



DAN BURDEN / WALKABLE & LIVABLE COMMUNITIES INSTITUTE

PART 2 CASE STUDY: HAMBURG, NY

Restoring Vitality & Value
Project Background
Current Conditions
Before & After

RESTORING VITALITY AND VALUE

Traffic calming techniques address many of the actual causes of blight and disinvestment by calming and civilizing the behavior of traffic, as well as providing room for all of the other desired social and economic activities of the street. In recent years, many towns and cities around the country and in New York State have used these techniques to transform their streets into vibrant, people-friendly places. Property values have surged. People have returned. In many cases, these efforts have even increased the amount of vehicular traffic that the refurbished street handles.

This section will examine, in-depth, one such project. Starting in 2005, residents and political leaders in the Village of Hamburg, NY (just south of Buffalo) used many of today's best traffic calming techniques to restore value and vitality to their village's traditional main street.

“Citizens and businesses like to see a partnership with government that pays them back.”

*Laura Hackathorn
Trustee, Village of Hamburg*

PROJECT BACKGROUND

In 2002, the Village of Hamburg had a choice. NYSDOT was planning a \$13 million complete reconstruction of the village's commercial thoroughfare, the roughly two-mile-long stretch of Route 62 known locally as Main Street and Buffalo Street. Former Mayor John S. Thomas, village trustees, and concerned citizens advocated for something better than a standard rebuild project.

Residents formed the "Imagine Hamburg" Committee and worked with the State, pushing for a walkable, traffic-calmed street with roundabouts. They brought in Dan Burden, a civic activist and founder of the nonprofit Walkable Communities, which has helped citizens in over 2,500 cities worldwide make their communities more livable. With Dan's help, the village started an education and outreach campaign, including several

"charrettes," or design workshops, where village residents could raise concerns, make suggestions, communicate their values, and collaborate with designers on a vision and plan.

Initially, there was some skepticism. The charrettes allowed participants, including NYSDOT staff, fire and police chiefs, and many residents to overcome suspicion and build a strong consensus.

Construction began in 2005 and was finished by 2009. Four roundabouts replaced traditional intersections, and the stretches of roadway in between were traffic-calmed. The project sparked a renaissance in the village.

"Our nation is in a transformation. We've been building a lot of the wrong stuff for the wrong reasons for a long time. Hamburg can be an inspiration for the entire nation."

*Dan Burden
Founder & President, Walkable Communities Inc.*

Shoppers, strollers, joggers, and cyclists have returned. Investment by developers and small-business owners has surged. Traffic congestion has eased.

In 2010, the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials, The American Automobile Association, and the US Chamber of Commerce selected the Hamburg roundabouts as one of the top ten transportation projects in the country.

"I don't think any of us imagined it would make such a difference," said Margaret Rust, of Imagine Hamburg. In 2010, the project was selected the project as one of the top ten transportation projects in the country.



NEW INVESTMENT, RISING PROPERTY VALUES

The redesign of Main and Buffalo Streets has triggered a renaissance in the Village of Hamburg. Private investment and property values are up.

The original 2006 grant of \$200,000 resulted in over \$1 million in new private investment.

Since 2005, commercial building permits have skyrocketed from less than 20 to almost 100 per year.

Village leaders knew it was not enough to simply redesign the road, so they took a wholistic approach, understanding that private development also needed to be guided to support the public investments in the streetscape.

Prior to the start of the project, the village developed building design guidelines, incorporating them into the local zoning code. The changes strengthened the traditional business district, with zero-setback rules for new buildings on Main Street, support for upper-floor residential by requiring two-to-three story buildings, and enhancement of the pedestrian experience with glass and signage standards.

The guidelines create an environment

¹ *New York Main Street Program, www.dhcr.state.ny.us/Programs/NYMainStreet/*

² *Hamburg Village Newsletter, June 2010, tinyurl.com/hamburgvillagenews-june2010*

³ *Town of Hamburg, NY, Building Inspection Department, townofhamburgny.com/Building_Inspection.html*

of predictability essential to attracting private investment, while maximizing the public investments in the roadway. This kind of preparation helped the village to win several grants under the New York State Main Street Grant Program.¹

The grants contribute up to 50% of the cost of approved façade improvements and building rehabilitation, paid directly to business owners.

The traffic calming, design guidelines, and grants helped drive investment. Due to effective coordination and support, no businesses were lost during construction.

The state also receives a great return on its expenditure. **The initial \$200,000 received in 2006 contributed toward \$1.2 million in private investment.** Subsequent grants totaling \$600,000 have returned at least an equal amount of new private investment.²

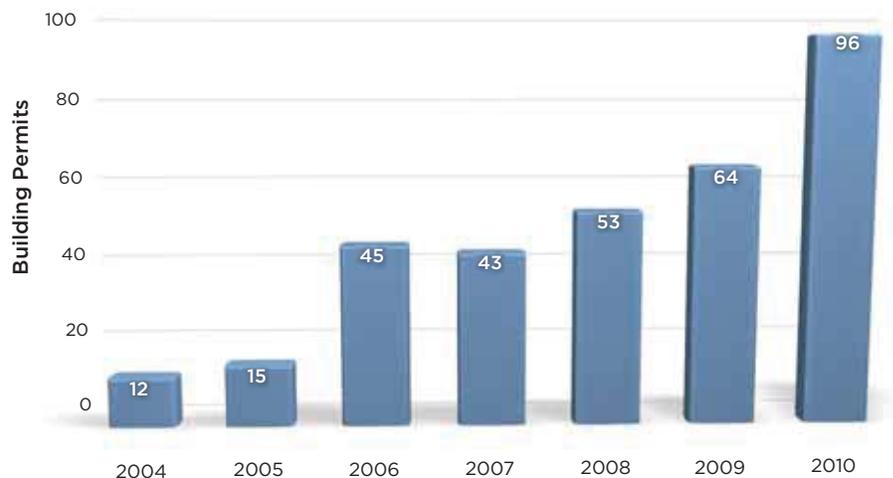
In the last five years, **annual building permits in the village skyrocketed, tripling in 2006, and doubling again in 2010.** Average property sale value along Route 62 increased by 169% since 2005.³

Over 40 property owners have been assisted so far, with more than **\$3.1 million in future building rehabilitation commitments** from over 30 businesses.²

Because of these successes, the Village of Hamburg is recognized by the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal as “Best Practices” for the Main Street Grant Program.

Dramatic Increases in Investment

Commercial Building Permits Issued
Village of Hamburg, 2004–2010³





FEATURED ELEMENTS

① ROUNDABOUTS

Perhaps more than any other part of this project, the roundabouts were the focus of much initial skepticism. But an education campaign led by activists and village officials built a productive consensus.

Virtually all skepticism evaporated once people began to use the four modern roundabouts. In line with expectations, the village has seen about a 90% drop in severe accidents and a 60% drop in accidents overall. Construction costs were on par with standard signalized intersections.

② MAIN STREET

Two driving lanes were removed and the remaining two lanes narrowed, allowing wider sidewalks, two bike lanes (tinted red), and additional street trees.

The village has been transformed into a people-friendly place, and has attracted considerable private investment.

Main Street now handles roughly the same volume of traffic than before reconstruction, but congestion is down about 30%.

“The roundabouts move a lot of traffic. More than the old signals did. And they’re easy to plow.”

*Marc Shuttleworth
Superintendent, Hamburg DPW*



① MID-BLOCK CROSSWALK

A mid-block crosswalk, including curb extensions (“kick-outs”) on Buffalo Street. Pedestrians don’t have to walk to the corner to cross, and the kick-outs and fog lines tame traffic speeds between intersections. These traffic calming measures have created an environment of civility and mutual respect.

Cars move slowly, pausing for pedestrians, yet traffic moves efficiently. Once dominated by the car, Buffalo Street is now a comfortable place for all users.



② PEDESTRIAN ISLANDS

Islands provide a safe haven for pedestrians, who only need to cross one direction of traffic (and in this case, one lane) at a time.

Slow speeds and good sight lines mean that pedestrians and bicyclists never feel endangered, even at times when there is lots of traffic. Constrained by islands and alerted by pavement markings, motorists are much more alert.



③ FLEXIBLE ROADWAY DESIGN

Flexibility in design is important. Bicycle and parking lanes can do double-duty as a loading zone. Speeds are slow enough so that the many activities necessary for a lively street can coexist.

“There has been a 63% drop in accidents. We used to spend lots of time writing up accident reports and issuing tickets. Now we’re able to spend time on more important things.”

*Dennis Gleason
Village of Hamburg Police Chief*



④ NEW INVESTMENT

After a period of decline, many village property owners are now investing in their buildings. The village is seeing a boom in both renovation and new construction.

⑤ RENEWED PRIDE

A good example of the successful partnership between business, government, and citizens, business owners have spruced-up their sidewalks and façades.

“I’ve always thought it was an amazing collaboration between government and a group of citizens. It seems to be causing a metamorphosis in the downtown business core.”

*Paul Gaughan
Hamburg Village Trustee*



CHUCK BANAS

⑥ BEYOND THE STREET

Streetscape improvements extend beyond the street itself. In this case, there was a good opportunity to turn an eyesore into a civic amenity. The

curb cut for a large parking lot has been traffic-calmed with a “parklet,” containing an interpretive marker for a village walking tour.



MAIN IMAGE:
LAURA HACKATHORN

INSET:
CHUCK BANAS

⑦ A SENSE OF HISTORY AND PLACE

Details matter. The village has embellished several side alleys, which provide access to parking lots behind businesses on Main Street.

Scrollwork arches and historical plaques highlight the village’s rich history, and reinforce the walkable character of the street.



ALL IMAGES: LAURA HACKATHORN, VILLAGE OF HAMBURG TRUSTEE

BEFORE & AFTER

MAIN & BUFFALO STREETS

The old four-way intersection was dominated by the automobile, and was notorious for traffic congestion. Dangerous and uncomfortable for pedestrians, blight had started to creep into the village.

The people-friendly redesign of the street has created a boom in development. With the guidance of citizens and town officials, virtually all of the private investment is oriented

toward the pedestrian. The center of the village has a renewed identity and sense-of-place.

“I love the roundabouts. There used to be long lines of cars waiting at the light. It was frustrating. Now the traffic just flows. Drivers are more respectful of everyone else.”

Jennifer, Employee at Tina’s Kitchen



ALL IMAGES: CHUCK BANAS

TRUCKS & LARGER VEHICLES

Buffalo Street is a designated truck route, and the redesign of the roadway takes this into account. With easy curves, generous clearances, and special design features, Hamburg's modern roundabouts easily accommodate trucks and other large vehicles.

Extremely long vehicles like tractor-trailers, fire trucks, or oversized vehicles use a "truck apron," a standard roundabout design feature. A truck apron is a raised area in the center of the roundabout equipped with a mountable curb, usually paved in a differing texture or material.

A secondary benefit of the truck apron is for emergency vehicles. Since the apron area is almost never used by traffic, it also serves as a safe, reliably clear bypass for ambulances and police.

Understandably, though, public safety officials are often initially skeptical of roundabouts, as well as many other traffic calming measures. But for a project like this to be successful, it is vitally important for emergency responders and public safety officials to understand the broader issues, to realize that the interests of emergency responders and citizens are not mutually exclusive.

In fact, the wide streets that facilitate emergency response are themselves a daily source of danger to pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists.

Fortunately, as studies have shown, virtually all suspicions disappear once the community uses the new roadways and roundabouts (see *Safety & Statistics* in the Appendix).

In this way, traffic calming can help improve the health and safety of all citizens, and is perfectly aligned with the missions of public safety officials and first responders.