



A view of part of Bull's Head neighborhood, looking east from the roof of the old St. Mary's Hospital. Streets are West Main (running diagonally), Brown (at top) and Genesee (at right). KAREN MITCHELL/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE FILE PHOTO 1977

# Bull's Head revitalization plan spurs wave of public feedback

**Genae Shields**  
Rochester Democrat and Chronicle  
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Bull's Head Revitalization Project plans were released to the public earlier this year, sparking a wave of public feedback.

During early settlements in Rochester, the term "Bull's Head" referred to a cattle market. On the intersection of Genesee Street and Buffalo Road, stood an old wood building known as the Bull's Head Tavern. Over a century later, after the tavern was demolished, more residents began moving into the area and adopted the neighborhood's name-sake.

Despite the city's ongoing efforts to rejuvenate the Bull's Head neighborhood, the area has witnessed a substantial decline in residents and investment in recent years.

District 17 delegate and South West Liaison at St. Mary's Campus, John DeMott has seen the disinvestment over the years and hopes this project can help. "My history with Bullshead goes back to when I was an RIT student, and RIT was downtown [in] 1966," DeMott said. "Bulls Head was still thriving, there were just tons of businesses there, but at the same time, the riots had occurred in 1964. White flight, it's a great embarrassment [for] many of us. White folks in droves were moving to Gates and beyond, and abandoning the city, in some cases, converting their homes to apartments, all of which had an effect of disinvestment."

In 2009, Rochester began revitalization efforts, planning with community input until the Bull's Head Urban Renewal Plan emerged in 2018. This plan was meant to improve over 60 potential "brownfields" in the neighborhood before total revitalization. Brownfields are abandoned plots of land that are underutilized due to pollution from industrial use.

In 2021, DevelopROC was chosen to oversee redevelopment plans for the 12-acre neighborhood.

After overseeing the closing of local businesses and other necessary demolitions, construction is scheduled to begin in 2026.

Concerns about gentrification and affordable housing

Throughout the planning process, the city has held public meetings to inform the community about upcoming plans and to receive feedback. Many have come forward with concerns about affordable housing units and a lack of resources for current residents. There are also concerns about gentrification and the likelihood that BIPOC families will be pushed out of the community over time.

Bill Sullivan, who was a community housing planner for the city in 1982 and City Council chief of staff until 2010, has strong opinions about the revitalization plans. He has concerns about the project's financial feasibility but thinks they are on the right track. He says, "The city was built for 330,000 people. We have 210,000 people. I mean, people claim gentrification if their rent goes up. Rents go up for a lot of reasons. When people talk about gentrification, I will challenge that 100%. We need some



## Plans for Bull's Head revitalization

**Banking:** ESL is set to kick off the construction as the first tenant in the neighborhood's redevelopment. The full-service branch will be located near West Main and Genesee Street. Construction for the new branch is expected to begin in Spring 2024.

**Housing:** Potential residents can look forward to having up to 800 new apartments and townhouses available at market-rate pricing. An undetermined percentage of the units will be set aside for affordable housing.

**Retail:** The demolition of Bull's Head Plaza at the West Main and Genesee Street intersection is set to begin in April 2024. When the redevelopment is complete, 34,000 square feet of street-level retail and office space is expected to be available. In hopes of bringing more jobs into the community, U.S. Ceiling Corp. CEO Melissa James-Geska says they plan to relocate their headquarters from Brighton.

Above: A rendering shows plans for the Bull's Head Revitalization Project. The street faces west on West Main Street. PROVIDED BY DEVELOP

## Residents respond to project plans

With much anticipation for this long overdue project, residents are excited about potential investment but still unsure if the city will follow through with these plans. Here's what they had to say about the plans. (Responses have been lightly edited for clarity and length.)

**Josie McClary, President of the 19th Ward Community Association,** says, "I've been on Chili Avenue for 19 years, but I lived in the 19th ward for about 24, 25 years now. I drive past there to go to work and to come home, and it's been...truly an eyesore. So to know that they are planning and developing, I would like to say, something that you would typically see in the suburbs right here in the city of Rochester, I think it's wonderful. Once [there are] more meetings, the public is more informed and they get comfortable on hearing and seeing the plans that's going to take place, I think they will warm up to the idea."

**Mary Venturilli, a delegate of the 19th Ward's District 8 and nurse navigator at Lipson Cancer Institute** on the corner of Genesee Street and Chili Avenue, shares similar sentiments as McClary. "I've been on Chili Avenue now for 20 years, but I grew up in the 19th ward. It kind of sounded like people were feeling that we're segregating them again, but I think the way the roadways are, it's actually connecting the three close neighborhoods—probably four, including Plymouth Avenue, to each other by opening up that space as opposed to creating those barriers that were once there and structural barriers, hopefully not personal barriers."

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gentrification. We used to say when I was working with the city, we want to start a campaign saying, send us your rich people; we have enough poor people. We got a lot of them, [but] we're not trying to get rid of them. How about we even it out a little by sending us some of your rich people? I mean, who's going to pay the taxes? We need people that have enough money to pay the taxes to help support the people that need help."

Executive Director of St. Peter's Kitchen on Brown Street, Robert Boyd, is hopeful but has concerns about how the plans will impact senior residents and those without transportation.

"We've been here at St. Peter's Kitchen for 42 years, and we've seen the evolution of the neighborhood from when it was much more energetic and there was a lot more space," Boyd said. "It's coming in the middle of this community, which is primarily elderly. They don't have cars and I'm curious as to how they're gonna really build all this housing. I don't know whether the market can support it. How is that going to really benefit those who live here that don't have a car? Is there going to be a focus on people who actually live here today? I think the real challenge with it is how do they integrate that with the community as opposed to just putting a wonderful set of buildings and landscaping and all that nice stuff."

Genae Shields is the business & development impact reporter. Reach out at [gshields@gannett.com](mailto:gshields@gannett.com) or on Instagram: [@genaebriphoto](https://www.instagram.com/genaebriphoto) for questions, comments, or concerns.