

## **OCL Community Image Steering Committee meeting**

**October 20 2010**

Attending: Bob Doucette, Katie Hayduke, Gene Cilento, Jessi Lyons, Yasmin Guevara, Matt Potteiger, Barbara Carranti, Jim D'Agostino, Aaron McKeon, Therese Driscoll, Clyde Ohl, Merike Treier (co-chair), David Holder, Tony Malavenda (co-chair), Greg Munno, Joe Hucko, Sharon Owens, Kate Auwaerter, Sheena Solomon, Rachel Pollack, Sandra Barrett

### **Introduction**

“The Power of Beautiful Spaces: The Economic and Social Impact of Physical Environments” proposal was the unanimous choice, from among many, of a study topic by OCL board. The proposal, now with the working title of **Community Image: Creating a Better First Impression**. The topic builds off the earlier Downtown Study and Rethinking I- 81 findings, and ties into current discussions on CNYSpeaks, as well as the work of City and County on comprehensive plans. The Board also feels that the topic has the potential to engage a broad spectrum of the community.

The draft statement of purpose was displayed:

*People form their first impressions of a community at its gateways, on major routes through town, and approaches to its downtowns and major centers of activity. What are our public spaces saying about our community? What message does the look of our community convey to residents, investors, visitors, business owners, potential employees and students, or motorists that are just traveling through? How do we quantify the benefits of community image and redirect our energies and resources into making (physical) Syracuse and Onondaga County a place of pride?*

### **Role of Committee**

The Steering Committee’s job at this point is to define the focus of the study in a way that will guide our research. This can be a broad topic covering everything from aesthetics to poverty. We need to narrow it down.

Our Goal: Nine month total, finish the research, have a draft report in May or June. This will require a tight definition and focus.

Each study is unique, but fact finding and research, can include: Existing **reports and articles**; **Case studies** from other places (including other countries); **Presentations** at Study Committee meetings – either invited experts (including committee member) or subcommittee research findings; **Public Study Sessions** – citizen involvement is important –speakers or panel discussions, held at accessible locations around the community *planned ahead - in this way we are inviting people and the media to come along with us (in our investigation)*; **Surveys** – informal or formal.

Based on what we have heard and our discussions, the committee then develops Findings and Recommendations: what are the Study Committee’s findings (the facts), conclusions (value judgments) and suggestions for actions (specific recommendations)? Dissemination – varies from study to study; the Committee will come up with a plan later.

Some of the questions:

Looking at Public Spaces, downtown, how what we are putting forth and what is the response to that?

How do we quantify the benefits of community image?

“Why can’t we clean up litter?”

Building relationships with entities/organizations is part of the goal. At the end we want to have people/organizations be able implement the recommendations. It is important to impart the information to many organizations because it will not be clear which organizations would pick this up and use it.

### **General Discussion**

Creating a better first Impression, for instance recent bridge construction projects over I-81, more decorative bridges, changed perception of area; better lighting could make difference in perception of area; condition of buildings, empty lots, landscaping; there are many possibilities.

SMTC’s role: Can provide educational resources regarding: travel routes through gateways of community; improvements in bicycle and pedestrian routes; (multimodal transportation improvements makes it more inviting for users, makes for a prettier environment); information on changing land use patterns toward a multi-use perspective. Recently completed a comprehensive transportation and land use survey with SOCPA. SMTC can provide that information.

Are we looking solely at the city or at planning in villages and townships? We are looking at both. (Megan Costa of SOCPA will be a committee member).

*If we could somehow communicate to public that there is a link between our environment and the way we live; how our environment affects the way we live. It is a profound connection. We take care of environments that we value and we don’t take care of environments that we don’t value. The goal is to have people recognize that connection. For instance, a place like Skaneateles is beautiful place, and people invest in that beauty. The goal is to establish that idea of investment.*

*There is a feedback loop between your environment and how you feel about yourself, (theory behind broken window study.)*

There are also economic ramifications to how the city presents itself. For instance, this occurs in trying to attract people to send their children to our colleges and universities.

In the fields of travel and tourism, the way we look as a community impacts us from all points, in economic development. (The Conventions and Visitors Bureau uses a specific route through town for visitors. They try to pick out those areas that show off the city.)

What does the finish line look like? In talking about what that finish line is, we want something that is brings about a cultural awakening in the community, a “this is what we need to do moving forward,” but we also want “What we do right now.”

AAA issues an annual study of the nation’s top ten most dangerous roads. If your town is on the list, you are all of the sudden in reaction mode. It would be great to come out of this study with a top ten, a list of areas we radically need to take care of in our area. First on the list: Harrison Street exit off I-81. And we need to look at who is going to take ownership of those issues.

We need to address the fact that people assume that beauty is “just for rich people.” The appreciation for beauty does not relate to income levels.

We need to define beauty in relation to what people value, zones people care about. The study is also about finding what the identity of what Syracuse is, and where it is going and not necessarily trying to “beautify” Syracuse but to reveal that essential nature. We need promote that or make links to that. It becomes more strategic planning as opposed to beautifying.

A big category to look at is Syracuse as part of the rust belt. There are some interesting strategies used in cities such as Cleveland and Pittsburgh. We could look at how Pittsburgh totally transformed its image.

One of the things in the city we’ve been terrible at looking at is the details, for instance why is the grass growing up between the pavers? Why aren’t property owners taking care of that? Curbing? Why are we not deploying available resources into what we can control to make it the best it can be? It is these micro things we need to take care of.

E.g. Meadowbrook Drive Neighborhood Assn. planted flowers along the road, creating beauty within the community.

Countywide focus: Are there certain themes we can look at that carry over to, downtown, city, suburban community?

Macro theme and micro theme: Be careful of anything that is resource intensive, anything that implies that government has to pay more. What can we do to change people’s behavior that doesn’t cost anything?

We are talking about community pride. Negativism of many people has to be countered.

We have a pride deficit. We have a better quality of life than most people give us credit for. It’s not that we haven’t done a good job marketing the city but for some reason, for all of the changes we’ve made, we haven’t had buy in. For all of the positive changes (oil tanks are gone, Armory Square, expansion of university and hospitals), there is no sense among people that these things have happened.

Philadelphia movie: Horticultural Society requires percentage investment by any given neighborhood to participate in horticultural efforts, ensuring a sense of ownership. Somehow we should address not just how to solve this issue but how to do it in a collaborative way: how to bring people with us.

Community suffers from seasonal affective disorder (affect of weather on these issues.)

**Next Meeting Date: Tuesday, November 2, 12 – 1:30 PM, CenterStateCEO Conference Room, 572 South Salina St., Syracuse, NY 13202**

**[Map/Directions](#)**

**Resources Page: [http://onondagacitizensleague.org/ocl\\_studies/index.htm](http://onondagacitizensleague.org/ocl_studies/index.htm) - some items to begin to skim**