

Summary of Comparable Village Review

Purpose

Williamsville is one of many historic commercial village centers in the Western New York region. While Williamsville does have a unique history and function, it is still useful to examine other similar village centers to better understand the broader regional context and to glean ideas to help Williamsville plan for its future.

Five comparable villages have been examined as part of this review: 1) East Aurora; 2) Hamburg; 3) Kenmore; 4) Lewiston; and 5) Pittsford.

Location of Comparable Villages

Map Made with Google Earth™



All of these villages share commonalities with Williamsville: historic architecture, a mix of retail, office and residential uses, civic and cultural amenities and the presence of a major regional traffic route in the village center. However, each comparable village has its own quirks that make it different from Williamsville:

- East Aurora and Lewiston are both home to major tourist attractions, thus providing them with access to broader markets.
- Hamburg's downtown is more of a crossroads than a linear strip.
- Kenmore is in a far denser and more urban location
- Pittsford is oriented towards the historic Erie Canal and benefits from being adjacent to a permanently preserved agricultural property.

Despite these differences, there is still much that Williamsville can learn from all of these other village centers. With this in mind, the following information is presented on the five comparable villages:

- Demographic and housing profile
- Business profile
- Land use profile
- Urban design issues
- Traffic and transportation issues
- Planning and development activities
- Marketing activities
- Summary of findings

Information was gathered on these villages from a variety of sources, including Census data, data from the Erie County Assessor's office, tours of the villages by the consulting team, and consultant interviews with officials from governments of each of the comparable villages.

Demographic and Housing Profile

As of the 2000 Census the six villages ranged in size from 1,427 (Pittsford) to 16,426 (Kenmore), with Williamsville being in the middle at 5,545. Williamsville's population is considerably older than most of the other villages; only Lewiston has a comparable share of residents aged 55 or older. Williamsville also has the lowest share of people enrolled in school as a percentage of its total population.

Williamsville is attractive for its proximity to employment; 63 percent of its working population commutes less than 20 minutes (only Lewiston has a higher share.) Only 1.5 percent of Williamsville residents commute 45 minutes or more to work; all of the others have at least four percent of residents making such long commutes, with East Aurora (8.9 percent) having the greatest share of long commuters.

Williamsville, Hamburg and East Aurora all have very balanced income structures and median household incomes just under \$50,000. Williamsville has a very high per capita income level relative to its household income level, which is a result of having smaller households than most of the other villages. Pittsford is by far the most affluent village and Kenmore and Lewiston both have lower income levels.

Somewhat surprisingly Williamsville has the greatest share of renters and of multi-family units of all of the villages (even more so than very urban Kenmore). Just 53 percent of Williamsville's units are single-family detached; three of the others are more than 90 percent single family. Williamsville has a younger housing stock than the all of the others except Lewiston (the majority of Williamsville's units was built between 1940 and 1979). Other than East Aurora, none has experienced much housing construction since 1980.

Comparison of Williamsville and Other Communities, 2000 Census

	East Aurora	Hamburg	Kenmore	Lewiston	Pittsford	Williamsville
Population	6,585	10,107	16,426	2,781	1,427	5,545
Households	2,577	4,001	7,092	1,276	640	2,573
Age Profile						
Under 18	26.1%	26.2%	23.2%	17.4%	20.7%	17.9%
18-34	16.3%	17.7%	21.2%	17.7%	21.8%	17.5%
35-54	28.7%	29.9%	31.3%	28.2%	28.2%	27.7%
55+	28.8%	26.1%	24.4%	36.8%	29.4%	36.9%
Households with Children <18	35.0%	34.6%	29.6%	20.8%	25.5%	20.3%
School Enrollment as % of Pop	31.3%	30.3%	30.6%	24.1%	26.6%	23.8%
Commuting Time of Residents						
Worked at Home	3.4%	3.8%	1.2%	1.8%	7.3%	5.0%
<20 minutes	43.7%	46.0%	51.1%	69.2%	50.9%	58.5%
20-44 minutes	44.2%	44.6%	43.6%	23.1%	36.5%	35.0%
45+ minutes	8.7%	5.6%	4.0%	5.9%	5.2%	1.5%
% Using Public Transportation	1.0%	0.3%	3.9%	0.0%	0.7%	2.7%
Income Profile						
Under \$25,000	24.8%	21.2%	27.7%	31.7%	17.2%	23.6%
\$25,000-49,999	26.1%	27.4%	32.8%	31.7%	21.1%	27.3%
\$50,000-74,999	23.4%	25.0%	22.7%	21.2%	23.4%	21.3%
\$75,000+	25.6%	26.4%	16.9%	15.3%	38.3%	27.8%
Median HH Income	\$49,028	\$51,239	\$42,252	\$37,598	\$60,543	\$47,557
Per Capita Income	\$22,753	\$23,371	\$21,695	\$21,482	\$32,637	\$27,177
Housing Tenure						
% Owner Occupied	70.7%	72.7%	66.6%	62.4%	71.2%	61.5%
% Renter Occupied	29.3%	27.3%	33.4%	37.6%	28.8%	38.5%
Units in Structure						
1, detached	92.1%	91.0%	78.7%	61.4%	98.9%	52.9%
1, attached	0.7%	0.3%	0.5%	4.4%	0.0%	1.9%
2-4	5.0%	4.9%	15.3%	17.8%	1.1%	26.6%
5+	2.1%	3.8%	5.4%	16.4%	0.0%	18.4%
Other	0.1%	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%
Year Housing Unit Built						
1980-99	14.3%	6.6%	4.7%	6.6%	1.1%	5.9%
1960-79	13.9%	27.8%	15.0%	26.6%	4.5%	25.7%
1940-59	21.5%	32.0%	52.2%	47.2%	9.3%	35.0%
Pre-1940	50.3%	33.6%	28.1%	19.6%	85.2%	33.4%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Business Profile

The Census Bureau’s Economic Census program profiles business activity at the municipal level for most towns and villages in New York State. Data from this program (last produced in 2002) allow for a comparison of the business composition of Williamsville with the five comparable villages. Due to its small size, Pittsford had no data produced; instead, data from the Village’s website about active businesses were substituted for comparative purposes.

Relative to the other villages Williamsville has strong concentrations of both Retail Trade and Professional Services businesses—63 percent of Williamsville’s businesses are in these two categories, while the other villages range from 42 percent (Kenmore) to 52 percent (Pittsford).

Williamsville trails most of the other communities in the Educational & Health Services, Leisure and Hospitality (including restaurants, bars, hotels, arts and entertainment uses) and Other Services (including personal, business and other types of non-professional services) categories.

Business Profile Share of Total Businesses by Sector

	East Aurora	Hamburg	Kenmore	Lewiston	Pittsford*	Williamsville
Manufacturing	4.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Wholesale trade	3.9%	6.1%	9.7%	2.9%	1.3%	6.1%
Retail trade	27.5%	25.5%	21.5%	30.8%	23.6%	31.2%
Professional Services*	24.0%	23.2%	20.7%	18.3%	28.4%	32.2%
Educational & Health Services	14.4%	19.4%	19.0%	18.3%	13.3%	12.0%
Leisure & Hospitality	11.8%	14.1%	13.1%	19.2%	8.0%	9.3%
Other services	13.5%	11.8%	16.0%	10.6%	25.3%	9.3%

* Pittsford data are from the Village's own inventory; the Economic Census only reports data for the Town of Pittsford, so this was the most comparable dataset available.

** Includes Information, Real Estate, Professional/Scientific/Technical Services, and Administrative Services

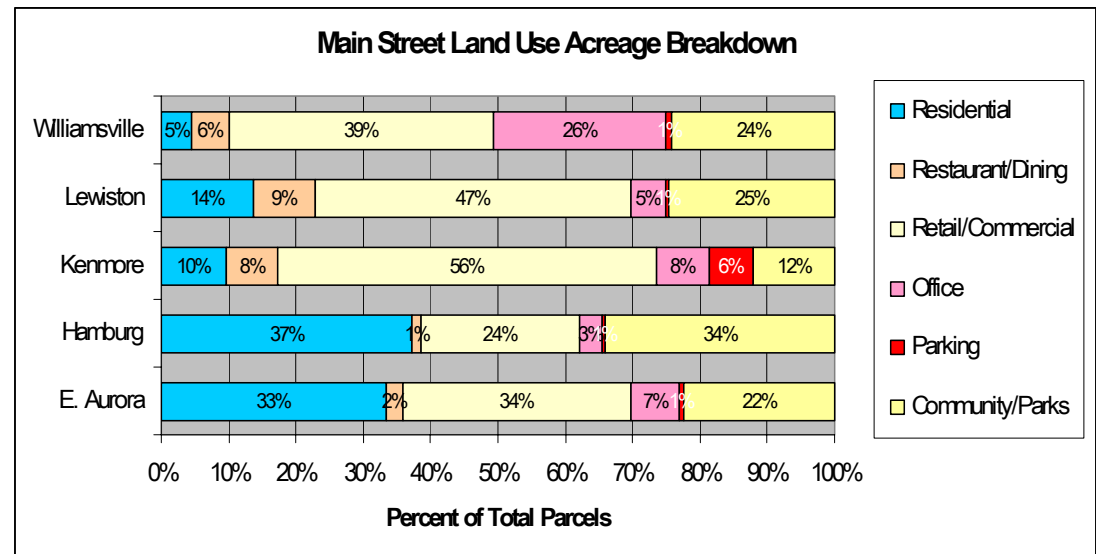
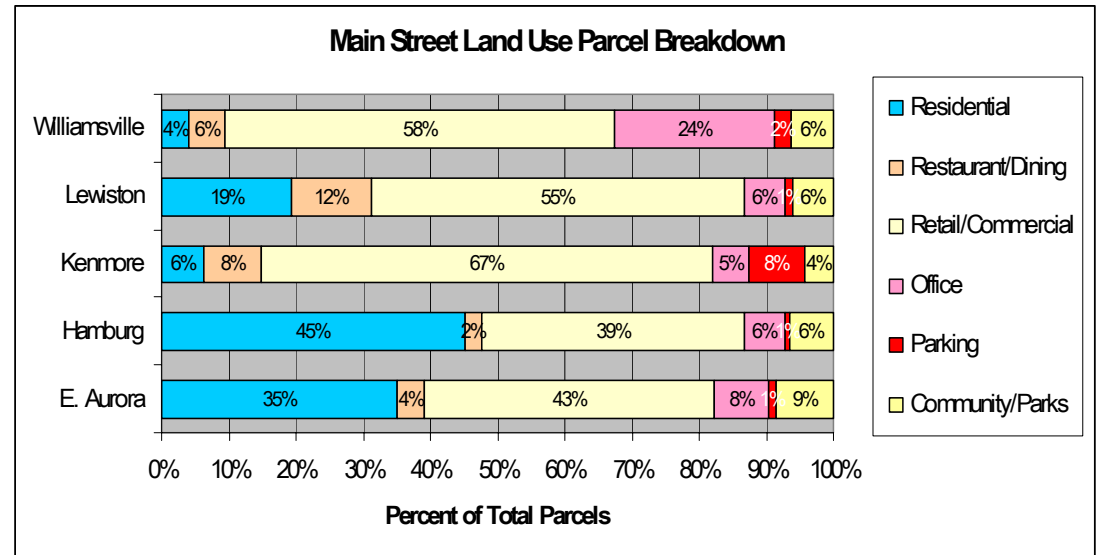
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002 Economic Census; Village of Pittsford

Land Use Profile

The tables to the right were assembled by the Town of Amherst’s Planning Department using data maintained by the Erie County Office of Real Property Tax Services. Information is presented for all villages except for Pittsford, for which such information was not readily available (Erie County provides this service for Niagara County, so Lewiston’s information was available).

The information presented here shows the breakdown of land uses by parcels and by gross acreage for the Main Street/downtown areas in each of the villages. Looking at the parcel breakdown, Williamsville has a very heavy concentration of office uses (24 percent of parcels) but a very low concentration of residential uses (four percent). Williamsville has an above average share of retail/commercial parcels at 58 percent, but a fairly low share of restaurant/dining uses (six percent)

Looking at the share of acreage, Williamsville’s separation from the other villages relative to concentration of office space grows even more, as does its gap on residential uses. Interestingly, only 39 percent of Main Street Williamsville’s acreage is in retail/commercial use, compared with 58 percent of its parcels. The difference in share of parcels and share of land is much smaller in the other villages. This clearly suggests that Williamsville’s individual commercial parcels are quite small relative to those in the other villages.



Urban Design Issues

In preparing this research the consulting team visited each of the five comparable villages to get a clearer sense of the urban design initiatives undertaken in each location as part of their improvement strategies. This section presents annotated photographs for the comparable villages to illustrate some of the ways that urban design issues are being addressed.

East Aurora



East Aurora's historic Main Street village area is comprised mostly of two to three-story commercial blocks is located on a ridge, with residential streets sloping down from Main Street, providing for a smooth transition from the commercial area to nearby residential streets. Though its wide sidewalks emphasize pedestrian usage, there are no dedicated public spaces in heart of village



Despite its attractive and historic architecture, East Aurora's urban environment is very uneven, with the quality of development varying greatly from block to block. Poorly defined and maintained crosswalks in the village area take away from an otherwise attractive environment.



The village has worked with developers to ensure that new projects reinforce village identity. A new shopping center at east end of village has a faux second story above retail stores, though buildings are mostly set far back from the street. This property also features extensive landscaping and historic-style lighting.



Hamburg

Hamburg is a crossroads village, with commercial buildings stretching down two different streets, one of which is the very busy U.S. Route 62 (Buffalo Avenue). It is mostly comprised of undistinguished two to three-story commercial buildings, with just a few architectural gems sprinkled in. The commercial center is in very close proximity to high density residential neighborhoods.



There is little streetscaping and sidewalks are not well maintained, but there are many attractive street trees. There are some well designed signs and urban design features that connect to parking lots at the rear of buildings. A positive contributor to the village is Memorial Park, which is located at its northern edge, and is similar in size and scale to Island Park, though much more visible.



Some newer developments in downtown make good use of shop windows and use of the sidewalk environment, including dining tables.



Kenmore

Kenmore is, like Williamsville, an historic trolley-car commercial strip, consisting mostly of one and two-story buildings dating from the early to mid 20th Century. There are a few larger civic buildings as well, including Village Hall and churches. The maturity and scale of the commercial area makes for very smooth transitions to surrounding residential neighborhoods, with rear drives and alleys usually separating the two use types.



The Village Green is unattractive and poorly maintained with 1960s-era globe lights alongside it. The Village is planning to improve this park but does not currently have funding for this project. Delaware Avenue's street environment is presently undergoing a transformation, with new street lighting, plantings and benches being installed.



There has been little recent development along Delaware Avenue. The only relatively new building is a 4-5 story apartment building that is out of scale with existing development and architecturally inconsistent. The village did recently enact better development regulations, but there has yet to be much significant investment to test the viability of these regulations.



Lewiston

Lewiston is a low-density, small town Main Street comprised mainly of historic homes and small commercial buildings. The wide Main Street, combined with the predominance of one and two-story buildings, makes it feel very spacious. Main Street is lined with a row of mature street trees and most properties fronting on it are well kept.



The Village of Lewiston underwent a wholesale landscaping and streetscaping project in 2001. Today, there is very extensive streetscaping including grass strips, brick sidewalks, historic-style lighting and uniform signage for welcoming, wayfinding and traffic. There are several attractive public parks and open spaces of varied sizes and public art is stationed in visible locations, tying the downtown to the nearby Artpark.



There are many attractive renovations of historic Main Street properties in Lewiston. Several projects have resulted in the creation of attractive “outdoor rooms” at the streetfront, which greatly enhance the village environment.



Pittsford

Pittsford is an historic canal village, located a few miles southeast of downtown Rochester. It contains a very well-preserved inventory of historic commercial and civic buildings and is an oasis of sorts from nearby suburban highways. Longstanding preservation efforts in Pittsford have resulted in a very attractive urban environment that includes high-quality gateway, wayfinding and historical signage, attractive street lighting and sidewalks, uniform street trees and plantings and buried utility lines.

Downtown Pittsford benefits greatly from its proximity to the historic Erie Canal and the Village has gone to great lengths to knit its commercial center into the greenway trail along the canal.



Another unique feature of Pittsford is the agricultural preserve located just across the canal from the village center (shown at left). This rural landscape provides a very attractive and memorable backdrop to the bustling commercial area.



Traffic and Parking Issues

Williamsville undoubtedly hosts more traffic, particularly through traffic than do any of the comparable villages. However, even with lower volumes, all of the other villages do have traffic issues at certain peak times and several of them have taken bold steps to help address these issues.

East Aurora is in the process of improving its downtown area to allow for a better pedestrian environment and easier access between parking lots and Main Street. The new shopping center on Main Street (pictured on Page 7) provides an attractive, privately owned, off-street lot in close proximity to the rest of Main Street.

Hamburg is in the midst of the Route 62 reconstruction project. This \$24 million improvement project will begin this spring and will occur in stages over a three-year period. The project will include a complete overhaul of the corridor through the heart of the village and will encompass four roundabouts, making it the first location in New York State that is using a comprehensive system of roundabouts to improve transportation flow and safety in a village area. The plan also includes bicycle lanes on both of the major streets. The final design of the Route 62 project emerged from an intensive community planning process spanning three years. The final plan received a Livable Communities award in 2005 from Partners for a Livable Western New York and its design has been adopted as a best practice by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO).

Hamburg has also done a good job of creating attractive environments around its public parking lots, by investing in attractive walkways and public art projects in front of its lots.

Kenmore has, in addition to its ongoing streetscaping program, worked to think strategically about parking. Recent changes to its downtown zoning resulted in a requirement that parking must be behind buildings and that front parking must be on-street. Parking for Delaware Avenue businesses is allowed on side streets, which greatly aids the parking situation.

Lewiston used an ISTEA grant to leverage a \$3.0 million investment in its downtown (only \$150,000 in local match was needed.) The project ultimately entailed reducing the number of travel lanes from four to three (with a center turn lane), installing brick sidewalks and crosswalks, planting 100 street trees and installing historic-style lighting and signage. Many business owners initially opposed the plan, thinking that it would lead to traffic bottlenecks, but the village leadership pushed forward regardless, insisting that it would not harm traffic flow. Since the project's completion in 2001, traffic has moved smoothly, with the only tie-ups occurring immediately before and after major events at the Artpark. There are about 50 arts, music and other special events in Lewiston each year, and traffic is only a minor concern.

The extensive system of streetscaping and related infrastructure is maintained through a combination of village staff and volunteer support. The village's public works department maintains all of the trees, plantings, sidewalks and fixtures, and its work is

supplemented by volunteers from the village's Beautification Committee. After six years of maintaining the infrastructure, everyone is happy with it. The brick pavers have held up very well and have not resulted in an unreasonable amount of maintenance or replacement.

Pittsford has accepted its traffic congestion as a sign of its attractiveness, and has instead worked to improve the pedestrian environment and to better manage its parking to improve walkability. Choosing not to rezone residential sites to build new off-street lots to support commercial areas, Pittsford has instead worked to join and consolidate lots that were formerly fenced off from each other. As part of the new library project, the village acquired several adjoining private parking lots and assembled them to form a new public lot to support the library. The village has also worked with NYSDOT to reclaim on-street spaces in the downtown area. Finally, the village has worked with its residents to educate them that allowing on-street parking in neighborhoods near downtown is a positive thing, as it helps slow traffic through the area.

Planning and Development Activities

East Aurora has not taken a proactive role with the use of zoning and regulation to guide development. Instead the village government has relied on the advisory role of its Historic Preservation Commission and a very professional Planning Board to guide new development. The recently-built shopping center at the roundabout at the end of Main Street is a perfect example of how East Aurora's approach has worked. Knowing the Planning Board's reputation for encouraging historic architecture and village design, the developer proposed a plan featuring faux second stories on the new buildings, ample landscaping and even a building that holds the corner at the front of the property. This project has been universally well received in the community. East Aurora also has a different zoning designation for the historic CBD from the nearby "Mid-Main" zone that reaches to the roundabout.

Hamburg has taken a very active role in planning for improvements to the central business district. An economic development plan was completed in 2005, laying the groundwork for further improvements. In 2006 the village enacted a new set of building design standards in the downtown area that very specifically illustrate what design features can and cannot be built. This visually-based document gives very clear direction to the Planning Board and code enforcement office regarding many different physical elements of new construction and rehabilitation, including: façade design, storefronts, signage, awnings, lighting, and handicapped accessibility.

Another village government initiative was the successful pursuit of a \$200,000 grant from the New York State Main Street Program to fund façade improvements in the downtown area. The village is actively working to distribute these funds and intends to pursue additional funding for 2008. This program will augment an existing joint façade improvement program with the Town of Hamburg that has been in place for the past 15 years.

Kenmore altered its zoning in 2001 to distinguish between the central business district along Delaware Avenue and the restricted business district along its other major streets. This classification is seen as a way to ensure that new development along the secondary streets fits in better with nearby residential neighborhoods.

Lewiston's downtown area development is controlled through the Historic Preservation Commission (the village is a certified local government). The historic ordinance places strong controls on colors, signage and building materials in the downtown area and has proven to be very effective at maintaining the consistent appearance of the area.

Pittsford designated its entire downtown as a historic preservation district in 1971. Since that time the village has placed a strong emphasis on maintaining the scale and functionality of its historic downtown through a combination of investment, regulation and cooperation. The village has worked to keep key civic functions in their historic locations, and recently spent \$7 million to build a new library that serves both the village and Town of Pittsford. Major investments have also been undertaken along the historic Erie Canal waterfront—the proximity of the commercial district to the waterfront has made Pittsford the preferred place for people of all ages

from the Rochester area to go for a stroll or a leisurely day out. The village has also made major investments in its pedestrian environment, including a partnership with businesses that has resulted in the private donation of 25 benches in the downtown core.

The village has resisted pressure to expand the size of the commercial core, and has chosen to keep the zoning boundaries intact. This has led to very strong demand for the existing commercial inventory and to a continued healthy stock of historic homes in the area immediately surrounding the commercial core. Downtown zoning has been in place for many years to control the nature of new development and rehabilitation projects. All buildings in downtown must be at least two stories, and no office or residential uses are permitted at street level—all storefronts must contain retail, dining or service businesses. All new restaurants are subject to special exception permits, as parking is a major concern in the village.

Marketing Activities

East Aurora has used its two major destinations (the Roycroft campus and the Toy Museum) as marketing vehicles for the village itself. Beyond that, little has had to be done to market the village, as it is already popular destination for local residents and tourists alike.

Hamburg has used the Route 62 project as a means of building marketing capacity for the village. Since the reconstruction will result in major disturbances of traffic patterns and business activities during its construction period, a consortium of government (village and town), business, civic and economic development groups have come together under the name Village Business Advisory Council (VBAC). Though this group has formed to help the community effectively manage the road reconstruction, it is being built as a long-term effort with a mission of acting as a permanent venue for discussions of community issues. A major issue with the reconstruction is its effect on small businesses: of the 430 businesses in the Village of Hamburg, 270 are located within the Route 62 project area. VBAC has secured support from the Small Business Development Center at Buffalo State and all 14 lending institutions with branches in Hamburg to work with local businesses to provide assistance with business planning, financing and real estate issues related to the reconstruction.

Kenmore has struggled to market itself, due to a fairly inactive merchants association and local Chamber of Commerce. The village is hoping to increase marketing activities in the future.

Lewiston does not have a formalized downtown management group, but it does have an ad hoc group called Service Organizations of Lewiston (SOL) that coordinates event planning, publicity and management for a variety of local organizations. SOL was first convened by the Mayor, but is now mostly self-run, with occasional staff support from the Chamber of Commerce. The organization meets quarterly and plans three months of efforts at a time. Lewiston also benefits greatly from the 50 or so concerts and other events held at the Artpark each year.

Pittsford has also thrived on special events. The Town of Pittsford's Events Committee is the umbrella organization under which village events are held—this arrangement is critical to success. Events are planned via a partnership among the village, the town and the Pittsford Merchants Association.

Summary of Findings

- New development has been rare in most of the comparable villages, except for East Aurora. As a result, there has not been a great deal of attention placed on regulation in the past, but recent investment has led to a renewed focus on the character of new development.
- Relative to the other villages Williamsville has a very strong concentration of office and retail uses, but lags on dining and entertainment uses. This helps explain why Williamsville does not have the broader appeal that others like Lewiston, Pittsford and East Aurora do.
- All of the other villages either have or are about to undertake major streetscaping efforts, both as a means to beautify their downtowns and as a way to improve pedestrian and vehicular safety.
- Investments in the urban environment have been very positive in the other villages, but must be effectively managed to ensure that they do not unduly impact existing businesses.
- If a community has a strong Planning Board, increased regulation is not always necessary. East Aurora has been able to effectively guide new development without imposing aggressive regulations. However, this approach is tied to personalities, and membership on local boards often changes very quickly.
- The answer to downtown parking problems is usually not to add more public parking, but instead to effectively manage the existing inventory and to work with developers and landowners to ensure that private parking has some public benefit.
- The best marketing for other villages has been special events and major attractions that bring people into their downtowns.