

Meeting Notes

Route 32 Linkage Study-Community Workshop

Watervliet Elks Club - 7:00 PM

May 11, 2010

Introduction

This document provides a brief summary of comments received at the Community Workshop for the Route 32 Linkage Study held on May 11, 2010 at the Elks Club in the City of Watervliet.

The evening began with a presentation that highlighted the current conditions along the Route 32 Corridor in the City of Watervliet, Town of Colonie and Village of Menands. Examples of how other communities have managed similar conditions were shared and a discussion to clarify the scope and timing of the discussion as well as participant ideas began. Key comments included:

What are we going to do from 1st to 8th Street (in Watervliet) and when are we going to do it?

The study will provide recommendations to the communities and the Study Advisory Committee (SAC). The SAC will decide which recommendations should be pursued and then the draft report will present those at the next community meeting for further comment and refinement, following which a final report is issued and the report will be adopted in each community. The speed of implementation of the study depends upon the availability of funding and the priority and complexity of the concepts chosen. When finished (this plan) will list projects by priority, phasing, scope and ballpark cost. The idea is to have short and long term improvements to show early support and build momentum for implementation.

This is more for information? Is anything set in stone?

Participants were assured that nothing is “set in stone” and that their comments can influence the outcome. As materials are completed and accepted by the SAC they will be made available on the web including the City of Watervliet’s web site at <http://watervliet.com>.

Is this a traffic study or a corridor study for gentrification of businesses and jobs?

The consultant shared that the study is not intended to gentrify the communities. It is a study of how you can improve the corridor for existing businesses and new businesses that might want to locate there, making improvements around businesses, and thinking about other modes of transportation (walkers, bikers, etc.). None of this assumes businesses leaving the corridor, though that is certainly possible as land they own becomes more valuable. Reoccupying existing space, for example at the Arsenal wouldn’t displace any businesses but would have a major impact on the corridor. One participant felt that this was not the right approach. As a local developer he felt that we should look for opportunities for new investment, feeling that “gentrification” can be a good thing. Other concerns were voiced about the densely built environment in Watervliet arguing that there will never be more than two lanes and growth is not possible there.

Many of the issues we are discussing (crosswalks and signals, for example) are NYSDOT issues and not within the communities control. How is that handled?

The goal is for communities to work with NYSDOT. The strategy is coordinated with NYSDOT and partnerships between the communities and the state are an opportunity of this kind of Linkage Grant from the Capital District Transportation Committee. In Watervliet, for example the City, not NYSDOT, maintains traffic controls in the City. Purpose is to work together. The process is to do the plan and get

buy in from NYSDOT and other agencies and then begin implementation. The funding formula is typically 80% of funding from the federal and state governments and 20% from the local municipalities.

A Village Trustee from Menands commented that the (Village of Menands Transportation Access and Land Improvement Study Broadway (NY Route 32)) completed by the Village with CDTC support was beneficial because even though NYSNYSDOT controls Route 32, that study provided recommendations to NYSDOT in an adopted plan and they have been able to implement projects with NYSDOT's assistance. He commented that their work was, in part, to create a streetscape like Watervliet has. Improvement on the existing assets is as important, or more important, than new development.

Can the Route 32 Bike Route be on Broadway? Could the local communities designate other bike routes?

Route 32 is the State designated Bike Route, and as such must be on a State roadway. Participants recommended that 4th St should be a Bike route, and the study should give people other options, since there is not enough road-width in Watervliet along 32 for bicycle facilities. Although a detailed bike plan is outside of the scope of this project, participants asked that it be a recommended implementation project.

Other thoughts about information presented to make corridor more effective?

The use of curb extensions/bump outs was discussed. Some participants felt that curb extensions are not necessary since the road width is so narrow. Others felt that they would help to create a "parking bay" at the intersection to prevent people from parking so close to the corner that visibility is decreased and pedestrians are at risk (based upon crash data). Some participants felt that the curb extensions could help to create little green areas and landscaping could help to reduce stormwater runoff and flooding. The City is using these features on 19th Street Streetscape Project and they look like they will help. It was also suggested that the communities help in fixing the sidewalks to be more unified, matching the commitment of local property owners.

A number of comments were received.:

- *Bus Rapid Transit - Though this CDTA initiative is outside the scope of the study, participants liked the idea of Bus Rapid Transit. They felt that improved basic service such as an express along Route 32 from Schuyler Flatts to Corning Preserve or expanded hours of operation would help to connect the two recreational areas and all of the communities. Another service, such as a trolley system could be designed entirely for recreation, like the trolley from Green Island to Watervliet. Participants felt that this would help to build community among the three municipalities.*
- *Marked turn lanes - The left turn lane at First Street and Third Street in Watervliet would be improved and better defined with a left arrow.*
- *Traffic Circle - A traffic circle discussed is not necessary. It would be challenging for the heavy truck traffic using gas stations and other auto-dependent uses. Participants thought that a roundabout might actually make crossing the street more difficult. The consultant explained that each leg of the roundabout where road feeds in – has a channelized area called a "splitter island" where the road feeds in at a narrow point, and that is where the pedestrian would be able to cross.*
- *Rerouting Truck Traffic - This would be difficult to do through residential areas but the options to use secondary routes or ideas expressed in the a study Albany County completed to create access to industrial lands might be possible.*
- *Greening Up The Corridor- Participants complained that the trees are chopped up all along the corridor to accommodate power lines. Opportunities to place utilities underground should be pursued. They asked that the plan identify suggested street tree species and for the municipalities to share one*

planting strategy to create more visual consistency and feeling of a consistent corridor. It was also felt that properly designed and located landscaping could help with stormwater management.

Can we hear from NYSDOT representative about timing on previous Menands study? How soon could projects be implemented for the other Route 32 communities?

The Menands project south of Route 378 began with bridge replacement project. After the bridge improvements were complete they restriped the area north of area to 378. Drainage improvements were completed to reduce flooding problems at the Menands Shelter. Funding involved a complicated process, including a potential land swap and auction was undertaken and the proceeds were used to make improvements. This is not a common process. Safe routes to school programs can also help with the sidewalk, crossings and ramps. NYSDOT feels that it helps when a municipality goes through this kind of a planning process. They also consider regional issues like increased activity at the Arsenal in prioritizing projects. In the City of Watervliet participants commented that Third Avenue from First Street to Seventh Street backs up as people try to avoid congestion on 787, at other times is it a speedway. It might help to put the traffic light back on Third Avenue.

How can this project help the tax base?

Participants asked for an idea of the cost of improvements and the consultant's aid that would be part of the final report. Participants favored the improvements but don't want taxes to increase. They felt that commercial development and job creation must occur simultaneously to help pay for improvements. Participants commented that abandoned buildings along the corridor could be replaced or brought back on the tax roles if corridor conditions were improved and connections to other parts of the communities were established. By making property more attractive you also make it more valuable and it might help to bring thriving businesses back. Participants concluded that incremental change, like Menands is enjoying, can make a big difference. They also felt that it is very important to increase cooperation between the municipalities especially with regard to regional issues like job growth and recreation planning.

Meeting Wrap up

At the end of the discussion the consultants reviewed the next steps which include reviewing meeting comments with the Study Advisory Committee, outlining preliminary concepts and recommendations, bringing those recommendations back to the community for discussion and helping the communities to adopt the final plan.