Welcome to this meeting of the Stakeholders’ Advisory Working Group, which will focus on urban design.
NYSDOT has always recognized that this project is about more than building a roadway. The future form of I-81, whatever it turns out to be, will have a profound effect on the look and feel of the City, and it needs to be considered in concert with the community’s vision for the future of Syracuse. This will be the first of several meetings on urban design.

For the first meeting, we thought it was important to look at the urban fabric of Syracuse. We invite you to share your knowledge and insights with us as we go along in this presentation today.
Good urban design matters. It can have a profound effect on the quality of people’s day-to-day lives. A well-designed urban environment contributes to a feeling of well-being. We believe that urban design is not something that happens at the end of a project—it’s imbibed and integral to the process.

Urban design encompasses many factors, including aesthetics, the quality of the environment, and economic viability. Good urban design contributes to the creation of a sense of place. Franklin Square and Armory Square are both outstanding local examples of socially and economically vibrant neighborhoods that embody a distinct sense of place.
Good urban design creates a distinctive identity—a sense of place—which in turn fosters community pride. Good urban design results in a beautiful place: a place where people want to live, work, and play, a place that welcomes and encourages investment, tourism, and economic vitality.

Today we will look at the City of Syracuse through the lens of urban design. First, we will look at how the city has changed over time to take on its current urban form in and around the I-81 viaduct.

The presentation will not focus on any one alternative for I-81; rather, it concentrates on some of the principles of good urban design. NYSDOT is committed to a high level of urban design in the development of all of the project alternatives.
The images on this slide illustrate some of the components of urban design. Some of these urban design elements—streetscapes and plazas, for example—fall within the purview of NYSDOT and could be implemented as part of the I-81 Viaduct Project. Other elements, such as land use and density, fall within the purview of others; zoning, for example, is under the aegis of the City. Development of architectural design—architectural form, building orientation, and massing—is controlled by the City and largely effected by private developers.
Route 9A is an example of a NYSDOT project that helped to shape the revitalization of an area in Manhattan. The project included a full spectrum of landscaping, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and connectivity. The area near the highway is now highly desirable, with easy access to a high level of amenities.

An early example of a “complete streets” approach, the Route 9A project was featured as an exemplary case study in FHWA’s Guide for Achieving Flexibility in Highway Design (1997).
The I-81 Viaduct Project also will consider the vision set forth in the VisionCNY Regional Sustainability Plan and the CNY Regional Economic Development Council Strategic Plan.
The regional context for the project is within the drumlin hills of Central New York.
The City of Syracuse is situated at the south end of Onondaga Lake. The City boundary is indicated in yellow in the map on the left-hand side of the slide. The I-81 corridor traverses the watershed of Onondaga Creek (indicated in light blue), a tributary that runs through the City and feeds into the lake. The water quality of the creek and the lake is an important environmental issue, and will need to be considered in the design of the I-81 Viaduct Project. Today, however, we will focus on I-81’s urban context—how the project relates to the surrounding city.
The history of the City has influenced its physical shape today.

The Onondaga Nation, the City’s first settlers, developed the area as a major regional transportation corridor. (Original Native American regional trails and paths were eventually developed into turnpikes and village streets.) Following the Revolutionary War, New York State land was divided and given to soldiers, encouraging settlement of the region. Small hamlets (Salina, Syracuse, Lodi, Geddes, Onondaga Valley) developed independently, mostly due to region’s advantageous location on major transportation corridors and its valuable salt deposits. By 1850, the original hamlets merged into the City of Syracuse. Independently developed hamlet streets joined together to form a street grid with many odd angles, creating a unique urban fabric.

In the 1850’s and 1860’s the Erie Canal and railroads, which passed through the center of the City, spurred rapid development. What was once the village of Syracuse developed into the downtown, which shifted from a residential area to a governmental, religious, banking, and business center.
This 1874 map of Syracuse shows the Erie Canal, which runs east-west through the city, and the Oswego Canal, which travels north-south and meets the Erie Canal in downtown Syracuse. On the right side of the slide are views of the Erie Canal in downtown Syracuse dating from the early 1900s.
At that point in time, New York Central ran east-west through the city and the Delaware Lackawanna ran north-south. Railroad tracks, which were abundant through downtown, were at street level (at grade), and the frequently operating passenger and freight trains snarled traffic throughout the city.
By the turn of the century, railroads had firmly supplanted the canal system as the most important commercial and passenger network through New York.

The Erie Canal and the Oswego Canals through Syracuse were both filled in, with Erie Boulevard constructed over the Erie Canal and Oswego Boulevard constructed over the corridor of the Oswego Canal. The Inner Harbor was constructed for shipping at the terminus of the new enlarged Barge Canal system. The New York Central and Delaware Lackawanna railroad systems were consolidated and partially elevated through the city. Extensive railroad yards were developed in the area; I-690 was eventually built in the same locations once occupied by these yards.
During the middle of the twentieth century, “urban renewal” transformed many American cities, including Syracuse.

The 15th Ward, on the east edge of downtown, historically had a finely grained urban street grid, with numerous short blocks and single-family residences. As a result of urban renewal policies, a sixteen-block area was cleared and replaced by a five-block area. This “superblock” was eventually lined with high density residential towers, the Everson Museum, and municipal service buildings offset from one another by large parking lots.

The map highlights in yellow those streets that were eliminated. The loss of the street grid had a detrimental effect on pedestrian connectivity and walkability.
In 1938 the downtown area of the City of Syracuse was characterized by a fine grained network of city blocks and small buildings. Urban renewal and numerous transportation projects eliminated many of the streets – highlighted in yellow – resulting in larger blocks and larger buildings.
In the 1950s and 1960s the Eisenhower Interstate System was being implemented throughout the country.

In the City of Syracuse, the interstate system was developed along former transportation corridors. I-690 follows the former New York Central east-west corridor through the city, and northern I-81 (north of I-690) followed Oswego Boulevard, formerly a Canal and rail corridor. To the south, I-81 parallels the existing rail corridor.

While I-81 was originally conceived as running along the Townsend Street corridor, it would ultimately be built one block east on Almond Street, through a portion of Pioneer Homes.
This slide and the next one contain aerial before-and-after photos, illustrating urban renewal and interstate construction. The first aerial is from 1951 and highlights key areas in yellow. The map shows the finely grained urban grid of the 15th Ward, a large residential area between today’s downtown and University Hill, which includes Pioneer Homes. The New York Central Railroad station and yard were located in the 15th Ward. At that time, West Street was a smaller street that connected areas of commerce and industry to the west of Onondaga Creek.
By 1966, when this aerial photograph was taken, Pioneer Homes was bisected by the partially built I-81 viaduct, and the 15th Ward had been cleared, as shown by the large open areas on the photograph. The “superblock” also is visible to the west of the I-81 viaduct. While the New York Central Railroad station remains, it is no longer used; a new passenger terminal has been built north of downtown. I-690 will soon be constructed, and West Street is in the process of becoming enlarged to connect to this future east-west interstate.
By 1973, the City and interstate had reached its contemporary form, with transportation infrastructure that would look very familiar to us now. The photograph on the top right of the slide shows the Townsend Street superblock. The photograph on the lower-right side depicts Cedar Street, looking west, including the elevated viaduct as well as the high-rise towers of the superblock beyond it. Cedar Street, once located between the buildings, now terminates at Almond Street.
The city has continued to evolve and develop. From a transportation standpoint, there is greater emphasis nationally on walkability and non-motorized modes of transportation. In Syracuse the development of the Creekwalk and the Connective Corridor are both under way, Centro has a new bus hub, and the Syracuse Regional Transit Hub has relocated north of downtown.
Syracuse is a city of neighborhoods, each with its own identity, and some are adjacent to the I-81 viaduct or located within the project area. The next few slides take a look at how these neighborhoods connect to I-81.
Situated northwest of the I-81/I-690 interchange, Franklin Square has limited connections to Downtown and to other neighborhoods to the east and south. Its central square, tree-lined streets, and the Onondaga Creekwalk, which passes through it, offer strong pedestrian and bicycle connectivity.

The western edge of Northside has always contained transportation infrastructure: first it was home to the Oswego Canal and railroad, and later to Oswego Boulevard, which was built over the canal. This portion of the neighborhood is bordered by I-81.
Prospect Hill, home to St. Joseph’s Hospital, hugs the northeastern curve of the I-81/I-690 interchange area. North Salina provides a major connection to downtown Syracuse. This area is a commuter route, with both on- and off-ramps to and from I-81.

Hawley Green is on the north side of I-690, just above its interchange with I-81. When this area was laid out and developed, the Erie Canal and New York Central rail lines formed its southern edge. The intersection of James, Burnet, and State Streets on the neighborhood’s western corner is a major link to Downtown.
The Near East Side is bounded on its west side by I-81, and on its north side by I-690. Its northern boundary was originally the important east-west industrial and commercial corridor of the Erie Canal and the NY Central Railroad. The neighborhood’s connections to the north are limited by the embankment of I-690.

The western portion of University Hill is adjacent to the I-81 viaduct and Almond Street. The number of crossing points under the highway is limited.
Park Avenue is bounded by I-690 on the north. On its eastern edge, West Street and its ramps connecting to I-690 limit this neighborhood’s connections to Downtown.

In the Near Westside, the Connective Corridor provides a link to the primary Syracuse University campus across town. West Street, on the eastern side of the neighborhood, connects directly to I-690. This neighborhood also includes a portion of the Onondaga Creek and the elevated railroad.
The Southwest neighborhood is bisected by both the Erie Delaware Lackawanna Railroad and I-81. Because the viaduct is elevated, the surface streets provide connections underneath the viaduct.

I-81, the Erie Delaware Lackawanna Railroad and the Oakwood Cemetery run along the Southside’s eastern edge. Because of these features, east-west connections are limited.
Land uses west of the viaduct include residences (Pioneer Homes and the superblock towers), medical facilities, and open surface parking lots; east of the viaduct, there are medical and university campuses, surface parking lots, and parking garages. Farther north, the downtown urban core occupies both sides of I-81. Upstate Medical has invested in residential towers on the west side of the viaduct to house its students as well as for other uses, increasing pedestrian traffic across Almond Street, in particular at Harrison and Adams Streets.
Many of the parcels near the viaduct that were cleared for either urban renewal or the construction of I-81 are now surface parking lots (shown in red on the map on the left side of the slide).
The Syracuse Comprehensive Plan establishes the City’s vision for the future. The Future Land Use/Character Area Plan indicates the City’s desire to reinforce the urban core (indicated in the pink salmon color) immediately adjacent to the viaduct. Farther north, the urban core area is found on both sides of I-81.
The 2013 zoning reinforces the Land Use Plan. Business and residential uses are indicated for the urban core.
This table from the Comprehensive Plan indicates typical uses, building forms, and site arrangement for each land use/character area, including the urban core. The table provides general urban design guidance.

Examples of goals from the Land Use and Development Plan relating to urban design include:

- **I.1** Reinforce Downtown as the mixed-use center of the land use and transportation network.
- **I.2** Promote land use patterns that support connectivity, efficient transportation service, and reduced reliance on automobile travel.
- **I.3.2** Enable and encourage a mix of uses along transportation corridors and within neighborhood centers. Emphasize that a mix of uses is desired in these areas. Zone these areas to encourage a variety of commercial, residential, and office activities.

**SPECIFIC DOWNTOWN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Encourage connections between successful nodes of activity within Downtown. Ensure that zoning along these connective routes is set at an appropriate scale and that new development includes pedestrian-intensive uses.
- Require the ground floor of parking garages to be wrapped in retail or office uses that engage passing pedestrians and generate more visual interest.
The 2040 Land Use and Development Plan identifies character areas and the types and arrangements of uses desired for each.
Successful streetscapes in Syracuse are social spaces. Streets should be welcoming, lively places in and of themselves. Sidewalks should be inviting and comfortable, attracting activity that contributes to the vitality of the neighborhood. Street trees should be provided for shade and enclosure, and benches for resting and socializing.

Numerous factors contribute to creating a sense of place, many of which are outside the scope of NYSDOT. For example, individual buildings set back a specific distance from the sidewalk create a uniform “street wall” and enclose the street. How buildings “address” the street is a key factor in determining an area’s physical character. Building location, orientation, proportion, and massing influence the quality of the walking experience. Building articulation and detailing create another layer in the experience of place; buildings that are articulated and finely detailed provide more interest to the eye and help improve the walking experience.
Many streets in downtown Syracuse are beautiful compositions of high quality architecture, much of which is retained to this day. Here are comparison views on South Salina Street from 1905 compared to today.
Washington Street has also retained much of its fine architecture as seen in the above comparison views between 1910 and 2014.
This can be contrasted to the character along streets where the buildings have been removed and there is a lack of enclosure.
Buildings located adjacent to the street provide a sense of enclosure, which is an important element of creating a feeling of comfort and a sense of place.
Many existing streets in Syracuse – such as this example along South Salina Street - exhibit this sense of enclosure.
The winter is an environmental factor that must be considered in design decisions. Weather protection should be incorporated into streetscape design. Careful placement of seating areas and plantings can maximize sun exposure.

Use of color and light and other design features is encouraged to provide interest year-round and counter winter conditions. Evergreen plantings can add natural color and function as a windscreen.
Parks, squares and historic districts are also important components of the urban character of a city.
The City of Syracuse has an abundance of parks, squares, open spaces, and historic resources. Hanover Square became the City’s first historic district listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976, followed shortly thereafter by the Hawley-Green Street, North Salina Street and Armory Square Historic Districts. Over the next 25 years, other neighborhoods and areas of the city were nominated to the National Register. The greatest concentration of parks, squares and historic districts occurs here, creating a vibrant walkable neighborhood with notable landmarks and opportunities for social interaction.
The City of Syracuse has a strong tradition of well-designed urban squares—for example, Hanover and Clinton Squares—which are a distinctive component of the landscape. These squares enrich the experience of the City, provide a public focus for neighborhoods, and function as markers within the City. They serve as receptacles for art, commemorate historical events and people, and are destinations and gathering places.

Consideration will be given to the existing network of squares and how they relate to the larger urban design context. The project will consider the potential for connectivity between these squares and the local street network.
Parks and open spaces are containers for civic life—for recreation, for respite, for people. The project may offer opportunities for the development of new squares and open spaces.
Syracuse has both local and regional bike facilities that provide connectivity to a range of destinations. The principal bicycle facilities include:

- The Erie Canalway Trail, an on-road striped bike lane, which is part of the statewide Erie Canalway Trail system that runs from Albany to Buffalo
- The Connective Corridor, which links Downtown to the University on a separated cycle track
- The Onondaga Creekwalk, an off-road multi-use trail that connects Onondaga Lake on the north to neighborhoods throughout the City that are located along the creek
- New York Bike Route 11, an on-road signed route on State Street, and
- West Street, a separated cycle track.

NYSDOT will seek to understand the City’s vision for the bicycle network in the project area and identify how the project can support and advance this vision. Incorporation of bicycle facilities, consistent with the Complete Streets legislation, will be integral to the project.
This illustration focuses on the downtown area adjacent to I-81. The greatest concentration of parks, squares and historic districts occurs here, creating a vibrant walkable neighborhood with notable landmarks and opportunities for social interaction.
Each of the existing bike/ped facilities has a unique identity and function. The project offers an opportunity to build and expand on the existing network.
Syracuse is replete with extraordinary historic buildings that contribute to its rich texture and beauty. On the left is a view looking east on the original Erie Canal. On the right is the same view today. The Clinton Square fountain references the historic urban context of this urban open space.
Syracuse is replete with extraordinary historic buildings that contribute to its rich texture and beauty. On the left is a view looking east on the original Erie Canal. On the right is the same view today. The Clinton Square fountain references the historic urban context of this urban open space.
Oakwood Cemetery is a substantial historic landmark located adjacent to I-81. This project will need to be sensitive to this outstanding example of the Picturesque landscape style.
This project will seek to identify opportunities to incorporate public art.
The project offers an opportunity to create a strong sense of arrival to the City of Syracuse, which can be accomplished in a variety of ways: through gateways or a distinctive sense of character, identifiable streetscape elements, artwork, and other possibilities.
Transportation systems historically coexisted with beautiful architecture and urban design that accommodated a range of modes transportation. This project offers an opportunity to re-examine how the city will relate to the primary transportation corridor – I-81 – in the future.
We would like you to continue to think about the various elements that we’ve discussed today—connectivity, historic resources, public art, and so on—and consider how they can be incorporated into the project alternatives. Future SAWGS will consider outstanding examples of urban design along other transportation corridors and what we might learn from them. Ultimately, we will consider urban design principles as they relate to the specific alternatives that move forward in the EIS.