Describing Our Process

Organizational Meeting:
Creating the partnership
In early January the partner groups met to plan a particular design process that would involve community residents in the development of a vision plan for the North Side Neighborhood in Binghamton. A work plan was developed around a series of interactive workshops scheduled from February through April. The Communities of Shalom, a faith-based group, held an on-going asset-based planning process and the workshops were designed to complement and build on this process. The students started to terimize themselves with the North Side through walking, focus groups, interviews and research.

Group Meeting One:
Discovering community values
The first workshop involved a series of activities through which residents revealed the ways that they use and value their community by identifying favorite places, traditions, and activities. They also discussed their vision for the neighborhood, identifying ways to strengthen the areas and address problems and issues through future change. The participants linked their visions and each group took responsibility for developing visions for two of the three North Side realities: the residential commercial and the riverfront. One additional vision group was charged with further developing and refining a broader community-wide vision incorporating and integrating all three realms.

Group Meeting Two:
Exploring Alternatives
At this meeting the four groups reviewed the summary findings from the mapping, photo surveys and visioning activity conducted at the first meeting. They then brainstormed the opportunities they identified and discussed ways they might take advantage of these to address concerns. Through the course of these workshop activities, participants explored alternative expressions of their vision, considered future choices and began to identify actions that they could take to fulfill their vision. Activities included the review of case studies from other communities, and the use of modeling and photo simulation to explore alternative changes within the neighborhood.

Group Meeting Three:
Evaluating Alternatives—Implementing the Vision
Between the second and third meetings, students identified their vision goals and evaluated the alternatives generated during the previous meeting. They then proposed a series of design proposals that were consistent with this vision. A group of incorporated resident preferences following a discussion of these alternatives, groups began to develop strategies for implementation and expanded community participation in the process.

Final Community Meeting:
Celebrating the process
A community gathering at Rosewell School was hosted by the community partners. Groups present visions and concepts planning designs for an audience of over 50 local residents and community leaders. The results of the four-month process were a stepping-stone point for creating a larger dialogue with neighbors, the city of Binghamton, and other local, regional and state level partners.

Outcomes
Mapping Sacred Places
Residents create maps revealing the sacred spaces and activities in the North Side.

Discussing Concerns
Vision group members create a “matrix of possibilities” that helps them shape and clarify ways to strengthen the North Side’s community identity and vitality.

Identifying Opportunities
Research, dialogue, and back and forth interaction helps to test shared values and visions for the North Side’s desired future.

Exploring Alternatives
Alternative solutions generate and deepen understanding of the North Side’s needs and desires for revitalizing neighborhood, commercial, and waterfront areas.

Evaluating Possibilities
Design and planning ideas become refined and focused as the benefits of various proposals are weighted and discussed.

Developing Recommendations
Meeting attendees review the models, plans, and documents generated by the vision, commercial, residential, and riverfront groups.

North Side Community Visioning
Binghamton, NY
May 2002

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Revitalizing our Neighborhood

Process

Group Meeting One: May
Discovering Community Values
Members of the community along with students from Cornell University and SUNY ESF became acquainted and focused their attention on defining the existing conditions of the North Side Neighborhood. Through an inventory mapping activity, community members identified shared spaces, areas of concern, and opportunities for notification. The neighborhood groups chose to address residential concerns while paying particular attention to the Liberty Street area.
Community members met with councilors and set out to take a photo tour of their neighborhood in the week.

Group Meeting Two: Apr
Developing Alternatives
Students presented an analysis of the neighborhood compiled from information gathered at the first meeting. The community members reviewed inventory maps, analysis diagrams, potential projects, and photos. Classmates and classmates were coordinated to clarify and prioritize community needs. Concerns and opportunities identified by the neighborhood group included safety, landscape improvements, housing conditions, and overall appearance of the community.

Group Meeting Three: Apr
Evaluating Alternatives Implementing the Vision
The neighborhood group convened to review design concepts and potential projects to achieve the goals of a safer, more connected, and visually improved neighborhood. Projects were prioritized, categorized, and phased for implementation. The group also worked together to identify resources that could assist in the program implementation process.

Outcomes

G3
Concerns & Opportunities
- Safety
- Community Appearance
- Neighborhood Abandonment
- Housing Conditions
- Lack of Physical Connections

Goals

1. Strengthen Pedestrian Corridors through the Community
Recommendations
- Initiate a coordinated program of streetscape improvements
- Organize neighborhood clean-up days throughout the year
- Work with the city to repair and add sidewalks where necessary

2. Improve Housing Conditions
Recommendations
- Initiate a community education program about existing resources available to homeowners and renters for
- Explore the financial resources available for boats
- Gather support for holiday decorating contests to strengthen neighborhood

3. Reuse Vacant Lands
Recommendations
- Initiate projects to clean up and plant abandoned lots
- Create outdoor gathering spaces with seating, gardens, and play areas
- Reuse an abandoned building in the heart of the community to create a new community center

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Rethinking Our Marketplace

Group Meeting One

Discovering Values

The Commercial Group’s activities began with mapping exercises to identify vacant places, opportunities and areas of concern. This was followed by the development of a map inventory of the North Side's commercial properties and the travel routes people use to reach them. The group members created a priority listing of desirable services and physical improvements for the commercial area. This information was useful in shaping designs and planning directions for the area.

Group Meeting Two

Visioning Possibilities

The summary of the findings from the first meeting led to a series of design studies focusing on Binghamton Plaza's redesign and pedestrian connections between the North Side's commercial areas and the riverfront. The group first undertook site planning concepts on aerial photos and sketched rough design ideas. Then a physical mockup of pedestrian connections between Binghamton Plaza and the riverfront was presented. Such design ideas and concepts set the stage for the development of several integrated and linked design concept alternatives generated together with the Riverfront Group.

Group Meeting Three

Considering the Alternatives

At the beginning of the meeting, the Commercial and Riverfront Groups worked together to develop integrated design strategies. Three alternative concepts were presented and the pros and cons of each scenario discussed. Through discussion, the groups refined ideas and moved toward a first city council plan that includes desirable aspects from the alternatives. The final meeting resulted in a focus on how to implement the ideas developed and realistically phase changes over time. Such phasing will be critical to the fulfillment of the community's vision.

Concerns & Opportunities

- Limited and unsafe pedestrian access to commercial spaces
- Poor visual quality of storefronts and streetscapes
- Lack of diverse commercial services and amenities
- Existing commercial space is a barrier to the riverfront

Goals

- Strengthen neighborhood connections to commercial spaces and the riverfront.
- Integrate the Binghamton Commercial Plaza, Riverfront, and Residential area by designing for mixed-use.
- Undertake a streetscape plan to improve pedestrian safety and experience and develop design guidelines for storefront facade enhancement.

Group Members:

Laurie Kimball
Shiva Patel
Eve Gonnell
Martin Williams
Erin Bullock
Tim Insgrain
Dale Kramer
Jeff Stein

North Side Community Visioning
Binghamton, NY
May 2002

The North Side Community Visioning Project was initiated by the New York State Quality Communities Program in December of 2001. The success of this project was dependent on strong partnerships between the following groups: the New York State Department of State, City of Binghamton, Communities of Shalom, Landscape Architecture faculty and students from SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry and Cornell University.
Group Meeting One—May
Discovering Community Values

The process of discovering what the community values was based on the analysis of the North Side neighborhood as a whole entity. Previous work along with mapping and research provided a fuller understanding of the neighborhood’s relationship to the North Site. The Riverfront Group further analyzed the important characteristics of the riverfront and the Chenango River system. Group members generated a series of illustrated scenarios and identified places and opportunities for improvements along the riverfront. Concerns about the riverfront and its relationship to the community were discussed and located on the map. The summary illustrates the groups’ options, hopes, and expectations for the future of the riverfront and the community.

Group Meeting Two—April
Exploring Alternatives

In order to explore new concepts for the riverfront redesign, many illustrative examples of design possibilities were developed. This involved working power point and storyboards. The group used this information along with analysis maps and diagrams of the North Side’s riverfront to begin generating and exploring design concepts and approaches to improving the North Site’s riverfront. A scale study model of the riverfront was used for exploring site alternatives. The group members gathered additional information and concepts in an interactive manner by manipulating and rearranging such elements as roads, buildings, public spaces, paths, and pieces that shape riverfront and community dynamics.

Group Meeting Three—April
Analyzing Design Concepts

A variety of alternative riverfront design strategies were presented to the group. The concepts ranged from simple solutions to comprehensive urban design solutions. The process revealed the inter-connectedness of the commercial area and the riverfront and led to the decision to create an integrated riverfront and commercial design scheme. Working together, the Riverfront Group and Commercial Group discussed concept outlines, implementation issues, and redevelopment resources for the riverfront and the commercial area. The combined final design proposal was presented at the April 21st public meeting.

North Side Community Visioning Project

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May 2002

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Concerns

- Commercial district lacks definition and orientation
- Buildings lack facades facing river
- Steep slopes and difficult access to water’s edge
- Visually isolated from Binghamton Plaza
- Entrance to Cheni Lindsay Park is hidden
- Safety concerns in park
- Disconnected from neighborhood

Opportunities

- Speeds up—popular place, social and possible
- Opportunity to build around
- Kent-Lindsay Park—pool is popular summer activity
- Binghamton U. students in renovated building—bring life to commercial area/waterfront
- Connection to small commercial area north of highway
- Take advantage of westward looking views

Goals

1. Chenango River and Community Recommendations
   - Eliminate visual barriers between the community and the riverfront
   - Create trail and connections
   - Provide cut-through vacant plaza building-granite pavers, shrubs
   - Create access for recreational river use

2. Improve Safety, Visibility, and Access Recommendations
   - Improve biking and walking access
   - Improve streetscape circulation
   - Improve pedestrian access to the street
   - Improve visibility and lighting
   - Provide clear bosques and increased police presence

3. Define Boundaries

4. Improve Visual Quality

Recommendations

- Plant vegetation for screening, separation and beautification
- Make breaks of building by creating masts, etc.
- Improve perception by changing building orientation
- Improve façade appearance
- Reduce asphalt

Meetings:

- May 7
- May 14
- April 12
- April 21