



CHUCK BANAS

PART 3
**VISUALIZATIONS:
OLEAN, NY**

Current Conditions

Union & State

Union & Front

Union Street Section

Union Street Median

BACKGROUND

When planning a traffic calming project, it helps to examine similar examples. It also helps to use many of the visualization tools available today. This section contains several examples of Union Street today, and what it might look like in the future.

These images were prepared to give the reader a general idea of what is possible, and serve as a starting point for conversation. They are not intended to be the final word on the subject, and it is not presumed that these renderings are the only possible options. Certainly, it remains for the people of the Olean to decide what is best for their own community.



The Good: North Union Street, Downtown



The Not-So-Good: North Union & Main Streets

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CURRENT CONDITIONS

Olean has a grand American Main Street with excellent potential. It is obvious that the community thinks of Union Street as a the center of both civic and commercial activity. Immediately downtown, efforts have already been made to make the street more pedestrian-friendly. The streetscape features curb kick-outs, mid-block crossings, bollards, angled parking, and benches as well as other street furniture.

This is a good start. However, most of the improvements did not go far enough, and this is why Union Street isn't thriving. Travel lanes are too

wide, and there are too many of them. There are no medians or pedestrian islands. Bike lanes are too narrow, poorly marked, or not marked at all. At most corners, curb radii are too large. Lighting is inappropriate.

With four travel lanes, each 12 feet in width (and sometimes 14 or 15 feet), left-turn lanes, and wide shoulders, these measurements closely resemble expressway geometries. Indeed, the street as currently designed could easily handle 50,000 vehicles/day, at average speeds greater than 45 mph. This is not only design overkill, it is dangerous, especially for a downtown

street that includes pedestrians, bicyclists, and handles less than 12,000 vehicles/day—the same amount, incidentally, as Hamburg's Main Street.¹

Most of the basic design elements along Union Street encourage an automobile-dominated environment. However, by fixing some of the fundamentals, the street could be transformed.

¹ NYSDOT, 2009 Traffic Data Report for New York State, www.nysdot.gov/divisions/engineering/technical-services/highway-data-services/traffic-data



VISUALIZATION: UNION & STATE STREETS

Currently, this is a standard four-way signalized intersection. Travel lanes are too wide, there are no pedestrian islands, no bike lanes, and overly-generous shoulders. Despite the location in the heart of downtown, the current design most resembles a high-speed rural highway or suburban arterial.

Traffic speeds along both Union and State Streets are high, with prevalent stacking problems, especially in the left-turn lanes.

Instead of a standard traffic signal, a roundabout is proposed. This will ease traffic flow and create a palpable sense-of-place at this important location.

In the visualization, several driving lanes have been removed, and the remaining lanes are narrowed, leaving space for a bicycle/safety lane, additional room for pedestrians, and more street trees.

The center of the roundabout is a good place to put a civic monument, public art, or, as seen here, a lantern and gardens.



Present



Future

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VISUALIZATION: UNION & FRONT STREETS

These images depict Front Street at Union Street, looking northwest. Here lies an opportunity to better connect Olean's largest business district employer with the business district.

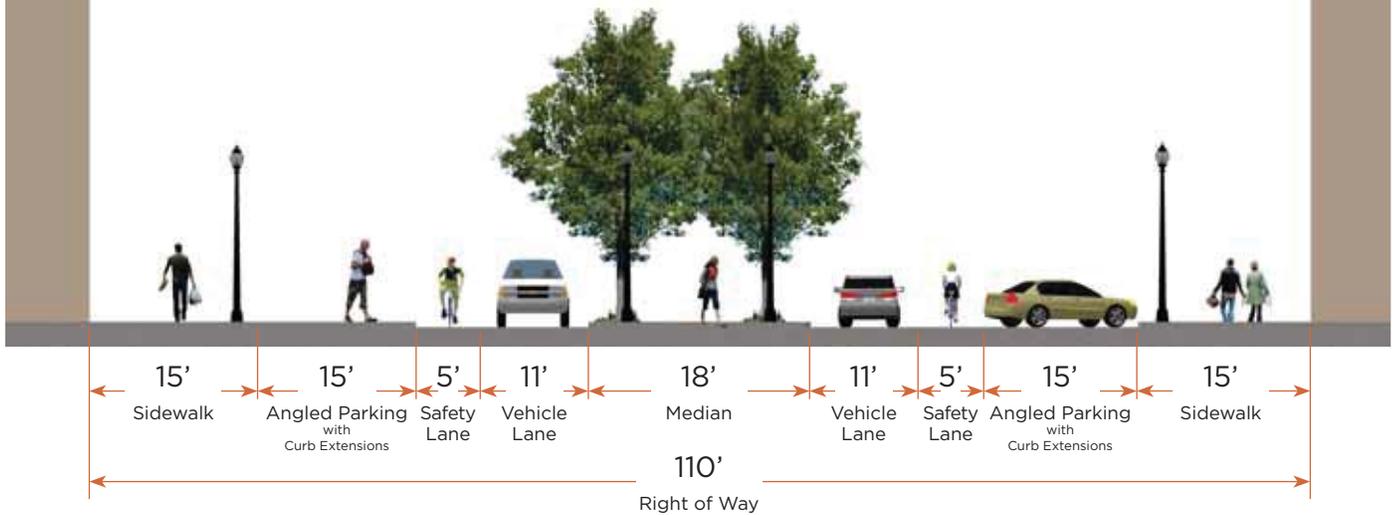
Olean General Hospital could provide spinoff benefits for restaurants and stores on North Union Street if the design of the streetscape encourages employees and visitors to venture off the Hospital campus.

Currently, this three-way signalized intersection—with overly-wide travel lanes, no pedestrian amenities, and no accommodation for bicycles—acts as

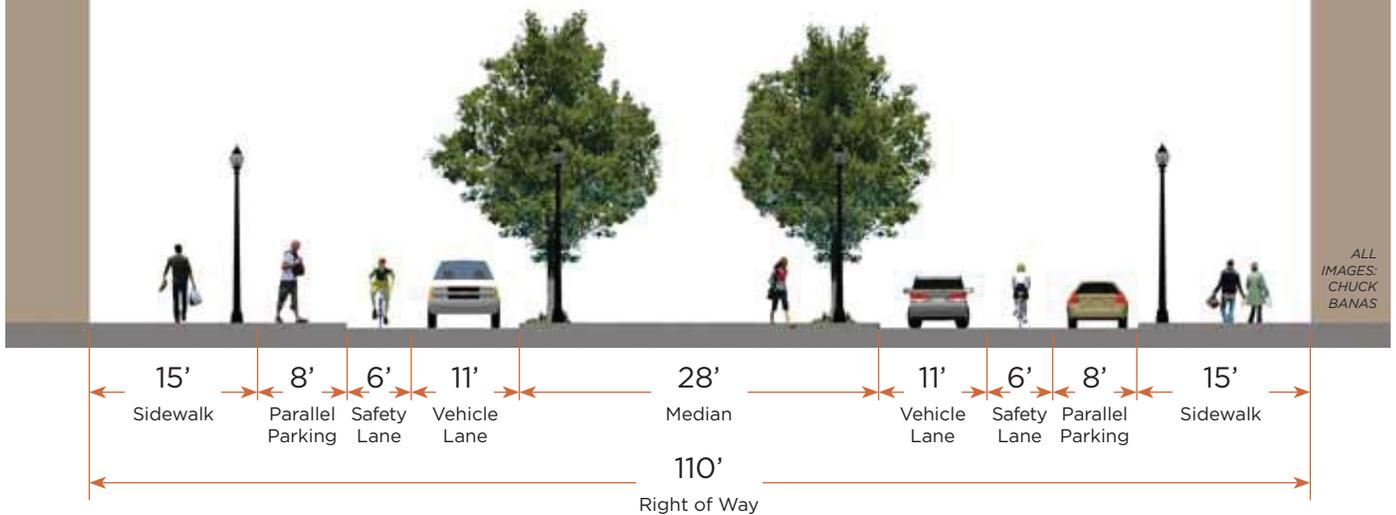
a barrier between downtown and the hospital.

If the intersection is improved with a roundabout and facilities for people on foot, it will become a gateway to the city, a point of transition from rural to village driving behavior. A proper redesign will improve traffic flow and end the problem of stacking in the left-turn lane; and it will connect the city to the hospital while opening-up attractive views of Olean Creek.

Angled Parking Option



Parallel Parking Option



ALL
IMAGES:
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STREET SECTIONS, UNION STREET

At roughly 110 feet, Olean has an extremely wide main street. While this is a big reason why the street isn't very people-friendly, it also provides a lot of room to make necessary improvements.

There are two alternatives presented here: "angled parking" and "parallel parking." The angled parking option retains the existing angled parking lanes, an effective traffic-calming tool for wide streets. This might be more economical, as the

existing curb extensions and parking lanes would not have to be reconfigured.

The parallel parking alternative shows the narrower parking lanes and a wider median. Notably, parallel parking has been shown to be slightly safer than angled parking, depending on context. As long as traffic speed are sufficiently slow, as they would be with both of these options, there seems to be very little difference between the two

configurations in terms of safety.

Capacity is another story. Angled parking provides over twice the number of parking spots per block. While there is currently a tremendous oversupply of both on-street and off-street parking along Union Street, it may be advantageous for business owners to retain the angled configuration in the long-term.



Present



Future

ALL IMAGES: CHUCK BANAS

VISUALIZATION: UNION STREET, DOWNTOWN

Even including some of prior streetscape improvements, the extreme width of Union Street is evident in these images.

Currently, travel lanes are too wide (12-13 feet) and there are too many lanes, given the relatively low amount of traffic. Pedestrian amenities are inadequate. There are no pedestrian islands. At 50 feet, even with several well-intentioned curb extensions, the crossing distance for pedestrians is too far. The “cobra-head” expressway

lighting is inappropriate for this context, and the tall standards and wide spacing promote fast traffic speeds.

There are few people on the street, even fewer who seem to be using the street informally or recreationally. The place suffers from a palpable emptiness, a lack of a sense-of-place, when it should rightly be the center of civic and commercial life.

This visualization in the bottom image

fixes the basics. A tree-lined median is added. Two of the four travel lanes are eliminated, and the two remaining lanes are narrowed from 12 feet to 10 feet. There are tinted bike/safety lanes, additional curb kick-outs, and appropriate lighting.

Note that this rendering most closely follows the “angled parking” alternative on the previous page, but the reader can easily envision the parallel parking configuration.

