

OCL Community Image Steering Committee meeting March 1, 2011

Attending: Chris Capella-Peters, Gene Cilento, George Curry, Therese Driscoll, Joe Hucko, Tony Malavenda (co-chair), Maude Morse, Donna Rohde, Rachel Pollack, Sandra Barrett,

Agenda

TAKING CARE OF GATEWAYS

David Smith, PE, Operations & Maintenance Engineer, NYSDOT
Carol Eaton, SCVB
Barb Humphrey, University Neighborhood Partnership
Gene Cilento, NYSDOT

Understanding Gateways: In terms of Lynch's method, gateway may not be a point but rather a linear experience. One may experience gateway over a few blocks as one is traveling. Gateway may happen over time.

Announcement (by Gene Cilento)

The first I-81 Public Forum Meetings will be held in first week of May; May 3, May 4th and May 7th.

What will be presented: Traffic and Technical information that have been gathered to date; history of Project to date; Case Studies from other elevated highways, in some cases removed and in some cases modified. SMTC will have blast to the media going out within week or so for information in advance of public meetings.

Presentation: David Smith, PE, Regional Director of Operations, NYS DOT in charge of mowing, snow and ice removal, plowing, maintenance of equipment, maintenance of signs.

What I do, is everything maintenance. When I think of economic development and gateways to Syracuse, certainly I think of interstate highways.

For example, quarter finals of the NCAA tournament last spring, we were coming off from snow and ice, seeing all debris and litter along highway. That is in my ball park to address.

Several years ago region started a contract for litter pickup, sweeping and mowing. With the budget situation we haven't been able to have that contract. We have process, Attachment A and Attachment B. Attachment A encompasses all projects but those which are federally funded or safety related.

The Highway Cleanup Project did not fall under either Attachment. It was completely state funded. We have not been able to move forward on that for three years. Direct impetus was the need to clean up, but don't have resources to do that work. Over course of summer, they would pickup litter twice, sweep twice, complete four cycles of mowing. Absent that contract our goal internally is to do half that. Early retirement incentive staff decrease makes that even harder. We haven't had Cleanup contract for the last three years.

State DOT gives the region a budget and decisions made locally? - Yes

We are trying to do half of what done under the contract, but how do you decide what to do? (Maintaining in-house) For the most part our goal to get everywhere mowed, try to pick up litter everywhere, but instead of four times a year, twice a year.

My impact on gateways, that I can make through state forces, is decreased. We incorporate that work with our summer work, pavement repairs, culverts, drainage, everything else that goes on.

Also Adopt a Highway Program: That is an excellent way to tap into resources outside the dept. to aid in litter clean up. We have some limitations, safety concerns in downtown area. Heavy volumes of traffic, closely spaced, limited entry, hard to bring private citizen for cleanup because it is dangerous. But for areas outside immediate city area, Adopt a Highway is another great avenue to effect cleanup.

We do have a permitting process for signs, plantings, with maintenance guidelines.

Does bridge maintenance fall to you? Yes. Just on Interstate, most of it. At grade/street level we have an arterial maintenance contract with the city.

What falls to you? Rt. 11; Rt. 173; Rt. 92, but not in the city, West street is ours, (still have jurisdiction over but city has contract to do the maintenance) City is paid based on square yard for maintenance, *85 cents a square yard for 6 months, going back to legislation in the 1970s*. In cost, that probably doesn't even cover snow and ice control. That amount must cover mowing. Includes some state highways up to the city limits.

But you still have jurisdiction over what gets done, yes? You just hire out to the city? Yes.

This agreement does not include anything on Interstates; includes whole right of way.

Erie Blvd. in the agreement but only within the city limits.

Similarly, in NYC, city arterial maintenance agreement; 495 just portion within city that is maintained by city. Once it hits Nassau County it is maintained by NYSDOT.

Comments:

There appears to be a fundamental injustice to city tax payers. The maintenance costs more than is being reimbursed. But in the town of Dewitt, the state picks up cost.

The Government Accountability Office came out with 34 ways to save billions of government dollars. One of 34 ways was DOT-related. Related to the interface between federal and state DOTs; the fragmentation costs billions.

You mentioned Adopt a Highway not on viaducts, but where? That program in suburbs, not in city. For the city, on the street level, I don't know.

What if someone wanted to adopt Genesee Street?

People talk about image associated with area adjacent to and under the highway. In terms of plants, paint etc. From a maintenance perspective, what can be done? What if, to improve community image, the community wants to paint it? Is that something you encourage or discourage, if part of image building for community?

Answer: I was recently at a meeting re the Connective Corridor: We met and talked about putting up banners under the highway, but at the end of the day, we have to talk to FHWA (federal highway administration) and they traditionally take hard line against that. If driver is looking at painting and gets in accident, it is problematic. If we are not following FHWA rules they don't fund things.

Gene has been approached by a lawyer in city looking at a single event community trash pickup around Earth Day. Typically groups sign up for four times during warm weather times. This person wanted a one-day event. Unfortunately, the volunteer is pinpointing the areas (within city) that are difficult because of safety issues. If he was willing to go with different area, we might be able to get day use permit. Or the group might choose to fund a cleanup rather than do it themselves.

What about putting in bike lanes on streets? Has that ever been proposed?

FHWA would listen, that has a lot of momentum now.

The last couple of years, East Genesee went to two bike lanes, and two car lanes in several areas.

If you could identify a couple of things that really should be changed? What do you view as the biggest obstacles?

With money and resources, I would find out what collectively is the best for the community, best from an engineering standpoint, the possibilities could be great.

You feel it is a function of money? Yes. We are entering a perfect storm because of funding situation and condition of State Transportation System. Have to make decisions from limited funds standpoint.

One of things Governor Patterson did was sign Smart Growth Act, centered on curbing suburban sprawl, whole list of criteria, every project will have to meet those criteria or justify why not meeting criteria.

Do people at NYSDOT have to go through some kind of training regarding Smart Growth? How is that being implemented?

There are processes that are being developed right now.

Presentation on Signage: Carol Eaton, Syracuse Convention and Visitors Bureau

Signage is very much about how you are greeted on arrival, and addressed at departure. How are we doing? We could use some help. Our signs seem to say different things, Emerald City, etc., consistency would help brand the community.

Syracuse Convention and Visitors Bureau : Our job 100 percent to attract visitors from out of town, funded by room occupancy tax. *Display:* Photos of signage from other communities

We have spent time researching signage. Some are communities have unlimited budget, for instance Huntington Beach, California was able to place a sign at each gateway, commissioned with artist (beautiful signage.)

Some communities find that they focus on the one thing that makes them famous,: "Pellston, ice box of the nation." Our snow clearly is one of our celebrities. Spotsylvania: "Cross roads of the Civil War"

Communities with a limited budget: Sacramento, they paint it every place they can, even on the water towers.

It is also important to thank people for coming. In the town of Franklin, “Thank you for visiting,” at points of exits.

We are struggling with consistency of the brand. We have colorful logo at the CVB. It is on everything we do. I mentioned that the bowlers were coming. Last year, they were in El Paso, Texas. The big signage there is pole banners, everywhere. They have pole banner brackets all over. Where the pole banner bracket is empty, they are fined by the city. The city has embraced consistent signage.

We have designed pole banners and in about two weeks you will see these popping up all over town, near the OnCenter, Armory Square, Crouse-Marshall area, East Genesee. We put a plea out to towns and villages and the city. We asked if we get you banners will you hang them? It was easier said than done. Many communities said yes but there are different sizes/types of brackets. Ultimately it is going to happen.

The bowlers: 43 thousand women and their friends and family for 100 days of bowling, generating about 45 million dollars. While this is one particular group, the good news is that during this process, we put the brackets and banner process in place. Ideally this will spread.

One of my favorite CVBs is Philadelphia. They realized the importance of brand, with “XOXO Philadelphia,” which they put around Philadelphia. Philadelphians have embraced it, put it in Penn Station in NYC (target market). If we could take our message and put in our target communities, but if we take it to our destination markets, we would take to Albany, Ottawa, etc.

Importance of image that you give to community inside community just as important as image you give outside the community.

A few years ago, there was an **adopt-an-interchange** program. We did get some companies to come up with some money to adopt certain exits. Everything talked about earlier is what helped it to fail. They thought that for price that they paid they would have flowers, have landscaping. The businesses talked to landscaping company and the company told them we need permission to do that.

We have research around that, and about how cities comparable to ours were able to overcome that. We are recognizing that this is not just a local promotional activity.

For our current logo, we used the bright colors on purpose. We continue to look for corporate sponsors/private partners. Clearly private partners will make this successful if we can show this to be an opportunity for them. But this brings us back to what might distract drivers, etc. Clearly we don't want a company's logo all over something.

Question: We've talked about gateways, in terms of roads, but what about other gateways--regional transportation center and airport?

We learned things in terms of the airport while getting ready for the event. There will be welcome banners along entrance to the Blvd. Surprisingly, the airport brackets are owned by Turning Stone. They were very willing to let us use their brackets.

Within the airport there is a company handling this, the rates are a bit pricey. As for regional transportation center, we called and they said go ahead but someone is going to steal it. We need to know that those we approach take it seriously. For somewhere like that we have ordered sidewalk decals, not as visible.

We often hear that our airport is not welcoming. In our travels you can tell the difference when you feel the communities presence there. During the renovation process, we have been involved in their discussions.

What will be drawn from community to represent it in the airport renovation?

We have talked to the Onondaga Historical Association, our history kind of an underappreciated notion. Also want to include businesses that are growing here. People might not realize that they are growing here-- radar, sonar research, helps us position ourselves where we are leading in the business world.

For airport, are you working with the University, with arts and culture organizations? Yes. the Arts and Culture Leadership Alliance.

We have planned a fixed kiosk at airport with a mobile version of our website listing things to do in the area. "If you have three days, this is what you should do; a week, this is what you should do."

Shouldn't there be a radar convention? Yes. That is part of what we have been doing lately. We call it "Meet Syracuse." We realize that most of the conventions that have come here have a local contact. We recently booked a convention through Sensis. That was one guy who called us up and said, I go to this conference every year and I want to bring it to town. We keep asking people to tell us about conferences we might pursue. Our affiliation as part of CenterState CEO is a big help.

Comment: The kinds of things you are doing with banners, puts color in our environment, interest in our environment. Sometimes we don't understand that. You may do it for the visitors, but it wakes up people.

CVB is nothing without everyone in town embracing what we do.

With standardization of brackets, it would be possible for someone to buy banners advertising Jazz Fest and hang them. Minimal cost for installation, Groups that will help: Downtown Committee in downtown area, Crouse Marshall business district....

Pilot Snow Removal Program presentation by Barb Humphrey, University Neighborhood Partnership, Chairperson of Westcott Street Cultural Fair.

The snow shoveling (pilot snow removal program) had nothing to do with image and everything to do with safety. We are part of University Neighborhood Partnership, which includes the four major educational institutions, residents, investors, owners and the city.

We are grappling with various issues, a lot of them based on the impact of the student population. We keep hearing that students never shovel their sidewalks. We walk a lot. (Children going to public schools, students going to SU and employees.)

2009: we decided to look at snow shoveling, and we looked at different models. We thought of trying to get grant to do it; a private pay program; municipal program. We got done studying it in May and thought it would sit on shelf, and then a neighbor came over in July and said we need to do something this winter.

So 2009-2010, we got large landlords to come together to commit to being part of this. We sent letters out. We picked a major pedestrian route, (called it "safe routes to schools" seeing that as a real selling point) We hoped to get 50 to 60 percent of properties on route selected to participate. We barely got between 20 and 30 percent. People said they didn't hear about it. We hired a contractor to clear the sidewalks. The landlords tried to make the

contract a bit more lucrative by giving him some driveways. As a pedestrian, it was great. It facilitated walking. It was a problem that we had only 20 to 30 percent participation rate. We hoped the city would realize the importance and pick it up. Over the last 7 or 8 years, I've been in touch with Rochester. It is easy to call there and find the person who knows about the program. They take pride in their snow removal program. Their attitude is "This is for all of us." Rochester goes to middle of street to your property line, it includes road repair, sidewalk repair and snow removal. It was about \$140 for a forty foot frontage for a whole year. It was a user fee, not a tax. And that is important because everyone pays whether tax exempt or not. That way it is spread over whole tax base. Politically we couldn't get it to go. I was in contact with people from the Valley, from Tapp Hill, from Eastwood. There wasn't enough of a way to get it to take off.

This year we are trying to do something with grant money, but we were cautioned about using grant money, told "once someone gets something for free, they don't want to pay for it." I do think that if Rochester can figure a way to do it, we can.

A lot of our neighborhood is a destination. People are going to come regardless of what we look like. But it would be nice if we looked better, with well-maintained sidewalks, sidewalk level lighting, (city insists they have to light the street but if you have ever tried to walk on city streets at night when there are branches and trees, you know it is kind of treacherous and don't feel very safe.)

Issues: Our trash situation, vacancy rates, street signs.

In Florida, street signs hang in middle of road and light up, so at night you can see.

We do have some programs that are being replicated in other neighborhoods in the city. We have a bulb project. We want to have daffodil days, for a week when daffodils are in full bloom, we do some special thing. Always a great deal of difficulty with banners, so I'm glad to hear that you are getting banners out.

Other thing I was thinking about was what a city should look like and what a city should be. Cities should look, sound, and smell like cities. There should be people and there should be noise and there should be action, vibrancy and diversity and fun. Not pristine, suburban kind of look to it. As much as we like to look prettier, I think what we really need to make our city a city.

Going back to Rochester and the snow, what parts of the city have the program?

It is pretty much the whole city, only University of Rochester has exclusion. My understanding is that they contract it out in five mile segments, so it is also an employment boost, giving contracting work that might not otherwise be done.

\$140 a property, midline of street to property line includes sidewalk repair (in Syracuse it is responsibility of property owner, even though city owns the sidewalk). The reason that's included, as we discovered with our snow shoveling program, is because a broken up sidewalk doesn't allow for proper snow removal. (Broken sidewalk, couldn't put blade on sidewalk.)

There are special lighting districts; there are precedents for user fees. You can structure user fees so that it is just the planting strip and the sidewalk. George was on one of those routes last year; paid \$70 and it was wonderful.

This winter children not walking, just amazing that no one has been hit by a car walking in the street. Also, walking contributes to healthy activity for children in a nation obsessed with childhood obesity rate.

Difference between a tax and a user fee: User fee is mandatory, if you are a church you still pay,

Why wouldn't everyone make everything user fees? Some places have trash as user fees.

What about places where there are no sidewalks? Would they have to pay?

NO. Your tax bill number says a lot about your property, says if you have a sidewalk.

Recent interview with mayor: 'Don't have money to enforce the rules for sidewalk clearance.' That's why this program makes so much more sense. How are you going to enforce sidewalk clearance anyway?

Think about as code enforcement. If you had to prioritize, officials are going to be looking at building safety issues before sidewalk issues.

Whether looking at commercial districts, even in a Special Assessment or Business Improvement District (BID), you pay a surcharge. It goes to snow.

When creating the BID you decide what it is you are going to buy. In BID most people don't want to be supplementing services they are already getting in their taxes. It is tough to come up with a list that will make everyone happy.

Highway Cleanup

Question regarding defunct Highway Cleanup project—When contracts in place, was there a noticeable difference in cleanliness?

Responses from committee members:

It is hard to say. Part of the problem is way the highways go through city, almost requires some capital improvement to improve the way it looks and then do maintenance from there. Four times a year instead of two, is not that different. If there were capital improvements made you might minimize maintenance.

Studies have shown you tend to not trash a place that looks nice.

Some region had a program that planted wildflowers in the medians outside the city. No mowing required.

Are County storm water efforts affecting what you do? Is there any infrastructure to try to avoid run-off?

What is driving our work is DEC regulations, (just got stricter) causing us to address the runoff from our system and what gets from us into the lakes and the city system.

On highway projects now, we are looking at capturing first flush of storm water and treating it before it goes into streams. Using oil grit separators, settlement basins, and passive treatment.