

Village Revitalization Steering Committee

Report #1 to York Board of Selectmen

June 2018

This is the first report of the Village Revitalization Steering Committee (VRC) to the York Board of Selectmen (BOS) and the community. It provides details on the organization and purpose of the committee and its work to date. Background, updates and commentary on Parking and Signage, Underground Utilities, Funding, and Timing are included.

Introduction to the Committee

Background

In 2010, local business and town leaders shared a growing concern over the condition and future of York Village. That led to the formation of the Village Study Committee which undertook a multifaceted process culminating in the York Village Master Plan. Voters approved incorporating the master plan into the York Comprehensive Plan in 2015 and approved a bond appropriation of \$400K in May 2016 representing the town's obligation for 10% of the construction costs on a \$4 million project budget. With its mission complete, the Village Study Committee disbanded.

Mission and Organization

The BOS established the Village Revitalization Steering Committee (VRC) as a new ad hoc committee with an advisory role throughout the final design and implementation phases of the project. The revitalization project is overseen by the York DPW Director and BOS. The initial committee scope includes providing citizen input on the various project design areas. The committee will also help coordinate activities related to community and direct-stakeholder outreach as needed.

By design, five members of the VRC are past members of the earlier Village Study Committee. This was to ensure that the reasoning and lengthy effort invested in the development of the Village Master Plan would be available to the new committee and some "wheels" would not have to be reinvented. Five additional members were also appointed by the BOS. The work of the committee is under direction of DPW Director, Dean Lessard, and Planning Director, Dylan Smith. Selectman Mike Estes serves as BOS Liaison to the committee.

Committee Focus

During the period January 2017 to May 2018, the committee held 14 meetings. The first meeting included administrative tasks and a presentation by Regina Leonard of Milone & MacBroom, who is the consulting team project leader. She filled us in on the status of the design and the activities of the team through the end of 2016.

Five areas were identified by the previous Village committee in its final report as needing further attention. One area, economic development, was deemed beyond the scope of the committee. The other four were considered key to continuing the development of the project and were adopted by the VRC as focus for our work. They are parking management, public signage, relocation of overhead utilities, and finding additional external funding. We formed three workgroups to facilitate research and planning in these areas. The workgroups are: Parking and Signage, Underground Utilities, and Funding.

MISSION

The mission of the Village Revitalization Steering Committee is to represent the interests of the town and its citizens during implementation of the Village Revitalization Project.

The workgroup structure enables our committee to incorporate stakeholders into project planning. By including organizations and individuals from the community with specific skills and interests in the outcome, the final product will be better. As a committee, we are mindful that we are working on behalf of, and with, the community in our role as advisors on the project. Background and progress to date in each area is covered in the sections below.

Parking and Signage

Background

Throughout the long Village planning period, parking has been a concern of the town, committee members and the public. Many stakeholders and community members participated in one or more community meetings and stakeholder events integral to development of the voter-approved plan concept. There was general recognition that parking changes were needed to allow room for features in the Village that would improve safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles and increase its overall attractiveness and walkability. Assessment of the impacts of the existing parking configuration on the function and perception of the Village resulted in major changes planned for the intersection of York Street and Long Sands Road and streetscape changes for the wider York Street business area.

The importance of parking to the businesses and organizations in the Village has been, and continues to be, taken into consideration during all aspects of project planning. Signage was added to the Parking workgroup due to the overlapping nature of signage to both roadway and parking design.

Redesign to Eliminate Diagonal Parking

The 2014 parking studies identified 57 curbside parking spaces in the project area. Thirty-six percent of those are diagonal spaces. This mix of parallel and diagonal parking developed over many decades in the Village and resulted in a lack of sidewalks in some sections and inconsistent walkways in others. Diagonal parking spaces severely limit pedestrian movement, restrict sight lines at intersections and crosswalks, and increase the potential for accidents. The overall narrow right-of-way in York Village limits space and necessitated choosing between streetscape and curbside parking. The diagonal spaces, while taking up less curb space, extend further into the right of way, leaving even less room for amenities like wider sidewalks, green space, lighting, bike lanes, etc.

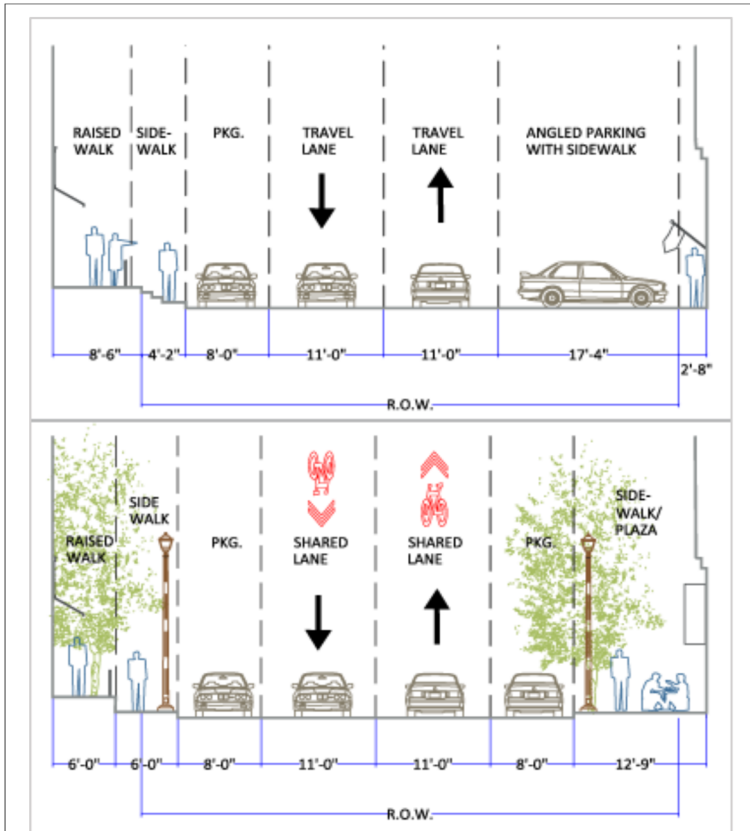
For the Village to function and be attractive for both business investment and customers, there must be convenient and available parking as well as a safe and attractive pedestrian environment. The York Village Master Plan seeks to rebalance the existing public right-of-way so that it serves both vehicles and pedestrians. Parking study data and the well-known safety concerns related to diagonal parking along with the community's desire for that better balance between pedestrian, bicyclist, and vehicular needs, resulted in the decision to remove all curbside diagonal parking spaces in the Village Center.

Implications for Village Parking

Diagonal parking spaces in the Village take up approximately 8 feet of curb space as they are designed to accommodate the width of the vehicle. This compares to a parallel parking space taking up from 20-24 feet of



curb per vehicle to account for its length and parking maneuverability. In addition, an average U.S. diagonal parking space extends into the right of way from 14-20', depending on the angle of the space to the curb. In deciding to eliminate diagonal spaces in favor of parallel spaces, there was an expectation that there would be a loss in the total number of spaces in some portions of the existing street area. The Master Plan estimated the initial loss of curbside spaces in the Village core to be about 15.



York Street between Berger & Ciampa Buildings facing South. Above: Existing Street Section; Below: Proposed Section. Illustrates additional street side space gained by replacing 90° diagonal parking with parallel parking. -- York Village Master Plan, Pg 16.

Fig. 2: One of a series of potential street sections presented in the Village Master Plan.

As further design and engineering work has progressed, the number of “lost” spaces in some locations has begun to be made up with new spaces at other places within the project area. DPW Director Lessard, after reviewing design plans last winter, identified opportunities for more curbside public parking. The proposed spaces may require a mixture of slight reductions in the size of some pedestrian safety zones, shifting some sidewalks further out into the right-of-way, and slightly reducing the size of certain parking spaces. The concept of adding parking spaces along Lindsay Road near the Museum was also offered for consideration.

The committee agreed that these ideas should be forwarded to the traffic engineers and the design team to be evaluated and incorporated where possible but, without being detrimental to the overall goals of the project.

In addition, there is an emerging plan to expand public parking near the Village Fire Station. This is due to a recent agreement between York Hospital and the Town to provide an easement on land belonging to the Hospital adjacent to the firehouse for ten new parking spaces.

Taking any combination of these steps could result in a potential addition of 20-30+

spaces that would not only replace the “lost” spaces due to the elimination of diagonal parking but, increase the number of parking spots convenient to Village destinations. We believe this will significantly improve both BOS and public satisfaction with the project and look forward to seeing the evolving plan.

Parking Management

While there has been a long-standing impression that there was not enough parking in the Village, the parking survey data showed that curbside parking average off-season usage was 36% of available spaces while in-season it reached 44%. It also reported that 25% of the spaces were used 4 hours or more, indicating they were likely being used by businesses rather than customers. Full detail on the parking surveys is available in the Village Master Plan documents.

The Master Plan identified several opportunities for improving parking in the Village. Given that the parking studies indicated a substantial percentage of unused spaces, the recommendations are focused on better management of the spaces.

The committee agrees the following should be undertaken over the next 12-18 months:

- Better definition of public parking, including current and future off-street lots;
- Boost valuation of customer parking over long-term business parkers at curbside spaces;
- Seek new parking options convenient to the Village center (see Implications for Village Parking section above);
- Define loading zones and establish timing for use; and
- Define time-limited public spaces.

The Parking and Signage workgroup began consideration of these items during the summer of 2017. At that point, project funding had not yet been approved to a level high enough that a target starting date could be set. Therefore, the work was put on hold. Preliminary planning ideas included contacting property and business owners in the project area in the form of conversations and gathering data by conducting a parking survey. Goals for designing and collecting data on a parking survey would be to:

- clarify current parking inventory including private and public spaces;
- assess “real” parking needs of existing businesses (e.g., # employees per day that require parking, frequency of deliveries by truck, etc.); and
- measure overall business and residential parking needs.

Performing some type of survey and having conversation(s) with stakeholders about parking plans and their individual needs will help get answers to questions such as: do we need one or more 15 or 30-minute parking spots?, should we set delivery truck times and locations? and should employee parking be regulated?.

Signage

The Master Plan did not specify the style, size or design of any elements of public signage. The consulting team did suggest that a comprehensive program of informational, directional and regulatory signs be developed. Money requested for outside assistance with signage planning was not approved at the time the current design consulting contract was accepted. Planning in this area is being coordinated by York Public Works with inputs from the VRC and other stakeholders. This will be done in a manner that assures the preservation of the Village’s historic character while also being mindful of the benefits of coherent signage to businesses and public safety and convenience.

As mentioned earlier, creating signs for specialized curbside parking spots is part of signage requirements. York also needs to provide better direction and identification of off-street public parking locations (e.g., Library, Hospital spots) and to encourage property owners to better identify private spaces. Developing a Village brand for directional and spot signage should become part of the long-term plan for a revitalized Village. Parking information can be disseminated in other ways such as the town website, visitor handouts, and other signage.

Some parking signage improvements have been identified as potentially useful in the short term. We understand the BOS recently began discussions on parking in York. We welcome any procedural guidance they will provide going forward regarding parking and signage for the revitalized Village.

Underground Utilities

Relocating utility lines underground in all or part of the project area would greatly enhance the appearance of the Village and has been recommended in multiple unfulfilled plans for York Village since the 1940's. The relocation of utility lines and elimination of poles in the Village project area was a notable feature of the Master Plan. Regrettably, the initial cost estimate for doing that was two times (\$7.9 m) the estimate for the rest of the project (\$4 m) and, therefore, was deemed unachievable. Underground utility project costs do not qualify for traditional Federal or State funding. Research by the committee could not find any source of outside funding. In addition, the utilities are not obligated to pay the cost of relocating existing utilities underground. The cost, therefore, of moving existing overhead utilities underground falls to the municipality requesting the work.

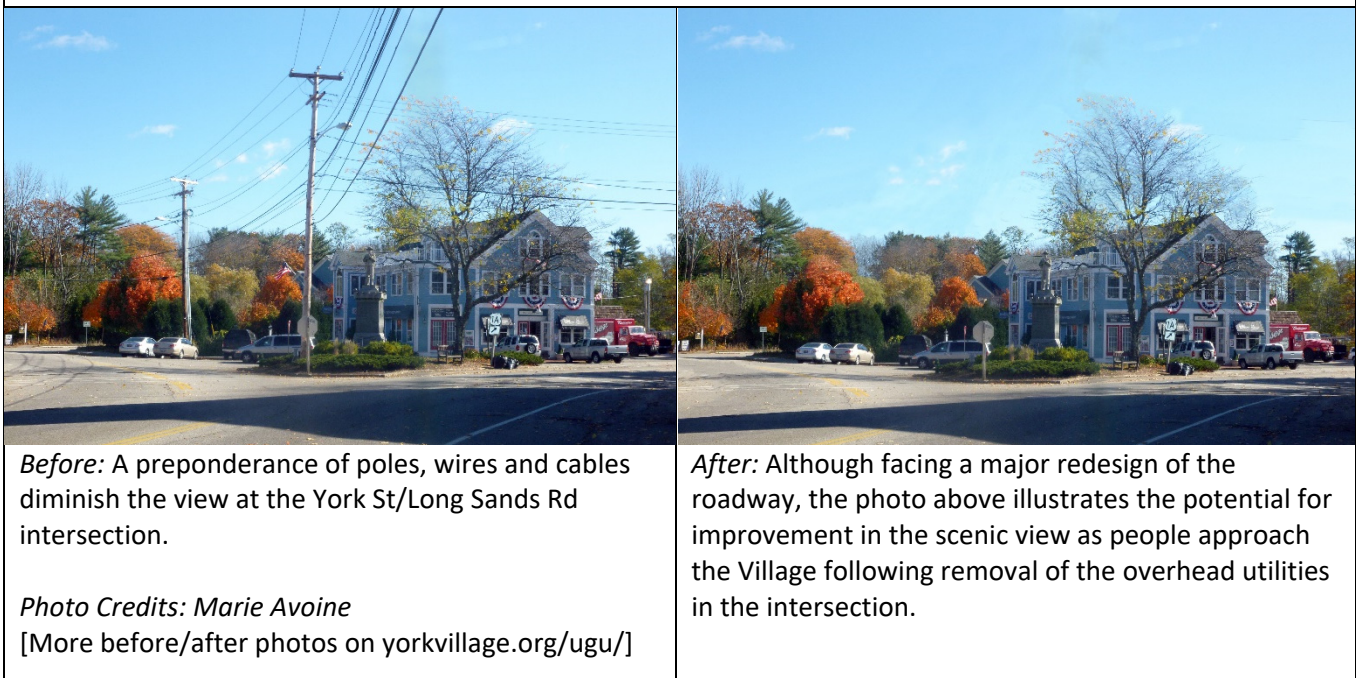
Two Options Under Consideration

In spite of the original estimate for moving all Village utilities underground, there continued to be support for something to be done about utilities in the Village. The design team has been asked to continue to explore the idea and seek information from the utility companies needed to develop more detailed costs to do the following:

1. Move current overhead utilities below ground in the right of way in a portion of the project area yet to be determined and retain existing overhead utilities elsewhere; and,
2. Install conduit throughout the project area while the Village project streets are being reconstructed thus, creating the option for the town to relocate utilities at a future date.

While only one of these two options will be chosen, it is important to develop costs for both.

Fig. 3: Comparison of Village Intersection with and without Overhead Utilities



Based on preliminary data the utilities provided the consulting team early in the design work, DPW Director Lessard estimated a materials cost for conduit only of \$126,000 per 1,000 feet. However, there will be a lot of additional costs involved in completing any sized installation. In order to get detail on material and installation costs, further engineering is needed and the utilities charge for that level of detail.

The consulting team will be contacting the utility companies to confirm whether the costs they provided many months ago for engineering level estimates are still valid. Once we have a cost estimate for the utility engineering services, an action item can be presented to the BOS. The town must set up accounts with each utility company for them to do engineering work based on conditions specific to the York Village project. The committee has been told that it should be possible to develop an estimate for any given length of underground utilities because the utility companies will estimate the entire area of the project as we originally define it and their design estimates will be provided per linear foot of conduit or wire, manhole unit, square footage, etc. With that information, the project team can scale their estimates to a defined utility project area with a realistic price that may be sent to voters for funding.

Village Utility Pole Survey

At our February 2018 meeting, Planning Director Smith proposed that we undertake a site walk of the entire project area to help us define the boundaries of the area(s) within the overall project that, if money were no object, would ideally have utilities relocated underground. The walk was undertaken on a rather cold February day. Supplied with a map of numbered utility poles in the project area, six VRC members, Planning Director Smith, Selectmen Palmer and Estes, and Bike & Pedestrian Committee member Leah Drennan, walked the area and individually recorded a rating for each pole. Each pole was rated for the importance of its location and the pole’s impact on scenic view and secondary ranking based on impact on plan design, signage, foliage, pedestrian flow, and cost. Two additional VRC members took the survey on their own prior to the next regular committee meeting.

At its March 15, 2018 meeting, the committee reviewed the results of the survey walk. The group had surveyed the area along Long Sands Road from Woodbridge Road to the Village center and along York Street from the First Parish cemetery entrance to Williams Avenue. The survey tally identified an area from the Town Hall entrance drive to the east side of the old church building and up Long Sands Road to the library driveway as having the highest priority for relocating utilities. (See Figure 4.)

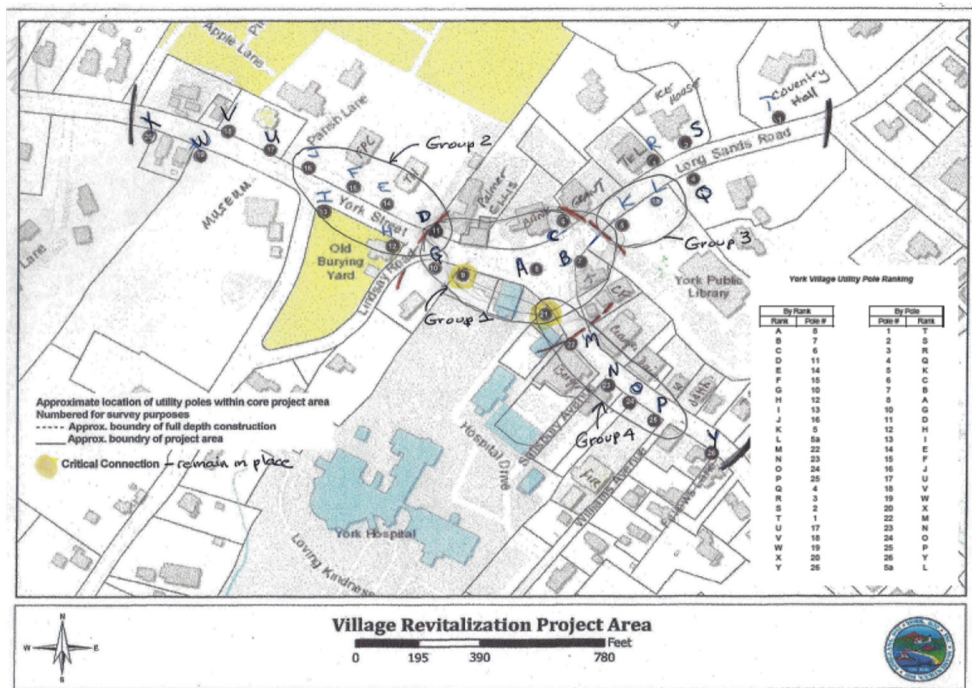


Fig. 4 Utility Pole Survey: Used to set priority areas for relocating existing overhead utilities underground.

To establish the priority areas, the committee assigned a letter to each power pole on the plan reflecting the priority for its removal based on our survey results and further discussion of each by the group. 'A' being the highest priority to 'Y' being the lowest priority. After completing that exercise, four groupings of poles were identified and prioritized. These have been sent to the consultants.

The group discussed various options and methods for removing or moving power poles along several segments of the roadway. The idea of moving power poles and lines behind buildings was discussed. That was ruled out

because of the complication of having to get easements from property owners and that doing so could require property owners to face associated costs and further delay the project.

If an underground utilities project is to be added to the revitalization project, the next available opportunity to obtain voter approval will be the May 2019 budget referendum. The project team needs to start working on capital planning issues and making progress soon to meet the lead-in timeline for that date.

Funding and Timing of the Project

Intersection, Road Realignment and Sidewalk Improvements

The overall scope covers roadway, sidewalk and drainage improvements on York Street from the Remick Barn to the Bagel basket and on Long Sands Road from the monument up to Woodbridge Road. It includes realigning the intersection of York St/Long Sands Rd, repositioning the monument, installation of street lighting, some site furnishings and landscape improvements. It is estimated that this work will cost \$4.0 million. The funding plan calls for the use of Federal (80%) and State (10%) transportation funds. To qualify for these funds, the town must provide the remaining 10%. This match of \$400,000 was approved by voters in May 2016 in the form of bonds to be issued as the Federal and State funds become available.

Funding and Timing of Project

A commonly heard question is, “When will the project be done?” While close followers of the project are aware of the reasoning behind the delay, others are not. From the beginning of this project, the goal has been to minimize the funds needing to come directly from York taxpayers. That meant that the town would be relying mainly on Federal Highway funds to implement the work. For a municipality to receive Federal funds, they must request them from a metropolitan planning organization. In York’s case this is the Kittery Area Comprehensive Transportation System (KACTS) which is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Maine portion of the Portsmouth and Dover-Rochester, New Hampshire urbanized areas. KACTS towns include: York, Kittery, Eliot, South Berwick, and Berwick. Federal funding must have the approval of the KACTS board to be allocated to a specific project. These awards are based on fiscal years. Projects like York’s, which exceed KACTS’ annual allocation, require multiple approvals. Expectation for funding as mentioned above was for \$3.2 million from Federal funds matched with \$400K from State transportation funds and \$400K from Municipal funds. To date, KACTS has approved allocations to York as shown in Table 1.

Funding Year	Fed \$K	State \$K	Town \$K	Total \$K
FY 2017	\$ 436	\$ 55	\$ 55	\$ 545
FY 2018	\$ 716	\$ 90	\$ 90	\$ 895
FYI 2019	\$ 716	\$ 90	\$ 90	\$ 895
FYI 2020	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0
FYI 2021	\$?	\$?	\$?	\$?
FYI 2022	\$?	\$?	\$?	\$?
To Date	\$ 1,868	\$ 234	\$ 234	\$ 2,335

With the funding approved to date, definition of a first phase is underway. The earliest this first \$2.335 million would be available is late 2019. The earliest Phase 1 could begin is fall 2019, but 2020 may be more realistic. The project will be a multiyear effort with a possible gap between end of Phase 1 and start of Phase 2. The total budget had been estimated at \$4 million. It could take a year (or more) beyond 2020 to secure the additional funds to complete Phase 2.

External Funding Requirements

1. Funding Underground Utilities

As mentioned above, if there is to be some advancement of underground utility work, separate funding will be required. Our Funding Workgroup reached out to many contacts and did online research to pursue opportunities for external funding for moving existing overhead utilities underground. We were unable to identify either a municipal project elsewhere that had received outside funds for such work, or any funding sources that offered grants in that area. Unless additional information surfaces, we believe that the cost of moving some or all overhead utilities in the Village center will have to be funded by taxpayers.

The consultants continue to develop design and cost estimates for 1) moving all utilities in the immediate vicinity of the intersection underground at the same time the Village improvements are implemented and 2) installing underground conduits at the same time as the roadway realignment work but delaying burying the utility lines to a later date. A funding request may be put forward to the BOS for consideration later.

2. Landscaping, Lighting, Street Amenities

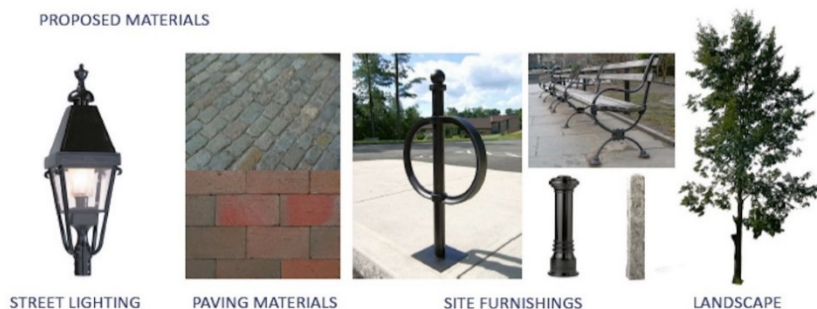


Fig. 5: Illustrative design of street accessories for York Village.

Street amenities like those shown above will add both safety and aesthetic benefits to the Village. Local garden clubs, the Historic District Commission, Museum, and Village Association among others have been and will be included in helping determine a fitting “Look” for the core Village. A yet to be determined amount of town or external funding for street amenities will be required to fund the purchase and installation of some of these features.

It is anticipated that funds beyond the Federal and State highway funds and the town-match bond funding will be needed for supplementary tree planting, landscaping, lighting, street furnishings, etc. Local, state and national grants and private funds will be pursued. Several possibilities have been considered but none are being pursued until we are clear on the overall project timetable and what level of extra funds will be required.

Summary

In the short to medium term, revitalization project activities of the committee will focus on the following:

- Finetuning the number and location of curbside parking spaces to be included in the final project design plan;
- Parking management planning through conversation(s) with stakeholders and design of a parking needs survey in consultation with the Board of Selectmen;
- Instituting short term signage improvements;
- Pursuing a viable option regarding relocating overhead utilities underground;

- Obtaining Town funding for underground utility engineering planning work; and
- Identifying outside funding sources for street amenities in preparation for submitting grants or pursuing private donations once needs are clearly identified.

The committee understands the public’s frustration with the lack of a fixed start date for the project, but we hope you better understand the reasoning behind it. We continue to be optimistic about the benefits of revitalization on our town center. In the meantime, the public can continue participating in the project. Please come to our meetings or email us with your ideas, concerns, and questions and join us at upcoming public events. Also, if you have expertise or interest in any of the topic areas mentioned in this report and might be willing to join a workgroup, we would love to hear from you.

Addendum – Community Input

Monthly meetings generally take place at 10 am on the third Thursday of the month (subject to change) at The Library. All meetings are public. Town and community organizations, Village stakeholders, and interested individuals are invited to bring suggestions and questions at any time.

As we get closer to final design, we expect to host public outreach sessions to gain specific inputs and share progress with the public. We will also be reactivating our email list to keep interested parties up to date. Reports, presentations, news articles, meeting minutes and much more can be found on our website at www.YorkVillage.org. The committee is also listed on the Town website under Government, Boards and Committees as “Village Revitalization Committee” and we have a Facebook page at www.Facebook.com/yorkvillage.

Public concerns and complaints can also be directed to DPW Director, Dean Lessard at dlessard@yorkmaine.org, Planning Director, Dylan Smith at dsmith@yorkmaine.org, or Selectman Mike Estes, BOS Liaison to the committee at mestes@yorkmaine.org, or the Village Revitalization Committee at info@yorkvillage.org.

Current Committee Roster

Steven Carr
 Brent Drennan
 Stu Dawson*
 Antonia DeSoto*
 Christine Hartwell* (Chair)
 Bill Lord
 Ron McAllister*
 Dan Poulin (Vice Chair)
 Don Rose
 Peter Smith* (Secretary)

*Indicates member was also on the earlier Village Study Committee.