

TOWN OF CHEEKTOWAGA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN MEETING SUMMARY

Date of Meeting: May 28, 2009

Attendees:

STEERING COMMITTEE

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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Daniel Ulatowski | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Diane Benczkowski |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mary Holtz | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rachel Chrostowski, ECDEP |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Anthony Sisti | <input type="checkbox"/> Richard Leimbach, Amherst |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Andrew Kulyk | <input type="checkbox"/> Allita Steward, City of Buffalo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arthur Beaman | <input type="checkbox"/> Bill Parke, City of Buffalo |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> William Pugh | <input type="checkbox"/> Stanley Keysa, Lancaster |
| <input type="checkbox"/> James Boy | <input type="checkbox"/> Linda Hammer, Depew |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tom Adamczak | <input type="checkbox"/> Patrick Allaire |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kevin Schenk | <input type="checkbox"/> Robert Stalker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Charles Markel | <input type="checkbox"/> Richard Olday |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> John Marriott | <input type="checkbox"/> Jane Wiercioch |

CONSULTING TEAM

- | | |
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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Drew Reilly | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wendy Salvati | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ellen Parker | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Michael Leydecker | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Suzette Goldstein, HOK | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Colin Greene, HOK (<i>via Webex</i>) | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> David Versal, ESI | |
| Others | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pat Staniaszek (Supervisor's Ofc.) | |

Location: Wendel Duchscherer Board Room

Time: 2:30PM

Minutes Issued: June 2, 2009

I. Welcome and Introductions

Welcomes and introductions were made. Diane Benczkowski was introduced as a new appointment to the Town Planning Board and the Advisory Committee. It was also noted that John Marriott is now a member of the Town Planning Board. Wendy introduced David Versal, from Economic Stewardship, Inc., who was in Buffalo for the meeting. Colin Greene, from HOK, was brought into the meeting via the WebEx web-conference format. This format enables those outside the meeting to view maps and documents and participate in discussions. It also allows the outside consultants to present their information.

Wendy Salvati provided a brief overview of the agenda for the meeting.

II. Public Participation

Wendy reported on the Visual Preference Survey (VPS) and stated that the survey is now up and running through the project webpage on the Town's website. She provided an overview of the survey, showing the Committee the photos that were selected and the format for the survey. This survey is another means of gathering public input and is centered on ascertaining the public's vision for how they would like to see the Town developed or redeveloped in the future. The VPS looks at how development should be designed and how it should be integrated with the public realm. The survey will gather opinions from the public about basic residential development, commercial development, streetscaping and design elements, such as landscaping, parking, lighting, signage and architectural aesthetics. The information that is gathered will help the Town determine how existing regulations could be improved to help achieve better development (based on the desires of the Town and the public). The idea is to improve the overall identity and character of the community through development and redevelopment.

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Dan has sent an email to all Town employees asking them to take the survey as a way of showing commitment to this planning effort. He said that initial feedback was that the survey was a bit long but was good. Wendy informed the Committee that they can access the VPS through the Town's website by going to the link for the Comprehensive Plan and then clicking on the link to the survey. The survey has been designed to be very simple to use so that those who do not have a lot of computer experience can participate easily. The survey can also be done on computers in local libraries or at the Senior Center.

Wendy stated that a publicity campaign is being initiated to inform the public that the survey exists and encourage them to participate. A press release is being sent to the Buffalo News and local papers and fliers have been designed to give to Committee members to distribute around the community. Fliers have been designed for display in the high schools and articles for school newspapers will also be provided. To reach those without computers, Wendy noted that paper copies of the survey would be provided to the members of the AdHoc Committee for distribution to the members of their local organizations.

Wendy discussed the Public Design Charrette, which is the next big public meeting. The Project Team is to hold two charrettes and it was determined that these sessions would be held during the third week of July. The Team would like to utilize the instant response technology again for this effort. More will come on this and the charrettes will be organized in greater detail at the next Committee meeting. The Visual Preference Survey will stay up and running through the charrettes.

III. Progress Reports on the Planning Components

Wendy noted that the Project Team wanted to update the Committee on the efforts that have been made since the last meeting for the planning components for the Plan. To begin, Wendy turned control of the meeting over to Colin Greene to provide insights into the work being done for the findings and recommendations for the Neighborhood Revitalization component. He provided a detailed review of the Transit Ready piece for the Walden Harlem area to show how each planning area was being dealt with. He then offered an overview of the work for the other two areas (French Road Corridor and Airport Plaza area).

Colin stated that the work for each area will be comprehensive and set up in a format that would allow the Town to lift the narrative out in a booklet form. He reminded the Committee that the Walden Harlem area, as well as the other two study areas, were selected because they provided representative examples and that the design concepts could be replicated in other areas of the Town.

A 10-minute walk within the Walden Harlem or "Transit Ready" area provides access to stores, shops, other commercial activity, as well as parks and the hospital. This area is centered on the potential transit corridor, but the recommendations don't require transit to be in place. Although there are a mix of uses in this area, these uses are not easily accessible to pedestrians; the area is very vehicle-centric and hostile to pedestrians. Opportunities for very strategic redevelopment exist here. The Thruway plaza could be transformed into a more town-center type of development. It is recognized that ownership issues exist and that there is a need for cooperation from all parties to make this a reality. However, the area is easy to imagine as a good quality, livable area. This would be further enhanced by the transit corridor.

Colin provided illustrations of the development guiding (or regulating) plan, with two companion maps (transect map and special requirements map), and explained them to the Committee. He noted that this mapping would be prepared for all three study areas. Colin explained transect based mapping and zoning concepts and said that the Walden Harlem study area could easily be perceived to be more densely developed with residential and commercial uses. He also explained the Special Requirements Map, which looks closely at streets, gateways, civic locations and frontages, as well as parking. In the Walden Harlem area we need to consider larger areas of parking, where patrons could park and then catch public transit or easily cross the street and shop and/or go to work. West of Harlem, the potential exists to enhance pedestrian capability for crossing the street. The idea is to turn the roadway into a proper avenue. Harlem Road is a "Main Street" serving neighborhoods but also extending north and south, to

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both town boundaries. The Thruway Plaza would be transitioned into a small “power center” that does not cannibalize the Galleria. This center would be different as the trade area is smaller. It would continue to service the surrounding area, but has to have improved access. The vision for this area (as illustrated on maps that were shown to the Committee) includes some new roadways that would provide connections aimed at taking some traffic pressure off of Walden and Harlem. Other considerations in this area could include expansion of the hospital as long as it did not adversely impact the surrounding neighborhood.

Colin showed a google image of the streetscape for Walden Avenue and discussed how this roadway could be transformed to improve pedestrian mobility. Currently, the driving lanes are too wide and there are too many curb cuts that prohibit the ability for the use of a median (which would preclude left hand turns). Some short and long-term recommendations will be provided for this roadway, with the long-term being the construction of buildings closer to the street, improved streetscaping and a planted median that would represent a full transformation of the area.

Andrew Kulyk asked if HOK was only looking at the Thruway Plaza area of Walden or could these ideas be considered for the wider extent of Walden Avenue, as the whole road is dangerous. Colin said that is the Town considered more “form based” zoning solutions, improvements could be made to a wider area. Not all buildings need parking out front and there should be key locations identified for improving pedestrian access and crossing. HOK is advocating looking at Walden from end to end. Although the entire can't and won't be a boulevard, there are key segments to be identified for improvement. Colin stated that how we treat the Walden Harlem area will ultimately dictate the success of the comprehensive plan. The “wow” factor here is tremendous because of the exposure of the area (regional destination).

Colin noted that improvements must be defined – are they for economic development, livability, etc. By using something like the transect based zoning map, you can consider the transition from one area to another and also consider using increased density as a way to manage transition. There will be many opportunities and continued change in the area in the future. The idea is to set the vision through the comprehensive plan now; even Galleria Mall is transforming.

John Marriott commented that CSX is planning to move out of the rail yard in the vicinity. This site could be a viable location for an industrial park in the future.

Colin moved on to the French Road Corridor area. He stated that this area needs a series of redevelopment guidelines at the western gateway that would be reliant on the Guiding/Regulating Plan and the transect mapping. French Road is a good connector road but it must be ensured that the quality of the roadway is maintained and enhanced. Improving access to the greenway system and developing access to Stiglmeier Park through neighborhoods is important. Focus on the intersection of Union and French, looking at connections, character and quality of the pedestrian environment.

Andrew Kulyk mentioned that the French Road area offers great opportunities but that the Garden Village Plaza needs revitalization. The corridor and area has good bones and the area has a nice variety of uses that actually provide good opportunities (but were previously viewed negatively). Colin said it's about good design and allowing the mixture of uses that work well together. Wendy stated that we need to rethink how the plaza area should be reused and not try to recreate the same old shopping center thing. It was noted that people willing to go further to shop and that we want to maintain the strength of the Galleria area, rather than create areas of competition. The Garden Village Plaza area has potential for more of a mixed use center. Ownership by Benderson was brought up and the fact that they have not made a concerted effort to find tenants for the area. Drew noted that Benderson is more open to doing different things and would likely be responsive to new ideas.

Finally, Colin discussed the Neighborhood Study area (Union and Genesee). HOK and the Project Team are looking at ways the Airport Plaza can be transformed. Union Road could have more parkway quality. There are opportunities to think about how some neighborhoods could be revitalized through design and development standards to relax lot restrictions and add some greenspace. Dan Ulatowski asked if the area will encompass the transit component as the line will come through this vicinity and the opportunity

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exists. Colin noted that this is one of the benefits for this area; the close proximity rail and transit, and the surrounding neighborhood, but here it would be leveraged in a different way.

Colin finished by saying that the aim of his presentation today was to provide the Committee more information and get them more familiar with the drawings and concepts that will be going into the comprehensive plan. Also, to get Committee input and feedback as we move forward.

Michael Leydecker from Wendel was introduced. He noted that he had a meeting scheduled for Friday morning, May 29th, with representatives from the NYS Thruway Authority, the NYSDOT, Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) and Town officials (everyone except the County). The purpose of the meeting is to start dialogue about their perception of the Town of Cheektowaga transportation network and their plans for the future. The GBNRTC (who is the gatekeeper of federal funds) will be involved. We want to make sure we properly advance transportation systems in the Town and their relationship with land use.

Mike showed the Committee some mapping and discussed one map in particular that showed activity centers, parks and other community facilities and public transit routes. The map illustrates outlying area that lies within ¼ mile of transit opportunities. Although the map is useful, it portrays a more ideal perspective, because it does not factor in the various impediments that interfere with the public's ability to reach transit stops or the other features on the map. This is something that is being looked at. Mike said that they are studying bus headways (the wait time between buses) and how this could be enhanced. He also noted that the NFTA is in the midst of conducting their route system study and currently gathering public input. Drew suggested that announcements be made at Town Board meetings so that Town residents can get involved and offer input (at the NFTA meetings).

Mike stated that the Project Team is also looking at establishing character corridors for each of the roadways in the Town, looking at the surrounding neighborhoods and determining context elements. This is similar to the study that was completed by the Town of Amherst. In doing this, there is an incentive for the Town, to make such determinations now, as part of the comprehensive plan, and establish criteria for all roads within the Town. This would help with redevelopment projects because the Town will already have established the vision and context for the various roadway locations. That way, if a transportation agency is proposing a roadway project, the Town can direct them in that action in terms of how the roadway is designed or redesigned.

Andrew Kulyk noted the Walden corridor and the NYS Thruway Authority's neglect of the interchange. He asked that in the meeting with agencies that the Authority be asked to relocate their industrial staging area to a different location. They also need to do a better job of maintaining the entire cloverleaf. This area of the Town is a gateway of sorts and has high exposure; it should look better. Dan also noted that need for visual barriers in Cheektowaga, like they have done in other communities. The Town has many residential neighborhoods that front along the Thruway and visual barriers would be helpful for privacy and for improving quality of life in the Town. Mike stated that the Thruway Authority is in the process of looking at the I-90 corridor between Exit 49 and Exit 53 (where the last project ended). He also noted modeling that was being conducted by the GBNRTC. Dan asked if the Town should consider this modeling and stop pushing for the removal of the William Street ramps. This is a question for the 5/29 meeting. Also, what about ramps at Broadway; is this too close to Walden? Mike said that these types of modifications require FHWA approval. However, the Town needs to identify such improvements nonetheless.

Wendy asked David Versel from ESI to provide an update on his efforts. David mentioned that he and Wendy attended a meeting that morning with economic development representatives at Town Hall, including Debbie Liegl from the Chamber of Commerce, Paul Leone (who is the Town's Economic Development consultant), Grant Lesswing from the ECIDA, Jerry Gabryszak, Dan Ulatowski and Tom Adamczak. Pat Staniaszek was representing the Supervisor (who is out of Town). The meeting was held to discuss possible economic development strategies, brownfield opportunities and other issues.

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David noted that the economic development component will support much of the work that is being done by Wendel and HOK. He is working on determining what economic development strategies would work to achieve the goals or assist with the land use transitions. All will build up to the design and implementation of an economic development program unlike anything the Town has done yet. The Town currently has a Community Development Corporation (CDC) that only meets when there is a request for funding. The Town has a consultant (Mr. Leone) working on a stand alone piece for business development that is not well integrated into the Town's overall planning process. The Town needs someone or some entity to take ownership and fully/comprehensively represent the Town for economic development (an "elevator" conversation is needed).

David emphasized that economic development efforts must be centered on improving the Town's image and identity. The Town should no longer let the Town be defined by external sources. David has spent quite a bit of time interviewing different stakeholders and individuals and has learned a lot about the Town. He feels that Cheektowaga has a lot to offer, affordable housing, easy access to downtown, the airport, etc. We have to get deeper into identity building and broadcasting that to the world. What good are the Town's assets if no one knows about them?

Drew Reilly finished the presentations with a discussion of land use and zoning. He showed a map that illustrated rezonings that have occurred in the Town. He also showed a land use map and the current zoning map. He noted that many rezonings have occurred in the Walden Avenue area and that the land uses on Broadway are somewhat confusing. He is not sure what the vision is for Broadway; is it a town center concept? If so, the existing uses and zoning, which exist in this area, don't really tie in with that concept. The Project Team is currently reviewing rezoning trends and existing design standards.

Drew asked the status of the Pine Hill community development study. Tom Adamczak said that Chapter 4 has been completed but the study is not done. Dan said that there were design guidelines developed for the Pine Hill area that still have not been adopted; he said there was a lack of motivation to move them forward). John Marriott said that the Cedar Grove Heights area needs attention. There are huge opportunities there for redevelopment on a large scale.

IV. Other Issues of Importance

Drew noted that, in general, the Project Team is striving to produce a plan that will be utilized and followed. Past studies have not been acted upon or have not been utilized. We are attempting to produce a document that will be actively used by the Town.

Drew said that the schedule for the completion of the comprehensive plan has been updated and will be placed on the ftp site for the Committee. This will provide an idea of when the draft plan will be ready. It was noted that we want to make sure that the plan is reviewed thoroughly by Town representatives, and that the adoption process may take a few months, but this is important.

Wendy stated that SEQR has to be initiated for the Comprehensive Plan and that the Project Team would like to do this in June. Since it is planned that the project would receive an automatic Positive Declaration and that a GEIS will be prepared, the Town Board needs to seek Lead Agency status for the environmental review. Dan Ulatowski was concerned that currently there are no materials to send to involved and interested agencies. Drew Reilly said that there is no plan to send anything out at this time; we only need to notify the agencies that the Town wants to establish itself as Lead Agency and a positive declaration will be issued for the preparation of the GEIS. Wendel will prepare a standard cover letter and project description, along with a long form environmental assessment form for agency notification. These materials will be provided to Dan and Drew will work with him to get the other necessary documentation prepared, such as resolutions, for Town Board action. Drew also noted that the intention is to utilize the design charrettes as the "scoping" meetings for the SEQR process.

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V. Other Business / Next Steps

The next Advisory Committee meeting was set for June 23, 2009. This meeting will be held in the Town of Cheektowaga, most likely in the Senior Center conference room. Dan will make sure that a phone line is available to allow for web conferencing with the subconsultants. A confirmation on the date and location of the meeting will be provided prior to the meeting. At the next meeting, updates will be provided on the four primary planning components, as well as the status of the Visual Preference Survey. This meeting will also be used to prepare for the Design Charrettes, which are planned for July. The project team will continue to hold weekly progress teleconference meetings. Wendy indicated that Dan and others are welcome to participate via Webex. Wendy will invite Dan to each meeting and he, in turn, will advise others so that they can be included, if desired.

Meeting adjourned at 4:30PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Wendy E. Weber Salvati, AICP