

February 6, 2019

Ms. Laura Allen
Town of Berlin
10 William Street
Manassas, VA 20110

Reference: Stakeholder Interview Notes

Sabra & Associates (SAI) conducted stakeholder interviews in support of the Berlin Parking Study on November 15 and 16, 2018. The list of interviewees included the following representatives of the Town of Berlin, its business community, religious institutions, and stakeholder agencies.

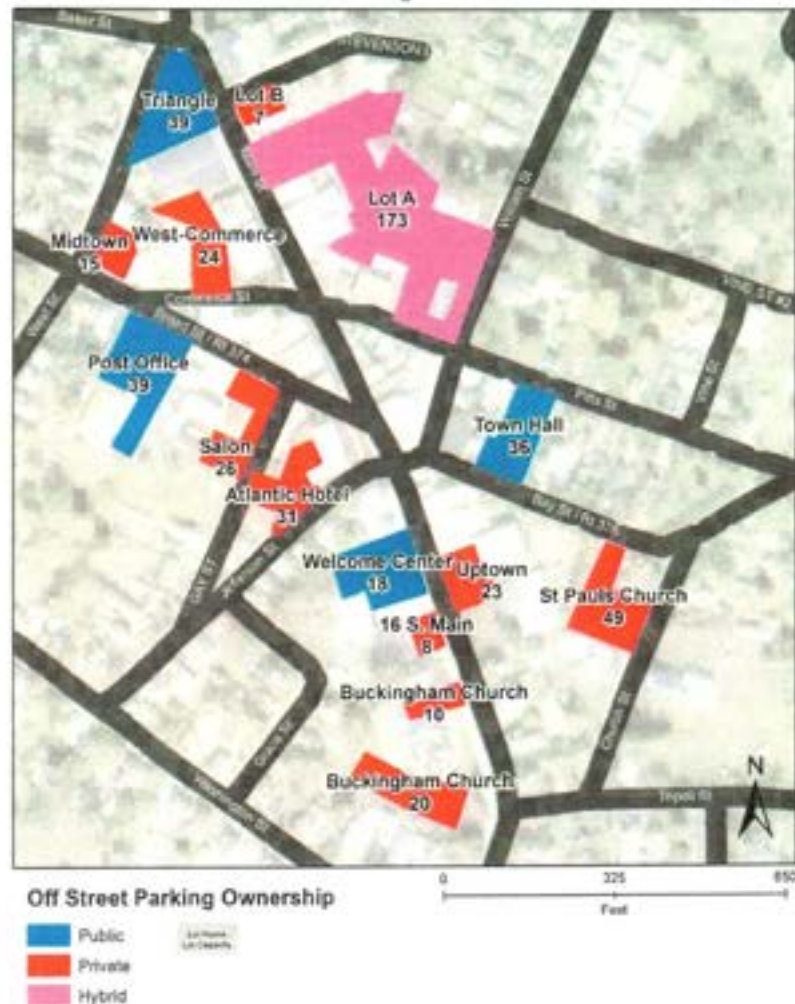
- Mayor William "Gee" Williams – Town of Berlin
- Laura Allen, Town Administrator – Town of Berlin
- Ivy Wells, Economic & Community Development Director – Town of Berlin
- Dave Engelhart, Planning Director – Town of Berlin
- Councilmember (VP) Elroy Brittingham – Town of Berlin
- Councilmember Zackery Tyndall – Town of Berlin
- Councilmember Dean Burrell – Town of Berlin
- Councilmember Thom Gulyas – Town of Berlin
- Larnet St. Amant – Berlin Chamber of Commerce
- Cate Nellans – Berlin Chamber of Commerce
- Ray Thompson, President – Taylor Bank
- John Fager, owner of Atlantic Hotel
- Father Michael Moyer – St. Paul's Episcopal Church
- Paul Cook – Buckingham Presbyterian Church
- Jack Burbage, downtown property owner and owner of Burbage Funeral Home
- John Barrett, downtown property owner
- Jay Bergey, downtown property owner
- Kate Patton, downtown property owner (The Globe); cycling advocate
- Joseph Moore, Chair – Board of Zoning Appeals
- Carol Rose, Chair – Berlin Historic District Commission
- Robert Poli, Vice Chair – Berlin Historic District Commission
- Chris Denny, Chair – Berlin Planning Commission
- Tres Dank, cycling advocate
- Steve Farr, cycling advocate and Town of Berlin resident

Overview

Note: The parking lots in the downtown area are referred to by the following shorthand (see map for locations):

- Lot A
- Lot B
- Triangle Lot
- Post Office Lot
- Town Hall Lot
- West-Commerce Lot
- Midtown Lot
- Salon Lot
- Atlantic Hotel Lot
- Welcome Center Lot
- Uptown Lot
- 16 S. Main Lot
- St. Paul's Church Lot
- Buckingham Church Lots

Downtown Off Street Parking Facilities



The interviewees had varying perspectives on the issue of parking supply and mobility in the study area. However, among the stakeholders a handful of common themes emerged over the course of the full set of interviews. The following concerns and observations were all expressed by multiple interviewees.

- a. **Recent development trends have placed a strain on local parking supply.** Several stakeholders pointed out that parking has historically been plentiful and easy to find in Berlin, but that the recent surge in development and turnover of commercial space to restaurant uses has placed additional strain on that supply.
- b. **Employee parking is a large factor.** The consensus is that visitors park for a few hours, while employees park for much longer. Every interviewee mentioned seeing employees parking in prime spots, such as on-street spaces directly in front of businesses, all day. Past efforts to get

employees to park further away have foundered due to lack of cooperation among businesses. The one exception to the rule are the Town's employees, who park at St. Paul's Church to preserve spaces at Town Hall for those who have business with the Town.

- c. **There are widely varying opinions on paid parking and parking enforcement.** Opinions varied from the point of view that people would quickly adjust to paid parking to the idea that it would be the death knell of the downtown. Resistance to paid parking or parking enforcement centered on worry over creating a negative perception of the town – that visitors might come to think of Berlin as a place where it's a hassle to park or where they got a ticket. Others pointed out that if paid parking opens up some spaces, it would reduce the hassle of parking in downtown.
- d. **There are widely varying opinions on the prospect of a parking garage,** with the majority of stakeholders wary of the idea due to its expense and the potential negative impacts on the downtown's historic look and feel. Others felt that the time was right for such an investment and that it was the most forward-thinking approach.
- e. **Parking supply is already perceived as a drag on business,** although there is little data to quantify if or how much the lack of supply is affecting merchants.
- f. **Midday and evenings during the summer tourism season are the most critical periods relevant to parking scarcity,** driven by the increased restaurant and shopping patronage in the area. Even within these broad time periods, demand can fluctuate wildly (the "cloudy day phenomenon"), although the problem is worsening on "typical" days during the tourist season.
- g. **On event days, the problem seems to shift into the neighborhoods surrounding downtown.**
- h. **There is no shortage of potential satellite parking locations,** both on the outskirts of downtown (park & walk) or further away (park & bike/ride).
- i. **There is general agreement that improving bike access to downtown could help,** specifically to link satellite parking areas such as Berlin Falls Park with the downtown.
- j. **The church parking lots are a critical resource keeping the problem from being worse.** While visitors do not generally park there, they provide overflow capacity during events and for the Town's employees on a daily basis. The post office lot is also a critical resource in the evenings when the post office is closed.

Detailed notes from Stakeholder Interviews

All notes listed here reflect opinions of the interviewees.

Mayor William "Gee" Williams – Town of Berlin

- Downtown business landscape
 - Town's vision is to always be drawing in visitors, achieving "managed growth."

- 80% of downtown businesses are owned by women, and many of the local business owners are relatively young (20s-40s).
- When are the busiest times?
 - The busy seasons have to a degree merged into one long season, from April to New Year's Day.
 - There are multiple peak seasons within that period.
 - Summer season (mid-June to mid-September) is the busiest time and the most sustained parking problem.
 - Holiday Season (mid-November to New Year's Day)
 - Every day of the week except Sunday is busy.
 - The peak timeframes are 11:00AM -6:00PM on weekdays, and Friday and Saturday nights.
- Outside of downtown:
 - Establishing a green zone around the town core is an objective of the town.
 - Potential uses for Berlin Falls Park include a YMCA or an amphitheater.
- Scope of the parking issue:
 - There are a variety of opinions. Some in Town are not aware that there is a problem
 - Employees parking in prime visitor spots are a big part of the problem. The Rayne's Reef restaurant attempted to get their employees to park further away, but the effort fell through when other businesses did not follow suit.
 - The Mayor believes most visitors park for 2-4 hours patronizing multiple businesses in one visit.
 - There needs to be a solution in which those who use the parking contribute to the cost.
- Candidate sites for additional parking:
 - Furniture company lot on Bay Street
 - Small lot on Vine Street close to William Street
 - Stephen Decatur Park
 - Burbage Funeral Home property
 - Lot at corner of Washington and West

Laura Allen, Town Administrator & Dave Engelhart, Planning Director – Town of Berlin

- Parking policy:
 - The Town isn't receiving a direct financial benefit from the visitors. Most people believe we get a portion of the sales tax, but it all goes to the State of Maryland. It's important for us to have a vibrant downtown; that adds to the quality of life for our community, but it's challenging to determine the best way to pay for parking improvements especially if we don't charge for parking or have the businesses contribute financially to the solution.
 - The Town is legally permitted to charge an "in lieu of" fee for businesses that do not provide adequate parking, although this provision has never been implemented. In order to implement, the Town would first need to quantify the value of a space to a merchant.

- Many of the downtown businesses do not have adequate parking attached. This is largely due to the fact that the parking requirements for businesses have historically not been enforced. In recent years, the increased number of restaurants in the downtown mix has exacerbated the problem, as a change to a more trip-intensive use has not resulted in additional parking being created.
- There is no hard data on the proportional relationship between the primary summer peak season and the secondary holiday peak season (i.e. the summer is ___ percent busier than the holiday season), although it's accepted that the summer season is definitely busier. An ancillary benefit of this study, if data is collected again in the summer, could be a first set of hard data to establish that relationship.
- Partnerships:
 - The Town has a non-verbal agreement with St. Paul's Episcopal church
 - The Buckingham Church in the past has not been interested in working out a deal with the City to make its parking lot available, but indications are that the church may be more interested soon.
- Upcoming projects:
 - The offset intersection where Decatur and Flower cross Bay Street will be realigned.

Ivy Wells, Economic & Community Development Director – Town of Berlin

- Current practices regarding Town events:
 - The shuttle that is run on event days is sometimes provided for free by the Ocean Downs Casino. When the shuttle has to be rented from Shore Transit, it costs \$500/day.
 - The shuttle only picks passengers up at Berlin Intermediate School.
- Ideas for the future:
 - Consider dedicating a pickup/dropoff zone for ridehailing services to encourage their use. Uber and Lyft have already been operating in Berlin.
 - If parking shortage can be addressed, consider reclaiming some of the Main Street parking spaces to widen the sidewalks.
 - Likes the idea of a "bike shuttle" – i.e. free loaner bikes placed at satellite parking locations on event days, and collected at the end of the day.
 - The owner of the Burley brewery (and other businesses downtown) wants to shuttle customers between downtown and the brewery.
 - Fun trolley ride from other locations where people would be entered into a drawing to win a basket of merchandise from our businesses. Driver would also act as tour guide talking the entire time about the history of the town so it's not 'just a ride'.
 - Establish a designated pick-up spot in Ocean City for "A Day In Berlin." This would be in conjunction with the rental of a shuttle vehicle from Shore Transit for \$500/day (noted above). Could be tried on specific event days or summer season days when high numbers of visitors are anticipated.
 - Offer a valet service with cars being parked at one of the churches or Berlin Falls Park.
 - Offer free carriage rides between downtown and Berlin Falls Park or Decatur Park.

- Re-engineer Lot A to increase the number of spaces.
 - Create 'drop-off zone' for elderly or disabled visitors.
 - Have wagons people can use to carry packages to satellite parking locations such as Decatur Park.
- Berlin hosts many bus tour groups, who drop off passengers at the Atlantic Hotel or the Welcome Center and park their buses at Stephen Decatur Park. The tour operators love the arrangement.

Councilmember (VP) Elroy Brittingham – Town of Berlin

- View of the problem:
 - Parking supply does not meet the current need.
 - Some will only patronize a business if they can find parking right in front.
 - Local people tend to park for a short time, while tourists park for longer. Some locals do not patronize downtown because they feel it is geared towards tourists.
 - Part of the problem is drivers circling around looking for a spot, but it's almost always possible to find one within walking distance.
 - The other Taylor Bank branch closed, adding even more demand for parking downtown.
 - Apartment residents park on Main Street for long durations.
- In favor of more bike racks and rest stops on area bike trails.
- Safety Concerns:
 - William Street crossing of 113 is hazardous.
 - Difficult to determine who has the right-of-way at William & Pitts intersection
- Outside of downtown:
 - Flower Street during school dropoff/pickup times is an issue. Vehicles back up near Decatur Middle School.
 - Area around Worcester Prep School experiences backups.
 - Many out of state students from Delaware.

Councilmember Zackery Tyndall – Town of Berlin

- Downtown:
 - Favors a paid-parking approach for downtown (possibly seasonal).
 - Town should better manage its existing parking before making major investments in infrastructure.
 - There would be resistance, but people would get used to it.
 - There's already paid parking in Ocean City, Rehoboth, Lewes, Bethany, and Salisbury.
 - Metering the public spaces would probably spur private landowners to meter their parking lots.
 - The Town should take on seasonal enforcement.

- Sees a tie between satellite lots and pricing downtown (i.e. if you price the downtown parking, you must offer a reasonable alternative where people can choose cost over convenience).
- Favors a satellite lot at Washington & West
 - Could include a solar canopy, which might qualify for a grant as an environmental showcase project.
 - These streets already fill up with vehicles parking during events, making them impassable.
- Timed loading zones may be a good re-use of a few on-street spots.
- Residential parking permits may be necessary to alleviate the event overflow into neighborhoods.
- Outside of downtown:
 - Schools only have sufficient parking for day-to-day, when there are events there is spillover into adjacent neighborhoods.
 - Would tie paid parking to additional biking opportunities, including more racks and possibly a bikeshare system, with docks at the satellite lots.

Councilmember Dean Burrell – Town of Berlin

- View of the problem:
 - The parking problem is very irregular. Certain days are much busier than other (cloudy day phenomenon).
 - Tour bus access is an important sub-issue. Many tour operators would probably like to come to Berlin, but it is very difficult because there is no place to park the buses. Satellite lots are probably the best solution.
 - Traffic backups get bad when school buses are on the road.
 - Businesses need to instruct their employees to park further away.
- Enforcement of short-term spots would help, although he is not sure how people would react to being ticketed.
- Favors satellite parking:
 - At Berlin Falls
 - School Lots
 - Fire Department Lot/Library Lot
- Improved wayfinding signage could help.
 - Currently does not address ADA concerns.
 - Need more signs that direct people to parking.

Councilmember Thom Gulyas – Town of Berlin

- View of the problem:
 - Not enough town-owned land. Finding a location to add parking will be a challenge.

- Will be challenging to get people to park and walk.
 - The challenge in operating a shuttle is directing people to the pickup location.
 - On-street parking is not used efficiently. Space goes to waste between cars.
- If a garage is built, the Burbage property makes sense. Retail on the ground floor would help.
- Paid parking would be accepted if rates are kept low.
- Satellite parking:
 - Hesitant to put parking in a residential area.
 - Can't force employees to park farther from work.
 - There was a past effort to get employees to park at the Buckingham Church. Some businesses participated while other didn't, so the program fizzled.

Larnet St. Amant & Cate Nellans – Berlin Chamber of Commerce

- Employees of downtown businesses are occupying a large portion of available spaces. Downtown lots are empty at 8:00AM, but full of employees' vehicles by 10:00AM. Few spaces remain for visitors.
 - St. Paul's Church has offered the church parking lot to be used for employee parking.
 - Incentives for employees to park in satellite locations would should be the first approach tried. A system could be created based on swiping a card in a card reader. A certain number of swipes would result in a reward provided by the downtown merchants Association.
- The Large Lot is in poor condition, which makes it less inviting.
- There may be a gain of a few spots to gain on Stephenson Lane, and connecting Stephenson Lane to the large lot could improve circulation.
- Event days and midday periods are the times when parking is most scarce.
 - The Black Friday/Small Business Saturday weekend is even worse than event days, because visitors are more willing to use satellite lots on event days.
 - The event day situation could be improved by additional temporary signage identifying one-way streets and directing visitors to parking.
- Pay parking would be very detrimental for the town, and would push visitors to other locations such as the outlets in West Ocean City.
- Enforcement of the 2hr limited parking (or pay parking) would be detrimental. Tickets would put a negative taste in the mouths of visitors, driving them to locations with unlimited free parking.
- Parking on side streets and in church lots is underutilized.

Ray Thompson, President – Taylor Bank

- Taylor Bank owns a large portion of Lot A.
- View of the problem:
 - Customers cannot find spaces at the bank. Some of the Bank's board members want to fence off their portion of Lot A and charge for access.

- Worst case scenario is a funeral on a Friday in the summer, because the funeral home uses the bank lot like everybody else, and on a Friday afternoon it is completely full.
- The Bank's 35 employees generally park in Lot A or in the Post Office Lot.
- Sometimes deliveries are an issue, because there are no loading zones downtown.
- The affordable housing units downtown have no allocated spaces.
- The parking shortage used to be a summer issue only, but has become a year-round problem
- Favors a building a garage to meet parking demand.
 - Would have to benefit the bank financially in order to build it on Bank's portion of Lot A. Would also want to have parking set-aside for the bank.
 - Garage could be designed to blend in architecturally, Annapolis and Frederick are examples of this approach.
- Favors satellite parking with a trolley to shuttle people to downtown.
- Favors policing of the short-term spaces downtown. It will be important to strike a balance. Enforcement needs to be a disincentive to abusing the short-term spaces without becoming a deterrent to coming downtown.
- Paid parking could work if rates are kept relatively low.
 - The town would have to carefully craft the message to residents (how does it benefit the town? What will it pay for?).
 - Benefits should include:
 - keeping some spaces available
 - funding a shuttle
 - Consider revenue-neutral parking (i.e. pay to park in prime spots downtown, while others get paid to park in satellite locations).

John Fager, owner of Atlantic Hotel

- View of the problem:
 - Thinks it's a little overblown right now.
 - The Atlantic Hotel's parking (30 spaces) is marked as hotel-only, but not enforced. It is always full.
 - The problem should be solved through multiple actions, not one thing.
 - The Town should show appreciation to the bank and others who have allowed public parking.
- Not in favor of a garage – doesn't fit the character of downtown, which is critical.
- Favors satellite parking.
 - At Berlin Falls
 - Closer in locations – Town should acquire land.
 - Give people multiple ways to get downtown from satellite locations:
 - Shuttle bus
 - Bike rental/bikeshare

- Pedicabs (during busiest times)
- Golf carts
- Horse carriage
- Not in favor of paid parking.
 - Negative for the town's image. People are attracted to events because they are free.
 - Would prefer a dedicated sales tax.
- Not enthusiastic about enforcing 2-hr spots, but sees the necessity. Should focus on only the prime spots, to keep them available for customers.
- Bike infrastructure
 - Town should connect downtown & Berlin Falls by a bike path.
 - Integrate bike connections with satellite lots. Market as "Plenty of free parking; bring your bike."
 - Long-term – connect local bike path to a regional network.
 - Continue on RR ROW to Snow Hill
 - Connect to Ocean City
 - Bike tours could become a new tourism opportunity.

Father Michael Moyer – St. Paul's Episcopal Church & Paul Cook – Buckingham Presbyterian Church

- Use of Church lots:
 - Town employees use the St. Paul's lot in exchange for maintaining the lot. The church wouldn't necessarily want other employees parking there.
 - Buckingham Church raises funds by charging for parking (any donation amount) in its lot during events.
- View of the problem:
 - Berlin has gone from a cloudy-day destination to an every-day destination.
 - People regularly park all day in the 2 hour spots.
 - Bus tours come in once or twice a month.
 - Businesses need to instruct their employees to park further away.
 - No Parking signs on Church Street are difficult to see.
 - Excessive speed on Main Street
- Satellite parking:
 - Owners of the West & Washington lot have no plans to develop it, but would be receptive to being approached.
 - Density of restaurants in downtown would support a shuttle for employees or customers.
 - Donaway furniture property could provide an opportunity for additional near-in satellite parking.
- Not in favor of paid parking – would discourage visitors.
- 15 minute spots in front of businesses where people make quick stops (Coffee shops, bank, thrift store, Rayne's) could work.
- Summertime ambassadors handing out maps and answering questions could help.

Jack Burbage, downtown property owner

- Owns properties adjacent to Lot A.
- View of the problem:
 - Visitors cannot find spaces during lunch hour or during events.
 - Local people have stopped patronizing the businesses in downtown.
 - Feels that the lack of parking is holding back growth.
 - Restaurants are the primary drivers of parking demand. Restaurant customers occupy spaces for a while because people like to walk around after eating.
 - Thinks that the holiday season is only perhaps 40% of the summer demand.
- Favors a building a garage to meet parking demand.
 - Within the footprint of Lot A.
 - 4-5 levels (~300 spaces), with retail businesses on the ground floor.
 - Charge for parking to pay down debt.
 - Without a parking deck, revitalization will go in reverse.
- Not in favor of adding satellite parking, because people will not walk to the events. New parking needs to be in downtown. Stephen Decatur park has been a safety concern due to illegal activity.
 - Pitts House and/or County health center provide opportunities to add some parking closer in.
- Not in favor of charging for existing parking. It would be a "disaster," and would "kill the town." He believes that people would be willing to pay for parking in a new garage, though.
- Adding more wayfinding signs would be a help.

John Barrett & Jay Bergey, downtown property owners

- Each owns properties adjacent to Lot A (and also part of the lot).
- View of the problem:
 - Town growth has been very positive, but has created the parking shortage. 300 restaurant seats have been added in two years. There are now more restaurant seats than parking spaces.
 - Most businesses have no spaces to contribute to the overall supply.
 - Lot A & the Fins Lot fill up quickest.
 - Employees parking in prime visitor spots are a big part of the problem. Visitors park for 2-3 hours, employees occupy a space for much longer.
 - Apartment tenants take up many of the on-street parking spaces.
 - Feel that the lack of parking is holding back growth. Businesses had a bad summer. The Globe restaurant suffers from the lack of parking in particular.
- They are each considering closing off their lot in order to ensure that their tenants have somewhere to park. Will probably do so with the Fins lot (charge to park, but free with validation from the restaurant).
- Favor a paid-parking approach for downtown.

- Both public and private spaces should be metered, with funds going into a parking fund to pay for improvements.
- There would have to be enforcement.
- There are multiple locations that present an opportunity to create additional parking, such as property offered to the town by the Burbage funeral home.

Kate Patton, downtown property owner (The Globe)

Tres Dank, cycling advocate

Steve Farr, cycling advocate and Town of Berlin resident

- Washington Street:
 - Need to restrict parking to one side during busiest events, including the Christmas parade and the Fiddlers Convention.
 - Would like to see lot at Washington & West remain open space.
- Downtown:
 - Post office lot is a key resource.
 - Hair Salon next to the Globe allows re-use at night when it is closed.
 - Wainwrights auto shop would be a candidate spot for additional downtown parking.
 - Lot behind the firehouse is an opportunity for satellite parking.
- Bicycle Infrastructure:
 - The biking environment in downtown is poor, due to the congested streets. It's better to bike to the fringes of downtown and walk around. Additional racks on the edges of downtown would encourage this.
 - A bike shuttle option could be popular.
 - Provide between Berlin Falls Park & Downtown
 - Options:
 - Cheap fixed up bikes painted bright colors
 - Electric bikes
 - Pedi-cab (would provide local charm)
 - Enthusiastic about bike corral downtown.
 - Would like to see more sharrows.
 - Key to making bike solutions succeed is cooperation between Town, business owners, landowners.

Joseph Moore, Chair – Board of Zoning Appeals

Carol Rose, Chair – Berlin Historic District Commission

Robert Poli, Vice Chair – Berlin Historic District Commission

Chris Denny, Chair – Berlin Planning Commission

- View of the problem:
 - The Comp Plan allows for downtown apartments without requiring parking
 - Zoning does not require businesses to have parking.

SABRA
& ASSOCIATES
Engineering Innovative Solutions

- Town has been slow to acquire land for parking.
- Concern over accessibility for emergency vehicles in neighborhoods when cars are parked on both sides. The fire company has committed to purchasing a smaller engine.
- Need to find cost-effective ways to alleviate parking pressure during events.
- Paid parking:
 - People would get used to it. Pushback would be short-lived.
 - *Denny*: The visitors who come are expecting to pay, any pushback would come from locals.
- Parking Deck:
 - *Denny, Rose* – Not feasible
- Satellite Parking
 - *Poli* – Are there distressed properties to convert?
 - Suggested locations:
 - Land behind fire company
 - Rayne's Gravel
 - Library
- *Denny* – suggest a moratorium on development
- The historic look and feel of downtown must be maintained.
- Owner of The Globe restaurant fires employees who take prime spots away from customers.