

A Study of the Village of Haverstraw's Downtown

Prepared for

Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress

Village of Haverstraw

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June 17, 2016

HUDSON VALLEY **PATTERN** *for* **PROGRESS**



**Hudson River
Valley Greenway**

This project/plan was funded in part by a grant from the Hudson River Valley Greenway

Executive Summary

The Village of Haverstraw is located in the town of Haverstraw and is one of the more urbanized communities in Rockland County. Incorporated in 1854, it sits on the shore of the Hudson River approximately 40 mile north of New York City and has a uniquely diverse population of 12,000 people.

Due to the abundance of clay and its advantageous geography, Haverstraw became the center of the brickmaking industry in the late 1800s and early 1900s. With over 40 brick factories lining its shores, the city earned it the well-deserved nickname, the “Brickmaking Capital of the World”.

As the brick industry declined, so did the population of its diverse makeup that included the English, Irish, and African Americans who prospered during the brick making boom; however, during the 1950s, new wave of Hispanic immigrants arrived filling the gap and contributing to the ever growing multicultural tapestry of the village’s community.

Over the past several decades, as the village has experienced a combination of both inbound and outbound migration it has grown even more diverse but also poorer and less cohesive. While more recently it has been in a state of relative stasis it is perfectly poised for a renaissance that could make the village a healthy and vibrant place to live, work, and visit.

With the completion of a successful building project that boasts 200 rental units, new restaurants continue to open along its Main Street corridor. It also enjoys the institutional presence of a vibrant public library, Rockland Community College’s second campus and the new Rockland County Career Center, which hosts community organizations and contributes to civic life of the village.

With strong leadership, long-term planning, and community participation, this charming village with its historic and rich heritage could become an ideal home for those who desire a lifestyle that is more relaxed, ethnically diverse and less costly.

Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the reader to Haverstraw with a focus on its downtown area and make recommendations that will help the village grow and flourish.

Haverstraw Downtown Existing Characteristics

Probably more than any other municipality in the lower Hudson Valley, the Village of Haverstraw's downtown is a "diamond in the rough". Haverstraw has retained its historical character and a Main Street corridor that leads directly to the river. Its Main Street businesses are concentrated on serving the local residents for services such as restaurants and other basic amenities.

Based on consultation with local public officials, stakeholders and community advocates, the following assessment of the downtown/commercial areas of the Village has been compiled.

Assets

- High population density with residential units in the downtown promoting livability and walkability rate (76 percent).
- Ethnically diverse, with large Hispanic demographic (67% of the 12,000 residents).
- Ample labor pool for prospective employers to utilize.
- Diversity on the Board of Trustees that substantively reflects the community.
- Proximity to NYC (~ 40 miles) and historically intact downtown.
- Narrow streets reflecting the quaint appearance and character of the Village.
- Ample access to public transportation
 - Rockland County bus system.
 - Ferry to Ossining that connects to the Metro-North line into NYC.
 - Large number of taxicabs.
- Abundance of restaurants and bars which could cross-market to attract increased patronage outside the Village
- Many parks offering diverse recreational activities.
- Recreational trails and paths that provide linkages to outstanding waterfront views.
- Long waterfront access with 3.2 miles of publicly-accessible shoreline with a public pedestrian promenade.
- Active downtown with retail and commercial uses concentrated along New Main Street.
- The presence of locally owned small-scale businesses with a vested interest to succeed.
- A wealth of significant historic resources and institutions that include:
 - Public Library (registered on the National and State Registry of Historic Places)
 - Post Office (registered on the National and State Registry of Historic Places)
 - Rockland Community College (higher education)
 - the Rockland County Career Center (training and employment skills)

Challenges & Opportunities:

- Better integration between Hispanic groups needed.
- Lack of community-based policing with a dedicated focus on local safety needs.
- High property taxes which stifle upgrading and renovation efforts.
- Lack of variety in the number local businesses catering solely to local needs
- Visible vacancies downtown.
- Aging infrastructure such as sewer/water
- Limited retail banks to serve the general public.

- Lack of public access amenities along the riverfront.
- Lack of effective code enforcement.
- Ineffective signage throughout the downtown.
- Lack of uniform and aesthetically pleasing streetscape

Background and Revitalization Plans

The village of Haverstraw enjoys a rich heritage. Its origins date back to 1609 with Henry Hudson’s explorations and was official purchased from local native inhabitanace in 1666. Situated on the banks of the Hudson River, it served as an important lookout during the Revolution. Its access to the Hudson River and proximity to New York City made for an advantageous location that attracted industry as the country matured and its economy grew.

By the 1880s there were over forty brickyards operating in the Haverstraw area. In a single year over three-hundred million bricks were shipped out of Haverstraw Bay to the New York City, giving the village the title, “Brickmaking capital of the world”. Although brickmaking represented every ethnic group, it is estimated at close to sixty percent were African-American.

Like all industrial towns along the Hudson River, the Village of Haverstraw attracted continual waves of immigrants from each successive influx of nationalities coming through the ports of New York and beyond. These ongoing cycles of immigration have left indelible marks on the village’s landscape, architecture, and most significantly, its culture.

By the 1950s, with the brick industry in rapid decline, the village experienced a new wave of migration with Hispanics setting down roots in the inexpensive housing that was available. This pattern has continued into the present and as of 2010, Hispanics make up over sixty-seven percent of the village’s population which is just short of twelve-thousand.

Geography

The village of Haverstraw encompasses approximately five square miles. At roughly thirty feet above sea-level, the village is wedged tightly between the Hudson River and High Tor Mountain. Its main commercial corridor, New Main Street, runs from 9W directly to the edge of the Hudson River. These natural geographic features provide an organic framework through which the village can expand its density as well as economic vitality.

Revitalization Efforts and Urban Planning

Over the past decade, the Village of Haverstraw has spent time working with community leaders and local developers to layout specific visions for the village’s future growth. These particular initiatives were

| Item | Year Completed |
|--|-----------------------|
| Master Plan | 1993 |
| Downtown Waterfront Redevelopment District | 2001 |
| Local Waterfront Revitalization Program | 2004 |
| Blight Study of targeted area of Main Street | 2004 |
| Downtown Revitalization Plan | 2005 |

never fully implemented mainly due to several economic challenges facing the village stemming from the *U.S. Housing Market Crisis* in 2008.

The Riverfront and New Main Street

Haverstraw's riverfront has immense potential in the form of recreation, transportation (via Ferry), and commercial development. Additionally, the village's diverse population offers a unique cultural experience upon which a thriving community could be built.

The major assets of the village: the riverfront, High Tor State Park, New Main Street, and surrounding neighborhood should all be included in a comprehensive approach.

Most Recent Plans and Visions for Revitalization

Streetscapes Project

This project was funded through a NY DOT grant and focused on improving the facades and appeal of the commercial streetscape. Implementation of the project has been delayed through a series of bureaucratic "red tape".

Waterfront Redevelopment Plan

This redevelopment plan focused on a combination of amenities and features that would power the future growth of the village. The plan included a museum, recreational ferry, conference center, marina, and even a cable car to High Tor Mountain.

Best Practices

"Over time, all communities experience changes that affect the industries, technologies, and land use patterns that help form the foundation of their local economies. Economically resilient towns, cities, and regions adapt to changing conditions and even reinvent their economic bases if necessary. Even if the community has lost its original or main economic driver, it has other assets that it can use to spur the local economy. While most economic development strategies involve some effort to recruit major employers, such as manufacturers or large retailers, many successful small towns and cities complement recruitment by emphasizing their existing assets and distinctive resources." (Kramer, 2015).

Peekskill

This city on the Hudson River is a testament to revitalization and celebration of its natural and cultural resources. Peekskill essentially has two downtown districts, one along the river front and one up the hill in its historic district. With no natural connection or designated transportation between the two areas, there is a physical disconnect that begs for creative resolution – electric shuttle vans for example – to encourage visitation between the two unique and thriving areas. Cultural diversity is celebrated and integrated very well in Peekskill. Outdoor seating, public gathering places under gazebos, ethnic groceries, bakeries and eateries abound along with excellent directive signage, convenient on-street and in lot parking, and obvious chamber of commerce support with shopping incentives and free parking during holidays along with a public art presence with murals and sculpture punctuating the downtown streetscape. Haverstraw's cultural diversity and strong history mimics that of Peekskill and provides an opportunity for Haverstraw to learn from them and their best practices.

Beacon

A burgeoning art mecca with a direct rail access to NYC, the city went through an era of significant vacancy and decay throughout the 1980s and early 90s. By 2010, under steady visionary leadership, stringent code enforcement, and strong local community participation, the city has prospered. Today, Beacon's "downtown anchor business" consists of a combination of mom and pop shops, eateries, bars, galleries, cafes as well as a world renowned contemporary museum. The remaining goals of tying together both ends of the Main Street and connecting it to the riverfront and MTA are being successfully addressed. Development of a pedestrian walkway from the rail station or some simple form of transportation to the Main Street would be a great improvement.

Gentrification issues have also popped up now that rising local rents are displacing longtime residents and artists; while attracting city dwellers and young families drawn to the walkability, accessibility and the natural beauty of the area surrounding this arts and cultural gem along the river. Beacon's revitalization is an example to Haverstraw of how a river town can flourish with visionary leadership and code enforcement.

Yonkers

Yonkers current revitalization efforts are a continuation of efforts that began over 10 years ago. A noted restaurateur opened an anchor restaurant on a Victorian-era pier overlooking the Hudson River which spurred the revitalization effort. The restaurant is situated within a block of the train station and serves as an anchor. Redevelopment expanded from the train station up New Main Street. Yonkers improved the streetscape and attracted businesses. Yonkers has made excellent use of its natural assets with its day lighting of the Saw Miller River. This created the appealing Van der Donck Park near the train station. This partnership between business, government and the community resulted in economic growth that transformed the area.

Yonkers' revitalization is not complete. There is a noticeable decline in building stock and infrastructure as one travels' from Main Street to New Main Street. As Yonkers's continues to develop it will need to make sure there is enough affordable housing that the local residents do not get displaced.

With results apparent from the revitalization efforts, Yonkers created an advertising campaign to highlight its success. The "Generation Yonkers" campaign is successfully targeting businesses and millennials with the many attractions of living and working in Yonkers. Yonkers is poised for continued economic growth.

Yonkers is a natural example for Haverstraw as its revitalization effort started 10 years ago and it demonstrates what can be accomplished in a decade with a clear vision and strong municipal leadership. Yonkers also share some characteristics with Haverstraw, such as high Hispanic population, affordable housing on the Riverfront:

Recommendations for Haverstraw

Haverstraw shares similarities with many of the cities and towns along the Hudson River from which it can learn from both their successes as well as their challenges. The case studies of Peekskill, Beacon, and Yonkers exemplified the best practices for revitalization. Furthermore, interviews with local community and civic leaders, residents, businesses and other stakeholders provided a cross section of unique ideas and viewpoints to build upon. A combination of site visits, research and analysis resulted in the following is recommended to revitalize the downtown area and bring economic growth to the area:

- Establish a **Comprehensive Plan** that takes the riverfront and ties it in with Main Street. This will lay the ground work as a strategic plan needs to be developed. The plan must include “buy-in” from the residents/government officials/community leaders and other stakeholders. This may require having translators from the Hispanic community that can participate.
 - Increase **Communication and Collaboration** between the business community and all levels of government. Sources of communication may include but not be limited to the Mayor’s office, Haverstraw website, routine meetings between business and government, establish an Advisory Council etc.
 - **Form Based Zoning Code Planning** should be implemented. This type of zoning is becoming the urban planning norm and is concerned with human scale, livability, walkability, and mixed uses. Adopting this approach promotes economic development by making it attractive for a shopping/exploration/tourism experience.
 - Complete a **Parking Plan** that may include: park once strategy, build a municipal parking garage, explore digital parking, time limits on meters and allowances to encourage holiday and evening traffic.
 - Implement the **Street Scap Project** which includes sidewalks, building facades, way finding signage, trees and plantings.
 - **Improve the Hardscape** by perhaps installing bike racks, benches, planters, sculptures, bollards, etc.
 - Develop **Affordable Housing** options to bring more residents to the area
- **Code Enforcement** needs to be increased. Codes should be reviewed and modified as necessary and then enforced. Zoning goes to usage - two families cannot have SRO (single family rentals). Perhaps there is a need to change the code for extended family to make it all inclusive accommodating the cultures that exist. Uniform signage codes that are up to date and maintains the aesthetic look of the community should be developed/enforced.
- **Update Infrastructure** such as improved sidewalks, reconfiguring electric cables, newer sewer system, fix street cracks, and install LED lighting street lights.
- Address **Safety** concerns through a community policing program.

- Explore **Financing options** that include grant opportunities at the local, regional state and national level to support the implementation of the comprehensive plan. Research corporate sponsorship as well as individual contributions (public/private). Explore the Consolidated Funding Applications (CFA) opportunities for Haverstraw. Consider the SBA, NYSERDA and other sources of funding.
- **Revitalize the Waterfront** by improving accessibility, providing amenities and connecting it to Main Street.
- Maintain **Cleanliness** by adding garbage cans, recycling and creating an environmentally friendly community.
- Develop more **Tourism Events** such as Haverstraw Culture Day, Haverstraw Restaurant Week, Haverstraw Brick Day, etc. Enlist the community.
- Create and implement a **Marketing Plan** perhaps partner with Rockland County Tourism Office to brand and promote the area.
- Explore sustainable funding opportunities to re-activate the **Ferry on the Weekends** to draw the tourists.

The research undertaken in this report was conducted by participants in the Pattern Fellows Program, a part-time education and learning experience available to mid-career professionals from government, agencies, organizations and corporations with the region. While Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress provides guidance and oversight of the training program, the body of work is solely that of the participants in the program.

Sources

Individual Interviews

| Name | Title / Position | Affiliation / Address |
|------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| Michael Kohut | Mayor of Village of Haverstraw | Elected Official |
| Ramon Soto | Proprietor | El Sol - Newspaper |
| Richard Sena | | Realtor |
| Randy Casale | Mayor of Beacon (current) | Elected Official |
| Clara Lou Gould | Mayor of Beacon (former) | Elected Official |
| Tim Dexter | Building Inspector | City Government |
| Jose Taveras | | A&P Taxi |
| Ramon Lopez | | Lopez-Cintron Agency |
| Elvis Lopez | | 50 Broadway Grocery |
| Riquil Sanchez | Proprietor | Riquil Barbershop |
| Al Gambino | | Mariella's Restaurant |
| Vito Ariel | | Michael's Pizza Restaurant |
| Raymundo Lopez | | Vilma Bakery |
| Michael Newhard | Mayor of Village of Warwick | Elected Official |
| Michael Johndrow | Exec. Dir. Warwick Chamber of Commerce | Community Organization |
| Claudia Depkin | Kings Daughter Library Director for Haverstraw | Community Organization |
| HPVV list of resources | | |
| | | |

Books

| Author | Name |
|--------------------|--|
| Kramer, M. (2015). | <i>How Small Towns and Cities Can Use Local Assets to Rebuild Their Economies: Lessons from Successful Places.</i> Washington, DC: United States Environmental Protection Agency. |

Website

| URL |
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| http://www.haverstrawbrickmuseum.org/history.html |
| https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haverstraw_(village),_New_York |
| https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haverstraw,_New_York#History |
| http://www.voh-ny.com/revitalization.htm |
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