

DELAWARE AVENUE HAMLET ENHANCEMENT STUDY

Implementation Task Summary

To: Delaware Avenue Hamlet Enhancement Study Advisory Committee
Study Advisory Committee Meeting #3
January 14, 2009
From: Margaret Irwin, River Street Planning
Date: January 15, 2009
Re: Meeting Minutes for SAC Meeting #3

Attendees:

Mark Kelly
Dianne Barber Kansas
Virginia Acquario
Michael Morelli, Assist. Director Economic Development & Planning, Town of Bethlehem
Robert Leslie, AICP, Senior Planner, Town of Bethlehem
Leslie Lombardo, Albany County
Mila Vega, CDTA
Robert Cherry, NYSDOT
Todd Fabozzi, CDRPC
Robert Horn
Sam Messina, Town Board, Town of Bethlehem
Anne Benware, CDTC
Jen Ceponis, CDTC
Margaret Irwin, Principal, River Street Planning
Leila Jabour, AICP, Principal Planner, River Street Planning
Michael Schreiber, CLA Site
David Fields, Nelson/Nygaard (By conference Call)
Amy Pfeiffer, Nelson/Nygaard (By Conference Call)

Recap of Community Workshop

The Town announced that there were approximately forty people in attendance at the December 1st Community Workshop. The Committee discussed the lack of representation of small businesses at the Workshop despite the extensive outreach efforts. Town Staff went door-to-door with flyers and mailed flyers to everyone located in the Delaware Avenue Corridor. Additionally, the Chamber also provided assistance with the outreach efforts. The PowerPoint presentation is on the Town's website.

Margaret expressed hope that the graphics that will be available before the next meeting might stimulate more people to participate. It was suggested that River Street contact the Chamber to see if a presentation could be made at a Chamber Breakfast before the next Community



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Workshop or if a brief survey could be distributed. Mike Morelli said he would contact the chamber about those options.

Review of Workshop Notes

The committee discussed the summary of the Community Workshop. Comments included the following:

- The Rail-Trail was a big topic of discussion – The funding for the project is actually coming from the federal and state government (the funding sources should be clarified in the notes)
- Albany County has hired a consultant to evaluate issues related to the rail trail (Albany County DPW is the lead)
- There are questions about how upkeep and maintenance of the trail will be managed.
- The County is beginning to consider access points to the trail. The Hamlet enhancement study can make suggestions. The final decisions will be made following significant public outreach as part of the trail development.
- The Trail engineering study is expected to be completed by late 2009.
- Virginia and Bob discussed interest in expanding Veteran’s Park (could be used as a stop-off on the Rail-Trail) and adding some small parking areas (realizing that neighbors are concerned about having a lot of vehicle traffic in their area). A site plan was prepared a few years ago which will be reviewed.
- The Town has been in discussions with Verizon about using their front lawn on Delaware Avenue for public greenspace.
- The Delaware Reformed Church is also receptive to allowing public use of their property which is already being used as an informal gathering space.
- There was discussion about the importance of maintaining the overpasses since they restrict truck passage. The County will own the overpass and will explore ways to deal with the flooding that occurs around it.
- The team clarified that traffic volume counts for Delaware Avenue will be included in the final profile. Anne clarified that volumes have been steady/moderating, with no significant increase though rush hour bottlenecks do occur.
- The committee concluded that residents seemed to be on the “same wave length.” Residents were not interested in widening the road. Most people focused on identifying areas where traffic calming and safety improvements are needed. They emphasized creating a more walkable environment with sidewalks that address ADA, density and mixed uses.
- The team clarifies that a design manual will be developed to create some architectural conformity in design.
- Residents felt that absentee property owners are not interested in improving their building, frustrating tenants who support improvements.



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- There was a discussion about biking, bike routes, and the needs of commuter bicyclists. The plan needs to address the needs of different classes of cyclists.
- Delaware Avenue is the primary route for commuter biking, but other routes should be considered (maybe Hudson?).
- There was a discussion about the role of parallel parking. Concern was expressed that merchants will likely oppose removal of parking. There should be a careful evaluation of which parts of the corridor are dependent on the parking and where it might be unnecessary. The group also discussed the function parallel parking plays in narrowing the roadway and reducing speeds. If it were removed, sidewalks widened and a bike lane established, would the same benefit be realized?
- The consensus is that the corridor has an adequate supply of parking. CDTC parking counts showed that existing lots are underutilized, including at high demand times like weekends.
- It was observed that many businesses have off-street parking lots. We should be careful not to “blind side” businesses if we propose to remove any parallel parking.
- Delivery trucks on Delaware Avenue block the road and the driver, pedestrian and bicyclists view. This is an enforcement issue. Deliveries should be made in the rear of businesses.

Implementation Tasks

A summary of the implementation tasks for the Study was distributed to the Committee and reviewed. Tasks include:

Urban Design Guidelines/Standards: The guidelines will define the relationship of buildings to streets and architectural characteristics. A review of the “Commercial Hamlet” and “Hamlet” Design Standards in zoning will be completed. Existing guidelines are general the implementation plan should expand upon them and make more specific recommendations for this study area. A design guide manual will be developed that will focus on neighborhood design, site design that supports walkable neighborhood scaled mixed-use development and architectural features. It will address multi-modal site access, circulation, parking, building placement, lighting, signage, and landscaping.

- *The guidelines for the hamlet and commercial hamlet district are general with some overlap (good intent, but no teeth). The Project Team will get more specific but not too specific. Instead of numbering, ideas will be grouped (new construction versus adaptive re-use; facades/storefronts, painting, lighting, screening, landscaping, signage (town has signage section in Zoning Code).*
- *It was recommended that the Town pursue an educational program – grant resources for façade improvements for property owners to work with an architect to help them improve their buildings.*



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- *The Town needs to decide on Design GUIDELINES versus Design STANDARDS. Rob felt that most people comply with the existing guidelines following discussion with the Town staff.*
- *The team needs to visit the Town's other hamlets. Will standards address all hamlets or be specific to the Delaware Avenue study area?*
- *However it is approached, the manual should consider the need for requirements to be practical and affordable.*

Streetscape Guidelines including a Typical Cross Section: These guidelines will address lighting, overhead wires, landscaping sidewalk width, signage while complementing the urban design guidelines. A street enhancement plan will be developed for the area that recommends landscaping and lighting improvements by location. The guidelines will graphically represent desired street cross section(s) and related elements. The focus will be on improving the visual quality as a whole and providing a buffer or comfort zone for pedestrians and other street users.

- *This section will include graphic and narrative recommendations (including street cross sections specific to the corridor).*
- *Committee would like to see the guidelines address trash barrels, screening for cans and location, benches and hedges, landscape criteria for parking in front of businesses.*
- *CDTA is installing automatic trash compactors at the BRT location on Central Avenue – these may be worth considering.*
- *Question as raised about whether we could allow/create internal connections between abutting businesses?*
- *Access management of multiple driveways - guidelines for combining and consolidating was seen as important.*

Transportation Improvements: A concept plan for the hamlet will be developed that includes alternative approaches for resolving multi-modal hamlet area transportation issues. It will show how to integrate elements like traffic calming, transit, vehicle and bicycle circulation and connectivity. This element will address:

- Operational and management actions to improve mobility and connectivity for all modes. Driveway consolidation, shared access, roadway connections, and other actions will be identified. Bike/pedestrian and transit accommodation are seen as key.
- Appropriate locations for shared parking/on-street parking for vehicles as well as bicycle parking facilities will be identified.
- Pedestrian/bike circulation plan for the area will be identified, providing for better connectivity between residential neighborhoods, businesses, and community/civic properties in the study area and in adjacent areas of the Town. It will include potential locations of connections to the former D& H Rail Line.



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- Potential crosswalk locations or enhancements will be identified.
- New/improved sidewalks, strategic shortcut paths, pedestrian traffic controls such as countdown pedestrian walk/don't walk signal heads will be identified.
- Transit stop/shelter improvements will be identified.
- *The concept should evaluate a road diet in the area where Hudson diverges from Delaware Avenue.*
- *We should call for a public information campaign – stopping at crosswalks.*
- *It was observed that a major obstacle to bicyclists is the amount of debris on Delaware Avenue. More frequent street sweeping would be a cost effective way to improve bicycling conditions in the short term.*
- *There is no agreement currently between the Town and New York State regarding street cleaning of Delaware Avenue.*

100 Mile BRT Project

Mila Vega from CDTA provided a review of the 100 Mile BRT Project. The Delaware Avenue route is considered a Priority 3 for future BRT service on a scale of 1-3. Priority 3 ranking is for trunk routes and other busy neighborhood routes need improvements to the physical environment. Things like pedestrian enhancement, density, safe crosswalks will help boost priority ranking for a community. The 100-mile BRT initiative is very long term, but the Town start now by making improvements and establishing policies that are transit supportive.

Town of Bethlehem Related Initiatives

- 48 Hudson Avenue is under construction - it is a mixed-use project.
- Town is currently in the process of creating a “Pathways Committee” to look at things like bicycle routes, etc.
- Japanese restaurant opened in Main Square – new business is coming to the hamlet
- Friends of the Rail Trail Group has formed, meeting scheduled for Jan. 28 at 6:30PM at Bethlehem Library.

Next Meeting:

The next SAC Meeting will be on Wednesday, March 4th at 4PM at Town Hall in Room 101.

