

**“Connecting Downtown to the River:
A Vision for Sustainability and Growth
in Wellsville, New York”**

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Title of Project: Connecting Downtown to the River: A Vision for Sustainability and Growth
in Wellsville, New York

Grant Period: January 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017

Grantee Name: Alfred State College

Project Director: Dr. Craig Clark

Description of Project:

In Fall 2016, Professors William Dean and David Carli, instructors in the Architecture and Design **Department's senior Urban Design Studio**, selected the Allegany County Town of Wellsville, New York, as the subject for a semester-long *Community Visualization Study*. Working individually and in small groups, 24 students researched and documented the subject area and completed a *Neighborhood Development Analysis* for each of the two studios which included a visual survey of the defined physical characteristics that represent urban design excellence and design linkages in the neighborhood pattern and design of the community. The reports also took into consideration conversations with area residents and local officials and a preliminary draft comprehensive plan that outlined the **municipality's** strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

The information generated during these initial efforts was used as a point of departure to illustrate and explain a positive vision for sustainability and growth of Wellsville through community engagement. Students attended public meetings intended to identify sites within the community which are underutilized, have future development potential, or are being promoted for future development by local officials. The two studios then combined to complete a study focused on visualizing suggestions for reconnecting the **village's downtown to the Genesee River**, 5, 10, and 15 years in the future. The Community Visualization Study included action items for implementation and was presented publicly by the students to design professionals and community partners including the Village of Wellsville, the Wellsville Area Chamber of Commerce, and Genesee River Wilds, Inc.

Activities:

1. Students were assigned a project to document and research aspects of the village in preparation for completing the Community Visualization Study. This phase included the investigation of places, sources, and ideas as part of a coordinated effort in each studio.

Students visited Wellsville on September 2 and had the opportunity to interview Mayor Judy Lynch and Director of Public Works William Whitfield, and take a guided tour of the village. The students walked/drove around the **Village's** commercial district, residential neighborhoods, and public parks, and toured several sites key to the revitalization effort.



2. Following the site visit, each studio worked together as a group to refine and coordinate the collected information into a seamless Neighborhood Development Analysis of Wellsville. Students shared this information with the faculty and each other on September 9 in a presentation which included the investigation of the project area using LEED ND criteria that graphically addressed the following issues:

- Walkable Streets
- Compact Development
- Connected and Open Community
- Mixed-Use Neighborhoods
- Housing Types and Affordability
- Reduced Parking Footprint
- Transit Facilities
- Transportation Demand Management
- Access to Civic & Public Space
- Access to Recreation Facilities
- Visitability and Universal Design
- Community Outreach and Involvement
- Local Food Production
- Tree-Lined and Shaded Streetscapes
- Neighborhood Schools



3. The students held an in-studio design charrette on September 14 to generate additional ideas for future development. The studios were divided into six groups based on areas of focus to review the **village's** preliminary draft comprehensive plan, brainstorm concepts, and begin the visualization process. At the end of the day each group presented their work for discussion and critique.

4. Based on a review of the Neighborhood Develop Analysis information and ideas generated during the design charrette, the initial Community Visualization Study concepts were refined and presented at Alfred State September 25. The audience included students and faculty along with Village Mayor Judy Lynch and Treasurer Earl Johnson, who provided feedback to the students. In addition, the presentation material was shared with Director of Public Works, William Whitfield, and Executive Director of the Wellsville Area Chamber of Commerce, Brian Perkins, who offered written comments for the **students'** consideration. The students were asked to take these comments into consideration and continue to develop the study further.



5. Prior to the final public presentation, three local planners were invited into the studios at Alfred State on October 21 to review the Community Visualization Study, and offer suggestions regarding its verbal, graphic and written presentation. Guest critics included Eve Holberg from LaBella Associates, DPC, Aaron Lehman from the Community Design Center Rochester, and Matt Ingalls from Ingalls Planning and Design. Students then had several days to make adjustments and improve the presentation based on the critique of the design professionals.



6. On October 26, Professors William Dean and David Carli accompanied 24 fourth-year architecture students to the David A. Howe Public Library in Wellsville for a public presentation of their Community Visualization Study. Students presented their designs, which were based on the **village's preliminary** draft comprehensive plan, to an audience of village officials, community stakeholders and interested residents. The event was sponsored by the Village of Wellsville, and was well attended.



7. The presentation in Washington DC, in December 2016, was a highlight of this community based project. The students prepared and presented both a PowerPoint and a poster outlining their research efforts during the semester. Several of the students had never been to Washington, and enjoyed both **their experience at the conference and the opportunity to tour the nation's capital.**



8. Student work was placed on display at the Community Design Center Rochester gallery where it **opened as part of the center's "First Friday" open house** on April 7. The work was on display through May 2017. (Photo below left)



9. Four fourth-year architecture students re-presented the Wellsville Community Visualization Study as part of a poster session at the 2017 New York Statewide Preservation Conference in Rochester, New York. (Photo above right)

Project Outcomes:

A successful community partnership was developed with the Village of Wellsville through the development of the Community Visualization Study.

1. This project developed a partnership between the Allegany County Village of Wellsville and Alfred State in serving the Appalachian area of New York State. The project was presented to the elected officials, community stakeholders and residents on October 26, 2016.
2. This project served as a model for creating sustainable communities in Allegany County by capitalizing and highlighting their assets through the Community Visualization Study.
3. This project is consistent with ARC strategic plan goals *1. Economic Opportunities* and *4. Natural and Cultural Assets* in developing a phased strategy for the sustainability of Wellsville.
4. This project developed a leadership and civic engagement opportunity for students involved by working with a local rural community.
5. Working through the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and being allowed to present at the conference in Washington DC, exposed the students to other communities and how the ARC is integrated throughout the region.
6. The project enhanced the ability for the community partner to further develop avenues to obtain funding for improvement to the community using the Community Visualization Study.

Problems Encountered:

There were several minor problems encountered, but they did not necessitate a deviation from the original project proposal.

1. When this project was originally proposed, it was done with the assumption that there would be a newly-adopted comprehensive plan in place. This turned out not to be the case, and the students had significantly less guidance/information to work from than was anticipated.
2. Based on conversations with the mayor, it was also assumed that the Allegany County Director of Planning was aware of the project, but this turned out not to be the case. He was brought up to speed later in the project, and was supportive of the work being done by the students.
3. Of the three community partners identified in the original project proposal, only two – the Village of Wellsville and the Wellsville Area Chamber of Commerce – **played an active role in the project's** development. The third partner – Genesee River Wilds, Inc. – was peripherally involved, but not to the extent that was initially anticipated.
4. The faculty did not become aware, until several weeks into the project, that the village mayor was up for re-election. Mayor Lynch eventually lost her re-election bid. This did not impact the project, and it is not clear if/how it will affect next steps going forward.

Program Continuation and Sustainability:

Short-term impact – This specific project in Wellsville is complete. The project was well received by the community partners, drew a better-than-average crowd to the public presentation, and resulted in positive press for the students, program and college.

Long-term impact – The project resulted in stronger ties with the Allegany County Department of Planning, and the program has had inquiries from nearby communities regarding future projects. Next year the Urban Design Studio will select another municipality in Allegany County to assist with a Community Visualization Study. Civic engagement is one of the core values at Alfred State, and the Appalachian Teaching Project continues to enjoy an exceptional level of support from both the Department of Architecture and Design, the School of Architecture, Management and Engineering Technology, and the college administration.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

The project was a success for both Alfred State students and the residents of Wellsville, addressing both the course guidelines and project goals and the project impact identified in the ATP Project Outline.

The students became active participants in the Village of Wellsville planning process, and shared their project outcomes and recommendations with the community. In the process, they were able to educate those in attendance about the **ATP, the ARC, and the village's place within the Appalachian region.**

The Allegany County Director of Planning, H. Kier Dirlam, expressed that he would like to see the student work used as a stepping stone to more detailed project exploration, and for pursuing grants to achieve some of the objectives set forth in the project. In fact, the student work was included as an appendix to the Village of Wellsville Comprehensive Plan that was completed several weeks after the conclusion of the project. More recently, the Wellsville Community Garden Project requested to use work generated by one of the student groups as a blueprint to develop one of the vacant sites in the village.

We expect that architecturally-related student engagement activities in **New York's Southern Tier** will be ongoing for the near future. Professors William Dean and David Carli committed 60% of their time in the fall semester design studio classes for this project which is well in excess of the required total match of \$1,500, and fulfills the committed cost share for Alfred State College.

WELLSVILLE DAILY REPORTER

A-State architectural students reimagine Wellsville

Wednesday

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By Kathryn Ross

WELLSVILLE — Everything old is new again, at least for the senior urban design students at Alfred State who reimaged and redesigned the Village of Wellsville this past semester to look like and feel like it did in the '50s and '60s.

The six teams of future architects and designers, under the direction of professors of architecture William Dean and David Carli, presented their drawings and designs to officials and members of the public at the David A. Public Howe Library Wednesday night.

All the plans hinged on turning Genesee Parkway (the four-lane Route 417 expressways, which is less than 40 years old), which skirts the village's Main Street, into a two-lane highway divided by a combination pedestrian/bike path.

"This is not our vision of Wellsville, but it does bring to light some of the images you have had and puts them on paper," Dean told those assembled. He said the designs came after discussions with village residents and officials and tours of the village by the students.

"The students walked the sidewalks of Wellsville, they have eaten in the restaurants and shopped in the stores and have gotten to know Wellsville," he said.

He also said the students' images will be turned over to the Chamber of Commerce and the village.

Mayor Judy Lynch said that some of the images will be included in the village's new comprehensive plan which is nearly complete and the rest will be placed in a document for future planning and will be put on display at a future time.

As for the change in the Genesee Parkway, Lynch said she believes it is feasible.

"I'm really excited about changing the four-lane to make better use of the river. You start out by taking baby steps and then you get to where you want to be," she said.

County Planner Kier Dirlam agreed with her, saying, "It is feasible and it is inline with what other towns are doing. The plans focus on getting the community involved in the village environment and returning Wellsville to its 1950s layout."

He also noted that the traffic use on the four-lane compared to the traffic use on Main Street is about the same or about 8,000 vehicles a day.

Some of the changes in addition to reducing the four-lane to a two-lane included:

- extending the WAG (Wellsville, Addison and Galeton railroad line) trail through the village allowing it to join with the Greenway Trail to complete a trail running from Rochester to Williamsport, Pa.;
- adding two (southern and northern) welcoming gateways to the village;
- creating more green space throughout the village;
- changing Madison Street into a grassy pedestrian mall;
- introducing roundabouts to deal with traffic flow;
- construction of a multi-layered parking garage on the current site of the Jones Memorial Hospital parking area for hospital parking;
- expand and develop access to the Genesee River;
- turn the wetlands area along 417 into a park;
- develop the Fassett Building lot into a public garden and green space,
- expand Culligan Park and improve access to Island Park; and
- rebuild the former Pearl Street bridge as a walking bridge.

Suggestions were also made to change the facades of several businesses including the Modern Diner, Giant Food Mart and Sugardaddys.

Two students working on separate teams were Nate Piscitelli of Wellsville and Jessica Woughter of Andover.

Piscitelli said, "This is my fourth project. (Working on Wellsville) has been an awesome opportunity and I'm very pleased that they (the plans) all came together the way they did."

Woughter said, "I grew up coming to Wellsville, going to the stores shopping and attending the movies, so it was a lot of fun to work on this project and have it turn out so good."

The students started working on the Wellsville project at the beginning of the fall semester. Their first draft was completed earlier this month. In the past, the Urban Design Studio has worked with towns in Steuben County.
