

Personal Statement  
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Growing up in an area that is considered an inner ring suburb of Rochester, I have always been interested in urban areas and the issues they face with regards to their surrounding suburbs. During my childhood, we would rarely go into the central city, even though we lived just two blocks from the border of the City of Rochester. Once I was in high school, I started to experience more of the city, and realized it had so much to offer, but has many issues due to suburbanization and movement of population to other areas of the country. As I grew up, I began to see the neighborhood in which I resided changing dramatically as many of its residents moved out farther from the city in search of better schools and the perception of the neighborhood becoming more and more like that of the city. Suburban decline can be seen in many other cities in the nation including Buffalo.

I pursued an education in Environmental Design at the University at Buffalo in order to gain a better understanding of urban issues and how to solve them. Cities in the northeast have tremendous potential, and I want to be able to realize that potential. Two cities are of great interest to me, Rochester and Buffalo. Both cities have similar issues such as population decline, lack of investment in the central city, job loss, and much more. However, the scales to which these issues affect the two cities are very different. The City of Buffalo has experienced greater population loss, a harder time shifting from an industrial economy to a high tech economy, and a stock of homes, infrastructure, and factories that have been abandoned.

While my background in planning is relatively broad from obtaining a degree in Environmental Design, my interest and work experience is transportation related. I have worked with the Monroe County Department of Transportation for two summers, gaining a greater understanding of the inner workings of transportation infrastructure. Urban design is my other interest in planning, as I am specializing in it while pursuing a Master's Degree in Urban Planning.

Buffalo and Rochester both have barriers in their transportation systems that cause the cities to suffer as a result. Buffalo is cut off from one of its major assets, Lake Erie, by an Interstate 190 and the Route 5 Skyway. In order for Buffalo to realize its potential, it must make use of its assets to set it apart from other cities in the nation. Cities in the south and west do not have such water assets, and in the event of water shortages, having access to such a great asset could cause it to become an attractive location to live and do business. Downtown Rochester has a significant barrier with the Inner Loop Expressway cutting off access to the neighborhoods surrounding the central core. Both situations necessitate creative solutions in transportation and community development to remove the barriers.

Both Rochester and Buffalo are cities that are continuing to experience population decline, and this needs to be addressed in planning. Rather than focusing on new development efforts, there should be more of a focus on building upon what each city has to offer. Building first upon the assets each city has will ensure that it will have a strong future in those areas. Once that is accomplished, new development efforts can occur. By focusing so much effort and money on new development projects, such as developing the waterfront in Buffalo, the city is placing funding that could be used to improve current conditions for residents through improving education and other public service to retain the current populations.

An issue that I find of great importance in both Buffalo and Rochester is that of using the large college student populations to their advantage. While students come to both areas to pursue higher education and provide the area with great economic benefit, once they graduate, they often leave in search of job opportunities that are not available in Buffalo and Rochester. The college campuses are also very disconnected from the surrounding communities, so students do not develop ties to the area. Therefore, there is nothing keeping students once they graduate. By focusing development efforts and funding on projects that would build upon colleges and students, Buffalo and Rochester could retain some of their student population. Area colleges are the major employers in both regions, and investment in them should be a major priority.

My interests are in transportation planning and urban design. Transportation is a major element in the development of a city, and both Buffalo and Rochester have very unsuccessful transit systems that need to be improved to better serve residents that cannot afford their own car or the increasing trend toward utilizing public transit because it is environmentally friendly. The major issue with Buffalo and its transportation system is that its transit authority has its own agendas that do not serve the good of the community.

The urban environment can have a major impact on the conditions and development of a city. Urban design can change communities to become more attractive for residents and businesses. It could be used to improve distressed communities in both Buffalo and Rochester. It could also be used to reform environments such as those in suburbs that are auto dominated and do not bode well for pedestrians or for people in general. Transportation planning and urban design can be used to reshape communities in ways that make them more attractive and conducive to changing lifestyles. While Buffalo and Rochester have areas that are very walkable, there are disconnects between the environment and transportation that keep areas from being revived. Areas in Buffalo that are popular are those that are pedestrian friendly with businesses and amenities that appeal to the shift back toward city lifestyles, such as Allentown and the Elmwood Village. Areas that are not as popular could become so if they were redesigned with urban design principles with a focus on public transportation to improve accessibility.

The Western New York Region is where I intend on staying after graduation. Whether it be Buffalo or Rochester that become my future home, my intention is to help these cities realize the great potential that they have. My career aspirations are to work in either Buffalo or Rochester to improve accessibility through improving public transportation and the design of communities.