

Downtown Working Group Recommendations



Table of Contents

1. Summary	2
2. Downtown Working Group Recommendations	3
3. Recommendation Discussion	4
A. Checklist of Key Recommendations	4
B. Maintenance Recommendations	12
C. Medium-Term Project Recommendations	17
4. Conclusion	19
5. Supporting Links	20

Downtown Working Group

Recommendations for Downtown Improvement

June, 2020

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1. Summary

This report contains the checklist of recommendations developed by the Downtown Working Group (DWG) and a summary of the results of the DWG meetings during the period of April 2019-May 2020. The DWG was formed with the charge of developing a set of recommendations for the downtown area. The “deliveries” or duties of the DWG were set out as 1) *Request for Proposal (RFP) for architect*, 2) *Selection of architect*, 3) *Checklist of planned improvements* 4) *Meeting summaries*.

In the period from March 2019 through May 2020, the DWG held 18 regular meetings and two public forums. Through these meetings and our group deliberations we developed a series of recommendations. These recommendations include three types of projects for the Board of Trustees to consider in allocating funds for the downtown.

- 1) Checklist of Key Recommendations,
- 2) Maintenance Recommendations, and
- 3) Medium-Term Project Recommendations

Our charge is fulfilled with the Key Recommendations Checklist. We think it is important to include two additional categories of recommendations because they emerged from discussion with businesses, Village committees and downtown residents, as well as from the study “Hastings Analysis and Master Plan” of the Village undertaken by Peter Gisolfi Associates (PGA). We include the PGA Master Plan with this recommendation document. The RFP and summary of our meetings (minutes) can be found on the DWG page of the Village website.

2. Downtown Working Group Recommendations

Checklist of Key Recommendations

- I. Bike Parking and Beautification**
 - a. Train Station Gateway
 - b. Boulanger Corner Spot
 - c. Post Office Lot
 - d. Lower Library Station
- II. Improved Spaces**
 - a. Replacement of benches
 - b. Replacement of trash cans
 - c. Flowerpots
 - d. Hardware Alley
 - e. Firehouse Plaza
- III. Village Gateways**
 - a. Library Hill Native Garden
 - b. Southside Avenue Divider Garden
 - c. 5 Corners Green Curtain
- IV. Public Arts**
 - a. Arts Commission Support

Maintenance Recommendations

- I. Immediate Actions**
 - a. Clean and paint lamp posts
 - b. Street signage review
 - c. Removal of generic flags
 - d. Repair capstone at Boulanger Parking
 - e. Straighten and paint parking meters
 - f. Powerwash sidewalks
- II. On-going Actions**
 - a. Develop a plan for litter removal
 - b. Develop a planting maintenance system
 - c. Action Steps and Future Policy for Trees
 - i. Replacement where needed
 - ii. Clean out currently dead
 - iii. Development of Policy to Protect Street Trees

Medium-Term Project Recommendations

- I.** Sidewalks
- II.** Steinschneider Stairs
- III.** VFW Plaza

3. Recommendation Discussion

In the following section we discuss aspects of the DWG recommendations. The “Checklist of Key Recommendations” is comprised of projects we recommend most highly. This is followed by “Maintenance Recommendations” and “Medium Term Project Recommendations.”

A. Checklist of Key Recommendations

I. Bike Parking and Beautification

Improving bike parking in our downtown will support both cyclists and local businesses. We recommend the installation of bike parking structures in four locations in the downtown area. The range of work to be done at each of these locations varies from little intervention to a more comprehensive improvement of the space. See page 17 of PGA Village Master Plan for a mapping of these sites.

a. Train Station Gateway

The Village of Hastings currently lacks sufficient bike user infrastructure. This is a reality throughout the downtown area, but especially at the train station. During pre-COVID-19 days, the covered bike area in the train station was packed with bikes that were frequently vandalized and stolen.

The site we are recommending to the Board is a triangular piece of land at the northwest corner of the train parking lot. This area is Village property but is currently taken over with trash and trash receptacles by the landowner adjacent to the lot. It is frequently filled with litter and is overgrown. As the area is directly catty-corner from the exit of the train station it is highly visible to all entering this Village “Gateway”.

The conceptual design provided by PGA envisions transforming this underutilized and unsightly area into a bike station area with plantings, seating and a durable and simple aesthetic which matches the Village. This proposed site would eliminate three car parking spots. At the moment these are two handicapped spots (with one buffer spot) that would need to be shifted (removing standard spots). The proposed bike parking area would provide covered parking for at least 40 bikes. Our recommendation is that this area take high priority and meet all environmental and safety codes, with solar lighting systems and the capacity for video surveillance so as to improve security should that continue to be a challenge for the Village. Please see page 18 for the conceptual drawing of this site.



Proposed Bike Parking site, currently overgrown, teeming with trash. March 2020

b. Boulanger Corner

In the far northeast corner of the Boulanger parking lot there is a car parking space adjacent to the corner of two granite walls. The proposed bike parking structure would take this spot and have a covering that is buttressed by the two walls. This proposed location would require the elimination of one car parking slot in return for twenty spaces for bike parking. See page 19 of the PGA Master Plan for the conceptual drawing of this location.



Proposed Bike Parking site, March 2020

c. Post Office Lot

This parking area would not impact car parking. A simple rack is envisioned, taking advantage of a space between the sidewalk and parking lot. This would provide for 8-10 bike parking slots. The DWG received several observations from business owners in this area regarding bikes often parked on narrow sidewalks along this strip of Warburton. A bike parking site would alleviate pressure on narrow sidewalk space to ensure pedestrian flow. The drawing from PGA proposes improved tree plantings in this location. See page 20 of the PGA Master Plan for conceptual drawing.



Proposed Bike Parking site, Post Office Parking lot. March 2020

d. Lower Library Entrance

There is no bike parking available at the library. Adding spaces at the lower library entrance could also support customers attending the Farmers Market as well as events at Village Hall.

II. Improved Spaces

a. Replacement of benches

The design of Village benches is inconsistent. There are at least eight types of benches throughout the Village. They are not harmonious aesthetically nor are they, in many cases, comfortable.

We recommend that benches be replaced by one standard model. The position of benches in each location should be carefully evaluated as there are a number of examples in the Village where increased bench placement and attention to bench positioning could improve pedestrian spaces. Finally, the bench design should incorporate a request from the Senior Citizen Advisory Committee to have seat separators that are placed so as to make sitting (and getting up) easier. Please see page 10 of the PGA Master Plan for a map of locations for improved seating opportunities and a bench replacement model. This model can be adapted to include arm-rest structures as requested by the Senior Citizen Advisory Committee.

b. Replacement of trash cans

Many trash cans throughout the Village are in a poor state. Several of the latches on the side of the cans are not functional or not properly used so that after DPW removes trash from the receptacles, the side door remains swinging open, conveying a messy look and endangering pedestrians who may walk by and not notice the protruding metal door. We recommend painting and fixing when the condition of the receptacle allows for it. When the structure is not in sufficiently good condition to be painted or fixed, it should be replaced. There should also be an increase in cans throughout the downtown area as

well as the addition of recycling cans. Please see the models provided in the PGA document on page 11. These options should be evaluated with the DPW and Conservation Commission. Page 11 of the PGA report includes a map of suggested trash and recycling locations.



Trash cans and side door to cans left open, March 2020

c. Flowerpots

Flower pots throughout the downtown are in many cases decomposing. According to the head of the Beautification Committee, Sue Smith, money has been made available for them to be replaced. The DWG recommends that replacement pots be of municipal-grade standard, given their importance aesthetically. Please see the three samples provided by PGA on page 12 of the Master Plan. The procurement of these items should be coordinated with the Beautification Committee so as to ensure that the models selected are durable, aesthetically consistent and practical for seasonal planting. We celebrate the assiduous work of the Beautification Committee as they sprinkle magic and color throughout the Village. It is our hope that proper planting structures will give their arrangements increased prominence in our streetscapes.



Inconsistent and broken flowerpots, glorious contributions of Beautification Committee, March 2020

d. Hardware Alley

The alley that runs along the side of the VFW Plaza and connects the north end of Boulanger Plaza and Warburton is currently a graceful, pedestrian-friendly area of the downtown. This is an area which is already an attractive point in the Village but could be improved. In the medium term, the alley should be considered in the context of decisions made regarding VFW Plaza. In the short term, there are important maintenance issues in the alley, including a huge cluster of poison ivy that cascades over the edge of the wall around the same height of a passer-by. In addition to plant maintenance issues, we recommend creating a lighting system through the alley to highlight its beauty. Finally, the wall of the hardware store is an area that could serve as an “Art Museum in the Streets,” with fixed display cases that rotate and showcase the work of local artists.



Poison Ivy cascading into walkway at Hardware Alley, March and June 2020



Hardware Alley, June 2020

e. Firehouse Plaza

In the course of our meetings, we referred to the area of sidewalk on Warburton between the Firehouse and Movie House Mews as Firehouse Plaza. This is an area where the sidewalk is wider than at many points in the downtown. The position of the current benches does not optimize usage of the space. Because of its key location in the center of the downtown, this is a site that could be improved with more benches, plantings and public art.



Beloved bell, view toward Firehouse Plaza June 2020

III. Village Gateways

Hasting's "Gateways" play an enormous role in welcoming people to our beautiful Village. This was also noted by Gisolfi associates in their presentation to the community and in their work analyzing the Village. In their analysis, they note four central entry points into the downtown: Five Corners, the train station, Warburton Bridge, and Wagner Park at Warburton and Broadway. We recommend moving forward with beautification projects at two of these locations: Five Corners and the train station.

a. Train Station Gateway: Library Hill Native Garden

In this set of recommendations, we propose the installation of the Train Station Bike Plaza. As presented, it is much more than a bike rack, but the re-taking of a piece of currently unsightly and underutilized land. Diagonal from this site, across West Main Street, lies another opportunity to improve maintenance and amplify beauty in the Village. Beneath the lookout point of the library extends an overgrown and unkept hillside. We recommend a project to landscape this area with native, flowering plants which would improve the ecology of the downtown and serve as a welcoming sight for those arriving in Hastings via

the train. We also consider this a prime area for potentially installing illuminated sculpture art or a Hastings-on-Hudson sign.

b. Train Station Gateway: Southside Avenue Divider Garden

This divider was planted in years past. While it has some specimens which have survived, it is spotty and sparse and would make a great visual impact if plantings are refreshed



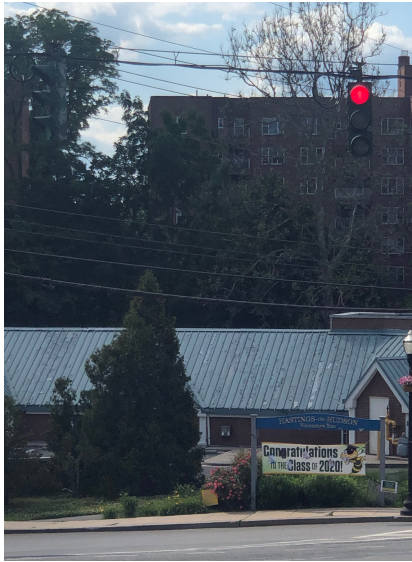
Southside Avenue Divider. March 2020

c. Five Corners: Green Curtain

At the intersection of Five Corners, the area behind the entrance sign to the Village has arborvitae bushes of varying condition, grass and two benches. This area should be replanted with bushes and trees that can provide a “green curtain” or backdrop to the Village sign and established garden planted by members of the community.



Impressive flower bed at Five Corners. Grassy strip behind walkway should be filled with “Green Curtain” to hide peeling paint roof of Foodtown. March 2020



Congrats to our seniors! Backdrop of peeling paint, June 2020



Sidewalk along Foodtown, trench could be cut to plant ivy along chain-link fence, potential for green wall, March 2020

IV. Public Arts Support

Hastings has long held a reputation as a community where the arts thrive. Many of our residents are engaged in the arts, whether visual arts, literature, or performing arts. The Village Arts Commission has been instrumental in bringing visual arts to the downtown with rotating exhibits showcasing local artists in Village Hall and sculpture in Fulton Park.

The DWG met three times over the course of a year with members of the Village Arts Commission to discuss a project in the downtown. Building on those discussions, the DWG held a public meeting (available [here](#)) where we emphasized our view that supporting a public arts project in the downtown would be beneficial for the Village as a whole, as well as for downtown businesses and residents. There was no opposition to the proposal to support a public arts project at the Public Forum held on this issue.

In our discussions with the Arts Commission the idea of a mural, set of murals, or fixed weather-proof display cases for rotating exhibitions (a sort of visual art museum in the streets) emerged as a popular idea. The Gisolfi team indicated in their study of the downtown area that multiple blank walls could serve as an urban canvas for local artists.

The recommendation of the DWG is that \$20,000 from filming revenues be allocated each year to the Village Arts Commission to support public arts projects in the downtown. The determination of a specific public art site (or sites), artist selection, and process of public involvement are important questions the Arts Commission is best positioned to manage.

B. Maintenance Recommendations

A number of issues in the downtown could use immediate maintenance attention. These are low-cost, high impact improvements. We call these items “immediate actions.” The second category of maintenance recommendations are “on-going actions” that would also enhance the look of downtown if implemented. These items are in the purview of Village management.

I. Immediate Actions

- a. Clean and paint lamp posts
- b. Street signage review - remove unnecessary signs, replace shabby signs
- c. Removal of generic flags from lamp posts
- d. Repair pillars at Boulanger parking lot entrance
- e. Straighten and paint parking meters
- f. Powerwash sidewalks



Generic Flag should be removed, lampposts should be decluttered. March 2020



Half-dead tree in prominent location,
Warburton, March 2020



Useless signage should be removed, March 2020



Capstone missing at entry to Boulanger
Parking, March 2020



Dead tree on Warburton, March 2020



Parking meters tilted and in-need of paint, March 2020

II. On-going Actions

a. Develop a plan for litter removal

Over the course of our 18 meetings, complaints regarding litter in the downtown area were frequently raised. We recommend this issue be fully analyzed and addressed by Village management. The procurement of new trash receptacles seems a ripe moment to launch a plan engaging the public, informing residents of new trash and recycling cans and encouraging them to be advocates for and participants in habitual, good practice. This could be accompanied by the development of a system for analyzing how effective cans are at different locations, honing in on “problem spots” and evaluating if litter has been reduced in problematic locations.

b. Develop a planting maintenance system

Many of the planting locations throughout the downtown area are neglected and overgrown. For one example, please see below photos of the flower beds across from the train station. These are signature locations at the entry to our Village, sites where cutting of grass and general planting upkeep should be seamlessly integrated into Village maintenance programs.



Neglected and overgrown planting areas, March 2020

c. Action Steps and Future Policy for Trees

The condition of the trees in the Village should be addressed. Key issues are dead trees along prominent sidewalks, overzealous and unskilled trimming of healthy trees, and an overall lack of protection of tree health.

i. Replacement of dead trees

See PGA report and presentation at first public forum for full count and mapping of dead or half-dead trees throughout downtown. It is our recommendation that dead and sickly trees be removed and replaced.

ii. Selection of tree grate system

See page 16 of PGA Master Plan for images and alternatives. When sidewalks are replaced and repaired, the DWG recommends the adoption of protective tree

grate systems. Currently tree pits are uneven and treacherous for pedestrians, collect filth easily and do not protect tree roots.

iii. Development of Policy to Protect Street Trees

Overlapping jurisdictions between the county and the Village can make repaving and sidewalk replacement complicated. On the west side of Warburton, between the bridge and Antoinettes, there is a particularly egregious, recent case of poor tree management. In this example, blocks of new sidewalk were installed without any protections for trees in the sidewalk beds. As a result, this lovely, historic strip of the Village is anchored by at least four dead trees. Moreover, the bed between the sidewalk and the road area is far too narrow to plant future trees. Many municipalities have extensive policies to improve sidewalk landscaping, which provide habitat for birds and insects and reduce stormwater runoff. We recommend the Village adopt a policy requiring the meeting of key ecological criteria when sidewalks are replaced.



New sidewalks by county, lack of protection of trees, March 2020

C. Medium-Term Project Recommendations

I. Pedestrian Priority and Sidewalks

The poor condition of the downtown's sidewalks was repeatedly raised with the DWG. Reconstruction of sidewalks did not fall under the purview of this group. Concerns from the public fell into two categories: safety and aesthetics.

As the Village moves forward in the medium term to address sidewalks, it is the view of the DWG that sidewalk replacement presents an opportunity for pedestrian safety to be prioritized throughout the Village. In particular, there are four zones where "bump-outs," essentially taking the space of a parked car, could improve the safety of pedestrians crossing vehicular pathways. They also create opportunities for improved plantings and seating areas. The locations where we identified the potential for bump-outs are listed below. Items i.-iii. are included with conceptual drawings in the PGA report.

- a. Bump-out: Potential to Prioritize Pedestrians and Beautify
 - i. Firehouse Plaza Extended Pedestrian Area
See page 14 of PGA Master Plan
 - ii. Northeast Business Pedestrian Area
See page 14 of PGA Master Plan
 - iii. Boulanger Alley Extension
See page 15 of PGA Master Plan
 - iv. Library Crossing Pedestrian Zone

II. Steinschneider Stairs

The condition of the Steinschneider stairs was raised by both members of the working group and members of the public. Key complaints include the lack of proper illumination at night, broken and uneven steps and the depressing aesthetic condition of the stairs which run parallel to a chain-link fence.

Due to its central location in the downtown and high usage by Hastings villagers, we recommend that the stairs be addressed. An alternative placement of the stairs was presented to us by PGA and our group discussed many alternatives to transform this space. These include integrating public art into the stairs and shifting the position of the stairs to increase visibility. The stairs have the potential to be an iconic feature of the downtown and a place that villagers not only traverse, but recognize as representing the identity and history of the Village.

III. VFW Plaza

The DWG supported the Village's application to the county of Westchester for a Community Development Block Grant to allocate resources toward the VFW Plaza. Discussion of the VFW Plaza became contested with a number of residents opposing the grant application. Opposition

to the project drew heavily on resistance to the conceptual drawing which accompanied the grant application. This drawing was misinterpreted as a permanent proposal for the space, instead of a beginning of a discussion on how to improve the area.

Through our discussions with residents and comments at the public forum, it is clear that there is interest in improving this critical public space at the heart of our Village. The DWG believes that the Board of Trustees needs to determine the resources it wants to allocate to this area. The crux of this decision is whether the Village chooses to take on a holistic study, evaluation and discussion about the plaza, or to move forward with patch-work improvements.

General Recommendations for the VFW Plaza:

1. The VFW Plaza plays an important role in the center of the Village as a verdant place for public gathering, protesting and memorializing. This idea of a “Village Commons” should be strengthened and supported. For example, both River Arts and the Arts Commission reported to the DWG that Hastings lacks open-air theater locations for concerts, poetry readings and all types of public performance. One of the suggestions of the Gisolfi team was to expand the platform area at the lower end of the plaza to create more of an open amphitheater structure.
2. Seating at VFW plaza is very limited. One bench sits in the lower plaza area. A scattering of oversized Adirondack seats, which are difficult to get in and out of, dot the landscape. Should the Village choose to take on a larger reworking of this space, the hillside could be transformed with multiple seating areas.
3. Many of the plantings in the plaza are in poor condition. In the photos below, one example is found in the native eastern redbud tree, at the center of the plaza, which is completely rotten. Re-planting the VFW would provide an opportunity to take advantage of vistas and increase public gathering spaces and seating, all while reinforcing our commitment to the local ecology through native, bird and insect friendly specimens.



VFW Plaza, March 2020

4. Conclusion

The Village of Hastings-on-Hudson is a uniquely vibrant community, drawing on a rich cultural and social history. The Village's downtown is the heart of this community. It is much more than a geographic location for businesses, residents and visitors--it is a place for vital economic activity and civic engagement.

Our key "checklist" recommendations in this document aim to facilitate pedestrian and bicyclist circulation, improve seating and gathering areas, enhance aesthetics and ecology through plantings and provide financial support for arts in the Village. Our "maintenance" recommendations provide a checklist of actions that could immediately better the state of the downtown and improve the palette of signage, landscaping and sidewalks. Our "Medium Term" project recommendations will require extensive and on-going policy attention. This document has provided a brief discussion of the areas we consider priority. When the Board of Trustees determines to move forward, we stand ready to discuss in greater depth.

5. Supporting Links

1. DWG Charge
https://www.hastingsgov.org/sites/hastingsonhudsonny/files/uploads/downtown_working_group_charge.pdf
2. Reference for Proposal
https://www.hastingsgov.org/sites/hastingsonhudsonny/files/uploads/downtown_street_scape_improvements_4-1-2019.pdf
3. First Public Forum
<http://hastingsonhudsonny.swagit.com/play/09242019-2249>
4. Second Public Forum
<http://hastingsonhudsonny.swagit.com/play/02252020-1911>
5. Meeting Summaries (Minutes)
<https://www.hastingsgov.org/node/86293/minutes>