



Open Buffalo Urban Ecology Campus & Climate Resilience Hub Community Impact Report



“There has to be a place where vision can be seen and expanded upon. It has to be a place where local minds can be fertilized. Regardless of their economic status. Regardless of if their parents are together. Regardless of if they’re Muslim or Christian. Regardless of if they’re Black people from America, Black people from the Caribbean, or the Bangladesh community. We have to have spaces and places where people can be free to imagine, follow their curiosities, and have accessibility and tools to move higher.”

*-Ras Jomo Akono
Member of the Open Buffalo Eco Collective.*



Illustration by Stacey Robinson, 2023

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Introduction

“Every resident of Western New York deserves access to economic opportunity and a healthy environment.”

But generations of disparate investment patterns and historical exclusion mean that many residents do not have the ability to access high-quality education, good paying jobs, restorative natural spaces, or welcoming gathering places.

The **Open Buffalo Urban Ecology Campus & Climate Resilience Hub (Eco Campus)** is a holistic solution to address the intersecting and systemic challenges faced by residents of these communities, the 256,000 residents of NYS designated Disadvantaged Community Areas (DACs) in Buffalo, Cheektowaga, Lackawanna, and Niagara Falls¹, and in particular, approximately 93,000² residents of the East Side of Buffalo.

The model of the Eco Campus is rooted in environmental sustainability, residential empowerment through leadership development, and economic development that benefits systemically disinvested community members first. The Eco Campus will provide much-needed outdoor green space to promote personal and community wellness.



2025 Open Buffalo Staff

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Max Anderson, *Deputy Director*

Todd Geise, *Director of Administration*

Darryl Gaines, *Impact Officer*

Devon Patterson, *Director of Community Engagement*

Leslie Nickerson, *Director of Leadership Development*

Dr. Kush K. Bhardwaj, *Director of Racial Equity and Justice*

Dr. Jim Golden, *Director of Ecological Justice*

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Greg Glover, *Ecological Justice Specialist*

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Letter From the Executive Director

Greetings,

As I write this, I am filled with immense gratitude for the unwavering commitment and collective action that have propelled Open Buffalo forward since our founding in 2014. Our journey toward ecological justice and community empowerment has been marked by significant milestones, none more transformative than the strides we've made in realizing the vision of our Urban Ecology Campus and Climate Resilience Hub (Eco Campus).

This initiative is more than a project; it's a testament to our dedication to addressing the intersecting challenges of environmental degradation, systemic disinvestment, and social inequity that have long affected Buffalo's East Side. The Eco Campus stands as a beacon of hope and a model for climate refuge cities nationwide, rooted in the principles of justice, equity, and environmental healing.

Central to this endeavor is our Eco Collective, a dynamic group of visionaries, community leaders, and advocates who have been instrumental in shaping the strategic direction of the Eco Campus. Their active participation ensures that our efforts are community-driven, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of those most impacted by climate change and environmental injustice.

At Open Buffalo, we believe deeply in the power of people to transform their own conditions. Any solution that truly lifts people and changes lives must come directly from the community.

Through collaborative design and planning, we've envisioned a space that not only addresses environmental toxins in our air, soil, and water but also prepares our communities, especially communities of color, for the growing opportunities in the green job sector. The Eco Campus will serve as a hub for education, workforce development, and community engagement, offering residents the tools and strategies needed to build neighborhood-level climate resilience.

As we look ahead, we are excited to continue to be a strong community anchor. This report illustrates the myriad ways in which Open Buffalo hopes to empower and equip residents with the skills, knowledge, resources, and opportunities to create lasting change in their community.

To those who have been on this journey with us: Thank you! To those who are new to our work: Welcome! We have a place for you. Your support, engagement, and advocacy are vital to the success of that mission. Together, Buffalo can create a legacy of resilience, justice, and environmental stewardship that will inspire climate action across the nation.

Peace and Blessings,

Franchelle C.H. Parker
Executive Director
Open Buffalo





Introducing the Eco Campus





“Extreme weather patterns and lack of fresh water are currently causing global displacement; forcing people to find safety in places such as Buffalo, N.Y.”

However, Buffalo grapples with its own toxic legacy of environmental issues, disinvestment, and racialized poverty. Buffalo is presented with a unique opportunity to become a national model for what it means to be a climate refuge city. The **Open Buffalo Urban Ecology Campus & Climate Resilience Hub (Eco Campus)** will be a one-of-its-kind neighborhood anchor that will develop neighborhood-level climate resilience strategies, prepare communities of color for new green sector jobs, and spark wealth building, and utilize asset-based community building strategies that create more just and joyful neighborhoods for us all.

The campus will be an environmentally sustainable, indoor/outdoor ecology facility. It will be located in Buffalo's East Side and will be a space for collaboration between nonprofit, academic, philanthropic, and government sectors. It will be a hub that houses: a green sector workforce development center, community space, shared nonprofit offices and services, and a cutting-edge ecological education institute. As superstorms and increasing frequency of “SNOW-VEGMENTS” occur, we see that it is our region's poorest communities that are left to maneuver the compounding impacts of the climate crisis. Therefore, it is critically important to focus resources on disinvested communities that need climate resilience strategies.

New York State's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act recognized these place-based environmental disparities and the increasing environmental risk to these environmental justice communities. The State tasked the Climate Justice Working Group (CJWG) with the development of "criteria to identify disadvantaged communities to ensure that frontline and otherwise



underserved communities benefit from the state's historic transition to cleaner, greener sources of energy, reduced pollution and cleaner air, and economic opportunities."³, The CJWG employed multiple indicators to "represent the environmental burdens or climate change risks within a community, or population characteristics and health vulnerabilities that can contribute to more severe adverse effects of climate change."⁴

There are 87 such DAC Census Tracts within Open Buffalo's regional focus areas of Buffalo, Cheektowaga, Lackawanna, and Niagara Falls.

These communities demonstrate not just increased burdens, vulnerabilities, and stressors from Climate Change impacts, but also, because of a systemic legacy of disinvestment in communities of color and working class communities of every race and ethnicity, decreased access to opportunity and resulting achievement gaps.

Because of a legacy of policy and practice driven

governmental and Financial, Insurance, and Real Estate (FIRE) sector disinvestment, these communities' stressors include inequitable access to opportunity: in education access, job access, financial systems access, health care access, quality food access, transportation access, recreational and natural space access, and more.⁵ Generations of systemic disinvestment have also created disproportionate levels of vacant and underutilized property and environmental hazards.



Vision and Impact

Despite these challenges, residents of these DACs, and of the focus location of the Eco Campus, continue to survive and thrive, working without the supports and resources many other communities take for granted. Together they work to build better lives for themselves and their neighbors and to create pathways to existing opportunities and take bold action to create new opportunity.

This is how the vision of the Eco Campus came to be.

Open Buffalo, working directly with members of impacted communities identified the priorities for the Eco Campus, and formed the Eco Collective. The Eco Collective is the leadership team tasked with guiding development of the project. In order to ensure community members can overcome barriers to participation such as transportation, childcare, and loss of wages, Open Buffalo has resourced supports for these challenges, as well as incorporating an intentional focus on building the Eco Collective's management, leadership, and community building skill sets. To further broaden the reach and impact of the Eco Campus, the Eco Collective is engaging 500 residents through in-person and virtual community listening and visioning sessions.

The vision of the Eco Campus that has emerged sees it functioning to:

1. Develop neighborhood-level climate resilience strategies.
2. Prepare communities of color for new green sector jobs.
3. Utilize community-building strategies that create more just and joyful neighborhoods for everyone.
4. Implement innovative and culturally attuned community wealth building initiatives.

The Eco Campus will also provide much-needed accessible outdoor, high-quality green space, outdoor recreation, and cultural assets to promote personal and community wellness.

These activities, programs, and facilities will, in turn, support a Just Transition; build the community economy; revitalize intergenerational collaboration; be a space of healing; be a global destination; and facilitate transformation.



Community Impact Study

This Community Impact Study takes an equity-centered approach to measuring social and economic change within the systemically disinvested and marginalized communities throughout the focus area DACs in Buffalo, Cheektowaga, Lackawanna, and Niagara Falls, and in particular on Buffalo's East Side.

Centering equity means that raw numbers and outputs are not sufficient on their own, but rather require nuance as to the ability and reach of those outputs within communities that have often played host to, but not benefited from, capital and/or infrastructure projects in the past.

Based on the initial visioning and planning work conducted by Open Buffalo and the Eco Collective Working Team, this Community Impact Study takes a cross cutting examination of individual, programmatic, and community level benefits of the proposed Ecology Campus.

This study names and quantifies those priorities that have been elevated by the local community to examine community impact at the ongoing/ programmatic level at organizational and societal levels.

Though there is not a singular project that contains the exact mix of elements within the Ecology Campus' proposed portfolio, this study draws from case studies of projects containing similar elements and combines them with local knowledge about what will work for the focus communities. The Community Impact Study applies outcomes and lessons learned across North America to the localized demographic composition of the focus communities envisioned to be home to Buffalo's Ecology Campus.





The background of the page is a light gray. On the left and right sides, there are vertical decorative borders. The left border features a pattern of green fingerprints of various sizes, some overlapping. A solid yellow circle is partially visible on the far left edge, with a series of white dots arranged in a curved path across it. The right border also features a vertical strip of green fingerprint patterns.

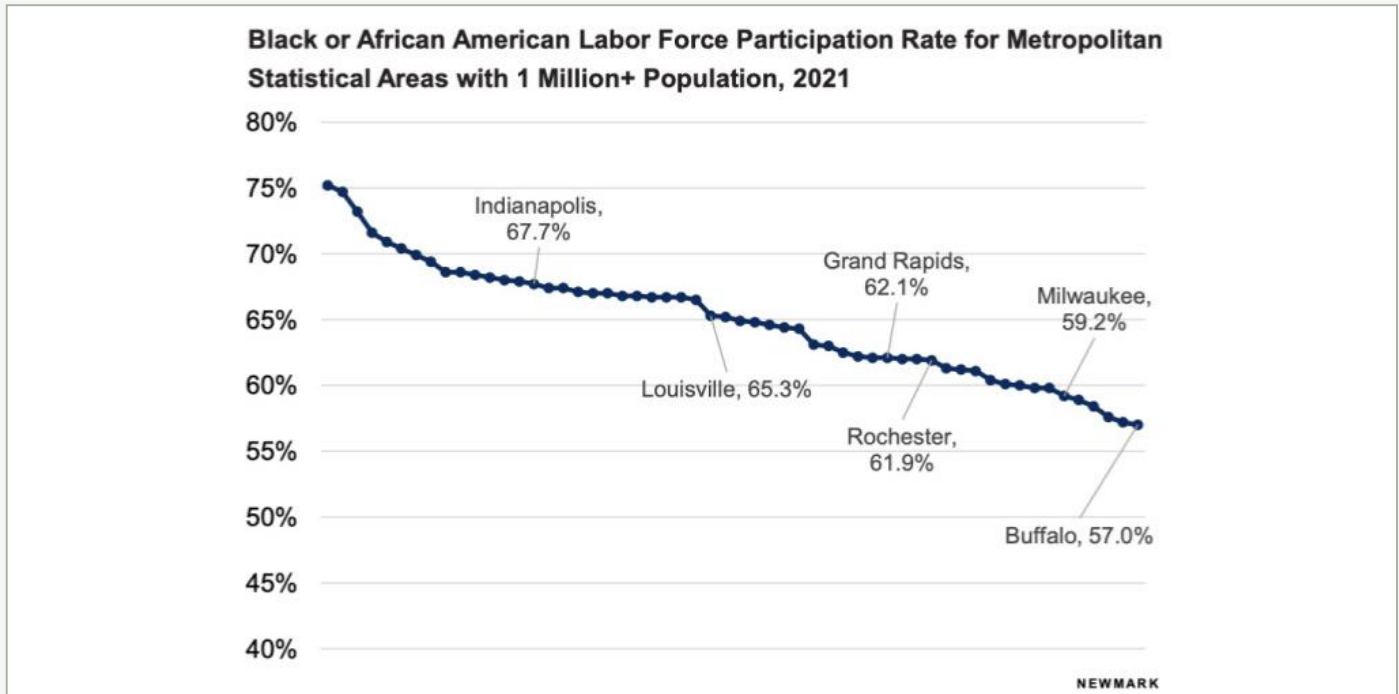
Focus Communities

The Buffalo region faces intense residential racial segregation brought about by intentional 20th century policies within public and private systems — including transportation, education, land use zoning, and housing finance, to name just a few.⁶

This intense segregation has created challenges throughout the community, but challenges that are felt most intensely by the region's Black and African American population. Black and African American residents and other people of color are more than seven times more likely to live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty than white residents (39%, 36%, 5% respectively).⁷ These neighborhoods of concentrated poverty contain lower levels of opportunity than well resourced neighborhoods.⁸ This is a major contributing factor for the workforce participation rate for residents who are Black and African American being

lower in the region than in any other metro area of more than one million people in Erie County.⁹

In 2023, New York State designated neighborhoods throughout the State as DACs - disadvantaged communities — for the purpose of identifying communities at an elevated risk for the negative impacts of climate change. The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (Climate Act) sets a goal of 40% (and a requirement of 35%) of State climate funds investment being directed to these neighborhoods. While 34% of Western New York Census Tracts are considered DACs, the distribution of these neighborhoods is far from uniform. In fact, communities clustered in areas that have faced systemic racial- and class-based disinvestment (such as HOLC/FHA redlining) are concentrated heavily on the east and west sides of Buffalo as well as Niagara Falls, and increasingly, the communities



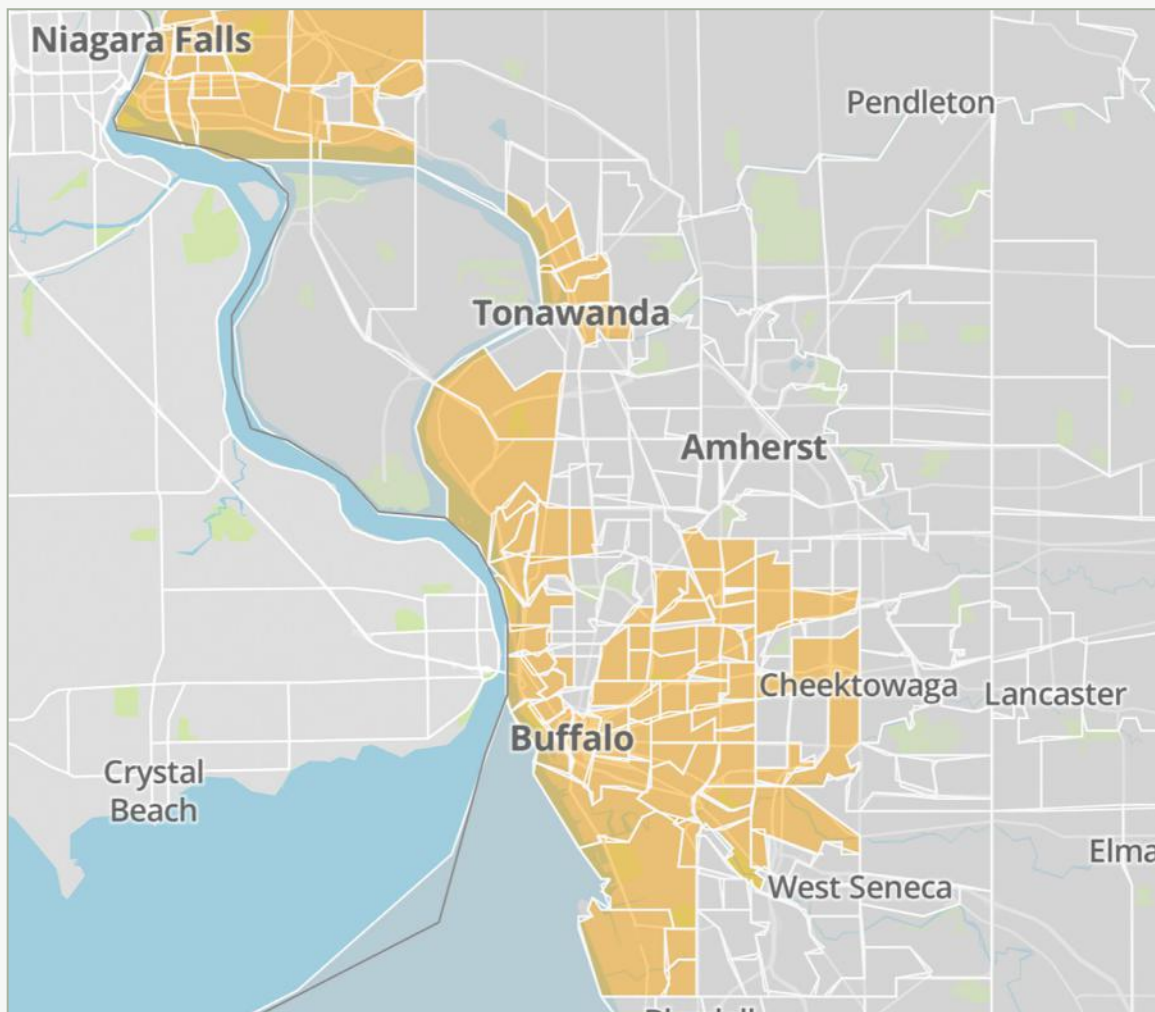
Black and African American residents and other people of color in the Buffalo region are more than seven times more likely than white residents to live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty and low opportunity. This is a major contributing factor for the workforce participation rate for residents who are Black and African American being lower in the region than in any other metro area of more than one million people in the county.

on the border of Buffalo in Cheektowaga and Lackawanna.¹⁰

Leveraging the resources allocated in the Inflation Reduction Act Environmental and Climate Justice Program (ECJ Program), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has also designated neighborhoods as priorities for investment. These neighborhoods have a very similar footprint to those in the state DAC designations. Action will be required at the federal, state, and local levels in order to create opportunities in front line communities and to begin to mitigate decades of systemic disinvestment and environmental justice concerns.

There are 256,249 residents of the Eco Campus's focus area DACs (22%), while there are 907,213 residents within the metro area that live outside of these neighborhoods (78%). Intense systemic racial segregation has led to vast

racial representation disparities within and outside of these focus area DACs. More than 85% of residents outside of these DACs are white-identified, while only 5% are Black or African-American, 3.5% are Latine of any race, 2.8% claim two or more races, and 2.6% are from Asian racial groups. In comparison, 40.5% of focus area DAC residents are white-identified, while 33.9% are Black or African-American, 12.6% are Latine of any race, 4.7% claim two or more races, and 7.6% are from Asian racial groups. (American Indian and Alaska Native communities are equally represented at 0.4% in both areas).¹¹



Map of NYS designated Disadvantaged Community Areas (DAC) surrounding Buffalo, New York.
<https://data.ny.gov/Energy-Environment/Final-Disadvantaged-Communities-DAC-2023-Map/6mn4-5vvz>

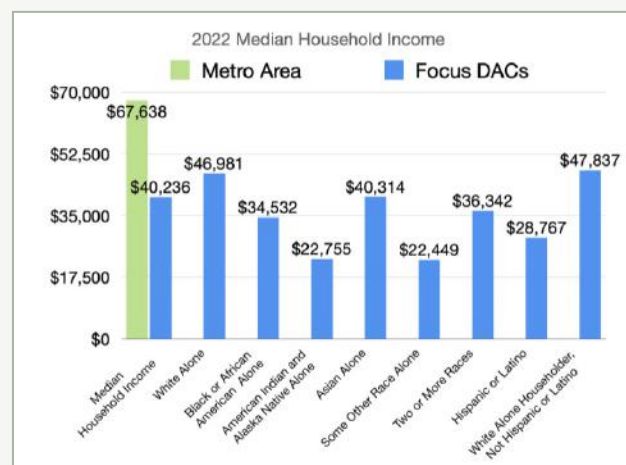
Because of systemic educational access issues,¹² there are significant educational attainment differences for residents of DACs as compared to residents of the remainder of the metro area.

In part as a result of these differences in access to education, the residents of these DAC focus areas are significantly underrepresented in Management, Business, and Financial Operations; and Professional and Related industries while being significantly over represented in Healthcare Support; Food Preparation and Serving Related; and Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance industries compared to metro area residents residing in different neighborhoods.¹³

However, education levels alone do not explain opportunity disparities. Residents of DACs make less money than residents of other areas of the region even when controlling for educational attainment. Focus DAC area residents make less money at every level of formal educational attainment than residents of the remainder of the metro; from those without a high school diploma (earning \$7,000 less per year) up to and including those with a Bachelor's degree (who earn \$18,000 less per year at the median).¹⁴

The average annual household income of the focus area DACs is forty three percent lower than that of the remainder of the metro area (\$56,934 v. \$99,264).¹⁵ Every racial ethnic group represented within the focus area DACs has a lower Median Household Income than the metro area as a whole. However, due to ongoing systemic disparities that influence access to opportunity, substantial racialized differences persist.

The US Census bureau considers those living above 2.0 times the poverty level as “Doing Ok”, while those below this threshold are considered “Poor or Struggling” Only 46% of residents of the focus area DACs are considered to be “Doing Ok”, versus 78% of those residing in the



remainder of the metro region, and residents of the focus area DACs are more than three times as likely to be living below the poverty line than other metro area residents.¹⁶

Within efforts to increase workforce inclusion, data from local workforce programs shows that the age of current program participants skews heavily to those under the 40. In fact, one prominent workforce development program provider – Northland Workforce Training Center – has reported an average program participant age of 24 years old, and that 94% of its participants are between the ages of 17 and 39.¹⁷ The focus area DACs are significantly younger than non-focus area DAC tracts throughout the metro area, demonstrating that there is the likelihood of a high demand for additional programming within these neighborhoods. Compared to the remainder of the metro area, every age bracket from birth through 44 shows a higher percentage of younger residents within the DACs. Meanwhile, every age bracket 45 and above is overrepresented in the remainder of the metro area.¹⁸

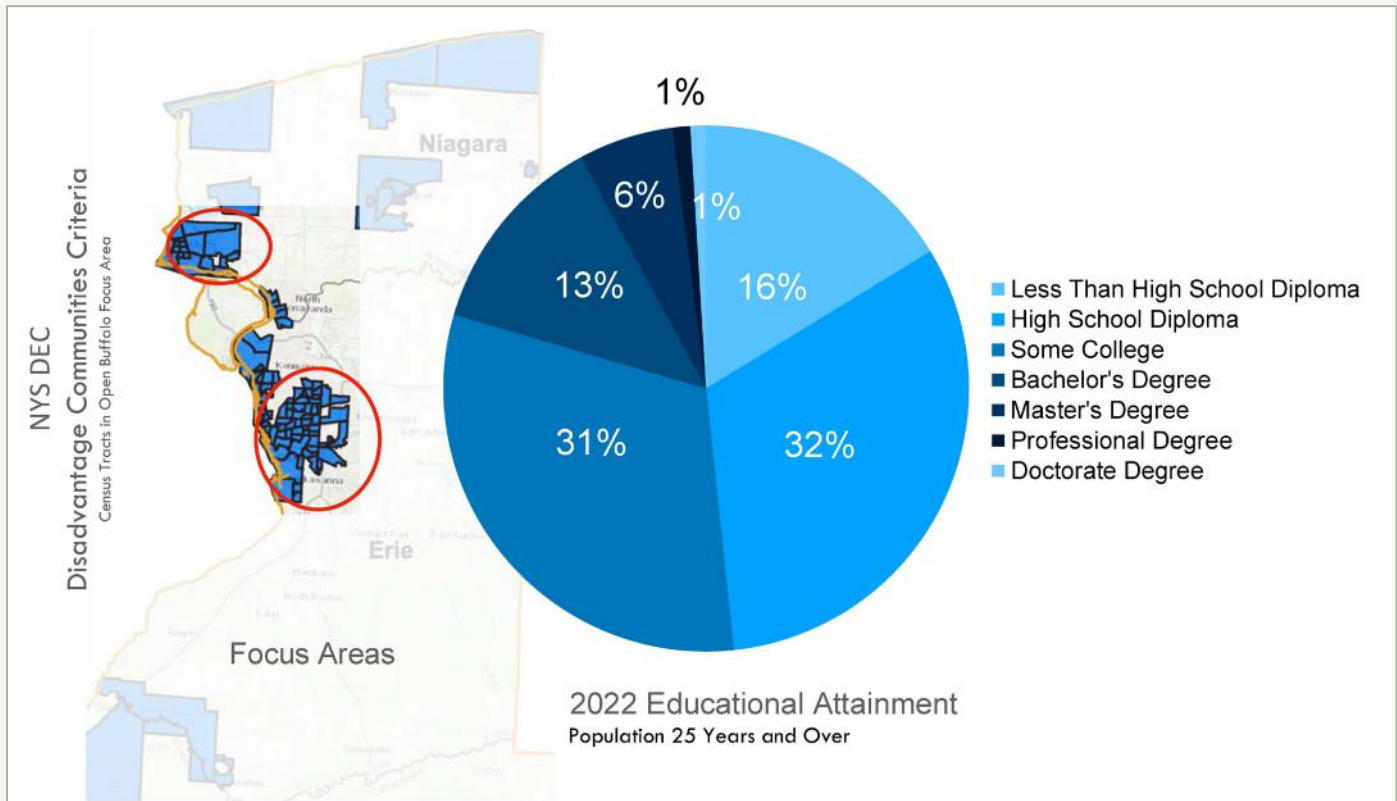
SE:A15001. Median Earnings by Sex by Educational Attainment

(In 2022 Inflation Adjusted Dollars) (For Population Age 25+)

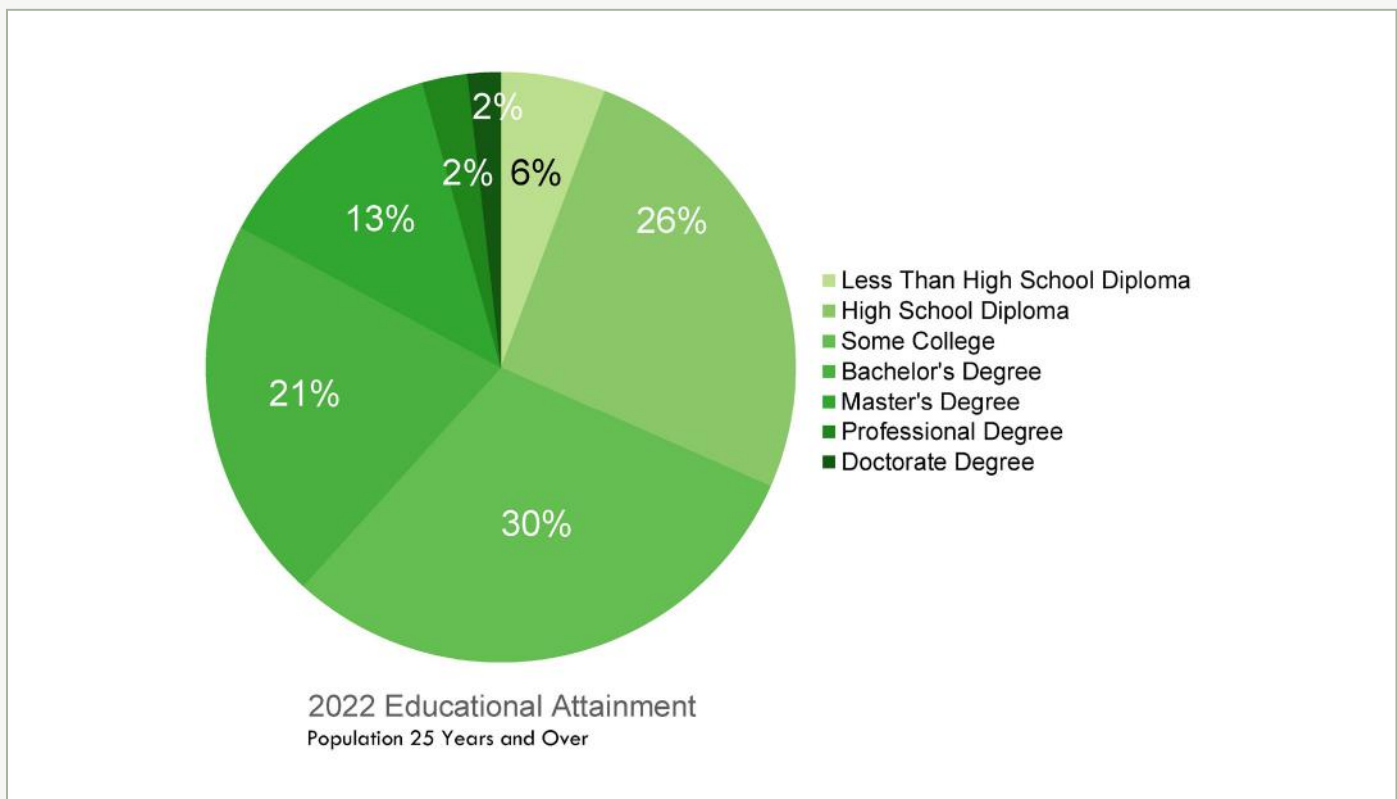
*data suppressed or not available

	DAC Focus Area	Metro Total	Differential	
Median Earnings	\$35,158	\$49,017	\$13,859	28%
Less than High School Graduate	\$20,525	\$27,954	\$7,429	27%
High School Graduate (Includes Equivalency)	\$27,669	\$36,240	\$8,571	24%
Some College or Associates Degree	\$33,497	\$44,805	\$11,308	25%
Bachelor's Degree	\$41,110	\$59,738	\$18,628	31%
Graduate or Professional Degree	*	\$74,494		

*ACS 2022 median income by education level. Graduate or Professional Degree information suppressed at the Focus area DAC level because of a small sample size.



Because of systemic educational access issues, there are significant educational attainment differences for residents of DACs (chart above) as compared to residents of the remainder of the metro area (chart below).



The Location





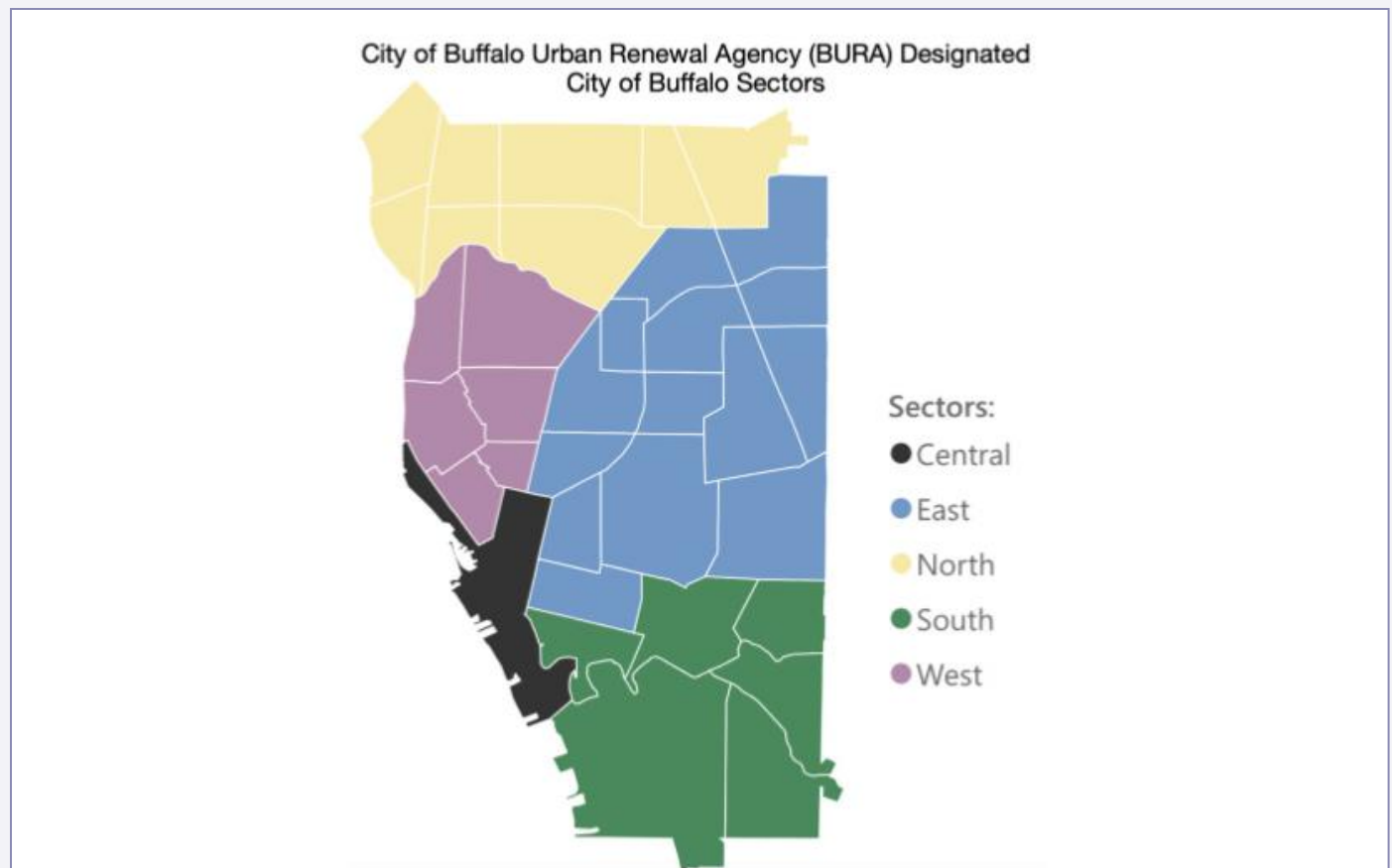
The Neighborhoods

As described in detail above, the DAC neighborhoods in the cities of Buffalo, Lackawanna, and Niagara Falls and the Town of Cheektowaga face measurable challenges to opportunity and inclusion. The neighborhoods east of Main Street in Buffalo have the lowest median income (\$25,189), per capita income (\$16,416), and the highest poverty rate (39%) of any of the five sectors within the City of Buffalo (Central, East, North, South, and West).¹⁹ Known as either Buffalo's East Side, or, more recently, East Buffalo, these neighborhoods are the focus for location of the Ecology Campus.

Locations That Were Analyzed in Depth

Neighborhoods in close proximity to potential Eco Campus locations are systematically marginalized with depressed access to opportunity. As a result, household incomes are very low even when compared to other nearby areas.

These disparities typify the kinds of persistent gaps that can be connected to historic and contemporary policies. This includes government sponsored redlining of communities of color and immigrant neighborhoods which strategically starved these neighborhoods of investment for decades while creating the disparate conditions that continue to make reinvestment challenging even though these policies have officially been repealed.²⁰



The five sectors within the City of Buffalo (Central, East, North, South, and West), as designated by the Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency, are seen in this color-coded graphic. The focus location for the Eco Campus is in the “East” sector.



Nearby neighborhoods in close proximity to potential Eco Campus locations are systematically marginalized with depressed access to opportunity. As a result, household incomes are very low even when compared to other nearby areas. These disparities typify the kinds of persistent gaps that can be connected to historic and contemporary policies such as government-sponsored redlining.



The Buffalo Sewer Authority's (BSA) citywide study of stormwater impacts and mitigations provides substantial insight into the potential for focus neighborhoods to provide positive environmental impacts. The target location for the Eco Campus lies within the BSA's Combined Sewage Overflow Basin 26, an area in which the BSA believes targeted infrastructure investments can yield the "greatest impact on water quality and public health in Buffalo."

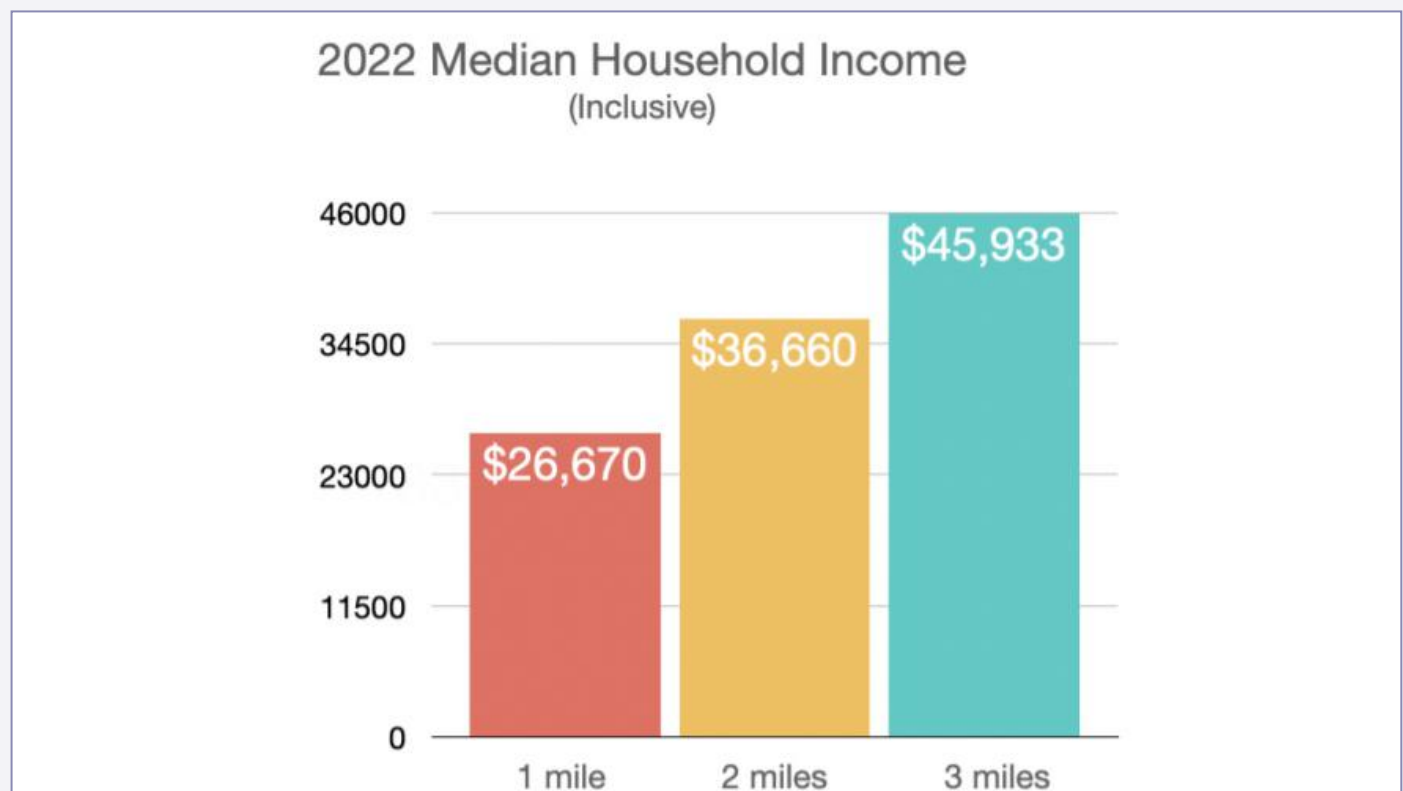
Broadway Fillmore Site

Among the most systemically challenged of DAC census tracts in the region are those north of Broadway, east of Fillmore Avenue and west of Bailey Avenue. The boundaries of this particular neighborhood vary depending on which agency's data is being collected and reported; however by any measure, the residents of this community continue to face additional barriers to opportunity because of overlapping legacies of public and private disinvestment.

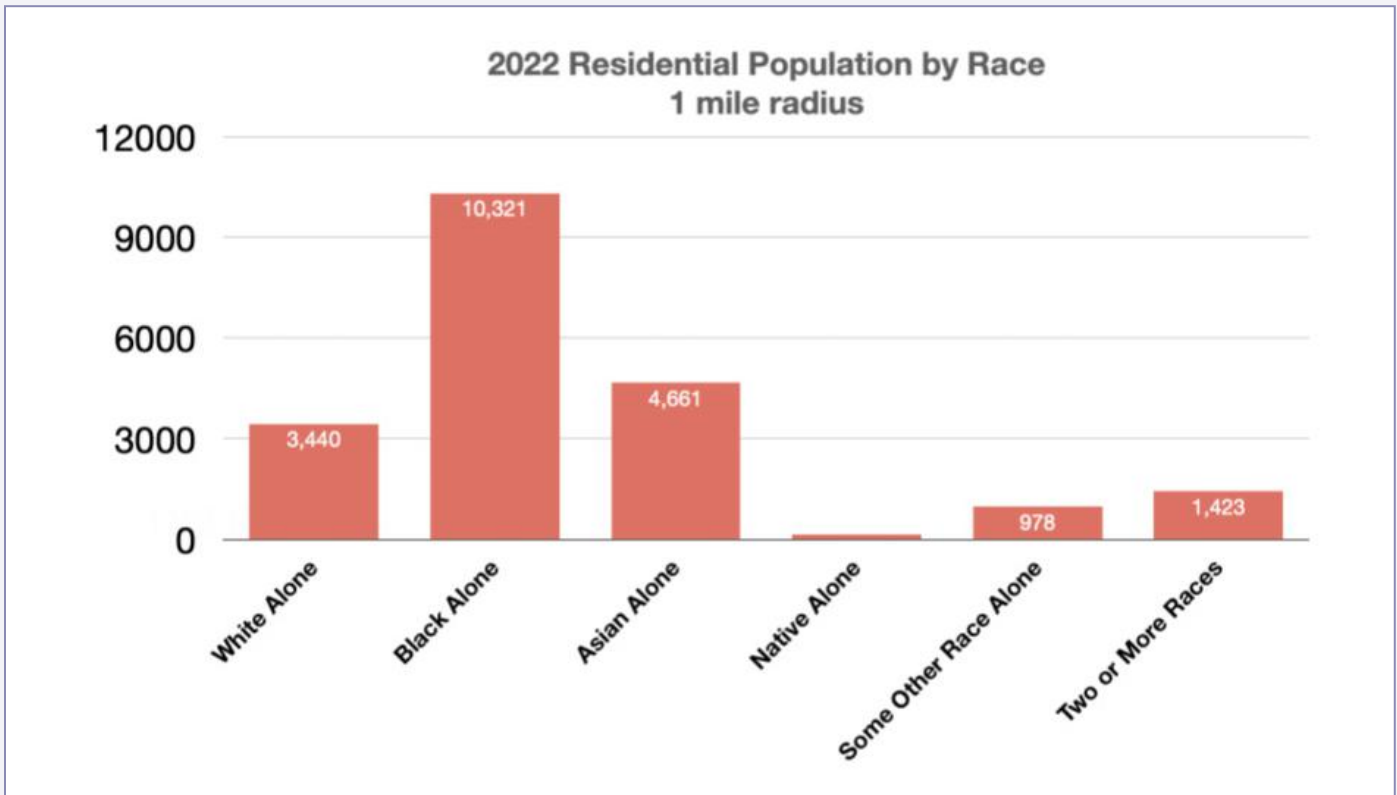
One proposed site is approximately ten acres of contiguous vacant land that has a prior history of mostly residential use. The properties consist of contiguous, primarily residential zoned tax parcels, located north of Broadway and west of Miller Avenue abutting the southeast side of CSX rail lines, in the city of Buffalo.

The current ownership is a mix of a single private sector owner and municipal ownership. The surrounding community has seen much residential vacancy and neglect, and a significant portion of property on adjacent streets is also vacant. The contiguous nature of the parcels provides a unique opportunity for a naturalized setting for the Ecology Campus, the Ecology Center building, and its diverse portfolio of programming. Meanwhile, the advanced state of systemic decline in the immediate neighborhood also creates potential for significant spinoff effects of catalyzed reinvestment.

The location also has synergies with a major thoroughfare (Broadway) in close proximity, as well as significant state and local investments in nearby large scale public and private infrastructure, such as the Broadway Market and Buffalo's New York Central Terminal. This site is in close proximity to two east-west bus routes (#4 Broadway and #6 Sycamore) which run at roughly 30 minute frequencies throughout weekday hours. In addition, it is proximate to the Bailey Avenue north-south transit line (currently at 20 minute day time intervals), which has recently received a major federal grant to transition to bus rapid transit along the corridor.



Median household incomes within one mile, two miles, and three miles of the Eco Campus location in the Broadway Fillmore section of Buffalo's East Side. Chart by Make Communities.



Data by Social Explorer based on Census 2022 ACS 5-year data. Map by Social Explorer. Charts by Make Communities.



Data by Social Explorer based on Census 2022 ACS 5-year data. Map by Social Explorer. Charts by Make Communities.

Environmental Conditions

The Buffalo Sewer Authority's (BSA) citywide study of stormwater impacts and mitigations provides substantial insight into the potential for this neighborhood to provide positive environmental impacts.

The BSA refers to this area as CSO Basin 26. CSO stands for Combined Sewage Overflow. Because the city of Buffalo has a combined sewer system which collects waste water (anything that goes down the drain from commercial, residential, governmental, or industrial properties) with stormwater (any rainwater or snow melt that makes its way into gutters and storm drains), any major precipitation event (roughly 1/10 of an inch of rain or more) will overwhelm the system's processing capabilities. When these capabilities are overwhelmed, all of this combined sewage of stormwater and wastewater will bypass the Sewer Authority's cleaning systems and pass directly into local waterways. This is what is known as Combined Sewage Overflow (CSO). The Buffalo Sewer Authority is legally required to reduce the number of times each year that this is able to happen by reducing the amount of rainwater runoff reaching the system.

Basin 26 is one of many individual catchment areas, in other words, one section of the city that all flows into the same part of the system. In an in-depth study of the potential equity impacts of an approach to reduce CSOs, the University at Buffalo Regional Institute examined the existing disparities in CSO Basins and where investments should be prioritized to positively impact existing disparities. Basin 26 emerged as one of six high priority areas for the Sewer Authority's investments in Green Infrastructure. Green Infrastructure is the use of natural processes to slow, process, and treat precipitation so that it does not enter the stormwater system. An additional benefit of Green Infrastructure is that this type of storm water mitigation can provide local jobs and bring quality of life, environmental, and beautification benefits to communities as well.

These priority areas were selected with the goals of having the "greatest impact on water quality and public health in Buffalo." In addition these priority areas were selected "to leverage other investments, and to decrease impervious cover [i.e., roofs, streets, parking lots and other areas where rainwater is not absorbed into the ground] where its percentage is highest."²¹

The CSO basins targeted by the Buffalo Sewer Authority "predominantly lie on the city's East Side, which showed the

most widespread level of disadvantage of any community in Buffalo."²² "Among all targeted basins, the need for G[reen] I[nfrastructure] investments may be highest in CSO 26, as it scores higher in the overall G[reen] I[nfrastructure] equity index than any target basin"²³:

"Basin 26 has the highest share of low income households (73 % with incomes less than double the federal poverty line), and adults without a high school diploma (25%) of any targeted basin. People of color comprise most (82%) of the population in basin 26. Just over half (51%) of people age 16 and over participate in the labor force (compared to 59% for Buffalo overall). Many neighborhoods in CSO 26 are also marked by environmental concerns, such as limited tree canopy coverage and vacancy. With about 30% of its land area covered by vacant lots, basin 26 has more than double the vacant land coverage of the city overall, indicating an abundance of opportunities for G[reen] I[nfrastructure] investments."²⁴





The proposed site for the Eco Campus boasts 10 acres of contiguous green space. However, it currently suffers from dumping, neglect, and a history of environmental challenges.







Impacts

The Facility

The Open Buffalo Ecology Center will be a 31,000-square-foot facility that anchors an environmentally sustainable campus. It will be located in Buffalo's East Side and will be a space for collaboration between nonprofit, academic, philanthropic and government sectors.

Current estimates place the total cost of site planning, brownfield remediation and development at roughly \$30 million. Open Buffalo and its Eco Collective are determined to ensure its investment in the design and construction of the Eco Center facility and Eco Campus have as much of a positive economic spinoff on disinvested and marginalized communities as possible, and that the construction design, materials, and methods, reflect those green development goals that will be championed by the campus and its program participants and graduates.



The Ecology Campus is envisioned as a 10-acre development including:

- Highly sustainable architectural design and operations
- Beautiful, natural outdoor and indoor green space
- Team-building facilities: a ropes course, walking paths, creative play-spaces
- Space for educational events, and performing arts productions, and arts programs of all types
- Multi-use art spaces
- Shared space for organizations and people advancing Just Transition principles
- A hub for organizing, strategizing, and building community agency and power
- A community store-style space with quality food and home goods
- Gardens, composting, and commercial kitchen nurturing a holistic food economy
- Publicly available wifi and technology access like a computer lab + maker space
- Cafe and co-work space where healthy food and peace of mind are present
- On-site green workforce development programming, wraparound services, and mentorship



This concept rendering of the Eco Campus depicts the front facade of the approximately 31,000-square-foot Eco Center building, permeable parking structures, as well as visitors engaging with outdoor assets including composting areas, community gardens, and a ropes course. Rendering by eco_logic STUDIO, architecture & engineering, PLLC.



The Eco Center building is being designed to meet “passive house” building standards, with an aim of being the “greenest” building in Buffalo. These concept renderings of the building depict a green, living roof, and a rooftop solar array. Rendering by eco_logic STUDIO, architecture & engineering, PLLC.

The Facility

The facility, as currently designed, will contain 31,000 total square feet, with roughly 15,000 square feet of leasable space and the remainder for Open Buffalo programming, operations, and common areas.

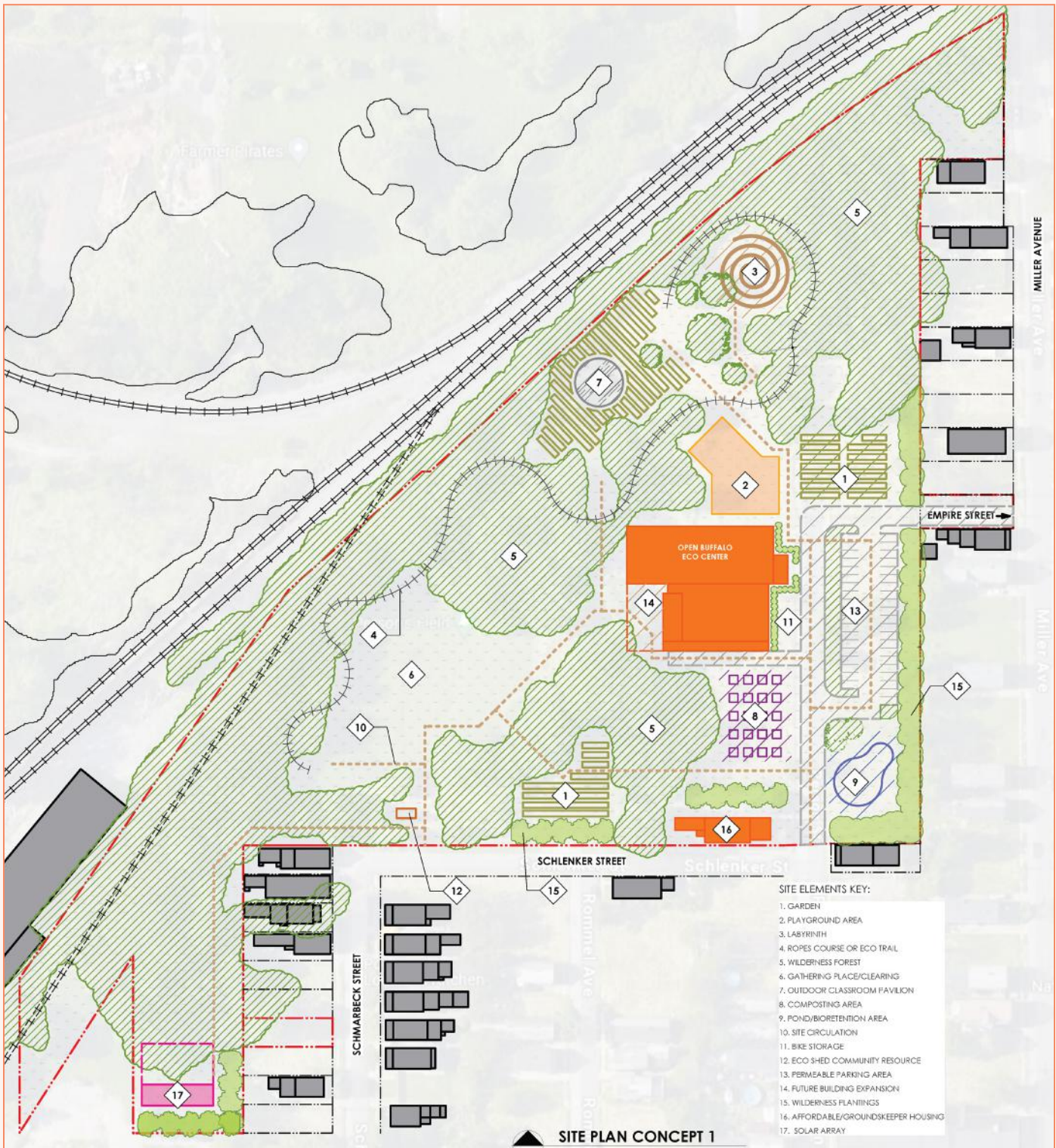
Examining industry standard multipliers for New York State, it is estimated that the total economic impact of Eco Campus construction, through the first year of building operations will be roughly \$51.6 million. This includes the creation of two hundred and fifty construction related jobs, as well as five ongoing direct and indirect jobs from building operations.²⁵

	Direct Spending	Output	Earnings	Jobs
Sub-Total Construction Cost	\$17,927,051	\$32,806,503	\$12,548,936	200
General	\$1,433,435	\$2,666,189	\$903,064	13
Overhead, Profit and Insurance	\$2,389,058	\$4,443,648	\$1,505,107	22
Design Contingency	\$3,185,410	\$5,924,863	\$2,006,808	30
Escalation to Mid-Point of Construction	\$796,353			
Total	\$25,731,307			265

In addition, the New York State impact multipliers for a project of this size, project five permanent jobs created within the local economy based on the ongoing operations of the facility.²⁶

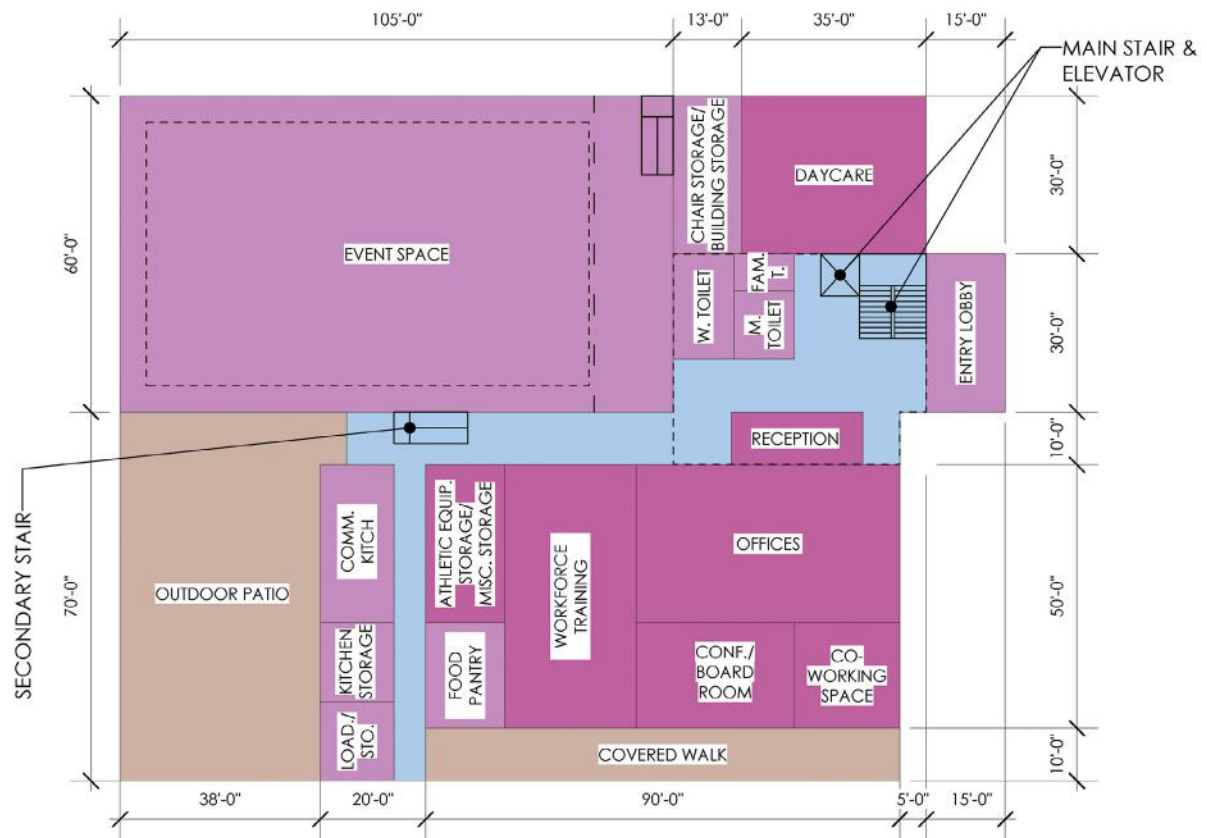
In keeping with the core principles of the initiative, the building methods and components planned for the Eco Campus (and factored into the above named budget projections) will adopt emergent technologies. The use of green technologies will minimize the ecological impact of new building and its operational needs, and will provide demonstration opportunities for the Western New York region where energy efficiency efforts trail behind other major cities and implementation of emergency technology has not entered mainstream building practices in a significant way.²⁷ The facility will include passive heating and cooling design, a green roof / solar roof combination, a freestanding solar array, exterior sun-shading, a high performance building envelope and continuous exterior insulation, as well as energy recovery ventilation, permeable pavement and green infrastructure.

Each of these features are critical components for large scale building technique and materials adoption to mitigate the ongoing climate crisis. New York State's Climate Act is making unprecedented investments in carbon reduction and clean energy to meet energy affordability, quality of life, environmental protection, economic opportunity, equity and inclusion targets,²⁸ and the Eco Campus design and implementation will put it on the leading edge of championing these initiatives within frontline communities.



This site plan portrays the various assets of the Eco Campus, including the 31,000-square-foot Eco Center building, as integrated with the existing topography of the focus site in the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood of Buffalo. Rendering by eco_logic STUDIO, architecture & engineering, PLLC.

Concept Programmatic Layout



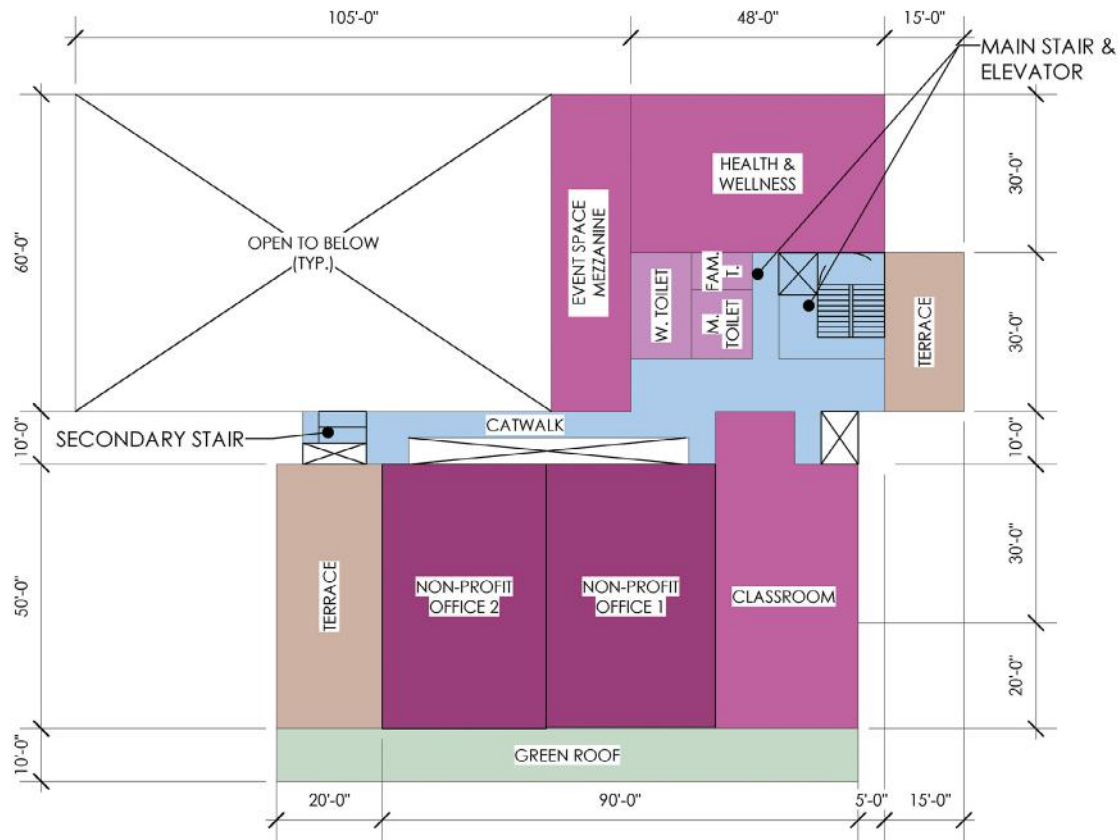
FIRST FLOOR CONCEPT



FRONT ELEVATION

The Ecology Center will be the cornerstone of the larger 10-acre campus. This concept programmatic layout shows a potential ground level floor plan for the center as well as a front elevation view.

Designed by eco_logic STUDIO, architecture & engineering, PLLC.



SECOND FLOOR CONCEPT



REAR ELEVATION

This concept programmatic layout shows a potential second floor plan for the center as well as a rear elevation view.

Designed by eco_logic STUDIO, architecture & engineering, PLLC.

Green Sector Workforce Development

Open Buffalo is working collaboratively with government agencies and national organizations to establish green sector workforce development opportunities at the Eco Campus. The Eco Campus will become a Green Sector workforce training hub comprising two tiers of instruction.

Tier 1 represents the soft skills required to excel in the workplace such as leadership, teamwork, time management and conflict resolution. Open Buffalo recognizes the system challenges faced by marginalized populations in the workplace. What is traditionally named “soft skills” is often implicitly tied to assimilation into dominant cultural norms and expectations. Open Buffalo currently offers Race, Power, and Privilege, a four-month experience for organizations wanting to make cultural and systemic shifts toward racial equity. Participants gain understanding of the cultural and societal structures that have created systemic advantages and disadvantages (and, therefore, differential outcomes) for differently situated populations. Training programs that similarly acknowledge these barriers for job seekers from marginalized communities are better positioned to connect with participants by reflecting their actual lived-experience, and navigating barriers, rather than prescribing a singular set of normative behaviors based on an exclusionary culture.

Tier 2 represents technical skill development and mentorship relevant to green sector jobs. The emerging green sector economy presents an opportunity to reduce the achievement gap for Buffalo and Western New York’s traditionally marginalized populations. The Inflation Reduction Act at the Federal level, and the Climate Act at the New York State level, both represent unprecedented investment in new programs and technologies that are necessary to mitigate the ongoing climate crisis. By building a local hub for focused investments in neighborhoods that have faced additional barriers to economic inclusion and that have disproportionately suffered from poor environmental conditions and worsening climate impacts, the Eco Campus will ensure that Buffalo’s populations and communities will be a part of a new – and necessary – green economy.

In 2022, Invest Buffalo Niagara commissioned a labor market study (funded by National Grid and the U.S. Economic Development Administration’s Build Back Better Regional Challenge Grant awarded to Empire State Development) which names the top five challenges for the Buffalo Niagara Economy.²⁹ Four of these challenges can be directly addressed through the training programs at the



Eco Collective members Deirdre Wright and Ras Jomo Akono bring years of experience in creating pipelines from disinvested communities to the green infrastructure and building trade job sectors.

Eco Campus: skilling up young talent to help replace an aging workforce; building pathways for diverse, equitable, and inclusive leadership; providing skilled training opportunities for a diverse workforce; and addressing the spatial mismatch so many of the communities within the State designated focus DACs face.

Planning for the Eco Campus also recognizes the immense gender gap in Green Sector jobs and in local blue collar training programs. The Eco Campus programming intends to make Green Collar jobs more welcoming, appealing, and inclusive through its community-based approach.

In the aggregate, the scale of what is possible to close the employment gap with the State-designated DACs is tremendous. If the focus area DACs were to achieve the same level of average household income as the rest of the metro area, the region would see \$3.6 billion of increased household annual income.

Open Buffalo’s vision is that people directly experiencing systemic challenges and inequities will always have a voice in identifying the problems and developing the solutions. As such, its approach to workforce inclusion and development is unique and tailored to and with the residents it serves.



Michael Zak (left), a graduate of Open Buffalo's 2015 Emerging Leaders class, shows equipment at Gro-Op, a cooperatively owned aquaponic vertical farm that he founded. Gro-Op also has offered youth development and cooperative economics education.

There are several green sector and advanced manufacturing workforce programs in the City of Buffalo that are disconnected from communities of color, specifically Black residents that these programs intend to serve.

This goes deeper than just marketing and awareness. Because of legacies of systemic disinvestment, communities of color need additional resources and wraparound services to ensure successful completion of these programs.

Peer organizations across the country provide benchmarks for program design and structures, as well as the ability to understand the potential scale of the Eco Campus's impact when at full capacity.

Open Buffalo serves as an anchor organization in a national Just Transition and climate strategy network; with established relationships with experts in the climate justice and environmental justice fields. Open Buffalo has established local partnerships with SUNY Erie, Buffalo State University, and the University at Buffalo.

Open Buffalo's existing national just transition networks and local partnerships position it extremely well to provide a community-based anchor for workforce inclusion. For example, Open Buffalo and SUNY Erie proposed a partnership that would create pathways to micro credentials and certifications for success in the green sector economy.

Open Buffalo also jointly applied for a U.S. Department of Labor with National Clean Energy Workforce Training grant with Power52 Foundation and a host of local partners in summer of 2023. This program envisioned infusing leadership, mentorship, teamwork, time management, and conflict resolution skill building with secondary supports such as childcare, transportation, and nutrition. It also planned to engage at least four employers in the design and implementation of strategies that ensure diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility; improve career pathways; and embed the Good Job Principles.

This program proposal envisioned providing an average of at least 47 participants each year for the duration of the grant term with an 80% completion rate. A five year cumulative completion rate, then, would produce roughly 190 program graduates. Assuming a 90% placement rate and a starting wages in the range of \$24/hour³⁰, after five years would equate to nearly \$9.5 million in annual wages brought into local families within the DAC communities.

Though the application was not successful, a dedicated facility has the potential to improve performance on future grant applications. The Eco Campus provides a space to implement this programmatic vision and build capacity to scale up through increased partnerships and collaborations over time.

Resident Empowerment

Since its inception, Open Buffalo has been committed to increasing community voice, power, and participation by providing opportunities for individual growth and collective action. Open Buffalo has prior success in areas of: Engaging and empowering youth in movement spaces; Building social and political power in BIPOC communities; Engaging community members safely during the pandemic; Leadership development and using popular education methodology. The Eco Campus will provide a home base for expanding existing Open Buffalo programming while creating capacity to launch new initiatives based on national best practice models.



Every year, Open Buffalo engages thousands of East Side Buffalo community members along the Juneteenth Parade route and at the festival that follows. This photo was captured during the 2024 parade.

Emerging Leaders

Emerging Leaders is Open Buffalo's flagship leadership development intensive. This four-month program continues to evolve to meet the emerging needs and aspirations of local leaders and continues to seek to empower participants with the skills, networks, and opportunities to effect meaningful change in their communities. Skills building topics include history of organizing and movement building, Buffalo/Niagara social history, community organizing, communications, advocacy, research and analysis, and policy campaign implementation.

Since 2015, Open Buffalo's Emerging Leaders program has an over 95% graduation rate, and nearly 150 individuals have graduated the Emerging Leaders program. The program has supported leaders to run policy change campaigns, launch local initiatives and programs, and directly enter the political process. Several alumni have gone on to run for and win local offices.

In a recent survey of Emerging Leaders alumni, 95% of respondents said the program met or exceeded their expectations, and 100% have recommended the program to their friends and colleagues, and 95% would recommend the Emerging Leaders Program to others seeking to increase their leadership skills in their communities. More than 82% of respondents cited both skill-building opportunities and networking as a key takeaway of the program, while 77% cited Relationships/Mutual Support Among Cohort Members as a key takeaway. Some 77% also indicated that they have participated in social change campaigns since graduating from the program, and, of those 94% reported their level of leadership in these campaigns is now higher than prior to my participation in the Emerging Leaders Program. More than half also reported increased participation in electoral campaigns.

Professionally, nearly 60% reported taking a new position since graduating and 89% report that the Emerging Leaders Program (i.e., new skills, enhanced network, increased confidence) helped them increase leadership opportunities/responsibilities in their job.

Additionally, while calculating the economic and social impact of the enhanced community, political, and professional leadership of these program graduates is beyond assignable dollar values, 33% reported that their income had increased "a lot" and an additional 19% reported their income had increased "somewhat" since their participation in Emerging Leaders.

The survey also revealed that 86% of respondents reported that they themselves found out about the program through word of mouth, with others finding out about the program through Open Buffalo's social media feeds and email list. Though this is a striking endorsement of the networks developing around the Emerging Leaders program, the profile of the program in its current iteration may not be reaching additional areas of focus communities within the state identified DACs. A more prominent and high profile location base that the Eco Campus will provide for the program has the opportunity to expand the visibility and reach of the program to support leaders in communities that have not yet benefited from the leadership capacity that the program develops.

The successful outcomes represent the effectiveness of the intensive program that is tailored to be culturally representative and responsive to people and communities that have been marginalized. 86% of respondents are from communities of color and 73% of respondents self-reported being from another identity or community that has been marginalized.

The Emerging Leaders program, however, is just one aspect of the potential for community education and leadership development and residents empowerment at the Eco Campus.





Environmental Education Institute

The Environmental Education Institute will build on Open Buffalo's successful history of resident education and engagement to provide various levels of programming with youth and adults.

Milwaukee's Urban Ecology Center provides youth programming through its Preschool Environmental Education Project (PEEP), its year-long partnership program with local schools, the Neighborhood Environmental Education Project (NEEP), and environmental education summer camps. These models reached 63 schools and 32,000 children throughout the 2021-2022 school-year.³¹

The Eco Campus will continue to partner with and learn from this model, launching with site-based field trips and in-school presentations that are estimated to reach 10,000 students throughout the school year.

Open Buffalo's leadership development programs will build long-term community capacity to enact systemic changes to address climate change. Our goal is cultivating more Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) leaders in climate and environmental spaces.

Open Buffalo has co-anchored the Crossroads Coalition to implement Just Transition strategies in our region. This collection of 10 non-profits is helping create a future in which frontline communities — LGBTQ communities, Indigenous communities, communities of color, and youth — are leading the Just Transition by building a culture of change and mobilizing for concrete victories that address the intersectionality of structural racism, economic inequality, and environmental degradation. Together, it has trained over 5,000 residents in Just Transition, changed Buffalo's climate change narrative to one that centers racial justice.

These initiatives coincide with national efforts at increasing everyday capacity, mitigating acute impacts of climate disasters (such as the December 2022 blizzard), and supporting disaster recovery efforts in communities that have been marginalized by systemic disinvestment and now shoulder the highest burden of the climate crisis. The national network of Urban Sustainability Directors names facilities that perform these three functions Climate Resiliency Hubs. As Buffalo looks to build out a local network of community and faith-based institutions as community hubs, the Eco Campus is envisioned to be a Climate Resiliency Hub in its own right, while also supporting the capacity and operations of the local network.

While other facilities may provide immediate support and life-saving emergency care to nearby residents, the Eco Campus will help provide ongoing "opportunities to address root causes of disproportionate exposure and sensitivity to climate impacts, and enhance communities' capacity to adapt"³²

The Eco Campus will build on this legacy of success to create multiple programmatic opportunities to build environmental and climate awareness and leadership.

1. The Eco Collective will host a six-week, outdoor Environmental Education Institute (EEI): Utilizing popular education, members of the Eco Collective will learn about green space challenges from community members and facilitate a conversation on solutions based on national best practices. **Fifty community members will participate in the Environmental Education Institute per cohort.** Topics include but are not limited to: race and the environment in Western New York, emergency preparedness, ecology wellness, green jobs in a just transition economy, climate change mitigation, and environmental justice.

2. Open Buffalo's Youth Action program develops leaders, and advances policies and practices that will eliminate poverty and create healthy communities and robust opportunities for young people. With the Eco Campus operational, the **Youth Action program will train an annual cohort of 50 youth (ages 14-24) in community organizing and ecological justice.**

3. The Eco Campus will annually **train 25 professionals from local government, urban planners, nonprofits and park systems** that play a key role in park inequity and lack of green space in urban communities. Participants learn the history of race in America, as well as tools for improving workplace culture and ending racial oppression in the community. Initial cohorts will be focused on local communities and then Open Buffalo's national network will be leveraged to expand the audience for these trainings to officials from across the country.

In addition to Open Buffalo's offices, operations, and program space, The Eco Campus will be home to 8,000 square feet of office space for other non-profits and social enterprises.

Sharing space and services can increase purchasing power, create efficiencies, reduce redundant expenses, help retain employees longer, improve the quality of resources, generate collaboration and innovation, and improve organizational stability.

visions, and values. Though these benefits can be hard to quantify, the most exciting feature to the overwhelming majority of respondents is the networking potential of a shared space, making it attractive to groups from across the financial spectrum. Smaller organizations wanted the recognition of having real professional space and larger organizations wanted to stay involved with the ever changing social Buffalo community.³⁴

Accommodating multiple organizations within the Eco Campus also allows for synergy in client facing and wrap around services. This provides for greater opportunities to introduce and welcome non-traditional candidates into, for instance, Open Buffalo's leadership development programs as well as the green workforce training center.

In addition, the campus' focus location, the neighborhood along Broadway, was formerly the second largest commercial center in the city of Buffalo. Current day time population numbers suggest that the area retains only a fraction of its once significant commercial draw.³⁵ This



location is on the edge of three East Side Avenues focus zones: Fillmore Avenue, the Broadway Market, and the Central Terminal, and not far from Bailey Avenue. Together the East Side Avenues are targeted for \$65 million of New York State investment and \$8 million in philanthropic support.³⁶

The co-location of multiple non-profit organizations will increase the daytime population of its surrounding neighborhood somewhat but, more significantly, will generate additional visitor and user traffic. In this scenario, the synergistic impacts with the redevelopment of the Central Terminal may also be significant.

The Eco Campus is also being designed with facilities to support the development and promotion of local businesses from marginalized communities. With a cafe space and a rotating (“pop up”) retail outlet on site, the trips generated by the Eco Campus will lead to direct spending and profile building of various small businesses. The Evergreen Brickworks model in Toronto features both a regular farmers market/ vendor fair and permanent onsite

cafe and eco-related retail. While the market potential of the Eco Campus location will be further investigated and tested as the site grows to programmatic maturity, the presence of multiple tenants and their employees, clients, and visitors, will provide a heightened visibility for, and foot traffic to, on-site offerings. Elsewhere in this report (see: Outdoor green space on the next page), it is estimated the Eco Campus could draw 100,000 annual visitors, which would be a significant contributor to the local neighborhood economy as well.

Projected annual leasing revenue to the Eco Campus:

\$120,000

Number of office tenant employees in the building (at 175 sq ft/ employee):

46



East Side Avenues investment areas. University at Buffalo Regional Institute.

Outdoor Green Space

The effects of exposure to and immersion in natural spaces have been studied globally and are widely shown to have positive impacts on both mental and physical health. These impacts have been overwhelmingly displayed in observational, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodology academic studies.³⁷ Nature-based interventions (NBIs) have been prescribed as an alternative to more intensive and expensive medications and therapies to reduce stress, manage anxiety and even treat Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.

Locally, the recent City of Buffalo Parks and Recreation Master Plan recognizes these health and community benefits while recognizing that not all of the city's neighborhoods have similar access to quality public green spaces. The plan analyzed levels of access and potential benefit across three dimensions: social, health, and natural and built environment.

Social indicators included Poverty; Racially concentrated areas of poverty; Acres of park per 1,000 residents; Population density; and the Presence of Children; Seniors; People of color; and People with Disabilities. Health indicators included: Physical inactivity; Poor mental health; Poor physical health; Poor air quality; Heart disease; Population without health insurance; Asthma hospitalizations; Diabetes; and Obesity. Natural and built environment indicators included: Tree canopy; Impervious cover; Crimes per 1,000 residents; Percentage of neighborhood in priority CSO; Percentage of neighborhood in urban heating; Houses in distress; High traffic stress roads; Pedestrian and bike accidents; Bus stops; Percentage of neighborhood in a flood zone; Existing bike facilities; and Proposed bike facilities.³⁸

In aggregating these risk categories, the parks plan created a scale of neighborhood based prioritization from "very high" to "very low." The Broadway neighborhood, proposed location of the Eco Campus, is a "very high" priority for park investment (see on Page 45).

The distribution of these high priority areas is not random. Many line up with 20th century redlining maps that served to define those urban neighborhoods that would be restricted from government backed investment and were quickly adopted as investment area guidelines by the private sector. Research has shown that the positive and negative categorizations of these Depression-era policy maps remain, even to the level of pollution levels experienced to this day.³⁹

The irony, and opportunity, of these categorizations is that many of the "Very High" priority neighborhoods — including the proposed Eco Campus locations — are actually neighborhoods that also are home to vacant and disused land. This land previously held homes or businesses that has since gone fallow due to the systemic disinvestment in these neighborhoods. This abundance of vacant and underutilized land can be repurposed as restorative and healing space, particularly in high priority areas. The Eco Campus intends to live into this potential by demonstrating the community-based benefits of access to natural public spaces.



Community changemakers, including Sabriyah Lailla Smith, participate in an outdoor boxing class during the 2024 Open Buffalo Emerging Leaders Opening Weekend retreat.



To access the benefits of hosting programs in green space, Open Buffalo needs to rent outdoor conference facilities outside of Buffalo and Erie County. Top: Franchelle Parker, Open Buffalo Executive Director, appears with Eco Collective members Athenia Cyrus, Ladaisha Williams, and Dr. Lourdes Vera at the 2025 Eco Collective strategic planning retreat. Bottom: A welcoming circle from the 2017 Emerging Leaders Opening Weekend.



Outdoor Green Space

There are many barriers to access to nature, and these barriers are often compounded by race, gender, class, and physical ability. Research has revealed three major themes that impact engagement with nature: “1) formative influences promoting adult nature engagement (i.e., persons/organizations and places of origin), 2) detractors from nature engagement (i.e., perceptual, material, and physical barriers), and 3) role of current setting (i.e., natural and built environments) shaping nature-seeking relationships.”⁴⁰

The Eco Campus aims to provide “early life exposures outdoors, personal mentorship, and organizational affiliations”⁴¹ as antidotes to the alienation from nature that many people from systemically marginalized groups now face. Normalizing nature as a place where all people can feel connectedness will provide the mental and physical health benefits now lacking within the immediate Eco Campus neighborhood and, more broadly, to the residents of the focus area DACs that the Eco Campus will engage.

The outdoor components within the Eco Campus site plan include a community vegetable garden, a playground area,

a labyrinth, a ropes course, various structured outdoor learning spaces including a small clearing and a learning pavilion/ outdoor classroom, a composting area, a pond/ bioretention basin, and native wilderness plantings.

Evergreen Brickworks in Toronto, one of the case studies and best practices examined for the development of this community impact report, provides a similar mix of programming and opportunities for the metro Toronto area.

Evergreen Brickworks draws large numbers of people to its site year round, welcoming “more than 500,000 visitors annually to experience its public markets, participate in conferences and events, enjoy outdoor learning and nature play, and explore public art.”⁴² There are certainly differences in the operating model and in the surrounding demographics of their site east of downtown Toronto, and the Eco Campus location. But, comparing the population sizes of urban Toronto and the Buffalo-Niagara metro, and using Brickwork’s visitorship as a benchmark, the Eco Campus can look toward roughly 100,000 visitors annually upon facility and program maturity.

Potential number of residents with the immediate neighborhood (within a 10-minute walking radius) benefiting from mental and physical health benefits:	Broadway location: 1,998
Potential number of people from focus area DACs utilizing the Eco Campus and benefiting from mental and physical health benefits:	100,000 at full facility and programmatic build out

“The effects of exposure to and immersion in natural spaces have been studied globally and are widely shown to have positive impacts on both mental and physical health. The Eco Campus aims to provide “early life exposures outdoors, personal mentorship, and organizational affiliations” as antidotes to the alienation from nature that many people from systemically marginalized groups now face.”

A New Type of Venue for Youth Recreation

As a lead agency within Buffalo's Project RISE (Respond, Invest, Sustain and Empower) initiative, Open Buffalo is a close collaborator with many youth focused organizations throughout the city. Buffalo is one of seven cities across New York that has received Project RISE funding from Governor Kathy Hochul's administration to help "community-based organizations identify needs, gaps in services and develop plans to expand programming for youth and families and improve public safety."⁴³

Though the City of Buffalo maintains six youth recreation centers which provide opportunities for recreation for thousands of children, members of the Project RISE collaborative continue to report a lack of opportunities for productive out-of-school time for youth in systemically disinvested communities.

The Eco Campus is being designed with multi-use community and flex space. Open Buffalo does not plan to create a competing youth recreation center to those sponsored by the City, such as Delavan-Grider or the Lincoln Field House, for example. However, the design of the Eco Campus is intentional in its ability to provide programming space for youth services organizations and initiatives that do not currently have permanent or adequate space to offer their programming.

Open Buffalo and the Eco Collective will engage with youth service providers to set terms and parameters for how this flexible community space is programmed and made available, and how it can be synergistically combined with the outdoor facilities and offerings that the Eco Campus will provide. Rental of the space is envisioned to be on a sliding scale, or offered in partnership on shared programming opportunities.

Innovative programming is not always easiest to execute within the constraints of federal or state block grant resources or within municipal contracts. With these partnerships and flexible space parameters, Open Buffalo plans to be able to expand the types of opportunities open to youth in the city of Buffalo.

In particular, the integration of natural spaces and natural play areas within the Eco Campus creates opportunities for free play and exploration in a setting that can also be combined with environmental awareness, and the demonstrated mental and physical benefits of access to nature.





Open Buffalo's Color Run is a youth-designed and youth-focused annual event that draws hundreds of residents looking for family fun, community connection, and wellness.

Event Space

The meeting sector in the United States is massive. Pre-pandemic research by Oxford Economics found that direct output of the industry exceeded \$300 billion annually, and that the direct employment of the meeting industry neared 2.5 million, surpassing performing arts, spectator sports, and related industries, and second only to the hospital sector in nationwide employment.⁴⁴

While this sector of the economy is incredibly diverse in type and in size, from large scale conventions to small staff retreats, the sector as a whole often operates in the background. However, the barriers to inclusion in this sector and in meetings, generally, are deeper and more complicated than may be immediately recognizable as well.

In fact, one of the major instigating factors for the Eco Campus project was the inequitable treatment that was experienced by Open Buffalo leadership and Emerging Leaders trainees at a well known event venue in the Buffalo region. The inclusion of an event and/or retreat space on Buffalo's East Side is underscored by the desire to provide a welcoming, accessible and culturally appropriate venue for organizations and individuals currently marginalized by the events industry.

Although major meeting industry groups nominally support diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, a report from Meeting Professional International reveals that industry insiders gave themselves only a C+ on creating meetings and events that are inclusive and welcoming to "ethnic minorities," and some of the participants in their survey sample indicated there was "too much" of a focus on DEI.

The report found "Discussions with the venue, speakers and suppliers about inclusiveness, however, happen only around half of the time, and venue staff members are rarely briefed." Those engaged in the study reported barriers to planning inclusive meetings including not having enough time (14%); not having the budget (20%); not having the leadership support (14%); or not having all the information/knowledge needed to plan inclusive experiences (40%).⁴⁵

While clearly there is room for improvement in the mainstream event industry, marginalized communities continue to bear the brunt of inappropriate or exclusionary practices that continue. Rather than treating inclusive design as an afterthought or something that is nice to have but is ultimately expendable, the Eco Campus will build its approach to meetings and events with inclusion and welcoming at the center. Only when attendees feel a true

sense of welcoming and belonging are they able to fully commit their best selves to the meeting challenges and opportunities at hand.

Large scale gatherings can also be responsible for a tremendous negative environmental impact, from travel to solid waste and energy inefficiencies. The event space at the Eco Campus takes cues from the Urban Ecology Center in Milwaukee as well as Evergreen Brickworks in Toronto. These spaces provide alternatives to traditional venues by focusing on inclusive user experiences and built-in environmental best practices. These venues welcome team building retreats, conferences, private events, weddings, birthday parties, and leverage their intentionally nature-based settings to both attract users and provide a unique city-based retreat experience.

Current projections for the Eco Campus events space conservatively forecast \$160,000 in annual direct revenue for the Eco Campus. National industry estimates place venue rental fees at roughly 5.2% of direct meeting expenditures,⁴⁶ suggesting that full direct expenditures for Eco Campus hosted conferences would be \$3.05 million. Using the 1.6 indirect multiplier calculated by the Events Industry Council, this would result in \$7.93 million generated or retained within the local economy annually.



Dr. Jamie D. Smith, educational strategist and academic administrator, appears at Open Buffalo's "Movement Morning" fundraising breakfast.

Meetings direct spending by commodity: Summary⁴⁷

<i>(amounts in millions)</i>	2016	Share	Average per participant
Meetings direct spending	\$325,045	100%	\$1,294
Travel spending	\$120,425	37%	\$479
Accommodations	48,910	15%	195
Transportation	42,471	13.1%	169
Transportation to destination	28,015	8.6%	112
Transportation at destination	14,456	4.4%	58
Food and beverage	16,410	5.0%	65
Shopping	7,436	2.3%	30
Recreation and entertainment	5,197	1.6%	21
All other meeting direct spending	\$204,620	63%	\$814
Meeting planning and production	166,874	51.3%	664
Food and beverage	47,931	14.7%	191
Audio-visual/staging services	23,161	7.1%	92
Venue rental	16,990	5.2%	68
Transportation and tour	12,132	3.7%	48
Entertainment/production services	10,534	3.2%	42
Other	56,126	17.3%	223
Other direct spending (exhibitor spending, capital expenditures, DMO, other)	37,746	11.6%	150

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Partners & Stakeholders

Funders & Philanthropy

Chorus Foundation (Boston, MA) - Land acquisition and remediation support and network building with philanthropy.

Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo (Buffalo, NY) - Resources for creation of this Community Impact Report.

The John R. Oishei Foundation (Buffalo, NY) - Operating support and network building with philanthropy, developers, public agencies.

Government & Public Officials

Buffalo Common Council member Zeneta Everhart (Masten District)

Buffalo Common Council member Mitch Nowakowski (Fillmore District)

Erie County Legislator Lawrence J. Dupre (1st District)

NYS Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes - Connecting Open Buffalo to state funding opportunities, bringing attention to Eco Campus project, community engagement.

Congressman Tim Kennedy - Connecting Open Buffalo to national funding opportunities, bringing attention to the Eco Campus project, and community engagement.

Erie County Legislator Taisha St. Jean Tard (2nd District)

Organizations & Stakeholders

Buffalo Urban League - Co-hosting events and collaborative fundraising.

BFLO Worm Works - Advisor and programming partner in composting and food waste management, policy, and education.

Groundwork Buffalo - Programming partner in outdoor education and land use.

Juneteenth of Buffalo - Community engagement, recruitment, education, and publicity.

Niagara River Greenway - Advisor on land use and outdoor education, community engagement support.

Partners & Stakeholders

Organizations & Stakeholders cont.

Western New York Land Conservancy - Advisor on land acquisition, land use, outdoor recreation, and environmental education.

Technical Assistance Partners

eco_logic STUDIO - Sustainable architecture and concept design.

Hallmark Planning & Development - Technical assistance on site selection, real estate purchase, development planning, and capital stack planning.

J40 Accelerator Program - Capital stack development, connection to public agencies and funding opportunities, funded strategic planning for Eco Campus and operations of Eco Collective governance group.

Make Communities - Partnering to develop this Community Impact Report.

New Jersey Institute of Technology Center for Community Systems - Technical assistance with Brownfield mapping and remediation, technical assistance with navigating Environmental Protection Agency opportunities.

Path Consulting - National fund development strategy and support.



Get Involved

Does Open Buffalo's mission of advancing racial, economic, and ecological justice resonate with you? Every individual with a passion for justice and equity can play a role in advancing this critical mission. Below, find a variety of opportunities to make a positive impact.

Donate



Volunteer



Sponsorship Opportunities



Become a Mentor



This land

By Jillian Hanesworth, 2024

Open Buffalo Emerging Leader
(2017 Class)

This land was made for you and me
Holy grounds stolen from its original care takers
Tended to by Black lives stolen from their homes
Stood on right now by you and me
With soil rich enough to sprout greens that fuel the air we breathe
Resilient enough to provide for us even when we don't provide for it

This land is a sanctuary
A reminder that as long as there is good soil, crops will always be produced
Leaders will always emerge ripe with ideas and innovation
Brimming with the knowledge that everything we feed this land will be fed back to us
So we plant seeds that will not only give rise to the food that sustains our bodies,
But the capacity needed to sustain our movements

You see, from this land came you and me
And as long as there's an "us", we will be alright
We will bask in the light of liberation and restoration
As long as there's an "us" our youth will have a future
Our Buffalo will be open to new possibilities and an identity we can all endorse
Our freedom will be as attainable as our democracy should be

This land was made for you and me
And now we get to decide what to make of it
We have the privilege to cherish it by making it a safe haven
A space to honor the ancestors who taught us how to study and cultivate it
Who embedded in us that ecology is love and love is a human right
We owe it to this land to edify it in even the most unexpected places
To create a retreat for the trees and place it right in the middle of the hood
To build a campus for Black people and for all people to seek refuge from the harms
Polluting our environment and our collective culture

This land is not just a place we must survive
It's a place we must uplift
And even when we can't stand on the front lines,
We owe it to each other to support the ones who do
For this land was made for me and you



Hanesworth served as the City of Buffalo's inaugural Poet Laureate. She is also a graduate of Open Buffalo's Emerging Leaders Program and a former Director of Leadership Development at Open Buffalo.

Connect with Us

Visit
1327 Jefferson Avenue, Upper
Buffalo, NY 14208

Email
info@openbuffalo.org

Call
(716) 243-8777

Text
(716) 221-6597

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by Make Communities



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