

Community Workshop #1 Summary

December 6, 2008

Introduction

Project for Public Spaces (PPS) and McFarland-Johnson facilitated a community workshop on December 6, 2008, to assess and brainstorm improvement ideas for Route 40 in the Town and Village of Schaghticoke. Following a presentation on the qualities of great public spaces, the workshop attendees were broken into four groups that each focused on one of the following locations.

1. Route 40 & Route 67
2. Stewarts/Shag A Val
3. Route 40 & Lower Main Street (plus A. E. Diver Library)
4. Hamlet of Melrose

The groups evaluated their assigned site using the “Place Game.” The Place Game ignites a creative process about how to make a place vital and how to improve the experience of people in a place. This structured exercise asks participants to use common sense and intuition, along with structured observation and interview skills, to allow them to very quickly see the good and bad qualities of a place using the characteristics listed below under the following 4 attributes: comfort and image, access and linkages, uses and activities and sociability.

Comfort & Image

- Overall attractiveness
- Feeling of safety
- Cleanliness/quality of maintenance
- Comfort of places to sit

Access & Linkages

- Visibility from a distance
- Ease in walking to the place
- Transit access
- Clarity of information/signage

Uses & Activities

- Mix of stores/services
- Frequency of community events/activities

- Overall busy-ness of area
- Economic vitality

Sociability

- Number of people in groups
- Evidence of volunteerism
- Sense of pride and ownership
- Presence of children and seniors

Once participants evaluated their site, they were then asked to formulate improvement recommendations and summarize their group's ideas for:

- What they liked best about the site;
- Short-term improvements;
- Long-term vision; and
- Partnerships and local talent to help implement these ideas.

Finally, each group reported back to all workshop participants, describing the issues and opportunities they identified for their specific area. These workshop outcomes are described in detail below.

Site 1 – Route 40 & Route 67

Site Assessment

Comfort & Image:

The intersection of Route 40 and Route 67 serves as a gateway into the Village of Schaghticoke. Its country-like atmosphere contributes to the small-town image of the Village. However, the lack of sidewalks and crosswalks, combined with heavy traffic in that area, creates feelings of unease and discomfort for pedestrians. Poor lighting and a lack of seating also contributes to a poor pedestrian environment in an area with a large amount of commercial activity. The fence around the fairgrounds also deteriorates the image of the Village and conveys a sense of exclusion. The shopping plaza is predominately asphalt and is used solely for parking. It is a monotonous hardscape that is unfriendly and unattractive.

Access & Linkages:

Pedestrian accessibility is a major concern for students and those walking from the shopping mall to Stewarts or the Schaghticoke Fairgrounds. The lack of crosswalks, poor signage and weak connections to other destinations discourage people from walking.

Uses & Activities:

The Hoosic Valley Center retail, the Hoosic Valley Central Schools and the Fairgrounds generate a busy area with a mix of stores and services. However, with very few non-retail activities or programmed community events, especially for students, the economic vitality of the area suffers. The infrequency of the Schaghticoke Fair contributes to this issue.

Sociability:

Despite a strong sense of pride and ownership amongst local stakeholders, pedestrian activity in general is minimal. Even with the High School so close, there's a low level of social interaction because there are no amenities or activities that would encourage people to spend time outdoors.

Opportunities for Improvement

Short-term:

- Provide benches and movable seating, especially in front of the pizza store
- Create a community bulletin board
- Stripe crosswalks at the intersection
- Improve retail and wayfinding signage
- Create an opening in the fence between the schools and the shopping plaza
- Install temporary school art displays
- Create a stronger police presence or install security cameras
- Enhance landscaping in the parking lot
- Remove/replace fence around the Fairgrounds
- Create a "Park and Ride" area, perhaps locating it in the Shop N Save parking lot and creating a formal bus stop in this location

Long-term:

- Change the intersection to roundabout, rather than signalized, control
- Enhance a possible bus stop with lighting, informational signage and a shelter structure
- Enhance/improve street lighting to be pedestrian-scaled
- Build sidewalks and curbs
- Create an entrance/gateway that signals to motorists that they have entered a pedestrian area

Partnership Ideas

- Hoosic Valley Center
- Stop N Save
- Capital District Transportation Authority

- Schaghticoke Fairgrounds
- Hoosic Valley Central Schools – student involvement
- Community service groups

Site 2 – Stewarts/Shag A Val

Site Assessment

Comfort & Image:

The area around Stewarts and Shag A Val offers a pleasant village feel with residential homes and a mature tree canopy. The outdoor seating provided by Stewarts is well utilized; however, the quality of storefront maintenance is poor and the Fairgrounds fence weakens the overall attractiveness of the place. The lack of sidewalks, crosswalks and curbs, in addition to speeding traffic, creates many pedestrian safety concerns.

Access & Linkages:

Northbound visibility is limited by a horizontal curve in Route 40 that obstructs the view of the southern driveway into Stewarts. The proximity of these two businesses makes it convenient for people to walk between them, but the lack of sidewalks and crosswalks makes this difficult. Snowmobiles actively use this area in the winter, and any proposed design changes should consider and accommodate these roadway users.

Uses & Activities:

The mix of uses and services provided by Stewarts and Shag A Val allows for a vibrant commercial node and the presence of people. As a result, economic vitality thrives and the area remains busy.

Sociability:

Popular commercial and food destinations attract people in groups. This is one of the site's greatest assets and explains why there is a variety of people here, including seniors.

Opportunities for Improvement

Short-term:

- Replace the Fairgrounds fence or plant trees/shrubs in front of it
- Paint a crosswalk between the businesses
- Enhance retail signage
- Clean up litter outside Stewarts
- Provide picnic tables for motorcyclists and snowmobilers traveling through the area
- Improve landscaping

- Provide on-street truck parking

Long-term:

- Implement sidewalks and curbs, beginning with the east side of Route 40
- Improve highway drainage
- Install pedestrian-scaled lighting (energy-efficient lighting would save money on operations)
- Manage driveways to reduce vehicle-pedestrian conflicts
- Implement a 30 MPH speed limit and a speed indicator
- Change roadway design to slow traffic
- Gateway element to enhance entrance to the core of the Village

Partnership Ideas

- Hoosic Valley Central Schools
- New York State Department of Transportation
- Village of Schaghticoke
- Business community
- Rensselaer County
- Schaghticoke Fairgrounds
- Rotary Club
- American Legion
- Local churches
- Community groups

Site 3 – Route 40 & Lower Main Street (plus A. E. Diver Library)

Site Assessment

Comfort & Image:

The small town atmosphere and architecture add to the positive image and overall attractiveness of the Village of Schaghticoke. Traffic entering and exiting the Mobil station, however, creates conflicts between cars and pedestrians. The overall lack of wayfinding signage, pedestrian amenities and seating makes this area unwelcoming and uncomfortable. The roads are in poor condition and, without crosswalks, crossing them is dangerous because vehicles often speed through this area. The small park and the lawn in front of the library are well kept and aesthetically pleasing, but the little seating that is provided is oddly located.

Access & Linkages:

Despite being the historical and logical center of the Village, there is insufficient indication from a distance that motorists are entering the heart of the community. There is also poor signage

directing people to businesses on Lower Main Street, which was diminished as the village “core” when Route 40 was shifted to its current alignment. Further, the lack of a continuous sidewalk, crosswalks or traffic controls make walkability in this area difficult and unsafe, especially for children going to the library and people trying to cross between the Village Hall and the Post Office. The narrow sidewalks on the Hoosic River Bridge and its poor aesthetic quality are also deterrents to walking and biking between different parts of the Village and Town of Schaghticoke.

Uses & Activities:

A good selection of stores and services at the intersection creates a small community feel yet there is little evidence of community activities or events. The overall busyness of this site is generated by vehicular traffic, not pedestrians.

Sociability:

Some evidence of volunteerism and town pride can be seen in the well maintained pocket park. However, besides attractive landscaping and a sculpture, there is no reason to spend time in this public space. It appears underutilized, and no children, seniors or groups are present. There may be more activity in this location during the summer when Chrissy’s is open for business.

Opportunities for Improvement

Short-term:

- Locate crosswalks near pedestrian generators
- Create a unique gateway treatment
- Enhance traffic enforcement, potentially with radar
- Paint roadway markings the better delineate the Route 40/Lower Main Street intersection
- Provide Wi-Fi Internet access in the park
- Enhance park programming
- Install sidewalk benches
- Create signage that directs people to the businesses on Lower Main Street
- Create a community bulletin board in the park

Long-term:

- Provide sidewalks on both sides of the street
- Widen sidewalks
- Use traffic calming to slow traffic
- Create on-street parking spaces for the library
- Reconfigure the intersection of Main Street and School Street
- Manage access to the Mobil station
- Improve lighting

- Replace the Hoosic River Bridge as a pedestrian-friendly destination in the Village (look to South Glens Falls Bridge as a design model)
- Relocate the bridge to intersect Lower Main Street farther to the south (near the Legion Hall)
- Create an overlook area at the foot of the bridge for pedestrians and motorists
- Use the old bridge as a bicycle trail

Partnership Ideas

- Chrissy's
- Presbyterian United Church
- Legion Hall
- Dave D'Ambrose
- Local children – Boy and Girl Scouts
- Hoosic Valley students – government class
- Hoosic Valley PTO

Site 4 – Hamlet of Melrose

Site Assessment

Comfort & Image:

Speeding vehicles approaching Melrose create an unsafe and uncomfortable pedestrian environment. The Esquire Food & Drug site and the Getty site in particular are in poor shape and not well maintained, and the Getty site creates an image of abandonment and lack of ownership. Commercial and institutional signage is generally poor and detracts from the aesthetics of the Hamlet. However, the green memorial park is well maintained and litter free.

Access & Linkages:

There is no sense of entrance into the Hamlet, and visibility from a distance is poor. The lack of sidewalks and crosswalks discourage pedestrian activity and accessibility to local destinations, such as the Post Office. Narrow shoulders do not accommodate bicyclists well. Esquire Food & Drug, located at the Route 40/Church Street intersection has poorly managed access and confusing parking patterns. Vehicles parked at Esquire limit sight distance at the Church Street intersection and create numerous potential conflict points. The geometry of the Route 40/Melrose Valley Falls Road intersection also creates potential traffic safety issues.

Uses & Activities:

Despite the presence of a range of pedestrian generators, including Esquire, a gift shop, the Methodist church and a post office, there are no community events or activities that create a

busy, economically and socially thriving place. Poor visibility and the lack of synergy between these destinations and services contribute to this feeling of inactivity.

Sociability:

A lack of pedestrian amenities and community events limits group activity. However, the well maintained pocket park suggests evidence of volunteerism and community pride. The speed and noise of passing traffic, however, limit its attractiveness as a gathering place.

Opportunities for Improvement

Short-term:

- Lower the speed limit
- Provide benches outside the church and in public spaces
- Improve Esquire's signage
- Talk to Esquire owner about improving the condition of the site
- Slow traffic at the blinking light at Church Street and Route 40
- Paint a crosswalk for pedestrians
- Create a formal bus stop

Long-term:

- Reconfigure the Melrose Valley Falls Road intersection
- Install a roundabout to slow traffic and address difficult intersection designs
- Change the blinking light to a regular stop light, which is controlled by detection sensors
- Make better use of Getty property for a bus stop, park space or intersection improvements
- Install sidewalks and curbing
- Provide formal on-street parking
- Improve drainage at the old railroad overpass
- Continue more extensive improvements of the Esquire site

Partnership Ideas

- Hoosic Valley Central Schools
- Community and neighborhood groups
- Fire House/Department
- Melrose Methodist Church