

Walkable Community Workshop

Greenburgh, New York

Hartsdale Avenue and Central Avenue

To the

Hartsdale Metro-North Railroad Station

Considering the Role of the

Central Avenue Bus Rapid Transit Assessment Study

And the

Hartsdale Avenue, Central Avenue Intersection

May 8, 2007

Central Avenue Firehouse
Central Avenue, Greenburgh, NY

Ms. Naomi Klein, Principal Planner, Westchester County Department of Transportation welcomed the attendees who represented various Greenburgh elected officials and community organizations. She gave a brief outline of the Central Avenue Bus Rapid Transit Assessment Study and a review of the potential for bus rapid transit along the Central Avenue Corridor. There was an emphasis on the potential role of the Four Corners intersection with the possible implementation of Bus Rapid Transit along Central Avenue and the existing connection with the business district around the Metro-North Railroad Station.

Mr. Charles Gandy of Livable Communities Inc., the presenter of this Walkable Community Workshop, started by having each of the participants introduce themselves by name and the organization with which they were affiliated. He took the opportunity to stress that, while this was a walkable community workshop, it was also a leadership meeting.

Mr. Larry McAuliffe, Manager, Research Unit, for the sponsor of the workshop, the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC), spoke briefly about the role of NYMTC in the New York region and specifically about what objectives this workshop expected to accomplish. He stated that NYMTC would supply a report for distribution to the community shortly after the conclusion of the workshop and that the report would also be posted to the NYMTC website. Mr. McAuliffe went on to say that there were various avenues of funding that might be available to the community in order for them to follow through on some of the courses of action that might come out of this workshop.

Mr. Charles Gandy then began the workshop by reaffirming the need for planning and the production of a report outlining a community course of action that could be used to justify a funding request. He went on to say that in the course of this professional presentation the community would see some technical solutions to real daily problems. Among the areas covered would be a safe place for children to walk and bike not only to and from school but also for recreation and exercise. For walkers, both youthful and adult, there would be a discussion of sidewalks and sidewalk connectivity. This in turn would spur a discussion of how to create a true walkable community, one that provided the opportunity to bring shopping, working, entertainment and residential living all together in one convenient place.

It will be necessary for the community to build a consensus as to what is the vision for the future and what steps must be taken to achieve this vision. Different groups within the community will have different lists of what needs to be done but some of these lists will overlap. It is in this overlap of ideas that the start of consensus building will be found.

Two communities were presented to illustrate how, with vision and consensus, change can be effected. The first example was Coeur D'Alene, Idaho which transformed itself from a gritty rural mining town into a leading rural resort community after the closing of the mines. Here the resorts and the downtown are all located in one walkable

community. The second example is the city of Seattle where the traditional Central Business District reinvented itself as the Central Neighborhood District. While preserving its traditional downtown offices, Seattle added residential buildings along with dining and entertainment venues and knitted them together with a network of walking trails and sidewalks. These represent “changes of place” and the evolving of neighborhoods similar to what transpired in various parts of Manhattan, most notably south of 14th Street.

This introduced the concept of stewardship of the generations. The present generation inherited their city, town or neighborhood from their grandparents through their parents and will in turn pass it on to their grandchildren by way of their children. While each generation will leave their mark on a place, theirs is the responsibility to ensure that this mark is a positive one. For example, in Seattle it was found that the presence of a bike and/or walking trail near condominiums could increase each unit’s value by up to 10 percent. In Appleton, Wisconsin the concept of stewardship led to the clean-up of the Fox River and the construction of a large mixed use urban development along the banks of this formerly polluted waterway.

Context sensitive design (CSD) can be defined as a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders in the develop of a transportation facility that fits its physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic, and environmental resources, while maintaining safety and mobility. CSD is an approach that considers the total context within which a transportation improvement project will exist. This preserves a “Sense of Place” which needs to be genuine, unique, and true to it’s self. It was pointed out that Four Corners has applied suburban solutions to urban problems and it “falls apart.”

Innovation is an important component of creating and/or preserving a walkable community. In Seattle this took the form of building a downtown “run” for joggers, in Orlando Florida uncovering and repairing the original brick street paving and the creative use of flowers and “flower pots” to direct parking and traffic flows in places as diverse as Texas and New York City. Communities must be willing to invest in the places where the people live. The full spectrum of the population, from young people to senior citizens needs to become involved. The children of the community need exposure to “public spaces” and incorporate them into their daily life. This can take the form of kids on bicycles and participating in Safe Routes to School programs. Young adults need to take advantage of parks, athletic fields and the other recreational facilities offered by “public spaces” while the senior citizens are encouraged to make use of the more sedentary facilities such as park benches and thus become part of the “Senior Security Patrol” by virtue of their spending more time out in the community.

Issues that need to be addressed include such diverse items as:

- Utility poles in the middle of the sidewalk
- Sidewalks that do not line up to provide a continuous walkway
- Non ADA compliant walkways

- Excessively wide street crossings without any pedestrian refuge points in the middle
- Insufficient space between the sidewalk and the curb
- Possible use of mid-block crossings with timings coordinated with corner lights

Within the framework of creating walkable communities, transit and transit marketing matter. It is necessary to position Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in the market place between local transit and light rail. The image of BRT must be more than “just a different colored bus stop.” BRT can be instrumental in supporting Transit Oriented Development (TOD) and in encouraging well conceived “in-fill” projects.

Mr. Kenneth Lyn of STV, Incorporated, and the Project Manager for consulting firm hired by Westchester County to conduct the Central Avenue Bus Rapid Transit Assessment Study spoke briefly about the nine characteristics of bus rapid transit. These characteristics are:

- Stylish vehicles
- Attractive stations featuring context sensitive design
- Faster fare collection
- Guideways and rights of way
- Intelligent transportation systems
- Efficient operations
- Addresses community land use issues
- Provides easy access to stations
- Has a strong brand identity

Ms. Naomi Klein of the Westchester County DOT then advised the group of the creation of the BRT website that was expected to be operational shortly and announced that the first of the BRT Public Open House would be held on Tuesday evening June 26, 2007 between 5:30 PM and 8:00 PM at the County Center in White Plains.

A participant asked from the floor if there was enough business along Central Avenue to warrant the operation of Bus Rapid Transit all day long and if such a service would meet the needs of young people along the corridor who do not drive. Ms. Klein responded by pointing out that the market along the Central Avenue Corridor study area is robust all day long and that there are many different destinations located on the Corridor.

Mr. Gandy interjected that it might be desirable to go back in time to when mixed use communities were the norm where the apartments were located over the retail stores. This is increasing being found to be a dynamic economic model by various communities in that it brings life and activity to the neighborhood streets for extended periods of time.

Mr. Thomas Madden, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Community Development and Conservation, Town of Greenburgh indicated that, unfortunately, current local zoning did not permit mixed use development. However, he stated that the

mixed use concept had much to recommend it and that it needed to be seriously considered.

Ms. Klein pointed out that the concept of “minimum parking” was developed in Europe, a concept that effectively limits the amount of parking in urban areas.

Mr. Gandy continued the workshop by presenting a check list for consideration by the Hartsdale community as it applies to the workshops study area.

- Medium to high density development
- Mix land use
- Short to medium length blocks
- Transit routes within a one mile radius
- Two to four lane streets

Pedestrian friendly features included:

- Continuous sidewalks appropriately sized
- Safe crossings
- Appropriate buffering from traffic
- Street oriented buildings
- Comfortable and safe places to linger

The challenge is to blend smart growth principals with transit oriented design and a local “sense of place.” This includes such factors as:

- Engineering considerations:
 - Raised Crosswalks
 - Curb Extensions
 - Chicanes
 - Road diets
 - Mid-block medians
- Walking trails can be part of the solution
- Bike lanes should be considered as part of the transportation mosaic
- Public art work adds to the “sense of place”
- Restaurants and high end retail are important components to a revitalized Main Street

At this point the workshop participants took a walk along East Hartsdale Avenue from Central Avenue to the Metro-North Railroad Station.

Upon returning to the meeting room Mr. Gandy encouraged the group members to come up with ideas for improving the Central Avenue/Hartsdale Avenue intersection. Included among the suggestions put forth by the group were:

- Need to take a look at the local zoning laws that prohibit mixed use development
- Design guidelines for commercial use of Central Avenue
- Push out curbs on Central Avenue to facilitate pedestrians at the crosswalks
- Zone buildings to the street or sidewalk line with parking in the rear
- Eliminate the entrances to various driveways
- Continue sidewalks along Central Avenue
- Mid-block crossing signals timed to work with the signals at the ends of the blocks on Central Avenue

In his concluding remarks Mr. Gandy touched briefly on some of the various potential funding sources and summed up with the phrase “Money follows good planning.” Mr. McAuliffe mentioned both possible Federal and State funding sources. He also presented the thought that private developers are sometimes willing to fund related improvements in order to make the project more attractive to potential clients. Finally, he mentioned the possibility of issuing local bonds to pay for potential improvements.