

Niagara Gorge Corridor

***Robert Moses Parkway Removal
Main Street to Findlay Drive
Niagara Falls, NY***

Design Report/

Environmental Assessment

Appendix H - Visual Impact Assessment Report

PIN 5761.90

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In cooperation with:

**New York State Department of Transportation
New York Power Authority
USA Niagara Development Corporation
The City of Niagara Falls, NY**





**Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation**

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

ROBERT MOSES PARKWAY REMOVAL PROJECT
MAIN STREET TO FINDLAY DRIVE
Niagara Falls, New York

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1 INTRODUCTION

Parsons was retained by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (State Parks) to prepare a Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) for the proposed removal of the Robert Moses Parkway (RMP) between Main Street and Findlay Drive, a part of the New York State Parkway System located in the City of Niagara Falls, New York.

This VIA was prepared under the direct guidance of a registered landscape architect experienced in the preparation of visual impact assessments. It is also consistent with the policies, procedures, and guidelines contained in established visual impact assessment methodologies.

1.1 PROJECT LOCATION

The Project is located in the southwestern portion of Niagara County within the western New York State region (refer to **Figure 1**). The Project Area extends in a northerly direction along the east side of the Niagara River from Main Street near the entrance to the Rainbow Bridge to Findlay Drive near Whirlpool State Park and just south of DeVeaux Woods State Park. The length of the Project is almost two miles and it is entirely based in the City of Niagara Falls. The portion of the RMP proposed to be removed crosses over the International Whirlpool Bridge.

1.2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed improvements to the Niagara Gorge Corridor between Main Street and Findlay Drive in the City of Niagara Falls, New York, are focused on the complete removal of the existing RMP within that segment, including both the two-lane limited-access roadway currently in operation and the previous two-lane limited-access roadway currently operating as a pedestrian and bicycle facility (Robert Moses Parkway Trail), as well as the Whirlpool Bridge Plaza overpass and all other RMP interchange/accessory facilities. Upon completion of the Project (i.e., the Build Alternative), it is anticipated that most of the vehicular traffic currently using the RMP in this area would divert to Main Street at the southern end and a reconstructed Third Street / Whirlpool Street, which would intersect with Findlay Drive at the northern end, and then extend northward a short distance to transition back with the existing RMP.

At the southern end of the Project, primary access from Main Street to the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center would be provided via a new Park Road as an extension of First Street. Two points of access to the new Parks Police Station would be via the new Park Road and an extended Walnut Avenue from Whirlpool Street. Access to the Niagara Falls Water Board's sewage pumping station would be via a rerouted access road connecting to Third Street. These improvements allow for an open pedestrian green space between the Aquarium of Niagara and the Discovery Center. Reconstruction of Third and Whirlpool Streets is proposed to include new pavement to accommodate two 12'-wide travel lanes with on-street parking at certain locations, as well as new curbing, sidewalks, landscaping and signage. Several locations along Whirlpool Street would be enhanced to include gateway features to highlight entrances into the new green space made available by the removal of the RMP. At the proposed intersection with Findlay Drive, a stop sign on Findlay Drive would be provided at the point where it meets the extended Whirlpool Street at a T-intersection.

Other improvements proposed as part of the Build Alternative for this Project include: construction of a new multi-use trail network designed to provide uninterrupted pedestrian and bicycle access to all attractions along the Gorge rim, and connecting to other trail systems and adjoining neighborhoods; incorporation of amenities/betterments associated with proposed improvements, including reconstructed parking and improvements related to overlooks at several locations along the Gorge rim; and restoration of the landscape/habitat on lands reclaimed along the Gorge rim from the removal of the RMP with native species.

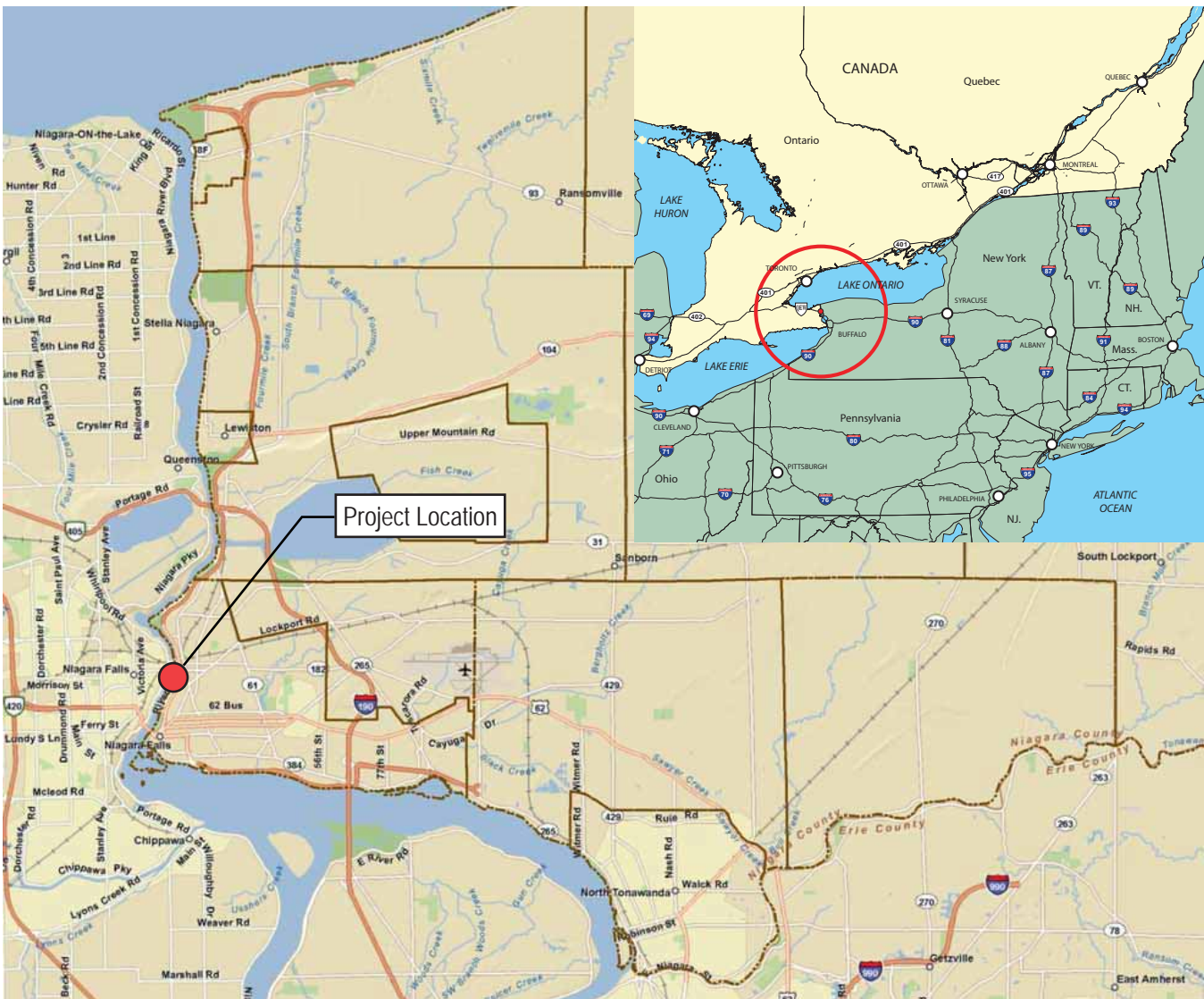


Figure 1: Regional Map

1.3 PROJECT PURPOSE AND NEED

The needs and concerns of the region have changed significantly from the early 1960's when the RMP was constructed. Rather than experiencing continued growth following construction of the RMP, the city's population has decreased by more than 50% since that time. As a result, the original four-lane limited access highway, which was once envisioned to carry a multitude of motorists, is now underutilized. Economic development and support for the local business community are currently near the top of the list of community concerns. Preservation and restoration of the upper rim of the Niagara Gorge, one of the region's most cherished resources, as well as unimpeded pedestrian/bicycle access to the Gorge rim from neighborhoods adjoining the RMP (which for safety reasons are fully cut off, except at a few locations), are now considered just as important as, or more important than, the need to maintain an underutilized and oversized transportation system. In addition, the growth in cycling and walking has led to increased efforts to provide suitable and sustainable multimodal routes.

The Project has been proposed to address the future transportation needs of the park visitors, commuters, bicyclists, hikers and people from the surrounding communities while considering how to balance those transportation needs with the goal to improve the park area environment, provide better access to the Niagara Gorge from the adjacent communities and enhance opportunities for sustainable economic development.

The purpose of the proposed Project between Main Street and Findlay Drive is to directly address several deficiencies and needs that exist within the Project Area, as listed below:

- The total number of travel lanes that parallel the Niagara Gorge far exceeds the traffic demand in the existing condition as well as in the future.
- There are limited points of access between the adjacent neighborhoods and the Niagara Gorge rim, thereby restricting the amount of local usage of this great natural resource.
- The Project Area lacks a continuous trail network that links together existing and proposed attractions, parks, trails, cultural/historic sites and adjacent neighborhoods in a more natural park-like setting.
- Although not technically a transportation deficiency, there is a need to promote economic development and tourism within the corridor.

The deficiencies and needs presented above are oriented toward improvement of the overall transportation system located within and in proximity to the corridor, as well as enhancement of the recreational, visual and economic opportunities of the corridor. The needs would be met with the construction of the proposed Project between Main Street and Findlay Drive. The Project Area extends north of Niagara Falls State Park (which attracts 9 million annual visitors) and downtown Niagara Falls (i.e., the primary location for lodging and dining facilities). In turn, the Project Area immediately runs along some of the city's most densely developed neighborhoods, and would open direct Gorge/waterfront recreation access to its entire ~50,000 residents.

1.4 PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

A number of alternatives for reconfiguring/removing segments of the RMP have been developed and considered over the past several years, beginning with those developed and presented during the scoping process for the entire Niagara Gorge Corridor between Main Street in Niagara Falls and Center Street in Lewiston. Once it was determined that a shorter, first-phase Project corridor between Main Street and Findlay Drive in Niagara Falls demonstrated logical termini and independent utility, and would not restrict consideration of alternatives for other reasonably foreseeable transportation improvements, only the alternatives related to this currently proposed two-mile long project were considered in detail for this VIA.

After consideration of a number of alignment features along the Project limits, two alternatives have been carried forward for detailed assessment in this document: a "No-Build Alternative" and a "Build Alternative," the latter of which is also referred to as the "Project". A brief description of the two alternatives is presented below.

1.4.1 No-Build Alternative

The No-Build Alternative is established as a baseline against which the "Build Alternative" is compared. Under the No-Build Alternative, all built features of the RMP would remain in place between Main Street and Findlay Drive (refer to **Figure 2**). This would involve continuation of the current use/alignment established under the 2000 "Pilot Project", including use of the former southbound expressway lanes as the "Robert Moses Parkway Trail"; use of the former northbound expressway lanes as a single, two-way, 40-mile-per-hour (MPH) highway; and continuation of all other existing expressway features, such as the Whirlpool Bridge overpass (also referenced in this document as the RMP viaduct), pedestrian bridges, and access prevention from adjoining neighborhoods (e.g., fencing, guiderails, grade separation, etc.). In turn, the existing four-lane alignments of Whirlpool Street and Third Street would remain directly adjacent the RMP between Main Street and Findlay Drive.

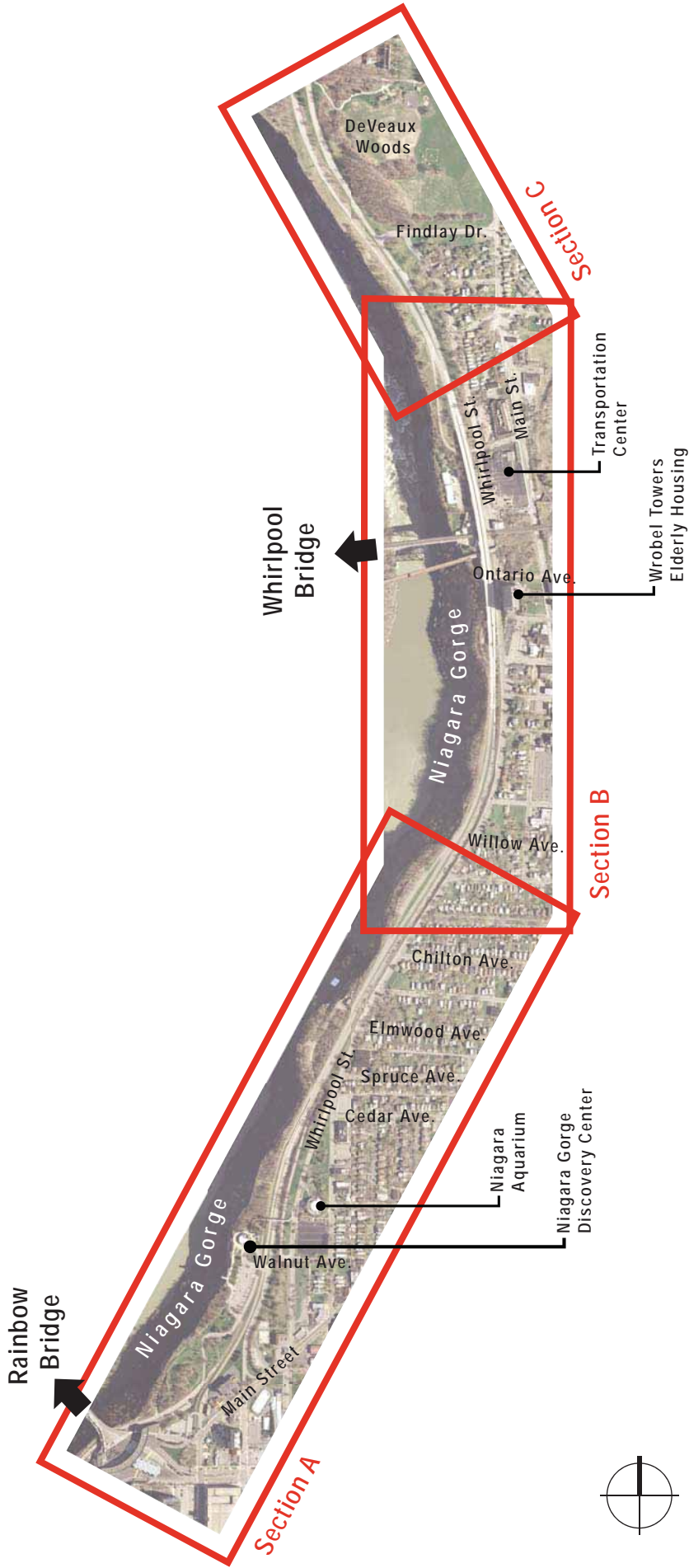


Figure 2: No-Action Alternative (Existing Conditions)

1.4.2 Build Alternative

The Build Alternative would involve removal of the RMP (i.e., all vehicular lanes, lanes used for the Robert Moses Parkway Trail, the Whirlpool Bridge Plaza overpass, and all other RMP interchange/accessory facilities) from Main Street (NYS Rte 104) to Findlay Drive (refer to **Figures 3a to 3c**). The Build Alternative would also include:

- Reconstruction of Whirlpool Street from Main Street to Walnut Avenue and from Cedar Avenue to Findlay Drive as an at-grade, two-lane, 30-MPH road to accommodate north-south vehicular and potential future bus access, and removal of Whirlpool Street from Cedar Avenue to Walnut Avenue;
- Reconstruction of Third Street from Main Street to Cedar Avenue in a manner consistent with that of Whirlpool Street;
- Restoration of the landscape / habitat on lands reclaimed along the Niagara Gorge rim from the removal of the RMP with native species;
- Construction of a pedestrian / bicycle trail network along the Gorge rim, connecting to other trail systems and adjoining neighborhoods; and
- Incorporation of amenities / betterments associated with the above improvements.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of existing aesthetic resources in the landscape requires the application of a process that seeks to objectively identify the visual features, or resources, of the landscape; assesses the character and quality of those resources relative to overall regional visual character, and identifies the importance to people, or sensitivity, of views of visual resources in the landscape. With this preliminary establishment of the baseline (existing) conditions, a proposed project or another change to the landscape can be systematically evaluated for its degree of impact. The degree of impact depends on both the magnitude of change in the visual resource (i.e., visual character and quality) and viewers' responses to and concern for those changes. This general process is similar for all established federal procedures for visual assessment (Smardon, et al. 1986) and represents a suitable method for visual assessment for other projects and areas.

Guidelines in FHWA's Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects. Publication No. FHWA-Hep-15-029 (January 2015) and NYSDEC's Assessing and Mitigating Visual Impacts Policy, Publication No. DEP-00-2 (July 2000) were referenced to organize this study. The manuals provide a methodology to characterize the visual quality of existing resources, analyze the proposed Project effect on these resources, and predict the degradation or improvement of the visual quality and the viewers' response (refer to the Glossary for definitions of common terms used).

Section A

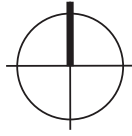


- Key**
- Project Limits
 - Trails
 - Sidewalk
 - Gorge Trail Access
 - Parking
 - Naturalized Meadow Area
 - Gateway
 - Open / Vacant land



Figure 3a: Preferred Alternative

Section B



Key	
	Project Limits
	Gorge Trail Access
	Parking
	Naturalized Meadow Area
	Gateway
	Open / Vacant land

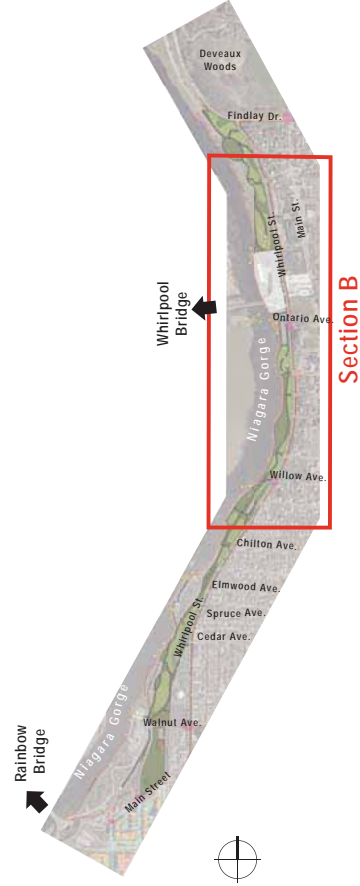
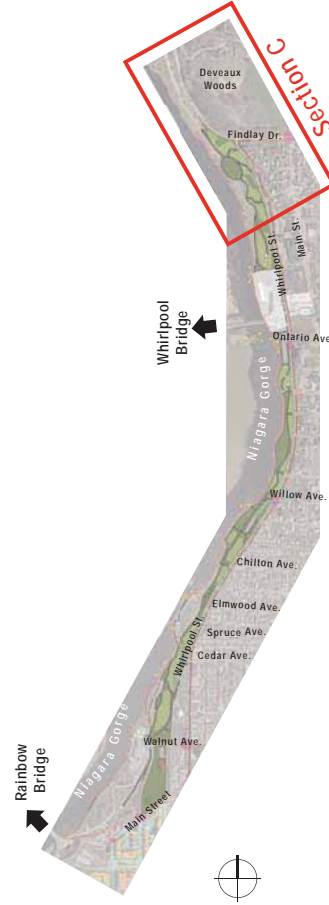
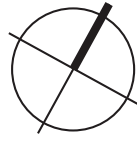


Figure 3b: Preferred Alternative

Section C



- Key**
- Project Limits
 - Trails
 - Sidewalk
 - Gorge Trail Access
 - Parking
 - Naturalized Meadow Area
 - Gateway
 - Open / Vacant land

Figure 3c: Preferred Alternative

Generally, the visual impact assessment for the removal of the RMP followed these steps:

- Define the Project Study Area (refer to **Figure 4**) for determining existing visual resources and landscape units of the study area;
- Identify the Project viewer groups and their typical viewpoint locations that are likely to be affected by the proposed Project;
- Identify community goals for visual quality;
- Identify the visual quality of viewsheds from the Project Study Area landscape units;
- Evaluate the proposed Project's impact on the visual quality of the visual resources viewed by the viewer groups;
- Predict viewer response to changes in visual quality; and,
- Propose strategies that may be considered to mitigate adverse effects.

1.5.1 Methodology Preparation

Before field surveys were conducted, the project landscape architect met with project engineers to discuss the proposed design and the visible changes it may cause to the existing environment. Local and State Master Plans were reviewed for community goals or policies concerning visual resources (refer to **Section 2.4**).

1.5.2 Field Visits

Visibility of the RMP was evaluated in the field by car and on foot during daylight hours during late Summer of 2015 with full leaf conditions on the existing vegetation. Public roads were travelled and vantage points were visited within the study area to document from where the RMP can or cannot be seen. Photos were taken from nine viewpoints (refer to **Attachment A** of this VIA). Viewpoints were collected using a digital camera (Canon Rebel T4i) and noted on field maps.

1.5.3 Photosimulations

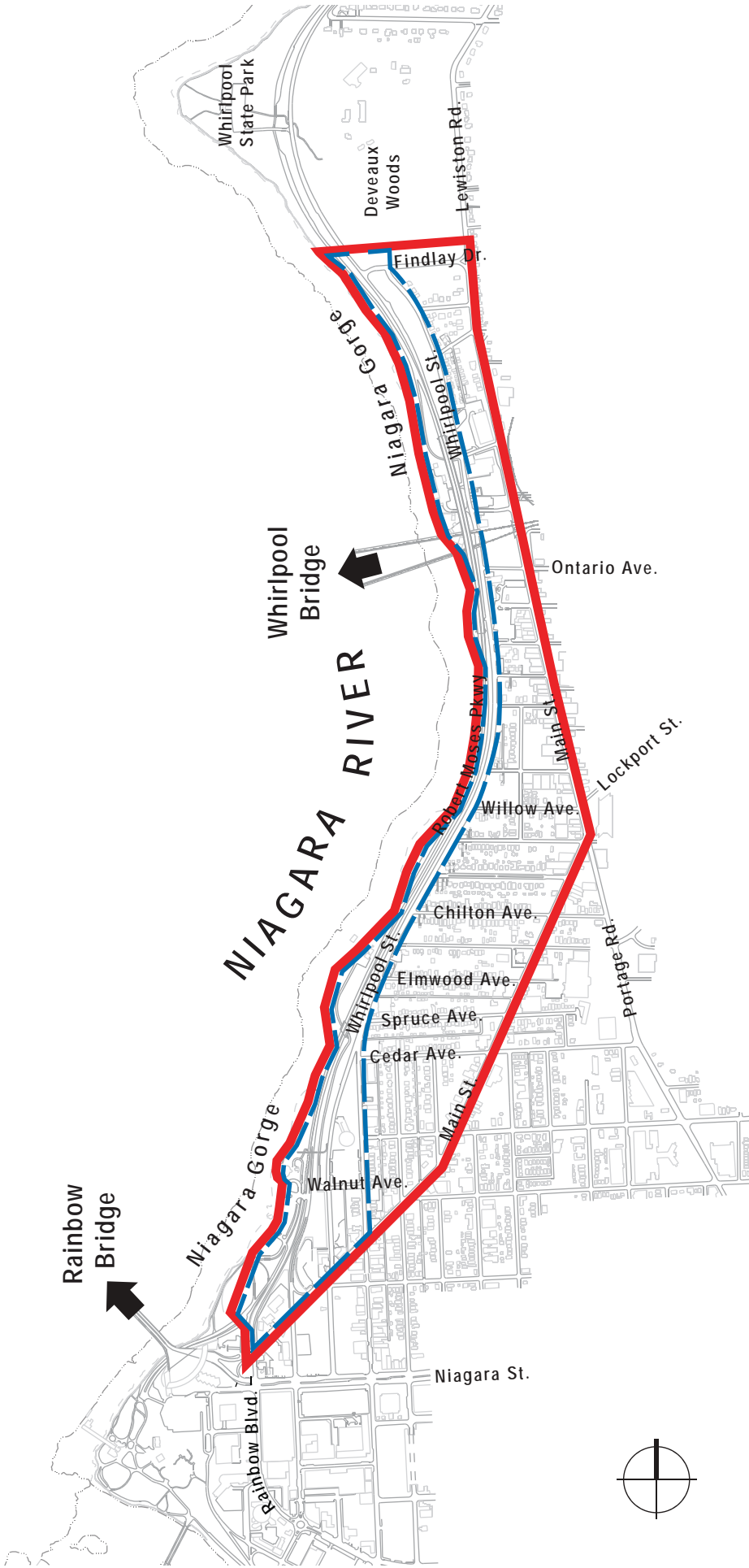
Point source photo simulations were used to illustrate the Build Alternative on the existing environment. The simulations show the final conditions once the RMP was removed, and new green spaces and transportation infrastructures constructed in its place (refer to **Chapter 2**).

2 VISUAL ENVIRONMENT

Identification of the regional landscape provides a frame of reference for the inventory and evaluation of the visual resources. The regional landscape covers a broad area in which land uses, landforms, and natural resources describe an overall visual character that will assist in comparing the visual effects of the Project and determine the significance of these effects.

2.1 REGIONAL LANDSCAPE

The RMP is situated along the western border of Niagara County, south of the Town of Lewiston, New York. The following describes the natural environment found within the County and City in which the RMP is located.



Key
 Study area
 Project area

Figure 4: Study Area Map

2.1.1 Landform

The RMP is located in the Huron Plain, which begins at the Niagara Escarpment and continues south terminating in Erie County. The Huron Plain may be characterized by relatively flat uniform topography broken up occasionally by low-lying ridges. The Niagara Escarpment is oriented east to west and is generally 200 feet high (see **Figure 5**) and is one of the area's most unique and prominent natural features. Its uniform side slopes and flat top surface visually identifies it as an engineered landform.

South of the Niagara Escarpment, the Project Study Area is relatively flat with the exception of the Niagara Gorge along the western border. Man-made landforms, including roadway and bridge embankments, are located along the RMP. These landforms are utilized for the ramp access and road layout of the RMP.

Overland drainage south of the escarpment flows to the west feeding into the Niagara River. Years of flow over the escarpment has eroded the bedrock, forming a long narrow Gorge along the western edge, known as the Niagara Gorge. The Gorge is a source of renown scenic beauty and wildlife habitat viewed from the top of its walls and trails along the Gorge walls and the Niagara River.



Figure 5: Niagara Escarpment

2.1.2 Vegetation

The major area with vegetation is along the Niagara Gorge region, while the residential areas provide some vegetation in the form of street trees, backyard landscapes and buffer areas between land uses. The remaining areas, immediately surrounding the RMP are open lawn areas with some successional shrubland. The following vegetative communities are located within the Niagara Gorge are:

- Calcareous Cliff;
- Calcareous Talus Slope Woodland; and
- Successional Shrubland.

Vegetative communities within the Niagara Gorge can be characterized as Eastern Red Cedar, Northern White Cedar, Sugar Maple, White Ash, Eastern Hornbeam and White Oak. The Gorge area has a dense canopy with sporadic open areas where shrubs are abundant but maintain open views towards the river and escarpment. The shrubs within these open canopy areas can be characterized as Dogwood, Arrowwood, and Bladdernut (refer to **Figure 6**).

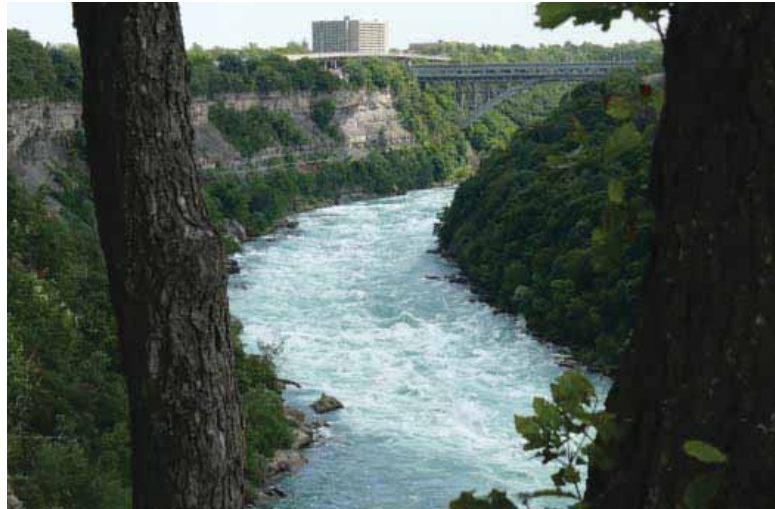


Figure 6: Niagara Gorge Vegetation

Vegetation within the residential buffer areas is primarily composed of large mature street trees, buffer areas and shrubland along the RMP and within State Park areas, and finally landscaped backyards which provide limited views of the RMP. Tree species within the residential area include Maple, Ash and Oak, which is consistent with the vegetation communities found along the Gorge. The buffer areas within the residential areas provide a natural screen towards the RMP, and the vegetation along them is typically a mix of deciduous and evergreen species providing a year round screen for the residents (refer to **Figure 7**).

2.1.3 Land Use

Existing land use in the area can be defined as residential, residential – deteriorated/blighted fabric, discontinuous urban fabric/vacant, main street corridors (commercial), and open space. Single family detached housing within clusters of residential neighborhoods dominate the area. The most concentrated residential land is to the east of the RMP, and the main commercial/business district in the area is located south of the site limits, primarily in the Niagara Falls downtown area, and following the length of Main Street. Recreational land consists of the State Parks along the Niagara Gorge connected by NYPA-owned open space lands, and is located along the western boundary of the RMP. The RMP and the Robert Moses Parkway Trail are within the Niagara Gorge Corridor and vehicular access to the RMP is located via Main Street from the south, and via Findlay Drive from the north. Other recreational land in the area is Oakwood Cemetery (east of Main Street), included as an isolated recreational space which, although it does not provide typical recreational programming, offers little to no visual impact to the site.



Figure 7: Suburban residential neighborhood along Whirlpool Street.

2.2 LANDSCAPE UNITS

To provide a framework for comparing the visual effects of the Project, the regional landscape is divided into distinct landscape units. Based on the following, four distinct landscape units can be defined within the Project Study Area (refer to **Figure 9**).

- Landform: The topographical features of the study area and the uniqueness of the form, pattern and edge identification.
- Vegetation: The type and magnitude of vegetative cover within the study area.
- Color: The elements of visual pattern on the surrounding project element of soil, vegetation and landforms.
- Man-Made Development: The type and magnitude of structures within the study area and the level of contrast with its natural surroundings.

The units' visual character, use and views to the RMP are described in the following sections.

2.2.1 Suburban Residential

The Suburban Residential landscape unit makes up a substantial amount of the study area. The development within it is mostly composed of single family residences which are situated along city streets laid in grid-like and free form patterns with access to the residential clusters from either Downtown Niagara Falls, Whirlpool Street or Main Street. Residential streets are lined with mature trees and a natural vegetative buffer is present along most of the edge of the RMP adjacent to Whirlpool Street (refer to **Figure 7**). Ornamental landscapes within the residential developments provide varying color, texture and patterns. Open views to the RMP are limited to residences along Whirlpool Street near Findlay Drive.

2.2.2 Business / Commercial

This unit is comprised of a variety of businesses, commercial enterprises, and institutional facilities, most of which are concentrated in the City of Niagara Falls Downtown/Historic District and along Main Street (refer to **Figure 8**). The topography in these areas is mostly flat, and the colors and textures within it are provided by the varying building architecture and by the different streetscape treatments assigned to different neighborhoods. An elderly care facility is located immediately adjacent to the RMP overpass over the Whirlpool Bridge, which currently screens views of the park and Gorge from this building. Other institutions present within this unit are the Niagara Falls Conference Center, Chamber of Commerce, City Hall, Tourism and Convention Corporation Visitor Center, Library, Post Office, and a series of elementary schools and churches.



Figure 8: Landscape Units Map

Similarly, prominent businesses include the Aquarium of Niagara, Howard Johnson's Hotel (located at the southernmost point of the RMP within the Project limits and a prominent visual element adjacent to the proposed main entrance to Niagara Falls State Park), Niagara Wax Museum, and a series of medical care centers, pharmacies, restaurants and bars, supermarkets and hotels. All these elements are attractions for both local residents and visitors.

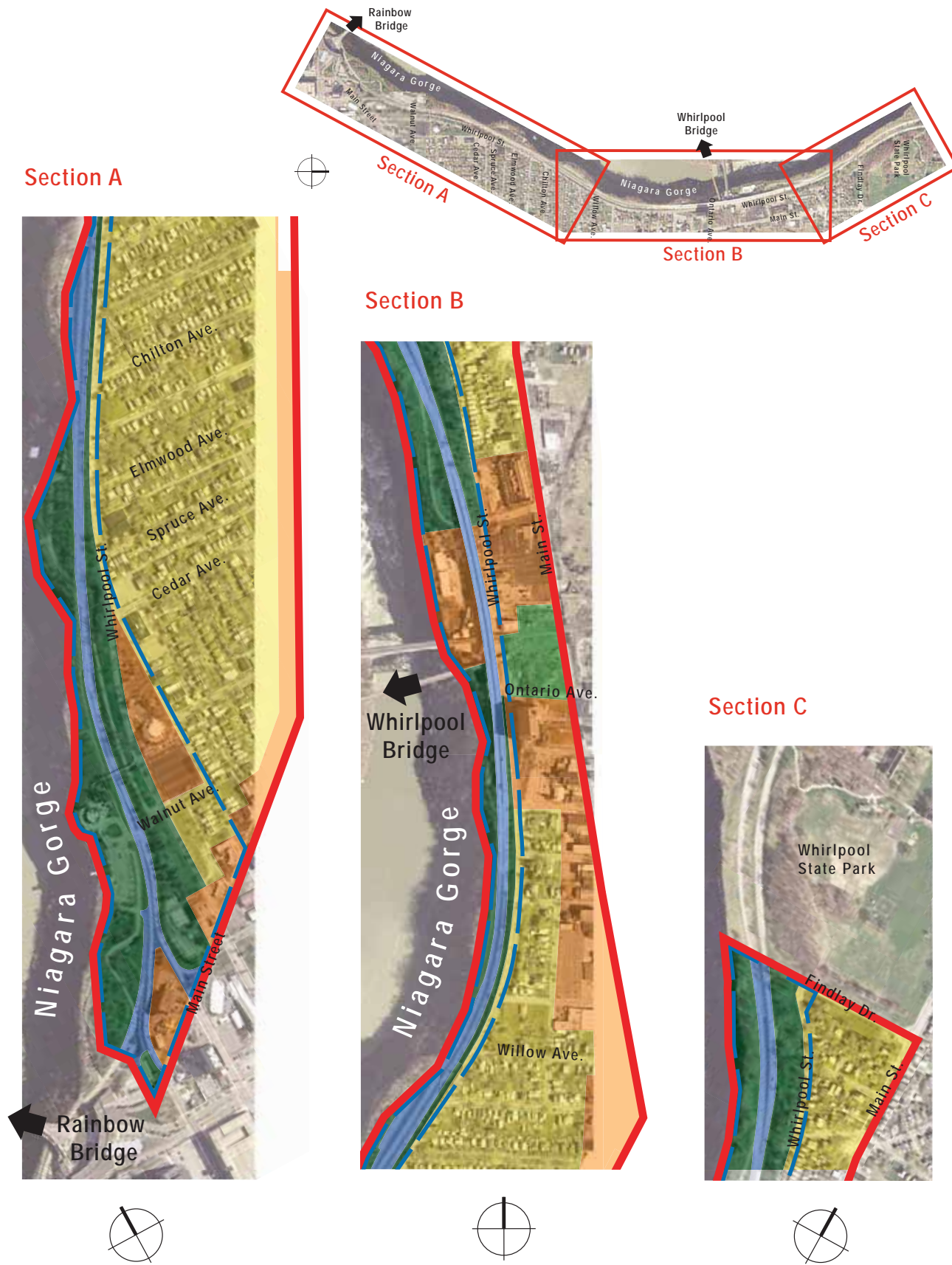


Figure 9: Landscape Units Map

Key		Landscape Units	
—	Study area	—	Suburban residential
—	Project area	—	Business / Commercial
		—	Recreation / Parkland
		—	Transportation corridors

2.2.3 Transportation Corridors

The Transportation Corridors Unit occurs primarily along the RMP and Whirlpool Street within the Project Study Area. The highway areas are characterized by level, multi-lanes that include transportation-oriented features such as road signs, guardrails, walls, abutments, on and off ramps, and bridges. The open lawn areas immediately adjacent to the RMP provide little color and textures to the landscape unit. Views from the highways are typically focused along the corridor providing little opportunity for casual viewing of the scenery from the motorists. Motorists may experience a brief glimpse of the Niagara Falls on a clear day from the top of the RMP overpass that goes over Whirlpool Bridge. Whirlpool Street and the various residential streets are characterized by level, single lanes that include transportation-oriented features including signalized and non-signalized intersections, street trees, sidewalks, street lights, and signage. Views from the local roads, including the north and south lanes of Whirlpool Street, provide a greater opportunity for casual viewing due to their lower speeds and stops at intersections. When open views are present, much of Whirlpool Street has a vegetative buffer consisting of scrub brush and trees obscuring views of the RMP and the Niagara Gorge beyond (refer to **Figure 10**).



Figure 10: Southward view of Robert Moses Parkway and Whirlpool Street.

2.2.4 Riverfront / Recreation / State Park

This unit is located immediately adjacent to the Niagara Gorge (refer to **Figure 11**), mostly following the western limits of the Project Study Area. Located within the Gorge is the RMP and the adjacent Robert Moses Parkway Trail. This stretch of the RMP is a low speed two-way (one lane in each direction) byway along the Niagara Gorge which provides motorists with prolonged views of the Gorge to the west along portions further south than the study area. Vegetation along the Gorge provides varying color and texture. Views of the Gorge are the primary focus for motorists and recreational users. Within this unit, the Niagara Falls, Whirlpool and Deveaux Woods state parks are present, with associated State Park main offices, maintenance buildings, and tourist centers such as the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center, Maid of the Mist, and the Niagara Falls Observation Tower.



Figure 11: Niagara Gorge

2.3 VIEWSHEDS

Viewsheds define what can be seen or valued by viewer groups within the landscape units, illustrate the existing and proposed visual environment, and are used to assess the visual impact of the RMP. Nine viewsheds were selected to represent typical views by the four viewer groups for their effectiveness in depicting the visual impacts of the proposed improvements of the Project (refer to **Figure 12** which follows the below table).

Table 1 provides a summary of the viewsheds, along with their associated landscape units, viewer groups, and key visual features. Worksheets summarizing the evaluations of the nine viewshed evaluations, including their existing and proposed visual quality, are documented in **Attachment B** of this VIA.

Table 1: Viewshed Assessment Summary.

VIEW	VIEWER GROUP	LANDSCAPE UNIT	KEY VISUAL FEATURES
VIEW 1 - ROBERT MOSES PARKWAY TRAIL ENTRANCE ON MAIN STREET	Business employees/ Recreational Users/ Commuters	Business/Commercial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> View of open lawns and park trees in background Howard Johnson's Hotel blocks view to Park Existing vegetation and trees on Main Street screen entrance to Park
VIEW 2 - NIAGARA GORGE DISCOVERY CENTER VIEW TOWARDS WALNUT AVENUE	Recreational Users/ Commuters	Riverfront/Recreation/ State Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open lawns and little variation in the vegetation provide moderate-low visual interest in the foreground RMP and pedestrian bridge crossing very present in viewshed Existing vegetation screens view completely to Aquarium
VIEW 3 - SOUTH VIEW AT INTERSECTION OF THIRD STREET WITH WHIRLPOOL STREET	Business Employees/ Local Residents/ Recreational Users/ Commuters	Suburban Residential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connection from Whirlpool Street to Park closed off with unsightly concrete barriers and bright orange signage White road fencing stands out visibly against scrub vegetation buffer (which in turn limits view to RMP/ Gorge) Aquarium lawns visible in the distance and only clue to existing access to the Park
VIEW 4 - ABANDONED RMP PARKING AREA NEAR NIAGARA GORGE OVERLOOK OPPOSITE ORCHARD PARKWAY	Local Residents/ Recreational Users/ Commuters	Transportation Corridor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parking and RMP dominate the view Limited open lawns and young trees reflect maintenance practices Stone wall along Gorge adds visual interest and draws visitors to explore views of the Gorge
VIEW 5 - SOUTH VIEW AT INTERSECTION OF WHIRLPOOL STREET WITH PIERCE AVENUE	Business Employees/ Local Residents/ Recreational Users/ Commuters	Suburban Residential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Four lanes of Whirlpool Street dominate the view Views of the RMP are screened by existing vegetation buffer, which is cordoned off with a very visible white fence which follows the entire stretch of Whirlpool Street

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 VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

<p>VIEW 6 - VIEW UNDER RMP VIADUCT AT INTERSECTION OF WHIRLPOOL STREET AND ONTARIO AVENUE</p>	<p>Commuters/ Business employees/ Recreational Users/ Local Residents</p>	<p>Business/Commercial</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ RMP viaduct dominates the view, limiting vistas to the Gorge, blocking sunlight underneath its structure and providing little to no visual quality to the streetscape ▪ Poorly developed trees and damaged paving provide poor aesthetic value to the view ▪ Visibility of parking underneath the viaduct is limited ▪ Recreational users are forced to walk along this stretch to follow existing multi-use trail and connect to the other end of the park towards Whirlpool State Park
<p>VIEW 7 - SOUTH VIEW AT INTERSECTION OF WHIRLPOOL STREET WITH CHASM AVENUE</p>	<p>Local Residents/ Commuters</p>	<p>Suburban Residential</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Whirlpool Street becomes less visibly predominant ▪ Tree lines on both sides of the street provide screening of part of the RMP and offer a more pedestrian friendly streetscape, creating longer views for commuters ▪ RMP visible from houses and Whirlpool Street in some stretches ▪ Open lawns suggest visual and physical accessibility for recreational users and local residents to park
<p>VIEW 8 - SOUTH VIEW OF RMP OPPOSITE CHASM AVENUE</p>	<p>Recreational Users/ Commuters</p>	<p>Transportation Corridor</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ RMP dominates the view and viaduct in the distance limits views beyond where the structure begins ▪ Selective maintenance practices provide open spaces with visual and physical access for recreational users, as well as natural meadow landscaped areas ▪ Dense vegetation limits views to the Gorge
<p>VIEW 9 - VIEW ALONG NORTHBOUND RMP AT INTERSECTION WITH FINDLAY DRIVE</p>	<p>Recreational Users/ Commuters</p>	<p>Transportation Corridor</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ RMP dominates the view, with clear signage marking the intersection with Findlay Drive ▪ Dense vegetation and grade changes limit views to the Gorge and to Whirlpool Street residents ▪ Selective maintenance practices offer open spaces which suggest visual and physical access for recreational users, as well as natural meadow landscaped areas



Figure 12: Key Viewpoints

2.4 COMMUNITY GOALS FOR VISUAL QUALITY

NYSOPRHP sensitivity toward changes in the area’s visual resources is evident from the general planning recommendations established by USA Niagara Development Corporation, City of Niagara, Niagara River Greenway Commission, and NYPA. The following summarizes the most recent recommendations made by these entities specific to scenic and visual resource preservation within the project limits or adjacent areas.

NIAGARA FALLS STATE PARK REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE AND LANDSCAPE IMPROVEMENT PLAN, NIAGARA RIVER GREENWAY COMMISSION & NYS OFFICE OF PARKS, RECREATION AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
In April, 2012, State Parks released the Niagara Falls State Park Landscape Improvement Plan which presents a comprehensive approach for revitalizing the heavily used park areas, trails and viewing areas that bring visitors to breathtaking vantage points next to the Niagara River and the American and Horseshoe Falls.
The visitor experience of park patrons is predicated in part on Frederick Law Olmsted’s notion of the “contemplative” and “healing” effects of natural scenery and their ability to restore the human spirit through the experience of nature. A key goal of this Project is to restore the natural scenery and character of the park to be more consistent with the plans, principles and vision of Olmsted’s historic plan. The preservation and enhancement of natural ecosystems and the restoration of the original landscape and scenery are important goals of the Project.

CITY OF NIAGARA ILLUSTRATIVE MASTER PLAN - STRATEGIC ACTION PROGRAM, USA NIAGARA DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
<p>The Park and Niagara River/Gorge Waterfront: The City’s greatest assets, policies and projects would better connect these assets to adjoining neighborhoods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lessen barriers related to the RMP. • Enhance easy access to the base of the Gorge. • Expand/enhance the number of ecologically sustainable and outdoor recreational activities for patrons to experience the Park, Gorge and waterfront.
<p>The Cultural District: From the City’s Comprehensive Plan, serves as a transition between the Gorge and downtown. Contains educational/cultural institutions and uses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancement of the Aquarium of Niagara. • Redefine the “Gorge Discovery Center” as the gateway to all Gorge activities. • Consider DiFranco Park for a unique outdoor venue. • Encourage lodging/retail that complement the theme.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, CITY OF NIAGARA FALLS
The Comprehensive Plan establishes a clear vision and an action strategy that leverages key economic, natural, social, historical, and cultural drivers. The goal is to reposition Niagara Falls as a more economically and culturally diverse, attractive, and vibrant regional center, possessing a distinct role within both the Erie/Niagara and the Bi-National Regions.
Proposals for the redesign of the RMP and development of the Niagara Experience Center are important first steps in strengthening Niagara Falls as a more inviting city and addressing arrival, orientation and transportation issues. Importantly, both of these initiatives build on the city’s premier assets – the riverfront, the Falls, and the Olmsted Park system that frames the riverfront and plays host to residents and visitors.
Major tourism destinations such as the riverfront and its attractions, including the Niagara Aquarium and the Niagara Reservation, should be better connected to the city, local places and established main streets, to promote visitation of neighborhood districts, local establishments and cultural destinations. Greening public spaces and improving the public environment will extend the value of the riverfront’s edge into larger areas of the Core City.

New connections should be, at every opportunity, introduced through the removal of the RMP. Views between the city and the riverfront corridor would be strengthened and many new street extensions would reconnect people and businesses to the riverfront corridor. Strengthening these linkages depends on rethinking local streets as attractive pedestrian-oriented tree-lined places that accommodate people and activity, not just cars. A well-designed network comprised of the riverfront, streets, parks, squares and other open spaces will not only advance the purposes and intent of developing the Niagara River Greenway and the Niagara National Heritage Area, but play a key role in enhancing the city's image and its quality of life, while creating an attractive setting for high-quality private sector reinvestment.

NIAGARA RIVER GREENWAY PLAN AND FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT, NIAGARA RIVER GREENWAY COMMISSION

Niagara River Greenway Vision Statement:

The Niagara River Greenway is a world-class corridor of places, parks and landscapes that celebrates and interprets our unique natural, cultural, recreational, scenic, and heritage resources and provides access to and connections between these important resources while giving rise to economic opportunities for the region.

Chapter 3 - Vision and Principles:

The principles for the Niagara River Greenway represent the general values that will guide greenway planning toward achieving that vision. The principles promote high-quality, ecologically sensitive and sustainable activities and development.

- Accessibility – The Greenway will be designed to provide and increase physical and visual access to and from the waterfront and related resources for a full range of users (youth, seniors, persons with disabilities).
- Ecological Integrity – The Greenway will be focused on maintaining and improving the health, vitality and integrity of natural resources and wildlife habitats. Emphasis will be placed on restoring and retaining ecologically significant areas and natural landscapes, both in and over the water and upland.
- Public Well-Being – The Greenway will be designed to achieve and promote physical and emotional wellness through the experience that it offers to the public. Availability of both land- and water-based recreational facilities, and access to both active and passive recreational opportunities should be considered in the development of Greenway assets.

NYPA LAND MANAGEMENT AND RECREATION PLAN

As part of NYPA's new, 50-year license with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to operate the Niagara Power Project, NYPA prepared and the FERC approved a new Land Management Plan for its land holdings associated with the Niagara Power Project. Goals related to scenic and visual resources are:

- Provide a comprehensive land management strategy that will protect and enhance environmental, historic, aesthetic and recreational resources.

Maid of the Mist Proposed Storage Facility: The development of the \$32 million Maid of the Mist winter storage facility at the base of the former Schoellkopf Power Station could open the potential for a significant expansion of access and recreational activities that would greatly advance the goals and objectives of the Land Management Plan and Recreation Plan under the NYPA License to Operate the Niagara Power Project.

- Programming and Recreational Activities - Observation Deck: The staging area would be largely unoccupied by boats, creating opportunities for new photo and viewing perspectives of the Falls and the Gorge.

2.5 VISUAL QUALITY

To begin to evaluate the visual impact of the proposed Project, the visual quality of the existing landscape must be determined. Following the guidelines stated in the Federal Highway Administration's Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects, the visual quality of the landscape was determined according to the following elements:

- Natural Harmony: The memorable landscape components as they combine in striking and distinctive visual patterns
- Cultural Order: The visual integrity of the natural and man-made landscape and the visual freedom from element encroachment

- Project Coherence: The visual coherence and compositional harmony of the landscape considered as a whole, a combination of the natural and man-made elements of the view.

Table 2 below provides criteria for defining the level of visual quality associated with each of these three elements:

Table 2: Visual Quality Evaluation Table

CRITERIA	HIGH QUALITY	MODERATE/AVERAGE QUALITY	LOW QUALITY
NATURAL HARMONY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Highly memorable. ▪ Elements combine in striking visual patterns. ▪ Presence of distinct focal point(s). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Somewhat memorable. ▪ Elements form perceivable pattern(s). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not vivid. ▪ Elements appear random with no perceivable pattern(s).
CULTURAL ORDER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of man-made development does not disrupt the natural landscape. ▪ Minimal to no encroachments to the landscape are visible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Man-made development and the natural landscape are disturbed and encroach on the visual setting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The landscape has encroaching elements that create an eyesore to viewers.
PROJECT COHERENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Man-made development blends with the natural landscape providing an integrated design with its setting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some visual relation between man-made and natural setting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Man-made and natural patterns do not reinforce each other and visually looks chaotic and jumbled.

These three visual qualities are evaluated independently, and each quality is assigned a rating from 1 to 7, as defined below:

- 0 to 1.5 - Very low
- 1.5 to 2.5 - Low
- 2.5 to 3.5 - Moderately low
- 3.5 to 4.5 - Moderate / Average
- 4.5 to 5.5 - Moderately high
- 5.5 to 6.5 - High
- 6.5 to 7.0 - Very high

The following discussion uses Table 2 for evaluating the visual quality of the nine key viewsheds.

2.6 VIEW 1 - ROBERT MOSES PARKWAY TRAIL ENTRANCE ON MAIN STREET

Pedestrians have this view when standing on the corner of Main Street with First Street looking north. It consists of the southern-most entrance to the state parks and green space areas along the Niagara Gorge rim, and beginning of the RMP. Adjacent to the road, a multi-use trail (Robert Moses Parkway Trail) was constructed to enable pedestrian and bicyclist access, which connects to sidewalks and pedestrian crossings on Main Street. The Howard Johnson’s Hotel dominates the view, blocking further vistas to the park on the west side of the entrance. As commuters and visitors access the entrance, existing vegetation screens views towards the park, leaving access visibility nearly totally dependent on signage.

Natural Harmony: The dominating presence of the Howard Johnson’s establishment does little to make this view memorable. The lack of any gateway feature makes the entrance difficult to identify and locate, both for pedestrians and motor vehicles. Given this, the view has been rated with a low natural harmony quality value.

Cultural Order: The vast majority of the view is constructed structure or paving. The minor presence of the vegetation buffer does little to improve on the visual encroachment caused by the presence of Main Street, with only the existing vegetation in the far background within the park providing some balance and integrity to the visual order of the portion of the park visible from the street. This view has been rated with a moderate to low sense of cultural order.



Figure 13: View of Robert Moses Parkway Trail Entrance on Main Street

Project Coherence: The existing construction and surrounding streets do not reinforce each other, and the lack of visual relationship between these, the hotel building, and the park vegetation give this view a very low project coherence quality value.

A summary of the existing visual quality ratings for View 1 - Robert Moses Parkway Trail Entrance on Main Street is provided below in **Table 3**. As shown in the table, the overall Visual Quality rating for this view is 2.0 (Low).

Table 3: View 1 - Existing Visual Quality Evaluation Summary

VIEW	NATURAL HARMONY	CULTURAL ORDER	PROJECT COHERENCE	VISUAL QUALITY
VIEW 1 - ROBERT MOSES PARKWAY TRAIL ENTRANCE ON MAIN STREET	2	3	1	2

2.7 VIEW 2 - NIAGARA GORGE DISCOVERY CENTER VIEW TOWARDS WALNUT AVENUE

This scene consists of a nearly 180 degree view from the exit drive of the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center looking east towards Walnut Avenue and Third Street. During the site visit, the construction of a new building for the State Parks Police Station was underway and constituted a dominant presence in the view. Following the RMP north, a pedestrian bridge connecting the Aquarium of Niagara (screened by the existing vegetation buffer) and the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center is visible.



Figure 14: View of Niagara Gorge Discovery Center view towards Walnut Avenue

The RMP is another element which dominates this view, paired with the additional paving of the Robert Moses Parkway Trail which runs alongside. Open lawns and little variation in the vegetation provide a moderate to low visual interest, although the aesthetic of the manicured lawns does provide a sense of maintenance and order to the area.

Natural Harmony: There are no perceivable visual patterns in the landscape within this view, or distant focal points. The lack of memorable elements within this view provides a very low quality natural harmony value, in spite of the park vegetation visible in the background.

Cultural Order: The RMP disrupts the view quite dominantly, dividing the vegetation and access between the park amenities which are in close proximity to one another. The construction currently reduces even further the value of cultural order, but given that it is a temporary setback in this view, it has not been accounted for in the overall cultural order value, which is rated as moderately low.

Project Coherence: The RMP also reduces the Project coherence value considerably by intersecting the natural landscape and increasing considerably the amount of paving visible from this point. Traffic signage reduces the Project coherence value further, making the view confusing and jumbled for both pedestrians and motorists. The overall visual project coherence quality is rated as low.

A summary of the existing visual quality ratings for View 2 - Niagara Gorge Discovery Center View towards Walnut Avenue is provided below in Table 4. As shown in the table, the overall Visual Quality rating for this view is 2.5 (Low to Moderately Low).

Table 4: View 2 - Existing Visual Quality Evaluation Summary

VIEW	NATURAL HARMONY	CULTURAL ORDER	PROJECT COHERENCE	VISUAL QUALITY
VIEW 2 - NIAGARA GORGE DISCOVERY CENTER VIEW TOWARDS WALNUT AVENUE	2	2.5	2.5	2.3

2.8 VIEW 3 - SOUTH VIEW AT INTERSECTION OF THIRD STREET WITH WHIRLPOOL STREET

This view can be seen by pedestrians looking south and standing on the corner of Whirlpool Street with the alley between Cedar Avenue and Spruce Avenue. It is dominated by Whirlpool Street and the green buffer that screens the view of the RMP on the other side. This green buffer (and access to the park) is fenced off by a prominent white fence which runs along the side of Whirlpool Street. In the far background some of the Aquarium of Niagara lawns are visible, which act as the only visual cue to existing access to the Park.



Figure 15: South View at Intersection of Third Street with Whirlpool Street

The connection from Whirlpool Street that leads to the Aquarium of Niagara is closed off with unsightly concrete barriers and bright orange signage, and broken paving of the road impoverishes even further the aesthetic appeal of this streetscape.

Natural Harmony: This view has no elements that make it particularly memorable, and there are no perceivable visual patterns present in the current landscape, providing a very low natural harmony quality value. The vegetation buffer offers little variety in texture, improving very little the natural harmony of the view.

Cultural Order: The road blockade creates an eyesore for pedestrians and commuters, which contributes to the low visual cultural order of this view. There is no visual character in the man made structures along this stretch of Whirlpool Street, which has no visual elements which draw the eye or provide visual interest. The visual cultural order value of this view has been rated as low/very low.

Project Coherence: The lack of compositional harmony or visual relation between the constructed elements and the natural landscape in this view lead to a low quality Project coherence value.

A summary of the existing visual quality ratings for View 3 - South View at Intersection of Third Street with Whirlpool Street is provided below in Table 5. As shown in the table, the overall Visual Quality rating for this view is 1.5 (Very Low to Low).

Table 5: View 3 - Existing Visual Quality Evaluation Summary

VIEW	NATURAL HARMONY	CULTURAL ORDER	PROJECT COHERENCE	VISUAL QUALITY
VIEW 3 - SOUTH VIEW AT INTERSECTION OF THIRD STREET WITH WHIRLPOOL STREET	1	1.5	2	1.5

2.9 VIEW 4 - ABANDONED RMP PARKING AREA NEAR NIAGARA GORGE OVERLOOK OPPOSITE ORCHARD PARKWAY

This view is located on the off-ramp of an abandoned rest stop located on the southbound side of the RMP, looking northward. The four lanes of the RMP (both current and former) are clearly visible, intersecting the park and reducing any sense of pedestrian connectivity between one side and the other. The abandoned parking area is separated from the RMP by a maintained tree lawn with some newly planted trees which offer a slight screen effect of the RMP, paired with some additional visual interest. On the other side of the parking area there is a stone wall which follows the length of this area and offers an opportunity for views towards the Niagara Gorge.



Figure 16: Abandoned RMP Parking Area near Niagara Gorge Overlook Opposite Orchard Parkway

The vegetation along the east side of this stretch of the RMP is dense and screens any view of Whirlpool Street and the residences located along it. Dense vegetation along the Gorge also limits vistas of the Gorge itself and the Niagara River.

Natural Harmony: The lack of contrasting components that could potentially have made this view visually distinctive makes the natural harmony quality moderately low. The surrounding presence of dense vegetation masks landform and views of the Gorge, reducing the degree of natural harmony. However, the newly planted trees and their spacing offer a different visual pattern and texture which improves the natural harmony of the view, and the variety of species in the older trees should offer a peak natural harmony quality in the fall. Factoring in all of these components, the overall natural harmony quality value is rated as moderate to average.

Cultural Order: The RMP lanes predominantly intersect the natural setting in this view, reducing the sense of the landscape being “untouched” and consequently the quality value of cultural order. The condition of the parking pavement reduces the sense of visual integrity in the scene. However, the stone wall integrates well with the surrounding landscape, thereby elevating the cultural order provided by the man-made elements in the view, although it is greatly screened by the existing vegetation. Overall cultural order quality value is moderate to moderately low.

Project Coherence: Although the RMP and parking area provide very little visual Project coherence between man-made and natural pattern elements, the stone wall along the Gorge edge integrates well with the surrounding landscape, thereby raising the Project coherence quality value in this view. The overall value of visual project coherence quality for this view is moderately low.

A summary of the existing visual quality ratings for View 4 - Abandoned RMP Parking Area near Niagara Gorge Overlook opposite Orchard Parkway is provided below in Table 6. As shown in the table, the overall Visual Quality rating for this view is 3.5 (Moderately Low to Moderate/Average).

Table 6: View 4 - Existing Visual Quality Evaluation Summary

VIEW	NATURAL HARMONY	CULTURAL ORDER	PROJECT COHERENCE	VISUAL QUALITY
VIEW 4 - ABANDONED RMP PARKING AREA NEAR NIAGARA GORGE OUTLOOK OPPOSITE ORCHARD PARKWAY	4	3.5	3	3.5

2.10 VIEW 5 - SOUTH VIEW AT INTERSECTION OF WHIRLPOOL STREET WITH PIERCE AVENUE

This is the view that pedestrians and commuters have from Whirlpool Street looking south between Orchard Parkway and Pierce Avenue. The four lanes of Whirlpool Street dominate the view, and the vegetated buffer that runs along its edge screens out all possible views towards the park and the Gorge. The white fence that follows the edge of the park stands out very strikingly against the vegetation behind it, and takes away any visual cue of possible access points from the street to the park.



Figure 17: South view at Intersection of Whirlpool Street with Pierce Avenue

The residential side of this view is moderately vegetated, partially screening the pedestrians and commuters from the side lawns of the houses that face the side streets. This increases the focus of the viewer on Whirlpool Street, and although the vegetation on either side provides some texture and visual interest, the overall sight provides few focal points.

Natural Harmony: This view has few elements that make it particularly memorable, and the only visual pattern and texture present in the current landscape is provided by the vegetation buffer and residential front lawn vegetation. The overall visual natural harmony quality value has been rated at moderate to moderately low.

Cultural Order: The white fence is an eyesore for pedestrians and commuters, which contributes to the low visual cultural order of this view. There is no visual character in the man-made structures along this stretch of Whirlpool Street, which has no visual

elements to draw the eye, and the lack of balance between the vegetation and the streetscape provides no visual interest. The visual cultural order quality value of this view is rated as low.

Project Coherence: The lack of transition from the streetscape to both the park and residential sides offers a very low visual Project coherence quality value. There is poor integration of the man-made elements with the natural landscape, resulting in a low visual relation between the two. The overall project coherence quality value is very low to low.

A summary of the existing visual quality ratings for View 5 - South View at Intersection of Whirlpool Street with Pierce Avenue is provided below in **Table 7**. As shown in the table, the overall Visual Quality rating for this view is 2.5 (Low to Moderately Low).

Table 7: View 5 - Existing Visual Quality Evaluation Summary

VIEW	NATURAL HARMONY	CULTURAL ORDER	PROJECT COHERENCE	VISUAL QUALITY
VIEW 5 - SOUTH VIEW AT INTERSECTION OF WHIRLPOOL STREET WITH PIERCE AVENUE	3.5	2.5	1.5	2.5

2.11 VIEW 6 - VIEW UNDER RMP VIADUCT AT INTERSECTION OF WHIRLPOOL STREET AND ONTARIO AVENUE

In this view the RMP viaduct is clearly the most dominant element present, with a looming supporting structure which blocks out a considerable amount of light and obscures the sight to the parking present underneath it. This structure also impedes adequate light reaching trees on the park side of Whirlpool Street, making the growth of any sort of screening vegetation very difficult. Vegetation along the Gorge is visible through the viaduct structure, as is Whirlpool Bridge, which adds some character to the scene. At the back of the parking lot, an old bridge stone abutment is visible, being another distinctive feature in the view.



Figure 18: View under RMP Viaduct at intersection of Whirlpool Street and Ontario Avenue

The broken paving of Whirlpool Street, paired with the white fence that runs along it and the lack of streetscape elements give this view a very unremarkable character. Narrow sidewalks, limited vistas, and the lack of pedestrian crossings make this stretch of Whirlpool Street unappealing for pedestrians, and the narrow crossing under the rail tracks of Whirlpool Bridge paired with limited open views and signage make the drive unattractive and confusing for commuters as well.

Natural Harmony: The lack of distinctive visual landscape components that bring character and appeal to the view provide for a very low visual natural harmony quality value, which is solely improved marginally by the presence of the iron structure of Whirlpool Bridge and the old stone abutment in the background. The lack of vegetation reduces the degree of natural harmony in the scene, as does the darkness cast under the viaduct. Accounting for all these factors, the overall natural harmony value for this view is rated as low.

Cultural Order: The viaduct raises considerably the visual encroachment of this view, and draws the eye away from other elements that provide character to this area. There is little visible pattern within the man-made elements of the view, and the

visual order of an undisturbed natural landscape is unapparent. The value of visual cultural order quality has been rated as very low.

Project Coherence: The visual elements within this view do not form a coherent or balanced visual pattern. There are little to no natural elements included in this predominantly man made setting, or any visual relation between the structures and street with the park. Given this, the visual Project coherence quality value of this view is low.

A summary of the existing visual quality ratings for View 6 - View under RMP Viaduct at Intersection of Whirlpool Street and Ontario Avenue is provided below in **Table 8**. As shown in the table, the overall Visual Quality rating for this view is 2.0 (Low).

Table 8: View 6 - Existing Visual Quality Evaluation Summary

VIEW	NATURAL HARMONY	CULTURAL ORDER	PROJECT COHERENCE	VISUAL QUALITY
VIEW 6 - VIEW UNDER RMP VIADUCT AT INTERSECTION OF WHIRLPOOL STREET AND ONTARIO AVENUE	2.5	1.5	2	2

2.12 VIEW 7 - SOUTH VIEW AT INTERSECTION OF WHIRLPOOL STREET WITH CHASM AVENUE

This view looks south along the residential stretch of Whirlpool Street, which has some of the most open views towards the parklands and the RMP (close to the end of the street at Chasm Avenue). In this view, the beginning of the north side of the RMP viaduct is visible in the distance, clearly bisecting the parklands and visually cutting off access to the Niagara Gorge rim. The existing tree line offers a smooth transition from the park setting to the residential urban fabric, although Whirlpool Street is still the dominating element in this view. The tree line also slows commuter traffic down, prolonging this viewer group's duration of views to the park.



Figure 19: South view at intersection of Whirlpool Street with Chasm Avenue

Natural Harmony: The open views to the park and Gorge, and even to the buildings from the Canadian side, increase the memorability of this view. The well-established tree line integrates the streetscape with the park edge efficiently, and the open/grassy spaces visible within the park contrast with the larger trees in the fore and backgrounds. The overall value of natural harmony visual quality in this view is rated at moderately high.

Cultural Order: This view has no notable visually encroaching elements, and the overall integrity of the visual pattern is quite cohesive. The RMP does present a clear visual disturbance in the views of the park however, and Whirlpool Street still remains as a dominant element which drives the viewer's eye. The overall visual cultural order quality value is rated as moderate/average.

Project Coherence: The tree lines along Whirlpool Street integrate the residential/suburban fabric transition smoothly into the park edge and beyond, although this visual project coherence is disrupted by the presence of the RMP in the background, which intersects the natural landscape of the park. Overall visual project coherence quality value is moderately high.

A summary of the existing visual quality ratings for View 7 - South View at Intersection of Whirlpool Street with Chasm Avenue is provided below in **Table 9**. As shown in the table, the overall Visual Quality rating for this view is 4.3 (Moderate/Average).

Table 9: View 7 - Existing Visual Quality Evaluation Summary

VIEW	NATURAL HARMONY	CULTURAL ORDER	PROJECT COHERENCE	VISUAL QUALITY
VIEW 7 - SOUTH VIEW AT INTERSECTION OF WHIRLPOOL STREET WITH CHASM AVENUE	4.5	3.5	5	4.3

2.13 VIEW 8 - SOUTH VIEW OF RMP OPPOSITE CHASM AVENUE

This view was taken from the RMP looking southbound towards the beginning of the overpass that runs adjacent to and crosses over Whirlpool Street. The vegetation of the Niagara Gorge is very prominent in this view, with hints of buildings on the Canadian side, and a selective mowing practice has led to patches of open lawn interspersed with naturalized meadow areas that add texture and visual interest to the view. The RMP intersects this natural landscape, dominating the view and breaking the park setting very brusquely, and the overpass in the distance shortens the horizon and blocks out any views further south.



Figure 20: South view of RMP opposite Chasm Avenue

Natural Harmony: Although the natural harmony value is disrupted by the presence of the RMP, the overall value is rated as moderately high given the richness and textures of the natural landscape of the park and presence of the Gorge.

Cultural Order: The RMP produces a clear visual encroachment in the current view, splitting and disrupting the natural landscape of the park and offering no visual integrity with the surrounding elements. Given this, the value of visual cultural order quality for this view has been rated as low.

Project Coherence: There is little to no project coherence visible between the RMP and the surrounding park. The mowed fringes along the edge of the paving offers a slight transition from the impervious surface of the RMP to the natural meadows and thickets on either side of this element. The overall visual project coherence quality value is rated as low.

A summary of the existing visual quality ratings for View 8 - South View of RMP opposite Chasm Avenue is provided below in **Table 10**. As shown in the table, the overall Visual Quality rating for this view is 3.0 (Moderately Low).

Table 10: View 8 - Existing Visual Quality Evaluation Summary

VIEW	NATURAL HARMONY	CULTURAL ORDER	PROJECT COHERENCE	VISUAL QUALITY
VIEW 8 - SOUTH VIEW OF RMP OPPOSITE CHASM AVENUE	4.5	2.5	2	3

2.14 VIEW 9 - VIEW ALONG NORTHBOUND RMP AT INTERSECTION WITH FINDLAY DRIVE

This final view is dominated again by the northbound lanes of the RMP, as it extends further north towards Lewiston. This view shows the connection of Findlay Drive to the RMP, and the direct access to Whirlpool State Park.



Figure 21: Northbound RMP at Intersection with Findlay Drive

Natural Harmony: The RMP dominates this view, disrupting the natural landscape of the park and reducing the visual natural harmony. The various textures provided by the natural elements and large Chinquapin Oak stands in the background bring some memorability to the view, providing an overall moderate/average visual natural harmony quality value.

Cultural Order: The strong contrast the RMP provides against the park vegetation makes it an eyesore and detracts the viewer's attention from the other elements in sight. The large bright green signage is also disruptive to the eye and the only cultural order provided comes from the visual integrity coming from the park vegetation and landscape. Given this, the overall cultural order value has been quantified as moderately low.

Project Coherence: There is little project coherence visible between the RMP and the surrounding park, with only the mowed fringes along the edge of the paving offering a slight transition from the RMP to the natural meadows and thickets on either side of this element. The overall visual project coherence quality value is rated as low.

A summary of the existing visual quality ratings for View 9 - View along Northbound RMP at Intersection with Findlay Drive is provided below in Table 11. As shown in the table, the overall Visual Quality rating for this view is 3.0 (Moderately Low).

Table 11: View 9 - Existing Visual Quality Evaluation Summary

VIEW	NATURAL HARMONY	CULTURAL ORDER	PROJECT COHERENCE	VISUAL QUALITY
VIEW 9 - VIEW ALONG NORTHBOUND RMP AT INTERSECTION WITH FINDLAY DRIVE	4	3	2	3

3 VIEWER GROUPS

Visual impact is the combination of the effect on the visual quality of the landscape and the perceived viewer's sensitivity. Sensitivity depends on the number and type of viewers and understanding the viewers' exposure, activity and awareness. Based on these factors viewers can be placed into similar groups. The viewer groups within the Project Study Area are separated into four (4) categories:

- *Residential Neighbors:* People living within viewing distance of the proposed project.
- *Civic Neighbors:* People working in and around the project area.
- *Travelers:* People traveling through the project area.
- *Recreational Neighbors:* People involved in outdoor activities in and around the project area.

The following factors that modify perception are used to determine each viewer group's sensitivity:

- Proximity to the visual resource
- Number of viewers
- Frequency and duration of views
- Viewer's activity
- Viewer's awareness

The following describes the viewer groups and the predicted viewer response based on their physical factors.

3.1 RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORS

Residential neighbors may view the RMP from their homes, front and back yards, and local roads. Except when involved in local travel, these viewers are likely to be stationary, and from certain locations would have frequent and prolonged views of the RMP. Residential neighbors may view from ground level or elevated vantage points and from foreground or background distances. However, the opportunities for such views are limited by the general orientation of residential structures toward the adjacent side streets in some cases, screening provided by other buildings and the vegetation buffer along portions of Whirlpool Street, fences and trees, and their distance from the RMP. Residential neighbors' sensitivity to the visual quality is low, in spite of their close proximity, long duration and frequent exposure, given that the removal of the RMP would open up further views of green spaces and the Gorge, providing a significant visual improvement. Upgrades to Whirlpool Street would increase the aesthetic appeal for local residents and pedestrians as well.

3.2 CIVIC NEIGHBORS

These individuals work at local businesses, with the greatest concentration of employees located in Henry E. Wrobel Towers (elderly facility of the Niagara Falls Housing Authority located on Whirlpool Street in front of the RMP viaduct), Howard Johnson's Hotel on Main Street, Unifax, and the Aquarium of Niagara. Except while traveling to and from their places of employment, their views of the Project Area are generally limited due to their focus on work activities, and to the limited access to these businesses from the RMP. Limited views tend to be quick glances towards the RMP from Whirlpool Street. In the case of the Wrobel Towers, rooms with views toward the RMP and the overpass would have the opportunity for improved views to the Gorge and park, and would be most aware of changes to the visual importance. Therefore, business employees' sensitivity to the visual quality is low

due to their limited views, short duration and frequency, and to the visual improvements which would derive from the removal of the RMP and the viaduct.

3.3 TRAVELERS

This group includes motorists that would view the RMP from its active lanes and access points, or from the local streets adjacent to them. Travelers would view the area while traveling at higher speeds in short durations in relatively narrow visual fields, as their primary focus would be on the highway traffic and signage. Travelers make frequent repeat trips and develop a sense of identity with landmarks within the visual environment. A very limited and brief view of the Niagara Falls can be seen on a clear day from the top of the RMP viaduct which would not be accessible once this is removed. Based on this sensitivity, visual quality is low due to their limited and short views of the Project Area.

3.4 RECREATIONAL NEIGHBORS

This group generally includes local residents and visitors involved in outdoor activities that travel through the project area on foot or bicycle for sport, or are visitors to the Niagara Gorge with its ecological and recreational amenities. Like residential neighbors, recreational neighbors are highly sensitive to the visual environment. In this case, recreational areas with views of the RMP would be vastly improved by the removal of the RMP and the viaduct, and their access to views and the site would be upgraded with the pedestrian accessibility enhancements. The frequency and duration of views from this group are seasonal. The recreational users' sensitivity to visual quality is low, given the notable visual and aesthetic improvements that are associated with the removal of the RMP.

4 VISUAL EFFECTS

Visual impacts of the Build Alternative were determined by assessing changes in the visual quality of viewsheds from the perspective of the landscape units, and then predicting each viewer group's response to that change. Photo simulations were used to predict the visual change from key views. All changes were considered from the perspective of the viewer groups and their sensitivity toward the visual environment.

4.1 CHANGES TO VISUAL CHARACTER

The Build Alternative's impacts on the visual quality of the landscape units, and the selected key views within those landscape units, are described in terms of the natural harmony, cultural order, and project coherence criteria in the following sections. **Table 12** provides a summary of the visual quality change of each key view.

ROBERT MOSES PARKWAY REMOVAL PROJECT | MAIN STREET TO FINDLAY DRIVE
VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Table 12: Visual Quality Rating Changes by Key View

KEY VIEW	EXISTING CONDITION	PROPOSED CONDITION	VISUAL QUALITY CHANGE
VIEW 1 - ROBERT MOSES PARKWAY TRAIL ENTRANCE ON MAIN STREET	Low	Moderate/Average	Improved
VIEW 2 - NIAGARA GORGE DISCOVERY CENTER VIEW TOWARDS WALNUT AVENUE	Low	Moderate/Average	Improved
VIEW 3 - SOUTH VIEW AT INTERSECTION OF THIRD STREET WITH WHIRLPOOL STREET	Low	Moderate/Average	Improved
VIEW 4 - ABANDONED RMP PARKING AREA NEAR NIAGARA GORGE OVERLOOK OPPOSITE ORCHARD PARKWAY	Moderately Low	Moderately High	Improved
VIEW 5 - SOUTH VIEW AT INTERSECTION OF WHIRLPOOL STREET WITH PIERCE AVENUE	Moderately Low	High	Improved
VIEW 6 - VIEW UNDER RMP VIADUCT AT INTERSECTION OF WHIRLPOOL STREET AND ONTARIO AVENUE	Low	Moderately High	Improved
VIEW 7 - SOUTH VIEW AT INTERSECTION OF WHIRLPOOL STREET WITH CHASM AVENUE	Moderate/Average	High	Improved
VIEW 8 - SOUTH VIEW OF RMP OPPOSITE CHASM AVENUE	Moderately Low	High	Improved
VIEW 9 - VIEW ALONG NORTHBOUND RMP AT INTERSECTION WITH FINDLAY DRIVE	Moderately low	High	Improved

4.1.1 View 1 - Robert Moses Parkway Trail Entrance on Main Street

The most visible change to this view with the Build Alternative is the incorporation of a Primary Gateway installation to clearly identify access to the parklands for both pedestrians and motorists. Use of materials would be kept consistent with similar structures in other locations and state parks in the area, using a natural stone aesthetic which immediately brings identity to the intersection.

Natural Harmony: The dominating presence of the Howard Johnson’s establishment still does little to make this view memorable, but the addition of the gateway feature makes the entrance more identifiable and striking, both for pedestrians and motor vehicles. This results in an improved natural harmony visual quality value which is borderline between average and moderately high.

Cultural Order: The vast majority of the view is still constructed structure or paving. The minor presence of vegetation buffer is encroached by the presence of Main Street, and existing vegetation in the far background within the park (now screened slightly by the new gateway element) give this view a moderate to low visual quality of cultural order. However, the design of the gateway element does portray a sense of timelessness and character, increasing slightly the value of cultural order quality compared to the existing conditions, raising the cultural order value to moderate/average.

Project Coherence: The use of natural stone for the gateway element integrates the structure into the surrounding landscape and park aesthetic, elevating the project coherence quality value of this view to moderate.

A summary of the existing visual quality ratings for View 1 - Robert Moses Parkway Trail Entrance on Main Street is provided below in **Table 13**. As shown in the table, the overall Visual Quality rating for this view with the Build Alternative is 4.0 (Moderate/Average).

Table 13: View 1 - Proposed Visual Quality Evaluation Summary

VIEW	NATURAL HARMONY	CULTURAL ORDER	PROJECT COHERENCE	VISUAL QUALITY
VIEW 1 - ROBERT MOSES PARKWAY TRAIL ENTRANCE ON MAIN STREET	4.5	4	3.5	4



Figure 22: View 1 - Existing view of Robert Moses Parkway Trail Entrance on Main Street



Figure 23: View 1 - Proposed view of Robert Moses Parkway Trail Entrance on Main Street

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4.1.2 View 2 - Niagara Gorge Discovery Center View towards Walnut Avenue

This view undergoes several notable changes which alter its visual quality quite dramatically. The removal of the RMP reduces a sizeable amount of pavement, allowing for greater project coherence of the elements that compose the park’s natural landscape. Also, the redesign of the park access road complete with sidewalk and a tree line on either side, integrate the street better into the park landscape. Also, by opening the access to the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center from Walnut Avenue, there is a greater visual connection between the park and the residential area in the background of the view. The removal of the pedestrian bridge also lengthens the vistas northward towards the Park, and the open lawns and meadow areas add further depth of view.

Natural Harmony: The tree-lined park road integrates this infrastructure into the landscape, offering a perceivable pattern/ difference between planted areas along paved roads and the vegetation of the park itself, and providing a vegetated screen blocking out the view to the newly constructed State Parks Police building. The placement of Walnut Avenue directly in front of the Discovery Center brings attention to the distant focal point of the residential setting on Third Street, driving the eye away from the State Parks Police building as well. The long views to the north make this a unique vantage point with a view, increasing the visual natural harmony quality value further to moderate/average.

Cultural Order: With the disruption of the RMP and the pedestrian bridge gone, the sense of cultural order and greater integration of the paved areas with the landscape is improved. Roads still encroach on the visual setting, but the open views to the north counteract this effect, offering this view a moderately low visual cultural order quality.

Project Coherence: The attention to the streetscape of the access road and narrower paved trails increase the visual coherence and compositional harmony of the landscape with the man-made development present in the view, offering a moderate/average visual project coherence quality value.

A summary of the existing visual quality ratings for View 2 - Niagara Gorge Discovery Center View towards Walnut Avenue is provided below in **Table 14**. As shown in the table, the overall Visual Quality rating for this view with the Build Alternative is 4.2 (Moderate/Average).

Table 14: View 2 - Proposed Visual Quality Evaluation Summary

VIEW	NATURAL HARMONY	CULTURAL ORDER	PROJECT COHERENCE	VISUAL QUALITY
VIEW 2 - NIAGARA GORGE DISCOVERY CENTER VIEW TOWARDS WALNUT AVENUE	4	3.5	5	4.2



Figure 24: - Existing view at the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center looking towards Walnut Avenue



Figure 25: View 2 - Proposed view at the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center looking towards Walnut Avenue

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4.1.3 View 3 - South View at Intersection of Third Street with Whirlpool Street

The proposed changes in this view significantly increase the viewer’s awareness of the presence of the park, which now offers a greater sense of accessibility with openings in the vegetation buffer that allow views of the park to a greater extent from Whirlpool Street. The improved streetscape offers a smoother transition between the urban texture and the park’s natural landscape with the addition of a tree line and a vegetated island separating the small access parking from the street.

Natural Harmony: The memorability of this view increases significantly with a greater depth in the vista towards the park and the Gorge. Improved views of the landcover and vegetation raises the natural harmony visual value, as does the presence of the tree line along Whirlpool Street. The overall visual natural harmony quality value is increased to a moderate/average value.

Cultural Order: The tree line softens the urban setting and integrates the man-made materials with the texture of the park edge. The extended view of the park in the background offers a greater sense of integrity in the visual order of its natural landscape, and the removal of the concrete barriers, signage, and white fence takes away two of the more disruptive elements that were present in the view in the existing condition. Given this, the overall cultural order quality value improves to a moderate/average value.

Project Coherence: This value is also increased by the presence of the tree line along Whirlpool Street, given that the inclusion of these natural elements integrates the street into the landscape of the park edge. The tree line and small vegetated island which diverts the traffic into the small parking adjacent to the park also aid in integrating the urban fabric with the park setting and texture, increasing the coherence of the view and, consequently, the visual project coherence quality, which in this case has a value of moderate to average.

A summary of the existing visual quality ratings for View 3 - South View at Intersection of Third Street with Whirlpool Street is provided below in **Table 15**. As shown in the table, the overall Visual Quality rating for this view with the Build Alternative is 3.8 (Moderate/Average).

Table 15: View 3 - Proposed Visual Quality Evaluation Summary

VIEW	NATURAL HARMONY	CULTURAL ORDER	PROJECT COHERENCE	VISUAL QUALITY
VIEW 3 - SOUTH VIEW AT INTERSECTION OF THIRD STREET WITH WHIRLPOOL STREET	4.5	3.5	3.5	3.8



Figure 26: View 3 - Existing view at intersection of Third Street with Whirlpool Street



Figure 27: View 3 - Proposed view at intersection of Third Street with Whirlpool Street

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4.1.4 View 4 - Abandoned RMP Parking Area near Niagara Gorge Overlook Opposite Orchard Parkway

In this proposed view, the four lanes of the RMP (including the current Robert Moses Parkway Trail) would be completely removed, thereby visually connecting one side of the park to the other and offering the opportunity of easier access from Whirlpool Street to the Gorge through the trail system or across the lawns/natural meadows. The dense vegetation screening the views to the Gorge have been selectively cleared providing opportunities for vistas to the Niagara River. The adjacency of the trails to the reconstructed, although reduced parking area integrate this area into its surroundings and provides easier access for pedestrians and bikers. Although not visible in this particular view, selective openings in the vegetation along Whirlpool Street would also visually connect the surrounding residential neighborhood with this area of the park and allow for easily identifiable access points to and from the park.

Natural Harmony: The opening in the vegetation, paired with the greater presence of the stone wall and the Gorge beyond, greatly increase this value with the Build Alternative. The stone wall's form becomes more apparent, and its materials add visual interest and a contrasting pattern to the park's vegetation. In addition to this, the removal of the RMP provides greater stretches of green open space, making the park look larger and more spacious. The trails interweave between existing vegetation, thereby offering a pleasant visual balance between the man-made elements and the natural elements. The overall natural harmony quality value for this view is moderately high.

Cultural Order: The parking area still acts as a moderately visually encroaching element in the view, but the stone wall provides a strong established visual character to the scene which counteracts this effect by drawing the eye away from this area. The removal of the RMP considerably increases the sense of cultural order of the park landscape, which seems much more undisturbed or disrupted. The interweaving trails through the park do not disrupt the natural landscape very much. The overall cultural order of this view is average to moderately high.

Project Coherence: The materials used in the construction of the stone wall blend with the natural landscape nicely and its layout parallel to the Gorge provides an integrated design with its setting. There is a visual relationship between the trails and the vegetation in some areas, and the taller/thicker vegetation along the two edges of the park paired with the regular spacing of vegetation within provide a sense of order and compositional harmony, thereby increasing the visual project coherence quality value to moderately high.

The summary of the existing visual quality ratings for View 4 - Abandoned RMP Parking Area near Niagara Gorge Overlook Opposite Orchard Parkway is provided below in **Table 16**. As shown in the table, the overall Visual Quality rating for this view with the Build Alternative is 5.0 (Moderately High).

Table 16: View 4 - Proposed Visual Quality Evaluation Summary

VIEW	NATURAL HARMONY	CULTURAL ORDER	PROJECT COHERENCE	VISUAL QUALITY
VIEW 4 - ABANDONED RMP PARKING AREA NEAR NIAGARA GORGE OVERLOOK OPPOSITE ORCHARD PARKWAY	5	4.5	5.5	5



Figure 28: View 4 - Existing view of Abandoned RMP Parking Area near Niagara Gorge Overlook Opposite Orchard Parkway

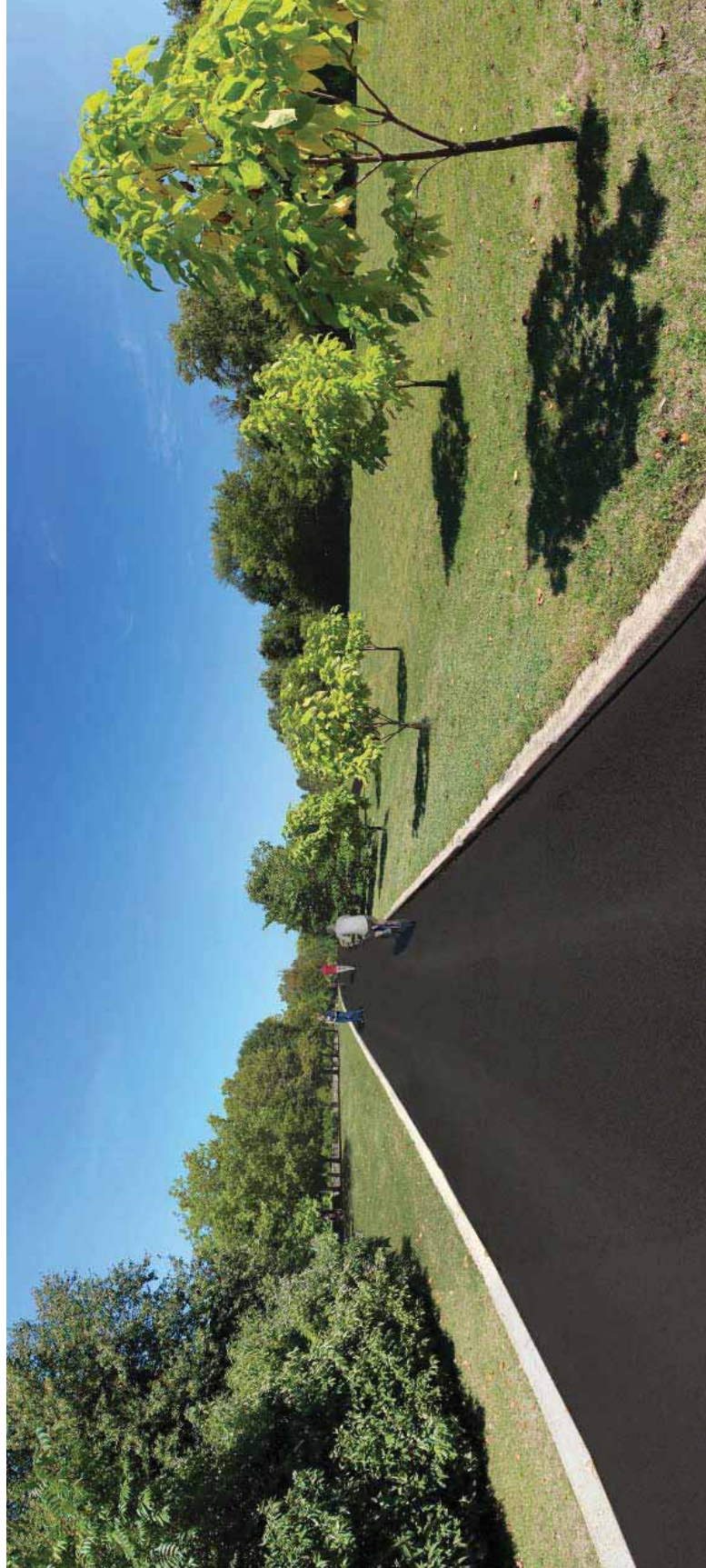


Figure 29: View 4 - Proposed view of Abandoned RMP Parking Area near Niagara Gorge Overlook Opposite Orchard Parkway

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4.1.5 View 5 - South View at Intersection of Whirlpool Street with Pierce Avenue

In this proposed view, the vegetation buffer along the edge of Whirlpool Street would be removed, opening the vistas to the park beyond and providing a visual clue for access opportunities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and so on. The Gorge tree line is visible in the distance, and clearly marked access points invite commuters and pedestrians to access the park and explore it further.

The streetscape would also be modified considerably with the addition of a tree line on either side of Whirlpool Street, offering a smoother transition between the urban fabric and the natural setting of the park, and slowing down traffic (increasing this viewer group's duration of views). Whirlpool Street has also been modified by reducing the street to two lanes. This is paired with the use of different paving in key access points to the park, increasing pedestrian safety and integrating the park setting further into the streetscape.

Natural Harmony: The additional texture of the paving used to mark key access points into the park provides some visual contrast in the streetscape. The new tree lines and extended tree lines increase the natural harmony value, thereby considerably providing additional texture and visual interest to the view. Extended views to the park also increase the natural harmony, which would experience a peak during the fall with the variety of colors and patterns associated with the park vegetation. The overall visual natural harmony quality value has been rated as high.

Cultural Order: The reduction of lanes on Whirlpool Street make it a less dominant element in the view, and the addition of different paving in the access points provide additional visual character to the street. The street trees integrate the park landscape into the urban fabric and reduce the visual encroachment against the natural landscape. The overall value of the cultural order has been rated as moderately high.

Project Coherence: The clear transition from the streetscape to both the park and residential sides offers a notable improvement in the visual project coherence quality value. There is a better integration of the man-made elements with the natural landscape, with a much higher visual relationship between the two provided by the tree line and paved connections to the park trails. The overall project coherence quality value is high.

A summary of the existing visual quality ratings for View 5 – South View at Intersection of Whirlpool Street with Pierce Avenue. is provided below in **Table 17**. As shown in the table, the overall Visual Quality rating for this view with the Build Alternative is 5.5 (Moderately High - High).

Table 17: View 5 - Proposed Visual Quality Evaluation Summary

VIEW	NATURAL HARMONY	CULTURAL ORDER	PROJECT COHERENCE	VISUAL QUALITY
VIEW 5 - SOUTH VIEW AT INTERSECTION OF WHIRLPOOL STREET WITH PIERCE AVENUE	5.5	5	6	5.5



Figure 30: View 5 - Existing south view at intersection of Whirlpool Street with Pierce Avenue



Figure 31: View 5 - Proposed south view at intersection of Whirlpool Street with Pierce Avenue

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4.1.6 View 6 - View under RMP Viaduct at Intersection of Whirlpool Street and Ontario Avenue

The removal of the RMP is the first and foremost notable change in this view. The parking underneath is more visible from the street and the additional light now allows for a tree line to grow along Whirlpool Street, integrating the streetscape better with the natural texture of the park on both sides of Whirlpool Bridge. Pedestrian crossings are proposed to be added to slow commuter speeds and to mark out access points to the parking and park areas more clearly. The multi-use trail is designed to be realigned to follow the side of Whirlpool Street along this stretch and connect park users with the other side of the park.

The entrance of the parking lot has been marked with a “Secondary Gateway” element of two stone columns, using materials which match the other Primary and Secondary Gateways of the park, and which coincide with other historic elements within the park such as the overlook wall in View 4, or the bridge abutment visible in the current view. This visual cue invites pedestrians and motorists to enter and stop at this point of the park, where there is a Gorge trail with closer access and views to the Niagara River.

Natural Harmony: The Secondary Gateway elements are a distinctive feature which draws attention to the old bridge abutment left behind, providing a unique visual character to this stretch of Whirlpool Street. The greater presence of the structure of Whirlpool Bridge increases the natural harmony further, as do the tree lines to be added on either side of the street. Finally, the more visible presence of the Gorge increases the memorability of this view. The overall natural harmony value rated for this view is moderately high.

Cultural Order: The still heavy presence of Whirlpool Street and the railway bridge take away from the more visually appealing elements. The man-made development in this setting as a whole encroaches on the visual setting of the natural landscape of the park and Gorge. This value has been improved however by the addition of the tree line along the street, thereby creating a greater balance between the artificial elements and the natural elements. Overall, the value of the cultural order for this view is moderate/average.

Project Coherence: The greater visibility of the bridge abutment and matching aesthetic of the Secondary Gateway elements increase the visual project coherence of this scene. The greener streetscape of Whirlpool Street, paired with the removal of the viaduct, greatly improves the transition between the urban setting and the park. The open views to the parking area and beyond also offer a greater visual readability and project coherence of the scene. The overall visual project coherence quality value for this proposed view would increase to moderately high.

A summary of the existing visual quality ratings for View 6 – View under RMP Viaduct at Intersection of Whirlpool Street and Ontario Avenue is provided below in Table 18. As shown in the table, the overall Visual Quality rating for this view with the Build Alternative is 5.0 (Moderately High).

Table 18: View 6 - Proposed Visual Quality Evaluation Summary

VIEW	NATURAL HARMONY	CULTURAL ORDER	PROJECT COHERENCE	VISUAL QUALITY
VIEW 6 - VIEW UNDER RMP VIADUCT AT INTERSECTION OF WHIRLPOOL STREET AND ONTARIO AVENUE	5	4.5	5.5	5



Figure 32: View 6 - Existing view under RMP Viaduct at intersection of Whirlpool Street and Ontario Avenue



Figure 33: View 6 - Proposed view of under RMP Viaduct at intersection of Whirlpool Street and Ontario Avenue

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4.1.7 View 7 - South View at Intersection of Whirlpool Street with Chasm Avenue

In this proposed view, Whirlpool Street would be narrowed to provide formal on-street parking. The tree line along the park side of the street would also be filled out in spots where the tree line currently has gaps, and the RMP would be fully removed in the distance. The denser tree line and narrower Whirlpool Street would slow traffic down, increasing the duration of views of this viewer group.

Natural Harmony: The views towards the park and presence of the Gorge are more apparent with the removal of the RMP, and the open lawns and natural meadows that are visible would remarkably increase the memorability of this view. The well-established tree line integrates the streetscape well with the park edge, and the widened tree lawn provides a better balance between the natural elements visible and the street. The overall visual natural harmony quality value of this view has been rated as high.

Cultural Order: The removal of the RMP reduces drastically the visual disturbance in the views of the park, and the improved streetscape of Whirlpool Street draws the eye away from the street and towards the park. The removal of the RMP also increases the depth of the views to the park, which looks wider and with no visual disturbance other than the Gorge itself. The overall visual cultural order quality value is rated as high.

Project Coherence: The improved and extended tree lines along Whirlpool Street integrate the residential/suburban fabric transition even more smoothly than before into the park edge and beyond. The balance of trees, open lawns, and natural meadows provide a harmonious visual pattern, which is complemented nicely with the street trees of Whirlpool Street and the front gardens of the residences facing the park. The overall visual project coherence quality value for this proposed view is high.

A summary of the existing visual quality ratings for View 7 – South View at Intersection of Whirlpool Street with Chasm Avenue. is provided below in **Table 19**. As shown in the table, the overall Visual Quality rating for this view with the Build Alternative is 5.7 (High).

Table 19: View 7 - Proposed Visual Quality Evaluation Summary

VIEW	NATURAL HARMONY	CULTURAL ORDER	PROJECT COHERENCE	VISUAL QUALITY
VIEW 7 - SOUTH VIEW AT INTERSECTION OF WHIRLPOOL STREET WITH CHASM AVENUE	5.5	5.5	6	5.7

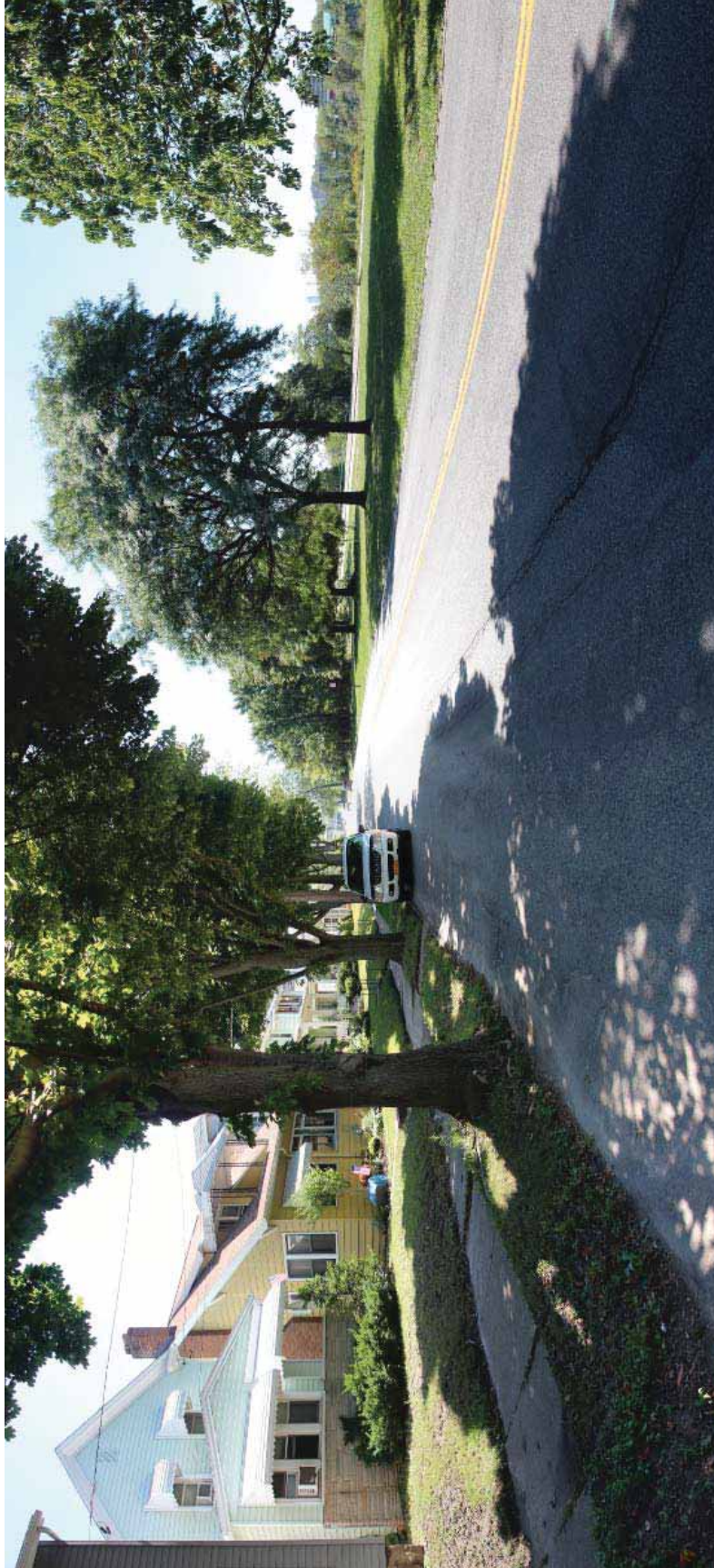


Figure 34: - View 7 - Existing south view at intersection of Whirlpool Street with Chasm Avenue



Figure 35: - View 7 - Proposed south view at intersection of Whirlpool Street with Chasm Avenue

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4.1.8 View 8 - South View of RMP Opposite Chasm Avenue

This proposed view sees a drastic change and improvement on its visual quality with the complete removal of the RMP and the viaduct. In its place, open spaces and areas of mowed lawns and naturalized meadows provide texture and visual interest to this park scene. Travelers that originally used the RMP would be moved to Whirlpool Street and would not be able to access this view from their vehicles. In the case of park users who currently use the Robert Moses Parkway Trail, they would either enjoy similar views from the proposed new multi-use trail system located closer to the Gorge, or slow down the speed at which they traverse the park and experience longer durations of views.

Natural Harmony: The complete removal of the RMP increases the existing natural harmony value, and the more extensive lawns and naturalized meadows provide greater richness and textures to the natural landscape of the park. The linearity of the taller vegetation along the edges of the park direct the viewers sight to the distant focal point near Whirlpool Bridge, increasing the memorability of this scene. The overall visual natural harmony quality value for this proposed view has been rated as very high.

Cultural Order: This open view of the park would not present any disrupting elements within its natural landscape, which is comprised of different vegetation masses of grasses, thickets, and trees, thereby resulting in a more coherent visual pattern. Given this, the value of visual cultural order quality for this view would increase to moderately high.

Project Coherence: This park landscape presents a variety of natural patterns which reinforce each other, thereby offering a coherent and harmonious view. The overall visual project coherence quality value of this value is rated as high.

A summary of the existing visual quality ratings for View 8 – South View of RMP opposite Chasm Avenue is provided below in **Table 20**. As shown in the table, the overall Visual Quality rating for this view with the Build Alternative is 5.7 (High).

Table 20: View 8 - Proposed Visual Quality Evaluation Summary

VIEW	NATURAL HARMONY	CULTURAL ORDER	PROJECT COHERENCE	VISUAL QUALITY
VIEW 8 - SOUTH VIEW OF RMP OPPOSITE CHASM AVENUE	6.5	5	5.5	5.7



Figure 36: View 8 - Existing south view of RMP Opposite Chasm Avenue



Figure 37: View 8 - Proposed south view of RMP Opposite Chasm Avenue

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4.1.9 View 9 - View Along Northbound RMP at Intersection with Findlay Drive

In this proposed view, the RMP would be completely removed and all that remains would be the connection of Whirlpool Street (visible in the background) with the north end of the RMP connecting to Whirlpool State Park and beyond. The selective mowing practices would continue along this new green area, with interspersed open lawns and natural meadows substituting the paving of the RMP.

Natural Harmony: The removal of the dominant element of the RMP from this view enhances the natural landscape of the park, and the additional green space brings more visual natural harmony to the scene. The various textures provided by the natural elements and the large Chinquapin Oak stands in the background bring more memorability to the view and would become the focal point of the viewer, providing an overall high visual natural harmony quality value.

Cultural Order: The cultural order in this view would be provided by the visual integrity coming from the park vegetation and landscape, and would be lacking the visual disruption caused by the existing RMP. The overall cultural order value is quantified as high.

Project Coherence: The value of visual project coherence quality would improve greatly in this view with the removal of the RMP, and the areas of current pavement would be connected by lawn and natural meadow grasses to bring a greater harmonious visual pattern to the scene and make for a more coherent relationship between the elements in the view. The overall visual project coherence quality value is rated as high.

A summary of the existing visual quality ratings for View 9 – View along Northbound RMP at Intersection with Findlay Drive is provided below in Table 21. As shown in the table, the overall Visual Quality rating for this view with the Build Alternative is 5.7 (High).

Table 21: View 9 - Proposed Visual Quality Evaluation Summary

VIEW	NATURAL HARMONY	CULTURAL ORDER	PROJECT COHERENCE	VISUAL QUALITY
VIEW 9 - VIEW ALONG NORTHBOUND RMP AT INTERSECTION WITH FINDLAY DRIVE	6	5.5	5.5	5.7



Figure 38: View 9 - Existing view along northbound RMP at intersection with Findlay Drive



Figure 39: View 9 - Proposed view along northbound RMP at intersection with Findlay Drive

4.2 VIEWER RESPONSE

The following provides the predicted viewer response for the four viewer groups based on the physical factors listed in **Section 3**. Therefore, the visual quality rating for key views shown in **Table 12** were studied further with consideration of the viewer group's perspective. In some cases, the effect on visual resources would be greater from the viewer's perspective.

Based on the local community's recommendations for the proposed Project to be sensitive to the Gorge, parklands and the residential streets' visual character, as well as the various viewers' understanding of the existing visual character, it is anticipated that residential neighbors and civic neighbors, as well as travelers along Whirlpool Street, would all respond positively to changes in the visual environment related to the proposed removal of the RMP, improvement of the park and trail system along the Niagara Gorge rim, and street improvements along Third and Whirlpool Streets. Each of these viewer groups currently are exposed to prolonged and, in some cases, unobstructed views of the RMP. Under the Build Alternative, they would be provided an opportunity to view additional contiguous green space, an improved trail system, overlook vistas and improved landscaping in place of the RMP.

The response from travelers currently using the RMP to the change in visual quality is predicted to be neutral. These viewers would have to change their commute itineraries to drive along Third Street / Whirlpool Street instead of the RMP, which would generally provide them less time to view the parklands and the Niagara River Gorge from their vehicles. In some viewsheds, the Build Alternative introduces new focal features, such as new views to the parklands and the Gorge and an improved tree-lined streetscape. Although travelers are expected to respond positively to these opportunities, this could be offset due to the viewers' narrower visual fields and need to maintain their primary focus on traffic, signage and the road, thereby resulting in a more neutral response.

The response from recreational neighbors is predicted to be very positive, given the removal of the RMP, and the improved trail system that would increase recreational opportunities and provide additional space for programming potential future park improvements. These viewers are expected to remain longer in the improved park areas with more prolonged views due to their activities, the improved aesthetic value of the park's landscape, and the greater recreational opportunities available.

5 FEATURES TO ENHANCE VISUAL QUALITY

The following features of the Build Alternative would help ensure that the visual impacts of the Project are perceived as positive by the various viewer groups, and are categorized as:

- Proper design and siting
- Long-Term Maintenance

5.1 PROPER DESIGN AND SITING

The reduction of visual quality for viewers within the suburban residential and business/commercial landscape units would be avoided, minimized, and/or mitigated by the following strategies:

- **Residential Lawn Verge Extension:** The proposed lawn verge area (i.e., grassed area between the street curb line and the sidewalk) along the residential side of Whirlpool Street would be widened where possible. This would provide a larger buffer between the roadway and the houses fronting and/or adjacent to Third and Whirlpool Streets.

- **Landscape Revegetation:** Locations where existing vegetation is adjacent to the RMP and Whirlpool Street, thereby serving as a buffer and visual screen, would be managed in certain areas to allow improved views to the parklands and increase the visual connection between pedestrians and travelers along Whirlpool Street, and the elements which comprise the Gorge rim landscape. All areas where the RMP would be removed would undergo re-vegetation to increase the parkland’s ecological and aesthetic value.
- **Streetscape:** Whirlpool Street, Third Street and the new Park Access Road (i.e., which would connect Main Street with the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center) would include improvements in their streetscapes, mostly comprised of tree lines, gateway features and pedestrian access points, lighting, on-street parking, and decorative crosswalks.

5.2 LONG-TERM MAINTENANCE

How the landscape and trails within the redesigned parklands are maintained has implications to the overall visual quality and would include the following strategies.

- **Gateway Element and Trail Maintenance:** All access points would need general landscaping and maintenance to ensure a continued level of positive aesthetic quality that would convey to recreational users and visitors a sense of care and attention to this improved area. The multi-use trail system and other infrastructure features would also require maintenance to provide comfort and safe access to the various park and open space features.
- **Landscape Maintenance:** Regular activities, including selective mowing, weeding, and pruning would be periodically necessary on all landscape areas to promote and maintain healthy vegetation, although the intent would be to create a more naturalized landscape that might reasonably minimize the need for such maintenance activities. Removal of invasive species would also ensure native species would establish themselves in the restored Gorge rim landscape.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The overall visual impact of the proposed removal of the RMP (i.e., Build Alternative) according to the ratings defined in Section 4.1 compared to the ratings for the existing condition (i.e., No-Build Alternative), is determined to be moderately high because it would result in a moderately high change to the visual resources with low viewer response and no notable negative impacts in the visual quality of the corridor. By incorporating the several measures identified in Section 5 above as part of the Build Alternative, positive visual quality changes would be achieved as shown below in **Table 22**. As indicated in the table, all nine viewsheds assessed would experience positive visual quality change. In combination along the overall corridor, a substantial positive visual quality change would be achieved.

Table 22: Overall Visual Quality Rating.

KEY VIEW	EXISTING CONDITION	PROPOSED CONDITION	VISUAL QUALITY CHANGE
VIEW 1 - ROBERT MOSES PARKWAY TRAIL ENTRANCE ON MAIN STREET	2	4	+2
VIEW 2 - NIAGARA GORGE DISCOVERY CENTER VIEW TOWARDS WALNUT AVENUE	2.3	4	+1.7
VIEW 3 - SOUTH VIEW AT INTERSECTION OF THIRD STREET WITH WHIRLPOOL STREET	1.5	3.8	+2.3
VIEW 4 - ABANDONED RMP PARKING AREA NEAR NIAGARA GORGE OVERLOOK OPPOSITE ORCHARD PARKWAY	3.5	5	+1.5

VIEW 5 - SOUTH VIEW AT INTERSECTION OF WHIRLPOOL STREET WITH PIERCE AVENUE	2.5	5.5	+3
VIEW 6 - VIEW UNDER RMP VIADUCT AT INTERSECTION OF WHIRLPOOL STREET AND ONTARIO AVENUE	2	5	+3
VIEW 7 - SOUTH VIEW AT INTERSECTION OF WHIRLPOOL STREET WITH CHASM AVENUE	4.3	5.7	+1.4
VIEW 8 - SOUTH VIEW OF RMP OPPOSITE CHASM AVENUE	3	5.7	+2.7
VIEW 9 - VIEW ALONG NORTHBOUND RMP AT INTERSECTION WITH FINDLAY DRIVE	3	5.7	+2.7
OVERALL VISUAL IMPACT			+20.3

7 REFERENCES

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8 GLOSSARY

Dominance: Dominance of components or specific features in a scene may be dominant because of prominent positioning, contrast, extent, or importance of pattern elements.

Cultural Order: The integrity of visual order in the natural and man-built landscape, and the extent to which the landscape is free from visual encroachment.

Key View: A location from which a viewer (traveler or neighbor) can see either iconic or representative landscapes, with or without the highway, of the Project corridor. Usually there is at least one key view for each landscape unit. Used for visual simulations.

Landscape: Landform and land cover forming a distance visual pattern. Land cover comprises water, vegetation and man-made development, including cities.

Landscape Unit: An area or volume of distinct landscape character which forms a spatially enclosed unit at ground level; it may include more than one landscape type; outdoor room. The extent of a single landscape type which is not spatially enclosed at ground level.

Natural Harmony: The memorability of the visual impression received from contrasting landscape elements as they combine to form a striking and distinctive visual pattern.

Project Coherence: The degree to which the visual resources of the landscape join together to form a coherent, harmonious visual pattern. Project Coherence refers to the compositional harmony or inter-compatibility between landscape elements.

Regional Setting: The regional landscape establishes the general visual environment of the Project, but the specific visual environment upon which this assessment is focused is determined by defining landscape units and the Project viewshed.

Sight Line: The unobstructed line of sight between an observer and viewed object.

Texture: The visual or tactile surface characteristic of various elements in the landscape; often the least dominant of the four visual pattern elements.

Uniqueness: A resource-oriented criterion: a visual resource, visual character, or visual quality which is rare or uncommonly found at a regional or national scale.

Viewer Activity: The extent of a viewer's ability to perceive the landscape and its detail may be heightened or decreased by the visual requirements of his current activity and his past experience of the landscape.

Viewer Awareness: A viewer's receptivity to the visual character of the landscape can be affected by elements and relationships in the landscape setting itself or by expectations about the setting. Visual experience contrary to expectation may be suppressed or heightened, depending on the degree of disagreement.

Viewer Exposure: The degree to which viewers are exposed to a view by their physical location, numbers viewing and duration of view.

Viewer Groups: Classes of viewers differentiated by their visual response to the highway and its setting; response is affected by viewer activity, awareness and values.

Viewer Response: Measures of viewer response to change in visual resources include viewer exposure, viewer sensitivity, cultural significance and local values.

Viewer Sensitivity: The viewer's variable receptivity to the elements within the environment that he is viewing, affected by viewer activity and awareness. A person cannot readily notice every object and all the attributes of the objects that compose the total visual environment.

Viewshed: A viewshed is a subset of a landscape unit and is comprised of all the surface areas visible from an observer's viewpoint. The limits of a viewshed are defined as the visual limits of the views located from the proposed Project. The viewshed also includes the locations of viewers likely to be affected by visual changes brought about by Project features.

View: A scene observed from a given vantage point.

Visual Character: The visual character of a landscape is formed by the order of the patterns composing it. The elements of these patterns are the form, line, color and texture of the landscapes visual resources. Their interrelationships can be objectively described in terms of dominance, diversity, and continuity.

Visual Impact: The degree of change in visual resources and viewer response to those resources caused by highway development and operations.

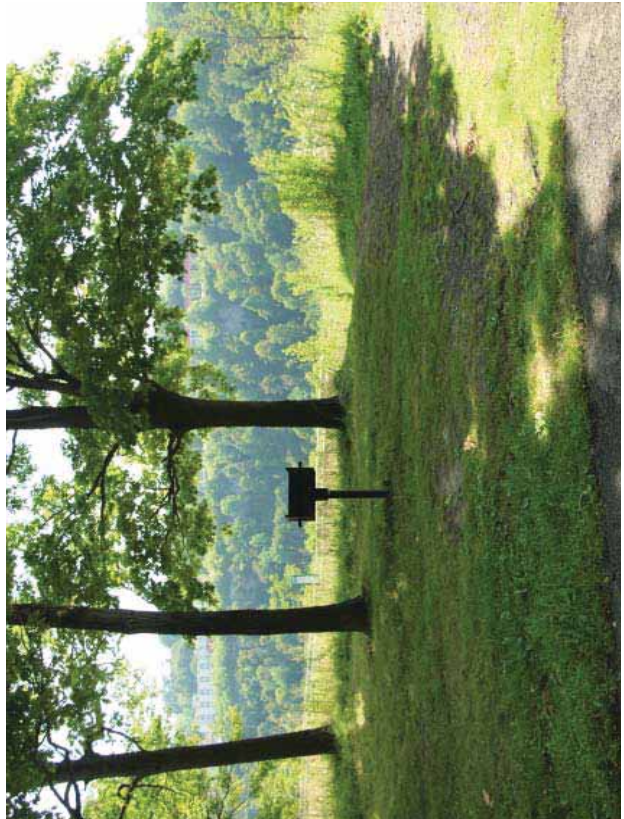
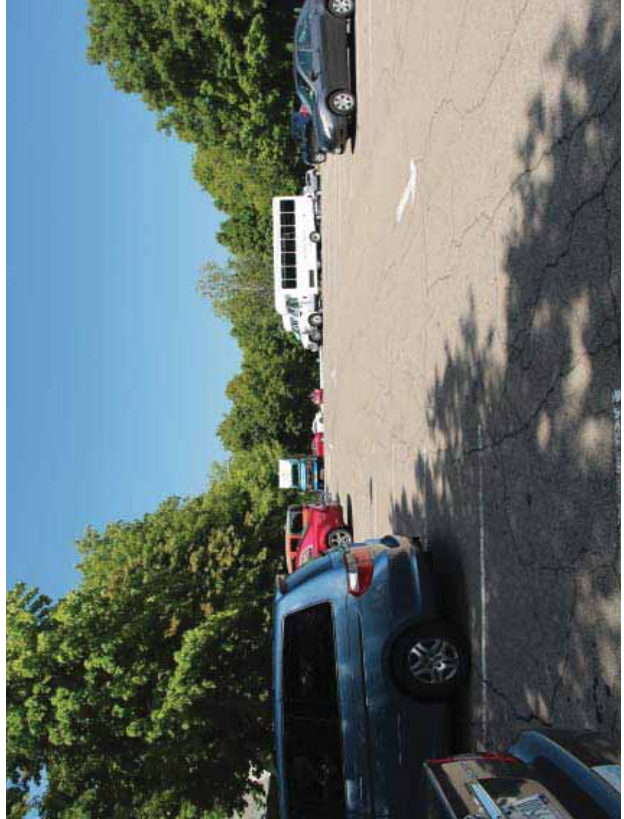
Visual Quality: While many factors contribute to a landscape's visual quality, they can ultimately be grouped under three headings: Natural harmony, Cultural order and Project coherence.

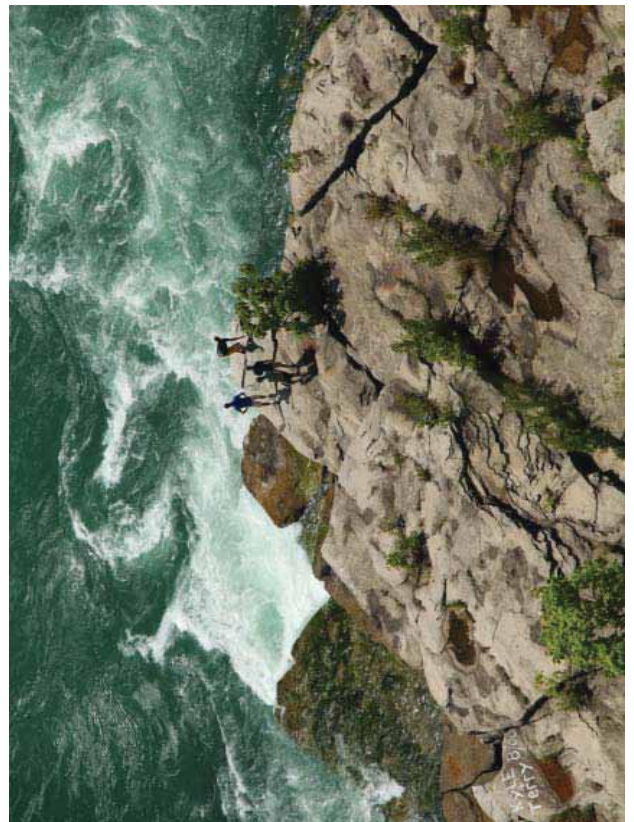
Visual Resources: The appearance of the features that make up the visible landscape. Includes the land, water, vegetative, animal, and other features that are visible on all national resource lands. (U.S.F.S.)

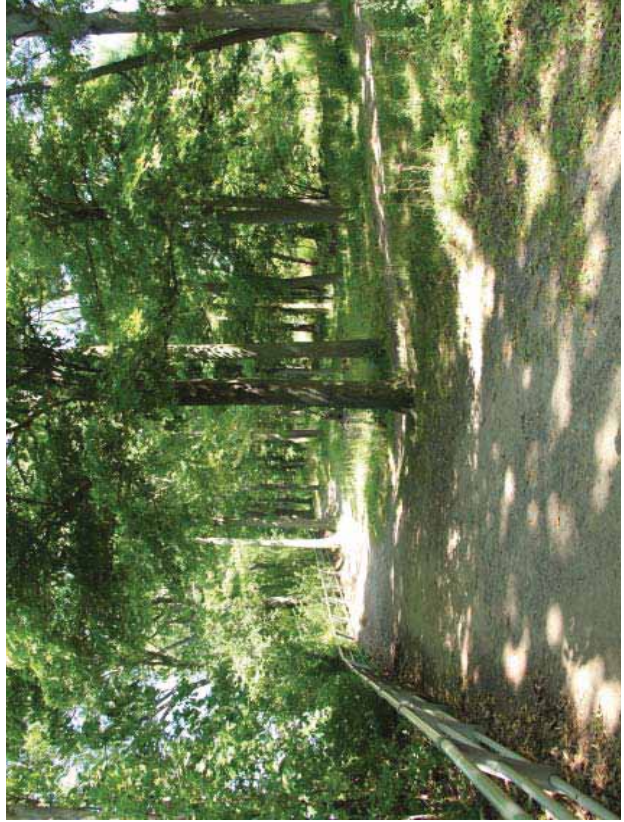
ATTACHMENT A
FIELD VISIT PHOTOGRAPHS

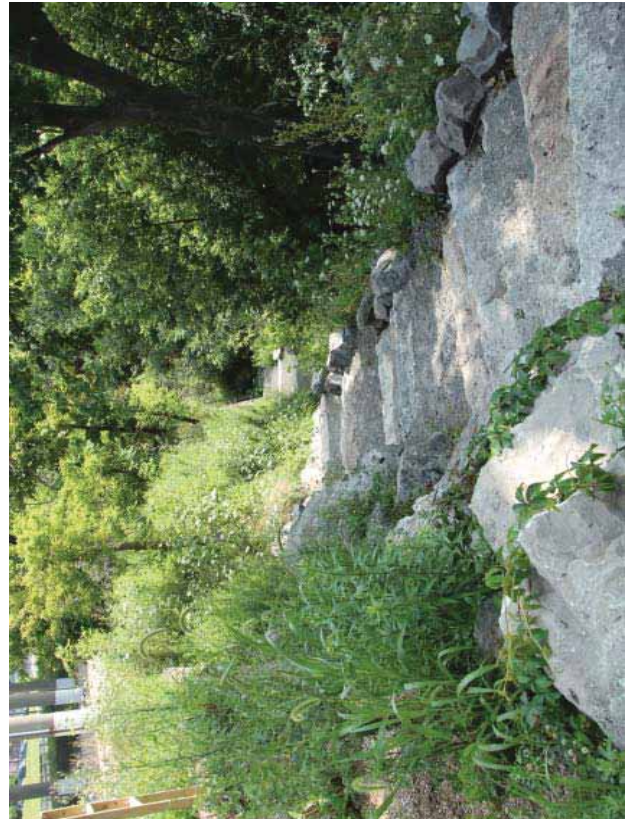
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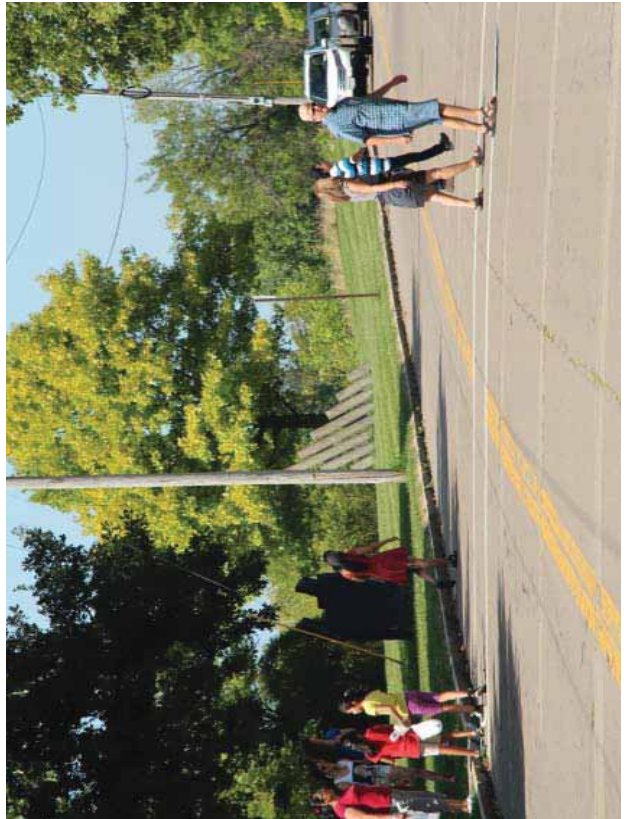
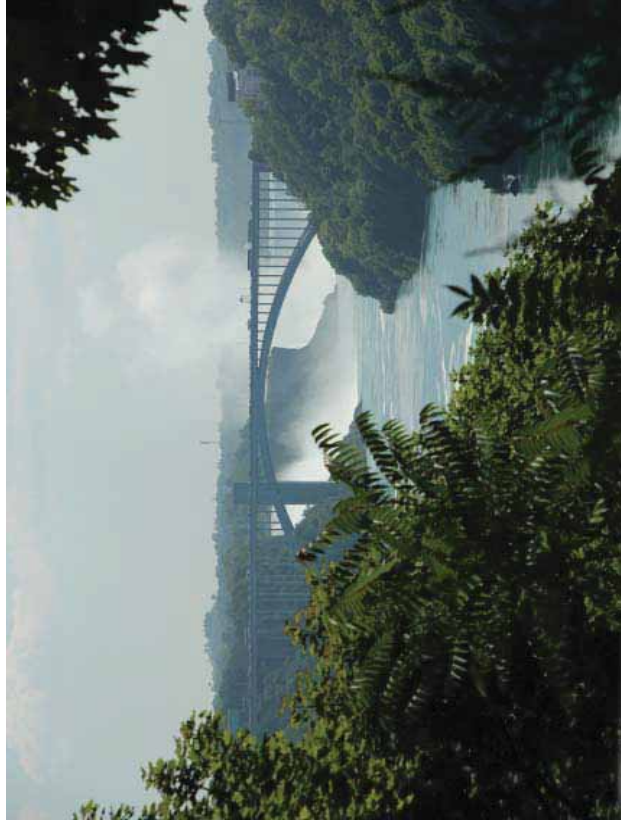
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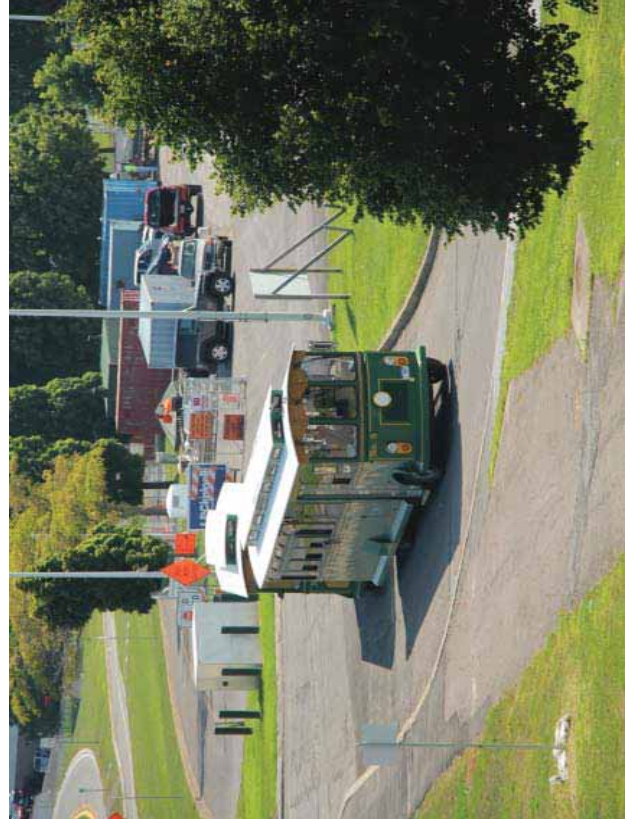








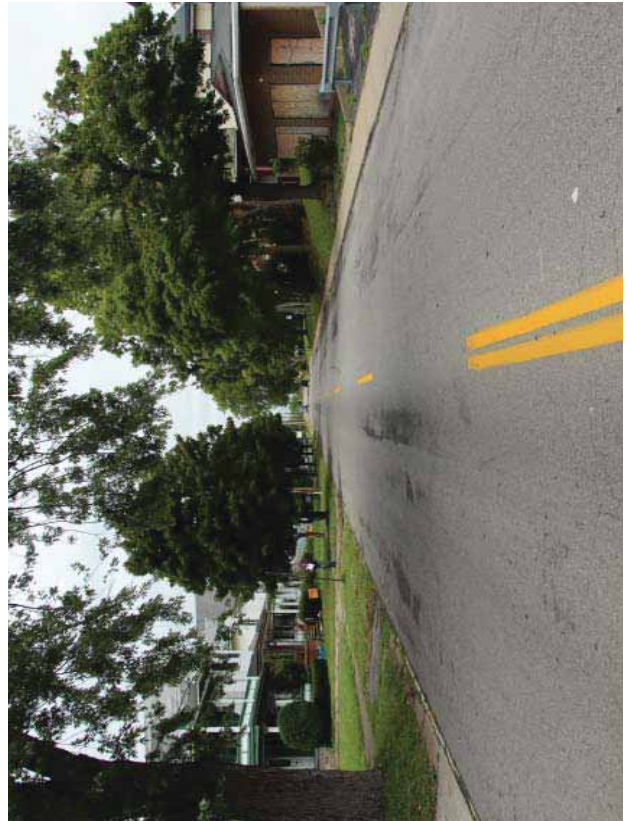


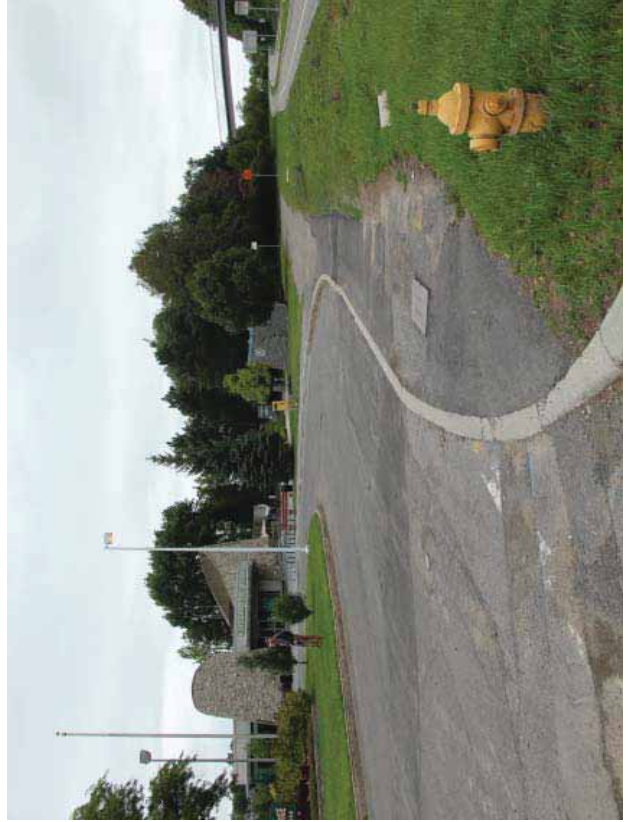


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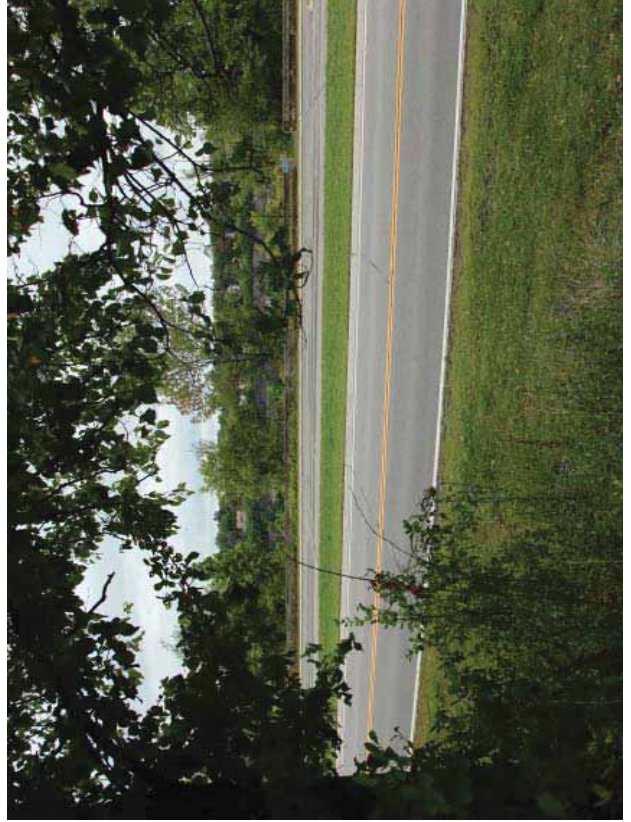
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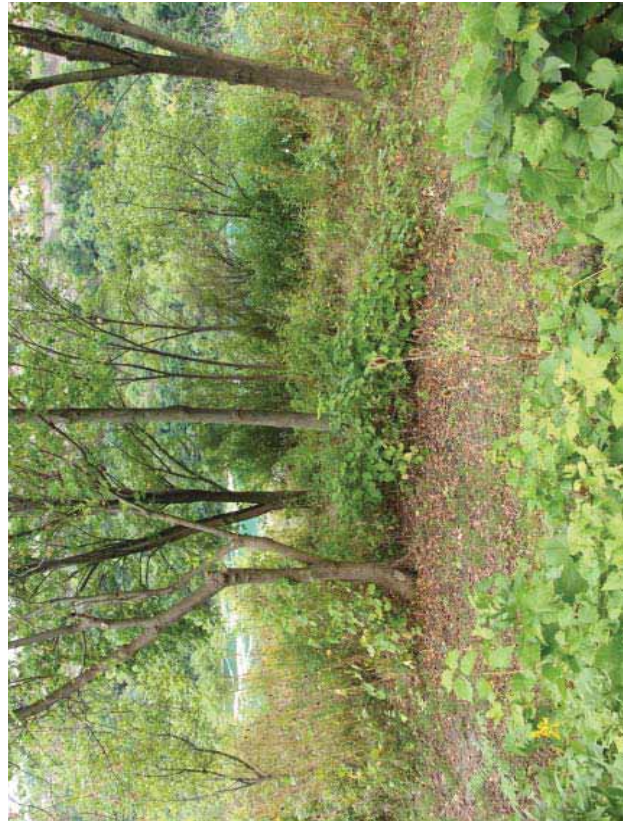
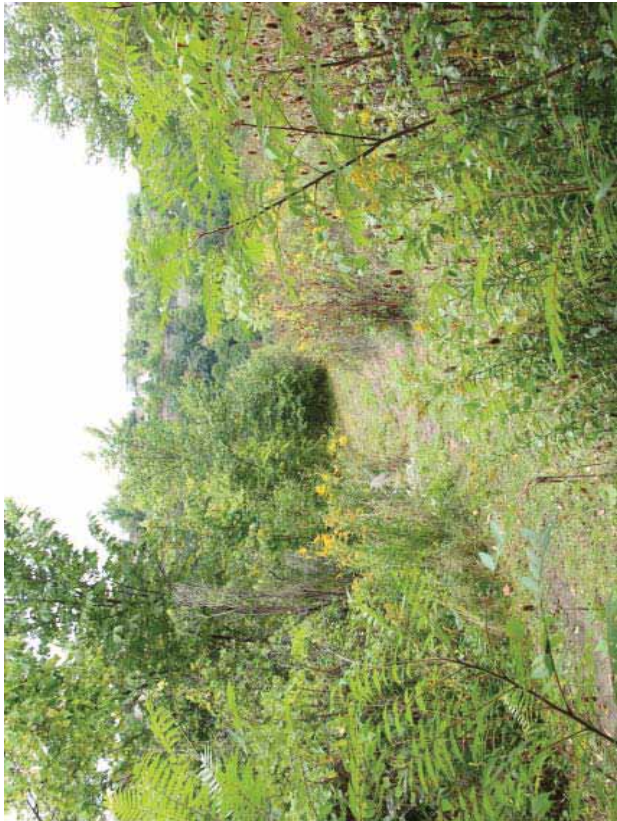


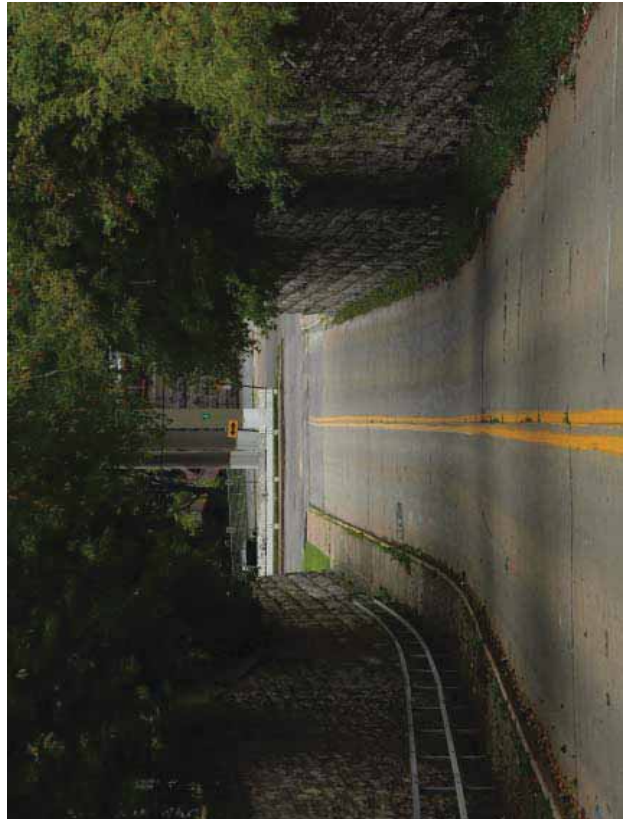


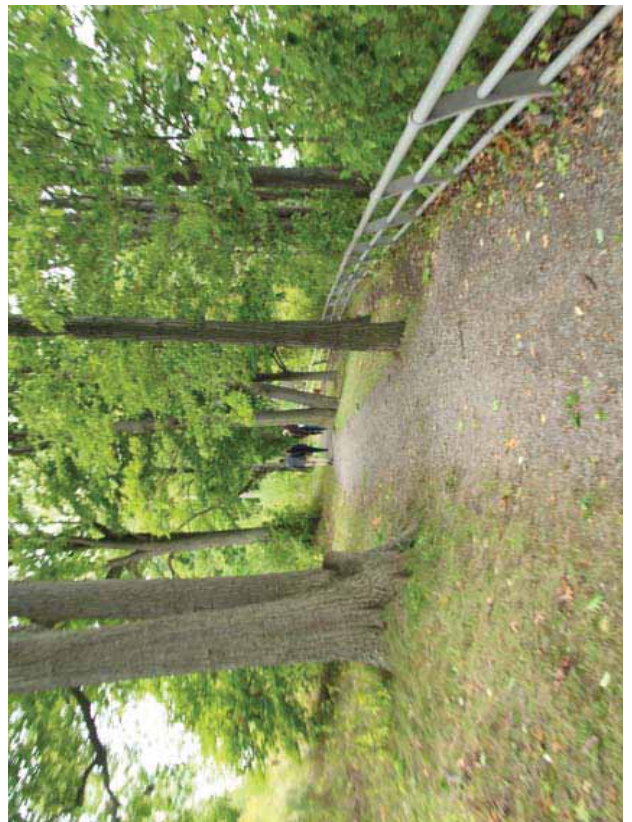
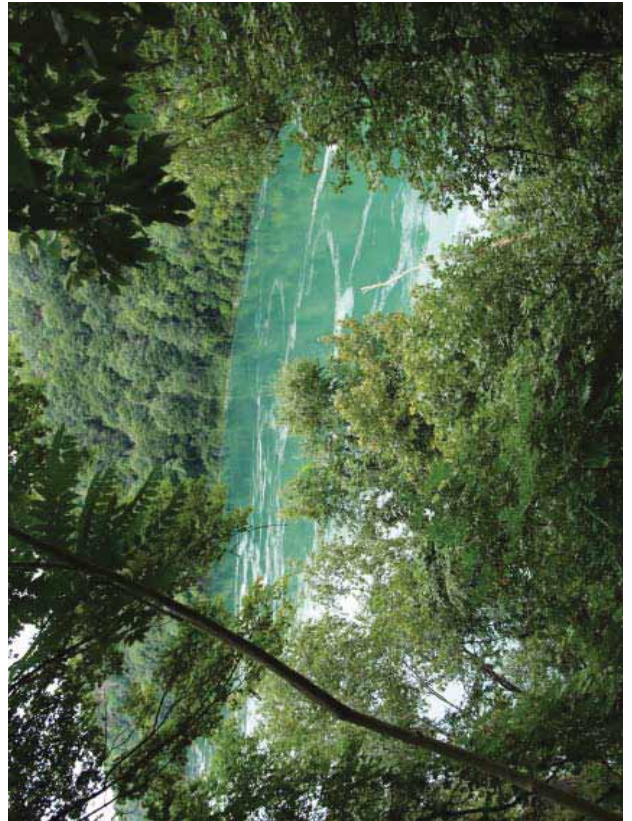
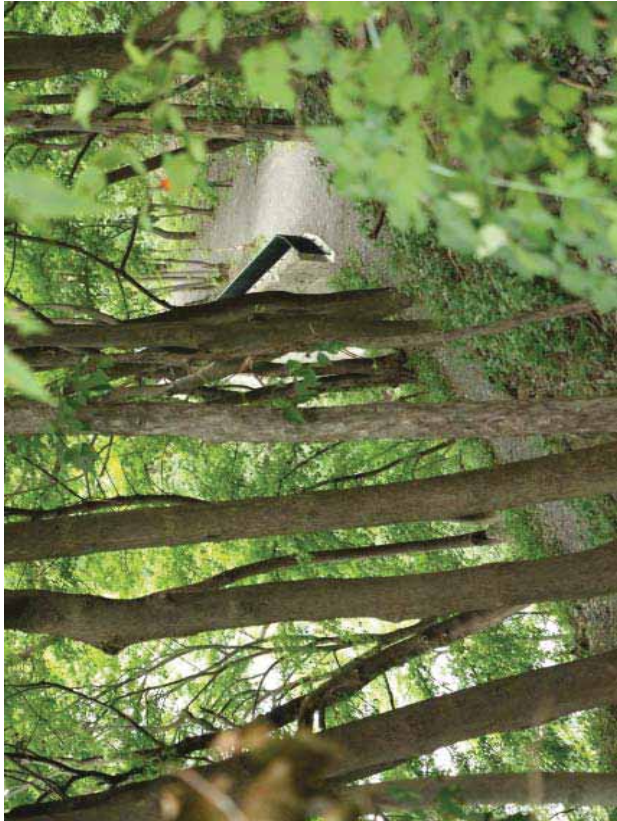






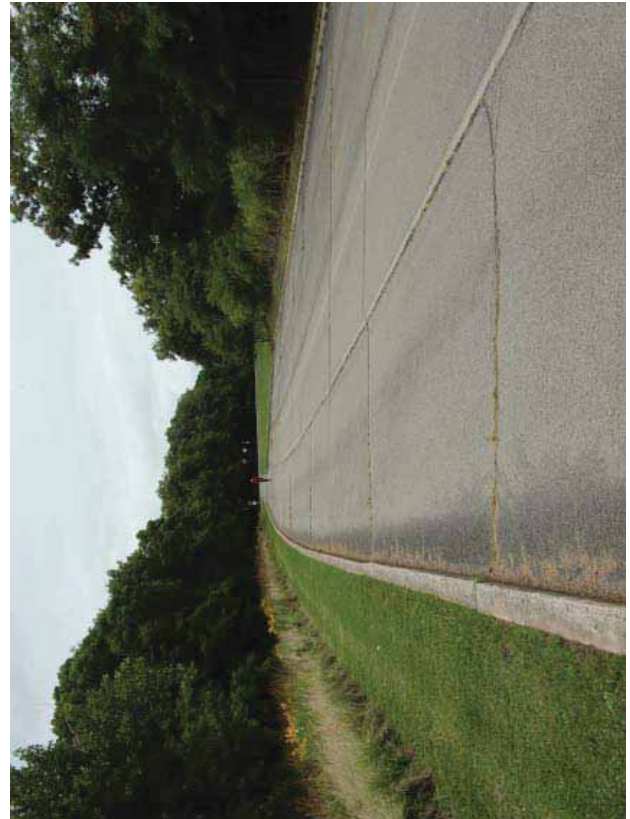






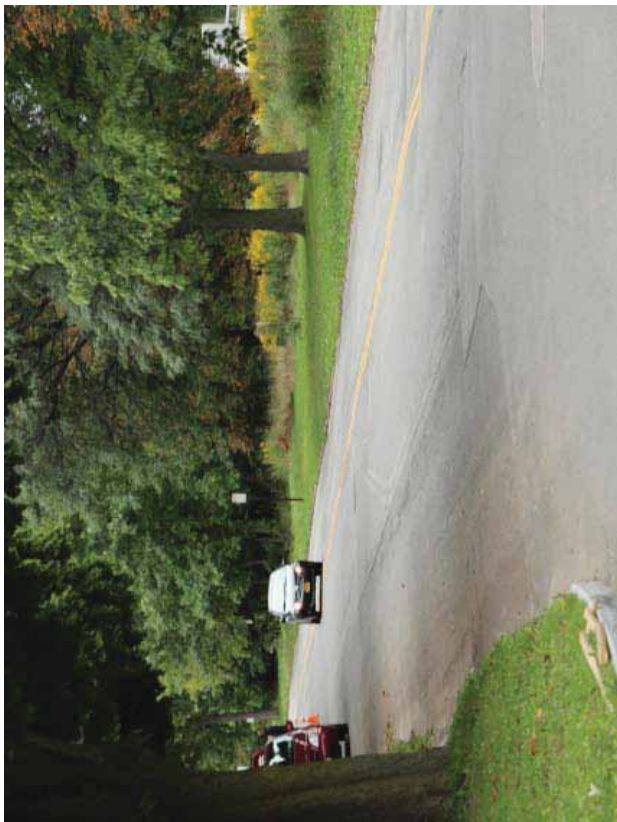


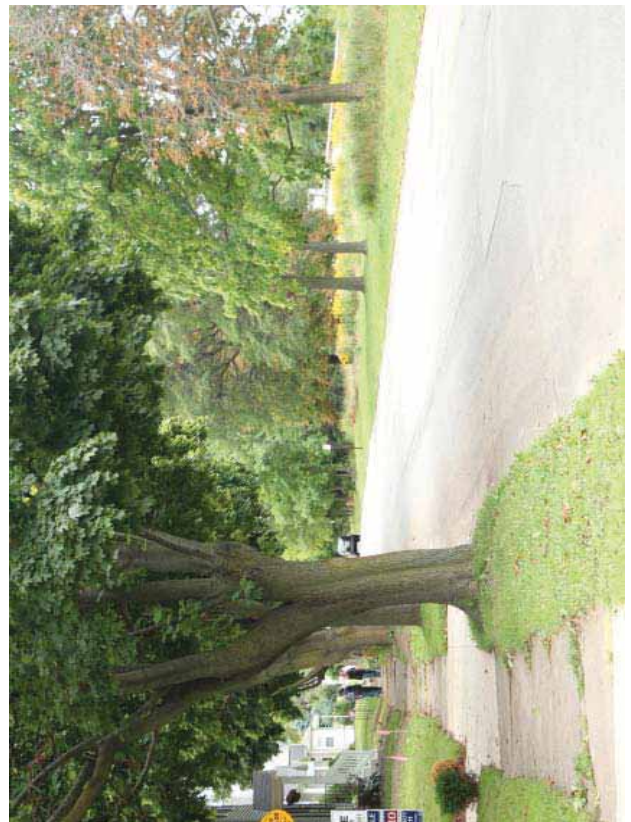
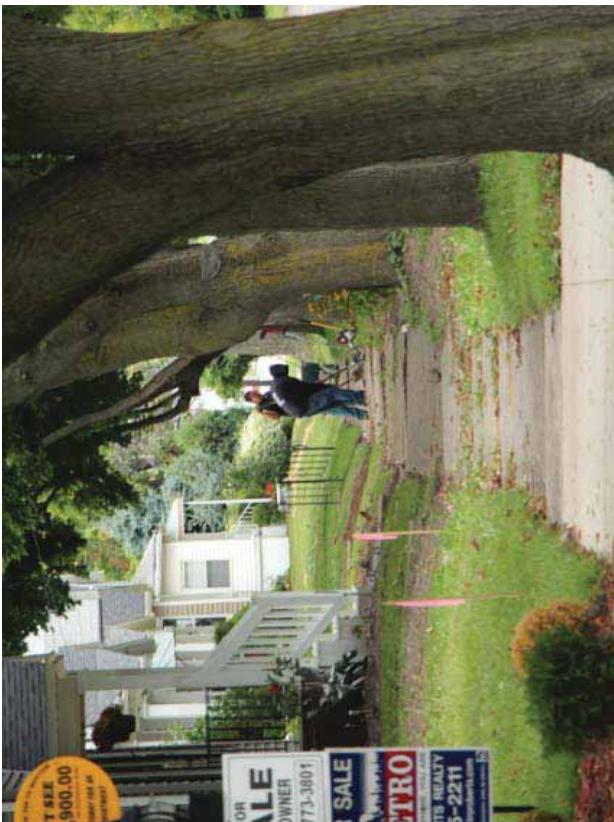












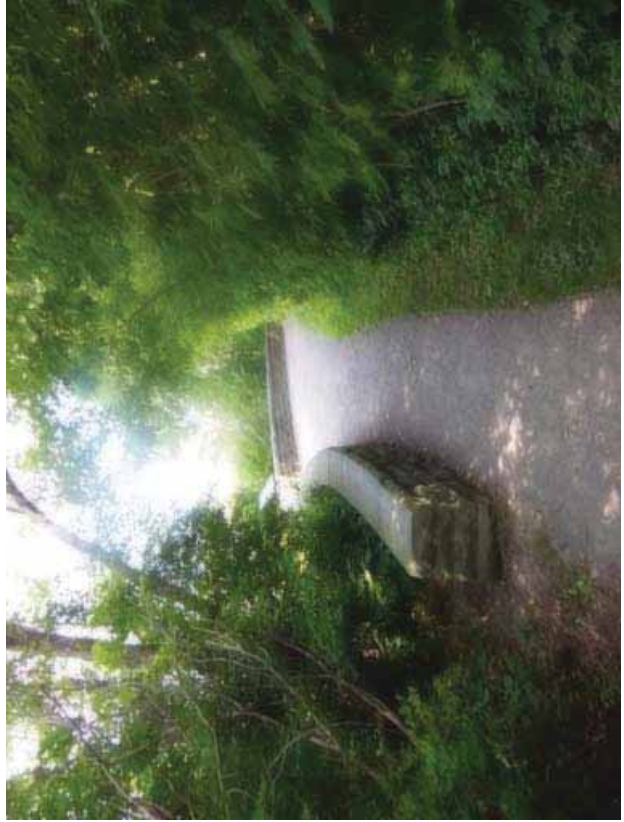


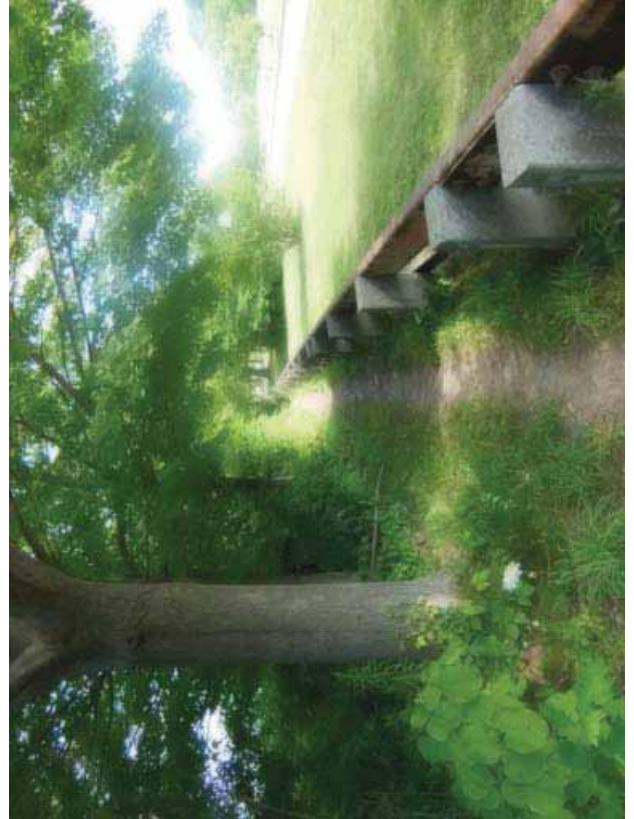
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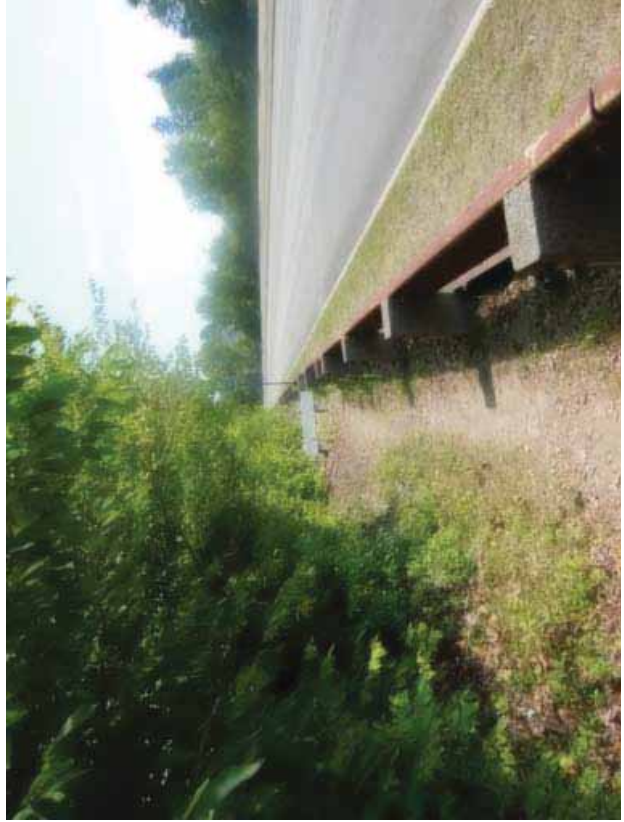
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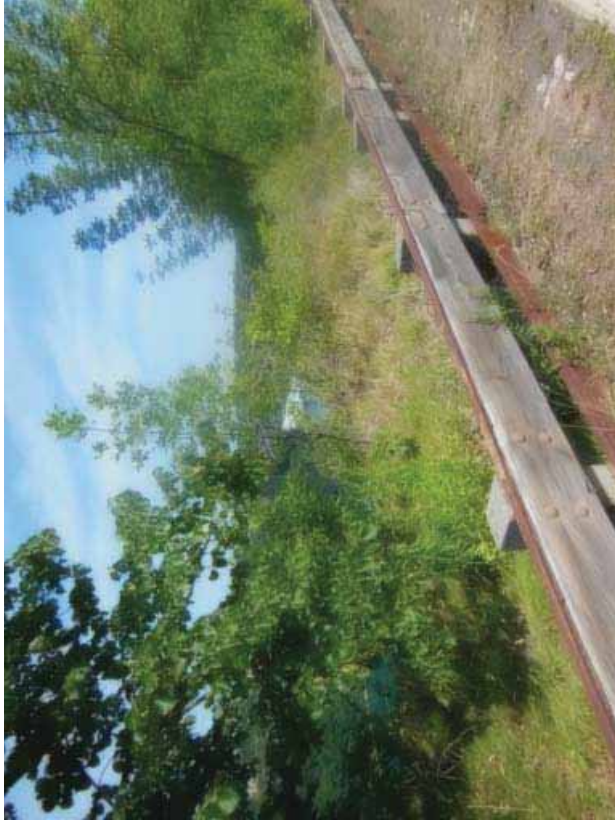


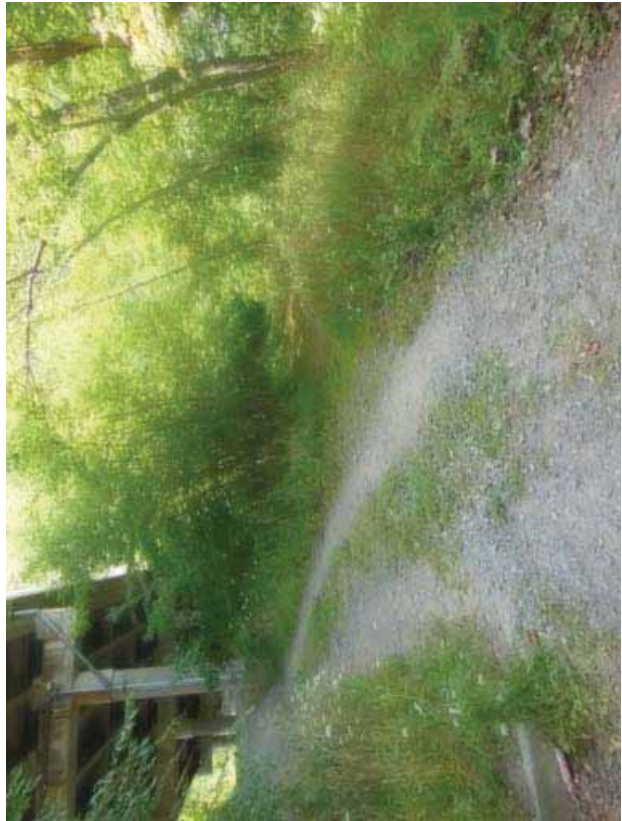


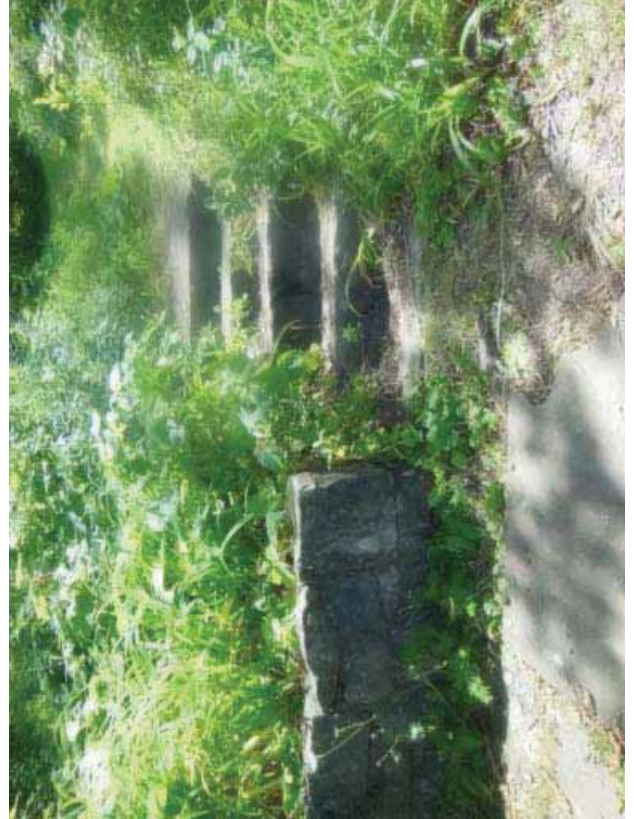
















Niagara Gorge Corridor
Niagara Falls, New York







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ATTACHMENT B
VIA WORKSHEETS


VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET						
PROJECT:	Robert Moses Parkway: Main Street to Findlay Drive			ALTERNATIVE:	Proposed Action	
LOCATION:	Robert Moses Parkway Trail Entrance on Main Street			KEY VIEW No.	1	
Photos	Existing			Proposed		
						
VIEWER GROUP:	Business employees Recreational Users Commuters			LANDSCAPE UNIT:	Business / Commercial	
	EXISTING		PROPOSED		CHANGE	
NATURAL HARMONY	The dominating presence of the Howard Johnson establishment does little to make this view memorable. The lack of any gateway feature makes the entrance difficult to identify and locate, both for pedestrians and motor vehicles. Given this, the view has been rated with a low natural harmony quality value.		The Howard Johnson building still does little to make this view memorable, but the addition of the gateway feature makes the entrance more identifiable and striking, both for pedestrians and motor vehicles. This results in an improved natural harmony visual quality value which is borderline between average and moderately high.		Natural harmony quality rating would increase from low to average/moderately high.	
	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	2	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	4.5	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	+2.5
CULTURAL ORDER	The vast majority of the view is constructed structure or paving. The minor presence of the vegetation buffer does little to improve on the visual encroachment caused by the presence of Main Street, with only the existing vegetation in the far background within the park providing some balance and integrity to the visual order of the portion of the park visible from the street. This view has been rated with a moderate to low sense of cultural order.		The vast majority of the view is still constructed structure or paving. The minor presence of vegetation buffer is encroached by the presence of Main Street, and existing vegetation in the far background within the park (now screened slightly by the new gateway element) give this view a moderately low visual quality of cultural order. However, the design of the gateway element does portray a sense of timelessness and character, increasing slightly the value of cultural order quality compared to the existing conditions to moderate/average.		Cultural order quality rating would increase slightly from moderately low to moderate/average.	
	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	3	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	4	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	+1
PROJECT COHERENCE	The existing construction and surrounding streets do not reinforce each other, and the lack of visual relationship between these, the hotel building, and the park vegetation give this view a very low project coherence quality value.		The use of natural stone for the gateway element integrates the structure into the surrounding landscape and park aesthetic, elevating the project coherence quality value of this view to moderate.		Project coherence quality rating would increase from very low to moderate.	
	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	1	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	3.5	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	+2.5
TOTALS	Total of Existing Ratings (V+I+U)	6	Total of Proposed Ratings (V+I+U)	12	Total of Change Ratings (V+I+U)	+6
	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	2	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	4	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	+2



VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET						
PROJECT:	Robert Moses Parkway: Main Street to Findlay Drive				ALTERNATIVE:	Proposed Action
LOCATION:	Niagara Gorge Discovery Center view towards Walnut Avenue			KEY VIEW No.	2	
Photos	Existing			Proposed		
						
	VIEWER GROUP:	Recreational Users Commuters		LANDSCAPE UNIT:	Riverfront / Recreation / State Park	
	EXISTING		PROPOSED		CHANGE	
NATURAL HARMONY	There are no perceivable visual patterns in the landscape within this view, or distant focal points. The lack of memorable elements within the view give it a very low quality natural harmony value, in spite of the park vegetation visible in the background.		The tree lined park street integrates this infrastructure into the landscape, offering a perceivable pattern/difference between planted areas along paved roads and the vegetation of the park itself, and providing a vegetated screen blocking out the view to the newly constructed Park Police building. The placement of Walnut Street directly in front of the Discovery Center brings attention to the distant focal point of the residential setting on Third Street, driving the eye away from the Park Police building as well. The long views to the north make this a unique vantage point with a view, increasing the visual natural harmony quality value further to moderate/average.		Natural harmony quality rating would increase from very low to moderate/average.	
	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	2	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	4	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	+2
CULTURAL ORDER	The RMP disrupts the view quite dominantly, dividing the vegetation and access between the Park amenities which are in close proximity of one and other. The construction currently reduces even further the value of cultural order, but given it is a temporary setback in this view, it has not been accounted for in the overall cultural order value, which is rated as moderately low.		With the disruption of the RMP and the pedestrian bridge gone, the sense of cultural order and greater integration of the paved areas with the landscape is improved. Roads still encroach on the visual setting, but the open views to the north counteract this effect, offering this view a moderately low visual cultural order quality.		Cultural order quality rating would increase slightly from moderately low to moderate/average.	
	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	2.5	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	3.5	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	+1
PROJECT COHERENCE	The RMP also reduces the project coherence value considerably by intersecting the natural landscape and increasing considerably the amount of paving visible from this point. Traffic signage reduces the project coherence value further, making the view confusing and jumbled for both pedestrians and motorists. The overall visual project coherence quality is rated as low.		The attention to the streetscape of the access road and narrower paved trails increase the visual coherence and compositional harmony of the landscape with the man made development present in the view, offering a moderate/average visual project coherence quality value.		Project coherence quality rating would increase from low to moderately low.	
	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	2.5	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	4.5	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	+2.5
TOTALS	Total of Existing Ratings (V+I+U)	7	Total of Proposed Ratings (V+I+U)	12	Total of Change Ratings (V+I+U)	+5.5
	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	2.3	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	4	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	+1.8



VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET						
PROJECT:	Robert Moses Parkway: Main Street to Findlay Drive				ALTERNATIVE:	Proposed Action
LOCATION:	South view at intersection of Third Street with Whirlpool Street			KEY VIEW No.	3	
Photos	Existing			Proposed		
						
VIEWER GROUP:	Business Employees Local Residents Recreational Users Commuters			LANDSCAPE UNIT:	Suburban Residential	
	EXISTING		PROPOSED		CHANGE	
NATURAL HARMONY	This view has no elements that make it particularly memorable, and there are no perceivable visual patterns present in the current landscape, providing a very low natural harmony quality value. The vegetation buffer offers little variety in texture, improving very little the natural harmony of the view.		The memorability of this view increases significantly with a greater depth in the vista towards the park and the gorge. Greater views of the landcover and vegetation raises the natural harmony visual value, as does the presence of the treeline along Whirlpool Street. The overall visual natural harmony quality value is increased to a moderate/average value.		The natural harmony quality rating would increase from very low to average.	
	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	1	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	4.5	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	+3.5
CULTURAL ORDER	The road blockade creates an eyesore for pedestrians and commuters, which contributes to the low visual cultural order of this view. There is no visual character in the man made structures along this stretch of Whirlpool Street, which has no visual elements which draw the eye or provide visual interest. The cultural order value for this view is rated as very low to low.		The treeline softens the urban setting and integrates the man made materials with the texture of the park edge. The extended view of the park in the background offers a greater sense of integrity in the visual order of its natural landscape, and the removal of the concrete barriers, signage, and white fence takes away disruptive elements that were present in the view in the existing conditions. Given this, the overall cultural order quality value has improved to a moderate/average value.		The visual cultural order quality rating would increase slightly from low/very low to moderate/average.	
	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	1.5	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	3.5	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	+2
PROJECT COHERENCE	The lack of compositional harmony or visual relation between the constructed elements and the natural landscape in this view lead to a low quality project coherence value.		This value is also increased by the presence of the tree line along Whirlpool Street, given that the inclusion of these natural elements integrate the street into the landscape of the park edge. The tree lawn and small vegetated island which diverts the traffic into the small parking adjacent to the park also aid in integrating the urban fabric with the park setting and texture, increasing the coherence of the view and consequently the visual project coherence quality, which in this case has a value of moderate to average.		The project coherence quality rating would increase from low to moderate/average.	
	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	2.5	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	3.5	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	+1.5
TOTALS	Total of Existing Ratings (V+I+U)	5	Total of Proposed Ratings (V+I+U)	11.5	Total of Change Ratings (V+I+U)	+6
	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	1.7	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	3.8	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	+2



VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET						
PROJECT:	Robert Moses Parkway: Main Street to Findlay Drive				ALTERNATIVE:	Proposed Action
LOCATION:	Abandoned RMP Parking Area near Niagara Gorge Overlook Opposite Orchard Pkwy.			KEY VIEW No.	4	
Photos	Existing			Proposed		
						
VIEWER GROUP:	Local Residents Recreational Users Commuters			LANDSCAPE UNIT:	Transportation Corridor	
	EXISTING		PROPOSED		CHANGE	
NATURAL HARMONY	The lack of contrasting components that could make this view visually distinctive make the natural harmony quality moderately low. The surrounding presence of dense vegetation masks landform and views of the gorge, reducing the degree of natural harmony. However, the newly planted trees and their spacing offer a different visual pattern and texture which improves the natural harmony of the view, and the variety of species in the older trees should offer a peak natural harmony quality in the fall. Factoring in all of these components, the overall natural harmony quality value is rated as moderate to average.		The opening in the vegetation, paired with the greater presence of the stone wall and the gorge beyond, greatly increase this value in the proposed option. The stone wall's form becomes more apparent, and its materials add visual interest and a contrasting pattern to the park's vegetation. In addition to this, the removal of the RMP provides greater stretches of green open space, making the park look larger and more spacious. The trails interweave between existing vegetation offering a pleasant visual balance between the man made elements and the natural. The overall natural harmony quality value for this view is moderately high.		The natural harmony quality rating would increase from moderate/average to moderately high.	
	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	4	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	5	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	+1
CULTURAL ORDER	The RMP lanes predominantly intersect the natural setting in this view, reducing the sense of the landscape being "untouched" and consequently the quality value of cultural order. The condition of the parking paving reduces the sense of visual integrity in the scene. However, the stone wall integrates well with the surrounding landscape elevating the cultural order provided by the man made elements in the view, although it is greatly screened by the existing vegetation. Overall cultural order quality value is moderate to moderately low.		The parking still acts as a moderately visually encroaching element in the view, but the stone wall provides a strong established visual character to the scene which counteracts this effect drawing the eye away from this area. The removal of the RMP considerably increases the sense of cultural order of the park landscape, which seems much more undisturbed or disrupted. The interweaving trails through the park do not disrupt the natural landscape very much. The overall cultural order of this view is average to moderately high.		The visual cultural order quality rating would increase from moderately low to average/moderately high.	
	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	3.5	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	4.5	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	+1
PROJECT COHERENCE	Although the RMP and parking area provide very little visual project coherence between man made and natural pattern elements, the stone wall along the gorge edge integrates well with the surrounding landscape raising the project coherence quality value in this view. The overall value of visual project coherence quality for this view is moderately low.		The materials used in the construction of the stone wall blend with the natural landscape nicely and its layout parallel to the gorge provides an integrated design with its setting. There is a visual relation between the trails and the vegetation in some areas, and the taller/thicker vegetation along the two edges of the park paired with the regular spacing of vegetation within provide a sense of order and compositional harmony increasing the visual project coherence quality value to moderately high.		The project coherence quality rating would increase from moderately low to moderately high.	
	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	3	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	5.5	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	+2.5
TOTALS	Total of Existing Ratings (V+I+U)		Total of Proposed Ratings (V+I+U)		Total of Change Ratings (V+I+U)	
	10.5	15	+4.5	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	3.5	+1.5

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET						
PROJECT:	Robert Moses Parkway: Main Street to Findlay Drive				ALTERNATIVE:	Proposed Action
LOCATION:	South view at intersection of Whirlpool Street with Pierce Avenue			KEY VIEW No.	5	
Photos	Existing			Proposed		
						
VIEWER GROUP:	Business Employees Recreational Users Commuters			LANDSCAPE UNIT:	Transportation Corridor	
	EXISTING		PROPOSED		CHANGE	
NATURAL HARMONY	This view has few elements that make it particularly memorable, and only visual pattern and texture present in the current landscape is provided by the vegetation buffer and residential front lawn vegetation. The overall visual natural harmony quality value has been rated at moderate to moderately low.		The additional texture of the paving used to mark key access points into the park provides some visual contrast in the streetscape. The new tree lines and extended tree lawns increase the natural harmony value considerably providing additional texture and visual interest to the view. Extended views to the park also increase the natural harmony, which would experience a peak during the fall with the variety of colors and patterns the park vegetation would provide. The overall visual natural harmony quality value has been rated as high.		The natural harmony quality rating would increase from low to high.	
	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	3.5	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	5.5	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	+2
CULTURAL ORDER	The white fence is an eyesore for pedestrians and commuters, which contributes to the low visual cultural order of this view. There is no visual character in the man made structures along this stretch of Whirlpool Street, which has no visual elements which draw the eye, and the lack of balance between the vegetation and the streetscape provides no visual interest. The visual cultural order quality value of this view is rated as low.		The reduction of lanes of Whirlpool Street make it a less dominant element in the view, and the addition of different paving in the access points provide additional visual character to the street. The street trees integrate the park landscape into the urban fabric and reduce the visual encroachment against the natural landscape. The overall value of the cultural order has been rated at moderately high.		The visual cultural order quality rating would increase from moderately low to moderately high.	
	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	2.5	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	5	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	+2.5
PROJECT COHERENCE	The lack of transition from the streetscape to both the park and residential sides offers a very low visual project coherence quality value. There is poor integration of the man made elements with the natural landscape, with a low visual relation between the two. The overall project coherence quality value is very low.		The clear transition from the streetscape to both the park and residential sides offers a notable improvement in the visual project coherence quality value. There is a better integration of the man made elements with the natural landscape, with a much higher visual relation between the two provided by the treeline and paved connections to the park trails. The overall project coherence quality value is high.		The project coherence quality rating would increase from low to high.	
	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	1.5	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	6	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	+4.5
TOTALS	Total of Existing Ratings (V+I+U)	7.5	Total of Proposed Ratings (V+I+U)	16.5	Total of Change Ratings (V+I+U)	+9
	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	2.5	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	5.5	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	+3

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET						
PROJECT:	Robert Moses Parkway: Main Street to Findlay Drive				ALTERNATIVE:	Proposed Action
LOCATION:	View under RMP Viaduct at intersection of Whirlpool Street and Ontario Avenue			KEY VIEW No.	6	
Photos	Existing			Proposed		
						
	VIEWER GROUP:	Commuters Business employees Recreational Users Local Residents		LANDSCAPE UNIT:	Business/Commercial	
	EXISTING		PROPOSED		CHANGE	
NATURAL HARMONY	The lack of distinctive visual landscape components that bring character and appeal to the view provide for a very low visual natural harmony quality value, which is solely improved marginally by the presence of the iron structure of Whirlpool Bridge and the old stone abutment in the background. The lack of vegetation reduces the degree of natural harmony in the scene, as does the darkness cast under the overpass. The overall natural harmony value for this view is rated as low.		The Secondary Gateway elements are a distinctive feature which draws attention to the old bridge abutment behind, providing a unique visual character to this stretch of Whirlpool Street. The greater presence of the structure of Whirlpool Bridge increases the natural harmony further, as do the tree lines added on either side of the street. Finally, the more visible presence of the gorge increases the memorability of this view. The overall natural harmony value rated for this view is moderately high.		The natural harmony quality rating would increase from low/moderately low to moderately high.	
	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	2.5	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	5	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	+2.5
CULTURAL ORDER	The overpass raises considerably the visual encroachment of this view, and draws the eye away from other elements that provide character to this area. There is little visible pattern within the man made elements of the view, and the visual order of an undisturbed natural landscape is unapparent. The value of visual cultural order quality has been rated as very low.		The still heavy presence of Whirlpool Street and railway bridge take away from the more visually appealing elements. The man made development in this setting as a whole encroach on the visual setting of the natural landscape of the park and gorge. This value has been improved however by the addition of the tree line along the street, creating a greater balance between the artificial elements and the natural. Overall, the value of cultural order for this view is moderate/average.		The visual cultural order quality rating would increase from low to moderate/average.	
	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	1.5	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	4.5	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	+3.5
PROJECT COHERENCE	The visual elements within this view do not form a coherent or balanced visual pattern. There are little to no natural elements included in this predominantly man made setting, or any visual relation between the structures and street with the park. Given this, the visual project coherence quality value of this view is low.		The greater visibility of the bridge abutment and matching aesthetic of the Secondary Gateway elements increase the visual project coherence of this scene. The greener streetscape of Whirlpool Street, paired with the removal of the overpass, greatly improve the transition between the urban setting and the park. The open views to the parking and beyond also offer a greater visual readability and project coherence of the scene. The overall visual project coherence quality value for this proposed view has increased to moderately high.		The project coherence quality rating would increase from low to moderately high.	
	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	2	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	5.5	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	+3.5
TOTALS	Total of Existing Ratings (V+I+U)	6	Total of Proposed Ratings (V+I+U)	15	Total of Change Ratings (V+I+U)	+9.5
	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	2	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	5	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	+3.2

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET						
PROJECT:	Robert Moses Parkway: Main Street to Findlay Drive				ALTERNATIVE:	Proposed Action
LOCATION:	South view at intersection of Whirlpool Street with Chasm Avenue			KEY VIEW No.	7	
Photos	Existing			Proposed		
						
VIEWER GROUP:	Local Residents Commuters			LANDSCAPE UNIT:	Suburban Residential	
	EXISTING		PROPOSED		CHANGE	
NATURAL HARMONY	<p>The open views to the park and gorge, and even to the buildings from the Canadian side, increase the memorability of this view. The well established tree line integrates the streetscape with the park edge efficiently, and the open/grassy spaces visible within the park contrast with the larger trees in the fore and background. The overall value of natural harmony visual quality in this view is rated at moderately high.</p>		<p>The views towards the park and presence of the gorge are more apparent with the removal of the RMP, and the open lawns and natural meadows visible increase remarkably the memorability of this view. The well established tree line integrates the streetscape well with the park edge, and the widened tree lawn provides a better balance between the natural elements visible and the street. The overall visual natural harmony quality value of this view has been rated as high.</p>		<p>The natural harmony quality rating would increase from moderate/average to moderately high/high.</p>	
	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	4.5	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	5.5	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	+1
CULTURAL ORDER	<p>This view has no notable visually encroaching elements, and the overall integrity of the visual pattern is quite cohesive. The RMP does present a clear visual disturbance in the views of the park however, and Whirlpool Street still remains as a dominant element which drives the viewer's eye. The overall visual cultural order quality value is rated as moderate/average.</p>		<p>The removal of the RMP reduces drastically the visual disturbance in the views of the park, and the improved streetscape of Whirlpool draws the eye away from the street and towards the park. The removal of the RMP also increases the depth of the views to the park, which looks wider and with no visual disturbance other than the gorge itself. The overall visual cultural order quality value is rated as high.</p>		<p>The visual cultural order quality rating would increase from moderate to moderately high.</p>	
	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	3.5	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	5.5	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	+2
PROJECT COHERENCE	<p>The tree lines along Whirlpool Street integrate the residential/suburban fabric transition smoothly into the park edge and beyond, although this visual project coherence is disrupted by the presence of the RMP in the background, which intersects the natural landscape of the park. Overall visual project coherence quality value is moderately high.</p>		<p>The improved and extended tree lawns along Whirlpool Street integrate the residential/suburban fabric transition even more smoothly than before into the park edge and beyond. The balance of trees, open lawns, and natural meadows provide a harmonious visual pattern, which is complemented nicely with the street trees of Whirlpool Street and the front gardens of the residences facing the park. The overall visual project coherence quality value for this proposed view is high.</p>		<p>The project coherence quality rating would increase from moderately high to high.</p>	
	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	5	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	6	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	+1
TOTALS	Total of Existing Ratings (V+I+U)	13	Total of Proposed Ratings (V+I+U)	17	Total of Change Ratings (V+I+U)	+4
	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	4.3	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	5.7	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	+1.3

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET						
PROJECT:	Robert Moses Parkway: Main Street to Findlay Drive				ALTERNATIVE:	Proposed Action
LOCATION:	South view of RMP opposite Chasm Avenue			KEY VIEW No.	8	
Photos	Existing			Proposed		
						
	VIEWER GROUP:	Recreational Users Commuters		LANDSCAPE UNIT:	Transportation Corridor	
	EXISTING		PROPOSED		CHANGE	
NATURAL HARMONY	Although the natural harmony value is disrupted by the presence of the RMP, the overall value is rated moderate to moderately high given the richness and textures of the natural landscape of the park and presence of the gorge.		The complete removal of the RMP increases the existing natural harmony value, and the more extensive lawns and naturalized meadows provide greater richness and textures to the natural landscape of the park. The linearity of the taller vegetation along the edges of the park direct the viewers sight to the distant focal point near Whirlpool Bridge, increasing the memorability of this scene. The overall visual natural harmony quality value for this proposed view has been rated at high to very high.		The natural harmony quality rating would increase from moderate/moderately high to high/very high.	
	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	4.5	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	6.5	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	+2
CULTURAL ORDER	The RMP produces a clear visual encroachment in the current view, splitting and disrupting the natural landscape of the park and offering no visual integrity with the surrounding elements. Given this, the value of visual cultural order quality for this view has been rated as low.		This open view of the park now presents no disrupting elements within its natural landscape, comprised of different vegetation masses of grasses, thickets, and trees, which provide a more coherent visual pattern.. Given this, the value of visual cultural order quality for this view has increased to moderately high.		The visual cultural order quality rating would increase from moderately low/low to moderately high.	
	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	2.5	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	5	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	+2.5
PROJECT COHERENCE	There is little to no project coherence visible between the RMP and the surrounding park. The mowed fringes along the edge of the paving offers a slight transition from the impervious surface of the RMP to the natural meadows and thickets on either side of this element. The overall visual project coherence quality value is rated as low.		This park landscape presents a variety of natural patterns which reinforce each other offering a coherent and harmonious view. The overall visual project coherence quality value of this value was rated at high.		The project coherence quality rating would increase from low to high.	
	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	2	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	5.5	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	+3.5
TOTALS	Total of Existing Ratings (V+I+U)	9	Total of Proposed Ratings (V+I+U)	17	Total of Change Ratings (V+I+U)	+8
	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	3	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	5.7	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	+2.7

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET						
PROJECT:	Robert Moses Parkway: Main Street to Findlay Drive				ALTERNATIVE:	Proposed Action
LOCATION:	View along Northbound RMP at intersection with Findlay Drive			KEY VIEW No.	9	
Photos	Existing			Proposed		
						
VIEWER GROUP:	Recreational Users Commuters			LANDSCAPE UNIT:	Transportation Corridor	
	EXISTING		PROPOSED		CHANGE	
NATURAL HARMONY	The RMP dominates this view, disrupting the natural landscape of the park and reducing the visual natural harmony. The various textures provided by the natural elements, and large Chinquapin Oak stands in the background bring some memorability to the view, providing an overall moderate/average visual natural harmony quality value.		The removal of the dominant element of the RMP from this view, enhances the natural landscape of the park and the additional green space brings more the visual natural harmony to the scene. The various textures provided by the natural elements, and large Chinquapin Oak stands in the background bring more memorability to the view and are now the focal point of the viewer, providing an overall high visual natural harmony quality value.		The natural harmony quality rating would increase from moderate to high.	
	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	4	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	6	NATURAL HARMONY RATING:	+2
CULTURAL ORDER	The strong contrast the RMP provides against the park vegetation detracts the viewers attention from the other elements in sight. The large bright green signage is also disruptive to the eye and the only cultural order provided comes from the visual integrity coming from the park vegetation and landscape. Given this, the overall cultural order value has been quantified as moderately low.		The cultural order in this view is now provided by the visual integrity coming from the park vegetation and landscape, which is now lacking the visual disruption caused by the RMP. The overall cultural order value has been quantified as moderately high.		The visual cultural order quality rating would increase from moderately low to moderately high.	
	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	3	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	5.5	CULTURAL ORDER RATING:	+2.5
PROJECT COHERENCE	There is little project coherence visible between the RMP and the surrounding park, with only the mowed fringes along the edge of the paving offering a slight transition from the RMP to the natural meadows and thickets on either side of this element. The overall visual project coherence quality value is rated at low.		The value of visual project coherence quality has benefitted greatly in this view with the removal of the RMP, and either sides of what once was pavement are now connected by lawn and natural meadow grasses which bring a greater harmonious visual pattern to the scene and make for a more coherent relationship between the elements in the view. The overall visual project coherence quality value was rated as high.		The project coherence quality rating would increase from low to moderately high/high.	
	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	2	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	5.5	PROJECT COHERENCE RATING:	+3.5
TOTALS	Total of Existing Ratings (V+I+U)	9	Total of Proposed Ratings (V+I+U)	16.5	Total of Change Ratings (V+I+U)	+8
	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	3	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	5.5	Visual Quality (V+I+U)/3	+2.7