

TOWN OF CHEEKTOWAGA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN MEETING SUMMARY

Date of Meeting: October 27, 2008

Attendees:

STEERING COMMITTEE

- Daniel Ulatowski
- Mary Holtz
- Anthony Sisti
- Andrew Kulyk
- Arthur Beaman
- William Pugh
- James Boy
- Tom Adamczak
- Kevin Schenk

- Linda Hammer, Depew
- Stanley Keysa, Lancaster
- Richard Leimbach, Amherst
- Rachel Chrostowski, ECDEP
- Richard Olday
- Patrick Allaire
- William Stalker
- Allita Steward, City of Buffalo
- Bill Parke, City of Buffalo

CONSULTING TEAM

- Drew Reilly
- Wendy Salvati
- Ellen Parker
- Jacob Needle
- Suzette Goldstein, HOK
- Colin Greene, HOK (*via telephone*)
- Elaine Van S. Carmichael, ESI
- Jane Wiercioch
- Charles Markel

Location: Cheektowaga Senior Center

Time: 4:30PM

Minutes Issued: November 24, 2008

I. Welcome and Introductions

Welcomes and introductions were made; it was noted that a few members of the Ad-Hoc Committee were in attendance. Drew Reilly provided an overview of the agenda for the meeting. The following handouts were provided: Memorandum from Economic Stewardship outlining interviews with 20 key stakeholders (10/24/08); and preliminary draft goals and objectives for the comprehensive plan.

Drew Reilly and Dan Ulatowski reminded everyone about the internal (Sharepoint) and external websites that have been set up for the project. Dan noted that the Advisory Committee and the AdHoc Committee should be accessing the internal site regularly. Wendy noted that the project website, which can be accessed through the Town's website, is being regularly updated with meeting notice and summaries. This site should be used more by the Committee over the coming months.

II. Review of Preliminary Goals and Objectives

Drew and Wendy discussed the preliminary goals and objectives that were handed out at the last meeting in September (the committee had been asked to review the draft and offer comments). It was noted that the project team developed the eight big picture goals, which are each identified with one "theme" word—Identity, Revitalization, Leadership, Creativity, Cooperation/Coordination, Quality, Mobility and Prosperity. Many of these were the major areas that were targeted in the RFP. Each theme is followed by a goal statement and a listing of objectives. The objectives are based on what we heard at the meetings. Comments were gathered on the eight different goals, as follows:

- Goal 1 – Identity
Change the first objective to note that the Town is a good place to live, work, visit, "shop and recreate". Add another objective about promoting the Town's Native American heritage (consider the cultural connection with the stream corridors). Make mention of the importance of improving transit

Cheektowaga Comprehensive Plan Meeting Summary

Page 2 of 3

options as a way of improving the Town's identity. Recognize the Galleria Mall as having an area called "Main Street".

- **Goal 2 – Revitalization**
Stress the importance of having more entertainment amenities, particularly for youth. Create strong main street areas in the neighborhoods around the Town. Add an objective that talks about the important of redeveloping brownfields. Include something that focuses on creating a greater sense of community in the Town. Note that there is a need for more upscale retail in the South Cheektowaga area. Property maintenance is an issue.
- **Goal 3 – Leadership**
Stress the importance of keeping the public involved. Have something that emphasizes the need to merge the school districts. Also, place greater emphasis on the importance of promoting light rail transit connections from the airport to downtown; the Town must take a leadership role with this effort.
- **Goal 4 - Creativity**
The many ideas that were received from taxpayers were discussed, including ideas for retirement villages, incentive programs for home improvements, more entertainment uses, etc. Here again, mention the need for light rail transit options. Add something to note the need for a transfer of development rights program to preserve the natural resources in the Dubonnet Ponds area. It was noted how Jimmy's Ice Cream shop in the Village of Depew (on George Urban) became an overnight success that many residents can walk to. The same thing was noted with the Dairy Queen on Harlem – need to focus on the neighborhoods.
- **Goal 5 – Coordination/Cooperation**
Add something to stress consideration of village consolidation with the Town, as well as consolidation of the school districts. Language should be stronger than what is currently written. Also, consider consolidation of police and fire services. Make mention the light rail rapid transit as an area where coordination and cooperation is needed.
- **Goal 6 – Quality**
Here again, add something about the need for light rail rapid transit. There is concern about the truck stop on Walden and the quality of that area. Address the need to improve the character of roadway corridors (reduce width) – context sensitive design issues.
- **Goal 7 – Mobility**
We must include something about the light rail rapid transit under this goal. Also note that the AmTrak station is an important asset that does not get enough recognition. Consider potential for connections to Toronto. It was also noted that we need to have something that addresses the need for streetscape improvements to reduce the width of certain roadway corridors, such as French Road (context sensitive design). Transit Road, through Depew, is the only section of Transit that has not been widened. We also need to look more carefully at how the section of Transit Road, in South Cheektowaga, is developed over time. Finally, we need to focus on providing a good transportation base without impacting the quality of our neighborhoods and businesses. And, we must consider more north-south travel; currently everything seems to be oriented in an east to west direction. We need to find ways to relieve the pressure on certain roads.
- **Goal 8 – Prosperity**
Add something about the importance of the light rail rapid transit. We also need to think about expanding opportunities for public transportation (times, routes) and add north/south connections.

Drew stressed that we want to receive any final comments as soon as possible because we want to get the preliminary draft posted on the project website as soon as possible so that the public can review this document before the next public meeting.

III. Discussion of Neighborhoods

For this portion of the meeting, Colin Greene, from HOK, was contacted and brought into the meeting via telephone connection to discuss the planning aspects of the project for neighborhood revitalization. The committee was reminded that, per the scope of services, HOK will be doing plans for three residential neighborhoods and one commercial area (meaning three to four block areas). The most important thing that needs to be discussed at this point in time is which neighborhoods should be selected. Colin talked about criteria for these selections and noted that the areas that we select should be considered as good models that can be emulated in other areas of the Town. These places are intended to be example that set forth common guidelines for revitalization and rejuvenation (but don't necessarily provide specific design solutions). These are ways to help areas evolve and keep growing prosperously. Colin stressed that the designs that are developed must be properly vetted with the public as we are providing ideas that could ultimately be used in more than one place rather than just one specific area.

Colin discussed neighborhood "typologies". He talked about three things. First, the "traditional neighborhood fabric", meaning the older, urban neighborhoods. This would include any neighborhood adjacent to the City and anything south of Route 33 – Walden, Dingens, Genesee Streets, etc. These areas typically have pretty good housing stock, with older degraded infrastructure that can be revitalized (not redeveloped). These areas are close to the City (employment center) and are areas that people care about; they are well established. A second type would be the "conventional fabric", which would be found east of the Thruway in the airport vicinity. This would include 40 to 50 years old development such as Nob Hill, CleveHill, St. Barnabas, etc.). The question is "do they have their needs satisfied" within a short distance: Are there opportunities for mixed use development? Where can transit and rail connections be introduced? Also, where can new development or housing go?

It was noted that there are opportunities in the Pine Hill – Walden areas for infill development on small lots. However, this area is currently being studied under a community development initiative so we may want to consider another similar area. Dan said that the community development study is looking at everything between Route 33 and the Village of Sloan/freight yards. Therefore, William Street is the only area left to study, west of the Thruway. This area meets the criteria and could include Sloan, which will hopefully be consolidated with the Town at some point in the future.

The Cedar Grove Heights area has potential for mixed use. The inner ring has fairly well kept, small single-family homes that are surrounding by the 4-unit projects, which could be eliminated and replaced with a mix of uses to revitalize the overall area. What do we do with the vacant land from demolished housing – should it be kept as green space or redeveloped with new housing? Do we keep the smaller lot sizes or do less housing on larger lots? Colin stated that the ultimate goal is to find an area that offers a number of these features (infill opportunities, vacant lands, housing to be revitalized, etc.). He also noted that the idea is not to go in and gentrify – it is to understand the issues and continue to provide affordable housing for the workforce. We do not want to risk the displacement of existing residents. We must find ways to accommodate people of every income and need.

Dan Ulatowski said that the light rail rapid transit corridor is and OK idea for some sort of transit oriented development (TOD) but this may miss the opportunity for a neo-urbanist or mixed-use traditional neighborhood design along Transit Road in South Cheektowaga. It was asked if a TOD could also focus on bus stops and couldn't we also link neighborhoods with pedestrian trails? Colin noted that TOD may not be the proper terminology for Cheektowaga; he said that other areas are doing "transit ready" models. So this may be an option as we move forward. Dan stated that the light rail transit may factor into the selection of the commercial area.

It was noted that French Road in South Cheektowaga has been poorly developed through prior spot zoning decisions that have adversely impacted the area. This could be a future problem for the Town with an aging housing stock and home values (assessments). We should consider the future of this area. It could meet the criteria for the conventional fabric area.

Cheektowaga Comprehensive Plan Meeting Summary

Page 4 of 3

It was noted that the Town has 12 miles of abandoned rail lines that connect all of the parks and cultural features. This provides an opportunity to connect the Town with walkable, bikeable trails.

Colin discussed the retail commercial criteria. First there is the “traditional Main Street”, which is something that has existed for a long time and something that should be rediscovered for incubator businesses or that is cheaper than the Galleria. Second, is the conventional “strip shopping center”, which is many times anchored by a grocery store. There is also the “conventional power center”, which is larger and anchored by a major retailer (Home Depot, Target, etc). These areas are destinations, servicing a larger trade area. Commercial can also mean industrial uses and connections to the airport.

It was noted that Harlem Road, south of Kensington to Walden, is emerging as a medical corridor that is anchored by St. Joseph’s Hospital. There are also 2 or 3 power centers in the Town, but no traditional Main Street.

Union and Genesee has the Airport Plaza (conventional strip) that has been stagnating for many years. There is also the Dick’s Plaza on Dick Road and Garden Village on Union Road. All of these are good examples of strip centers, and there are many others.

There are areas where there may be some overlap and there may be opportunities to tie in some of the neighborhood studies with the commercial areas.

If we are choosing one area, then the Town wants a conventional strip development and strongly suggests the Airport Plaza as a great locale for potential mixed use development. It would be helpful for HOK to look at the plaza and develop schemes that focus on the physical framework of the area. The idea is to develop a framework that could show how the site could evolve into a number of different things (realistic options). The goal is then to apply the framework to other areas. It is important to stay at a level where the designs remain examples; it must be clear what the plan says and how it can apply to other locations. It was stressed, however, that before we make a final determination on this selection, we need input from others.

Based on this discussion and what comes out of the Public Focus meeting, we will move forward with a selection and tie it in with the goals and objectives. We will categorize the Town’s neighborhoods under the topic headings and then choose the most representative communities for the design plans.

IV. Update on the Public Participation Process

Wendy Salvati provided an update on the status of the public participation process. Stakeholders’ meetings are being conducted, which started with a meeting with local businesses in late July. With assistance from the Cheektowaga Chamber of Commerce, a second meeting with business stakeholders is scheduled for October 28th (tomorrow) at the Millennium Hotel. Ellen Parker, from Wendel, will moderate this discussion.

Wendy also noted that representatives from Economic Stewardship were in Town to conduct interviews with local business owners and other stakeholders to gather additional data. Their notes were handed out.

A stakeholders’ meeting with Taxpayer groups was held on October 7th at the Cheektowaga Senior Center. It was well attended, and most of the taxpayer groups were represented, but it was noted that the Harlem Kensington group had not been notified of the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to vet the draft goals and objectives and get additional feedback. A summary of this meeting will be provided.

The next step in the public participation process is the Public Focus Meeting. This meeting will be held in early December (tentative for 12/10). Dan will investigate using the Hospice Center again, as that worked out well for the first public information meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to clarify what we have heard from the public and undertake a SWOT analysis of the information. In combination with this

Cheektowaga Comprehensive Plan Meeting Summary

Page 5 of 3

meeting, the visual preference survey will be initiated on the project website to gather input from the public on the visual quality of the Town and their preferences with respect to community character and architectural quality. Dan is working with Wendel to also set up an interactive map that would allow the public to offer comments on specific locations around the Town that could be posted and viewed on the map. The public focus meeting will also involve the use of "clicker devices" to record public opinion. Dan Ulatowski has arranged for the project team to borrow these devices from a professor at Buffalo State College. Wendy will contact Dr. Mix to arrange for their use. All in all, the public focus meeting will be different from the first public meeting and provide more challenge and opportunity for direct participation. The use of the clicker devices will allow us to gather comments in an anonymous manner that will hopefully provide more useful data. Wendy will provide Dan with copies of the meeting flier and a press release to publicize the meeting. We want to get as much information out as possible to get the public excited and build attendance.

The committee was encouraged to watch the website to learn more about the meeting. It is important that the committee also attend this meeting to learn more about the public's concerns and preferences.

V. Other Business / Next Steps

No date was set for the next Advisory Committee meeting, but it is expected that the committee will convene again in January, after the holidays and after the public focus meeting. The committee was encouraged to attend the public focus meeting and monitor the website.

Meeting adjourned at 6:00PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Wendy E. Weber Salvati, AICP