



CITY OF ROCHESTER
**WEST MAIN
MULTIMODAL
TRANSPORTATION
+ PLACEMAKING
PLAN**

DECEMBER 2021

THE

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IS THE

LIMIT

REACH

FOR IT!





What should West Main look like?

How should it feel?

How should people be able to get around West Main?

What support do existing local businesses need?

What new businesses or services does the community need?

What kinds of policies will help generate wealth for existing community members?

How and where can public art be used to express the spirit of the community?

What are the community's priorities? How can we bring them to life?

Together with community partners, the City of Rochester and the Genesee Transportation Council launched a project to help answer these questions. Building on Citywide efforts to promote prosperity, sustainability, and justice, the West Main Street Multimodal Transportation + Placemaking Plan establishes an actionable vision for West Main that considers the role of both public, private, and community partners.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

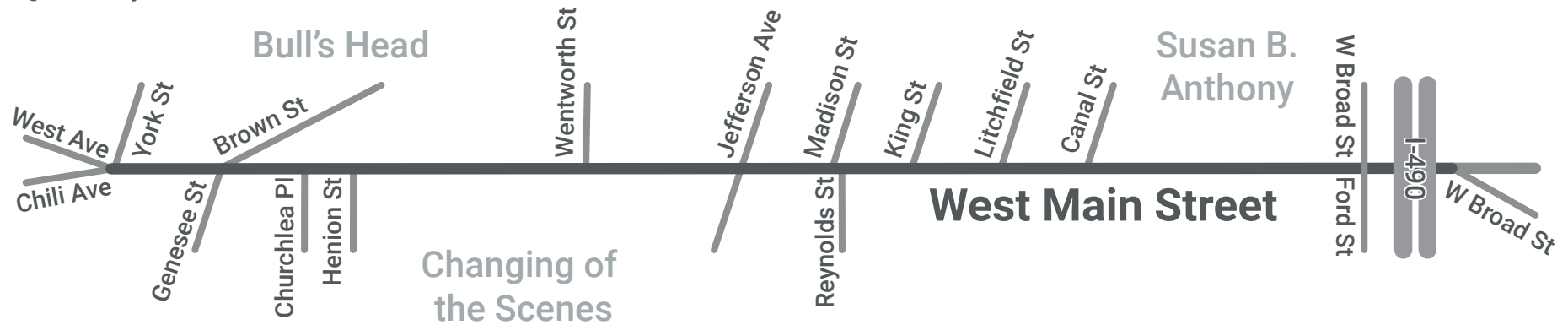
Situated just west of the heart of Downtown Rochester, West Main is a major transportation corridor that carries people to and from the places they need to go. West Main is also a place where neighbors live, shop, socialize, and work. Together with community partners, the City of Rochester and the Genesee Transportation Council launched this plan to engage communities on and around West Main in a discussion about transportation and placemaking investments for the street, stretching from Bull's Head to West Broad Street.

Primary Project Goals

- 1 Improve safety, accessibility, and connectivity**
- 2 Support sustainable communities and grow community wealth**
- 3 Celebrate and promote history, culture, and legacy**

Beginning with community goal setting, this plan was developed through the collaboration of residents, community members, and a steering committee comprised of government partners, local property and business representatives, community organizations, advocates, and residents. Building from the goals established through many previously completed plans and initiatives – such as *Rochester 2034*, *ReImagine RTS*, and the *Bull's Head Revitalization*

Figure 1. Project Area



Plan – community partners helped refine goals that speak to the specific needs of West Main. Through this process, it quickly became clear that any discussion about West Main’s transportation and placemaking futures could not take place in a vacuum; while people shared ideas and excitement about the street design possibilities for West Main, they also stressed that other community priorities – like preserving affordability, addressing crime, building community capacity, and growing community wealth – were critical to consider alongside any discussions about investments to the built environment.

The primary goals established for the project reflect this desire to plan for West Main from many angles:

Plan Process

This visioning process began in late 2020 and included four phases. In total, this planning process included 10 steering committee meetings, 10 pop-up events on or around West Main, 4 one-on-one stakeholder interviews, 4 community surveys, and 1 virtual public meeting.

Phase 1: Community Goal Setting – Building on the goals from other recent planning processes, a range of community and steering committee feedback was used to refine the project goals.

Phase 2: Establishing Existing Conditions – Next, the existing conditions on West Main were analyzed and documented using in-person observations, available data, and community insights.

Phase 3: Developing Ideas and Iteration – Using ideas suggested by the community as well as regional and national best practices, street design, placemaking, and policy ideas were discussed and iterated on.

Phase 4: Confirming Recommendations – Finally, the refined concept was shared out for a final round of feedback and iteration.

West Main Today

Using a wide range of information and data points – from on-the-ground conversations to historic archives to large data sets – the existing conditions on West Main were explored to set a foundation for thinking about the future. Some of the key findings of the existing conditions exploration are highlighted below.

Social and Economic Life

Today, West Main is home to a range of locally-owned and -operated businesses, social service providers, community and faith organizations, and cultural institutions. The street is also the center of social and economic activity for the multiple residential neighborhoods in Rochester's southwest quadrant that converge at West Main. There is a lot to celebrate on West Main and a foundation for strong community ties and economic activity to be strengthened in the future.

In many ways, however, West Main and the surrounding neighborhoods show the signs of a community with stretched incomes and a legacy of harm caused by discriminatory policies and practices. People living around West Main have lower household incomes than the City of Rochester as a whole, suffer from higher rates of chronic disease, and are more likely to be underemployed. Local businesses compete for resources and customers with large corporations just outside the study area. And as a predominately Black neighborhood, people carry the weight of living in a society that struggles to reconcile its aspirations for equity with entrenched structural racism. These challenges are significant, but they are not unique to West Main or to the City of Rochester.

Social and Economic Key Takeaways

- Compared to the City as a whole, residents around West Main have several notable demographic characteristics. Around 75% of residents around the study area are Black (compared to 40% citywide) and around 65% of households around West Main have annual incomes below the citywide median of \$35,000.
- Communities around West Main are also more likely to be renters, who are more vulnerable to changing housing markets and who accrue equity far more slowly than homeowners, if at all. Around 75% of housing units around West Main were occupied by renters. Through this process, concerns about displacement accompanied an eagerness to see investment and resources brought to West Main.
- Meanwhile, home purchases have been slow to rebound around West Main since the crash of 2008. Vacant housing in the area makes up a sizable percentage (around 17%) of the full housing supply. Filling vacancies on and around West Main – both residential and commercial – was consistently expressed as a priority through this process.
- Compared to the average rate among all Rochester residents, people around West Main are 38% more likely to be diagnosed with high blood pressure, 45% more likely to have chronic heart disease, and 60% more likely to suffer a stroke. Between 9% and 24% of area residents don't have health insurance, compounding the quality of life impacts of these public health issues.
- West Main is home to a range of small businesses. Within the study area, there are over 70 businesses, the vast majority of which are small businesses owned and operated by women and people of color. There is currently no business association

that is active in strategic and collaborative planning for West Main. Though there is a mix of business types along the street, better access to both grocery and restaurants on West Main was commonly expressed as a specific priority through this process.

- There are also several anchor institutions – including Rochester Regional Health and the Susan B. Anthony House and Museum – that draw people to West Main for distinct purposes. Through this process, people expressed a desire to strengthen, grow, and broaden the range of cultural institutions within the area.

The Built Environment

Today, the built environment on West Main has an inconsistent character that fluctuates dramatically from one end of the street to the other. Adjacent land use and street design reflect a tension between the utility of a high-speed, vehicle pass-through route and an historically walkable, human-scaled place. Some sections of the street express a distinct place that has been nurtured and established, while much of the street perpetuates the idea of West Main as merely a conduit to and from Downtown from areas farther west.

At 66 feet in width, the majority of West Main today includes approximately eight-foot sidewalks on each side of the street, four vehicle travel lanes totaling approximately 40-42 feet, and an additional 8-10 feet that is used either for one lane of on-street parallel parking or turn lanes for cars at intersections.

Built Environment and Transportation Key Takeaways

- Compared to the City as a whole, people around West Main are more likely to rely on walking, biking, transit, and carpooling. Approximately 40% of residents around West Main do not have



Photo of West Main
near King Street
looking east toward
Downtown

access to a vehicle (compared to 26% citywide) and approximately 19% of residents around West Main use transit for their commutes (compared to 10% citywide). In the southwest portion of the study area, as many as 40% of people use the bus to get to work.

- Safety on the street was one of the most common concerns voiced through this process. Between 2015 and 2019, 504 crashes were reported on West Main for an average of one crash every 3.5 days. While around 21% of all crashes resulted in an injury, the injury rate for crashes involving people walking and biking was much higher (72%). Since 2012, three people have lost their lives in traffic crashes on West Main. Speeding was expressed as a major concern by many through this process; In 2019, the average speed of people driving on West Main was 33 mph and around 15% of drivers (3,000 vehicles per day) were recorded traveling above 40 mph, greatly increasing the risk of serious injury or death in the event of a crash. In addition to traffic safety, people frequently expressed concern about crime and personal safety on West Main.
- Though the surface quality of existing sidewalks is generally good on West Main, conditions for people walking are complicated by a range of other factors. Crossing opportunities on West Main are very limited, with as much as 1,500 feet in between crossing opportunities (a 5-8 minute walk), even though demand is very high at some locations; observations from April 2021 showed that nearly 300 people in one day crossed the street at the bus stop near Family Dollar even though there is no crosswalk present. Winter maintenance of sidewalks was also commonly noted as a major issue for people walking, waiting for the bus, and people with disabilities.
- West Main is a key bus route. With the implementation of *ReImagine RTS*, two bus routes provide frequent bus service on West Main, with less-frequent service provided by several other local service routes. Around 600 people each day get on or off the bus within the study area.
- Though West Main connects to several existing and planned bike routes, there is no clear or separate space for people who bike on West Main itself. As a result, some people bike on the sidewalk, some ride in the street with traffic, and some bike in the wrong direction on the street for better visibility and sense of control.
- Around 19,400 vehicles traveled along West Main each day in 2019, with traffic in the westbound direction generally higher than in the eastbound direction. Counts taken in April 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic show reductions of vehicle traffic at intersections along West Main ranging from 5% to 46% over pre-pandemic conditions.
- On-street parallel parking is provided along around half of the street, most of which is unregulated. Off-street parking lots serve many businesses on West Main, especially along the western half of the study area. Community members have reported that double parking is common in front of some businesses and that more customer- and resident-oriented vehicle parking is desired.
- From murals to painted utility boxes to decorative lighting fixtures, West Main has many historic buildings and displays of public art honoring local histories and leaders. People are eager to see public art – including transformative and iconic public art – expanded and broadened to reflect not only historic legacies but contemporary cultures as well.



Photos showing a range of conditions for people traveling on West Main

A Vision for West Main

Through this process, many big and bold ambitions for West Main were revealed. These ambitions cut across topics – from transportation to community wealth to arts and culture – and acknowledge that these topics are all related. Taken together, the vision for West Main reflects a future where people travel freely and safely; where small businesses grow and prosper; where families become free of financial insecurity; where social justice is felt and seen.

The project’s Steering Committee and the public consistently emphasized the multifaceted and complex forces that affect West Main. While people shared ideas and excitement about the street design possibilities for West Main, they also stressed that addressing the root causes of existing conditions – like housing stability, community organizing, personal security, and equitable resource access – is critically important to include alongside investments in the built environment. Many of these issues are not unique to West Main; they reflect systemic challenges in our society that affect

communities across Rochester and cities nationwide. As such, systemic responses are needed. And while no single project, program, or government entity will be able to single-handedly implement effective responses to these issues, some solutions are actionable at the corridor and local scale. This plan strives to present an honest accounting for these complex issues by including recommendations for both built infrastructure and *invisible infrastructure*, like policies and programs that are felt but may not be seen.

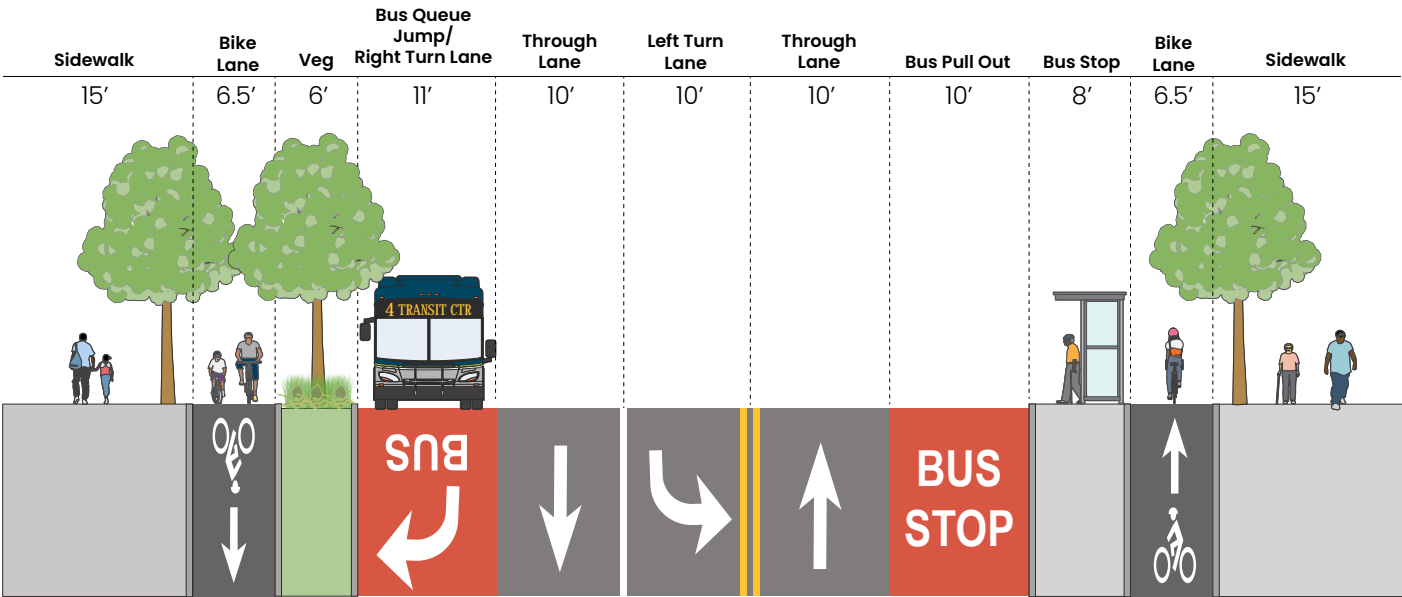
Summary of Recommendations

Using ideas from the community and examples from around the country, a menu of high-level concepts were developed and shared for discussion. With community feedback and direction from the project’s Steering Committee, multiple rounds of iteration and refinement were undertaken to prepare the recommendations in this plan.

Recommendations are summarized at a high-level below, with more detail provided in Part 3 of the plan, including implementation details.

Figure 2. Cross section diagrams showing a range of typical street configurations proposed for West Main.

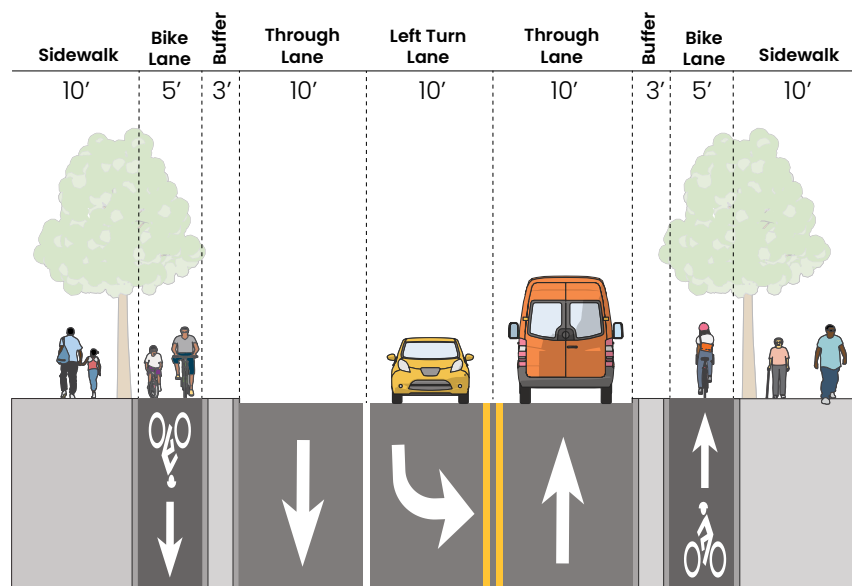
Left: West Main near Genesee Street
Center: West Main near Jefferson Avenue
Right: West Main near Litchfield Street



1 Goal: Improve safety, accessibility, and connectivity

Both design and policy recommendations are included to help address some of the most pressing concerns voiced through this process. In particular, recommendations are focused on addressing traffic and personal safety, a need for more resources to care for the street, and features to support people who walk, bike, and take the bus.

While the long-term concept design includes compromises between competing priorities for the street's limited space, care and thought was incorporated into design decisions both large and small. This concept is intentional about prioritizing on-street parking, sidewalks, and bike lanes over vehicle travel lanes to emphasize the needs of the neighborhood over the needs of regional travelers. Though West Main today functions as a pass through street for many people, feedback from the Steering Committee and public consistently demonstrated a desire for more elements – like wider sidewalks, bike lanes, and trees – that are simply not possible while accommodating multiple lanes for vehicle traffic.

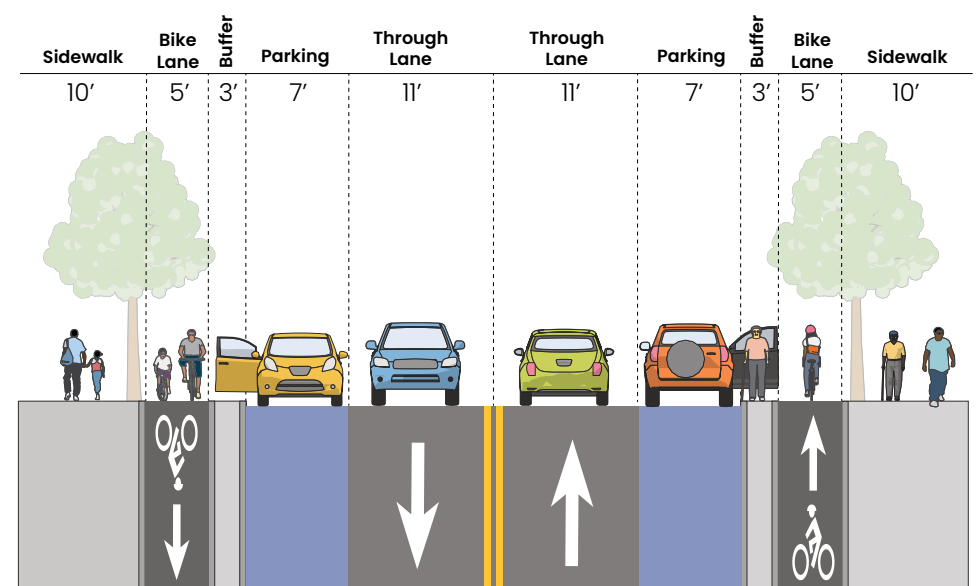


Invisible Infrastructure Recommendations

- Maintain a Clean and Functional Street
- Manage On-street Parking for Varied Demands
- Confront Perceived and Real Crime

Built Infrastructure Recommendations

- Advance planning and secure funding to reconstruct West Main using the long-term vision and community feedback from this process as a guide
- Advance the spirit of the long-term vision with short-term changes through lower-cost construction methods
- Support future design phases in the short- and long-term with updated observations and analyses
- Use the time needed to plan, design, and implement physical changes on West Main to simultaneously advance “invisible infrastructure” recommendations described above



2 Goal: Support sustainable communities and grow community wealth

The recommendations for supporting sustainable communities and growing community wealth are built around community priorities related to expanding community capacity and organizing, preserving affordability and preventing displacement, food access, and leveraging a wide range of economic opportunities, especially related to vacant land and storefronts. These recommendations are situated within a discussion of the many existing policies and programs already supported by the City and other partners, including numerous goals and strategies identified through the City's Comprehensive Plan, *Rochester 2034*.

Invisible Infrastructure Recommendations

- Build and Sustain a Coalition for West Main
- Preserve and Expand Affordability
- Minimize Vacancies on and Around West Main
- Grow Community Wealth
- Expand Access to Healthy and Affordable Food

Built Infrastructure Recommendations

- Use vacant and pre-development lots for short to-mid-term community and entrepreneur programming
- Leverage vacant storefronts for temporary community uses
- Create pop up play spaces to support joy and community interaction across age groups
- Continue to promote urban greening and gardening

3 Goal: Celebrate and promote history, culture, and legacy

The recommendations for celebrating and promoting West Main's history, culture, and legacy include a range of ways the street can be used to express community identity and culture, with a specific emphasis on some of the most highly visible elements of the street, such as the I-490 underpass. Recommendations also acknowledge the need to institutionalize support for public art and programming.

Invisible Infrastructure Recommendations

- Expand pathways for showcasing community culture

Built Infrastructure Recommendations

- Create a cohesive visual and thematic experience
- Use the street as a canvas for community expression
- Activate the 490 underpass

Moving Forward

This planning process allowed for a radical imagining of what is possible for West Main, and the long-term vision for the street reflects that freedom. Achieving this vision will take time. Reconstruction of the street and implementation of major policy and programmatic initiatives will require strong cross-sector collaborations and significant funding. However, short-term progress is possible and important. Through lower-cost construction methods and implementation of priority policies, important community priorities can be brought to life in the near-term.

Along the way, incremental progress can be celebrated, street design and policies can be tested and refined, momentum can grow, and more voices can be empowered to lead.



A rendering showing West Main with expanded sidewalks, furnished and accessible bus stops, separated bike lanes, on-street parking, and a narrowed vehicle travelway

