

## **OCL Community Image Steering Committee meeting Feb. 8, 2011**

**Attending:** Kate Auwaerter, Chris Capella-Peters, Gene Cilento, George Curry, Bob Doucette, Therese Driscoll, Katie Hayduke, Joe Hucko, Ben Lockwood, Tony Malavenda, Melissa Maskulka, Sarah McIlvain, Maude Morse, Don McLaughlin, Greg Munno, Donna Rohde, Sheena Solomon, Merike Treier, Rachel Pollack, Sandra Barrett

**Agenda:** Discussion of Scheduled Sessions; Review of Revised Mission Statement; Presentation by Kate Auwaerter; Subcommittee reports. The OCL Community Image Study Committee Meetings and Public Study Session updated draft schedule was presented; additional sessions to be scheduled.

**Assignment:** For next week's image exercise, read Kevin Lynch excerpt (distributed by email.)

### **Chris Capella-Peters described the process for the upcoming February 15 exercise:**

Kevin Lynch, the urban designer and planner developed-process: We break into small groups and use maps and magic markers to define "image." George Curry will go over Lynch's method. The excerpt from Lynch's book would be useful to read beforehand. If you have never done anything like this it will be very informative.

Chris will then make a composite map, (i.e. if each group identifies a particular place as a gateway, she'll transfer that to the composite.) It might create a better sense, in terms of image, of where we agree and also where we don't, giving us additional talking points. The composite will be presented at the Committee meeting on Feb. 22.

Is it worth doing a similar exercise as part of public session? Advisory committee of Hawley Green project used this activity. It might be best to do it by invitation. If 100 people showed up, it might be unwieldy. Ford Foundation materials might be useful.

**Review of revised mission statement:** Altered slightly from previous mission statements. We removed "community pride" from study language. We should use the "blue paper," as our guide during meetings.

Comments: From a landscape architecture ad in Planning Magazine (Boston issue), George Curry drew a tag line that describes what we are trying to say: "Great Public Spaces Require Great Public Vision."

We have unnecessary competition between towns and villages, for instance for a box store or for (public?) art: How do we get cooperation between towns and villages?

### **Public Policy Subcommittee Report:**

Group met real estate broker Kerry Mannion, Dewitt Town Planning Board member, and attorney Tim Frateschi, the chairman of the Salina Town Planning Board, who also works with other town boards (Geddes codes officer did not attend) to better understand their site review guidelines as they relate to community image, and how they work. What changes do planning boards need to make their jobs easier or get the community vision across?

They told us everything they need is already there. What we heard is that it depended on who was on the planning boards. The composition of the boards affects what happens in those towns.

Dewitt a bit more advanced in attention to aesthetics, currently working on tree ordinance. Dewitt was focused on getting additional trees put in around the Best Buy. Dewitt was concerned with how business interacts with the street front, not just the trees. Dewitt has a professional planner on staff, most other towns don't.

What occurs depends on makeup of planning board. But the planning board representatives didn't have a solution to that or want to change the appointment process. This is what led to discussions about an area-wide strategy and SOCPA.

SOCPA is supposed to be looking at overall; but most towns seem to view SOCPA as a hindrance. What role should SOCPA play? Should it be viewed as a resource? What needs to happen at SOCPA to make it more useful to the process?

The lack of common standards can be frustrating. Say Best Buy wants to go in Dewitt and Cicero, they must go to two different places with two different sets of rules. Required to have more trees in Dewitt than in Cicero, and it takes more time and energy to go through the process. Many people say it is hard to do business in this area.

What we learned: SOCPA only gets involved in projects within 500 feet of border of town or state or county highway. Also, SOCPA not sufficiently staffed. And, it is easy to override the recommendations of SOCPA. Supermajority of one by the planning board allows an override of SOCPA. SOCPA has no teeth. In NYS every county has to have their equivalent SOCPA.

We did ask about public spaces. They said that was more of NYSDOT territory: roadways and gateways. Manlius has no parks. We did ask what effect this study had on affecting their community image. They suggested referring specific sites for critique. The public space in suburbs is solely the streets. Dewitt has Erie Blvd.

Political awareness is important regarding appointments to planning boards. Citizens may not realize what power actually entrusted in planning boards. More planning boards are involved in getting professionals active on planning boards. Should SOCPA have more authority over process? In that case need more staff and funding.

DeWitt McDonalds "PlayPlace" font is different from standard font because head of planning board didn't like the font. There tends to be a focus on a particular eyesore that an official believes needs to be changed. There is a sense that there is no overarching strategy. Guidelines exist but they are around the fringes.

Perception that Town of Manlius "does not need" public spaces because "we insist that developers zone a certain percentage of space for each development to use as public space." If homeowners have their own private "public space" and they have a state park, the point of view is that there is no need for public space. It is called cluster development, (small green space.) Builders build what they know will sell.

Do towns have recent comprehensive plans upon which they base their decisions? County planning did put together some plans for Rt. 31 in Clay; also Rt. 57 had a recent plan by county with cooperation of state. There are plans but many are dated and "What does it take to get resources together to develop plan?" Or there can be that attitude, "If it's my town, we'll do it my way." Planning takes the form more of persuasion; developers persuade the Supervisor and board that this is the way. In terms of planning, towns feel as if they have tools in place, but do they really have them if there isn't a good guiding vision?

They had choice to embrace a vision. There was a county plan done, for every single town, with assistance of one of premier planners in the country, and they wouldn't vote it in. Same problem as consolidation. County government has very little control of land use. The control lies with the towns. Villages are getting short shrift.

It is impossible for SOCPA to be effective when there is no agreed upon vision about what drives prosperity, about what our community looks like, about what our community is. That comes back to the initial element of

the mission statement which is that we don't define community. Identity as related to city, county (being part of Onondaga County as an identity has very little meaning). Much of our conversation goes back to Syracuse, back to city (community) center.

### **Presentation by Kate Auwaerter, Preservation Planner, City of Syracuse**

Kate is housed with the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability which is a new bureau with the new administration. The idea is to create overarching coordination over many different departments. We are trying to bring in DPW, parks, code enforcement, for the purpose of communication.

In speaking to every department, we are trying to use our planning and the vision we are coming up with to direct spending, to shape budget priorities. To use a plan and vision to direct budgeting seems to naturally be the way it should have gone, always, but this was not the case.

In the new administration, we do have people with title of planner that are actually skilled in those areas. Kate works with Katelyn Wright on preservation-related issues, which should not be in its own box. We are talking about community character, not just talking about brightest and best examples or architecture and sites, but also looking at neighborhoods as unique and special places, and what the forms and characteristics of those neighborhoods are that make them special.

We also have transportation planner, land use planner, and we are working toward tackling these issues.

### **Project Site Review Process**

We need to be able to provide developers and others with some guidance. Project Site Review was created about 10 years ago, came about in response to the Family Dollar that came in on Salina Street. It created uproar in the community because there was a building basically presenting its side/backside to neighborhood. The mayor got a group together to talk about what options there were available to prevent future incidences.

Best Case Scenario: you have a design review that is part of your zoning ordinance.

What we have is better than nothing, but it is certainly can do with some improvement. Project site review only looks at commercial properties and residential development of 4 units and above. It only looks at envelope/exterior of property.

The way the process works is that the applicant takes photos of surrounding blocks/area. It is operated out of zoning administration, will look at architecture plans and say, "is this in the character of neighborhood?" They'll look at parking (?), heights, set backs, materials, fenestration patterns. Most of it can be done in-house, administrative review, sometimes goes to planning commission, not a robust design review. Design review would require a lot more changes.

Through the Landmark Preservation Board the real design review occurs in the city. It is a board of 9 people, a number of architects and designers, landscape architect, real estate agent. The landmark preservation board was created as part of preservation ordinance that was created back in the 1970s to review material changes to those properties that are local protected sites or within preservation districts. The board uses the standards, the Secretary of Interior standards, for reviewing all of the projects coming through, fairly narrow area of city, 500 buildings in two areas of city about 58 protected sites, but if you are proposing a material change to the

property and it includes the site (can include taking down trees), all of those need to come before the Landmark Preservation Board. Applicants must fill out a standard certificate of appropriateness. It's a fine-grained look and review within those districts at those specific properties.

There are referrals by Zoning that does include national register-listed and eligible properties. City's public spaces: If they have been locally identified within city, and if it is a city park, courtesy call to Landmark Preservation. A number of these things could be strengthened in terms of how we are dealing with our public spaces. The planning that is going on right now, we are looking at our whole land use plan: Open space planning, parks planning, and transportation. Also talking about gateways. It is a good time to be looking at improvement.

**Further Information on preservation and commentary:**

When was Landmark Preservation Board formed? Preservation ordinance in 1978 because of demolition of most of the mansions on James Street, threat to Landmark Theater. Mayoral appointees to LPB.

There have been a number of surveys that have taken place through the years. The last larger scale survey done in the 1990s. We are now trying to become more proactive. Early nominations may have come through 1980s, largest portion of local protected sites then.

Berkeley Park was created three or so years ago; no systematic way that this has been done in neighborhoods. It is one of the things that we would like to change.

In general across state, local preservation allows for identifying places that the community collectively believes are important. Most of those local laws establish the board or commission. They have (almost always) the authority to initiate designations; they almost never do. The idea is that government is not going to come in and impose this official designation on you. We will tell you are eligible and we want you to be informed and bring us the designation application. That is what happened in Syracuse. Landmark worked with the homeowners in Sedgwick and came up with the first preservation district. That has pretty much been the method since. There is a local not-for-profit group, like a housing association working in conjunction with homeowners, and they come forward and say "we would like to be called a historic district." That would be reviewed and approved.

There are national studies that show that in communities of comparable character, if one is locally designated and the other isn't, over time the designated one shows a greater increase in real property value, essentially because you are sending a signal to the community that the status quo will be maintained here. You know what you are investing in.

Anyone can nominate a property to be locally designated and property owner does not have to approve it, but it does have to be vetted. Landmark Preservation board has to recommend it for designation to the Planning Commission, then it goes on to Common Council. Without owner support it would typically die.

Atypically, Holy Trinity Church parishioners, against wishes of diocese/property owner, moved through process.

National Register designation provides access to tax credits, but doesn't provide any protection.

Greatest amount of protection towards community/neighborhood character is a local ordinance. State review only kicks in with federal or state funding.

Locally protected historic district is different, interested in image or character, then local protection is a really good way to advocate.

Demolition by neglect (deferred maintenance) is an offense that can be fined for, so that an owner can't abandon a property and then five years later come in and say it has to be demolished. Our suggestion is that people build that in.

In claiming demolition, we ask is that people include an economic hardship rule, so if someone comes in and says "I can't possibly use my building I need to demolish it," the ordinance now includes justification for it.

City doesn't have this law.

Comment: You spoke of the design review/project site review. You have people taking pictures of bad design around their building site and you are allowing them to put in something equally bad. You should say, "You have to comply with current zoning process." Poor argument: If it is bad to begin with I can put in something equally as bad. In Rochester, "This is what you have to do even if neighbors were able to do something else."

We are gearing up toward complete overhaul of zoning ordinance.

Bringing us back to public spaces, does the city have catalog of all public spaces, and beyond that, list of all park land?

There is not. Triangles/circles such as Grant Blvd at James Street, those are public spaces not cataloged. It would be a good thing to do.

For instance, we are calling it the Beech Street knoll, at Westcott and Beech, the neighborhood folks want improvements on knoll, artistic and compatible with neighborhood. There isn't any type of catalog or look at how we are maintaining those spaces. There is a value in having that piece of information.

The parks department is responsible for all these public spaces. There is not one designer in the department, all we have are people responsible for programming, scheduling, and a Parks Commissioner who knows little about parks. Because there is a vacuum there, people can propose things that run counter to good image.

Meadowbrook: Every year someone plants flowers. That idea didn't come from city parks. That isn't someone who said this is a really important street on the east side of the city, it gets a ton of traffic, wouldn't it be nice if... It is a bunch of neighbors, who said let's plant some flowers, do you think the city will bring in some mulch? Generally we are fortunate that in the city neighborhoods the solutions have been okay. But what happens in the vacuum? Thinking professionally, you can see ways Meadowbrook project could be improved, but it is ok. But someone could propose a bad idea in green spaces and do lasting damage.

Point has to do with what was mentioned earlier: someone made decision to put in galvanized infrastructure, and there was no designer on board. NYS Preservation got called when almost all of WPA project got ripped out (the 1930s limestone channel on Meadowbrook). Had we been called before most of it was ripped out, we would have had input.

We need an input mechanism as part of the process.