

Canton Brownfield Opportunity Area Step 2 Nomination Study— Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Project Overview

The Village of Canton BOA Step 2 Nomination Study addresses the aspirations of the Canton community while striving to be economically feasible and readily accomplished after the project is complete. Following thorough analysis of the Study Area's current conditions, extensive community outreach and concise market-analysis with a focus on diverse housing options, the Nomination Study provides recommendations for the future of Canton, along with strategies for implementation of projects. The suggested projects are driven by a plan that identifies catalytic sites or areas and redevelopment alternatives and other improvements based on extensive community outreach, stakeholder meetings and roundtables, Steering Committee meetings and a market and housing analysis.

The Nomination Study also includes implementation strategies such as: sources of funding, phasing techniques, and continuation of or new partnerships to assist with development within the Study Area, and maintaining Canton's status as a regional hub and destination. The ultimate goal of the Step 2 Nomination Study is for the BOA to receive an official designation, enabling the Village to execute the plan provided to them, have increased preference for grants, and attract new investment.

What is a Brownfield?

In New York State brownfields are defined as vacant, abandoned, or underutilized properties for which redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination. They are often former commercial and industrial buildings or the land on which they were located. Examples include mills, factories, foundries, and gas stations.

What is the Brownfield Opportunity Area program?

The BOA program is funded by New York State Department of State and provides an area-wide approach to the assessment and redevelopment of brownfields or other vacant or abandoned properties within a community. The overall goal of the program is

- Assess the range of redevelopment opportunities
- Build a shared community vision for the reuse of sites and the actions needed to achieve revitalization
- Coordinate with agencies, community groups and private sector partners to implement solutions and leverage investment in the community

The BOA program is three steps. The ultimate goal of a Step 2 Nomination Study is to receive an official Brownfield designation, allowing the City to execute the plan provided to them, have increased preference for grants, and attract investment from developers.

Step 3 of the program provides funding through the Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) for continued studies and pre-development activities to advance strategies and projects that were identified in Step 2.

Regional and Community Setting

The village of Canton, located in St. Lawrence County, is just 30 minutes south of the City of Ogdensburg and an hour north of the City of Watertown, home of the Fort Drum Military Base. Canton is the County Seat and a regional economic hub within a predominately rural county. Once a thriving and dense area, the village experienced a variety of development due to the abundance of mills along the Grasse River. Almost all of the mills within Canton have since shut-down, creating pockets of industrial vacancy and associated vacancy within the village's main corridors.

The village is home to two major universities, the State University of New York (SUNY) Canton and St. Lawrence University. This creates a seasonal swell for the Canton, which in turn leads to economic drought in the months that classes are not in session.

Despite the hardships that Canton has felt, there are a number of attractions within the community of Canton. Among those attractions are the natural resources and parks surrounding the Grasse River and its regional setting within the North Country. The Town and Village of Canton also recently completed a Comprehensive Plan and is submitting an Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields grant for FY2022. The BOA is comprised of many of the cities prominent structures and properties, including the Cascade Inn & Diner, the former Kraft Foods Plant, the Miner Street Feed Mill and the vacant Jubilee Plaza.



Project Timeline

- Step 1 Pre-Nomination Study (Complete in 2011)
- Step 2 Nomination Study (Complete in 2021)
- Official BOA Designation (2022)
- Step 3 Implementation Projects (Following Designation)

Public Participation

The Village of Canton BOA Step 2 Nomination study was developed through and informed by an extensive community participation process which involved gathering input from residents, visitors, business owners, elected officials, private and nonprofit organizations to ensure that the plan was representative of the community's desires and the needs of the community it is intended to serve and attract. The engagement activities are as follows:

- Steering Committee meetings
- Community Conversations – meetings with groups in various settings
- Visioning Tours – interactive site visits with groups of stakeholders
- Public Meetings and Workshops – Conducted in person in October 2019; online thereafter because of COVID-19 restrictions
- Community Survey – distributed online via Survey Monkey

In March of 2020, the COVID 19 Pandemic stay-at-home order issued by Gov. Andrew Cuomo forced planning projects into a brief hiatus while project owners and teams waited out the uncertainty triggered by the panic phase

of the pandemic. The project team began planning to pivot to online engagement when it became clear that the situation was grave and would last many months. Project Team and Steering Committee meetings were held on the Zoom platform. Fortunately, much of the public engagement activities planned for the project had already taken place when the stay-at-home order was issued. Additional public workshops were held via Zoom in _____, 2021 which completed the engagement schedule.



Study Area Boundary

The Study Area boundary was informed by the Step 1 Pre-Nomination Study and extended early within the Step 2 process. The Boundary was extended to include all parcels directly abutting Gouverneur Street. Due to this, only one parcel was added, and the boundary increased by just over 6 acres total. Other than the additional parcel, no other changes were made to the boundary.

The updated, 215-acre Study Area encompasses the southwest portion of the village of Canton and includes a portion of Grasse River which flows from south to north. The Study Area includes Bend in the River Park as its southern boundary; the State University of New York at Canton (SUNY Canton) footbridge as its northern boundary; Gouverneur Street as its western boundary; and Park Street as its eastern boundary.

Demographics

The population of the Canton BOA increased 1.1% from 2000-2019, but is projected to decrease 1.2% by 2024. The town and village of Canton are both experiencing similar circumstances with populations that are projected to continue to shrink through 2024.

Including the 353 (21.2%) households in the Canton BOA, there are 1,669 households in the village of Canton. The households within the Canton BOA have a median income of \$52, 515 with 20.5% earning less than \$25,000 per year.

Residents aged 55 and older experienced large population growths between 2010 and 2019 in St. Lawrence County, the village and Town, and the Study Area. People aged 35-to-44 and 75-and-over age cohorts, followed by those between the ages of 65 and 74 are experiencing the fastest population growth in the village of Canton and the BOA Study Area, as indicated by ESRI projections through 2024.

Land Ownership

The village and town of Canton own a total of 22 acres within the Study Area which makes up 13% of the parcels. Village owned properties include the municipal building and Bend in the River Park.

With 1% owned by the US Postal Service and 3.25% owned by St. Lawrence County, the remainder 82.75% is privately owned. Notable private properties within the Study Area include the vacant Jubilee plaza, The Cascade Inn & Diner, the Feed Mill and the vacant McDonald's on Main Street.

Land Use and Zoning

There are 8 Zoning Districts within the Study Area. More dominant zoning consists of:

- 14% as C-1 Retail Commercial
- 27% as C-2 General Commercial

- 16% as O-S Open Space
- 18% as R-2 Residential General

The smaller portions consist of 9% as B-1 Business, 7% as R-1 Residential-One Family, 7% as M-1 Manufacturing, and 2% as P-M Planned Manufacturing.

The Village Park Historic District that is focused on the Village Park and surrounding properties located on Main Street, falls within the BOA Study Area totaling 4.75 acres.

Brownfields and Underutilized Sites

33 sites within the Study Area have been identified as potential brownfields, or vacant and underutilized lots. The sites make up over 65 acres and comprise 30% of the BOA Study Area.

Nearly half (15) of the brownfield, vacant, or underutilized sites are found in the Retail Commercial zoning district surrounding Main Street, Riverside Drive, and Miner Street due to the industrial history of Canton's downtown area. Therefore these sites are extremely visible to both community members, commuters and visitors to the area.

The Step 1 Pre-Nomination document for the Canton BOA established five Focus Areas based on locations of sites that were a part the Brownfield, Vacant, and Underutilized site inventory. When revising the inventory, it is evident that the previously established focus areas below have remained intact.

- Canton Highway Department
- Riverside Area
- Jubilee Area
- Gouverneur Area
- Bend in the River Area

Key sites within the inventory include:

- 25, 27, 29 Riverside Drive – Former Riverside Laundromat
- 2 Main Street – Former Family Dollar
- 8 Miner Street – Feed Mill
- 25, 27 Gouverneur Street – Former Mace Motors



Parks and Open Space

The village of Canton contains a variety of park space including Bend in the River Park, the Buck Street Playground, and Canton Island Park are all within the BOA Study Area, are maintained by the Canton Parks and Recreation Department.

Two parks were developed and are owned by Grasse River Heritage within the Study Area:

- Grasse River Heritage Park
- Dwight Church Park

Transportation Systems

The main transportation routes found within the Study Area are Main Street (Route 68/Route 11) and Gouverneur Street (Route 11). These routes are heavily used by local and regional traffic as well as semi-trailers.

Public transportation is available through the St. Lawrence County Public Transportation system and its partnership with SUNY Canton. Since the two organizations have partnered, routes have been updated and expanded. SUNY

Canton students can utilize the bus service for free with student ID and the public is able to ride any route for \$2 a trip. There are two stops within the Study Area including the Diane Burns Tower on Riverside Drive and the Buck Street Playground.

Walking ability is dampened as you move further from the downtown center of the village, and there are bike lanes on the 2 primary travel routes.

Currently, there are bike lanes located on the Route 68/11 Bridge due to Canton's Complete Streets initiative. These are the only bike lanes present the village and BOA Study Area.

Natural Resources

The Grasse River, which flows northeast from the Adirondacks to the St. Lawrence Valley, is a significant resource for the Study Area for recreational and environmental purposes.

Despite the fact that the Study Area does not contain any NYS or federally designated wetlands and is not located above an aquifer, the entire BOA Study Area contains rare plants and animals that prospective developments should be mindful of when planning for the future.



Market Analysis

The market analysis includes relevant information on demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, economic conditions, and real estate market trends in and around the village of Canton, and identifies opportunities for the redevelopment of sites within the Study Area. Among the findings and conclusions of the market analysis are the following:

- More individuals commute into the village to work than leave for jobs elsewhere. About 25% of in-commuters travel at least 50 miles each way from home to work.
- Demographic shifts impacting housing demand in the Canton area include fewer family households with children; an increasing number of one- and two-person households; and a dramatic rise in households headed by an individual aged 65 or older.
- Retail stores make up about 23% of the businesses in downtown Canton, but selection of everyday convenience goods such as groceries is limited. Accommodations and food service account for 19%, but there are fewer restaurants than there were in the past.
- Potential commercial opportunities in the proposed BOA include additional specialty goods retailers; sit-down restaurants offering waterfront dining or music; businesses related to the arts, entertainment, and recreation; personal services; and alternative business models such as pop-up stores, retail incubators, and food halls.

Project Goals

The overall goals were created from key themes that were noted during the planning process. They also reinforce goals established in Canton's recently updated Comprehensive Plan, DRI Application and other past planning efforts.

1. To realize our shared ambitions and our personal ambitions through transparency, accountability, and mutual positive regard in all aspects of civic life.

2. To preserve, enhance, and interpret the historic and culturally significant qualities of BOA study area.
3. To develop an ethic of environmental responsibility and understanding of the importance of durability, resiliency, and sustainability in community design and development.

Vision Statement

Engaged. Historic. Resilient.

*We are an **engaged** community. We are active in civic affairs because we care deeply about our community and about one another. We are economically and socially inclusive. We support a diversity of business, education, housing, and recreational resources.*

*We are an **historic** community. We retain Canton's founding principles of hard work, hospitality, and ingenuity. Legacy North Country families and newcomers alike are integral to the vitality of our community and of the river that runs through it. The Grasse River is our heritage and our future.*

*We are a **resilient** community. We are climate conscious, and we prepared for an efficient, environmentally sustainable future. We have forged clean industries and returned our land to health. Together we craft a vibrant future.*

Strategic Sites and Suggested Reuse

Long before the start of the BOA process and the completion of the Canton Step 1 Pre-Nomination Study in 2011, multiple parties have taken vested interest in the redevelopment of properties that have the power to be transformative within the community and positively impact the surrounding North Country region. Many of these properties were identified in the Step 1 Pre-Nomination Study, are mentioned in other planning documents/studies, and are within the existing Step 2 Study Area and part of the Brownfield Inventory. Though a great deal of planning has gone into these sites already, it is still necessary to include them as Strategic Sites within the Step 2 Nomination Study to leverage previous planning and to remain diligent with consistent efforts towards reuse.

Previously Planned Sites

1. Jubilee Plaza

Located on Miner Street just south of Canton's municipal building and the vacant McDonald's, experienced deterioration and disinvestment within the downtown core for many years. Although the plaza is partially occupied, the former Jubilee grocery store, which had the largest footprint within the plaza, has been closed and the building deteriorating for over 15 years.

Suggested reuse: Entrepreneurship Center, commercial space, residential units

2. Former Family Dollar

The former Family Dollar footprint is located just south of Canton's Main Street and sits directly east of the Grasse River and Willow Island. The building is surrounded by a large parking lot, H&R Block to the north east and a Feed Mill directly east. Being located on Main Street, which is Canton's most traversed thoroughfare, makes the vacant Family Dollar constantly visible to community members, seasonal visitors to the area, and commuters who may not live or work in Canton but utilize Main Street as part of their daily routine.

Suggested reuse: Eatery, restaurant, outdoor seating

3. 25,27,29 Riverside Drive

Since the end of river-dependent industry within the village and more recently, the closing of Riverside Laundromat; 25, 27 and 29 Riverside Drive became dilapidated and quickly transformed into an eye-sore. After being identified in the Step 1 Pre-Nomination Study as part of the Brownfield Inventory and as a redevelopment project as part of the Grasse River LWRP, the Town of Canton demolished the unsound structure in the summer of 2019 to provide space for new development.

Suggested reuse: Mixed-use commercial with residential

Remaining Sites

4. Riverside Drive

Riverside Drive is the northern gateway into the village of Canton and home to a number of long-standing local businesses and senior living facilities. Riverside Drive also connects directly to the SUNY Canton Footbridge just north of the BOA Study Area and directly abuts the Grasse River to the west. Now that there is vacant space within the corridor, there is opportunity for change. Many community members and local stakeholders have expressed the desire for opportunities to enjoy views of the Grasse River via restaurants and bars.

Suggested reuse: Restaurant with outdoor dining, streetscape enhancements, bike lanes

5. Main Street Alley

An alley separating two Main Street buildings is located just south of one of the Village's public parking lot. Currently, this alley has little to no pedestrian traffic due to minimal lighting, lack of signage and the presence of barriers on either end that discourage use as a pedestrian thoroughfare.

Suggested reuse: Activation through outdoor seating, lighting and temporary art

6. Gouverneur Gateway

The Gouverneur Gateway has seen a lack of investment for a number of decades. Many traveling north from Syracuse and Watertown use Gouverneur Street as a way to enter the village of Canton. Despite this traffic, there remains a number of underutilized and vacant lots fronting Gouverneur Street. Although there is a wide variety of uses, the area itself is not deemed pedestrian-friendly, experiences a high amount of automobile and truck traffic, and lacks density.

Suggested reuse: Updated streetscaping to address traffic, installation of gateway features, waterfront dining, waterfront trails and access in areas that allow small watercraft launches

7. Bend in the River Park

Bend in the River Park is located in the southern portion of the BOA Study Area and encompasses a number of highly utilized community assets including the Canton Recreational Pavilion, courts and ballfields, a multi-purpose paved loop trail and a picnic shelter with grills. Although Bend in the River Park offers a number of amenities for community members and visitors to the area, the lack of gateway enhancements and vacant building on site take away from its appeal as a sprawling and relaxing green space in the village. The park is also tucked away from areas of high pedestrian and automobile traffic.

7. Bend in the River Park Cont'd:

The park was identified in Canton's Step 1 Pre-Nomination Study as a subarea to focus on due to the land once being a landfill, being home to the inactive water treatment facility as well as being in close proximity to underutilized land directing abutting the Grasse River. The park is also just south of the Atlantic testing being a former co-generation facility and the Village's highway garage located just north east of the Park's gateway.

Suggested reuse: wayfinding signage, installation of small water craft, Frisbee golf course or bike track, streetscaping improvements

Key Findings and Recommendations

The Town and Village of Canton's Department of Community and Economic Development has been a leader in furthering the success of economic development initiatives throughout the community that aid in revitalization. Below are strategies that Canton should continually refer back to assist with the inducing of development and prosperity within not only the local community but the North Country region.

- Development of New and Diverse Housing
- Marketing and Branding Plan
- Continued Waterfront Enhancement and Development
- Maintain a Supportive Small Business Climate

Recommended Step 3 Implementation Projects

NYS DOS provides funding for planning and design project recommendations developed as part of Step 2 Nomination studies. The projects should align with the goals and vision realized during the Step 2 planning process and with ongoing planning work within the community. A variety of Step 3 projects were suggested for the Canton's BOA spanning from the implementation of a bike lane network to Main Street alley enhancements.

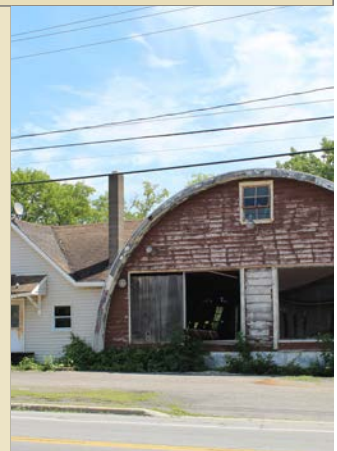
Priority projects were identified with assistance from the Village of Canton, DOS and the Steering Committee including:

Transportation and Access Plan

The Village and Town of Canton in partnership with their residents, can actively plan transportation improvements to create a more accessible and safer circulation system for full-time residents, University students, and visitors. Current efforts are chiefly around two ongoing projects: implementation of the 2018 Master Trails Plan and implementing recommendations developed by the Complete Streets Task Force.

Gouverneur Street Gateway Enhancements

The Gouverneur Street Gateway is one of St. Lawrence County's busiest corridors with almost 7,700 cars entering the village from the south on Route 11 each day. This was once a thriving mixed-use corridor with homes, local businesses and services including the local bakery, one of Canton's two lumber yards and a car dealership. Over the years the character of the corridor has eroded. It lacks defined curb cuts, and features narrow sidewalks, few streetscape amenities, and no bike lanes. There are some deteriorating vacant and underutilized properties. The Gouverneur Street Gateway can be a welcoming image for the village of Canton. It should communicate a sense of prosperity and vitality. A greener, cleaner and more comfortable atmosphere will naturally calm traffic and result in increased property values.



Cascade Inn New York Main Street Technical Assistance Grant

The iconic Cascade Inn motel and restaurant with its appealingly retro downstairs watering hole, the Buc-caneer Lounge (the Buc) is a Canton landmark. The building has presided over the intersection of Gouverneur and Main streets at the gateway to downtown for more than 50 years. The Village of Canton should apply for a New York Main Street Technical Assistance grant from New York Homes and Community Renewal to support the owner of the Cascade Inn.



Canton Pavilion and Recreation Rehabilitation and Bend in the River Park Improvements

The state of the Park's current Pavilion and Recreation Center is outdated and worn with signs of visible wear and tear surrounding the exterior of the building. The building is also the first thing visitors and community members see when they enter the Park from the north on Lincoln Street. As such, the Pavilion and Recreation Center needs significant exterior and gateway improvements in order to maintain and increase the visitor ship to both the Park and to the village's downtown for events and tournaments.

Suggested improvements to the Pavilion and Recreation Center include streetscaping and new sidewalks leading to the Park, façade improvements, new signage for the building, wayfinding signage within the downtown, lighting improvements and parking lot improvements such as striping and plantings.

Riverside Drive Public Realm Improvement Plan

The Village of Canton has been continuously working on transforming Riverside Drive into an active corridor within the community. As it seeks to expand the traditional downtown outside of Main Street and draw people to the waterfront along Riverside Drive, a focus on the public realm is a crucial piece of the puzzle. Leveraging views of the Grasse River and redeveloping vacant space will assist in molding Riverside Drive into an active, multi-modal thoroughfare, where community members both live and gather.

As part of a focus on a public realm design plan and efforts to revitalize Riverside Drive, the Village of Canton should identify elements that tie the community together through streets, sidewalks and trails, as well as thematically.