



7. Economic Development Strategy

7.1 Overall Summary of Area

The Snyder area is a well-established commercial and residential district that remains one of the most desirable locations in Western New York. Although its population is relatively small, with roughly 14,000 people living in the area, it is an affluent and well-educated population that forms the core of the region’s resident market for upscale retailers.

In contrast to other nearby areas, the population of Snyder is getting younger, driven by a recent influx of younger families who are replacing longtime residents. As a result of these new families, residential property values in the area are going up, and enrollment in the Amherst Central School District is on the rise.

The Snyder Business District is very well situated, both in terms of proximity to residential markets and accessibility to the regional transportation network. Though it possesses a strong history and identity, it is currently facing several challenges that are threatening to weaken its competitive position. These challenges include the following:

- **Unsafe pedestrian environment** – High speed limits, wide traffic lanes, short timings at traffic lights, and the absence of visual impediments have created an environment in Snyder that favors motor vehicles over pedestrians. As a result, pedestrians find it increasingly challenging to cross Main Street and Harlem Road.
- **Competition for parking** – Although there is ample off-street parking in the Snyder district, a good deal of it is located behind buildings. Many office workers who could use these rear lots instead park in front of retail buildings, limiting access of potential retail customers to businesses. This situation has caused concern among area retailers.
- **Erosion of the historic retail base** – The critical mass of retail in the district has faded, due largely to the transformation of Snyder Square from a retail development to an office property. Snyder’s retail struggles can be mainly attributed to regional competition, as continued retail growth in outlying areas of the region give customers many more choices today than they had 30 years ago. Much of this new development is of the big-box variety, featuring stores that offer a wider range of products under one roof, making it more difficult for smaller retailers to compete.
- **Management issues** – More modern retail developments are typically run by one private entity that provides comprehensive management, including marketing, promotion, leasing, snow removal, and sanitation. In a diverse, older district like Snyder, property ownership is fragmented, and these management responsibilities are divided among many public agencies and private businesses, thus making it more difficult to administer them.
- **Limited residential options** – Snyder is primarily a community of single-family houses, many of which are very highly priced. The multi-family properties in the area are mostly older and lower-



quality, and the majority of them are aimed at fulfilling housing needs for college students and young adults. With many of Snyder’s residents approaching retirement age, they cannot remain in the area if they want to trade their houses for lower maintenance residences like apartments or townhouses.

7.2 Recommendations for Improvements

The above issues all contribute to concerns among property owners, businesspeople, and residents on Snyder. The recommendations that follow address these issues and provide future direction for dealing with them. Each recommendation is aimed at addressing one or more of the above issues, in order to improve the competitive position of Snyder in the regional real estate market.

■ **Recommendation #1:**
Introduce Traffic Calming and Pedestrian Access Measures

The traffic calming measures laid out in Point 4.3, which include narrowing travel lanes, more on-street parking, and lowering the speed limit, all would be very positive for businesses in the area. Both retail and office businesses would benefit from traffic calming. Retailers would gain both better accessibility for pedestrians, as well as more parking spaces in front of stores. Office businesses would benefit from having employees be more mobile as pedestrians during the workday.

■ **Recommendation #2:**
Strengthen Business Association

As presently constituted, the Friends of Snyder group acts as a unified voice for local businesses, but has modest resources and a limited ability to induce change in the area. In an area like Snyder, where the two main roads are state highways and property ownership is fragmented, a stronger organization is needed to provide coordinated management in the area. This organization could take a number of directions, including:

- A Business Improvement District (BID), which is a geographically specific entity that collects a small tax from property owners in the district and provides a wide range of marketing, management, and event planning functions.
- An extension of the Friends of Snyder, but one that would provide some of the functions of a BID. In order to expand the role of the Friends of Snyder, however, more funding would be needed. Funding could either come from the businesses themselves or from the Town of Amherst.
- An area-wide business association, combining Snyder businesses with the neighboring Harlem-Kensington and Eggertsville business communities. Since these three areas are so close to one another, and face many of the same issues, a larger business group for all of these areas may be able to accomplish more.

■ **Recommendation #3:**
Establish and Enforce Parking System



Although there are sufficient on and off-street parking spaces in Snyder, parking spaces are scattered among many privately-owned properties. Since individual property and business owners cannot adequately monitor who uses their parking spaces, the situation often becomes chaotic. One of the roles of the strengthened business association would be to address this situation. Its role could include encouraging office tenants to use parking spaces, promoting the use of public transit and, potentially, providing staff to enforce parking in the area.

■ **Recommendation #4:**
Improve Snow Removal System

Snow removal on Main Street and Harlem Road is conducted by the New York State Department of Transportation (DOT), as both roads are state highways. DOT snowplows move snow off of these roads and onto curbs and sidewalks, where snow tends to pile up. Presently, the responsibility of removing the snow from sidewalks falls to individual property owners, and property owners are cited and fined by the Town of Amherst if they do not clear off their sidewalks in a short period of time. This system, plain and simple, is inadequate, and needs to be addressed. A number of different solutions are possible:

- The Town of Amherst could also remove snow from sidewalks in Snyder.
- New York State DOT could be persuaded to remove snow from sidewalks in Snyder.
- The business association could purchase its own snow removal equipment and clear sidewalks and parking lots for its members.
- The business association could contract with a snow removal service to provide this service for the district.

■ **Recommendation #5:**
Conduct a Public Relations Campaign

A major factor in maintaining Snyder’s competitive position is public relations, as developers, retailers, and shoppers all need to be kept aware of the area and its advantages. A marketing and public relations campaign is recommended, with the business association taking responsibility. Marketing Snyder will require varied approaches in order to attract each of these audiences, but each group is important, as developers need retailers, and retailers need customers.

One aspect of this campaign will be to recapture retail spending from local-area residents, as locals are increasingly spending their dollars elsewhere. An initiative that has worked well in other locations is a “local currency,” that residents can use at businesses in the area. Such a currency can be circulated by businesses and can be used to offer discounts to people paying with it. A less radical initiative would offer cooperative discounts among patrons of multiple businesses—for example, attendees of shows at Theater in the Square would receive vouchers for discounts at nearby restaurants.

■ **Recommendation #6:**
Encourage Reinvestment and Redevelopment



There are a number of underused properties in the Snyder business district. Although the owners of many of these properties are comfortable with leaving them alone for the time being, the Town of Amherst and the business association can take steps to encourage to reinvestment and redevelopment.

The major obstacle to reinvestment is the limited return on investment, but this can be overcome by offering stronger economic incentives than the existing 485(b) loan program. The recently expanded eligibility policy of the Amherst Industrial Development Agency (IDA) now allows property tax abatements for buildings in designated redevelopment areas. The Town can help establish Snyder as a redevelopment area, and then work with the business association to administer the IDA's abatement programs.

The business association can also help encourage reinvestment by working as a liaison between property owners and potential tenants. It is possible that property owners are unaware of potential retail and office users, and may be willing to reinvest in their buildings if they have stronger tenants available.

■ **Recommendation #7:**
Plan Special Events

One of the negative consequences of regional competition is that Snyder's identity as a unique place has faded somewhat. In order to play up Snyder's identity, the business association should plan more special events throughout the year. These events should, first and foremost, be aimed at residents of the immediate area, as they provide the core of the area's retail customers. Given the recent influx of children in the area, Snyder should offer seasonal public events for local families.

7.3 Short-Term Action Steps

Many of the above recommendations may not be feasible in the immediate future, due to high cost, the limitations of the existing Friends of Snyder group, a struggling real estate market, or other factors. However, since one of the major goals of this action plan is to enact short-term solutions for Snyder, the opportunities that do exist today should be pursued.

This section lists a few short-term opportunities to enact positive changes in the Snyder district that do not require major structural changes or infusions of large sums of money.

■ **Action Step #1 – Parking Enforcement**

As mentioned earlier, the parking problems faced by Snyder-area businesses and customers are not caused by a lack of spaces, but by a lack of organization. Although physical changes in the future should help the parking situation immensely, conditions can be improved right away by simply enforcing the existing rules. The Town of Amherst should be more proactive about regulating



parking in Snyder, and business owners need to make more of an effort to enforce parking on their properties.

■ **Action Step #2 – Create Marketing Materials**

Building an effective public relations effort for Snyder will take several years, and must therefore begin immediately. The first step in this process is a relatively inexpensive one—creating marketing materials such as maps and brochures. These materials can be circulated all over Western New York so as to reach regional residents and visitors alike. If more people knew about Snyder’s offerings, it would likely see increased business activity.

■ **Action Step #3 – Organize an Informational Session for Loan Program**

The Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Buffalo State University is a valuable resource for businesses needing financial or technical assistance. The SBDC offers, among other things, low-interest loans to new and/or growing businesses. At an upcoming Friends of Snyder meeting, an SBDC representative should be invited to brief Snyder-area businesses and prospective entrepreneurs in the area on available programs for funding and technical assistance.

■ **Action Step #4 – Hold Quality Special Events**

While creating a menu of special events will not happen overnight, one effective event can be planned in a short amount of time—a couple of months or so. The Snyder Business District and Friends of Snyder should expand upon the successes of the annual Greater Buffalo Alumni Rally - 5k Run & Wellness Walk sponsored by Loughrans Bar & Restaurant. Also, more considerations should be given to the collaboration between the Snyder Business District and the likes of Daemen College, Park School, Amherst Central School District and the YMCA. Other event possibilities should include a collaboration between the Friends of Snyder and the Harlem-Kensington-Cleveland (HKC) Business and Community Associations, as well as the Eggertsville Community Organization.

The key is to make the events memorable, fun, and, most importantly, well-organized. If planned for the late summer or early autumn, event ideas could include a “back to school” event, a harvest festival (recalling Snyder’s beginnings), or an outdoor theater production. An autumn event could be an Oktoberfest or a Halloween festival, among other things. Regardless of the choice of festival or event, it must be done with strong commitments from all participants in order to ensure quality.

■ **Action Step #5 – Hold Joint Meetings with Other Partners**

Snyder does not exist in a vacuum. Within one mile of Snyder’s commercial core are three other historic commercial districts: Harlem-Kensington, Williamsville, and Eggertsville. Given the acknowledged limitations of a small district like Snyder to induce change on its own, active partnerships should be pursued with nearby business districts. Even a small gesture like a joint meeting of the area’s business groups would serve to build momentum for future collaborative efforts. Snyder also has several strong educational institutions, and these should be part of future dialogues.



7. Conclusion

This Action Plan is based on the collective thoughts, ideas, and concerns of the Snyder business area stakeholders, along with the professional knowledge and expertise of the planning team and economic consultant. By bringing these together in one document, it is hoped that the positive and pro-active spirit encountered in the district thus far can be maintained and enhanced.

This report makes several key recommendations and suggests ways to take the next step towards implementing them. It is hoped that the concerned business owners, residents, and others in the Snyder community will use this document as a springboard for continued neighborhood revitalization and improvement. All efforts should be done in the spirit of a “public-private partnership.” Ideally, the more private efforts and interest that are put forth, the more neighborhood support will be given, and the more public dollars will funnel towards the Snyder revitalization efforts.