

## 2.0 Focus Groups

An important element of the Public Input process is Focus Groups. Focus Groups are usually small groups brought together by invitation to discuss particular elements of the Plan. For the New Hartford Comprehensive Plan, Circulation and Business & Economic Development Focus Groups were held.

### 2.1 Circulation Focus Group

Paul Evans, NYSDOT Region 2; Sharon Heyboer, Herkimer-Oneida Counties Transportation Study (HOCTS); Kenneth Lowell; Jim Papaleo, NYS DOT Region 2, Bob Rice, NYSDOT Region 2; Margaret Thompson, Mohawk Valley Bike Club

#### **Assuming no constraints exist - physically, financially or otherwise – what is the ideal for circulation system in New Hartford?**

##### **What is good about it?**

- Highway system and maintenance are very good
- Judd Road
- Judd Road can enhance access and circulation
- Spatially it is limited; it's not too big, it's manageable
- Suburban area is more contained
- State roads are fairly well integrated
- No a.m./p.m. commuting issues; able to get east/west very quickly
- Pedestrian friendliness in the Village can be expanded to the Town
- Opportunities for trail development – Sauquoit Basin Commission looked at trail opportunities along the creek
- LOS is good – very few places we have poor LOS
- Connection to Thruway is good
- Quick transition into rural areas – quality and amount of roads available for a nice bike ride is superior, low traffic volumes
- Nice roads for biking connect to roads in other towns
- Congestion means you're living someplace that offers something

##### **What are the problems and problem areas?**

- There are spot conditions related to development but not system-wide
- Judd Road to NH Street in NY Mills; Town can't move equipment right out onto Judd Road from Town Barn
- Should be able to get south from the Town Barn; it's locked in, you have to go to Utica to get back onto southbound in NH
- Neighborhoods are somewhat split by Judd Road Connector and the boundaries of the Town
- Clustering of big box commercial development has left other properties vacant
- Land use and transportation have never been joined to make the necessary funding available to solve potential problems as the shopping

- centers developed; roads have not kept pace with commercial development; transportation investment has not been enough to address current and future development
- Consumer Square – inadequate entrance volumes; internal circulation of Consumer Square backs traffic up to 5A
  - Those internal circulation problems were identified but were never addressed
  - Maybe there is a discourse that should take place that doesn't
  - Consumer Square is anti-pedestrian
  - No discourse between the Department of Transportation and the Town because most of the development has occurred on primary state highways; it's the Town's responsibility to work with the developers or consultants
  - DOT's interest in the development only goes as deep insofar as it impacts our highway
  - Parking and circulation up there is terrible
  - NH can't use any FILM on State highways
  - Incremental approach to addressing development
  - Quality of life issues need to be addressed in traffic and circulation
  - Lack of collector highways connecting to state highways
  - There are still residents on highly developed local commercial roads; maybe that could be relocated to a more rural area
  - Buses can't get in and out of Consumers Square easily
  - Frequency of transit might be an issue
  - 5, 8 and 12 intersection needs to be addressed is in HOCTS Long Range Plan from Judd Road north into Utica "non-standard weaving intersection"
  - Access between NH and NY Mills
  - Judd Road cuts NH Village off
  - NiMo is not happy with same issue Town barn has
  - 4-lane Genesee Street going into 2-lane Genesee Street at some point is a problem
  - Cooperstown has a lot of traffic and they don't have people going 40 mph through it
  - Bike connections from New Hartford
  - Riding from NH Street to Genesee Street
  - Wilbur Road pedestrian crossing – no one in a car is prepared for the light to change
  - Judd Road bike lane stops at Consumers Square but you can't cross Commercial Drive (changes to interchange to accommodate pedestrians are being implemented)
  - Planet Fitness is going to paint mile markers and there will be a lot more use
  - Cost constrains development of a bike lane on the bridge because of the issue of getting across the ramps
  - Signage isn't good – Commercial Drive is not marked

### **What new trails and roads should be developed here?**

#### **List specific locations for trail development**

- Along the entire Sauquoit Creek for bikers and joggers off the main highway; it has to be wide enough so that it can be maintained (10 feet)
- N/S arterial along Genesee Street
- CSX doesn't want anyone near their rail ever
- "Rails with Trails" Susquehanna NYS&W opportunity; not very frequent
- Crossing main highways have to be developed in order to create connections throughout the trail system
- Tour de NH or Tour de Mohawk Valley aren't feasible
- As motorists see more cyclists, they will get used to seeing and accommodating them
- Valley View area and Tibbits Road are areas where trails could connect to activities and schools
- Chapman Road will have sidewalks but they will be narrow

### **List specific locations for road development**

- Seneca Turnpike is said to be the next development area
- We've got plenty of roads
- Road development should follow commercial development
- Developers want to look at traffic counts; we can look at those and predict where roads should go
- Connect sidewalk systems as much as possible within feeder areas and schools
- Bypass from Route 8 over to Route 5S around New Hartford
- Water expanding out Mohawk to Higby Mallory, etc. Next will be Roberts, reduce residential development and truck traffic conflicts; trucks coming out of Litchfield, they go out Higby and on to Frankfort

### **What are the specific deficiencies, issues and problem areas of the circulation system in New Hartford and its regional context – including its air, rail, road, waterway and trail systems?**

- DOT philosophy is maintain in good repair; not to change
- If you have a certain impact, you should have a mitigation
- DOT can only ask developers to mitigate to a certain extent; the Towns can do more
- J-K – distance between the two signals is not enough; straightening or realignment is prohibitive – a multi-million dollar taking
- Capacity improvements aren't occurring anywhere in the state
- Land use element and transportation element have to be integrated
- Most of the congestion is people going from mall to mall; it's us generating more trips
- DOT does not consider congestion to be a problem in NH
- Congestion on 5A is limited
- Speeds to the mid to high 50s on New Hartford Street now that traffic is down
- Burrstone traffic counts are down

- DOT thought that people would reeducate themselves at a much slower pace than they have to take the Judd Road Connector which may be more distance but less time
- New Hartford Business Park (proposed) area there was going to be interchange
- Reconstruct Seneca Turnpike from J-K west to the edge of Town; not going to happen because of a lack of funding mechanisms
- DOT comments under SEQR incorporate the need for the Town to fund highway improvements
- Under state law, moving of utilities is done at the expense of the utility; when developers do it, it increases the cost of development dramatically

## 2.2 Business & Economic Development Focus Group

Lawrence R. Adler, Judd Road Group; Steve Brown, St. Luke's Campus; Steven P. Devan, Oneida County Water Quality & Water Pollution Control; Kevin M. Kelly, Jay-K Lumber, Jim Mackey, Sangertown Square, Pat McCann, Piggy Pats, Domick Pavia, Pyramid Brokerage Company, Philip Porter, Slocum Dickson Medical Group; Mark Reynolds, Mohawk Valley EDGE; Victor Mangome, Hartford Insurance; Patti Hayes, Charles T. Sitrin Home

It is the year 2015. New Hartford has undergone a wonderful transition, Describe what the Town looks like and what amenities will be here.

- Consolidation of garbage pickup
- Consolidation of government; we need to be less fragmented
- Consolidation needs to start at the state level
- Regional cooperation can stop us from (for example) stealing all the business from downtown Utica
- NH is part of the whole and NH needs to plan to be part of the whole
- Washington Mills is centrally located but to get anywhere you have to go get on a super highway
- Difficulties in recruiting because spouses need jobs too; limited job market
- Recruiting: Difficult to get them here but once they are here, they like it; low taxes relative to other places; malpractice situation is good; schools here are a huge draw
- Single professionals right out of college won't settle here because of the lack of nightlife and culture; The Hartford markets this location as a step along the career way
- Quality of life value – these are folks coming from larger cities
- Whitestown's parks and trail system, well used, great asset
- Sauquoit Creek Corridor
- Sprawl – “a little bit of control of the sprawl”
- Improved circulation system; scary part is Commercial Drive is new
- Water, water quality is going to constrain development; limited water infrastructure

- There is a plan in the works to enlarge the library; \$1 million in the bank, 8,000 square feet almost doubling in size – have a pledge for \$150,000, a \$600,000 wing possibility named after a donor and need \$500,000 more
- SR Sloan leader in roof truss manufacturing moving to Whitesborough; Par Micro; Special Metals; Con Med, medical support and insurance
- Trails maybe not a necessity but a very nice thing to have
- Should emphasize recreational facilities over trails and open space
- Arts, culture and recreation should be supplied on a regional level
- More mini high tech kinds of businesses
- Commute times are very low
- Connect Commercial with Washington Mills with Middle Settlement Road provide connectivity
- State canal system website
- We should all be New Hartford; make all the villages and names disappear
- Planning Board process is difficult; ponderous, they charge you; there's all these rules; process is difficult, drawn out and arbitrary
- When you have experience in developing here, you know how to do it
- Planning Board doesn't meet in the winter
- Sitrin looks for property outside of the town because of the Planning Board situation; businesses need to move quickly, be light on their feet; if you innovate, you wind up in a holding pattern
- Town of Webb inside the blue line – it is easier and quicker to develop there
- There needs to be less politics; the boards need to be balanced
- Planning Board: they're not planners
- Demand for growth here slows the Planning Board down because there is
- CEG in Utica, economic development group identified a need for training for planning boards; maybe you should have an architect or a civil engineer or a planner on the planning board, maybe more than one
- Is there value in the T/NH's planning function becoming more prescriptive, a checklist
- Urban Design Review (?) book title, Syracuse University prof 25 years ago
- There need to be designed standards and they need to be enforced
- Imperative that it is easy to do business
- Image, jobs need to be addressed
- Trails, parks, small town amenities
- Trails don't need to follow the roads
- Elect officials but professionally administer municipalities; mergers and acquisitions
- We are spoiled: Commercial Drive, 25,000 ADT, same road in Florida, 100,000 ADT
- Soon to be vacant Eckerd in front of K-mart will be filled
- Create jobs and the culture will come to life
- We need to be prepared for the jobs
- This becomes a mini-city if everything comes together
- Progress toward regional cooperation is being made; fragmentation hurts us
- Retailers say sales are good here

- Village of New Hartford 4-day-a-week garbage collection
- New Hartford wants a Wegmans
- Schools – need to have e-mail with teachers; opportunity for special ed
- Medical community not as developed, need to leave town for specialists
- Retail contribution to quality of life –movie theater, Barnes and Noble
- People moving out for retirement and taking their money with them; state laws discourage senior living development
- Smaller living situations, condos, gated communities needed
- Retail needs to slow down while the population catches up
- Sitrin and Pres Home have market studies on the demand for senior housing
- Technology Parks and Business Parks needed
- Town needs to be a leader and needs to be able to discuss issues such as the decay in the City of Utica; NH is a jewel in a rusting hulk
- NH has shown a lot of leadership in spite of itself commercially and etc.
- Helps our quality of life to have the pretty Barnes and Noble and functional green space
- The retailers are going to tell you when there are enough stores
- NH needs growth and better growth
- NH competes with Utica for offices; businesses are moving out but NH isn't prepared with a nice business park
- Chappaqua is nice, it looks good but here people don't maintain their buildings, it looks like the 1960s
- NH has to decide what it wants to be in the future
- Housing: Newer stock, more amenities

**What one thing should the Comprehensive Plan address?**

- Planning board should meet every two weeks or every week; some way of ensuring a minimum level of expertise on the board; planning is not the priority
- Focus on creating a supportive environment for businesses to grow
- The plan should be progressive for people that want to do something
- Create jobs and be positive toward managed growth, focusing on higher quality jobs
- Deal with infrastructure: sewer, water, road infrastructure or the development decision will be out of our hands
- FILM (Fees In Lieu of Mitigation) – Parts of Town you have to pay huge FILM and parts you don't – where does that money go? They have a list of where it goes, but there is never an accounting of where it went. (\$3.13/foot)
- Judd Road is a diamond in the rough; plan needs to incorporate some well planned growth on Judd Road
- Don't forget the value of local identity; we waste too much time trying to put one umbrella over us; London is nine cities, NYC is five boroughs.