

I-81 Viaduct Project

Project Recommendations of the Syracuse Urbanism Club

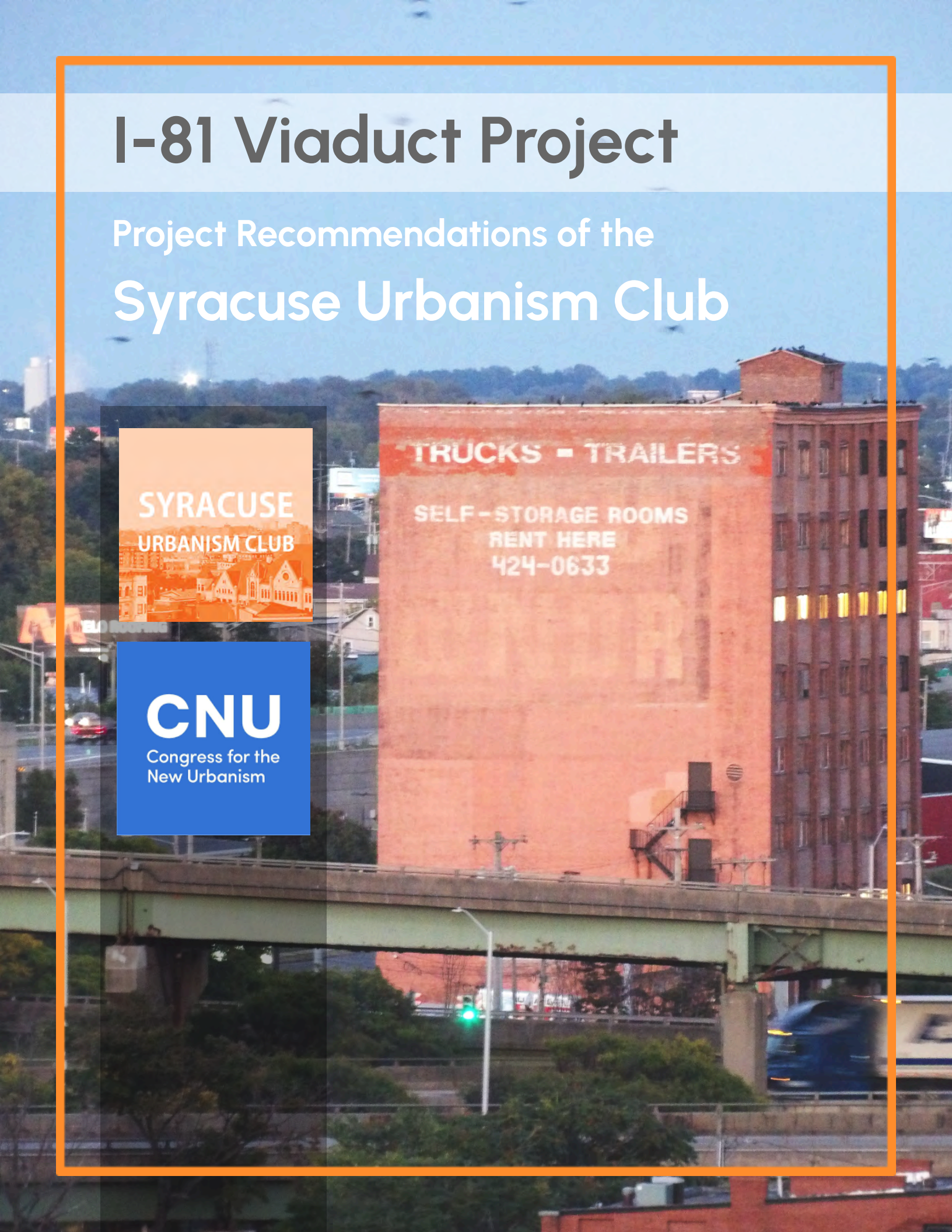
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I-81 Viaduct Project: Official Project Recommendations

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I-81 Viaduct Project: Official Project Recommendations

Summary

Our Project Recommendations for the I-81 Viaduct Project

The Syracuse Urbanism Club makes these project recommendations for the NYSDOT's designs for the Community Grid Option of the I-81 Viaduct Project with the goal of a productive collaboration with the NYSDOT to create the best project outcomes for all users. The Community Grid is the right path forward for our city, and we see an opportunity to fine-tune the details of the project's designs to ensure an even greater success for the NYSDOT's transformative efforts in the Salt City.

In this document, we've made a series of suggestions for enhancements to public spaces, bicycle / pedestrian / transit infrastructure, plantings, traffic, design details, and community creative involvement relevant to the scope of the I-81 Viaduct Project. We look forward to working with all stakeholders to implement these changes where feasible and in the best interests of the public.

The Syracuse Urbanism Club

The Syracuse Urbanism Club strives to build access to human-centered, walkable, vibrant communities and spaces for all. Our goal is to enhance the urbanism of Syracuse through physical installations and programming in public space, as well as advocacy on policy and design. We are the Syracuse subchapter of the [Congress for the New Urbanism](#).

We were founded in March of 2023, and have since grown to a membership of 81 at the time of voting to approve these project recommendations.

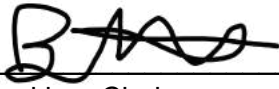
Learn more about us at: SyracuseUrbanism.org



I-81 Viaduct Project: Official Project Recommendations

Approval of our Project Recommendations

The September 2023 general meeting of the Syracuse Urbanism Club has voted unanimously on 9/26/2023 to approve a draft of our project recommendations, pending amendments that we've now incorporated into this document.



Baxter Hankin – Chair

10/8/2023
Date



Jaynelle Nixon – Vice Chair

10/8/2023
Date

Endorsements of our Project Recommendations

The Syracuse Urbanism Club's Official Project Recommendations for the I-81 Viaduct Project are endorsed by those listed at the link below:

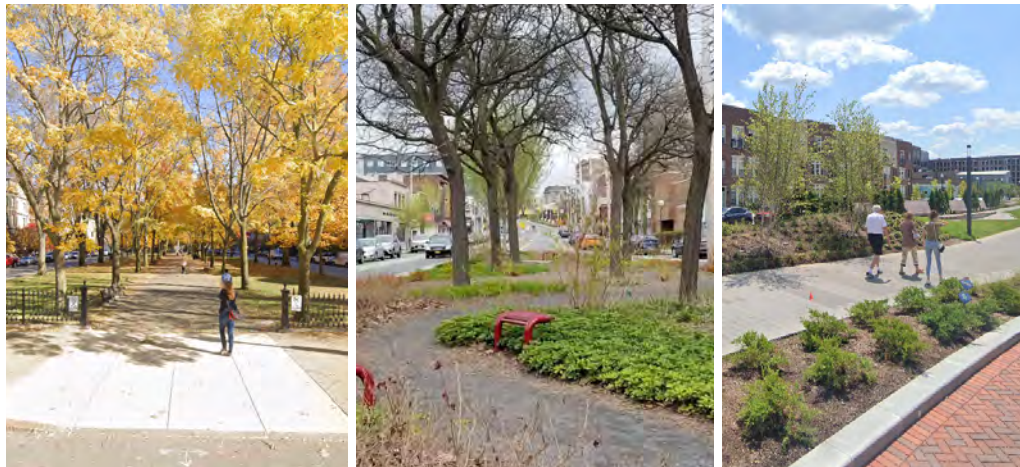
SyracuseUrbanism.org/i-81

Project Recommendations

Public Spaces

1. Almond Street Median.

The median of Almond Street can have a pedestrian path down the center, lined by trees and benches on either side, to create a linear park. For examples, see the three images below. From left to right: Commonwealth Avenue in Boston, the small triangular green space just east of Forman Park in Syracuse, and Monon Boulevard in Carmel, IN.



Left: NYSDOT Almond Street Median Design

Right: Syracuse Urbanism Club Median Redesign

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2. Enhance Existing Spaces.

Work with the city's parks department to enhance existing public spaces in and around the I-81 Viaduct Project area, including but not limited to (A) Clinton Square, (B) Forman Park, and (C) Ormond Spencer Park. Additionally, transform the space in front of the (D) Center of Excellence into a usable park space.



3. The Canal District.

The new Canal District public spaces can be designed with programming in mind, imagining more active, everyday uses for the space. If the water feature is kept, perhaps a splash pad could be more interactive.

4. Creekwalk Expansion.

Create a kayak launch on the new NYSDOT-proposed section of the Onondaga Creek Downtown.

5. Interactive Features.

Create interactive features in public spaces. These could include skate parks, playgrounds, climbing walls, sports courts and fields, chess and ping pong tables, and outdoor exercise equipment.

6. Winter-Oriented Spaces.

Design public spaces to have interactive uses for the winter so that the spaces of the city remain vibrant and full of people year-round.

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7. Entrance to Hawley-Green.

Reconnect the city center with the Hawley-Green neighborhood. Underneath I-690 at this location, add murals, other art, and creative lighting design to encourage people to walk, bike, or drive across, reconnecting a part of the city that has been divided for far too long. This location is shown below.



8. Corner Parklets

In the small grass lawn areas designed near the corners of the reconstructed Almond Street, program these spaces to be usable. Incorporate native plantings, bicycle parking, trash cans, sculptures, murals, seating, and other interactive elements. Each of these spaces can have its own unique identity, with an artistic flair to the design of each of the objects in the space, no matter how mundane the use of the object is. Examples of the locations of four of these spaces on the NYSDOT's reconstructed Almond Street are outlined with dotted lines below.



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Bicycle, Pedestrian, & Transit Infrastructure

1. Protect On-Street Bike Lanes.

Keep on-street bike lanes protected with bollards if there is not enough room for full separation from the street, and purchase bike lane snow plows so the city can perform proper winter maintenance for them.

2. Pedestrian Connections at Hiawatha Blvd & Park St.

Create pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure connections between the Creekwalk and Destiny USA Mall across I-81 to the CNY Regional Market, the Regional Transportation Center, and the Syracuse Mets Stadium. Also provide pedestrian connections across Hiawatha Boulevard to the Washington Square neighborhood. In the map below, existing pedestrian connections are shown in blue, and missing pedestrian connections are shown in red. The gaps in bicycle infrastructure extend to the whole area except for the creekwalk itself.



3. Raised Crosswalks.

Implement raised crosswalks at reconstructed street intersections to prioritize the safety of the pedestrian.

4. Bus Shelters.

Provide protected, accessible bus shelters with LED boards and clearly legible schedules at all bus stops within the I-81 Viaduct Project scope.



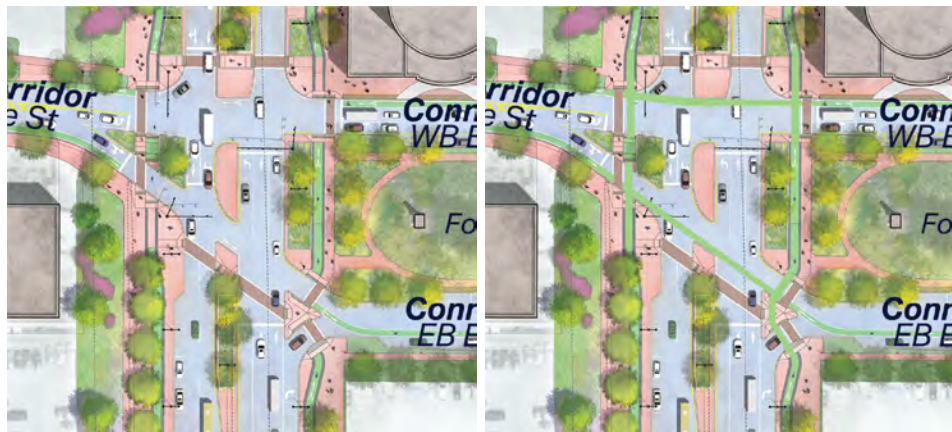
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5. Bicycle Parking.

Provide bicycle parking on all city blocks and along all bike lanes within the I-81 Viaduct Project scope.

6. Mark Bike Lanes at Intersections.

The green surface marking the location of bike lanes should continue across intersections. See our revised drawing below. Apply this to all intersections.



Left: NYSDOT Bike Lane Markings at Intersections

Right: Syracuse Urbanism Club Bike Lane Markings at Intersections

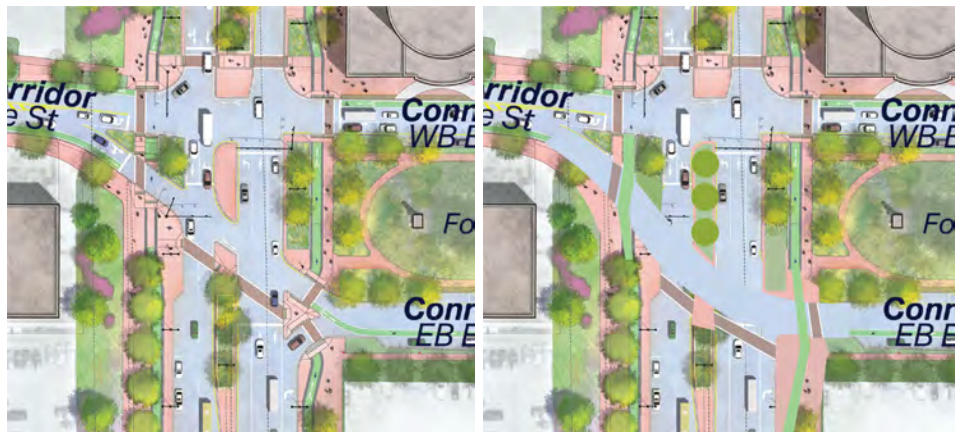
7. Bicycle Traffic Lights.

Incorporate bicycle traffic lights at all bike lane intersections.

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8. Continuous flow of bicycle traffic.

Ensure continuous flow of bicycle traffic. Bicycle lanes should not require dismounting or slowing the bicycle to navigate intersections. Nor should they block bicycles from turning at an intersection. Examples of bicycle lanes that limit proper movement of bicycles in the NYSDOT I-81 Viaduct Project designs are shown below. Images on the left are the NYSDOT designs, while images on the right are Syracuse Urbanism Club revisions.



The curvature of Genesee Street is shifted at Almond Street to remove an unnecessary triangular median and to straighten out pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure at that point.



Sharp angles are smoothed in bicycle lanes at Erie and Almond.

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At Madison and Almond, the Almond Street median is cut to allow flow of bicycle traffic from the southbound bike lane and Madison Street. Crosswalks are added, too.



At Monroe and Almond, the Almond Street median is cut to allow flow of bicycle traffic from the southbound bike lane and Monroe Street. Crosswalks are added, too.

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At Cedar and Almond, a curb cut connects bicycle traffic from the southbound bike lane and Madison Street.



At East Adams and Almond, the transition between Almond Street's shared use path and the northbound bike lane is more clearly marked.

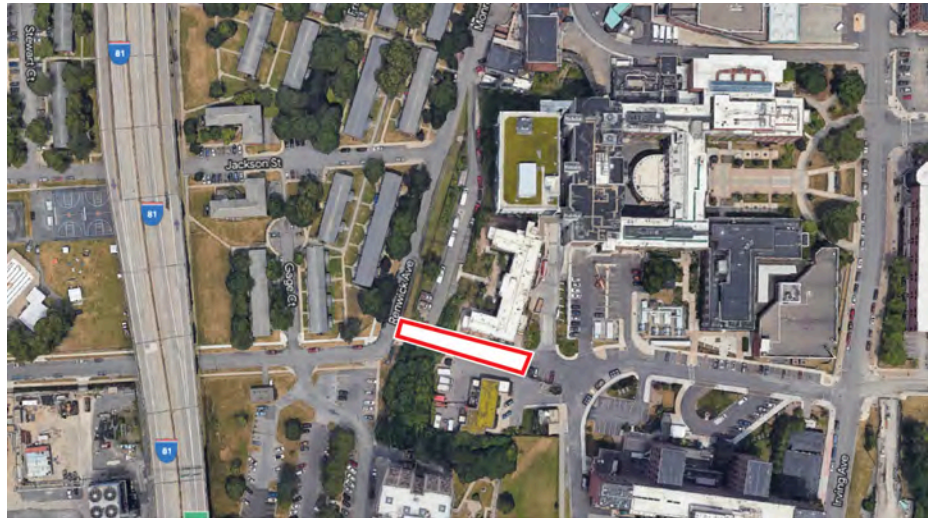
9. Separated Bike Lanes.

All streets within project scope should include separated, safe bike lanes. We recommend that these are designed to MassDOT "Separated Bike Lane Planning & Design Guide" standards available at the link below: <https://www.mass.gov/lists/separated-bike-lane-planning-design-guide>

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10. Renwick Avenue Steps

Build an exterior staircase from Renwick Avenue to Upstate Medical in the location highlighted below to reconnect the two neighborhoods. Provide a structure for shelter over the steps to prevent ice and snow buildup.



11. Colvin & Dougal Crosswalk

Add a crosswalk at E Colvin Street and Dougal Avenue.



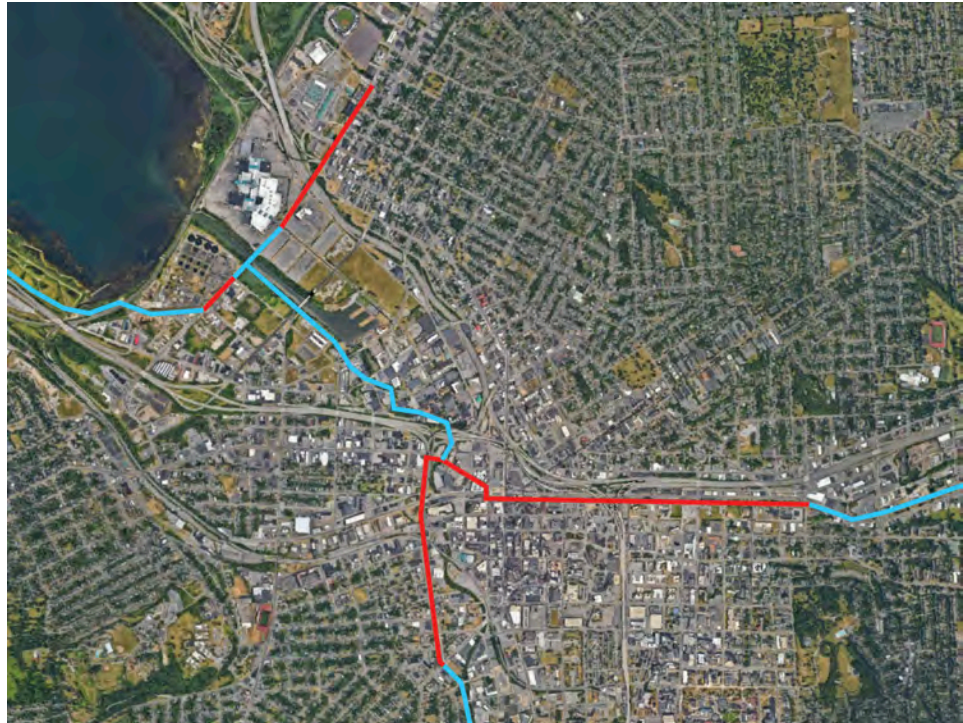
Left: NYSDOT I-81 Colvin Street Ramp Area

Right: Syracuse Urbanism Crosswalk at E Colvin & Dougal

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12. Protect Bicycle Infrastructure at Empire State Trail & Onondaga Creekwalk.

Protect all bike lanes of the Empire State Trail and Onondaga Creekwalk. This includes the connection between the Onondaga Creekwalk and Beech Street, the connection between the Onondaga Creekwalk and where the Empire State Trail continues at Hiawatha Boulevard and Pulaski Street, and between the northern and southern ends of the Creekwalk with protected bike lanes along West Street. An additional connection from the Creekwalk at Hiawatha Boulevard to the Syracuse Mets Stadium, CNY Regional Market, and Regional Transportation Center is proposed as well, extending at least as far as TexSimone Drive. Below, existing protected bicycle infrastructure is shown below in blue, while our proposed protected bicycle infrastructure connections are shown below in red.



13. Bollards at Clinton Square.

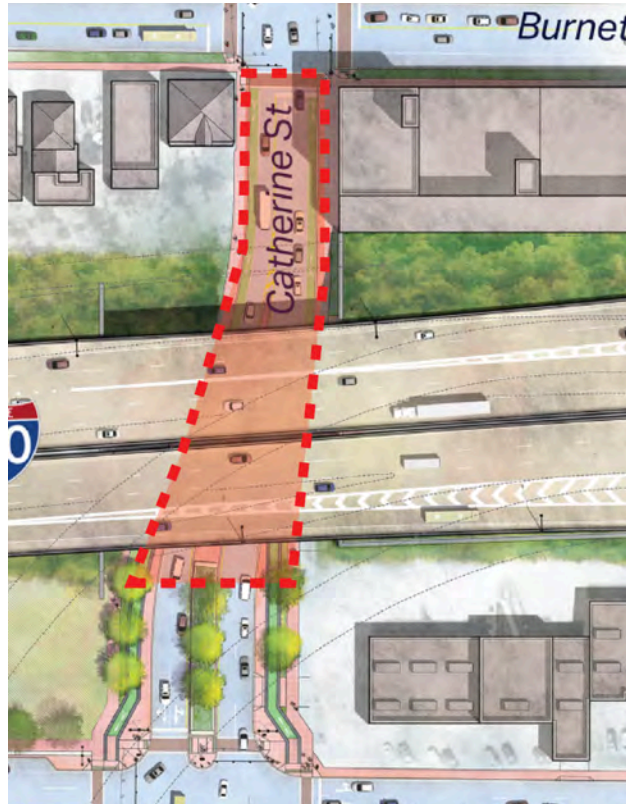
Replace the gates with bollards at the southern corners of Clinton Square, which currently block bike access for the Empire State Trail along Water Street.



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14. Protect the Last Block of the Almond Street Bike Lane.

Protect the northernmost block of the new Almond Street bike lane as it crosses in a dark underpass below I-690.



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15. Creekwalk to Park Avenue Crosswalk.

Connect Park Avenue and Leavenworth Park to the NYSDOT's proposed Onondaga Creekwalk extension and Downtown with a crosswalk across West Street so pedestrians and cyclists can more directly access between Park Avenue and both Downtown and the new viewing platform, while avoiding the need to walk along pedestrian unfriendly West Genesee Street or Erie Boulevard West.



Above: NYSDOT Intersection at West Street & Park Ave
Below: Syracuse Urbanism Club Crosswalk Proposal



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16. Continue West Street Sidewalk.

Complete a missing block of the western West Street sidewalk from Erie Blvd West to Tracy Street.



Left: NYSDOT Missing Sidewalk Between Erie Blvd & Tracy St
 Right: Syracuse Urbanism Club's proposed sidewalk & crosswalk

17. Bring Erie & West Intersection to Grade

Bring the intersection of Erie Blvd West and West St to grade. The current design makes for a poor pedestrian experience and disconnects Downtown from the Park Avenue Neighborhood.

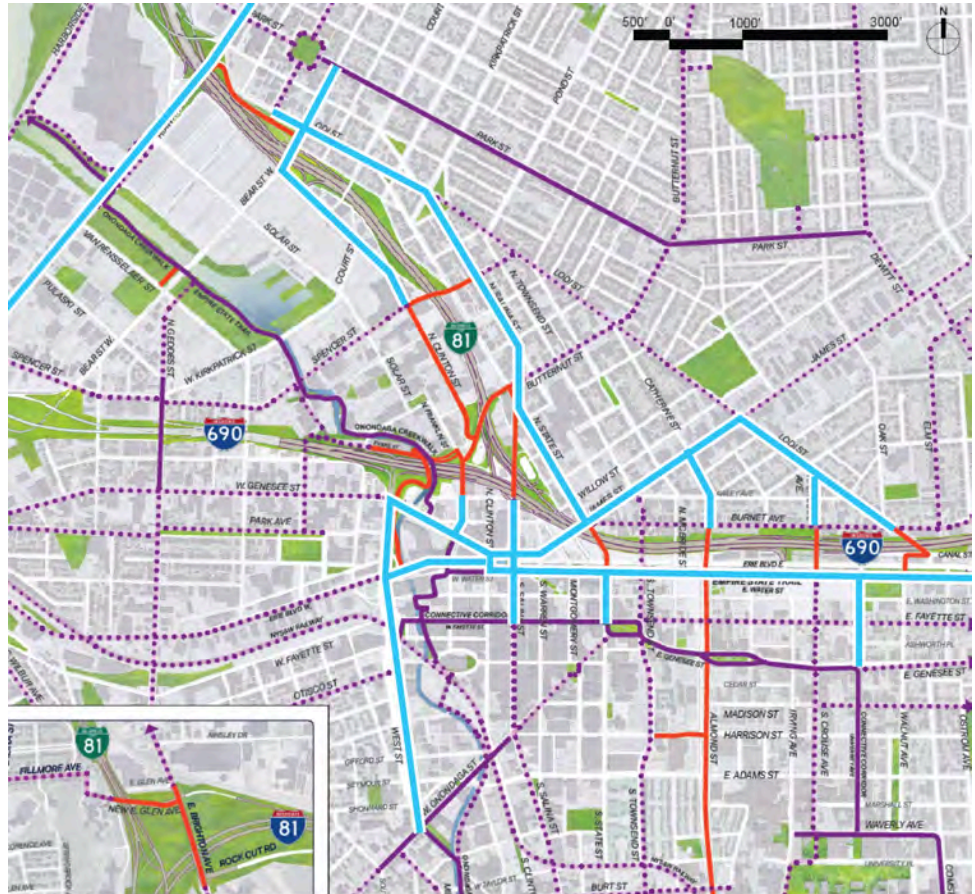


Left: NYSDOT Design for Erie Blvd and West St Interchange
 Right: Syracuse Urbanism Club's Flattened Intersection Design

I-81 Viaduct Project: Official Project Recommendations

18. Connect New Bicycle Network.

Connect existing and new NYSDOT-proposed bike lanes into a continuous network. Below, orange lines are bike lanes proposed by the NYSDOT. The Syracuse Urbanism Club proposes connecting these with additional protected bike lanes shown in blue below.



KEY

- NYSDOT I-81 Viaduct Project Bike Lanes
- Existing Bike Lanes
- ⋯ 2012 Syracuse Bicycle Plan's Proposed Bike Lanes
- Syracuse Urbanism Club Proposed Bike Lanes

19. ADA Review.

We urge that all designs for the I-81 Viaduct Project be reviewed to meet ADA requirements to ensure that Syracuse is a city accessible for all.



I-81 Viaduct Project: Official Project Recommendations

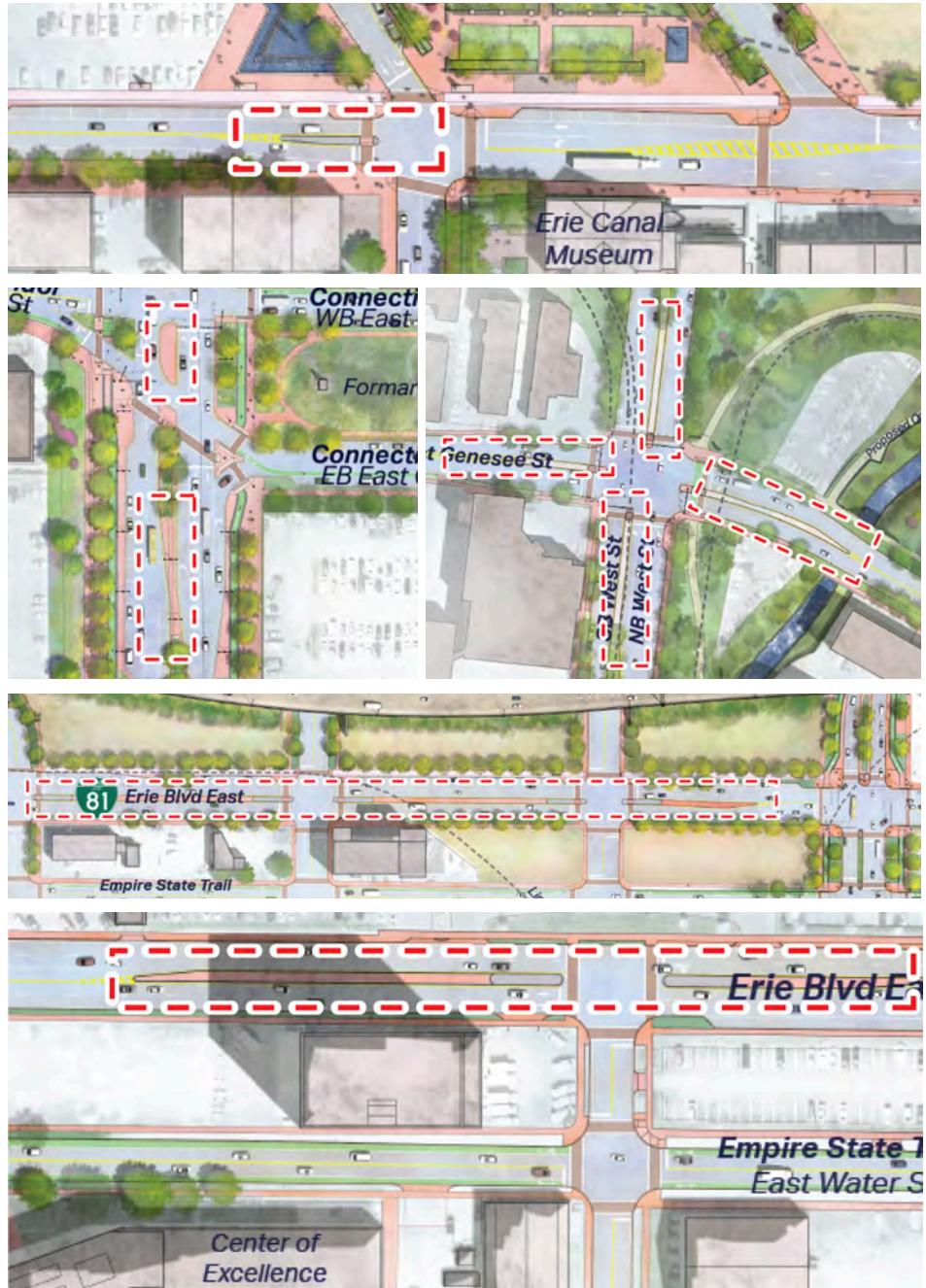
Plantings

- 1. Native Plantings.**
Select native, varied plantings.
- 2. Varieties of Plantings.**
Select a variety of trees, shrubs, native grasses, flowers, and other plantings.
- 3. Food-Bearing Plants.**
Select plantings that provide food for the public to pick, such as fruit and nuts.
- 4. Mature Trees.**
For neighborhoods and streets that feel full and shaded from the beginning, plant mature trees instead of saplings.
- 5. Tree Spacing.**
Plant street trees closer together for more shade.
- 6. Winter Scenery.**
Design landscaping and select plantings with a vibrant appearance during Winter in mind.
- 7. Avoid Lawns.**
Avoid mowed lawns. Instead, plant native grasses, flowers, and/or other types of plantings.
- 8. Planter Box Benches.**
Include planter boxes with built-in benches in strategic locations for a better pedestrian experience.
- 9. Parks and Public Spaces.**
Parks and public spaces within the I-81 Viaduct Project scope can include rain gardens, botanical gardens with native plants, and shaded areas with seating and other interactive features.

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10. Plantings on Medians.

The NYSDOT design for medians on Almond Street and elsewhere is mostly planted, but contains some narrowed sections that are only paved. Plant these sections, too. Some examples of the current I-81 Viaduct Project’s designs for paved medians are shown below.





I-81 Viaduct Project: Official Project Recommendations

Traffic

1. Speed Limits.

Limit speeds to 30mph or less and install speed cameras.

2. No Right on Red.

Right on Red is dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists. Remove the ability for cars to turn right on red within the I-81 Viaduct Project scope.

3. Roundabout Location.

The NYSDOT has shifted the Almond Street roundabout from the MLK School further north. Instead, shift this roundabout further south to minimize the amount of people living in the shadow of the highway.

4. Reconnect East Washington Street.

Reconnect East Washington Street between Forman Avenue and University Avenue with a shared-use bicycle and pedestrian path, protected with bollards at street intersections.



Above: The NYSDOT’s Community Grid design leaves East Washington Street Disconnected

Below: Syracuse Urbanism Club’s reconnection of East Washington Street reconnects the Almond Street Area with the Near Eastside.





I-81 Viaduct Project: Official Project Recommendations

Designing the Details

1. Street Lights.

Design street lights to illuminate pedestrians and cyclists, not just cars.

2. Emergency Buttons.

Provide emergency call buttons along sidewalks for safety, especially in the middle of long blocks.

3. Community Peace Officers.

Provide funding for community peace officers in the I-81 Viaduct Project area to ensure safety and high usage of the newly created spaces.

4. Accessibility.

Design all aspects of the I-81 Viaduct Project in accordance with accessibility needs and ADA standards.

5. Utilitarian Objects.

Frequently place and be creative with the design of utilitarian objects such as trash cans, bicycle racks, street lights, benches, bus stops, and more. The frequency of these and other similar items can improve the pedestrian and cyclist experience, while their creative design can help build the identity and artistic expression of a place.

6. Public Restrooms.

Public restrooms are crucial so visitors to the I-81 Viaduct Project area do not need to rely on private businesses in order to use the restroom. In these new restrooms, provide areas for hazardous waste disposal.

7. Location of Benches.

Place benches at street corners and mid-block, not just in parks. Ensure that benches are shaded. Well-designed and frequent areas to sit are important for all, but especially for those with accessibility needs.

8. Public Art.

Provide local Syracusans with the opportunity to design sculptures and other public art to be placed along the reconstructed Almond Street and throughout other areas of the I-81 Viaduct Project scope.

9. Charging Stations.

Provide charging stations for electric vehicles, both cars and others such as ebikes and scooters.



I-81 Viaduct Project: Official Project Recommendations

Community Creative Involvement

1. Locally-Designed Spaces.

Provide the City of Syracuse with a blank slate and funding for public spaces, landmarks, cultural elements, art, utilitarian objects with the potential to be designed in an artistic manner, and more. Then, the community, local designers, local businesses, and others can have a hand in designing the details of some of the places that they'll spend time in long after the I-81 Viaduct Project is complete. This process can generate designs that are highly responsive to local culture and local contexts while creating community pride in something that Syracusans have helped to create.



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Next steps

Next Steps for the I-81 Viaduct Project Team

We urge the NYSDOT and all other stakeholders to implement the design changes recommended in this document.

In doing so, please engage in a continued dialogue with us and the community of Syracuse to ensure ideal outcomes for all end users, as well as all those impacted during the project's implementation.

Work with the City of Syracuse to ensure that designs for this project, including connective and creative elements, are self-determined by the people of Syracuse. The lives of Syracusans may be enriched by positive, locally generated, and inspiring outcomes for generations to come.

Next Steps for the Syracuse Urbanism Club

We will continue to gain endorsements on these project recommendations from other organizations. We'll update you as we gather these additional endorsements.

We also plan to stay in contact with the NYSDOT to ensure the best possible outcome for the I-81 Viaduct Project.

The Syracuse Urbanism Club will continue to refine our suggestions for this project. We'll send in additional comments, likely focusing on designs for key landmarks and public spaces.

We are open to acting as a liaison between the NYSDOT and the Syracuse community as the I-81 Viaduct Project moves forward.

I-81 Viaduct Project

Endorsements of:

The Project Recommendations of the
Syracuse Urbanism Club





I-81 Viaduct Project: Endorsements of our Project Recommendations

Endorsements

The organizations and individuals below endorse the project recommendations of the Syracuse Urbanism Club as of 11/12/2023, in addition to a unanimous vote of the Syracuse Urbanism Club. Our process of seeking endorsements began before Addendum #01 was complete, so these endorsements refer primarily to our original project recommendations. However, many of the items in our addenda resulted from the feedback we received as we sought endorsements. We will continue to update this page of this document on our website as more endorsements come in. Learn more at: SyracuseUrbanism.org/i-81

SUNY ESF: Based in the city of Syracuse, this is one of the nation's premier colleges focused on the study of the environment, developing renewable technologies, and building a sustainable future.

Syracuse Parks Conservancy: The mission of the Syracuse Parks Conservancy is to ensure that all Syracuse parks, public lands and their habitats are sustainably protected, restored, enhanced and developed for the educational, recreational and wellness uses of our citizens and their guests.

David Haas: Executive Director, Sarah's Guest House.

Erie Canal Museum: The Erie Canal Museum, located in Downtown Syracuse, NY, engages the public in the story of the Erie Canal's transformative impacts on peoples and places in the past, present, and future.

Wildflowers Armory: A multi-vendor artisan marketplace in Downtown Syracuse, for local makers, artists and creators.

Mighty Oaks Student Association: The representative voice and student government for the undergraduate student body at SUNY ESF.

Michael Greene: Syracuse Common Councilor At-Large, President Pro-Tempore.

Candlelight Collective: A Syracuse-based coalition of artists and musicians.

Additional endorsements are listed on our website.

I-81 Viaduct Project

Addendum #01 to:

Project Recommendations of the

Syracuse Urbanism Club





I-81 Viaduct Project: Addendum #01 to our Project Recommendations

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I-81 Viaduct Project: Addendum #01 to our Project Recommendations

Summary

Our Project Recommendations for the I-81 Viaduct Project

The Syracuse Urbanism Club makes this addendum to our comment on the NYSDOT's designs for the Community Grid Option of the I-81 Viaduct Project with the goal of a productive collaboration with the NYSDOT to create the best project outcomes for all users. The Community Grid is the right path forward for our city, and we see an opportunity to fine-tune the details of the project's designs to ensure an even greater success for the NYSDOT's transformative efforts in the Salt City. For our main project recommendations document and all addenda, visit SyracuseUrbanism.org/i-81/.

The Syracuse Urbanism Club

The Syracuse Urbanism Club strives to build access to human-centered, walkable, vibrant communities and spaces for all. Our goal is to enhance the urbanism of Syracuse through physical installations and programming in public space, as well as advocacy on policy and design. We are the Syracuse subchapter of the [Congress for the New Urbanism](https://CongressfortheNewUrbanism.org/).

We were founded in March of 2023, and have since grown to a membership of 85 at the time of voting to approve this addendum.

Learn more about us at: SyracuseUrbanism.org

Approval of this Addendum

The October 2023 general meeting of the Syracuse Urbanism Club has voted unanimously on 10/31/2023 to approve this addendum.



I-81 Viaduct Project: Addendum #01 to our Project Recommendations

Additional Project Recommendations

1. Almond Street.

Reduce the footprint of the transportation infrastructure of the NYSDOT's proposal for a reconstructed Almond Street to what is needed for a balanced multimodal system. Return excess right of way to the city to be redeveloped in the best interests of the larger community.

2. Underpasses and Bridges.

All underpasses and bridges should have wide sidewalks, approximately 15 ft in width, for pedestrian safety and ease of passing the snow that accumulates to the sides of the street in the winter.

3. Bike Lockers.

Public bicycle lockers should be added to the project in addition to public bicycle parking.

4. Mid-Block Crossings.

Our proposed additional mid-block pedestrian and bicycle crossings could use a pedestrian-activated crosswalk system in order to provide visibility, ease of crossing, and safety for pedestrians while not impeding traffic when pedestrians are not present.

5. Maintenance.

We propose that the NYSDOT provides the city of Syracuse with a maintenance fund or support for maintenance through its own maintenance teams for parks, plantings, and other elements within the I-81 Viaduct Project's scope.

6. Leading Pedestrian Interval Crossing Signals.

Provide leading pedestrian and bicycle interval crossing signals to give pedestrians and cyclists a few extra seconds to begin crossing before vehicles get a green light, improving pedestrian and bicycle safety.

7. Reconnect Oakwood Cemetery's Original Entrance.

Reopen the original entrance to Oakwood Cemetery, reconnecting it to the street grid of the Southside.

8. Business Remediation Funds.

Provide readily available, timely funds for business remediation for those affected by the construction process of the I-81 Viaduct Project.

9. Right of Way Reductions.

In any instance where the NYSDOT's I-81 Viaduct Project reduces lanes and/or the existing width of the automotive right of way, the newly available space should be first given to protected bicycle, public transit, and wider pedestrian infrastructure where lacking. If additional width remains, return this to parks and/or buildable parcels of land.