

CITY OF TONAWANDA

INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

I. INTRODUCTION:

The City of Tonawanda Waterfront Revitalization Area (as previously established by the City) encompasses roughly 3 miles of shoreline along the Niagara River and New York State Barge Canal extending roughly 300' inland to Niagara and East Niagara Streets, as well as a one-mile long, 200' wide corridor along Two Mile Creek and including all of Veteran's Memorial Park. The Tonawanda Island/Barge Canal Area, located partly in the City of North Tonawanda, is considered historically significant.

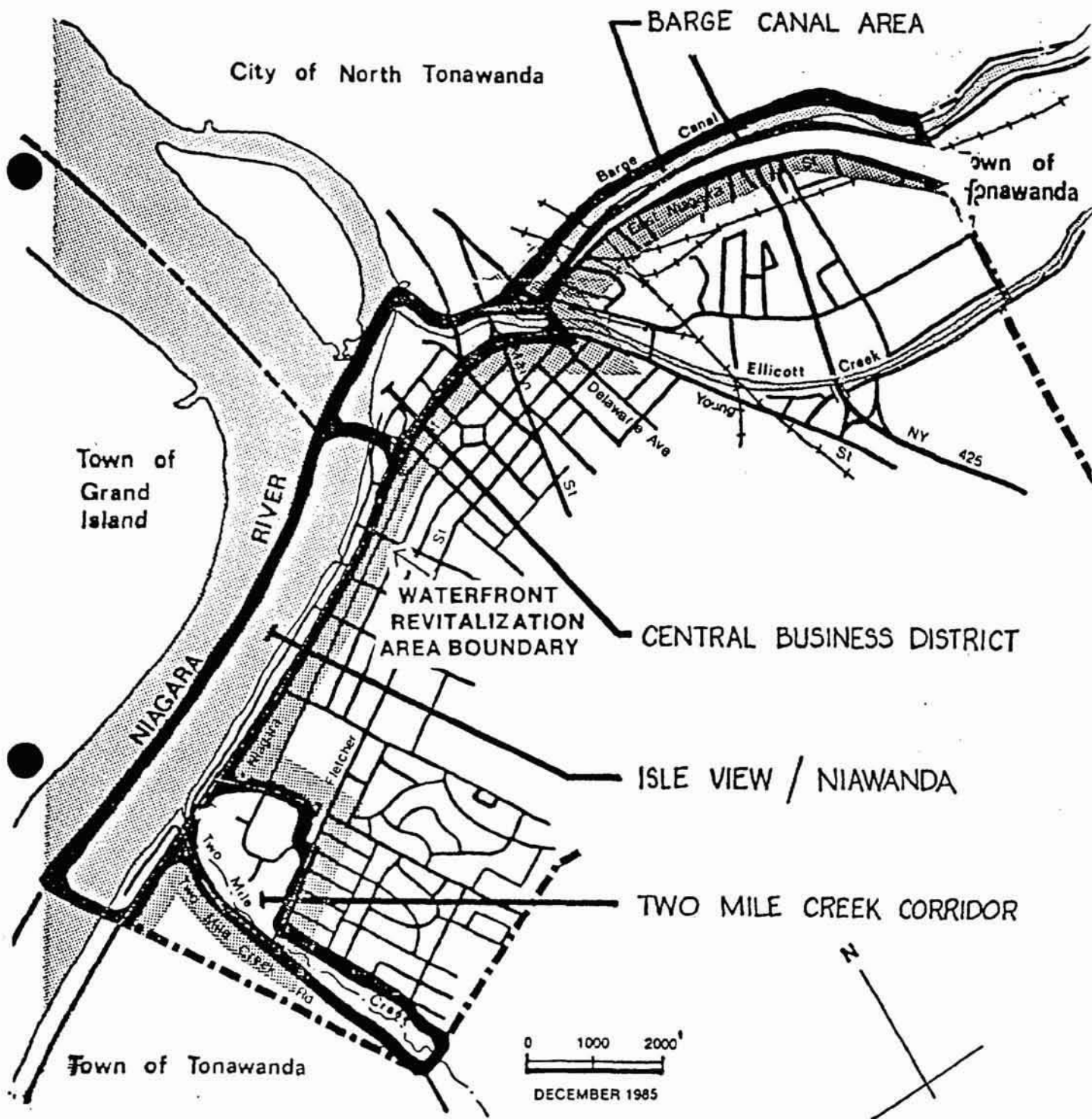
Large amounts of land within the Waterfront Revitalization Area are developed for public recreation (Veterans, Isle View, Niawanda, and Barge Canal Parks). A portion of the Tonawanda Central Business District also lies within this area.

II. PHYSICAL STATUS:

- A. Land Use and Buildings: Existing neighborhoods and uses are illustrated on Maps 2 and 3.

Isle View/Niawanda Area

Beginning at the western limits of the City, the Niagara River shoreline is developed as continuous parkland for 1 1/2 miles. The Erie County-owned Isle View Park occupies roughly an 1800' length of this shoreline, from the Town of Tonawanda border to the mouth of Two Mile Creek. This park contains boat launch, scenic drive, parking, picnic areas,



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MAP 2

**CHARACTER/
NEIGHBORHOODS**

CITY OF TONAWANDA

and a temporary bandshell. Both Niawanda and Isle View Park are well-maintained, attractively landscaped, and heavily used.

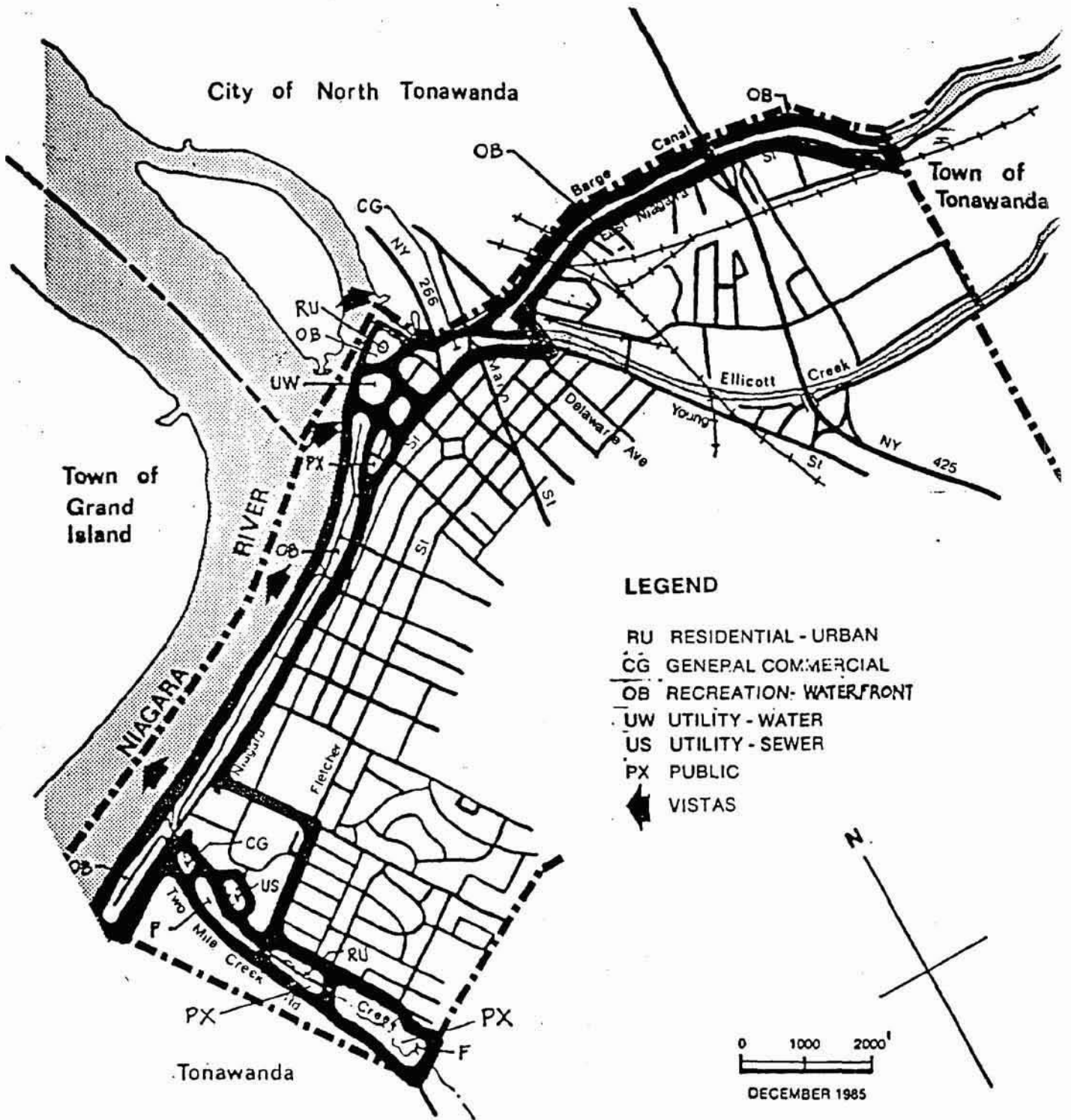
Central Business District

The Tonawanda City Hall, water plant, and incinerator lie to the north of Niawanda Park, separating the Park from the downtown business district. Inland from these buildings and the Park, Niagara Street is lined with one and two story homes occasionally interspersed with small scale commercial uses.

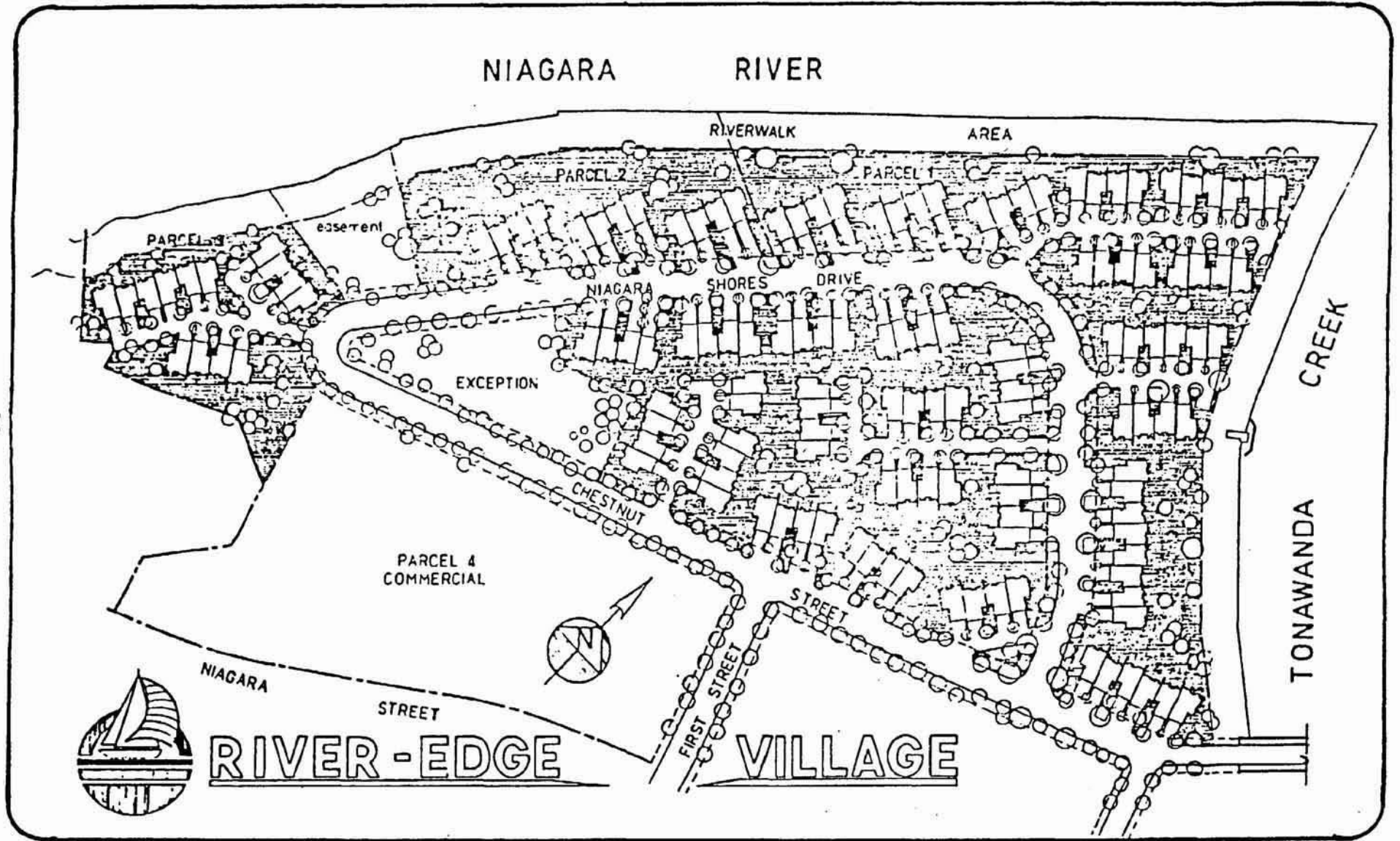
The portion of the downtown business district lying within the Waterfront Revitalization Area contains a mixture of retailing, services, parking, automotive uses, and vacant land. A strategically located 25 acre area at the junction of the Barge Canal and Niagara River (the "Continental Can Site") has been cleared for redevelopment through Community Renewal procedures. The River Edge development is presently under construction and will eventually encompass 138 residential units on the site. These will be townhouses and will provide a valuable water enhanced use for a long dormant area. Map 3A contains a graphic description of the site.

Barge Canal Area

Immediately west of downtown, Ellicott Creek flows into the Barge Canal. Creek banks are landscaped, and Ellicott Creek is crossed by a pedestrian bridge. At the eastern terminus of this bridge is the Long House, the oldest structure remaining in the City. A unique new land use along this area is a transient boating complex at the confluence of Ellicott Creek with the Barge Canal. It contains twelve



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MAP 3A RIVER EDGE DEVELOPMENT
 SOURCE: CITY OF TONAWANDA

temporary boat docks for use by pleasure boaters traveling the State Barge Canal system. It allows tourists to frequent the commercial establishments in the central business district prior to continuing on their travels.

The remaining 4000' length of Barge Canal shoreline from the Long House to the Twin Cities Memorial Highway Bridge is occupied mainly by Barge Canal Park, a passive facility including landscaped grounds, benches, and limited parking. To the south, immediately beyond the boundaries of the revitalization area, lies the Gastown neighborhood. This area contains a mixture of residential and industrial uses housed in older structures of varying physical condition. Gastown has been receiving considerable rehabilitation funding through the Community Development Block Grant Program.

Two Mile Creek Corridor

The portion of the Waterfront Revitalization Area extending southward along Two Mile Creek from the Niagara River to the City limits is largely occupied by Veteran's Memorial Park. This 47-acre (the City's largest) park includes athletic fields, picnic grounds, bike path, parking and restrooms. A reservoir is adjacent to the Park. The remnants of a demolished building are located at the corner of Two Mile Creek Road and Niagara Street. A light industrial use occupies a small site immediately south of Veteran's Park. The remaining segment of the revitalization area along Two Mile Creek is undeveloped woodland and scrub brushland.

B. Transportation and Utilities:

Access through the waterfront area is via Niagara and East Niagara Streets and Two Mile Creek Road. With the exception of a short four-lane segment of Niagara Street in the down-

town area, all are two-lane roads. Bridges across the Barge Canal to North Tonawanda are located at Niagara Street, Main Street, Delaware Avenue, and the Twin Cities Memorial Highway. Two railroad bridges cross the Canal east of Ellicott Creek. A low-speed scenic drive parallels the shoreline through Niawanda Park. Generally roads within the revitalization area are in good condition.

A public bus route operated by the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority serves the City's waterfront area. It provides service every one half hour along Delaware Avenue thereby servicing the Barge Canal corridor with easy walking access to the Niagara River. Approximately, 60% of all residents live within a one mile radius of the bus route.

C. Topography

The section of the waterfront along Isle View Park and the southern half of Niawanda Park is characterized by a steep 20' bank separating the parks from Niagara Street. The steepness and height of this bank lessen to the north, virtually disappearing at City Hall. With the exception of this embankment and the 10'-high banks adjacent to Ellicott Creek, the remainder of the waterfront area is relatively level.

D. Soils

The soils within the City of Tonawanda's waterfront area fall into three series as classified by the U.S.D.A. Soil Conservation Service. These include Cazenovia (gravelly silt loam), as well as Lima and Niagara (sandy silt loam).

These soils range from poor to moderately well drained and experience seasonal wetness. A slow permeability rate and high water level table (0.5' to 3') also contribute to their

relative instability, and limit the development potential to some degree. Soil nutrients will support plant growth; however seasonal wetness limits the plant material variety. Bedrock is generally located four to five feet below grade throughout the City of Tonawanda's waterfront area. Soil information is illustrated on Map 4.

E. Flooding and Erosion

Flood Hazard Areas, as identified by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) within the City's waterfront area exist at the following locations:

- o 20-25' inland from the Niagara River along the entire city shoreline with the exception of an area 100-300' inland from the Niagara River immediately west of Tonawanda City Hall.
- o An area 25-300' in width adjacent to Two Mile Creek extending from its mouth with the Niagara River to a point approximately 200' southeast of Adam St..
- o An area approximately 100' in width and adjacent to the Barge Canal from the foot of Clay Street east to Main Street.
- o An approximately 50 ft,. wide strip of land on either side of Ellicott Creek eastward from its confluence with the Niagara River.

In addition to the above described Flood Hazard Areas, FEMA has identified the entire length of Ellicott Creek within the City, as well as a narrow strip of adjacent land, as a floodway.

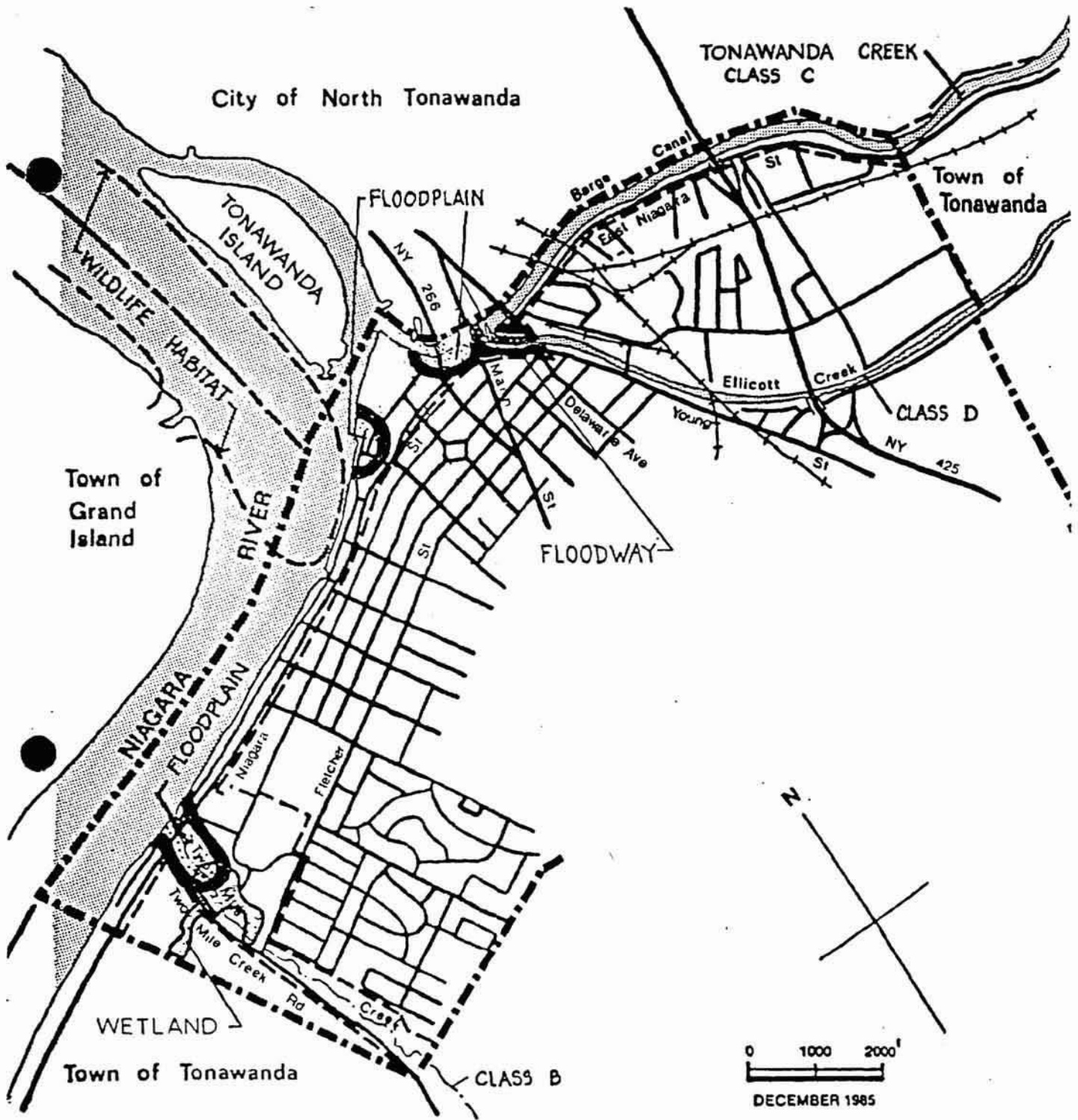
With the exception of the narrow band along the Niagara River all areas are depicted on Map 5. Although these areas are designated in the 100 year floodplain, severe flooding rarely occurs in the City. The land uses within the floodplain are almost all (i.e. 90%) in public parkland and thus does not represent any danger to structures of human life.

Erosion is also not a major problem along the shoreline. Minor erosion does occur in some areas of Niawanda Park which is of concern to local officials. The rate of erosion in this area has never been fully determined but field inspections and local interviews revealed that the rate is far below the one foot per year standard used to determine coastal hazard areas in recent State legislation.

The riverwall which provides shore stabilization for the waterfront in the former Continental Can site is over 30 years old. Signs of wear are apparent and a major overhaul will be necessary in the near future to continue the shoreline stabilization function and protect the Riverwalk located on the landside of the wall.

F. Hydrology

A number of streams flow through the City's waterfront area. Such streams, along with their water quality classification, include the following: Niagara River (Class A - Special, International Boundary); Two Mile Creek (Class B; Tonawanda Creek/Barge Canal (Class C); and Ellicott Creek (Class D). See Map 5 which displays the location of these streams, as well as Appendix A for a description of the water quality classifications. The separation of the City's sewage collection system from 1977 to 1982 has a positive effect on the water quality of the Niagara River through a reduction in combined sewer overflows.



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Finally, a small wetland exists within the waterfront area, located adjacent to Two Mile Creek approximately 1500 ft. from its mouth (see Map 5 for location). Due to its size, however, this wetland was removed from the list of regulated freshwater wetlands by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. The wetland is classified as "palustrine forest, broad-leveled deciduous, temporary water regime and palustrine shrub-scrub, broad leveled deciduous, seasonally saturated" by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

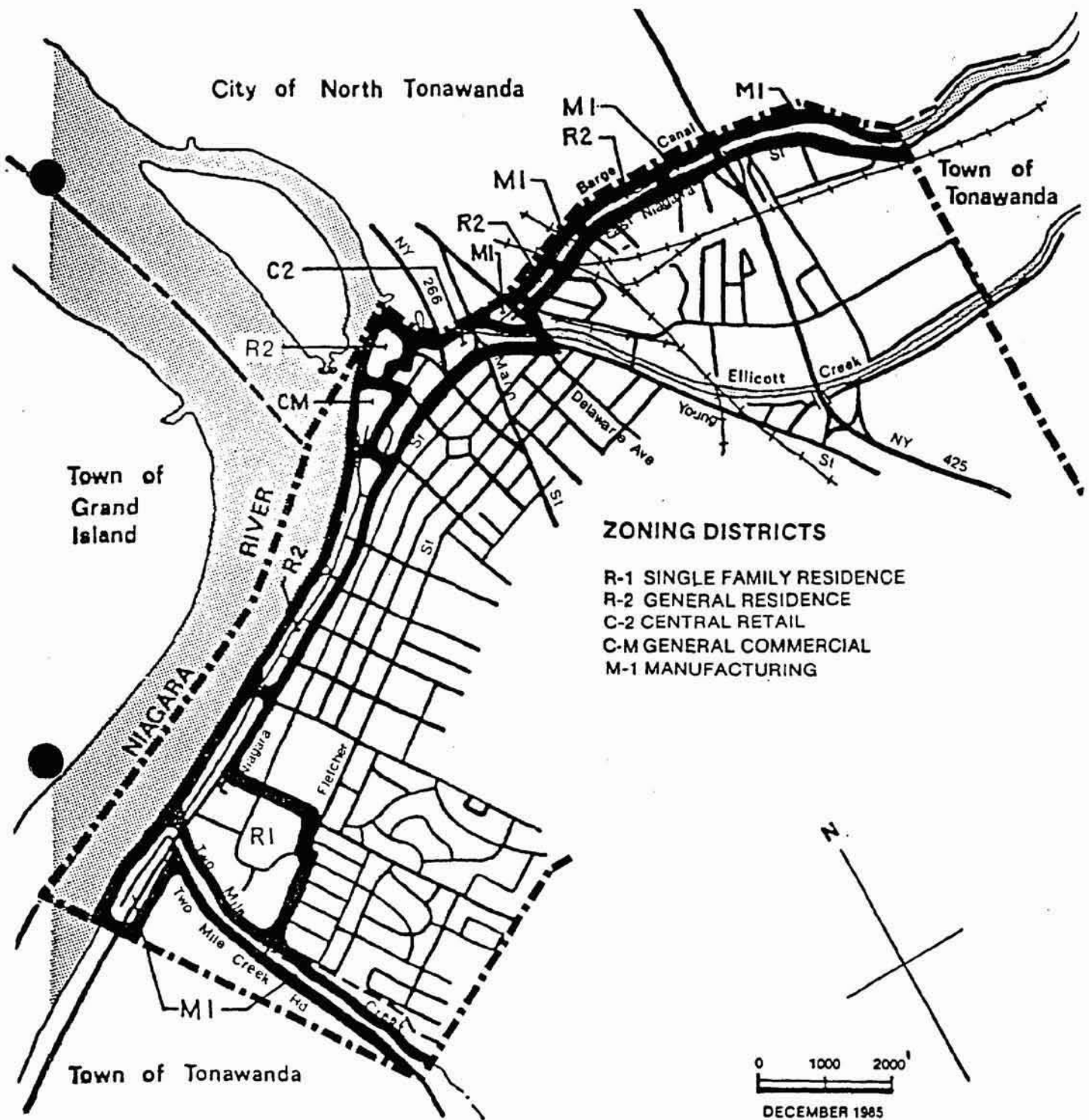
G. Off-Shore Conditions:

The Niagara River in the vicinity of the City of Tonawanda shoreline is used for commercial navigation, and a 21-foot deep channel is maintained well into North Tonawanda. Depths up to 23' are reached as close as 200' offshore, reflecting the relatively deep natural character of the River in this area.

The Barge Canal averages a 14' depth in the City of Tonawanda, reaching this depth in close proximity to shore. The channel is maintained by the State and is heavily used by pleasure craft.

H. Wildlife Habitats

No fish or wildlife habitats having statewide significance exist on land or water within the City's waterfront revitalization area. Offshore, yellow perch are frequently found in the Niagara River adjacent to Niawanda Park, and black bass in th middle of the River. There is also an abundance of waterfowl. This area is considered a locally significant fish habitat and is graphically located on Map 5.



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I. Zoning

Five types of zoning districts exist within the City of Tonawanda waterfront revitalization area. These are illustrated on Map 5A and include:

R-1: Single-Family Residence

R-2: General Residence

C-2: General Retail

C-M: General Commercial

M-1: Manufacturing

The M-1 areas are located south of the Two Mile Creek along portions of the Barge Canal east of Ellicott Creek.

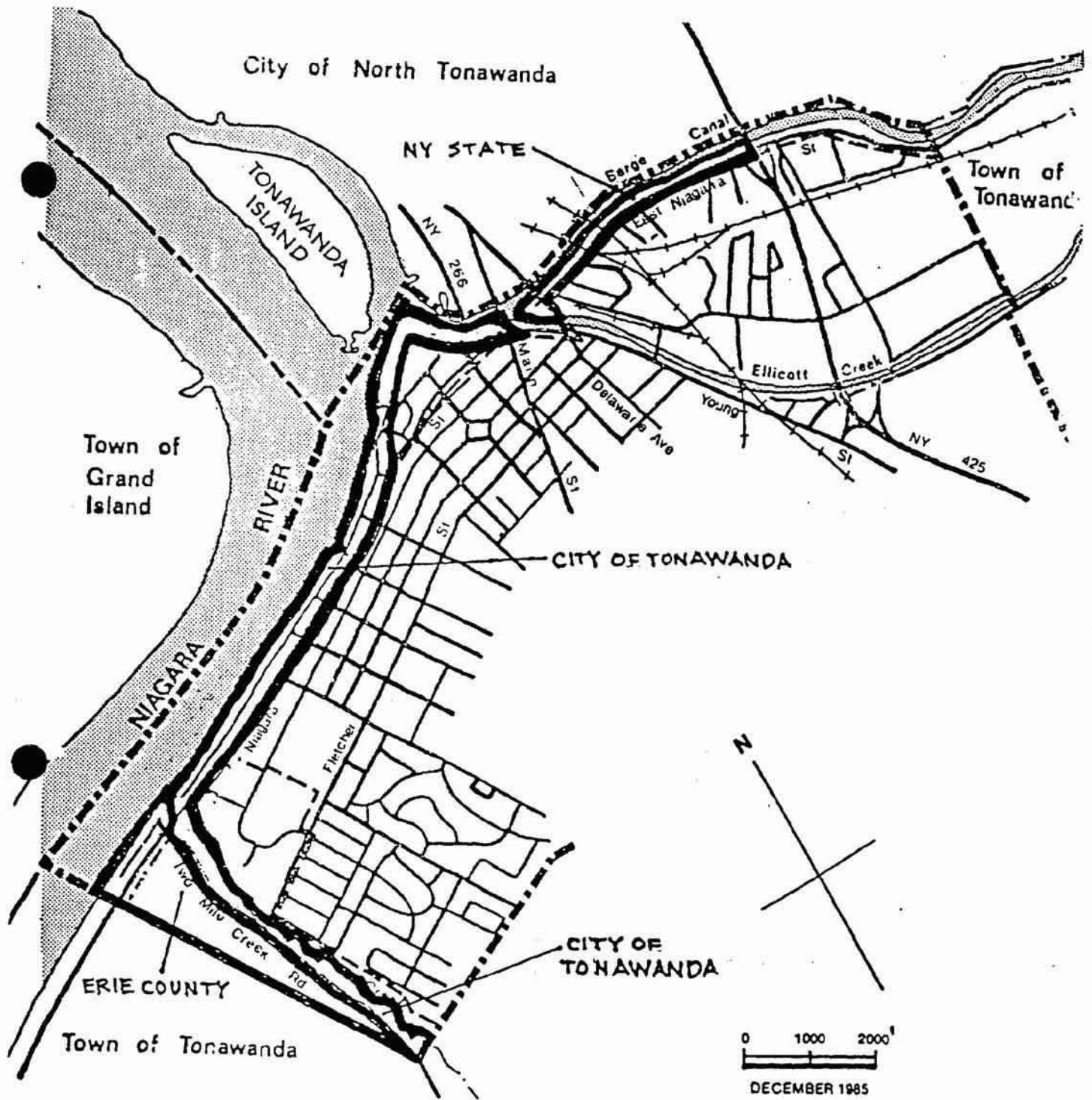
The C-M district includes City Hall and adjacent public buildings. The C-2 district comprises most of the downtown business area.

The R-1 area extends from Two Mile Creek northward to Hinds Avenue. The remainder of the Niagara River shoreline is zoned R-2. Other R-2 areas are found along portions of the Barge Canal east of Ellicott Creek.

J. Historic Resources

Although no structures are presently listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places, the Long House is a historic structure of local significance. A restored and publicly-owned building located at the confluence of Ellicott Creek and Barge Canal, Long House is the oldest structure within the City.

Also, of note is the Barge Canal itself, which has played an important role in economic development since its completion in the early 1800's.



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**MAP 6
PUBLIC
WATERFRONT
LANDS
CITY OF TONAWANDA**

An area of statewide archaeological significance is located on or in close proximity to the former Continental Site. This was identified by the NYS Department of Education. Two significant archaeological sites are known to exist in the area.

K. Public Access and Recreation

Roughly 70% of the City's waterfront is publicly-owned and used for recreation. Isle View County Park and the City's Niawanda Park occupy 1 1/2 miles of Niagara River shoreline and contain a diversity of facilities. These are being supplemented with the Riverwalk project, an Erie County venture which will ultimately create a paved, landscaped bike path from the Tonawanda business district south along the Niagara River to the Erie Basin Marina in downtown Buffalo. Barge Canal Park extends over one-half mile along the shoreline to the east of downtown Tonawanda. In addition, twelve new transient docking facilities have been installed at the junction of Ellicott Creek with the Barge Canal. This provides needed docking space for pleasure boaters travelling through the State Barge Canal.

Both Isle View and Niawanda Park contain boat launches that are heavily-used by pleasure boaters and fishermen. Niawanda Park also contains a popular fishing pier.

Map 6 shows the extent of publicly owned waterfront land in the City.

L. Water-Dependent Uses

Other than previously described public recreation facilities, the only water dependent use within the waterfront area is the municipal water plant at the southwestern edge of the Continental Can site near City Hall.

M. Aesthetics

With approximately 70% of its waterfront developed as public parkland, the City of Tonawanda's shoreline is among the finest in Western New York. The parks are well-maintained, attractively landscaped, and offer excellent vistas. The City's residents are extremely fortunate in having visual access to virtually the entire waterfront. Views from the embankment along Niagara Street downward into Niawanda Park and to the Grand Island shore are particularly dramatic, although occasionally obstructed by overgrown brush and weeds. Views along the Barge Canal, although less spectacular, still create a scenic drive along East Niagara Street while overlooking private boat houses, small crafts, and the downtown business districts of the Tonawandas. Reference should be made to Map 3 for vista locations.

III. CRITICAL ISSUES

Current conditions along the City of Tonawanda waterfront reflect an existing untapped potential for creating a uniquely vibrant urban waterfront environment. An excellent system of public parkland has created a strong base for this environment. The upcoming implementation of the Riverwalk project will further enhance the waterfront's attractiveness.

As noted earlier, the latter is a fourteen mile hike and bike path along the Niagara River from downtown Buffalo to the Seymour Street Bridge in the City of Tonawanda. It is under the jurisdiction of the County of Erie and is 60% complete. Full implementation is scheduled for 1988. The sections in the City of Tonawanda will be built in 1987 and provide a unique open space corridor on the waterside of the River Edge residential development presently under construction on the former Continental Can site.