

Town Comprehensive Plan of Bedford, NY

Bedford Village Subcommittee

DRAFT/PROGRESS Report

April 12, 2021

Introduction

History

Bedford Village has seen many changes in its 341 year history. But its core identity as a community with civic and merchant buildings – and a burying ground - around a Village Green with residential properties surrounded by large open spaces radiating from the three corners of the green has remained remarkably unchanged since it was laid out in 1680. After nearly a century of growth and prosperity, all but one house was burned to the ground by the British and Hessian troops during the Revolutionary War. With a commitment to their village and community, the residents began to rebuild, anchored by the 1787 Court House and with many of the houses built from 1780-1800 that are still standing today.

Preservation in Bedford Village came early, with the Bedford Historical Society being founded in 1916 to save the Methodist Church on the Village Green, now Historical Hall. In 1972, the Bedford Village Historic District was established and listed on both the New York State and National Register of Historic Places. Today, the Historical Society owns and preserves eight historic properties around the Village Green and together with the Bedford Village Historic District Review Commission, also founded in 1972, continues to play an important role in the protection and preservation of the historic character of the Village.

At the same time, Bedford Village is no stranger to change. The 1806 Methodist Church now known as Historic Hall was actually moved to its current location in 1837 from the corner of Baldwin and Succabone roads. The Village Post Office was also moved to its current location and of course each of the historic buildings has been home to a rich and diverse mix of uses including general stores, taverns, inns, schools, museums, jails, and many more. Today, more modern retail, restaurants and services are in many of those same buildings, and the village continues to thrive despite challenges of traffic, parking, outdated infrastructure and the uncertainty of many larger issues not unique to Bedford Village.

Looking Forward

As our committee reflected on the future of Bedford Village and a vision for the next 20 years, the conversation centered on the balance between maintaining and protecting the unique character and history of Bedford Village while building a stronger community with greater engagement and identity. A thriving, vibrant, safe village that draws people together and builds connections and purpose will ensure that it is appreciated, protected, and sustainable for years to come. We believe it is possible to navigate thoughtful and responsible change that embraces our existing community character and values, while improving the experience of living in and around, and visiting, Bedford Village. Historic and dynamic. The same Bedford Village, only better.

In the following report, we examine ways to build a stronger and safer community through everything from bike paths to sewer systems; increased density to expanded sidewalks with 'micro-park' green spaces. There are extensive challenges and expansive opportunities – and we believe the timing is right for this process. There are global, national, and local changes and challenges that must be addressed, an increase in people moving into the area, a cultural shift in the way people work and live, and finally specific opportunities with properties throughout the village and the 172/22 corridor from the green to the Shell Station.

At the time of this draft, we are working to refine and develop our goals in each area of study, including a review of land use and zoning impacts and input from many local groups and stakeholders. We look forward to the critical step of getting feedback from residents in the public sessions, and ultimately developing our work into recommendations for the larger Town Comprehensive Plan.

Respectfully submitted,

Bedford Village Sub-Committee for the Town of Bedford Comprehensive Plan

Guiding Principles developed by the members of the Subcommittee – see also separate document

In order to improve the quality of life for all citizens of the Bedford Village Hamlet now and in the future:

1. Strengthen community engagement, connection and impact in the Bedford Village Hamlet
2. Enhance the vitality and economic sustainability of the Bedford Village Hamlet
3. Address safety and services
4. Preserve and enhance the beauty and historic character of the Bedford Village Hamlet
5. Embrace leadership role in addressing environmental and climate crises issues
6. Strengthen and improve identity / sense of place of larger Bedford Village area

Responsibilities outlined by the Town for the Hamlet sub-committees

Discuss how to preserve and enhance the unique characteristics of their hamlet while meeting the broader needs of the Town in regard to:

1. Housing needs
2. Merchant and customer parking
3. Economic development issues
4. Impact of lack of sewers
5. Water supply issues
6. Transportation / public transportation
7. Existing zoning and potential changes, as relates to hamlet vitality through new uses or limits

Areas of study and recommendation in following report

- A. Community
- B. Circulation
- C. Streetscape
- D. Infrastructure
- E. Sustainability
- F. Zoning*

*Zoning opportunities, including re-defining the Hamlet boundary (beyond Historic District) through re-zoning are included in some of the sections above, but may be developed into a separate section moving forward.

A. COMMUNITY

Goals:

- Strengthen community engagement, connection, and impact in Bedford Village
- Prioritize local circulation and connections – walkability and safe, appealing access
- Enhance the vitality and economic sustainability of Bedford Village – attract merchants
- Strengthen and improve the identity and sense of place of larger village area
- Recognize the change in demographics and in expectations of residents of Bedford & Bedford Village

Challenges:

- High taxes in town
- Losing older residents as priced out of housing market / taxes
- Lack of affordable housing
- Not truly walkable community – and village doesn't connect anywhere with safe walking or bike paths
- Unsafe shoulder of roads as soon as you get beyond very limited sidewalks
- Lack of speed control – dangerous intersections
- Lack of public transportation, including train / commuter piece
- Lack of parking – although is it lack or just lack of parking people want to use?
- Limited retail, restaurants
- Sub par grocery store – the worst.

Opportunities:

- Many properties in transition: Fire House; St Patricks School; Old gas station next to Lucia
- Opportunity to improve and expand stretch from village to shell station with improved walking paths and streetscapes
- Opportunity to work with Alchemy for thoughtful development at edge of village
- Support and encourage proven assets to the town such as Truck restaurant
- Encourage and support more local events, regular activities on the village green
- Partner with groups to use the village green for community and cultural events
- Promote activities, and businesses that would bring density to the village including in the evenings

Community Feedback:

- Need more motivation to shop in Bedford Village (store variety)
- Broad interest in more community events in Bedford Village (cultural, farmer's market, food trucks, recreation)
- Senior housing and connection opportunities are missing
- More local shopping promotions
- Consider a community garden
- Update the recreation offered at the Bedford Town Park (Indoor space, pickleball, walking perimeter with exercise stations)

Recommendations:

B. CIRCULATION

Goals:

- Address safety and services – bike / walking paths, speed control, parking
- Addressing environmental crisis through transportation – biking and walking
- Connect the hamlets with bike paths

Challenges:

- Commuter / non-local traffic through the village
- Speed control
- Lack of sidewalks or bike paths
- Parking
- Lack of funds directed to Bedford Village

Opportunities:

- More and improved sidewalks
- Work with private developers such as Alchemy to invest in pedestrian circulation and parking in the village
- Parking behind Presbyterian church and on court road

Community Feedback:

- There is tremendous concern among residents and businesses about the traffic hazards in Bedford Village
- Need for better crosswalks
- Interest in bike paths throughout the area
- Easier and safer connection needed between center village and town park / center village and Hunting Ridge
- Increased gathering opportunities (more benches and tables on green)
- What can be done with St. Patrick's school?

Recommendations:

- Expand and improve sidewalks
- Bike paths – Bedford center road to connect Bedford and Bedford hills
- Speed control – cameras / automatic monitoring? Neck down?
- Consider cobblestones in village section?
- Relocate crosswalks to the places that people actually cross based on use today
- Better lighting at cross walks and throughout village

C. STREETScape

Goals:

- Create more green spaces beyond Village Green
- Preserve and enhance the beauty and historic character of Bedford Village
- Strengthen and improve the identity and sense of place of larger village area – create defined pedestrian path of travel connecting all sites within the historic district and beyond
- Safer crossings
- More consistent and attractive materials throughout – standards for sidewalks, curbs, guardrails

Challenges:

- Layers of municipalities – TOWN / COUNTY / NYS / DOT
- Mix of public and private properties throughout the village
- Lack of standards
- Lack of enforcement of some standards, historic district requirements
- Sign pollution
- Power lines
- Difficult to actually get onto the green other than a few entry points
- Lack of funds directed to Bedford Village

Opportunities:

- Create “one” community – visually and physically
- Standards for materials
- Improve and add sidewalks and walking paths
- Extend green space and sidewalks down 22/172 to corner at shell station, including plant trees / greenery
- Bury utility lines
- Reduce sign pollution, consider more historic wood signs to replace jungle of metal single sided signs throughout
- Better lighting throughout
- Many properties in transition: Old Fire House; New Firehouse; St Patricks School; Old gas station next to Lucia
- Potential new anchor tenant at hunting ridge mall, alchemy / New development next to playhouse – leverage and collaborate
- Partner with larger properties – Playhouse
- Open spaces – corner across from Shell station, in front of old gas station next to Lucia.
- Could town ever buy / move Verizon building?
- Look at current and potential zoning to encourage thoughtful development of commercial corridor

Community Feedback:

- Residents want a walkable village
- Clean up between Bedford Village and Hunting Ridge
- Want more sidewalks and bike lanes
- More development is acceptable and desired

Recommendations:

D. INFRASTRUCTURE

Goals:

- Enhance the vitality and economic sustainability of Bedford Village, attract new businesses, shops, restaurants
- Remove obstacles to new, appropriate development
- Address safety and services that are lacking
- Attract homeowners who expect a reasonable level of service for the tax rates
- Connect village green with hunting ridge mall

Challenges:

- Lack of Sewer or space for septic
- Lack of Cell service
- Lack of parking
- Crumbing shoulder or lack of shoulder on roads
- Ensuring any development is in keeping with historic district and appropriate
- Lack of funds directed to Bedford Village
- Power lines – losing power often

Opportunities:

- Explore options for sewer, septic, including new technologies
- Explore new technologies for cell service that would not require traditional large towers
- Off street parking – behind church or court road – but must be connected, attractive and inviting to users
- Explore private public partnerships to help develop
- Holistic approach – improve and add sidewalks – would be the time to bury utility lines and address other services

Community Feedback:

- Parking not sufficient (Build Court St lot)
- Cell Service totally inadequate
- Businesses need better waste treatment capacity
- Consider burying overhead wires

Recommendations:

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E. SUSTAINABILITY

Goals:

- Strengthen community engagement, connection, and impact in Bedford Village
- Embrace leadership role in addressing environmental and climate crisis issues
- Recognize the urgency for renewable energy solutions
- Farming / agricultural opportunities?

Challenges:

- Limited space in Bedford Village
- Communication / education
- Are power alternatives available?
- Cost of investing in these options

Opportunities:

- Work with local organizations like Bedford 2030
- Charging stations at all town parking lots
- Support and encourage current trend of outdoor activity and walking / biking – bike paths!
- Build on agrarian history and values of Bedford – to explore farming opportunities, co-op etc

Community Feedback:

- Provide electric car charging in Bedford Village
- Explore solar farms at BVES
- Create community garden

Recommendations:

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