

Maplewood Messenger

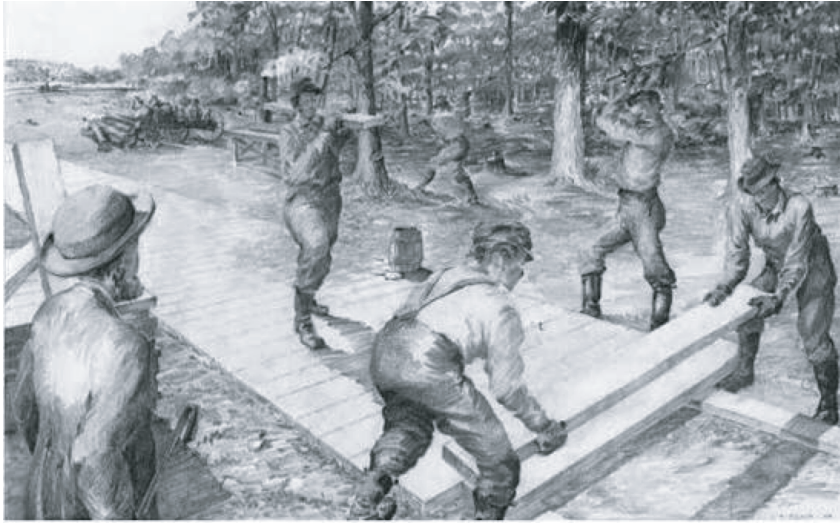
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The Newsletter of the Maplewood Neighborhood Association

Spring 2026

MAPLEWOOD HISTORY

LAKE AVENUE WAS A PLANK ROAD



Building a plank road, as imagined by artist A.E. Blair.

The Rochester-Charlotte Plank Road holds a special place in the history of Rochester's Maplewood neighborhood, as it directly shaped the area's early transportation and development in the mid-19th century.

Historical Background

During the Plank Road Boom of the 1840s–1850s, New York State saw a surge in these innovative (but short-lived) wooden toll roads, built from thick oak planks laid across timber stringers to create a smoother, all-weather surface than dirt or corduroy roads. Central New York was a hotspot for this trend, though the roads often rotted quickly due to heavy use, weather, and poor maintenance.

The Rochester-Charlotte Plank Road was one of the key examples serving Rochester. The company organizing it formed in March 1849, and the road was completed by the fall of 1849, remarkably fast construction for the era. It was about 5–7 miles long (sources vary slightly; one 1921 Democrat and Chronicle article lists it as 7 miles from the city line at Lake Avenue to the steamboat dock in Charlotte).

It started roughly by Driving Park Avenue, the Genesee River, Mount Read Boulevard, and extending north toward Holy Sepulchre Cemetery and the city line, was directly tied to this road.

- The plank road began near the present-day Driving Park Avenue (the southern boundary of Maplewood) and ran north along what became Lake Avenue.
- This alignment passed through or along the edges of the Maplewood area, connecting it to downtown Rochester southward and to the Lake Ontario port village of Charlotte (now Rochester's Charlotte neighborhood) northward.
- Before Lake Avenue existed as a paved modern street, it was essentially this plank road corridor, promoted by figures like George Geddes (son of Erie Canal engineer James Geddes). It served farmers, travelers, and goods heading to/from the lakefront, helping integrate Maplewood's early farming and industrial communities (centered around the west side of the Lower Falls of the Genesee River) with the broader region.

The road operated as a private toll road for several decades (maintained by the Charlotte Plank Road Company), with occasional newspaper complaints about poor upkeep typical of plank roads. By the late 1800s, it was superseded: railroads arrived in Charlotte by 1853, and in the 1890s, Lake Avenue became the route for Rochester's first electric streetcar line to the beach, boosting tourism and suburban growth.

No physical remnants of the wooden planks survive—most plank roads were replaced by gravel, macadam, or pavement by the Civil War era or shortly after.

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

As we go into 2026, the Maplewood Neighborhood Association was able to realize many of our goals for 2025. The biggest barrier to the MNA accomplishing more is the need for VOLUNTEERS! Whether it's helping with the community gardens, picking up litter on Monday nights, walking PAC TAC patrols, or organizing/helping with new events, we need your help to improve the neighborhood. If you can help with any of these, or if you have a project you'd like to get started, please either attend a MNA Town Hall on the first Wednesdays of every month and let us know, or if you can't make the meeting, email me at 585-456-5570. Together, we can make a stronger Maplewood!

MNA 2025 GOALS – OUR PROGRESS

Early in 2025, the MNA Board, with community input, developed a list of its goals for 2025. This is a brief accounting of our progress during the year. The Town Hall presentation of these goals can be found on our website: www.maplewood.org.

1. ONGOING ACTIVITIES:

The MNA Board conducted Monthly Town Halls at Aquinas, with updates from the police and fire departments, and from government officials. They featured guest speakers from the City and other organizations, who discussed new recycling programs, the Genesee River Trailway project, the 2034 Comprehensive Plan, the new Real ID implementation, the new non-emergency response team, Walking for Rochester litter initiatives, the 911 Nurse Navigator program, and small business liaison efforts. The MNA actively maintained our Facebook, Instagram and website pages. We published 2 newsletters, and are hoping to get back to quarterly in 2026.

We did weekly litter pickups, continued PAC-TAC walks, maintained our 3 Dewey Avenue gardens, reported code violations, and responded to zoning issues as needed. We attended monthly neighborhood association presidents meetings, and hosted tables at various events.

The MNA led 4 teams in the City's Clean Sweep event. We applied for and received grants for cable box painting and tree well maintenance, and completed these projects.

2. ADVOCATE FOR PROJECTS:

We provided design input to the Maplewood Library Expansion team, and monitored their progress and direction monthly. The library is scheduled to reopen in March. We worked with our City Councilperson to finalize funding for the new Nature Center. They are scheduled to open this Spring. Also with our councilperson's help, the Maplewood Rose Garden had a fully staffed maintenance crew. We have met with the City to discuss upgrades to the gazebos and restrooms. We initiated a request for a safety study at the intersection of Dewey and Driving

Park. Plans are in the works for improvements to the northwest corner, including a potential Miyawaki Forest. Funding is in the works for rehabilitation of the southeast corner building (previously Maplewood Books). We did not address any RCSD building reorganization.

3. INCREASE MNA PARTICIPATION: The MNA reached out to churches and schools, as well as current members. We are researching the feasibility of a storefront presence. We did a postcard mailing to households north of Ridge Road. We are working with Causewave, an organization that helps to grow non-profits. Two new Board members were elected. It is an ongoing struggle to attract active membership.

4. ORGANIZE EVENTS:

We continued the Gorge Guide Tours, and had a table at the Bridging Communities Event. Unfortunately, due to a lack of person-power, we were unable to organize other Maplewood events.

5. DEWEY AVENUE REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE:

Blight cleanup was initiated at one business location, and is on hold until the landlord is able to evict. The 22 existing planters were replanted for the season and 11 additional locations were rolled out. DARC coordinated an event with ROCovery – their members worked with us to plant and place the new locations. The 4 Neighborhood News Centers located in businesses are being refreshed monthly. We have been unable to roll out more locations yet. The American Deli façade improvements were completed. The window display was updated regularly – see the photo page in the newsletter. We have yet been able to tackle any other businesses. Work on a business database and efforts to fill store vacancies were put on hold. Much of the DARC activity had to be postponed because of member health issues – we are planning to regroup this Spring.

6. LEAD UP NEW INITIATIVES, AS SUGGESTED BY MNA MEMBERS:

The MNA has worked with City Council to begin to address issues at the Maplewood Rose Garden, and to initiate development of the green space at Dewey/Driving Park. One of our new Board members has taken on the responsibility of handling zoning issues. We are in talks with library personnel about setting up a Maplewood-specific display. We are researching the feasibility of repainting the arch at Lake and Ridge. In summary, the MNA came a long way in 2025 towards accomplishing our goals. Of course, many of the goals will be carried over for completion in 2026. The primary impediment to our progress is our need for more active involvement from our members and from the community. Maplewood needs you to join in!

MNA TOWN HALL HIGHLIGHTS

MNA TOWN HALL HIGHLIGHTS - July 2025– February 2026

The MNA Town Hall meetings are held at the Aquinas Institute on the first Wednesday of every month at 7:00 PM. They are open to the public and provide an opportunity to learn about neighborhood updates and share your input. The atmosphere is casual, and participation is encouraged.

July 2025

- No Town Hall meeting – Summer Break!

August 2025

- Public Safety: Jay Blanchard (RPD) reported that the Dewey/Lyell intersection remains closed while the site of the massive Tent City fire is assessed for demolition. Sergeant Justin Collins discussed recruitment efforts, including an upcoming exam, the Junior Police Academy, and successful outreach in refugee communities. RPD is currently down 120 personnel.

- Government: Bridget Monroe (City Council) reported that Teen Empowerment is moving into a facility at Dewey and Magee. Anna Keller (Northwest Neighborhood Service Center) spoke about the upcoming Maplewood Uplift event on 8/21. Yversha Roman (County Legislator) announced grants for art projects, direct flights to Fort Myers, American Sign Language access to County facilities, and free computer literacy courses (with a free computer upon completion). Joanna (Library) reported a planned return to the renovated Dewey facility in March 2026.

- DARC: Five bike racks were installed by the City on Dewey.
- Other: The “Welcome to Maplewood” sign has been repaired and reinstalled. Volunteers are needed for many MNA projects.

September 2025

- Public Safety: Lieutenant Tamburello reported that school buses will soon have cameras to record drivers who fail to stop for flashing lights (\$250 ticket). She also reported 1 homicide, a shooting, and a stabbing in Maplewood.

- Government: Bridget Monroe (City Council) reported that Rochester’s sanctuary city status was voted into law. Marshall High School is being used for storage; its fields are used by UPrep. Anna Keller (NWNSC) reported that the Dewey intersection (former Tent City site) will reopen soon.

- Guest Speakers: Matt Apple and Alonso Ponce (Walking for Rochester and Lake Ontario Microplastics Center) presented on litter and microplastics impacts.

- Litter is ugly, hazardous, clogs drains, and hurts businesses.

- Microplastics are ubiquitous—we consume roughly a credit-card-sized amount of plastic weekly.

- Walking for Rochester organizes litter cleanups and relies on volunteers.

- Psychology of litter: Clean areas stay clean; littered areas encourage more litter.

- Other: MNA holds weekly litter pickups and needs volunteers. MNA will lead Gorge Tours for ROC the Riverway (9/26–28).

October 2025

- Public Safety: Jay Blanchard (RPD) reported increasing homeless encampments with ongoing outreach.

No major crime incidents in Maplewood this month.

- Government: Bridget Monroe (City Council) reported potential pedestrian/bicycle safety improvements at Dewey/Driving Park and Dewey/Ridgeway. She is initiating a City/MNA meeting on Maplewood Rose Garden maintenance. Anna Keller (NWNSC) reported reassignment of their assistant administrator. Joanna (Library) announced a grand reopening event for May 2026.

- Guest Speaker: Mark Haron (Rochester Refugee Settlement, now consolidated with Mary’s Place) discussed services for refugees (housing, legal, jobs, functional living). Over 500 served to date; most spent years in camps and are fully vetted. Organization helps bring housing to CofO code—6 refugees have purchased homes. Asylum rules are more restrictive, but Rochester remains welcoming.

- Other: Foodlink FallFest on 10/18 will showcase their new building and programs.

November 2025

- Public Safety: Jay Blanchard (RPD) reported a new lieutenant for Lake Section. Another quiet month in Maplewood. Ticketing for illegal school bus passing begins 1/3/26.

- Government: Bridget Monroe (City Council) met with DES and MNA officers at the Gorge and Rose Garden to discuss improvements. She initiated action on 411 Seneca Parkway (tenants with no CofO). Noted Fire Department often first responder to medical 911 calls. Yversha Roman (County Legislator) announced new grant programs and a public hearing on renaming the stadium. Ann Keller (NWNSC) reported handling 47 tenant complaints this year. Noted Taj Mahal Indian restaurant opening on Ridge Road, City leaf pickup schedule, volunteers needed for ROC7 turkey giveaway. Speed bumps on Flower City/Magee complete; Lily Street roadblock removed. LaGrange Park improvements study complete; Dewey-Emerson realignment will demolish buildings on southwest corner.

- Guest Speaker: Kristy Jackson (City’s new Community Response Action Team) presented. Mission: Handle non-violent 911 calls (noise, trespassing, disputes) empathetically to de-escalate, mediate, and connect to services—reducing RPD load and addressing root causes.

December 2025

- Holiday meeting – Refreshments were served!

January 2026

- Public Safety: Lieutenant Tim Hall introduced himself as new Lake Section commander. Lt. Tamburello continues homeless outreach alongside northeast commander duties.

- Government: Bridget Monroe (City Council) is now Chair of Parks and Public Works. Met with Sarah Clark (NYS Assembly) and deputy mayor on northwest recreational needs. Also on Public Safety Committee; pursuing Dewey/Driving Park study. William Burgess (County Legislator) reported on budget progress, short-term rentals study, County RG&E takeover study, and funding solicitation for painting the Lake Ave/Route 104 sculpture. Anna Keller (NWNSC) reported outreach/cleanup of inactive homeless camps at Rose Garden and Route 104 underpass. Michael Maxwell discussed 2025 NIA grant improvements and 2026 grant applications now open.

- Guest Speakers: Casmic Reid and Anne Wallace (City Building Compliance and Code Enforcement) discussed CofO requirements, enforcement, and the Tolemi public access system. For property issues: call 311 (sidewalk to road); call NSC (sidewalk to house).

Rochester Buzz: What's Happening March – April 2026

Hey Mapewood friends! Spring is (slowly) arriving, and the city is gearing up with parades, runs, live music, family fun, and more. Here's your roundup of standout events through the end of April—mark your calendars!

March Highlights

- March 1-8: Eat Up Roc – Enjoy prix-fixe menus, special dishes, and deals at participating downtown restaurants. Perfect for foodies!
- March 3: Warren Haynes Band at Kodak Center – Rock out with this legendary performer.
- March 6: Lords of the Sound: The Music of Hans Zimmer at Kodak Center – Epic film scores live!
- March 7: The Fab Four: Beatles Tribute at Kodak Center – Relive the classics.
- March 10: Lyle Lovett & John Hiatt – Together on Stage at Kodak Center – A must-see acoustic duo.
- March 14: Tops St. Patrick's Day Parade (12:30–2:30 p.m., East & Alexander) – Celebrate Irish heritage with floats, bands, and community spirit.

Same day: Runnin' of the Green (9:30 a.m. start, downtown/Main Street) – The unofficial kickoff to spring racing season! 5-mile run/walk along the Genesee River—join thousands for fun and fitness.

- March 14–15: Member Chats & Special Programs at Rochester Museum & Science Center (RMSC) – Family-friendly science chats and exhibits.
- March 21–22: Homeschool Afternoons at RMSC – Interactive learning sessions.
- March 21, 22, 28, 29: New York State Maple Weekend – Tour sugar shacks across the region for fresh maple syrup tastings and demos. Sweet spring tradition!
- Ongoing: Catch Rochester Red Wings baseball (season opener vibes), Amerks hockey, Knighthawks lacrosse games, and indie shows at venues like The Bug Jar, Montage Music Hall, and Water Street Music Hall.

VISIT US ON FACEBOOK & INSTAGRAM!

JOIN TODAY!

To join the MNA, download the membership form from www.maplewood.org. You can bring the completed form and annual dues payment to any monthly MNA Town Hall Meeting, or mail it to our office. You can also get a form at the townhall meetings.

If you have any questions regarding membership, please contact (585)647-3186 or info@maplewood.org.

MNA TOWN HALL HIGHLIGHTS

cont

February 2026

- Public Safety: Jay Blanchard (RPD) reported drug warrant execution at 1358 Dewey; NSC working on tenant eviction. Long-standing open-air drug sale issue. Encouraged attending monthly PCIC meetings for detailed police/crime reporting.
- Government : Mitch Rowe (City Council assistant) reported library renovation changes and planned Driving Park bridge work this summer. Yversha Roman (County Legislator) reported funding approved for airport baggage system, Monroe Community Hospital, etc. Anna Keller (NWNCS) reported 16 front-yard parking tickets issued; all now in compliance after follow-up.
- Guest Speakers: Shantera Mitchum (Teen Empowerment director) with 2 teen employees announced Grand Opening on 2/18 at Dewey/Magee. Location chosen for its history of violence and high visibility. Focus: hiring local youth to become leaders/organizers tackling violence, addiction, and homelessness. Long history of grassroots success.
- Other: Spring is coming! Please consider volunteering with the MNA for the gardening team, litter pickup, or PACTAC.



April Highlights

- March 28 – April 4: Spring Break: Space Week & Behind-the-Scenes Tours at RMSC – Perfect for families during break—explore space themes, planetarium shows, and more.
- April 14: Run our River 5K (Ford St. Bridge start) – Scenic run/walk series event.
- April 19: Rochester River Run (at GVP/URMC area) – Support Strong Memorial with this community run/walk.
- April 25: Rochester NY Coffee & Chocolate Festival (Joseph A. Floreano Rochester Riverside Convention Center) – Indulge in tastings, vendors, and sweet treats.
- April 26: Rochester Regional Health Flower City Challenge (Parcel 5, downtown) – Half Marathon, 5K, Kids 1/2 Mile, and post-race party. Great for all levels!
- April 29: Food Truck Rodeo at the Public Market (5:00 p.m.) – Grab dinner from your favorite trucks in a lively outdoor setting.
- April 30 – May 2 (kicks off end of April): Rochester International Film Festival at George Eastman Museum – Free short film screenings—cinema lovers, don't miss it!
- Ongoing: Wrap-up of Amerks hockey/Knighthawks seasons, plus museum programs at RMSC and Strong National Museum of Play (superhero themes and spring activities).