

20/20 VISION
VILLAGE OF WILLIAMSVILLE COMMUNITY PLAN
COMMUNITY PLAN COMMITTEE

APPROVED MEETING NOTES – November 28, 2006

The meeting was called to order shortly at 7:00 PM.

Community Plan Committee Attendees: Walter Pacer – Chair, David Brody, Mary Carr, Thomas Claxton, Kim Giannelli-Calos, Brian Kulpa, Pastor Timothy Madsen, Victor Paquet, Charles Rizzone, Carolyn Schlifke, David Vitka, Kate Waterman-Kulpa

Absent: Steven Appler, Paul Iskalo, Todd Nelson, Wesley Stone, Edward Zabel

Consultant/Town/Village Staff Present: John Behan, Lawrence Bice, Joelle Guy, Dan Howard, Lynda Juul, Sally Kuzon, David Versel

Village Board Members: Mayor Mary Lowther, Trustee

Residents/Other Attendees: Jim Keysa, Thomas Frank

APPROVAL OF MEETING NOTES

On motion by Brian Kulpa, seconded by Vic Paquet, the meeting notes of October 30, 2006 were approved.

Unanimously Carried

INTRODUCTIONS

David Versel of Devonomics was introduced to the committee members. He will be working on the Business District Development Plan as part of a Quality Communities grant received by the Village. Mr. Versel recapped the findings of the prior consultant, and discussed Williamsville's role in the region, as well as opportunities for the water mill.

Mr. Versel has been conducting interviews over the last two days and getting feedback about the situation on Main Street. He then discussed his memo which summarizes the planning effort to date. Included in the memo were "10 Questions for Further Discussion", which were then reviewed with the committee.

Vic Paquet commented that he felt that the Village residents should be included as an important resource to the retail shops.

1) Does the desire to grow Williamsville's appeal as a regional destination conflict with the very close proximity of stable residential neighborhoods and the needs of residents of those neighborhoods?

Brian Kulpa stated that this is a 20-year vision. In 20 years everything will have changed considerably. What is a stable neighborhood now may not look that way in the future. Conflict may not be a bad thing. If it means offering more diverse housing, that could be a good thing.

Kate Kulpa stated that if you look at a destination like Niagara on the Lake, you don't see the dry cleaner, pharmacy, mom and pop shop. These are important to sustain for the residents. David Versel stated that as the economics grow, you start to see chains coming in. He doesn't think the Village wants to become a virtual outdoor mall, but wants to maintain a balance.

Dave Brody was not sure about the regional destination concept. He wondered what that means. Every place can't be a regional destination and he doesn't necessarily agree that's where Williamsville should go. He would like to find a better term to use. This is more like an old fashioned city shopping district. David Versel asked what went into the use of those words; the committee was unsure. Vic Paquet thought it was presented to the committee for comment, and wasn't necessarily constructed by the committee. They were trying to define the Village as a unique place.

Dave Vitka stated that to him this has meant a place where people want to be and visit. It includes cultural events, civic things, theater; things we don't have a lot of now.

Dave Brody asked "what is regional?". Amherst? Erie County? Western New York? Wally Pacer didn't think this was ever addressed.

Pastor Madsen recalled that there was a lot of talk about the historical features of the Village, and how to get the word out about this.

Brian Kulpa stated that there is some progress being done at the County level to define a regional goal to stop the expanse into rural areas. Part of that plan is infrastructure improvement and improvement in village and municipal centers. This may mean more employment opportunities.

2) Are there concerns about Williamsville becoming attractive to more national chain retailers and the impacts on locally-owned businesses?

Mary Carr didn't think this had been discussed before. She felt it didn't seem amenable to what the committee wants with the historic features of the Village. She used the look of Ten Thousand Villages as an example. David Versel compared Williamsville to the corner of Main and Main with very desirable demographics for lots of retailers. They will say they don't want to design a certain way, but they will if they are pushed to do so.

The village needs to politically answer the question of how far they are willing to push the envelope to set the parameters on development. The question is do you actually want to do that?

Brian Kulpa thought that the Village needs to ask itself (i.e. the Village Board, Zoning Board, and Planning Board). This doesn't mean the end of local retail, just another type of retail. How much you let them push you as far as look and setback is an internal problem. He is concerned about whether the Village will ever get everyone on board together to stand up and adhere to the standards. That's the concern. David Versel stated that if it's in the ordinance, you have to adhere to it.

Vic Paquet stated that the residents have demonstrated that they do have concerns over this.

Dave Versel asked if the issue is the actual use within the building, or the appearance of the building. Vic Paquet felt it has to do with the surface parking. Mary Carr felt that locally owned businesses present an appealing appearance, and chains do not. She thinks it's advantageous to have unique shops.

Dave Brody disagreed. He thinks the real issue is the design standards. We have Pendleton, Talbot's, and Starbucks, and they all fit well into the community. It's not the chains but the way they fit in. They need to fit Main Street; Main Street shouldn't change to meet them. They have the financial wherewithal to do that. The demographics are there.

Mary Carr used Muleskinner's, Shoe Biz, and Sweet Jenny's as examples of unique shops that will attract people to the area.

David Versel added that there is a need to spend more time on this issue. There will not be consensus on every issue. He needs to find out where we need to dig deeper, and this is clearly one area.

3) What models exist to illustrate the community's image of what Main Street could become?

David Versel stated that we want Williamsville to be unique in the region. What other places has the committee been that they would like Williamsville to emulate and why?

Carolyn Schlifke stated that Main Street has had a lot of changes over the years, many of them which were not so good. The appearance is not comparable to Niagara on the Lake or Ellicottville or Elmwood. Those areas have maintained their character, but we have lost a lot of ours. In the future we need to set standards that go back to what Main Street could have looked like. You can't tear buildings down. Many don't meet the criteria of what should be in a Village. These are long term issues that we are trying to solve. We should start now with some short term solutions. David Versel asked if the model is the Village's own past. Carolyn agreed. She gave the example of the corner of Main and

Evans. There were two houses that were turned into businesses. At that time the Board of Trustees insisted that the houses be maintained, and they were. You have that look of an 1800's home. There is a lot of that on the east end of the Village, but the west end is a hodge-podge. A few areas have been maintained (Rock to Reist is very attractive). It's important that the Village start right now to keep the existing character of anything that comes up before a Board of Trustees or a Planning Board. Some of the older homes have been allowed to put a box up to the sidewalk in front of them. The house is hidden. In the future, a building with historical atmosphere should be maintained so it follows what the village looks like.

Brian Kulpa had two models. The first is the University District in Toronto. This area has maintained its smaller scale. It has a lot of local retail, but is under immense pressure for development. It survives as a district because people use the stores for what they are and reuse buildings in unique ways. The second model is Celebration, Florida. It was built by Disney as a model city. David Versel commented that Celebration was built to recreate the past. The book *Learning from Las Vegas* was also mentioned as teaching important lessons about what people want.

Mary Carr cited Greenwich, Connecticut. It has a vibrant Main Street and off Main Street there are really nice condominium developments that are more like row houses and are done with very interesting materials. It has a very nice look, and it is busy at the same time. There is interesting parking behind.

Charles Rizzone used Canandaigua as an example. He said he likes what they've done there. It has a sense of identity and pleasantness, so you are willing to walk. Mary Carr stated that they are lucky that they have enough land to route the traffic around the town.

4) What types of cultural uses are desired for the Village?

David Versel commented that the Village is surrounded on all sides by a school, art facility, etc. These sorts of uses fall just outside the Village. He hears that people want to bring these types of uses into the Village.

Kate Kulpa stated that civic and governmental uses are important to keep on Main Street.

Chuck Rizzone said he would like to see a greater use of the Meeting House for art exhibits, poetry readings, a coffee house, etc. He feels it is currently underutilized. Carolyn Schlifke stated that a Meeting House Events Committee has recently been formed to try and bring more things like that into the Meeting House. It is currently used for church services, weddings, as a polling place, etc. That committee is looking to utilize it further. There is also a museum on the second floor that is open the second Sunday of each month.

Brian Kulpa said he would like to see some better sort of public art. Something different than others in the city, possibly with digital media. David Versel asked if this would be

private or public. Brian thought he would like to partner with one or more of the higher education facilities.

Vic Paquet stated that he is interested in maintaining the public library. Dave Versel asked if the library is continuing year by year, and if the Village wants to do anything to secure this? Brian Kulpa felt that part of the problem is the way the libraries are serviced. Multiple groups need to be on board. You could embellish on that as a library with a specific target audience. This would make it easier to fight to maintain in the future. Kate Waterman-Kulpa asked if we are tied to the building, or the facility? Brian Kulpa thought it was the facility and not the building

Kim Giannelli-Calos said she would like to do something theatrical in the park, such as Shakespeare in the Park. We have many parks to do something like this.

Mary Carr suggested student readings, as well as festivals.

Carolyn Schlifke felt that it is important to differentiate between recreation and culture. The Village has a tremendous amount of recreational things. There are things going on every month. People come from all over the Town of Amherst for these things. But we are probably remiss in the area of culture. But we are in such close proximity to UB, Daemen, Shea's, etc. We don't have the space or facilities to get involved with things like this.

Chuck Rizzone suggested that we have the history of the War of 1812. We could have a museum pertaining to that.

David Brody stated that we have a history in the context of Western New York. There are many villages in the area. We have many historic buildings, few of which we have dealt with in any systematic way. Also, look at the businesses on Main Street. There are thirty salons. There are many things that cater to people who have money. A gallery would be a great idea. The Village is a wonderful place, and there's a lot to work with. We need to take advantage of what's already here. This could much more simply and quickly bring things into focus.

5) What types of village-oriented zoning and regulatory changes can the Village reasonably explore?

Examples are visual design standards such as materials, roof pitches, minimum building height instead of maximum building height; maximum setback instead of minimum setback; etc. Communities have used these sorts of tools in their zoning regulations. David Versel asked if any of these things are possible in the political environment here.

Brian Kulpa felt that we shouldn't ask if it's possible in the political environment. If the committee and the residents are in favor of this, then the politicians will have to develop ordinances that will support this. We have to have a no setback policy. No village that is

serious about historic preservation and pedestrian usage would question that. David Versel asked if anyone had a strong disagreement with this; no one did.

Dave Brody felt that we need to find ways to create space for a wider sidewalk or area for outdoor dining. Could we allow the setback of a building if there is an outdoor awning and is used for pedestrians and not parking?

Chuck Rizzone asked how we can regulate existing buildings. David Versel stated that change of use could trigger this, but change of ownership doesn't. The Village could put in access management regulations to close off curb-cuts and have more community access points. Access management is limiting curb cuts and encouraging side roads or sharing access. Steve Ferranti will probably be addressing this in his section of the plan.

Kate Kulpa felt that design standards are an absolute must. We need to be specific as to material use and building height.

Kim Giannelli-Calos said she thinks this is the purpose of the pictures the committee is going to take. This will show what the committee would like to see.

David Versel added that it's not just the design, but the bulk and size as well.

Lawrence asked then when photos are submitted, to please put in comments as to what they like about the photo. Also, what you don't like.

David Versel asked about signage. He has noticed an epidemic of impromptu street sign to catch the attention of passersby. Walter Pacer stated that a new sign code has been put into place as of September. Hopefully this will minimize the differences in signs in the future.

Tom Claxton stated that there is no consistency in the village. There is a lot of vinyl on windows.

Brian Kulpa felt that a lot of that comes down to policy. As a planning committee they need to stress to those in charge of the Building Dept. and to the Board of Trustees that we need enforcement. The ordinances don't help if there isn't enforcement. Dave Brody commented that there has been an instability in the Building Department for a while which is probably part of it too.

Brian Kulpa stated that many communities have a business association that self regulates. He isn't sure what the Williamsville Business Association does. David Brody stated that it is becoming more active and trying to get more involved in these issues. Carolyn thinks they are doing a wonderful job on Main Street. Aesthetics gets people to stop and they are doing a great job in that area. Other areas that could be addressed are with those on Main Street that don't belong to the WBA. The Village should be able to enforce things that don't meet our standards.

Brian Kulpa felt that the Village needs a formal policy on shared parking. In doing so, we need to adjust zoning to accept shared parking. He believes the Town of Amherst's newly adopted zoning has some examples we could follow. This would not require developers to allocate as much parking. It takes advantage of street parking and shared parking. David Brody stated that his experience is that there are rules, but that they are very flexible. Brian Kulpa doesn't agree that relying on a variance is the best policy. It should be more orderly.

6) How can the Village work to boost transit usage to ease traffic impacts and reinforce Williamsville as a regional node?

David Versel stated that he was shocked to find out how little used the bus system is.

David Brody felt that it is a vicious circle. The NFTA doesn't assign enough buses for people to rely on, so they don't bother to use the buses. If a bus goes by once an hour on most suburban routes, that's a lot.

David Versel stated that there are local transit services that have been established to supplement the regional ones. All the cars that come down Main Street don't have to. There are things you can do to chip away at this. Transit is one way of doing this.

Dave Vitka suggested keeping our eyes open for an aging community in which transportation is a gigantic issue. David Versel asked how the para-transit system is. Dave Vitka feels it's a huge issue. David Brody added that it's not just the elderly. Our kids don't have the opportunity to do this because they all have cars. We want to look long term. Can we get the DOT to think about truck traffic.

Thomas Claxton stated that Toronto has parking at the end of their historic areas.

David Vitka stated that there is a high need in the healthcare realm with caregivers using the bus system to get to the site from city locations. There are issues with facilities out in the countryside because the employees can't get there.

Brian Kulpa said that there is a shuttle system that runs all the time that no one considers from the Hampton Inn to the airport. All day long people come back and forth from that shuttle system.

7) What can and should be done to address the identified parking shortage north of Main Street and west of Ellicott Creek?

David Versel asked if there is an appetite to construct public parking.

Carolyn Schlifke said that there has been discussion of a ramp above Glen Park. This could solve some problems, but many people were against it. She is not sure how aesthetically pleasing it could be made. Land is at such a premium. Clarence has a nice big public parking lot right on main street near their public shopping areas.

David Brody said that for all the complaints about parking, there is almost never a time when all the parking spaces are full with the exception of the week of Old Home Days. The cost of a parking ramp was discussed. It would probably be in the \$3 to \$4 million range, plus maintenance. David Versel felt that the bigger problem is that almost all of the off-street parking is on private property. There is a need for shared parking and documentation.

Charles Rizzone stated that there is plenty of parking on the weekends. This is something that needs to be looked at to determine potential sharing arrangements.

David Brody said that only 13% of space is retail, which is why there is plenty of space to park on the weekend. It is taken up by the professionals and the offices. How do you convince those people to park off Main Street?

The committee agreed that expensive parking structures are not what they need to be thinking about.

8) What types of economic incentives, if any, could the Village enact to attract appropriate investment and development?

David Versel asked if this has ever been discussed. What options does the committee see?

Brian Kulpa questioned if the Village would want to do this, or use the money for other things instead, such as parking or keeping the streets clear. The Village may want to use incentives to attract a certain type of clientele.

David Brody stated that the WBA sponsored a program the night of the storm (October 12, 2006) regarding tax abatement and loan programs available for very small businesses. There are a couple of those programs and the WBA is trying to make their association more aware of that. He is not sure if this is something the Village would want to do.

Mary Carr thought that instead of an economic incentive, a person working to draw in businesses from the outside, such as a development person, may help to promote the Village.

David Versel stated that if both the government and WBA are trying to promote the Village, there is a national Main Street program whose aim is to bring business and government together. The local government usually puts up 1/3 of the revenue needed and there is a paid staff person to do this. It formalizes that arrangement and puts a formal staff position into that role. There is quite a bit of funding available for that now.

Brian Kulpa said that the Village could put together a set of one stop shopping, shovel ready sites, and make it clear what is expected. David Versel said that his town has a guide which advises how to set up a business in their town. Brian Kulpa said that there are vacancies that are not readily apparent. If there was a database available to advise of

this, that would be helpful. David Brody felt the WBA would be interested in getting information on something like that.

9) Which sites are most ripe for redevelopment?

David Versel stated that he has gotten good feedback on this.

10) What about the Water Mill?

David Versel asked if it is the priority of the Village to use the property to recoup the funds expended for the purchase, or more as a tool to enhance the Village. Kate Waterman-Kulpa felt it was the latter. David Brody thought that any commercially viable alternatives are not acceptable to the Village (such as condos). Brian Kulpa felt that if it could show a revenue stream, even if minimal to help maintain the mill, that would be acceptable. The mill needs to be used somehow by the community. He was not sure if that will pay for the acquisition. Kate Waterman-Kulpa thought that grants should be sought after. There is money out there. Sally Kuzon stated that the village has a grant writer and that a grant for the mill was recently received.

David Vitka asked if the Village wants to own the property. Carolyn Schlifke thinks the Village wants to own it.

John Behan stated that the more you value public access, the more you tend toward a not-for-profit. Typically a building like that would go through renovation to save it for private amenity.

Kate Waterman-Kulpa stated that not-for-profits in this area have fund raisers for a specific building. A building the size of the mill is not beyond maintenance via this method. The Village needs to find a way to fund it.

Brian Kulpa stated that the Village acquired the mill because it was afraid of what the private sector would do with it.

BREAKOUT GROUPS

The committee separated into two groups and each discussed a specific topic. They then reconvened and a member from each group reported on their topic as follows:

UNION ROAD AREA

The group struggled to decide what parcels they were talking about – from Main Street down through California and into the Lehigh Memory Trail. This area encompasses the park and properties adjacent.

This area is currently very disorganized, with many different functions in one area.

There would be value having a more actively used park as a cornerstone for the Village (S. Long Park). They would like to see residential creep into the area and blend from lower density to higher density as you approach the park. The park parcel could be modified to shift south and encompass part of the construction yard. Alternative locations for the Village Public Works facility should also be explored. It would then merge into Lehigh Memory Trail and the train depot and be a centerpiece for the development.

They envisioned higher density development north of the park, tapering into mixed use at Main Street. Higher density residential would continue down Union. This could provide different types of residential that aren't available in the Village, or even in Western New York.

There is an opportunity for higher density along Main Street to clean up some of the fractured look.

They would like to see continuity in connecting the park system.

Finally, consideration should also be given to extending Milton Street, improving access to the area.

PARK AND GREENWAY PLAN

The committee reported the following points:

There are concerns with historical areas being lost to make room for green space

They like the green space, but it doesn't need to be so wide

Closing off of Spring St. could be explored

There is a need to see the Mill from Main Street

Connections could be made over or under Main Street (there is a need to be able to get across Main Street)

The parking lot behind Village Hall breaks up the view of the park

There is a need for visual queues at the center of the Village for the crossover (pavers, focal points, etc.)

A better connection is needed between Amherst State Park and Glen Park

Like the greenway path! Distinguish with special sidewalk treatments or bike lanes

5500 Main could have infill for a skating rink or a fountain

Restrooms in Glen Park would be nice, however they recognize that there are environmental challenges at the Nature Building

There is a need to coordinate with other committees such as the Glen Park Joint Board

FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting is January 30th, 2007. Steve Ferranti of SRF will be here to discuss traffic.

Behan Planning will focus on a bubble concept of what was discussed tonight for the committee to review and discuss if they have captured what the committee wants.

There will be a public meeting in late February or March. The exact date will be determined in January.

Behan will better define a park circulation plan.

John asked that if the members get a picture off the internet, that they write down where it came from for copyright purposes.

Wally reminded that pictures are due by January 7th. E-mail or send to Sally Kuzon.

Wally reported that the Meeting House Event Committee is looking for events to sponsor, such as concerts, lectures, plays, and art shows. They are going to actively try to promote use of the Meeting House.

PUBLIC COMMENT

David Brody introduced Jim Keysa. Mr. Keysa has been the Chairman of HPC in Lancaster for 21 years, and was very involved in the reconfiguration of Broadway and the Village of Lancaster. Mr. Keysa talked about his experience in Lancaster. He felt that the fact that they have many building eligible for the National Historic Register gave them a lot of leverage with the DOT. He felt design standards are very important, and offered any help that they can give from Lancaster.

Thomas Frank, 225 C Evans Street

Mr. Frank had six photographs which he gave to Administrator Kuzon regarding the connection and mapping for Niagara River tributaries. He stated that there are long-term issues from the after-effects of the storm. His photos show erosion on Ellicott Creek and the need for stabilization and maintenance.

CLOSE OF MEETING

On Motion by Carolyn Schlifke, seconded by David Brody, the meeting was closed at 9:47 PM.

Unanimously Carried.