

OCL Community Image Steering Committee meeting Nov. 30, 2010

Attending: Kate Auwaerter, Gene Cilento, George Curry, Bob Doucette, Therese Driscoll, Bart Feinberg, Karen Hanford, Katie Hayduke, David Heymann, Joe Hucko, Jessi Lyons, Tony Malavenda (co-chair), Sarah McIlvain, Maude Morse, Aaron McKeon, Matt Potteiger, Clyde Ohl, Donna Rohde, Sheena Solomon, Merike Treier (co-chair) Rachel Pollack, Sandra Barrett

Presentation of Second Draft of Mission Statement

Mission Statement suggestions regarding language were incorporated into the second draft.

Presentation by Ben Walsh, a deputy commissioner of the Syracuse Neighborhood and Business Development Department

Walsh, formerly of the Metropolitan Development Association, discussed a project the organization had jointly sponsored with the Ford Foundation, the "Creative Communities" project.

In a previous presentation to OCL, it had been pointed out that many of the initiatives of the Creative Communities project should be city initiatives. Walsh, who is now working for the city sees the project as a building block for city initiatives.

The photo project: People were given disposable cameras and asked to use the cameras to identify things they liked or didn't like about the community. The exercise was never used to its fullest potential. It might be a useful component for this study.

Summary of Creative Communities Initiative: MDA looked for areas of partnership with Ford Foundation. The Ford Foundation was looking at Syracuse at a postindustrial city that they could use as a case study for other communities in which they were/are working.

Initial Concept for project: What was and is driving development is adaptive reuse of Syracuse's historical and industrial building stock. We felt this concept lent itself to being explored on a broader scale.

- 1) Cataloguing and Mapping exercise to Identify Where these clusters of properties were. (For purposes of future investment.)
- 2) Attempt to match that catalogue to strategic and creative thinking about how we are/were currently using these properties and how they might be used better.
- 3) An underlying theme was the need for active community participation. (For too long these types of planning exercises were happening without real community input and involvement; there was a need for an active dialogue.)

The community participation element was a key part of the process.

- 4) Tried to tie what was learned to real market analysis. What was the market potential for these properties, for these neighborhoods and how could we use that data to inform the kinds of interventions we were suggesting?

A few lessons learned based on what we did:

One of key themes that emerged was that Onondaga Creek was a key asset (booklet passed around by Walsh regarding Onondaga Creek).

We overestimated MDA and Ford Foundation ability to influence local real estate market. (Even with the second largest foundation in world on board, it is hard to make an impact in terms of catalyzing new projects.)

Differing Approaches: The MDA was very much place-based. The Ford Foundation was policy-based. By the end of process with the Ford Foundation, much of action items the Ford Foundation still involved with were policy issues, much more on the macro level. "I wish we had been able to focus on micro level." (Creating a local land bank; taking a more comprehensive and holistic approach to historic preservation; establishing more historic property districts.)

We underestimated the impact of various small-scale interventions; of local community efforts and the impact they can have on broader collective efforts. For instance, the bridges over 81, the ones that have been replaced: They have been improved in terms of lighting, design and connectivity between neighborhoods. Without feedback from meetings, particularly meetings on the North Side regarding the issue of connectivity, those types of bridges wouldn't have happened. Ultimately, came up with a much better product.

Consider Lipe Art Park on West Fayette Street; that has changed people's perspective about that part of the city in conjunction with the Near Westside Initiative and with what Rick Destito is doing with his building. (http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2010/07/owner_tries_to_bring_old_syrac.html) Consider the pocket park on the corner of Warren and Fayette. When the buildings on that site were torn down, it was lamented because of "decreased density," but the community reaction to that open space was underestimated. It was a relatively small intervention with results.

As you look at the photographs here, in terms of what people look at as assets and liabilities in the community, it is important to remember the importance of community input. That input is needed not just in informing the outcomes, but informing the process that leads to the outcomes.

Comments:

What the pictures demonstrate is that everyone knows what looks good and what doesn't look good. The issue to some large part is that we don't have a mechanism by which to make things look good.

Example: In the past, a mayoral task force was started for these purposes and nothing came of that.

The small things add up. City tree grates are not cared for. The sign ordinances are not adhered to and it is these small things that make an impression.

We need a mechanism to get these things done.

How can you engage the average person? How can we focus on low-cost solutions?

Bridge replacements: This was a big item. Bridge replacements are ongoing but unless someone is focused on the small details that go with these projects, things don't change. The bridges had to be replaced. The issue was "How were they replaced?"

Folks living in the neighborhoods, are more aware of the details than someone who is sitting in City Hall.

Discussion of the effectiveness or lack of effectiveness of hotlines.

Nothing has changed at our Gateway in many years. To a business person, it suggests the wrong mindset.

The example of the bridges over 81 provides understanding of the difficulty in making change. There were a large number of bureaucrats involved in the bridges and everyone was on a different calendar. The city couldn't extend

sidewalks because the city capital budget wasn't in line with the state's capital budget. If citizens are involved they need to know the timetables of city and state.

Shouldn't we distinguish between bureaucrats and elected officials? Isn't it up to elected officials to show leadership?

Who do you call (the city line) to get things done? Actually have called the city several times and had fairly speedy responses, to graffiti on stop signs for instance.

One of the issues: If you see a problem, how do you find out who to call, or whether to take care of it yourself? One of the issues is letting people know who is responsible.

There is a 1-800 pothole number at DOT. Most of the calls DOT gets are from officials; individuals calling complain about construction delays typically.

This may be an opportunity to be able to clarify some of these issues for residents.

Bridge improvement projects: By asking for more the community got more. How do we raise the ante? In Skaneateles, for instance, McDonalds knows it will not get away with its normal construction. How can we get it to the point where it is known that (DOT, etc.) has to start at a different level here in Syracuse?

Soul of the Community Study

Results: Physical beauty, opportunities for socializing and the openness of the community were important to city residents in cities of all sizes. This was true across age, ethnicity, levels of wealth, etc. 26 communities, including some smaller, low-density MSA's studied.

Economic Development Subcommittee report

Gene Cilento reported on subcommittee's discussion of success of other areas such as Indianapolis. Discussion of recruitment, retention, pride and "How do we make visitors into salespeople?" We got into some discussion of what makes an area attractive; parking difficulties downtown; spoke about Creek Walk. We would like to come up with a list of components of what we consider quality of life; quality of roadsides. The sessions that we are looking at are "Ownership: What can be done in a particular geographic area;" "Marketing: Use of Marketing as an image builder (and) A future vision for implementation of ideas (a simplified checklist on how to rehabilitate old buildings). For the ownership of roadsides, I would like to get someone who is not the typical DOT speaker, one of our maintenance persons for instance, who may have a slightly different take.

Is there a timetable for these sessions?

We talked about starting in January going through March. Do we feel that there is a certain sequence we should follow?

For Economic Development group, do we need to establish evidence to link economic development to attractiveness? This will be worked on through case studies.

Everyone needs to circulate the information we find regarding case studies that we think are most pertinent and have Case Study Group go through it in more detail.

The thought is that we will find a huge body of evidence that aesthetics are key to the emotional bond with the community and that the emotional bond is the economic driver--bringing people back to community after graduation, to establish businesses, etc. (Keep America Beautiful)

How much of study do we devote to proving this? Or is the study a neighborhood cookbook: How does your community hook up with Keep America Beautiful, what people are doing in their own yards, own villages?

But the establishment of the idea that community image matters could be our greatest contribution. The thrust is to have people really believe this, and thus get funds devoted to it.

Who are we proving this to, the politicians? The residents?

Both. Part of the criteria for establishing value is whether money is being allocated.

We have continually reduced our spending on public spaces in last 25 years. Using the criteria of spending, it is not established the people believe in beauty as a priority.

Can we get numbers from city, county, state on reduced spending on public spaces?

Parks and Recreation Dept. There used to be four landscape architects on staff. This is no longer the case and yet we have over 1000 acres of park. This is an example of the devaluation of aesthetics.

We talk about capital expenditures, but is there a correlation between capital expenditures in terms of sprawl (roads) and decreased spending on parks?

What are the best uses of monies to best benefit all of the citizens?

Budget related closings of state and county parks.

Idea of socialization (related to Soul of the Community study): Suburbanization takes socialization off the map.

(Ford Foundation) There was a survey of properties suitable for development. It listed all of them but didn't fill out forms for all of them, yes? We just have the addresses.

In light of income tax credits for economic development, it might be worth having economic development group look at this.

Have we decided where gateways are? I don't think study can identify this for the entire county, but we can speak to what the characteristics of a gateway are.

The study can be a guide for discovering where logical gateways are within communities.

We need to tie it to our communities, need to point to a rural gateway and inner city gateway.

Auburn has beautiful gateways.

What else might be good? We might look at a gateway on a local campus?

Congregation areas, corridors are different than gateways.

Dec. 14th, 12 – 1:30 PM room 307 University College - next committee meeting.