

Mobile Workshop: City of Rensselaer Waterfront Development Then & Now



UPSTATE
RENAISSANCE
2026 UPSTATE NY PLANNING CONFERENCE

WELCOME TO RENSSELAER!

This session explores how the City of Rensselaer balances a rich, centuries-old history with the complex realities of modern planning. Participants will tour key waterfront and downtown sites to examine how the city is actively managing multiple, intersecting planning tracks, from its industrial roots to contemporary economic development and shifting regional dynamics. This tour highlights how Rensselaer is responding to historic investment across the river in Albany, potential future transformations to the Route 787 highway and Dunn Memorial Bridge corridor, and the catalytic momentum of its recent 2026 Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) award.



Thomas Hulihan

City of Rensselaer Director
of Planning & Develop-
ment



**Norabelle
Greenberger**

Eastern New York Planning
Lead, LaBella Associates



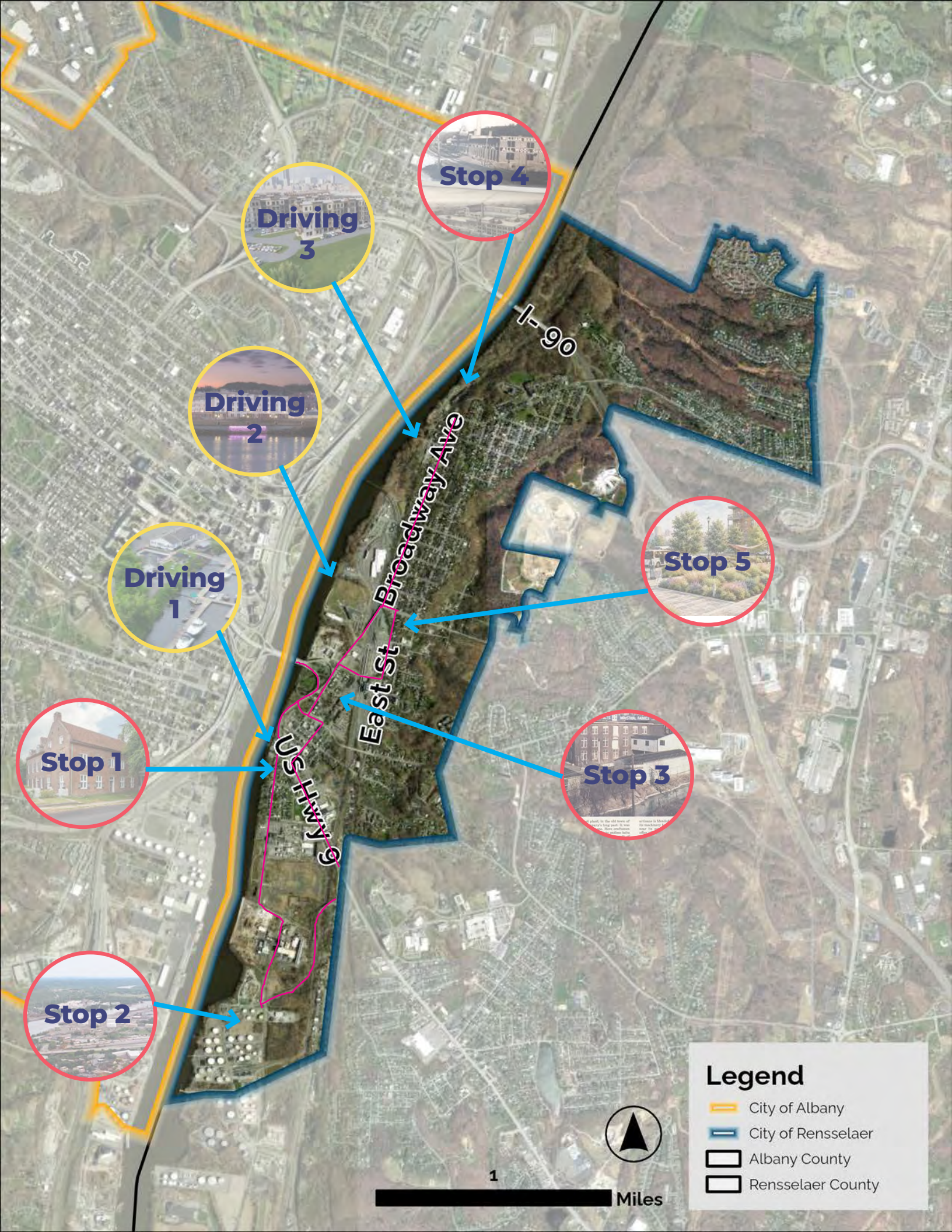
Mirren Galway

Planner, LaBella Associates

With Guest Speakers:

Megan Daly, Chief Commerce Officer at Port of Albany

Greg Youmans, Project Executive BBL Construction Services



Stop 4

Driving 3

Driving 2

Driving 1

Stop 5

Stop 1

Stop 3

Stop 2

East St Broadway Ave

US Hwy 6

I-90

Legend

- City of Albany
- City of Rensselaer
- Albany County
- Rensselaer County



1

Miles

Intro

Recent Planning Context...

Continuous Public Engagement...

Planning for 787 Changes

BOA Designation
Achieved 2025

**Natural Resource
Inventory 2021**

**Citywide Playground Planning
& Improvements**

**Open Space & Recreation
Plan 2025**

**NYSERDA Clean Mobility Grant
for Connectivity & Food Access**

**Pro-Housing Status,
Infrastructure Grants &
Technical Assistance Grants**

**Waterfront Trail
Connector Project**

Aiken Avenue Connectivity Study

**EPA Brownfields
Assessments &
Planning Grant**

**Significant Housing
Projects & Investment**

\$10 MILLION

DRI Funding Secured 2026

As we drive...

Albany Yacht Club, founded 1873

Boating is one of the recreational activities that occurs on the Hudson River. Kayaking and fishing are two other activities and Shoreline Trails are quite popular. Rensselaer has a boat launch and pier in the north end of the city as well as a pier in Riverfront Park. These get regular use for boating, kayaking and fishing.

The Albany Yacht Club is one of the oldest organized yacht clubs. Over the years changes in the Albany waterfront led to several relocations including a move to Rensselaer in 1954 when the river basin was filled in to make room for Interstate-787. In 1971 New York State took the original Clubhouse site of the in Rensselaer to build the Dunn Memorial Bridge which crosses the Hudson to Albany and connects to Interstate 787, and the Club built the new Clubhouse at this present location.

We will be talking more about Reimagine 787 and the plans being considered for the relocation of the Dunn Memorial Bridge later on during this tour.



Stop 1:

Crailo Historic Site and Rensselaerwyck

Land use planning in this area dates back to 1629 when the Dutch West India Company deeded 700,000 acres along both sides of the Hudson River (Albany and Rensselaer counties), to Kiliaen van Rensselaer, creating Rensselaerswyck.

The estate remained in the hands of the Van Rensselaer's for over 200 years. The Patroon had jurisdictional authority, establishing civil and criminal law, villages, and a church (to keep vital records). Tenant farmers were allowed to work the land for a portion of their crops and proceeds.

Tenants Rights in New York State

Eventually, the Manor of Rensselaerswyck came to an end during the Anti-Rent War. The tenants' revolt occurred between 1839 and 1845. Anti-Renters declared their independence from the manor system run by patroons, resisting tax collectors and successfully demanding land reform. The conflict resulted in adding provisions to the New York Constitution in 1846 for supporting Tenants' Rights, abolishing feudal tenures and outlawing leases lasting longer than twelve years. The remaining manors dissolved quickly as the patroons sold off the lands.



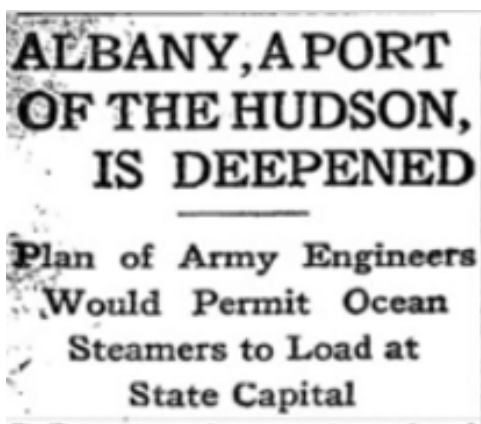
Stop 2:

Port of Albany-Rensselaer With special Guest Chief Commerce Officer Megan Daly

Since the founding of Albany in 1614 as a trading post, shipping has been important to growth and prosperity in this area. Private and public port facilities have existed in both Albany and Rensselaer since the 17th century, with an increase in shipping after the Albany Basin and Erie Canal were built with public funds in 1825. This led to an increase in manufacturing in the area during the Industrial Era.

In 1924 the Deeper Hudson Project dredged and deepened the Hudson River from New York City to Albany and the Albany Port District was established in 1925 under New York Law. The project successfully transformed Albany into a deep-sea ocean port connecting local manufacturing and the Erie Barge Canal directly to global shipping lanes and enabled year-round navigation for large vessels.

In 1915 Bayer opened its first American tablet-making (aspirin) operations at their Rensselaer facility on this site. The plant in Rensselaer shut down on December 28, 2000 and the factory on Riverside Avenue was demolished in 2010, leaving behind a 40-acre Superfund Site that was remediated and closed out in 2008.



Since then, the City of Rensselaer and the Port of Albany have been working on plans to locate new tenants. Construction Materials Handling, Waste Incineration, Paper Manufacturing and Battery Energy Storage Systems have been proposed but nothing has happened yet. A new consideration is the relocation of the Dunn Memorial Bridge that may actually go over the site.

**As we
drive...**

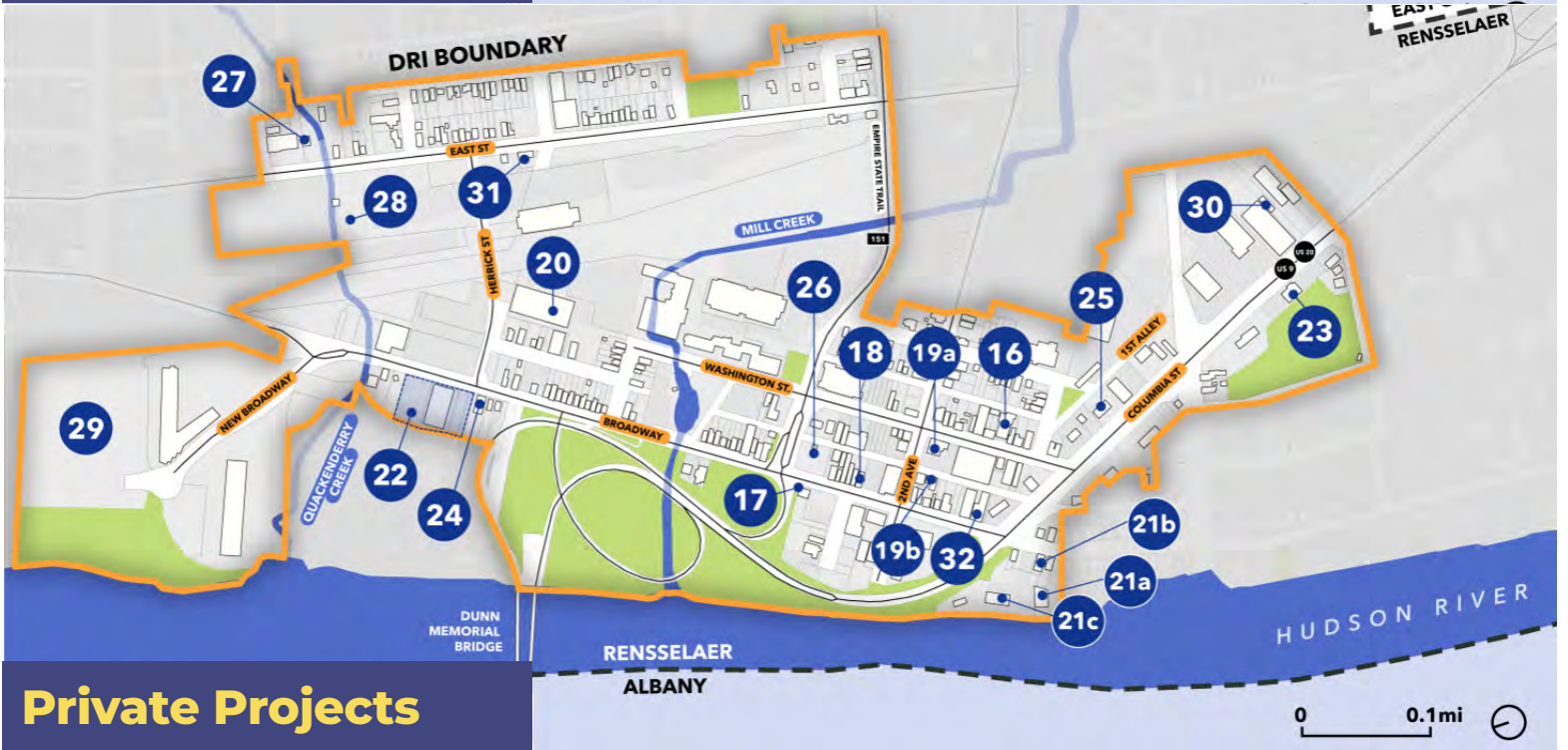
City of Rensselaer's \$10,000,000 Down- town Revitalization Initiative (DRI)

"Experts say Rensselaer, at one time named East Albany, is an old city with a fractured identity searching for a downtown that has not garnered confidence from outside investors. Is downtown along Washington Street? Broadway and the Rensselaer Amtrak Train Station? Columbia Turnpike? Some say the city should carve a new downtown out of its valuable waterfront." From 5/23/2015 Times Union Article: "Rensselaer: Tiny city in search of a future" by Bob Gardinier.

The answer is becoming all of the above.

That article was written just after Rensselaer's bid to locate a regional casino on the waterfront failed. Since then, U. W, Marx has transformed the area that would be the casino into high end apartments, but Rensselaer's downtown area has remained stagnant. That is about to change thanks to a \$10 Million NYS Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) Grant.





While waterfront development is limited due to the Dunn Memorial Bridge infrastructure, we are currently planning for an interconnected downtown area that extends from the Columbia Street Commercial Corridor and Albany Yacht Club to the Amtrak Train Station on East Street. 32 projects have been proposed involving \$490 Million in investment, all building on the City's Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) plan that achieved designation and focused on a similar area.

Currently vacant and underutilized land and structures will be transformed into mixed-use buildings and a hotel, improvements will be made to community amenities like parks, greenspaces and trails. Existing buildings will also receive grant funding to make needed improvements giving Rensselaer's expanded downtown a fresh new look that will be inviting and appealing to residents and visitors.

Stop 3:

Huyck Monument Park & F.C.Huyck & Sons Felt Mill (1894-1980)

F.C. Huyck and Sons moved to Rensselaer from Kenwood, near Delmar, in after a fire in 1894. The company successfully manufactured papermaking felts as well as woolen suits and blankets.

Rensselaer proved to be an ideal location. Not only did it have access to the railroad, there was also Mill Creek, which helped to supply power to the mill. Huyck Felt Company shut down operations in Rensselaer in the early 1980's and the business was sold. The buildings are now home to over 500 employees of the NYS Office of Children and Family Services.

Presently, the Mill Creek Dam, originally built to power a 19th-century felt mill, is obsolete and creates a barrier for river herring and American eels migrating from the Atlantic Ocean. Backed by state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) funding, the conservation group Riverkeeper is leading planning efforts to remove the dam and restore the stream's watershed ecology and the City of Rensselaer is working to beautify the area into a Waterfront Themed Park as part of the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI). Other DRI Projects proposed in this area include new Mixed Use Buildings, Adaptive Reuse of existing buildings and improved public amenities.



The weathered walls of Huyck's oldest plant, in the old town of Rensselaer, New York, are a sign of the company's long past. It was built in 1894 after a fire destroyed an earlier one. Here craftsmen spin and weave blanketlike fabrics and make them into endless bolts of felt for use in the papermaking industry. Here an old craft of

artisans is blended with modern research techniques. Although half its machinery has been moved to a new plant in Aliceville, Alabama, near its southern customers, this establishment is still the head office of the felt division, whose profits supply the backing for the development of the new Huyck Corp.



As we drive...

DeLaet's Landing & The Esplanade

A little over 10 years ago New York State had a competition to place commercial casinos in every region of the state. The Hard Rock Hotel & Casino was a proposed \$280 million waterfront development pitched in 2014 for this DeLaet's Landing site. The project ultimately lost out on the Capital Region casino license in December 2014 to the Rivers Casino & Resort in Schenectady.

Shortly thereafter, U.W. Marx submitted plans for development of the 240-acre site on what is now New Broadway. Ultimately, there will be over 300 waterfront apartments on this property which includes a permanent access easement to the City of Rensselaer for The Esplanade and a waterfront trail that will connect to the Livingston Avenue Bridge and eventually proceed north to Troy. A Fitness Court Studio will also be placed on The Esplanade next year.



As we drive...

Kiliaen's Landing

Similarly, just north of the Livingston Avenue Bridge is a 20+ acre plot land known as Kiliaen's Landing, named after Kiliaen Van Rensselaer. The City of Rensselaer, a Pro-Housing Community, is currently reviewing plans for 350 + modern apartments, a restaurant and other commercial space with a waterfront dock and an extension of the waterfront trail that will eventually connect to Troy.

Even though plans for this property are consistent with a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) that was completed by CHA in 2018 there is much planning work being done. The developer is acquiring surplus lands from New York State, had to coordinate access rights with New York State for the replacement of the Livingston Avenue Bridge, had to coordinate the relocation of a sanitary sewer line with Rensselaer County that runs through the middle of the property, had to complete a Traffic Impact Study, and had to incorporate the Rensselaer Waterfront Trail into the plans. Progress is being made and construction will start after the new Livingston Avenue Bridge is completed.



As we drive...

Broadway Mixed-Use Area

Urban housing and community development during the Industrial Era evolved rapidly and Rensselaer was transformed from a small Dutch agrarian and trading footprint into a densely packed, working-class river and rail transportation and manufacturing hub. Workers needed to live within walking distance of the factories, rail terminals and ports that provided employment. This led to compact neighborhoods clustered around churches, schools, fraternal clubs and small businesses that offered a sense of community for industrial laborers and railroaders.

In Rensselaer over 56% of the housing stock and neighborhood buildings were built before 1939. They are on small lots with limited or no off-street parking. This creates Planning and Zoning challenges when someone wants to restore a two- or multi- family building or reactivate a storefront. The ideal outcome is to allow a suitable use with the least impact on neighborhood parking, even with a variance.

Many communities also have former school and church buildings that are no longer in use. Schools are often converted into apartments or offices, much like Rensselaer City Hall.

Presently, Doane Stuart School recently announced its closure and we are exploring reuse options for that massive facility.

Churches can also be difficult to reuse when they close. Rensselaer has churches have been transformed into a music studio and a homeless family shelter. Another is being used for offices with plans to create community and co-working space as part of Rensselaer's Downtown Revitalization Initiative.

After five decades, Doane Stuart School is closing

After years of fundraising, mergers and enrollment efforts, the Rensselaer private school says too few students remain to continue.

By Kathleen Moore, Staff Writer
June 20, 2024

Share this article



Stop 4:

Barnet Mills Mixed-Use

With Special Guest Greg Youmans, Project Executive BBL Construction Services

Originally, the buildings on this site consisted of an old malt plant built in 1873 and converted to Shoddy Mill in 1905. A shoddy mill is a factory that recycles old wool and cotton rags into reusable fibers.

Workers would sort used clothing and fabric scraps by type and color and then remove buttons, zippers, and other hard pieces. The fabric is then soaked in acid to destroy any leftover cotton, leaving only the pure wool behind. The dry, brittle rags are then sprayed with oils to soften them. The rags are then machine shredded and the torn, recycled wool fibers would be mixed with a small amount of new wool.

In addition to being an early form of recycling, because of the harsh chemicals and heavy machinery, many former shoddy mills have become brownfields (with real or perceived contamination).

The site entered the New York State Brownfield Cleanup Program (BCP) to address contamination before construction. BBL Barnett LLC is completing the \$26 million redevelopment, aided by a \$1.8 million Restore NY Grant. Construction is nearly complete, converting the abandoned mill into modern waterfront housing (72 apartments) and retail space (20,000 square feet).



As we drive...

Rensselaer Rail History & Livingston Avenue Bridge

Rensselaer's rail history goes back to the 1840's when it emerged as a key railroad town with strategic connections to major lines to New York, Boston and Montreal.

The construction of the Livingston Avenue Bridge in 1866 connected the Hudson River to all points west and set the stage for the westward expansion of the United States in the 19th century.

The original 1866 Livingston Avenue Bridge was replaced in 1902 but the original piers were reused. Because the bridge is over 120 years old, and



the piers are over 150 years old, it has structural limitations requiring trains to cross it one at a time at speeds of 15 miles per hour. This creates bottlenecks has initiated a massive \$635+ Million Livingston Avenue Bridge Replacement Project. The new bridge will allow for higher train speeds, and feature a long planned Shared Use Path with connections to the Empire State Trail that will provide a link between Rensselaer and Albany as well as a link to the Rensselaer Waterfront Trail.

As we drive...

Amtrak Maintenance Facility

In addition to the Train Station and tracks that run through our city, Rensselaer is also home to a 42-acre Amtrak Train Maintenance Facility. Late last year Amtrak introduced the Airo Trainsets, designed to deliver a more comfortable, connected, and reliable travel experience. With the launch of the Airo Fleet, Amtrak also announced major upgrades at six rail yards including: Seattle, Philadelphia, Boston, Washington, D.C., New York City and Rensselaer.

Built by Siemens in the United States, the Airo trainset is billed as a faster, more spacious way to travel by rail, with panoramic windows, more comfortable seats, better lighting, touchless restroom controls, handicapped accessibility and other features. The upgrades to the Train Maintenance Facility in Rensselaer will bring more modern equipment and jobs to the region. Amtrak and Rensselaer staff have held planning meetings to discuss the upgrades and the impacts on the broader community.



August 19, 2025

**Amtrak Advances Three Major East
Coast Rail Yard Modernization Projects**

Stop 5

Amtrak Train Station & Transit Oriented Development

In 1995 CDTA originally unveiled plans for Transit Oriented Development (TOD) around a new Amtrak Train Station in Rensselaer. Groundbreaking for the Train Station occurred in 1999 and construction was completed in 2022 but funding was not available. One concern was potential environmental contaminants.

The Transit Oriented Development were later included in a 2024 Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) Study with LaBella. In 2025 the City of Rensselaer applied to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for Brownfield Assessment and Clean-up funding as well as Technical Assistance to Grow Pro-Housing Communities from New York State. These funds can be used to support TOD around the train station.

Most recently, as part of a Federal Initiative for Amtrak to enhance their presence in train station communities, Amtrak solicited master developers to focus on train station TOD. As part of Rensselaer's Downtown Revitalization Initiative, Amtrak and Gilbane have proposed plans for a \$400 Million Project in Rensselaer around the train station.



Stop & Walk

Rensselaer's DRI & Long-Ran

RENSSELAER BOA DRAFT PROPOSED A

Rensselaer, New York
November 2024

Here we are in Riverfront Park but it's hard to see the river due to the bridge ramps of the Dunn Memorial Bridge that leads to Albany and connects to Interstate 787 that were built in the 1970's. Fifty+ years later and the Department of Transportation is Reimagining 787 and planning for the relocation of the Dunn Memorial Bridge.

Several concept alternatives have been presented and the City of Rensselaer is pleased by the prospect of enhanced waterfront access through the elimination of excess bridge ramps (including one incomplete ramp that was intended to fly over Rensselaer and connect to Interstate 90 in North Greenbush).

The varying concept alternatives for I-787 and the relocation of the Dunn Memorial Bridge and ramps have created planning challenges for the Rensselaer downtown and waterfront area. Recent planning projects have taken these potential changes into account, including develop two variations of a master plan for the BOA and is becoming especially important as we consider projects for the \$10 Million Downtown Revitalization Initiative.

All projects are being vetted with DOT to assure that new development and infrastructure upgrades will not be impacted by the bridge relocation.



Change Planning for Changes at the Waterfront

AREA PLAN

RENSSELAER BOA DRAFT PROPOSED AREA PLAN LONG-TERM VISION (If I-787 EXIT IS REMOVED) Rensselaer, New York November 2024

