

WINTER **BUFFALO**
INTERMISSION

WINTER CITY STRATEGY

Wintermission Buffalo is led locally by the City of Buffalo’s Division of Citizen Services, GObike Buffalo, and the Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo. The program is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and CAF America. This report was prepared by 8 80 Cities in December 2020.

Wintermission was a response to Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Global Ideas for U.S. Solutions fund, which sought to find global solutions to reducing social isolation and apply them to the U.S. context. In the fall of 2018, 8 80 Cities put out a call for program partners and challenged American cities to assemble diverse teams that would advance the goals of Wintermission. The response was astounding, with 62 cities of all sizes submitting applications. The three cities selected to participate in the program were:

**Buffalo, New York
Eau Claire, Wisconsin
Leadville, Colorado**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

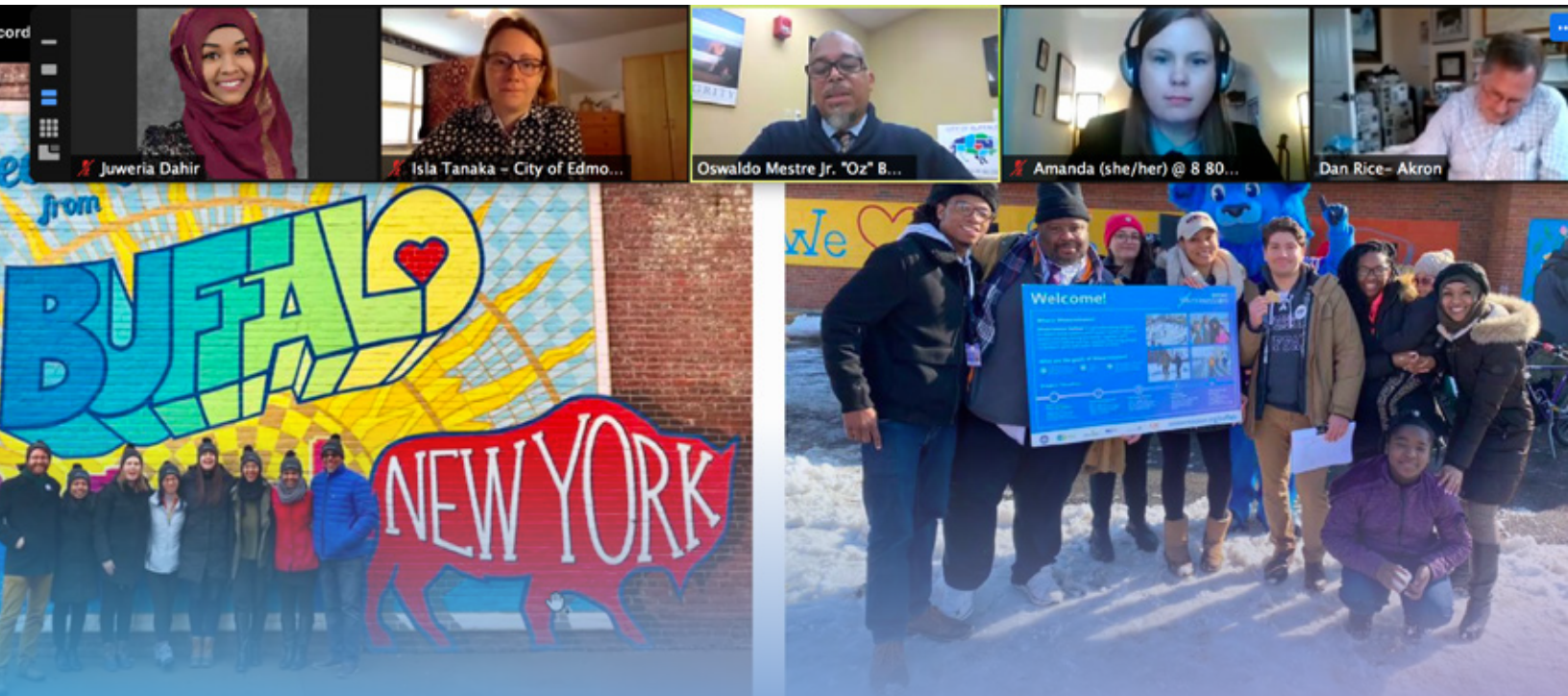
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wintermission is a nationwide initiative led by 8 80 Cities, a Toronto-based nonprofit organization, in partnership with Children and Nature Network and National League of Cities. The project is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and CAF America. In the fall of 2018, 8 80 Cities put out a call for program partners and challenged American cities to assemble diverse teams that would advance the goal of reducing social isolation during winter. The response was astounding, with 62 cities of all sizes submitting applications. Buffalo, New York, along Eau Claire, Wisconsin and Leadville, Colorado were selected as the three winning cities.

The Wintermission Buffalo team is lead locally by representatives from the City of Buffalo's Division of Citizen Services, GObike Buffalo, Slow Roll Buffalo, and Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo, in collaboration with a long list of community partners. Over the past two years, Wintermission Buffalo's activities have included:

- 1. **Convening** with the Eau Claire and Leadville Wintermission teams at the Winter Cities Shake-Up Conference in Saskatoon, Canada to workshop winter city ideas with leaders from other cities and get inspiration for their own winter city work.
- 2. **Engaging** over 600 diverse residents on how to improve winter life in Buffalo through an inclusive community consultation process.
- 3. **Piloting** four community ideas for enhancing public life in public spaces and reducing social isolation during winter through a series of short-term pilot projects.

The Buffalo Winter City Strategy lays out a common vision and recommended actions for improving the quality of winter life in Buffalo's residents over the next 10 years. It was created using Buffalo's existing strengths as a winter city, feedback from community engagement and pilot project activities, and lessons learned from other winter cities around the world. Buffalo's Winter City Strategy is about capitalizing on its community assets, creating new programs and policies to fill existing gaps in winter design and public life, and ensuring the city is welcoming and inclusive for all.



VISION

Buffalo is a city where people celebrate and embrace winter as an opportunity to connect across generations, languages, classes, and cultures. We envision a future in which Buffalo's city and community leaders alike generate and participate in winter initiatives that empower our most vulnerable residents to be active in winter. Ultimately, our hope is that Buffalo will be seen as a welcoming destination to live, work, and play year-round.

Winter City Strategy

Community members identified four priority areas for increasing social and physical activity in winter, forming the four pillars of the winter city strategy: 1) Winter Accessibility, 2) Winter Programming, 3) Winter Warmth, and 4) Winter Inclusivity. Each pillar includes its own vision and associated recommendations. The recommendations reflect the need to build on existing winter programs and policies that have already seen some success in Buffalo as well as community-based desires for brand new winter initiatives.



Pillar I: Winter Accessibility

Vision: Buffalo is a city that prioritizes mobility and safe access in winter, reducing barriers so

that vulnerable residents and visitors are can get around more easily and stay active year-round.

Recommended Actions:

1.1 Provide sidewalk clearing services after heavy snowfall:

If snowfall accumulates beyond 4", the City should take responsibility for clearing all sidewalks within 24 hours. Below 4", it is the responsibility of the property owner. This service would be funded through a surcharge on property owners' property tax bills.

1.2 Increase awareness and enforcement of snow clearing bylaws and policies:

Create a central webpage on the City of Buffalo website containing a comprehensive overview of municipal snow clearing bylaws, policies, and resources for residents, and promote 311 as an avenue for reporting and enforcing uncleared sidewalks.

1.3 Establish block club-based shovel corps:

Extend the Wintermission Microgrant pilot program and continue providing annual microgrant opportunities to block clubs to coordinate volunteers to clear neighborhood sidewalks.

1.4 Improve snow clearing at transit stops:

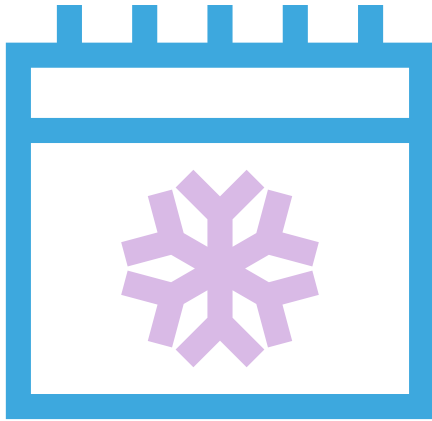
Coordinate with NFTA to take responsibility for clearing snow from sidewalks surrounding transit stations and bus stops within 24 hours of snowfall.

1.5 Clear snow along park paths and recreational trails:

Identify priority parks and recreational trails to include in a pilot for snow clearing.

1.6 Provide a real-time map of streets, sidewalks, parks, and trails that have been plowed:

Post the live map on an easily accessible webpage hosted by the City of Buffalo and promote the live map via social media during major storms and snow events.



Pillar II: Winter Programming

Vision: Buffalo is a city that creates opportunity for collaboration with and between local partners to animate and activate parks and public spaces across the city year-round, with a focus on neighborhood parks that also includes educational and social components.

Recommended Actions:

2.1 Expand Winterbash dates and locations:

Building on the success and lessons learned from the Winterbash pilot project, create a regular Winterbash schedule at the four pilot park sites and over time, expand the program to other neighborhoods.

2.2 Support and promote small-scale neighborhood-based activations in winter:

Develop a simplified and streamlined application process to make it easier for residents and local organizations to host public programming in local parks and public spaces.

2.3 Provide economic incentives for winter programming and business activation:

Continue using the the Love Your Block mini-grant program to fund small-scale, community-based solutions for improving winter life; pilot an annual winter innovation grant that funds brand new approaches to improving winter life in Buffalo; promote among community organizations, event organizers, and Business Improvement Districts.

2.4 Increase provision of and access to adaptive and accessible winter recreation:

Work with members of the adaptive sports community and Parks and Recreation Department to identify opportunities to offer adaptive winter recreational activities in both indoor and outdoor settings.

2.5 Include “Park Winterization” as an option in the Adopt-A-Park Feature program:

Allow sponsors to adopt winter maintenance activities of a park that would allow for it to remain open, accessible, and inviting throughout the season.

2.6 Provide afterschool winter programming in parks:

Hire activity leaders to supervise and host winter-appropriate games, activities, and programming in parks during afterschool hours and encourage community centers, schools, and other after school programming providers to bring their activities outside to parks.

2.7 Pilot a winter gear share program:

Provide free winter gear rentals to lower the barrier to winter recreation. This program can be hosted at locations such as public libraries, community centers, neighborhood skating rinks, etc.





Pillar III: Winter Warmth

Vision: Buffalo is a city that ensures that residents and visitors have access to warmth and security from the elements during the coldest season of the year with the purpose of allowing citizens and guests to enjoy our unique winter culture.

Recommended Actions:

3.1 Expand home winterization

resources: Build on the weatherization kit pilot project by formalizing and expanding the distribution of weatherization kits so that people can keep their homes warm, increase the efficiency of their home heating systems, and reduce home heating costs.

3.2 Distribute resources to educate tenants about their rights during winter and year-round:

Provide specific winter-related information such as landlord responsibilities pertaining to home heating, snow removal, and repairs and include legal information and tips on how to negotiate the court system and negotiations with landlords.

3.3 Create more winter-friendly bus shelters:

Work with NFTA to identify opportunities to improve the frequency and/or wind resistance and/or heating of

bus shelters including piloting heated bus shelters.

3.4 Install permanent pavilions in parks and public spaces:

Provide shelter for people to find reprieve from wind, sleet, and snow as well as amenities such as winterized bathrooms, changerooms, seating, and vendor areas.

3.5 Install temporary “warming hut” art installations:

Host an annual competition inviting artists, architects, and designers to submit creative warming hut concepts; winners will receive funding to build and exhibit their installations in parks and public spaces.

3.6 Use year-round plantings in parks, public spaces, and transit waiting areas to provide shelter from wind in winter and sun in summer:

Identify and prioritize streets, parks, and public spaces in the city that experience harsh winter microclimates.

3.7 Install winterized bathrooms in parks and public spaces:

Retrofit existing park bathrooms to support winter use and require that all new public park bathrooms be winterized.

3.8 Amend the open fire bylaw and create a new fire pit policy:

Incorporate community fire pits and fire bowls into park programming and design; require fire pit operators to book the fire pit ahead of time and undergo a simple fire safety training session.

3.9 Use pedestrian-scale lighting to improve safety and provide visual warmth:

Use creative yet context-sensitive lighting to make streets, parks, and public spaces more whimsical, inviting, and magical in winter.

3.10 Support public art that uses color and light to brighten up the long, dark days of winter:

Fund public art that responds to the need to increase warmth, light, and sense of safety and comfort throughout the year; encourage artists to develop interactive, site-specific works.



Pillar IV: Winter Inclusivity

Vision: Buffalo is a city that works closely with our vulnerable and historically marginalized populations through programs that facilitate access to resources so that all residents, visitors, and communities can connect and thrive in winter together.

Recommended Actions:

4.1 Develop a comprehensive online winter resource guide: Target information in guide towards both longtime residents and newcomers who are unfamiliar with living in a winter city. Include practical information such as dressing for the weather, keeping a house warm, getting around safely in winter, as well as information about affordable recreational programming and events.

4.2 Pilot a Seniors in Service Friendship Program for Newcomers: Connect seniors with newcomers to introduce them to winter activities and resources, teach them how to brave the cold, even invite them over for winter holidays.

4.3 Increase accessibility of existing winter events and programming for people with low mobility and disabilities: Require that winter event organizers and their staff receive education, training, and/or resources on how to support participants with disabilities from their arrival to their departure from the event.

4.4 Expand indoor winter recreation options and spaces for people of all ages and abilities: Work with disability advocates

and Division of Senior Services to identify opportunities to expand year-round indoor accessible and adaptive recreation for all ages and abilities.

4.5 Expand reach and impact of block club meetings and Block Chats through virtual channels: Continue using the block chats and block club meetings to engage residents about winter challenges and opportunities and to share winter-related information and resources. Even as it becomes safer to conduct meetings in person, continue to allow virtual participation in these meetings to reach a wider audience.

CONCLUSION

Winter affects all aspects of life in Buffalo and the journey towards becoming an even more inclusive and accessible winter city will require all hands-on-deck. The Division of Citizen Services will lead the implementation of the Buffalo Winter City Strategy, which provides a path forward to capitalize on the energy built up over the course of the Wintermission project. By leveraging winter as a time for social connection and wellbeing instead of social isolation and hardship, Buffalo has positioned itself as a foremost winter city vanguard, and in doing so has trailblazed a path in the snow for winter communities across the country to follow in its footsteps.





INTRODUCTION

I. INTRODUCTION

ABOUT WINTERMISSION

Wintermission was a two-year project that set out to combat social isolation by inviting more people to get outside and enjoy the health benefits of social interaction, physical activity, and nature connection in winter.

Winter can be a challenging time of year, where snow, ice, lack of sunlight, and cold weather can combine to exacerbate social isolation. Social and physical activity outdoors declines in winter and feelings of loneliness and isolation creep in. Not everyone experiences winter the same, and qualities that can make winter joyful for some, can make it miserable for others.

For people experiencing homelessness, and the precariously housed, winter means an increased risk of cold-related injury and death. Children and elderly residents are more vulnerable to extreme cold yet are often overlooked as important users of public space. The voices of those most vulnerable in winter are rarely invited to meaningfully shape and inform city building decisions.

A lack of winter-specific public space design and maintenance also reinforces inequity by creating additional barriers and challenges for those who walk, bike, or take public transit. This limits independent mobility for transit riders, people with disabilities, older adults, and children. Winter can also come as a shock to newcomers and refugees immigrating and adjusting to colder winter cities. People living with low income may not have the time or resources to engage in winter activities. Racialized populations face the compounding effects of historical and contemporary racist policies and practices influencing their everyday interaction with public space. All these examples stand in the way of increasing social connection and creating a sense of belonging in public space for all in winter.

When we embarked on this project in 2018, the predominant narrative about winter was that it was to be endured rather than embraced. There were few U.S. Cities proactively creating a culture of active and social winter life through the intentional design, programming, and management of their public spaces.

Our Wintermission project aimed to challenge and change the status quo around winter and reimagine it as an asset to be leveraged in reducing social isolation and creating healthier, more equitable, and vibrant public spaces.



PROJECT PARTNERS

Wintermission is led by 8 80 Cities, an international non-profit organization based in Toronto, Canada. Our mission is to improve the quality of life for people in cities no matter their age, ability, socioeconomic status, race, gender-identity, ethnicity, or cultural background. We bring people together to enhance mobility and public space so that together we can create more vibrant, healthy, and equitable communities. We believe that if everything we do in our public space is great for an 8-year-old and an 80-year-old, then it will be great for all people.

Wintermission is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and CAF America. Project partners include the Children and Nature Network, and the National League of Cities.



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation



WHO IS WINTERMISSION BUFFALO?

The local Wintermission Buffalo Team is led by the members of the Mayor’s Division of Citizen Services, GObike Buffalo, Slow Roll Buffalo, and the Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo.



This project is dedicated in memoriam to Phil Haberstro, former Executive Director of the Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo.

A special thank you goes out to the following individuals who dedicated the past two years to making Wintermission Buffalo a success:

Oswaldo Mestre	Division of Citizen Services, City of Buffalo
Nicole Brown	Division of Citizen Services, City of Buffalo
Lucy Connery	Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo
Zulmary Cruz	AmeriCorps VISTA
Juweria Dahir	Division of Citizen Services, City of Buffalo
Nina Ngoc-Han Dinh	AmeriCorps VISTA
Emily Gallivan	AmeriCorps VISTA
Seamus Gallivan	Slow Roll (formerly of GObike Buffalo)
Shantel E. Heben	AmeriCorps VISTA
Michael Smith	AmeriCorps VISTA

Buffalo’s Winter City Coalition also includes: Americorp Vista; Blue Cross Blue Shield; Border Community Services; Buffalo Board of Block Clubs, Inc.; Buffalo Center for Health Equity; Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy; Buffalo Museum of Science; Buffalo Department of Permits & Inspections; Buffalo Department of Parks & Recreation; Buffalo Department of Senior Services; Explore Buffalo; Buffalo Division of Citizen Services; Buffalo Fire Department; Buffalo Police Department: Neighborhood Engagement Team; EPIC - Every Person Influences Children; HEAL International; Jericho Road; Jes Breathe Block Club Association; National Fuel; Penn Dixie Fossil Park & Nature Reserve; Police Athletic League of Buffalo; Project M.O.V.E.; Pride in Place Buffalo; Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation; The Smile Team; The Tool Lending Library; UB Center for Successful Aging; Victory Sports Global Outreach, Inc.; Westminster Economic Development Initiative; West Side Youth Development Coalition and the Willie Hutch Jones Educational and Sports Program, among others.

Project Contact:
 Oswaldo Mestre
 CDI2@ch.ci.cuffalo.ny.us

SOCIAL ISOLATION, WINTERMISSION & COVID- 19

What is Social Isolation?

Social isolation describes an absence of social contact and connection. It is a state of being cut off from social networks^[1]. It can operate on an individual level through an absence of contact with family, friends, and neighbors, or on a broader level, with a lack of connection to society at large^[2]. While temporary feelings of loneliness are healthy, chronic feelings of social isolation are one of the single largest predictors of health and happiness.^[3]

Why should we address Social Isolation?

Human beings are inherently social creatures. We thrive when we have strong social connections^[4]. Decades of research has found that being socially connected significantly reduces risk for premature mortality from all causes^[5]. On the other hand, studies have found that experiencing social isolation increases risk for earlier death by 29%^[6]. These effects are independent of age and initial health status^[7]. Social isolation can completely alter an individual's health and wellbeing, regardless of how healthy they were prior to losing social connections.



Numerous studies have identified the myriad ways social isolation can impact physical and mental health. Loneliness can be as bad for a person's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day^[8]. Social isolation and loneliness are strongly related to arthritis, mobility impairment, chronic lung disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and other cardiovascular diseases. For mental and cognitive health, a lack of social connection leads to higher levels of depression, anxiety, poorer cognitive function, and dementia. Social isolation has also been linked to deaths of despair, such as drug and alcohol related deaths and suicide^[9]. While research into social isolation continues, each new study deepens our understanding of how damaging social isolation can be to every aspect of wellbeing.

Social isolation also has wide-ranging impacts beyond individual health. There are major economic costs associated with high levels of social isolation. As a society, the social connections and wellbeing of our workforce are rarely discussed. Lonely workers think about quitting their jobs twice as often as non-lonely workers^[10]. Looking only at Americans aged 65 or older, social isolation costs the U.S. government nearly \$7 billion in additional health care costs each year^[11].

What causes social isolation?

The root causes of social isolation run deep into the foundation of our society and are intertwined with the roots causes of many societal inequities. What follows is a brief description of some of the most commonly understood factors contributing to social isolation:

Access to Transportation

Safe, convenient, and affordable transportation options are key factors in developing social capital and community wellbeing. Individuals and communities lacking in access to public transit and safe active transportation infrastructure see much higher levels of social isolation as compared to those where taking transit, walking, and biking are common forms of travel^[12].

Poverty

The links between poverty and social isolation are extensive and self-sustaining. Social isolation contributes to poverty, and poverty often means social resources are inaccessible. Experiences of social isolation are often cited by residents with lower income as painful aspects of poverty that prevent them from engaging in social and physical activity^[13]. Conversely, social capital and connection are vital assets for those seeking to escape poverty.^[14]

Unemployment

Poverty, unemployment, and social isolation form a vicious cycle that reinforces and sustains itself. The marginalization caused by unemployment ‘leads to poverty and social isolation, which in turn reinforce the risk of long-term unemployment.’^[15] On a larger societal scale, unemployment—in the absence of a universal basic income and robust social supports—drives poverty, and by extension, social isolation. On the individual level, job loss has detrimental effects on subjective perceptions of social integration and life satisfaction. Losing one’s employment can cause an individual to feel more isolated. This feeling of isolation hinders the psychological wellbeing of the individual, making it more difficult to obtain new employment. The longer the duration of unemployment, the more profound and damaging the feeling of isolation becomes.^[16]

“Just as fish can’t swim without water, nor can victims of loneliness reap the benefits of social interaction without shared spaces to do so in.”

**- Julia Hotz,
Journalist & Communities Manager,
Solutions Journalism Network**

Access to high-quality public spaces

Social connections do not occur in a vacuum. They need safe, comfortable, welcoming spaces to grow and thrive. Multiple studies found that patients who were prescribed ‘socialization’, non-medicalized community-based activities, by their doctors gained self-confidence and reduced their social isolation. However, those studies also found that this strategy only works when public spaces, such as parks, libraries, and community centers, were easily-accessible, well-designed, and programmed for social interaction.^[17]

Physical and Mobility Impairments

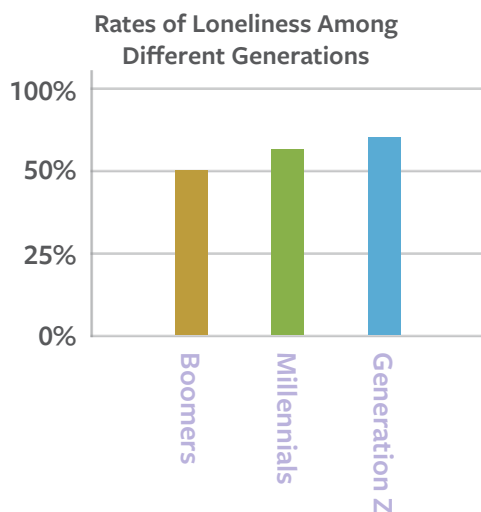
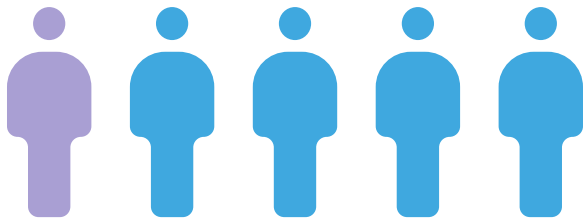
Many of the factors that cause social isolation are systematic, but individual causes exist as well. Individuals who are not independently mobile are much more likely to suffer from social isolation as compared to those who are independently mobile. Physical impairments such as loss of hearing also create barriers in maintaining social connections^[18]. Losing a loved one, domestic abuse, and personal crises can all create intense feelings of social disconnection. These individual causes are often exacerbated by systematic issues that contribute to social isolation.

Who does Social Isolation impact?

The most conservative estimates suggest that loneliness affects one in five adults across the globe. From 2018 to 2019, rates of loneliness increased from 47% to 61% of the American population. The average size and diversity of core networks like spouses, friends, coworkers, etc. has similarly been declining for decades.^[19]

Loneliness has been found to be prevalent amongst all age groups, but is highest among younger generations. 50% of boomers, 71% of millennials, and 79% of Generation Z self-report as lonely. Individuals with lower-incomes are far more likely to report feeling socially isolated as compared to individuals with higher income. Communities of color in general, and Latinx and Black Americans in particular, are most likely to suffer from social isolation^[20].

One out of five people around the world is affected by loneliness



The connections between the main causes of social isolation and communities who are most likely to suffer from social isolation are clear. Individuals with lower-income who are experiencing poverty and unemployment report high levels of social isolation, as do Black and Latinx Americans, who are also more likely to be living in poverty. Neighborhoods that are parkland deficient and lacking in other public services, such as libraries and community centers, are far more likely to be home to lower-income communities of color. Similarly, neighborhoods that do not provide safe sustainable mobility options are also more likely to be home to marginalized communities. Health researcher Yolanda Ogbolu from the University of Maryland School of Nursing coined the term ‘situational isolation’ to describe the self-isolating behavior driven by the built form and environmental conditions of a social setting or neighborhood.

“Every year, as the days become short and dark, people with SAD... slow down and have a hard time waking up the morning... their concentration suffers, and they withdraw from friends and family. As you can image, their work and relationships suffer, and they can become quite depressed.”

**- Dr. Norman Rosenthal,
Clinical Professor of Psychiatry,
Georgetown Medical School**

How does winter influence social isolation?

Winter in the United States amplifies existing conditions that cause social isolation. While some people may welcome colder temperatures, others feel trapped, vulnerable, and isolated. Research indicates that severe seasonal affective disorder (SAD) affects 6% of the American population, and disproportionately affects women. An additional 10-20% of Americans suffer from mild forms of SAD. Symptoms of SAD include depression, social anxiety, a desire to avoid social contact, lethargy, and sleep deprivation.^[21]

Why does social isolation get worse in winter? Most cities in the northern United States experience winter for substantial portions of the year. However, their built environments and transportation systems do little to embrace their climate. Public spaces and transportation systems that are already forces for exclusion and social isolation become even more problematic in winter. On average, parks and public spaces see significantly fewer visitors during colder months, and residents report being much less socially and physically active in winter as compared to other months. Many municipalities stop maintaining and programming their public spaces in winter. Outdoor spaces are often not designed to enhance warmth and light, two key factors in encouraging people to spend time outside in colder months. Those with independent mobility barriers in particular report feeling disconnected in winter, as sidewalks and transit stations are often left unplowed and unsalted by municipalities. In icy conditions, residents are 40% less likely to leave their homes, with older adults having great difficulty setting foot outside due to unmaintained sidewalks.^[22] Women are far more likely to rely on walking and public transit to get around and, not coincidentally, experience SAD at a much higher rate as compared to men.

Many northern American cities also see economic activity fluctuate with the seasons, reaching peak activity in the summer and slowing greatly in the winter. The same barriers that make it harder for people to engage in social activity

in winter also prevent people from participating in local economies.^[23] For many individuals with lower income, employment can be seasonal and winter often sees levels of unemployment and poverty rise in American cities, further contributing to levels of social isolation. Winter in the United States worsens many of the conditions that contribute to social isolation in the first place, making it no surprise that Americans who suffer from SAD typically exhibit symptoms that last 40% of the year.



How has COVID-19 influenced Social Isolation?

While social isolation and loneliness were prevalent in Americans prior to COVID-19, efforts to reduce the virus spread via stay-at-home orders, quarantine, and physical distancing recommendations have exacerbated an already acute mental health situation. 28% of Americans live alone, and the pandemic meant little to no human contact for months. Regardless of living situation, interactions with anyone outside the home have been severely limited across the board.

While the impacts of COVID-19 will not be fully understood for years to come, we do have some sense of how it has impacted people's emotional and mental health. Some surveys suggest that within the first month of COVID-19, loneliness increased by 20-30%, and emotional distress tripled.^[24] In particular, older adults, people of color, individuals with lower-incomes and those in congregate living centers such as long-term care homes and prisons have seen their mental health and levels of social interaction disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.



28% Americans lives alone, and during COVID-19 loneliness has increased by 20-30%

“The old African American aphorism when white America catches a cold, Black America gets pneumonia has a new, morbid twist: when white America catches the novel coronavirus, Black Americans die.”

- Taylor, Assistant Professor of African-American Studies, Princeton University

Impacts of inequity and COVID-19

Long-standing systemic health and social inequities have put many people from racial and ethnic minority groups at increased risk of getting sick and dying from COVID-19. Inequities in the social determinants of health, such as poverty and access to healthcare, combine with interpersonal racism and racial biases in the health care system to expose BIPOC communities to the greatest risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19. Some of the many inequities that put vulnerable communities at increased risk include:

Racism

Unfortunately, racism and discrimination exists in systems meant to protect well-being or health. racism can lead to chronic and toxic stress and shapes social and economic factors that put some people from racial and ethnic minority groups at increased risk for COVID-19.

Healthcare Access and Utilization

People from some racial and ethnic minority groups are more likely to be uninsured than non-Hispanic whites. Healthcare access can also be limited for these groups by many other factors, such as lack of transportation, child care, or ability to take time off of work; communication and language barriers; cultural differences between patients and providers; and historical and contemporary discrimination in healthcare systems. Some people from racial and ethnic minority groups may hesitate to seek care because of a history of inequity and discrimination perpetuated by governments and healthcare systems, leading to fear and distrust among individuals.



BIPOC Communities in Essential Jobs

Some BIPOC communities are disproportionately represented in essential work settings such as healthcare facilities, farms, factories, grocery stores, and public transportation. Some people who work in these settings have more chances to be exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 due to several factors, such as close contact with the public or other workers, not being able to work from home, and not having paid sick days.

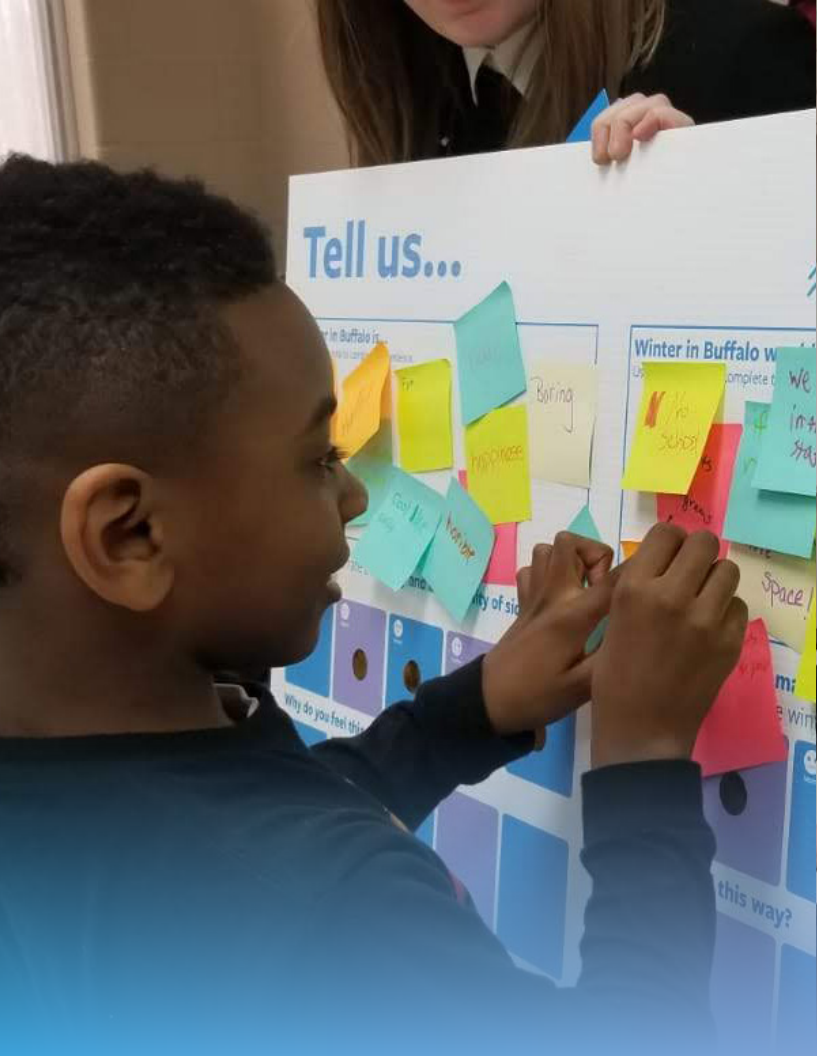
Educational, Income, and Wealth Gaps

Inequities in access to high-quality education for some racial and ethnic minority groups can lead to lower high school completion rates and barriers to college entrance. This may limit future job options and lead to lower paying or less stable jobs. People with limited job options likely have less flexibility to leave jobs that may put them at a higher risk of exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19. People in these situations often cannot afford to miss work, even if they're sick, because they do not have enough money saved up for essential items like food and other important expenses.

These factors and others are associated with more COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths in areas where racial and ethnic minority groups live, learn, work, play, and worship. They have also contributed to higher rates of some medical conditions that increase the risk of severe illness from COVID-19. In addition, community strategies to slow the spread of COVID-19 may cause unintentional harm, such as lost wages, reduced access to services, and increased stress for some racial and ethnic minority groups. These populations were already at high risk for poor health outcomes prior to the pandemic. The very same inequities in transportation systems, access to public space and resources, unemployment, and poverty that drive social isolation and prevent people from leaving their homes in winter are contributing to the pandemic's disproportionate effect on vulnerable communities.







Buffalo's Unique Context

Buffalo proudly self-identifies as a winter city. Memorable winter weather events such as “The October Surprise” and “Snowvember” are fundamental to Buffalo’s collective identity and resilience. Since the iconic “Blizzard of ’77,” the city has experienced six severe winter storms, the most recent of which culminated in nearly eight feet of snow and required the dispatch of the National Guard.

However tough Buffalo winters might be, its citizens and mayor are committed to the challenge. Through Wintermission, the City of Buffalo wants to facilitate equitable public activity that shows it to be a creative, inclusive, engaging, and fun place to live, work and visit during winter. In particular, the Wintermission Buffalo team is dedicated to inviting typically underrepresented communities into conversations about active winter living as part of the process of developing solutions that ultimately advance social and health equity.

Beyond the city’s evolving efforts to address winter weather, the city has also committed to the World Health Organization’s standards of an “Age-Friendly Community.” Through a multi-pronged approach, Buffalo plans to further its internationally renowned winter-wonderland status and transcend Wintermission and winter itself to become an even more engaged and connected “City of Good Neighbors.”



WINTERMISSION BUFFALO

Welcome!

What is Wintermission?

Wintermission Buffalo is a grassroots effort to reduce social isolation and support outdoor activity and play during the winter. Together, we will implement creative and fun solutions that activate Buffalo's parks and public spaces in winter.

What are the goals of Wintermission?

- Increase outdoor activity and play during the winter
- Increase social connections and support
- Increase community engagement

Project Timeline

1. Buffalo Division to identify city properties
2. Community Engagement





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BUFFALO WINTERMISSION

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What's the Problem?

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Plan Project Implementation

Winter City Strategy

Winter City Strategy

II. WINTERMISSION BUFFALO

From March 2019 – December 2020, Wintermission Buffalo set out to achieve the following project goals:

1. Spark a citywide conversation about winter life
2. Test innovative solutions to bring public life to the public realm
3. Facilitate equitable public activities that showcase Buffalo as a creative, inclusive, engaging, and fun place to live, work and visit during winter
4. Develop strategies to improve quality of life and reduce social isolation during Buffalo’s long winter season

Wintermission Cities Selected

January 2019
Buffalo, NY, Eau Claire, WI and Leadville, CO selected through a national competition to participate in Wintermission

Pilot Project Planning

June 2019 - September 2019
Review community feedback and identify key themes and priorities

Winter City Strategy Development

September 2020 - December 2020 Using the information and lessons learned from the engagement and pilot phases, develop a Winter City Strategy that includes a clear set of recommendations for advancing public life and reducing social isolation in winter



Community Engagement

March 2019 - May 2019
Start a city-wide conversation about what people love about winter in Buffalo and what could be improved

Pilot Project Implementation

November 2019 - March 2020
Test out four new approaches to improving winter life in Buffalo

SUMMARY OF ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES



In March 2019, the Wintermission Buffalo team began a comprehensive and inclusive community engagement process to spark a citywide conversation on improving winter life in Buffalo. This engagement process included a neighborhood kick-off party in Martin Luther King Junior Park, public pop-ups in high foot-traffic locations across the city, focus groups with priority groups, stakeholder workshops, and an online survey. By using a “meet people where they are” approach, our team was able to capture the diverse perspectives and lived experiences of Buffalo’s residents. The following section includes a summary of the engagement activities and findings. A comprehensive report on the engagement findings can be found in the Wintermission Buffalo Engagement Summary Report on the [Winter Cities Toolkit website](#).



600+
People Engaged



32
Public Pop-Ups,
Focus Groups,
and Workshops



5000+
Individual
Pieces of
Feedback

NEIGHBORHOOD PARTY:

We kicked off our engagement process with a Sunday afternoon neighborhood party in Martin Luther King Jr. Park, featuring a live DJ, hot chocolate, and s'mores around portable fire pits. Community members chatted with Mayor Byron Brown, took selfies with firefighters, and told us about their Buffalo winter experiences and ideas.



PRINT AND ONLINE SURVEY:

The survey was distributed in both English and Spanish. From March to May 2019, it received a total of 246 responses.

POP-UP ENGAGEMENTS:

We set up pop up engagement stations across the city, including at the Broadway Market, the West Side Bazaar, college campuses, the downtown public library, and numerous festivals and public events. This style of engagement was particularly successful in reaching individuals who normally would not attend a formal consultation meeting. Participants shared their perspectives through conversations with the Wintermission team and responding to the questions on the oversized survey boards using sticky notes and dots. We thanked participants for their input with small tokens of appreciation like coffee, hot chocolate, donuts, and Wintermission stickers.



FOCUS GROUPS:

We set up focus groups with specific priority groups, including older adults, children, people with disabilities, refugees and recent immigrants, Black and Latinx communities, and frontline workers serving these groups. These focus groups allowed us to develop a more fulsome understanding of how to center equity as part of winter placemaking efforts. Focus group locations included: Broadway Market Senior Drop-In Center, the Belle Center, Frederick Law Olmsted Middle & High School, Hope Refugee Drop-In Center, Journey's End Refugee Services, Richmond-Summer Senior Center, REACH (Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health) Community Action Team, Western New York Independent Living Center, and more.



WORKSHOPS:

We held a series of workshops in which city staff and community leaders collaborated to identify winter challenges, map existing resources, generate pilot project ideas, and develop potential action plans. Participants included representatives from the Division of Citizen Services, Department of Community Services and Recreational Programming, Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets, Buffalo Fire Department, and Buffalo Police Department. We also led workshops with the Buffalo Urban League, the Buffalo Urban Development Corporation, the Board of Block Clubs, and individual block clubs and neighborhood organizations.

Major findings include:

1. Many residents feel underprepared for and fearful of winter

- In asking residents to complete the sentence “Winter in Buffalo is...”, 67% of responses focused on how winter can be harsh, long, challenging, and overall negative. 19% of responses highlighted the positive aspects of winter—that it can be beautiful, amazing, fun, and adventurous.
- Moreover, despite 74% of survey participants having always lived in a place that has winters, when asked on a scale of 1 – 5 how prepared they feel for winter each year, the average response was a 2.3 out of 5 (1 = very underprepared and 5 = very prepared).
- While the Buffalo Winter Strategy will build on what people already love about winters in Buffalo, there will be a strong focus on how we can better prepare people for winter—especially for newcomers or residents inexperienced with winters—and expand opportunities for winter wonder and joy to the 67% of those who say they struggle through the season.

2. Winter significantly impacts residents' social and physical activities

- 78% of survey respondents spend less time outdoors during the winter compared to the rest of the year.
- Additionally, a combined 64% of residents agree or somewhat agree that they experience feelings of isolation or a lack of contact with friends and family in the winter.

3. Lack of snow clearing makes winter especially challenging

- On average, survey respondents rated the safety and accessibility of sidewalks in the winter a 2.1 out of 5 (1 = poor, 5 = excellent). This negative perception was consistent among participants of all ages, genders, neighborhoods, and racial backgrounds.
- Residents consistently identified insufficient snow clearance on streets and sidewalks as a major barrier to their daily travel needs, including commuting to work or school and accessing basic services. This issue disproportionately affects lower income residents who rely on active and public transportation. Older adults, who are more prone to injury on icy sidewalks, are often relegated to their homes because the task of going outside is too risky.

4. Residents have a big appetite for winter programming

- Despite the challenges of winter, residents were especially keen on increasing winter programming and events, especially ones that are either free or low-cost. When asked to complete the sentence “Winter in Buffalo would be better if...”, 20% of responses pertained to programming and events.
- As part of the engagement activities, the Wintermission Buffalo team hosted a neighborhood kick-off party in Martin Luther King Junior Park with fire pits, hot drinks, snacks, and a DJ. It demonstrated that even with such simple and low-cost interventions, residents were willing and enthusiastic to participate in winter park programming.

5. Four key themes emerged

- Winter snow clearance, winter warmth, winter programming, and winter inclusivity form the four pillars of the Buffalo Winter City Strategy. We will elaborate on these four pillars in the Strategy section and all recommended actions will fall under these four priority areas.



Welcome! BUFFALO WINTERMISSION

What is Wintermission?
 Wintermission Buffalo is a groundbreaking program to reduce social isolation and support outdoor physical activity and play during the winter. Together, we'll implement creative and fun solutions that bring people to Buffalo's parks and public spaces in winter.

What are the goals of Wintermission?

- 1. Increase outdoor winter recreation opportunities
- 2. Increase social connections and community support
- 3. Increase physical activity and mental health benefits
- 4. Increase awareness of winter recreation opportunities

Project Timeline

1. Initial research on winter recreation opportunities
2. Community engagement
3. Pilot implementation
4. Evaluation and reporting

Logos for partners: Buffalo, Erie County, NYS, CAF, and wintermission.org/buffalo

WINTERMISSION BUFFALO PILOT PROJECTS

WINTERMISSION PILOT PROJECTS

The Wintermission Buffalo team analyzed the feedback from all Wintermission Buffalo engagement activities and identified four key priority areas: 1) winter snow clearance, 2) winter warmth, 3) winter programming, and 4) winter inclusivity.

Wintermission Buffalo's local team, in partnership with community partners, implemented the following four pilot projects during the winter 2020 season to reflect these four priority areas:



SNOW CLEARING MICROGRANT PROGRAM + BLOCK CLUB AWARENESS CAMPAIGN



WINTERBASH PROGRAMMING IN PARKS



WEATHERIZATION KITS



WINTER RESOURCES GUIDE

These pilot projects were established to experiment with quick, cost effective solutions to advance the goals of Wintermission. Implementation was primarily focused on U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) eligible areas—neighborhoods with high levels of poverty that have received federal designation for increased investment. While there are no quick fixes to creating equitable winter public spaces or combating social isolation during the winter, these pilot projects provided opportunities to study and determine clear, effective solutions upon which to iterate moving forward. Each of the pilots had its own evaluation method, which are explained in detail in each of the pilot project descriptions in the following section.

In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the course of cities everywhere, Buffalo notwithstanding. This unprecedented turn of events encouraged everyone to stay home in a global effort to prevent the spread of the virus. For this reason, please note that some of the formal evaluation elements were not completed as initially planned. Instead, evaluation of the following pilot projects is based on interviews with city staff and a virtual workshop with partners and participants of the pilot projects.

PILOT ONE: WINTERMISSION MICROGRANT PROGRAM

Buffalo residents told the Buffalo Wintermission team that their number one concern is the need for better snow clearing on streets and sidewalks. Snowy or icy sidewalks can become hazardous for pedestrians when property owners are unable or unwilling to clear them quickly enough. A doctor told us that she discourages her older patients from walking in the winter because the risk of injury is too high on dangerous sidewalks. Many people suggested finding more ways for government and community members to work together to improve ice and snow clearance throughout the city as a way of promoting social participation and reducing social isolation.

In response to this discussion, Citizen Services created a Wintermission Microgrant program for block clubs and block club coalitions located in HUD-eligible neighborhoods, based on Buffalo's existing Love Your Block microgrants. Block clubs and coalitions were asked to make commitments to coordinate youth volunteers to shovel at least three blocks of a local sidewalk, preferably located close to an amenity like a community center, within 24 hours of every storm. The application also asked each team to commit to programming a social activity that responds to community needs.

The microgrant pilot ran from February to March of 2020 and provided each block club between \$250 - \$750 in funds. This pilot project enabled Buffalo to develop a volunteer-led approach to improve winter quality of life.

In addition, the Division of Citizen Services attended every block club meeting that fell within HUD-eligible areas to develop a better understanding of how the City could best target resources to help the neighborhood's most

vulnerable populations in winter.

Long term goals of this pilot project include:

- 1) Creating more inclusive communities
- 2) Creating a culture of intergenerational volunteerism
- 3) Increasing sidewalk accessibility within participating neighborhoods.

The three winning applicants included:

1. Mayer Ave. Community Garden

Activities: Promoting inclusivity and decreasing social isolation through the creation of a snow removal station in the community garden

2. Black Rock/Riverside Alliance

Activities: Recruited community members to take part in a snow removal team and purchase a communal shed for the residents to use

3. ELCON Block Club

Activities: Planned a maintenance and activity day where neighbors cleared snow in the area and gathered for hot chocolate



PILOT PROJECT RESULTS

SUCCESSSES

Microgrant application allowed for flexibility: Recognizing that every community is different, the application encouraged for community groups to pitch winter solutions that reflected their unique assets and needs

Social and community connection: Pair snow shoveling activities with fun community programming for increased engagement

Centralized resource area: Communal shed allowed community members to share resources such as a salt bucket to use in wintertime; also valuable for summer resources

Weekly Block Chats: This weekly meeting later transformed into a key avenue to share COVID-19 related resources, analyze community feedback, and update the response and information shared with communities in line with their needs and requests.

Good Neighbour Network (GNN): Weekly Block Chats led to the creation of the GNN, a program to connect and alert residents to their neighbors' needs without violating physical distancing measures. Over 70 Block Clubs, 400+ volunteers and 50+ community organizations distributed door hangers to more than 150,000 homes. The door hanger included resource information and a bright sign that reads "I need a good neighbor", designed to alert volunteers and the police department that someone required immediate assistance



PILOT PROJECT RESULTS

CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE SUCCESS
Low uptake: The microgrant program received fewer applications than anticipated	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dedicate more resources to outreach and marketing to spread awareness and excitement about the program
COVID-19 cancellations: Workshops and engagement events were cancelled. These events are essential for building intergenerational community connections, excitement about winter, and invite project applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Move workshops and engagement online if it is unsafe to meet in person
Pilot period too short: Program ran from February to March; difficult to analyze results given lack of snow days within the month to react to	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct the second iteration of the pilot for the entire duration of winter (December through March)
Limited Pilot Project Evaluation: Unable to measure the full impact due to COVID-19	Future evaluation methods: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus groups with participating block club captains• Pedestrian counts along shoveled routes• Door to door surveying along streets that receive snow clearing• Engagement boards at social events organized by grant recipients



PILOT TWO: WINTERBASH PROGRAMMING IN PARKS



Wintermission Buffalo heard from community members that they wanted to experience more winter activities in local parks. Buffalo has several excellent winter destinations, from Canalside on the waterfront to the big sledding hill in Delaware Park, but community members told us that they would be thrilled to see more programming in their own neighborhood parks, both through city-led and community-led initiatives.

In response, Wintermission Buffalo piloted a series of three Winterbashes held on Saturday afternoons in parks located in HUD-eligible neighborhoods. At each Winterbash, Citizen Services provided hot chocolate, DJ and music, and winter activities for all ages. In preparation for each event, the team placed new string lighting and colorful decorations in each park and left them up for the duration of the winter season. Attendees also received access to winter resources, including the Wintermission Events & Resources Guide (see Pilot #3).

At two of the Winterbashes, Snow Roll led bike rides where community members could try winter cycling in a safe and comfortable group environment. Before the Snow Roll ride, participants received a free winter beanie hat or pair of gloves from Snow Roll's presenting partner, Independent Health. After the ride, participants enjoyed complimentary hot chocolate, food, and fun games in the park. The gathering also featured a Snow Roll custom, a donation drive for an organization especially in need at this time of year. In total, over 200 community members and 36 service providers participated.

Winterbashes took place in the following public spaces:

1. Massachusetts Ave. Park on February 22, 2020
2. Roosevelt Park on March 1, 2020
3. Martha Mitchell Community Center on March 14, 2020
4. Martin Luther King Jr. Park on March 21, 2020 (cancelled due to COVID-19)



PILOT PROJECT RESULTS

SUCCESSSES

Social and community connection: Created excitement about winter and brought people together

Exciting elements: DJ, music, lights, fire pits – inspired residents to think about winter differently

Strengthened relationships with community partners: Playful and engaging programming from GObike, Children’s Museum, Fire Department, and other partners

Increased coordination with Parks Department: Winterbashes inspired Division of Citizen Services and Parks department to work together and integrate winter activities/spaces into the City’s Parks Master Plan to increase nature and “ready play” in the built environment

Snow Roll: Two of the Winterbash events coincided with Snow Roll bike rides led by GObike Buffalo along a prepared route, inviting community members to try winter cycling in a safe and comfortable group environment

Inspiration for other organizations: The Winterbash approach has inspired other organizations, most notably the Police Athletic League, to host new winter programs that are specifically focused on expanding access to winter sports, equipment, and activities to communities that are typically underrepresented in winter programs



CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE SUCCESS
<p>Success location dependent: Each park had a varied response; some locations engaged more residents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Target parks that are more easily accessible and visible for programming activities
<p>Inclement weather: Temperature and forecast impacts engagement levels</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clearly advertise amenities that make outdoor winter events more comfortable and warmer (e.g. firepits, warming stations) ● Have a contingency plan for bad weather
<p>Underrepresentation of certain demographic groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conduct targeted outreach to attract older adults, newcomers, and other groups that were underrepresented at events
<p>Outreach and promotion: Lack of awareness among residents about the Winterbashes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop stronger media relationships ● Establish better methods for information sharing ● Advertise the events well in advance and in a variety of languages
<p>Event accessibility: Winterbashes primarily catered to people living close to the event location</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide accessible transportation to help people get to the events ● Provide signage in and around the event location ● Ensure sidewalks leading to the event are accessible and cleared of snow
<p>Logistics and set-up: Cumbersome to carry tables, chairs, food, decorations, and other heavy items from cars to event space</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Integrate existing park seating into event site planning ● Enlist more volunteers ● Partner with food trucks to provide meals ● Ensure portable or nearby bathrooms and garbage cans
<p>Limited Pilot Project Evaluation: Unable to measure the full impact due to COVID-19</p>	<p>Future evaluation methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Public life studies before, during, and after Winterbashes at participating parks ● Pop-up engagement boards during each Winterbash to collect participant feedback

PILOT THREE: WEATHERIZATION KITS

Wintermission Buffalo heard from some community members that it was hard for them to consider going out to enjoy public spaces and public life when their own homes did not adequately protect them from the cold. In response to this issue, Citizen Services partnered with the Division of Senior Services and National Fuel to provide 200 Wintermission Weatherization kits in HUD-eligible neighborhoods. Kits contained items such as window insulation sealer tools, electric outlet sealers, vinyl foam weather seals, and heat and air deflectors. The kits were designed to provide better insulation of homes, promote energy conservation, and ensure Buffalonians have a warm home.

The team identified kit recipients based on information provided by the local block clubs and the door-to-door Clean Sweep program. While distributing the kits, Citizen Services and Senior Services took the opportunity to offer additional socialization supports, health checks, clean energy audits, and winter resources. In total, over 150 community members received weatherization kits, socialization supports and access to winter resources.



PILOT PROJECT RESULTS

SUCCESSSES

Distribution: Initial 150 kits distributed through Wintermission expanded to over 600 kits distributed by Division of Citizen Services.

Inspiration: “Kit” approach inspired a brand-new winter pilot project launched in December 2020 called “Winter in a Bag”. The bag is a winter COVID-19 response and includes resources such as family bonding activities (e.g. gingerbread kits, puzzles, board games) and items that inspire play and movement (e.g. jump ropes, dumbbells) and other wellness resources (e.g. essential oils, informative literature) to encourage social and physical activity in the home.

Community coordination: Working closely with block clubs helped ensure that kits and resources reached those who needed them most.

CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE SUCCESS
Documenting impact: Citizen Services did not track the impact or scale of program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a tracking method to better understand program successes, impacts, and gaps
Demographic reach: Kit recipients limited to mostly seniors and older adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand criteria of kit recipients to also include lower-income individuals and families of all ages
Limited resources available: Impact limited to the 600 households that received the kit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase awareness of the program Expand partnership with National Fuel to provide more households with kits Work with other partners and sponsors to expand kit distribution
Limited Pilot Project Evaluation: Unable to measure the full impact due to COVID-19	<p>Future evaluation methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One-on-one interviews or surveys with kit recipients

PILOT FOUR: WINTERMISSION EVENTS & RESOURCES GUIDE



Winter can be difficult and expensive, especially for vulnerable communities, and the Buffalo Wintermission team heard from many Buffalonians that they lack the experience or the funds to genuinely enjoy winter. Recent immigrants told us that when they arrived, they did not know where to look for clothing donations or activity options, while service providers were not always sure which programs to recommend to the populations they serve.

The Wintermission Buffalo team developed a beta version of a printed and online guide that contained information on ways to keep warm in cold weather and participate in affordable indoor and outdoor winter activities and more.

Citizen Services and the Wellness Institute partnered with service providers that work with vulnerable communities to distribute the Wintermission Events & Resources Guide, with a specific focus on recent immigrants, seniors, and low-income communities. The local team also distributed the guide during the Winterbash series (see Pilot #2) and promoted it online. The guide was developed in English and Spanish. Additional considerations:

1. Feedback on the helpfulness of the guide
2. Which demographic found the guide most helpful? (Age, newcomer status, income, etc.)
3. What content should be included in future iterations?

PILOT PROJECT RESULTS

SUCCESSSES

Potential Impact: Initial feedback on the beta version of the Wintermission Events & Resources Guide affirmed the need for a more comprehensive online resource to provide residents with information on winter programming opportunities and winter resources.

CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE SUCCESS
<p>Providing unique content: Need to complement existing guides rather than recreate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase awareness of the program ● Expand partnership with National Fuel to provide more households with kits ● Work with other partners and sponsors to expand kit distribution
<p>Limited Pilot Project Evaluation: Unable to measure the full impact due to COVID-19</p>	<p>Future evaluation methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus groups with potential guide users, including recent immigrants, people with disabilities, seniors, and low-income communities, as well as with service providers ● User survey included in the guide

PILOT PROJECTS SUMMARY

The experience of conducting these small-scale pilot projects provided the local Wintermission team with key insight into the needs and areas of improvement for future iterations of these projects. Other benefits of using pilot project method include:

- Strengthening the capacity of the Division of Citizen Services to use pilot projects to experiment with new ideas
- Due to the small-scale nature of the pilot projects and the relatively low implementation costs, the Wintermission Buffalo team could exercise more flexibility and learn from mistakes in a low-risk environment
- The success of the Wintermission pilot projects and their role in quickly inspiring other organizations to implement winter projects affirmed the importance of applying a winter lens to the City of Buffalo



BUFFALO WINTER CITY STRATEGY

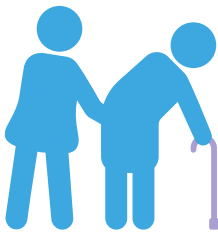
III. BUFFALO WINTER CITY STRATEGY

The Buffalo Winter City Strategy lays out a common vision and recommended actions for improving the quality of winter life in Buffalo’s residents over the next 10 years. It was created using Buffalo’s existing strengths as a winter city, feedback from community engagement and pilot project activities, and lessons learned from other winter cities around the world. Buffalo’s Winter City Strategy is about capitalizing on its community assets, creating new programs and policies to fill existing gaps in winter design and public life, and ensuring the city is welcoming and inclusive for all.

VISION

Buffalo is a city where people celebrate and embrace winter as an opportunity to connect across generations, languages, classes, and cultures. We envision a future in which Buffalo’s city and community leaders alike generate and participate in winter initiatives that empower our most vulnerable residents to be active in winter. Ultimately, our hope is that Buffalo will be seen as a welcoming destination to live, work, and play year-round.

Based on the results of the engagement and pilot project phase, the Wintermission Buffalo team identified four priority areas for increasing social connection and physical activity. These four areas form the four pillars of the Buffalo Winter City Strategy.



Pillar I: Winter Accessibility



Pillar II: Winter Programming



Pillar III: Winter Warmth



Pillar IV: Winter Inclusivity

Each of the four pillars includes a set of recommendations. Each recommendation also outlines the following:

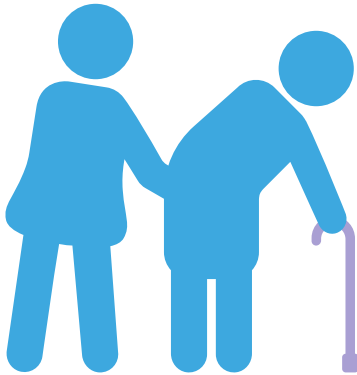
- **Timeframe for Implementation:** The estimated amount of time it would take to carry out the activities of the recommendation, starting from the project start date (which is to be determined by the City of Buffalo and its partners)
- **Budget:** The estimated cost of carrying out the recommendation, based on the following budget key



- **Equity Impacts:** The rationale for a recommendation from a social and/or health equity standpoint
- **Case Study:** An example of another winter city that has implemented an initiative similar to the one being recommended
- **Potential Partners:** A list of organizations who need to be consulted or directly involved in implementing the recommendation



PILLAR ONE: WINTER ACCESSIBILITY



Winter Accessibility Vision: Buffalo is a city that prioritizes mobility and safe access in winter, reducing barriers so that vulnerable residents and visitors can get around more easily and stay active year-round.

Background: Of all the winter challenges that Buffalo residents face, insufficient snow clearing was the most frequently cited issue and the one with the most equity-related implications. Snowy and icy sidewalks are a hazard for everyone but especially for those who have mobility issues and those who rely on walking and public transit. It impedes access to essential services and is the cause of many debilitating injuries and municipal lawsuits. The fear of slipping prevents many people, especially older adults and those with disabilities, from venturing outside altogether, contributing to social isolation during the season.

With the first full Covid-19 winter ahead of us, it is even more imperative to ensure that streets and sidewalks remain accessible throughout winter. For those who work primarily from home, a simple walk or jog in the neighborhood is one of the few ways they can safely and consistently get fresh air and exercise. Improved snow clearing would continue to make this possible so that residents can maintain their physical and mental health throughout the winter. Essential workers are typically from lower income groups that have greater reliance on public transit. Improved snow clearing would make it safer and easier for them to travel to work in winter in what are already challenging times.

Recommended Actions:

1.1 Provide sidewalk clearing services after heavy snowfall

- If snowfall accumulates beyond 4", the City should take responsibility for clearing all sidewalks within 24 hours. Below 4", it is the responsibility of the property owner to clear overnight accumulation of snow by 9 a.m. the following day.
- Ensure the clearance of curb cuts to better facilitate safe travel for everyone, especially those who use walkers and wheelchairs
- Fund the sidewalk clearing service through a surcharge on property owners' property tax bills

Timeframe for Implementation: 1 - 2 years

Budget: \$ \$ \$ - \$ \$ \$ \$

Equity Impacts: Improving sidewalk snow removal would have the effect of improving the safety and comfort of getting around, especially for community members who make a lot of local trips, such as children, caregivers, and older adults.

Case Study: [Rochester, NY](#)

The City of Rochester offers supplemental snow clearing services within 48 hours on all sidewalks once snowfall has accumulated beyond 4". The program is funded by a frontage fee assessed on all city properties. Property owners pay 87.8 cents per foot of sidewalk for snow removal. For example, the City would charge a property owner with a 30-foot wide lot \$26.34 a year for this service. In total, the City plows 878 miles of sidewalks.

Potential Partners: Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets, Assessment and Taxation Department, Division of Citizen Services

1.2 Increase awareness and enforcement of snow clearing bylaws and policies

- Create a central webpage on the City of Buffalo website containing a comprehensive overview of municipal snow clearing bylaws, policies, and resources for residents, as well as a “Frequently Asked Questions” section
- Create a communications campaign during winter reminding property owners of their snow clearing responsibilities
- Use this campaign as an opportunity to promote 311 as an avenue for reporting and enforcing uncleared sidewalks and to promote usage of volunteer-based snow shoveling services among property owners who are physically unable to do clear their own sidewalks

Timeframe for Implementation: 1 year

Budget: 

Equity Impacts: Increasing the compliance among property owners to clear snow from sidewalks is a low-cost approach to increasing the accessibility of Buffalo’s sidewalks.

Case Study: [City of Toronto, Canada](#)

The City of Toronto has an online hub for all snow clearing operations-related information, including snow removal policies, property owners’ responsibilities, winter safety tips, and links to contacting 311 to report snow-clearing issues.

Potential Partners: Division of Citizen Services, 311 Call Center, Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets

1.3 Establish block club-based shovel corps

- Extend the Wintermission Microgrant pilot program and continue providing yearly microgrant opportunities to block clubs to coordinate volunteers to clear sidewalks after light snowfalls (less than 4” accumulation), specifically along routes the connect to community destinations such as parks, community centers, libraries, grocery stores, etc. These efforts would supplement the proposed sidewalk snow clearing activities performed by the City on heavy snowfall days (more than 4” accumulation) as described in Action 1.1
- Connect volunteers with neighborhood residents who require assistance clearing their sidewalks
- Partner with local high schools to recruit student volunteers who can apply their time spent shoveling to community volunteer hour requirements

Timeframe for Implementation: 1 year

Budget:  -  

Equity Impacts: This program would target those who are most in need of assistance clearing their sidewalk. It would help ensure that the most important local sidewalks are clear after light snow falls, making it safer for residents who rely on walking and public transit to access community destinations throughout winter.

Case Study: [Evanston, IL](#)

The City of Evanston is in its tenth year of organizing a Snow Shoveling Program that connects residents who are unable to shovel their own walks with volunteers who are willing to do it for them. People requiring assistance are provided with a contact list of volunteers in their neighborhood who they can directly reach out to for help. The volunteers are responsible for responding to requests or informing the resident if they are unable to perform the task.

Potential Partners: Division of Citizen Services, Board of Block Clubs, Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets

1.4 Improve snow clearing at transit stops

- Coordinate with NFTA to take responsibility for clearing snow from sidewalks surrounding transit stations and bus stops within 24 hours of snowfall
- Coordinate snow clearing at transit stops with that of surrounding streets and sidewalks to maximize mobility

Timeframe for Implementation: 1 year

Budget: 

Equity Impacts: Transit riders are disproportionately lower-income and from BIPOC communities. Improving snow clearing at transit stops means improving access to travel and economic opportunities for these groups.

Case Study: [Minneapolis, MN](#)

Minneapolis' Metro Transit, US Bench Corporation, and adjacent property owners share responsibilities for clearing snow from bus stops. Metro Transit prioritizes clearing snow within 24 hours along bus routes with the highest ridership numbers and travel routes mainly used by people with disabilities. Adjacent property owners are responsible for clearing bus stops that do not have a shelter or a bench, which is approximately 58% of all bus facilities. The City will come afterwards to create an opening in the snow windrow to provide access to the bus stop area. The US Bench Corporation is responsible for clearing snow from bus stops with benches but without shelter.

Potential Partners: NFTA, Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets, Buffalo Transit Riders United

1.5 Clear snow along park paths and recreational trails

- Identify priority parks and recreational trails to include in a pilot for snow clearing
- Ensure the clearance of sidewalk networks that connect to these facilities
- Collect data before and after the pilot to measure impact of snow clearing on usage of park and trail facilities

Timeline for Implementation: 1 year

Budget: 

Equity Impact: Providing people with nearby opportunities to safely walk, exercise, and access nature in their own neighborhoods is crucial during COVID-19, particularly for lower-income communities where people are less likely to have the time or resources to access nature outside of the city.

Case Study: [Guelph, Canada](#)

The City of Guelph proudly proclaims that while they are not required by law to clear their trails, they do so anyway because it benefits the community. They currently maintain 15 miles of winter recreational trails and encourage community members to call a central number to report if a section of the trail has not been cleared within 24 hours of snowfall.

Potential Partners: Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets, Buffalo Trails Board, Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy

1.6 Provide a real-time map of streets, sidewalks, parks, and trails that have been plowed

- Post the live map on an easily accessible website hosted by the City of Buffalo
- Promote the live map via social media during major storms and snow events
- Supplement the map with social media updates about snow clearing activities to manage residents' expectations
- It's anticipated that the live map will reduce the number of calls to 311 and Public Works from residents inquiring about snow removal in their area, resulting in significant time savings that can be allocated to other projects or services

Timeline for Implementation: 1 – 2 years

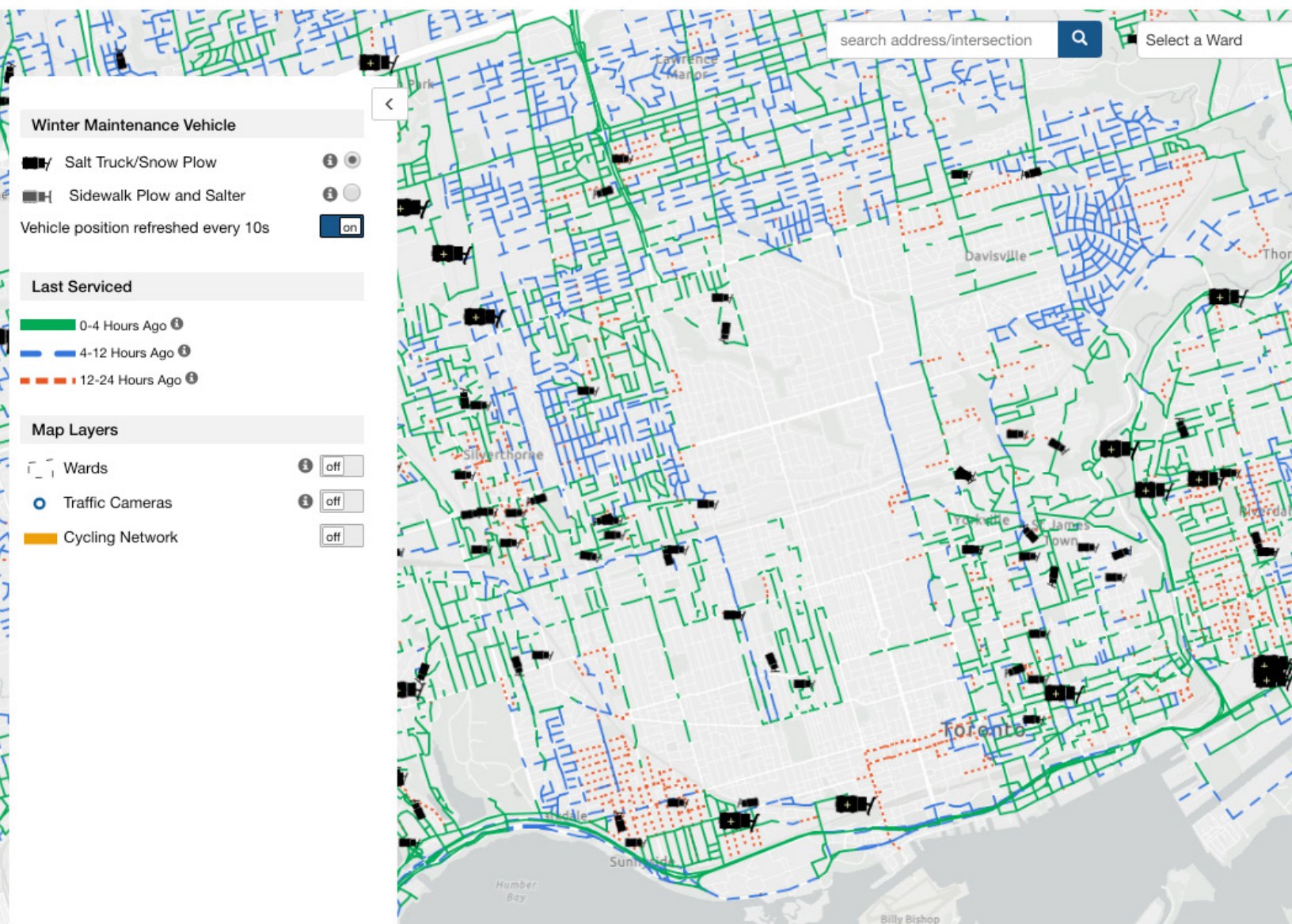
Budget: 

Equity Impact: Individuals whose mobility is particularly impeded by snowfall can check the maps to help plan their travel journey.

Case Study: [Toronto, Canada](#)

Toronto's PlowTO Map tracks the real-time location of street plows, sidewalk plows, and salting trucks and allows users to see which roads have been serviced by winter maintenance crews.

Potential Partners: Streets Department, Division of Citizen Services, 311 Call Center, Public Works, City of Buffalo MIS/Open Data



PILLAR TWO: WINTER PROGRAMMING



Winter Programming Vision: Buffalo is a city that creates opportunity for collaboration with and between local partners to animate and activate parks and public spaces across the city year-round, with a focus on neighborhood parks that also includes educational and social components.

Background: Buffalo has a diverse variety of winter programming offerings that people look forward to every year, including holiday markets like the Queen City Pop-Up Market, scavenger hunts like The Great Winter Get Out, and marquee events like the Larkinville Ice Festival. Canalside especially shines in the winter, with its myriad of offerings including skating, curling, ice biking, and even ice bumper cars. While people love the excitement of these popular winter destinations, many wondered how we could bring the energy of Canalside during the winter to neighborhood parks. Residents expressed that they wanted to see more community programming take place closer to home. While the ability to attend a winter program without traveling across the city appeals to most people, it is especially true for families with children who are more tethered to their local neighborhoods, older adults, and people with disabilities for whom longer-distance travel is a major barrier to access.



Recommended Actions:

2.1 Expand Winterbash dates and locations

- Building on the success and lessons learned from the pilot project, create a regular Winterbash schedule at the four pilot park sites so that residents can come to expect programming at the same time every month (e.g. every second Saturday of the month throughout winter).
- Build community partnerships and bring on sponsors to help support the Winterbashes
- Once the Winterbash model becomes more established, expand the program to other neighborhoods
- Use the Winterbashes as opportunities to conduct ongoing engagement about improving winter life in Buffalo and to distribute existing winter-related information and resources

Timeframe for Implementation: Immediately

Budget: 💰 – 💰 💰

Equity Impacts: The first four Winterbash locations are in HUD-eligible neighborhoods where residents face many barriers to accessing winter recreation and activities. Growing the frequency and quality of the Winterbashes in these areas will build and sustain community members' enthusiasm and social participation throughout winter.

Case Study: N/A

Potential Partners: Division of Citizen Services, Department of Community Service, City of Buffalo Communications Department, Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets, GObike Buffalo, Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency, Buffalo Center for Health Equity

2.2 Support and promote small-scale neighborhood-based activations in winter

- Develop a simple and streamlined application process for residents and local organizations to host public programming in local parks and public spaces
- Create a step-by-step guide or tips sheet on how to successfully host small-scale winter programs in local parks and make it available on the City's website
- Continue leveraging the Love Your Block program to provide capacity building and technical assistance to help block clubs and other community groups launch winter-related programming

- Provide discounts on permits for winter outdoor activations; provide discounts for public events hosted by non-profit and community-based organizations

Timeframe for Implementation: 1 year

Budget: 💰

Equity Impacts: Local winter events close to home are more accessible to busy families with children, older adults, and people with disabilities for whom traveling a long distance is a greater barrier to access.

Case Study: [New York City, NY](#)

New York City's Criminal Justice Department published "Safe Places, Active Spaces!: A Community Playbook for Transforming Public Spaces in Your Neighborhood". It provides context-sensitive, step-by-step instructions for various types of public space activations that residents and community groups can lead to improve safety and wellbeing in their neighborhoods. There are specific chapters dedicated to hosting programs/events in specific locations, such as open spaces in NYC Housing Authority complexes, streets and sidewalks, and gardens and public parks.

Potential Partners: Division of Citizen Services, Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets, Board of Block Clubs, Olmsted Parks Conservancy, Ralph C. Wilson Foundation, Jericho Road, Boys and Girls Clubs of Buffalo, Buffalo Public Schools



2.3 Provide economic incentives for winter programming and business activation

- Continue using the the Love Your Block mini-grant program to fund small-scale, community-based solutions for improving winter life
- Pilot an annual winter innovation grant that funds brand new approaches to improving winter life in Buffalo; promote among community organizations, event organizers, and Business Improvement Districts
- Offer event organizers a discount on winter event and street closure permit fees
- Provide additional maintenance support at these events by clearing snow, if any, from the network of sidewalks connecting to the program/event space

Timeline for implementation: 1 – 2 years

Budget: 

Equity Impact: Grant programs are more likely to appeal to and benefit small-scale community activations and promote more equitable distribution of winter programming across Buffalo’s neighborhoods

Case Study: [Toronto, Canada](#)

The City of Toronto runs a Winter Activation Grant Program that provides funding for Business Improvement Associations and community organizations to animate their main streets during winter. Applicants can apply for up to 50% of project costs, for a maximum grant of \$12,500 per project. The application process is relatively short and straightforward and can be accessed on the City’s website.

Potential Partners: Division of Citizen Services, Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets, Buffalo Place, Buffalo Board of Block Clubs, Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency, Buffalo Urban Development Corporation

2.4 Provide economic incentives for winter programming and business activation

- Work with members of the adaptive sports community and Parks and Recreation Department to identify opportunities to offer adaptive winter recreational activities in both indoor and outdoor settings

Timeline for Implementation: 1 – 2 years

Budget: 

Equity Impact: Many adaptive winter sports opportunities are located just outside Buffalo. Providing more opportunities in the city would greatly increase the access to residents, especially those without a car.

Potential Partners: Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets, Department of Community Services and Recreational Programming, SABAH, Adaptive Sports Buffalo, Buffalo Waterfront, IDEA Center – University of Buffalo, Mayor’s Commission on Disabilities, Western New York Independent Living

2.5 Include “Park Winterization” as an option in the Adopt-A-Park Feature program

- Allow sponsors to adopt winter maintenance activities of a park that would allow for it to remain open, accessible, and inviting throughout the season
- Winter maintenance activities could include heating public bathrooms, clearing walking paths, maintaining decorative lighting, maintaining skating rinks, etc.
- Expand the Adopt-A-Park Feature program to non-Olmsted parks across the city

- Advertise Adopt-A-Park sponsorship or volunteer opportunities within the park

Timeline for Implementation: 1 – 2 years

Budget: N/A

Equity Impact: Increasing the attractiveness and accessibility of parks in the winter would benefit all Buffalo residents, especially those who rely on Buffalo’s park system to access nature and physical exercise.

Case Study: N/A

Potential Partners: Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy, Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets, Department of Community Services and Recreational Programming, Ralph C. Wilson Foundation

across the city. In 2015, the program expanded into the winter season by offering afterschool programming every weekday from 3:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. and on Saturdays from 1:00 pm – 5:00 p.m. Program leaders host a variety of fun games, crafts, and activities for children using materials that are stored in a simple green shack. Activity schedules are posted on the side of the shack every week and kids participate for free.

Potential Partners: Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets, Department of Community Services and Recreational Programming, Police Athletic League of Buffalo, Buffalo Board of Education, Buffalo Freedom School, Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo, Buffalo Science Museum Boys & Girls Clubs of Buffalo, GObike Buffalo, Penn Dixie Fossil Park & Nature Reserve, Willie Hutch Jones Educational and Sports Program, Victory Sports Global Outreach, Inc.

2.6 Provide afterschool winter programming in parks

- Hire activity leaders to supervise and host winter-appropriate games, activities, and programming in parks during afterschool hours
- Encourage community centers, schools, and other after school programming providers to bring their activities outside to parks

Timeframe for Implementation: 1 - 2 years

Budget:   –   

Equity Impacts: Offering outdoor afterschool programs is an appropriate way to pivot programming post-COVID-19.

Case Study: [Edmonton, Canada](#)

The City of Edmonton Parks and Recreation Department’s Green Shacks program is a longstanding summer drop-in program aimed at children ages 6 – 12 that takes place in parks

2.7 Pilot a winter gear share program

- Provide free winter gear rentals to lower the barrier to winter recreation
- Start by offering the most popular and accessible gear items, such as skates, snowshoes, and sleds, before expanding into more specialized winter gear
- Identify an accessible location for the pilot gear share program e.g. a public library, community center, public park office, neighborhood skating rink, etc.
- Prioritize lower-income neighborhoods for the pilot
- Solicit community donations of gently used winter gear
- Partner with sporting goods stores and companies through sponsorship opportunities

Timeline for Implementation: 1 – 2 years

Budget: 💰 – 💰 💰

Equity Impact: Residents with low income face many barriers when it comes to participating in winter recreation due to the prohibitive cost of winter gear and equipment. A free, public gear share program would greatly increase the accessibility of winter recreation.

Case Study: [Eau Claire, WI](#)

The City of Eau Claire operates a gear share service out of two local public libraries. Residents can borrow gear for free with their library card. For those without a library card, they have the option of borrowing gear directly from Pinehurst Park, a local public park that offers many winter recreation opportunities. Residents can borrow a wide selection of gear including sleds, snow shoes and poles, hockey gear, and more.

Potential Partners: Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets, Department of Community Services and Recreational Programming, Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo, Boys & Girls Clubs of Buffalo, Buffalo & Erie County Public Library, Buffalo Tool Lending Library, Erie County Department of Social Services, Dress for Success, Catholic Charities



PILLAR THREE: WINTER WARMTH



Winter Warmth Vision: Buffalo is a city that ensures that residents and visitors have access to warmth and security from the elements during the coldest season of the year with the purpose of allowing citizens and guests to enjoy our unique winter culture.

Background: While winter is inevitably cold, a key part of thriving in the season is finding ways to keep warm, whether it's having warm clothing, a temporary place to warm up before venturing back into the cold, or the ability to keep a warm home. Residents expressed that they generally feel unprepared for the season. When asked to rate how prepared they feel for winter every year, the average answer was 2.3 out of 5 (1 = very underprepared and 5 = very prepared). Providing winter warmth in the city of Buffalo means not only finding ways to better prepare residents for the season, but also identifying infrastructure and programmatic changes that can help people feel comfortable in the cold. Staying warm despite the freezing temperatures is an important step towards enjoying everything that winter has to offer, be it a quiet walk in the snow or a rowdy toboggan ride down a hill.

Recommended Actions:

3.1 Expand home winterization resources

- Build on the weatherization kit pilot project by formalizing the distribution of weatherization kits aimed at helping people keep their homes warm, increasing the efficiency of their home heating systems, and reducing home heating costs
- Provide a supplementary resource containing instructions on how to use the items in the weatherization kit
- Set up tables/tents to distribute weatherization kits at fall and winter events across the city, with a particular focus on lower-income neighborhoods
- While distributing the kits, use this opportunity to offer recipients socialization supports, health checks, clean energy audits, and winter resources
- Support existing organizations that are already doing this work in Buffalo or are interested in helping distribute weatherization resources

Timeframe for Implementation:

Budget: \$ \$ - \$ \$ \$

Equity Impacts: Winter can be expensive. Providing households with weatherization kits is a small upfront investment that could potentially increase the energy efficiency in their homes by 35%. These cost savings are especially significant for low-income families who already struggle with other costs associated with living in a winter city.

Case Study: [Chicago, IL](#)

The Low-Cost Weatherization and Education Program (LCWEP) prepares, educates, and trains Chicago residents to implement low-cost weatherization techniques. Chicago Conservation Corps volunteers first receive training on these techniques. They then host weatherization workshops where they distribute weatherization kits to their neighbors and provide them with training and assistance installing the kit contents.

Potential Partners: National Fuel, Division of Citizen Services, Division of Senior Services, Erie County Department of Senior Services, Matt Urban Center, Project M.O.V.E., PUSH Buffalo, local energy providers, the U.S. Department of Energy Weatherization Assistance Program, NeighborWorks® Community Partners Buffalo, NHS of South Buffalo, Community Action Organization, Inc. Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency, Department of Inspection Services, New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA)

3.2 Distribute resources to educate tenants about their rights during winter and year-round

- Include specific winter-related information such as landlord responsibilities pertaining to home heating, snow removal, repairs, etc.
- Include legal information and tips on how to negotiate the court system and negotiations with landlords
- Provide translations of these resources in Spanish and other commonly spoken languages

Timeline for implementation: 1 year

Budget: 

Equity Impact: The threat of eviction in winter puts tenants in a particularly vulnerable and dangerous situation. Educating renters about their rights better enables them to advocate for themselves vis-à-vis landlords and in court.

Case Study: [New York City, NY](#)

The Center for Urban Pedagogy collaborated with Housing Court Answers and designers to create a resource for tenants to learn about their rights and how to represent themselves in court. The guide uses illustrations and plain language to convey otherwise complex details about the legal system.

Potential Partners: Division of Citizen Services, PUSH Buffalo City of Buffalo Fair Housing Office, HOME, Inc., Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency - Cities Rise, Department of Inspection Services, Buffalo City Court, Community Action Organization, Inc, City of Buffalo Office of New Americans

3.3 Create more winter-friendly bus shelters

- Work with NFTA to identify opportunities to improve the frequency and/or wind resistance and/or heating of bus shelters
- Pilot heated bus shelters at major transit hubs, along routes with the largest ridership numbers, and in neighborhoods that have the greatest reliance on public transit
- Source heaters that operate on a timer and are activated by a press of a button
- Work with NFTA to improve bus shelter materials and designs to increase comfort in winter e.g. seats made of wood or composite instead of metal

Timeframe for implementation: Ongoing

Budget: 

Equity impacts: Transit riders are disproportionately low-income and their reliance on transit makes them more vulnerable to winter weather challenges. Winter-friendly improvements to bus shelters would make the public transit experience more comfortable and dignified for riders.

Case Study: [Fort McMurray, Canada](#)

Fort McMurray's temperatures dip as low as -40F. To increase ridership and comfort, the City spent \$9 million in 2013 to heat 300 bus shelters across the city. The shelters feature doors that keep the cold out and a button, when pressed, activates the heater in the ceiling for 10 minutes at a time before shutting off.

Potential Partners: NFTA, Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets, Buffalo Transit Riders United, Buffalo Center for Health Equity, GObike Buffalo, Planning Division

Timeline for Implementation: 2 – 3 years

Budget: 

Equity Impacts: Having places for people to seek respite from the elements will encourage them to stay longer in public spaces. Covered, comfortable seating areas are also important for catering to the needs of older adults.

Case Study: [Edmonton, Canada](#)

The City of Edmonton has funded the construction of five architecturally stunning park pavilions that provide park users with a place to use bathroom and changeroom facilities, purchase a warm beverage, sit and enjoy a beautiful view of the park surrounds, storage for sports equipment, among a variety of other amenities.

Potential Partners: Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets, Department of Community Services and Recreational Programming, Board of Block Clubs, Olmsted Parks Conservancy, Ralph C. Wilson Foundation, Niagara River Greenway

3.4 Install permanent pavilions in parks and public spaces

- Provide shelter for people to find reprieve from wind, sleet, and snow
- Enclosed, winterized pavilions can provide park goers with useful amenities such as bathrooms, changerooms, seating, and vendor areas
- Open, outdoor pavilions can be designed for all-season usage by including benches, picnic tables, wind protection, and outdoor fireplaces for added warmth
- Pavilions can be rented out for special events by individuals or organizations



Bison-shaped warming hut in Winnipeg, Canada
Image by Rob Swystun

3.5 Install temporary “warming hut” art installations

- Host an annual competition inviting artists, architects, and designers to submit creative warming hut concepts; winners will receive funding to build and exhibit their installations in public space
- Celebrate the launch of the warming huts with concurrent winter programming, e.g. music, food, family-friendly activities, etc.
- Keep the installations up and open to the public for the duration of the winter
- Create sponsorship opportunities to help fund the costs of the competition
- Partner with arts and culture organizations, colleges, local galleries and museums to promote the competition
- Host the art installations in a location that typically sees significantly less foot traffic in the winter

Timeline for Implementation: 1 - 2 years

Budget: 

Equity Impacts: Warming huts can be displayed in parts of the city that do not see much foot traffic or activity during the winter. By driving people towards the area, they can serve as both a driver of local economic development and a free winter attraction for all ages.

Case Study: [Winnipeg, Canada](#)

Winnipeg’s Warming Huts started as a local effort to bring art and intrigue to Winnipeg’s winters but has since grown into a global phenomenon. In 2019, the competition attracted 177 entries from 32 countries, all vying for a chance to see their design concepts come to life on the banks of Winnipeg’s River Trail, where visitors can skate to, interact with, and enjoy the warming hut installations. The huts remain open to the public until the end of the skating season

Potential Partners: Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets Department, Ralph C. Wilson Foundation, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy, Visit Buffalo Niagara, Explore Buffalo, Buffalo Board of Block Clubs, Niagara River Greenway, Buffalo Waterfront, Buffalo Place, American Institute of Architects Buffalo, Buffalo Architecture Foundation, Explore & More Children’s Museum, University of Buffalo School of Architecture, Buffalo State College-International Center for Studies in Creativity (ICSC)

3.6 Use year-round plantings in parks, public spaces, and transit waiting areas to provide shelter from wind in winter and sun in summer

- Identify streets, parks, and public spaces in the city that experience harsh winter microclimates
- In large open spaces, plant trees and dense vegetation along edges and walking paths to reduce wind speeds and windchill
- Planting trees near buildings can help reduce wind pressure and lower building heating costs
- Require developers to plant trees to offset winter wind effects

Timeframe of Implementation: Ongoing

Budget: 

Equity Impacts: Trees and vegetation play a tremendous role in how comfortable it is for someone to walk or bike. It provides protection from the elements year-round as well as other environmental benefits.

Case Study: [Vancouver, Canada](#)

Scientists at the University of British Columbia studied the effect of wind on home energy costs. The research found that the trees in the neighborhood they studied reduce homeowners' energy bills by an estimated 15% in the summer and 10% in the winter, compared with a neighborhood with no trees. Even in dense downtown neighborhoods where trees are shorter than buildings, they have the effect of reducing wind speeds for pedestrians.

Potential Partners: Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets, Buffalo Waterfront, Niagara River Greenway, Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy, Ralph C. Wilson Foundation, Buffalo Place, Division of Citizen Services' CPTED Program

3.7 Install winterized bathrooms in parks and public spaces

- Retrofit existing park bathrooms to support winter use and require that all new public park bathrooms be winterized
- Ensure that the pathways leading to the bathrooms are clear of snow and ice

Timeline for Implementation: 1 – 2 years

Budget: 

Equity Impact: Providing public bathrooms year-round will make it easier for people to stay longer in parks and public spaces, especially children, older adults, caregivers, and anyone with chronic illnesses who require frequent access to bathroom facilities. It will also provide people with handwashing facilities and a temporary place to warm up during the winter.

Case Study: [Toronto, Canada](#)

In November 2020, the City of Toronto more than doubled the number of bathrooms that will remain open throughout winters, from 64 to 143. Of the 79 new bathrooms, 28 are within existing facilities that were normally closed throughout winter months, some of which required minor retrofits to support winter use. An additional 51 portable bathrooms have been deployed to areas where there are high levels of winter activity.

Potential Partners: Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets

3.8 Amend the open fire bylaw and create a new fire pit policy

- Incorporate community fire pits and fire bowls into park programming and design; require fire pit operators to book the fire pit ahead of time and undergo a simple fire safety training session
- Encourage a four-season patio culture by allowing residents and businesses to safely operate fire pits

Timeline for Implementation: 1 – 2 years

Budget: 💰

Equity Impact: Currently, it is illegal to host an open fire. However, many hardware stores sell fire pits for personal use, and residents either knowingly or unknowingly host open fires in violation of the bylaw. Given the lack of clarity among residents about this issue, it results in inconsistent—and potentially inequitable—reporting and enforcement.

Case Study: [Toronto, Canada](#)

Toronto has 29 parks with fire pits that are available for community members to rent and use. Fire pit users need to obtain a permit ahead of time, which can be done by calling a central number to book the fire pit and pay permit fees. The fire pits are often the centerpiece of birthday parties and social gatherings year-round.

Potential Partners: Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets, Buffalo Fire Department, City of Buffalo Department of Law, Buffalo Common Council



Public realm lighting in Eau Claire, WI

3.9 Use pedestrian-scale lighting to improve safety and provide visual warmth

- Encourage parks, public space, and main streets to use creative yet context-sensitive lighting to make places more whimsical, inviting, and magical in winter
- Incorporate outlets into tree planting sites to allow for decorative lighting. Encourage buildings to incorporate creative lighting to enhance the aesthetics of the building features and its surroundings; use lighting to highlight Buffalo's historic buildings and sites
- Use lighting as part of an overall strategy for nighttime design to create a distinct sense of place and visual identity for neighborhoods, streets, and public spaces in the evening, while also addressing issues of pedestrian safety and comfort

Timeline for Implementation: 2 – 3 years

Budget: 💰💰 – 💰💰💰

Equity Impacts: Historically, North American cities have prioritized the needs of drivers and automobiles in their urban lighting strategies over that of people walking and biking. This has often resulted in well-lit roadways, with little attention paid to the amount of light that reaches sidewalks and how that affects the safety and comfort of pedestrians. There is also a gendered aspect to lighting and safety—women feel much less safe walking at night than men.

Well-lit sidewalks can help increase people’s sense of security, particularly those who are more vulnerable to street-based harassment and violence. By shifting the lighting focus to pedestrians and other vulnerable road users, Buffalo can take steps towards becoming a more safe, welcoming, walkable winter city.

Case Study: [Public Lighting in Cities](#)

This research paper explores the benefits of strategic public lighting in urban settings, including reduced crime, reduced fear of crime, and reduced road accidents.

Potential Partners: Buffalo Place, Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets, Waterfront Buffalo, Niagara River Greenway, Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy, Ralph C. Wilson Foundation, Preservation Buffalo Niagara, Division of Citizen Services- Love Your Block, Division of Citizen Services’ CPTED Program, Buffalo Police Department Community Police Unit/NET

3.10 Support public art that uses color and light to brighten up the long, dark days of winter

- Fund public art that responds to the need to increase warmth, light, and sense of safety and comfort throughout the year; encourage artists to develop interactive, site-specific works
- Expand the Canalside illumination art show to silos, grain elevators, and blank industrial buildings in other parts of the city
- Hire local community members to conceive, fabricate, and/or install the art pieces

Timeline of Implementation: 1 – 2 years

Budget: \$ \$ – \$ \$ \$

Equity Impacts: Public art can help create a sense of place and identity. Interactive, site-specific works can foster community pride and help activate otherwise underused areas in the wintertime.

Case Study: [Montreal, Canada](#)

Montreal’s Luminothérapie brings a new “illuminated playground” to a downtown square every year. Each year the city works with a new lighting designer or artist to transform the space into an interactive, light-based wonderland during the winter months. For example, the 2020 edition of Luminotherapie will bring 30 interactive seesaws with light and sound that changes when people use them, creating a unique chorus from one minute to the next. The installation is free for visitors to explore and is a winter highlight for many.

Potential Partners: Explore Buffalo, Visit Buffalo Niagara, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo Arts Studio, Board of Block Clubs, Buffalo Rising, Buffalo Bayou Partnership, Niagara River Greenway, Ralph C. Wilson Foundation, Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy, Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets, University of Buffalo, Arts Services Initiative of Western New York, Buffalo Arts Commission



PILLAR FOUR: WINTER INCLUSIVITY



Winter Inclusivity Vision: Buffalo is a city that works closely with our vulnerable and historically marginalized populations through programs that facilitate access to resources so that all residents, visitors, and communities can connect and thrive in winter together.

Background: While winter affects everyone, its benefits and disadvantages are unevenly distributed among the population. Some groups are better able to access festive gatherings, outdoor recreational gatherings, and the coziness of a warm home. Others are made disproportionately more vulnerable in winter and find themselves more isolated due to unsafe travel conditions and lack of warm clothing and affordable recreation options. The Winter Inclusivity pillar is about centering the needs of groups that are underrepresented in winter activities and identifying targeted ways to increase access to these opportunities.

Recommended Actions:

4.1 Develop a comprehensive online winter resource guide

- Target information in guide towards both longtime residents and newcomers who are unfamiliar with living in a winter city
- Include practical information such as dressing for the weather, keeping a house warm, getting around safely in winter, as well as information about affordable recreational programming and events

- Work with settlement agencies to ensure comprehensiveness of the guide for newcomer groups
- Promote the guides among service providers and settlement agencies to use the resource guide as the basis of winter workshops and training sessions for newcomers
- Provide translations of the guide in Spanish and other commonly spoken languages
- Identify and highlight programs and services that are accessible to people with disabilities
- Update the guide every year to reflect new services and calendar of events

Timeframe for Implementation: 1 - 2 years

Budget: 💰 – 💰💰

Equity Impacts: There are so many ways to prepare for and enjoy winter in Buffalo but many people lack experience with winter or are simply unaware of those opportunities. A comprehensive guide would expand knowledge of simple tips and tricks for improving quality of life in winter and would be particularly helpful for those adjusting to their new home in the city.

Case Study: [Edmonton, Canada](#)

WintercityEdmonton.ca is Edmonton's premier online winter resource. It targets a broad audience and includes a comprehensive list of resources on how to enjoy winter in the city, from creative ideas for hosting your public or private events to accessing winter related services and recreational programming.

Potential Partners: Division of Citizen Services, Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo, Jericho Road, HEAL International, Board of Block Clubs, Buffalo Place, Visit Buffalo Niagara, Explore Buffalo, City of Buffalo Office of New Americans

4.2 Pilot a Seniors in Service Friendship Program for Newcomers

- Connect seniors with newcomers to introduce them to winter activities and resources, teach them how to brave the cold, even invite them over for winter holidays
- Organize winter walking groups, activity groups, outings to indoor and outdoor events, etc.
- Create intercultural and intergenerational community connections while also reducing social isolation among seniors

Timeframe for Implementation: 1 year

Budget:  –  

Equity Impact: New habits are most likely to stick during periods of life transition. Introducing newcomers to active and social winter activities at the onset of their settlement process will more likely result in them keeping these healthy habits going forward.

Case Study: Toronto, Canada

Toronto’s CultureLink settlement agency hosts the Wintegration Program as part of their overarching NEAT (Newcomers Explore and Appreciate Toronto) Mentorship Program. It organizes accessible opportunities for newcomers of all ages to familiarize themselves with winter pastimes and develop a healthy habit of being active year-round. Activities range from outdoor ice skating, tobogganing, winter walks and hikes to indoor museum visits. Volunteer mentors and newcomer peer volunteers plan the activities which typically run from December to

April and engage hundreds of newcomer families in fun and safe winter activities.

Potential Partners: Division of Citizen Services, Division of Senior Services, Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo, Erie County Department of Senior Services, Jericho Road, HEAL International, Board of Block Clubs, Service Collaborative of WNY, United Way Buffalo & Erie County, Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)

4.3 Increase accessibility of existing winter events and programming for people with low mobility and/or disabilities

- Require that winter event organizers and their staff receive education, training, and/or resources on how to support participants with disabilities from their arrival to their departure from the event
- Ensure that sidewalks and paths leading to and from winter events are properly cleared and accessible for people using wheelchairs or assistive devices

Timeframe for Implementation: 1 – 2 years

Budget:  –  

Equity Impacts: Disability advocates and residents with disabilities expressed that their needs are often not understood by event organizers (in winter or otherwise). Additionally, people with disabilities are not always clear on their right to be accommodated, resulting in discrimination and inability to participate in certain programs and events. Creating a greater understanding across the board of the rights of people with disabilities and responsibilities of event organizers will help create a more inclusive and accessible winter culture in Buffalo.

Case Study: N/A

Potential Partners: SABAH, Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo, Erie County Office for People with Disabilities, Department of Community Services and Recreational Programming, Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets, Law Department, Adaptive Sports Buffalo, Division of Senior Services, WNY Independent Living Center

4.4 Expand indoor winter recreation options and spaces for people of all ages and abilities

- Work with disability advocates and Division of Senior Services to identify opportunities to expand year-round indoor accessible and adaptive recreation for all ages and abilities
- Offer adaptive virtual programs for those who cannot travel to a program location and/or as a safe programming alternative during Covid-19
- Create a central information hub where people can access a comprehensive directory of accessible recreation options
- Provide discounts on winter space rental fees of city-owned event spaces

Timeframe for Implementation: 2 – 3 years

Budget: 

Equity Impact: For some people, outdoor winter recreation is simply not a feasible option. This is particularly true for older adults and people with disabilities who expressed during the community consultation process that indoor winter activities are often the most accessible option. For newcomers to Buffalo/ North America, participation in winter indoor activities may be more palatable and serve as a steppingstone for outdoor activities.

Case Study: [Toronto, Canada](#)

The City of Toronto runs Adapted and Inclusive Services (AIS), which offers recreational programs for individuals with disabilities who want to be with other people with similar interests and abilities in a safe and positive environment. These are typically held in small group settings in locations across the city. During Covid-19, AIS started offering virtual adapted programming for all ages.

Potential Partners: Department of Community Services and Recreational Programming, Police Athletic League of Buffalo, Jericho Road, HEAL International, SABAH, Adaptive Sports Buffalo, Visually Impaired Advancement (formerly Olmsted Center for Sight), Buffalo Club for the Deaf, Erie County Office for People with Disabilities, Division of Senior Services, Asarese-Matters CC, Hennepin CC, JFK CC, Lincoln Field House, Machnica CC, Tosh-Collins CC

4.5 Expand reach and impact of block club meetings and Block Chats through virtual channels

- Continue using the block chats and block club meetings to engage residents about winter challenges and opportunities and to share winter-related information and resources
- Even once it becomes safer to conduct meetings in person, continue to allow virtual participation to reach a wider audience
- Promote participation in Block Clubs among segments of the community that are currently underrepresented

Timeline for Implementation: Ongoing

Budget: 

Equity Impacts: Participation in Block Chats and Block Club meetings are direct ways to inform and influence the Division of Citizen Services and other municipal departments' policies and practices. Creating opportunities for more citizens to get involved would increase the efficacy of the city in providing community members with the resources and services they need in winter and beyond.

Case Study: N/A

Potential Partners: Division of Citizen Services, Board of Block Clubs, Division of Senior Services



IV. SUSTAINING WINTERMISSION BUFFALO

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's support and funding of Wintermission Buffalo has instigated and accelerated the City of Buffalo's adoption of a winter lens over the past two years. Sustaining the driving spirit and activities of Wintermission Buffalo in the long term will rely on three key approaches:

1. Commitment from a lead agency:

- The Mayor's Division of Citizen Services has been the primary local leader of Wintermission Buffalo. Given Citizens Services' existing centralizing role within the City of Buffalo and ability to work across departmental silos, they are in the best position to continue leading this initiative
- Designating a staff member within the division to serve as the Program Lead for all things that fall under the Wintermission Buffalo banner would further entrench the winter lens within the City of Buffalo's culture, policies, and operating procedures

2. Formalization of Wintermission Buffalo working groups:

- Each of the four pillars of the Wintermission Buffalo Winter City Strategy can form the basis of four distinct working groups: Winter Accessibility Working Group, Winter Programming Working Group, Winter Warmth Working Group, and Winter Inclusivity Working Group
- Each working group will ideally consist of representatives from various city departments and community organizations who are committed to working together to advance the strategic goals and projects of their respective pillar
- The multidisciplinary makeup of each team also promotes the adoption of a winter lens in other city departments and initiatives
- Each working group should meet regularly throughout the year to plan and implement the recommended actions that fall under their pillar focus in addition to developing new ideas and approaches for winter projects and programming
- As there will inevitably be areas of overlap between the four working groups, it is recommended to schedule either quarterly or bi-monthly meetings with all working groups present to ensure a harmonious implementation of the Winter City Strategy

3. Monitoring and evaluation of the Winter City Strategy:

- The Program Lead should collaborate with working group members to identify and track of measurable goals and indicators of success both for the overarching Wintermission Buffalo initiative as well as for the individual projects that fall under each pillar
- A progress report that captures the stories, successes, and lessons learned from the first two to five years of the implementation of the Winter City Strategy will serve as a helpful document for both informing the public about Wintermission activities and the continued importance of using a winter lens
- Having measurable indicators of success can also help make the case for additional budget allocation towards Wintermission related projects
- This strategy should be revisited and updated in another 8 – 10 years to reflect future changes in Buffalo's population and planning context

V. CONCLUSION

When asked to think about Buffalo's relationship with winter, Buffalo's reputation as a City of Good Neighbours that has proudly come together to endure winter storm events is what often comes to mind. While that hardy identity is indeed foundational to Wintermission Buffalo's work, conversations with leaders and residents across the city have proven that winter in Buffalo is and can be so much more than that.

Based on feedback from residents, the results of Wintermission pilot projects, as well as the success of existing winter programming in the city, it has become ever clearer that there is a massive appetite among Buffalonians to embrace all the unique opportunities that winter has to offer, but they need the City's help in doing so.

Wintermission Buffalo allowed city leaders and residents to apply a winter lens to the design, management, and programming of streets and public spaces. This Winter City Strategy lays a path for the City of Buffalo to fulfill its vision of becoming a place where winter can be safer, more accessible, and more joyful for all. By leveraging winter as a time for social connection and wellbeing instead of social isolation and hardship, Buffalo has positioned itself as a foremost winter city vanguard, and in doing so has trailblazed a path in the snow for winter communities across the country to follow in its footsteps.

