

C O D E S T U D I O

MEMORANDUM

TO: Eric Gillert, Town of Amherst Planning Director

FROM: Lee D. Einsweiler

DATE: May 8, 2016

RE: Stakeholder Meeting Notes: Kick-off Trip -- March 8, 9, 10, 2016 (NYSERDA Task 3.3D)

MARCH 8TH 2016

Design Professionals (8-10am)

Attendees:

- Chris McCaffrey, Ulrich Sign Company
- David Sutton, Sutton Architecture
- Lowell Dewy, C&S Engineering
- Anthony Mussachio, Mussachio Architects

Comments:

- » Politics will play a big role
 - » Article in today's paper.
 - » Strong anti-development feeling in Amherst.
 - » Amherst is not broken – a lot of good things exist, good quality of life.
 - » Talk to Sean Hopkins – prominent attorney in the area.
 - » It's a fiscal discussion (note to self, look at the RESET: Housing Study Report).
- » There are no "places" in Amherst
 - » The Riverwalk in San Antonio was used as a good example.
 - » Need excitement, food, natural horticulture, need something to do.
 - » There should be an architectural vernacular for the Town.
 - » Got to look outside the box for precedents. Cleveland is a comparable city to look at.
 - » Buffalo is starting to get the benefits of density. The Larkin District is a good example.
 - » The weather is a big deal – 7 months of the year you can't go outside – 5 months of the year you can't find a seat at an outdoor restaurant. It's about quality of life.
- » Infill
 - » What we are doing now is all infill – neighborhoods will fight you.
 - » New project on Main St. straddles the line between the Village and the Town.
 - » Straightforward approval in the Village
 - » Everything in Town required a variance.

- » The Hyatt Place really shook up the neighborhood (about 5 people).
- » Height is a major topic of discussion.
- » Mike Jordan – parcel on Youngs Road, 30 acres – neighborhood went nuts – fought the project for 3 years.
 - » Originally 70 senior units.
 - » Needed a variance – project reduced to 46 units.
 - » Drainage, traffic, wildlife used to reduce impact of project.
- » Mosey building on Main.
 - » 6-story controversial mixed-use building.
 - » 120-room Wyndham Hotel.
 - » 33 high-end apartments.
 - » 2,000 square feet of retail space (Tres Auraé Spa, Briosso by Butterwood is currently closed for renovations).
- » Process
 - » Staff is always available. The code is the problem. Don't always get the political support that you need.
 - » The code is tough – have to go to staff for interpretation all the time.
 - » Site plan process involves the neighborhood almost every time.
 - » System should be more balanced – constantly on the defense.
 - » First site plan – the public will never like the first one submitted.
 - » Education will be key – show images of successful projects – get out in front.
 - » Variances - look at old ZBA approvals for patterns.
 - » Planning Board has a hearing for most site plans.
 - » Permitting process has become more difficult, complicated, too many layers.
- » Centers
 - » Proactive rezoning would help; even just a proactive plan amendment would help.
 - » Village has a new code, good example of a modern approach to zoning (design standards).
 - » Redevelopment of centers might help relieve development pressure elsewhere in the Town.
 - » What makes each center unique? Characterization and hierarchy needed.
 - » Habersham (Beaufort, SC).
 - » Planned Community, beautiful, dense, tons of green space – ION (SC)
 - » Southern Village (Chappell Hill, NC).
- » Other Standards
 - » Too much stuff required in a 10-foot buffer.
 - » Signs – hot button issue, right rules, right place. What works in the Village won't work along Transit Road.
 - » New Damon College sign very nice.
 - » Lightning, dark sky starting to become a topic of discussion.
 - » Have to do a photometric plan so for the most part lighting is not a problem.

Environmental (4-5:30pm)

Attendees:

- Lois Shriver, Amherst Conservation Council
- Joy Kuebler, Joy Kuebler Landscape Architects
- Sophia Shilen
- Don Owens, Earth Dimensions
- Kathleen McCormick, WNY Land Conservancy

Comments:

- » Process
 - » Village form of Government is more nimble than the Town's.
 - » Mayor very proactive in leveraging money for green infrastructure.
 - » Stormwater is the Village's largest source of funding right now.
- » • Spring Street (Mill)
 - » Lots of run-off.
 - » Stabilized escarpment.
 - » Improved streetscape.
 - » Plaza – permeable brick pavers and green living wall.
 - » \$3mil from EPA.
- » Stormwater
 - » South Long Park: bio-retention, street grade planters.
 - » Main Street: stormwater in bump-outs coming.
 - » School of Medicine in Downtown (Buffalo) – added stormwater under sidewalk.
 - » HGTV Extreme Makeover
 - » Site had to be as “green” as building
 - » Had to take roof drains off line (not typically allowed, have to go into city sewer)
 - » This was seen as a pilot.
 - » Clay soils are not good for natural detention – won't drain – have to punch down through the clay.
 - » If you remove barriers to green infrastructure you will see some movement but won't see wholesale change – need requirements to make people use “green” approaches.
 - » City of Buffalo – Clarendon Street/Clarendon Place pilot – pervious pavement – needs cleaning and regular maintenance.
 - » New York City requires 75% native plants in public spaces – plants have to be diversified. Not a native environment anymore, hotter water in a dirtier setting – it's a balancing act.
 - » Alternative energy – geothermal used at Damon College.

- » Trees
 - » Still recovering from the 2006 storm.
 - » Village weaker on maintenance.
 - » Ash borer – treating but will still have to take some trees down.
 - » Trees on private properties/parking lots are an issue.
 - » Are there best practices that we should be following that need to be in the code?
 - » High plow area might need curbs.
- » Buffers
 - » Saw lots of fences on our tour (walls are a better option)
 - » Hyatt Place – buffer too small – only 10 feet.
 - » Meets code.
 - » Need an option that allows for increased buffer for reduced parking.
- » Parking
 - » Structured parking doesn't really exist in Amherst – the Mosey has a parking deck – one floor of parking above surface parking.

MARCH 9TH 2016

Business Owners (8-9:30am)

Attendees:

- Michael Newman, NOCO Energy Corp.
- Maria MacPeck, Irishman Pub, Williamsville Business Association.
- Tara Cadmus, Sweet Jenny's

Comments:

- » •he Irishman
 - » 9 years old.
 - » Major renovations 2 years ago.
 - » Past uses of the building include: deli, gas station and a pharmacy.
- » Village
 - » Parking is a problems.
 - » But this does mean more people walk.
 - » People will have a drink at the Irishman and then walkover and get an ice cream.
 - » Would like to see the vacant Iskalo site developed – Main and Garrison – former gas station and motel.
 - » Not too worried about food trucks taking our busines – more concerned about popup retail selling product cheaper than the brick and mortar store.

- » Snyder/Eggertsville
 - » Like the Village but quieter.
 - » Corner of Harlem Road has 3 drug stores – need more options.
- » Sweet Jenny's
 - » Would you consider additional locations. Where?
 - » Snyder, East Amherst (Swansville).
 - » Mill will use hydroelectric power to make ice cream.
- » Town
 - » NOCO has four gas stations in Amherst.
 - » Could Amherst provide a Village-like setting outside of the Village?
 - » What's missing in Town? Senior housing.
 - » Condition of roads a problem in some areas – potholes.
 - » No Uber or Lyft – do have a designated driver program.
 - » Westwood – former Country Club with golf course – developer looking to intensify site.
 - » Hotels – too many new ones getting built – who is staying there?
 - » Where are all the people coming from?
 - » The Irishman gets a lot business from weddings.
- » Infill
 - » People propose new development but do nothing to solve the additional traffic generated.
 - » First Whole Foods coming to North Town Plaza (first in the region).
 - » Trader Joe's located on Niagara Falls Blvd at Romney Dr.
- » Process
 - » Must emphasize how important public input is for this project – the Working Committee must be representative of the areas they will be working in.
 - » Village has so many duplicate services – could save a lot of money if the Town took over some of those services (failed referendum to dissolve Village in 2010).

Land Owners (9:30-11am)

Attendees:

- Dennis Penman, Ciminelli
- James Boglioli, Benderson
- Paul Iskalo, Iskalo Development
- Carl Montante, Uniland
- John Bevilacqua, Bevilacqua Development

Comments:

- » Whole Foods
 - » First Buffalo store in the region.
 - » Location – didn't want to be near a Wegmans (but it is?).
 - » High traffic area.
 - » Wegmans stores can be 140,000 square feet.
- » Village Charrette (happened sometime in the past – look at previous material prepared for background).
 - » Parking and traffic biggest problem.
- » Main and Hirschfield – mixed-use project – built across Town/Village boundary.
 - » 98 parking spaces.
 - » 3 stories/48 feet.
 - » Needed variances from the Town.
 - » 2-year process.
- » Main and Garrison
 - » Zoned since the 1970's.
 - » Maximum height used to be 6 stories.
 - » GB zoning.
 - » Maximum height is now 50 feet – not enough intensity.
 - » Easier to do a single-story Walgreens.
- » Temporary use on vacant sites?
 - » “It's going to cost me money.”
 - » People will complain about the loss of something when you develop the property.
- » The office market is changing
 - » No longer single-use office parks.
 - » Limited services.
 - » Nothing to walk to.
 - » Have to drive everywhere.
 - » How to convert to more of a mixed-use environment.
- » Need structured parking – tough to make structured parking work in a suburban environment.
 - » The Mosey parking deck was a risk – still not sure how that project will do in the long run.
- » Rents low, haven't changed much in the past 10 years.
- » Buffalo – recently seen a proliferation of charter schools.
- » Westwood Country Club
 - » 60 acres, former country club, golf course, adjacent to a major expressway, next to a major institution.
 - » Lack of community support for the project.

- » Former Buffalo Gun Club property
 - » 34 acres, Maple Road, close to the University of Buffalo
 - » Was a proposed mixed-use development – lightning rod and major political battle.
 - » Delays caused legal action, which Benderson won but lost all the tenants in the 7 years the court case took.
 - » Site Recently sold by Benderson to American Campus Communities
- » In the last 3 decades the Town has experienced a strong and healthy growth pattern.
 - » Open space and good schools were its strength.
 - » Things are changing, younger people are looking for “places” – where they can’t walk and feel comfortable.
 - » Can Amherst offer this to future residents who may be looking at Buffalo?
 - » Concerned about the future for the Town, historic growth is based on a declining model.
 - » Don’t make it too difficult for good developers to do the right thing.
 - » If you are not growing, you’re declining – need to modernize.
- » Bollard Law
 - » Following some serious car into building crashes, Amherst Council wanted all new retail buildings to install bollards between the building and the parking lot.
 - » Ultimately failed. Would have driven a number of developers out of Amherst if it had passed.
- » Give more authority to the Planning Department
 - » Town currently has a great minor modification process – very efficient – increase the purview of minor modifications.
 - » Need more flexibility in the code.
 - » Provide us with a more predicable model.
 - » Hyatt was approved because it was by-right.
- » Amherst is over parked.
- » Planning Board acts illegally – they are happy to go to court.
- » SEQ, supposed to be a shield but it’s used as sword to stop projects.
- » Move more authority down to Planning Board.
 - » To date, the Planning Board has been very good. With recent and upcoming appointments, this is likely to change – no growth.
- » Amherst Growth Corridor.
 - » ULI charrette.
 - » Heat map.
 - » A lot of material out there.
 - » Where is the Town going to be in 10 years?
- » Reassemble this group from time to time throughout the process.
- » Educate the community – the rest of the world is headed in a different direction.

Neighborhood Groups (4-5:30pm)

Attendees:

- Michelle Marconi - Friends of Mike's Pond
- Steve Matisz, Eggertsville
- Dave Ray - resident
- Judy Ferraro - Gun Club
- Maryann Hochberg - resident

Comments:

- » Do form-based codes ignore use? Does form-based code equal urban?
- » Working Committee is pro-development – questions about legitimacy of the people on the committee.
- » Add work scope to the project website.
- » Does this project include the overlay in Eggertsville?
 - » Once size does not fit all.
- » All variances are bad!
 - » Zoning Board of Appeals is the keeper of the code.
- » Interested in talking to you after you've done your analysis.
- » Eggertsville
 - » New buildings are going in.
 - » Rehab was first.
 - » Need incentives to reuse older buildings.
 - » Have not had any height problems yet.
 - » Traffic is a concern.
 - » Buffering would be helpful.
 - » Needs some love.
- » Problems
 - » Infrastructure, sewage capacity, traffic and drainage.
- » Town has very different areas; different character, new code must address this.
- » Tax incentives – IDA needs to rethink its approach.
- » Good development
 - » Mennonite Meeting House – corner of Main and Forest. Across the street from the Mosey. Recently rehabbed – now a Bank.
 - » Maple and N. Forest – old drugstore.
- » Medical office - not enough parking.
- » Car dealers have consumed Sheridan Drive.
- » Do a better a job at noticing people about meetings and events. Town newspaper.

MARCH 10TH 2016

Young Professionals (8-9:30am)

Attendees:

- Matthew Pelkey
- Ryan Carney
- Sara Svisco
- Chris Poole

Comments:

- » Black Squirrel Distillery – Elmwood, Buffalo,
- » Schools in Buffalo not good – Charters school of grown rapidly – not an issue – will pay for private school to stay in Buffalo.
- » Moving back to Amherst not an option.
- » Amherst built on an old model.
- » Buffalo going through a revival – drawing from the suburbs.
- » Amherst just got a brewery. 4 and 12 Brewery?
- » Where would you live if you didn't live in Buffalo?
 - » Village of Hamburg (south of Buffalo).
 - » Village of East Aurora (way east – cute, very wide sidewalks, street pavers, 2 stories).
 - » Village of Williamsville.
- » Amherst – everybody drives, “I don't like to drive.” Found it difficult driving out here for this meeting.
- » Housing stock is amazing in Buffalo – something you don't have in Amherst.
- » Parkside in Buffalo – amazing neighborhood – exceptional character – adjacent to Delaware Park and the Zoo.
- » You can pay \$8K to \$10K in annual taxes for a house in Amherst. 3,100 square foot house in Buffalo and I pay \$5K.
- » East Amherst has promise but Transit Road is terrible. Still have to drive everywhere.
- » Want and need character.
- » Money in Amherst is professional. Doctors, lawyers – not instinctively entrepreneurs – need to start investing their money in local start-ups.
- » Four big developers with money in the area – and they are all going to Buffalo.
- » Violent crime is up in Kenmore.
 - » Downtown – more people around, more eyes, everybody knows each other, violent crime is down.
- » Housing options – need more density.
- » 250 Delaware serves as the new world headquarters for Delaware North.
 - » Developer is Uniland.

- » 12 stories in the CBD.
- » 120 room Westin Hotel.
- » 193,000 square feet of office space.
- » 18,000 square feet of retail space.
- » 5 levels of parking – 593 spaces.
- » Branding and PR of this project very important.
- » Potential other younger participants.
 - » Students at UB.
 - » High school students.
- » Property prices along Eggert having been dropping for the last 10 years.
- » Pilot area for this effort. Southwest corner of Town – over by UB – Bailey?
- » IDA needs reforming.
- » One Region Forward – collected a ton of data that could be used for this effort.
- » Pitch to professionals.
 - » Paul Jenkins, chef.
 - » Big Ditch Brewery.
- » What can Amherst do to enable development activity?
- » Talked about the Walker Center.
 - » Kids came back – offered them jobs/spaces in the center.
 - » None of them are pushing the envelope in terms of creativity.
- » Talk to Tara and Howard.
- » Write something for My View | The Buffalo News.

Makeup session for anybody that couldn't make original timeslot

- Ben Vilonen (9:30-11am)

- » Background
 - » Owns land in the northern portion of the Town – agriculture land - cutflowers (Ben Brook Farm) – sells at Elmwood Farmer Market.
 - » Day job: Village of Williamsville, Department of Public Works.
- » Old Mill Site
 - » Plaza - permeable paver system.
 - » Water storage underneath plaza.
- » Clay, clay, clay
 - » A lot of water everywhere.
 - » Historically, German lowland farms.
- » Ellicot Creek
 - » A month ago the water flowing over the Falls was brown.

- » Hyatt Place
 - » Stormwater controls in some of the parking lot landscaping.
- » Natural stormwater
 - » Optional in the Town.
 - » SWIP – Stormwater Plan – mitigation measures.
 - » Put it on the roof as well.
 - » Mosey – how does it deal with its stormwater?
 - » Detaching the down spot – take out of the sanitary sewer.
 - » Road edges could use permeable paving.
 - » Punching through the clay doesn't happen.
 - » Everything we do is draining into a water storage device underneath – landscaping and soil filters the water.
 - » On-street parking – permeable – doesn't happen here.
 - » Ideal – median in parking lot – aggregate to pipe – with overflow that is not treated.
- » Main Street streetscape
 - » Will gain room for snow storage.
 - » Will only get stormwater from the sidewalks – street will continue to drain directly into the creek.
- » Edges
 - » Asphalt to grass.
 - » Snow plow damage.
 - » Need a softer edge.
- » Campbell Blvd improvements – used to be a ditch. Put in 24-inch permeable pipe.
- » Only solar you will see in on Ben Brook Farm and UB.
- » Mixed-use centers are the future of the Town – show successful models from elsewhere.

APRIL 21ST 2016

Young Residents (6:30-7:30pm)

The following stakeholder meeting was conducted using Skye – the consultant team was Austin, Texas and the stakeholders were in Amherst.

Attendees:

- Gabriela Ragusa, Restaurant owner and homeowner
- Mark Bennett, East Amherst resident, works Downtown
- Heather McCarthy, Homeowner, just moved back from Boston
- Mark Bermon, Village resident and jewelry storeowner, just relocated to Town
- Richard Lynch, Lives in Synder, grew up in the Village.
- Charlie Specht

Comments:

- » Williamsville
 - » Very walkable.
 - » But can't find a parking spot.
 - » Cars move too fast down Main.
 - » 2 hour parking in front of jewelry store – have to keep moving my car every 2 hours.
 - » Recently relocated store – up closer to Sheridan – more of a business park – need easier parking for my customers.
- » Missing
 - » Coffee shop I can walk to (Synder).
 - » More franchise businesses – millennial love brands – Chipotle.
 - » Need a good mix of things, variation.
 - » Need activity, liveliness, and parks.
- » Amherst
 - » Good schools.
 - » Great housing prices.
 - » Compete, making schools even better.
 - » Sense of security, Amherst is safe.
 - » Don't see Amherst as much of a draw for millennials.
 - » Boulevard Mall.
 - » Santa Monica promenade used as good example.

- » Public outreach
 - » Hold meetings in popular places right after to work – Irishman, Spot Coffee.
 - » Twitter/Instagram – take pictures of good and bad and post.
 - » Use a #hashtag
- » Williamsville/Snyder/Eggertsville
 - » Need a better pedestrian connection over the freeway – bridge?
 - » Need to beautify some of the auto-oriented areas.
 - » Columbus, Ohio, one of the best-built cities in the country.
- » How do you get someone to stop and stay?
 - » More boutique stores, microbreweries.
 - » More places for kids – Glen Park.
 - » Make big box areas better – get rid of some of the parking – Sheridan, Niagara Falls Boulevard.
 - » Build something around the outdoors; summers are really nice.
 - » There is a strong appetite for outdoor space here in Amherst.
 - » Need something like Delaware Park – event space, destination?
- » Chicago
 - » Was there for a week, couldn't live there.
 - » Love the Lakeshore running track.
 - » Running track here around Audubon Park – scary, running through a forest – doesn't feel safe.
- » Westwood
 - » Like the ideas proposed.
 - » Lack of trust.
 - » Sounds like the Town is being taken for a ride.