

# C. TOURISM

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an important industry in cities, as it is an economic driver and is reflective of civic pride. Rochester is home to many unique spaces, events, and buildings, making it a center of culture that attracts thousands of visitors from around the region and the world.

The Finger Lakes Region, consisting of 14 counties in Upstate New York, saw a 2.4% increase in traveler spending in 2017, to a total of over \$3 billion.

Roughly one third of this was spent in the City of Rochester. Tourism in the region supports over 58,000 jobs, generates \$925 million in direct labor income, and \$229 million in local taxes.

Visit Rochester is the official tourism promotion agency for Monroe County; they also do extensive promotions for the larger Finger Lakes Region. They are a membership-based organization, boasting more than 400 members including the lodging, retail, restaurant and service industries as well as community organizations. The Finger Lakes Regional Tourism Council serves a similar role, but covers the larger 14-county region, in which Rochester is the largest city.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Tourism is an economic driver – an average visitor spends \$240-\$450 on Rochester hotels, restaurants, museums, and shops each day.
- Rochester's variety of natural, historical, cultural, and business assets are all things that can attract visitors.
- Better promotion of events and amenities can be enhanced through community partnerships.
- Tourism is an opportunity for residents to build community pride by showing off our unique identity and assets to visitors.

### PUBLIC COMMENT

**“We need to get young entrepreneurs in the city and make this a destination place! Capitalize on tourism.”**

## BENEFITS OF TOURISM

### VISITOR SPENDING

According to Visit Rochester, an average visitor here spends roughly \$240-\$450 per day. This money is pumped into the local economy through shopping, eating at restaurants, and visiting museums, theaters, and festivals – all of which supports the jobs and businesses of local Rochesterians. New tax dollars from these businesses direct money into municipal funds to be spent on other areas such as infrastructure and public projects. According to the Finger Lakes Regional Tourism Council, the average household in the region would have to pay an additional \$495 to maintain the same level of government revenue.

### STRENGTHENED LOCAL IDENTITY AND CULTURE

Rochester has a rich collection of arts, culture, destinations, and neighborhoods/districts. Tourism is an opportunity for residents to show off our unique identity to visitors. By building on assets and promoting them to visitors unfamiliar with the city, Rochester can reinforce its identity and create pride for the residents who live here. More specifically, as Rochester turns the corner after decades of decline, its increasing attractiveness to visitors and those relocating here contributes to a reversal of negative perceptions that is especially meaningful to locals.



### INCREASED INVESTMENT

When visitors come to a city, they patronize local businesses, talk with residents, and explore the area. By enhancing these experiences, visitors may be encouraged to invest in the city, whether it's by buying a home, pursuing local employment, starting a business, or simply visiting again in the future. The more positive experiences people have in Rochester, the more likely they are to make the city a part of their future. As much larger cities become increasingly more expensive and crowded, legacy cities like Rochester become more viable choices because of their affordability and more reasonable pace of life.





## C. TOURISM (CONTINUED)

### PUBLIC COMMENT

“Please find a way to advertise events better. I know people who have lived here their whole lives and don’t even know about some of the festivals and activities.”

## CAPITALIZING ON ROCHESTER’S STRENGTHS + AMENITIES

### WATER

Waterfront areas present important activity hubs for visitors and provide visitor entryways into the city. Waterfront attractions are key economic drivers and should be part of any economic development vision and planning. Rochester and the surrounding region has one of the most unique and varied collections of water features of any metropolitan area.

The city features the Genesee River, with its highly diverse array of settings as it flows through Rochester, as well as the Erie Canal and Lake Ontario. Beyond that, the region boasts Irondequoit, Braddock, and Sodus Bays and the 11 Finger Lakes. There are three waterfalls along the Genesee, making Rochester the only large city in the country with a downtown waterfall.

The river has been named a Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat of State-Wide Significance, branding it as a regional center for fishing. The river also forms a

highly unusual four-way “intersection” with the Erie Canal within Genesee Valley Park, framed by historic footbridges designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. Also intersecting at this point are the Genesee Riverway Trail, Genesee Valley Greenway, and Erie Canalway Trail, three of the most significant multi-use trails in the state.

**The ROC the Riverway initiative has brought a renewed sense of hope to Rochester’s downtown waterfront. It has rebranded the Genesee River from an abandoned industrial waterfront to a recreational asset that will benefit residents and visitors.** More information can be found on the [project website](#).

At the mouth of the Genesee River at Lake Ontario, the Port of Rochester boasts a new state of the art



## CAPITALIZING ON ROCHESTER'S STRENGTHS + AMENITIES CONTINUED

### MARKET NEW YORK GRANT

Market New York is a grant program funded by Empire State Development that supports regionally themed marketing projects that promote tourism destinations, attractions and special events, as well as tourism facility capital improvement projects. Eligible applicants include municipalities, tourism promotional agencies, and not-for-profit and private companies.

In 2017, the Rochester Museum and Science Center was awarded a \$1 million Market New York Grant. The museum plans to use the money to undertake Phase 2 of a renovation project to construct a 4,000 square foot Gateway Building to bridge the gap between the Museum and Strasenburgh Planetarium.

marina that welcomes boaters visiting from all over the United States and Canada. It is widely regarded as the highest quality marina on Lake Ontario's southern shore. The tourism potential at the Port is not yet fully realized, as the new marina is just beginning to increase boating traffic and a major development site is now poised for a mixed-use infill project.

The South River Corridor, also known as Erie Harbor, is part of the Erie Canal system. The ROC the Riverway initiative aims to dramatically increase boating activity in this corridor by providing better boating facilities and amenities, improved parks and trails, more programming, and the reestablishment of a tour boat. These improvements should attract more Erie Canal traffic and increase usage of the city's segment of the canal.





### CAPITALIZING ON ROCHESTER'S STRENGTHS + AMENITIES CONTINUED

#### HISTORY

Rochester's rich history is a centerpiece of the tourism industry. It is bolstered by being the home and final resting place of freedom-fighter and abolitionist Frederick Douglass and suffragist Susan B. Anthony. Rochester has an extensive history as a center for social justice and human rights – with key stops along the Underground Railroad. The Susan B. Anthony House attracts thousands of visitors a year.

George Eastman had arguably the single greatest impact on the city through the massive success and footprint of Eastman Kodak Company and his widespread philanthropic efforts. The George Eastman Museum, founded in 1947, is the world's oldest photography museum and attracts over 100,000 visitors a year. The wealth generated by his company, and the resulting economic ripple effects, contributed to an abundance of ornate homes, institutional centers, and commercial buildings. History enthusiasts can enjoy tours of many well-preserved neighborhoods, sites, and architectural gems throughout Rochester.



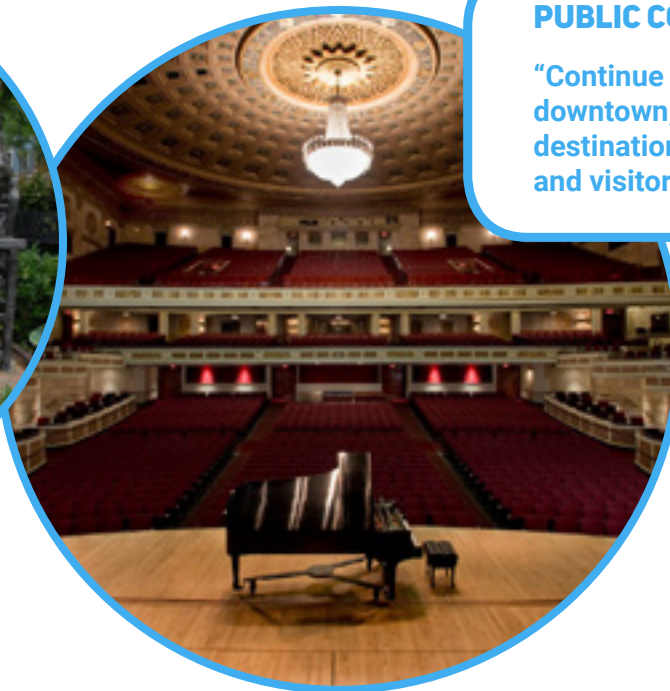
## CAPITALIZING ON ROCHESTER'S STRENGTHS + AMENITIES CONTINUED

### ARTS AND CULTURE

[Initiative Area 3-Section C, Arts and Culture](#), describes Rochester's arts and culture scene, which is often noted as being unusually robust for a city of our size. This scene is one of the primary drivers of tourism in the city, from museums to performances, from cultural celebrations to ethnic restaurants, and from major destinations to individual creators. Despite its successes, there is room for improvement with regards to coordination within the industry. Greater collaboration on promotions and programming can leverage investments. Stronger arts advocacy and increased support from the City can increase patrons while strengthening these pursuits as viable careers or as a source of supplemental income.

### BUSINESSES

The business community and the tourist community mutually benefit each other, as businesses thrive when patronized by a mixture of residents and visitors. Rochester is home to thousands of businesses, many of which are independently owned and operated by locals. Visitors have the option to patronize an eclectic mix of businesses, including retail stores, entertainment venues, and restaurants. Recent years have seen a growth in creative establishments, especially in food and entertainment, which feature the vibe of much larger cities and have contributed to a growing sense of optimism in Rochester's future.



#### PUBLIC COMMENT

**"Continue to revitalize downtown, making it a destination for locals and visitors alike."**

## C. TOURISM (CONTINUED)

### CAPITALIZING ON ROCHESTER'S STRENGTHS + AMENITIES CONTINUED

#### PARKS

Rochester has more than 3,500 acres of parks, including the aforementioned Olmsted-designed system. The parks are diverse in physical attributes and amenities and therefore offer a range of opportunities for visitors. Beaches, picnic areas, hiking trails, arboretums, wildlife viewing areas, athletic facilities, and robust programming for youth make the system highly beneficial to residents and visitors alike. More information can be found in [Initiative Area 4-Section B, Parks, Recreation, and Open Space](#).

#### EVENTS

Rochester is home to many highly-successful events focused on food, music, arts, and culture. The festival season kicks-off with the Lilac Festival at Highland Park, home to the world's largest lilac collection, where hundreds of thousands of visitors enjoy the 10-day festival each year. The Corn Hill Arts Festival, Park Avenue Festival, Clothesline Festival, Rochester Pride, Puerto Rican Festival, Fringe Festival, Image Out Film Festival, and Rochester International Jazz Festival are just a sampling of the more than 100 festivals offered throughout the year. Rochester even hosts a popular winter event, the Lakeside Winter Celebration at Ontario Beach Park, which features the Annual Lake Ontario Wine and Craft Beer Festival, Polar Plunge, and Chili Challenge. Understanding and maximizing the economic impact of these events should be part of the City's economic development planning.



#### OLMSTED PARKS

Rochester is fortunate to be one of only four American cities that have a comprehensive park system designed by one of the most revered landscape architects in American history, Frederick Law Olmsted. Olmsted, who also designed New York City's Central Park, was commissioned in 1888 to design an exceptional urban park system which resulted in Genesee Valley Park, Highland Park, Seneca Park, and Maplewood Park. Today, these parks remain outstanding examples of Olmsted's pastoral designs.



## PUBLIC COMMENT

“The festivals in all neighborhoods are what makes the city breathe. Now keep them safe and family friendly.”

## LOOKING AHEAD

In future years, reaching the full potential of these various tourism generators will have a substantial impact on the local economy and overall sense of pride in Rochester. The City should continue to stay on the leading edge of trends related to amenities desired by visitors and those considering relocating to Rochester. This includes mobility choices, urban outdoor adventuring, the ever changing lodging industry, trends in conventions, and the urban experience-based desires of younger generations.

More robust partnerships between the City, visitor organizations, the hospitality industry, and economic development partners will ensure better promotion of events and amenities. These enhanced relationships are also critical to achieving a holistic and dynamic approach to securing Rochester’s brand locally, nationally, and beyond.





# C. TOURISM [TOU]

## ACTION PLAN

GOAL	STRATEGIES	PARTNERS
<b>TOU-1</b> <b>Expand opportunities to attract new visitors to the city.</b>	TOU-1a Identify groups, regions, or population segments underrepresented in tourism figures and develop marketing strategies to encourage them to visit the city and establish Rochester as a long distance destination.	<b>Visit Rochester, FLRTC, NYS, City</b>
	TOU-1b Pursue funds through the Market New York Grant to help promote tourist destinations, attractions, and special events, or capital improvement projects for tourist facilities.	<b>Visit Rochester, FLRTC, City</b>
	TOU-1c Promote Rochester and tourism through the use of multiple platforms and networks, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Social media platforms</li> <li>– Email lists</li> <li>– Newsletters and websites</li> <li>– Educational, special interest, and faith-based meetings/events</li> <li>– Other networking opportunities</li> </ul>	City, Celebrate City Living Coalition, Visit Rochester, FLRTC, City, Museums, Business Community, Faith Leaders, Entertainment Venues
	TOU-1d Ensure new investments and developments through the ROC the Riverway project are included in tourism marketing strategies.	City, Visit Rochester, FLRTC
	TOU-1e Develop a robust outreach strategy for potential visitors coming to Rochester by boat through the Port of Rochester or from the Erie Canal.	Visit Rochester, FLRTC, NYS, City

**Notes:**

1. Partners listed in bold are recommended to lead the implementation of that strategy.
2. For a list of partner acronyms see [Appendix A](#).

GOAL	STRATEGIES	PARTNERS
<b>TOU-1</b> Expand opportunities to attract new visitors to the city.	TOU-1f Develop events and activities during the wintertime, and promote existing wintertime activities, to encourage tourism during cold weather.	Visit Rochester, FLRTC, City, Museums, Business Community, Entertainment Venues
	TOU-1g Promote the Genesee River’s status as a Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat of State-Wide Significance to encourage fishing activity.	<b>Visit Rochester, FLRTC</b> , NYS, City
<b>TOU-2</b> Enhance the visitor experience.	TOU-2a Establish a visitor center in downtown Rochester that offers services to visitors, such as tourist information, event ticket sales, walking/biking tours, a “Made in Rochester” retail outlet, etc.	Visit Rochester, FLRTC, Business Community, Event Sponsors, RDDC, City, Monroe County, Downtown/ Riverfront Management Entity
	TOU-2b Install “Welcome to Rochester” kiosks at Brooks Landing, Corn Hill Landing, Erie Harbor Landing, and at the Port of Rochester to greet visiting boaters and direct them to local shopping, eateries, and cultural amenities.	<b>City</b> , Chamber of Commerce, Event Sponsors, Business Community
	TOU-2c Increase the number of bike share station locations near hotels to encourage visitor use of Pace Bikes.	<b>City</b> , Bike Share Partners



# C. TOURISM [TOU]

## ACTION PLAN

GOAL	STRATEGIES	PARTNERS
<b>TOU-2</b> Enhance the visitor experience.	TOU-2d Establish a relationship with short-term rental companies (e.g., Airbnb, VRBO, HomeAway, etc.) and partner with hosts to promote tourist opportunities to guests.	<b>City</b> , Visit Rochester, Short-term rental companies
	TOU-2e Add signage along the Erie Canal that directs boaters to downtown Rochester.	<b>NYS</b> , City
<b>TOU-3</b> Increase tourism dollars spent within the city.	TOU-3a Work with local businesses to help them capture the patronage of the people visiting the many attractions and festivals within the City of Rochester.	<b>City</b> , Chamber of Commerce, Visit Rochester, FLRTC, Business Community
	TOU-3b Develop a “convention district” that is centered on the Riverside Convention Center but also includes the conference rooms and amenities of nearby hotels as well as a more robust experience outside these buildings through ROC the Riverway investments.	<b>City</b> , Riverside Convention Center, Hotels

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