

OCL Community Image Study Committee Meeting

April 19, 2011

Katie Hayduke, Tony Malavenda, co-chair, Don MacLaughlin, Donna Rohde, Maude Morse, Sarah McIlvain, Fran Nichols, Merike Treier, co-chair, Colleen Karl-Howe

City of Syracuse Guests: Corey Driscoll, Deputy Director, Codes Enforcement; Paul Mercurio, Transportation Planner, DPW; Pete O'Connor, DPW Commissioner

Merike: focus of the study is on how we as a community can collectively address community appearance issues. How do DPW, Codes, address community image and placemaking?

Pete:

- Litter crews IN CONJUNCTION WITH Downtown Committee do maintenance Downtown and with Crouse Marshall business district
- Sweeping downtown 7 days/week
- Regular Trash pickup Monday through Saturday MORNINGS - commercial trash cans in those areas
- Normal trash collection throughout the city; road maintenance throughout the city
- Road and sign condition (complaint driven) DPW has its own sign shop
- Try to go through once a year for pavement markings, esp. crosswalks in school areas
- Gateway litter picking crew; 690 and 81 not city's responsibility but NYS shirks its responsibility. There are no state funds available so the City provides the clean up through taxpayer money; cut the grass, etc. When city stopped, complaints came to City Hall, so City had to do it to make it a welcoming gateway. Also done by Downtown Committee in downtown areas.
- clean up is everyone's responsibility
- DPW is working on pot hole repairs now with 5 crews working on potholes and one on reseal program on selected streets (no curbs or concrete base); was strictly complaint driven in the past
- Pot hole repairs are complaint driven
- City is divided into 4 quadrants – allows DPW to make a bigger dent in repairs
- This winter was 4th snowiest and the coldest since 1904
- Looking to do things for next winter, will be doing more for potholes to hold better (keep patch material hot) Hot patch repairs, now, waste of money doesn't hold v. Cold patch
- Gateways = 81 and 690 on-ramps and off-ramps – City has assumed responsibility to keep appearances
- Lots of volunteers helping with clean-ups
- Other gateways – clean-ups are complaint driven. Much is commercial and residential private property. Would send Codes people to cite. DPW would pick up if property owner didn't. There is no Gateway Clean-up schedule in the city as there is at highway and downtown entrances. Parks does flower plantings in some areas ... "There are opportunities ... we could get things going'.

- Sarah noted that moving day for residents creates excess litter on curbs/properties. There should be a system that gets picked up even if tenant or property owner doesn't call. Merike noted residents can call for p/u of trash if residents move on day other than regular trash pick-up day. Pete noted the cost to the city is approximately \$250 (staff, gas, equipment, etc). Residents need to call to make arrangements. Trash left on the curb is in most cases a landlord issue, meaning landlord either doesn't care about the trash left behind or doesn't know about the trash because he/she is not local.
- City picks up lots of stuff – many tires left in City. DPW has no mechanism for sending Codes out to cite all the time.
- In the city, trash pickup is part of tax bill; trash pickup is an additional cost for those living in suburbs. We do a “pretty good job but we could do better.”

Paul:

- Street striping wears away, DPW gets lot of complaints. Transportation dept is requesting recommendations for alternate pavement materials and different paint in bids.
- Priority areas include Safe Routes to Schools – have funding. City paints lines at least once/year, crosswalks come next. Have issues with crosswalks – take more paint and more time, so go to outside contractors, so decided to go to other materials. (Were required to use water base paint that adheres to DEC requirements).

Corey – Division of Code Enforcement (Division of Neighborhood and Business Development Office).

- Noted the Division of code enforcement inspects properties, doesn't necessarily enforce the laws. Their primary concern is the health and safety of structures. Jurisdiction includes residence, businesses, the airport, malls. Enforcement comes from Law department.
- Required to make sure vacant properties are secure and that no one is inside the building(s). Required to make sure that lawns are maintained properly.
- Limitation as to what the department can do – can issue a ticket or a violation to property owner.
- In many cases, property owner doesn't care about maintenance. Dept. will issue a ticket, allow compliance time, if problem isn't correct then the complaint goes to legal department. If/when the complaint goes to court it doesn't often provide results residents want.
- Gap between enforcement and law
- Moving problems through faster but playing catch-up
- Using outdated technology – Inspector gets printout (dot matrix printer! Carbon paper!), hand writes on the paper what transpires on appointment. At the end of the day, a clerk then enters info into the system on ancient equipment.
- System cannot keep up with property turnovers. Attorney needs to make valid threats or people won't respond. City is making strides. E.g. Take liens on property – even in another County – take rents,
- Inspectors now work in quadrants, similar to DPW; now can get in tune with neighborhood issues.

Q: Why is code enforcement so underfunded? All of City government doesn't operate with that low level of technical expertise.

- Hasn't been CE staff didn't know what is possible and what is available. Inspectors want to do job, don't have the necessary tools to do their jobs effectively and to keep up with expectations and ... and with some of the slyness of property owners. Need homeowner information, history of citations, actions. Now doing better with the team of attorneys we have.
- Want to attack vacant property problem next. What are places like Cleveland and Buffalo doing? Needs to be multiple approaches to attack.
- Code enforcement is complaint driven
- Not allowed on property unless allowed in. (If children or seniors involved City can partner with the County.
- Since inspectors have no computers, they have no idea who owns property, if been cited, etc.
- working on updating software and equipment
- No way to track phone calls from complaints
- Timetable - funding is there; time frame of September or October; working on documenting workflow for software.
- State of the art programs/confident good move for the city. Then need to train inspectors.
- IBM coming to city (Smart Cities grant) pro-active approach to vacant properties. Will be working with new CE system in the Fall.

Tony:

Is using lawyers the right approach? i.e. give parking tickets, don't sue people

New approach where actual tickets are given and fees and fines are easily collected? Like boot on car.

Corey – goal is compliance

- Need to connect people with information and resources that they need to fix the problem
- Only want to use court cases if worst case scenarios, multiple property owners
- Balance between fine and getting job done; charging fine doesn't get job done.
- Need a paralegal in Collections.
- Law is needed; cite broken window, back in 2 weeks not fixed, 1 more week fixed – Done
- If not addressed, goes to legal. Costs \$55 per visit after goes to legal.
- Looking at other cities and how they handle; Need to attack from bunch of different ways
- A lot of changes going on in Code Enforcement, moving in the right direction.
- Looking at appearance tickets, particularly for trash and debris.
- No equivalent to "boot" concept – can't lock up your house, unless an extreme case
- Open to suggestions how to improve process

Fran:

Covenants (codes) in towns and villages - Town has ability to bring it to compliance then put lien on property if owner violates covenant. Owner is responsible even if property is sold – title cannot be transferred with lien.

Corey: we are pursuing something like that. The money we are collecting through code enforcement can go into account for housing improvement, but historically has just gone into general fund. We are looking at ways to hold the owner accountable for work and have money come back to CE.

Merike – what about sidewalks, and safety:

DPW: Give resident opportunity to fix, must meet city specs. If owner doesn't repair, city will and add charges to taxes.

Being more proactive: City will look at entire block, not just one residence that is subject of complaint.

Fran- NYS Thruway – prisoners clean-up crews clean-up. Can City use same resources, contract with State?

Some legal issues; looking into now.

Community courts is being used now for graffiti painting.

Paul: asset management modernization: looking for funding for program; NYS does with signals - mapped inventory.

Street signs must comply with new federal regulations by 2018.

SMTC way finding study for city on Northside; Didn't become what was wanted, parking concerns of businesses overshadowed way finding. became smaller scale parking study, hospital signage issue bigger issue; hospitals not in GPS (liability issue); no signs downtown to hospitals.

Have requested a way finding study for the City at large requested of SMTC. Hope to fold OCL recommendations into SMTC study scope.

Recommendations for OCL study from City:

Paul – focus on strengthening cores rather than boundaries

With reference to wayfinding: Focus on pedestrian, how long it will take an average pedestrian to walk from here to there. Bikes as well.

Sign study: uniform signage. Color-coded signage for type of use or neighborhood.

Wayfinding signage for surface lots as well as garages.

Sign pollution is an issue, not sure if will be addressed.

Signs must comply with "book."

Still looking for Wayfinding study final report that was done by C&S a few years ago.

Corey: we are open to ideas

Looking to shift CE culture;

How to instill sense of pride in residents?

Gap in cultures, educate refugees; No idea of rights

Owners need to take responsibility; but they don't live in Syracuse