

**IMAGINE AMHERST
MEETING NOTES**

**PROJECT WORKING COMMITTEE MEETING
AUGUST 10, 2016**

This meeting is being recorded.

Working Committee Attendees: Dal Giuliani, Chair; Ellen Banks, Duncan Black, David Chiazza, Jim Cwierley, Brian Kulpa, Carl Montante, Jr., Gary Palumbo, Ramona Popowich Daniel Ulatowski, Bob White and Jane Woodward

Absent: Steven Herberger, Frank Pasztor

Technical Committee Attendees: Gary Black, Brian Andrzejewski, William (Bill) Pidgeon, David Mingoia, Kelly Dixon, Mark Rountree, Bart Roberts

Staff Present: Dan Howard, Kim Schueler, Jean Brzezinski, Amy Carrato

Dan Howard gave a brief overview of the meeting agenda regarding recommended sites and that this is the last step before the Charrette at the end of September.

Dal Giuliani spoke about the bus tours. He mentioned that the public bus tour was full and asked the Committee what they thought about the tour – was it helpful, did they get anything from it?

David Chiazza stated the tours were great.

Ellen Banks stated it was a new way to view these locations; she had never really seen them in that way before.

Annette Herman from Homerun Creative spoke and stated that one of the attendees on the public bus tour, Heather McCarthy, sent a lengthy positive email after the tour (Jean has a copy).

Ramona Popowich said the public tour was well attended, people were receptive and asked detailed questions, and they were pleasantly surprised by all the information given by Gary and Dan.

Dal Giuliani thanked Gary Black and Dan Howard for a great job for an informative tour that laid out and described things in layman's terms so everyone could understand.

Brian Kupla stated he felt people worked more collaboratively outside of a board room.

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Kelly Dixon thought the public tour was helpful from both a land use and transportation standpoint.

Dal Giuliani asked Kelly if she received any feedback from the public on the tour. Kelly did not, but most people probably don't know who she is and that she is knowledgeable about the subject.

Ramona Popowich stated that the presentation to the public was more detailed than the one for the Committee and she thought it was very helpful.

Dan Howard asked Lee if the public presentation will be posted online. Lee stated yes, it will.

Gary Black wanted to point out that if the Town does nothing – if the project didn't exist and we stuck with the same Plan and Zoning Code – there will be an unwanted consequence and we will keep getting types of development we may not want to see. We won't be able to make everyone happy, but hopefully we will be able to satisfy a high percentage of the public.

Dal Giuliani agreed and stated that most people want to see this go in the right direction, but it is not possible to please everyone.

Annette Herman discussed the websites activity; it has increased since March due to the tour and social media. The public watches the videos on the website, but some views were likely from staff due to technical issues (the video and audio sometimes do not line up correctly). One option would be to consider doing just an audio podcast due to the technical issues that are occurring. Facebook has 136 likes. Posters have been designed and will be printed and distributed to the centers that will be studied during the Charrette.

Lee discussed the Charrette and stated that the dates are correct but the locations for each event are yet to be determined. If Committee members aren't available to attend all days and need to choose certain events to attend, Lee suggested the following order:

1. The Saturday Hands on Workshop where there will be work and discussions on the selected centers.
2. The closing presentation Wednesday evening to voice your opinions/concerns and to hear about the week's events in compressed form.
3. Monday evening Open House from 6- 8 pm, drop in when convenient.
4. Monday and Tuesday lunch and learn. Bring your own lunch.
5. Anyone is welcome to the Open Design Studio on any of the days.
6. We may ask Working Committee members to be a stakeholder and attend a meeting or focus group.

Lee asked if there were any questions.

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Gary Palumbo asked if Saturday is a continuous event.

Lee answered that they want 3 ½ hours of your time at the Hands on Workshop. You can also start at 9 am and possibly leave early, if needed. They would you to attend the entire time, if possible.

Dal Giuliani asked Lee if he wants to meet with the Committee together and what day he would prefer. Lee answered possibly Tuesday for 1-1½ hours preferably at 6 pm. Dal Giuliani asked for a show of hands who would be available on Tuesday at 6 pm. The majority of people raised their hands.

Lee stated that the handouts are currently available on the website and updated handouts will be distributed at a later time once locations are finalized. The intent is to treat the Charette choices as pilot areas that can be more broadly used to rezone commercial centers.

Lee discussed the 5 recommended types of centers: Deep/Large Parcels, Shallow Parcels, Williamsville Edge, Traditional Node, and Suburban Node. When choosing a center, the Committee should use the following criteria: likelihood of redevelopment, transferability, anticipated investment by the Town/IDA, and State/Federal Government/Community acceptance.

First, the Deep/Large Parcel sites were discussed:

David Chiazza stated his first reaction upon seeing the list is these are not the obvious parcel choices. Why isn't the Gun Club or Ridge Lea Campus on the list? They don't have many neighbors and are already going through change. He is not excited by the isolated location of Home Depot.

Dal Giuliani asked if they can chose a location not on the list. Lee answered absolutely if the staff is ok with that.

Brian Kupla would like to see the Northown Plaza location but also feels we should use the Gun Club site, it is a large vacant parcel and a likely place for redevelopment in the future.

Dan Ulatowski stated we need to question if that is something that can be transferable to another site.

Duncan Black said the Gun Club site is a greenfield and the other sites are active and should be upgraded.

Dan Ulatowski stated the focus should be looking at commercial centers, not greenfields.

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Ramona Popowich stated that the bus tour spent a lot of time at the Northtown Center location and that is her choice of the three parcels.

David Chiazza stated that property is already being developed and a site plan may come in before we can get any of these new zoning provisions in place.

Dal Giuliani stated that the parcel being discussed is not just Northtown Plaza but the entire block...Eggert, Bailey, Sheridan and Niagara Falls Blvd.

Gary Black stated these are all valid points. He stated he thinks the Committee should lean toward sites that are near residential areas and more context with surrounding areas.

Dan Howard stated that Northtown Plaza may also have transit options that may arise in the future.

Dal Giuliani said it may be worthwhile to look at this site for new use before it is developed.

Duncan Black stated the developer may have suggestions of things that may not be endorsed.

Brian Kulpa asked how far along is the planning for the Northtown Plaza site?

David Chiazza stated that the Northtown Plaza site is a unique property, may not be transferable to other sites, and that we want to use resources to create results that we want which may not occur at Northtown.

Lee stated he is reluctant to use the Gun Club site due to the controversy around it; he would rather go elsewhere. The Northtown Plaza site is a good site, but it will only be really great if the Shopping Center is completely redone.

Gary Palumbo stated that the Transit Road parcel has transferability and should be considered.

Gary Black stated that no firm plans, except for Whole Foods, have come in from the developer at the Northtown Plaza site. The developer could just cosmetically fix the existing buildings, possibly add out buildings, or redo the entire site. Six months ago there was no indication of any plans/submittals but this is all we know right now. He agrees that plans could come in at any time and it could be before this project is completed. He agrees with Lee on Gun Club site.

Lee reminded the Committee to think about redevelopment and transferability criteria.

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Brian Andrzejewski feels the Home Depot site is off the table, Ridge Lea site is off the table, the Transit parcel has everything the Committee is looking for and the demographics are different compared to the Northtown Plaza site.

Dave Mingoia asked if the committee is looking sites with office components because there are no office sites on the list. The Ridge Lea site has office and is transferable.

Gary Black stated the site for the project should be existing commercial centers, but that the staff and Lee talked about doing office as a component. It was decided that for now the Committee should stick to commercial centers.

Lee stated a node of that type is not in the scope of this project, to keep it on a side burner for now. A separate study should be done regarding the office environment in Town and how to use office buildings in the future.

The vote for the Deep Large Parcel was done by a show of hands.

Results:

Transit Road from Maple Road to Sheridan Drive – 4

Intersection of Sheridan Drive and Niagara Falls Blvd. – 10

Niagara Falls Blvd. – Home Depot Plaza – 0

Second, the Shallow Parcel sites were discussed:

Jim Cwierly stated that the Niagara Falls Blvd. from Willow Ridge Dr. to S. Ellicott Creek Rd. area is currently a safety concern, development would help the area and the Willow Ridge neighborhood tremendously.

David Chiazza asked if there will be overlap with the Town of Tonawanda and the Town of Amherst regarding Niagara Falls Blvd. from Willow Ridge Dr. to S. Ellicott Creek Rd. site because it involves both municipalities. He stated that the Towns are already working together on a Niagara Falls Boulevard Study.

Kim Schueler described the Niagara Falls Boulevard Study.

Lee stated if the Niagara Falls Blvd. from Willow Ridge Dr. to S. Ellicott Creek Rd. or the Transit Road south of Main St. sites are voted on we will work with the neighboring town.

Gary Palumbo stated that the Tonawanda and Amherst sides of Niagara Falls Blvd. have different zoning and this could make it difficult to work with this area.

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Brian Kulpa stated that the Sheridan Drive does not deal with two municipalities and the site is transferable to others within the Town.

Carl Montante Jr. stated it makes sense to have the continuity on Sheridan Dr. if we did Northtown and then Sheridan near it, which may open up the possibility of receiving grant money for infrastructure improvements; it would help Sheridan Dr. become more pedestrian friendly and may help promote reinvestment in that area.

Ramona Popowich stated that homeowners should get involved and doing Niagara Falls Boulevard near Willow Ridge would get the Willow Ridge Association interested and they would likely become involved.

Gary Palumbo stated that Sheridan Dr. has a lot of neighbors and is adjacent to a lot of residential.

Lee stated that Sheridan Dr. will likely never be fully walkable due to six traffic lanes and a median.

Bill Pidgeon stated Transit Rd. south of Main St. has been neglected and he gets a lot of complaints and sees a lot of issues in that area.

The vote for the Shallow Parcel was done by a show of hands.

Results:

Transit Road south of Main St. – 8

Sheridan Dr. from Millersport Hwy. to Bailey Ave. – 5

Bailey Ave. from Eggert Rd. to Oxford Ave. – 0

Niagara Falls Blvd. from Willow Ridge Dr. to S. Ellicott Creek Rd. – 3

Third, the Williamsville Edge sites were discussed:

David Chiazza stated they are both good choices and this is a tough decision. Main Street will be going through changes soon.

Gary Black agrees with David. Main St. has significant parcels for redevelopment and needs to catch up to things being done in the Village.

Bill Pidgeon stated the Tops Plaza and Amherst Collision sites are underutilized and are not well taken care of. It can be an asset to the Town to redevelop this area.

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Brian Kupla had concerns and stated it is hard to get continuity. The Town has 10 separate zoning districts from Youngs Rd. to the Village line. This area has a very low density right now and a lot of larger individual parcels. The Village has plans for an on/off ramp on Youngs Rd. and that would change the current traffic pattern.

The vote for the Williamsville Edge was done by a show of hands.

Results:

Main Street – Union Road to the I-290 – 7

Main Street – Youngs Road to the Village line – 9

Next, the Traditional Node sites were discussed:

David Chiazza struggled with the Traditional Node, wanted more variety but couldn't decide on or find an alternative.

Ramona Popowich prefers the Eggertsville – Main Street from Westfield Road to Maynard Drive site. This also would involve the ECO Homeowner's Association

Dave Mingoia stated that there is opportunity in Eggertsville. He also asked if the Harlem/Kensington/Cleveland area could be in the mix?

Ellen Banks stated that Daemen and the surrounding community is an area to consider if we do the Snyder area.

Dan Ulatowski asked for Lee's perspective on Harlem/Kensington/Cleveland area. He stated that the Town of Cheektowaga has an initiative in that area as well so if it is chosen it could be collaborative work. Lee stated it may be ok.

Dan Howard questioned if the roundabouts should be a concern as they are unique and probably not very transferable to other sites.

Brian Kulpa stated that Harlem Rd. is not pedestrian friendly but should be; it has the potential to be.

Gary Black stated the overlay zoning district for the Harlem/Kensington/Cleveland area is also in place at Main and Eggert, and that if we examined Eggertsville it could be transferable to the Harlem/Kensington/Cleveland area.

The vote for the Traditional Node was done by a show of hands.

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Results:

Snyder – Main St. from Burroughs Dr to Amherstdale Rd - 1

Eggertsville – Main St. from Westfield Rd. to Maynard Dr. – 6

Harlem/Kensington/Cleveland area – 8

Lastly, the Suburban Node sites were discussed:

Ellen Banks stated the Hopkins/Klein site has a lot of potential. Residents will support this site and the community would be accepting of this.

Ramona Popowich stated people are happy with how the Hopkins/Klein area is now, and the Dodge area seems ok the way it is.

David Chiazza doesn't see the developer changing soon at the Hopkins/Klein site or any redevelopment because people like it the way it is now. Millersport and N. French / Crosspointe would be a good study site for Suburban Node.

Gary Palumbo asked if Getzville Plaza is an option.

Carl Montante stated that Getzville Plaza is a tired plaza, so is Maple Ridge Plaza.

Brian Kulpa stated that the residents love the Hopkins/Klein and Williamsville North High School areas as they are. He would support change in the Maple Ridge Plaza/UB area; it would be great to have an area near UB to examine.

Lee stated the University has done a poor job of walkability on campus and Maple Ridge Plaza is not really considered suburban node because it has no context with surrounding residential.

Gary Black thinks Maple Ridge Plaza is worth looking at, need to get more typical suburban centers in the mix.

Brian Kulpa suggested adding a University Node.

The vote for the Suburban Node was done by a show of hands.

Results:

Hopkins Road/Klein Road - 4

Hopkins Road/Dodge Road - 0

Getzville Plaza – 11

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Dal Giuliani told the committee that the Planning Board will be updated at their meeting next week on the project, and that all are welcome to attend. On September 6th, Code Studio will be in Town to appear before the Town Board to update them on the progress and look for confirmation of direction

The next Joint Committee Meeting will be on September 7th.

The public in attendance was asked if they had any questions:

Don Smith stated:

1. The problems regarding the website can be avoided if the meetings are moved to town hall.
2. The problems with the software that the town uses should be able to be fixed at no cost.
3. The town's population is 124,000 people, if the committee is only getting 1,500 people that is just a drop in the bucket. They should filter by IP addresses for a total number of users.
4. The Town of Amherst has the skills to do public outreach accurately but currently has no involvement/input from residents.