NORTH CENTRAL TROY
GIS MAPPING & PLANNING ALTERNATIVES

PLANNING STUDIO
FALL 1995

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

North central Troy is an urban neighborhood facing serious social and economic problems, yet it also presents many opportunities for constructive action. The Troy Rehabilitation and Improvement Program (TRIP) has been building, renovating, and managing affordable housing in the area for twenty-eight years and continues to work with the community on revitalization projects. In 1995, the Urban and Regional Planning Program at the University at Albany (SUNY) joined with TRIP to design a planning studio that would improve the database on neighborhood conditions and generate strategies for neighborhood improvement.

During the fall semester of 1995, a group of fourteen graduate students studied north central Troy in depth. The area's history and current conditions were evaluated from historical records, census data, tax records, and intensive field analysis. Starting from scratch, the students created a comprehensive GIS database to store and display this information. Personal interviews were conducted with residents and with officials from public and nonprofit agencies in order to determine the neighborhood's most pressing needs as well as its current strengths and weaknesses. High crime, lack of jobs, substandard and expensive housing, lack of commercial development, a lack of parks and gardens, and parking were viewed as the most serious problems. The students divided into groups to address four areas of concern: (1) community gardens and parks, (2) transportation, parking, and commercial development, (3) housing, and (4) urban design. For each of these areas, the students offered a set of preliminary recommendations for neighborhood improvement for each of three time periods: short-term (1 to 5 years), medium-term (5 to 10 years) and long-term (10 to 20 years).

Community Gardens and Parks

Many people in north central Troy feel that more parks and gardens would positively influence young people, decrease crime, and bolster community spirit. At present, the area has few parks and gardens, but a large demand for such spaces. Recommendations to improve park and garden facilities include:

- Create small, informal pocket parks throughout the area.
- Increase the availability of community gardens.
- Develop an indoor recreational facility.
- Link parks and gardens together and to the Hudson River.
- Create a Safewalk through the area. A Safewalk is an actual land use, designed and constructed by local residents, to connect people with the places they want to frequent.
Transportation, Parking, and Commercial Development

Transportation recommendations focus on mitigating impacts of the Collar City Bridge and improving pedestrian mobility. Street locations that need sidewalk improvements, painting, striping and installation of walk/don't walk signals, and traffic calming measures have been identified.

Parking problems are concentrated around Hedley Park Place on River Street. However, as the area revitalizes, more housing and commercial development may bring additional parking problems. Recommendations to improve parking conditions include:

- Develop a system of shared parking.
- Design consistent signage for public parking lots.
- Incorporate good design features in all existing and future parking lots.
- Examine the feasibility of constructing a parking garage for the River Street commercial area.

Commercial development is sorely needed. The lack of stores makes it expensive and inconvenient for residents to purchase their daily needs. It also contributes to traffic and pedestrian safety problems. Strategies to encourage increased commercial development are as follows:

- Simplify existing regulations to facilitate conversion of old warehouses for new uses.
- Increase police protection.
- Recruit businesses that can provide currently lacking goods and services.
- Use the neighborhood designation as an Enterprise Community to attract commercial development.
- Invest in street, parking, and urban design improvements.
- Construct a parking garage when justified by demand.
- Form a Business Improvement District (BID)

Housing: Rehabilitation and Infill

In order to revitalize north central Troy, affordable and sound housing needs to be developed in appropriate locations. Rehabilitation of existing units can strengthen the fabric of the community. Infill housing, placed on vacant or underutilized lots, and designed to fit in architecturally with existing buildings, can improve community appearance and expand housing opportunities. Recommendations include the following:
Try to rebuild whole blocks rather than isolated individual dwellings. A concentration of effort will yield a higher rate of success.

- Encourage public/private partnerships to facilitate rehabilitation and infill housing.
- Transfer city-owned lots to TRIP or other agencies to be used for infill housing.
- Offer incentive programs and assistance for home buyers and renovators.

Strategic steps can be taken to attract more middle income people, and provide enhanced rental and homeownership opportunities. An important goal for north central Troy is to develop new housing that benefits, rather than displaces, current residents.

Urban Design

Urban design means the creation of places that function well and look attractive. Even small improvements can increase comfort levels, generate neighborhood pride, expand pedestrian activity, and promote care for public spaces. The urban design section offers guidelines which can be applied to all of the physical improvements recommended in this plan. New development should capitalize on north central Troy's rich architectural heritage, maintaining a similarity of scale, building material, color, detailing, and density. Specific design recommendations are given for historic building renovation, commercial buildings, plazas, parks, streets and riverside development.

This plan describes many opportunities for revitalization, but also acknowledges the constraints facing north central Troy. The City of Troy is experiencing serious fiscal problems. Funding for urban investments will require assistance from other levels of government as well as public/private partnerships. The studio members understand that changes in the physical landscape will not magically solve deep-seated social and economic problems. Physical design is only a part of the equation, which must include economic revitalization, job generation, crime prevention, and the rebuilding of the social fabric of the community.

The steps required to address these problems go far beyond the scope of this plan, or any plan that focuses on the physical environment. But there is a connection between physical design and community livability. The physical environment reflects back to residents an image of their community, and even small changes can begin to stake out spaces of pride rather than despair, of involvement rather than indifference. Therefore, it is worthwhile to create a stock of ideas for community improvement that can be brought into play as funds and political support allow. A certain optimism is necessary for any positive change to occur. In the end, the impetus for change must come from within the community. However, this report can support that process by providing an improved database for TRIP and a body of specific suggestions for community improvement.

Executive Summary
INTRODUCTION

The City of Troy is facing serious challenges in the 1990s. Like many older cities in the northeast, Troy has lost jobs and population to the suburbs. The downtown contains a wealth of historic architecture, but also has many vacancies. Adjacent to the downtown, in north central Troy, crime is high, housing conditions are poor, and many buildings are in disrepair. However, certain blocks are vital and whole, and there is great potential to build upon existing strengths. Many residents are optimistic that the area will improve. The City of Troy, local nonprofit agencies, and the business community are all involved in revitalization efforts.

North central Troy is strategically located immediately north of the downtown, and is the first neighborhood in Troy that drivers see when they enter the city on the Collar City Bridge. It also includes the River Street commercial district which draws customers from the entire Capital District. The future of this area is linked to the future of the rest of the city, and improvement in its housing stock and urban amenities can only help to strengthen the health of the city as a whole.

In the Fall of 1995 students from the Urban and Regional Planning Program in the Department of Geography and Planning at the University at Albany (SUNY) conducted a planning studio in north central Troy. The Troy Rehabilitation and Improvement Program (TRIP) served as community liaison for the project. The purpose of the studio was to:

- develop a comprehensive Geographic Information System database for the neighborhood,
- determine the area’s strengths, weaknesses, and most pressing needs,
- provide both short and long term recommendations for community improvement.

The studio members made a concerted effort to determine the community’s view of its problems and opportunities. While an extended, full-scale citizen participation program was not feasible, interviews were conducted with residents and professionals who work within the community. These interviews revealed a fairly consistent set of concerns that could be used as a basis for planning recommendations.

Due to limits of time and funding, the studio could not produce a comprehensive plan for north central Troy. The GIS task by itself used up more than half of the total time dedicated to the project. However, it was feasible for the students to divide into four small groups, each concentrating on an issue that was considered important by the community. Each group produced a brief analysis of existing conditions, identifying opportunities and constraints. Then, they offered short-term, medium-term, and long-term recommendations for community improvement. The four groups are as follows:

Introduction
(1) Community Gardens and Parks

*Community gardens and parks* are an important resource for any neighborhood. They improve the community's appearance, provide focal points for interaction, and serve as convenient locations for outdoor activities. Green spaces of all kinds need to be planned as a coherent system that matches community needs, fits in with surrounding land uses, and forms a continuous system where possible.

(2) Transportation, Parking, and Commercial Development

*Commercial development* is a way of providing jobs for area residents, while at the same time improving the city's tax base and giving residents of the neighborhood access to goods and services. *Adequate parking and transportation* are crucial to the neighborhood's development because of the link between new commercial establishments, housing, increased traffic and parking problems. Transportation issues in this neighborhood must also be addressed to assure pedestrian safety and resident access to areas outside of the immediate neighborhood.

(3) Housing: Rehabilitation and Infill

North central Troy has many structures suitable for rehabilitation and an abundance of vacant land that could be used for infill housing. The area also has a need for decent, affordable housing. Current efforts to revitalize the area need continuing support. In addition to increasing the number of safe, affordable housing units, rehabilitation and infill help to rebuild the urban fabric, replacing vacant lots and abandoned buildings with sound structures that reestablish the integrity of individual blocks.

(4) Urban Design

Urban design is about more than just community appearance. It also means providing the features that make an urban area feel safe and comfortable, a place that people want to frequent and maintain. Many of these features are relatively small, but they add up. Urban design improvements, based upon the specific character of the neighborhood, can increase neighborhood pride and strengthen the commitment of residents to improve their community. North central Troy has a rich historical heritage that can serve as a foundation for appropriate urban design strategies.

The recommendations found in this plan are preliminary. They are based upon several months of research, field work, and interviews. However, many more months of work would be required to develop more detailed plans for implementation. This document is not a substitute for a comprehensive revitalization plan for north central Troy, but it does accomplish two tasks. First, it provides a state-of-the-art GIS database which can be used by TRIP in their construction and rehabilitation activities. Second, it provides a stock of ideas for community improvement, at a range of time scales and costs. The studio members hope that the residents of Troy will make use of these resources and continue their ongoing revitalization efforts.
NORTH CENTRAL TROY: LOCATION MAP

(Source: *Upstate New York City Street Maps*, Freeport, Me.: DeLorme Mapping, 1990.)
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

by Michael Welti

There was a time, she says, when you didn’t have to explain to people that Troy is north of Albany: “Troy was a great industrial center in the 19th century.”

Donna Halvorsen quoting Diana S. Waite in “Historic Troy Buildings on National Register,” Times Union, 26 February 1973

Troy is situated on a narrow, low-lying plateau along the eastern shore of the Hudson River. This location, at the confluence of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers, was once a small portion of the lands owned by the Van Rensselaer family. The city was initiated in the 1780s, over a century after the Dutch settlement at Fort Orange (Albany) approximately ten miles to the south. The city went through a period of rapid growth during the nineteenth century. During this period, two industries propelled its growth, the iron industry and the shirt-and-collar industry. It was a major center of the industrial revolution in America. Although still referred to as the “Collar City”, these industries are no longer located in Troy. However, beautiful residential buildings, a symbol of the wealth that accompanied its industrial power, are still found throughout the city and large industrial buildings, once bustling factories, can be found along the river. In fact, much of the city’s charm and potential still lies in the remnants of its industrial past.

Troy was not the first major settlement north of the City of Albany. Beginning in 1771, when Abraham Jacob Lansing subdivided a portion of his lands into building lots, immigrants from New England began to stream into the Village of Lansingburgh. Lansingburgh, popularly referred to as Nieuw Stadt (New City) to distinguish it from Oude Stadt (Old City as Albany was known), received its first charter on April 5, 1790.¹

To the south were three farms owned by Jacob I., Jacob D., and Matthias Van der Heyden. Although not eager to subdivide their lands, by 1786 the rapid growth of Lansingburgh convinced them that they could realize greater profits by doing so than by farming. The middle farm, owned by Jacob D. Van der Heyden, was the last to be subdivided. However this location, laid out in a grid modeled after Philadelphia, became the center of what is now Troy. Jacob D. called this new village Vanderheyden but the earlier names of Ashley’s Ferry and Ferry Hook were still commonly used. Many of those who came to the new village came from New England and did not like the Dutch name. On January 5, 1789 they met at Ashley’s Tavern (corner of Division and River Streets) and renamed the village Troy. Thomas Phelan, in The Hudson Mohawk Gateway,

points out that, “The new name was not a surprising choice in a young nation modeled after Greek democracy and captivated by classical styles in architecture.” The village of Troy received its first charter in 1791 and the city was incorporated in 1816.2

During the 19th century, Troy grew at a rapid rate. Using the Poestenkill and Wynantskill Rivers, which flow down into the Hudson, as sources of power and its strategic location along the Hudson for transportation, Troy became a center of the American Industrial Revolution. The iron industry in south Troy had its start in the first decade of the century. Small mills located along the Wynants Kill opened as early as 1807. Due to growing markets and the efforts of a number of entrepreneurs and inventors, the industry grew steadily in the first half of the century.3

Four major enterprises eventually dominated the iron, and later the steel, industry in Troy: the Albany Iron Works, the Rensselaer Iron Works, the Bessemer Steel Works, and the Burden Iron Works4 The Bessemer Steel Works, opened in 1863 by three Troy entrepreneurs, converted iron to steel for the first time in Troy just two years later. During the Civil War, these companies played an important role in supplying the Union army. For example, the Albany Iron Works produced the rivets and metal plates that fortified the ironclad ship Monitor and Henry Burden’s company, later named the Burden Iron Company by his sons, produced horseshoes for the cavalry.5 In 1880, the first three companies (above) were combined to create the Albany and Rensselaer Iron and Steel Company which five years later became the Troy Iron and Steel Company. This conglomeration and the Burden company combined to employ 2,500 men in that year.6 Overall 4,500 men, one of every four males over the age of fourteen in the city, worked in an iron mill or foundry in 1880.7 The huge complexes that employed them were generally located south of downtown along the Hudson River.

The tremendous growth in the iron and steel industry that occurred from the Civil War forward to 1880 and beyond was mirrored in the population growth of Troy as a whole. From 39,235 residents in 1860, the city grew to 56,747 in 1880. Most of the residents were either immigrants

3Ibid., 20-21.


5Rensselaer County Historical Society.

7Walkowitz, 22.
or the children of immigrants. In 1860, nearly three out of every five persons fell into this category and by 1880 the figure had increased to two out of every three.  

Figure 1. Map of north central Troy in 1876.

However, Troy was not dominated by only one major industry. Detachable collar manufacturing and laundering, which started on a small scale in the late 1820s, was joined by the detachable cuff in 1845 and grew into a substantial textile industry by 1880. Employing almost exclusively women, many of these factories were located just north of downtown in north central Troy (the study area for this project). Arthur James Weise, author of *City of Troy and Its Vicinity* (1886) describes collar and cuff manufacturing as "Troy's leading industry" and goes on to note that:

Now not less than seven thousand girls and women, aided by adapted machinery, earn annually more than a million and a quarter dollars by doing the work required of them in the manufacture of about 4 million dozens of collars and cuffs.9

The "Collar City" produced collars, cuffs, and shirts that had a reputation nationwide. These products were sold in salesrooms in cities such as New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and even San Francisco. Troy was also the place where Sanford L. Cluett invented a process that allowed cotton to be Sanforized, or preshrunk, before being manufactured into clothing.10

Among the major textile manufacturers that had factories along Federal and River Streets were:11

- George B. Cluett, Bro. & Co. (later Cluett Peabody & Co., Inc.) - 441 to 479 River St., part of which is the current location of Hedley Park Place.
- H.C. Curtis & Co. - 421 and 423 River St.
- George P. Ide & Co. - northwest corner of River St. and Hutton
- Holmes & Ide - 13-23 Federal St.
- Beirmeister & Spicer - 481 and 483 River St.
- Joseph Bowman & Sons - 57 and 59 Federal St.

By the early part of this century, Cluett Peabody employed nearly six thousand people in its plant on River Street and, on an individual basis, throughout Rensselaer County. It was one of the biggest textile manufacturers in the world.12

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10Ibid, 74-86.

11Ibid.

12Rensselaer County Historical Society, 148.
During this period, women played an increasingly important role in the industrial growth of Troy. Never before had such large numbers of women worked outside of the home. It was not unusual for women in the textile industry to work fourteen hour days for relatively low pay.  

Troy was a leader in the labor movement nationwide and, as with the men in the iron and steel industries, these conditions eventually led women to demand shorter hours, better pay, and a safer work environment. Thomas Phelan notes:

"Phelan, 49."

"Ibid, 59-61."
The prosperity that accompanied Troy’s industrial power led to the construction of many spectacular residential, commercial, and public buildings. Wealthy industrialists acquired the services of notable architects such as Philip Hooker, Stanford White, George Post, Frederick Withers, Marcus F. Cummings, Marcus Reynolds, Alexander Jackson Davis, Ithiel Town, and James Dakin. Tiffany stained glass windows adorned (and still do) a number of buildings, and art and culture were strongly supported by influential members of the community.15 The physical manifestation of this prosperity can still be felt in Troy today.

Even during the prosperous times, Troy endured some difficult moments. A notable example occurred on May 10, 1862. On that day a spark from a passing boat ignited the wooden bridge which connected Troy and Green Island. Built by the Rensselaer and Saratoga Railroad in 1835, the bridge was located on the site of the current Green Island Bridge. High winds blowing out of the north and west spread the flames into downtown Troy. The fire engulfed seventy-five acres of the city’s business section but only a small portion of north central Troy was affected.16

The twentieth century has witnessed tremendous change in the City of Troy. Early in the century the city continued to prosper and the future looked bright (see artist’s rendition of Troy in 2016). However, changes were occurring in the national distribution of industry that would have as profound an effect on Troy as they did on other small cities in the northeast. People and industries were moving south and west. Technology was changing rapidly and local labor unrest made it even more difficult for Troy to compete. Late in the nineteenth century, the iron and steel industry had already started to decline in Troy. The introduction of the Bessemer process for converting iron to steel, used here for the first time in the United States, only slowed the decline. But by the turn of the century, steel production was shifting away from the northeast to the coal regions of the mid-west. The textile industries fared better for a while but eventually competition from the south would contribute to their decline as well.17

Through the 1920s, the manufacture and laundry of detachable collars and cuffs continued in north central Troy. But soon after, the popularity of this style disappeared and the industry faded fast. In 1970, the last of the collar laundries, Triangle Collar Makers at 621 River St., closed due to a lack of business. At that time, only two manufacturers of detachable collars and cuffs

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16Phelan, 25.

17Ibid, 65.
Figure 3. An artist's conception of Troy in the year 2016, drawn around 1916.
remained; Joseph Bowman & Sons, 409 River St. which filled orders for the armed services, and Nurses Collars of Troy, 2282 Fifth Ave., which made collars for choirs and college graduation gowns.¹⁸

Troy’s population reached a high of 76,800 in 1910.¹⁹ From that point, it continued to decline as industry moved away and people began to leave the city for life in the suburbs. This process was accelerated after World War II when government policies facilitated the process of suburbanization.

In addition, two NYS Department of Transportation plans contributed to the deterioration of downtown Troy. The first, and most important, was a 1948 plan to build a north-south arterial from the Menands Bridge, right through downtown, and on north towards Lansingburgh. It would have traversed the Central Business District along Sixth Avenue and, north of Hoosick Street, would have turned to cross River Street at about the point where River becomes Second Avenue. Although the route was never built, anticipation of its construction caused property owners in its proposed path to neglect these parcels. According to the City of Troy Housing and Community Economic Development Study, prepared by EastWest Planning & Development Associates, approximately 1,400 housing units were demolished in the 1960s along this corridor. Between 1970 and 1974 another 700 demolitions took place.²⁰ A second plan, which was built, called for the upgrade of Hoosick Street to meet regional transportation needs along Route 7. The Collar City Bridge, opened on August 14, 1980 was the centerpiece of this plan. It too had a profound impact on the condition of housing in its immediate vicinity and on the cohesiveness of the surrounding community in north central Troy.

Although struggling to recoup from its losses, Troy has a tremendous amount of potential: a prime, unobstructed location along the Hudson River, two fine colleges in the heart of downtown, and a significant and visible historical past manifest in some of the finest architecture in the Capital Region. Building on these resources, and an emerging identity as a regional center for technology and fine restaurants, Troy is poised to emerge from its decline as it enters the next century.


¹⁹EastWest Planning & Development Associates, Section 1, p. 2.

²⁰Ibid.
“Hollywood comes here to make movies, and tourists like to see the sights. There’s no reason why we can’t take advantage of these attributes and make our business community strong. Once someone has success, it snowballs and others join in.”

John Hedley, owner of Hedley Park Place on River Street, Troy

Resources for Historical Background Section


Parker, Joseph A. “Last of Special Collar Laundries Closes in Troy.” The Record, 26 September 1970.


A special thank you to the Rensselaer County Historical Society and to the Troy Public Library for their assistance with the research for this chapter.
EXISTING CONDITIONS

North central Troy has a mixture of residential, industrial, and commercial uses which evolved from a working class neighborhood that served the industries of Troy during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The area was once the vibrant site of mills, warehouses, heavy industry, and worker housing. Today, building and housing conditions have deteriorated and commercial activity has decreased. A mix of single and multiple family housing of varied ages, sizes, and conditions predominates, with commercial activity concentrated along the major thoroughfares. Many vacant lots are scattered throughout the neighborhood.

Physical Conditions

The study area is bounded by Middleburgh, Federal, River and 10th Streets and is bisected by Hoosick Street (Route 7). The Hudson River flows along the western edge. In most places, the river bank is steep, and residential or commercial uses often continue to the edge of the bank. The topography along River Street is flat, but the land slopes quickly up in an easterly direction towards 10th Street. Mount Olympus, found along 5th Avenue in the northern section of the study area, is an undeveloped, high rock outcropping overlooking the area.

Building conditions vary considerably. The students performed a visual survey of the study area (examining exterior features only) and determined that the majority of buildings (56%) are in good condition, with defects that are correctable with normal maintenance. Approximately 15% of the buildings are new, near new, or rehabilitated. Another 5% of the buildings are substandard and 7% are abandoned. The remaining buildings are in fair condition (17%).

Six parcels in the neighborhood are used for community gardens and eleven others contain parks or recreational facilities. Vacant lots have been created over the years as buildings have been demolished and not replaced. Sidewalk conditions in north central Troy are generally good, but in certain sections sidewalks are in poor condition or lacking entirely. About half of the parcels in the area are lined with street trees.

Demographics

Data for this section was taken from EastWest Planning & Development Associates, City of Troy Housing and Economic Development Study (Troy, N.Y.: EastWest Planning & Development Associates, 1994) and from Sarah Love, Collar and Cuff Heritage Area of Riverspark Urban Cultural Park in Troy (1995).

General demographic trends for the City of Troy show a steady decline in population since 1950. Troy's population is expected to continue to decline at a modest rate. Average household size in Troy has also declined to 2.37 persons per household in 1990 compared to 2.9 in 1970. African
Americans represent the largest minority group in Troy with 7.4% of the population. Asian Americans are second with 2.9% followed by those of Hispanic origin with 1.6%.

Troy’s median age is 29.3 years, however, the number of people aged 75 and older has increased. The median household income in Troy in 1990 was $23,362, but income levels are lower than in other areas of the Albany-Schenectady-Troy MSA ($32,416 in 1990) as well as in Rensselaer County ($31,958). Over half of Troy’s households are of low or moderate income levels. Approximately one third of all households have very low incomes as defined by the U.S. Census. Overall, 17.2% of Troy residents are living at or below the poverty level.

The study area for this project consists of portions of four census tracts: 404, 405, 406, and 407. In the absence of a block-level analysis precisely matched to the study area, these census tracts can be used as a rough proxy for the north central Troy study area. These four census tracts account for over 17.3% of Troy’s population. Between 1980 and 1990, they lost 10% of their population—one of the highest population declines in the City. The percentage of the population living below the poverty level varies from between 19% and 36%. Median household incomes are less than the median for the City. Unemployment is higher than for the rest of the city by about 13%. The school drop out rate is high. For example, in Tract 404, less than half of the people 25 years and older have received a high school diploma and the dropout rate is 18.5%. This compares to 2.2% for the overall Troy School District. The other tracts have similar characteristics.

Specific demographic conditions in north central Troy illustrate some of the difficulties facing this area. The four census tracts within which the study area is embedded have 31% of all Troy households receiving public assistance, 25% of all residents lacking a high school diploma, 47.6% of the African Americans, and 29.1% of the Hispanics found in Troy. The poverty rate is almost four times that of the rest of Rensselaer County and the unemployment rate is twice that of the county. The teenage pregnancy rate for 15 to 19 year olds is twice that of the state.

ZONING

The existing zoning for north central Troy reflects the area’s historical evolution. When Troy was a large industrial center, factories and warehouses bordered the Hudson River along River Street, while the areas to the east contained residences for workers along with an assortment of businesses. The southern half of the area was directly adjacent to the downtown and continues some of its commercial uses. There is a large enclave of industrial activity in the northern half of the study area, between 6th Avenue and 8th Street.
The zoning ordinance defines six acceptable uses in north central Troy. These include:

**R3** Multi-family Residential - Medium Density
**R4** Urban Neighborhood Residential (Intended to stabilize and upgrade the city's oldest and most well established neighborhoods)
**R5** High Rise Residential - High Density
**B4** Central Commercial (Mixed land uses characteristic of the city's central business district)
**B5** Highway Commercial (Includes a wide variety of land uses requiring access to major transportation routes, e.g., warehousing, building materials, transportation terminals, auto body shops, light manufacturing, etc.)
**IND** Industrial (manufacturing, construction, chemicals, textiles, refining, etc.)

The zoning map for north central Troy is provided in Figure 4 below.

![Figure 4. North Central Troy: Existing Zoning](image-url)
THE GIS MAPPING PROJECT

by David Esposito

A major portion of this studio project was devoted to the creation of a comprehensive GIS database for north central Troy. A total of 1,082 tax parcels were digitized, streets were defined and labeled, and the thematic maps were overlaid on a raster layer showing major topographic features surrounding the study area. The study area encompasses 141.6 acres.

The tax parcels were digitized and the entire coverage was created in MapInfo format. Analysis and map generation were also run using MapInfo on a Pentium workstation. The information attached to each polygon (tax parcel) is derived from two sources:

- Real Property Services tax parcel data obtained from the City of Troy
- Field survey information gathered by students in the Planning Studio

During the field survey, students examined every parcel in the study area, recording information about land use, building condition, building material, vacant lot condition, curb/sidewalk presence and condition, street trees, hydrants, utility poles, and the presence of bars on windows.

A large number of analytical maps were generated during the research phase of the project. In this final document, six of those maps have been reproduced: Land Use, Vacant Land, Community Gardens and Parks, Existing Parking, Building Conditions, and Curb and Sidewalk Conditions.

On the following pages, the structure of the GIS database for the project is portrayed. All of the information columns from the beginning up to the second Tax Parcel ID column are derived from the RPS data. From that point to the end, the data are derived from the Planning Studio field survey.

At the conclusion of this project, the entire GIS database will be conveyed to the Troy Rehabilitation and Improvement Program (TRIP) for use in their planning activities. With this database, they will be able to access information about any parcel in the study area and generate analytical maps for a wide variety of purposes.
NORTH-CENTRAL TROY PARCEL DATA SPECIFICATION

1) FILE INFORMATION:

Size: 1.21MB
Total records: 1082
Format: MapInfo (.TAB)
Platform: Windows PC

2) GEOGRAPHIC/CARTOGRAPHIC INFORMATION:

Projection: US State Plane (New York Eastern Zone NAD 27)
Scale: 1:50 (ORIGINAL SOURCE)
Total Area: 6,168,433 square feet
Level of Geography: Tax parcel (property)

3) DETAILED TABLE INFORMATION:

Each tax parcel property polygon has the following information attached:

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<td>GRID_COORD_NORTH</td>
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<td>Trees NUMBER TREES PER PARCEL</td>
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<td>Hydrant FIRE HYDRANT PRESENCE</td>
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<td>Pole UTILITY POLE PRESENCE</td>
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<td>Window Bar WINDOW BAR PRESENCE</td>
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</table>
BUILDING A GIS FROM THE GROUND UP

GIS DATABASE

- QUALITY REVIEW AND CORRECTION
- COMBINE DATA
  - DATA CONVERSION TO USABLE FORMAT
  - GATHERING EXISTING DATA
  - CLEAN AND CORRECT
  - DIGITIZING
  - DATA INPUT
    - COLLECTING SURVEY DATA
    - ASSESSMENT OF AVAILABLE DATA
    - CONCEPTUAL DESIGN
  - PLANNING AND FINAL DESIGN
COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS

In order to develop a more accurate assessment of community needs, the studio members spent several weeks interviewing residents of north central Troy, officials with both public and nonprofit organizations, and some business people from the private sector. The interviews were lengthy, open-ended interviews that allowed the interviewees to paint a detailed picture of the community's problems and opportunities. They covered both general conditions and the four subareas defined for the studio. A total of 20 people were interviewed; 7 residents and 13 non-residents representing organizations working in north central Troy.

Summary of Interviews

Half of the interviewees felt that negative changes have occurred in north central Troy over the last ten years. Many attributed the changes to increased drug use and a general deterioration of the community. Economic, racial, and social inequalities were frequently identified as underlying causes. A common thread running through virtually all of the responses was that the area needs more jobs and community investment. Almost two-thirds of the people who were interviewed stated that drugs were the biggest single problem facing north central Troy. Other problems noted were: lack of jobs and investment, no minority representation, lack of commercial activity, lack of quality housing, racism, safety, crime, lack of parks and recreational facilities, and poor public attitudes.

Community Gardens and Parks
Eighty percent of the people interviewed felt that there were not enough parks in north central Troy. More playgrounds, community gardens, sports fields and indoor recreational facilities were desired, along with better maintenance of the existing parks. Residents felt that more opportunities for healthy recreation would help to direct children away from drug use and other criminal activities.

Housing
Infill housing was thought to be important by a third of the interviewees. Many were concerned about who would benefit from infill housing and rehabilitation. Half felt that it was important to attract more middle income residents to north central Troy. However many others voiced concern that doing so would drive out existing residents because gentrification might price them out of the housing market. These people felt that it was very important to improve housing costs and conditions, but not at the expense of current residents.
Parking and Traffic
About half of the interviewees felt that parking is a problem. However, more than two-thirds of the neighborhood residents felt that parking was a major problem, especially the lack of enough parking in front of multi-family houses. Interviewees identified many streets which posed threats to pedestrians because of fast traffic or lack of safe crossings. These streets were Hoosick Street, Federal Street, Eighth Street, River Street, Fifth Avenue, Ninth Street, Earl Street, and Tenth Street. In general, lack of crosswalks and pedestrian lights and/or wide streets with heavy traffic make it dangerous for pedestrians to cross safely.

Commercial Development
Most of those interviewed felt that there are not enough services to meet community needs. The lack of a large grocery store within the immediate area was often mentioned. Many felt that this makes it difficult for people without cars to shop for groceries. Although a few small convenience stores are present, they are perceived as being high priced and often a magnet for crime. Other elements missing in the neighborhood are health care facilities, laundromats, and fast food restaurants. Interviewees also identified a number of factors that might be discouraging businesses to locate in the area, including crime, depressed economic conditions, a bad community image, high property taxes, and competition from large retailers in the surrounding suburbs.

Urban Design
Respondents felt that cleaning up the community and repairing damaged structures would improve both the attitudes of residents and the image that the community projects to outsiders. Better maintenance of both private properties and public spaces was desired. Some interviewees felt that changes in street design were needed to enhance pedestrian safety. The streets identified as needing the most improvements were Hoosick Street, Sixth Avenue, Eighth Street, Seventh Avenue, Fifth Avenue, Federal Street, Jay Street, and Rensselaer Street. Specific design improvements mentioned included removal of overhead wires, better landscaping, replacement and repair of sidewalks, better lighting, and more effective trash cleanup.

Other Issues
Many of those interviewed felt that changes in public attitudes were necessary. They said that people need to have a stake in their community and a belief that they can influence its future. Currently, most decisions affecting the community are made by people other than the residents of the area. Lack of minority representation in city administration, police and fire departments, and the school system was cited as an example of this problem. Many interviewees agreed that more community involvement needs to be generated, with some suggesting that more home ownership would increase the number of residents willing to participate in community affairs.
Assets of North Central Troy
The list of community assets varied from person to person. Community involvement, empty and available warehouse space, the labor pool, the urban fabric, and the river were all mentioned as assets. Many of the respondents expressed optimism about the future of Troy, citing, for example, a current trend toward increased community involvement. They believed that community residents were resilient and willing to make the effort necessary to overcome persistent problems.
Introduction

Insufficient park and recreation space is a major concern of inner city residents. In 1992, after the L.A. riots, residents there ranked the importance of parks, recreation areas, and community gardens as "absolutely critical," higher than health care or business development. Improved parks and recreational opportunities can help to reduce crime, create a better business climate, and improve the overall quality of life for residents. They can also serve as a focal point for community interaction and involvement in neighborhood revitalization.

Community gardens and parks provide a safe place for children to play. Drug dealers usually stay out of gardens, especially if they are bright places with lots of activity (Hickey 1994). Streets are safer when residents have a sense of proprietorship, as Jane Jacobs pointed out more than three decades ago. Many parks and gardens actually become lively cultural centers. In some cities, gardens have been established by elementary school children on school property. These types of gardens provide educational opportunities for the children as they learn about the environment, the balance of nature, and how to care for living things.

The idea of community gardening has been a tradition in Europe since the nineteenth century. In the United States during World Wars I and II, community gardens were known as "victory gardens," and were used to increase the food supply for the war effort. In the 1960s and 1970s, community gardens experienced a revival as people rediscovered them as a constructive way to make use of underused urban land. Today, community garden programs often involve city governments, school districts, churches, and private businesses.

Community gardens are cooperative gardens divided into individual plots that are then planted and cared for by individual families. They are usually established on vacant lots. This new land use is much more attractive than a vacant lot or an empty field. In addition, it gives community members a sense of place and gets people physically involved in their community. It fosters community sharing and involvement.

Once community gardening programs are established, cities usually have difficulty in meeting the demand for the plots. The city of Troy is faced with the same problem. Currently there are four community gardens in north central Troy. There is definitely a demand for more community gardens in the area as shown by the large number of participants and the waiting lists for the current gardens.
Development of community gardens and parks often spurs a contagious urban renewal effort. When one lot in the neighborhood is well kept, the neighbors become more interested in keeping their own property in good shape. Examples of this can be seen in low-income areas of the South Bronx. Here, where community gardens are established, “a number of city owned and private apartment houses and tenements up and down the block are getting new roofs and new boilers and new windows. For the first time one building owner has been offered a homeowner’s insurance policy” (Hiss 1992). Many times a city will install sidewalks and other amenities in front of well kept gardens because these are places where the city has something to display that it is proud of. Children of the area learn that their own individual efforts can add up to a big change in community appearance.

North central Troy is an urban neighborhood having few resources, but a great need for parks, open space, and recreational facilities. The community interviews confirmed that there are not enough open spaces and recreational areas in the neighborhood. In addition, residents feel strongly that a community center in the neighborhood would bring the different community organizations together and would provide a place for children’s activities and recreational facilities after school and on holidays. There are existing structures in the neighborhood which could easily be converted into such a facility.

Very positive things usually come from the establishment of community gardens and parks in a neighborhood. “Open space is the only way you can give a neighborhood focus that is always visible from the streets—a garden or park brings all the strengths of a community out into the open” (Hiss, 1992). However, it is crucial that any new parks be placed only in locations where they will be used and maintained. Isolated parks can become hangouts for illegal activities. Therefore, any new park sites must be chosen very carefully and in full consultation with community residents who know the neighborhood well.

Opportunities

- A large number of residents can become involved in the planning, construction, and maintenance of parks and gardens.
- State and federal grants are available for these types of projects.
- Key organizations already exist to help build more parks and gardens. Neighborhood associations like TRIP and Community Gardens of the Capital District, Inc. are well-known in the community and can assist with the preparation of grant proposals and project planning.
North central Troy is rich with the history of the collar and cuff industry. This can be exploited to enhance recreational and tourist opportunities. The state government can play an active role in increasing awareness of the significant history of the area.

Cooperation between businesses, citizens, and private groups is a necessity. There are opportunities to forge new ties between these different actors.

Parks and gardens provide many ecological, recreational, and educational benefits for the community. Young children will benefit through more recreational opportunities. School aged children can become involved in sports and other activities near their homes. Older members of the community will profit from the chance to grow their own food in a community garden.

There is the potential to link existing and new parks and gardens together into a Safewalk (see page 38).

Constraints
While the benefits of parks and gardens are clear, their creation is not a simple matter. The following constraints should be taken into account in any plans for improvement of this nature.

- Some vacant lots are rubble-filled or polluted, making conversion to parks and gardens more difficult and costly.
- It may be difficult to obtain long-term leases on some properties.
- Lots may be unavailable in the locations that are needed to create an interconnected system.
- Conflicts may exist with adjacent land uses.
- Issues of insurance, vandalism, and crime may deter the city or nonprofit groups from assuming responsibility for parks and community gardens.
- Care must be taken to place parks and playgrounds in the appropriate locations, with sufficient observation from area residents, or they can turn into liabilities rather than assets (Jacobs 1961).
- Construction and maintenance of the Safewalk would require a considerable amount of leadership and administration.
Recommendations

Phase 1: Short-term Recommendations (1 to 5 years)

At first, priority should be given to the creation of some simple areas for recreational use. A few safe, well-designed facilities would provide quick results and lay the groundwork for later projects. Eventually, the community’s system of parks, gardens and pathways could form a system connecting schools, stores, and residential areas—generating more pedestrian traffic through the area and reducing the number of isolated high-crime locations. As with all facilities, an ongoing program of maintenance must be in place or the facilities will deteriorate.

☐ Create Pocket Parks

Pocket parks should be the public focus for each neighborhood. Single lots will be very suitable for this type of park. The Vacant Land map on the following page shows that there are a number of potential sites for pocket parks. They should be located near streets, residential areas, and retail uses, if possible. The design should create an atmosphere that encourages informal gatherings. For high density population areas such as this, Calthorpe (1993) recommends that one to four acre pocket parks be placed within two blocks of every residence. This scale allows gardens, strolling areas, picnic areas, and tot-lots.

Figure 5. Pocket Park (Source: Calthorpe 1993, 90)
The pocket parks should be slightly different in each area, with simple, low-maintenance plantings that are appropriate for the locale. Recommended plants include flowering perennial flowers and herbs (for butterflies, birds and insects), and berry-producing shrubs and trees (for birds and small mammals). As a minimum, grass and flowers are critical. Other plants may be used, but they must be chosen for safety and view. Prickly bushes that prevent someone from hiding are appropriate. Trees should be trimmed for full view under the canopy. Pocket parks should be designed as convenient, safe, pleasant places to walk to or sit in. Facilities should include adequate lighting, a bench or picnic table, trash receptacles and, in some cases, fencing. Signs to interpret and describe the park's theme should be placed to appeal to students or other visitors. Linkage of these parks in later phases will form the basis for the development of an urban greenway in Troy.

Create More Community Gardens

The Community Gardens and Parks map following page 32 illustrates locations of existing community gardens. Efforts to create more community gardens should be coordinated with Community Gardens of the Capital District, Inc. Any vacant lot is appropriate, but it is recommended that guidelines for garden selection, as determined by Community Gardens of the Capital District, Inc. be followed.

![Figure 6. A community garden in Troy, New York.](image_url)
Where possible, the City of Troy should allow for the inexpensive transfer of city-owned lots to appropriate neighborhood associations or to the Community Garden program. Well maintained plots are easier to convert to gardens than asphalt. Figure 6 illustrates the layout of an existing community garden.

Develop More Playgrounds and Small Sport Facilities

New parks should be mid-size—at least two acres. Uses should include baseball, basketball, and tennis. Also appropriate would be well maintained grassy lots for informal outdoor games. An important component of this phase is to construct an indoor recreational facility. This recreation center should be associated or linked with parks and schools to help foster a sense of identity in the neighborhood. A facility such as this was identified during the interviews as a pressing need for young people in the area. In addition to year-round recreational activities for neighborhood residents, jobs can be created in development, construction, and maintenance of these parks and facilities. An old factory or warehouse could be converted for this purpose. Existing structures along River St. might be appropriate.

Figure 7. Neighborhood residents using existing park facility.
All parks and gardens developed in phase 1 should be designed with the following criteria in mind:

- Facilities must be clean—trash cans and litter patrol will be necessary.
- Parks should avoid locations where graffiti is invited.
- Parks should not be placed in oddly shaped parcels or out of the way places.

It is important that all facilities constructed in Phase 1 be consistent with the character of the area (See Urban Design section). Views and linkages to the street are part of the safety design, and should be reinforced. For example, landscaping should not prevent views into a park. There must be sturdy (permanently installed) benches having no advertising on them. Lighting must be carefully planned so that there is enough light at night, but not too much to make it look like a prison.

**Phase 2: Medium-term Recommendations (5 to 10 years)**

- **Link Parks and Gardens Together and with the Hudson River**

Pocket parks, community gardens, and recreational parks should be linked together to form a unified green trail. River Street at the southwestern end of the study area should be an important destination, especially as it becomes more fully developed. Providing river access is an important goal of Phase 2. The trail should be connected with the proposed River boardwalk. Pocket parks and gardens in the northeastern section of the study area near Eighth St., Ninth St., and Tenth St. can be linked to the central portion of the area and then to the river. This linkage will not only create another recreational and cultural opportunity for neighborhood residents, but will allow easy pedestrian travel to downtown Troy. In order to unify the two sides of the neighborhood and to create a greenway, a pedestrian crossing of some sort must be put in place over Route 7 (see the Transportation section for a discussion of safe pedestrian crossing mechanisms). The result of this work will be to create a connected trail of green space that would permit biking, walking, or running. In this manner, the linkages not only create a greenway, but can be expanded into a fitness trail. Where appropriate, the trail can be provided with an obstacle course along the path for young children. It will be necessary for the design to include plans for proper lighting, resting stops, trash receptacles, and public restrooms. The design should heavily favor safety and aesthetics.

- **Utilize Mount Olympus**

Mount Olympus offers a unique opportunity to develop a cultural or recreational facility. It provides visitors with a unique view of the river and the rest of the city, and should be incorporated into the greenway. Figure 8 shows the existing conditions on Mount Olympus.
Phase 3: Long-term Recommendations (10 to 20 years):

The goal of Phase 1 is to provide safe, desirable, and usable parks and gardens throughout the neighborhood. Phase 2 expands on those facilities, provides access to the river, and connects all parks, gardens, and recreational opportunities into a greenway and a fitness trail. The final phase is to package the entire system into the Troy Safewalk. A Safewalk is a designated route connecting people with places they want to frequent. The early phases of this plan call for the creation of facilities that people will safely want to visit. The Safewalk links them all together. The key point of a Safewalk is that the connections are more important than having a perfectly contiguous park-like trail. It should connect crime watch locations with schools, stores and other portions of the neighborhood.

The Safewalk (and its park and garden components) will be a designated route. It is recommended that, in this phase, the route be enhanced with a new, uniform surface, and incorporate benches, flowers, trees, and grass along the portions that connect to the various parks. Streets that already have parks, gardens, and street trees can be most easily incorporated into a Safewalk route. A Safewalk logo should be designed and signs placed along the route.
Litter patrol will be necessary for maintenance. Lighting along the entire route should be carefully planned in terms of the shape of the light source, the glow, and the look of the pole in daytime. Whenever possible, new electric lines should be buried to prevent visual clutter along the path. Other activities could develop along the Safewalk in time. For example, storefront owners can identify their location as a safe zone for children who are lost or need help. Residents can have watchful eyes along the street as well.

In order for the Safewalk to be developed, local control must be created. Local residents must be involved in all phases to help identify key locations to be included, and to offer design ideas. They will also help pick the final route and all the "furnishings"—benches, equipment, and plants. Local residents should also be hired to do the work, and later, the maintenance of the facilities.

Safewalks have been successfully developed in several U.S. cities. Canoga Park, California has a greenway where designated adults wear special hats and patrol the path to help children home after school. In Los Angeles, the Watts Tower Crescent Greenway (along an old railroad right-of-way) has a paved bike-pedestrian path, with lawns, trees, and shrubs. Houston, Texas has a Safewalk along a rail corridor, as does North Richmond, California and other cities. Nashville, Tennessee has the first official Safewalk. Nashville bears many similarities with Troy, and their
The Nashville Safewalk includes access to a park, a community center, tennis courts, ball fields, and a lake, as well as links with numerous schools.

**Funding Sources**

The Safewalk is a proposed new land use that has many opportunities for funding. Other cities putting a Safewalk in place have found large sums of money for the work. For example, Houston secured $4 million. Funding sources include:

- ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act)
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Recent federal anti-crime legislation provides money for lighting and phone systems
- UPAR (Urban Parks and Recreation funds rehabilitation of facilities)
- National Recreational Trails Fund (Troy may be eligible for part of New York's share of this money)
- Community Development Block Grants
- Private funds from businesses and other organizations
- The State Youth Corps (run by Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation) could be utilized for labor.
TRANSPORTATION, PARKING, & COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

Transportation, parking, and commercial development are related concerns in inner city neighborhoods such as north central Troy. For example, the availability of parking influences a neighborhood’s ability to attract residents, shoppers, and commercial enterprises. This is especially true in older cities where each new business struggles to find a sufficient number of parking spaces to meet requirements and to satisfy the demands of shoppers and workers who are accustomed to convenient free parking outside of the city. In addition, residents in an economically depressed neighborhood such as north central Troy often must walk or use mass transportation to get to stores, jobs, and services that are no longer found where they live. Therefore, the condition of the pedestrian environment is very important. This chapter addresses these issues, and has been divided into three sections: transportation, parking and commercial development.

Transportation

A glaring transportation-related problem in north central Troy is the impact of Route 7 (Hoosick Street) on the neighborhood. In many ways, the integrity of this community was sacrificed to the regional transportation network when the Collar City Bridge was constructed in the late 1970s. The bridge, with its wide roadways and on/off ramps, has created a serious physical division of the neighborhood. A 1992 NYSDOT traffic study found that 37,500 vehicles traveled on this route during an average weekday, significantly encroaching on pedestrian safety and ease of mobility. In addition, the highway provides convenient access for those involved in the drug traffic that cripples the community. Our recommendations focus, therefore, on ways to mitigate the impact of the bridge and associated roadways while improving pedestrian mobility throughout the study area.

Pedestrian access and safety is crucial because many neighborhood residents do not own cars and must walk to work, school, shopping, and necessary social services. In several locations it is difficult for pedestrians to cross important roadways. For example Hoosick, Federal, and River...
Streets all carry large volumes of traffic. The community interviews indicated that many people cross Federal Street in order to get downtown where critical social services are located, and cross Hoosick Street in order to shop at Troy Plaza. Improvements to pedestrian roadway crossings and sidewalks should be a transportation priority. We have identified a number of crossings that require attention below. In addition, many locations that are either lacking sidewalks or have sidewalks in poor condition will require work in the future.

Continued access to CDTA bus service is crucial to many residents. While the current level of service is adequate, some improvements could be made. For example, CDTA has been building bus shelters in many locations around the Capital District to allow riders to wait comfortably for their bus. CDTA should be encouraged to build them in north central Troy.

Other modes of transportation should also receive attention. Bicycle improvements, such as bike lanes and trails, should be added where feasible. Bicycle transportation can be a low cost means of travel to work and a valuable recreational asset. It combines affordability with social and environmental responsibility.
Opportunities

We have identified a number of opportunities and constraints that will influence transportation improvements in north central Troy:

- The neighborhood is already pedestrian oriented. The pedestrian infrastructure is quite good in parts of the area. Sidewalks and curbs, street trees, and walk/don't walk lights already exist in some places. Opportunities exist to build upon this infrastructure.

- Despite the city's financial situation, there are several low cost alternatives for maintaining and upgrading the neighborhood's pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

- There are opportunities to link the area to downtown Troy along the river, as discussed in the Community Gardens and Parks section. Furthermore the bike path that ends in the area provides an opportunity for expanded transportation and recreation opportunities.

- There is a substantial amount of literature available concerning the improvement of pedestrian and bicycle facilities in high flow traffic areas.

- The city should capitalize on this neighborhood's designation as an Enterprise Community and seek to acquire new sources of federal funding to implement these improvements. Enterprise Communities receive special consideration for federal programs.

Constraints

- Due to the financial problems that Troy faces, it will be difficult to implement all of the following recommendations. Residents and their community organizations must work to lobby the city in order to ensure that the needs of this neighborhood receive appropriate consideration in the annual budgeting and project prioritization process.

- Although Route 7 cuts right through the center of this neighborhood and effectively divides it into four pieces, it is unlikely that regional transportation decision makers will see changes to the Collar City Bridge and its associated roadways as a high priority.

- Transportation remedies such as rerouting traffic or realigning highway routes tend to involve prohibitively high costs. These types of solutions will not be feasible in the near future.
Troy is situated in a narrow river plain. There are only a small number of roads that run north/south between downtown and Lansingburgh. Because of this it will be difficult to reduce traffic volume on the roads in our study area.

Phase 1: Short-term Recommendations (1 to 5 years)

- **Sidewalk Improvements**
  There are a number of locations that require immediate sidewalk improvements. They include:
  - Much of 5th Avenue--especially north of Hoosick St.
  - 10th Street--in the southern portion of the area
  - The north side of Federal (then Peoples) from 6th Avenue to 9th Avenue.
  - 6th Avenue north of Rensselaer St.

- **Crosswalks**
  Crosswalks on roadways two-lanes wide should be distinguished with clear painting and striping so that drivers are aware of pedestrians crossing. In conjunction with the effort to distinguish these crosswalks, traffic calming measures should be employed on these roads. Painting and striping alone at wide or heavily traveled (by automobiles) intersections is not adequate. These intersections require installation of walk/don't walk signals. In addition, the city should schedule regular maintenance of existing walk/don't walk signals throughout the area. Traffic calming measures will be discussed in greater detail below. Recommended crosswalk improvements are:

  (a) Painting and striping, and installation of walk/don't walk signals should occur at:
  - Federal Street at 5th Avenue
  - Hoosick Street at 8th Street
  - Hoosick Street at 10th Street

  (b) Painting and striping only at:
  - Peoples at 8th Street
  - Lower Hoosick Street (under the bridge) at River Street, 5th Avenue, Earl Street, and 6th Street
  - River Street at Jacob Street, Hutton Street, Hoosick Street, Vanderheyden Street, Jay Street, Rensselaer Street, North Street, and Middleburgh Street
  - 6th Avenue at Vanderheyden Street, Jay Street, Rensselaer Street, North Street and Middleburgh Street
Traffic Calming Measures
Traffic calming measures are efforts to reduce the speed of automobiles traveling through an area. These measures are important to promoting a safe pedestrian environment. Traffic calming measures include increasing police enforcement of existing speed limits, traffic signs and signals, or the addition of new stop signs and traffic lights where appropriate. In some cases, other measures such as well-marked speed bumps on residential streets might be necessary. While these measures decrease the efficiency of automobile movement through the neighborhood, that is an acceptable trade-off for improved pedestrian safety.

A preliminary look at the neighborhood reveals several locations where these types of measures would be appropriate. These include:

- River Street between Hoosick Street and Middleburgh
- Jay Street at the corner of Fifth Avenue
- 8th Street between Hoosick and Peoples

Consider “Defensible Space” Traffic Changes
Transportation decisions can impact crime and drug traffic in a neighborhood. Based on community interviews, crime and drug traffic is a major concern facing the community. Easy highway access to the region from north central Troy makes the area attractive to drug dealers and consumers. The city should conduct a study to examine the possibility of rerouting traffic on certain roads in order to make the neighborhood less accessible for drug traffic.

Oscar Newman has argued for some controversial but interesting modifications of existing neighborhoods to create “defensible space.” These include closing streets and adding strategic barriers and speed bumps to reduce outsiders’ access to a neighborhood, thereby reducing drive-through crime. Though the street closures make getting about more difficult, they also discourage outsiders from wandering into the area (Newman 1995).

Bus Shelters
CDTA should be encouraged to expand the number of bus shelters in the neighborhood. Currently there is only one, across the street from Hedley Park Place. As mentioned above, many residents in this community depend on public transportation to get to work, acquire services, and to shop.

Traffic Light Timing
Community interviews have identified the intersection of Hoosick Street and 8th Street as the scene of a number of automobile accidents. It has been suggested that the timing of the traffic light at this intersection be examined.
Low-cost Bicycle Improvements
Several low-cost bicycle improvements might encourage increased use of bicycles as a mode of short-range travel in the city. They include:

- Provide "bicycle stop lines" ahead of auto stop lines to increase rider visibility & safety.
- Require that pedestrian / bicycle circulation considerations be part of any road widening improvements.
- Promote the inclusion of bicycle parking facilities in the design of new automobile parking facilities.
- Provide benches and bike racks at employment and shopping centers.

Phase 2: Medium-term Recommendations (5 to 10 years):

Traffic Signals, Painting and Striping
Some crosswalk improvements can be delayed until this period. Installation of a traffic light, walk/don't walk signals, and painting and striping of the crosswalk are needed at the crossing of Hoosick Street at 9th Street. The west side of 8th Street at Jacob also requires painting and striping.

Pedestrian Islands
Create textured pedestrian islands in the middle of Hoosick Street at 8th, 9th, and 10th Streets. These islands would serve as pedestrian-safe zones and would be particularly useful for the elderly who might need to rest before completing their crossing of this seven-lane road. An example of this technique already exists where King and River Streets intersect with Federal Street (See Figure 11).

Pedestrian Paths and Stairways
The city should create pedestrian paths and/or stairways at intervals along the steep embankment between 6th Avenue and 8th Street. Currently there are treacherous footpaths (created by frequent pedestrian travel) at certain locations - for example, two footpaths run down the embankment from 8th Street at Hutton Street to different locations along 6th Avenue (See Figure 12). There is an existing stairway farther downtown. That stairway connects RPI to the Central Business District. Unfortunately it has fallen into disrepair and funds are still being sought to restore it.
Figure 11. A pedestrian island on River St. This feature makes it much easier and safer to cross the street.

Figure 12. Pedestrians have carved this rough footpath down an embankment.
Crosswalk Improvements
Install distinctive road textures or paving in certain crosswalks. Usually brick patterns are used for this purpose. These are more distinctive and attractive than simple painted crosswalks.

Phase 3: Long-term Recommendations (10 to 20 years):

Modify Hoosick Street
At a minimum, the character of Hoosick Street should be modified to communicate to drivers that they are passing through an urban neighborhood and must slow down. The existing signs on the Collar City Bridge have some effect, but stronger measures are warranted. Landscaping features and paving at intersections can make it clear to drivers that this portion of State Rt. 7 is not a superhighway, but rather an urban boulevard. A more drastic solution would be to remove one or more lanes from Hoosick Street, between 8th and 10th Streets. Although this measure would reduce the automobile capacity of the road, it would greatly enhance pedestrian access and reduce the road's devastating visual impact on the neighborhood.

Parking
Community interviews identified parking as a problem in north central Troy, with the more serious conflicts occurring in the southern portion of the neighborhood near the downtown. Because residential densities are modest and many residents do not own cars, the pressure on parking has been limited. However, as existing vacant buildings are renovated and infill housing is built, parking problems could intensify. In addition, new commercial development along the two commercial nodes (River Street, and 6th Avenue between Hoosick and Middleburgh), would increase the demand for parking for employees and patrons, further aggravating the parking situation.

Currently, the only part of the area experiencing increased demand for parking is around Hedley Park Place on River Street. This excellent example of the reuse of an old industrial structure has been very successful. As new companies and state government offices move into the building, the demand for parking has become a major problem. To meet this demand, many vacant lots all over the area around Hedley Park Place have been or will be converted to parking lots. This is not an ideal solution, since it detracts from the appearance of the surrounding neighborhood and has reduced the amount of land along River Street that is available for more intensive commercial use. A comprehensive approach to parking is needed, and one that is responsive to the character of the
neighborhood. Without a comprehensive, proactive approach to parking in this neighborhood, Troy will not be able to lure commercial development to the River Street commercial node.

Opportunities

- There is underutilized parking that could be used more intensely near Hedley Park Place. A shared parking system could be created. "Shared parking opportunities exist where the same parking spaces can be utilized by two or more different land uses due to differences in the principal operating hours for the uses involved" (Smith 1983, 5). This idea is already being proposed in other parts of the region.
- There are many local examples of aesthetic improvements to surface lots which can be used as models for improving parking lots and reducing their visual impact on the neighborhood.

Constraints

- The perception that parking is a problem seems greater than the current reality. This is a major problem for commercial enterprises which need to lure consumers downtown. It also might keep people from purchasing homes in the neighborhood or investing in businesses in the neighborhood. Even if parking is significantly expanded, people may continue to believe that the problem remains.
- It may be difficult to convince owners of existing underutilized parking areas to agree to shared parking scenarios.
- Parking requires a lot of land and therefore tends to be very expensive.
- Fiscal difficulties in Troy may limit the funding options for parking

Phase 1: Short-term Recommendations (1 to 5 years):

☐ Create an Inventory of Existing (Especially Underutilized) Parking Facilities

This inventory can be used to develop a plan for more efficient and intensive use of the existing spaces. Based on a partial parking survey of the area bounded by Federal Street, 6th Avenue, Hoosick Street, and the Hudson River, it was determined that there are existing spaces close to River Street (and especially to Hedley Park Place) that could potentially be used in a shared parking scenario. These include approximately 60 spaces in the St. Peter's Church lot on 5th Avenue (See Figure 13), about 40 underutilized spaces connected to a small commercial building farther down 5th on the corner of Hoosick, and the church lot on the corner of Jacob Street.
between King Street and 5th Avenue. The city should coordinate the agreements that would make these spaces available when they are not needed for their primary use.

![Figure 13. St. Peter's parking lot with Hedley Park Place in the background.](image)

- **Consistent Signage**
  In conjunction with a shared parking system, a system of consistent signage on public parking facilities should be created. This will enable drivers to locate public spaces easier. For example, there are over 100 spaces behind the commercial buildings on lower River St. (behind TRIP) that are marked "Permit Parking Only." There is no official indication of when someone can park there without a permit. Instead someone has used a marker to add the words "Weekdays, 8am to 5pm." (See Figure 14).

- **Parking Lot Design Standards**
  The City of Troy should incorporate parking lot design standards into their zoning regulations to improve the visual quality of the neighborhood. Good design elements to maintain the street facade include fencing, walls, or bushes. Furthermore, the city should request that inadequately landscaped or substandard existing lots be upgraded (See Figure 15).
Figure 14. Missing information added to a parking sign.

Figure 15. A local example of a parking lot with landscaping and a fence.
New Parking Lots
It may be necessary to convert several vacant lots to public or private parking lots. Lots should be carefully chosen and designed to minimize their visual impact on the neighborhood. Potential new parking lots include the vacant lot at the corner of River Street and Jacob Street, and the unused playground on the corner of Hoosick and 5th Avenue (for private parking for Hedley Park Place), unless another more appropriate use is found for that parcel.

Phase 2: Medium-term Recommendations (5-10 years):

Parking Structure
The city, along with River Street business owners, should examine the feasibility of constructing a parking garage near this commercial district. In addition to alleviating the current parking situation, the facility might entice new business owners to locate offices, restaurants, and shops to the area. Caution must be taken to minimize the visual impact of a garage, and especially to maintain site lines to the Hudson River.

Phase 3: Long-term Recommendations (10 to 20 years):

Explore Other Parking Options
The city and the business community should at least consider a number of other options to expand parking. For example, the plan to build a monorail from a Center Island parking facility to downtown could be reexamined. This idea was originally proposed by John Hedley several years ago. According to Mr. Hedley, the cost of developing such a system would not be much more than the cost of building several parking garages. A monorail could create an atmosphere of excitement and a progressive attitude towards the future. In addition to resolving much of the parking problem downtown and in the southern portion of north central Troy, a monorail could increase tourism in downtown Troy. A lower cost alternative to the monorail would be for the city to annex the land on Center Island for a new public parking facility and use a shuttle bus or enclosed footbridge to access downtown.

Commercial Development
The vitality of a city depends largely on the success of its economic activities. The economic performance of the City of Troy has been poor for some time. This makes it more difficult to address other problems of city life such as poor housing and the lack of jobs. The transportation and parking recommendations will improve the conditions for commercial redevelopment. In addition, this section offers some more specific recommendations for expanding commercial
activity in the north central Troy area. Since the area is small, and the boundaries somewhat artificial, several of the specific recommendations and strategies for improving local economic activities are applicable to other parts of the city as well.

**Opportunities**

- The continued success of Hedley Park Place on River Street provides an opportunity for additional commercial development. This building, the former site of the Cluett, Peabody & Co. shirt factory, was purchased by John Hedley in 1990 and converted into an office building. It is an excellent example of the successful conversion and reuse of an old, abandoned building.

- Troy's history, architecture, and proximity to the Hudson River create opportunities for continued business expansion. The success of several food establishments along the southern portion of River Street between Federal and Hoosick shows that there already is demand for these types of services in the area. These businesses take advantage of the beautiful architecture and historic atmosphere in the neighborhood. They also take advantage of their prime location next to the Hudson River.

- There is an opportunity to draw upon the experiences of business owners who have completed the difficult task of converting vacant structures on River Street. These owners have already experienced the frustration of dealing with the large number of regulations that govern such activity and they can help make the process more accommodating to other developers.

- There are already two commercial corridors within the study area. The first is located along River Street and the second is along Sixth Avenue from Hoosick to Middleburgh. Commercial development should be focused within these two nodes.

- There is a large opportunity for commercial development in the area. Several basic services such as substantial food markets or pharmacies are lacking and there is demonstrated need.

**Constraints**

- The perception, and in some areas, the reality that there is a lack of parking in the area is a constraint.

- The perception that the area is rundown, inaccessible, and unsafe is a problem for continued commercial development.
Redevelopment can be costly, especially given the age of some existing buildings. Many developers perceive redevelopment to be more costly than building in a new location and often shy away from these sites in order to avoid cleanup and demolition costs.

Due to the financial situation in the City of Troy, there is not a great deal of confidence on the part of investors. Furthermore, the leadership necessary to promote commercial development in the area has been lacking.

Phase 1: Short-term Recommendations (1 to 5 years):

- **Change Perceptions Concerning Parking in the Area**
  Eliminate the *perception* that parking is a substantial problem in our study area. Implementing the parking recommendations above will help address this concern.

- **Make the Reuse of Old Buildings Easier**
  Facilitate the conversion of old warehouses by simplifying existing regulations. These regulations should be consolidated into one document. The city, as part of its ongoing economic development process, should undertake this consolidation and actively promote conversion of existing buildings.

- **Improve Neighborhood Safety**
  Neighborhood safety has been identified as a barrier to commercial development, as well as to quality of life in general. Community groups and business leaders should work together to encourage a stronger police presence in the neighborhood. Police foot patrols have recently been established in the central business district (south of Federal Street), and this program could be extended into north central Troy.

- **Enterprise Community Opportunities**
  Use the neighborhood's designation as an Enterprise Community to attract commercial development. The Enterprise Community designation includes incentives for businesses and priority consideration for other federal programs.

- **Business Recruitment**
  The city should actively recruit businesses along the River Street commercial corridor with emphasis placed on recruiting businesses that could provide essential services currently lacking in the neighborhood. Interviews in the community identified some of these services and included businesses such as supermarkets, pharmacies, banking, laundromats, dry cleaners, and day care.
centers. The city should offer tax incentives that target businesses such as these. Furthermore, these incentives could be dependent on an agreement to hire people from the neighborhood. There are already programs in place that seek to provide job training to city residents. The city could facilitate the coordination of these programs with new businesses in the study area.

Phase 2: Medium-term Recommendations (5 to 10 years):

☐ Streetscape Improvements
The city should invest in or encourage streetscape improvements to increase the attractiveness of these commercial nodes. Please refer to the Urban Design section.

Phase 3: Long-term Recommendations (10 to 20 years):

☐ Rebuild Business Confidence
The City of Troy must improve its financial situation to increase the confidence of the business community. Strong leadership during the ongoing budget process will help to assure business
leaders that the financial picture will improve. Fear of tax increases and elimination of services result in reduced investment within the city. Elimination of the deficit is crucial to improving the business climate.

Consider a Business Improvement District

In light of the city's fiscal situation, merchants along the southern portion of River St. should join with downtown merchants and consider forming a Business Improvement District (BID). In order for businesses to succeed, basic problems of cleanliness, safety, and an attractive environment must be dealt with in an effective and consistent manner. Furthermore, shared resources allow for joint marketing strategies that allow urban businesses to compete more effectively with suburban malls. Business Improvement Districts (BID) across the state have been successful in providing basic services and restoring vitality to commercial districts. Eventually this district could be expanded to include new and existing commercial enterprises further north on River St. and along Sixth Avenue. *New York Mainstreet* (Summer 1995) lists several factors that contribute to the success of a BID.
HOUSING: REHABILITATION AND INFILL

Introduction

In order to revitalize north central Troy, affordable and sound housing needs to be developed. This section presents some guidelines for that task. It includes an evaluation of housing needs, availability, characteristics, and costs. Information from the community interviews has been reviewed. Finally, the section offers a series of short and long-term recommendations to help meet the neighborhood's housing needs.

Infill, or the process of developing vacant or underutilized parcels of land located within existing built-up-areas, can bring many benefits to north central Troy. New infill development expands housing opportunities for residents and can increase community cohesion by filling in gaps in the urban fabric. Key steps include carefully choosing locations for new residential development and matching the new structures with the existing architectural context of the neighborhood.

Opportunities

- There is a lot of space available for infill housing, including tax delinquent properties.
- Infrastructure for many existing vacant lots is already in place.
- Larger lots for single family residential housing are available.
- North central Troy has a rich architectural history.
- Newly constructed affordable homes can be provided by building attached rental units.
- Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) for neighborhood rehabilitation are available.
• Newly appropriated federal dollars are available through the Enterprise Community initiative.

• More information on affordable housing opportunities could be made available through the help of local community groups.

• An increase in community group and resident participation makes it easier to coordinate an infill housing program.

• TRIP is already successfully involved in housing rehabilitation.

Constraints

• The current fiscal state of the City of Troy is poor.

• Current zoning regulations and building codes are not designed to encourage rehabilitation projects.

• Many people feel that the area is unattractive and has an uncertain future. This lack of confidence reduces the willingness to purchase or rent property.

• Employment opportunities are limited for local residents.

• Some buildings have significant structural damage that could make rehabilitation more expensive.

• Maintenance of some structures, particularly those owned by absentee landlords, is poor.

• Neighborhood safety needs to be improved.

• Inappropriate or poorly maintained adjacent land uses may make some lots or structures less desirable for rehabilitation.

• North central Troy currently lacks easy access to a variety of goods and services.

• There are potentially adverse side effects of infill, including gentrification, displacement of existing residents, and increased demands for parking space.
Current Housing Conditions

The interviews with neighborhood residents and civic leaders in north central Troy revealed that there are many housing problems. Although most people felt that the building stock in north central Troy was a potential asset for the community, they were concerned about the number of absentee landlords, lack of code enforcement, hazards represented by vacant and boarded-up buildings, and the urgent need for affordable housing. Residents and leaders also complained about rampant drug activity, and desired increased on-street police patrols.

The following information on housing conditions in the City of Troy was compiled from the 1990 census, local market resources, and local planning studies.

- Over half of the housing units in Troy are multi-family units and are renter-occupied.

- The costs of renting have grown at a greater rate than household income between 1980 and 1990, where the median gross rent increased 142.5%

- 54.4% of Troy households are of low and moderate income, and 34.6% have very low incomes (incomes less than 50% of the median for the area). North central Troy has the highest concentration of very low, low, and moderate income households of any area in Troy.

- Affordability studies suggest that potentially large numbers of households, especially those with many members, are unable to afford current market rates for rental housing.

- North central and south Troy had the lowest values for owner-occupied homes in Troy. Housing costs have increased throughout the Capital District. It is estimated that only 25% of Troy's 20,708 households are above the necessary income levels to purchase an average-priced existing home.

- The city-wide vacancy rate for all types of housing in 1990 was 9.2%. A vacancy rate of 5% or less is considered to be "healthy". The highest percentage of vacant rental properties in Troy is found in north Central Troy. Many units are uninhabitable and north central Troy is known for high numbers of code violations.

- 45.6% of north central Troy households pay more than 30% of their income on housing costs, regardless of whether they rent or own their own home.
Recommendations

Housing plans for north central Troy should serve current residents of the neighborhood as well as potential future residents. They should not induce large scale gentrification or sacrifice neighborhood livability to short-term financial calculations. In the interviews, the respondents indicated that they would prefer a housing plan that encourages homeownership, attracts some middle income residents back to the neighborhood, and keeps housing affordable. A balance should be achieved between rental and homeownership opportunities. Given this difficult set of demands, a flexible housing strategy is required. The housing group offers the following general recommendations.

- Concentrate housing improvement efforts in a few key blocks rather than in a random pattern. Rebuild these blocks first, and then expand to adjacent areas.

- Match new construction with the area’s traditional styles of building, especially on blocks that have a significant number of buildings with architectural merit.

- Allow for a range of housing types to accommodate different age, income, and family groups.

- Modify any archaic zoning regulations and building codes that are no longer necessary and serve only to block rehabilitation of old buildings.

- Encourage public-private partnerships to construct new housing.

- Take advantage of federal government funding for housing development and rehabilitation including Community Development Block Grants and Enterprise Community grants.

- Encourage the city to update the tax rolls, determine which properties are tax delinquent, and sell such parcels at low cost to nonprofit housing developers.

- Provide information and assistance to first time home buyers who are not familiar with the complexities of buying a home.

- Encourage the city to provide incentives for people who would like to renovate or repair their homes.

- Encourage owner-occupation of housing in order to reinforce neighborhood stability and increase personal involvement in community activities.
These general recommendations apply to all housing improvement efforts. A more specific list of actions for the short, medium, and long term is offered below.

**Phase One: Short-term Recommendations (1 to 5 Years)**

Concentrate efforts on the block level, and in particular on Earl Street between Jacob and Hutton Streets, so that scarce resources can make an immediate impact on the area. Directing money and rehabilitation efforts at this section of Earl Street will produce a noticeable visual improvement and provide momentum for further rehabilitation. This section of Earl Street contains a number of abandoned buildings that are suitable for rehabilitation, and is close to community service and commercial centers.

TRIP can make use of the GIS database created by this studio to assess the pattern of vacant lots and abandoned building in north central Troy. More specific investigations of individual parcels can reveal which ones are genuine candidates for new investment. This will depend on current ownership, building condition, vacant lot condition, assessed value, and many other variables.

**Phase Two: Medium-term Recommendations (5 to 10 years)**

In this phase, greater effort should be concentrated on infill construction and rehabilitation in other subareas, particularly the northeast quadrant, between Sixth Avenue and Tenth Street north of Hoosick Street. Ideally, the goal should be to rehabilitate 3-5 abandoned houses per year, and to construct approximately three new houses per year. Investment should be targeted to strengthen areas that are still reasonably sound but are in danger of deteriorating if no intervention occurs. It should be noted that infill opportunities may be limited if vacancy rates remain high.

**Phase Three: Long-term Recommendations (10 to 20 Years)**

Assuming that some of the stronger blocks have been rebuilt by this time, investment can be spread over the remainder of the area. At this stage, it may be possible to shift toward more infill construction, gradually filling in the gaps in street frontages throughout the neighborhood.

**Design Recommendations for Infill Housing**

New infill housing and rehabilitation work should fit in with the historical character of north central Troy. This does not mean that all new construction must replicate or imitate existing buildings. In many cases, this might be prohibitively expensive. The goal is for new construction to “fit in” with the surrounding context, even though it is made of modern materials. This can be achieved by following some relatively simple design guidelines that deal with height, shape,
materials, colors, and location on the lot. An example of attractive infill housing from Albany, New York is shown in Figure 17 to illustrate these principles.

- Building height should be limited to a maximum of five stories. Where adjacent buildings are of uniform height, new buildings should maintain that height.

- New construction should make use of contemporary interpretations of traditional styles. For example, infill development in a rowhouse block should have flat roofs, brick facades, cornices, and windows that are similar to those of adjacent buildings.

- In general, multi-family infill housing should be built near existing multi-family units.

- Where possible, deteriorated building elements should be repaired rather than replaced, to preserve the integrity of the original building. Where replacement is necessary, the replacement windows, columns, porches, and moldings, should approximate the originals in size, shape, detail, and pattern.

Figure 17. Some examples of rehabilitated housing.
Figure 17. Completed infill development.

Figure 18. Possible candidates for rehabilitation.
URBAN DESIGN

Introduction

The goal of urban design is to create places that function well and look attractive. North central Troy offers many opportunities for the application of urban design techniques that can improve comfort and safety, enhance the pedestrian environment, and generate feelings of community pride. Some recommendations will require significant funding. Others are simply a matter of respecting the existing architectural context whenever rehabilitation or new construction occurs. A relatively simple list of guidelines can lead to significant improvements in neighborhood character.

The urban landscape in north central Troy is composed of elements such as buildings, streets, sidewalks, alleys, yards, and open space. These elements should fit together to create both private and public spaces that are comfortable, safe, and interesting. This section sets forth some principles to guide future changes in the physical environment of the area, with an emphasis on taking advantage of existing assets.

Common Architectural Characteristics of North Central Troy

Urban design guidelines must begin with an appreciation of the area’s existing architectural characteristics. Buildings in north central Troy are oriented towards the street with the public facade and main entrance on the street. Private areas are often in the rear, with service access from alleyways. Most buildings are of similar form, scale, proportion, color, materials, and texture. Typically, buildings are two or three stories high, perpendicular to the street, attached on both sides to an adjacent building, aligned at the front property line, and crowned with a flat cornice.

The major design elements are simple and symmetric. Most buildings are brick. Building facades are interrupted by bay windows, stoops, and entrance ways. Windows and doors are typically arranged in a grid. Entrances and accompanying stoops are set up above the basement. Minimal ornamental architectural is seen. Most entrance ways are simple wood paneled doors having a tree-light transom over them. The neighborhood lots average 25 x 100 feet in size.
Most buildings have flat roofs with cornice detailing. Many have more intricate designs on lintels and sills with elaborately patterned cornice and entrance details. Some lower levels are used as storefronts and are designed differently than the upper levels.

Opportunities

- Historic structures in the area provide an important foundation for rebuilding the urban fabric. They are valuable in their own right and provide a context for new additions.

- The proximity of the Hudson River presents opportunities for connections with riverside parks and greenways. Waterfront activities may also present opportunities for more tourist-related economic activities.

- More than 50% of the parcels in the study area already have street trees, which provide a shady canopy during summer months and help to frame the street as a pleasant space.

Constraints

- Troy’s fiscal problems will limit City funding for urban design improvements. Basic services will have to be funded first.

- The lack of urban design controls in the past has left the area with a number of poorly designed structures that detract from the historic character.

- In a number of blocks, curbs, gutters, and street trees have either never been installed or have been allowed to deteriorate. Significant investment will be required to remedy these deficiencies.

- Industrial and commercial zones within the study area are almost completely lacking in urban design amenities, even though they are in close proximity to residential areas.

- The Collar City Bridge and Hoosick Street form a jarring barrier between the northern and southern halves of the area. The bridge cannot be changed, and the pressure to maximize traffic flow on Hoosick Street may limit the options to soften its impact on the surrounding residential neighborhoods.
Figure 19. The historic architecture of north central Troy provides an appropriate context for both rehabilitation and new construction. (CADD drawing by Jianrong Zhang)
Crime and vandalism in the area may place constraints on the kinds of urban design improvements that are feasible. Fragile structures, plants, and street furniture may have a short life span, especially if they are placed in inappropriate locations.

Recommendations

The recommendations section is divided into four sections: buildings, public spaces, streets, and guidelines for the exterior decoration of buildings.

Buildings

- Respect the Existing Architectural Context

There are many vacant lots and abandoned buildings in north central Troy. These sites have the potential for infill or rehabilitation and any new construction should respect the existing architectural context. Tearing down familiar buildings to replace them with brand-new ones may be counter-productive, and could alienate local residents. Inappropriate alterations to existing, handsome buildings can have the same effect. However, given the community's limited economic resources, retention of older buildings should not become a slavish exercise in preservation for its own sake. Where possible, those buildings having high architectural quality in facades or structure should be adapted, and where replacements must be made, they should be carried out in harmony with the remaining buildings in the vicinity. Decisions concerning the demolition of older buildings should consider both (1) the contribution the building makes to the neighborhood setting, and (2) the economic implications of rehabilitation versus demolition.

- Commercial Buildings Should Fit in with Existing Structures

Many new commercial buildings in urban areas pay no attention to their neighbors and disrupt the visual harmony of the street. This is unnecessary. Commercial activities can be accommodated in structures that enhance rather than detract from their surroundings. The examples below illustrate the difference. In Figure 21, the existing character of the block is enhanced by a new commercial building. In Figure 22, the new building is out of place.
Figure 20. A new commercial building that enhances its surroundings.

Figure 21. A new commercial building that is out of place.
Some guidelines for commercial buildings include the following:

- Maintain the same setback as adjacent buildings.
- Provide an inviting entrance.
- Approximate the window proportions of surrounding buildings.
- Use signs of modest size that blend in with the historic context.

Figure 22. Appropriate signage on commercial uses.
Corner Sites Are Especially Important

Corner sites are highly visible and can become landmarks within the community. They have a dual frontage, can be viewed in three dimensions, and can be seen from three or four directions. Special care should be taken to place attractive buildings and public spaces at these key locations.

Figure 23. A corner site.

Public Spaces

Create Small Plazas in a Few Strategic Locations

North central Troy has several locations that would be suitable for small plazas--public gathering places with some street furniture to make sitting and talking possible. Usually, a corner location is preferable to the middle of the block.
Provide Some Places to Sit

When plazas are developed, proper seating should be provided. It is recommended that one linear foot of seating be provided for each 30 square feet of open space. Ensure that some of the seating has backs, for the convenience of the elderly and disabled. Seating should be provided near buildings and along the sidewalks and should be located so that it:

- provides shelter from wind
- takes advantage of site views
- is not too close to circulation paths
- provides a variety of options for pedestrians such as sunlight, shade, quietness, activity, formality, and informality

Seating can be in the form of benches, stoops, ledges, seat walls, or steps.

Figure 24. Convenient seating in an urban plaza.
Design Parks for Safety, Comfort, and Ease of Maintenance

- For parks and plazas enclosed by adjoining buildings, covering these walls with ivy or other greenery may prevent graffiti.

- Proper lighting increases plaza or park safety and usage. Lighting is especially important for any public spaces where visibility is limited.

- Plazas or parks should be designed to become an extension of the sidewalk, and to ensure openness and visibility. Accessibility is a function of the location and the design of the plaza or park entrance. Sunken or raised plazas separate these spaces from street visibility and accessibility, and should be avoided.

Riverside Development

The Hudson River is an important asset of north central Troy. Revitalization strategies should try to enhance access to locations along the river. River Street should be emphasized as an important commercial location. Greenways and the Safewalk should lead to the river as well. Unused buildings should be reclaimed and aesthetically modified to encourage riverfront activity. A park-like atmosphere for recreation would entice tourists. An infrastructure of access roads, riverside walks, bike paths, and landscaping should be established to fully capitalize on the River.

Provide Adequate Lighting

All access roads, paths, and parking areas must be adequately lighted at night. It is important to provide outdoor lighting around community facilities and some highly used recreational areas. Fixtures should not look institutional yet should be vandalproof. Lights should be of unbreakable plastic, recessed, or otherwise designed to reduce the damage and replacement problem. Hooded fixtures should be used near residential areas to keep direct light away from windows of dwellings close by. The location, design, fixture, and light intensity should be considered in selecting the appropriate lighting. The intensity, for example, should be high at street intersections and large open areas and low along backyards or walkways. For pedestrian area lighting, the light source should be relatively low to the ground in order to remain in scale with the human body and to provide light beneath the canopy of street trees. In this case, uniform area illumination is not always desirable. Vehicular lighting on roadways must have a greater height than those for pedestrians and must illuminate the road more uniformly.
Streets

Streets are a critical element of any urban landscape. A Safewalk has been recommended for north central Troy, and the overall condition of pedestrian paths within the area needs to be improved. The following street design recommendations should be implemented as funding permits.

- **Sidewalk Design**
  Curbs and sidewalks should be wide enough for pedestrian traffic, at least four feet wide even in lightly traveled areas. Good sidewalks improve accessibility, community appearance, and pedestrian safety. (See the Transportation section for more on this subject.)

- **Alleys**
  Alleys provide access both for residents and service vehicles. Alleys should be modified to provide safety as well as be aesthetically appealing. Existing alleys can be cleaned and redesigned to create paths linking community gardens, parks, open spaces, and residential areas.

- **Street Signs**
  Signs serve to inform, identify, and create a visual balance on the streets. Badly placed signs should be replaced with signs that are easy to read yet do not obstruct views or clutter the pedestrian landscape.
Street Trees

Street trees are a crucial urban design element. There are several advantages of planting trees along the street. The most obvious benefit is that they add visual interest and affect overall street scale. When street trees are planted close enough together to form a continuous, arched canopy, it creates visual unity and results in uninterrupted quality of light and shade. Another benefit of street trees is the separation they offer both visually and psychologically between vehicles and pedestrians. Street trees also help shade sidewalks in warm months, improve air quality, and dampen noise.

Tree planting should be focused on specific areas in north central Troy that currently lack street trees. Trees can also play an important role in softening the impact of parking lots and screening them from neighboring residences (while still allowing adequate visibility for surveillance).

Figure 26. Street trees significantly improve the quality of urban streets and sidewalks.
Some Guidelines for Exterior Decoration of Buildings

Select Colors Carefully
While there is room for variation in color, buildings that use unusual or excessively bright colors can detract from a neighborhood. In an area like north central Troy, with its tradition of brick architecture, earth tones are often the most appropriate choice. Specific recommendations for color treatments are:

- Raw brick surfaces should be maintained.
- Sills and lintels should be painted gray or light tones.
- Stone should be repaired and/or repainted to match original colors.
- Doors and windows can be painted the same color or with a compatible color.
- Other elements should be painted to blend with the background surface.
- Semi-gloss paint is preferred because gloss reflects lights and emphasizes defects.
Try to Retain Original Architectural Features

- The original surface covering—brickwork, stone, stucco, wood—should be repaired and preserved where possible.
- New and replacement windows should approximate the placement and size of the originals. If a larger window is necessary, it should be chosen carefully to avoid disrupting the historical pattern of windows along the street.
- Cornices should be preserved if possible, or replaced with modern ones of similar size and shape.
- Plantings should be compatible with those of other buildings in the neighborhood.
- New additions to the rear facade—which is less visible from the street—have the option of containing more contemporary window openings, such as sliding glass doors.
- If entrances are modified or replaced, they should maintain the proportions and form of the originals.
- Window air conditioning units or condenser elements should be discouraged.
- Flower boxes can give an attractive personal appearance to residences and are a welcome addition to the streetscape.

Update Zoning Regulations to Include Design Guidelines

As part of the development review process, proposals for new development in north central Troy should follow a clear set of design guidelines that would ensure compatibility with the existing urban fabric. At some point, it may be possible to create an architectural design review board to examine proposed projects and work with property owners to arrive at satisfactory designs.
CONCLUSION

The future of north central Troy is linked to the future of the adjacent downtown and the city as a whole. Any planning for the area should make sense when viewed from this larger perspective. The studio members are fully aware of the fiscal crisis in the City of Troy and know that funds will be scarce. Therefore, the planning recommendations in the document span the entire range from the simple to the complex, the low-cost to the expensive.

The future of north central Troy is also linked to the future of the surrounding region. The economic development, transportation systems, and social dynamics of the entire Capital District will influence what is possible in inner city areas like north central Troy. If the current trends toward decentralization are allowed to continue, with no countervailing efforts to encourage infill development, transit-oriented development, and the recentralization of some economic activities in city centers, then the possibilities for imaginative planning in inner city areas will be limited. If a new commitment toward rebuilding central cities emerges in the coming decades, then the prospects for neighborhood renewal will increase.

The studio members understand that changes in the physical landscape will not magically solve deep-seated social and economic problems. Physical design is only a part of the equation, which must include economic revitalization, job generation, crime prevention, and the rebuilding of the social fabric of the community. The steps required to address these problems go far beyond the scope of this plan, or any plan that focuses on the physical environment. But there is a connection between physical design and community livability. The physical environment reflects back to residents an image of their community, and even small changes can begin to stake out spaces of pride rather than despair, of involvement rather than indifference. Therefore, it is worthwhile to create a stock of ideas for community improvement that can be brought into play as funds and political support allow.

The members of the Fall 1995 Planning Studio hope that the ideas and information contained in this document contribute to the improvement of north central Troy. While the obstacles to community revitalization are many, and plans do not implement themselves, thoughtful planning is still a necessary step in the long and difficult task of reclaiming our inner city neighborhoods.
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