

### **Town of Tonawanda seeks to unlock ‘inherent potential’ of waterfront, industrial areas**

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The Town of Tonawanda has nearly 4 miles of waterfront along the Niagara River and 2,300 acres of land in its western industrial section. But about 50 percent of that land is vacant or underutilized.

Now, there’s a master plan in the works to clean up the area in hopes of luring businesses and jobs.

“It’s hard to find an area in the developed part of Western New York that has this much waterfront and this great access,” said Edward Flynn, planning division director for LaBella Associates, the town’s consultant on the project. “We wanted to really unlock that inherent potential.”

The Tonawanda Opportunity Area, as it’s known, is part of the state’s Brownfield Opportunity Areas Program and includes such sites as the Huntley Station power plant, Tonawanda Coke and the Cherry Farm park. This area between Buffalo and Niagara Falls is “ideal,” Flynn said during an overview of the plan at Monday’s Town Board meeting, given its access to the Niagara Thruway and Youngmann Memorial Highway.

The plan involves restoring certain parcels through brownfield remediation; reconnecting the area by developing an internal road network; rearranging parcels to square shaped parcels preferred by developers; and rebranding the area.

“I think everyone else in Western New York needs to know we have 3 to 4 miles of waterfront property in Tonawanda that can be redeveloped,” Flynn said.

They’re looking at expanding the network of off-road trails. “That’s what a lot of employers are looking for nowadays when they’re deciding where to bring new businesses,” Flynn said.

The initiative is similar to what Lackawanna is undertaking with the former Bethlehem Steel site, said Planning Board Chairman Kenneth J. Swanekamp. “The former heavy industry areas that are just lying fallow have to be redeveloped and put back into productive use creating jobs and taxpayers,” he told the Town Board.

Flynn was invited to Monday’s meeting by Councilman John A. Barngesi Jr., after a similar presentation last month before the Planning Board and an open-house public meeting in January when strategic sites such as the NRG fly ash and Huntley sites were identified.

“It has incredible access from I-190 and 290, it has lots of waterfront and if it gets redeveloped it could be catalytic,” Flynn said of Huntley plant, which was shuttered last week. “Everyone recognizes it could be a long-term process, but they want to get it started with this plan.”

A full project overview is online at [tonawandaopportunity.com \(http://tonawandaopportunity.com\)](http://tonawandaopportunity.com).

Also Monday, the town and the Village of Kenmore lifted their winter overnight parking bans. The bans had been scheduled to continue until April 1 but were lifted early because of the long-range weather forecast calling for warm temperatures.

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