

MILLWOOD REVITALIZATION STRATEGY



DRAFT Working Paper #2: Planning Strategies

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INTRODUCTION

The Town of New of Castle is undertaking an update of its Comprehensive Plan. Concurrent with this process, the Town is also assessing revitalization opportunities in the hamlets of Chappaqua and Millwood. The purpose of these two area studies is to ensure that long-term comprehensive planning is consistent with the revitalization needs of the Town's two primary commercial hamlets.

This document concerns the Millwood Revitalization Strategy (MRS). The first working paper for the MRS, Existing Conditions Assessment, established an empirical and regulatory baseline. Prior studies were also inventoried in order to identify any enduring planning strategies that could still be relevant in this current undertaking.

This document, grounded in the findings from the first working paper, offers ten strategies for revitalizing Millwood over the short and long-term. For each strategy, the opportunity for change is explained along with the challenges compelling that change. Specific actions are then proposed for translating the strategy into a specific implementation path. The strategies outlined in this document will be enfolded into the strategies refined in the New Castle 2015 Comprehensive Plan.

MILLWOOD PLANNING AREA

The empirical analysis conducted in Working Paper 1 mainly employed the boundaries of Millwood's Zip Code Tabulation Area (ZCTA) as the best geographical unit for presenting various data sets. However, the ZCTA is too large of an area for the purposes of revitalization planning. More appropriate would be to focus strategic planning interventions within Millwood's center. The boundaries of Millwood's center or what this paper refers to as the "Millwood Planning Area" (MPA) are Saw Mill River Road on its west, Shuman Road on its east, and Station Road on its south. Millwood's center features two retail clusters. These two retail sectors, and their interconnection, figure prominently in the strategies presented below.

It should be noted that certain areas proximate to Millwood's center were consciously excluded from the boundaries of the MPA. For example, Millwood Business Center off of Saw Mill River Road was not included in the MPA because it is unlikely that any future redistribution of this now commercial land would be subject to a high intensity land use such as mixed use development or multi-family housing. Given its distance from Millwood Road, and its circumscription by lower density housing, it is likely that the only future change to the Millwood Business Center would be its rezoning for single family residential uses. Similarly, the Pheasant Run residential complex is within close proximity of the MPA's southern retail cluster located at the intersection of Saw Mill Road and Station Road. However, the project's disconnection from Saw Mill Road and the suburban nature of its built form limits the viability of any meaningful integration of the project into Millwood's center.

The interior of the MPA, however, is rife with opportunities for dramatic change. As documented in the first working paper, there is a variety of land uses along Millwood Road, Station Road, Schuman, and Saw Mill Road. These areas include ground floor retail uses, single family residential, multifamily housing, commercial office space, and industrial buildings. Although the number of town owned

properties is limited and the amount of land allocated to the Con Edison utility right of way is high, there are still opportunities for better linking together the various disparate parts of the MPA and generating a place defined with a more cohesive civic identity. Amongst the Hamlet of Millwood's assets is a rural yet easily-accessible community full of high-income residents. There are excellent public schools, which have partially contributed to a strong housing market, but also enough nature-based activities that those without school-aged children live and remain in the community. Moreover, the Hamlet of Millwood is well-connected to the surrounding region due to highways and local bus service. There are multiple train stations nearby, making commuting to the surrounding municipalities and New York City within reach. The presence of exceptional recreational amenities including Millwood Park, Gedney Park, and the North County Trailway are all unique assets that when combined with progressive urban design and development principles can help transform Millwood into a vibrant mixed use community.

STRATEGY 1: REDESIGN THE RETAIL CLUSTERS

The Opportunity

Millwood is unique from the rest of New Castle by virtue of its holding two retail districts that are not only within close proximity of each other but also adjacent to recreational sites. The northern retail cluster, at the intersection of Millwood and Station Road, is linked to Gedney Park and the North County Trailway. The southern retail cluster, at the intersection of Station Road and Saw Mill River Road, is also served by the North County Trailway and also anchored by Millwood Park. As such these two retail clusters have the potential to serve not only as the primary source of the surrounding community's necessary goods and sources but also as cultural centers attracting visitors to the possibility of recreating, shopping, and dining within two definable retail districts.

The Challenges

Millwood's design regulations (summarized in the MRS's first working paper) were published in 1993 and amended in 1999. The regulations were forward thinking with regard to their prescriptions for street design, building frontage, signage, and architectural guidelines. The problem with the guidelines is not their content but the constraints on their enforceability. Only if a developer comes forward with a new project are the guidelines invoked and therefore have the chance of upgrading the aesthetic appeal and legibility of the hamlet. Given the constraints on development due to the lack of sewers as well as limitations on the number of developable properties, the potential for the design guidelines to have any meaningful impact is highly limited in the short-term and subject to the uncertainties of the market over the long-term.

Proposed Actions

Action 1a: Commence Streetscaping Now

The Town should advance a comprehensive streetscape program throughout the MPA by exploring creative approaches to its financing and implementation including private foundation support, business improvement district, private philanthropy, and state grant programs. This program should include a comprehensive package of elements including façade improvement grants, street furniture acquisition,

and the redesign of streets in accordance with best practices for urban landscaping as well as green infrastructure. These interventions should be focused especially at the two retail clusters and along Station Road.

Action 1b: Initiate dialogue with the owner of the A & P Shopping Center

The northern retail cluster is easier to redesign because the buildings alongside it are already at a relatively fine grain and front the street edge (albeit with considerable room for improvement). However, the southern retail cluster is more problematic from a design perspective because the A & P is set back so far from Station Road as a result of the parking lot. The A&P Shopping Center is ripe for a major redesign. Not only is the current site design outdated and out of conformity with best practices (including those identified in the Millwood Design Guidelines), but the future of the A&P supermarket is also unknown at this time. As such, the current time is a good opportunity for engaging the building owner in a dialogue on the opportunity for redesigning the space in a way that retains the range of retail goods and services it currently provides but that also better connects to the MPA's circulation system, introduces civic space, better links to the neighboring recreation facilities, and helps reposition Station Road as a main street with links to the northern retail district.

STRATEGY 2: CONNECT RETAIL CLUSTERS

The Opportunity

Millwood's commercial center is anchored by two commercial clusters within close proximity and walking distance. They are connected by Route 133 (Station Road), which features a sidewalk on its western edge. Stitching together the two commercial clusters would help create a more definable commercial center, enhance walkability, improve access to the North County trail, and support the financial performance of local businesses.

The Challenges

The connectivity between the two commercial sites is constrained by (a) the uneven development along Route 133 (b) the alignment of Con Edison's power line (c) the lack of sidewalks along both sides of Station Road and (d) the lack of fully built out or programmed land uses right up to Station Road's street edge.

Proposed Actions

Strategies for better connecting the commercial clusters include:

Action 2a: Enhance the pedestrian infrastructure along both sides of Station Road

The fact that the eastern side of Station Road is served by the North County Railway does not obviate the need for sidewalks on both sides of Station Road over the long-term. The Railway is a recreational path that is used by fast moving bicycles. The absence of bi-directional sidewalks impedes crossing of the street (including at the entrance to the Railway), makes it foreboding to walk between the two retail clusters, and compromises wayfinding.

Action 2b Establish trail heads at the retail clusters

Both retail clusters are served by the North County Trail yet neither retail cluster features any sort of trailhead or informational kiosk that lets visitors know that the trail can be accessed from the retail clusters. Currently, the only trailhead within the MPA is located within the nondescript parking area off of Station Road that is not only removed from the retail clusters but also barely visible from Station Road itself.

Action 2c: Improve Wayfinding Signage

Currently, it is unclear at either retail cluster that there is another retail cluster within walking distance of the other. Such signage could be located at the trailheads positioned at each retail cluster and also along Station Road to help visitors combining the experience of shopping or dining in Millwood with a walk along the Trailway or Station Road.

Action 2d: Provide a more visible and aesthetically pleasing trailhead on Station Road

As noted above, the trailhead off Station Road at the parking area is not well defined and insufficiently visible from the road. The trailhead should either become better defined or alternatively eliminated and integrated into the retail clusters (with parking provided at each end).

Action 2e: Stimulate Urban Infill along Station Road

There are multiple examples of dead spaces within both retail clusters. These dead spaces have the effect of discouraging movement between the two retail clusters, thereby compromising the overall legibility of Millwood as a cohesive center. The most egregious dead space on the southernmost retail district is the surface parking in front of the A&P Shopping Center. The most detrimental dead space on the northernmost retail district is the underutilized “station property” along the east side of Station Road, just south of Millwood Road. As noted above, the A&P Shopping Center should be redesigned to bring the retail facades right up to the edge of Station Road. Similarly, the “station property” should be reprogrammed as a civic green space anchored by a bike station. Both properties are privately held. The Town should proactively engage the owners of dead spaces in a dialogue about redesign and reuse especially since such interventions could have positive effects on the overall value and profitability of their land.

Action 2f: Shift Transit Service to the Center

Currently the Route 15 bus route only serves the bus pad located at the intersection of Millwood Road, Saw Mill Road, and Shingle House Road. The bus pad is located amidst an awkwardly designed road geometry disconnected from any destination. The bus pad should be relocated to the intersection of Millwood Road and Station Road with an additional stop potentially located at Saw Mill River Road and Station Road. This routing would not considerably affect travel time while simultaneously enabling direct service to Millwood’s two retail clusters, while simultaneously linking them together.

STRATEGY 3: ADVANCE URBAN INFILL DEVELOPMENT

The Opportunity

There are underutilized and vacant properties in Millwood's commercial center. Sites especially appropriate for infill development include the A&P Shopping Center on Station Road, the "Station Property" on Station Road, and the undeveloped land across from the A&P Shopping Center, and the old Fire Station on Route 120. The redevelopment of these parcels into a higher intensity and broader range of uses including retail, housing, commercial, cultural, and mixed use could help transform Millwood's commercial center into a more vibrant downtown district with higher levels of street traffic.

The market and economic analysis conducted by Project for Public Spaces and the data in the MRS' first working paper suggests that there is leakage for goods and services within Millwood's primary trade area. That is, there is a demand for goods and services within Millwood's primary trade area that is not met by the offerings provided by retail and service establishments within the primary trade area. Enabling a larger residential population in tandem with expanded retail offerings could help residents from Millwood and surrounding areas better access goods, services, and experiences within the Millwood's center and save them from having to travel longer distances to other shopping areas. Office uses are a less viable use, on account of the sluggish Northern Westchester office market for large corporate tenants. However, smaller professional service offices may be possible. Industrial uses may also be viable but are likely a less desirable use especially if the infill approach maximizes opportunities for attracting a residential population to Millwood's center.

The Challenges

It is easier for a Town to promote and advance urban infill development when there are high volumes of publicly held properties. In the Chappaqua CDP, for example, there is a large supply of land in the immediate vicinity of the Train Station. In Millwood, however, the Town does not own a considerable amount of land. Much of the undeveloped space within Millwood's commercial center is either county owned park land or part of Con Edison's utility alignment.

Urban infill development is harder to do on properties without sewer connections. None of the properties within Millwood's center are connected to sewers. All of the development is served by underground septic fields.

A portion of Millwood' center falls within the New York City watershed. Specifically the properties immediately north and south of Millwood Road are within the Croton watershed, and so therefore subject to New York City's watershed regulations including constraints upon land use development.

Proposed Actions

Action 3a: Undertake a development feasibility analysis for Millwood

This analysis would contemplate the maximum buildout on the Millwood opportunity sites based upon a range of different waste management technologies including sewer connections and subsurface sewage management facilities.

Action 3b: Rezone Millwood's center to enable a higher intensity and greater mix of land uses throughout the center

Based upon the outcome of Action 3a, contemplate a rezoning of the MPA to accommodate a greater variety and intensification of land uses depending on a range of approaches to managing waste. While it may be that a certain level of density is not possible to achieve without the sewer connections, it may also be that a higher level of density, than what is allowed under current regulations, could be achieved depending on the nature and extent of the subsurface sewage management facility constructed to serve it.

STRATEGY 4: ENABLE MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING

The Opportunity

New Castle, and Millwood itself, has only a limited supply of multi-family housing. Throughout Westchester, and also within New Castle, there is a demonstrable demand for more multi-family housing especially from seniors, millennials, young families, and artists. Millwood is an ideal place for locating multi-family housing because, relative to most of New Castle, Millwood's center is considerably more dense with a higher intensity of land uses including some existing multifamily housing developments such as Granite's Crossing. More multi-family housing in Millwood would complement the existing housing stock, expand the consumer base for the commercial clusters, increase foot traffic, and enable a more sustainable approach to meeting area housing needs.

The Challenges

There are limited opportunities for higher density housing in Millwood on account of the absence of sewers. Millwood also has numerous areas which are not supported by infrastructure for housing or areas where light industrial uses are present. The existing zoning code does not support higher density housing in much of the district. For housing developers to make a profit, they require a certain level of density that is not supported under the existing zoning regulations and existing infrastructure.

Proposed Actions

Action 4a/3a: Undertake a development feasibility analysis for Millwood

This analysis would contemplate the maximum buildout on the Millwood opportunity sites based upon a range of different waste management technologies including septic tanks and sewer connections.

Action 4b: Rezone industrial areas for housing

The Town of New Castle may want to consider allowing multi-family housing options on underutilized sites in industrial zones, such as the I-G zone to the east of the downtown B-R and B-D zones. These are sprawling sites with significant acreage, access to highways as well as the bus route, and walkable access to downtown. It is important to note – the goal of such re-development is not to displace or remove industrial uses from the community. These industrial sites bring both jobs and dollars to the Hamlet of Millwood. Rather, the goal is to take underdeveloped parcels and create additional housing options.

STRATEGY 5: CREATE CIVIC CENTERS

The Opportunity

Millwood already has strong retail institutions and recreational services that serve as places of congregation. However, nowhere in Millwood is there a truly definable public space that helps to bolster a sense of civic identity, enable chance encounters, and help define Millwood as more than a collection of individual destinations and instead make it into a community space.

The Challenges

Unlike downtown Chappaqua, Millwood does not have town owned property that could easily be transformed into a defined civic center. Any efforts to create a civic center will require a cooperative approach with private land owners and working closely with them on a strategy for joint financing and implementation.

Proposed Actions

Action 5a: Partner with Private Property Owners to Create Civic Centers

The northern and southern retail clusters both have obvious locations for civic space. Under a major redesign, the parking area in front of the A&P could be transformed into a public gathering space. Similarly, the “station property” at the intersection of Millwood and Station Roads could be formalized as a public green, anchored by a bike station and served by a stop on bus route #5. As noted above, both of these spaces are privately owned yet the land owners stand to profit by partnering with the Town on their reprogramming.

Action 5b: Expand the Use of the Circulation System as Civic Spaces

Although the Town does not have extensive land holdings, it does have greater ability to control the street network. Millwood and Station Roads both have the potential, through their redesign and the provision of street furniture, for serving as active main streets that serve as places for gathering and cultural activity.

STRATEGY 6: IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIVITY

The Opportunity

The New York State Department of Transportation awarded the Town of New Castle \$500,000 in multimodal grant funding to implement the development of sidewalks in the Millwood area. Two priority areas include improvements for pedestrian safety by the A&P, consisting of 600 feet of sidewalk, two crosswalks and decorative lighting, estimated at \$450,000, as well as neighborhood improvements north of Millwood park, consisting of 474 feet of sidewalk, crosswalk, and decorative lighting, estimated at \$515,000. |

The Challenges

It is imperative that the Town complete the buildout of the planned sidewalk improvements in lock step with the Millwood Revitalization Strategy. Specifically, the provision of sidewalks should be done in coordination with broader plans for streetscaping, infill development, and the activation of dead spaces into civic spaces.

Proposed Action

Action 6a: Develop a land use and transportation plan for Millwood

This plan would ensure that the pedestrian infrastructure improvements are not done in a silo removed from the land use and urban design recommendations that emerge out of the MRS. Especially important considerations are (1) access and egress from potential infill sites (2) the access to new civic spaces created out of current dead spaces (3) the pedestrian access implications of a relocated transit route and (4) opportunities for aligning sidewalk improvements with broader street design concerns including green infrastructure and landscaping.

STRATEGY 7: CONNECT MILLWOOD TO SEWERS

The Opportunity

Millwood's center is not currently connected to the Saw Mill Sewer District. The absence of sewer connections also has a negative impact on the commercial vitality of Millwood's center. The owners of commercial properties are economically burdened by the ongoing costs for maintaining their septic systems. These charges are then passed on to retail tenants whose cash flows are reduced by higher leasing costs. If Millwood was connected to the sewer district, property owners and business owners would benefit from lower overhead costs and also a higher level of urban infill development would be possible. However, the sewer connections would also have a positive environmental impact by eliminating the adverse effects of septic systems including the leaching of contaminants into soils and the discharge of sludge into the watershed.

The Challenge

The Sewer Diversion project does not currently include Millwood. Given the potential for Millwood to support sustainable urban development including higher density housing and mixed use development, it would have been logical to also include connection of Millwood to sewers as a priority in the Sewer Diversion project. There are multiple reasons why Millwood was not included in the project. One reason is that New Castle's 1989 Town Development Plan did not identify sewer connections for Millwood as a policy goal. However, a more direct explanation is that the Sewer Diversion project is principally aimed at reducing pollution in the Croton Watershed. Only a narrow segment of Millwood's center, along Millwood Road, falls within the Croton Watershed.

A further compounding challenge to the connection of sewers to Millwood is the very potential for such a sewer connection to facilitate higher intensity of land use intensification. Only very limited new development is possible in the areas subject to the Sewer Diversion Project. As a result, the impact of a

connection to the sewers on the wastewater treatment plan in Yonkers is at least knowable. However, a connection to Millwood could raise concerns that it would significantly increase development and therefore tax the waste management system. In other words, the very benefit derived from such a connection, namely the intensification of land use, could ironically also serve as an impediment to the connection.

Proposed Actions

Action 7a: Include Millwood Sewer Connections in the 2015 Comprehensive Plan

The Town of New Castle is currently updating its comprehensive plan. Unlike the 1989 Town Development Plan, it is expected that this iteration of the town's plan will include a formal policy priority for including sewers.

Action 7b: Prepare a Millwood Sewer Connection Plan

The prospects of connecting Millwood to sewers have repeatedly surfaced over the years in the political realm. However, there has yet to be any technical or financial feasibility analysis that professionally examines the connection of Millwood to the sewers and gauges its economic, environmental, and land use impacts. Such a plan should also be done in concert with a broader commission of stakeholders charged with not only examining the connection's physical feasibility but also ascertaining options for its financing it and ensuring its inclusion as a capital priority.

STRATEGY 8: PROVIDE AMENITIES ALONG THE NORTH COUNTY TRAIL

Opportunity

The North County multi-use trail runs directly through the heart of Millwood's center, and directly serves both of its commercial clusters. Currently, however, there are only limited amenities available along the segment of the trail that runs through Millwood. Providing more amenities to trail users along its length in Millwood could help increase utilization, improve the overall visitors experience, expand the consumer base for Millwood's retail clusters, and better connect Millwood residents to the history and aesthetic appeal of the trail alignment.

The Challenges

The trail serves both of Millwood's retail clusters. However, neither retail cluster offers a visible trail head, trail information, parking access, concessions, or bike services. The trail head and parking area on the east side of Station Road, midway between Millwood Road and Saw Mill River Road, also lacks concessions and bike services. Also, the parking area is barely visible from Station Road. The Town does not control the alignment of the trail segment that runs through Millwood. The trail falls under the purview of the county. The property at Station Road is owned by the owner of the Millwood Lumber Yard.

Proposed Actions

Action 8a/2b: Integrate access to the North County Trail with the Retail Clusters

The Town should provide a trail head at each of Millwood's retail clusters, one of them at the A&P shopping area and another the station property at the intersection of Route 120 (Millwood Road) and Route 133 (Station Road).

Action 8b: Provide a Bike Station on the Station Property

The Town should construct a full service bike station on the station property. The station could be built to reference the historic train station that was demolished on the site in 2012. The station could feature secured bike parking, bike rentals, bike pumping, trail information, concessionaire, bathrooms, and shower facilities.

Enhance Parking Access along the Trail

There are a limited number of parking spaces available at the current trail head location. The addition of two more trail heads, at each of the two retail clusters, may increase parking demand. The southernmost retail cluster already has a considerable supply of parking available in front of the A&P. However, the northernmost retail cluster at the intersection of Route 120 (Millwood Road) and Route 133 (Station Road) does not have a parking facility. The Town should revisit the parking and access proposals that were outlined in the Frederick P Clarke's 2009 zoning analysis.

STRATEGY 9: IMPROVE PARKING ACCESS

Opportunity

The underutilization of properties in Millwood opens the possibility for increasing parking supply in the commercial center without compromising the walkability of the retail districts. Potential sites include the area behind the old fire station, the area behind the vacant industrial building on Route 120 (next to Hoops), and properties along Schuman Road.

The Challenge

The Town does not own properties that can be converted into parking spaces. As a result, any creation of a surface parking lot would entail land acquisition costs.

Proposed Action

Action 9a: Initiate conversations with landowners on land acquisition

The Town of New Castle, as part of a broader economic revitalization strategy for Millwood, may want to invest in the acquisition of land (via purchase or easement) in order to create parking spaces that support visitor access to the MPA.