

Downtown Business District Revitalization



GOALS:

- A. Revitalize the economic viability of the Village's downtown business district.**
- B. Increase the visibility of the downtown business district to potential customers traveling along Route 104.**

Existing Conditions

The largest concentration of retail and service businesses in the Village of Sodus is located in the downtown business district. The downtown business district is generally located on Main Street between Gaylord and Central Avenue, on Mill Street between Main and Grove Streets and on Maple Avenue between Main and Smith Streets. See Map 18: Downtown Business District.

On-street parking is permitted downtown, and a municipal parking lot is conveniently located behind the Sodus Municipal Building provides additional off-street parking space. The private-parking lot in front of the shopping plaza at the western edge of the downtown business district is also used for off-street parking by persons patronizing stores in the downtown business district.

Although businesses are concentrated in the downtown, other retail and service businesses are located along the length of West Main Street interspersed between residences and churches. The Super Duper grocery store west of Newark Street is the most notable and generates substantial vehicular traffic.

Most of the buildings in downtown were built prior to World War II, are constructed of brick or stone and adjoin each other and the street rights-of-way. There are, however, a couple of notable exceptions. One is the 1812 Hotel on Main Street between Mill and Gaylord Streets. The 1812 Hotel is a three-story, historic wooden structure with a small parking lot in front of the building.

The other notable exception is a small shopping plaza on the north side of Main Street at the western end of downtown. The plaza contains single-story structures of more modern construction and a parking lot separates the stores from the street. The CVS pharmacy, the newest building in the plaza, is architecturally compatible with the older downtown business district. The two other buildings in the plaza, one which houses a general merchandize discount store and the other vacant, are not architecturally compatible with the older downtown buildings.

The downtown business district displays characteristics typical of the downtowns found in many small, upstate New York villages. Several of the storefronts exhibit signs of poor or deferred maintenance such as peeling paint, damaged windows or siding, and deteriorating signs. Most notable, due to its prominence, is the 1812 Hotel with missing siding and rundown appearance. Owner-occupied business structures are typically better maintained than the structures occupied by tenant businesses. A few storefronts are vacant and business turnover is a common occurrence. Business signs present a disorderly appearance as the signs vary in size, style, color, and location. In

some cases unused signs for defunct businesses remain as do some unused sign structures. The large-scale CVS freestanding sign towers over the downtown and appears inappropriate in a downtown business district. Overall, the downtown conveys an image of a business district struggling to survive.



Residents Survey Highlights

61.6% of the respondents strongly agree and 27.5% somewhat agree that the appearance of the downtown business district should be improved.

Survey respondents cited the need for the following measures to improve the appearance of the downtown. The ranking by frequency selected follows with frequency in parentheses:

- Improve storefront appearances (74.8%)
- Install landscaping (53.3%)
- Improve appearance of signage (46.7%)
- Install decorative sidewalks and lighting fixtures (40.2%)

25.5% of the respondents were very satisfied and 39.8% somewhat satisfied with the amount street lighting illumination in downtown

29.5% of the respondents strongly agreed and 42.8% somewhat agreed that parking in downtown is convenient and that there are sufficient parking spaces.

Residents Survey **Highlights** *continued*

Survey respondents were queried about what measures would need to be taken to cause them to patronize downtown businesses more frequently. The results ranked by frequency selected with frequency in parentheses follow:

- Increased selection of merchandise (77.2%)
- Reduce loitering (72.2%)
- Lower prices (25.2%)
- Improve illumination of street lighting (18.9%)
- Provide more parking space (18.8%)
- Provide better service (18.2%)

Downtown Business District Walking Tour

The Comprehensive Plan Committee and members of the public participated in a walking tour of the downtown business district in the Village of Sodus on June 21, 2004. The purpose was to identify attributes and features that enhance the commercial area and should be retained and those that detract from the commercial environment and should be eliminated or changed. The following summarize observations and suggestions resulting from the tour:

Utilities Infrastructure

- Utility poles and overhead utility wires and cables are detracting and provide a cluttered appearance
- Street lights are not of pedestrian scale nor aesthetically attractive

Public Infrastructure

- The sidewalks along portions of Main and Mill Streets were observed to be in deteriorated and poor condition. Several sections were severely cracked with uneven surfaces attributable to pieces of concrete missing and/or heaving caused by the action of frost-thaw cycles.
- Mill Street lacks storm sewers
- The pavement paint delineating pedestrian crosswalks was observed to be faded and not readily visible. Motor vehicles were observed not yielding to pedestrians crossing the street in the crosswalks
- The public parking lot adjoining downtown provides adequate parking space, and is well maintained, aesthetically landscaped and conveniently located.

General Appearance and Character

- The business district is devoid of trees and landscaping, except for Myers Memorial Park, giving the area a barren appearance. Meyer's Memorial Park at the east end of downtown contains flowerbeds and other landscaping, decorative pedestrian-scale lamp fixtures and park benches which enhance the appearance of this area in downtown.
- Residents of the apartments above the storefronts were

Downtown Business District Walking Tour

(continued)

- observed sitting on front stoops and loitering on the sidewalks.
- Trash cans and debris from the apartments above the businesses had been placed at curbside early in the evening for collection the following morning which presented an unsightly appearance. Trash and litter was observed in the street gutters.
- Business signs detract from the appearance of downtown and provide a disorderly and, in some cases, an unsightly appearance. Business signs are of various shapes, sizes, styles and colors and are not consistently located on the buildings. Signage for defunct businesses and unused sign structures were also observed.
- Several of the commercial buildings were not well maintained. Peeling paint and missing siding were observed on some of the buildings.
- Most of the buildings exhibited attractive architectural features characteristic of buildings erected in the era when these buildings were constructed. The facades and/or windows of some of the buildings, however, had been modified in ways that were visually incompatible with the architectural character of the structures and detracted from their appearance. Buildings that were owner-occupied tended to be better maintained than buildings not occupied by the owners.
- A soft drink vending machine in front of one of the downtown businesses detracted from the appearance of the building.
- Some of the storefronts have attractive awnings that enhance the appearance of these buildings.

Observations of Specific Properties

- The construction material used for the new CVS pharmacy makes the structure visually compatible with the architecture of the older buildings in downtown. The CVS pharmacy stand-alone sign is much too large for the downtown business district and the base of the sign lacks landscaping.

Downtown Business District Walking Tour *(continued)*

- The façade of the buildings in the shopping plaza adjacent to the CVS pharmacy have an unkempt appearance and are not architecturally compatible with the architecture of the other businesses in the downtown.
- The exterior of the 1812 Hotel and the parking lot serving the hotel are in substantially deteriorated condition. Due to its location and prominence, the hotel detracts from the appearance the downtown business district.
- Some of the residential rental structures adjoining downtown are poorly maintained and unsightly. In some cases, off-street parking is provided in the front yard which also detracts from the appearance of the properties.

Suggestions for Improving the Downtown Business District

- Lobby the utility companies to remove the utility poles and to install underground cables and wires.
- Install decorative, pedestrian-scale lighting fixtures along the streets similar to the lighting fixtures in Meyers Memorial Park.
- Plant decorative trees and shrubs along sidewalks in the downtown business district
- Encourage property owners to restore the original architectural appearance of their store fronts by removing facades that are incompatible with the architecture.
- Encourage property owners to better maintain their store-fronts.
- Require the owners of downtown properties with residential rental dwellings to provide for refuse storage and collection in the alleyway behind the buildings.
- Establish sign standards to ensure business signs have a more uniform and attractive appearance.

Issues and Opportunities

The appearance of the downtown business district is not appealing or inviting. The downtown may be perceived as an unsafe area, especially in the evenings. The following factors contribute to this image.

1. **Poorly maintained buildings** - Although several owners of businesses and property downtown are making an effort to maintain the aesthetic appearance of these properties, many are not. Some properties display evidence of deterioration such as peeling paint, cracked windows, and/or damaged or missing siding resulting from a lack of routine maintenance. Some business signs are not well maintained. In some cases signs for defunct businesses are still displayed and in other cases sign structures/supports remain on buildings even though no sign is displayed. Some of the vacant storefronts contain debris and detritus visible through the display windows giving the properties an unkempt appearance.
2. **Visible Trash Receptacles and Litter** – The tenants of the rental apartments above the storefronts place their trashcans and waste on Main Street at curbside for collection. It is common practice for the trash to be placed at curbside early in the evening the day before collection. As the residents utilize various refuse disposal companies, with collections scheduled on different days, trashcans and debris are visible along Main Street on any given weekday. Litter may be scattered along the street if the trash containers do not have lids or if trash spills when collected. This situation causes the downtown to have a littered and trashing appearance.
3. **Loitering in front of the Storefronts** – People loitering on the sidewalks along downtown is a common sight. The problem principally stems from unsupervised adolescents. Women and elderly residents may not feel safe walking downtown and may perceive loitering youth as menacing.
4. **Lack of Landscaping** – The downtown is devoid of trees, shrubbery and other types of landscaping. The absence of landscaping gives the area a barren, harsh uninviting appearance. If landscaping were to be planted, care would need to be taken to ensure the appropriate types of trees and shrubbery were selected so the landscaping would not interfere with overhead utility lines, screen business signs or obscure the sight lines of motor vehicle operators and pedestrians.

Issues and Opportunities (*continued*)

To improve the appearance of downtown, the Sodus Rotary Club and Chamber of Commerce have donated hanging flower baskets and flower barrels. The flower baskets are hung from utility poles and the barrels placed along the sidewalks. The Sodus Garden Club cares for the flowers.

5. **Utilities and Lighting** – The utility lines and cables are above ground in the downtown. The lines, cables and utility poles contribute to a cluttered appearance. Lighting is provided by lamps high on the utility poles and have an unattractive appearance.
6. **Parking in Downtown** – On-street parking in the downtown is not metered nor are parking time limits enforced. It is reported that the tenants who reside in the apartments above the store-fronts routinely park their vehicles on Main Street for long periods of time. As these downtown properties have no off-street parking, tenants have little choice but to park on the street. This situation limits the amount of on-street parking available for use by business customers. Although the Village maintains a parking lot behind the Sodus Municipal Building, the on-street parking 7
7. **Sodus Chamber of Commerce** – The existence of a local Chamber of Commerce is advantageous for downtown businesses. A Chamber of Commerce can do much to promote local businesses, provide networking opportunities for members, sponsor educational programs for members designed to improve their managerial skills and to better advertise and promote their businesses. The Sodus Chamber of Commerce has approximately 83 members at the present time (2005). Membership has been recently growing and efforts are underway to undertake a campaign to recruit even more members.
8. **Visibility to Route 104 Traffic** – NYS Department of Transportation traffic counts reveals that approximately 10,000 vehicles per day travel along the segment of Route 104 between the Route 88 and Ridge Road intersections. The highway is only a short distance from downtown business district and can be accessed from Route 108 via Route 88 or Maple Street. This traffic represents an untapped source of potential customers for downtown businesses. The business community needs to develop strategies to increase its visibility to passing motorists and to entice motorist into downtown.

Currently, it is easy for motorist traveling along Route 104 to drive right past the Village of Sodus without realizing how close downtown is from the highway.

9. **Appearance of Gateways into the Village**— Unfortunately, the Route 88 and Maple Street gateways into the Village of Sodus contain numerous poorly maintained and deteriorated buildings and properties. Such buildings and properties reflect poorly on the community and may deter motorists from coming into the downtown.

The Sodus Chamber of Commerce and the Sodus Garden Club have installed decorative welcome signs along Ridge Road at the east and west entrances of the Village. Flowers have been planted around the base of the signs to enhance their attractiveness. The Sodus Garden Club cares for the flowers.



Tools and Techniques

Business Improvement Districts (BID)

BIDs provide a means for raising revenue to pay for the cost of making public improvements and providing specialized municipal services to benefit businesses within such districts. The revenue is raised by a special property tax levied against the properties within the BID. The formation of a BID requires action of a municipal governing body with the consent of property owners whose properties would be incorporated into the BID. Revenues may be used to make such public improvements in the BID as the installation of sidewalks, lighting, benches, trash receptacles and other pedestrian amenities, and landscaping or for the provision of specialized services such as street cleaning or sidewalk snow removal.

The Main Street Program

The Main Street Trust for Historic Preservation headquartered in Washington, DC has developed tried-and-true strategies small municipalities nationwide use to revitalize their downtown business districts. The Main Street Program is a self-help, do-it-yourself program that relies principally on volunteers to carry it out the various steps and measures called for in the program. The strategy is based on four elements: (1) organization, (2) promotion, (3) economic restructuring, and (4) design. The Main Street Trust make consultants, workshops and educational books and materials provide information on how to implement the Main Street strategy available to member communities.

The Community and Rural Development Institute (CaRDI) is affiliated with Cornell University and is headquartered in Ithaca, New York. CaRDI offers a Main Street educational and technical assistance program for revitalizing downtown business districts in Village's in New York State.

Curfew Law

In November 2004, the Village Board enacted a curfew law that prohibits youth under the age of 18 from loitering in the Village of Sodus. Enforcement of the new law should reduce the amount of loitering that occurs downtown, although it will not prevent or reduce loitering by the adults who reside in the dwellings above the storefronts.

Zoning Regulations

Zoning regulations can be used to require the owners of downtown property containing residential rental dwellings to provide dumpsters for the disposal of their tenants' trash. Such regulations usually require the dumpsters to be sited behind the buildings if feasible.

Where siting a dumpster behind buildings is not feasible, zoning regulations usually require the property owner to screen the dumpster from view with decorative plantings or fences.

The unsightliness of refuse containers being placed at curbside for pickup in the downtown business district could be reduced by the Village of Sodus by franchising refuse collection within the Village. By issuing an exclusive franchise to a single refuse collection company, the Village could restrict the weekly collection of refuse in downtown and throughout the remainder of the Village to a specified day of the week. Franchising also has the potential to result in reduced costs for residents.

Sign Design Standards

Some communities develop and utilize sign design standards and sign regulations to regulate the: size, type, placement, illumination, style, color, maintenance and removal of signage installed in their business districts. Often the sign regulations are incorporated into the zoning code. Removal of the sign or at least the sign message is routinely required if the businesses that erected the sign ceases operation. Sign standards can do much to improve the appearance of a downtown business district.

Small Cities Comprehensive Grants

The federal Small Cities grant program (Community Development Block Grant) administered by the Governor's Office for Small Cities, provides a potential funding source to pay for making physical improvements in the downtown business districts including public improvements, residential improvements and business improvements. Small Cities grants of up to \$650,000 for "comprehensive" projects are available annually on a competitive basis. Grants to capitalize micro-enterprise revolving loan funds for use to provide financing to small businesses are also available annually through the Small Cities program. Micro-enterprise grants are also on a competitive basis and funding is limited to \$400,000. Financing may be provided to existing businesses as well as to start-up businesses.

The Wayne County Micro-Enterprise Revolving Fund Program was capitalized with Small Cities funds and is available to small businesses located in Sodus that meet the loan criteria.

Cooperative Advertising and Promotions

Small, locally-owned businesses often operate on a "shoestring" and have very limited amounts of funds available for advertising or promotional activities. Cooperative advertising and cross-promotional programs offer such businesses with an affordable way to advertise and increase businesses.

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Cooperative advertising involves a number of businesses working together to develop print advertisements that advertise all of the participating businesses in a single advertisement. Each business is allotted a portion of the space. The advantage of cooperative advertising is that together, businesses that pool their advertising resources can afford to purchase more space for a single advertisement that is more likely to be noticed than small individual advertisements scattered throughout a newspaper that might be overlooked by readers. Cooperative advertising also enables the participating businesses to develop an image of the business district, that individually placed ads cannot achieve.

Cross-promotional activities are also cooperative undertakings. Contests and discounts contests represent a couple of typical cross-promotional tools that can be used. Contests typically require people to go into the participating businesses in order to qualify for the prize which provides the businesses with opportunities to sell merchandise or services to contestants. Discounting, involves giving customers who make a purchase in one of the businesses with a discount coupon redeemable in one of the other participating businesses. The discount coupons are designed to entice customers into all the participating stores and businesses to take advantage of the discounts.



Recommended Actions

1. Lobby and encourage the electric, telephone and cable television companies to bury their respective utility lines and cables in the downtown business district.
2. Form a business improvement district (BID) to raise tax revenue to pay for the cost of making public improvements in the downtown business district. Such improvements may include visually appealing surface treatments for streets, sidewalks, and pedestrian crosswalks, and the installation of landscaping and decorative, pedestrian-scale street lights.
3. Install attractive signage on Route 104 at the Route 88 and Maple Avenue intersections to inform motorists of the quick and easy access to the Village's downtown business district and that identify the businesses in the Village.
4. Encourage the Sodus Chamber of Commerce and the Village of Sodus to work jointly to implement a "Main Street" revitalization program utilizing the strategies developed and recommended by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.
5. Encourage businesses owners and operators as well as individuals to join the Sodus Chamber of Commerce and become active in Chamber activities and events.
6. Encourage local community events, festivals and programs such as the Olde Tyme Country Faire designed to bring in people from outside Sodus into the community.
7. Eliminate the unsightliness of trash receptacles being placed at curbside in the Village on multiple days of the week by franchising with a single company to provide refuse collection services.
8. Enact zoning regulations applicable to residential apartments located in the downtown business district to establish minimum off-street parking requirements, provisions for storage of refuse, and other appropriate requirements.
9. Develop and enforce design standards for business signs to improve the appearance of signage in the downtown businesses district.
10. Pursue a Small Cities Community Development Block Grant to pay for the cost of making public improvements in the downtown business district.
11. Erect a billboard along Route 104 for the display of a "community calendar" to inform passing motorists of community events and activities.