



Village of Waterloo Downtown Needs Assessment

October 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Village of Waterloo's Downtown is in a state of transition. More and more, it is losing the types of businesses that primarily cater to the local community such as a meat market, a full service grocery, and a liquor store, to name just a few. If trends that are sweeping the nation continue, such as online banking and social networking, it is likely that the local post office will be threatened with closure and local banks will merge and become fewer in number. This may also change the face of Downtown Waterloo in the future. In addition to emerging economic trends, the Village sits at the doorstep of the Premium Outlet Mall just five miles away, which includes 100 retail shops in addition to eateries. A new Super Wal-Mart was developed at the edge of the Village. This provides a significant amount of competition for the community's retail sector.

Another issue for the Village is that its buildings, many with significant historic architecture, are showing signs of decay. Many have had inappropriate alterations or additions that are not in keeping with the buildings' historic character. There are many vacant storefronts, particularly on Virginia Street. The condition of its buildings detracts from the sense of place found in the Village.

Waterloo is not without significant assets, however. In addition to its treasure trove of historic buildings, it is located on the banks of the Cayuga-Seneca Canal, an asset in which the Village has heavily invested. Waterloo is steeped in national history as the birthplace of Memorial Day and as a contributor to the early Women's Rights Movement. It is located at the crossroads of NYS Route 5/U.S. Route 20 and NYS 96, which intersect in the heart of Downtown. The Village has many long-time downtown business owners that have remained loyal to the Downtown. A small number of eateries have opened. The Village of Waterloo government has remained steadfast in seeking funding and creating programs to benefit Downtown. However, more needs to be done.



Waterloo needs the tools to assist it as it transitions from a traditional downtown with a local focus to one that maintains its present customer base while embracing its location in the Finger Lakes Region and its potential to lure customers from outside its borders.

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In order to lay the groundwork for a revitalized Downtown Waterloo, Thoma Development Consultants was hired by the Village to complete this Needs Assessment of its downtown and immediate surrounding area. A map delineating the target area is included on page 2-A following.

The purpose of the Needs Assessment was threefold:

- Revisit the Village's *1998 Downtown and Canal Area Planning Needs Assessment Study* to evaluate what progress had been made and what issues had not been addressed.
- Identify five (5) priority projects that the Village can undertake to strengthen its Downtown to capitalize on future opportunities. These projects were selected based on community input gathered through resident, building and business owners surveys, input from stakeholders, and recommendations made by Thoma Development Consultants based on our 25 year relationship with the Village, review of survey and other pertinent data, and based on observations gathered during a walk through of the target area.
- Create a document that would align Waterloo with the goals and implementation measures put forth in the *Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council's Strategic Plan*.

BACKGROUND

The Village of Waterloo is a small community nestled between Cayuga and Seneca Lakes, in the heart of the Finger Lakes Region. Its 2010 Census population is 5,171 persons, a 1.1% increase since 2000. The Village's 1990 population was 5,116 persons. The population has remained stagnant for decades. However, it is the County's second largest population center after the Town of Seneca Falls, which includes the recently dissolved Village of Seneca Falls, located a few miles to the east. Collectively, the Waterloo/Seneca Falls area of the County contains the majority of the County's population.

The Village includes just over two square miles. Major transportation routes bisect in the center of the Village: NYS Route 5/U.S. Route 20 that travel east to west (Main Street) and NYS Route 96 (Virginia Street) which travels north to south. This is the nucleus of the Village's Central Business District.



Waterloo is steeped in American history, being one of the sites involved in the birth of the Women's Rights Movement over 150 years ago. It also lies on the banks of the Cayuga-Seneca Canal, which played a significant role in the economic livelihood of the Village and region's industrial past. Waterloo is also recognized as the Birthplace of Memorial Day which is commemorated each year on the observance day of May 30 and the succeeding weekend.

The Village is fortunate to have retained much of its historic downtown architecture, an asset that can play an important role in spurring economic revitalization.

Waterloo's history, canal-side and major transportation route location, and its architecture are assets that define the character of the community. These are major themes of this Needs Assessment.

1998 DOWNTOWN AND CANAL AREA PLANNING/NEEDS ASSESSMENT STUDY – 14 YEARS LATER

As part of a previous Downtown planning effort, Thoma Development Consultants was hired by the Village of Waterloo in 1998 to complete a Planning/Needs Assessment to increase economic development activities in the Village. All of the recommended activities were reviewed and prioritized by the Village Mayor, Board of Trustees, and Village Administrator. The following table lists the action agenda items that were identified in the 1998 Planning and Needs Assessment Study and whether or not each item was addressed.

RECOMMENDATION	YES	SOME PROGRESS/COMMENTS	NO
Parking Signage			X
Welcome Sign Improvements	X		
Traffic Calming		X – Initial discussions with DOT re: physical changes to Rt. 5/20.	
Encourage Niche Businesses and Products		X - Village offered a microenterprise grant program in 2006.	
Upgrade the Rear of Main Street Buildings		X – Some minor repairs have been completed.	
Education Programs Geared Toward Downtown Revitalization			X
Canal Corridor Initiative – Coordinated Signage Program			X
Landscaping for Youth Building	X		
Weekly Trash Removal in Waterways		X - Occurs during community cleanup day but not on a weekly basis	
Improvements to Oak Island	X		
Trail from Oak Island to Downtown		X – Vern Sessler trailhead is new. Need connecting trail to downtown.	
Development of Village Trails			X
Memorial Day Museum – Tourism Development	X		
Develop Autumn Event			X
Informational Kiosks		X – Existing kiosk on Oak Island. Could use one or more on Main Street.	
Village Brochure			X
Increase Presence on Seneca Chamber of Commerce			X
DOT Site Development - Develop market/feasibility study, remove existing structures, move salt storage.		X – Buildings were removed and Canal Corporation now owns the site. A portion of the site is leased to the Village for a trail.	
Village Relationship with WPBA		X – Relationship with existing business association needs to be improved.	
Promote Accessibility			X
Reuse of Downtown Buildings		X – Some developers have reused buildings; however, there are many vacancies.	

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

For purposes of this Needs Assessment, three surveys were conducted to gather as much public input as possible. These are described following:

1. Residents Survey

A Residents Survey was sent to 200 randomly selected households located throughout the Village. Seventy-three (73) responses were received which is a 36.5% response rate. Significant highlights include:

- Of the 73 surveys received, 33% of respondents were aged 65 and older.
- 26% of respondents have lived in their current residence for over 30 years.
- 66% of respondents go downtown daily or at least once per week.
- The three main reasons people go downtown, in order, are to eat, go to the post office, and walk/exercise. Shopping ranked 5th.

Survey respondents were asked to rank Main Street's existing conditions/services as "poor, fair, satisfactory, good, excellent, or no opinion". Highlights of these responses follow:

- Most respondents feel the types and mixes of shops and services in the downtown are only fair.
- Most said that the availability of parking was satisfactory.
- Most noted that the condition of storefronts and buildings was only fair.
- The amount of green space and trees was satisfactory for most of those answering the survey.
- Cleanliness in the downtown was noted as "good".
- The times businesses are open are good.

2. Building Owner Surveys

Sixty-two (62) Building Owner Surveys were sent to those who own buildings in the study area and 23 were returned, a 37% response rate. Highlights include:

- Of the 23 building owners who answered the survey, eight (8), or 35% of respondents, also are business owners who work out of their buildings.
- A significant percentage of all building owners believe the types and mixes of shops and services in Waterloo are "poor or fair".
- Almost all building owners noted a need to make repairs or renovations to their buildings. Common components that were mentioned were new roofs and façade work. Several expressed an interest in creating or renovating upper floor residential units.
- Several noted that the municipal parking areas need to be improved via new paving and signage and that downtown Waterloo needed to be more appealing.

3. Business Owner Survey

Business owner surveys were handed out by Thoma Development Consultants during a walk through of the Downtown on May 22, 2012. Every attempt was made to contact as many business owners as possible. A total of 63 surveys were distributed and 23 were returned for a total response rate of 36.5%. Selected highlights of the survey include:

- Several business owners noted the desire to expand their services.
- Regarding needed improvements in downtown Waterloo, the most prevalent theme was the need to fix downtown buildings and have building owners be more responsible for the condition of their properties.
- Many complained about the condition of the buildings on the northern portion of Virginia Street, in particular.
- Traffic flow on Main Street was another complaint. Many feel the need to slow traffic or reduce the number of lanes on Main Street. A number noted, however, that the traffic flow on Main Street is satisfactory.
- Some respondents noted that people don't seem to want to stop and shop in Waterloo.
- The parking lots need to be fixed and more attractive.
- Some noted that the Waterloo Business Association needed to expand or that someone should be paid to coordinate business services and downtown events.

SURVEY INSTRUMENTS AND SELECTED RESULTS

Survey instruments and results are available at the Village.

DOWNTOWN ONSITE ASSESSMENT

A four-member team from Thoma Development Consultants did an onsite assessment of the study area on May 22, 2012. The purpose of the activity was to inventory the downtown and make general observations about its conditions. Highlights include:

- Many downtown commercial buildings need repairs and/or have had inappropriate alterations made to them.
- The parking lot located to the south of Main Street buildings, the Main Municipal Parking Lot area, includes some nice features such as a large mural painted to the rear of the Village Offices, a gazebo, and a nicely landscaped area at the head of the Vern Sessler Trail. Unfortunately, these features have no physical relationship to one another, their presence is negated by the poor condition of the rear facades of Main Street buildings, and there is an expansive amount of blacktop, with no defined space for pedestrians and drivers, and no landscaping features.
- The number of vacant storefronts seems to have increased from the time of the 1998 study. Two buildings have been condemned and one additional condemned building on Virginia Street has been demolished as part of a Restore NY grant award. Some businesses have disappeared such as a liquor store and meat market.
- Virginia Street buildings are particularly in a state of disrepair.
- The number of restaurants has increased.
- Some of the commercial building signage in the downtown is poor.
- Many of the commercial buildings lack awnings.
- There were very few public places or benches on which to sit.
- Few, if any businesses take advantage of the sidewalk to advertise their wares or provide an outdoor experience for eating, for example.
- During this visit, and subsequent visits, there were very few pedestrians downtown.
- There was significant traffic going through the Village on Routes 5/20 and 96. Route 5/20 is so wide, it tends to divide the Downtown in half.
- There are no signed bicycle or pedestrian trails.
- Parking signage and wayfinding is lacking.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT FORM

The Mayor, Village Board, Department Heads, and four community stakeholders identified by the Village were asked to complete a Needs Assessment form. Fourteen (14) Needs Assessment forms were distributed and five were returned. Committee members were asked to note if there were issues of concern in a number of downtown-related categories and also asked to offer potential solutions. Highlights follow:

Recreation – One person noted that ongoing maintenance was needed and that the Village needed to develop a recreation plan.

Parking – Two people noted that there is not enough parking but one other person noted that the Village had a good handle on its parking. Of these three persons, two noted the need for more signage with an historic theme.

Flood Drainage – Three people noted that the drainage system needed to be updated but not necessarily in the Downtown.

Street or Highway Improvements – Five persons chose to comment on streets and highways. Two noted that the Village was taking care of streets as fast as they can. Two additional persons noted that cars travel too fast through the Village because Route 5/20 is too wide. Two people noted the need for more/better sidewalks. One person noted that the stampcrete work started in the Village needs to be expanded.

Lighting – One person noted that lighting is fine.

Infrastructure Needs – Two people see the need for sewer upgrades and two additional persons noted that both water and sewer infrastructure needs to be upgraded.

Crime Prevention – One person would like to see surveillance equipment installed, one person said there was no need for projects related to crime, and a third person stated that the level of crime prevention available at the present time was sufficient.

Code Enforcement – Three people noted that better code enforcement was needed, with one person adding a need for equitable enforcement.

Other Public Service Needs – One person said there were areas such as the needs of the elderly, or recreation needs where a focus group would be helpful. One person noted that complaints should be recorded.

Downtown Organization/Management – One person noted that the WBPA was not working, while another stated that “a game plan” was needed.

Events and Promotions – Three people stated that events needed to be expanded upon.

Marketing – Two people stated that there was a lack of a consistent marketing effort and that there should be more attention paid to making people aware of what goes on in the Village.

Assistance with Historic Preservation – One person stated that there should be a blend of the old with the new and one person noted that the Memorial Day Museum needs operational funding.

Business Financing – Three people took the time to comment on this topic. One person said to assist thriving businesses, one person wants to invest in the Downtown, and wanted to help those who want to open a new business.

Business Technical Assistance – One person stated the need to help with business plans.

Commercial Building Rehabilitation – Three people noted that the Downtown needs a facelift and one person wrote that empty storefronts need to be filled with retail uses.

Housing Rehabilitation – One person noted that a funding source needed to be available.

Upper floor development – Two people said that upper floors were in a state of disrepair and a third person said that if there are vacancies at the street level, it is difficult to develop upper floors.

Other Private Development Needs – One person said that there needs to be a team approach with working with the County, IDA, and EDZ while another suggested a review of other successful downtowns.

Other Comments – Three people took the time to write about other needs in the Downtown. Highlights follow:

Village of Waterloo is historic and needs significant infrastructure improvements. The needs should be incorporated in a Comprehensive Plan.

If the Village Downtown is revitalized, its location on the canal, near the Outlet Mall, and with significant traffic traveling through the Village, business activity could develop.

Ethnic-oriented restaurant development is a good sign.

As a “pass through” Village, the community should investigate ways to catch the eyes of tourists.

The Village is not a lake community but is between lakes and has historic value. Move forward with aesthetics.

The Downtown needs to be “dolled up”. It looks rundown.

There is room for improvement regarding the homes on East Main Street.

POTENTIAL PROJECTS

Based on the input gathered from all of the above data sources, the following list of projects was developed by Thoma and presented to the Village.

1. Continue to seek funds for façade and building renovations such as the NY Main Street Program.
2. Develop a microenterprise assistance program.
3. Strengthen the Waterloo business association.
4. Improve the rear facades/entrances to the south side of Main Street buildings.
5. Redesign the roadway/parking to the rear of buildings in #2 above to better define vehicle and pedestrian space with landscaped medians/islands including trees, and pedestrian walkways. Install better signage to attract people to use Vern Sessler trail.
6. Work with the DOT to reduce the number of driving lanes on Main Street. Create a bicycle lane and consider a boulevard or other traffic calming efforts.
7. Strengthen the Village's zoning laws that relate to Downtown development such as updating the site plan review process, creating an historic district and passing a local historic preservation law, and adopting design guidelines.
8. Enact a vacant building and/or a nuisance property law.
9. Update the Village sign ordinance.
10. Continue work at Oak Island which shall include creating more/better access to downtown such as sidewalks, signage, bicycle paths, kiosks. Consider art park with Memorial Day/War and/or canal era theme.
11. Install benches on Main Street. Encourage as much outdoor restaurant seating and merchandise displays as the sidewalk will safely allow.
12. Sponsor more downtown events, especially those that connect the waterfront to downtown.
13. Facilitate a downtown storefront window display program.
14. Create a connection to local wineries and wine trails. Begin with local wine tasting opportunities.

The committee reviewed and discussed each of the recommendations. Some were deleted and some were edited. The Committee then developed the following five (5) priority projects:

Condition and Character of Main Street

Downtown Organization

Land Use and Zoning Regulations

Condition of the Rear Façades of Buildings and the Main Municipal Parking Lot

Route 5/20 Through the Village

Each of these priority projects is described in detail following. Waterloo should recognize that time, money, and opportunity are important factors in determining which activities will be addressed first. The Village should not be afraid to undertake more than one activity at the same time. To the contrary, the various issues in the Downtown must be addressed concurrently to effect real change. If volunteerism is an issue, Waterloo should look to Village boards/commissions, not-for-profit organizations, County agencies, and the community at-large to assist with these projects. Ad hoc committees can also be formed for specific purposes. It may be more appropriate for the Village government not to be the lead for certain activities but rather be a partner. The Village needs to recognize that some of the projects included herein may require fees for services such as consultant or engineering fees.

In order to generate enthusiasm for these activities, the Village may want to consider a kick off presentation, press release, and provide progress reports on its website. On the one-year anniversary of the kick off meeting, the Village should reevaluate the progress it has made. It may be necessary to reorder priorities if an unforeseen opportunity presents itself or circumstances otherwise change.

The Village Board should be united in its commitment to undertake these implementation activities before it makes any public announcements.

I. PROBLEM/OPPORTUNITY – Condition and Character of Main Street

The onsite assessment of Downtown Waterloo revealed a number of physical conditions that are significantly detracting from the sense of place found in the area. These are noted following.

- There are a number of Main Street buildings that are in a state of disrepair, have had inappropriate alterations, are vacant and decaying, have poor signage, and have vacancies on upper floors, detracting from the Village's historic architecture.
- There is a lack of "vibrancy" in downtown Waterloo. On several occasions, we noted a lack of pedestrians in the downtown.



Many buildings in Downtown Waterloo are in a state of disrepair



Sidewalk displays add interest in the Downtown

- There are few awnings on buildings. Besides providing protection from the elements, awnings also contribute to the aesthetic in downtown by providing a sense of enclosure. This is particularly important on a wide, busy street.
 - Poor signage is rife in the Downtown.
 - There are very few benches for people to sit. Benches can provide a place for those who like to people watch, a comfortable seat while waiting for someone who is shopping, and provide respite for those who need to rest. As the population ages, benches become more of a need.
- Some places are in desperate need of more street trees.
 - Very few businesses utilize their sidewalks with the exception of Nugents Hardware. Nugents places items for sale on the sidewalk that are a visual attraction, enticing people to want to stop and shop. Regarding restaurants, there are no



Creative window displays and "for sale" merchandise create interest and lure customers into stores. Displays should be changed regularly.

tables on the street for outside dining. There are very few signboards, statues, or other art that create a sense of fun and excitement. Very few window displays are creative.

- Main Street is wide and very busy (See IV on page 24).
- There are a significant number of historic buildings with very few gaps.
- Very few businesses are handicapped accessible. As the Baby Boomer population has now begun to retire in significant numbers, and will continue to do so in the ensuing years, residents and visitors alike will need physical accommodations to access businesses and circulate within the interior of businesses. Handicapped bathrooms will be needed for individual businesses and community events.



Signboards are a creative and colorful way to add interest to the sidewalk and attract customers.

PROJECT

Provide incentives to assist owners in preserving Downtown buildings, and creating or rehabilitating accessible commercial and residential space.

TASKS

- Develop a financing pool utilizing State, federal, local, and/or private funding, or any combination thereof, to assist property owners in renovating their buildings, improving facades, and creating or rehabilitating accessible commercial and residential space.
- Provide technical assistance programs in areas such as historic preservation tax credits, historic building renovations, and financing programs to educate property owners on various issues related to building maintenance, preservation, and rehabilitation.
- Hire an architect with historic building preservation expertise to complete a building conditions report on a small number of key Downtown buildings.

PROJECT LEADER

- Village of Waterloo

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- Downtown Business Owners
- Downtown Property Owners
- Consultants, Architects
- Banks

RESOURCES

- Community Development Block Grant Program
- NY Main Street Program
- State and Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credits
- Village of Waterloo Community Development Funds

PROJECT

Work with business owners to create a better sense of space in Downtown Waterloo.

TASKS

- Develop a financing pool utilizing State, federal, local, and/or private funding, or any combination thereof, to assist property owners in upgrading signage, installing awnings, appropriate lighting, or other façade improvements that would improve the aesthetics of buildings in Waterloo.
- Provide technical assistance programs in areas such as window and sidewalk displays, murals and street art, to educate property owners on the types of features that can create an air of excitement and interest in Downtown Waterloo.
- Ensure that local laws and land use and zoning regulations are not in conflict with these projects.
- Identify/Seek funding to provide benches, flower planters, banners, flags, and other amenities to improve the aesthetic and function of the Downtown.

PROJECT LEADER

- Downtown Business Group

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- Downtown Business Owners
- Downtown Property Owners
- Consultants, Architects, Artists
- Banks
- Business Organization

RESOURCES

- Community Development Block Grant Program
- NY Main Street Program
- Historic Preservation Tax Credits
- Village of Waterloo Community Development Funds

II. PROBLEM/OPPORTUNITY - Downtown Organization

In order for positive and proactive change to occur, and for the strategies and recommendations of this and other plans to be implemented, a framework for implementation must be established. Currently, no organization has, as its sole mission, a focus on the Waterloo Downtown area. The Waterloo Business and Professional Association (WBPA) has members throughout the Town and Village of Waterloo. Currently there appear to be few active members. Downtown success is only possible if property owners, business owners, and local government work cooperatively towards mutual goals.

There are a number of organizational models that could be utilized in strengthening the existing business organization or creating a new one, ranging from a loose affiliation or network of existing groups or organizations to a highly structured, incorporated, non-profit organization. One model is the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Four-Point Main Street™ Approach (website <http://www.preservationnation.org>).



A more formal downtown organization modeled after the “Main Street” program would greatly benefit the Downtown. The WBPA could be an appropriate entity to reorganize in concert with the policies established by the National Main Street Center's four-point approach or a new organization can be formed that focuses only on downtown. The National Trust for Historic Preservation created the Main Street model and it has been successfully used to revitalize downtowns throughout the nation. The program outlines four broad areas important to downtown revitalization including Organization, Design, Promotion, and Economic Restructuring. It also stresses that revitalization efforts should be undertaken in partnership with the various downtown stakeholders, and that efforts must be incremental in nature. Although volunteer driven, a Main Street Program usually has a paid staff person, a Main Street Manager, who runs the program. This, however, is not necessary and may not be financially feasible in Waterloo. Waterloo could partner with other nearby communities to share a Main Street Manager. Even if a manager is not feasible, following the comprehensive Main Street Approach would enhance the likelihood of successful revitalization efforts.

At a minimum, an active organization of Waterloo businesses and property owners should meet once a month to discuss mutual issues of concern. This can be a forum for local business owners in identifying their needs or creating the critical mass needed to become a presence at the regional level. The organization can sponsor speakers to talk about best business practices, activities on the State and regional level that may provide opportunities or trigger concerns, and provide technical assistance to owners on a variety of topics such as creating quality window displays or developing a local tie-in to the Finger Lakes Winery trade. The organization can sponsor community events that create economic opportunities. They can track buildings for sale and vacancies to assist in attracting new businesses and tenants. As noted in Number I

above, *Condition and Character of Main Street*, the group can consult on how to make businesses more accessible regarding ramps, elevators, and other amenities.

Building and business owners will need to be convinced of the benefits of participating and contributing financially so that the organization has the ability to sustain itself. This organization should work to organize one or two small events per year, and should tackle other downtown projects, such as setting uniform hours of operation, street cleaning, business mentoring, and other business initiatives.

PROJECT

Develop a sustainable downtown business organization.

TASKS

- Identify a core group of individuals (5-8 persons) to act as a Steering Committee for the development of a downtown organization. The Village can assist by hiring a consultant (Thoma) experienced in developing downtown organizations and building local capacity.
- The Steering Committee should accomplish the following: Determine an organizational structure whether new or the WBPA. Develop a specific plan of action for initial and future activities. Propose a budget for three years for the organization. Determine the available revenue sources to cover budget needs. Formalize into a presentation.
- Bring together all business and property owners, as well as government and interested individuals at an initial meeting to make the presentation.
- Based upon the outcome of the meeting, the Steering Committee should decide whether to move forward by forming a new organization, reorganizing the WBPA, or take no further action.
- If the Steering Committee decides to move forward, the organization should create bylaws to organize itself into four standing committees: organization, design, promotion, and economic restructuring. Members should be solicited and committees should be appointed.
- Core members, or representatives thereof, should attend available Main Street/downtown revitalization training workshops, such as the New York Conference of Mayor's Main Street Conference.
- A strong community-wide volunteer base should be fostered.
- Implement revitalization activities, focusing on small, easily accomplished, highly visible projects first.

PROJECT LEADER

Steering Committee

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Downtown Business Owners
Downtown Property Owners
Interested Residents
Village of Waterloo
WPBA

RESOURCES

National Main Street Center
New York Main Street Alliance
Thoma Development Consultants
Village of Waterloo

III. PROBLEM/OPPORTUNITY – Land Use and Zoning Regulations

It is not the intent of this Needs Assessment to thoroughly examine Waterloo's land use and zoning regulations related to its Downtown. However, a cursory review of the Village's zoning regulations and some of the more recent developments on Main Street reveal a number of concerns.

Building Design

Under the definition of the Village's CB Central Business District, which includes most of the study area, the zoning regulations note, *The Village's core has been identified as the CB District. This district provides for intense service and commercial land uses in a dense area. The CB District also serves as a cultural and historical point for the community. The land use and density of the CB District encourages pedestrian-related activities.*

While this definition is appropriate for Waterloo's Business District, in fact, there are no protections in place to ensure the historic integrity of the district. Building alterations such as the site of the new Savannah Bank and the brick work done on Amy's bar drive home the point that Village has no input on design via the site plan review process and possibly there is no one on the Planning Board with an historic preservation background. The Village should strive for the best design possible for its Downtown and be willing to work with developers in this regard. Many times this can be accomplished via a required sketch plan meeting of the Planning Board prior to the developer incurring final design or engineering costs. New development should be considerate of size, scale, and massing of building components.



The storefront “design” has no correlation to the upper floor. Window and door size, in addition to building materials, are inappropriate and unattractive. Sixty percent of a downtown storefront, regardless of use, should be transparent.



Before



After

For a cost of \$7,000 (2006) the façade of this City of Cortland bar was redesigned so that it is not only more attractive, it is more fitting in this historic district.



Savannah Bank (left) in downtown Waterloo exhibits none of the architectural look and feel present in other downtown buildings. Architectural details such as those found on the bank to the right could have been incorporated into the Savannah Bank.



Caution! This Dollar General store in a nearby downtown is more typical of a suburban setting. While this project may have brought a new business to the area, the design is totally inappropriate for a historic downtown. The building should have been constructed at the sidewalk, with parking to the rear or sides of the building. The front façade should be primarily glass. The roof should have been pitched and a historic entryway created. A community should not fear being labeled as “business unfriendly” when negotiating building design. Design guidelines would greatly assist the Planning Board.

Vacant Buildings

It does not appear that the Village has regulations related to vacant buildings. Vacancies can occur for a variety of reasons and for hard to predict time periods. The longer a building remains vacant, the more likely it is to deteriorate and produce a negative impact on adjacent properties, and in some cases, the entire Downtown. At the present time, most of the North Virginia Street buildings are vacant. At a minimum, vacant buildings should be secured from the effects of weather, vandals, insect infestation, and vermin. Hazardous or other materials should not be stored without the written consent of the Village Code Officer or fire department. Windows should be in good repair, covered with curtains, or possibly be camouflaged by artwork to minimize the impact of the vacancy, particularly at the storefront level. The law may want to set timelines for building redevelopment or building removal. Code officers need to be granted access to the interior of the building on a yearly basis to assess the condition of the building, its contents, and other areas of concern.



There are a number of vacant and decaying buildings in Downtown Waterloo that are negatively impacting the community.



Signs

There is an eclectic mix of signs in the Downtown, many of which are unattractive. The Village should review its sign ordinance so that appropriately designed and sized signs are installed. Among other things, elements to consider are whether or not internally lit, neon, and/or digital signs should be allowed. Presently the Village's sign ordinance does not allow signs to project any more than three feet from the main wall of the building which may prohibit the installation of historic blade signage. Signs are also prohibited in the public right-of-way. The Village should consider whether this ordinance is detrimental to businesses.

Many existing signs in Waterloo are unattractive

Adult Businesses

The Village's Central Business District lists "Regulated Sexually Oriented Adult Businesses" as allowable by special permit. While two adult business uses can be no closer than 500 feet to one another and no closer than 500 feet to a daycare, church, or residential use, these distances are "appealable" through land use regulations. The Village may want to consider removal of this use from the Central Business District and create a separate law outside of zoning for adult uses, eliminating the appeals process.

Summary

Site plan review, design guidelines, creating an historic district, improving the sign ordinance, and reconsidering adult uses in the zoning district are areas that should be addressed. This can be done separately or as part of an overall zoning update that would occur after a new comprehensive plan is adopted.

As mentioned, the Village is fortunate to have a number of intact, architecturally significant historic buildings that can and should contribute to the experience of living, working, and visiting the Village. Waterloo needs to be proactive in its planning efforts and not allow poor design and decay to continue. For existing property owners, these regulations can provide a sense of security that inappropriate or insensitive development will not occur next door, possibly devaluing their property. For prospective developers, it can add a sense of predictability that the Village has a vision for itself and makes everyone "play by the same rules".

PROJECT

Update Land Use and Zoning Regulations in the Central Business District

TASKS

- Nominate the downtown for listing on the State and National Register of Historic Places. An initial survey has been completed.
- Consider the adoption of a local historic preservation law.
- Include sketch plan review procedures for new development in the Central Business zoning district. Create a commission that is comprised of those with a background in historic architecture to review projects in the historic district or retain a consultant to assist the commission when it reviews projects. The policy of this commission would be to invite new development while negotiating with developers on appropriate design.
- Develop and adopt Design Guidelines. Once completed, adopt as part of site plan review.
- Review the Village's sign ordinance and change as appropriate. Consider adopting an amortization schedule for non-conforming signs.

- Consider eliminating “Regulated Sexually Oriented Adult Businesses” as an allowable use, with or without special permits from the Central Business zoning district. Consider creating local law regarding this use outside of zoning to eliminate the appeals process.
- To ensure that vacant buildings do not continue to deteriorate unchecked in the downtown, adopt a local vacant property law or local nuisance property law.

PROJECT LEADER

Village of Waterloo

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Seneca County Planning Department
New York Main Street Alliance
Downtown Organization

RESOURCES

Village of Waterloo
New York Planning Federation
NYS DOS Division of Local Government Services
New York Main Street Alliance
Office of Community Renewal
NYS Local Waterfront Revitalization Program

IV. PROBLEM/OPPORTUNITY – Condition of the Rear Façades of Buildings and the Main Municipal Parking Lot

Despite the significant attention and financial investment in and around the canal area, the physical connection between the canal and downtown still needs to be improved. While the canal area is very attractive, if one takes the Vern Sessler Trail to its conclusion in the Main Municipal Parking Lot, there are no signs, kiosks, or pedestrian amenities to direct canal-goers to Main Street. Instead, they arrive in an asphalt wasteland. The Main Municipal Parking Lot has a significant amount of space which is ill-defined for both pedestrians and drivers. It also lacks landscaping.



Large expanses of asphalt and unattractive rear building façades detract from the Downtown’s inherent sense of place



The mural located on the rear of the Village Offices is attractive, but all the unbroken pavement is not.

The Village should consider hiring a landscape architect to continue the walkway from the Vern Sessler Trail through the parking and into downtown. Create a tie-in to the gazebo and the mural. Green medians with a significant amount of tree canopy should be included. The Village may also want to consider some additional art pieces, kiosks which tell what is going on in the Village, and wayfinding signage to get people to and from the canal area and the downtown. Include places for snow removal and screening for dumpsters.



The beautiful trailhead to the Vern Sessler Trail ends abruptly in the Main Parking Lot area.

Rear Parking Lot Improvements



Rear Parking Lot – Adding landscaped medians and planting areas can help to separate and define travel lanes from the parking lot. Adding sidewalks along Water Street and behind the Main Street buildings offers pedestrians a place to walk safely.



Center of Parking Lot – Landscaped islands better define the parking lot, soften the space, provide shade for parked vehicles, and improve the aesthetic of the parking lot. Large trees that will create a large shade canopy upon maturity should be planted wherever there is room.



Edge of Parking Lot – Landscaped sidewalk between the parking lot and W. Water Street should be installed.

PROJECT

Improve the condition of the rear facades of Main Street buildings facing the canal area and improve the condition of the Main Municipal Parking Lot.

TASKS

- Develop a financing pool utilizing State, federal, local, and/or private funding, or any combination thereof, to assist property owners in renovating their buildings, improving facades, and creating or rehabilitating accessible commercial and residential space.
- Encourage property owners to create attractive rear entrances to their buildings where feasible.
- Provide technical assistance so eligible property owners can take advantage of historic preservation tax credits.
- Architect to provide rear façade designs.
- Hire a landscape architect or firm with similar experience to create a design concept for the Main Municipal Parking Lot. This design will include, but not be limited to, balancing the need for parking with the needs of pedestrians, providing traffic calming in the area, creating not only a parking lot but a community gathering area that takes advantage of the gazebo in the parking lot, continuing the Vern Sessler trail into downtown, providing adequate signage, kiosks, and wayfinding to and from the waterfront, and providing a visual connection between the mural, gazebo, trail, and the downtown.
- Seek State funding for tree planting as a first step in creating needed green space.

PROJECT LEADER

Village of Waterloo

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- Downtown Business Owners
- Downtown Property Owners
- Waterloo Business Organization
- Local Garden Clubs, Beautification Committee, or Art Council

RESOURCES

- Community Development Block Grant Program
- NY Main Street Program
- Historic Preservation Tax Credits through the State Historic Preservation Office
- NYS Urban and Community Forestry Program
- Village of Waterloo Community Development Funds

V. PROBLEM/OPPORTUNITY – Route 5/20 Through the Village

Route 5/20 through the Village of Waterloo is four lanes wide. This roadway has significant traffic: 11,000-12,000 cars daily according to the NYS DOT website. Although the Village cannot necessarily control the traffic flow, the New York State Department of Transportation appears open to negotiation about making the roadway less wide. This project would help to “unify” the buildings on the north side with the buildings on the south side.



This would create the opportunity to calm traffic in the area. If the traffic is moving more slowly, there is a greater chance that visitors can observe what the Village has to offer and perhaps stop, shop, and eat or make a point to come back. This would benefit the Village by making Waterloo more pedestrian friendly and creating a better sense of place.

The Village could opt to create a boulevard down the center of the street, create wider sidewalks, or create a bike lane, or any combination thereof. Another pedestrian feature could include bulb outs that lessen the distance one has to walk across Route 5/20. The Village should consider other amenities including opportunities to create handicapped access to buildings, providing benches, and creating sidewalk areas that benefit individual businesses. If the Village opts to create a bike lane, bicycle racks should be included.



Wide sidewalks provide enough room for bicycle racks, benches, and outdoor seating.

PROJECT

Work with the NYS Department of Transportation to make physical changes to Route 5/20 through the Village to slow traffic, and fully develop a multimodal transportation system throughout the downtown for vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians.

TASKS

- Continue negotiations with the NYS DOT on making multimodal transportation system changes to Route 5/20 through the Village of Waterloo. Remain an active partner during the design phase.
- Seek State and federal funding to leverage DOT funding and supplement needed and wanted amenities.

PROJECT LEADER

Village of Waterloo
NYS Department of Transportation

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Downtown Building owners
Downtown Business owners

RESOURCES

NYS Department of Transportation
Local funding

CONFORMANCE WITH THE FINGER LAKES REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

In 2011, Governor Andrew Cuomo introduced the concept of Regional Economic Development Councils, the goals of which were to eliminate agency silos and provide a single point of contact, ensure that economic development efforts were community-driven rather than a top down approach, and to produce comprehensive, sustainable development that addresses needs in a holistic fashion. Each Regional Economic Council was charged with creating a Strategic Plan in 2011. Seneca County falls within the boundaries of the Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council.

As part of the inventory analysis section of the Finger Lakes Strategic Plan, it notes under “Tourism and Arts” that the Finger Lakes and the recreational communities along Lake Ontario contribute immeasurably to the region’s appeal and quality of life. These are powerful assets that help attract both new businesses and today’s highly mobile workforce. Scenic beauty and recreational and cultural attractions also draw visitors to the region, with Finger Lakes’ wine country rapidly becoming an international destination.

In addition, rich with history, the region has played a major role in the nation’s industrial development and transportation, the Underground Railroad, and the Women’s Rights movement. That history is displayed in numerous museums and historical sites, including the Genesee Country Village and Museum, the Susan B. Anthony House, and Women’s Rights National Historic Park. The Village of Waterloo’s strategic location on the Cayuga-Seneca Canal and its involvement with the early Women’s Rights Movement are regional assets to be explored and expanded upon.

Under the Strategies section of the Plan it notes, “Both quality of life and economic vitality rely on communities in the form of villages, towns, and cities that provide a sense of place and a range of supportive services. Successful community development relies on a built environment that helps to reinforce the character of the area and an effective use of infrastructure, including the region’s many downtowns.” The Finger Lakes Strategic Plan list of recommended actions includes:

“In order to continue to improve and strengthen its communities, create economic opportunity for diverse populations, and grow and retain the region’s workforce and firms, the Finger Lakes region will implement community development, infrastructure, and transportation strategies that:

- Reinforce the identity, sense of place, and character of the area through downtown redevelopment, adaptive reuse of existing buildings and infrastructure, and historic preservation;
- Strengthen transportation infrastructure through preservation and maintenance of the existing system;
- Seek to invest in water resource-related projects that enhance water access, retain water quality, and increase water safety;
- Improve access to credit and capital for revitalization and reinvestment.”

The recommendations included in this Needs Assessment provide the Village of Waterloo with the tools necessary to preserve its Downtown building stock and create a sense of place; develop a stronger connection between the canal and the Downtown; and strengthen the Village's local enforcement mechanism via land use and zoning. This assessment also recommends the Village continue to forge a partnership with the local business organization as a means to focus time and resources specifically to downtown issues and causes. All of these recommendations align with the strategies put forth by the Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council.