



Association of Towns of the State of New York

TALK OF THE Towns & Topics

ASSOCIATION OF TOWNS OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK



A town's
identity
begins with
it's master
plan.



PG. 4 & 12

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OF TWO COMMUNITIES UNFOLDED

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Gerry Geist, Managing Editor
Libby Schirmer, Publications Specialist

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C L A R K

A Vision of Revitalization,

The Community

Situated 25 miles from midtown Manhattan, the town of Clarkstown encompasses approximately 41 square miles, includes eight hamlets, and has a population of more than 82,000. Ranked nationally as one of the *100 Best Places to Live* by Money Magazine, Clarkstown is also one of the *Safest Places to Live in the United States*, according to Morgan Quitno Press, and was most recently placed as the *No. 1 Place to Live for 'Booming Suburbs' in New York State* by Coldwell Banker Real Estate.

The hamlet of New City, near the geographical center of Clarkstown, is a high profile area housing the seats of both the town and Rockland County governments. South Main Street, New City's main thoroughfare encompasses a mile-long business district. This commercial landscape contains a unique mix of services including the town and historic county courthouses, police and fire departments, professional services, eateries and a variety of retail venues.

Like so many long-established, growing suburban communities, New City's infrastructure was nearing the end of its usable life. Despite continual maintenance, the functional and visual continuity of this hamlet center was lost. The haphazard access to businesses and poor integration of the business properties with the public spaces, aging streets with patched asphalt, eroding curbs and sidewalks, a tangle of overhead utilities and an intermingling of conflicting styles along South Main Street combined to make an unfriendly environment that affected businesses and was not conducive to private investment.

The Vision and Master Plan

In 2005, a plan addressing a renovation of the New City business district along South Main Street was introduced. However, after further assessment of the direction for South Main Street's renovations, a revitalization master plan was developed and a commitment to rebuild the New City community was made by Town Supervisor Alex Gromack, the members of the town board, and Public Works Administrator Ed Lettre. Within this plan was the creation of a zoning overlay district that enabled them to tailor its design exclusively for New City, resulting in a complete overhaul of South Main Street. This public investment in

Story by Richard R. Hopkins III, P.E., Senior Project Engineer with Maraliese Beveridge, Public Relations Specialist, Maser Consulting, P.A.

S T O W N

A Return on Investment

the transformation of New City would stimulate private expenditure from the businesses and property owners in the area and rejuvenate commerce. Reviving the area into a vibrant pedestrian-friendly community, would transform the home of the county and town governments into a beautiful, vital hamlet center that this area deserved.

The commitment's initial steps to achieve the final objective involved the allocation of capital for the project. The leading source of funding was obtained through the town's bond program. This provided long-term, low-interest benefits reinforced by the town's excellent credit rating. The town obtained grant money from the federal and state levels and entered into an inter-municipal agreement with the county to help offset town expenditures. Lastly, the project was divided into multiple phases, which encouraged more bidders, increased proposal competition, and ultimately, reduced the town's costs.

The Design Process and its Elements

With the master plan established and financing allocated, the project required the development of an extremely meticulous design and contract documents so that all of the public enhancements encompassed by the vision would be accurately represented through the engineering and landscape architecture designs.

Maser Consulting P.A., as the full service civil engineering consultant; Behan Planning and Design, as a design team principal and landscape architect; and FP Clark Associates as the traffic consultant were hired to create the design drawings and contract documents that would ultimately bring this vision to fruition.

The enhancements planned for South Main Street focused on the creation of a cohesive, park-like business district with improved traffic flow, increased safety for vehicles and pedestrians, and a high level of ADA accessibility. However, the boldest resolution was to turn this corridor from a vehicle-dominated strip into a truly pedestrian-oriented realm. This unique concept guided every aspect of the project design.

See: Transformation on Page 6

All before and after photos provided courtesy of Behan Planning and Design

From Page 5: Transformation Stimulates Small Hamlet's Economy

The infrastructure within the right-of-way was completely redesigned to provide a solid foundation for the streetscape. Traffic patterns were evaluated and roadway realignment was designed to improve traffic flow. Along the new roadway, from the curb line to the limits of the right-of-way, a multitude of materials and textures were incorporated to provide visual interest and appeal. The edge of the roadway was constructed with a split-face granite curb. Separating the granite curb from the sidewalk is a herringbone-patterned brick area with a custom combination of colors and diamond shaped brick accents. Typical sidewalk details include a colored concrete walkway with a border of colored, textured concrete that acts as a visual cue to delineate the walkway edge.

Rather than using the traditional methods of lowering the sidewalk grade across driveways to accommodate vehicular traffic, the street aprons leading into off-street parking areas were raised. This works to slow incoming vehicles, provides for a continuous sidewalk grade, and maintains a consistent walking surface to give priority to the pedestrian. This priority was reinforced by merging driveway openings to reduce curb cuts, installing curbed bump-outs and embossed epoxy resin crosswalks cut directly into the final course asphalt, all which help calm traffic flow and increase pedestrian visibility and safety. On-street parking was increased and reconfigured to maintain a continuous pedestrian pathway and provide a buffer from the traffic flow. In addition, the town purchased a parcel adjacent to South Main Street for the construction of additional public parking.

Other design features include extensive, raised planters with granite



See: [Attention on Page 7](#)

From Page 6: Attention to Detail Hallmark of Downtown's Renovation

borders; stone veneer retaining walls with plantings; lighted bollards and other pedestrian-level lighting; the creation of civic places with upscale bench seating and attractive bike racks; and bus shelters with solar-powered lighting. The fine level of finishes on all of the new amenities is nothing short of stunning and complements the many planters and gardens with colorful landscaping. Ornamental trees line the street on both sides along the entire corridor. Decorative cast iron gratings around the base of the trees and brass plaques providing the trees' horticultural names were designed specifically for this project and contribute to creating an urban arboretum. To help ensure that the tree growth would not impact the sidewalk structure, the trees were planted using a special bedding material engineered by Cornell University, enabling vigorous tree growth while encouraging downward root development. Every element of this project was designed to balance and coordinate with all other features. Even the litter and recycling receptacles incorporate elements to match the streetlights and benches. The transformation of this streetscape has made walking through New City more like visiting an estate garden.

The Construction

Knowing the difficulties of constructing such a high-end custom project, the supervisor and town board retained the services of the original design team to ensure the continuity of the original vision. The public works administrator was provided the authority to lead the project with Maser Consulting P.A. performing the project management and full-time construction inspection along with Behan Planning and Design for construction management and support to guarantee that the vision that had so painstakingly been put to paper would be implemented during the construction process.

Elements exceeding ADA guidelines are embedded everywhere within the streetscape design to meet the latest requirements and provide a higher level of improved accessibility. Ramps are located at every crosswalk and are built into some of the bump-outs to provide connection to designated accessible on-street parking. Specialized textures and colors in the sidewalks, crosswalks and ramps and audible pedestrian signals act as a guide for the visually impaired.

To create a solid infrastructure for the streetscape, the gas, sewer, water lines and overhead utilities were upgraded, the drainage system was redesigned and a new street alignment was implemented. Of all this, perhaps the most striking infrastructure update was the elimination of the overhead utility clutter. All of the unsightly overhead wiring was within the visual frame of pedestrians and vehicles. This visual eyesore was eliminated by removing the vast majority of overhead



[See: Customized on Page 8](#)

Photos on page 7 taken by Maraliese Beveridge

From Page 7: Customized Street Plan Draws Visitors and Pedestrians into Downtown

street crossings as much as possible and relocating the poles and wires from their former positions along the curb line to the outside limits of the public right-of-way. In some cases, the overhead utilities were relocated to the rear of the buildings in order to hide as much wiring as possible. Utility pole mounted lighting was replaced by decorative black concrete lamp posts, with accessory provisions for mounting flags and hanging flower baskets. The unique top arm and light portion of the lamp post were designed by the town team specifically for this project. This one key aspect of utility relocation was able to divert the focus from utilities back to the streetscape amenities.

Prominently located in the New City Gateway area across from the county courthouse sits Kevin Landau Park. The park was originally a small grassed pocket park with trees and pathways. Today, it is a beautifully landscaped open space that serves as a focal point of the gateway and provides gathering spaces with benches and amenities for visitors. Features include a prominent illuminated fountain in a plaza along with a gazebo displaying the town seal, flagpoles, raised decorative concrete planters, bollard lighting, strategically positioned accent lighting and lavishly planted pathways that lead to the town's historic Fireman's Memorial Bell that was restored by the New City Fire Department.

The Return on Investment

What began as a vision of revitalization is now an inspiring streetscape that draws pedestrians into New City, promoting business by making it easier for people to access facilities and transportation; creates new opportunities for business; and offers visitors a safer, serene and social environment in which to shop, dine and conduct business. The town has seen a return on its investment with the empty commercial space on South Main Street now occupied, and many property and shop owners have used this revitalization as a catalyst to invest their own money to make enhancements to their facilities, yielding additional benefits to residential property values, all while the community's sense of place is strengthened.

This revitalization project went beyond the normal limits of design with its unique features and extreme customization applied to every detail along this busy, mile-long business district. It has instilled a new sense of pride within the community and has made this hamlet a destination unto itself. □



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