

New City Hamlet Center Vision Plan

CHAPTER FOUR FORM NEW CITY

Ensure that future Development is Consistent with the Vision Plan

The New City Vision Plan is a consensus-building process. Through this effort, a number of workshops, meetings, presentations, and discussions have been held to identify common goals and a concept for the future of the New City Hamlet Center. Implementation of this concept will require follow-through by civic leaders and municipal staff and officials as well as continued participation by residents and business people. Form New City is the foundation for long-term enhancement of the hamlet. These strategies relate to municipal policies such as land use regulations and parking standards, new institutions and organizations and opportunities for public-private partnerships for re-development and re-use.

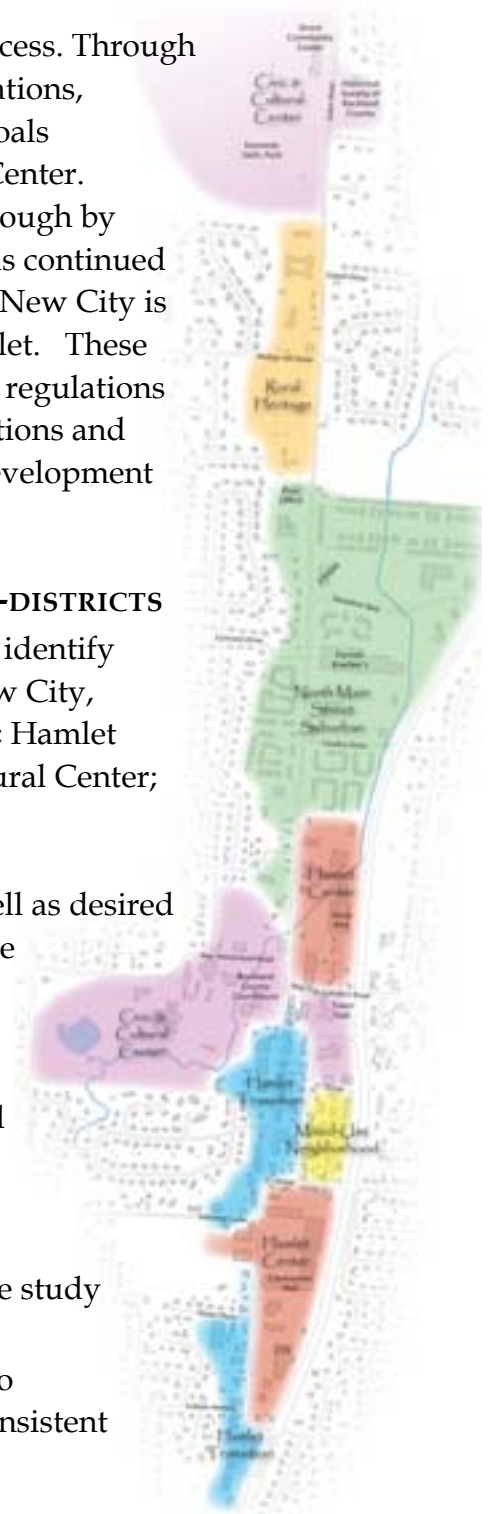
CHARACTER AREAS APPROACH – LAND USE SUB-DISTRICTS

To help conceptualize distinct areas of the hamlet and identify specific land use strategies for sub-districts within New City, six “character areas” were established: Hamlet Center; Hamlet Transition; Mixed-Use Neighborhood; Civic and Cultural Center; North Main Street Suburban; and Rural Heritage.

These categories relate to the existing conditions as well as desired future vision for each area and can help to guide future decision-making, particularly related to zoning and land use planning. Please note that the boundaries and proposed standards described for each character area should serve only as a conceptual framework and guide for implementation of the plan.

While each area is distinct, there are a number of recommendations that cross through much or all of the study area, including:

- The initiation of an incentive zoning program to encourage design and redevelopment that is consistent with the Vision Plan;



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- Reducing parking requirements and standards. As the town's parking management program moves forward (shared parking, etc.), existing standards can be reduced. In the meantime, allow the Planning Board to waive or minimize requirements where projects are consistent with the Vision Plan;
- Reviewing all projects in the Hamlet Center for consistency with the Vision Plan. Graphic design guidelines could be developed by the town to further expand on architectural and site layout concepts;
- Utilizing the sign ordinance recently adopted by the Clarkstown Town Board. Additional standards specifically for the hamlet character areas may be needed; and
- Incentivizing investment in projects that significantly advance the Vision Plan. For these projects, initiate a "fast-track" review process and provide the Planning Board with authority to waive or minimize certain standards such as parking requirements and setbacks through incentive zoning. These procedures should be designed to provide development flexibility while eliminating the need for additional board(s) review (e.g., Zoning Board of Appeals).

NEW CITY HAMLET CHARACTER AREAS

Hamlet Center: This character area is located in two portions of the hamlet and includes many significant opportunities to re-use, change and create a traditional Main Street.

The northern hamlet center character area focuses on the existing Shop Rite plaza at the intersection of New City – Congers Road, New Hempstead Road, and Main Street. These

stores and parking lots are the first impression visitors experience when entering New City from the east or west. The southern hamlet center character area is focused on the Clarkstown Mall and vicinity along South Main Street.



Sketch of Hamlet Center concept.

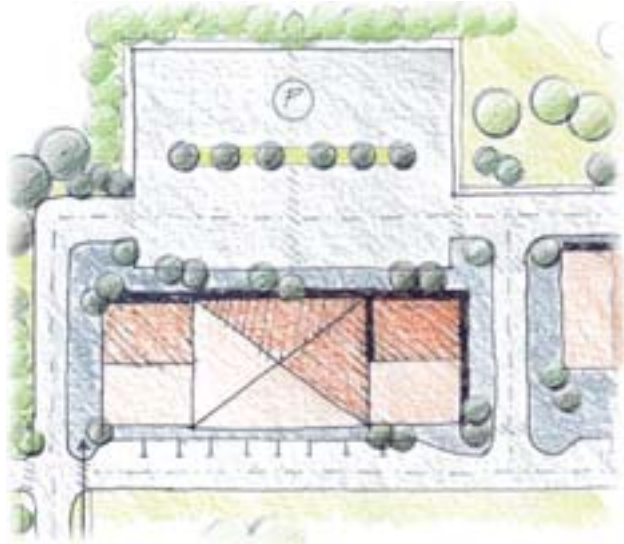
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The Hamlet Center areas are unique in that they include relatively large parcels of land where one or two re-development projects could dramatically change the character and form of New City. These areas are highly visible properties with generally older strip mall structures.

The existing zoning for these areas (Community Shopping) is not consistent with the vision plan and should be updated. New zoning districts should be developed refining the concept of the hamlet center including the specific district boundaries, area and bulk standards, uses, signage and incentives.

Recommendations for the Hamlet Center district include:

- Front yard setbacks: maximum of 30' with no minimums except to allow for large sidewalks and cafe-type settings. Overall, buildings should be located closer to the street with parking prohibited or highly restricted between structures and the public right-of-way;
- Height: up to 35' with allowances for taller features such as cupolas and pitched roofs through incentives;
- Uses: Mix of commerce, retail, public spaces and high quality living (with incentives for housing dedicated to emergency service personnel). All ground floors facing the public street should be commercial space; and
- Scale and intensity: highest density traditional Main Street character area. Floor area ratio of up to 2.0



Parking should be secondary to the streetscape and located behind structures.

Hamlet Transition: This character area includes parcels along the west side of South Main Street in close proximity to existing residential neighborhoods. Similar to the Hamlet Center areas, there are a number of opportunities for re-use and establishment of the traditional hamlet concept. However, lots on the west side of Main Street are generally shallower and smaller than those on the east side and consist of fewer strip plazas under single ownership. Further, this

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character area abuts large single-family neighborhoods where concerns about expansion of commercial uses and activities close to homes have been expressed. Re-development of these sites must be sensitive to the surroundings and potential adverse impacts to residential areas.

Existing zoning in these areas should be updated to promote a traditional hamlet style in keeping with the vision plan. Recommendations include:

- Front yard setbacks: maximum of 30' with no minimums except to allow for large sidewalks and cafe-type settings;
- Parking lots prohibited or highly restricted between structures and the public right-of-way;
- Height: up to 35';
- Uses: Mixed (commerce, retail and high quality residential with quality public spaces). All ground floors facing the public street should be commercial space; and
- Scale and intensity: Medium density traditional Main Street character area. Minimize impacts to adjacent neighborhoods. Floor area ratio of up to 1.5



The existing scale of the mixed-use district should be maintained.

Mixed-use Neighborhood: This character area is located along Maple Ave and Park Ave just east of South Main Street and includes many recently renovated structures. The neighborhood is a mix of small scale professional offices, service operations and residences. Existing zoning should be updated and a new district established to maintain the current scale of this character area. Preliminary suggestions for the district include:

- Front yard setbacks: recognize existing setbacks (generally 5' to 10');
- Parking lots prohibited or highly restricted between structures and the public right-of-way;
- Height: up to 35';
- Uses: Mixed (commerce, retail and residential); and
- Scale and intensity: recognize existing scale. Floor area ratio of up to 1.0

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Civic and Cultural: There are two civic and cultural character areas in the hamlet. The first is located at the Northern Gateway and includes Kennedy Dells County Park, Street Community Center, and the Historical Society of Rockland County. The second area is a part of the Central Gateway along New Hempstead Road, New City - Congers Road and Maple Avenue. This character area includes the County Campus, Rockland County Courthouse, Clarkstown Town Hall, the Fire Station and Police Department. Current zoning in these areas is a mix of residential, office and community shopping.

To recognize these areas and ensure that public projects contribute to the overall vision of the hamlet, the town should establish a civic and cultural zoning district. While most of this land is in public ownership, the zoning categorization would coordinate existing land use with the town's development regulatory system.



Town of Clarkstown's Police and Courts building (above) and Town Hall (park shown below) are parts of the Civic and Cultural character area.



Rural Heritage: This area serves as a transition to the Northern Gateway section of the hamlet. The area is generally built-out but includes the only farm in the study area - the Diamond Derby farm. There are no major recommendations for modifications to zoning district boundaries or uses in this area. However, landscaping standards should be enhanced to require maintenance of natural vegetation to the greatest extent possible and to encourage the use of informal planting styles.

North Main Street Suburban: A diverse mix of shopping, office, civic and residential uses including the former Bradley's shopping center, the library, post office and a senior housing center are included in this area. While there are

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numerous opportunities for increased connectivity for pedestrians, this character area is predominately auto-oriented.

- Consider a hamlet-style zoning district for the civic and business area around the post office, library and senior housing center. Otherwise, general boundaries for zoning districts are appropriate.
- Increase requirements for pervious coverage for all projects in these areas and improve connectivity through trails and sidewalks through site planning process.
- Utilize landscaping in parking lots through medians and pedestrian walkways, to minimize large asphalt areas and minimize stormwater runoff through low impact development techniques designed to address stormwater management on the site (e.g., bio-retention swales).

ORGANIZATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONCEPTS

Enhancement strategies for New City will rely on diverse participation and leadership from within the community. Local stakeholders such as the Clarkstown Garden Club, the Downtown New City Corporation and the New City Chamber of Commerce have already mobilized efforts to increase awareness of New City and improve and beautify the hamlet. Rockland County is poised to upgrade New Hempstead Road as well as provide improved public access to the county campus' wonderful park and historic resources. The Town of Clarkstown is also in position to re-construct South Main Street and improve the streetscape. These groups, organizations and elected officials make up the social capital needed for community enhancement. By continuing to work together the impact of these efforts will be multiplied and the community will realize that real change is happening in New City.

The town should continue to engage civic and community groups in planning and outreach programs. This planning process has provided civic groups with a platform for pro-active community involvement and a forum for communication and partnership.

There is significant interest in continued participation in planning and community renewal programs. Already, the



Continue to involve the community in dialogue during plan implementation. Above - a Vision Plan workshop break-out group at the Street Community Center

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Downtown New City Corporation has established a sub-committee to monitor and advance implementation of the Vision Plan. The partnership established between the county, town and the other stakeholder groups represents a special relationship and a success unto itself. The town and county should designate a formal plan implementation group to coordinate the community's social capital with enhancement and implementation efforts.

ADDRESS MAINTENANCE AND ENFORCEMENT ISSUES

Workshop and meeting participants continually expressed a desire to see a clean, well-maintained Main Street and downtown area. Certain issues, such as reconstructing sidewalks, have been purposefully held back to allow the vision plan process to complete in order to create a better design concept. However, as implementation moves forward a renewed effort will be needed to ensure for long-term maintenance of the hamlet.

- Enforce and monitor compliance with zoning regulations. The town may need to allocate additional staff time to monitor compliance with standards for housing, signage, site maintenance, landscaping and other performance standards detailed in site plan approval.
- Allocate resources to maintain streetscape. The new streetscape will include a number of community amenities that will require maintenance and upkeep such as planters, benches, trash receptacles, bike racks, and similar features. A process should be formalized for monitoring the condition of these features and budget set aside to fix or replace broken items.



Enhance capacity to monitor compliance with zoning regulations for elements such as use, signage, service, storage and utility areas and upkeep of required landscaping.



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- Consider establishment of a Business Improvement District for South Main Street for the purposes of maintenance, business promotion, landscaping, branding of the hamlet, etc. The Business Improvement District would be a voluntarily action and created by property owners, through a local law authorized by the town board and funded by a special tax assessment on commercial properties in the district.

ESTABLISH THE ADMINISTRATIVE MECHANISMS TO ENCOURAGE AND ENABLE CHANGE

As described in the Vision Plan, there are a number of challenges and hurdles to success. These challenges include fragmented ownership, incompatible land uses, limited or uncoordinated parking, maintenance of infrastructure such as sidewalks, code enforcement and traffic congestion (to name a few). The Business Improvement District could be a key element in long-term maintenance and improvement of the hamlet. However, to initiate change, an entity or mechanism will likely be needed to help coordinate renewal projects. The following organizations should be considered for plan implementation and enhancement of New City:

- A re-development authority or local development corporation to undertake economic development activities and to work with developers and property owners on renewal projects;
- A parking authority to establish and maintain municipal parking lots and receive funds in lieu of parking from development projects; and
- Business Improvement District (mentioned above).