

Community Participation and Guidance:



First Public Workshop held at Poultney High School

The Main Street Design Project was integrated as part of the Poultney Downtown Revitalization Committee's application to be come a Designated Vermont Downtown. With a number of efforts on - track simultaneously, the design team worked closely with the Main Street Manager, and the Committee and town/village staff to coordinate issues and opportunities for the project.

Critical to the development of the downtown improvements plan was a series of public meetings, and other stakeholder groups in Poultney including:

- The Downtown Redevelopment Committee and design team toured Main Street on October 2, 2001.
- Public Meeting #1 was held at the High School on the evening of October 2, 2001 to provide initial guidance for design goals and objectives and to define the specific issues and places on Main Street that residents and businesses felt the streetscape design should address.
- Public input on the project was sought by the Downtown Redevelopment Committee during the Chili Cook – Off, on the weekend of October 9, 2001.
- The Downtown Redevelopment Committee met with a Focus Group of 17 Poultney High School Students on October 8, 2001 to discuss youth issues and desires related to both the Main Street project and town planning in general.
- Downtown Redevelopment Committee met on October 16 to discuss a draft of the goals and objectives for the project.
- Public meeting #2 was held at the High School for the design team to present initial Conceptual Streetscape Designs on December 11, 2001. A PowerPoint Presentation and general discussion was held with some 40 community residents, business owners, Town/Village and Green Mountain College officials.

- The Downtown Redevelopment Committee met with downtown business owners for a breakfast meeting at GMC on December 11, 2001 to discuss specific issues with the plans relative to business interests on the project. Based upon the concerns of several businesses, a subsequent meeting was scheduled for after the holidays.
- The Downtown Redevelopment Committee met with the design team and service station owners on January 2, 2002 to review driveway access and parking, sidewalks and frontage issues for both the Mobil and Exxon Stations.
- The Downtown Redevelopment Committee met with the design team in a joint meeting of the Poultney Village Trustees and the Poultney Selectboard on January 29, 2002 to review preliminary estimates of probable cost for the project. Several Trustees could not attend, so a subsequent meeting was scheduled for February 19, 2002.
- The Downtown Redevelopment Committee met with Village Trustees February 19, 2002 to review refinements to the estimates of probable cost such that the final estimates could be entered into the final project budget in the design team report.

Main Street Improvements: a summary of important considerations:

Based upon the guidance from the Downtown Committee, members of the Poultney community and business owners, the following issues and opportunities were identified as key points for the development of the streetscape plans:

A. Main Street Aesthetics: creating a more attractive downtown that will appeal to both residents and visitors alike, and specifically address locations where streetscape improvements can make a positive statement to enhance the beauty of the Main Street corridor. The major areas of aesthetic improvements were envisioned to be:

- Create downtown gateway so that Main Street has an obvious presence as it meets RT 30. The gateway should include signage and directionals in addition to enhancing the signalized intersection, which is an unsightly cable arrangement.
- Lighting: replace or augment the unsightly overhead power poles with cobra head fixtures with a more attractive historic styled streetlights. The old Main Street lights were relocated to the GMC campus. The bright glare of the current streetlights, which have no shading or cut-off was perceived to be a strong negative for residents of apartments on Main Street.
- Signage: provide signage at the village gateways to direct visitors to Main Street and additional signage for businesses that need curbside attention.
- Street trees and landscaping; to reinvigorate the historic tree lined streetscape with both deciduous canopy trees as well as ornamental trees along Main Street.
- Make Main Street look more like the dignified historic street than a wide “drag strip” of pavement that promotes automobile use only.
- Play down the presence of the power lines that are visually dominant.

B. Main Street Infrastructure: There are basic structure and infrastructure deficiencies such as :

- deteriorated sidewalks
- inadequate storm drainage
- old sewer and water lines that will affect or be affected by streetscape improvements.

Town officials feel that attention to both public infrastructure as well as the amenities of Main Street should be attended to. Where possible, infrastructure should be completed first, before amenities, so that below-ground improvements don't have to disturb surface improvements.

C. Emphasize safety: Main Street can be a very busy place, and residents (in particular) feel that during these busy times, a number of problems occur where vehicular driving patterns and pedestrian patterns

overlap to be dangerous. These problems were perceived to such an extent that people feel uncomfortable coming downtown and staying to do business. A number of subset issues including general pedestrian safety and comfort were discussed. These caused the committee to define the need for improvements to:

- Sidewalks: given that many of the sidewalks are deteriorated and either uncomfortable or unsafe many of the sidewalks need to be replaced on an incremental basis.
- Crosswalks: some are not ADA accessible, and others are ill-defined. Improvements need to be made to pedestrian crosswalks including painting, raised crosswalks, integrating decorative/contrasting paving materials etc.
- Access management and commercial driveways: there are a number of driveways that conflict with pedestrian access at sidewalks and crosswalks and create unsafe and chaotic driving patterns. Additionally, some parking spaces and driveways conflict with on-street parking and pedestrian access.
- Traffic calming is needed at the intersections of Main / Depot Street, Main / Maple Street and Main / VT RT 30 (Beaman Street) and Main/College Street.

D. Parking is very important for both for residents, customers and employees. The plan should make on and off street parking more accessible, increase the number of spaces available, and attempt to resolve conflicts between landowner/tenant parking space users by creating more parking for the downtown. (See Chapter 2 and the current use/future needs survey in Appendix C for additional detail.)

E. Enhancing the relationship between Main Street and economic development opportunities so that the center of town can be a social place for residents and visitors through enhancements of Main Street aesthetics.

F. Commercial driveways access management: Curb cuts at the Mobil Station and other commercial drives were perceived to be excessively wide and auto circulation impinges on sidewalks such that cars are driving on the public sidewalk ROW.

G. Use the Rail - Trail Connection to draw more tourists to the downtown: An untapped opportunity is the D&H Rail Trail that comes into the village from the north. Rail Trails are nationally a major growth focal point for eco and heritage tourism that could bring seasonal income to the downtown. Winter uses of the trail by snowmobiles should also be enhanced.

H. Desire to link Main Street with public transit: Public transit is invisible in Poultney today. It was a significant request of the high school population. Bus stops could be well integrated with a Main Street design concept.

I. Promoting Economic Vitality/Development: Everyone involved in the process believed that the link between economic vitality and streetscape design for downtown Poultney was strong. The relationship between making an attractive downtown and the economic opportunities and the “return” on public investment by private development was full of possibilities.

The process illuminated a number of questions about the relationship between downtown improvements and the downtown economy, such as:

- There were questions regarding the existing town zoning regulations and whether requirements for parking might be a disincentive for downtown redevelopment. The town needs to find ways to create incentives to use upper floors.
- The challenge of recreating the historic streetscape is that the historic tree lined Main Street was pedestrian-oriented, whereas the existing Main Street is auto-oriented. Changes to the historic integrity of the streetscape need to be made carefully, and complement the demands of modern business and the relationship of business to automobile exposure.
- Downtown is historically a place to live and work – there is a correlation between economic vitality and the seasons in Poultney.
- Capitalize on the Rail Trail connection and include a creation of a visitor’s center in the New Depot to go with a new park for downtown and a trailhead for the Rail Trail. Coordinate with the VT Department of

Forest & Parks in Pittsford regarding the D&H Rail Trail, to find out who actually owns the Rail Trail and the status of the Rail Trail maintenance agreement with the village and the Women's Club. Capitalize on the untapped customer pool that could result from welcoming hungry snowmobilers by providing accessible parking.

J. Youth Related Issues: The Main Street planning process brought up adult concerns about youths hanging out in the downtown and conflicts that have arisen in the past. At the same time, discussion with local youth at the High School indicated that the youth feel singled out, and that they need a place to go. If a true democratic downtown is to be created for the community, people of all ages should be able to gather in public places downtown and youth should not be discriminated against.

The teen group interviewed reached consensus on something similar to a girls' club/boys' club model, possibly at the old IGA building, the Stonebridge Inn or the old Fire House would be a great addition to the community's accommodation of different ages. Other places such as an open pavilion either at the Stonebridge Inn or in Depot Park could serve as a performance stage or a place for summertime block dances and other events.

Poultney's youth look at the downtown as a place to have their freedom and don't appreciate teachers or other kids' parents telling them what to do. However, they also recognize the need for this facility to be thoughtfully managed. Students are looking for the following:

- at least one new eatery in town that would stay open late (Ideally a fast food place such as Taco Bell that would serve food they like, provide a place to work, and provide seating.)
- 24 hour convenience store
- movie rental store
- movie theatre (two screens)
- Chinese food restaurant
- Grinder shop
- Pet Store
- Paintball facility
- Skateboard/ Go Cart Park

Youth also wanted to see connections to the region added such as bus/transit connections to Rutland and Killington. While not necessarily a part of the physical improvements to Main Street, youth are an important part of the downtown community with both the college and Schools nearby. Whereas many communities have disenfranchised their youth by locating schools out of the downtown, Poultney has a great positive opportunity for their youth to be present, involved, and welcomed as an integral part of the community's future vitality that should not go untended.