

9.0.0 DETERMINING NEEDS AND ALTERNATIVES

Residents of the East Side are committed to change. Through a series of meetings as well as several surveys, we were able to determine what they believe are important aspects of the East Side and what they believe are needed improvements. It is recommended that the Neighborhood Assembly, other residents in the area, and business owners in collaboration with City of Binghamton officials are included in future studies of the East Side. The recommendations presented here, while being championed by City officials will be require the buy in of local residents and business owners. Residents and business people need to feel that they have a say in any future plans, thus must be included in the process.

The recommendations provided address the concerns of residents and businesses, while at the same time taking a forward look at what the East Side could be. These recommendations are presented in order of interest and concern to the residents, but should be seen as a package rather than as a checklist. It is the overall impact of these recommendations that will make a difference in the East Side. One or another will bring about some change, but together they offer the opportunity to revitalize this neighborhood. Again, because the residents of the East Side are committed to change, and in addition, because of fiscal constraints of the City Government, the East Side Neighborhood Assembly is a potential resource to accomplish the recommendations presented below. The Neighborhood Assembly could be expanded to attract more residents to create a neighborhood grassroots neighborhood organization in which members would be willing to invest time, talent and sweat equity to revitalize the neighborhood.

9.1.0 TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION

Improvements in transportation infrastructure and traffic considerations are a major component of the revitalization plan for the East Side of the City of Binghamton, especially along the Robinson Street corridor which serves the East Side as a small commercial strip located within a largely residential community. This was also the number one concern of residents and business owners. Both groups indicated the need for street repairs and the slowing of traffic along Robinson Street. Street improvements and better public transportation facilities should be the major priority of City officials. The improvements in transportation infrastructure and traffic flow efficiency along the Robinson Street corridor were developed with consideration given to the concerns raised by East Side residents attending neighborhood assembly meetings, by resident responses to surveys, and by Robinson Street business proprietors.

Concerns raised by East Side residents centered first on the condition of the road and sidewalks, suggesting the need for total reconstruction of the Robinson Street corridor including the replacement of

Figure 9.1: Center Island

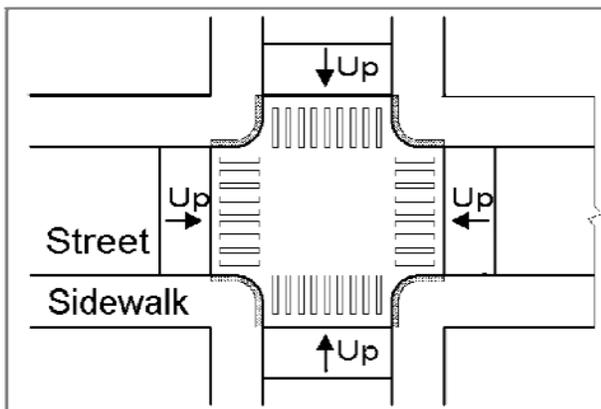
curbs and gutters along the corridor. Other concerns centered on the need for traffic slowing devices, including additional stop lights (particularly at the intersection of Bigelow Street and Robinson Street), more parking opportunities, and a truck traffic restriction



Given that the transportation infrastructure along the Robinson Street corridor requires total reconstruction, as suggested by residents, a unique opportunity arises to incorporate new traffic engineering practices into the revitalization plan. In an effort to address residents' concerns about increased traffic control, the implementation of various traffic calming devices is suggested in lieu of installing additional traffic lights. The Federal Highway Administration was consulted for information on current developments in traffic calming devices, the purpose of which is to slow the speed of traffic along roadways while not affecting the efficiency or volume of traffic flow. Traffic calming devices achieve this objective by narrowing the lane width, thus requiring traffic to reduce the speed of travel. With slower speeds of traffic, the corridor will be more pedestrian friendly. The decreased speed at which traffic will be able to move through the corridor will help the businesses located along the corridor become more visible to drivers and more accessible to pedestrians.

Creating a pedestrian-friendly community contributes to the development of walk-able communities, a planning focus throughout the country in order to combat increased obesity, traffic congestion, and air pollution. In addition, by re-focusing the Robinson Street corridor from that of automobiles to people, it

Figure 9.2 Raised Intersection



is possible for future development to occur at a different scale – the human scale, which fosters personal interaction between residents and shop owners. This type of interaction contributes to the creation of a sense of place. Given that traffic calming devices offer the potential to serve as a major component of the revitalization plan for the Robinson Street corridor, it is necessary to investigate the various methods of traffic calming to determine the most appropriate method of traffic control for this street.

9.1.1 Traffic Calming Devices

Center islands, placed at each end of the Robinson Street corridor, would accomplish several objectives. Specifically, a center island is an island made of concrete curbing with a green space in the middle that is placed in the median of the roadway. The strategic placement of a center island at each end of the corridor would act to slow traffic down as it enters the corridor. A center island is also aesthetically pleasing as it contains a green space in which trees or flowers can be planted. In addition, a welcome sign could be placed on the center island at each end of the corridor to welcome visitors to the area. Figure 9.1 provides an example of the center island traffic calming method. The figure illustrates how the center island technique serves both a functional purpose as well as an aesthetic one. The chief advantage of a raised intersection is increased safety for both pedestrians and vehicles. In addition, if a raised intersection is designed correctly, it can contribute to improving the aesthetics of the Robinson Street Corridor.

As illustrated in Figure 9.2, the implementation of raised intersections has the potential to foster the development of a walk-able community while also attending to aesthetic considerations. The application of this traffic calming method is recommended for use in only the busiest intersections because construction is costly. It is recommended that a raised intersection be placed at the intersection of Bigelow and Robinson Streets instead of a traffic light. Placement of a raised intersection at this location will achieve the same objectives as a traffic light; however it will be more efficient because traffic will be slowed not stopped. In addition, a raised intersection is more aesthetically appealing than a traffic light.

Another traffic calming device that is recommended for implementation on the Robinson Street corridor is raised crosswalks. Raised crosswalks are similar to raised intersections with the difference being that

Figure 9.3 A Raised Crosswalk



only the crosswalk is elevated as opposed to the entire intersection. Figure 9.3 provides an example of a raised crosswalk. Because less surface area is elevated, raised crosswalks are more cost-effective. As such, it is recommended that one raised crosswalk be constructed for each block along the Robinson Street corridor for a total of nine. The construction of raised crosswalks is consistent with the objective of orienting the corridor to

Source: Courtesy of Arlington County Department of Environmental Services

development at the human scale.

The final traffic calming device that is recommend for implementation along the Robinson Street corridor is that of chicanes or lateral shifts. Chicanes act to slow traffic by extending the curbing into the street on both sides at a specified interval. This narrows the width of traffic lanes, forcing traffic to reduce speed. Figure 9.4 provides an example of several chicanes along a street.

Figure 9.4: Chicanes



Source: Los Altos, CA

Chicanes utilize space that could otherwise be used

for on-street parking is unfortunate, but it is important to remember that the construction of chicanes contributes immensely to improving the aesthetics of an area as illustrated in the photograph. Given that a chicane occupies approximately the same space as one parked car, a limited implementation of chicanes is suggested along the Robinson Street corridor.

The construction of chicanes along the corridor will reduce the speed of traffic moving through the corridor while also improving the appearance of the corridor through the planting of trees and shrubs and the installation of benches, bike racks and trash receptacles. In addition, a few select chicanes would be an ideal place to locate a covered bus stop, as desired by the East Side residents. The construction of covered bus stops along the corridor would encourage greater use of public transportation by protecting public transit users from the elements. Figure 9.5 provides an illustration of a covered bus stop style which could be used along the Robinson Street corridor.

In addition, the construction of covered bus stops along the corridor would help establish a connection between the students traveling to classes at either Broome Community College, Binghamton University or, after the completion of an agreement between local schools and the State Hospital, medical classes at

Figure 9.5: Covered Bus Stop



the hospital and the Robinson Street corridor. Due to the fact that the hospital will be the future site of classes for nursing students in Binghamton University's Decker School of Nursing and medical students from Syracuse University (see Section 11.0 Implementation), it is imperative that the Robinson Street corridor be as transit-oriented as possible (without compromising the other goals of

this plan) so that the area can benefit from the increased student presence. The construction of covered bus stops is one way to achieve this objective.

Lastly, in improving transportation infrastructure and attending to traffic flow considerations, it is recommended that truck traffic be restricted from the Robinson Street corridor with an exception being made for local deliveries. Limiting truck traffic along the corridor as suggested by local residents will make the area quieter and improve safety. Improved safety is necessary if a walk-able community developed at the human scale is to be created.

9.2.0 AESTHETICS

Binghamton's East Side neighborhood has been targeted by the city as an area in need of improved streets, sidewalks, lighting and housing. In addition to these items, we also have determined that the area's aesthetic appeal is in need of improvement. Aesthetics of the area was second major area of concern mentioned by the residents and business owners and should be given high priority by the City. After conducting an inventory of Robinson Street's aesthetic qualities, several additional areas were singled out as critical to improving the aesthetics of the neighborhood. Improved aesthetics also adds to a sense of community. Thus, related needs include:

- increased landscaping
- improved 'curb appeal' of housing units and walking spaces
- more benches and park spaces to encourage outdoor pursuits,
- increased appreciation for the creek bordering Calvin Coolidge Elementary School
- the incorporation of murals and other art projects into the community
- renovation of the Cameo Theater's exterior
- storefront renewal and beautification
- litter-curbing efforts
- improved and widened sidewalks
- buried electric and telephone wires

Improvements in these areas will increase the aesthetic appeal of the community and will also serve to visually unify the area. The arts and the environment may appear to be far removed from the bounds of economic revitalization, but a closer examination reveals that improving the aesthetic appeal of a community can have dramatic effects on the area's economic value as well as its aesthetic, educational, and cultural values. For example, the attraction of tourists and home buyers, both of whom benefit the neighborhood economically can in many cases be attributed to improved community aesthetics. Many of

the items mentioned above could be accomplished through a partnership between the City and a neighborhood grassroots organization that would provide sweat equity for the projects. Attracting newcomers will also help to reinvigorate this community as its residents approach old age. An overview of the key aesthetic improvements identified is detailed below.

9.2.1 Landscaping

One of the most critical areas identified by both the City's Comprehensive Plan and our observations is the need for improved landscaping. Currently, Robinson Street lacks sufficient green space. Few trees or garden areas can be seen when viewing the streetscape, and the majority of homes and neighborhood buildings are without adequate landscaping. In order to improve the appearance and attitude of East Side Binghamton, the community needs to incorporate more plantings into its heart, most notably along the sidewalks, next to houses and in parking lots. It could be very beneficial to consider requiring commercial buildings to adhere to a minimum level of landscaping on their properties. Landscaping efforts could be as simple as planting a tree or placing hedgerows next to buildings. Hanging planters could be used to "green" store windows, and ivy covered walls could be also integrated to enhance the community's aesthetic appeal.

9.2.2 Curb Appeal

Because the ability of the East Side community to attract and retain both residents and visitors is in part a result of its outward appearance, its overall "curb appeal" should be improved. Curb appeal is a general measure of the first impression a community gives to visitors. Currently, Robinson Street has little curb appeal, as it provides few pedestrian opportunities, opting instead to promote roads and street traffic, and lacks an overall sense of beauty or charm while existing at an automobile scale rather than a human scale. The East Side can pursue several projects in an attempt to reverse this trend.

To bring the perspective back to the pedestrian scale, sidewalks can be repaved and widened, allowing for increased pedestrian traffic and outdoor pursuits. As mentioned previously, covered bus stops could replace the open bus stops that currently exist, encouraging more people to use public transportation and to drive less. Benches, planters and covered trash and recycling receptacles could be placed along the sidewalks, and shorter, more visually-attractive and energy-efficient LED street lamps could be installed to improve the sense of safety at night. The City should also consider the possibility of burying telephone and electric wires along the Robinson Street corridor. Although that would be an expensive undertaking, it makes the streetscape significantly more attractive.

Additionally, general improvements to the area's homes and buildings must be attempted. Commercial buildings should consider repairing and updating their signage and lighting. Additionally, the city should consider rezoning the area to allow commercial buildings to sport awnings or canopies, especially if cohesive awnings are used to aesthetically unify the structures. On private lots, simple improvements such as repainting and making small repairs to damaged exteriors can dramatically improve the look of a neighborhood, potentially increasing foot traffic as well as the resident's appreciation of their community.

Figure 9.6 East Side House



9.2.3 Murals

The East Side of Binghamton would greatly improve its aesthetic appeal by designating several of its many blank exterior walls as spaces for murals. Murals can be administered and designed by community members and/or organizations or by local professional artists to ensure that a natural sense of place is developed and not imported. This will help to create a unified sense of place and community for the East Side. Not only would murals benefit the community aesthetically, they would attract customers to the buildings on which they exist, and they would accent the community culturally, especially if they reflect the character and make up of its residents. Additionally, murals could help to bring the community closer together if painted by local civic or community groups. Combined, these benefits would increase residents' sense of place and degree of ownership over the neighborhood, and any interest by residents in the neighborhood will only bolster enthusiasm for future improvement initiatives.

9.2.4 Green space

A final aesthetic improvement that the East Side of Binghamton should pursue is an increase of green space. The difficult part is finding suitable space. The Chamberlain Creek coursing along Calvin Coolidge Elementary School and, on the other side of the street, beside Lourdes Primary Care facility is blatantly underappreciated and ill utilized. The East Side community has a beautiful, natural feature running through its center and yet the creek is blocked off from use on all sides by fences and wire barriers. If this area were opened to the public as a nature preserve or a park, it could greatly enhance the structure and character of the space. Removing a majority of the fencing from alongside the creek or

replacing it with more decorative, less forbidding fencing would, at the very least, open up the natural space for pedestrian, educational, and restorative uses. Adding a walking path would further enhance the neighborhood's aesthetic appeal and would benefit the community by providing access to a public green space and all the associated health and social benefits.

9.3.0 BUILDING A STRONGER SENSE OF PLACE AND COMMUNITY

Currently, there is no distinctive visual or cultural reference that says "East Side" or makes residents feel as though they belong to something special. We believe that the rehabilitation of the Cameo Theater would help to create the stronger sense of place and community (Figure 9.7). A strong sense of place would make the East Side more memorable to visitors and a sense of community would increase the resident's pride in their neighborhood.

9.3.1 Cameo Theater

The Cameo Theater was once a thriving movie theater, but today is nothing more than a fond memory of the older generation of the East Side. Restoring the Cameo is essential to developing a sense of place and community in the East Side. Furthermore, it would help draw more visitors to the area, boosting business activity. However, restoring the Theater to exactly what it used to be – a commercial theater – is probably not feasible in the face of competition from the two major commercial, modern movie theaters serving the Binghamton metropolitan area today.

Figure 9.7: Cameo Theater



There are several potential uses for the theater. First, it could serve as a multipurpose community center. It could maintain its theatrical function as a community theater. The Endicott Performing Arts Center (EPAC) was designed with just this in mind, to restore the Lyric Theater on the corner of Monroe Street and Washington Avenue in Endicott. Through the leadership of several people and numerous volunteers, the theater was restored and is now used for theater productions and classes. EPAC provides a very useful model to consider in restoring and reusing the Cameo. The theater could be used for low cost movies or for performances.

Other ideas for the Cameo include: a community center for neighborhood assembly meetings and neighborhood exhibits such as children's art shows; and a neighborhood youth center offering game rooms, a children's library, and space for after-school activities. Potentially, the Boys' and Girls' Club of America, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and local churches and civic organizations could be encouraged to utilize the space. It would help to keep East Side children safe and entertained under supervision. As discussed later, restoration of the neighborhood around the Cameo would serve to significantly increase the benefits restoration of the Cameo itself will generate.

9.3.2 East Side Binghamton Information Center

Many residents expressed a desire for a gateway facility to let visitors know that they were entering the East Side. A possibility to achieve this goal would be an information booth using the vacant lot on Robinson Street between the American Legion and the KFC Fast Food Restaurant. A small gazebo-like structure can serve as an information center, which will act not only as a visitor center promoting the East Side heritage, but also as a landmark for visitors to recognize the East Side. This building should be staffed by one or two permanent employees who are responsible for organizing neighborhood events and meetings and encouraging community initiatives.

Figure 9.8 Endicott Welcome/Community Information Center



Source: Village of Endicott, NY, 2007

The employees could be volunteers from the East Side Neighborhood Assembly or other residents from the neighborhood. This building could also be utilized as a contact office between meetings for the neighborhood assembly and the East Side Binghamton Business Association. Furthermore, since it is a relatively large lot, the area around the gazebo could be developed into a community garden, as recreational space is limited on the Robinson Street Corridor. Brick walkways for the community garden could be funded by the local residents via a brick drive, in which bricks are sold engraved with a donor's name. The drive would help the city raise money for the revitalization projects as well as give the participants a sense of ownership in their community. In addition, the lot overall would serve as a nice entrance to the East Side from downtown Binghamton as the lot is located near the intersection of Robinson St and Broad Ave. Figure 9.8 provides an example of a welcome/community information center.

9.3.3 CELEBRATIONS OF AMERICAN FESTIVALS

Part of our vision for the Robinson St corridor is a “Main Street USA” theme. The celebration of the American holidays, such as the Fourth of July, Veteran’s Day, St. Patrick’s Day, Halloween, are important to developing a sense of place and community. The celebration of these festivals could be encouraged by offering incentives to businesses to put on relevant holiday decorations and hold extended store hours to attract night-time visitors to the area. Residents could also participate by decorating their homes with the best decorated home or block of homes receiving a prize.

Another possibility is the hosting of an annual Winterfest, which would consist of a series of events between Thanksgiving and New Year to promote a festive atmosphere during the cold winter months. On weekend nights, there could be night markets on Robinson Street to get the residents out on the street, in which small booths would be set-up by local businesses and restaurants offering promotions alongside booths belonging to community organizations, gaming booths and information booths. Outdoor fire pits could be set up to provide warmth and good cheer. There could also be a holiday light display contest for all East Side households with small money prizes for winners to encourage residents to take pride in their homes and work to improve the neighborhood’s appearance. These light displays will become part of the attractions of the night markets.