



Greater Rochester (NY) Association Helps Village of Lima Keep the Charm While “Growing Smart”--December 2013

The village of Lima, NY boasts a charming historic downtown and a fortunate location that, at the height of wine-touring season in the Finger Lakes region, brings thousands of people a day through its streets. The challenge is getting them, and the locals, to stop and spend.

Lima and the surrounding agricultural township of the same name had been in danger of falling victim to reckless sprawl and development. 'Big box' stores of dubious aesthetic value were creeping in, detracting from the architecture that had been in place for well over a century. The citizens and combined Planning Board of the village and town of Lima had made a concerted effort in the past few years to protect the built assets of their environment, as well as the valuable farmland that defines their identity. Jim Yockel, Chief Executive Officer of the 2,500-member Greater Rochester Association of REALTORS® (GRAR,) explains, "They didn't want to stop progress, but they wanted to be sure that growth would mean mixed-use development that was sensitive to the existing village and town, and not subdivisions on former farmland."

This summer, the Citizen's Institute on Rural Design, under the auspices of the National Endowment for the Arts, awarded a major grant to the village of Lima to conduct a community design workshop. The grant is awarded to only four rural communities per year, with the intention that other communities will learn from these case studies. In Lima, the benefits were practical, specific, and, according to Yockel, very exciting.

When GRAR learned about the workshop, entitled "Saving Our Small Towns and Villages," it applied to NAR for a Smart Growth Action Grant to help support the weekend's activities. "In fact," confesses Yockel, it was NAR's Smart Growth team that alerted us to the workshop in the first place -- they are really on the ball. It was right in our back yard, but we might not have known about it, until it was too late to be involved at a significant level."

Applying for the grant forced GRAR to dig in and focus on all the details of its involvement, notes Yockel. "It also enlightened us about the many groups in our area that are focused on smart growth, and on creating better public spaces. Our Association has been established here for over a century, and yet we'd never connected with these other like-minded entities before. That's been a huge benefit."

The workshop, an intensive program that extended thirty hours over the course of an October weekend, was organized by the Rochester Regional Community Design Center. It featured local and nationally recognized planning professionals who delivered lectures, participated in walking tours, listened to citizens' concerns, and helped to prepare a long-range plan for the Village of Lima's future development. "It was inspiring to see these professionals, some of whom were there on a volunteer basis, staying until 9 o'clock on a Saturday night, discussing the day's ideas with such energy and care," says Yockel.

A portion of the grant from NAR was used to bring speakers in for the event, and roughly one-third has been reserved as seed money for



the implementation phase, which should begin by the end of this year. "The workshop generated tremendous excitement," Yockel explains, "and we want to build on that momentum by starting in on a few of the smaller, easier, high profile projects that won't involve too much red tape to get approved. This way, with funding in place, people will see results of their efforts and ideas, soon."

With the benefit of its recent experience and valuable contacts made in Lima, GRAR is already helping another community within its jurisdiction to work on a similar plan for long-range development.

To learn more about how the REALTORS® of Greater Rochester are supporting smart development in their communities, contact James Yockel, Chief Executive Officer of the Greater Rochester Association of REALTORS®, at jyockel@grar.net or 585.341.2128.



Scenes from Lima's Historic Downtown Area