

OCL Community Image Steering Committee meeting Feb. 22 2011

Attending: Chris Capella-Peters, George Curry, Bob Doucette, Karen Hanford, Katie Hayduke, Tony Malavenda (co-chair), Sarah McIlvain, Don McLaughlin, Maude Morse, Donna Rohde, Merike Treier (co-chair), Janie Thibault, Rachel Pollack, Sandra Barrett, Andrea Streeter, Carly Piersol, Ryan Brodovsky, Marilyn Higgins.

Agenda

Presentation by Chris Capella-Peters: Community Mapping, followed by commentary

Last Week's Activity: Using a method developed by urban theorist and planner Kevin Lynch, we broke up into groups of about four people and each group tried to come up with their version of an image of the city using Lynch's five elements.

Five characteristics:

- 1) Paths—components of the community along which we move.
- 2) Edges—components of the environment that divide one place from another, can be penetrable or impenetrable.
- 3) Districts--Areas which hold together as a cohesive unit because of similar physical characteristics or in some cases because of uses that happen in that area.
- 4) Nodes—which tend to be smaller than districts, and they usually area areas where a lot of activity occurs, where there is a lot of exchange between the users.
- 5) Landmarks: Pieces of the city environment that come to mind either because of social interaction or traditional relationships affiliated with them. They are point specific.

The groups' commonalities were plotted on a single image map; anything appearing in three of the four image studies/maps appeared on the composite.

All four groups drew these paths: Genesee Street, James Street, Teall, Butternut to Grant, the parkway up to where it morphs into 81, Geddes, and the other, western end of Genesee, Meadowbrook and Salina.

(Some people had Lodi, two had 81)

In terms of Districts, at least three groups had University, Westcott, Strathmore, Near West Side, Downtown, the Lake Front, Little Italy, Tipp Hill, Sedgwick and Eastwood.

There weren't a lot of Nodes shown in general but it may be that the idea of a node was hard to comprehend. Those listed were Thornden Park, Columbus Circle, Clinton Square, Carousel Mall. There were others but these were the only ones that came across in this exercise.

Landmark category had only two or three in common: Thornden Park, the Dome, Zoo or Burnett park, Regional Market-Stadium area, Columbus Circle, Clinton Square.

Last piece were Edges: Major edges were 81, 690 and West Street. Some of the groups got down to a smaller scale and marked "little Edges."

Another exercise would be taking all the things that appeared on two of the maps/versions.

It is telling because there are some really strong pieces that come to light when thinking about next step: Where you might invest in image.

Pretty much no one said anything about the Lake. It may have been a function of the exercise directions, in asking people to focus on city as you come to the core.

If we did this with another group might be good to expand the map a few inches; we might do this toward the end of the study.

People in the committee groups tended to know the city.

Would this have implications regarding report in terms of what places that should be focused on?

An example of the implications: If we look at Paths; we hope those are Paths are where people have a good experience. (Implication for investment.)

Idea behind it: If doing a plan (if we do a neighborhood plan or a comprehensive plan, you want to understand what people think about the place. Then presumably you would protect those key components. When places are memorable, but in a bad way, you focus a different kind of attention.

Part of what Lynch described is how we make a mental map. We use these in your head.

As a committee, how we can fold it into larger study?

If you think about it, a Gateway could be a Node. It is a place where something happens in the environment that lets you know that you are entering or leaving a place. There is no archway, either figuratively or literally, that you pass through that states, "You are here."

Presentation by Marilyn Higgins Connective Corridor, VP of Community Engagement and Economic Development at Syracuse University; The Connective Corridor and the Near Westside Initiative

Barriers to creating change: If you try to hang a flowering basket in Syracuse, you see how many layers of bureaucracy you have to go through.

A big part of charge of both the near Westside Initiative and the Connective Corridor is to activate Public Spaces.

The debate: Do you build beautiful spaces and people then use them, or do you create activities that make people want to go to place and then fix the places up to really accommodate the activity going on there?

I am not an urban expert, but I know that there are two completely different schools of thought on this.

I follow the CEOs for Cities; they have interesting and creative discussions about that. For instance, some people think Mayor Daley created Millennium Park and it brought people there; other people think Mayor Daley put interactive art in that park and that drew people there.

I'm going to talk about these two projects from the perspective of activating public spaces in the city.

Over 700 people participated early on in focus groups to create a description of "What the community wants." I always try to keep this in the picture. (These findings include, overcoming barriers (streetscape conditions, I-81; safety and security; landscape/environment, public art, add trees and green space; improved transit options; sustainability of improvements; more activities/events for different groups; accessibility: physical and social; project management/inclusiveness; source for economic development.)

Of importance: If you go around the city, and you look at our beautiful spaces and our not so beautiful spaces, one thing you notice is an absence of people. You go some place other than Armory Square, what you notice are some very beautiful spaces and tremendous absence of people.

The route of the corridor, most of you know, is down University Avenue onto East Genesee, punches under 81, to Fayette and through Armory Square and to the Near Westside.

This spring, University Avenue will become a two-way street again. The routing and preponderance of one way streets that were created in the 1970s is being addressed. It will be two way all the way to Erie Blvd even though not on corridor route. East Genesee and Forman Park will be reconstructed.

Our Nodes include the Little park in front of the Warehouse; public art done on the trestles that extend to Near Westside.

We are planning for people, not just cars: walking, riding, biking.

Olin, one of the consultants on this project spent a lot of time walking the route. They have a theory/idea that a route is a route when you have "an experience a minute, other wise you become bored and you don't stay on the route. Experience a minute: Not all in the public realm, some experiences are great shops, coffee places but if you achieve "an experience a minute" for someone walking along an urban route you will have achieved a stabilized urban corridor.

They did a beautiful redesign of Forman Park, which is a great park to begin with. Their analysis came from spending a lot of time with merchants and hotel property owners in that immediate vicinity. The hotel property owners would do special events in that park if it were designed differently. They conceived feeders that will go right from the hotel into the park; could close streets on days there were events spilling out from the hotel into the street. Activating the public space is part of design thinking.

Image of what might happen (in handout) "under 81:" Some of the early day dreams about route 81 had to do with putting movies there, etc. what was settled on is pictured, colorful graphic of word Syracuse. Critical spot: people must feel comfortable walking through. Also I was worried about all the levels of bureaucracy. Everyone thinks they own the area under 81 and have jurisdiction over it. Every single little thing, such as using fluorescent paint on the piers has to go through several different people and no one is really sure. So we went with something very simple, but bright and interesting, to make it a more pleasant place to walk.

We have come up with brand for the Connective Corridor, developed by a group called Pentagram. It takes the “use” in Syracuse to get across the message, “Use your city.” It is in a simple type face, use your feet, your eyes, etc. I think it is versatile enough to create some interesting work. We will allow the property owners along the route to use it in their own ways. “Reuse, etc.”

Façade improvement (see description of this program emailed by Sandra.) Some will use it for little things. We have red tables and chairs that people can have for free; even if a property owner just puts one banner that is something, but our desire is to have lots and lots of people use the program and use it well.

University has fostered some great ideas. The Visual and Performing Arts College has been a huge teammate. (See photos on handout.) These are just a few of the very early things that have been done. You will see more. We have also gone along in terms of activating Public Spaces, purchased equipment that can be used for street theater and street performance. Any nonprofit that wants to do performance on corridor can. If they need amplifiers, equipment, Syracuse Stage is housing this for us. We are doing everything we can to encourage people to activate this space once we get it built.

Near Westside Initiative

It is a different kind of a challenge in terms of the public spaces. We call it the SALT district. We are trying to break through the “Edge” that is West Street. We are trying to create commercial activity or warehouse activity between West and Wyoming streets. It is porous. It encourages people from the neighborhood to walk through. With our housing partner Home Headquarters we have over 100 residential properties immediately surrounding Blodgett School, everything from \$1 properties to completely refurbished properties. We got about 25 homes done last year including green homes featured in newspaper. When it comes to understanding how to deal with the Public Spaces in the neighborhood, I went and talked to people who know more about this than I do. There was a woman at the Annie Casey Foundation, who told me that in neighborhoods like this one activating the public spaces is always about doing what the residents want. So don’t go and plant lots of trees. Go and take a truck with six trees down there. Let them pick the trees. They will take care of the trees if they pick the trees. We are, working with city arborist and a neighborhood group. It is kind of a fascinating case study. This neighborhood was particularly hard hit by the Labor Day Storm. It took down the steeple in St. Lucy’s Church and the roof off the Delavan Art Center and when we first started talking in the neighborhood about trees, we had Emmanuel Carter come in with a plan and they looked and they said, “We don’t want the trees. We don’t want more trees.” It was still the scar from that storm. That has changed with the work of local nursery, ESF, Initiative. Now we have a resident green committee and there are some community gardens. Everything done in the public spaces must have resident engagement.

Skiddy Park: There was a shooting there several years ago. Little League taken from park. Swing sets from the 1930s. Building that houses Syracuse Bikes constantly broken into and in terrible condition. We had 45 young people in the neighborhood decorating that park. Baseball field pretty good but the neighbors want soccer. The kids like the Public Art; the kids liked participating in Public Art. We are going to try to do fundraiser for Skiddy Park.

There are a couple other things that I put in handout that I thought would be useful in terms of beautifying public spaces.

(Image of Case Supply Warehouse) Steven Mann does magnificent work with students who have been through trauma; works by taking pictures. Images of children on the side of the Case Supply warehouse, this is art that was prepared by those children in Steven's class.

Feb. 22nd paper, there was an article about Steve Mann.

(Another image from handout) Bridges: art on bridges "Fall Leaves Winter Longs." Philadelphia artist spent six months in neighborhood and spent time with residents to come up with these statements on the trestles. This makes connection between city and neighborhood; getting good feedback on it.

Activating public spaces is as important as taking care of our public spaces. You can't do one without the other.

Anyway this group can encourage guerilla activity in terms of activating public spaces, I encourage it. As a university VP I can't just go do the things I would like to do.

The head of transportation for NYC has given a lot of license to people, has said "go fix that." I think that if we could do some of that in Syracuse, our Public Spaces would get a lot more beautiful and interesting more quickly.

Question and answer:

Facade improvement program: Interested to know what kind of parameters, design guidelines for program? We are focused on public spaces and public policies.

Not there yet. E.g. We don't have any way in city of Syracuse of dealing with "Graphic Art." If it is Public Art it goes to the Public Art Commission. If it is a sign it falls under the sign and zoning ordinance. But if you have a big graphic, say flowers, don't know how to deal with it.

We had been working with the city. At first we wrote what they asked us to write, an overlay district ordinance (an overlay district is used to create alternative land development requirements within a specific area of the community that requires specific measures) because one didn't exist that would work for them. Someone in my office researched this and wrote an overlay district and then the city decided that maybe we didn't need it. Maybe we need a mandated plan, they said. Well that wasn't exactly right either. Now we are back to the overlay district. We haven't been in front of planning commission yet. We have been trying for nine months. All that is left is to allow graphic art and some of the branding that wouldn't fit the normal sign ordinance. You are not advertising a cup of coffee. You are advertising the corridor and your business. We are trying to get more flexibility, trying to make it possible for a business owner not to go through the public hearing process.

Question: Not since Armory Square thanks to George and Bob's vision and being made a national historic district, has something like this occurred. This is next big thing, the Connective Corridor, has chancellor's vision to kick it off. Is there something replicable from the experience, in a more sustained community development model? What lessons do we take away regarding replicability of the process?

We learned what trees not to plant, those notification signs with 44 separate bolts. I wish I'd kept a blog.

The only way you get significant funds is through the Federal Highway Transportation Fund. If it is not a highway project but an urban project, there are roadblocks. There are three things really missing. The rules and regulation are all geared toward cars. So you go through the traffic studies, and the time-consuming life of

those studies, that is written into NYS dept. of transportation manual for locally administered federal highway projects. They are not going to stamp your drawings until you have gone through all of the processes. So even for the urban programs, you are dealing with a process designed for automobile highway projects. That is the biggest thing looking forward that needs to be addressed.

With everything designed for automobile highway projects, how do you get dispensations, how do you get some brainpower on these problems? I still don't hear people addressing this.

It has to go back to the state administration. The local DOT good, but they have to follow these steps. I lacked lot of finesse in doing this because I was in state of shock that this process was what it was.

Because we haven't had a lot of urban redevelopment projects done here, we have difficulty find firms that have the expertise (to negotiate the process of urban projects.) Locally we don't have that expertise.

Positive side: We have people like Paul Mercurio, who did his masters thesis on West Street, now he is in a position to influence implementation. We went to DOT with new plan for West Street, to create bike lanes, cross walk at Otisco (we want to get more pedestrian activity there) and we were told NO. He helped to influence change in thinking to get some of the work approved.

Commentary:

U.S. Transportation Secretary LaHood had said 30 percent of funds have to go towards livability, but Congress is fighting the transportation budget.

Also New York State passed the Smart Growth (not the Complete Streets,) maybe that's a question for Paul. Has it had any effect, to have passed Smart Growth?

Clarification : You talked about local expertise. You meant since we haven't had these types of projects before, people don't know how to pull the right strings? Since we haven't had these types of projects, local firms don't have expertise.

When dollars come into the community, as much as possible, you want to create local jobs. There was a local firm that was the prime, and we got some subs from other areas in design expertise that some people felt was not available locally.

If you talk to OLIN they don't have NYSDOT audits approved (They are Philadelphia based.) Urban upstate cities (Buffalo, Rochester, Albany) all have the same problem implementing the projects. A good example: when we got down to doing final design and bid documents for this summer, we had two projects: University Ave, with funding out of SU's state funds, and East Genesee Street, \$2 million funded out of federal funds. I wanted to get something going so we put state funds into University even though that wasn't my original intention. The team of engineers said we've got to break that into two projects (two seasons), too much work to get done in one construction season. That is the fear that comes from not doing this kind of work locally. There are so many details and regulations associated with getting this done, they are afraid to make misstep.

What about going to a firm outside the area, might they not open up an office here?

It's always a mix. (inside area and outside area.) There is not a lot of urban redevelopment process locally.

If all these cities have same issue, there should be person at state level to shepherd them through the process.

How about getting funding from DOT as opposed to other agencies? Is there money available from US Green Building Council?

They don't have any money; they will do some design standards but it's a process, not a project to do those kinds of things. There really aren't dollars to do those kinds of things.

I'm not using federal money on University Avenue but I have almost as much regulation as on East Genesee.

For the overlay district, there wasn't a mechanism in place. What other public policy issues could be addressed?

It would have helped if there was a team of people in the city engineer's office that were problem solvers.

The Urban Video Project is a great example of that. We wanted to do something to activate Public Space downtown. Well the Public Art commission was telling us they didn't like what we were showing on there.

If it is not public art, there is not a rule, no rule for an urban video. Showing a bb game, e.g., isn't public art.

What about other cities? What have you looked at?

Cleveland has the necklace project; I like what Chicago does with just about everything. We are very interested in Montreal, and how they have created a bike culture in place that is colder and hillier than Syracuse.

One of the things we are looking at in study subcommittee is Montreal's snow removal. Has street or sidewalk snow removal come up in the Near West Side?

What hangs over it all is maintenance. There is this huge fear about maintenance. We have a city that doesn't have any money. We don't have many private sector groups planting flowers in Syracuse. We don't have a good track record taking care of our public spaces and it comes up constantly.

We did three things to get past it. We put a half a million dollars into state grants that we said to be given to the city but only for capital funds. If we are going to put in any particular item/feature we are going to buy enough that they can keep in storage and replace them when need them. The funds can be used for equipment, say a sidewalk plough. This action helped some but not enough

So we hired former head of NYC Parks and we asked him to analyze the entire route and estimate the level of maintenance that would be required based on these plans. Now there is a committee formed and we will say to the city, "Here is what the report said was required, for optimum maintenance, how much can you do with what you have?" Then he will tell us what he can't do and then, as a team, the County, the University, the Business Improvement Districts, will in a very practical way, look at what's left and say, "For the first year how are we going to get this done?" Each group will participate, offer support, and hopefully after the first year, there will be a good understanding of what we don't have and there will be more permanent solution.

How will Public Art be done in the corridor? Who is going to be the final decision maker when it comes to Public Art that the University wants to put up in the Connective Corridor?

We have a community working team. Bob Doucette was, I think the chairman of it, on how Public Art would be done in the corridor. They made some recommendations for a team of people to send out an RFP and get responses and make decisions on that. We've just been too busy to get it done.

We need to look at a lot of creative ways of doing Public Art.

ArtPrize, Grand Rapids: They have a week where they invited artist from all over the country to come, and different business owners put up the public spaces and said, "I'm offering this and this," and then artists from all over came in and did art installations. And that just filled that city with art.

Commentary by Bob Doucette as to why the Public Art Commission recommended a different process: I think that one of the points of the committee arrived at was that we need to have quality Public Art. It wasn't sufficient to have something that is called Public Art, that wasn't good. There are judgments to be made about art, (I'm not the one to make them), but our point is that Syracuse is sometimes a city that is willing to accept something that is not the best; that is second-rate. We saw that as a problem. That we could have all kinds of public art, stick it all over the place, was not something we were in favor of.

So we will probably come back to what the committee originally wanted. We will probably send out RFPs. That will govern the Corridor.

When you talk about activating Public Spaces, we need to talk about one of the problems that we have. Especially compared with big cities like Montreal or Chicago, we don't have enough people living downtown.

Clinton Square is probably the most active space downtown, especially in the winter, because it was activated with an ice rink. How do you activate an area if people aren't there?

I think people will come down if give them something interesting to do and something to look at. An example: the St. Patrick's Day parade was starting to wane in terms of numbers of people attending. We did a little research and found out people from the suburbs didn't want to come because they thought they would not be able to find a parking spot. We decided to try an experiment. Let's advertise in the Eastern suburbs Scotsman and offer free rides on the Connective Corridor Bus to anyone who parks at Manley. We had about 4000 people do it. And we had about \$300 to spend on ads in total.

I think that if we are deliberate about it, I think that if we think things through, if we put interesting things along the route, and if good shops and businesses start up along the route because they are happy with the public infrastructure, I think people will use it.

Commentary by Bob Doucette: The key is real economic activity. That's why Armory Square sustained itself. It was not just because George Curry did a great job designing the streetscape, but it is because restaurants and stores and businesses opened up there, which created a sustainable reason to be there and to use that space. That is the lesson. Without that kind of sustained economic activity, the spaces will not be maintained or used and we will get the kind of look that Salina Street has right now. It's abandoned. It has been abandoned.

Our real hope to create economic activity along this route is the market of the university. People want to capture that market of those students and their parents. Right now, they (parents) are going back and forth to Carrier Circle during a visit. But businesses are interested in those dollars. So if we do the streetscape and we

recruit those kinds of businesses, and the students use it, I think we will have sustainability. But Bob is right about the need for commercial activity.

Should we do a public session on Public Art? Or Activation of Public Spaces?

If you create the most beautiful Public Space, will that in and of itself create activity?

How about paying attention to places where there is already activity? The Bus Station: They intend to close the bus station at night. Here we have natural place where people already come and there is nothing there for them to do. They are going to move it now, but there is still going to be nothing for them to do. I ride the bus every day. I think if there was a larger public space nearby to use, people might stop and eat their lunch and then get on the bus.

If you have a meeting on Activating Public Spaces, you could spend a large part of the meeting just identifying those Public Spaces. You have to structure the meeting. Would you go into the meeting saying these are the public spaces we want to talk about?

Bob: Part of the idea presented today is to create activity with in these spaces, like having singers and dancers and that will draw people down. That's the idea presented today of activating the space. What is the value of that long term? So you have a piece of performance art downtown? What have we gained by doing that? You've brought people together, yes, but is there a real long-term gain?

What I think is critical is that we have economic activity, that people are making a living. That's what creates the activities. I had asked early on in discussion with the people from the Connective Corridor, "Can't we use some of that money if someone wants to open a store?" I'd rather have line of active shops than a beautiful street. Would I also like to have beautiful streets, yes? Armory Square would not have any inherent value to community, without the shops. Salina Street proved it is not the chicken and the egg. It looks worse than before.

Next week's meeting: Taking Care of Gateways, March 1, 3:30 -5:00, 307 UC.