

Village of Lansing
Planning Board Meeting

October 20, 1999

The special meeting of the Village of Lansing Planning Board was called to order by Carol Klepack. Present at the meeting were Planning Board Members Halevy and Waterman, and Code Enforcement Officer Curtis.

The Planning Board held a Special meeting to re-interview the consulting firms Saratoga Associates and EDR.

Saratoga Associates

The Board met Lisa Nagle, who would be working with Dan Sitler. Klepack asked them to speak about what their respective roles would be and their areas of expertise. Sitler is a landscape architect and Nagle is a planner. One of them will take the lead on a project depending on the circumstances. If it's a heavier design role or economic marketing role, Sitler will take the lead because of his interest in landscape architecture and because of his MBA. If it's more about community placement issues, Nagle takes the lead. Nagle said that she has been a planner for 10-12 years now. They feel strongly about creating a central sense of place, whether a main street or a main corridor, that you can identify with as the center of the community rather than a sprawling suburb. They are really concerned about creating a distinctive place .

They have worked with Warwick in Orange County, which is the fastest growing county in New York State. Warwick is constrained by its boundaries and wants to preserve its character. Saratoga Associates did a focused study of the assets and problems in Warwick: parcels are being developed, supermarkets are leaving, the post office wants to relocate, traffic problems, etc. The consultants have gone through the recommendations with the community and the next step is the development of the design guidelines. Lansing may have some of the same issues, such as pedestrian circulation and sidewalks connecting the various areas of the Village.

The consultants commented that the Village has enough market momentum, but there are still enough undeveloped to significantly shape the future of the Village depending on how they are developed. The Board members stated that they would probably be interested in making some lot requirement changes to the zoning regulations for this area, but they are not interested in changing the uses permitted by the Zoning Law or changing the area from Commercial Low Traffic (CLT).

Saratoga Associates uses a multi-media approach to their presentations. Their travel expenses are included in the \$110/hour cost.

Halevy said there is some leeway to make some zoning changes, but it's very limited. The Village is committed to the current CLT zoning which acts to buffer residential areas from the Commercial High Traffic uses. Some things could be done with design, traffic flow, trails, bringing buses in, and having centralized, shared parking, for example.

Sitler said that the Village has an economic base, houses, parks, and infrastructure. What is needed is to create a sense of community character, making a distinctive place so there will be a sense of welcome. When considering where to live, people ask questions including: can we get there, is there a park system, is a distinctive enjoyable place?

There are different types of standards. Design is the aesthetics part. Development is a much more comprehensive approach that considers things like setbacks, widening the road, sidewalks. A Level One site standard would include how to organize buildings on a site, how buildings relate to each other, and how parking relates to the buildings. In a Level 2 site standard they think about the combination of buildings, and relationships of heights and scale become issues. Level 3 is a more sophisticated and complicated level and traditionally only historic districts tend to address these issues. Most communities like the Village address the other two levels. It may be that they would develop two sub-zones. Clearly Pyramid Mall and Triphammer Mall are one footprint, and it might be appropriate to think about Level One for those, whereas further up the street the buildings sizes and relationships become more important.

Curtis pointed out that the community is economically vital and systems work reasonably well at this point but the Planning Board is now considering issues such as balancing an increase in the size of the mall against efficiency in transportation, and it's very complicated. Without the increase in size the mall may lose its economic vitality; with the increase the Village road system may not work efficiently. The decision we make on this will affect economic vitality and quality of life in the Village. We have economic vitality now but Curtis wasn't sure we will always have it.

Klepack said that this relates to the question of why all the CLT land is undeveloped. The Board needs the consultant's advice as to why this might be the situation and how to address it.

Sitler said that they would have to look at traffic counts on Triphammer. The issue is to see what the volumes are, and what number of cars travel beyond the malls. Board members said that this is the thoroughfare between the Town of Lansing and Cornell. Historically traffic counts have run around 10,000 and that number has been fairly stable. Sitler said that there may not be enough traffic to sustain the CLT zone from a market perspective. Or there may be causes such as lot sizes, zoning ordinances, etc. .

They said that 8-10 weeks is a normal time to develop guidelines. It may take another 4-8 weeks to see the process through. They would hope that the conclusion of their effort would be to file a set of guidelines; so the Village's adoption process would be straightforward after lots of public input. Saratoga Associates suggest that the guidelines become part of the Zoning Law.

Klepack asked about traffic reduction strategies. Dan said that calming means slowing the traffic down. Reduction has to do with adjusting land density so less traffic is generated per acre, or by diverting traffic away from target areas. Nagle suggested interconnected parking lots so vehicles aren't forced to go out onto the road and back into other commercial sites in order to reduce the amount of traffic on the road. The Board explained that East Shore Drive, Triphammer and Warren Roads are the only ways to cross the Village from north to south. A NEST study proposed a ring road which would have the effect of a bypass, but it is very controversial and there has been some strong opposition to it. Sitler said that alternative forms of transportation work intra-village, and could have some marginal impact. Klepack said that we have a responsive public transportation system in the County that really wants to work with communities and they have a lot of innovative ideas of how to enhance service. Waterman observed however that the only people using buses are students and others without a car.

Board members told the consultants that this will not be controversial and it will be difficult to get large numbers of the public involved. They said it would be helpful to look at different approaches and talk about what seems to make sense. The Triphammer Mall area may receive one level of detail and on the North side of Rt. 13 a different level. The Village needs to figure out what the image is that we're trying to achieve. Sitler said that if they think about what the district would look like in 15 years then they have a meaningful way to address both sides of the street and really shape the area.

Halvey asked if there is a minimum number of people that Saratoga Associates feel have to be involved with something like this, or can we just use a few key people from the public? For other projects the Planning Board has identified key people in the Village and asked them for feedback. Waterman said that at some point there should be an opportunity for the general public to be involved. Sitler said that they would encourage the Board to do both. They could add some key members to the effort as an advisory committee independent of public meetings. The public would then be included once the draft guidelines have been shaped. You need to have something developed that seems to make sense before you present it to the public. Sitler said that he would assume there are a couple key stakeholder groups: property owners, homeowners association, business owners.

Klepack asked Sitler about his degree. He has a BS in Landscape Architecture and is a licensed landscape architect.

Curtis said that they had passed over the implementation phase. He asked how they gauge themselves in success in terms of how many communities actually implement their plan. Sitler said that there are places which have adopted their guidelines into law, including Marbletown and New Paltz. New Paltz just won an award and three buildings have been constructed there using their guidelines. Ruth Elwell is a contact person.

EDR

David Crandall and Bonnie Majestic from Environmental Design & Research spoke to the Board. They brought material on a project they just finished in Syracuse in collaboration with other consultants. Regarding a budget, they said that they understood that the Planning Board had a grant of \$15,000. However, they would need to get some sense of what the Board is looking for and what the priorities are in order to put whatever funds are available to their best use. Regarding travel costs, Bonnie used their work in Canandaigua as an example. There they had a \$20,000 contract and that came with a \$1,500 reimbursement for travel and expenses, which included some photographs and scanning costs. Figuring 15% for reimbursables gives a good idea of what it could cost you. They felt that travel would be a small item. They said that the real trick to expending your dollars is targeting the issues that are most important. They also want to make sure that the Board does not waste its time, so part of their job is also to help manage the project so the Planning Board doesn't have to attend a lot of meetings beyond the 3-4 times that EDR presents. That also helps save on travel costs.

Crandall brought the Board up to date on EDR. He talked about Onondaga County where they have sprawl and are losing some of their urban fabric. In order to re-establish the urban fabric and hold down the sprawl, EDR came up with a series of pilot programs. They developed a parallel code which has an incentive base. For example, one of problems in Skaneateles was a trend toward subdividing lots so that houses were spread out. In order to preserve the countryside, an incentive was developed to encourage larger parcels to be planned out allowing them to then be developed as preapproved. They planned small increments in a slow growth community. The incentive is that developers don't pay taxes on 20 approved lots until they are sold. Also to get reduced taxes developers can create neighborhood or community centers at intersections. The community wants to encourage clustering to create an urban fabric. They prefer that developers build in groupings at a higher density; so if developers are willing to cluster develop the community will increase the density allowed and relax the assessed value on the undeveloped properties. So as this evolves, a code will be developed. With this overlay zoning, you don't get rid of your old code. This is a parallel code which is incentive based. Developers don't have to go through the planning process because it has already been done. If they want to use the old code, they have to go through site plan review, etc. It's a matter of what a community chooses to place in its planning that allows the developer to have a choice.

Crandall described another project - a dead mall in Syracuse. On the left is Bayberry, one of the nicer historic subdivisions in Syracuse. EDR took a small strip and turned that into a center. The trick was to just flip the front door to the back of the mall and create a pedestrian environment on the residential side and a service environment on the road side. It was a very successful strip but not in keeping with the character of the neighborhood. So EDR developed a total of 7 models. They were asked to look at a lot of different areas. Crandall said that this shows there are a lot of ways to approach an issue. You can try to work within the current code or you can develop a new code. This was a 5-month process which used focus groups.

Waterman said that what the Village of Lansing Planning Board is really talking about is coming up with some kind of design guidelines for just the CLT strip of land in front of Pyramid Mall to Oakcrest. This is not a controversial project. Nobody except some developers and the owner of the property want to change the zoning. We are talking about coming up with some guidelines for what it should be like, but we're not going to change uses. It's not like we'll bring in all these focus groups, and bring in a lot of opinions.

Crandall said that this comes back to a lot of the issues or principles that they used in Skaneateles and Canandiagua. The Village is small but you still should look from your borders in. You want to have a big picture and then the small picture.

Halevy said that they have about 25 key people in the Village - business people, bankers, educators - to give us input. We have to get a group interested enough to participate and something like this isn't controversial.

Majestic said that there are different techniques for getting people involved. One is a general mailing, which can be very expensive. You may not get a tremendous turnout, but you will get a higher sense from the people in the community that you're doing something and they will feel that they've been involved.

In Canandaigua they put an advertisement in the paper and there were articles that said please come and be part of this. Focus groups were invited by the Business Improvement District Manager. EDR helped choose the interest groups they felt should be involved - a residents group, a merchants group, government participation groups. Each group ranged from 15-20 but you don't have to have that many. Two or three interested people from each group continued on. The thread that went through it all was the steering committee of 5 people that EDR reported to all the time. With the kind of participation you're talking about some of the early focus groups meetings can be quick, not long and arduous, to just tell EDR what you think is important, from having lived here. They worked with the Planning Board as a steering committee. EDR made themselves available for 3 days in a row to have direct one-on-one conversations with the public. As a result there was very good support for the design guidelines from the business communities.

EDR's style historically has been to come in and collect all the data, do all the research, walk and see the community, identify resources of the community and then talk about all the options. To just talk, but by doing that in about 3 stages we find out which ones really fit the financial and environmental resources. It's all done in a friendly, casual atmosphere. When you bring the public in for short charettes, they are more like work sessions.

Guidelines are tools that you use when you're reviewing to give advance notice of what you're looking for. Standards are made a part of the zoning ordinance and are easier to apply. You may want to have a set of standards for the right-of-ways and a set of guidelines for parcels.

Klepack said that in Lansing they probably want to modify the setbacks that are currently in the Zoning Law. Crandall said that guidelines have more to do with character and quality of the space.

In Victor, the point of the guidelines that they developed was to not let retail creep out along the central strip so the village would have a chance of developing a tighter retail core in the village.

In Skaneateles they wanted to encourage development downtown and preserve the rural character of the village. They developed standards for in the village - grid systems, urban forms, rows of trees, sidewalks. But for the countryside they emphasized the curvilinear road systems, topography and walking system to pick up character of the rural landscape. So they have different design standards for the village and the town so there will always be a sense of country and village. That's the purpose of these standards. It's not a law, but the Planning Board understands that when they make a decision it should be based on these principles.

In Lansing the Planning Board is trying to decide what type of development the community would like to see. Are we looking for a particular block type development that sits on or off the street? Are we looking to develop colonnades or walking paths in the front of buildings to generate more foot traffic? A community can spend a lot of time dealing with the specifics of the guidelines it wants for a place. It can bring guidelines together that suggest buildings should or shouldn't have ornament, fenestration, vernacular architecture in the upstate NY Style. What would make good marketing sense?

Waterman said that the Planning Board is also seeking help in trying to create an identity in the Village. This was an artificially created entity as a result of zoning battles with the Town of Lansing. We're trying to create more identity for the Village of Lansing and maybe figure out what the center should be.

EDR said that we still have to look at the whole piece. Maybe the most difficult question is what does the Village want to be in 20 or 30 years? The likelihood is that the Village of Lansing wants a walking community where you get out of the car and walk and shop; a village atmosphere. That needs to be designed early to be achieved. The road system must not be ignored. Ways for pedestrians to get around and to preserve village connections must be found.

EDR said that they feel this is a unique opportunity for them as a design firm, and they are interested in working with the Planning Board to shape the community.