
V. Strategic Plan

A. Community Vision

It is the year 2015 and the Village of Herkimer's population has leveled off at just over 8,500 after growing at a slow but steady rate for 10 years.

The median age of the Village population has dropped from 39.4 in 2000 to 35.9, and the average household size has increased from 2.21 to 2.35 in the past 15 years.

The revitalization of the Central Business District was spearheaded by a series of streetscape beautification projects and Main Street investments between 2002 and 2005, and the bold purchase of the former Munger's building by Herkimer County Community College. The major reconstruction of Route 5 by the New York State Department of Transportation in 2010 helped strengthen the connection between the North and South Main Street business areas, and enhanced the Village's trademark clock tower as well. The Albany Street "parkway" project, developed as part of the Route 5 Reconstruction Project, has had a major impact on the quality of life and growing number of specialty shops in downtown Herkimer.

After years of looking for a new location outside the Village, H.M. Quackenbush has recently completed a second economic development project by purchasing all property between the Winston Arms building on North Main Street and Charter One Bank on North Prospect Street, north of their plant. A newly developed public park along north Main Street complements the Historic Four Corners area, and has helped blend the new HMQ facility with the North Main Street commercial area. A first expansion, which included a \$500,000 Village loan through the Small Cities program, helped the company modernize their metal plating operations and stabilize their workforce. Repayments from this 2005 loan helped to implement a "Downtown Investment Program" that has enabled small niche businesses to stay and grow in the downtown area.

After working closely with HCCC, the Library moved to the former Munger Building where the library doubles as a HCCC study center for its many students living in the downtown area. After much discussion, the Town relocated their offices to South Main Street.

The Castle Community Center at the former Masonic Lodge has served both Town and Village residents well for over 10 years, and the expanded Basloe Field has helped Herkimer develop one of the strongest youth soccer programs in the Mohawk Valley. The relocated Department of Public Works has functioned well from its new facility on the Marginal Road.

Parking problems in and around the County Office Complex were finally resolved when the County was able to add a second level to its parking lot on North Washington Street. Major improvements have also been made to the parking areas behind the former Munger's building, and the lot south of Church Street behind the former Herkimer County Trust Company bank on North Main Street. These improvements were done in conjunction with the second HMQ economic development project and the HCCC project at the Munger Building.

Village neighborhoods have been revitalized over the past 13 years using single purpose and comprehensive Small Cities grants and HOME grants to rehabilitate housing and encourage homeownership. Perhaps the most significant project undertaken by the Village in the last ten years has been the piping and filing of the Hydraulic Canal, which is now a linear park serving the southern and eastern Herkimer neighborhoods. This unique recreation facility includes a paved multipurpose path, benches and landscaping, and has been a popular location for block parties. Surprisingly, senior citizens living at "The Orchard" housing project on East Steele Street enjoy the new park as much as the Village youth. The very successful street reconstruction program initiated by James Franco in the 1980's has been diligently continued through the years, and has supported neighborhood revitalization.

The "Gems Along the Mohawk" Project has put Herkimer on the map with respect to the Erie Canal and New York State Thruway. This facility has become a major Mohawk Valley tourism attraction. The Canalway Trail is also bringing new visitors to the Village as well as expanding recreation opportunities available to Village residents. Both of these projects have contributed to the improvement of Mohawk and Caroline Streets.

Although much work has been done over the past 13 years, more work remains for the Village. Additional improvements are needed to Brookwood Park and Myers Park. The problem of parking continues to plague the downtown area as more commercial activities are placing increasing pressure for improved parking. The Bellinger Avenue area east of Bellinger Street continues to suffer from disinvestment, and streetscape improvements along Mohawk and Caroline Streets are needed to match those completed in the Central Business District. The large industrial building on East German Street is also underutilized, and an innovative reuse for this building is a subject of

continuing discussion. Demolition could provide space for additional housing development and/or a second expansion of Basloe Field.

B. Making “The Vision” the Reality

The vision described above attempts to show that much can be achieved over time with cooperation, focused effort, a long range plan, and simply undertaking small but important projects that can reverse trends of disinvestment and the feeling that nothing can be done.

While not all of “The Vision” elements may be possible or even desired after more detailed examination, it is important to have a vision - a vision that can and will change over time.

The Village of Herkimer *Community Development Strategic Plan* outlined below includes specific projects that will help the Village turn “The Vision” into reality. The projects may serve to alter the Vision as new ideas surface and new opportunities present themselves.

Essential to “The Vision” is action. Communities that are willing and able to take reasonable chances, act, and commit valuable and limited resources to their goals and vision are those that seem to achieve the greatest success over time.

C. Improvement Projects and Activities

1. Introduction

The Village of Herkimer has undertaken a number of actions to determine community development needs and identify improvement projects. These actions include:

- ◆ Surveys of local businesses as to their interests and desires;
- ◆ A windshield survey of housing conditions;
- ◆ A survey of residential property owners as to their interest in participating in a housing rehabilitation program;
- ◆ Solicitation of projects from Village officials and consultants;
- ◆ Holding public meetings and workshops to obtain citizen input; and

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- ◆ Participation in the Communities 2000 planning process.

These actions have helped the Village develop the conceptual vision of Herkimer in 2015 outlined above.

In the following paragraphs, a variety of improvement projects have been identified that will enable the Village to improve its housing, business district, and commercial areas, community and recreation facilities, and overall quality of life.

Proposed projects are illustrated on the Projects and Activities Map. The list of projects is not intended to be all inclusive. New ideas and opportunities will present themselves in the future, and the *Strategic Plan* should be amended as appropriate.

The projects are first described by type. The final section describes possible and recommended Comprehensive Programs that combine individual projects and activities into a program that can address area needs in a thorough manner.

2. Central Business District

a. Streetscape Enhancements

To revitalize the Central Business District, a phased plan of coordinated streetscape improvements including new sidewalks, ornamental period lighting, brick pavers, landscaping and street furniture needs to be developed and implemented over time.

First phase improvements on North Main Street between Albany and Green Street have been initiated. Future phase improvements should be implemented along South Main Street, North Main Street between Green and Court Streets, and along adjacent streets, including: Green, Mary, Park, Prospect, and Albany Streets.

Total estimated cost: \$1,000,000

b. Business Improvement and Property Rehabilitation

Surveys of businesses and business property owners in the Village have documented interest in participating in a "Downtown Investment Program".

Such a program could provide assistance to both property owners and business owners, and would complement public improvements and streetscape enhancements. Matching grant and low interest loan assistance would help business and property owners undertake building rehabilitation, facade improvement, and business expansion projects. A proposed "Downtown Investment Program" that includes an equal mix of grant, low interest loan, and private financing has generated significant interest, and needs to be implemented on a multi-year basis.

The program might first be implemented on a demonstration basis with highly motivated business and property owners. The program needs to be implemented in cooperation with local banks, who can provide lending expertise to the Village.

A Village-wide program is needed, but initial efforts might be focused in the Central Business District. Specific projects identified as part of the preparation of this *Strategic Plan* are outlined in Appendix D.

Total estimated cost: \$2,000,000 or more

c. *Munger Building Redevelopment*

The largest commercial building on Main Street is the Munger Building. In its present deteriorated condition, the underutilized building blights the Main Street area significantly. The adaptive reuse of this building would significantly enhance Main Street revitalization efforts. Discussions with the current owner should be initiated relative to future plans, funding, and other constraints to building improvement, and how the Village might be able to assist in any improvement plans.

Although a 2000 Small Cities application was not successful in this regard, continued efforts must be made to improve this key building and property. Potential users of the building might include the Herkimer County Community College, which is developing a major downtown presence.

Total estimated cost: \$1,000,000

d. Route 5/Albany Street Corridor Improvements

The Route 5/Albany Street corridor continues to have a major influence on the Village of Herkimer. This highway, along with Albany Street, forms a six lane barrier between the north and south halves of the Village. In its present state, however, the corridor detracts from the quality of life in the Village.

On the eastern end of the corridor, the Folts Home expansion and new medical facilities are positive additions to the corridor and Village. Similarly, the Wal-Mart and spin-off commercial development at the western end of the corridor are bringing much needed tax revenues into the Village. The middle portion of the corridor, despite the construction of a FasTrac mini-mart and new Burger King, is a major Village eyesore.

The reconstruction of Route 5 in the years ahead should incorporate improvements to Albany Street. Creating a pedestrian friendly "parkway" with additional landscaping, new streetscape amenities, better parking, and fencing improvements is recommended. A comprehensive plan to upgrade the central portion of the corridor would greatly enhance chances of securing future funding for this project through the Transportation Enhancements Program or others.

The installation of a clock tower and reconstruction of the traffic island at the intersection of North Main Street and Albany Street would give the Village and business district a much needed identity, and would help change the highway character of the corridor. Intersection improvements at Main Street and Prospect Street would also help to reduce the highway image and better connect the north and south halves of the Village.

As a precursor to major improvements, small scale fencing, landscape, and streetscape improvements to the Route 5 corridor would contribute significantly to revitalization efforts.

Total estimated cost: \$1,500,000

e. Community Center Development

While developing a Community Center is a critical community facility need in the Village, it is also a Central Business District need.