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For more information, contact:
Terry Alford, Executive Director
(716) 322-1002
talford@michiganstreetbuffalo.org

Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor Commission Launches New Community-Informed Strategic Action Plan and Economic Development Strategy

Buffalo, NY -- The Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor Commission (MSAAHCC) introduced its new strategic action plan and economic development strategy to the public on Thursday, February 10, 2022 through a virtual community meeting. The plan, developed through extensive community engagement and led by the national firm, Moody Nolan, and the MSAAHCC, will guide the redevelopment and future of the Corridor. The goals of the plan are to identify short-, medium- and long-term actions that will work to create a unified tourism destination; strengthen the corridor's cultural assets and the surrounding neighborhood; support the sustainability of the Commission; and further develop assets to facilitate increased visitorship and additional private investment. The strategic action plan and economic development strategy was funded as part of Empire State Development (ESD)'s \$65 million East Side Corridor Economic Development Fund (ESCEDF).

The inclusionary 12-month planning process collected input and direction from the corridor's four anchor institutions (Michigan Street Baptist Church, Nash House Museum, Colored Musicians Club, and WUFO Radio and Black Radio History Collective); six focus groups with 32 community residents; a community workshop with 105 registrants and 71 active participants; 13 interviewed stakeholders and representatives from the Office of Public Works and Empire State Development.

Strategic Action Plan Key Findings

Through extensive community engagement, these key needs were identified:

- **Safety measures** such as improved street lighting and slowed street traffic on the corridor's main streets.
- **Improved pedestrian access** through better landscaped sidewalks and installation of a bike path, bike racks and street furnishings.
- **Wayfinding and signage** including directions for visitors and historical markers around the corridor and along major routes to the corridor.

Economic Development

MSAAHCC's economic development strategy centers around three distinct opportunities:

- **The Commission as a place-based heritage nonprofit** with a solid business and operating plan.
 - To ensure that MSAAHCC's operations are sustainable for the future, the plan looks strategically at the Commission's revenue and resources, and how the Commission can bridge the needs of the community, city, and stakeholders. The plan provides:
 - A framework of targeted goals and priorities
 - Review of existing financial and operating procedures
 - Revenue generation opportunities

- Strategic actions to bolster operations
 - Suggested allocation of capital resources
- **Real estate and building/site development**
 - Linking future development and the community's vision supports new development efforts along Michigan Street and includes:
 - African American participation
 - Open space and green space
 - Celebration of African American heritage of Michigan Street
 - The *community's* desired uses
 - Addition of customers and visitors for the anchors which bolsters the area's vibrancy
 - Catalytic transformation
- **A tourism enhancement strategy** that increases and lengthens visitorship
 - Strategizing to bring more visitors and spending dollars to the anchors and corridor is a fundamental part of the commission's mission and vision. This will:
 - Ensure that the corridor is recognized as a focal point for learning about the city's African American history and recognizing the corridor's heritage legacy nationally and internationally.
 - Improve the sustainability of both the anchors and the Commission
 - improve viability for more businesses
 - Add vibrancy
 - Build on the Corridor's and the Commission's successes to date

What Makes This Plan Different from Past Plans

For the first time in history, the Commission has full-time, dedicated staff members who will lead the implementation of this plan and economic development strategy and continue to engage and connect with the community, funders, partners and city leadership. Terry Alford was appointed as the Commission's full-time Executive Director in March of 2020 and Audrey Clark serves as its full-time Project Manager. Through funding from New York State via ESD and with the support of East Side Avenues, a committed, consistent, and passionate staff will focus on completion of the plan and building long-term sustainability.

The recorded ZOOM launch session is available [here](#).

"This strong, community-driven strategic action plan celebrates the Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor's history, while outlining an economic development strategy for the neighborhood's vibrant future," said **Empire State Development Acting Commissioner and President & CEO-Designate Hope Knight**. "With this plan in hand, the Commission is now well-equipped to collaborate, expand and promote the area's cultural and historic assets as a destination for both tourists and residents alike."

"This day has been a long time coming," said **Terry Alford, Executive Director of the Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor Commission**. "Needless to say, I am extremely pleased to present this new strategic action plan to those who may have been residents for many years or continue to live with their families in historic neighborhoods within our Heritage Corridor that historically have been ignored or marginalized. I am quite confident in their acceptance of the plan, especially knowing many of these same residents were given real opportunities over the past year to provide input, suggestions and feedback that help form the vision for the Corridor as a vibrant destination which will spur an economic renaissance that we can all be proud of. Now the really hard work begins."

“Moody Nolan is excited to present the strategic action plan for the Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor. The Commission and the four cultural anchors have worked tirelessly to preserve and highlight the deep and rich history of African Americans in Buffalo and beyond. It has been our honor to collaborate with the community, the Commission, the stakeholders from each of the anchor institutions, and our consulting partners, Lord Cultural Resources, Elizabeth Kennedy Landscape Architects and Jon Stover & Associates on this important work. We hope this strategic action plan will provide a road map for restorative, sustainable, culturally relevant development in the Corridor that celebrates and honors this rich history and will be a catalyst for the continued economic growth of the Corridor for decades to come,” **Dawne David-Pierre, Senior Associate/Project Manager, Moody Nolan.**

About Moody Nolan

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 320 design citations and significant awards, most recently the 2021 AIA Architecture Firm Award.

About the Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor

The neighborhood along Michigan Avenue (historically known as Michigan Street) 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 creation of the MSAAHCC and expanded its ability to highlight the area’s historic assets, improve streetscapes, and install a commemorative arch over Michigan Avenue. 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.

About Empire State Development

Empire State Development (ESD) is New York’s chief economic development agency. The mission of ESD is to promote a vigorous and growing economy, encourage the creation of new job and economic opportunities, increase revenues to the State and its municipalities, and achieve stable and diversified local economies.

In 2018, the agency announced the \$65 million East Side Corridor Economic Development Fund (ESCEDF), 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). Funding for the Strategic Action Plan and near-/long-term capital grants for stabilization of the Corridor’s anchor facilities and future interpretative features are the key components of the strategy for Michigan Avenue.

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 a pooled, \$8 million **East**

Side Collaborative Fund administered by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. The Fund supports a variety of community organizations for full-time staff and consultants to expand their ability to implement projects and programs, initially to complement projects these organizations are taking on through the ESCEDF, with the goal of fostering on-going capacity to continue their efforts into the future.

East Side Avenues stemmed from UB Regional Institute's (UBRI's) 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 works 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.

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