

# **City Update Year's End, 2017**

## **Saving Private Littauer**

As you may know, the Littauer Building at 12 - 18 South Main Street was determined to be structurally unsound last year and suffered a partial collapse in part of the rear portion this past summer. The city has cited the owner to compel stabilization which has resulted in the owner agreeing to demolish the entire building (at a probable cost to him of between \$100,000 and \$150,000). This would solve the public safety issue, but we would lose an iconic and unique historic facade leaving yet another unsightly gap in downtown.

Since it is unfeasible to save the entire building, and since the facade is of critical importance to the future development of downtown, Steve Smith came to the rescue. Steve is our 4th ward councilman and is also an architectural and structural engineer. He arranged a professional study of the logistics of stabilizing the facade and demolishing the back part of the structure which has turned out to be eminently doable. Since the owner of the building is not willing to do this, the terms of settlement were renegotiated. The new settlement provides that the owner will transfer the building plus all four of the neighboring buildings (20 - 26 South Main which are stable and have value) to the city. The city will then effect the demolition and stabilization using funds from the Gloversville Loan Pool so it will have no effect on city finances.

Once stabilization is completed the city will turn over all of the properties to CRG to professionally market the reconstruction project to a developer. A reputable developer from the capital region has already expressed interest and has submitted a letter of intent to CRG. The developer would then be required to reimburse the Gloversville Loan Fund for its investment.

This is a major step forward in FINALLY getting this project off dead center after 15 years of stagnation. Kudos to the CRG Board of Directors, the City Council and to Steve Smith for turning a negative event into a positive opportunity for the future of the city.

## **A Solution for Our Sinking Storm Drains**

You have certainly noticed that there are hundreds of storm sewer catch basins in the city that are in various stages of collapse. The walls of these catch basins are built of brick and mortar. Since our city infrastructure is over a century old, the walls of these basins are badly deteriorated which has resulted in the collapse of many.

During the warmer months, our DPW has been struggling to rebuild them one at a time by laying up new brick walls. Doing this "in-house" is very affordable for the city, but it is such a slow process that it would be impossible to solve the issue.

Up to now, the only alternative was to contract the job out to a private company with the resources to correct the problem. This would be much quicker, but it would be prohibitively expensive.

More recently, however, Dale Trumbul, our DPW director has found a company that can supply us with pre-cast concrete inserts at a reasonable cost. These can be installed in one piece eliminating the time consuming process of laying brick. With this process our DPW can fully repair a storm sewer catch basin in less than 2 days. This will allow us to solve the problem within a reasonable time at a reasonable cost. The council has already authorized the purchase of the inserts and DPW workers will be starting to install them systematically in the spring.

## **1. New Police Officers Arrive from Academy**

## **2. State Accreditation for GPD**

## **3. Significant Drop in City's Crime Rate**

## **4. Heroic Action of our First Responders**

**1.** In the last update we reported the addition of 5 new persons to our police force. As you know, this was authorized a year ago by the council. It has taken some time to select and interview candidates. Once hired, officers must complete an extensive six month training at the Police Academy. Our new police officers recently completed their academic training and began what is called "field training" here in Gloversville. You might notice that police cars will have two officers, one being a trainee. This will be the case for a limited time until this phase is completed successfully. Soon, due to this increased staffing, coverage of the city will be much more comprehensive and you'll notice an increased police presence in the community generally.

**2.** It was officially announced in early December that our Gloversville Police Department has been awarded state accreditation. This is awarded to only the best and most well administered municipal police departments in the state and it is a significant honor. In order to retain accreditation, the GPD will have to continue to qualify on an annual basis.

**3.** As a result of the professionalism and focus of the GPD, Gloversville has experienced a dramatic drop in the crime rate for 2016 and 2017. DCJS statistics show a more than 25% overall reduction in crime in one calendar year alone with an approximate 30% reduction in property crime. Chief Porter and his department understand that there is much more work to do. With additional staffing now on board we look forward to this trend continuing.

**4.** We are all extremely proud of the actions of our first responders at the structure fire on Grand Street on October 20. Gloversville police officers and firefighters of both Gloversville and Johnstown in a quick and well coordinated response saved the lives of three people. There were a number of individual acts of selfless heroism by some of our officers.

Less than two weeks later, a team of specially trained firefighters were called to the scene of a hazardous chemical spill on the Thruway near Fultonville. They distinguished themselves as key participants in the cleanup. The city is fully reimbursed for these calls.

## **News on Street Lighting Conversion to LEDs**

As you learned from our last update, the city pays approximately \$220,000 per year for the electricity required to light our streets. A conversion of these lights from high pressure sodium to LEDs would reduce this cost by 70 to 75% to about \$60,000, a savings to taxpayers of \$160,000 per year assuming current rates.

National Grid recently responded to our request for quote with a price to purchase all of the lights. However, they also offered to convert to LEDs without requiring the city to purchase them.

### **Two Options:**

1. Engage National Grid to Convert to LED without purchasing the light poles. This would cost a small fraction of the expense of purchase, plus National Grid would continue to be responsible for maintenance of the poles and lights. However, with this scenario National Grid would replace only up to 20% of the lights per year which delay's the savings.

2. Purchase would require a very large outlay of money to actually buy the poles. It would require the city to maintain the poles and lights, but we would be able to replace all of them more quickly realizing the full savings much sooner.

As I already mentioned, Gloversville was last year recognized as the first "Clean Energy Community" in the Mohawk Valley Region. As a result we have been awarded a grant of \$100,000 which will help defray the cost of either of the scenarios mentioned above.

We have decided to go with option 1 above.

## **Placemaking Conference to be Held in Downtown Gloversville**

Jennifer Jennings, our Downtown Development Specialist, has scheduled a statewide placemaking and walkability conference for mid April in our downtown. Nationally known experts will share strategies that have proved successful in revitalizing downtowns in other cities. We expect municipal and state officials from many parts of the state in attendance.

You may recall that in April of 2016 we hosted an INCOM (New York State Innovative Communities) conference downtown which proved to be a great success. Many in attendance from all over the state were impressed by the beauty of our downtown as well as the great potential we have for developing a thriving destination and commercial center. This conference next year will bring this to a much higher level with leading authorities focusing in on things that can transform a place relatively quickly.

Jennifer has a masters degree in Placemaking and this conference is a perfect segway to the final presentation of our Downtown Development Strategy which is in process now and will be finalized just prior to the planned conference. This placemaking conference will highlight the innovative pilot projects that could add real momentum to our downtown strategy. Keep in mind that the ultimate goal is to make our downtown the place where people want to be, making it a magnet for commercial and residential development.

## **Why the Focus on Downtown?**

Some have questioned the greater recent focus on our central business district. They cite the deplorable conditions in some of our residential neighborhoods as a more urgent need. There is no question that improving the quality of our neighborhoods and housing stock should be a top priority, but the creation of an attractive, commercially vibrant downtown is an important first step in a proven strategy for revitalizing the whole city.

Stabilizing our neighborhoods depends on productive, responsible people moving into them — building new houses, improving old ones and enhancing the streetscape with trees and landscaping. Gloversville is capable of attracting such people with the right approach.

But we recognize that when a person visits a place to assess its potential as a community in which to live, work or start a business, one of the first things they do is tour the downtown to get a sense of the place — a feel for the character and potential of the community. If that downtown is attractive and thriving with a diverse mix of businesses — if they meet positive, creative business owners and residents — the whole city passes muster as a good place. A positive view of the downtown makes even its marginal neighborhoods appear full of possibility.

Downtown is the only neighborhood in the city that belongs to everyone. A city's downtown is its most powerfully defining aspect. It reflects the character of the whole community. This “downtown first” strategy has proven to be successful in hundreds of other cities across the country.

## **City Awarded Grant of \$750,000 for Infrastructure Improvements**

Like every other old industrial city, most of Gloversville's infrastructure (water and sewer system, curbs, sidewalks, storm drainage) is well over 100 years old. This past summer we applied for grant funding for restoration from the state. We just learned this week that our application was successful. Clearly, this is just a small fraction of what would be required for total restoration, but it is a big step in the right direction. We are currently in the process of making a full assessment of infrastructure needs, setting priorities and formulating a multi-year schedule of restoration. It is our intention to apply for this grant every year. Since every city in the state is with us in making Albany aware of the magnitude of this problem, we expect that funding will continue to be made available in future state budgets.

## **Two Things you Must See!!!**

- 1.** A few months ago our DPW Director, Dale Trumbull, had the idea of a photo contest for the city. The purpose was to grace the central corridors of City Hall with new photos of the scenes of Gloversville. First, second and third place awards have been presented and all of the photos have been printed on canvas, framed and hung in City Hall. They are BEAUTIFUL !! Just go to city hall on any business day between 8:00 am and 4:00 pm and look at these images of our city through the lenses of these talented photographers. It will make you proud.
- 2.** Gloversville's historic public library is undergoing a thorough renovation. At this moment in time the interior of the building is devoid of obstructions — no drop ceilings — no modern

accretions. The lights are kept on during the night and from the sidewalk in the evening you can peer right in and see its magnificent naked structure. Don't miss it.

## **Are Elm Trees Back??**

Geoff Gardner, head of our GHS science department, recently informed me that he will be receiving this April several young Elm trees. These are of an experimental strain intended to be blight resistant.

Those of us who are seniors and native Gloversvillians remember the stately Elms that graced so many of our major streets. Their crowns were incredibly high. They arched upward and toward the center of the street, with branches forming an impressive cathedral effect. From the late 50s through the 60s, Dutch Elm Disease spread through North America killing nearly all of them.

For years it has been the hope of botanists to develop a strain resistant to the disease and these trees are a latest attempt. Our DPW Director, Dale Trumbull, is on board to plant them on city property along the F,J & G Rail Trail where we can keep a close eye on them and report their success or failure to the appropriate monitoring agencies.

I have always been a big fan of shade trees. I think they make a huge difference in the quality of any neighborhood, mitigating the summer heat and blocking the winter wind. They also absorb tons of carbon from the atmosphere

But I recently learned of another benefit:

Cities, especially older ones with aging infrastructure are prone to what are called Combined Sewerage Overflows (CSOs). During a heavy rainstorm so much water washes over paved areas and into storm drains that it invades the sanitary sewers and causes overflow. Sewerage leaks out and pollutes the ground water, streams, ponds etc. New York State estimates that it would cost nearly \$36 billion over the next ten years to mitigate the problem state wide.

A mature deciduous tree can absorb up to 30% of falling rainwater in its crown, preventing it from ever reaching the ground, and can suck up another 30% through its root system. Several cities have adopted tree planting programs with the long term goal of establishing a continuous leafy canopy over city streets. This would absolutely prevent CSOs from happening and save millions of dollars in damage to both storm sewers and sanitary sewers.

It is my hope to apply for grant funding this coming year to begin a street tree program.