

Final Report, Middle Neck Road

Main Street Conference and Visioning Program

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Introduction

Two visits were made to Great Neck to analyze, validate and introduce walkability, sustainability and economic development concepts to revitalize Middle Neck Road and surrounding areas. The first visit was made in June 2006 by Dan Burden. On this first visit Dan conducted walking audits and held focus group meetings of the three villages with village officials and staff, members of the Chamber of Commerce, business owners and interested residents. Summary comments



and notes from this first visit are included in this appendix. Dan also facilitated a public workshop, "What is a Livable/Walkable/Sustainable Community," a Power Point presentation. This included a brainstorming and prioritization process with a diverse audience of approximately 70 participants that incorporated images and suggestions he has made in various towns and villages in his 15 years of working in nearly 2,000 communities. Dan focused on characteristics of neighborhoods, such as pedestrian-friendly environments, placemaking, mixed-use development, parking, traffic calming, bicycle/pedestrian accessibility and mobility issues affecting our elderly and disabled population.



Between July 24 and July 26, 2007, a small planning and design team from the firm of Glatting Jackson (i.e., Dan Burden and Ian Lockwood), worked further with all three communities along Middle Neck Road. During the second visit, the team toured the road and area, met with dozens of stakeholders from the area, presented walkability and sustainability concepts determined from the previous visit. That evening ideas were shared along with a rationale for concepts. A diverse group came together, including politicians, appointed officials, general public, business people, and professional staff from the three villages. The response was very positive and the general consensus was that these concepts and ideas would help shape the future design of the road as the process continues. Although three visits were outlined in the grant, it was determined that bringing in two

members of the audit team together with all three communities at the same time provided added benefits and more positive, collaborative outcomes.

This report outlines key concepts, recommendations and implementation strategies. Both short term and long term solutions are offered. The report also summarizes key findings, by topic, and provides a set of shared goals, strategies and tools providing a holistic, complete framework for Middle Neck Road. This work resulted in a shared vision and inspiration. All participants agreed that more work is needed, and expressed a strong collective desire to secure funding, policies and other directions that will lead toward a more vibrant and attractive street, buildings, building types to make this area more successful as a place.

Vision

Vision is the ability to see a place fifty to one hundred years from now, and being able to make decisions and affect change today that ultimately results in the type of place envisioned for the long run. Part of this vision has to do with how we define “capacity” of streets. Conventionally, the capacity of the street has been defined as the maximum number of motor vehicles that can pass by a point along the street during an hour. However, we know that streets have the capacity to be beautiful, to host social activity, to provide recreational facilities, to nurture businesses and homes, to retain jobs and provide greater economic prosperity. Streets have the capacity to contribute essential parts to the public realm on many levels. The vision for Middle Neck Road is a beautiful, safe, vibrant, economically successful, main street that respects its history and helps define the community for years to come.

Patterns

The issues, concerns, and problems facing metropolitan areas, cities, and villages (urban places for short) are often the result of long histories, evolving values, and layers of factors varying from block structure to social issues, to funding issues, to political boundaries, to topography, to climate, to you name it. Urban places are complex. What looks like a simple problem on the surface may be a symptom of a different and sometimes a larger problem.

From a design perspective, a tool that helps discern what is right and wrong for urban places is called the “transect.” The transect is simply a cross-section of the built environment ranging on a scale from urban to rural. For example, referring to the bottom of *Figure 1*, in urban areas we would expect buildings to be taller and closer to the street, lower further from the street in suburban places, and then even further from the street in rural areas.

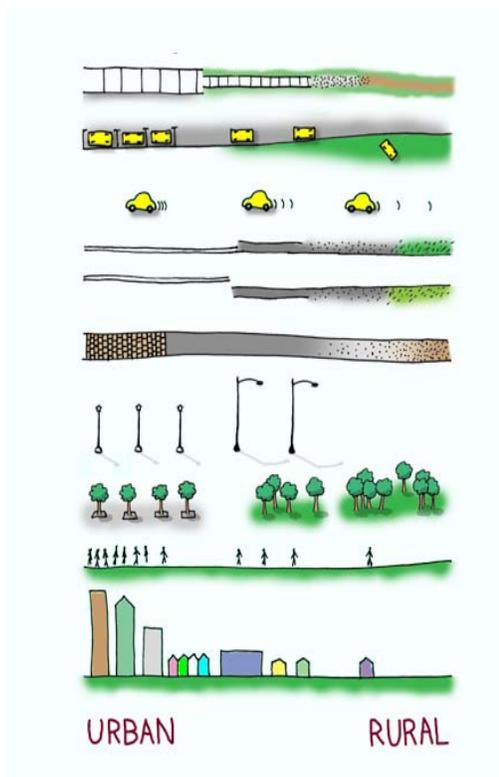


Figure 1: The Transect

Moving up *Figure 1*, the density of people in urban areas would be higher than those in rural areas. The transect for trees would involve regularly spaced trees in grates in urban areas, to less formal spacing and no grates in the suburbs, to natural forest in rural areas. Streetlights range from pedestrian scale lights that are evenly spaced, to high mast street lights, to no lights, as one goes from urban to rural. Paving materials would range from bricks, to asphalt, to gravel, moving from urban to rural. Edge treatments would range from vertical curbs, to paved shoulders, to gravel shoulders, to grass shoulders, to natural edges. The speeds of motor vehicles, in urban areas, would be slow and then become faster in suburban and rural areas. On-street parking would be formal and marked in urban areas, less formal and unmarked in the suburbs, and then off-street in rural areas. Sidewalk widths would be wide in urban areas, five or six feet wide in the suburbs, and then become trails or nonexistent in rural areas.

Consequently, if we were designing a street in an urban area, it would involve buildings up to the street, more people, trees in grates, pedestrian-scale lighting, higher valued paving materials, curbs, slow moving motor vehicles, on-street parking, and wide sidewalks. So we can use the transect to help determine if one aspect or another of the built environment suits the place or context. For example, streets without lights would not suit an urban street though it would be perfectly suitable in a rural area. Gravel roads would not be suitable in an urban environment, while brick streets would be out of context in rural areas. Though these examples may seem simple, the transect helps us to determine if design elements suit their contexts, urban or otherwise.

Middle Neck Road is within an urban environment, traversing several villages, and, thus, should have all the attributes of a village main street. Unfortunately, the transect has been violated several times with the removal of on street parking, two through lanes in the same direction in places, excessive speed limits, long crossing distances for pedestrians, and driveways interrupting the sidewalks.

Example of a portion of Great Neck Road that is suburban in form. The intersection, lack of trees and other harsh conditions are not favorable for many neighborhood and commercial activities.



Vision and Objectives for Middle Neck Road

The design of Middle Neck Road is somewhat like a mosaic of tiles. Each tile can be analyzed independently forever but to no avail. It is much better to first understand the big picture or vision for the street and then focus on the particular contributing parts.

By first recognizing that Middle Neck Road ought to be a thriving main street, then the design direction becomes clear in terms of speed, lights, driveways, sidewalks, etc. Changes to any of the parts that contribute to the main street environment should be supported, while changes that detract should be avoided.

Stepping back even further, we ask ourselves the fundamental question, “Why do urban places exist?” From a transportation perspective, one could argue that urban places exist to minimize travel, to bring people together for purposes of exchange; the exchange of goods and services, social contact, justice, entertainment, knowledge, wisdom, passion and so on.

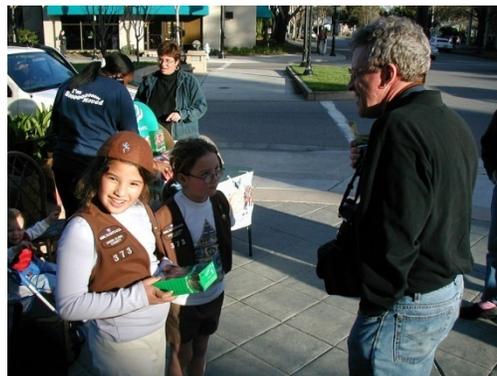
Exchange is related to access. People need to access each other in order for exchange to occur. The pursuit of mobility is typically anti-access. The pursuit of mobility attempts to speed up motor vehicles. It cocoons people in their motor vehicles, spreads places out, reduces density, increases land consumption, and reduces exchange.

Consequently, the pursuit of mobility builds an anti-urban place. In contrast, the pursuit of access and exchange is builds a pro-urban place.

The extreme width of this portion of Great Neck Road invites speed and other wrong behavior. This building and its accompanying driveways also reduce the ability of this portion of the road to fully serve the villages.

Assume for this discussion, that there are two types of exchange for people; planned exchanges and unplanned exchanges. An example

of a planned exchange is purchasing a bottle of sunscreen at the drug store. We drive to the drug store, pick up the sunscreen, and drive home. A single planned exchange would be accomplished. Assume now that we lived in a walkable urban place. On the walk to and from the drug store, one might chat with a neighbor, wave to the butcher across the street, watch some kids play ball on the green, say “hello” to another pedestrian, pop into a gift shop to buy a gift for a friend, sit on a bench and ponder a piece of public art, watch the brick layer deftly repair a wall, etc. We have accomplished one planned exchange and seven unplanned exchanges. The quality of the urban place is related to the sum of its unplanned exchanges that one experiences routinely.



Access and Mobility. High access locations (above) maximize exchange. While Main Streets still have a duty to manage a reasonable amount of traffic this should not be done at a level causing loss of social life, safety, and livability. High mobility places (below) compromise community life and detract from balanced transportation systems.



Exchange is important to urban places in general. Thus access is important in urban places. Higher access has design implications such as smaller blocks, slower speeds, increased walkability, increased mixing of land uses, etc. when compared to suburban and rural places. However, exchange and access are not equally important everywhere in urban places.



***Pedestrians at Peril.** Conditions in the people-rich retail areas of Great Neck Road are chaotic. This woman gave up trying to cross at the intersection, and started moving with the traffic until she was finally let out of the street.*



One would expect exchange to be richer in downtowns. Consequently, access is more important in downtowns than elsewhere in urban places. Furthermore, within the downtowns, the places where one would expect the most exchange would be along the main streets. Thus, access is vitally important along main streets. Therefore, design elements that support exchange are crucial to the future success of Middle Neck Road.

It is interesting that motor vehicle-oriented places discourage unplanned exchanges through their design (e.g., homogeneous land uses, long trip lengths, few routing choices, low densities, garages at the fronts of houses, dead end streets, gated entrances, driveways and parking lots in front of buildings, drive-thrus, etc.)

Yet some conventional thinkers equate motor vehicle use with freedom and choice. Their idea is that motor vehicles provide choices as to where to reside, what to do, and when to do it. Clearly, motor vehicles can be very handy, but when the urban place's design changes to such an extreme that motor vehicles become prosthetics, the notion of freedom and choice vanishes. People have little choice; they could not function effectively without motor vehicles. Furthermore, in these environments, people, who do not drive or who cannot drive motor vehicles, cannot function effectively (e.g., the young, some physically disabled, and the economically challenged) and, thus, their choices are diminished on several fronts (e.g., employment, recreation, shopping, walking, social contact, etc.



Thus, Middle Neck Road needs to be, firstly, pedestrian-friendly. This, in turn, will make the street conducive to public transit and, with low speeds; it will be friendly to cyclists.

Middle Neck Road needs to be a successful main street but, due to historically poor planning, when the villages

were originally laid out, it also has to serve a traffic function. The original planners provided an inadequate number of parallel streets. Consequently, a balance is needed between the two competing roles; the Main Street and moving volumes of motorists.

In some stretches, attempts have been made to move high volumes of motorists by adding through lanes (e.g., north of Maple Drive). However, constraints elsewhere cap car-carrying capacity of streets (e.g., south of Maple Drive). The reality is that widening harmed streets in terms of its main street role and did not increase the capacity effectively; drivers simply arrived at the next constraint and queued up there.



In other stretches, lane configurations limit the capacity of streets which, with some modification, increase car-carrying capacity without detracting from main street environments. Consequently, it is recommended that more consistent cross-sections be employed that balances the two roles; namely, one lane in each direction, a left turn lane, parking on both sides, and wide sidewalks. Design details that help the balance include low speed limits by design, bulbouts at corners and mid-blocks, valley gutters, street trees, pedestrian scaled lights, and paving textures. This set of tools chosen for Middle Neck Road will be expanded upon in the subsequent sections and samples are in the general cross-section, illustrated in Figure 3.

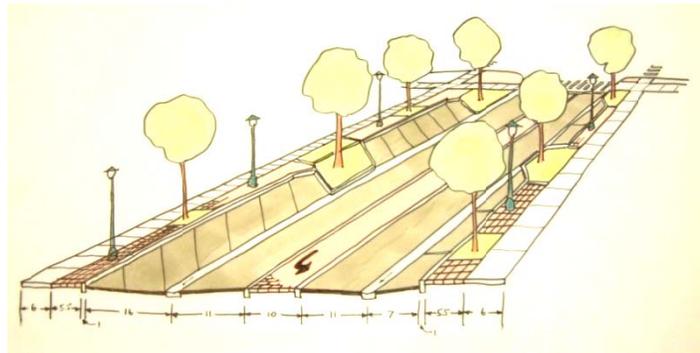


Figure 3: Sample of Cross-Section Elements for Middle Neck Road

Parking meters and time limits for parking are needed along portions Middle Neck Road where the regular turnover of spaces is desired for the success of retail, commercial, and restaurant users. However, individual parking meters on poles clutter up the rather narrow sidewalks. It is recommended that two parking meters be placed on each pole which will cut the number of poles in half. Better still, pay-on-foot stations would reduce the clutter even further. They would also simplify collections and allow for a better audit trail.



Driveways should be discouraged along Middle Neck Road. Driveways interrupt the pedestrian environment and lessen the supply of on-street parking. Access to parking and to service buildings should be done from side streets or alleys. Where there is no option but to use a driveway, there should only be one driveway to a property. Should adjacent properties have no other option but to have driveway access from Middle Neck Road, then the driveway should be combined and shared.

Example of a drive that is unfriendly to pedestrians, does not meet ADA guidelines, and is a problem for motorists. A clear set of new street making guidelines will need to be one of the "next steps" for the villages.



Street lights that are decorative and at a pedestrian scale are recommended along the street. There is a variety of lights employed today. A consistent fixture would simplify inventories and maintenance.

Sidewalk widths should be maximized. The minimum amount of width should be used for the lanes and then the remainder used for sidewalks. At driveways, the sidewalk material should go through the driveway, uninterrupted, at its full width, and at sidewalk height. Any elevation change between the sidewalk and the street should be made up in the apron.

Trees and Sidewalks. Although Middle Neck's sidewalks and trees have served the community well for decades, they are both approaching their end life. A new investment in both will be controversial and essential. A good public process to accomplish this is essential.

Benches should be supplied regularly along the street. The locations for benches should provide shade, a view, and allow the people sitting to feel secure (i.e., nobody walking directly behind the bench).

Art in the form of additional murals, sculpture, window displays, and through building design should be encouraged.



The **design vehicle** should be a WB 40 tractor trailer. These are bigger than a fire truck, delivery vehicle, school bus, etc. Because these vehicles are a tiny minority of the traffic, the design policy should be to allow encroachment.

The **design speed** and posted speed should be the same for Middle Neck Road and they should not exceed 25 mph. Plenty of volume can be moved at 25 mph or less. More importantly, safety is increased with slower speeds due to shorter stopping distances, wider fields of views for drivers, and less impact in the case of collisions. Slower speeds are better for the pedestrian and cycling environments as well.

d. Crossing distances across intersections and at other pedestrian crossing should be minimized by using the smallest radii that allows for the WB 40 tractor trailer (i.e. between 15 to 25 feet, depending on the intersection). Bulbouts should be employed at crossings. Bulbouts allow pedestrians a place to safely stand and see both ways before they cross the street, while allowing motorists to see the pedestrians too. Bulbouts self-enforce parking regulations by preventing motorists from parking too close to intersections and fire hydrants. They also provide locations for street trees that are closer to the center line of the street than locations along the sidewalk, improving the canopy and sense of enclosure along the street.



Buildings, with adequate window area and doors (i.e., more than 70% of the ground floor façade), need to be built up to the right-of-way line. There were several suburban buildings, built since 1950, that are set back from the street. These buildings detract from the street aesthetically and lower the street's walkability. Given the opportunity, these building should be replaced with building that respect the context. Buildings should offer 70-90% glass (window and door transparency) toward the street.

On-street parking is important to pedestrian comfort and economic success. The on-street parking supply should be maximized. Parallel parking should be employed except where the right-of-way is adequately wide to use back-in-angled parking. Back-in-angled parking doubles the parking supply compared to parallel parking and it is much safer than head-in-angled parking.

Enclosure is lacking along the street. To solve this problem, canopy trees should be planted in every bulbout. Over time, the trees grow and canopy over the street, providing enclosure. Also, as new buildings are built in the gaps along the street and as they replace suburban buildings, the sense of enclosure will increase. Trees planted in short medians will also help with the sense of enclosure.

Maple Drive to Cedar Drive

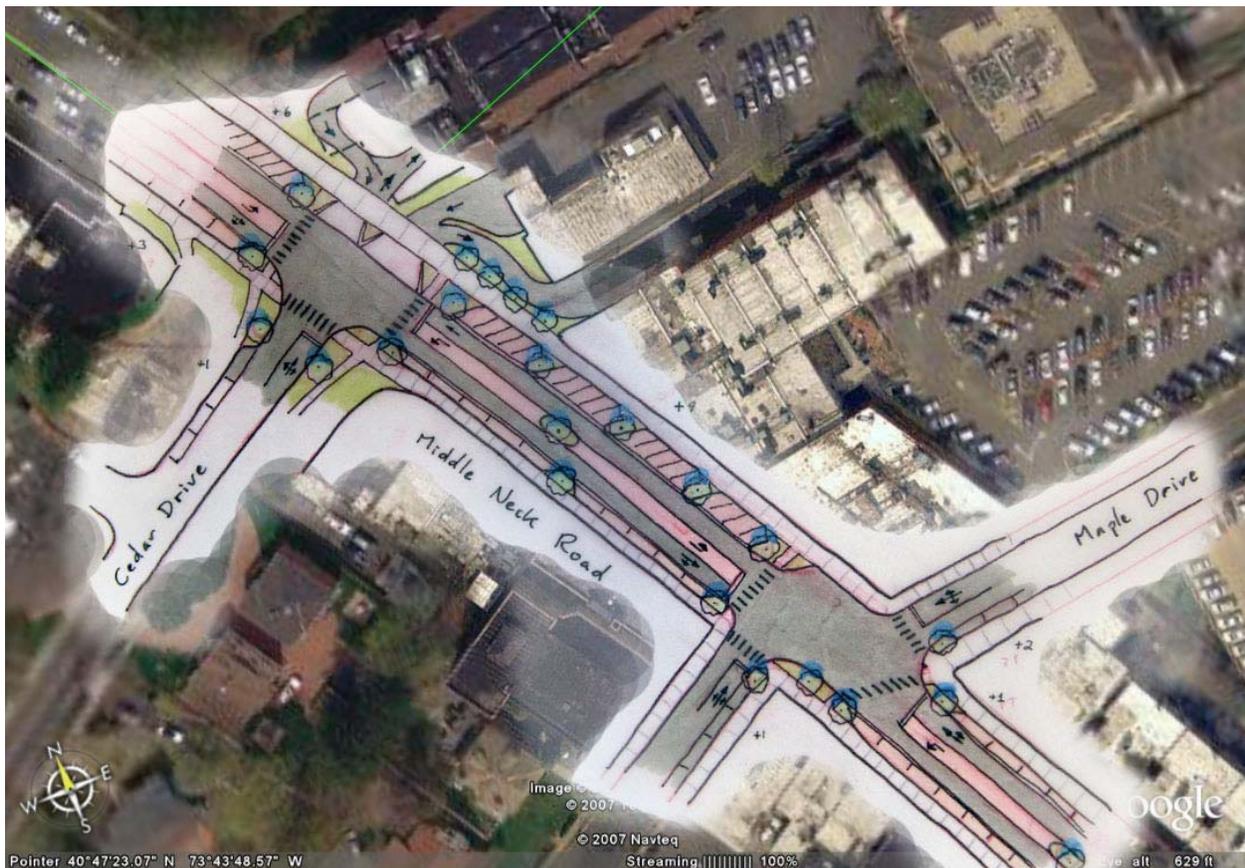


Figure 4: Concept from Cedar Drive to Maple Drive

Figure 4 shows a design concept for Middle Neck Road between Maple Drive and Cedar Drive. The street employs the cross-section shown in Figure 3. South of Maple Drive, parallel parking is used on the east side of the street instead of back-in-angled parking. A loading zone is suggested on the northeast corner south of the bulbout. A short median is suggested midblock to separate the left turn movements, prevent overtaking, and add enclosure.

The drive-thru bank across the street from Cedar Drive violates the transect more than any other building in area. It has two driveways, a suburban setback, and drive-thru facilities viable from the street. Replacing this building should be a priority for the community but, until then, the two driveways should be consolidated into one. The office building north of the drive-thru bank also has two driveways which should be consolidated as well. Combined, these two buildings do a very poor job at addressing the street and their four driveways result in a confusing access situation in a busy intersection and create plenty of conflicts with pedestrians. Once the two sets of driveways are consolidated, they should be placed next to other within the intersection and employ proper aprons.

Embassy Court to Allenwood



Figure 5: Concept for Embassy Court to Allenwood

The cross-section, as is shown in Figure 3, is recommended for Middle Neck Road between Embassy Court and Allenwood. The grocery store on the east side of the street employs a long blank wall which detracts for the street and the walkability of the area. A series of awnings and outdoor produce displays are recommended to animate that blank wall. To help the “famer’s market” succeed financially, back-in-angle parking is recommended on the east side. Furthermore, the sidewalk width on the east side should be kept very wide.

The driveway opposite from Embassy Court should be designed like a driveway, not a street. With its current design, it detracts for the pedestrian environment. South of that driveway, the back-in angled parking should switch to the west side of the street.

The gas station across the street from the grocery store has far too much ambiguous driveway. The driveways should be legible, a landscaped strip added, and proper aprons built.

A short media should be added to separate the left turn lanes, discourage over taking, and increase the enclosure.

There was some interest in redeveloping the grocery store building on the east side of the street. If this were to happen, then the new building or buildings should address the street, have 70% or more glazing on the ground floor, have the front doors on the street, and vary their façades every 30 feet or so. No driveways should be allowed on Middle Neck Road. The new buildings should take advantage of the wide sidewalk and back-in angle parking with ground floor retail, outdoor seating, street trees, and awnings.

In the unfortunate event that the new development is designed very poorly and the design for the street is not finalized, then the back-in-angle parking should be switched to the west side of the street. We were reluctant to recommend switching the back-in-angled parking to the west side because the existing buildings on the west side were designed poorly too. Though these buildings technically face the street, they did a poor job in addressing the elevation changes. The buildings functionally face the parking lot at the back. The windows displays are absent and pedestrian accommodation in front is poor. Consequently, we would prefer to see better buildings get built across the street and get the back-in-angled parking.

Arrandale Avenue to North Road

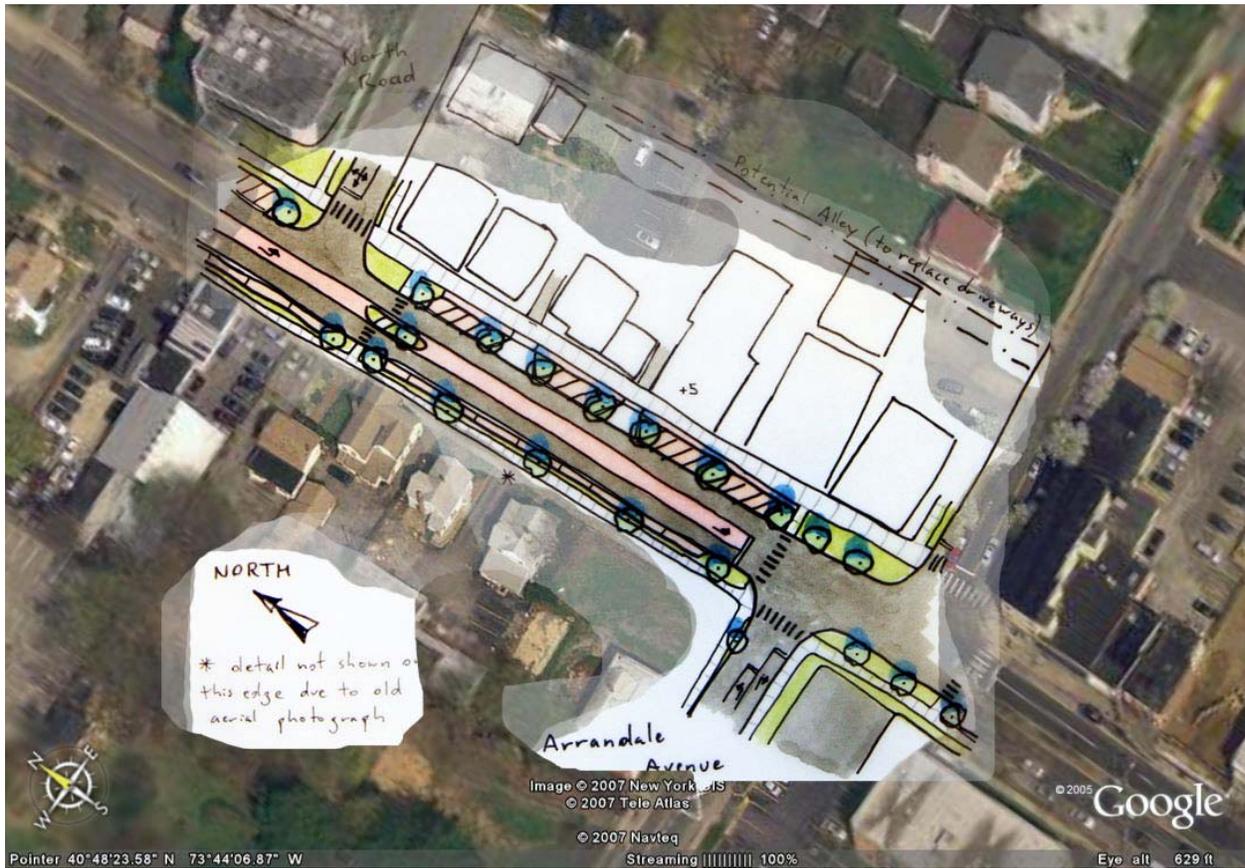


Figure 6: Concept for Arrandale Avenue to North Road

The concept for Middle Neck Road between Arrandale Avenue and North Road is shown in Figure 6. It is understood that on the west side of the street a new building has already replaced several of the smaller buildings shown in Figure 6. Again, it is unfortunate that the new building is a suburban styled building. Though the actual building is handsome, the double driveway, front-yard parking, and large setback detract from the street and the pedestrian environment. The pattern of new buildings, violating the transect, is excessively prevalent, indicating that the current land use planning rules and practices need immediate attention. The villages along Middle Neck Road should adopt a common ordinance or “form-based code” requiring properly placed buildings, no driveways on Middle neck Road, front doors, adequate glazing, etc. so that future buildings contribute to, not detract from, the area. If too many more new buildings get built that violate the context, the expectations of suburban speeds on the street will increase, the pedestrian environment will deteriorate further, safety will drop, the place will lose more of its character, and Middle Neck Road will evolve into a suburban street.

Again, the cross-section shown in Figure 3 is recommended in this location. Every effort should be made to build an alley to access the parking and service the buildings on the east side of the street. In this way, the driveways can be removed from Middle Neck Road, additional on-street parking can be added, and the pedestrian environment improved. A short median is recommended on the south approach to the intersection with North Road. This median serves to provide enclosure but it also provides a pedestrian refuge.

Next Steps

The above design recommendations are intended to set a direction for Middle Neck Road. However, implementing design changes like these is not a simple matter due to the small size and budgets of the villages, complicated approval processes, the County jurisdiction over the street, and the likely poor condition of the underground utilities.



Recommendations:

- 1. Form based code.** Pass a shared form-based code so that future buildings and site plans contribute to the area instead of detracting from the area. Three distinct districts (one for each village) will be needed. However, a number of design features and code language will be shared in common. Code re-writes are not easily worked out in short time frames. For a couple of years it will be helpful to get a standing agreement among the villages. This can be worked out with aid from an urban design firm that can assist with reviews and development applications.
- 2. Utilities.** Determine the condition and capacity of the utilities. If the street were to be reconstructed, which utilities should be replaced? Which properties would likely redevelop and should have the utilities stubbed out to them? The goal would be to not have to open up the street for 25 years after the street is rebuilt.
- 3. Funding.** Develop a funding strategy for the project. Explore a tax-increment financing area.
- 4. Broaden the Vision.** Develop and conduct a more thorough stakeholder, agency, and public involvement strategy and design the street for the entire study area. During this process, engage any properties that are being redeveloped or being considered for redevelopment so that their buildings and site plans can be considered at the same time as the street.
- 5. Short term,** adopt modern, people and retail friendly “complete street” sidewalk and streetscape design guidelines. Longer term build new customized street design guidelines that will help define the quality and character of this important street. Enter into a contract to write new street guidelines

6. **Long term**, develop a facilitated, coordinated, cooperative planning approach to overcome the problem of multiple jurisdictions. Agreements on process, funding, and scope will be key issues.

- A “charrette style” process will help build community engagements and ownership of the collective vision.
- In order to avoid multiple work projects and interruption of retail trade, mapping of utilities and establishing a plan for utilities replacement must be conducted with a streetscaping plan
- Numerous trees will require care and some will require replacement. Mapping trees for treatment, care and replacement will need to be incorporated in streetscaping plans.
- Following the charrette vision and master plan for streetscaping, infill projects and related master planning efforts are needed.