

“Two Main Streets” Forum, May 1, 2010
Cold Spring Special Board for a Comprehensive Plan

“Butterfield Commons” Roundtable Discussion

Group I

Participants: David Birn; Jan Thacher; Giom [John] Grech; Joe Immorlica; Seth Gallagher, mayor of Cold Spring; Drea Kaplon; Karen Doyle, Special Board member; Anne Impellizzeri, Special Board vice-chair (round-table facilitator); Chuck Hustis, Cold Spring trustee; Liz Schevtchuk Armstrong, former Special Board member (round-table note-taker)

Introduction

Anne gave a brief introduction, noting that the old Butterfield Hospital property, with its expansive lawn and several large, old trees, marks the southern gateway into Cold Spring, perhaps the foremost of the 5 entries to the village. She explained that the vacant hospital building, about 44,500 square feet, and all or part of the lawn, are the subject of talks between the owner, Paul Guillaro, of Unicorn Contracting Corp., and Putnam County, which hopes to buy the site and which is represented in the negotiations by Legislator Vinny Tamagna, with County Executive Robert Bondi. She also outlined some of the ideas for the site, were the county to acquire it. These involve creating a sort of “commons” that could include government offices for Cold Spring, Philipstown, including their respective justice courts, the Cold Spring police department; county offices; the Cold Spring Fire Company, to whom Guillaro had earlier promised a corner of land for construction of a new firehouse; ambulance corps; possible Putnam County sheriff’s sub-station; senior citizen-cum-community center; U.S. Postal Service post office, to replace the one across Chestnut Street, which is expected to be taken over by a Foodtown expansion in 2011; and, perhaps, private offices or small-business quarters.

The group discussed these and other various ideas for the site, weighing the pros and cons and their implications not only for the Butterfield site but for Cold Spring as a whole. In doing so, they addressed an informal series of questions:

“Butterfield Commons”?

- Impact on village?
- Village green-gateway?
- Public services: Offices? Firehouse? Police? Courts? Ambulance corps?
- Medical: Lahey Pavilion; urgent-care facility?
- Businesses: Research center? Other possibilities?
- Senior/Community Center?
- Education: adult courses?

Comments from Participants

- “The post office would be a plus because it would alleviate the congestion” found in the parking lots and area at the current site, next to the Foodtown grocery.
- There is a “plus” in that there’s a lot of square-footage up there at the Butterfield site, useful in grouping all those government functions together, but putting the Cold Spring village government there would lose the “synergy” of the current situation on Main Street, where village offices are now located. Also, it’s important to remember that the “commons” proposal is not a firm deal yet.

- The plans include allocating up to 10,000 square feet for a senior-citizen center, according to the Putnam County Office on Aging (as heard by local seniors).

Anne: The 2007 village survey undertaken as part of the Comprehensive Plan work revealed strong support for a senior center at Butterfield, plus space for teens and an overall community center. It is worth bearing in mind that the proportion of seniors in Cold Spring is double that of the county as a whole.

- But there's so far only one cluster of senior housing.
- "The interesting thing about that," the high proportion of seniors in Cold Spring, "is to ask 'why?'" A probable answer: By nature, the village is a good place for seniors to live, with high levels of security, cleanliness, pedestrian access and "walkability," and more. "That's a good thing, which we should try to encourage."
- It's part of the caring, friendly character of the village.
- There's also some change, which could affect that demographic breakdown, with younger families arriving and senior citizens leaving.
- That emphasizes the shared goals of those of all ages in being part of the village.
- Residents live longer and hang around the village longer. As to the idea of 2 Main Streets – how about a parking area at the beginning of the village? People don't walk to Foodtown; it's not as accessible as it might be. Also, what about putting in a larger parking lot somewhere else and encouraging more walking throughout the village?
- If there were proper signage, it would guide people. In a way, the Butterfield property as a collective government center "makes sense; it frees up the very picturesque Main Street" for other establishments.

Anne: One concept to consider is that of an old, walkable Main Street, where you go to do things – stop at village hall, eat at a restaurant, buy a few light things -- versus a new "Main Street" in the Foodtown shopping center area, where you go and park and carry heavier items.

- Many people *do* walk to Foodtown, up Marion Avenue, which runs behind the stores. But it can be confusing where the sidewalk runs out on Marion Avenue.
- There's a public right-of-way on an old path past the Grove, the 19th-century Lente house, called Loretto Rest in the 20th century when nuns lived there; it's next to the Butterfield property.
- If the focus is on developing the Butterfield area, look at the parking places that would be freed. "All the street parking would be made available. There's plenty of parking" on Main Street "but it's not convenient. People are spoiled."
- Would moving the government services from Main Street further harm Main Street?
- There was a note from a resident who claimed that the last time the post office was moved, from Main Street, years ago, it had a negative effect on Main Street. The writer emphasized the value of a "real" Main Street, with necessary functions such as the village office and the fire company with its members "hanging out" there, which contributes to the character of the village for both residents and visitors. *[Note: Several comments from other people reinforced that point.]*
- Remember what the village was "about" in the past, with store space and living space/housing all in one building.

- Every town used to be like Cold Spring; everyone patronized the local shops and did business locally. Cold Spring is really fortunate it's been able to preserve that to a large extent, in contrast to Fishkill, Carmel, Brewster, and other old Hudson Valley towns that became part of suburbia, with strip development and parking lots and everything car-dominated. "We have been incredibly lucky. It seems like lunacy to transport the last vestige of village life onto the strip mall," which is what would happen if the village offices were moved into a new facility at the Butterfield site.
- "I could see it up there," village hall at the Butterfield site and maybe have a career-counseling center, too."
- The Butterfield site now generates taxes based on the worth of the Lahey pavilion medical offices that occupy the building adjacent to the old hospital.
- You'd lose the tax income if there were government offices there instead. *[Note: The ideas under consideration assume the continuation of medical offices at Lahey and thus continuation of tax income.]*
- The village and other local governments could have offices there and the property could still rent space to others.
- The village needs a barbershop, a laundromat.

Anne: What about the Grove-Loretto Rest house?

- "I don't think the village should sell an asset. Don't lose important assets. The Grove is what's left of probably one of the single-most important [establishments] in the village," the West Point Foundry. Instead, lease any government property on Main Street – village hall, firehouse --- vacated by a move to the Butterfield site.

Time ran out, precluding any further discussion...

Tentative Conclusion/Consensus:

It makes sense to turn the Butterfield site, at least the building, into a center for government and more – if it's done properly. Moving the Cold Spring village government offices to the Butterfield site could work and may be a good thing, but there's a risk to the "reality" of Main Street.

Liz Schevotchuk Armstrong

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"Butterfield Commons" Roundtable Discussion

Group II

Participants: Marc Sabin; Eric Wirth; Judith Rose; Bruce Campbell, village trustee; Anne Impellizzeri, Special Board vice-chair (round-table facilitator); Liz Schevtchuk Armstrong, former Special Board member (round-table note-taker)

Introduction

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Comments from Participants

- Maybe the county tourism office could be included in the mix of offices at a Butterfield Commons.
- And maybe if the village got some county offices it would get more county attention.
- Tamagna and Rep. John Hall are reportedly talking to the U.S. Postal Service.
- It’s important to keep the village government on Main Street but it makes sense to put the police up there at Butterfield. Also, “I love having the fire department on Main Street, with the guys `hanging out.’”
- It would be better to have the village government and so on centralized, and it would open up more space on Main Street to business, and maybe such things as law firms.
- Having the village hall and fire department on Main Street is a vote of confidence in the nature of the village and its old-fashioned Main Street. “We know what works. Small towns have always worked.”

- “It’s so sad” when a village’s offices are off somewhere separate from village life.
- Would the Garrison post office close, given the wave of post office closings?

Anne: In regard to Butterfield, what about the idea of a village green and “gateway,” probably the most important of the five in the village? Do we value the lawn as a village green? And what about the old hospital itself? Keep it?

- Definitely, this will also preserve green space and keep a strip mall-type complex from spreading out too much.
- If that site became a village core, the lawn could become a village green and “common.” But would that have a bad effect on Main Street?
- Put the Philipstown Town Hall offices at the Butterfield site and thus accommodate the visits to non-village functions there.
- Have something on Main Street to draw visitors.
- Why not rent out some space at Butterfield to non-government establishments and offices? Also, a small urgent care-overnight care medical center or “cottage hospital” would be a good thing at that site.
- What about Loretto Rest-the Grove? To change the nature of that property and hurt the look of the old house would be wrong. Maintain it.
- Sell Loretto Rest with restrictions as to its future, so it’s fixed up and not torn down; sell it to whomever can make good use of it.

Anne: What about a community center on Main Street? Is that a possible use for the current firehouse if the fire department moves into a new building at the Butterfield property?

- With a firehouse at the Butterfield site, the idea was to have a community center-senior center...
- Are there problems regarding the location of the firehouse at Butterfield?
- The proposed site for the firehouse, below the Lahey Pavilion, was the developer’s idea. Ostensibly a firehouse could go elsewhere on the Butterfield site if that developer is no longer involved.
- There’s a question of the importance of having a village gateway-village green at the Butterfield site. “It’s prime real estate.”
- Overall, though, the general feeling of the table seems to be that the hospital and lawn should be preserved.
- There are differences between the lighting at the Foodtown plaza and the Yanitelli plaza, its neighbor across Benedict Road – apparently there are different laws governing them?
- Regarding Main Street: What about supporting the “slow money” or “3-50” movement, in which someone agrees to spend \$50 at each of 3 village shops – as at least one resident has pledged to do. Also, what about a community department store, run like a co-op, an apparent new “trend” in Saranac Lake? It’s a daunting process to get one going, though.

- One further idea for Butterfield is an adult education center or quasi-community college, with evening classes and other courses, perhaps run by Marist or another area college or university.

Tentative Conclusion/Consensus:

It makes sense to turn the Butterfield site, at least the building, into a center for government and more - if it's done properly. Moving at least some of the Cold Spring village government offices and functions to the Butterfield site could work and may be a good thing, although there is some risk to the "reality" of Main Street.

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