

## THE VILLAGE OF WEBSTER

Once an agricultural and distribution point for the Town of Webster, the Village of Webster historically served as the core or center of civic, social, educational and commercial activity in area. However, after World War Two, there were striking changes that transformed the Village's character. First, the agricultural nature of the area has seen major encroachment by suburban growth moving outward from Rochester. . The Town of Webster became one of the major suburban residential areas in Monroe County with its population more than doubling between 1950 and 1960. Substantial residential development has continued to the present. As a consequence, the agricultural industry that once made the Village a market point and an administrative, social, and institutional center has largely disappeared.

Secondly, decisions made in the 1950's and 60's by the former Haloid Company, now Xerox Corporation, to invest in major office, research and manufacturing facilities to be located in the Village and the Town of Webster brought about extensive changes in population growth trends in the area. The construction of Route 104 also contributed greatly to the area's growth as access to the metropolitan area was vastly improved.

The most recent stage of growth in the Town of Webster (1980 to present) has been characterized by rapid expansion of residential development, the growth in commercial development and undeveloped properties transferring to park land. Undeveloped land experienced a large reduction in total acreage from 6,944 in 2000 to 3,366 in 2006, a decline of 3,578 acres (51.5%). Undeveloped land presently accounts for less than 17 percent of the Town's total land area, down from 39.5 percent in 2000.

The population of the Webster area, outside the Village, grew substantially between 1980 and 2010 climbing from 28,925 in 1980 to 42,644, an increase of 13,719 or 47.42%. In the same period, the Village of Webster went from 5,499 to 5,399. However, it should be noted that the Village actually gained a modest number of residents between 2000 and 2010.

Along with population growth in the Town, there has been significant commercial expansion in the Town, particularly since 2000. This expansion includes the Webster Town Center and the Webster Woods Plaza along with a number of retail and service establishments located along the Route 404/Ridge Road Corridor. Other shopping and commercial centers in Webster include Webster Square, Webster Plaza, Wegmans Plaza and Lowes. These developments have certainly diminished the role of the Village core as the center for commercial activity in the Town but the downtown or core area is still attractive and vibrant. There is potential for new retail, residential, and office uses as evidenced by recent developments including the construction of an upscale steak house restaurant and a new multi-use office building as well as conversion of the former Key Bank into commercial and residential uses.

## **PRESENT VILLAGE SITUATION**

The Village provides a highly attractive environment for residents who have chosen to live in a small and historic community. In a survey conducted as part of the Village's Comprehensive Plan update, residents indicated that the following four reasons were the most important for why they chose to live in the Village:

- They wanted to live in a small village;
- To live near employment;
- To live near excellent public schools;
- To live in a village with good services and facilities.

The Village anticipates additional residential growth, which is occurring as of this writing, by the development of a vacant parcel of land along North Avenue. Another vacant parcel zoned for residential use may soon be developed. Development of these parcels could increase the population as much as 10%.

Aside from the many amenities available to residents which have contributed to the stability of the Village's population, there are also emerging opportunities for increasing the Village's commercial base. In the last several years, there have been sizable investments made in commercial projects in the Village business area. These include the new steakhouse on West Main Street, the commercial building behind the steak house, the rehabilitation of several buildings along the northern portion of West Main Street, the rehabilitation of a large building on North Avenue into a home for a local publishing company and the transformation of an old gas station to a well patronized, traditional Irish pub.. There are also a number of other developments underway including conversion of a portion of the storage facility on North Avenue to upscale rental apartments and renovation of the former Burger King restaurant on West Main Street which will draw new commercial ventures

In addition to those private sector activities that are in lay, Village government has undertaken a number of initiatives that will eventually improve the business environment in Webster. One of these initiatives, aided by the Webster Community Coalition for Economic Development (WCCED), is a Circulation, Accessibility and Parking Study funded by the Village and the Genesee Transportation Council. The purpose of the study is to develop feasible planning, design, and regulatory concepts that will improve circulation, accessibility, parking, and safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists in the Village core or downtown area. The need for this study was triggered by the Village's new Comprehensive Plan which recognizes that improved vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle movements by various population groups, including youth and the elderly, will help maintain commercial and retail investment and create jobs for community residents.

The Village has also been aggressive in seeking outside funding that will assist with and leverage investment in revitalization of buildings in the business district. The Village is pursuing State funding under the NYS Main Street Program for the purpose of promoting façade and interior building improvements. The Village is also considering the NYS Brownfield Opportunities program which could help the Village identify underutilized properties; determine the reuse potential of such properties and devise strategies for bringing about reuse.

The Village is also participating in discussions with the Xerox Corporation about the future of Xerox-owned properties located within the Village. While such discussions are only in their infancy, the Village is very interested in working with Xerox to ensure that decisions about potential disposition of properties involves the Village and reflect the Village's development strategies and priorities.

In addition to the above initiatives, Village government is actively working on a day-to-day basis on the improvement of the business environment. For example, the Village is actively promoting historic preservation, is pursuing parking improvements in the North East Quadrant, and is seeking changes to both sign and parking ordinances that will improve business location and parking identification.

The Village is also well served by its Business Improvement District which is funded by assessments on commercial property owners in the business area. Funds derived from these assessments are devoted to activities such as concerts, family movies in the park, festivals including the wildly successful Webster Jazz Festival, and a number of other events designed to bring people into the business district.

## **VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

Our vision for the Village of Webster is a continuation and strengthening of economic revitalization. The foundation for this vision is provided by the Village's Comprehensive Plan and that portion of the Plan, prepared by WCCED, which addresses Village Core Revitalization.

In the Village's Comprehensive Plan, the community has identified several basic priorities including:

- A. Preserving the Historic Village Setting
- B. Enhancing the Village Business District
- C. Creating a Walkable Community

**Historic Preservation:** In order to preserve the historic features of the Village, the Village needs to adopt an historic preservation ordinance with oversight by a Historic Preservation Commission. Participation in the preservation of historic property and sites will be on a voluntary basis. However, once a property owner secures landmark designation, exterior alterations, demolition and new construction will require the approval of the Commission.

**Enhancing the Business District:** Community residents have expressed their support for improving the vitality of the business district while at the same time maintaining a Village setting that provides a pleasant residential environment. The Village can accomplish this with four significant changes to the Village code including the following:

- Creating a separate district at the west end of the Village with new rules of development, such as additional setbacks with parking in front of a business, that minimize the need for zoning variances and to allow for different uses that are not possible or desirable in the old central part of the Village.
- Eliminate drive-in establishments from the list of permitted uses in the area of the Village designated the Central Business District. Existing businesses utilizing drive-in service will be grandfathered in until the business ceases operation,
- Reducing unnecessary light radiation while at the same time improving the effectiveness of signage.
- Address real and perceived parking problems by clarifying and updating various limits for parking for different kinds of businesses. Additionally, entire individual parking areas should be combined. These should include those behind businesses on the North side of Main Street between North Avenue and Kircher Park.

**Creating a Walkable Community:** There are a number of ways to improve walkability in the Village. These include:

- Promoting safety by reducing the speed limits in selected areas of the Village such as the highway between North Avenue and South Avenue between the Route 104 and Spry Junior High School.
- Posting additional speed limit signage.
- Enacting and enforcing regulations that make the four corners of the Village safer for pedestrians.

- Plant large shade trees on main arteries.
- Lower lighting on all streets to create a pleasant Village atmosphere and distinguish the Village's commercial area from that of the Town.
- Encourage the Town to provide sidewalks to connect the Village to Town facilities such as the Town Hall and Library.
- Install street furniture in the business district
- Provide additional crosswalks on North and South Avenues.

The Village of Webster Village Core Revitalization Plan, prepared by WCCED, also provides general and specific recommendations for improving the business district which are part of our Vision for the Village. These include the following goals:

**A. Making Webster's Core a Good Place to Do Business**

Revitalization efforts need to enhance the mix of uses in the Village Core particularly on the ground floors of businesses that open up to the street. The Village Core should promote a synergy between the community and businesses to allow for increased diversity and activity.

**B. Regional Connections**

The core area should connect to nearby amenities and resources, such as hiking and biking trails, Town Centre, and Village Neighborhoods. Impediments to this connectivity should be removed.

**C. Village Core to be Aesthetically Pleasing**

The Village Core should be aesthetically pleasing with more cohesiveness in design and the identity of the area which it conveys to residents and visitors alike. Architectural and building standards should be employed to improve the future physical attractiveness of the core area.

**D. Stress Village Core Identity and Role as a Gateway**

The Village Core should be a highly identifiable unique part of the community and various improvements such as signs and streetscapes should maintain and enhance that identity. There should be BID signs marking the Village Core

and incentives for improving landscaping and building appearance along with decorative improvements and features that would be unique to the downtown area.

**E. The Village Core as a Place for People**

The Village Core should be a place for people to live and do business, dine out, walk around, meet others, see art and local history, hear music and concerts, and enjoy holidays, festivals and local events. The streets, parking and open space should be designed to be flexible, attractive and to ensure a safe pedestrian environment. The Center Square should continue to function as the premier public place in the core area.

**F. Wayfinding and Convenient Parking**

The Village Core will continue to be an important civic, commercial, and residential district for the Village of Webster. Signage and markers must clearly direct residents and visitors to convenient parking close to downtown businesses and events. There should be a cohesive and comprehensive approach to wayfinding using design guidelines and stressing a unique sense of place for the core area.

**G. Accessibility and Safety**

The Village Core should be a place for people of all ages and abilities and access by car, bike, or feet should be safe and convenient.

The Village Core Revitalization Plan presents a number of strategies for achieving the above goals along with recommendations relating to timing and responsibility for implementation. For example, in order to advance the goal of Regional Connectivity, the study recommends that the Village Board address the need to overcome the barriers to safe and convenient connectivity which have been created by the Route 104 interchange. Another example is the presentation of a strategy that will achieve the goal of “Stressing Village Core Identity and Role as a Gateway”. This strategy recognizes the importance of “branding” and the need to ”sell” the Village with cohesive approaches that involve the Chamber of Commerce, the BID, SCORE and marketing professionals as appropriate.

**SUMMARY**

Our Vision for the entire area sees the Village of Webster as having a significant and vibrant role in the future of the Webster community. Continuing efforts to revitalize the Village’s business district are important for a number of reasons including:

- The Village business core is a symbol of community health, local quality of life, pride and community history. These are all factors in the community's efforts to sustain itself and improve economic vitality. They also have town-wide implications as it is much easier to attract investment to any area of the community when you can proudly exhibit a vibrant center.
- A vibrant Village business area retains and creates jobs which translate into a stronger tax base. Long term revitalization strategies facilitate the establishment of viable businesses that use public services and provide tax revenues for the community.
- The Village core area is a good incubator for new small businesses which form the building blocks of a healthy economy.
- A vital business area uses land, infrastructure, and tax dollars efficiently by concentrating activities and creating a "critical mass" of complimentary uses.
- A healthy Village core helps protect property values in surrounding residential neighborhoods.
- The traditional Village business area is an ideal location for independent businesses.
- A revitalized Village business area increases the community's options for goods and services including basic staples, professional services, restaurants or other functions such as housing and entertainment.
- The Village core provides an important civic forum where citizens can congregate and interact. Parades, festivals, street parties, and other celebrations reinforce the sense of community.