

**Ballston Spa
Comprehensive Master Plan Steering Committee
June 2, 2022**

Present in Person: Scott Burlingame, Bob Bush, Monique Cohen, John Cromie, John Hearn, Jared Iacolucci, Karen Martell, Peter Martin, Mathew Ercoline Ellen Mottola, and Jackie Pelliccia

Present on Zoom: Carrie Chapman and Marilyn Stephenson

Excused: Nafeesa Koslik and Jon Taisey.

Observers in Person: Frank Rossi, Jr. and Liz Kormos

Observers on Zoom: Bernadette VanDeinse-Perez, Dave Womer, and "IPad"

Meeting was called to order by Chair Karen Martell at 7:05 PM. Minutes of the prior meeting had been reviewed; there were no corrections. John Hearn moved they be approved as presented; Peter Martin seconded; passed. It was asked if the Steering Committee will have access to the map, in digital form, which Blue and Ariane are developing. It is expected we will be receiving it when it is done.

This month the committee is looking at the local economy, led by Ellen Mottola and Monique Cohen. Ellen noted that the 2019 Economic Development Plan put together by the former Saratoga County Prosperity Partnership is a summary of a lot of data points relating to the downtown business district. It identified four goals: enhance the CBD, the quality of place, economic development and marketing, and small business environment.

The report includes a series of action items and assigns responsibility for each one. Committee members are encouraged to access the report and Action Plan Matrix on the Village's website. Topics mentioned in the study are similar to those reviewed over the months by this committee.

When people arrive downtown, there should be reasons for them to do more than one thing. If someone comes for a haircut, that person should be enticed to stick around and shop or do something else. For instance, parking time could be extended so people would not have to go to their cars as soon as they do now. It was suggested a major need is public bathrooms, so people do not have to load into their cars and go to McDonalds, Stewarts, or wherever, and leave town. Bathrooms could be made part of the Zim Smith Trail, if it came into town. In the meantime, bathrooms in the library, Welcome Center (Bottle Museum), and police station could be opened to serve the public.

The plan also envisioned expanding the business district down Washington Street and west on Front Street to Iron Spring Park and Brookside. The portion of Washington Street that dead ends west of Bath Street also holds potential for commercial/retail development.

It was suggested that businesses could be enticed to locate in those areas through governmental financial benefits like tax breaks or other incentives like expedited site plan review. Village taxes and coffers may not be large enough to make a difference. If zoning allows single-family homes in the Bath Street; Court and Walnut Street areas to have home businesses with minor retail uses, they will act to draw people through the areas to be developed as CBD, increasing the likelihood commercial enterprises will open down Washington and Front Streets. Special events in Iron Spring Park will also familiarize potential customers with businesses along western Front Street.

A business Improvement district was suggested in the economic plan. It would form a taxing district, and the property owners would elect representatives to use the money to promote and improve the business area. Troy's is focused primarily on promotions. However, a development district can address hard infrastructure and beautification. Village merchants 30 years ago were willing to form an improvement district, but it was at a period when the legislature was moving from special legislation to general legislative authority, and the opportunity passed.

Saratoga Springs acts as an economic driver for Ballston Spa. People who visit Saratoga Springs often look at the village as another place to experience. They see it as a quaint, not self-conscience, pleasant place.

Clientele of village businesses regularly come from communities 25 or 35 miles away. Business owners have repeat customers from Lake George, Troy, Glens Falls, Schenectady, Niskayuna, etc. One business has customers come often from further down state. Many customers visit from Schenectady area because they want to experience the village. Some people say Ballston Spa is Burnt Hill's Saratoga Springs.

Although Malta tried to create a walking downtown, it is dependent on the automobile. Ballston Spa is the downtown experience for Malta residents.

People look at downtown as a source for goods, services, and entertainment. Having a movie theater would draw kids and families. Providing places for young kids to play and older kids to gather will add to the attraction of the community. Activities like the farmer's market draw people downtown. Wiswall Park is our village green and should be used for that purpose.

Downtown is the engine of our village. The greater the diversity of businesses and of people experiencing the village, the more its attractiveness increases, which in turn draws more people to Ballston Spa.

Responsibility for creating a diversity of businesses falls largely on Ballston Spa Business and Professional Association (BSBPA) and building owners. The government's fundamental role is to provide reliable infrastructure for businesses, ensuring their investments in the community, and secondarily to have an articulated promotional plan that describes its activities to support a positive image of the village. Because almost everything a village does is publicized, it creates an image. By not considering the effects of publicity, too often a negative image is produced unintentionally. Perhaps, if funding materializes, the village could have a designated person as a public information officer.

Much of Ballston Spa's marketing and promotions are carried out by BSBPA. Until the village's past financial crisis, it had contracted with BSBPA to market the village. SEDC has not picked up the promotion assistance that had been provided by Prosperity Partnership. Saratoga Chamber receives the County's tourism funds and the State's I Love NY money, but focuses its funds on Saratoga Springs. While BSBPA belongs to both Saratoga Chamber and the Greater Capital District Chamber and has good relations with them, their money has not been used to fund village promotions. Preliminary efforts by village trustees are being made to encourage the county to assist with promotion.

A necessary element in promotion and marketing is to articulate a simple message that encapsules a desired image. An effort should be made to find an appropriate moniker for the village. Currently it uses two, "A Village of Friends" and "A Strolling Village." A group had been created to look at branding or re-branding. But after its first meeting, COVID hit, and the momentum was lost.

Any brand should support the businesses and encourage new business owners. It should also convey the message that it is a

great place to buy a home, raise your kids, and have a good life. While looking at rebranding, the current tag line, "Strolling Village" ought not be overlooked. It implies people are downtown window shopping as well as walking through safe neighborhoods. The effort to find a brand for the village should be re-started and focused on where the village should be going in the next fifteen years.

There are 4,100 students and over 800 staff at the schools. This large number of people (including parents) will add to the prosperity of downtown if they can be encouraged to shop and use services in the village. Whether it be through gift certificates or other come-ons, an effort should be focused on bringing those who spend a good part of their day in or near Ballston Spa to the downtown. More cooperative efforts with the school will help.

It is important to be aware of the major gateways to the village. They form a visitor's first impression. To efficiently manage the primary entrances, the village government should seek partnerships with surrounding towns, especially Milton and Ballston. Malta tends to do its own thing, but shares two important secondary entrances to the village.

The remaining goal from the 2019 economic development study, "enhance small business environment" will be discussed at the next meeting, June 23 [not June 16]. Meeting was adjourned at 8:15.

John Cromie, Secretary