

THE FUTURE OF 6TH STREET

Introduction:

At the request of property owners along 6th Street, particularly those currently investing in or desiring to make improvements to their buildings, the City of Holland has coordinated some focus on the character and future of this corridor. Conveniently, the timing of this focus will assist the Planning Office and Planning Commission elaborate on the City's Master Plan for this area and bring further focus consistent with the Downtown's recently adopted Strategic Plan.

The following notes and the accompanying powerpoint presentation summarize discussions and ideas emerging from a series of three meetings with property owners. Assisted by Bill Johnson and Livable Community By Design (Phil Meyer), long term development and streetscape improvement opportunities are explored along the south side of 6th Street between Central and Columbia Avenues. Attention is paid to approaches from the south- College and Columbia Avenues and across the 7th Street parking deck- as well as to potential modifications to the southern edge of Window on the Waterfront Park that could serve to reinforce corridor improvements and more comprehensively establish a distinctive character to this district of Downtown.

In addition to longer term opportunities and intentions, short-term improvements, those that can happen immediately or within the next two years, are identified with the belief that the sooner the character begins to change and intentions begin to visibly unfold, the greater the attention to this area becomes and the sooner larger scale or costlier changes can be realized. Short term improvements should be tackled that assist those existing businesses (and residents) in reinforcing their investments while being consistent to the emerging vision for this district.

Framework:

This is a discussion and summary of potential direction. It will only serve as **an initial framework with much work to be done by the property owners in partnership with the City to fill in the gaps.** the commitment of property owners and the City working together. Once this material is shared with all stakeholders, it is important to bring to consensus a **VISION STATEMENT** formal statement of vision and define next steps for the group to move forward in a collaborative manner.

The following is suggested as the type of vision statement **phrasing** the property owners and City should develop and agree to as a Vision Statement for this district:

- **The most effective Vision Statement is first, of course, one that is commonly-held by the stakeholders and the City.**

- To be an enduring Vision over many years it needs to be Broad, Brief and Inspirational. (that is, capture the imagination).
- As only a sample, it might be phrased as follows:

“A part of Downtown Holland with a distinctive Identity, a Place to live, work and celebrate Artisan creativity, a Place where the Downtown engages the Macatawa Greenway System and a Place where urban vibrancy and casual recreation inter-mingle. This is the Spirit of the kind of special neighborhood we seek to achieve”.

- Accompanying a statement of this kind, it is wise to prepare a very basic diagram and any other simple illustration which describes the fundamental planning direction and the general character of the hoped for outcome. Again, only as a sample, noted below is a general diagram showing the planning opportunity before the stakeholders and the type of character sketch of 6th Street helping to sense the Vision direction.



The Streets:

6th Street, College and Columbia as Places and Connectors.

Concepts-

1. Street sections and layout-

The 6th Street corridor varies in character where building forms, building placement, and uses vary from east to west.

- **East end “A”:** street section (between Lumir/Cento Anni/Maxel properties and ITB). Proposed **angled parking on south side of street**, no curbside parking on the north side.

- **Center “B”:** Where E&V storage property sits across from the Park. Proposed **angled parking on both north and south sides** that would necessitate some additional right-of-way on the edge of the park to allow angled parking and potentially the introduction of a landscaped island within the street right-of-way and/or extending parking on an “arc” into the park. A portion of such parking, which is not needed all the time, could be stabilized turf or pervious paving with green surface.

- **West end “C”:** Where Lot 7C (envisioned as a future development site with embedded parking deck) sits across from residential condos. This area, in part due to existing curb cuts, to building placement and unavailability of additional right-of-way, and the location of the railroad tracks crossing the roadway, is proposed to have **parallel parking on both sides** of the street.

In all cases, the lines of parking along the street can be interrupted periodically for bump-outs that place street trees in key locations and which allow crosswalks at corners or at key north-south access points.

- **Short Term Actions:** Improvements described in “A”, “B” and “C” above require decisions to be made concerning infrastructure investments including new street pavement, new/modified walks, new curbing, and such things as snowmelt, lighting, and electrical undergrounding. In advance of such decisions and the accompanying budgeting necessary to accommodate these items, there are some **low-cost and relatively straightforward things that can be done in the short term** and readily modified as needed as time moves forward. This could include buying some paint- to **paint parking spaces on existing pavement, to more clearly denote crosswalks, and to designate bike lanes on each side of the street.**

With a bit of additional expense, curb-strip pavement might be selectively removed in order to **create some additional planting areas along the street**, including a limited number of street trees. Existing planting strips, many of which have long been neglected, could be **planted thematically, including grasses** that are described later. With some creative consensus on the part of district owners and tenants, **identity markers** could also be installed at key locations. Similarly, **benches and bike racks** could be explored and possibly located in useful places over time.

2. 6th Street and both College and Columbia Avenues-

Where does this district begin and how do you approach this area? Coming from the busy business district to the south, the approach by vehicle is by College and Columbia Avenues. **Identity markers and entry corridor character improvements** such as a sequence of street trees and sidewalk improvements are suggested. Access from the west is via the length of 6th Street, so where you begin to show this districts special identity could occur at River Avenue or at some point between River and College.

Unifying elements-

These elements are selected to both tie with typical elements that extend throughout downtown while integrating specific elements and detailing that is distinctive to this area.

Thematically, the focus is on a mix of urban living, entrepreneurial artisan and outdoor/recreation-related businesses, while inviting community activity that is set in a former industrial and emerging new neighborhood fronting the Window on the Waterfront Park and the Macatawa Greenway.

1. Street Use: The district has less traffic than 7th, 8th and 9th Streets but must **accommodate growth in use over time**. Users include commercial trucks serving businesses and Freedom Village, passenger vehicles with higher than typical numbers of senior drivers, increasing numbers of bicyclists, and pedestrians of all ages.

The City's Downtown is gradually embracing the concept of "**sharrows**", a street design and use that has as its core the shared use of street traffic lanes by motor vehicles and bicycles. While bicycle lanes are possible immediately, shared use can be a longer-term opportunity as the City expands these within the Downtown.

2. Sidewalk connections and treatment: Care should be given to **interconnecting** not only the street facing buildings with an attractive pedestrian environment, but also tending to side and rear parking areas, between parcels, and to the parking deck to the south. Similarly, new attention to the design and use of Window-on-the-Waterfront Park will call for connections from the street into the park at key locations.
3. Possible snowmelt: Consideration of the installation of **snowmelt for both typical sidewalks and internal connectors**- including the north-south linkages to and through the 7th Street parking deck- is important for assuring year-round accessibility throughout this district. Inclusion of snowmelt in new or renovated **parking areas** should be considered as well.
4. Parking: The nature of curbing and the lack of parking space demarcation in this 6th Street corridor are such that car parking is somewhat ill-defined. Some **regularity of pattern** is needed, particularly as existing uses become revitalized and new uses are introduced in a way that attracts additional residents, employees, and visitors. See the potential three-part street sections identified above for the 6th Street corridor.

Quantity of available parking is an issue. While the City's parking deck along 7th Street offers a significant number of spaces, the development of the new Marriott Hotel/restaurants and the filling of already constructed office, retail,

and restaurant space may well dominate the use of this deck. Finding ways to **integrate additional parking** into this 6th Street area is vital. The Downtown has successfully demonstrated that **shared parking** available to different users at differing peak times of demand has been the most effective parking strategy, as opposed to individual private parking for each individual business or property. Shared parking benefits from **multiple access points** for the vehicles and- more importantly- for the drivers/passengers to have easy access to multiple destinations.

At the same time, the numbers of users will likely vary dramatically depending on day of the week and time of day. As the City strives to be more **sustainable and green**, there may be parking infrastructure and design that is more sustainable (and distinctive). The introduction of pervious paving and materials/design that address this desire is proposed in certain areas. For example, parking fronting Window on the Waterfront Park might be constructed as a stabilized turf or porous paving material, remaining as a green swath until there is the periodic Park event that would call this into use as parking.

5. Plant materials: This district is heavily influenced by the Window on the Waterfront Park green space and northern waterfront. Much of the 6th Street corridor's north side is directly facing the Park. Focus of attention therefore may be most impactful if a **unifying planting scheme** along storefronts and property edges, such as a medium-height native **tall grass** used Downtown might in greater quantities help define a distinctive character. This coupled with periodic placement of **columnar street trees** in areas of new buildings or redeveloped properties can help the scale and character of the street and corridor.
6. Underground utilities: As several owners have noted, there is a desire to **place overhead wires underground** and remove remnant utility poles. This would significantly improve the appearance of the corridor and allow greater focus on new unifying elements.
7. Stormwater/Rain gardens considerations: As this corridor looks to redevelopment and expansion of uses, consideration should be given to how stormwater is handled on each property or within the district more comprehensively. The City is facing increasing federal and state pressure to address **stormwater management** and locally there is a major effort area-wide to improve the water quality of the Macatawa watershed (Project Clarity). This might be addressed in the design of paving areas, the introduction of rain gardens, or other creative measures.
8. Character defining arts/crafts elements: There is a history of industrial uses and emerging artisan uses that present an opportunity to help define the distinctiveness of this district. A special connection to this district is that

Columbia Avenue serves as an arts corridor through the Hope College campus and can extend neatly into the opportunity for this district.

Are there elements such as signage, benches, lighting, and bike racks that may **draw from the materials and character of these distinctive uses**? How can the district **tap the creativity of these artisans** to help create a special character? Distinctive, yet related to the whole of Downtown.

9. Signage: There are several key locations- primarily “entry” points- for **district identifier signs**, as shown on the accompanying map. The district property owners and tenants are encouraged both to create an **identifiable name for this area** and to develop a distinctive signage expression. Note that the City has recently approved an overall wayfinding signage program, so explorations of what is possible for this district should relate in some way to that system. Are there materials, or iconic elements, from past or present businesses that could provide inspiration for distinctive signage?

Signage on buildings within this district, given the diversity of architecture from an early/mid 20th century industrial building (ITB) to a Dutch-influenced building (Lumir) to more general older industrial and newer residential buildings suggests signage on buildings probably is more eclectic, with design suitability measured more by the building on which a sign is placed than by some prevailing theme. A logo or distinctive visual identity might even be integrated into business signs in this area. Character may vary, though there may be a desire to create some guidelines for placement, scale, etc. to suggest some level of commonality that goes beyond the minimum required by zoning and the Design Review Board guidelines.

10. Lighting: Another opportunity for a distinctive visual element is the **lighting of the street, pedestrian ways and building exteriors**. Mindful of Holland Board of Public Works reluctance to consider new lighting fixtures not already in their “portfolio”, consideration should nonetheless be given to a distinctive pedestrian light fixture that might unify areas multiple private properties, occurring as pole-mounted or building-mounted fixtures. A careful selection of such a fixture that might reflect the industrial and artisan nature of the corridor might then be carefully introduced into the public right-of-way. Energy efficient lighting such as LEDs should be considered.

11. Bicycles: There is an opportunity to **significantly enhance the bike-ability of this district** (as well as all of Downtown). Engagement with local biking advocates and “practitioners” would be helpful. The street options described above assume some attention is will be focused in this area.

As for bicycle parking, Downtown Holland has a standard bike rack that is installed in several locations along 8th Street. In private areas off of 8th Street, property owners have introduced a variety of alternative racks for their own tenants. Again, given the growing strength of creative artisans in this district, consideration should be given to a **distinctive artful design for bike racks**.

Mid-Block Connectors:

Prepared Passages: Previous development of the 7th Street parking deck extended north-south connectors intended to tie Hope College and neighborhoods on the south side of Downtown with the Park and waterfront on the northern edge of Downtown. The deck was constructed with two specific locations identified for making the linkage between 7th and 6th Streets. These points of connection occur along the west face of the Cento Anni building and within the current storage area of E & V's property. Each of these anticipates a crossing of the CSX rail line, with potential at grade and with an overhead bridge. Pending further conversations with the City and CSX, the at-grade crossings would likely be more readily accomplished. The City Engineer should take the lead on interactions with CSX.

Stakeholder Initiatives:

1. Land Use opportunities: There exists a diversity of uses in this corridor. If there is a **consensus on a Vision Statement**, then **key use categories** to be seriously considered should be identified and may include housing, artisan-related businesses, and businesses that can bring service and energy to the Park/Greenway opportunity of this district on the Park.
 - For **residential**, property owners should consult the City's recently completed Housing Target Market Analysis that identifies opportunities for a diversity of housing Downtown.
 - For **light and artisan-related industrial businesses**, key related industries and the Holland Area Arts Council ought to be consulted in an effort to explore opportunities within the local arts community.
 - For **offices**, look for office tenants that might be attracted to and participate in the artisan milieu.
 - Such topics also are of certain **interest to visitors** suggesting consultation with the Convention and Visitor's Bureau and Tulip Time may be of value.
 - Consultation with area **outdoor businesses and advocates** such as Outdoor Discovery Center/Macatawa Greenway, the City's DeGraaf Nature Center, the City's Recreation Department and activity-specific organizations could be beneficial.

2. Potential sites: There are a number of **private and public properties** that might be considered under-utilized or possibly available for redevelopment over time. Explorations consider more intensive development of the:
- Cento Anni property with expanded ground floor uses and potential upper level housing;
 - Residential development of the Maxel LLC property, which may consider short-term and longer term options;
 - Development of portions of E & V's property including the storage area between their offices and the Maxel building along 6th Street as well as their small building on the northeast corner of 7th and College;
 - Potential for a longer term intensification or change of use of the ITB property;
 - Possible redevelopment of the City's Lot 7C parking lot to the west spanning between 6th and 7th Streets for a mix of uses that should include an imbedded supply of parking serving existing and new businesses; and
 - Potential insertion of public uses within Window on the Waterfront Park such as outdoor ice skating, a public plaza/gathering place, and a greenhouse or winter garden.
3. Possible district heating: As renovation and new construction are considered, owners and developers should contact the Holland Board of Public Works to explore the potential for taking advantage of the new City power facility and the increased capacity for both snowmelt (mentioned previously) and district heating. With some cooperation between property owners and developers, the 6th Street district could become a model for the **incorporation of district heating**.
4. Building character: Existing buildings reflect a variety of architectural styling, period of influence, and influences of budgetary capacity. For the most part, they are **straight-forward and simple** and devoid of excessive ornamentation. New buildings infilling within this district should reflect this character. Buildings should affirm existing building placement and be **brought to the street** where practical. They should be **welcoming** with easily identified and accessible entrances. Street level facades should have a significant amount of **glass transparency**, allowing visual interaction, interest, and security between inside and outside. Such transparency will also add to the night-time light on the street and an enhanced feeling of activity. In support and **coordination with street planting schemes**, private plantings should include trees, grasses and flowers where possible.

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Perspectives and Suggestions for Stakeholder Consideration.

December 10, 2015 - The City of Holland with Phil Meyer and Bill Johnson

1). Working in Unison.

- **IDENTIFY OWNER INTERESTS** and arrange a **working partnership** with the City.
- **ADOPT A COMMONLY-HELD VISION** of the 6th Street future. State it broadly, briefly, in inspirational terms and share it widely. *See sample.*

2). Defining Key Planning Elements:

- **IDENTITY:**
 - DEFINE the unique feature or **THEME** of the future 6th St. Place.
 - DESIGN 'signature' language and symbolism accordingly, to sharpen the **VISION** and mark 6th St. **IDENTITY**. *See Sample illustrations.*
- **The STREETS:**

6th Street, College Ave. & Columbia Ave. as Places and as Connectors.

 - **CONCEPTS:**
 - Street sections and layout: **East end, Center and West end.**
 - Short Term Actions
 - **UNIFYING ELEMENTS:** Street use, sidewalk connections and treatment, possible Snowmelt, parking, plant materials, underground utilities, stormwater/rain gardens considerations, character defining arts/crafts elements, signage, lighting and bicycles. *See Sample illustrations.*

- **MID-BLOCK CONNECTORS:**
 - TWO PREPARED PASSAGES: Pedestrian walkways at two points through the 7th St. parking deck connecting to and from Downtown.
 - PLANNING & DESIGN THOUGHTS: RR crossing and walkway design prospects with important timing considerations. *See sample illustrations.*

- **STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVES:**
 - LAND USE OPPORTUNITIES: Mix of uses to investigate – A range of **Residential** concepts, light and artisan-type **Industrial** with various levels of **Office** functions. Other specialty functions related to **tourism** and **outdoor recreation** may deserve special attention.
 - POTENTIAL SITES: Private land-holders and portions of the Window-on-the-Waterfront Park.
 - POSSIBLE DISTRICT HEATING: Possible initiative with the new BPW power facility.
 - BUILDING CHARACTER: Straight-forward and simple. Bring buildings to the street where practical, seek a welcoming spirit by easy street entrances and featuring glass type transparency thereby adding evening-time light to the street. Add trees, grasses and flowers to match Street corridor planting themes. *See sample illustrations.*

3). Working Strategically:

- **LONG-TERM and SHORT-TERM:**
 - KEEP THE VISION ON THE TABLE: With the overview Vision in mind...
 - DEFINE THE ORDER OF ACHIEVABILITY: Gear up for a 'first-things-first' type of Patience.
 - SEEK 'SENSE OF CHANGE' LEVERAGE: Identify those achievable initiatives which most clearly demonstrate **change** – direct **evidence** of a **new and fresh time and place**. The rest tends to follow.

Notes From 6th Street Meeting

November 11, 2015

Cento Anni Building

(Composite from notes by Kollewehr, Vanderploeg, Johnson and Meyer.)

Observed about 20 people in attendance when the meeting started.

Introduction:

Overview

- Vision for Downtown: Downtown Vision diagrams, primary Downtown intentions.
- Retail core is east to west; North connection to waterfront is not necessarily retail but associated uses.
- Hope College is an overlapping force in Downtown.
- Green focus/connections.
- College/6th is an important focal point. Potential for ice skating rink, winter gardens/conservatory.

6th Street Area

- Parking may need to be addressed as the area develops.
- Rail crossing at deck: lower level is more likely than upper level.
- A rail trail (shared use) is a long term concept.
- District heating potential- timing.
- Identity for the corridor, the need for it and that this process looks to provide direction. Also an emphasis on connections.
- This area is no longer the “backyard” of downtown. It is the front yard of a new part of Downtown.
- Connectivity using Columbia and College. The 7th and College E&V building location is very important as a bridge from 6th Street to Downtown.
- Property owners may want to examine a two-tier level of value with investments. Investments that can be done now or in the near future that can be acted on for a larger play in the future.
- Reviewed a visioning statement

Comments from attendees:

- Make Windmill Island Gardens and Window on the Waterfront similar, related, connected. Connections are so important.

- Draw of this area for residences: downtown and open space; walkability is important, snowmelt is desirable (caution re cost), recreation friendly, boardwalk to WIG, winter use of area.
- An “active” residential demographic has invested here.
- Provide more emphasis on residential uses along 6th Street. Include more modest/affordable housing.
- Residential/industrial/artisan mix of uses is positive- mixing, blurring lines between uses.
- Make connections, make a part of downtown with common themes but unique character. Look at iconic cities that have unique districts that feel part of downtown. North Monroe in Grand Rapids- mix and connected.
- Want 6th Street to be “edgy”. Not necessarily brick buildings.
- Visual connections to downtown elements- landscape planters, Christmas décor, lighting.
- Artisan connection to Dutch.
- Paul Elzinga provided a history of the evolution of E&V in this block.
- Industrial feel- preference, artisan, make more attractive and more pedestrian friendly.
- Make inviting.
- Be respectful of homes, of kids in the City, be kid-friendly. Natural environment. This is “our yard”.
- For visitors- identity and connections. Private parking.
- Give better definition to curbing and on-street parking areas.
- Access to train station and beyond.
- Natural character/green space is really important in this area. Be careful- “when it is gone, it is gone!” Think about Chicago vis-à-vis greenspace.
- Access into green important. Give better access to CityFlats and Marriott Hotel guests. Add more recreational components.
- Keep an eye on parking need. Consider parking coincidental with park.
- Accessibility from parking ramp.
- Sidewalk is really important.
- Want “more attractive”: remove overhead power lines. Appears doable per conversations with City/BPW to-date.
- Create/attract businesses and environment that engage the district and community.
- Inquiry regarding “Smart Zone”. Dana Kollwehr described this economic development tool.

What is next?

- What can be done now?
- What can be done down the road- 2-tier?
- Direction... not a conclusion through these meetings.
- 6th Street improvement plan.