

West Nyack



Our vision...

The Local Resident Members Of
The West Nyack Hamlet Revitalization Committee

March, 2011

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Executive Summary:

West Nyack will follow New City in the succession of hamlet revitalization projects. The needs and opportunities in West Nyack are quite different from those of earlier projects. West Nyack has long been the poor stepchild of the Town and has more than its share of physical and environmental negatives. The Thruway, Hackensack Swamp, Town dump, CSX Railroad, Tilcon quarry and the Palisades Mall are each serious degraders of life quality. On the other hand, the hamlet offers unparalleled flexibility to remold itself into a cohesive, charming and economically productive center of local life.

The nine local resident members of the West Nyack Hamlet Revitalization Committee herewith present their collective vision – gained from up to eight years of effort – to accomplish the transition of the hamlet. This document should be read as a logical supplement to the basic Hamlet Vision Plan which was adopted in 2010. The basic plan lays out the broad concepts of the effort. This document begins to discuss specific plan elements and is intended to offer the professional consultants a checklist of key items for inclusion in future working documents.

Specific project elements include:

- Reconfiguration of the Klein Avenue/West Nyack Road intersection in the central hamlet
- Above ground relocation of utility lines in the central hamlet district
- Preservation of historic stone walls at the Richards Corner intersection
- Acquisition of land adjacent to the Post Office for utility lines, parking and traffic improvement
- Acquisition of additional right of way in the eastern project area

Specifically recommended for immediate action is the study of available land adjacent to the Post Office to determine feasibility of use for parking, establishment of a backyard utility corridor, traffic flow improvement, flood control and land improvement and beautification. This land is currently unimproved and is unkempt in appearance.

Also recommended for immediate action is the proposed layout of alternate, above ground, utility line routes to permit the removal of existing poles and wires. This action will permit greater flexibility in design of streetscaping and will complement the historic nature of the hamlet. Expensive underground construction is specifically not contemplated.

An annotated map is appended for reference.

The Committee:

This statement of our vision for our hamlet is the product of the nine resident members of the Revitalization Committee. It represents our collective wisdom gained over a period of over eight years of effort, the last four of which have been under the umbrella of the official West Nyack Hamlet Revitalization Committee. In 2003, then Supervisor Charles Holbrook appointed former Supervisor William Vines as chair of a committee to study the revitalization of the Hamlet of West Nyack. In 2007, the committee was reorganized by Supervisor Alex Gromack. To our knowledge, West Nyack is the only hamlet in Clarkstown which has had a working committee of residents focused solely on the creation of a vision for the future of their hamlet. Through dozens of meetings, formal and informal, large and small, this document has evolved. Included by reference are innumerable comments from hamlet residents at large. A few were cautious or negative, but the majority have been enthusiastically positive.

Our Goal:

To engage community residents in a process to discuss, recommend and help to implement a plan to revitalize the central hamlet area to provide a focus, sense of community and source of hometown pride.

Discussion: West Nyack has long been a waypoint in the route across southern Rockland County. Historically isolated by the Great Swamp, and now constrained by the Palisades Mall and the railroad, the current hamlet center offers a pleasant oasis and an unparalleled opportunity to establish a viable local commercial destination as well as a charming community identity.

Method: To leverage Town hamlet redevelopment funds, County, State and Federal participation in infrastructure improvements, State legislative member support, private and corporate foundations and private donations in kind and in cash, to provide the funding to plan and implement a major improvement which will set the standard and tone for growth of the hamlet during this century.

Project area: Encompassing the area from the West Nyack Elementary School to the CSX railroad along West Nyack Road, the designated project also incorporates those areas on Strawtown and Sickletown Roads within the West Nyack Historic District.

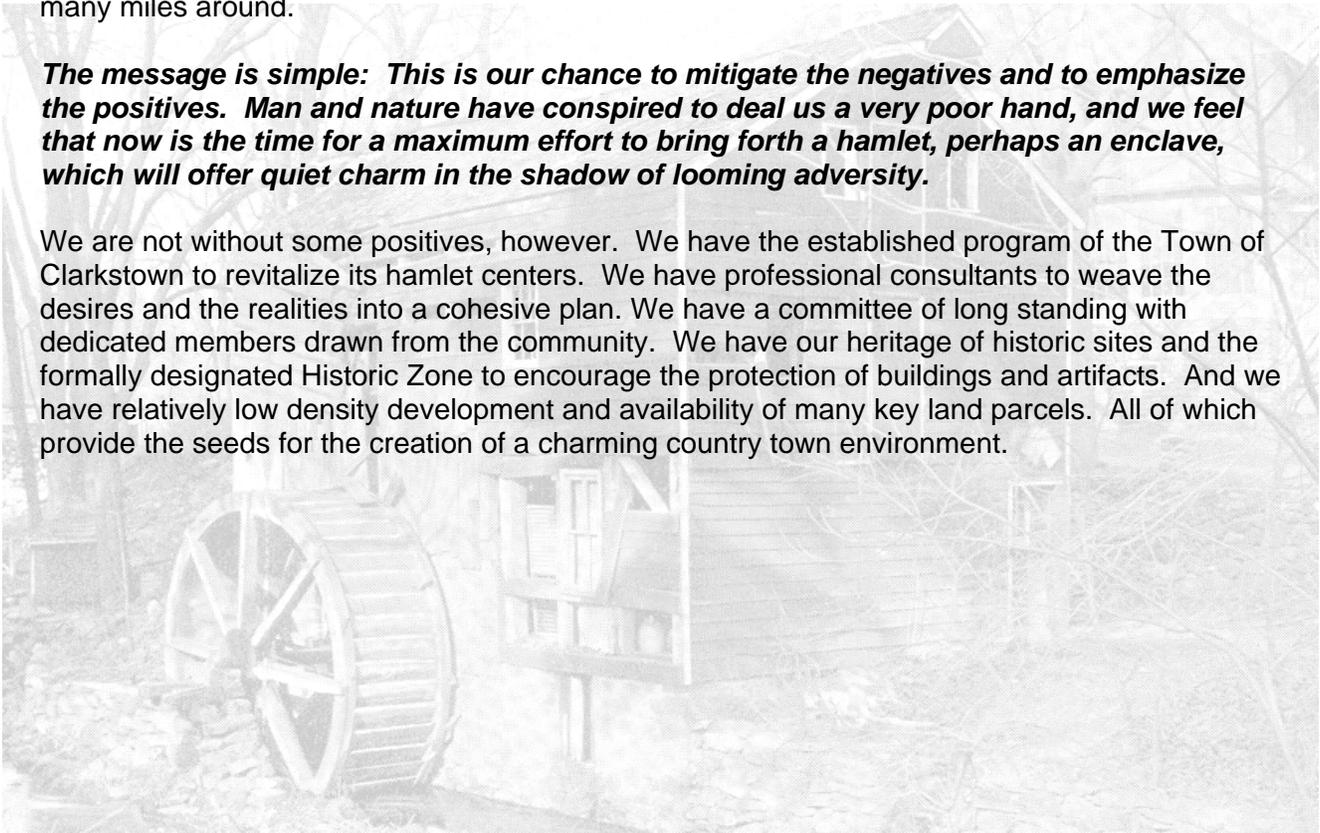
We believe that the very best vision plan will come from within the community, reflecting local views and benefiting from our collective connections with our fellow West Nyackers. This document is intended as an initial concept, to be formalized by our consultants and discussed with our fellow residents.

The Current Environment:

Any plan must address the realities of the present. West Nyack is impacted by a host of negative natural and man-made factors. We have often felt the impact of the Hackensack River basin and have to deal with the recurrent flooding which is beyond the purview of this vision statement. The heavy CSX freight railroad bisects the hamlet and limits east-west access, while fortunately forming a line which demarks the negatives – literally “on the other side of the tracks”. The Thruway poses problems with its heavy traffic and the promise of massive changes as the new Tappan Zee Bridge replacement project evolves. The Tilcon quarry operation limits growth to the north and contributes heavy truck traffic and frequent, though minor, tremors from blasting operations; The Clarkstown dump area lends a distinctive aura, both olfactory and societal, while drawing hordes of heavy garbage trucks to the recycling and transfer operations. And the huge Palisades Mall draws shoppers and attendant traffic from many miles around.

The message is simple: This is our chance to mitigate the negatives and to emphasize the positives. Man and nature have conspired to deal us a very poor hand, and we feel that now is the time for a maximum effort to bring forth a hamlet, perhaps an enclave, which will offer quiet charm in the shadow of looming adversity.

We are not without some positives, however. We have the established program of the Town of Clarkstown to revitalize its hamlet centers. We have professional consultants to weave the desires and the realities into a cohesive plan. We have a committee of long standing with dedicated members drawn from the community. We have our heritage of historic sites and the formally designated Historic Zone to encourage the protection of buildings and artifacts. And we have relatively low density development and availability of many key land parcels. All of which provide the seeds for the creation of a charming country town environment.



The committee has studied the preliminary project statement of Behan Consulting, has toured revitalization projects both in Clarkstown and in adjacent communities and has attempted to engage local residents in constructive discussion through both public and private meetings. We have focused on the following specific project areas to achieve our vision:

Normalization and expansion of the intersection of West Nyack Way (Viaduct Road) at West Nyack Road and Klein Avenue

The current configuration of the intersection is confusing, inefficient and dangerous. Traffic exiting Route 59 and merging westbound onto West Nyack Road is confronted with a dangerous angled merge which has led to numerous accidents and near misses. Additionally, the concentration of commercial business including a funeral home, has overwhelmed available parking space. This is especially true during peak business hours and when funerals are conducted.

The Town has acquired two key parcels in anticipation of this improvement. It is expected that the consultants will recommend construction of a normal 4 way intersection, aligned with Klein Avenue. This will permit the recapture of Town land now occupied by the traffic triangle, and will provide land for creation of a number of additional parking spaces. Discussions indicate the potential availability of additional land between West Nyack Way and the Town Park facilitating expansion of the park, provision for parking for the park, or commercial development. We seek acquisition of this additional land, which is severely impacted by wetland regulation, to provide enhanced flexibility for redesign of this key intersection.

Removal of utility lines in the area from Western Highway to Sickletown Road.

From the inception of the committee's work, it has been our strong intention to bring about the removal of the overhead utility lines through the core area of the hamlet. In our inspection of other hamlet projects, particularly in Congers, it appears that the residual poles and wires constitute a serious degradation of the aesthetic impact. While the streetscaping has certainly upgraded the appearance of the hamlet, the wires draw the eye and suggest that the project is still not complete. We believe that it is essential to eliminate the poles from Clarksville Corner to Western Highway. With appropriate streetlight fixtures and the absence of obtrusive overhead wires, the historic nature of the hamlet can be effectively projected.

Our inquiries indicated the prohibitive cost of underground construction, and led to the alternative approach of "backyard construction," whereby distribution lines for electric, telephone and cable are relocated from the street to overhead poles in the rear of existing buildings. Fortunately, this routing seems feasible for West Nyack due to the low density of existing development, large open areas around the Town park, and the apparent availability of key rights of way.

In addition to the aesthetic benefit, removal of the utility poles will allow for greater flexibility in the design of sidewalks, parking, and curbside green areas. Along with other options to be discussed, the entire south side of the core area may be expanded to permit a major enhancement of the project.

Acquisition, preservation and maintenance of historic stone walls within the Historic District

A signature element of the hamlet is the century old stone walls in the area of Richards Corners (Germonds, Old Mill and Strawtown Roads), extending southward to the Old Dutch Church. Recent surveys indicate that ownership of these walls is often split between municipal rights of way and private landowners. Current Historic District provisions do not offer any proscriptive power against removal of these walls, nor do they mandate any preservation and maintenance. Indeed, with indefinite – or often shared - ownership of the walls, it could be argued that expenditure of public funds in the effort might be improper.

It is proposed that the Town, with County cooperation as appropriate on county roads (Germonds and Strawtown), negotiate with landowners to acquire sufficient, but nominal, adjacent right of way in order for ownership of the walls to vest clearly and entirely with the Town. In this way, the walls could be protected and subject to routine maintenance as required. It is expected that the removal of the burden of maintenance will be sufficient incentive for landowners to cede a small (1 foot +/-) strip under the walls for nominal consideration.

Acquisition of unimproved land adjacent to the Post Office

Three parcels of unimproved land behind and adjacent to the west of the Post Office offer the opportunity for aesthetic improvement, parking for the Town Park, expanded parking for offices and business, a utility corridor and improvement of traffic flow around the Post Office. These parcels are impacted by wetland regulations and have doubtful commercial potential. They do, however, offer considerable potential benefit to the hamlet redesign. Improvement of this land will also rationalize an area which is now unkempt, and leads to a disorganized impression of the central project area.

A small stream bisects the area, and will in all likelihood limit any building construction. This stream offers the intriguing possibility for development of a greenway or natural preserve which will also permit the improvement of the natural drainage in the area. Installation of larger culverts under West Nyack Road incident to the road improvements would decrease the potential for flooding in the area north of the road. Municipal ownership of the land will make possible the orderly maintenance of the watercourse and the adjacent stream banks.

The third parcel also offers an unimpeded corridor for utility line relocation, allowing relocation of service to the rear of buildings at Clarksville Corner, the Post Office and the townhouses on the north side of West Nyack Way. The parcel also offers the land to the rear of the Post Office to permit rerouting of postal patron's cars in a one-way, counterclockwise flow, exiting on the west side of the Post Office onto West Nyack Road. Postal drop boxes, which are being displaced at the Village Square, can then be relocated to the exit, preserving this appreciated service for the community.

Parking can be developed behind the Clarksville Professional building, the auto service station, and to the west of the stream. This parking will relieve current congestion at the Clarksville Inn and at the professional building and will provide parking for events at the nearby Town Park. Similarly, parking on the east side of the stream will serve both postal customers and be ideally positioned for Town Park visitors.

Before any estimate of cost or regulatory difficulty can be made, an engineering study of the area is essential. If the parcels are indeed not viable for any productive use, they can be acquired at a reasonable price. If there is commercial viability, it can be developed for resale and will encourage orderly use of an otherwise unsightly and disorganized area. The committee has urged a study of this area before and the logic of getting a realistic appraisal of the value and viability of the property seems unassailable.

Expanding the right of way along the south side of West Nyack Way from the Town Park to Western Highway.

The western half of the south side of the project area, from Clarksville Corners to West Nyack Way (the triangle), is open area including the Town Park, the Village Square and the Yaboo property. This area can provide generous right of way for streetscaping and general improvements. The remainder of the south side, extending to Western Highway, is characterized by older single family homes (largely converted to multiple rental units) and small commercial establishments, set back from a narrow right of way. Removal of the utility poles will aid in designing a new streetscape, but the opportunity exists to materially expand the right of way through this area.

The Town has purchased the first two properties moving eastward from West Nyack Way to facilitate the realignment of the intersection at Klein Avenue. From this point on to Western Highway, there are no structures and only two significant trees within 25 feet of the roadway. Under current zoning, this area, often used improperly for pull-in parking, cannot be used for construction. The consultants have expressed a desire to minimize front parking and to encourage establishment of building fronts near to the right of way. Since the frontage area cannot be currently used, owners likely would cede space for a wider right of way, if that action resulted in better appearance, more accessible parking, and an improved value of their property. Of course they would have to be protected to insure that floor area ratios, setback requirements, etc. would not be held in violation of the requirements. By acquiring the right to develop an additional 5-15 feet for streetscape, the consultants could provide an enhanced appearance, possibly include some angle parking, and offer a continuous broader avenue along the entire project area.

Business owners have expressed concern about loss of parking along the eastern end of the project area. While much of the existing pull-in parking is illegal, with vehicles routinely extending several feet into the right of way, their concern is understandable. As an alternative to reduced on-street parallel parking, or angle parking, the possibility exists to purchase one of the existing residential buildings and to create an off-street parking lot close to the commercial store fronts. This would keep parking off the street, reassure business owners, and provide a safer roadway.

It must be noted that the current effort, supported by the committee and several property owners, to allow mixed commercial and residential use and to reduce or eliminate setback requirements, would negate some of the incentive for property owners to cede their current front yard area for a wider street design. This factor should be considered in the design of the new zoning, and in the speed of negotiation for any additional right of way.

Other issues.

Currently, heavy truck traffic and cars impose a substantial burden on the eastern end of the project area at the intersection of West Nyack Road and Western Highway. This is part of a broader problem which sees large waste haulers and tractor trailers using this route and Doscher Avenue to access the recycling, car preparation and tree services located along Western Highway. The low clearance of the Route 59 overpass now limits some of the larger trucks, but New York State is now in the process of replacing the overpass with a new higher structure which will permit full and increased use of the Western Highway route. There is pressure to restrict truck traffic from the residential Doscher Avenue, ultimately imposing all truck traffic on the local streets, with great impact on the revitalization area. This is clearly undesirable. While beyond the purview of the revitalization committee, this issue must be considered by the Town. A solution to bring this heavy traffic in to Western Highway from Route 303 must be found and while fraught with difficulty, it must be addressed.

Another serious problem beyond the scope of this vision document, is the chronic flooding of large areas of West Nyack during and after heavy rains. New York State is attempting to remedy the flooding situation in the Mall area west of the railroad by raising the level of Route 59. This is yet another of many expensive reconstruction efforts, dating back to colonial times. On the western side of the railroad, no such remedial action is being taken, and the area at the eastern end of the revitalization area continues to be subject to disastrous flooding. Already discussed is the limitation imposed by poor drainage on development of the area next to the Post Office. Other residents along Klein Avenue and Jeffrey Court have repeatedly been flooded. The overall drainage of the floodplain from the Lake DeForest dam to the state line must be studied and improved.

Additional properties remain available to the Town which should be considered for acquisition. These are not included in the revitalization area, but appear to be candidates for inclusion in the established program to acquire large open spaces for protection from undesirable development and adverse environmental impact. The area between the Town Park and Route 59 is heavily impacted wetland, and has been the subject of several efforts to illegally fill the area and to seek approval for marginal construction. These properties should be acquired before more extreme efforts at development are proposed.

Conclusion:

Clarkstown has a unique opportunity to recreate the hamlet of West Nyack, not to just offer a facelifting. In no other hamlet is there the flexibility of available land, lack of obstructive commercial development, and low density of structures to constrain the redesign process. We have a blank canvas on which to draw our vision for the future. As Clarkstown and West Nyack continue to mature in their role of desirable suburban residential locations, we must recast the hamlet to provide the services, the ambiance and the sense of community which define the quality of life which we all seek.

This is our chance to set the mold for the 21st century.

WEST NYACK HAMLET REVITALIZATION

LOCAL COMMITTEE CONCEPTS

MARCH 2011



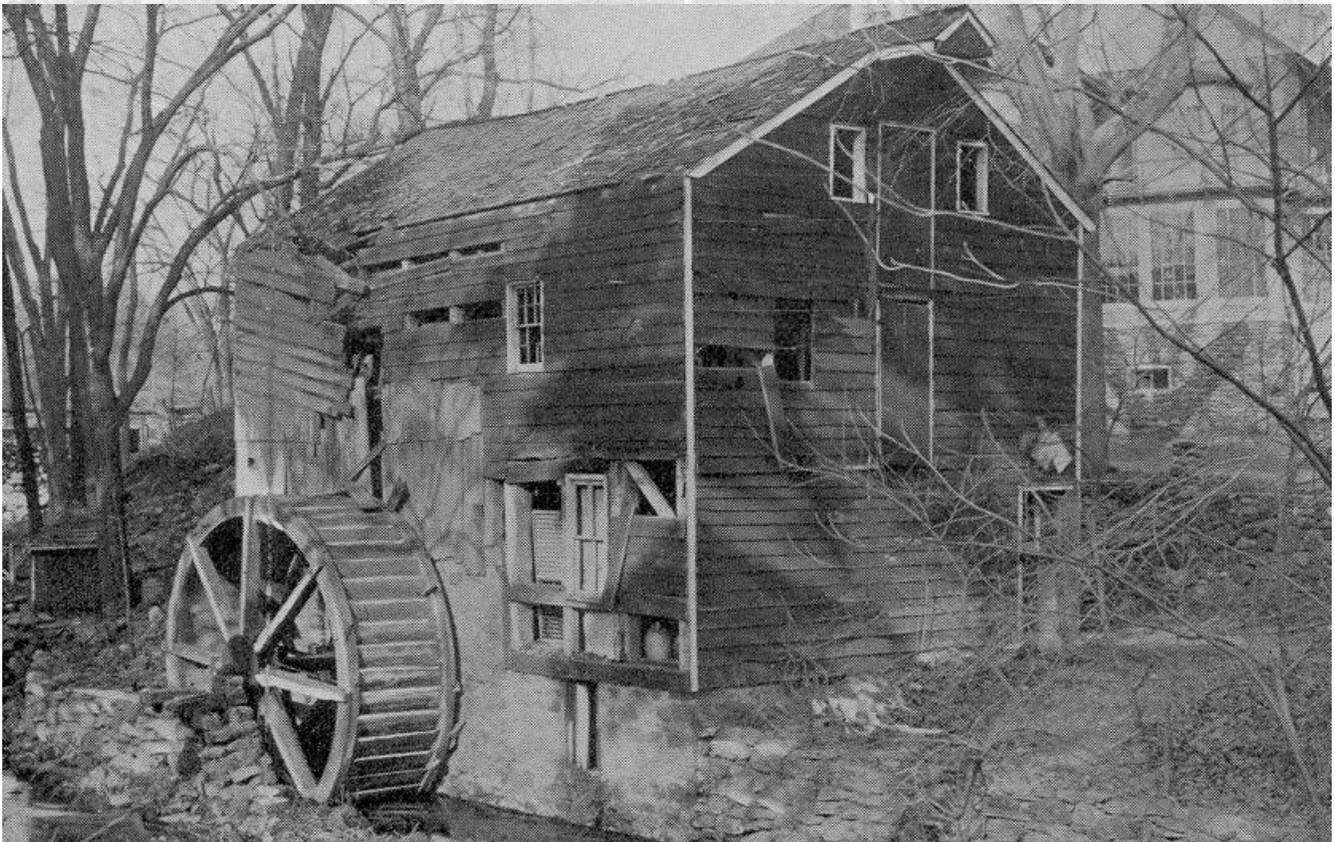
SOURCE: ROCKLAND COUNTY GIS PORTAL

Appendix 2:

A bit of history:

West Nyack's early history was driven by the nature of the land. The hamlet began as a way station on the road from the river port in Nyack to the important iron mines and foundries near Suffern and Sloatsburg. The center of the hamlet, around the Clarksville Inn, was at the very beginning of the climb up the hill heading west. Behind the traveler was the Great Swamp, an arduous crossing of the Hackensack River flats which continue to bedevil highway builders today. Initially, settlers built a corduroy road, consisting of small trees laid across the path to support the riders and wagons. Later, as trade increased, the route became the Nyack Turnpike, complete with a toll booth. Later still came Route 59 along the alignment of West Nyack Road, and ultimately the present highway, bypassing the hamlet center to the south.

The swamp again dictated that the earliest north-south road between the farms of Nauraushaun and the river town of Haverstraw would skirt the western edge of the wetland. At the intersection of the Turnpike and Strawtown Road (*its name derived we think from "Haverstraw Town Road"*) Oblenis corners grew with its signature Inn, a general store, livery stable and blacksmith. In the mid 1800's, the railroad drove northward, prompting an expansion of the hamlet eastward from Clarksville Corner to the new tracks of the West Shore Line. The Clarksville Inn and at least one other building at the corner of Benson Avenue and West Nyack Road were built to offer shelter and sustenance to travelers. A saw mill, fulling mill and grist mill were built on the stream at Richard's Corners a half mile north.



During the 19th century, Oblenis Corners, later called Mount Moor, then Clarksville, now West Nyack evolved. But while other hamlets expanded around the West Shore railroad (Valley Cottage, Congers), and others (New City, Nanuet) grew around the Erie railroad, West Nyack was slow to expand. The hamlet exists today, very much in the image of a century and a half ago. There was no real center of town, nor was there a cohesive feeling of community. The wetland between Clarksville Corners and the railroad (around the current Town Park) was a barrier to development of contiguous structures, and ultimately West Nyack became three hamlets. One at Clarksville Corners, another at the railroad, and later a third at the intersection of Nyack Turnpike (Route 59) and Route 303, in the area now dominated by the Palisades Mall.

Our challenge then, is to knit together the two western mini-hamlets, creating an identifiable hamlet center, and establishing a true community ambiance. This can be done with intelligent design, acquisition of key properties, and attractive streetscaping – all the while protecting our charming historical elements. The intensely commercial Mall area to the east, along with the adjacent natural and man-made complexities, are challenges which must be considered in our overall planning.

