

TOWN OF CHEEKTOWAGA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN MEETING SUMMARY

Date of Meeting: June 23, 2009

Attendees:

STEERING COMMITTEE

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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Daniel Ulatowski | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Diane Benczkowski |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mary Holtz | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rachel Chrostowski, ECDEP |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Anthony Sisti | <input type="checkbox"/> Richard Leimbach, Amherst |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Andrew Kulyk | <input type="checkbox"/> Allita Steward, City of Buffalo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arthur Beaman | <input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Robert Stalker |
| <input checked="" 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 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 <i>(via Webex)</i> |

Others

- | |
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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pat Staniaszek (Supervisor's Ofc.) |
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Location: Wendel Duchscherer Board Room

Time: 2:00PM

Minutes Issued: June 29, 2009

I. Welcome and Introductions

Welcomes and introductions were made. Colin Greene from HOK and David Versal from ESI were brought into the meeting via the WebEx web-conference format. This format enables those outside the meeting to view/share maps and documents and participate in discussions.

Drew Reilly provided a brief overview of the agenda for the meeting. Drew discussed the SEQR process for the project. He said that the Town Board needs to designate themselves as the Lead Agency for SEQR in late June or early July. Wendy has provided Dan with copies of the SEQR Environmental Assessment Form, the Lead Agency Notice and a sample resolution for the Town Board.

II. Public Participation

Wendy reported on the Visual Preference Survey (VPS) and stated that the survey is running through the project webpage on the Town's website. She provided an update on the survey, showing the Committee a copy of the survey as it currently exists on the website. She noted that as of 6/19, there had been 191 participants who started the survey, of that 104 completed it in full. We are hoping to get a good representative sample by the time we discontinue the survey. Wendy mentioned that there have been articles in the Cheektowaga Bee and the Buffalo News drawing attention to the survey. Wendy also did outreach to the schools. Bob Stalker asked if paper copies could be provided to the Senior Center for those who are not computer literate. Wendy will take care of this. The results of the VPS will assist Colin as he moves forward with his design work. The information that is gathered will also 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).

Cheektowaga Comprehensive Plan Meeting Summary

Page 2 of 6

Wendy discussed the Public Design Charrettes which is the next big piece in the public participation process. After discussion with Dan and the project team, it was decided that we would hold two charrettes and that these sessions would be held on two consecutive evenings. Daytime sessions were ruled out because they are generally poorly attended. If two meetings are held, one could be done in the northern part of the Town and the other in the south. It was suggested that the meetings be held during the third week of July (7/21 and 7/22). Wendy explained that the format would include three break-out sessions that would be centered on the neighborhood planning areas; each would last 30 to 40 minutes each. The charrette meetings would start with a brief 15 to 20 minutes presentation to bring the audience up to date on the plan. The three sessions would center on "access and mobility", which would focus on transportation, transit and access; "form and character", which would focus on land use and development; and "a day in the life" or quality of life, which would focus on how the proposed redevelopment scheme would affect the life of a typical user. A fourth area would be set up as a comfort station of sorts, where patrons could get refreshments, speak to project team members, complete the VPS or comment sheets, etc. The Team would like to utilize the instant response technology again for this effort but we have to determine how to integrate this in with the three break-out sessions. The doors could be opened up at 4:00 for an "Open House" to allow folks who may not be able to attend to walk through and view graphics, offer ideas, do the VPS, etc., but there would be no formal presentations going on.

The Committee initially agreed with the idea for two evening sessions. It was suggested that we have food as a motivator and to seek donations from local vendors. Another suggestion was to have an area set up for kids, where they could play games, etc. Perhaps representatives from a local daycare center would be willing to cover this as a way of demonstrating their services.

With the suggestions building the event up into a bigger, more-community based event, the concern was voice that having it in mid July is too early and that more time is needed to plan the event. It was also suggested that perhaps we only have one large meeting event, because it would be too difficult and time consuming to try to arrange two large events. Perhaps a meeting with stakeholders' could be done in a smaller venue to get direct input from those individuals. The Project Team will work with Dan Ulatowski to make the final determination and ensure a well-planned meeting(s). Either way, the event(s) should occur no later than the first or second week of August because this is a big month for vacations and we want to make sure we get a good turnout. We also need to make sure that whatever date we pick does not conflict with any other big, local event that would impact our attendance. Also, if we have the meeting(s) in August, then we could have another Committee meeting beforehand to prep.

III. Progress Reports on the Planning Components

Wendy discussed the status of the progress on the key components of the plan. She noted that for those who have been attending the last 3 or 4 committee meetings, they should see the progression of the work and see that it is really starting to come together. Wendy said that we would, again, spend time reviewing the status of the planning elements. She also noted that the draft sections for each component have been completed and posted to the project ftp site. Dan will also make them available on the Town's sharepoint site. The Committee members were encouraged to go to the site, download the materials and start to review them. The next Committee Meeting would include review and discussion of comments.

- Drew Reilly reviewed his draft materials and discussed the findings of the various areas he looked at. He broke the Town up in to sub-area for study with regard to land use and zoning. He mentioned that there are many ongoing studies that have been done that are all very good and should be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan.

Drew discussed Broadway, with its mix of uses. He said it has the potential to be a "Main Street" for the Town. It could be transitioned as such and the street side where the rail exists could be planted with trees to improve aesthetics. Tony Sisti said that CSX is considering cutting back on rail traffic along Broadway. Drew said that Broadway will transition and that reduced rail will not be detrimental to our planning efforts.

Cheektowaga Comprehensive Plan Meeting Summary

Page 3 of 6

He spoke about Transit Road and stated that it should not be all big-box stores. William Street is an isolated area that needs to be considered. The area between Losson and French should be more neighborhood commercial in nature.

Drew also noted that we are looking at the plans for adjoining communities, but he could not locate a copy of the Comprehensive Plan for the Village of Sloan. It was noted that they have sent out an RFP and interviewed consultants for this project a few years back, but it is not known if they ever carried it out. Tony Sisti said that he has never seen a copy of such a plan. He noted that the Town of Amherst plan calls for a Thruway interchange at Youngs Road. This could have a significant impact on Cheektowaga. Dan Ulatowski said that Drew should look at the Village of Williamsville's plan too.

Drew noted that he reviewed a map provided by the Town that illustrates recently rezoned properties and evaluated trends and needs. He stated that the Town cannot address all land use issued by rezoning land.

- Colin continued taking the Committee through his work again. Each time he adds more detail to the planning, which helps the Committee gain a better grasp of his efforts. He focused in depth on the three study areas and talked about how the Comprehensive Plan would affect the daily lives of residents. Colin's work is at a place where he will not go any further until he gets the input from the VPS. He discussed the narrative that accompanies his graphics and noted that each area includes an explanation of why it was chosen. He said that HOK is also looking at several of the obsolete commercial areas in Town that are unsustainable (short life span without change). He said that it is important to keep good areas working, as well.

Colin spoke about the "transect" approach and how they are looking at places through the lens of the transect. He noted that we don't want to rewrite the zoning code but we are looking at how land use decisions, coupled with form, quality and character, can transform the Town.

Colin reviewed the special requirements map in his section. He noted that while Drew is focusing on land use, he is looking at character and that there is good overlap between the work they are both doing. He said he is looking at reasonable solutions 10 to 20 years out. For instance, the existing Thruway Plaza could stay in place while the area around it is redeveloped with roads, etc. Everything north of the proposed transit line in this area is at a neighborhood scale; the south there are larger, developable parcels for commercial use.

He is also looking at improvements that are equitable. He noted that streets have just as much impact on character and quality as parks do. By improving the public realm you can improve access and mobility and create better, equitable roadways. We want to reinforce the street grid and focus investment in logical places. The Town can leverage public transit when, and where, it happens. Town's that have shown commitment to improving their streets have reaped the greatest benefits.

Colin said that the French Road corridor should be a quieter, less intensive place that would stay that way. It needs gateway improvements and incompatible land uses must be avoided. We want to make positive alterations in this area. The Garden Village Plaza should be replaced with something that will work – mixed use. We also need to link the special places in this area (parks).

The Airport Plaza area needs careful reorganization of the uses without just weeding out uses that are not liked. We must make sure the area can be useful and functional and that there are proper transitions from use to use. We have to make sure that all uses that are important to a functioning town and that are near neighborhoods exist. Also have to provide good access from the Maryvale area to key intersections and not stretch the commercial uses too far north. Colin said that we have to select special places that need to be improved but that we don't need to provide the same level of focus to every place in the study area (or Town wide), i.e., appropriate use of design standards. He ended by noting that we are trying to make "some" places special, not everywhere. If everything were special, then nothing really would be.

Cheektowaga Comprehensive Plan Meeting Summary

Colin mentioned that the Project Team and Town have devised a strategy that is not your typical comprehensive plan because the strategies conceived for the three study areas go much further.

- Michael Leydecker from Wendel was introduced. He stated that the minutes from the meeting that was held with representatives from the local transportation agencies have been posted to the ftp site. He said that during that meeting, the Town's Traffic Safety Coordinator and identified five high crash locations in the Town.

He discussed some of the mapping that was put together that illustrated roadway functional classification and transit routes. He stated that the project team has a copy of the NFTA Service Restructuring and Fare Analysis study and that they are continuing their route system study and currently gathering public input. He said that the Town is quite prominent for trip generation for public transit and that the Town has a significant transit component with many opportunities for enhancement. As shown on the transit route map, there are many bus routes that run through or from Cheektowaga into the City.

Mike noted that the Thruway Authority's I-90 corridor study is moving forward. He said that they are not presently studying the interchange at the I-90 and Broadway. During the Stakeholders' Meeting on May 29th, Town representatives suggested that the scope of the corridor study should be expanded to assess how a future new interchange might be achieved. Such a project should consider interchange alternatives at Broadway, with the potential elimination of the William Street interchange.

The Project Team has also been working on the character corridors element for Cheektowaga and has identified four types of character corridors in the Town – commercial, suburban, traditional and expressway (which have been mapped). For each we are looking at the surrounding neighborhoods and determining context elements. It was mentioned again, that 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. Drew noted that the character corridors look at all modes of transport and ways to improve utilization of the public right-of-way. Traditionally, corridors have been focused on in terms of their carrying capacity for increasing volumes of traffic. Character corridors take a more holistic approach to redeveloping roadways in concert with the surrounding neighborhoods and also consider pedestrians, bicycles, etc., in addition to motor vehicles.

Mike said that the level of services for Town roadways had also been mapped. He noted that very few Town roadway had a level of service (LOS) of E or F (meaning much congestion and significant delays or perceived delays). Most of the roads function at an LOS of D or above. Intersections have the greatest impact on LOS – intersection improvements and techniques such as roundabouts are ways to improve intersection flow without road widening. Access management is another way to improve through-put along highways and reduce or narrow lanes. The wider the lanes, the faster people want to go and there is less driving comfort. Dan noted that the Town is continuing to work with the Town of Lancaster on the Transit Road land use access management plan.

As we move forward with the analysis and recommendations, Mike noted that the corridor improvements may necessitate the Town taking on some long-term maintenance such as snow removal, to ensure that people can use facilities year round.

- Finally, David Versel from ESI provided an overview of his section. David reminded the Committee that the economic development component will support much of the work that is being done by Wendel and HOK. David walked the Committee through narrative, stating that you have to make a case for why you are doing what you are doing – hence, you need to understand the local and regional economy. David reviewed his key findings, highlighting the following.

Cheektowaga Comprehensive Plan Meeting Summary

Page 5 of 6

- For French Road, all signs show that this area will transition demographically in the next 10 to 20 years, as the population continues to age.
- The I-90 and Rte. 33 are important crossroads for the Town.
- Cheektowaga has two leading economic drivers for the whole region – BNIA and Walden Galleria.
- The Town's stock of affordable housing in solid neighborhoods can be made into an asset to attract young families from more expensive metropolitan areas.
- Identity building is clearly linked to how the Town moves forward. The Town is a lot of different places that are all part of a whole.
- The Town needs a coherent program to move forward and achieve real progress. To date there has not been a comprehensive approach to economic development.

David reviewed the vision statement that is included in his narrative and asked the Committee to review it carefully. David mentioned that he met with key representatives for economic development that will affect the Town. This helped in the development of three recommended models for economic development in Cheektowaga. He reviewed the three alternatives and the matrix briefly and noted that the recommendations included three categories: essential actions (do now), desirable or interim actions (next steps) and full/long-term intensive economic development efforts (not what could be done in the short term). David discussed the essential actions in greater detail because he feels they are critical to the Town's ability to improve economic development efforts:

- improve the website; post an economic development webpage
- reorganize the CEDC
- develop an on-line database of properties
- implement a land banking program
- work with property owners to redevelop key parcels
- advocate for an airport transit line
- development branding treatment for the Town

David discussed the table in the text that demonstrates that the Town of Cheektowaga is a very desirable community with regard to affordable housing and low crime. He highlighted the need to continue to selectively remove substandard housing and strategically reduce density in City line areas to create larger residential lots and off-street parking to support commercial activity.

Wendy reminded the Committee members to review all four draft sections that are on the ftp site. Share them with others (your local community groups) to gather their input. Nothing is final yet so we welcome the input.

V. Other Business / Next Steps

The Committee has been directed to commence their review of the draft planning elements that were posted to the project ftp site. It is important that the Project Team get feedback on these documents. The next Advisory Committee meeting was not set; it will depend on when the charrettes are planned for. A meeting notice will be sent out in advance, along with an update of what is being planned for these events.

If we meet again prior to the charrettes, we will focus discussion on preparation for them. Wendy will schedule a meeting with the Project Team and Dan (and anyone else who may want to participate) to work out the details for the charrettes.

Meeting adjourned at 4:30PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Wendy E. Weber Salvati, AICP