

Organic Revitalization



Artspace Buffalo

Think



Different

BLOCK ANALYSIS



Best Street

Artspace Buffalo

Parcel Inventory

Address	Type	Condition	Comments	Recommendations
45 Best	Substation	Good	unattractive barbed wire fencing	regreening space on corner
66 Best	Commercial	Good	Multicultural Potential Center	remove bricks covering windows
70 Best	Single	Good	brick Italianate	
72 Best	Single	Good	vinyl inappropriate	
74/76 Best	VACANT	Excellent	lawn maintained by private owner	
86 Best	Double	Fair		
88 Best	Double	Good		
92/94 Best	Double	Good	maintains 90 Best as shared driveway	
96 Best	Single	Fair		
98 Best	VACANT	Good	privately owned, attractively fenced	
102 Best	Single	Fair/Poor		
104 Best	Single	Fair	architectural character	
108 Best	VACANT	Excellent	garden maintained by 112 Best	
112 Best	Single	Excellent	stained glass windows, turret	
118 Best	Double	Fair/Poor		
120 Best	Single	Good		
122 Best	Double	Fair		
126 Best	Double	Fair		
130 Best	Double	Fair		
138 Best	VACANT	Poor	City of Buffalo, aligns vacant 1140 Michigan	residential/mixed-use infill

Best Street

Observations, Conditions, Opportunities

Best Street is a case study in how auto-focused and suburban design has ebbed away at the pedestrian quality of many Buffalo streets. Widened and reconnected to Summer Street a few decades ago, Best Street loses the narrow, comfortable feel it exhibits east of Michigan Avenue and immediately becomes a high speed artery along a two-block stretch, presumably designed for ease of traffic to and from Main Street. Ultimately connected to the Kensington Expressway to the far east, Best is considered one of several prime connections from the highway to the Main Street corridor and Elmwood Village. This plan aims to maintain the street's importance as a secondary auto and bus corridor, but would like to reconfigure the street as a landscaped parkway emphasizing its importance as a gateway into the historic Midtown area.

Once considered the center of gravity for what had been Buffalo's "Auto Row" of showrooms and car dealerships, the corner of Best and Main is today a less prominent focal point for neighborhood life. The existence of the Summer/Best subway station has been simultaneously a draw for community activity as well as a deterrent to it, designed to repel lingering users and ultimately failing to create as much activity nearby as it could have. The space in front of the building, in particular, has been rendered useless by an erratic placement of sculptures of questionable artistic value. The station's ability to contribute to the vitality of the neighborhood is still relatively untapped, however, and it does still have great potential. Sidewalks near the corner with Main are very narrow for the amount of pedestrians accommodated, and are unshaded and overwhelmed by



The corner of Ellicott and Best streets, crowned by the Multicultural Potential Center and two character brick houses.

aggressive auto traffic. Conditions for cyclists and pedestrians are unideal. The wide pavement and relative treelessness of Best Street also tend to create a heat island effect in summer and an unpleasant wind effect in winter.

The built landscape of Best Street is an exercise in contrasts. On the north, a relatively intact streetscape of older urban housing on narrow lots prevails, mostly double houses in relatively good condition. To the south are the unsightly, if well-maintained, Pilgrim Village subsidized apartments, a “gift” to the city from 1960s urban renewal efforts that razed several blocks of this once vital community. With deep setbacks, overly generous off-street parking, and buildings that face the street at obtuse angles over an unsocialable grass berm, the complex is a disaster for goals like encouraging pedestrian use and producing a cohesive urban fabric. Its existence is a visually evocative reminder, however, of the importance of preserving and strengthening compact urban streetscapes like the one that exists on the other side of Best Street. The fact that the Pilgrim Village-side of Best Street is so beautifully treed, its landscape so coordinated and planned, especially compared to older streets nearby, is yet another indication of how disinvested streets have been permitted to become in older neighborhoods.

Like many streets in Midtown, Best Street contains buildings that exhibit the qualities of both good stewardship as well as bad. Osmose, a company that has taken advantage of its position along a key transit corridor, has proven to be a good neighbor through its investment in older commercial structures and new builds, built up to the street and surrounded by attractive fencing and landscaping. The Multicultural Potential Center, located at Best and Ellicott, is an important cultural asset providing services as broad as fitness, boxing and dance. Located in a one-story brick structure crowned in a 1920s-era parapet, the Center could be enhanced through the unbricking of its ample windows, opening up scenes from within and projecting a greater sense of



Wide lanes and excessive asphalt degrade a pedestrian-focused environment. Imagine a landscaped median humanizing the street and contributing to its beauty.

vitality onto the urban setting outdoors. A Niagara Mohawk substation, located across the street, is fundamentally a good structure but, like many substations, is surrounded by unfriendly barbed wire fencing and borders an underkempt lot that could be reclaimed as a formalized desire path. It would be curious to see if Niagara Mohawk would express interest in improving the surrounds or even provide a space on its unadorned brick walls for a mural of some kind.

The mostly double houses of Best Street display the characteristics of both dedicated homeownership as well as landlord absenteeism. Some of the houses, like 112 Best, are excellently maintained and contain character features like stained glass windows and turrets. Others, like the brick Italianate 134 Best, are in less than ideal, but salvageable, condition. The City, as a rule, doesn't seem to do enough to reward responsible homeowners who invest time and money into their properties as sidewalks go unrepaired, removed trees are never replanted, and absentee landlords are permitted to allow their properties to deteriorate. Like all other streets in Midtown, Best Street can benefit greatly from those modest interventions that fertilize renewal processes initiated by the residents.

The urbanscape of Best Street gradually deteriorates closer to Michigan Avenue, the corner of which is vacant and City-owned but may, someday, make an ideal site for new small business space or residential development. Corner lots such as these are desperate for attention. They frame a block, socially and physically, and are important ingredients in the image of a neighborhood. The whole streetscape must be emphasized as an urban milieu in need of repair, not demolition, in direct contrast to the isolated suburban island of Pilgrim Village to its south.



The Pilgrim Village apartments along the south side of Best Street are nicely landscaped, but the buildings themselves are poorly designed, turning their back on the city's public realm.

Recommendations, Strategies, Suggested Improvements

1. Create a landscaped median on Best Street between Ellicott and Main streets

The sheer width of Best Street between Ellicott and Main streets creates conditions inhospitable to pedestrian activity, providing excessive vehicle lanes that permit an ease of traffic flow but little else. At 49 feet in width at the corner of Main, the street acts as a barrier in what should be a seamless border, a gateway, from downtown and the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus into Midtown proper. Interestingly, Summer Street on the other side of Main Street remains very narrow, but handles roughly as much traffic.

- Instead of calling for the narrowing of Best Street as a whole, install of a 20-foot-wide center landscaped median to calm traffic
- Reduce the number of vehicle lanes
- Provide a new venue for tree plantings that would otherwise be limited along the unusually slender planting strips of either side of the street
- No turning lanes on Best Street as there are now (this will markedly calm the pace of traffic and improving the safety of both pedestrians as well as drivers)
- Two vehicle lanes, each about 14.5 feet in width, would provide enough room for both buses and cars
- The use of a median would emphasize Best Street as a *boulevard*, not a thoroughfare (these are two phrases that describe streets containing roughly equal traffic volumes but evoking different levels of comfort, calm and beauty)

2. Reconnect Old Best Street to Best Street, rename to Lourdes Lane

When the commercial fabric of Main Street was ripped up to create a seamless connection from Best to Summer street, the former alignment of Best Street, now named Old Best from Ellicott to Main streets, was retained. Now abandoned as a street with any usefulness to the general public, Old Best Street was reduced essentially to a cul-de-sac ending in an underused surface parking lot. The historic Our Lady of Lourdes Church, recently sold to a new owner, anchors the street at one end but is reduced to less-than-prominent status by the blighted Old Best now framing its northern facade. This recommendation aims to:

- Resurrect the usefulness and prominence of Old Best Street, renaming it Lourdes Lane
- Reconnecting it to Best Street as a secondary one-way connection from Main Street
- Curve the new Lourdes Lane around to meet Best Street in a 90 degree angle, opening new lots up for redevelopment (this change would result in traffic calming on Best Street because of the new midblock connection and additional on-street parking)

Repair streetscape and treewall from Ellicott to Michigan

To emphasize the gateway effect of Best Street leading up to Main, special consideration should be given to:

- Providing tools to residents for improvement of the few problem properties along this two-block stretch
- Retaining City-owned vacant parcels, closer to Michigan, for new housing that complements the existing housing stock
- An aggressive tree replanting initiative that provides a counterpoint to the well-maintained greens of Pilgrim Village
- Applying a landscape treatment on the north similar to a prevailing 32-foot distance between trees along the south side of Best Street
- Replacing the standard cobrahead streetlamps and bland stoplights on the northern half of Best with quality, pedestrian-oriented ones that emphasize the street's importance as a landscaped boulevard



The lack of a quality public realm, with a unified tree canopy and well-maintained sidewalks, only reinforces negative trends on the block.