

Preparing Village “Main Streets” for Planning

Main Street Recommendations for the Village of Newark, NY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Preparing Village “Main Streets” for Planning* project is designed to address the body of issues that could potentially arise when reconstruction or rehabilitation of roadways that traverse a central business district or “main street” area is going to occur. This report – and its companion for the Village of Scottsville – presents the findings of the first phase of the project, providing recommendations to the Village of Newark based on a year-long evaluation of the community’s present attributes, future needs, and desired state.

The report consists of five chapters and an appendix. Chapter I summarizes the objective, structure, and components of the *Preparing Village “Main Streets” for Planning* project. In an effort to provide clarity for the reader, three terms used frequently throughout the report – *reconstruction*, *rehabilitation*, and *revitalization* – are defined and their contextual background is explained.

Chapter II provides the reader with a comprehensive review of the significance of main streets over time. The historical context of main streets is described in detail, illustrating the influence that these spaces have had on and within communities since the 1800’s. Main streets are described in terms of the functions that they served – as both a commercial district for the exchange of goods and services and as a civic center that facilitated the convivial interaction between residents for the purposes of finance, worship, governance, relaxation, or celebration. The variety of economic conditions, societal trends, and national policies that brought a decline to main street areas after the mid-20th Century is briefly described. During this period of decline, and partly as a result of it, many main streets were adapted to serve primarily as transportation corridors. Physical alterations that were made to promote the safe and efficient movement of traffic came, at times, at the expense of their historic attributes, detracting from their overall character and ambiance. The chapter concludes with a call for developing effective solutions that address the needs of today’s main street areas. The development of an adaptive, context-sensitive approach that strikes a balance between transportation, commerce, public interest, and community character is identified as an amenable framework.

Chapter III provides an overview of the case study community. A summary of the selection policy and process used by the project Technical Committee is included, as well as a delineation of the project study area and the development and role of the local main street steering committee. An inventory of existing conditions follows, including descriptive sections which address the following six subject areas: general historical context; economic development history; transportation history; present socio-economic conditions; present transportation conditions; and a current land use profile.

Chapter IV embodies the project’s overall emphasis on the importance of public involvement in the planning process. The chapter describes the process used to gather input from the public regarding the “existing” and “desired” states of the case study corridor and presents the data generated from that process. Public input was solicited through two primary mechanisms: directly at a public meeting and indirectly through a survey tool. A two-hour public meeting was held on December 15, 2006. Individuals in attendance were given a 45 minute presentation on the case study area. Issues pertaining to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats regarding transportation, pedestrian safety, community character and other relevant subject areas within the case study area were reviewed by G/FLRPC staff. Participants were then asked to visit one or more “stations” throughout the venue where

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their concerns could be submitted and recorded through a variety of mediums. These included both facilitated and non-facilitated comments which were recorded on charts and maps. All issues voiced by the public are summarized by subject area; in some instances, specific issue locations are illustrated with descriptive maps. Survey tools were distributed to residents and property owners within the case study area. Submitted survey data was integrated into the overall Summary of Findings.

Chapter V presents G/FLRPC’s recommendations for the case study corridor. Recommendations were generated from a variety of sources, including the application of the latest information and research on context-sensitive solutions and urban design, numerous staff field visits, agency consultation (specifically, NYSDOT Region 4 and Genesee Transportation Council), local steering committee concerns, and information gained through the public input process. Recommendations were separated into three primary categories: Structural/Physical Recommendations, Regulatory Recommendations, and Programmatic/Organizational Recommendations.

Structural/Physical Recommendations were further divided into three categories that together comprise the entire case study area: the roadway, the sidewalk and the building areas. Here, a variety of practical recommendations and design alternatives are put forth. Concepts pertaining to traffic calming, access, pedestrian safety, and streetscape appearance are explained; in some instances, alternatives are offered.

Regulatory Recommendations address the two pieces of land use regulation and control: specifically, the comprehensive plan and zoning law. Local laws were reviewed and evaluated according to their overall effectiveness in promoting a desirable main street area. Recommendations were put forth in this regard, proposing several minor revisions to current zoning regulations. Future strategic planning initiatives were also recommended, emphasizing a community visioning process and incremental implementation in order to control costs and allow for a continual community evaluation process.

Programmatic/Organizational Recommendations emphasized the importance of incorporating the public into the planning process well in advance of any serious planning and design activities. Recommendations for maintaining an open, active and effective main street steering committee were provided. A variety of organizational structures that can be used to guide the main street planning process were also presented and explained. Finally, the encouragement of a meaningful citizen/stakeholder role throughout the decision-making process was re-emphasized, described in part through the inclusion of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials’ six components of an effective public involvement program.

Appendices include: an explanation of the structure of the project Technical Committee, local main street steering committees and associated members therein; a copy of the Application for Planning Services used to solicit case study community participation; an explanation of the codes and characteristics of NYS Highway Sufficiency Ratings, as cited in Chapter III; a summary of Transportation Improvement Program eligible project types; a NYSDOT main street survey; and other tools and references associated with this project.