

Community Meetings at Starr Library with CPC Subcommittees
October 2, 2022 1:00-3:00 pm

POPULATION AND BUSINESS ECOSYSTEM SUBCOMMITTEE
MEETING WITH THREE BREAKOUT GROUPS

(n=40 participants, plus 13 presenters and volunteers)

Population and Business Ecosystem

Presenters: John Clarke, Elijah Bender, and Jeff Cotter

Facilitator: Kathy Marryat

Recorder: Stephanie Gunning

Session 1

QUESTION: Thinking about parking in regard to the size of the population, which is down by 375 from 2020, and even if you count contiguous properties in the Village, like The Gardens, a development that has added 340 people, does the loss of residents almost balance out in terms of numbers with the number of visitors? In terms of traffic and volume, do we see a fair balance in town? People drive in from out of town to visit shops, restaurants, and go to Sunday market.

ANSWER: (John) Well, everybody in the Town has to drive a car. If you park and walk in you have a choice. But if you grow the town, you lose farmland and forest. Those people would still drive.

QUESTION: How many homes in the village are second homes?

ANSWER: The housing subcommittee is trying to figure this out. Nobody currently keeps data on it. You would have to go parcel by parcel to count. Or use other means. We do not have reliable numbers yet. Anecdotally, we know that there are more people using residences in the Village as second homes.

QUESTION: Where does the loss of population come from?

ANSWER: In addition to weekend or secondary residences, multiple-family houses being turned into single-family houses is one way. We've gradually been transitioning back to single-family dwellings in the residential district.

QUESTION: Could you be more specific about some things you are thinking about—and you asked for comments and reactions—such as concrete information about the municipal parking lot and finding a location for a new Village Square? I am very curious but uncertain about the direction of the ideas you are exploring.

ANSWER:(John) So, for the municipal lot there are 121 spaces now spread over one acre of land. It is not as efficiently laid out as it could be for parking. The solutions we've looked at were short-, medium-, and long-term options. One way is you could change the exit. It is harder to get out through the west exit than the east exit. You could put a building on the corner. That would give you six extra on-street spaces on the front. We got fifteen extra spaces by making other tweaks. Or you could completely redesign and consolidate the parcel with less aisle spaces. Then the first third of the space could now be used for

something else—like a village green or shallow buildings that hide the parking lot. These could have three levels with stores on the bottom and affordable housing on the top level. The size of the green space would be roughly the size of the Rockefeller Center skating rink. There could be terrace levels and an arcade around the green. Lots of options. The third option we thought of is putting in a parking structure two stories high with three levels of parking, which has the same space footprint as option two, and adding 150 new parking spaces in the center of the Village.

QUESTION: I'd be curious to hear about other targeted areas and ideas brewing as possibilities.

ANSWER: We looked at infill buildings for other lots and changing the arrangement of the sidewalks to be twelve-foot wide.

Another thing we considered is the placement of trees. We asked, How do we balance a canopy of trees vs. new buildings and wider sidewalks? This is a consideration for a diagonal parking lot on West Market Street. Street trees could be on the south side of the street (the widest area of the street at the intersection with the traffic light) near the Beekman Arms. Surplus spaces in the 1940s were diagonal. That's an option.

We also looked at replacing the dying trees before they are dead. This is the same problem as on North Montgomery Street, you plant additional trees in front of existing trees and let them grow up a bit before you cut down the old trees. The Department of Transportation (DOT) will tell us what we are allowed to do. These would be new tree wells in parking lanes between cars.

Bigger areas for trees to go off the sidewalk in front of the wires—not under them—so you get a better canopy. You gain sidewalk area for pedestrians as the trees are removed.

These are not approved plans, just ideas being kicked around.

QUESTION: Did you hear back from businesses about ideas they would like to see?

ANSWER: There was support for outside dining on the sidewalk and in their parking lots. A big point of discussion is how to arrange it—and also discussion of loading zones. Right now, a lot of trucks are double parking.

QUESTION: Parking. If you could magically create 200 spaces people would want more! What could we do to have FEWER parking spaces in the Village?

ANSWER: The Transportation Subcommittee is looking at it. I'm not big fan of making more spaces. We've observed (from counting at various times of day and weekends versus weekdays) that people park irregularly. (sometimes 31 cars fit, other times, 36 cars). If you define a minimal parking space length and STRIPE THE SPACES (paint an outline), this might be easily corrected—my opinion.

Ours is a rural area so it's hard to get public transit here. New technology includes electric bikes. Then people could bike into town, instead of drive, if they live within a mile or so of the village center.

Paid parking is another option, so people with a choice might walk instead of drive. Or it could be paid only on the weekends, so the tourists who create our "peak" parking problems would pay for it. A lot is on the table.

QUESTION: Do we have a walking problem or a parking problem?

ANSWER: A lot of businesspeople/merchants think it's about parking.

QUESTION: In your report you said that fewer buildings has created more parking. Is that about businesses being required to have parking? What about eliminating those parking requirements?

ANSWER: Hard to do in Rhinebeck where you need a car to get where you need to go—AND without transit alternates it is hard to eliminate the need for parking. The burden sort of needs to be shared. Some private spaces could become public spaces. We haven't gotten so far yet as to need to alter parking standards—we might want to lower them rather than go without them. We might have exceptions for historical buildings. And those that are exempted could contribute funds to a public parking fund.

[SIDEBAR: In the subcommittee report, it was explained that within a few blocks of the center of town there are 1,000 parking spaces, some public and some private. The biggest need is on weekends, especially Sunday when the municipal parking lot hosts the green market.]

It is said that a good pedestrian area is one in which both an eight-year-old and an eighty-year-old can walk around safely.

QUESTION: Where is info on subcommittee activities available?

ANSWER: Right now, mainly in information sessions. You can reach out directly and ask.

Session 2

QUESTION: I'm intrigued about the idea of a village green. Some topics from previous session. A place for visitors and residents to put bikes. Somewhere to get a bagel and sit down and meet my friends. Where would you put it?

ANSWER: Two ideas are the front yard of Beekman Arms and the municipal parking lot. The space in front of the CVS and the US post office are not capable of functioning as a village green where there could be performances and village movies and lunches. Beekman Arms is privately owned. So, the only place we came up with as a real option is the municipal lot.

Three options exist for consolidating parking.

- A) If you get smart about it, you could figure out how to park more cars there.
- B) Create an L-shaped arrangement of store fronts surrounding a green about the size of the rink at Rockefeller Center in NYC. A few hundred people could gather there.
- C) If you want more housing or businesses, you could build a two-story parking structure in the back and get 150 extra spaces.

QUESTION: A comment. I hit on what you were saying about angled parking along Market Street. It would help influence people in walking up to the town park and the library from the Village.

ANSWER: Right now, partly because the walk to the library is a hill it is uncomfortable to walk there but also because you feel like you are walking along a highway. Traffic calming measures including angled parking might make this seem more walkable. Plus, adding beautiful street trees in this area of the Village would be beneficial. It needs work from a retail point of view, as it is much less populous. You need something to happen to fully integrate it into Village.

QUESTION: Yes, we need to make it feel welcoming if people are going to be walking to the AstroTurf field that's being created behind the library.

QUESTION: When you look at the population, are you distinguishing between full-time residents, Air BNBs, and weekenders? Have you looked at types of residents?

ANSWER: The housing subcommittee is in charge of this. And having a hard time with it, as there is not one place to grab those numbers. You'd likely have to look up the owners on the tax assessment rolls. Data right now is beginning to come from the census done in 2020.

QUESTION: Are you getting input from part-time people?

ANSWER: Yes, from everyone. We are inviting a wide range of voices into the planning process. Rhinebeck is a hub for Northern Dutchess County, and people want to see how successful the Village is in planning and watching. We will ask respondents to be clear on the survey about who they are so we can parse the data from part-time residents, business owners in town vs. the village, break down the data and we will know more demographically. A lot of this right now is anecdotal. Its starting to gel in data. The survey will be the main way we can tell in the future. Also getting data from Kitchen Table Conversations (KTCs).

QUESTION: Are you against the parking stripes? They make so much sense. You can fit more people.

ANSWER: The village can do it on Market Street and Route 9, but the State has to give us permission for stripping or diagonal parking. Lydia, one of our trustees, is willing to go to bat for our plan with the State and County. It is just a process. Permission-getting is a hurdle, but we are progressing in our planning process as if good ideas will prevail.

QUESTION: I like the idea of marking off spaces. But diagonally, the way people back up and pull out, wouldn't we have more fender benders? I know, with myself, that sometimes a truck is blocking you. I prefer to back into a space so I can pull out straight. Not in favor of diagonals. And where would it be?

ANSWER: Just in the two blocks on West Market Street. The road there is fifty-seven-feet wide and then tapers down to fifty feet. You could move the lane over and change the paving patterns. Then, you could back out halfway into the street before hitting a traveling lane. It would be on the south side only between the Beekman Arms and the Mirabeau Spa entrance.

QUESTION: Has attention been paid to the intersection with the traffic light?

ANSWER: The DOT won't stripe a traffic lane to turn right there. They wanted to remove twenty-five parking spaces and the Village said no. What has been suggested is extended curb lines at the corners. Then the cross walks become seven to fifteen feet closer to one another. This would create better visibility. We have looked at major intersections in the Village.

QUESTION: As far as diagonal parking, is there data about cyclists?

ANSWER: Yes, there is a problem. Option 2 for West Market has a different paving pattern to encourage cars and bikes to move toward the center lane and away from cars backing out. On West Market, in the southside lanes, there are two lanes now. The de facto right-turning lane is, however, as yet unstriped.

QUESTION: Do we want to minimize traffic flow into the Village center? Since The Gardens was built, traffic seems to have increased.

ANSWER: Traffic comes down Route 9 on an average day. But Route 9G is a bypass to the village on the weekend. Trucks going to Hyde Park can go down 9G and avoid our central traffic light.

QUESTION: Could we divert people to park at a distance and walk?

ANSWER: It would be almost impossible to get them to shuttle in. The best strategy we've identified to lower parking and traffic is paid parking. Charge people on weekends as a "tax" to people not otherwise contributing to the tax base. Fees would be paid via kiosks. Smartphone apps could also be used. It would be wonderful to make the Village a place where you don't need a car. With Housing and business occupying space together in the center.

Session 3

QUESTION: During the pandemic it seemed like there were more people moving in, and I thought I heard school enrollment go up. Is that true?

ANSWER: Enrollment went up slightly in 2021 and down in 2022. It has gone down 16 percent overall in the last 10 years. Reasons: People are generally having fewer kids. Houses in the Village are owned by older people who live in them with empty bedrooms. The count of people per household is going down due to the trend of bigger houses and fewer kids. Population tends to go down unless you add more housing. The Village population hasn't increased since The Woods went in.

QUESTION: Could you talk about street trees?

ANSWER: Nobody wants them cut down, but they are all maturing at the same time. Especially on the south side of Market Street, they are dying and we are facing the possibility of them all being removed and having a barren side of the street. Sidewalks are too narrow and the existing tree wells are too small. They need more space. We are looking at placing trees in the street itself, building planters into the parking lane between the cars. Bigger planters could be put in front of the wires so they can create a canopy over the street. Natural drainage would flow into the street wells instead of on the sidewalk when it runs off. On the parking lane side where these would grow, you could improve the sidewalks and cut down the older trees that are dying. Oddly enough you get more parking spaces this way because you can close excess driveways (like the tunnel driveway), exits and entrances for the municipal parking lot instead of two curbs with no parking in between. We could phase it in so there is not a tree barren period.

QUESTION: Have you considered—and I don't know the costs—of requesting that the power lines be placed underground from the stop light to the firehouse?

ANSWER: Central Hudson is not too cooperative because of the expense. They come up with reasons. Such as: It's hard to find underground lines when a problem occurs. They come up with tons of reasons. They say street trees are a problem. Instead, utility lines could be put on the backside of buildings. We would have to rewire buildings and get easements.

QUESTION: We have a big tree project happening this fall on Route 9, did anyone bring up the idea about street trees in front?

ANSWER: We are discussing trees because of talking about the importance of "street calming" (reducing traffic and traffic speed) but it sounds like things are moving ahead with the tree project you describe. We (this subcommittee) have had no input on that.

QUESTION: Modern building technology has changed. Wouldn't it be best to use 3D printed sidewalk squares instead of concrete? They're easier to lift up to work on underground lines.

ANSWER: There's a committee on the state level discussing underground wires. But these are expensive so the idea is probably not going anywhere. I feel we should spend the most money on the historic district. Overhead wires are contradictory to this.

QUESTION: Since our population is dropping, are there communities around ours picking up population because it is more affordable? Have you looked at neighboring communities?

ANSWER: I encourage the creation of more housing in walking distance of the community center. There are acres across from the library where lots of affordable and other housing would fit. Growth in the Village, together more walkability and bikeability, would lower our collective carbon footprint. Places like Hyde Park that don't have a pedestrian-friendly Village-Center are just adding pollution when the population grows.

QUESTION: Will there need to be new septic systems added to manage new housing?

ANSWER: They'd probably be placed on the central sewer system. Developers would have to pay for it. And the water district. Cost is lower this way than putting people individually on separate systems for their own houses. But we cannot have sewer lines going all over town.

We asked the housing subcommittee if housing like this was on the table. Nobody in transportation has been discussing zoning issues yet. First, we are looking for good ideas. Then, later on, we can discuss setbacks and building options.

QUESTION: What about members of the workforce that cannot afford to live in town too? Hospital workers, for instance? Is this something that you are addressing with the transportation subcommittee?

ANSWER: We've looked at infill possibilities and how it affects transportation. Looked at close-in possibilities or micro-apartments. New homes don't all have to be two- or three-bedroom apartments.

QUESTION: You didn't know the tree committee decision to replace the dying trees on Market Street? Is there a central place for information to be shared?