

**Ballston Spa
Comprehensive Master Plan Steering Committee
July 7, 2022
Social Considerations I**

Present in Person: John Cromie, Mathew Ercoline, Jared Iacolucci, Karen Martell, Ellen Mottola, and Jackie Pelliccia, Steve Springer.

Present on Zoom: Bob Bush, Carrie Chapman, Monique Cohen, Mathew Ercoline, John Hearn, Marilyn Stephenson, and Amy Fitzgerald

Excused: Scott Burlingame, Nafeesa Koslik, Peter Martin, and Jon Taisey

Observers in Person: Liz Kormos and Frank Rossi

Observers on Zoom: Anne M. and Jeff

Due to power problems with the computer, the meeting was delayed until 7:20, at which time it was called to order by Chair Karen Martel. Minutes of the last meeting were reviewed. Motion made by Ellen Mottola to approve the minutes as presented, seconded by Jared Iacolucci; passed.

Karen introduced Jared and Jackie Pelliccia who will be leading the discussion on Social Considerations. The topics to be discussed are Demographics, Social Organizations, Culture and Education, Transportation and Parking, Parks and Public Spaces, and Coming Challenges.

There are slightly more than 2,300 households in the village of which a bit more than half are families. Children raise the average family size to 2.79 individuals as compared to 2.1 for all households, indicating village families are of a modest size. The existing conditions report shows 56.6% of the households are owner occupied and 36.6% are rented.

The largest household income level is \$100,000 - \$140,000 at 19%, but it is 3.1% smaller than the proportion in Saratoga County. About 1/3 of village households exist on \$50,000 or less, which exceeds the county percentage. 6.3% of the households make over \$200,000, which is 5.2% less than the county. The takeaway is that Ballston Spa, overall, is a middle-class community with a large lower income segment. It also comes as no surprise that the village has very little racial diversity.

95% of the residents have a high school diploma or greater education, which exceeds the national average. However, only 35% of the residents have a graduate or professional degree, which is lower than the national average. In any case, the education level may be the reason why there is only a 2.2% unemployment rate. About 2/3 of the workers are classified as white collar; 14% blue collar, and 20% in unskilled service jobs. The median household income at \$71,000 is higher than in most communities. The village has twice the national rate of educators and librarians and three times the number of architects and engineers. The median age is 41 years, which is three years older than the national average. The village has fewer residents under 14 than the national average and more over 65 than the national average. It can be concluded the village has an aging population. Of those over 50, almost 60% own their homes and over half of the home owners live in non-family housing, meaning these people, as age impinges live style, may not have family to assist them. Due to this dynamic, social organizations may have increased importance in the near future.

As the older population ages, younger residents will have to take over. About a third of the village is between 18 and 49. A positive technique to encourage the up-coming generation will be to have procedures in place that bring them into decision making. Many in this age group are busy with kids and jobs and have little time. But it is important that boards and committees make room for these people, perhaps through term limits.

Of the social organizations in the village, there are a couple that serve the lower income population, especially Life Works and Rebuilding together. Both have a county-wide scope, but are easily available to village residents. Veteran and community housing seeks housing for veterans. Job link helps people seeking employment.

While diversity is usually viewed in racial and ethnic terms, the village's diversity is economic and to a lesser degree relates to disabilities. However, Life Works does have programs for immigrants and migrant laborers.

Service groups like Rotary and its exchange program give the community opportunities it would not otherwise have. Rotary is currently exploring a partnership with its Interact to introduce students to community projects.

With its schools in or adjacent to the village, BSCD as well as the village library bring families from adjoining towns into

the village, providing a major resource for downtown businesses and community organizations. It helps to have that large proportion of educators and librarians within the village population. The village benefits from its two museums which bring people into the village and promote the history of the area. The abundance of daycare possibilities provides an array of early childhood education which is important to young families, allows parents to be more productive, and attracts people to reside in the village. Attention to the arts, culture, and history is important to the quality of life in the village and is inculcated from one's early years by the school district.

The vast majority of village residents who travel to work drive their own autos. About 10% carpool and relatively small numbers walk, take taxis, or a bus. At the time of the report, 2019, around 4% worked from home. That pre-pandemic figure probably understates the number of people today working from home. Approximately 90 households do not own a car and depend on public transportation or family and friends. About 20% have one car, making it difficult to handle two work schedules. A large majority have two or more cars (77%). Given the people who do not have cars or those who don't have access because the one car is being used elsewhere, there is a good number of people who depend on the walkability of the village.

Rte. 50 carries about 15,000 cars a day and Rte. 67 handles about 8000 cars along West High Street. Greenfield Ave & West Streets, Rowland Street, Malta Ave., East High Street, Ballston Ave., and Fairground Ave, carry a significant number of cars. Traffic congestion on Rte. 50 is most likely related to the growth of Saratoga County in the last few years. The population increase is a momentum swing for the village, and the community should carefully consider how to engage that increase of population.

Much of the traffic comes from or goes to the Northway from the rapidly growing areas north and south of the village. Rte. 67 South and Northline Road are jammed at times. Milton Ave. is bumper to bumper certain times of day. Traffic congestion's silver lining is that it gives the community a sense of vitality and prosperity. It is preferred to the use of a by-pass, which has damaged other small downtowns.

Motorists are not just driving through the village. They are stopping and parking, making it difficult to find places to park near the popular areas. The Parking Advisory Committee found there isn't a lack of parking spots, but rather insufficient enforcement, people's expectation that they should not have to walk a block or

two to their destination, the lack of signage and maps (including online maps), and a need for an overall parking plan. During off hours, the county lot is available, but it is not well posted. Not-for-profit lots could be made available when not normally used, in return for village snow clearing.

CDTA has two routes running through the village. One runs almost 20 hours a day from Schenectady to Wilton Mall, and the other is geared for commuters who work in Albany. Other nearby areas are not accessible to those who do not have car transportation. The commuter run provides one-car households with more options.

The January 2022 pedestrian and bicycle master plan and the Existing Conditions Report of 2021 find sidewalks generally exist in the village but could be in better condition and intersections could be made safer and easier to use. A priority has been established to address sidewalks needed along Malta Ave and to improve sidewalks leading to downtown. As properties are developed or re-developed, sidewalks made part of projects are able to be financed with little impact on the ultimate owner. The current reimbursement program is not working, and something further has to be inaugurated to promote repair and replacement of faulty sidewalks.

Street signage has gone missing over the years and is needed for people to navigate side streets. In the past emergency vehicles had been known to get lost. (Today, fire trucks and ambulances are tied into the county-wide emergency services mapping.) The village has identified 91 missing street signs and is enlisting the aid of the county to replace them.

Smaller parks and public spaces in the village are used more than the larger areas. Victory Circle has little of its potential realized. It could be a gathering/recreation space for the northern portion of the village. Kelly Park is underutilized. The Village Cemetery may not be village owned but is a huge space suitable for passive recreation like jogging and walking dogs. The Cemetery Association wants it used in that manner.

Trees are noted by the US forestry service to increase residential values, make downtowns inviting causing shoppers to spend more, and, if strategically placed, can improve heating and cooling costs. It was noted a conflict exists along Milton Ave between mature trees and sidewalk heaves. Based on the effects of tree removal and replacement by the Lincoln Block, it seems mature

trees are more valuable than the sidewalk. The sidewalk should be lifted, and tree roots trimmed every 15 years or so.

There are some serious future challenges to the social fabric of the village. The increase of automation will replace a lot of human labor, greatly affecting 15% to 25% of our workforce. The international move away from fossil fuels to electrification will create major challenges for our older buildings that are not well fitted for energy delivered through electricity. Climate change will cause people to return to the northeast due to extreme weather conditions, rising sea levels elsewhere, economic viability of intensive agriculture, and other changing conditions. Increasing population pressure due to the development of the electronics industry and the generally favorable living conditions in the Capital Region is a force that could damage the village if not recognized and taken on as a challenge.

The best way for the village to prepare to meet future challenges, whatever they may be, is by encouraging residents to become involved in social organizations that will help the community meet the challenges and for decision making in the village to become more inclusive, constantly bringing new members onto boards and committees.

Because of the increasing number of electric cars, the village can make itself more inviting by providing charging stations. The state is funding their erection and they create a cash flow. There are monetary techniques to encourage turnover at the stations.

Challenges of retrofitting housing stock to meet future requirements for energy efficiency as electricity replaces fossil fuels will be formidable. Because such conversions will be expensive, but result in higher resale values, it will be more likely homeowners rather than landlords will take on that challenge. Encouraging home ownership in the village should result in sooner and more successful retrofitting.

National trends are going in the other direction. Large corporations are buying up tracts of housing to rent them out. New York's 2019 landlord tenant law favors corporate landlords because the required complicated processes and inability to spread the risk of non-paying tenants are pushing the small locally based landlords out of the business.

Major rental projects have been built in the last few years within a few miles of the village, providing a contrast to village life. The village must use whatever means it can to differentiate

itself, provide a positive environment for home ownership, and discourage single family homes as multiple or short-term rentals. Local laws exist that require landlords to provide tenants the right of first refusal if the property is to be sold.

Jackie and Jared's presentation ended with the following questions to be discussed at the next meeting.

1. How do we keep diversity in the face of rising housing values and cost of living?

2. As the population ages, how can we assure a good quality of living?

3. How can the village encourage more participation from young adults?

4. How do we support social organizations?

5. What role does the village play in addressing coming challenges posed by technological and demographic changes?

6. How can we best improve transportation in the village?

7. How can we preserve and enhance the parks and public spaces in the village?

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Amy had sent out a draft of the survey to gauge opinions of residents and visitors concerning the topics we have been discussing. It is needed to be finalized before the concert at Iron Spring Park next week. It was decided committee members access the survey on Google Drive, make edits, and send suggestions for changes to Mat Ercoine by Monday night. He will collate the modifications and edit the survey accordingly, creating the final product on Tuesday. Behan will have the survey available through a QR code and print for the concert on Thursday, July 14. It was suggested we should not depend solely on the concerts for distribution. There should be plenty of copies to be passed around and placed in businesses, library, senior housing, and other locations people go. Behan will make available paper copies for those who do not use electronic media, and electronic versions on the village Facebook page, website and distribution of QR codes for others.

Members volunteered to distribute the surveys at the various concerts.

A concern was expressed that in the minutes of the last meeting, it was noted no one in the village was responsible for press releases announcing the hiring of the consultant and the operations of the committee, it seemed the scope of work by the consultant was not being followed. The consultant is hired to be responsible for public outreach.

The Mayor noted that outreach was on the consultant's invoices and that he was worried that the consultant's product so far does not seem to match its requests to be paid 25% of the contract amount. He is setting up a meeting with the consultant and Karen. Issues like the one just raised should be part of that discussion. The consultant was asked months ago to pull the information and ideas of the committee together, which Amy may be working on. Also, the consultant was to report to the board no later than July, and that has not happened yet. We are in a critical period if we are to be engaging the public in a visioning session in September.

A concern was expressed that the Thursday before the Labor Day weekend is not a good day to expect residents to turn out to take part in a two-hour visioning session. It was suggested that another day be selected. Other dates in September would be equally bad because the community would be getting into its school routine.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:51.