



# Orleans Citizens Forum

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## IN FOLLOW-UP TO OCF FORUM ORLEANS VILLAGE STUDY GROUP UNVEILS MORE IDEAS TO IMPROVE DOWNTOWN ORLEANS

By Jim Mackey, OCF Board Member

ORLEANS, MA. Based on the Orleans Village Center Study Group's detailed responses to unanswered audience questions and comments, the Orleans Citizen Forum (OCF) compiled the Study Group's considered answers to 49 audience questions which the Study Group was not able to answer due to time constraints at the Orleans Citizen Forum's April 12, 2011 dialogue between the community and the Study Group. They revealed more ideas, issues and challenges about what's in store for downtown Orleans.

*(The Orleans Village Center Study Group is a public/private partnership task force of the Orleans Planning Board and the Orleans Chamber of Commerce for brainstorming ideas to improve the downtown Orleans Village Center. This business-government task force is an outgrowth of a town-meeting funded consultant's report that had 54 recommendations to enhance the Village Center and is charged by the Board of Selectmen to come up with short and long term development plans for the Town's Village Center. The OCF Forum gave citizens the opportunity to hear the Village Center Study Group's progress and to propose new ideas to the Group before it submits its plans to the Town Planning Board which will review the ideas and present them to the Board of Selectmen). (Also all graphics in this article are conceptual images of Streetscape art and not intended to represent specifics of downtown Orleans, any improvements therein or any ideas of the Village Center Study Group).*

For starters the Cape Cod Commission is providing 600 hours of the services of a professional consultant to Orleans on Streetscape design to create a sense of place for the Village Center. Some ideas could be implemented quickly, such as, Streetscaping improvements, new trees, bike racks, theme-based signage, matching benches, lamp posts, trash cans and convincing businesses with obstructed store views of the interior (e.g., CVS) to change them and encouraging businesses to provide their wireless service in 2011 to the public until the downtown area becomes wireless in the next year or so as the result of a recent Federal grant.



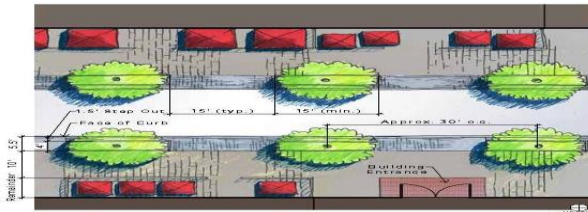
Of all the improvements the Village Center Study Group would like to see happen within a year or two is just getting the formation of a public/private entity (as the Orleans Action Committee or VC Action Committee) to carry out completion of these improvements. This number one priority would be followed by Wi-Fi in the Village Center, aesthetics throughout the Village Center, improved pedestrian safety in crosswalks and making Orleans a more bike-able community. The public/private partnership of a Village Center Action Committee will consolidate the work completed and work effectively under the umbrella of one organization with a broader membership circle of residents, business owners and town organizations. The partnership will include professional landscapers who will be concerned about sustainability of Orleans as an MA "Green Community" and the Streetscape Plan which will address the key intersection of 6A and Main Street to insure that future street landscaping plantings and watering will be properly maintained by the new public/private organization. The partnership will also include a member of the Orleans Historical Society so as to preserve and promote Orleans heritage into the vision of its future. The historical heritage of Orleans is an invaluable treasure. A group of business people and concerned citizens are addressing the organization of all these important projects now.

A downtown cultural center and a traffic study for the center was a product of the work group discussions. Possible sites are being considered but there is nothing definite yet. Traffic and parking studies focusing on a cultural center are complete. Some of the recommendations have already or will be implemented such as the Rt. 6A and 28 Roundabout. The Group is also addressing the identified need for parking in the Village Center. The Nauset Middle School Theater with a 500 seat venue is close to many Orleans attractions and is a tremendous asset to the Town. However, because it is highly programmed during the summer and its rental income is part of the school budget, the Study Group still believes the Town needs a year-round facility with daytime and evening hours that does not compete with the space demands of our schools. The Oddfellows Hall is a private organization and their participation in Town activities is at their discretion, as a viable cultural center, the Village Study Group considers the Oddfellows Hall beyond the walking distance of the Village Center and presents, therefore, the challenge of a car ride as does the current location of the Academy Playhouse.



Of course, one of the gems of Orleans culture is the Snow Library. Its usage increases at four percent a year. By increasing parking in the Village Center, especially the insufficient parking around Main Street and 6A, will relieve the pressure on library parking. A blend of central and peripheral parking that is easy and convenient will meet the needs of the Orleans population best. There is a need to have people park their vehicles once and walk through the Village Center, with a campus-like feel, especially for an aging year-round population less inclined to drive and desiring upscale, one level living in the Village Center. As the group addresses parking, it will also address long term future technologies, such as, electric car charging stations, occasional transport usage models like Zip Cars and bikes, smaller electric vehicles, trolleys and even Pedi cabs. Occasional transport vehicles would be seasonal with questionable cost effectiveness and public usage but such vehicles, as trolleys, could connect from Depot Square to Skaket Beach, Rock Harbor, Nauset Beach and possibly a future Orleans Transportation Center. The Streetscape design will address ways to separate pedestrian walkways from parking lots like the Friends Market parking lot. Early on in meetings of the Village Study Group there was interest to eliminate overhead wires in the Village Center, primarily on Main Street, which would make for a

great aesthetic improvement. This would be a long term objective but it is very expensive and coordination is needed between the sewer system and public utilities. In a separate study the Town is studying options for bike lanes including creating paths parallel to --- but not on --- Main Street that link up to the bike path and run eventually to South Orleans and configuring Beach Road to link Orleans by bike from the Bay to the Ocean. The Village Study Group will form a new subcommittee to address these biking and pedestrian route options throughout the Village Center. It wants to see bikes and sidewalks into center of Orleans from South Orleans, East Orleans and Rock Harbor linking outer parts to the center of Town. It also wants to enhance the Village Center by developing a contiguous Sidewalk Plan which would include sidewalks to the Town landing at the bottom of Cove Road, a sidewalk from Main Street, along the West side of Route 28 to Cove Road and the existing crosswalk to the right side of Route 28 to gain access to the waterfront, extending this sidewalk along the West side of Route 28 from Cove Road to a contiguous sidewalk to the end of the Village Center at the Route 6A and Route 28 Roundabout as well as improving the sidewalk on the Southside of Cove Road. In addition the new subcommittee will also study the dangerous problem of the bike trail crossing Main Street and Old Colony Way and the traffic back-up that occurs by the bike path and Snow's entrance driveway (located next to the bike path). On the issue of One Way streets, (as Main Street eastbound, Cove Road westbound), professional traffic engineers and Public Safety officials do not endorse one-way streets as they interfere with fire, police and safety vehicles.



The concern of having more restaurants downtown are challenged by their connection to sewer issues as well as how to support multiple year-round restaurants with seasonal usage. The Village Center will be sewered in Phase 1 of the Orleans Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan and the implementation of that plan will come before Orleans voters in the future. Some plantings can be done prior to sewer construction because the main sewer line likely will run down the middle of the street. Sewers are key to Orleans restaurant capacity but small restaurants can be accomplished now. Plans for the defunct Laundromat behind the Cape Cup envision a public/private partnership which will encourage private property owners to follow standards and guidelines set out in the final plan. The VC Action Committee will address the type of restaurants to complement existing Orleans businesses and amending the Orleans Board of Health/Zoning supporting Village dining. The Town Comprehensive Plan addresses the need to expand residential development in the Village Center above the first floor and the Town has passed Bylaws to accommodate an increase in density/improvement in design

The Town Zoning and By-laws affecting dining, parking, set back, signage, density and parking all need to be revisited once the decision as a community is made to support resources that do not exist like the cultural center, outdoor dining or a bike path through the Village. The Town Planning Board is open to creative approaches and will be addressing the feasibility of franchises through a Formula Business Bylaw as the priorities for the Village Center are articulated. The Town Planning Board also presented and received Town Meeting approval for a complete revision of the Sign By-law. The Town Architectural Review Committee reviews and approves all new or revised signs in the Business Districts. Sign enforcement is the responsibility of the Town Building Commissioner. For new construction the Town has an existing By-law that provides building setback requirements which would virtually direct parking in the rear. For existing buildings the Streetscape will provide plantings to aesthetically address obscuring out parking with buildings, parks and shrubbery. As far as "Night Sky" friendly lighting is concerned, the Planning Board presented the Lighting By-Law and it was passed as a General By-Law which

means that all Orleans businesses must comply. Lighting enforcement is also the responsibility of the Town Building Commissioner.

Successful improvement partnership task force models for towns, villages, cities and suburbs exist all over the U.S. Hyannis MA, Charlottesville, VA, Concord, MA, Williamstown, MA, Northampton, MA, Cleveland, OH, Alexandria, VA, Chagrin Falls, OH, Bethesda, MD and most notably the Cape Cod Cultural Center in Yarmouth, MA are examples of partnerships at different levels that worked to create improvements in their communities. Some are structured as Business Improvement Districts (BID), economic improvement organizations, while others are based with an arts, energy or education focus. Once the Town's priority list is created, funding to pay for these priority projects will be studied but the Village Center Study Group is not quite there yet.



While the Group is looking at additional Town attractions they recognize everyone needs to do a better job of coordinating on a Village-wide basis, existing attractions as baseball, concerts, and plays at The Academy Playhouse, guest speakers at the library as well as encouraging the interested Cape Cinema to consider an Orleans branch for art films and general audience movies. Unless the Town has a dialogue about all of the foregoing issues and challenges, Orleans will have design by default where it will have redundant services, as numerous gas stations, that are less than aesthetic. Organizing the Town around activity or usage nodes makes terrific sense and would help control and consolidate redundancy. If the Town has a plan, the Town Government can better encourage business development as current leases expire. It all hinges on having an articulated and agreed upon map of our future.

The Planning Board will report the Work Group's recommendations to the Board of Selectmen in the near future. With the Selectmen's approval the Orleans Village Center Study Group continues hope that its number one priority of a new private/public partnership will be formed to address implementation. This partnership will have governance to sort through which entity is most appropriate to handle a particular task. Creating a marketing campaign for local businesses through volunteer members and the Chamber of Commerce is different from seeking grant support to match public landscaping or art, which could be coordinated with local cultural council efforts and the Town. In the mission statement of the partnership, clear goals and governance must be articulated for it to work effectively.

To date Orleans citizens have given valuable inputs through the consultant's public surveys which resulted in the 54 recommendations to enhance the Village Center. About 40 residents actively participated on the six subcommittees of the Village Study Group. They studied and worked on about 56 action items. As the Village Study Group and the Town progresses on the Village Study, Orleans citizens will have more opportunities to attend public workshops addressing recommended initiatives and the Streetscape work presently under development. This subject will be addressed at the Town Planning Board meetings which are open to the public and televised.