

Downtown Sodus Point Vision Plan and Design Principles



INTRODUCTION

The Village of Sodus Point is well-known for its beautiful waterfront setting, friendly character, and attractive neighborhoods. During the warmer months people from around the region come for swimming, fishing, boating, and other waterfront related activities. However, the seasonal nature of its economy presents many challenges to the village and to local businesses. To address these challenges, the community approached the Wayne County Planning Department to determine how to maximize the assets of the village, attract and retain businesses, and improve the condition and appearance of the downtown business district.

In 2005, the Wayne County Planning Department secured a grant from the Governor's Office for Small Cities on behalf of the village for the development of a downtown vision plan, which would help the community create a framework for future actions in the downtown business district.

THE VISION PLANNING PROCESS

An advisory committee, consisting of village officials, local business owners, the Sodus Point Neighborhood Association, and residents, guided the vision planning process and coordinated community outreach and participation. Faculty and students from the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry Center for Community Design Research worked with county planning and the advisory committee to design and facilitate the process. The entire community was invited to four participatory workshops that encouraged community dialogue and collaboration around the development of a common vision for the future of the downtown business district. The workshop activities are fully documented in the Sodus Point Downtown Vision Planning Notebook located at the Sodus Point Village Hall.

The Downtown Vision Plan and Design Principles are the result of this community-based planning effort. The Downtown Vision Plan is composed of a vision statement describing the community's desired future for the downtown business district and a set of goals and action strategies to achieve the vision. The Downtown Design Principles are strategies that are necessary to create a physically cohesive, lively, and pedestrian-friendly downtown business district described in the vision statement. Together, the Downtown Vision Plan and Design Principles will guide community decision making for the downtown business district.



Thank you to all who have participated in the downtown vision planning process to date:

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Vision Plan

VISION STATEMENT

Downtown Sodus Point will be a welcoming commercial district and four-season activity hub nestled at the heart of the village waterfront. The pedestrian scale and cohesive appearance of the buildings and landscape will complement the traditional village setting and history while cherishing the beauty of the waterfront location. The mix of restaurants, shops, water-related and other businesses, and recreational activities will contribute to the enjoyment of the waterfront, providing an engaging atmosphere for all visitors while respecting and supporting the daily life of village residents.

GOAL 1. Develop productive working relationships and partnerships among the various municipal, civic, business and citizen interests that respect the needs of these different stakeholders while working towards fulfilling the shared vision for the downtown.



Strategies:

- Improve communication, coordination and information sharing between Village government, community organizations and residents so there is a shared understanding of actions, activities and purpose. Select strategies that build on existing networks, are regular, and readily updated and coordinated by representatives from each organization.
- Create a steering committee composed of municipal, community and businesses representatives to guide implementation of the downtown Vision Plan.

- Encourage the Village Board to adopt the Vision Plan and community organizations to recognize it as a cooperative guiding document.
- Share the Vision Plan broadly throughout the community in ways that will reach all residents and business owners. This might include presentations to existing organizations, broad distribution of the vision document and displays in public places and businesses.
- Publish a regular newsletter and/or develop other means of communicating regularly with the community about actions and progress related to the downtown vision.



GOAL 2. Encourage the establishment of an attractive, cohesive and diverse pedestrian-oriented waterfront commercial district that reflects the pride and care that residents have for the village.

Strategies:

- Based on the Vision Plan Design Principles, develop and implement a Streetscape Improvement Plan for physical improvements and modifications to sidewalk, streets, and open spaces that will encourage and support walking in the downtown.
- Establish design guidelines and design review procedures to encourage appropriate (in terms of size, scale, materials, windows, setback) development in downtown to apply to any new construction, substantial renovation, or rehabilitation.
- Develop a commercial signage program that identifies and promotes business and enhances the character of downtown, including guidelines for appropriate size, scale, lighting, color, and materials.
- Create a strategy to address the occasional large event parking demand.

- Encourage continuation and expansion of “signs of caring” (floral displays, well maintained properties, attractive storefronts) by individual residents, businesses, community and business organizations, through acknowledging and expressing appreciation of those efforts.
- In accordance with the streetscape plan and Vision Plan Design Principles, establish guidelines and introduce new pedestrian-related amenities, such as benches, tables and chairs, and planters.
- Identify, protect and build upon characteristics of a good pedestrian environment that already exist in the downtown. This includes short walking distances, 2 and 3 story building heights, large storefront windows and views to the water.
- Plan and implement improvements to existing parking areas to facilitate recognition and use, and to improve their appearance given their prominent central locations.

GOAL 3. Optimize the opportunities for public physical and visual access to and from the waterfront in the downtown.



Strategies:

- Investigate methods to improve the appearance of and provide public access to the waterfront east of the ball field, such as a cooperative agreement with the private owner.
- Continue to investigate options for creating a public dock in the downtown. As part of this strategy, revisit the desire and purpose for a dock, as well as the locations and associated costs that have been investigated, and prepare a summary that compares the approximate costs and anticipated benefits associated with each option.
- Create a coordinated plan or approach to improve boater access to downtown and to provide support facilities to enhance their visit.
- Encourage development of public access to the water at the O'Reilly's site (whether property remains in private ownership or becomes public property).

- Investigate alternative approaches and implementation strategies to establish a public access way along the waterfront side of downtown commercial properties. This should serve the dual function of taking better advantage of the waterfront location and improve the accessibility for those arriving by boat.

- Define and protect important view sheds to the water on the approach into and within downtown. Most of the views of the water are across private property and current regulations offer few protections for important views.



GOAL 4. Develop and promote four season use and vitality by expanding year round activities and by attracting and retaining businesses that are compatible with the village scale, respect the desires of residents, and encourage recurring use by both residents and visitors.

Strategies:

- Develop a coordinated system of signage and maps that will guide visitors (in cars, on foot or bicycle, or arriving by boat) to downtown and to other local attractions. The design and guidelines for this system should consider the village scale and traditional character, a limit on the number of signs, four season visibility, and promotion of walking and slow driving speeds.
- Investigate and develop a plan for a year round “coffee shop” in the downtown that provides a place for refreshment and eating, gathering, and meeting, and is welcoming to the diversity of residents and visitors.
- Improve and renovate the ball field to function effectively for community use as an open space for organized events and informal recreation activities. Particular attention is needed to address drainage and soil compaction, and to make the area more attractive and inviting through edge definition and appropriately placed plant material.
- Develop new community events that would extend the season and/or are seasonally related (e.g. fall festival, winter events).

- Consider alternative means of transporting visitors, including those that arrive by boat, to downtown and to local attractions, for example by trolley or shuttle bus.
- Develop a community activity program to provide year round activities for all age groups drawing from village and regional residents.
- Conduct a market study to determine the feasibility of desired businesses as well as other types of activities that may be appropriate to the waterfront village location and scale.
- Based on the findings of the market study, develop a business recruitment strategy that includes developing marketing information for prospective businesses and investors, creating a catalogue of available commercial space, and developing a resource guide for small business describing the “how tos” of opening a business in Sodus Point.



GOAL 5. Respect and reference historic features and traditions of the village in downtown redevelopment.



Strategies:

- Identify, restore and protect the scale and character of the Bay Street corridor as the entry to the village and downtown. Consider preparation of design guidelines specific to this important corridor.
- Document the important history, stories and architecture of the village and share in an engaging way, for example through a historic walking tour brochure.
- Survey historic structures to determine their condition and capacity for renovation and reuse.



GOAL 6. Continue to develop a network of pedestrian and bicycle connections through and beyond the downtown that connect and highlight the natural and cultural features of the village.



Strategies:

- Complete the development of the greenway connections between downtown and the beach with consideration to appropriate materials and location based on a coordinated long range improvement plan for the ballfield, parking lot and adjacent waterfront as illustrated in the Design Principles.
- Promote shared use of roadways for bicycles including designated bicycle lanes.
- Develop routes and maps for walking and biking tours.

Taking Action

The strategies under each goal require varying amounts of resources and time; some are short-term actions that can utilize existing local skills and resources, and others are longer term actions that require fundraising and outside expertise. Each strategy requires an action plan with defined steps and responsibilities. The following example outlines possible steps to implement a strategy related to Goal 2.

Goal 2: Encourage the establishment of an attractive, cohesive and diverse pedestrian-oriented waterfront commercial district.

Action Strategy: Develop and implement a Streetscape Improvement Plan.

Streetscape improvements involve multiple stakeholders that can potentially bring resources to the project. Stakeholders include (but are not limited to): property and business owners, DPW, fire and police, NYS DOT, National Grid, and other interested parties.

Recommended steps include:

- Create steering committee to oversee and advocate for the plan development
- Convene stakeholder meetings to introduce Downtown Vision Plan and the purpose of proposed streetscape improvement plan
- Research and secure funding for a detailed streetscape improvement plan
- Retain and work with consultant to prepare plan
- Convene stakeholders meetings to determine implementation and maintenance strategies
- Develop phasing plan based on funding availability and scheduled street improvements

Design Principles

Design has a profound effect on the perceptions and attitudes about a place. Downtown Sodus Point should provide the setting for a positive experience that supports use and enjoyment by residents and visitors. Through analysis of existing conditions and preparation of design studies, four design principles were identified that, if collectively addressed, will help achieve the vision of a welcoming and attractive downtown business district that takes full advantage of its waterfront location.

- Strengthen entry and arrival into the downtown
- Increase and enhance visual and physical access to and from the water
- Develop and improve the commercial street to have a cohesive, attractive, and lively appearance year round.
- Create a high quality pedestrian environment within the business district, linked to other parts of the village.

■ Strengthen Entry and Arrival into the Downtown

Entryways and gateways mark important boundaries and create significant first and lasting impressions. Sodus Point has two important entryways to the business district: Bay Street, for vehicular traffic and Sodus Bay, a unique waterfront entrance. The following design strategies will strengthen these entryways and reinforce the scale and character of the village.



Figure 1 View east along Bay Street

Bay Street sets the stage for arrival to the downtown. The visual quality of the Bay Street entry can be strengthened with consistent edging and clear delineation between the driving lanes, shoulder (or bike lane), driveways, and parking lots. In Figure 1, low stone walls, grass planting strips, and curbing create definition while reducing the visual dominance of the road and parking lot pavement.



Figure 2 View of entrance into business district from Bay Street

The entrance to the downtown business district is active with both vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Figure 2 illustrates how wide sidewalks, crosswalks with different pavement colors or materials, and clearly marked parking, indicate to travelers that they are entering a civic and commercial zone.

Arrival can also be announced through signage, public art, or other built features. Figure 2, features a low, appropriately-scaled welcome sign at the entrance to the business district. Care should be taken not to block or clutter the view to the water in this important location.



Figure 3 View of ball field parking lot looking north

different sidewalk materials strengthen the pedestrian orientation of the space. Unattractive features, such as the oil tank, can be screened from view by plantings, or fencing of appropriate scale and materials.

The ball field parking lot serves not only ball field users, but as overflow parking for downtown, and as an entry point for people arriving by boat. The visual appearance and efficiency of the lot could be improved by clearly delineating parking stalls, driving lanes, and pedestrian walkways. Curbing, planting strips, or the use of low walls, as illustrated in Figure 3, create a visual and physical separation between cars and pedestrians.

Figure 3 also illustrates how the use of pedestrian-scale lighting, trees, and low plantings along the ball field side, as well as use of

■ Increase and Enhance Visual and Physical Access to and from the Water



Figure 4 View of proposed boardwalk along north side of business district

The downtown business district's greatest asset and attraction is its visual and physical access to the water. Increasing public access to the waterfront may require the acquisition of public right-of-way. However, in the downtown area, opening up the waterfront will also create an opportunity for businesses to increase their commercial frontage to include both the waterfront and street sides of their establishments.

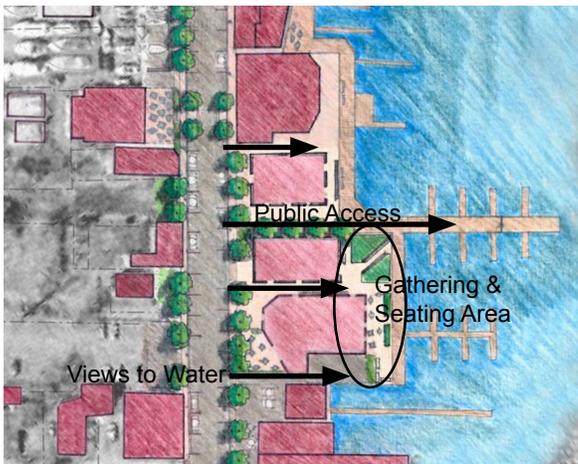


Figure 5 Illustration of redesign of O'Reilly's site

In Figure 4, a public boardwalk creates a waterfront pathway along the north side of the downtown district. Shop windows and entrances are opened up to the waterfront. Seating areas, tables and chairs create inviting spaces for people to stop and enjoy the views.

Future major renovations or new construction in the business district will provide opportunities to plan for greater physical and visual access to the water. Figure 5 illustrates a redesign of the O'Reilly's site utilizing the design principles. The footprints of new buildings maintain the view to the water from the street. Public pathways link the boardwalk to Greig Street and allow for easy circulation. Amenities such as benches, tables and planting areas create an enjoyable pedestrian environment.

■ Develop and Improve the Commercial Street to Have a Cohesive, Attractive, and Lively Appearance Year Round



Figure 6 Possible changes to Grieg St near Krenzer's boatyard

Knitting together the streetscape in the business district requires closing and/or screening significant gaps in the streetscape that are the result of the wide building setbacks, parking lots, and boat storage areas.

New buildings should be set close to the sidewalk and their size and scale should be compatible with the existing downtown buildings. Retail or restaurant functions should be located on the first floor with office or residential uses located in upper stories (as appropriate). Shop front windows should be large and inviting. Materials and colors need not be uniform, but should complement the traditional downtown setting.

The introduction of elements such as street trees, lighting, benches, and plantings—as part of a comprehensive streetscape improvement plan—can help to screen gaps in the streetscape and create visual continuity and consistency within the business district.

A more visually cohesive appearance can be created by screening parking lots and boat storage areas using fencing, creative display of boats, well-designed planters, and/or seating areas. In Figure 6, street trees, plantings and seating areas create a visual buffer that helps move the eye beyond the gap in the streetscape.

A variety of small elements can be considered collectively to make the street more unified and attractive. In Figure 7, signs, pedestrian lights on individual poles, and seating areas can be arranged to create a visual rhythm. Plantings can be massed or placed to reduce the haphazard appearance.



Figure 7 Ideas for improvements to streetscape in front of Papa Joe's

■ Create a High Quality Pedestrian Environment in the Business District, Linked to Other Parts of the Village

The scale and size of the Sodus Point business district is conducive to creating a pleasant walking environment. Quality pedestrian environments require separation between vehicular and pedestrian traffic, continuous and interconnected sidewalks and pathways, detailed and interesting edges along sidewalks and building fronts, and amenities such as seating areas and places to view and to watch.



Figure 8 Possible improvements to Grieg St at entrance into business district: crosswalk bumpouts and different colored paving to highlight pedestrian crossings



Figure 9 Example of sidewalk continuity in front of the Post Office

Visible crosswalks and crosswalk bumpouts encourage pedestrian crossing in areas that have adequate sight lines and alert drivers to pedestrian presence. Wide sidewalks that allow people to comfortably pass each other improve comfort and sense of safety.



Figure 10 Ideas for improvements to sidewalk and storefronts

Improvements to shop fronts such as wide display windows, window boxes, awnings, and appropriately scaled signs add visual interest and variety to the pedestrian environment.

Figure 11 illustrates potential streetscape improvements, including widened sidewalks, crosswalk bumpouts, and street trees. Street trees are placed along the curb in some locations and along property lines in others in response to varied conditions. Planted in continuous lines, they will still provide the desired cohesive appearance. To accommodate widened sidewalks and street trees in gap areas as shown, it may be necessary to acquire private right-of-way.

Benches, tables, chairs and other seating areas throughout the business district will encourage small gathering and social interaction. Figure 12 (F) illustrates potential gathering and seating areas in the downtown. Locating seating in both sunny and shaded areas provides choice based on season and personal preference.



Figure 11 Site plan of possible improvements to Grieg Street



Figure 12 Site plan illustrating integration of the four design principles.

A Design Framework for the Community Vision Plan

There are many ways to apply the design principles, but it is important that they are applied collectively. Figure 12 illustrates the integration of principles to create a cohesive downtown setting that encourages walking, complements the traditional village setting, and takes advantage of its cherished waterfront location.

- A) Enhance arrival into the downtown business district (see Figures 2 and 8).
- B) Redesign the ball field parking lot to improve function and appearance (see Figure 3).
- C) Delineate crosswalks with bumpouts and different materials to improve pedestrian safety, slow traffic, and mark arrival into the business district (see Figure 8).
- D) Develop boardwalk along the north side of the business district to facilitate pedestrian access to the waterfront (see Figure 4).
- E) Incorporate the design principles into redesign of underutilized spaces (see Figure 5).
- F) Create destination points and gathering areas for small groups and individuals.
- G) Create a pedestrian-friendly downtown through use of street trees, plantings, curbing, and wide sidewalks (see Figures 6 and 7).
- H) Complete greenway connection between downtown and beach

Get Involved:

If you would like to learn more about how you can help in the revitalization of downtown Sodus Point, please contact the mayor's office at 315-483-9881.

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