

## **OCL Community Image Steering Committee meeting Nov. 2, 2010**

Attending: Megan Costa, George Curry, Jim D'Agostino, Nell Donaldson, Bob Doucette, Therese Driscoll, Bart Feinberg, Katie Hayduke, David Heymann, David Holder, Joe Hucko, Jessi Lyons, Tony Malavenda (co-chair), Greg Maslak, Sarah McIlvain, Don McLaughlin, Maude Morse, Aaron McKeon, Greg Munno, Clyde Ohls, Sharon Owens, Sheena Solomon, Mary Thompson, Merike Treier (co-chair) Rachel Pollack, Sandra Barrett

### **Presentation topic: "Results of statistically valid Community Survey conducted by SMTC"**

SMTC is the agency responsible for comprehensive planning of transportation in Onondaga County and among the key factors that drive transportation decisions are development and land use planning.

This comprehensive survey by SMTC was designed to help set priorities as both the SMTC and SOCPA (Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency) look toward creating a new long range plans. The goal of the survey was to understand community values and goals as they relate to current and future settlement patterns and land use and transportation investment priorities. (from SOCPA website).

Before the process of creating a new County Plan, (a long range land-use plan designed to create sustainable development in Onondaga County,) SOCPA needed to understand the community's mindset. It had been some time since the agency had asked "What sorts of choices and investments do we/you want to make as a community?" The survey was one critical tool for querying the community.

Settlement plans we are creating in our communities are unsustainable both **environmentally** and **economically** (exurban developments extend infrastructure and spread tax dollars over large areas). The way we zone and the way we build must be examined. We need to look at current development trends and how they relate to land use patterns.

What is the process by which we get people to think about these issues?

It is similar for instance to the process of creating support for transit. We go out into the community with a lot of public information; do visualizing exercise regarding transportation, ask "How can we envision a future or confirm a future for which we are now laying the groundwork?" We talk about successes and failures. We offer suggestions at the municipal level.

An important component of the process is trying to gauge where people stand now, for instance do they know what smart growth is? Do they buy into this and other (sustainability) issues? The survey was very informative. There were lots of transportation issues as well.

SMTC Senior Transportation Planner Nell Donaldson reports survey results. The survey results have not yet been published. They are not yet on the website.

This statistically valid survey sampled 3900 randomly selected households. There were 922 respondents and 3.5 % margin of error. The survey examined differences among certain sub-groups including residents of different areas, income groups, and age. To see the actual survey questions go to <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/socpasmtcsurvey>

Among the questions the survey posed: (The first questions focused on land use.)

*What types of new development would you like to see in the county over the next 30 years?*

The most popular responses were linked with economic development: Shops and businesses, farms. There was less focus on housing development. At the bottom of the list were large stores and office buildings.

*Where should most development in Onondaga County take place?*

Respondents wanted to see future development in developed areas, within developed communities, (78 percent) and this held across all geographies.

*How should future development be arranged?*

Among respondents 77 percent said that they preferred a higher density model, with housing and buildings closely spaced.

*When should government expand infrastructure into new areas?*

There was a spectrum of responses: 54 percent said sometimes if it creates jobs and community benefits, more than 30 percent not at all, 9 percent anytime. The largest number of respondents were in the middle. Suburban, village and high income residents most likely to say anytime. Rural residents most likely to say not at all.

*Which of the following statements is closest to your opinion? A) Property owners should be able to do what they want with their land. B) New development should be reviewed so that one person does not affect the health or safety of nearby property owners. C) New development should be planned so that land development protects neighbors and promotes regional goals for orderly growth and attractive places.*

We asked this question about whether planning should be done.

53 percent felt that new development should be planned, 33 percent felt development should at least be reviewed, largest percentage in each geographic area believed that planning should happen. Older residents more likely to say planning should happen. Younger residents more likely to say property owners should be able to do what they want.

The last question on land use focused on goals, priority areas. Respondents were asked to rank how important a variety of ideas are to quality of life in Onondaga County.

Priorities included protecting air and water quality, preserving natural areas and open land, (environmental goals) and keeping the scenic beauty of Onondaga County (aesthetic goals). These were the top three. But people believed in all of the goals listed.

Next in priority were reducing our energy usage, preserving farmland (environmental goals.) At the bottom was the idea of connecting neighborhoods, encouraging mixed-use housing, but that said, these things were still seen as important.

We asked a question about opinions regarding the existing transportation system.

One of the questions asked was about what is the best long-term solution to reducing traffic congestion? People overwhelmingly said either “create communities where people don’t have to drive as much,” or “improve public transportation.” “Building new roads,” was not as popular an answer.

People think that the existing transportation system works fairly well for them. They were satisfied by the condition and availability of local trails; accessibility and traffic flow on major streets got a good rating. Lower in the ratings were public transportation, bus service, sidewalks and bicycle amenities. City respondents rated ease of getting to places lower than people in other places.

We asked a number of questions about mode share, for instance: *Do you walk or bike as means of transportation?*

27 percent said yes, overwhelmingly people in the city, and people from lower incomes.

What keeps people from walking? Distance, weather, lack of facilities.

We also asked about mode share during different types of trips. Overwhelming majority of trips made by car, solo or with children. Carpooling was fairly popular for shopping and social recreational trips, but this may not be carpooling in the traditional way we think of carpooling, for instance a group may travel in one car when they go to the movies together.

We asked for Agreement or Disagreement with statements/question related to transportation issues.

People very positive about the statements: 83 percent said they would consider carpooling to improve air quality but in response to the statement "I would continue to drive even if other forms of transportation were more accessible and convenient," only 50 percent of people disagreed. *People tend to over promote willingness to try other modes of transportation.*

#### **Key findings:**

**Strong support for smart growth concepts**

**Support for preservation and investment in existing resource**

**Support for planning for future growth**

**Strong tendency Single Occupancy Vehicle (driving alone)**

**Satisfaction with overall transportation system but disappointment with access to and availability of alternate modes of transportation, and are interested in exploring those options.**

The questionnaire is available on line, and it can be filled out. Responses have been similar to survey but the online questionnaire is not statistically valid.

People seem to react somewhat against the idea of planning but at the same time favor the concepts such as smart growth and density over sprawl. Do people misunderstand the word planning? It is equated with the idea of regulation perhaps. People think about being able to do what ever they want on "your own land." Getting people to think about that attitude within the scope of the larger public good is the challenge.

SOPCA is struggling to put all of this in a positive light, to have people see opportunity. That is a challenge.

There will be strong public outreach around projects we are doing; exposing people to what planning is, exposing people to best practices.

Looking back at the survey results: Priority areas, preserving the scenic beauty of Onondaga County high on list.

Protecting our air and water quality, 79 percent extremely important. Preserving farmland number 5 in terms of priority.

Why the online Questionnaire? Want everyone chance to participate, want people to make comments, another way to confirm results. We are using it as an outreach tool.

We will have report in December and significant public outreach over the next year.

Recap and New Discussion of themes which emerged at meeting on October 20<sup>th</sup>:

Discussion centered on two main themes of (1) *Community Ownership/Engagement*, and (2) *Community Image/Perception of Place*. A few subject areas started to emerge, including:

1. An assessment of the impact of appearance on community pride, quality of life, and economic development/tourism;
2. An exploration of what other metropolitan areas (particularly of our size and character) are doing;
3. A focus on public spaces and gateway routes;
4. An exploration of low cost, high impact beautification strategies. (response to comment if it costs a great deal, it won't happen. What is financially feasible?)

Other possible subject areas:

5. Establishing the idea of investment—what does “investment” mean? (Regard both financial investment and emotional/psychological investment);
6. An exploration of how you encourage private property owners (Buildings, houses, yards, businesses) to take ownership; creating the concept of “buy in” in the mentality of the larger community;
7. Identification of replicable “best practices,” any programs or funds available to help with these types of improvement efforts;
8. Identification of structure—going forward...steps we can put into place to lead to lasting results.

Don't want to get too deeply into negative image factor,

If you walk through downtown on a day when it is pretty and the sun is shining, it is different than how you feel on a bad weather day. Not a lot of color on buildings.

This point is related: need to focus on public spaces. We used to spend money on public spaces but now we do not include that in our budget priorities. We have to reexamine our budget priorities. That is a very significant shift, because it is saying certain people will have beautiful spaces, and others will not, they will have public spaces.

Europe with its history and historic places, has great emphasis on public spaces.

Go to Canada. They have different budget priorities and they have public spaces that are beautiful. They don't have 1000 roads crisscrossing every province.

Promoting the idea of pick up the trash yourselves, don't think you are above that.

Money was spent in Camillus to revitalize Old Erie Canal, but that investment is impacted by the presence of an unattractive NYS transportation garage nearby.

Getting ownership, having people appreciate aesthetic improvements, requires the approval of the smaller community where the improvement is occurring. We need to be more specific about, *name*, the communities we are referring to. That smaller community needs to feel they are part of it; the beautification needs to be something that is part of the identity of that neighborhood; needs to be something they can claim.

Image is something that can shift and be shaped; much of what we are talking about comes down to self image of the community. It seems that as a community we have a more negative self-image than we should have. Are there sociological studies on this?

In one study they gave people cameras and told them go out and take pictures of what you consider beautiful about our community. The result was a group of positive images. You can reverse the process by giving people cameras and saying take pictures of what you don't think is beautiful about our community. You get the two sides of what does beauty represent.

Education is necessary.

Decisions are often based on what officials themselves feel is important or economic issues, but the officials may not be aware that 62 percent of people say keeping the scenic beauty of Onondaga County is "extremely important."

Education and mindset are important. We need to educate and challenge people on these issues. Native Syracusans seemed to be the most negative about downtown; we need to encourage them to go downtown.

Differences in ideas about what is beautiful: When we go in as a foundation to the South Side, and say, "Do you want trees to beautify the neighborhood?" residents say they don't want trees, they remember the Labor Day storm when trees destroyed homes and cars. On the West Side they want trees. We can't put everyone under a broad umbrella.

OCL board would like to see actual progress; a piece of study needs to be devoted to how we identify the partners who are out there so that the study doesn't just sit on the shelf. How do we see it moving forward?

Discussion of subgroups, who do we need to target?

City and county, and local government—towns and villages—should be included.

Study has to encompass focus on community centers. There are nonurban visitors; visitors who don't even go downtown. When businesses are trying to relocate, are they looking at other locations beside the urban core, are they looking at town and villages instead of downtown? Two thirds of population is not in the city of Syracuse.

We are also looking at protecting farmland. There are pretty gateways through rural areas and if don't protect the farmland we lose those.

Recommendation: Make an invitation to towns and villages (offices), so that they get buy in to this early, if they were part of the process we may get better solutions.

In respect to town and villages, it may be a good idea to introduce some competition among the municipalities in terms of their planning. Also find active homeowners associations and include them; make them a part of best practices and case studies.

Greg Munno participated in a series of presentations in Auburn as to what is going on there. He would be willing to share with us.

We need to start with city; have to have big stakeholders here for bigger clout.

Establish a number of subcommittees, so we can have stakeholders at table.

OCL when we do a study we try to look at the other organizations in area to carry it forward. That is beyond our mission. Our mission to conduct the study and produce the report.

Suggestion: Doing a presentation to children, middle school kids, so that they begin to think about this.

What is missing from the list of identified themes? Is there anything we need to add as part of the study?

Requested that committee members reflect on presented "themes and emerging subject areas," and offer input so that suggestions can be incorporated in a timely manner.

Possible first step: Form subcommittees.

What is a likely subcommittee schedule?

Steering committee will likely hold meetings every two weeks. Subgroups will work on separate schedule, may work toward a public presentation (which would be set up in advance.) We are supposed to be a presenting a citizens' view point but we need to bring in the experts.

How can we stay in touch between meetings?

We may be able to establish on the website a place where people could post comments. Possibilities include Wiki pages. We have had a blog in the past

This is how we have been sharing information (and will continue for now): We will send emails out and members respond with information Sandra can share.

Next meeting: Nov. 16<sup>th</sup>