



Claremont City Center Project Focus Group Summary

Business and Property Owners

February 16, 2012

8:00 AM – 9:00 AM

Common Man Restaurant, Claremont, NH

DRAFT



Summary notes prepared by UVLSRPC

Narrative Summary

Mike McCrory, Senior Planner for the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Commission opened the meeting by explaining that participants in these outreach meetings are primary actors in the planning process to reimagine the city center. He explained that the meetings are intended to garner input from the different stakeholders in making the city center a viable and attractive area. Participants introduced themselves and represented a broad cross-section of the city including attorneys, shop owners, business people, commercial landlords, and City staff.

Mike began the discussion process by asking specific questions. These questions are presented below with the responding comments.

What experiences have you had related to permitting and zoning?

- the process is easy and the staff is helpful
- proactive, and encouraging good development
- have heard from others the process is inconsistent and unreasonable which affects the city image

What do you like or not like about the City's physical landscape?

- Don't like above-ground utilities
- No lighting between the Square and the parking garage although there are three existing poles

What do you think are the city center's attractions and detractions?

- Parking always the number 1 issue
- Several years ago, there was so much pedestrian traffic that they narrowed the street to make the sidewalks wider; this trend has reversed
- Parallel parking not liked by users—prefer diagonal parking for easy entry and exit; difficult access for passenger against snow bank
- Possibility of one way traffic on Pleasant from New Socials to Glidden
- Nowhere for bikes/runners/walkers to travel safely
- No available parking on Tremont, especially at lunch time
- No enforcement of limited parking times so lose business
- Commercial parking on Franklin behind buildings is tiered so areas must receive separate maintenance and snowplowing; do grading and proper layout; have employees park elsewhere
- Not clear if parking lots at Legion building and old theatre are being used—should determine use
- Lack of maintenance of sidewalks—have individual property owners pull weeds, sweep, and shovel snow

- City does great job with snow removal, but they can't keep up; some spaces at American Legion are blocked by snow piles

What do you think businesses could do to improve the city center as municipal resources are limited?

- Allow volunteer assistance with street sweeper; legal issues that could be surmounted
- Individuals clean up leaves under stairwells, leaves, snow, ash—provide some city power to make it happen
- Create ordinance for clean-up
- Provide more trash receptacles and make them attractive and permanent

What do you think about the green spaces around the city center?

- Better and better every year, don't know who maintains the flowers
- Replace dead trees
- Legal and maintenance issues for city to have street trees
- Get donations for trees
- Pleasant Street needs trees
- "Heart of Claremont" is a 501c3 that has replaced "Main Street Claremont" and has responsibility for flowers, brick work, fountain

Are there any plans for expansion within the city center area?

- Some out-of-area people have purchased properties in Claremont as a future investment as they see the city's potential
- Need to resolve previously mentioned issues before there will be significant expansion
- City center affects businesses elsewhere such as the mills
- Expansion dependent upon the city and school reputations; school facilities need rehabilitation

Are there other issues about the city center that have not been addressed?

- Initial reaction when hearing about Claremont is negative; perception changes upon actual visit to Claremont
- Currently stalled in improvements
- Personal accountability and city pride of greater use than reliance on government; begin with simple improvements for now
- Many vacant, dilapidated buildings; cost v. resale makes investment unrealistic; no incentive to revitalize buildings; rents are low
- Need grant money to make buildings useable again
- Wireless coming to city

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Summary Narrative - DRAFT

- No store for business clothing
- Nice to have brew pub in building next to parking garage
- School infrastructure not its best, but the schools provide a good education
- School buildings brought up to standard every time the fire codes change
- People used to come to Claremont for several reasons; this still occurs, but not as much as in the past
- Consider a pedestrian mall like on Church Street in Burlington
- Need something aggressive to improve city center

Nancy Merrill summarized that the HUD Sustainable Communities Grant is to improve the quality of the city center, evaluate the nine zoning districts within six blocks, and make recommendations to the Planning Board. The project ends August 2012.

Respectfully Submitted by,
Victoria Davis, Planner
Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission

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Public Safety and Building Codes
Focus Group Notes: February 16, 2012

The following notes have been transcribed from hand-written tablet pages. The following statements, concepts, and ideas were generated during a facilitated focus group interview with participants on this topic.

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Permitting/Zoning

- Positive, easy, helpful
- Proactive, willing to work with applicant, encourage good development
- Inconsistent, unreasonable – affects image (heard)

Physical Landscape

- Don't like above ground utilities
- Black hole – square > parking garage: 3 existing poles with no lights

City center Attractions/Detractions

- Parallel parking not liked – want diagonal on pleasant – holding-up rotary traffic
- Rotary around New Social
- Nowhere for bikes/runners to go safely
- Parking on Tremont look & drive on – enforcement of limited parking, esp. busy at lunch time
- Tiered parking behind buildings – Franklin – layout better grading employees use most
Plowing, lighting savings if shared
- Legion Bldg, Old theater parking – survey are they used? Why/why not? – education
- Property owners more responsible to clear sidewalks

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- Great job w/snow removal but hard to keep-up – some spaces at Am Legion blocked w/snow piles.

Business Assistance w/snow/cleanliness

- Liability using equipment
- Leaves under stairwells; mixed w/snow
- Sidewalk responsibility to store owner leaves, weeds, snow and residence
Some city power to make it happen
- Ordinance – too few trash receptacles & they're ugly and not bolted down
Would City maintain if installed?

Green Spaces

- Better & better every year – don't know who does it.

- “Main St. Claremont”? Taken over by “Heart of Claremont” 501c3 – fountain, brickwork, flowers
- Replaced trees – same species
- Legal issues & maintenance problems
- Get donations for trees
- Pleasant ST. needs trees

Expansion

- Investments by outsiders for potential
- Need to resolve issues first
- City center affects bus. Elsewhere (Mills)
- Reputation & schools need rehab

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- Initial reaction negative until visit Claremont
- Current stalled in improvements
- Personal accountability & City pride rather than reliance on gov’t
- Vacant, dilapidated bldgs.
Cost & resale makes it not economically feasible
Grant \$ to make them useable again
Can’t defray costs w/rents, etc. No incentive
- Wireless coming
- Simple things for now
- No clothing store (bus. clothing)
- Pub next to parking garage
- School infrastructure
Good education
- Used to come to Claremont for several reasons – stores; still some reasons
- Pedestrians mall like Church St, Burlington gets shot-down
- Need something aggressive for city center