

HIGH FALLS ECODISTRICT

ROCHESTER, NY, USA • AUGUST, 2017



SNAPSHOT

PROJECT TYPE: Existing Neighborhood

SITE SIZE: 322 acres

RESIDENTS: 1,682

ECONOMY:

- 91% affordable housing infrastructure
- Median income of Ecodistrict resident: \$15,865
- 29.82% unemployed
- 56.34% poverty rate
- 5,000 working professionals in the Ecodistrict

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES:

Urban gardens, community education, water efficient retrofits, green infrastructure, complete streets, enhanced bikeability and walkability, wayfinding, placemaking, reconnected river trail, district-wide recycling, net zero buildings, mixed-use development, affordable housing, job creation, green workforce development, community solar

NEIGHBORHOOD OVERVIEW

Located in Rochester, New York, the High Falls Ecodistrict is a model for ambitious sustainability standards grounded in equity, resilience, and climate protection. As the first Ecodistrict in the state of New York, High Falls will be a visible representation of Rochester's commitment to being a green leader among mid-sized cities.

The High Falls area is home to a 96-foot waterfall in the heart of downtown Rochester, establishing the city's character and personality. When migrants settled in the Genesee watershed in the early 1900s, the waterfall promoted hydraulic powered-industries such as milling, shipping, and electricity. After the Rochester settlement transformed into a town, its industries and population boomed. Rochester became an early leader in clean energy production.

However, the current development around the Falls is not reflective of the waterfall and river. The trails are in need of maintenance, the parks adjacent to the falls are not user friendly, the bridge lacks vitality, and the riverfront is not accessible to the public. There is incredible potential to once again put the Falls at the forefront of the city's pride. By having the Ecodistrict centered on the Falls, the community is reminded of its history as a city and the natural asset that gave Rochester its beginning. This unique urban ecosystem and history of clean, hydro energy serve as a catalyst and inspiration for sustainable urban redevelopment in future.

PLANNING STAKEHOLDERS:

- NYSERDA
- Greentopia
- Monroe Community College
- Webster Properties
- T.Y. Lin International Group
- City of Rochester, NY
- Monroe County
- Rochester Downtown Development Corporation
- The Community Foundation
- Highland Planning

ECODISTRICT STAKEHOLDERS:

- Monroe Community College
- Webster Properties
- WXXI
- Frontier Field
- Partners + Napier
- Genesee Brewing Company
- City of Rochester, NY
- Rochester Gas and Electric
- High Falls Business Improvement District and Business Association
- Kodak
- Carestream
- Center for Disability Rights
- Verona Street Animal Shelter
- Coca-Cola
- Stantec
- Entercom
- Shortel
- Roberts Communication



HIGH FALLS TEAM HARD AT WORK AT 2015 INCUBATOR

In December 2014, Greentopia, a nonprofit organization dedicated to green education, advocacy, and sustainable development in downtown Rochester, received a grant of \$240,000 from NYSERDA for planning and organization of the state's first Ecodistrict. In spring 2015, Greentopia began a two-year study to identify projects that will advance an Ecodistrict framework. The study engages business owners, artistic communities, local government, developers, and citizen's groups. High Falls Ecodistrict targets projects in transportation, energy, recycling, biodiversity, and water that can benefit residents, develop new green spaces, and reduce the area's overall greenhouse gas footprint. The study will address environmental goals that include improved waste management solutions, reduced carbon footprint, energy and water efficiencies, storm water management, and habitat through a combination of mixed use, mixed income development, neighborhood scale parks, schools, and services.

In addition, the Ecodistrict is adjacent to some of the poorest neighborhoods in the city. However, through the implementation of the High Falls Ecodistrict, residents in both the Ecodistrict and the surrounding areas will have increased access to fresh food, quality green space, education for sustainable living, and reduced energy costs. The Ecodistrict has potential to provide job training in the green industry, access to health care, and a world class green space.

After receiving NYSERDA funding for the Ecodistrict planning study, Greentopia convened a core team called the Critical Team to help guide the planning process. In 2015, the Critical Team attended the EcoDistricts Incubator in Portland, OR, a three-day intensive project-based workshop designed to accelerate district-scale sustainability and provide advanced training. At the Incubator, the Critical Team was introduced to the EcoDistricts Protocol and received the tools needed to develop a Roadmap to map out their projects and goals for implementation. The Critical Team meets on a monthly basis to provide input and hands on support to the Greentopia staff. Since the Incubator, the Critical Team has defined the Ecodistrict's initial boundary and its name, and drafted the mission and vision statements, outreach strategies, and the Ecodistrict Plan.

ABOUT THE ECODISTRICTS CERTIFIED PROGRAM

EcoDistricts Certified is the standard for community development that makes equity and sustainability fundamental to neighborhoods for all. By embracing the standard, neighborhoods commit to becoming the first certified EcoDistricts in the world. EcoDistricts Certified is the result of seven years of research, pilot projects and the best thinking from international experts. It provides a flexible, holistic, and rigorous "how to" framework for organizing and achieving important public policy, sustainability, and investment goals.

Learn more at:

<https://ecodistricts.org/ecodistricts-certified/>



The creation of the High Falls Ecodistrict meets the Finger Lakes Regional Economic Region's priorities by fueling economic and physical renewal, coupled with true environmental benefits. The High Falls Ecodistrict will be a comprehensive approach to social, environmental, and economic needs; it will require buildings and neighborhoods to meet concrete sustainability performance standards of energy, water, waste, and transportation systems, all of which are outlined as part of the region's economic goals.

PROJECT GOVERNANCE

As the Ecodistrict moves through its first phase of formation and implementation, it will be governed by the Greentopia Board, advised by the Critical Team and Steering Committee, and run by Greentopia staff. Greentopia will serve as the backbone organization providing fundraising support and infrastructure. As the project moves into the implementation phase, catalyzed by the ground work of the Critical Team, the Ecodistrict will ideally be an entirely collaborative entity with its own board and infrastructure.



IMPERATIVES

The certification process begins with a district's commitment to the Imperatives that underpin the Protocol: Equity, Resilience, and Climate Protection. These are indispensable cornerstones of neighborhood sustainability, and making a firm pledge to them at the outset of the process ensures their integration in the Formation, Roadmap, and Performance phases.



1. EQUITY

The High Falls Ecodistrict defines the Equity Imperative as acknowledging the communities most vulnerable to change. The Ecodistrict is actively working with the community's low-income population and surrounding area to ensure that they are involved in any changes that will occur in the Ecodistrict.



2. RESILIENCE

The High Falls Ecodistrict defines the Resilience Imperative as preparing the functions of the Ecodistrict to withstand any social, economic, and environmental shocks and stresses. The Ecodistrict is working toward diversifying how the neighborhood is supported by businesses so that there is not one entity providing support, but rather several smaller ones. This will serve to increase resiliency.



3. CLIMATE PROTECTION

The High Falls Ecodistrict defines the Climate Protection Imperative as using less natural resources. The Ecodistrict is working with businesses to use less energy, water, and paper. In addition, river restoration and decreasing pollution to the river are high priorities.





ROADMAP

The Roadmap is a performance-based sustainability action work plan that integrates a comprehensive set of project and programmatic investments across a district. The Roadmap sets ambitious performance targets and implementation milestones based on the Imperatives and Priority indicators.

After the formation phase, the High Falls Ecodistrict will begin its roadmap phase. During this phase, the Ecodistrict will collect data to set its baseline metrics, begin project implementation for the action phase, establish its long-term governance structure, and secure a funding strategy. The High Falls Ecodistrict anticipates completion of the roadmap phase by 2018.



PRIORITY AREAS

By using the EcoDistricts Protocol, the High Falls Ecodistrict has the flexibility to align their umbrella priority areas with their regional and local plans, while still being able to use the Protocol's process, indicators, and outcomes. One of the preliminary steps in the planning process was to assess all of the plans that preceded the Ecodistrict project. The Finger Lakes Regional Sustainability Plan (FLRSP) and the Rochester Climate Action Plan are the two primary regional plans that impact the High Falls Ecodistrict Plan. This assessment resulted in the creation of a collaborative matrix to outline the overlap between other relevant planning studies and the Protocol.

This information helped inform the specific priority areas of the High Falls Ecodistrict and the goals within those areas. The Ecodistrict restructured the priority areas to align more closely with the FLRSP as these studies have already been funded and vetted by New York State. Place, Prosperity, and Health & Wellbeing have been condensed into Livable Communities. Connectivity has been renamed Transportation & Mobility, while Living Infrastructure and Resource Regeneration have been broken out into Energy, EcoSystem Management, Materials & Waste, and Agriculture & Food Systems.

The Critical Team, the Steering Committee, and the High Falls community developed a list of strategies for each priority area. The community helped inform the plan's strategies and the overall goals in each section through multiple surveys, door-to-door outreach, and public meetings. These strategies will eventually become site specific projects and best practices will be established to implement each project. Described below are High Fall Ecodistrict's priority areas, goals, and strategies.

PLACE, PROSPERITY, HEALTH + WELLBEING

LIVABLE COMMUNITIES: Economic and neighborhood development to create engaged, vibrant, and equitable healthy places to live.

Goal: Advocate for neighborhood development that displays the equitable, vibrant, and diverse character of resilient places.

Strategies: Land use, mixed-use development, dog parks, ADA retrofits to existing buildings and green spaces, eco-signage, car sharing, sharing economy, resource library, tool library, new and retrofitted green space, affordable and diverse housing options, economic development, public art, wall therapy, pop-up programming.



CONNECTIVITY

TRANSPORTATION + MOBILITY: Provide clean, energy efficient alternative transportation options.

Goal: Increase access to alternative modes of transportation.

Strategies: ADA retrofits, complete streets, bike share, car share, ride share, bike lanes, bike racks, reconnect riverway trail, enhanced bus stops/shelters, charging station, wayfinding signage, street lights, fix-it stations, community education.

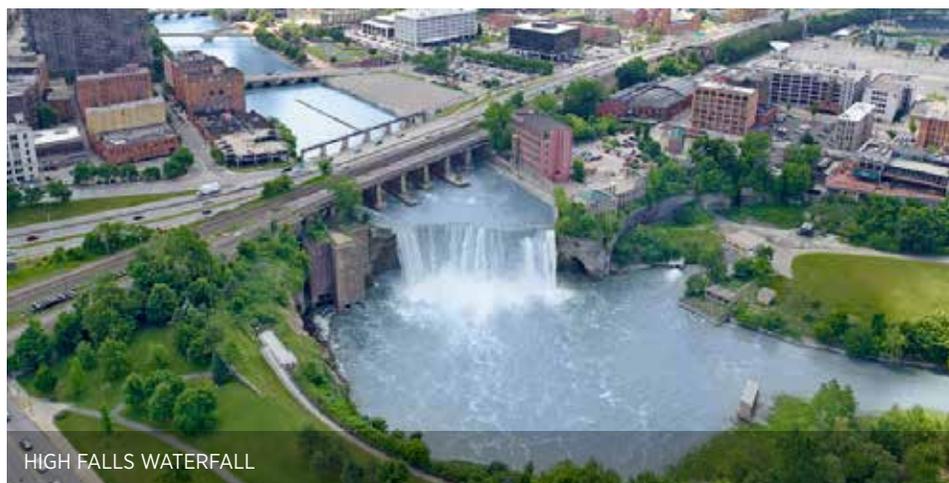


LIVING INFRASTRUCTURE

ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT: Improving access and quality of natural features.

Goal: Reduce the impacts of urbanism on the natural environment.

Strategies: Rain gardens, tree plantings, green roofs, green parking lots, porous pavement, bioswales, water metering, rain barrels, water efficient retrofits, living walls, community education.



HIGH FALLS WATERFALL





CONCEPTUAL DRAWING OF GARDENAERIAL

RESOURCE REGENERATION

ENERGY: Reduction of use and production of clean alternatives.

Goal: Advocate and educate for reduced energy use and catalyze increased use of renewable options.

Strategies: Solar, energy audit, energy monitoring, wind, hydro, energy efficiency upgrades, fuel switching, street lighting, building envelope improvement, incentives for green development, micro-grid, community solar, community choice aggregation, passive housing, economic development, job creation.



MATERIALS + WASTE : Reduce waste, provide recycling and composting options.

Goal: Facilitate district-wide waste diversion and reduction.

Strategies: Resource library, district-wide recycling, district-wide composting, tool library, promote upcycling, net zero buildings, zero construction waste programs, community education.

AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS : Increasing access to fresh local food.

Goal: Increase accessibility to fresh foods in the Ecodistrict.

Strategies: Urban gardens, adopt-a-garden, food forest, green visions program, tree planting, CSA pick up location, cooking classes, community education

LESSONS LEARNED + CONTINUED CHALLENGES

1. One of High Falls Ecodistrict's biggest challenges is securing funding to implement projects and run its operations.

2. There is a lot of community momentum. However, Rochester is not a particularly progressive city, though the tides are turning. High Falls Ecodistrict is working on advancing the level of sustainability culture in the area.

NEXT STEPS

1. Collaborate with stakeholders to solidify the Imperatives and Priority Areas.
2. Work on branding and programming so that residents and visitors alike know that they are in the Ecodistrict and have a sense of place.
3. Support High Falls to meet EcoDistricts Certified requirements with project management. As neighborhood leadership moves through the certification process, EcoDistricts will provide technical support and training, and serve as an information hub to connect the district with others for peer learning and the application of best practices.



“As Greentopia advocates for the development of the High Falls area, which is adjacent to some of the most challenged neighborhoods in Rochester, it is important to us that we found a model sensitive to our context. The EcoDistricts model was ideal in that it is mindful of resilience, climate protection, and most importantly, equity.”

- RACHEL WALSH, ECODISTRICT COORDINATOR, GREENTOPIA

ABOUT ECODISTRICTS

EcoDistricts is nonprofit that advances a new standard for community development. Through its programs and certification standard, EcoDistricts helps create equitable, sustainable, and resilient **neighborhoods for all.**