

HUDSON VALLEY
PATTERN
for
PROGRESS

VILLAGE of WAPPINGERS FALLS
Main Street Revitalization & Enhancement Plan
2016 Pattern for Progress Fellows Program
Central Hudson valley Group



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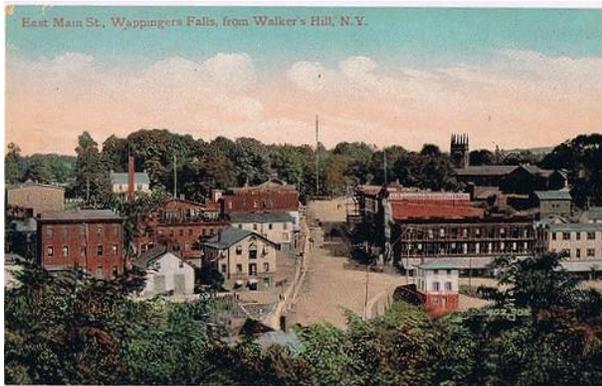
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Statement of Purpose and Project Scope

As part of its *Urban Action Agenda for the Hudson Valley*, a multi-year effort to review and encourage population growth and economic development within the valley's existing urban centers, Pattern for Progress has undertaken a "Main Streets and Downtowns" Project. The Project, which is funded in part by the Hudson River Valley Greenway and Community Foundations for the Hudson Valley, reviews three Hudson Valley urban centers, the City of Port Jervis and the villages of Haverstraw and



Wappingers Falls. This report, which undertakes an evaluation of the Village of Wappingers Falls, is designed to: (a) review and evaluate the existing conditions and characteristics of the village's Main Street; (b) review and analyze the village's past revitalization efforts; and (c) provide recommendations and strategies for reviving and enhancing commercial activity on Main Street. In preparation for developing this revitalization plan, the Pattern Fellows spent several months reviewing the village's planning documents, meeting with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, conducting personal



EAST MAIN ST. FROM WALKER'S HILL, POSTCARD

interviews of village residents and business owners, surveying the characteristics and existing conditions on Main Street, and attending meetings with local business owners and government officials to hear their concerns and recommended improvements. This report concludes with specific revitalization recommendations.

Background and Demographics

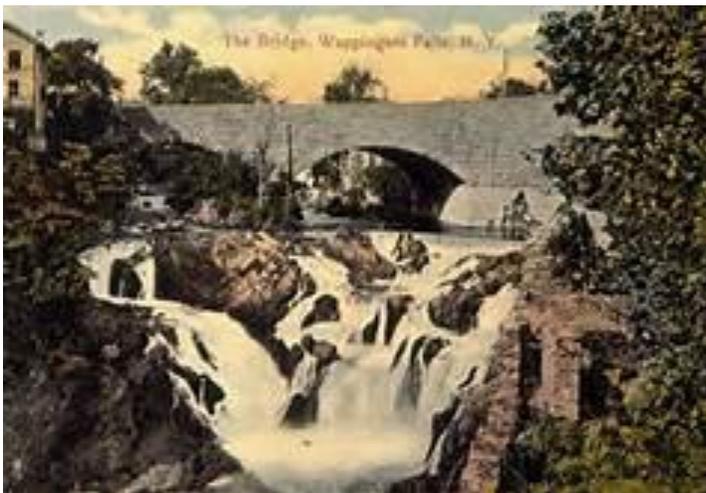
The Village of Wappingers Falls is located in central Dutchess County. It has a population of approximately 5,300 and straddles two towns; the Town of Wappinger and the Town of Poughkeepsie. The village is situated on Wappinger Creek quite close to the Hudson River to the west. To the east lies Route 9, a main commercial and transportation corridor, with a large mall, many big box stores and the attendant traffic.

The village was incorporated in 1871 and for generations was an industrial center. Like many other urban centers in the Hudson Valley, over time the village's large manufacturing plants closed, while the Route 9 commercial corridor boomed. To some extent, the village has been overshadowed by the nearby commercial development, which also stripped the village of its once vibrant local businesses.

The Village of Wappingers Falls lacks residents with disposable income. Median household income in the village is just over \$47,000. This compares to median household income across Dutchess County of \$71,500. Only thirty-two percent (32%) of village residents own their home and ninety-two percent (92%) of those homes are valued at less than \$199,999. Despite the relatively low cost of housing, thirty-two percent (32%) of those that rent spend more than thirty percent (30%) of their incomes for housing, classifying their situation as “unaffordable.” Overall, the village lacks the quality housing stock that would attract residents with higher levels of income.

The Village's Assets

The Village of Wappingers Falls is blessed with an abundance of natural assets and a complementary historical heritage. The village's focal points include the gorge and falls that give the village its name and the century old Stone Bridge over Wappinger Creek, and, although limited, there are public areas to gather to view the gorge and falls. There is an expanding Greenway Trail system in the village that connects its parks and thirty-seven (37) acres of public lands. The village also maintains a good stock of historic buildings with intact facades, including its Grinnell Library, that harken back to the 1880's, the village's industrial heyday. Yet, significant effort and strategic planning will have to be employed in order to revive its Main Street.



WAPPINGERS FALLS POSTCARD

Characteristics of "Main Street"

A Tale of Two Main Streets

As part of the Pattern Fellows' effort to investigate and assess the existing characteristics of Main Street, the Fellows attended a meeting held by a local business association. The meeting was intended to provide a forum for business owners to comment on the conditions on Main Street, and to hear their suggestions as to needed improvements. The meeting was well attended by many business owners, local professionals, and at least one member of the village planning board. The village's business owners and government officials clearly view "Main Street" as two distinct areas - East Main and West Main Street - which are viewed as separating essentially at the County Players theater, a growing community anchor, just over the Stone Bridge that transitions East Main Street to West Main Street.

East Main Street



EAST MAIN STREET BUSINESSES

East Main Street is generally well maintained, with few vacant store fronts. There are ample sidewalks, crosswalks, and some street parking to serve adjacent bustling businesses. Surroundings are clean, and pleasantly picturesque, with a large park and green space. East Main Street recently lost a long-standing anchor business due to a fire and partial building collapse. Despite concerted efforts on the part of the village over the past several years, the building has not been repaired or redeveloped.

West Main Street

West Main Street is approximately a one-half-mile stretch of Route 9D, from the Stone Bridge to the village limit, south of the rural cemetery. The street mostly comprises mid-nineteenth century homes and retail storefronts, which have fallen into disrepair at certain locations. However, other portions of West Main Street have been revitalized through façade and streetscape improvements and zoning code enforcement. Over all, West Main St. is currently marred by blighted and poorly maintained buildings. Its environs are uninviting, and its building stock poorly maintained, with only a few occupied commercial store fronts. While it appears that most of the buildings that line West Main Street were originally constructed for commerce, over time many street level commercial spaces were converted to low-rent residential units. Because these properties are generally not properly maintained, they provide a sense that the street is unsafe, and contribute to a pervasive negative atmosphere both on West Main Street and the larger downtown business district.



WEST MAIN STREET

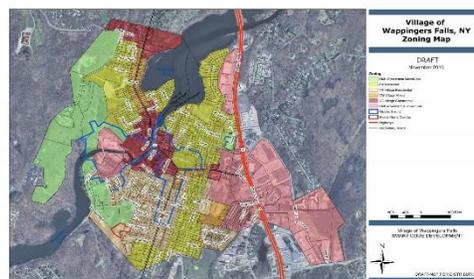
Main Street Generally (East and West)

Personal surveys by the Fellows, and their meetings with business owners and government officials demonstrated that Main Street in its entirety, along with other areas of the village, is in need of many improvements. With regard to Main Street itself, there is a significant lack of parking, and due to the village's staffing levels, there is a lack of police presence. Business owners and government leaders also agree that there needs to be a better demarcation of village boundaries, to create a sense of "being in the village".

Review of Past Revitalization Efforts

Over the past fifteen years, the village government, business owners, and residents have agreed upon the importance of revitalizing West Main Street and the adjoining Central Business District. In 2001, the village adopted a Comprehensive Plan, a Transportation Plan, and a Parks and Recreation Plan. In May of 2007, the Village Board adopted a "5 Goals" improvement plan. The first four goals identified the need for improvements to the village's water treatment facility, the need to upgrade its sidewalks and roadways, the need to update sewers, and the need to undertake environmental improvements within the village, including enhancing its lake quality and the mitigation of a local superfund site. The village's fifth goal was stated as the West Main Street Revitalization plan. Building upon these earlier plans and goals, in or about 2010, the village commissioned a Downtown Waterfront and Revitalization Strategy study.

To date, the village's efforts have primarily focused on mitigating village infrastructure deficiencies; essentially "working from the inside out", to lay a proper foundation for its intended redevelopment and revitalization efforts. To its credit, the village has successfully resolved longstanding water and wastewater issues; resurfaced more than two thirds of all village roadways, and worked with NYSDOT to implement transportation improvement programs, including the establishment of new trees in the village, designed to attract new residents and new business owners. The poor conditions and character of West Main Street, however, remain relatively unchanged.



2013 VILLAGE OF WAPPINGERS FALLS ZONING MAP

Best Practices, Recommendations and Proposed Implementation Plan for Main Street Revitalization

Consistent with the village's stated goal to revitalize Main Street, and specifically West Main Street, we recommend that the following actions be implemented.

Streetscape Improvements

To enhance the walkability of its downtown area, the village should take place-making initiatives to create pocket parks and other green areas; provide pedestrian amenities, such as plantings, benches, bicycle racks and trash receptacles. Longer term infrastructure improvements should be considered, including the widening of sidewalks at dangerous intersections, installation of distinctive pavements for crosswalks and important historical sites or features; and adding to and upgrading its street lighting with installation of antique lighting features.



Highlight the Village's Unique Natural Assets and Historical Character



The village's abundant natural features, including the gorge, the falls, its parks and Greenway trails, appear to be underutilized. The village should take steps to light the falls at night and improve riverfront and lake access.

MESIER-BREWER HOUSE

While the village has several parks and a Greenway Trail, those features are not connected to the downtown business area. The village should increase the visibility of its parks and the trail by installing directional signage at various locations within the business district. Additionally, the village should erect kiosks, signage or other markings to delineate the entrances to the trail and to those parks that visitors and tourists may not otherwise see. As to all of its parks, the village should expand the use of these vital community assets, by programming and expanding their use to promote civic and cultural festivities.

MESIER PARK

Pedestrian Safety and Traffic Improvements

To enhance pedestrian safety, the village must take measures to decrease the speed of through traffic, especially on West Main Street, and narrow its lengthy crosswalks. The village should take immediate action to improve its pavement markings by striping (or restriping) its crosswalks and by striping Main Street to better define its traffic lanes. Improved pavement markings could also be used to reduce the width of the roadway at dangerous locations. The Fellows also recommend the village consider expanding other modes of transportation, including bicycle transportation, and a potential shuttle from the downtown business district to the nearby Metro North Rail station. The village should petition the NYS Department of Transportation to reduce the speed limit on Main Street, and to install additional parking spaces along West Main Street, where appropriate.

Code Enforcement and Code Revisions

A number of the buildings along West Main Street are in various states of disrepair, and over the years, some first floor commercial spaces have been converted to residential use. The village should adopt appropriate zoning amendments to eliminate street level residential units, providing additional store fronts along West Main Street. Short-term incentives to attract local home-based industries should be considered. Further zoning regulations should be implemented to retain the long term viability of the historic facades and related features on Main Street. The village should actively enforce all applicable building and zoning codes within the central business district, to repair, maintain and improve the overall appearance of the residential and commercial properties on Main Street, particularly West Main Street, as a means of promoting continued business development and economic growth.

Private/Public Partnerships

The County Players at the Falls Theater, which is located on West Main Street, draws hundreds of people into the village during performances. Theater patrons then dine and shop at other Main Street businesses, benefitting business district as a whole. The County Players have stated an intention to increase their number of performances, which would further benefit local business, but have not had the financial ability to do so. We recommend that village officials strategize with the County Players, and other stakeholders, to expand this valuable community asset.



To address its need to improve its tax base, we recommend that the village partner with experienced real estate developers to construct a mix of high-quality housing stock and high end rental units. This will attract new residents with more disposable income to support the local business community.

Public Outreach and Marketing

The village should market empty storefronts with local and regional agencies to advise prospective renters and investors of the opportunities available in the downtown business district. The village should also take action to promote its significant natural and historic assets. With its gorge and falls, its Greenway Trail containing thirty-seven (37) acres of waterfront and public lands, as well as its walkable historic district, the village is poised to become a destination location for tourists, and will likely attract future housing development, which should be marketed to higher income levels to support a more sustainable local economy.

Increased Law Enforcement Presence

In personal interviews conducted by the Pattern Fellows, members of the public voiced concerns about local drug sales and unsavory conditions on West Main Street, particularly at night. There is a demonstrated need for an enhanced police presence on Main Street. It is recommended that the village require its police department to create a mandatory schedule of foot patrols through the central business district, in order to create a feeling of security and to create a sense of community with local law enforcement.

Promote Expansion of Cultural Activities and Economic Growth

It is recommended that the village engage in activities that support economic growth and provide incentives to attract the kinds of businesses of interest to a young demographic. Projects and policies should encourage the sharing economy, the green economy and promote cottage industries and community supported agriculture, which are stabilizing forces.

The village should continue to promote, and expand its promotion of, cultural activities and assist established entities, such as the County Players, to attract a demographic with disposable income. Increased use of public spaces such as its parks and historic library will attract residents of all socioeconomic levels and mixed age groups, and encourage community relationships.

Additional Improvements

It is also recommended that the village develop a cohesive system of signage, consistent with the village's historic character and its industrial heritage, and install the signage throughout the village - at its gateways, parks, trails and historic sites - to provide a sense of community and give direction to non-locals. Finally, until the collapsed anchor building on East Main Street can be redeveloped, it is recommended the village require privacy fencing to improve the view from West Main Street.

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.

Resources and Reference Page

Wappingers Falls Vision Plan, prepared by The Chazen Companies (Draft)

Wappingers Falls Action Plan, prepared by The Chazen Companies

Village of Wappingers Falls Smart Code, prepared by Elan Planning/Design Architecture PLLC and Lawrence Howard, Esq. (Revised July 2015)

West Main Street Revitalization Plan (Adopted by the Village Board, June 11, 2008)

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Meiser-Brewer House & East Main Street Businesses Picture Attribution: [Daniel Case](#) at the [English language Wikipedia](#)