

BULLISH ON ERIE BOULEVARD

PLANNERS ARE SEEKING IDEAS ON HOW TO REMAKE THE FOUR-MILE CANALWAY CORRIDOR INTO A FRIENDLIER THOROUGHFARE

By Elizabeth Doran
edoran@syracuse.com

More than a century ago, the Erie Canal welcomed travelers to Syracuse.

Today, the historic pathway — now Erie Boulevard — is anything but welcoming.

The commercial six-lane thoroughfare is jammed with strip centers, stores, gas stations and restaurants. It's not a place where people go to walk, jog, or bike and it's certainly not known for its attractiveness.

Planners want to change that, and they are running a contest to engage the public and experts in submitting their ideas.

The idea is to solicit proposals for transforming the four-mile section of Erie Boulevard that runs through DeWitt and Syracuse into a revitalized, reborn corridor that people want to use and appreciate. At the same time, the improvements would honor the historical importance of the Erie Canal in Syracuse and DeWitt.

The contest, launched Wednesday, seeks proposals, including out-of-the-box ideas, for revitalizing that stretch of the boulevard.

Planners agree that the four-mile section has the most potential, but also is the most challenging.

The winner, or winning team, gets \$3,000. The contest is open to anyone, but the town of DeWitt and city of Syracuse are looking for proposals from residents, designers, architects, ecologists, students and experts from around the world.

"Elevating Erie" also will address how to connect the Erie Canalway Trail from DeWitt, where it ends at Butternut Drive, through the city and eventually into Camillus, where the trail continues.

The statewide canal trail system is cut off in the 14-mile gap between DeWitt and Camillus — and planners would like to change that and somehow connect the trail through DeWitt and Syracuse.

The competition is funded with \$125,000 from the state Department of State.

"We're looking for ideas on how to make the Erie Canal corridor a place people want to go while remembering its importance as a historical corridor," said Sam Gordon, director of planning and zoning in DeWitt.

It could be anything from pedestrian walkways to bike paths, sidewalks, green space, bus lanes, and maybe

1878 A view of the Erie Canal looking east from the Syracuse Savings Bank building in downtown Syracuse.



Onondaga Historical Association

1960s By the mid-20th century, Erie Boulevard had become a major traffic artery delivering cars to ShoppingTown.



2015 Today, Erie Boulevard is a car-friendly six-lane thoroughfare.



ERIE, PAGE A-10



One goal of a revamped Erie Boulevard would be to help link the canalway trails that are disconnected for 14 miles from DeWitt to Camillus. (Post-Standard archives)

Erie canalway corridor in line for an upgrade

ERIE, FROM PAGE A-1

even reopening the canal, Gordon said.

Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Miner said the canal was the critical piece of infrastructure that promoted the city's growth, and it's important to rehabilitate this key historical corridor.

The competition will focus on four sites:

- **Boulevard:** A four-mile stretch from DeWitt to Syracuse.
- **Block:** A one-block area located between Teall Avenue and Peat Street in Syracuse;
- **Branch:** The intersection of Erie Boulevard East and Towpath Road, location of a former widewaters for the canal; and
- **Bridge:** The site connecting the Old Erie Canal State Historic Park over Interstate 481 to Towpath Road.

The contest also is looking for ideas on how to make the corridor "ecologically productive" by using green space, landscaping, trees and more, Gordon said.

Finalists will be highlighted in a spring 2016 exhibition at the Erie Canal museum. Along with the overall winner, there will be three individual category winners, who will get an iPad Pro.

Robin Dropkin, executive director of Parks & Trails New York, said people should think big in submitting ideas to "create a vibrant recreational and transit corridor along Erie Boulevard."

Work on the Erie Canal began in 1817 and was completed in 1825 as the "engineering marvel" of the 19th century.

It was filled in and converted to Erie Boulevard in 1925.



A sample of comments from [syracuse.com](#):

► **BRIGHT IDEA:** So they want to take one of our busiest commercial strips, which has been designed for ease of access by automobile and mix in bikers and pedestrians? Brilliant.
— FirmButFair

► **BIKES AND FEET:** Add sidewalks and a bike lane to both sides and it would be a great improvement — not that expensive and would make it much more accessible for those who don't drive. It is not easy to travel on foot from one plaza to another.
— BlueFan

► **NO NEED:** What is it with the "planners" that they can't help but find new ways to spend tax payer money. This is just but one example of ways that we are over taxed. Erie Boulevard does not need an overhaul.
— christoff9

► **THREE IDEAS:** Traffic light synchronization. Pot hole repair. Enforce the no litter policy, no cigarette butts on the road.
— doc105

