wildlife habitat along the river, including the subject site. Aquatic degradation is equally due to habitat severely impaired by toxic chemicals such as PCBs, mirex, chlordane, dioxin, dibenzofuran, hexachlorocyclohexane, PAHs, and pesticides.

Agencies concerned with fish and wildlife resources recognize the regional and world-wide significance of the Niagara River ecology. The NYS Department of State maps two Significant Coastal Fish & Wildlife Habitats nearby: the Buckhorn Island-Goat Island Rapids habitat adjacent to the project corridor, and the Buckhorn Island Wetlands complex across the river to the south. The Park and River shoreline serve as prime bird-watching locations, particularly for viewing waterfowl over-wintering on the Niagara River. The subject corridor is adjacent to the NYSDEC-identified Waterfowl Winter Concentration Area that covers the entire Niagara River, which is a major



migratory bird route within the Atlantic flyway. The Audubon Society has designated this area as an Important Bird Area (IBA).

The NYSDEC Natural Heritage Program indicates that two significant natural communities, calcareous talus slope woodland and calcareous cliff community, are present at the west end of the Park property, and two ecologically significant freshwater mussel species were identified around Goat Island. The USF&WS prepared a report on Great Lakes fisheries that identifies various fish habitats and provides maps of spawning and nursery areas of several species in the Niagara River. The report indicates the subject corridor is adjacent to the littoral and rapids fish habitats. The littoral habitat is considered an important spawning and nursery habitat for many fish species.

Regarding air quality, the proposed project is located in the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Region, which is in attainment of carbon monoxide and particulates levels established by the USEPA, but Niagara County is listed as a non-attainment area for ozone. This project is on the current Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), indicating it is in conformance with the State Implementation Plan (SIP) and will not have a significant effect on air quality.

Major noise sources along the corridor include traffic along the RMP and the rush of the Niagara River Rapids. Noise receptors in this area generally include residential properties along the corridor, as well as pedestrians and other users of the park.

Several sites of potential hazardous waste and/or contaminated materials are located on or adjacent to the subject corridor that may have some effect on the construction of any of the alternatives. Notable among these are former petroleum bulk storage sites and industrial sites adjacent to the corridor, historic industrial sites in and around Parking Lot 1 on the north end of the Park, and fill placed in the Park for construction of the existing parkway and to fill the former hydraulic canal.

## **2.6. Local Plans for the Project Area**

The project area is in a New York State Park under the jurisdiction of the Commissioner of the OPRHP. A Master Plan and FEIS were prepared for this project in 1983. All local and regional plans are considered “advisory”. Various historic and recent plans have been developed which overlap with the project area and have been reviewed as part of this scoping process.

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### 3. ALTERNATIVES

#### 3.1. Description of Alternatives

##### Alternative 1: No Build/Null Alternative

The Null Alternative would involve keeping the existing RMP as it currently exists and operates. No improvements would be made. Maintenance activities would continue within the park and interchange.

##### Build Alternatives: Common Features

The State Park is a National Historic Landmark and is included on the S/NRHP. During the first 50 or more years of the park's existence, the Olmsted & Vaux General Plan was the guiding document for park improvements. Therefore, the build alternatives incorporate features reflective of this plan. Although the original Riverway envisioned by Olmsted & Vaux was a two-way carriage road, the current two-lane, one-way westbound operation meets the needs of the park and will be retained.

Design criteria for the build alternatives will be established during preliminary design.

##### Alternative 2: Reconfigured Park Road on Existing Alignment

This alternative would remove the RMP from the John B. Daly Boulevard Interchange to the State Park Parking Lot Number 1, and construct a two-lane, one-way (westbound) low-speed Riverway that would follow the existing RMP alignment. The grade separated interchange would be removed and replaced with an improved intersection configuration. The reconfigured Riverway would connect to State Park Parking Lot Number 1 and to the City. Existing connections to the city street grid would be retained along the road's length.

Modern bicycle and pedestrian facilities would be constructed to consist of a continuous linear path along the entire length of the project, with connectivity to facilities on either end. The path would be either shared use or may be separated for bicyclists and pedestrians. This linear path would be connected to the city street grid at between four and ten locations along the length of the project. Pedestrians would retain priority at the existing overlooks and along the river.

Costs related to earthwork would be minimized by following the existing alignment. As a result, this alternative would not provide a Riverway alignment that follows the 19<sup>th</sup> century Olmsted/Vaux alignment. Overlook-style parking areas would be provided along the Riverway to imitate the historic Olmsted/Vaux design. Plantings, overlooks, and other design elements in context with Olmsted/Vaux design principles would also be incorporated into the design.

Additional parkland amenities will be provided along the length of the Riverway. A new park gateway feature would be placed near the east park limit. Wayfinding signage would be provided along the length of the project.

### Alternative 3: Reconfigured Park Road on Olmsted-Vaux Inspired Alignment and Riverway Design Character

This alternative draws inspiration from the Olmsted-Vaux design as it accommodates contemporary uses and development patterns. It would remove the RMP from the John B. Daly Boulevard Interchange to the State Park Parking Lot Number 1, construct a two-lane, one-way (westbound) low speed scenic Riverway in the character of the alignment of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Olmsted-Vaux design from the park entry to Niagara Street in the manner of a continuous, long, curving alignment. It would follow the historic location and alignment to the greatest extent possible. The grade separated interchange at John B Daly Boulevard would be removed and replaced with an improved intersection configuration. The Riverway would extend from the intersection and follow a curvilinear alignment reflecting that planned by Olmsted-Vaux. The west end of the road would be modified from its current configuration to maintain the quality of the Riverway drive experience. The road would connect to State Park Parking Lot Number 1, Goat Island vehicular bridge and the City. Existing connections to the city street grid would be retained along the roadway's length.

Modern bicycle and pedestrian facilities would be constructed to consist of a continuous linear path along the entire length of the project, with connectivity to facilities on either end. Additional overlooks and viewing areas would be provided, along with landscape treatments to enhance the experience of moving along the river, past the rapids and to the Falls. This linear path would be connected to the city street grid at between four and ten locations along the length of the project.

This alternative would provide a Riverway alignment that is inspired by the 19<sup>th</sup> century Olmsted-Vaux alignment, varied only to accommodate contemporary circulation and safety considerations. Overlook-style parking areas would be provided along the Riverway at key viewing locations. Plantings, overlooks, seating, and other design elements in character with Olmsted-Vaux design principles would also be incorporated.

Additional parkland amenities will be provided along the length of the Riverway. A new park gateway feature would be placed near the east park limit. The east end of the park would be improved for a range of recreational uses through paths, plantings and removal of the east-bound parkway on-ramp. Additional parking and improved pedestrian and bicycle connections to the city will also encourage city use of the east end of the park. Wayfinding signage would be provided along the length of the project.

### Other Concepts Considered

Other design concepts have been considered during alternative development but have been eliminated from further evaluation because they do not meet project objectives. For example, a "no road" through the park concept was considered, but it did not meet 13 out of the 16 project objectives and only partially met 2 more. One of the major concerns is that it does not provide direct access to the State Park from the U.S. interstate system, which is how the majority of park visitors get to the park. In addition, it would change the travel patterns in the City which is likely to benefit some businesses at the expense of those at the opposite end of the park.

<b>Exhibit 3.1 Evaluation of Removal of Park Road</b>	
<b>Objectives</b>	<b>No Road</b>
<b>Improve The State Park</b>	
Provide a clear sense of arrival	No
Welcome all visitors with appropriate arrival facilities	No
Create an appropriately scaled scenic park roadway system	No
Choreograph the roadway landscape	No
Preserve Olmsted & Vaux features (including the "Riverway")	No
Interpret Olmsted & Vaux features	No
Protect aquatic and avian habitats	Yes
<b>Improving the Park Interface with the City</b>	
Create an integrated circulation system	No
Design an improved interface with the City	No
Improve physical connections	No
Improve visual connections	Indeterminate
Provide direct continuous roadway access to the Park/Goat Island/Parking Lot Area	No
<b>Improve Access to the Park and the City</b>	
Reduce maintenance	Minor
Improve pedestrian and bicycle access	No
<b>Opening Economic Possibilities</b>	
Encourage visitors to enjoy both the park and the city	No
Enhance opportunities for appropriately-scaled uses in adjoining City neighborhoods	No

## 3.2. Intersection Configurations

### 3.2.1. John B. Daly Boulevard

All of the Build Alternatives include reconfiguration of the grade-separated interchange at John B. Daly Boulevard. At this location, there are a variety of configurations for reconnecting the roadways that are independent of the alternatives under consideration. The number of approach lanes and the roundabout diameters are based on preliminary evaluation and will be refined during preliminary design based on updated traffic data and additional traffic operation modeling.

#### Configuration 1 – Roundabout at Entrance to Park and City

This option would provide a two-lane modern roundabout south of the signalized intersection of John B. Daly Boulevard and Buffalo Avenue and north of the existing interchange bridges. The roundabout, with its landscaped central island, would serve as a gateway feature for both the City of Niagara Falls and The State Park. The overall diameter of the roundabout, including travel lanes, would be about 150 feet. The roundabout would have a speed limit of approximately 15 miles per hour and the speed reduction would be reinforced via signage and geometric design of the approaches.

Vehicles would approach the roundabout from the east and north. Overhead signs on the RMP would alert westbound drivers that “Expressway Ends”. Roadway geometry would complement speed reduction signage for vehicles approaching the intersection. Westbound vehicles would either enter the City via John B. Daly Boulevard or enter the State Park via a one-way westbound roadway via the roundabout. Vehicles from Niagara Falls on John Daly Boulevard or Buffalo Avenue would approach the roundabout along an extension of John Daly Boulevard. Vehicles could then turn into the State Park or continue to the eastbound RMP.

#### Configuration 2 – Roundabout at Park Entrance

This option is similar to Option 1 in that it provides a two-lane roundabout between the existing interchange ramps and Buffalo Avenue. Option 2 differs, however, in that traffic to the city is diverted via a single lane slip ramp to John B. Daly Boulevard. Diverting this traffic away from the roundabout allows the diameter of the roundabout to be reduced to approximately 130 feet.

Operations of the roundabout would be similar to Option 1, with the exception of the exit to John B. Daly Boulevard.

Operations of the roundabout would be similar to Option 1.

#### Configuration 3 – Free-flow Access to Park

This option would provide a simplified grade-separated interchange between traffic exiting the City from John B. Daly Boulevard to the RMP. This would allow for a grade separated surface slip ramp for RMP westbound traffic approaching the State Park, passing underneath the new overpass bridge which could serve as an entry feature. There would be a direct connection for westbound RMP traffic to John B. Daly Boulevard.

Overhead signs on the RMP would alert westbound drivers that “Expressway Ends” and would direct traffic to the City of Niagara Falls to keep right and traffic to the State Park to keep left. Roadway geometry would complement speed reduction signage for vehicles approaching the intersection.

### Comparison of Intersection Configurations

All three intersection options provide a visually-reinforced sense of transition between the RMP from the east to Park and City access to the west and north. The selection of intersection configurations will be based on a detailed traffic modeling exercise and evaluation of traffic flow characteristics during design development.

#### **3.2.2. Other Connection Points**

In addition to John B. Daly Boulevard, the following existing connections to the RMP will be retained under the Build Alternatives:

- 4th Street
- Main Street/Buffalo Avenue
- Old Falls Street
- Mayor Michael T. O’Laughlin Drive
- Prospect Street
- State Park Parking Lot No. 1

During the preliminary design phase configuration options will be evaluated for the connections.

#### **3.3. Evaluation of Alternatives**

Exhibit 3.2 below summarizes which Alternatives under consideration meet the project objectives. All those alternatives that meet the project objectives will be carried forward for further study. In addition, the No Build alternative will be studied further as required by NEPA and SEQRA.

<b>Exhibit 3.2 Comparison of Alternatives Considered to Objectives</b>			
<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Alternatives Considered</b>		
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
	<b>No Build</b>	<b>Reconfigure Park Road on Existing Alignment</b>	<b>Reconfigure Park Road on Olmsted/ Vaux Alignment</b>
<b>Improve The State Park</b>			
Provide a clear sense of arrival	No	Yes	Yes
Welcome all visitors with appropriate arrival facilities	No	Yes	Yes
Choreograph the roadway landscape	No	Partial	Yes
Preserve Olmsted & Vaux features (including the "Riverway")	No	Partial	Yes
Interpret Olmsted & Vaux features	No	Partial	Yes
Protect aquatic and avian habitats	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Improving the Park Interface with the City</b>			
Create an integrated circulation system	No	Yes	Yes
Design an improved interface with the City	No	Yes	Yes
Improve physical connections	No	Partial	Yes
Improve visual connections	No	Partial	Yes
Provide direct continuous roadway access to the Park/Goat Island/Parking Lot Area	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Improve Access to the Park and the City</b>			
Create an appropriately scaled roadway system	No	Yes	Yes
Reduce maintenance	No	Yes	Yes
Improve pedestrian and bicycle access	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Opening Economic Possibilities</b>			
Encourage visitors to enjoy both the park and the city	Yes	Yes	Yes
Provide opportunities for appropriately-scaled uses in adjoining City neighborhoods	No	Yes	Yes

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## 4. SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR ALTERNATIVES

### 4.1. NEPA and SEQRA Classification

This project will be advanced as a NEPA Class III, and a SEQR Type 1 project. While the project itself is generally contained within the boundaries of the State Park or other lands under the jurisdiction of the State of New York and City of Niagara Falls, the Historical Listing of the State Park and its proximity to the Niagara River may result in impacts that are heretofore unknown.

### 4.2. Issues to be Studied

This chapter will describe the breadth and scope of the issues that are to be studied during the design development of the alternatives stated in Chapter 3. These include:

- Social Issues
- Economic Issues
- Environmental Issues
- Historical Issues
- Access and Transportation Issues

### 4.3. Social Issues

The beneficial and adverse social effects of each alternative under consideration will be studied. The analysis will include maps or plans to clearly show any features discussed in the accompanying text such as: historic sites, parks, zoning districts, etc. In summary, the work will include analyzing the effect of the project alternatives on social and quality of life conditions in the community.

#### Demographics and Affected Population

Based on census data and local sources, the demographics of the potentially affected population in the study area will be described. The demographic composition of the study area will be compared to that of the rest of the City.

#### Consideration of Environmental Justice for Low-Income and Minority Populations

This project is located in an Environmental Justice Area identified by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The analysis will contain a map indicating the location of low-income and minority populations in the study area, a summary of the effects of the project alternatives on these populations, whether positive or negative. If any negative effects are identified there shall be a determination as to whether these impacts are disproportionately high and adverse based on overall demographic information in the study

area. However, the scope of the project alternatives is expected to be positive in terms of neighborhood character and access to important visual and park amenities. As a result, it is expected that none of the project alternatives will have disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects.

### Park User Experience

The park serves regional, national, and international visitors. The anticipated effect of the alternatives on the overall experience of each of these types of park users will be described qualitatively based on proposed changes to roadway, bicycle, pedestrian, and landscape features.

#### 4.3.1. Land Use

Existing land use adjacent to the project area will be mapped and described. The analysis will identify current land use development patterns and trends in the study area.

### Compatibility with Plans and Policies

The land use discussion will also assess the compatibility of the alternatives with the *Comprehensive Plan for the City of Niagara Falls, USA*, the *Buffalo Avenue Heritage District Strategy* prepared for USA Niagara, the *City of Niagara Falls' Zoning Ordinance*, the *Niagara River Greenway Vision and Project Proposals*, and other relevant documents. These documents will be reviewed for plans and policies related to the transportation system, parks and other community facilities, existing development, proposed and permitted commercial and residential development, economic drivers, neighborhood connections, and other factors.

The analysis will also identify and discuss potential coordinated planning and development initiatives that could preserve or enhance the social, economic, environmental, and visual values of the study area as per State Law (PAR Title B, Section 3.09.4). This work will consider the potential benefits to be derived, identify which business districts or residential areas are likely to benefit, and the entities responsible for maintaining the measures should be identified.

#### 4.3.2. Neighborhood Community Cohesion

The proposed alternatives would require no displacement of residences or businesses and there would be no relocation impacts.

Positive effects on community cohesion are anticipated as a result of the project alternatives. Specifically, the analysis will assess how the alternatives will:

- Promote neighborhood activity and interaction
- Physically reconnect the State Park with the adjoining resident neighborhood and commercial district
- Provide a connection between the downtown, the casino, and the river, thereby having a positive effect on pedestrian and vehicular traffic to support tourist-related businesses, thereby strengthening the health of the community; and

- Create an environment that encourages investment in vacant and underutilized properties that currently are “holes” in the fabric of the community.

#### 4.3.3. Community Character

The project area is a linear park and parkway which lines the Niagara River on the edge of a mixed-use urban neighborhood with a mix of one-, two-, and multi- family homes and scattered, predominantly tourist-related commercial uses along Buffalo Avenue and Rainbow Boulevard. The analysis will identify and map current land use development patterns and trends in the study area. Existing neighborhood character will be described based on the following characteristics:

- Visual quality and views
- Historic resources
- Walkability
- Percentage of owner-occupied housing
- Neighborhood stability, including any recent and anticipated changes in the neighborhood or its population
- Transportation and access issues
- Property values (existing and anticipated changes)

#### 4.3.4. School Districts, Recreational Areas, and Places of Worship

The report will identify all existing schools, recreational areas and facilities in the project and study areas and related mobility and access needs to these recreational resources. The project does not contain a residential component, and therefore would not affect school enrollments or places of worship.

#### 4.3.5. Effect on Public Safety

The emergency service providers (police, fire, ambulance) for the project area will be identified. Impacts, if any, to anticipated response times due to the project alternatives will be evaluated.

#### 4.3.6. Economic Issues

##### Regional and Local Economies

This study will describe the general economic conditions of the study area, the City of Niagara Falls, and the region. The analysis will describe the tax base, property values, employment opportunities, and Economic Development Zones. Specific attention will be given to the tourism industry.

The analysis will assess the economic impacts of the design alternatives on the regional and/or local economy. Potential effects to be assessed include the effect of the alternatives on development, tax revenues and public expenditures, employment opportunities, accessibility, and retail sales.

## Business Districts and Established Businesses

The analysis will identify and map local business districts in the study area along Buffalo Avenue and Rainbow Boulevard and describe their character and vitality. Key established businesses, including anchor establishments, will be described in terms of their size, location, and character. Existing transportation options in and out of district for vehicles, walkers, and bikers will be described. The character of the business district and the surrounding neighborhood will be described in general terms, and will specifically address existing traffic volumes; parking; and pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access.

This section will assess the potential effects of the project alternatives on established business districts in the study area. Opportunities to maximize positive effects on nearby business districts through coordinated public and/or private sector initiatives will be assessed.

Long-term impacts to the existing business districts are anticipated to be positive, based upon improvements to vehicular and pedestrian movements between the river and the adjoining downtown, and to the roadway enhancements. The work will include an assessment of the effect of the project alternatives on access, views, and other physical characteristics that attract tourism and the related effects on retail shops, restaurants, hotels, and other service-related businesses.

Effects on business districts will be assessed for each project alternative based on:

- Changes to existing traffic volumes
- Changes to character of surrounding neighborhood or area
- Changes to parking ease and availability
- Changes to pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access

## Potential Effects on property values

The potential effect that each alternative may have on property values will be studied. The relative extent to which each alternative would make the surrounding area more attractive for residents, businesses, and investors will be described. Data from other comparable projects will be referenced in evaluating the effect the proposed improvements would have on real estate values.

## Economic Impacts on the State Park

All excess revenue from park attractions and concessions is reinvested in the state park program. The alternatives will be evaluated to determine their potential affects on parks' revenues and the resulting impacts on the park infrastructure fund.

#### 4.4. Environmental

##### Water-Related Resources

- Surface Waterbodies and Watercourses

The alternatives are not envisioned to directly involve waterbodies; however, the alternatives will be evaluated for potential direct or indirect discharges of stormwater to the Niagara River. The alternatives will be evaluated for permit requirements to determine whether Section 401/404 or Section 10 permits will be required, and whether work will occur within 50 feet of the top of bank of the Niagara River, requiring a Part 608 Protection of Waters permit.

- Navigable Waters

The alternatives are not envisioned to directly involve navigable waters; however, the alternatives will be evaluated for potential direct or indirect affects on the Niagara River, which is classified as navigable water. The alternatives will be evaluated for permit requirements to determine whether a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Section 10 and/or U. S. Coast Guard Section 9 permits will be required.

- Coastal Resources

The proposed action will be assessed for compatibility with all applicable New York State Coastal Zone policies. Under coastal zone management laws, Niagara Falls and its adjoining lands is an “Area of Particular Concern” requiring special management based on the following criteria: “An area of unique, scarce, fragile or vulnerable natural habitat; unique or fragile, physical, figuration; historical significance, cultural value or scenic importance (including resources on or determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places). Consistency with these policies and plans will be documented in a Federal Coastal Assessment Form (FCAF).

- Stormwater Management

For each design alternative, potential sources of surface water pollution from construction activities and from motor vehicle use of the completed project will be assessed. Then temporary and permanent measures and practices will be considered to avoid or minimize surface water pollution. In addition, both temporary and permanent measures to control soil erosion and sedimentation will be considered. This assessment will be completed per NYSDOT procedures. It is anticipated that a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) will be required.

### General Ecology and Wildlife

A field investigation will be conducted to determine existing terrestrial and aquatic ecological characteristics in the project area, including: habitat types (field, shrubland, riparian, etc.); relative abundance of each habitat type; characteristic plant species associated with each habitat type; characteristic fish and wildlife known or expected to occur in the project vicinity; and the presence of invasive plant species.

The nature, extent, and significance of potential impacts of each project alternative will be evaluated on fish, wildlife, and habitat. Potential impacts on any threatened or endangered species will be identified. The amount and type of vegetation to be disturbed will be evaluated, along with any special habitats that might be damaged, the possible interruption of fish and wildlife movements and spread of invasive species.

### Cultural Resources

Niagara Falls State Park is a National Register of Historic Places Listed Site. Therefore the historic nature of the landscape and its relationship to the Olmsted and Vaux General Plan will be studied and evaluated as part of the design of the build alternatives and a Section 4(f) evaluation. The project study area will also be evaluated for other historic and cultural resources that may be present, in compliance with the Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

The initial screening will include research and documentation of pre-history and history of the project site, a field visit by an archeologist, and photographic documentation of structures within and adjoining the park. These materials will be submitted to the State Historic Preservation Office as part of the Section 106 consultation process. Affects to adjacent Historic Register-eligible sites will also be documented in a Section 4(f) evaluation.

### Visual Resources

The alternatives will be assessed to evaluate the qualitative changes in the visual environment of the park as seen by park patrons and persons on adjoining properties. Key views and significant visual resources will be defined for each viewer group. Visual simulations of the alternatives will be prepared for key views and incorporated into a Visual Impact Assessment.

### Air Quality, Energy, and Noise

Screenings will take place to determine if significant impacts on air quality or noise will occur. Issues to consider will be whether any of the alternatives result in receptor distances being closer than today. Receptors such as residences, places of gathering, etc. will be evaluated for their distance to pollutive sources such as automobiles.

Potential impacts on energy consumption will be evaluated. Since no change in traffic capacity or traffic patterns are anticipated, no significant change in energy usage is expected to result from the project.

### Asbestos and Hazardous Waste

- Hazardous Waste

A screening of existing environmental databases and historical resources has been prepared to identify any potential concerns associated with the project that may impact the environment or the health and safety of construction personnel and the public.

The sites of potential concern will be evaluated in the context of their potential effect on project construction as the alternatives are developed.

- Asbestos

The subject corridor has the potential to include asbestos-containing materials on utility lines, bridges or expansion joints. During design development, an Asbestos Assessment will be performed by a certified asbestos inspector to determine whether asbestos-containing materials (ACM) would be encountered during construction of the build alternatives.

### Construction Effects (HMM)

For each design alternative, the effects of construction on park operations and adjacent properties will be evaluated qualitatively.

## 4.5. Issues Not Present in Corridor

The following resources are not present in the project corridor and do not require further study:

- Farmland
- State & Federal Wetlands
- Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers
- Floodplains
- Critical Environmental Areas
- Sole Source, primary or principal aquifers

Future reports will document the lack of presence of these features in this project.

For a full discussion of Environmental Issues expected on this project, refer to **Appendix G**.

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<sup>i</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, *General Plan for the Improvement of the Niagara Reservation*, 1887; 6.

## Appendix A – Project Alternative Plans