

# Elevating Erie Challenge



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# Overview

The Elevating Erie Challenge is a state funded project led by the City of Syracuse and Town of Dewitt who seek ideas to transform Erie Blvd from its current form as an unattractive arterial road lined by one-story setback commercial buildings and plazas into a more urban, mixed-use, and dense “complete streets” environment, and to create a well-defined extension of the Canalway Trail along its length.

# Elevating Erie Challenge: Scope

- Improve development potential of Erie Blvd from Teall Ave to E. Genesee St. by transitioning to a more urban, dense, pedestrian/bicycle friendly, “complete streets” environment.
- Establish prominent markings for the Canalway Trail, including a pedestrian/bicycle route that follows the old Erie Canal.
- Develop the land parcel at Teall Ave.
- Develop the Land parcel at Bridge St.
- Canalway pedestrian/bicycle bridge at I-481.

# Should Erie Blvd be changed?

A legitimate question. Perhaps its current form is appropriate at this time and in the foreseeable future.

## Cons:

- It is an arterial road designed for cars but seemingly appropriate for the suburban development it serves.
- It is not yet clear whether there is demand or latent demand for a more dense and urban development.
- Are there sufficiently strong governmental tools (city planners, funding for new public infrastructure, new zoning, etc.) to spur the desired changes?
- Are current business owners and property owners open to considering dramatic changes to the street?

# Should Erie Blvd be changed?

## Pros:

- Added bicycle and public transit specific infrastructure.
- Added Canalway Trail infrastructure.
- Added roundabouts to reduce travel lanes and improve traffic efficiency.
- More attractive parkway to attract hotel, office, and residential development.
- More efficient public transit by creating densely populated streets.
- More tax revenue via higher value mid-rise development.
- A strong urban link between Syracuse, Dewitt, and future Shoppingtown redevelopment.

# Which developers will come?

**Why are there residential subdivisions?** -- They are a convenient and profitable path for large-scale developers; but, more profoundly, they arise due to lack of public urban planning.

**Why are their office parks?** -- They are a convenient and profitable path for large-scale developers; but, more profoundly, they arise due to lack of public urban planning.

**Why are there “hotel parks”** (e.g., Salina, Carrier Circle)? ...You get the idea...

A hotelier would surely prefer building along an elegant avenue rather than a small road off an unattractive arterial. Likewise for an office or residential building developer.

# Scenario for change

There must be a clear plan and demonstrated commitment by local government in order to assure developers their investment in the new boulevard vision will be secure and successful.

**Government will have to build the new public infrastructure first in order to prove its commitment to the new development.**

# Steps to Change: 1

Rebuild the Erie Blvd road as an urban boulevard:

- Add roundabouts for efficiency and to shrink the required road width;
- Add 15ft-20ft wide sidewalks in anticipation of, and commitment to, future frontage redevelopment;
- Bury utility wires and add municipal conduit for broadband infrastructure. (cheap to do while street is dug up);
- Add attractive street lights (the kind that shine broadly to street and buildings equally);
- Consider on-street parking, bicycle lane, and rapid transit infrastructure.

# Steps to Change: 2

Create new “form based” zoning that details the new type of development that is expected and encouraged along the street. Presumably:

- Multi-story (e.g., 4-7 or more, with exceptions); mixed-use with commercial ground floor;
- Buildings built to sidewalk (with exceptions);
- Parking requirements determined by zone, not by individual property (more shared parking).

# Steps toward Change: 3

Publicize the infrastructure redesign, re-zoning, and development opportunities to developers.

**Create a prime located ready to build site with pre-built public infrastructure and they will come.**

# What will they dare build first?

- A hotel? One at Thompson Rd has already been built; a revised boulevard should attract others.
- An office building? A mixed-use neighborhood walkable to restaurants is more desirable to tenants than an office park.
- After a few hotels and office buildings go up, mid-rise residential structures will become marketable.
- By this point, all property owners will explore selling or redeveloping their single story low value structures into mid-rise, mixed-use buildings.

# Erie Blvd design options: Simple

- Create uniform small median (representing canal), roundabouts at major junctions, and wide sidewalks.
- Consider extra wide sidewalk or protected lane on north side appropriately marked to represent the Canalway Trail, and accommodate cyclists.
- However, the Syracuse leg of Erie Blvd has limited space for such amenities.

# Erie Blvd design: Parkway

- Create ~80ft or greater green median fronted by boulevard at either side and buildings beyond.
- 2 travel lanes (per side), one parking lane, and wide sidewalks, 15ft-20ft.
- Roundabouts at major junctions for efficiency and reduced travel lane requirements.
- Use median for bicycles, jogging, Canalway Trail, and rapid transit.
- Convert some plaza roads into public streets to encourage an urban form and denser development of the shopping plaza areas.

# Erie Blvd design: Parkway



Example rendering

(Ignore road dimensions)

# Erie Blvd in Syracuse: Greenway (1)

A redesign of Erie Blvd must consider the Syracuse leg to make sense. An analysis of Erie Blvd through Syracuse suggests that a greenway would fit exceedingly well in the street grid, especially if the I-81 redevelopment takes a sensible path:

- Before Erie Blvd, buildings north and south of the canal were serviced by Canal St (which extended to near Clinton Square) and Water St, respectively. These roads today are very lightly used (Water St) or serve as little more than a private drive (Canal St). They, plus Washington St, could be upgraded to easily replace Erie Blvd west of Teall Ave.

# Erie Blvd in Syracuse: Greenway (2)

- Eliminating Erie Blvd to Clinton Square would also eliminate roughly 1 dozen intersections. Erie Blvd is clearly redundant as it sits between Water St and Canal St, which already form only a 1/2 block between them.
- West of Clinton Square, an upgraded Tracy St would serve the north side buildings, and an extended Water St or Washington St situated just north of the railroad would service the south side buildings---replacing the long disappeared Auburn St.
- An east-west greenway would create a fantastic new physical feature in Syracuse.

# Erie Blvd in Syracuse: Greenway (3)



Example rendering

# Erie Blvd in Syracuse: Greenway (4)

From today's perspective, the canalway within Syracuse should never have been turned into a street.

It is redundant on the street grid, and there seems no point to it; It was most likely just a default course of action.

Too bad they didn't turn it into a greenway back then.

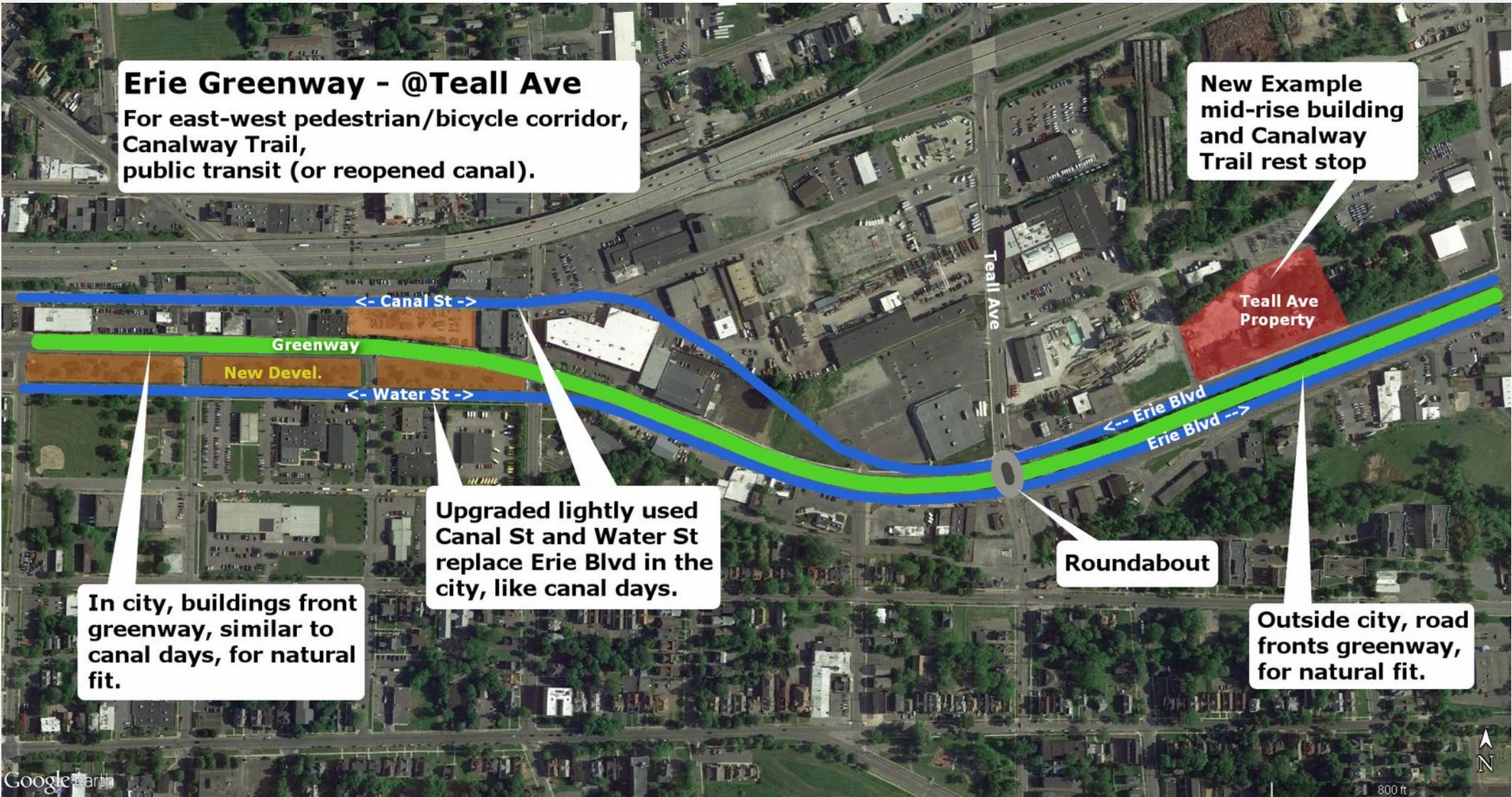
The city was exploring a north/south “Onondaga Creek Parkway” in 1919 Syracuse Comprehensive Plan. We would be enjoying a fully developed greenway today.

# Teall Ave property use?

1. Sell to a developer who will build a new major mixed-use structure (at least 5-7 stories) that exemplifies the new form-based zoning.
2. Build a small park or public space serving the Canalway Trail:
  - An information hut, outdoor sign/map, public restrooms, drinking fountain, picnic tables, bus stop.

The land parcel may accommodate both uses.

# Teall Ave property use?

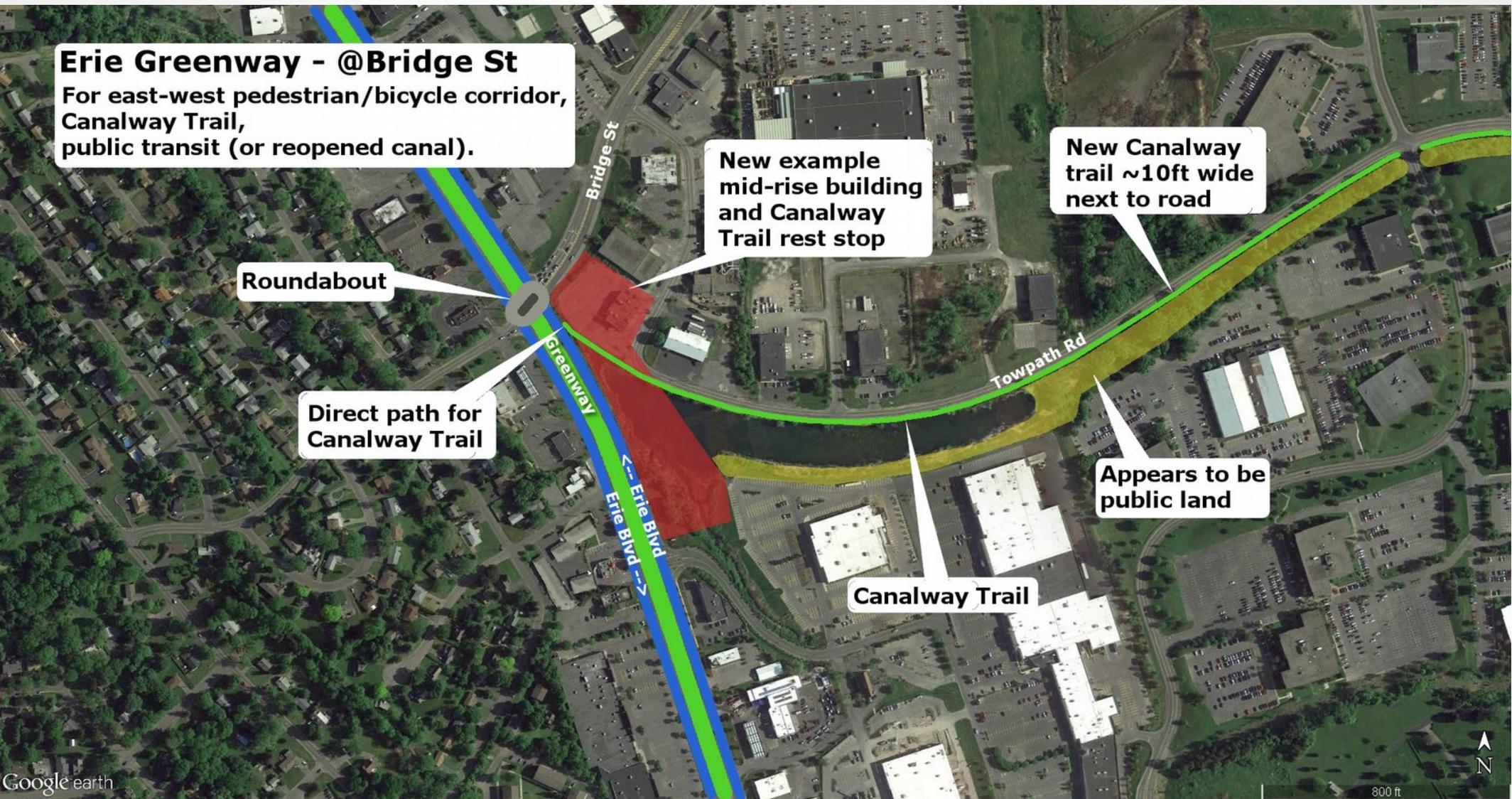


# Bridge St property use?

This property includes an old widewaters of the canal, and is also where the canal deviates from Erie Blvd. This feature makes it a strong candidate for a small Canalway Trail Park and rest stop:

- Information hut, outdoor sign/map, public restrooms, drinking fountain, picnic tables, bus stop.
- Possible concession stand: ice-cream, snacks, fast food.

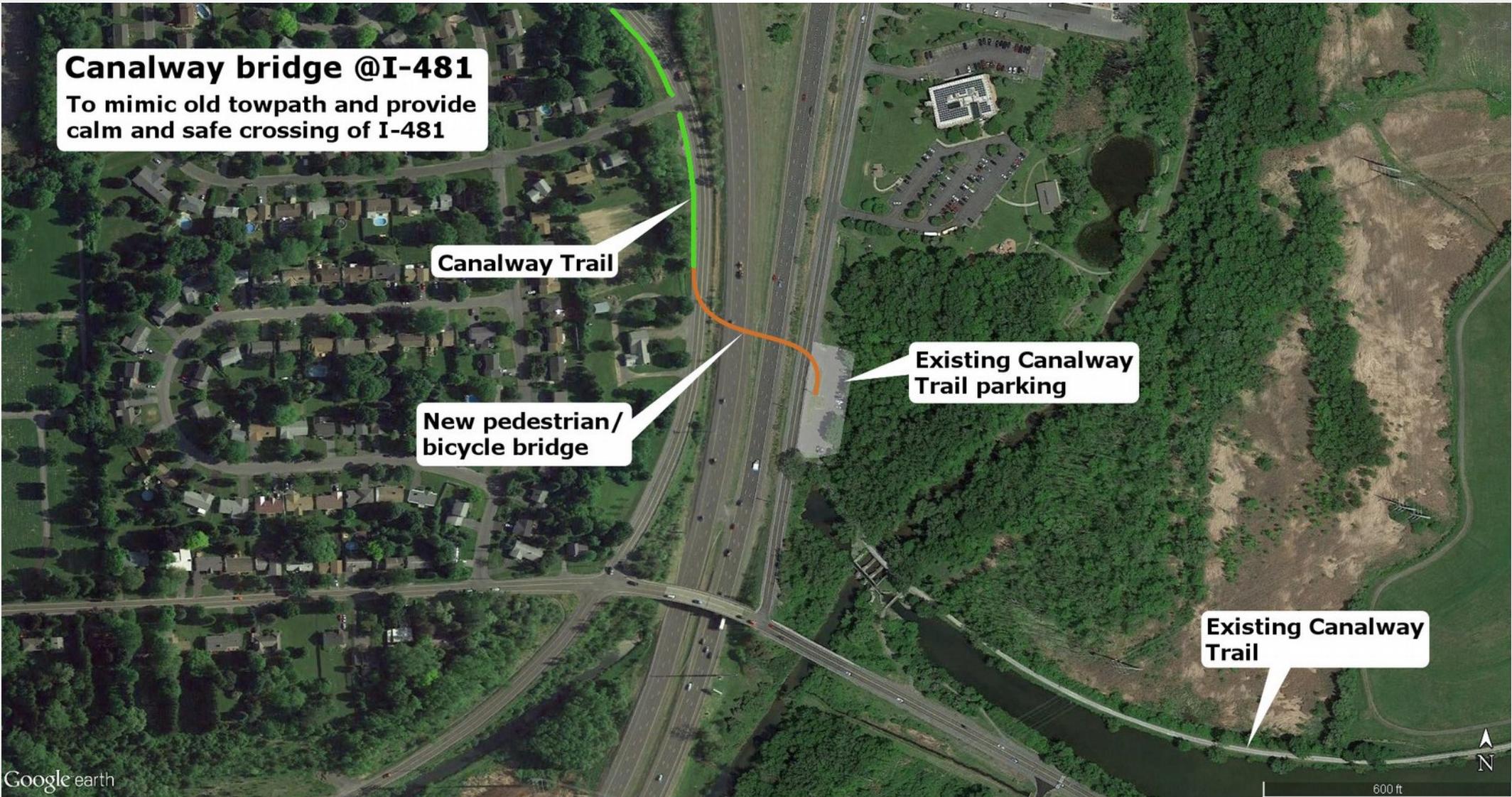
# Bridge St property use?



# Towpath Rd

- Create a direct bicycle/pedestrian path to Towpath Rd at the corner of Erie Blvd and Bridge St to mimic the original towpath.
- Create a well-marked, at least 10ft wide, bicycle/pedestrian way along the southern shoulder of Towpath Rd to mimic the old towpath.
- There appears to be an existing public ROW parcel to facilitate this.

# Towpath Rd



# I-481 pedestrian bridge

Construct a pedestrian/bicycle bridge to cross over I-481 where the old towpath use to be. This bridge, dedicated to serving the Canalway Trail, will provide a calm and safe crossing in keeping with the Canalway experience while also marking the old canal path.

# I-481 pedestrian bridge



Example rendering

# Reopen the canal: crazy?

Re-establishing the canal may at first seem unrealistic and pointless. However, upon deeper investigation, it appears quite doable, and even “fitting” and possibly advantageous:

- It's more economically feasible while the boulevard is already dug up for modifications.
- It would contribute spectacularly to the Elevating Erie project goals of attracting mixed-use development and re-establishing the Canalway trail.
- It would be a huge attractor to new development and redevelopment throughout Syracuse and Dewitt.

# Dewitt Canal image



Example rendering

(Ignore road dimensions)



# Future Vision: More streets

An urbanized and higher density Erie Blvd implies more people and more adjacent development. This will inevitably lead to a need for additional streets (if not for cars, then for people and public transit) in the valley in which Erie Blvd sits.

To the north, the old fragmented Canal St could be revived. To the south, there is space (some to be cleared) for a second road, which could also help the adjacent residential area tie into the boulevard area better.

# Future Vision: Pure greenway

At some point, if the two roads are created, Erie Blvd east of Teall Ave could optionally be closed and turned into a dedicated greenway, as is proposed for within Syracuse, creating a truly calm environment and a tremendous attractor for mixed-use development.

This would create an iconic community enhancing 4-mile park and a “picture postcard” tourist destination of national renown.

# Conclusion

Assuming a clear and irreversible municipal commitment, it is possible to transform Erie Blvd into a parkway in Dewitt and a greenway in Syracuse to create a calm, safe, and attractive east-west pedestrian, bicycle, and public transit path; a fantastic physical feature able to attract numerous new mid-rise mixed-use development opportunities along its length.

The path also creates an ideal environment to extend the Canalway Trail, and also paves the way to reopen the canal as an option, either in the initial project or in the future.

Thank You