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**Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor Commission Launches Strategic Planning Process to Create Unified Tourism Destination and Strengthen Cultural Assets and Surrounding Neighborhood**

*Award-Winning National Firm, Moody Nolan, Tapped to Lead the Effort*

**Buffalo, NY** -- The Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor Commission is pleased to announce the launch of a community-driven strategic planning process which will guide the redevelopment and future of the Corridor. The goals are to use the planning effort to develop a compelling vision for telling the important stories of the Corridor, achieve sustainable operations for the Commission, and further develop assets to facilitate increased visitorship and additional private investment.

As part of the East Side Corridor Economic Development Fund and East Side Avenues initiative, a Strategic Action Plan will be developed through a 12-month community-building process, to guide the Corridor in creating a strong, unified tourism destination that promotes key cultural and historic assets including the Michigan Street Baptist Church, the Nash House Museum, the Colored Musicians Club, and WUFO Radio and Black Radio History Collective.

A series of virtual public input meetings will be held in April and May of 2021 and will provide the opportunity for community members to inform the planning process and provide direct input. The planning process encourages stakeholders—such as local businesses, neighborhood residents, and nearby service providers to participate through these public meetings. Input from community members will guide improvements to the benefit of the Corridor and the region. Information on how to participate in the virtual input sessions, along with dates and planning documents, can be found at [www.michiganstreetbuffalo.org/planning](http://www.michiganstreetbuffalo.org/planning).

[Moody Nolan](#), a national design firm with an office in New York, was selected by the Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor Commission through a competitive procurement process to lead the planning and Strategic Action Plan development. Additional creative team members include national and local firms EKLA, Lord Cultural Resources, JS&A, and Trophy Point.

Moody Nolan is the nation's largest African American-owned and operated design firm with 11 offices in the U.S. It has a long history of serving clients with a keen knowledge of cultural sensitivities as well as a deep understanding of the impact its work has on individuals and communities. The firm offers design expertise in architecture, interior design, and experiential design and has a diverse portfolio of work which includes civic, classic design, historic preservation, and retail and mixed-use. Moody Nolan's work is reflective of the people who will live, learn, and heal in the spaces it creates. Its work has been lauded with more than 330 design citations and significant awards, most recently received the 2021 AIA Architecture Firm Award.

"The Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor sites reflect the richness of African American history and culture which is deeply embedded in the American story of perseverance," says Latoya Nelson Kamdang, director of New York operations for Moody Nolan. "With our firm's national expertise on cultural projects, we are energized by the opportunity to work with the community to identify ways to celebrate the people, the places, and the movements."

The neighborhood along Michigan Avenue plays a unique role in local and national African American history, including its involvement in the Underground Railroad, homes of residents in the "Niagara Movement" (precursor to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Persons), a venue that helped shape the Jazz Age, and ongoing association with the Civil Rights Movement.

Recent state and federal grants allowed the Commission to highlight the area's historic assets, improve streetscapes, and install a commemorative arch over Michigan Avenue. An additional round of anchor building stabilization projects is currently in process and state funding is in place for additional improvements guided by the Strategic Action Plan. With planning and resources in place, there is an opportunity for the Commission to build upon this momentum and work together with the community to take steps to improve the Corridor, while creating a national tourist destination that will tell the stories of Buffalo's rich African American history.

"Since this last spring, despite the many challenges posed by the pandemic, our Heritage Corridor has realized a great deal of momentum. Not only have those residents and other stakeholders living in historic neighborhoods around our Corridor re-discovered us, our Corridor has also received more local and national attention, mostly focusing on the cultural significance and impact African Americans have had on our region. Today's announcement only lends further to the excitement as our Corridor continues its transformation into the economic, cultural and social success we all know it can be," stated Terry Alford, MSAAHCC Executive Director.

## **COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PLANNING PROCESS**

The public will be involved throughout all stages of the planning process. Public meetings will be led by Moody Nolan and will be interactive, creative, and collaborative—to seek to understand community members' needs, aspirations for the Corridor, and leverage participants' ideas. Final public review sessions will be held to ensure the goals of the Plan reflect the vision of the stakeholders and Corridor community.

## **PROJECT SCOPE**

The planning process, which will guide the development of the Plan, will be structured as six phases of work which includes: (1) consensus building and stakeholder engagement program, (2) project familiarization and scoping, (3) best practices research, (4) draft Strategic Action Plan, (5) stakeholder and public review of draft Strategic Action Plan, and (6) finalize Strategic Action Plan.

In addition to gathering community-driven input, the creative team will travel to the Corridor to meet with the Commission, tour major cultural assets, and review operation procedures and expenses. During the third phase of work the creative team will conduct analyses of other cultural heritage/cultural destinations and districts with comparable characteristics of the Corridor and will document best practices and revenue generating strategies.

The Strategic Action Plan will be guided by community, agency and stakeholder feedback, and best practices will be used to formulate the Plan. Once the Strategic Action Plan is drafted, Moody Nolan will present key elements of the Draft plan to the community to provide feedback.

The final Plan will include short-, medium-, and long-term strategies to meet the goals for the Commission and the investment area and will provide deliverables for a business and operational plan, a marketing and communications plan, and an investment area capital plan for the Corridor.

## **Project Partners and Funding**

The Plan is being funded by a grant through Governor Andrew M. Cuomo's [Buffalo Billion Economic Development Initiative](#), which is focused on ensuring that all Western New Yorkers have an improved quality of life and have a role to play in the new Buffalo. As part of this strategy, \$65 million in state funding is dedicated to the revitalization of Buffalo's East Side through transformational capital investments along four commercial corridors (Michigan Avenue, Jefferson Avenue, Fillmore Avenue, and Bailey Avenue).

The Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor is part of [East Side Avenues](#), funded by the East Side Collaborative Fund, which is administered by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo.

## **About the East Side Collaborative Fund**

This pooled fund was created through a unique partnership of private and philanthropic organizations to complement capital funding that is being awarded by Empire State Development (ESD) as part of its \$65 million East Side Corridor Economic Development Fund (ESCEDF), which is part of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo's Buffalo Billion II initiative.

## **About the East Side Avenues**

East Side Avenues is a capacity building initiative developed to fund, plan and coordinate revitalization strategies and initiatives aimed at improving economic conditions in four main commercial corridors on Buffalo's East Side. It is backed by a unique partnership of private and philanthropic organizations that created the pooled, \$8 million East Side Collaborative Fund administered by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. The grants and supports are being provided to complement capital funding that is

being awarded by Empire State Development (ESD) as part of its \$65 million East Side Corridor Economic Development Fund (ESCEDF), which is part of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo's Buffalo Billion II initiative.

East Side Avenues stemmed from UB Regional Institute's (UBRI) partnership with ESD and the City of Buffalo to reach out to community members, to listen, analyze past investments and create a comprehensive plan focused on what key stakeholders said they'd like to see happen and what projects they believe are important for promoting economic activity.

East Side Avenues is led by a Project Implementation Team (PIT) from UBRI that will work to build organizational capacity by ensuring appropriate supports such as infrastructure, staff and funding are in place; assisting with strategic planning, program design and problem solving; reporting on progress and ensuring responsible use of resources. UBRI is a research center at the University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning.

Learn more about East Side Avenues at [www.eastsideavenues.org](http://www.eastsideavenues.org).