

2011



Neighborhood Vision



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2/1/2011

Special Thanks to:

**The College of St. Rose -
Massry Center for the Arts**
Mike D'Attilio

Citizens Bank
Anam Afaq

Price Chopper
Bill Phelps

Friends of the Madison
Anne Savage

BMT Realty
Mike and Brian Viglucci

Steamer No. 10 Theatre
Ric Chesser

**Make the Right Move
Chess Foundation**
Brother John McManus

**College of St. Rose
Graphics Design Professor**
Andrea Kohl

Albany Police Department
Richard Romand

Elk's Lodge 49
Herb Carle

Pine Hills Library
Ethel LaPier

St. Peters Children's Health Center
Gail Scarantino

Madison Theater
Jay Pregent

Albany Bicycle Coalition
Lorenz Worden

City of Albany Planning Department
Sarah Reginelli

City of Albany Gardener
Judy Stacey

**University at Albany, SUNY
MRP Professor**
Gene Bunnell

**All members of the Pine Hills, New
Albany, and Manning Boulevard Neighborhood
Associations.**

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
PART I – History and Positive Elements	1
History of Upper Madison	1
Positive Aspects of Upper Madison Today	2
PART II – Recommendations for Entire District	3
Results of Stakeholder Input	3
A) Form an Upper Madison Merchants / Business Association	3
B) Streetscape and Aesthetic Improvements.....	4
1) Trash Mitigation	4
2) Planters and Floriculture	7
3) Additional Sidewalk Trees	9
4) Tree Grates.....	10
5) Sidewalk Design.....	12
6) Lighting.....	14
7) Benches and Tables along Sidewalk (excluding Price Chopper)	15
8) Façade Improvements (other than Police Station / Steamer 10 building)	19
9) Murals	21
C) Pedestrian and Bicycle Improvements	22
1) Bicycle Racks.....	22
2) Crosswalk Upgrades at Intersections	25
D) Safety	27
PART III – Recommendations for Specific Areas	28
A) The “Triangle Park”	28
B) Area in front of and within Price Chopper property.....	33
C) Police Station and Steamer 10 Theatre Building	39
D) Pine Hills Library Patio	41
E) Suitable Green Space Venue for Summer Events.....	42
F) Yates Street Parking Reconfiguration	43
G) Branding.....	45
References	47
Appendix 1: Upper Madison Businesses.....	49
Appendix 2: Beautify Upper Madison Project Brochure.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Executive Summary

Commissioned by “Beautify Upper Madison Project”, a coalition of neighborhood associations in the surrounding area, the 2011 Upper Madison Neighborhood Vision provides a general roadmap for the future of the Upper Madison business district.

Findings and Recommendations

Based on stakeholder input and an individual assessment of the area, it became clear as to why many enjoy living in Upper Madison or doing business here. Some mentioned the relative economic stability and vigilant neighborhood groups here. However, various concerns arose such as excessive litter along sidewalks and between buildings; existing green spaces that are largely underutilized in an otherwise impervious, urban landscape; as well as a lessened desire to walk or bike the area due to vehicular traffic volume and speed, uneven sidewalks, and lack of convenient and comfortable places for casual seating.

The report makes the following key recommendations to address these issues:

- **Form a Merchants Association**

A merchants association would not only serve as the foundation for improving communication between businesses but also for providing support and funding for future improvements. The merchants have the most direct vested interest in seeing improvements in the area, and given that it is widely expected that the City of Albany Department of General Services (DGS) budget will be much leaner in the coming years, the merchants association can have a key role to play in both accessing limited City resources and providing direct in-kind and financial contributions.

1. **Reconfigure the “Triangle Park”**

As one of the largest and most visible green spaces in Upper Madison, the “Triangle Park” at the convergence of Western and Madison Avenues should be a frequently used and easily recognized symbol of the area, but is currently underutilized and lacks a visual focus. The report recommends maximizing the limited space in Triangle Park by reconfiguring tree placement, adding a small patio with seating, as well as adding a flowerbed with a “Welcome to Upper Madison” sign, and illuminating the World Wars monument and police station building.

2. **Reconfigure the Price Chopper Property**

The Price Chopper property on Madison Avenue at West Lawrence Street provides preferential treatment to vehicular traffic over pedestrians, resulting in hazardous conditions. The report recommends adding raised walkways and embossed crosswalks through the store parking lot in order to improve the ease of traversing from the street to the Price Chopper entrance. It also suggests relocating the loading dock to the side of the building from its existing location to allow for a greater use of that space.

3. Use the Elks Lodge Lawn for Concerts and other Neighborhood Events

The report suggests that the Elks Lodge lawn would be the best location in the district for festivals, concerts, and other events to promote community cohesiveness based on public accessibility and venue size.

- **Make Streetscape and Aesthetic Improvements**

Many modest improvements taken together could dramatically increase the sense of a pleasant, walkable, “Main Street” community. The report details ways to reduce litter through improved and increased trash receptacles, upgrade the streetscape aesthetics by replacing broken tree grates, planting additional sidewalk trees, installing additional flowerbeds and planters along the sidewalk, and suggesting façade improvements for select buildings. The report also mentions reconfiguring the outdoor benches in front of Price Chopper and Trustco Bank so that they encourage conversation while still offering a view of the street, as well as adding casual seating in key areas (including the Pine Hills Library patio, in front of Citizens Bank, as well as in the Triangle Park), with some arrangements including tables for chess/multi-use activity.

- **Improve facilities for pedestrians and cyclists**

Reconfigure the existing sidewalk benches in front of Price Chopper and Trustco Bank so that they encourage conversation while still offering a view of the street, as well as adding casual seating in key areas (including the Pine Hills Library patio and in front of Citizens Bank), with some arrangements including tables for chess/multi-use activity.

PART I – History and Positive Elements

History of Upper Madison

Our present-day Western Avenue (known as the Great Western Turnpike) was one of the first turnpikes to radiate out from the original City of Albany. Little more than a dirt trail, this was the best means of land travel during its time, providing direct horse and stagecoach access to distant cities. According to Norder (from her article “The Point, Always New, Always the Same”), the first steam-powered passenger train in the country, the DeWitt Clinton locomotive, departed from the present-day Triangle Park on a new rail corridor bound for Schenectady. Upper Madison was chosen as the eastern terminus because this is where Albany’s topography levels out, and also because the convergence of Western and Madison Avenues provided direct access down the hill into downtown via horses, stagecoaches and later, trolleys. The area currently known as Upper Madison remained largely undeveloped until the DeWitt Clinton Railroad was constructed-- the rail terminus being a reason why the area was established as a node for commercial activity.

Later in the 19th Century, Albany’s increasing population expanded westward from the Hudson, and the trolley helped accelerate that growth. By 1890, the Pine Hills Development Corporation (PHDC) was advertising large tracts of land to the west for development. According to McEneny (1998), all new development in this area had “Architectural Covenants in Deeds” – meaning that there were to be restrictions on what could be built where. Because the older parts of Albany at this time were not bound by zoning or other property regulation, many areas became unattractive places to live, with “the immigrant city [having] a saloon on every corner” (1998, 79). In contrast, the PHDC prohibited drinking establishments in its development area. The first residents who moved into Pine Hills and the Upper Madison district were mainly upper-class city dwellers, “predominantly non-immigrants – Pine Hills being seen as a rejection of the immigrant city farther to the east” (McEneny 1998, 79).

The Upper Madison area was almost entirely built up by the 1920’s. Since its initial development, the Upper Madison business district has always been a one-stop shop, containing stores and shops for almost every need during this time period, continuing to this day.

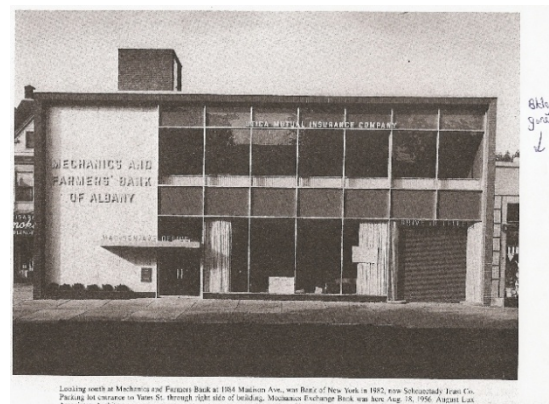


Figure 1. Currently the Trustco parking lot.

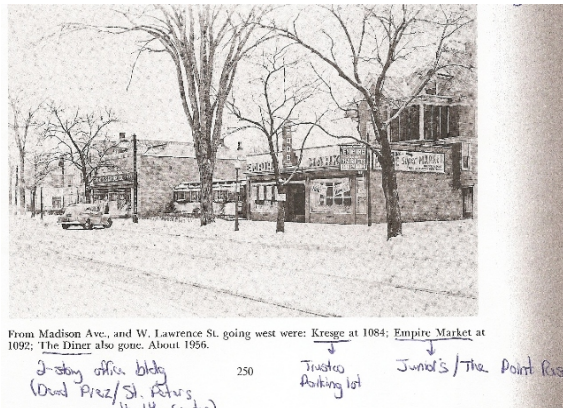


Figure 3.

Figure 2. Trustco Bank building in 1956. S.S. Kresge to the right.

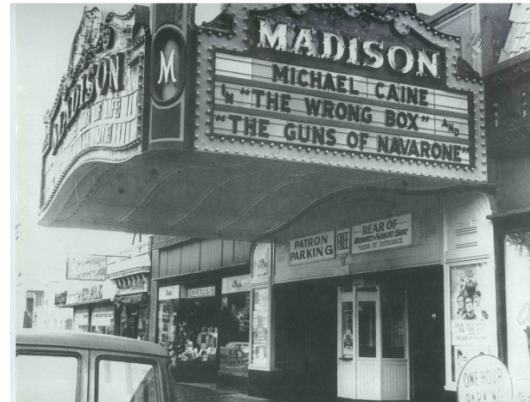


Figure 4. Madison Theater, early 1960's.

Source (Figures 1-4): McEneny, John J. (1998) *Albany: Capital City on the Hudson*. American Historical Press.

Positive Aspects of Upper Madison Today

- An economically stable area. The population that surrounds the Upper Madison business district consists primarily of citizens with moderate, stable incomes. Students from The College of Saint Rose and SUNY Albany also make up a substantial customer base. As a result, this business district has experienced an extremely low vacancy rate compared to other areas in the city.
- Active and dedicated neighborhood associations and groups. The area that encompasses Upper Madison consists of: The Pine Hills Neighborhood Association, New Albany Neighborhood Association, Manning Boulevard Neighborhood Association, and Melrose Neighborhood Association.
- Diverse array of businesses. There are places to get a coffee and bagel, perform banking transactions, buy groceries, get a suit dry-cleaned, get gas, fill a prescription, visit the library, go to the post office, get take-out food, eat lunch and dinner on an outdoor patio, catch an evening movie – all within two blocks.
- Institutions of Higher Education nearby.

Figure 5: The Upper Madison Commercial/Business District. Source: Google Maps.



PART II – Recommendations for Entire District

Results of Stakeholder Input

In the process of compiling ideas and recommendations for improving Upper Madison, I solicited input from various stakeholders in the area, especially individuals who live and/or work daily here. I contacted and interviewed a total of 13 stakeholders. A number of interviews were conducted in person, while others were conducted by phone and email. Some of the questions I asked were geared to elicit specific concerns they might have, such as the opinions of restaurant owners/operators concerning parking for their restaurant customers. Other topics I asked about were the same for all stakeholders, such as thoughts and suggestions for improving the Triangle and where additional outdoor seating might be appropriate.

After completing interviews and carefully examining and considering the notes that I took, as well as considering advice from past studies, I have attempted to extract what seem to me to be the best recommendations, which are presented and discussed in the remainder of this report.

A) Form an Upper Madison Merchants / Business Association

The formation of a merchant's association is an essential step toward creating a better Upper Madison. Firstly, formation of a merchant's association would improve communication and cooperation between and among the various businesses in the area, and enable the business community to negotiate differences and speak with a unified voice. Such an association could help provide funding for basic facility improvements and improved maintenance of the area. Such private sector funding would be especially valuable in leveraging public funding and grants requiring a local match.

The first step toward forming a merchant's association would be to seek nominations of future board members from all the businesses in the area, and solicit ideas regarding possible improvements that could be carried out using whatever funds were collected from participating businesses. At first,

there may be a number of businesses that wish not to join. This is fine, and the Association can move forward with the funds it does collect, and the effect they create via small, inexpensive streetscape improvements will hopefully influence others to join in as well, especially businesses that have notoriously been less cooperative to work with. The dues would be collected annually from each business, with the amount based on the size of the company or number of employees. According to Grondahl's *Times Union* article, titled "Delaware Avenue Resurgent" (2010, May 30), the 39 businesses in the Delaware Avenue merchant's association generally pay \$100 to \$200, depending on their size. Although a merchant's association in Upper Madison would be somewhat smaller, the same approach could be applied here. It might even be possible to get St. Rose to contribute as well, due to their close association with, and substantial influence on, the area.

B) Streetscape and Aesthetic Improvements

1) Trash Mitigation

Litter in the Upper Madison district was one of the most common complaints received from stakeholders. Widespread litter discourages pedestrian activity because it provides first-time visitors a negative impression of the Upper Madison area. Based on my surveys, locations most frequently found to accumulate litter are:

- i. Around the sidewalk benches in front of the Price Chopper wall.
- ii. Along the north side of West Lawrence Street - across from the Price Chopper and Food Court parking lots. Litter becomes entangled in the shrubbery along the sidewalk.
- iii. In front of and around Trustco Bank, including the narrow space between the Trustco building and 1080-1082 Madison to the east.
- iv. Alongside the CVS building – and especially in the stairwell.
- v. The alley between the former Muddy Cup and Dirty Harry's.
- vi. The space behind the Bruegger's building, facing South Allen Street.



Figure 6: BigBelly® Solar trash compactor and recycling unit in Columbia Park, Albany.

Photo taken by Kevin Boucher on 11/19/2010.

In November 2010, the City of Albany Department of General Services (DGS) announced that it will be installing solar-powered recycle and trash compacter containers (known as BigBelly® cans) in areas of Upper Madison with high foot traffic. These receptacles have already been implemented in various areas of the city. Following this DGS announcement, the BUMP committee submitted a diagram mapping out the desired locations for these receptacles. These cans were installed in those pinpointed locations that December. Contrary to the conventional wire-mesh cans that existed here, the BigBelly® containers do not have permeable exteriors allowing for smaller pieces of litter to escape. Figure 7 illustrates the current locations of these new receptacles. Yellow dots indicate trash only, and orange markers represent the new receptacles with recycling units attached.

Figure 7.



Source: Google Maps.

Although these sleek-looking solar powered trash cans will be a substantial help to Upper Madison, they will not solve the litter problem completely. Other steps will also need to be taken to curb litter in the area:

- a) **Install additional sidewalk cans in addition to BigBelly® ones.** A stakeholder I interviewed observed that DGS manpower will probably be more limited in the coming years, so it may be difficult to persuade them to take on additional maintenance responsibilities over and above ones deemed absolutely essential. As a result, private businesses may need to

provide and empty their own waste receptacles on the sidewalk outside of their entrances. Forming a merchant's association to fund and maintain additional trash and cigarette receptacles would help overcome this problem and achieve a more uniform level of cleanliness throughout the area.

- b) **Organize volunteer trash pickup days.** Again, this could be organized via a merchant's association, or existing neighborhood groups, perhaps every other weekend or once a month. Such an activity could provide an excellent outlet for neighborhood residents to become involved in their community and get to know one another in the process. There are also undoubtedly plenty of college students who would love to volunteer if these cleanup days are advertised on the SUNY and St. Rose campuses.
- c) **Continue stepped-up code enforcement.** Our current committee members have pursued this, and have been reasonably successful in some instances. Specific areas that continue to need attention include the exposed alley between Dirty Harry's Laundromat and the former Muddy Cup coffee shop, as well as the CVS stairwell.
- d) **Add trash cans in the Price Chopper parking lot.** The majority of litter accumulation along West Lawrence Street comes from Price Chopper parking lot across the street.



Figure 8: Alley between the former Muddy Cup and Dirty Harry's Laundromat.
Photo taken by Kevin Boucher on 12/22/2010.



Figure 9: Stairwell on the side of the CVS building, below mural.
Photo taken by Aimee Allaud on 10/20/2010.

2) Planters and Floriculture

This too is a type of improvement that could benefit significantly from the involvement of an Upper Madison Merchant's Association (UMMA). The DGS' City Gardener and surrounding neighborhood associations plant and maintain the large sidewalk planters that are currently in place. These planters create a pleasing appearance for the district. The following locations should be considered for additional plantings:

- a) **Work with Best Cleaners** to remove the steep sloping slab of concrete adjacent to the stairs leading down to sidewalk on West Lawrence, and construct a flower box here. This space currently features crumbling concrete overgrown with weeds. Because of its deteriorated condition and steep slope, this area does not function as part of the sidewalk, but rather as a barrier, and hazard, to pedestrians. A flower bed (Figure 11) constructed in this location could use a matching concrete block material as the existing boxes in front of the two nearby businesses, and also function as a retaining wall to deal with the sloping topography.



Figure 10: Current sidewalk in front of Best Cleaners.
Photo taken by Kevin Boucher on 12/22/2010.

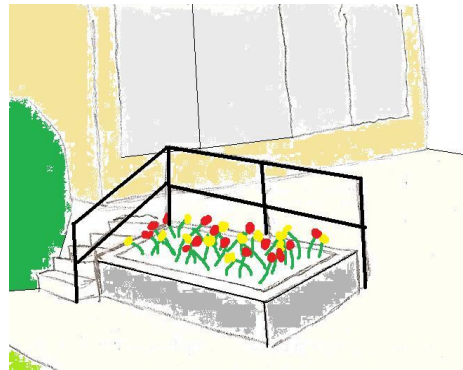


Figure 11: Improved area with proposed flowerbed.
Retaining wall would be at sitting height.
Illustration by Kevin Boucher.

- b) **The alley between Dirty Harry's and the former Muddy Cup.** Find out who owns the alley and approach them and see if they would be willing to allow it to be transformed into a landscaped shade garden (or sun/shade garden), complete with a winding path down its length. Designing and creating such a space would be a perfect subject for a university-based landscape design studio. Alternatively, a much more simple solution might be to simply hide the alley from view by installing a fence or trellis and allowing flowering vines to grow up and over.
- c) **Additional hanging flower baskets from existing telephone poles and street lamps.** Many areas in Albany implement year-round baskets, displaying winter greens during the colder months.



Figure 12: Baskets and banner attached to light pole on State Street, Albany.
Photo taken by Kevin Boucher on 1/10/2011.

- d) **Add a circular or square flowerbed at the Bruegger's corner, with a surrounding ledge at a height that invites casual seating.** Casual seating is especially desirable since the area generates a considerable amount of pedestrian activity and is excellent for people-watching.



Figure 13: A round flowerbed at the University of Connecticut campus in Storrs, CT. On most days during the University semester, this low retaining wall (about two feet high) is filled with students conversing and people-watching at a busy street corner.
(Retrieved 11/19/2010 from <http://katiehann.wordpress.com/2008/10/23/those-treacherous-textbooks/>)



Figure 14: A square flower and tree bed at Mashpee Commons, Mashpee, MA.
This is an alternative to the circular bed design.
Courtesy of Roy Casper.

3) Additional Sidewalk Trees

Existing sidewalk trees in the Upper Madison district are an extremely positive feature that enhances the streetscape. Because the trees have matured over the years, they provide welcome relief from the sun during the summer months (especially around the Madison Café area). Such trees are all the more valuable and essential in an urban setting with large areas of paved surfaces. Areas such as the Price Chopper parking lot, the Mobil gas station, and the Trustco parking lot are a few examples here.

Despite having many mature trees, there are still areas in the Upper Madison business district that could benefit from additional tree planting:

- a) **Along the south side of Madison Avenue, from the eastern end of the Price Chopper entrance to the corner with North Main.** With the exception of two small trees, this stretch is largely barren. The line of trees along the sidewalk in front of Price Chopper should be continued down to the CVS corner at South Main, taking care so as not to block views of the Madison Theater marquee from the road.



Figure 15: The south side of Madison Avenue, from North Main to the Price Chopper entrance, is largely void of sidewalk trees. Photo taken by Kevin Boucher on 12/22/2010.

- b) **Along the northern side of Western Avenue, between the Library and Citizens Bank.** There is currently no shade relief along this stretch of sidewalk.
- c) **Add one tree within each corner island on the Mobil property.** The addition of these trees will further break up the view of the large amount of asphalt compromising the property, and keep the asphalt cooler in the summer. It might also have the collateral benefit of discouraging vehicles from bypassing the traffic lights by cutting through the gas station property.
- d) **Add a short row of trees alongside the Bruegger's building on South Allen Street** to soften the effect of the blank side wall.

4) Tree Grates

Tree grates can help integrate trees into an urban landscape. Depending on their design, they typically minimize the amount of weeds and trash that accumulate in the planting area, while still allowing for foot traffic over them. However, the current grates within Upper Madison are not fulfilling that basic function as well as they might. During the summer, cracks in and around the grates fill with weeds, and small bits of trash and cigarette butts gather in the exposed ring of dirt around the tree trunk. The current grates are rusting; some are cracked and broken; and most no longer lie flush with the sidewalk. Indeed, many of the grates have become tilted, after years of exposure to the elements, so much that they are presenting an increasing hazard to pedestrians. Finally, based on my observations, it is clear that that a number of trees in the district have actually matured so much that their trunks are becoming choked by the inner rings of the iron grates.



Figure 16: Tree trunk becoming swollen as a result of an undersized grate ring diameter.
Taken by Kevin Boucher on 1/10/2011.

Some stakeholders told me they would like to see the tree grates removed altogether and replaced with flowerbeds of various designs. If this were done, however, these tree islands would become even greater magnets for litter, unless steps are taken to regularly clean them out.

Although some of the tree trunks have reached the grate ring capacity and need a larger ring opening, many others along the corridor are still young and need several more years of growth to reach the diameter allocated by their current grates. These, ironically, are the grates that are the ones that are collecting the greatest amounts of litter and generating the most weeds. As a result, one possible approach would be to replace all the current tree grates—not just the ones that are broken and tilted or those which are constraining the trunks of mature trees. All grate replacements in Upper Madison should conform to a new, more distinctive design. This design would minimize the amount of exposed dirt around the base of each tree, so as to limit weed growth. Some landscape material companies in the U.S. will produce custom grate designs for special orders. Perhaps an art course at The College of Saint Rose or SUNY Albany could be enlisted to submit proposed grate designs to BUMP, from which a choice could be made (similar to how the Upper Madison logo design was chosen).

Examples of distinctive tree grate designs:

Figure 17:

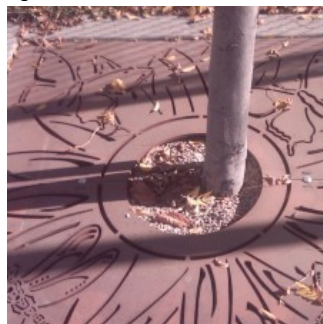


Figure 18:

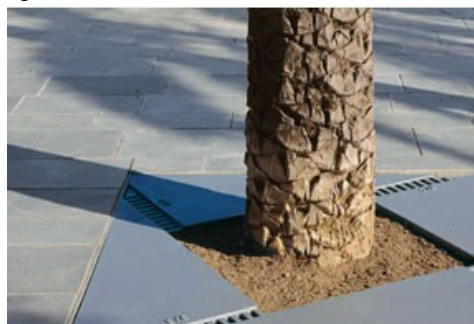


Figure 19:



Figure 20:



Figure 17: "Saskatchewan Arts Board". Retrieved 12/10/2010 from <http://www.artsboard.sk.ca/component/content/article/437-features/2037-tree-grate-art>

Figures 18 & 19: Retrieved on 12/10/10 from KE-ZU Furniture website: <http://www.kezu.com.au/index.cfm?page=product&pid=1834>

Figure 20: Jonite Landscaping. Retrieved on 12/10/2010 from their website: <http://www.jonite.com/landscape-portfolio.html>

A more cost-effective, but labor-intensive alternative to replacing all of the existing grates with new ones would be to salvage and reuse the existing grates in place already. This would involve scraping and repainting all grates that have rusted, replacing ones that have broken, and swapping grates from trees that have outgrown them and reinstalling them around smaller trees. All of the grates currently in place are in two large pieces and possess identical perimeter measurements, so they are relatively interchangeable. All grates no longer level with the sidewalk would of course need to be removed and repositioned. To minimize weed growth, a layer of weed control fabric should be installed beneath the grates surrounding the tree trunk, followed by a layer of rock pebbles instead of dirt on the surface in the space between the grate ring and tree trunk.

5) Sidewalk Design

Large portions of the brick paving alongside the concrete sidewalks and tree grates on the south side of Madison Avenue, between South Main and Allen Street, are no longer flush. As mentioned by several stakeholders, the settling of the brick pavers is not only making the area unattractive but is becoming a hazard to pedestrians and is something that will need attention in the near future. Because the brick has sunk lower than the concrete sidewalk in most instances, pedestrians frequently avoid the brick and walk instead on the narrow ribbon of concrete. Nevertheless, the general placement of the brick is fairly attractive, and may not need to be eliminated completely. There are two issues that need to be corrected here:

- 1) Raise and stabilize the brick surface to prevent future sinking.
- 2) Eliminate future weed growth between bricks.

Most cost-effective option: Reinstall using existing layout. The brick has most likely settled as it did over time because a combination of crushed stone and coarse sand was used as its foundation. In order to correct this and prevent it from reoccurring, all brick along this sidewalk would have to be removed, and a steel-reinforced concrete slab should to be installed a few inches below the surface of the concrete sidewalk. Then, the bricks would be laid on top of the new slab, creating a level surface with the existing concrete sidewalk. To eliminate the issue of weeds, the joints of these bricks can be mortared together, along with an occasional rubber expansion joint.

Less cost-effective option: Entirely new sidewalk design. (Figures 21 & 22) Because of the large amount of labor-intensive work involved in taking up and reinstalling the current brick pavers only to maintain the current design, it could conceivably make sense to consider adopting and putting into place a completely new paver design. This new design along the south side of Madison Avenue could consist of a combination of concrete and bricks & mortar that presents a uniform design from South Main to South Allen, as opposed to the currently haphazard one that looks like it was installed as time went on.



Figure 21: Oneonta, NY. Simple but consistent brick/concrete sidewalk design. Brick “striping” extends across the sidewalk from trees. This same design, or something similar, is an alternative to the existing brick layout in Upper Madison.

Photo taken by Roy Casper.

Figure 22.

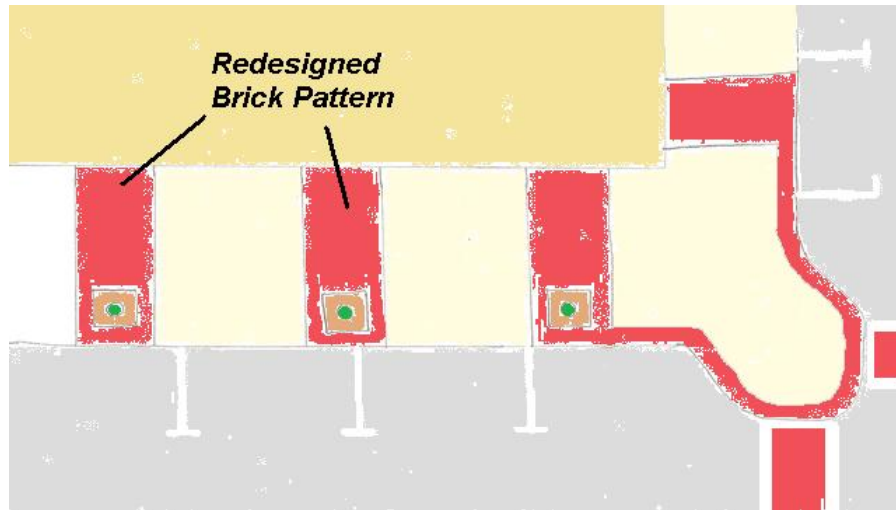


Illustration by Kevin Boucher.

6) Lighting

The Upper Madison business district currently has a combination of ornamental lamppost-style street lamps, as well as standard cobra-head lamps extending from telephone poles. The entire stretch of Madison Avenue, from South Allen to South Main, is lined with these ornamental lamps, as is the northern side of Madison between Allen and West Lawrence Streets. Although these lamps are a very positive addition to the area, it may be wise to replace the existing bulbs with more energy efficient, LED fixtures instead.

Additionally, there are a few areas where more ornamental lampposts should be installed:

- a) Along the north side of Madison Avenue, between West Lawrence and North Main. This is a dark area, made even more so due to presence of large trees on the residential properties.
- b) On the southern side of Western Avenue, alongside Triangle Park. Adding lampposts here will define the edge of Triangle Park, and counterbalance the row of lampposts along the south side of Western Avenue—thereby framing the park between rows of lampposts. Once these new fixtures are added, the two overhead cobra lights on north side of Western can afford to be eliminated.
- c) At the southwest corner of Western Avenue and West Lawrence, in front of the Steamer 10 entrance and CDTA bus stop. This is a very dark corner.
- d) At least one lamppost on each side of South Allen and West Lawrence streets, and Main Avenue near their intersection with Madison and Western Avenues. This will provide a

greater sense of security after turning onto these darker side roads from the more well-lit corridors of Madison and Western.



Figures 23 and 24: Existing view of Triangle Park with no decorative lampposts on northern side (top image) and same view with lampposts included and unnecessary cobrahead lamp removed (bottom image).

7) **Benches and Tables along Sidewalk (excluding Price Chopper)**

One issue that many stakeholders raised was the need for additional outdoor seating, so as to give the neighborhood a sense of identity and pride. Increasing the number of benches in the Upper Madison community will encourage more people to walk through the area, pause and observe their surroundings, and comfortably interact with friends, neighbors and visitors.

Currently, the only sidewalk benches that exist, in varying condition, are:

- 1) The row of eight benches lined up “barracks-style” in front of the Price Chopper wall. (Recommendations for this area discussed later.)
- 2) Four benches also in a row between the Trustco Bank entrance, and the St. Peters Children’s Health Center (SPCHC) building.
- 3) One bench in the Triangle Park, in front of the police station entrance. (Seating and table reconfiguration in Triangle Park discussed later).

Many of the areas containing the highest pedestrian volume in this business district currently do not offer benches or other places to sit. Also, these current bench setups create an uninviting setting for two or more people to converse together, since most are lined up in a row and do not face one another. The following are proposals for reconfiguring the existing layout, as well as ideas for new seating:

- a) **The four benches between Trustco and SPCHC:** These benches should be repositioned to create two sets of benches situated toward each other at 90-degree angles. This will allow people to sit on different benches and face one another, while still having a view of the street and sidewalk. Also, the benches should be moved back somewhat so as to take advantage of the shade and space behind them. The area behind the benches would include additional trees and shrubs.



Figure 25: Existing line of Trustco Benches.
Taken by Kevin Boucher on 12/22/2010.

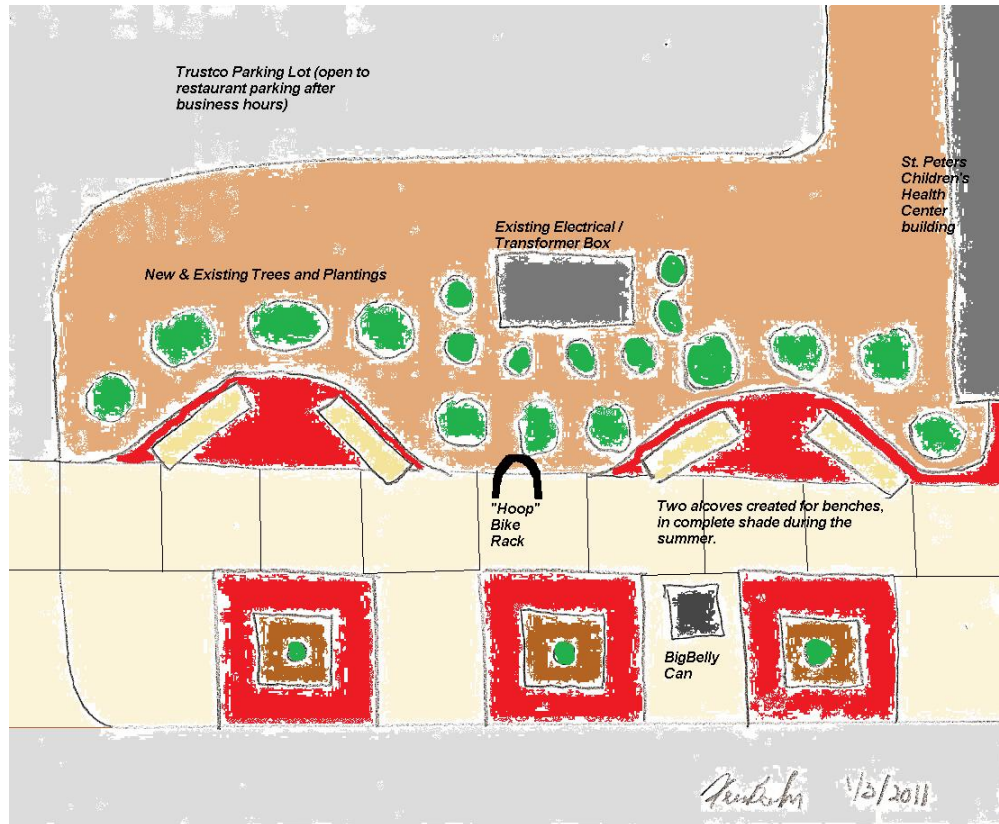


Figure 26: Proposed layout of the four Trustco benches. Illustration by Kevin Boucher.

- b) **New Seating in Front of Bruegger's:** As mentioned previously (with Figures 13 and 14 serving as examples), the installation of a circular or square-shaped flowerbed with a retaining wall could be built here at a height to accommodate casual seating. This could turn into a popular seating and conversation area due to the high level of pedestrian traffic here.
- c) **Replacement Seating at CDTA Bus Stop area in Triangle Park point:** The bench currently located adjacent to the bus shelter is unattractive, deteriorated, but always full. This bus stop should be upgraded and expanded to provide more ample seating inside and around it. BUMP should work with CDTA to achieve this.
- d) **New Seating on corner in front of Steamer 10:** At least one bench should be placed at the corner of Western Avenue and West Lawrence Street. Benches here would serve both the CDTA bus stop and for the Steamer No. 10 Theatre, as well as provide a place for general relaxation in a nice, shaded area.
- e) **New benches in front of Citizens Bank.** According to the bank, many of their customers are elderly. Placing benches in front of the bank would provide these elderly customers with a welcome place to rest on their way to or from the bank, as well as a place to converse with friends. Placing benches in this location might also help put added

pressure on Steamer No. 10 to finish its renovations, since people sitting on the benches looking across the street will be constantly reminded of the unfinished, and unsightly, state of the renovations.



Figure 27: Front of Citizens Bank with benches added.
Image by Kevin Boucher.

- f) **New Seating in front of Madison Theater and CVS:** This busy area is largely void of outdoor seating. A picnic table or two placed along the side of the CVS building might also enliven activity in this otherwise dead area.
- g) **New benches and Informational Kiosk in front of Best Cleaners, next to two existing concrete planter boxes.** This kiosk would be funded by a new Merchant's Association.



Figures 28 and 29: Kiosks at Mashpee Commons. Mashpee, MA.
Courtesy of Roy Casper.

8) Façade Improvements (other than Police Station / Steamer 10 building)

Most of the property owners in the Upper Madison business district keep their buildings and grounds in relatively good condition. However, there are a few notable buildings and properties that appear subpar compared to the surrounding urban fabric. In the Troy Architectural Project report for Upper Madison (2006), a “Façade Improvement Program” was recommended. Implementation of such a façade improvement program would be a particularly beneficial program for the following areas:

- a) Curry House building. The front entrance and front façade could use sprucing up. When looking at the building from a distance, the roof pitch and other details indicate that the building was once much more ornate—its distinctive design feature now having been covered over with vinyl siding, making it appear very bland and poorly maintained compared to its neighboring buildings.
- b) The former S&H Body Shop building. This building needs to be demolished and redeveloped for a commercial or retail use oriented to the West Lawrence Street sidewalk, as illustrated in Figure 30. Unlike other areas in Albany, the Upper Madison district has the demand that could support this additional commercial space.

Figure 30.



Illustration by Kevin Boucher.

- c) Remodel the front of CVS. The exterior of this important commercial establishment looks dated and poorly maintained. The redesigned, remodeled façade of the CVS building should either appear as a continuation of the Madison Theater theme into their building, or should resurrect the architectural style of the building when it was “Mack’s Drugs” (Figure 31).

Figure 31.



(Image hardcopy purchased from specialty store)

Figure 32.



Taken by Kevin Boucher on 1/10/2011.

- d) Refresh the Madison Theater marquee and façade. A new entranceway (including new flooring, carpentry, painting and lighting) would go a long way in sprucing up the appearance and allure of the Madison Theater. This is a business that people in the Upper Madison community are rightly proud of-- a key landmark in the district. The theater's owners need better encouragement to work with the “Friends of the Madison” group to seek outside matching funding to jumpstart the needed improvements.

Figure 33.



Retrieved 1/6/2011 from

<http://forum.skyscraperpage.com/showthread.php?t=177640>

9) Murals

The incorporation of murals can be a wonderfully effective way of reinforcing the identity of a neighborhood, and celebrating its history and distinctive qualities. Adding murals can be a particularly desirable and appropriate way of dealing with blank side walls of buildings that can make an area appear drab and uninviting, and thereby discourage pedestrian activity. However, when I asked stakeholders in Upper Madison what they thought of the possibility of adding a second mural along with the existing one on the South Main Avenue side of CVS, there seemed to be little interest—leading me to conclude that adding another mural to the area is probably not a good idea at this time.

However, stakeholders expressed generally positive opinions regarding the mural currently on the CVS building, and most agreed that something needs to be done to revive and refresh (and possibly replace) this work of art. When this mural was first created, it was intended to convey an appreciation of the thriving business district in the Upper Madison area decades ago. Unfortunately, the decrepit state of the mural now conveys the opposite impression. The peeling paint of this former masterpiece in a highly visible location results in projecting a stark impression of disinvestment and neglect. Designing and implementing a new mural in this prominent location this would be an excellent project for a neighborhood group in partnership with a mural artist with roots in the city and region. It could also be a suitable project for an art class from Saint Rose or SUNY. Gaining permission from the owner of the CVS building would be the first step.



Figure 34: Current mural on side of the CVS building.
Photo taken 12/22/2010.

C) Pedestrian and Bicycle Improvements

1) Bicycle Racks

The Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC), which serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Capital Region, has been encouraging and supporting the provision of bicycle racks in the region for the past several years. According to their website, the Capital Region Bike Rack Program offers bike racks at no cost to public sector and nonprofit entities, and CDTA offers to cover 50% of the cost of racks provided to private sector entities. The bicycle racks CDTA provides are manufactured by the Dero Bike Rack Company, and come in a variety of designs:



Figure 35: "Bike Bike" Rack



Figure 36: "Bike Hitch"



Figure 37: "Excalibur Cylinder"

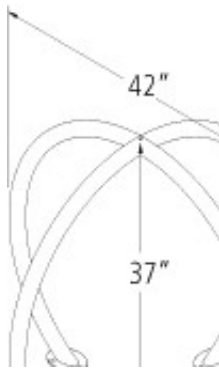


Figure 38: "Excalibur Sphere"



Figure 39: "Helix" Rack



Figure 40: "Hoop" Rack



Figure 41: "Swerve" Rack

Source: The Dero Bike Rack Company - Commercial Bike Racks.
Retrieved on 12/20/2010 from http://www.dero.com/commercial_racks.html

Unfortunately, a number of these designs are “cute” but deficient in terms of the level of security and protection they provide to bicycles, according to a stakeholder I interviewed who is also an active member of the Albany Bicycle Coalition. In his words, some of the bike rack designs “let artistic values supersede functionality.” For example, many of the designs permit metal-on-metal contact that wears away a bike’s paint. The best rack design, according to the stakeholder, is one that allows the cyclist to “lean the seat against the rack and secure the rear wheel and frame with a ‘U’ lock.”

When private businesses and non-profit organizations chose bicycle racks to place on or near their premises, they often choose visually and aesthetically pleasing designs such as the “Bike Bike Rack” and “Bike Hitch.” However these designs turn out to be not as secure or protective as others.

The most appealing as well as practical bike rack currently offered by CDTA and CDTC is the “Hoop Rack”—an elegantly simple design that “provides high security and easy bike parking” (www.dero.com). An additional advantage of this rack design is that it does not collect leaves and litter, unlike others.

Having carefully studied the Upper Madison corridor, it seems fairly clear that it would be most beneficial to install numerous, low-capacity “hoop” racks throughout the district, as opposed to having a small number of high-capacity bicycle racks spaced far apart. In the absence of conveniently placed bicycle racks, it is common to see bicycles secured to trees or lamp posts up and down the Madison Avenue business corridor. The Albany Bicycle Coalition stakeholder agreed on the importance of providing easy and convenient bicycle parking, noting that “it should be clear to the cyclist where to place the bicycle on the rack so as not to impede pedestrian traffic or extend the cycle into the street.”

Because “Hoop Racks” accommodate one or two bicycles at a time, they are relatively inexpensive, and should therefore be placed in the high-visibility locations shown in Figure 42.

Figure 42.



(Green logos represent one "Hoop" rack)

Source: Google Maps.

"Hoop" Rack Locations:

- 1) Two in front of Brueggers, between the sidewalk and street.
- 2) One in front of The Point Restaurant/Café Madison, between sidewalk and street.
- 3) One next to the benches between Trustco and SPCHC.
- 4) Two in front of the Food Court building, either between the sidewalk and street, or under the overhang if they permit it.
- 5) One next to the Price Chopper benches, near the Madison Avenue entrance.
- 6) Remove the CVS rack and replace with two of these.
- 7) One next to the entrance of the "Mobil Mart"
- 8) One at the southwest corner of Western and West Lawrence, at the CDTA stop.
- 9) One next to the CDTA bus shelter at the Point.
- 10) One next to the CDTA bus shelter at northeast corner of Western and North Allen.
- 11) One or two next to the store entrance in Price Chopper lot, if they are willing to replace the current one.
- 12) One in front of the library patio.

According to a CDTC representative I spoke to, a revised roster of bicycle rack designs, including some new styles, should be available sometime in the beginning of 2011. This revised selection of designs should be examined to see if there are any new bicycle racks worthy of consideration by virtue of being as secure and functional as the "Hoop Rack."

2) Crosswalk Upgrades at Intersections

One of the best ways of creating and maintaining a vital and vibrant neighborhood business area is to create a visually attractive, comfortable and safe pedestrian environment that encourages and invites people to stroll and walk throughout the area. If a pedestrian walking down a sidewalk or attempting to cross an intersection feels uncomfortable or insecure for any reason, he or she will likely cut short his or her time spent in the area, and not visit destinations or businesses they might very well have otherwise encountered. The cumulative effects over time of such unrewarding pedestrian experiences can prove devastating to the health of a business district.

In order to cross Madison Avenue at the intersection of West Lawrence or at Main, pedestrians must wait patiently for the Madison Avenue overhead traffic light to turn red, since there is no pedestrian crosswalk signal. When it does change, there are usually cars still speeding through on all four lanes trying to beat the light. When those motorists do finally clear, pedestrians then have the right to cross. However, there are usually vehicles from the side streets pressing forward to turn onto Madison, given the limited amount of green-light time that they have. These vehicles usually stop short in the middle of the intersection, startling pedestrians trying to get across as quickly as possible in their poorly-marked crosswalk.

The situation that currently exists at the two main intersections in Upper Madison undermines the goal of providing a pleasant, walkable neighborhood. A few possible improvements/modifications aimed to increasing pedestrian comfort and safety seem worth considering.

1. Sidewalk Bump-outs at Intersections: This is a frequently used pedestrian and streetscape improvement, particularly along corridors with on-street parking. “Bumping” the sidewalk several feet outward minimizes the distance pedestrians must traverse to cross the street. Such bump-outs also screen and essentially “book-end” on street parking, so that obstructions caused by cars parking too close to the corner are avoided. Some good examples of sidewalk bump-outs can be found further east on Western Avenue in the center of the College of Saint Rose campus.

Bump-outs should be seriously considered for the signalized intersections at:

- Madison Avenue, Western Avenue, and Allen Street
- Madison Avenue and West Lawrence Street
- Madison Avenue and North Main Avenue
- Western Avenue and West Lawrence Street

A bump-out might also be advantageously considered to be placed in front of the Pine Hills Library that would lead to a proposed new crosswalk across Western Avenue leading to the Triangle Park. Since this would be a mid-block crossing, a standing yellow “Yield to Pedestrians in Crosswalk” sign would need to be placed at the midpoint of the crosswalk in the center of Western Avenue.



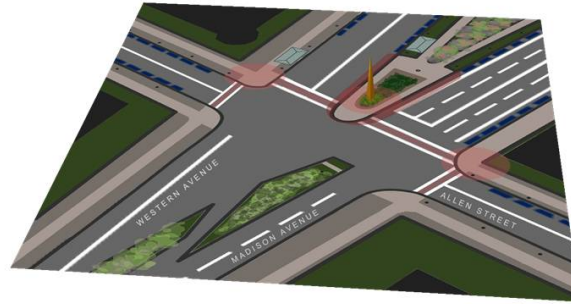
Figure 43: Corner sidewalk bump-out in West Hartford, CT.
Source: Google StreetView.

2. Stamped/Embossed Concrete or Composite Material Embedded in Asphalt for Crosswalks. Current crosswalks in Upper Madison are extremely uneven, with ruts worn down into the pavement due to years of heavy vehicular traffic. There is also the problem of standing water in the crosswalks, due to a combination of ruts in the pavement and poor drainage—a problem which is particularly serious at the corner of Madison and West Lawrence. Puddles of standing water present an unwelcome obstacle to pedestrians crossing the street, as well as a potential hazard when such puddles freeze in winter.

Standard painted crosswalks need frequent restriping. Utilizing stamped/embossed concrete or composite material eliminates the need for such continuous maintenance. Such materials also increase motorists’ awareness of sidewalks, because their red brick tint of such crosswalks (such as those along Delaware Avenue and Central Avenue) creates much more clearly defined crosswalks. Motorists’ awareness of the crosswalks is further increased by using a stamped design that creates a slight rumble.

Figures 44 & 45: Painted / Embossed Crosswalk illustration at Allen, Western and Madison Avenues.

Source: TAP, Inc. (2006, May 12). Upper Madison Block Planning Initiative – Final Presentation [PowerPoint Slides].



Figures 46 & 47. Standing water at corner of Madison Avenue and West Lawrence Street.
Photos taken by Kevin Boucher on 11/7/2010.



3. Audible Pedestrian Signals at Intersections. It is somewhat surprising that a long-established, active business district such as Upper Madison does not already have pedestrian crosswalk signals in place. For the blind and disabled, audible signals such as the familiar bird-chirp in downtown intersections should be considered here. Also, “No Turn on Red” signage should be installed where there is none already, and these signs should be hung next to the traffic signals rather than on the side of the road for better visibility.

D) Safety

The Upper Madison community has an enormous advantage inasmuch as it has a police substation right in the heart of the community. Nevertheless, previous studies of the area, as well as my interviews with stakeholders, have produced a few suggestions for reducing crime, increasing safety, and creating a more vibrant area.

- Increase the police presence in the Upper Madison area on weekends and at high school dismissal.
- Increase police presence around the Price Chopper parking lot, on Yates Street and in the area around the Madison Theater—where vehicular and other personal property is frequently damaged, but many of these incidents go unreported.
- Reduce the number of police cruisers parked along Western Avenue and that frequently block the sidewalk in front of the Station.

PART III – Recommendations for Specific Areas

A) The “Triangle Park”

This triangular-shaped sliver of green space offers an oasis of relative tranquility in a bustling business area. It is also a signature space, framed as it is by two major arteries that defines and distinguishes the Upper Madison District. Put simply, the Triangle Park is the most important landmark in Upper Madison. What happens to and within Triangle Park is therefore critical to the shaping the image and identity of the district. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons the space in Triangle Park is largely underutilized and under-appreciated, and fails to function as it should as the focal point for the neighborhood.



Figure 48 - The Point at Triangle Park. Photo taken by Kevin Boucher on 1/10/2011.

Triangle Park – Existing Layout (Figure 49)

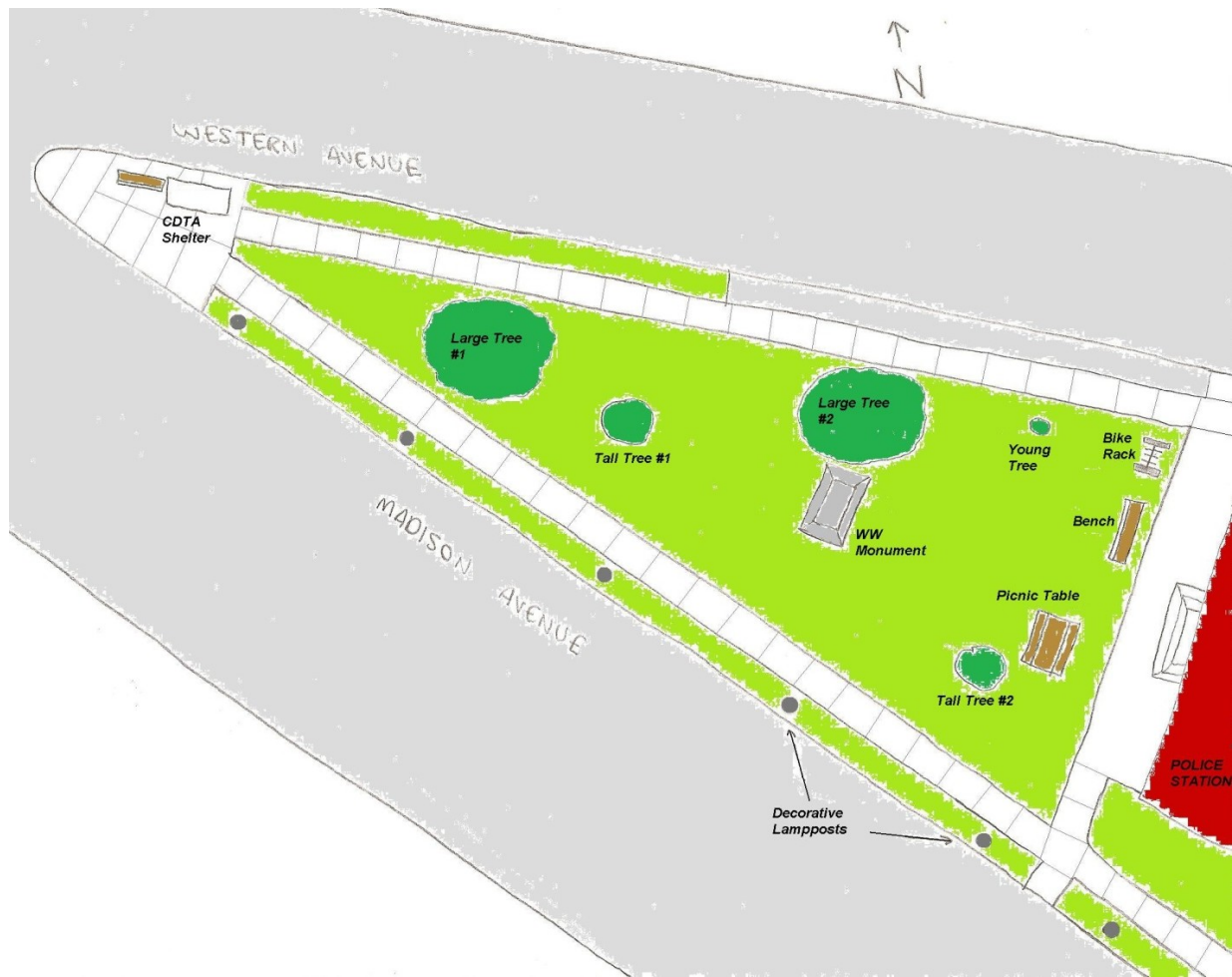


Illustration by Kevin Boucher

Triangle Park – Proposed Layout (Figure 50)



Illustration by Kevin Boucher

Triangle Park contains a “World Wars” monument that, despite being located in the center of the park, is generally unrecognized and unappreciated. Improving and reinforcing pedestrian access into the center of the park would draw greater attention to this important feature. This can be done by constructing two short walkways leading to the front of the Monument from the sidewalks along the two main sides of the triangle along Madison and Western Avenues. The walkway from the Western Avenue sidewalk should connect to a crosswalk across Western Avenue leading to the Pine Hills Library.

In front of the Monument, a patio area should be created large enough for about four tables, each with a chess board embedded into the table tops. Placing a new patio with tables in this location, with the Monument as the meaningful backdrop, could be part of a larger effort to remind local residents of the monument’s existence, historic significance, and importance to the district. Providing tables here would also provide people with a comfortable place to sit and socialize, as well as a welcome venue for organized chess tournaments. The tables could serve a multiplicity of functions; having chess boards embedded in the table tops would make playing

chess a bit more convenient. Installing lights that would shine upward onto the monument from the flowerbed at its base would provide a pleasing sight at night. After these improvements are made, a re-dedication ceremony for the Monument should be organized and held, with a maximum of publicity.



Figure 51: Example of outdoor chess tables at Columbia Park, downtown Albany.
Taken by Kevin Boucher on 1/10/2011.

Additional design improvements are needed at the point of Triangle Park. This can be done by adding a *Water Feature* within a raised triangular flowerbed, which would provide a welcome focal point for the park as illustrated below.

Illustration of Proposed Triangle Park Focal Point (Figure 52)

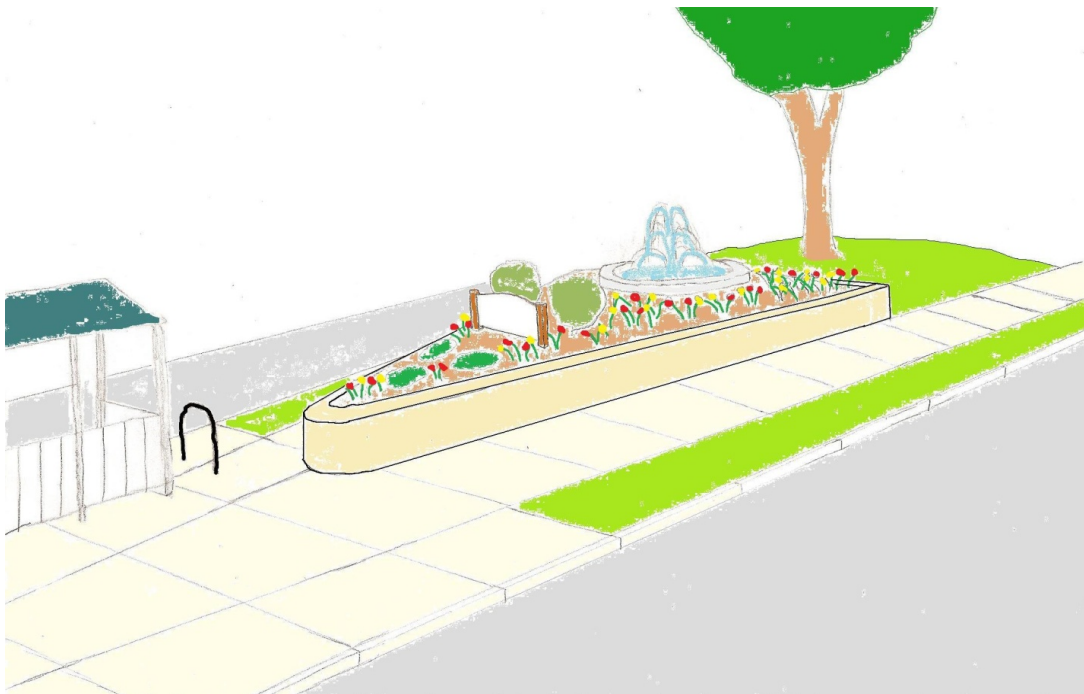


Illustration by Kevin Boucher.

The flowerbed's retaining walls should be constructed at a height that invites pedestrians and bicyclists to stop and sit. To discourage local youth from damaging the wall by using its edge for skateboard "grinding" stunts (which is a common result in walls about this height), the top ledge can either be constructed of stone with an uneven texture, or metal brackets or miniature ornaments can be interspersed along the edge.



Figure 53: Round emblems attached to low wall at Picotte Hall, College of St. Rose.



Figure 54: "Brackets" attached to casual sitting area at Collins Circle, SUNY Albany.

Photos taken by Kevin Boucher on 1/10/2011.

The proposed water feature at the base of the raised flowerbed will be a highly visible feature of the park, and the sound of water will have a soothing effect against the background sound of vehicles passing by. A sign that reads "Welcome to Upper Madison – City of Albany," displaying the new logo of the Upper Madison area, should be placed in front of the fountain.

Examples of Outdoor Fountains:

Figure 55.



Figure 56.



Figure 57.



Figures 55 & 56: Conservatory Garden Center Fountain. The Official Website of Central Park. Retrieved 1/4/2011 from <http://www.centralparknyc.org/visit/things-to-see/north-end/conservatory-garden-fountain.html>
Figure 57: Fountain in Stanley Quarter Park. New Britain, CT. Taken by Kevin Boucher on 8/12/2010.

In addition to the proposed multi-use/chess tables in front of the Monument, three new picnic tables should be placed in the grassy area between the Monument and the entrance to the police station. This will provide a place for reading, for students to study, and for people to eat their lunches outside in summer and when weather permits. There are currently two picnic tables in this general area, but these are in poor condition and need to be replaced. There is an existing bench as well as a bike rack closer to the police station entrance, both of which can remain.

The removal of trees can be unpopular and provoke controversy. Nevertheless, the tree closest to the point will need to be removed for the flowerbed and fountain to be constructed. The other low, wide tree to the left of the Monument also needs to be taken out to make space for the patio. Generally speaking, these two trees do not work well in the park because they consume a great deal of valuable ground space. Lastly, a third tree, the one closest to the police station, should also be removed for a number of reasons. First, it blocks views of the pleasing architectural features of the police station building. Second, many dead limbs were recently cut off from this tree, leaving it with an awkward appearance. After the chess patio has been created, two new maple trees can be planted adjacent to the patio and Memorial, which will provide ample shade as they mature. These trees will also display vibrant color in autumn.

B) Area in front of and within Price Chopper property

The Golub Corporation, owner of all Price Chopper supermarkets, is a locally owned company and has shown commitment to urban areas; most recently by locating their new headquarters in the city of Schenectady. Although a popular, heavily patronized store, the Madison Avenue Price Chopper and its associated parking lot, constructed in the 1970s, create an unfortunate void in the streetscape of the Upper Madison community. The food court building that was more recently constructed on the corner has somewhat improved the situation, by partially shielding the Price Chopper lot from view, and helping to generate sidewalk-oriented pedestrian activity.

A concrete wall constructed along the edge of the sidewalk fronting on Madison Avenue separating the parking lot from the sidewalk provides minimal visual screening of the large parking lot. Nevertheless the present situation is far from ideal both aesthetically and functionally. For one thing, the concrete wall fronting on the Madison sidewalk obstructs pedestrian access, forcing pedestrians to walk through the automobile entrance. The Price Chopper parking lot itself is also extremely dangerous for the many pedestrians who currently cross through it to reach the store. Below are recommendations for addressing some of these deficiencies, and illustrated in Figures 58- 63.

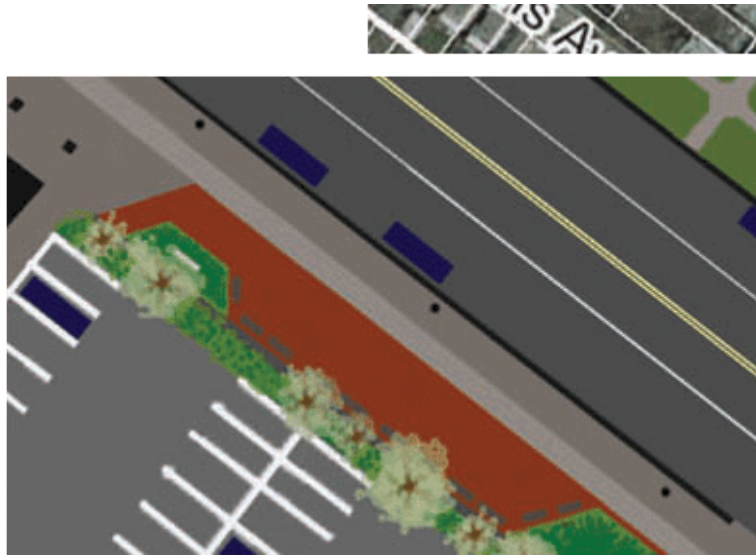
1. Bench reconfiguration:

- a) The eight existing benches currently placed in a row along the concrete wall should be rearranged into four groups of two, which each pair of benches placed at 90-degree angles to one another, creating four “pods.” This will allow for groups of two or more people to converse as well as face one another while sitting on opposite benches, while still being able to observe the street and sidewalk.
- b) At two of the four pods, a permanent, triangular-shaped table should be installed. As with the multi-use tables on the Triangle Park patio, this bench and table setup could accommodate and provide space for a variety of recreational pursuits, reading, studying, having lunch, playing chess or checkers, or doing anything else that requires a table. Because not everyone who sits at these benches will need a table, the other two “pods” will not include them.
- c) To improve the appearance of the concrete wall and parking lot beyond, a landscaped buffer should be added in front of the wall consisting of trees, shrubs, flowers, and other plantings. This will help soften the dominance of the concrete and masonry. The “enclosure” of plantings proposed here is similar to what the Troy Architectural Plan (TAP) proposed in their 2006 report, except that most of the plantings TAP called for were to be located behind the wall, whereas what is proposed here is that the plantings be placed in front of it to increase their visibility and create a more pleasing pedestrian realm.

Figure 58.



Figure 59.



Source: TAP, Inc. (2006, May 12). Upper Madison Block Planning Initiative – Final Presentation [PowerPoint Slides].

Plan for Price Chopper Sidewalk (Figure 60)

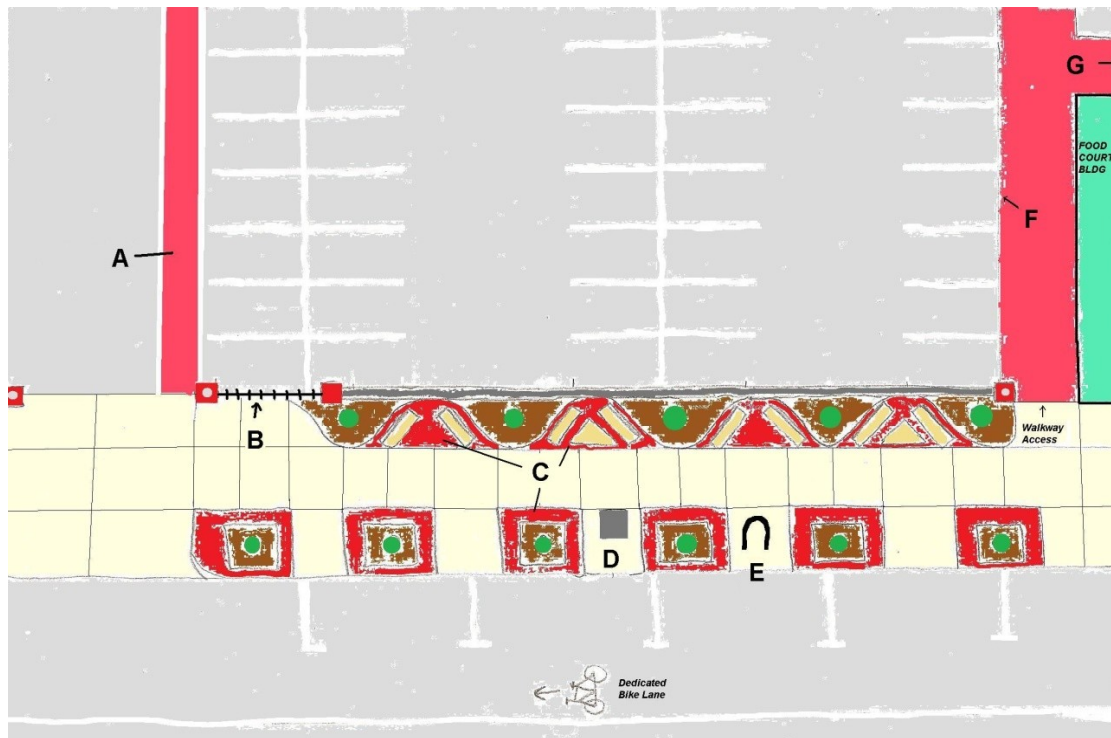


Illustration by Kevin Boucher.

- A. Embossed/painted walkway to improve pedestrian safety to store entrance
- B. 15-20' of wall replaced with permeable fence to improve entrance visibility for vehicles and pedestrians
- C. Existing sidewalk brick removed and reinstalled. Existing benches grouped together, with two of the four "pods" having triangular-shaped, multi-purpose tables. Additional trees and shrubbery should be planted between groups of benches to hide existing wall and parking lot.
- D. BigBelly® Can
- E. "Hoop" Bike Rack
- F. Defined pedestrian walkway leading to store, elevated and separated from parking lot by means of a curb. Remove sections of wall and guardrail for more convenient pedestrian access to and from walkway.
- G. Provide convenient pedestrian access between Price Chopper parking lot and rear of Food Court building.

2. **Madison Avenue automobile/truck entrance** – Remove the last 15-20 feet of concrete and masonry wall along each side of the Madison Avenue automobile/truck entrance and replace with black iron or imitation-iron fence, including brick posts with illuminated lamps on the ends. This will improve aesthetics as well as pedestrian safety, by making the ends of the wall more visually permeable, thus enabling drivers of vehicles and pedestrians to more readily see each other.



Figures 61 & 62: Existing Madison Avenue, taken by Kevin Boucher on 1/3/2011 (above), and with wall improvements (below).



3. **Add walkways** connecting the Madison Avenue and West Lawrence Street sidewalks to the store entrance, relieving pedestrians from having to walk through the treacherous parking lot. These two clearly defined pedestrian walkways should essentially follow the property line of the food court building.
 - i. The first walkway should begin at the Madison Avenue sidewalk, between the existing Price Chopper wall and the corner of the Food Court building, and traverse along the edge of the parking lot. It should be elevated and separated from the parking lot by means of a curb.
 - ii. The second walkway would begin at the West Lawrence sidewalk, also elevated and separated from the parking lot by a curb, where it would eventually join with the first one. Both walkways will terminate just short of the entrance, and will include a short crosswalk to the existing sheltered store entrance.

- iii. A lengthier crosswalk embossed into the parking lot asphalt will traverse from the Madison Avenue automobile/truck entrance to the store entrance.

- 4. **Existing dumpsters need to be fenced in.**
- 5. **Two residential properties on Morris Avenue currently encroach onto the side of the Price Chopper building,** forcing the store to position its loading dock facing Madison Avenue. Price Chopper has expressed a desire to make this modification in the past. If they are still interested in pursuing this, this may be a good time to once again approach the owner(s) of these two residential properties and encourage them to consider dividing and selling some of their property to Price Chopper. This would allow unloading and delivery activity to be relocated to the side of the building instead of the front.
- 6. **When the loading dock is relocated, a small patio with benches and picnic tables could be added along the front of the store facing Madison Avenue,** which would very probably be appreciated and much used during spring, summer and fall months by store customers, especially the elderly, and store employees.

Figure 63.

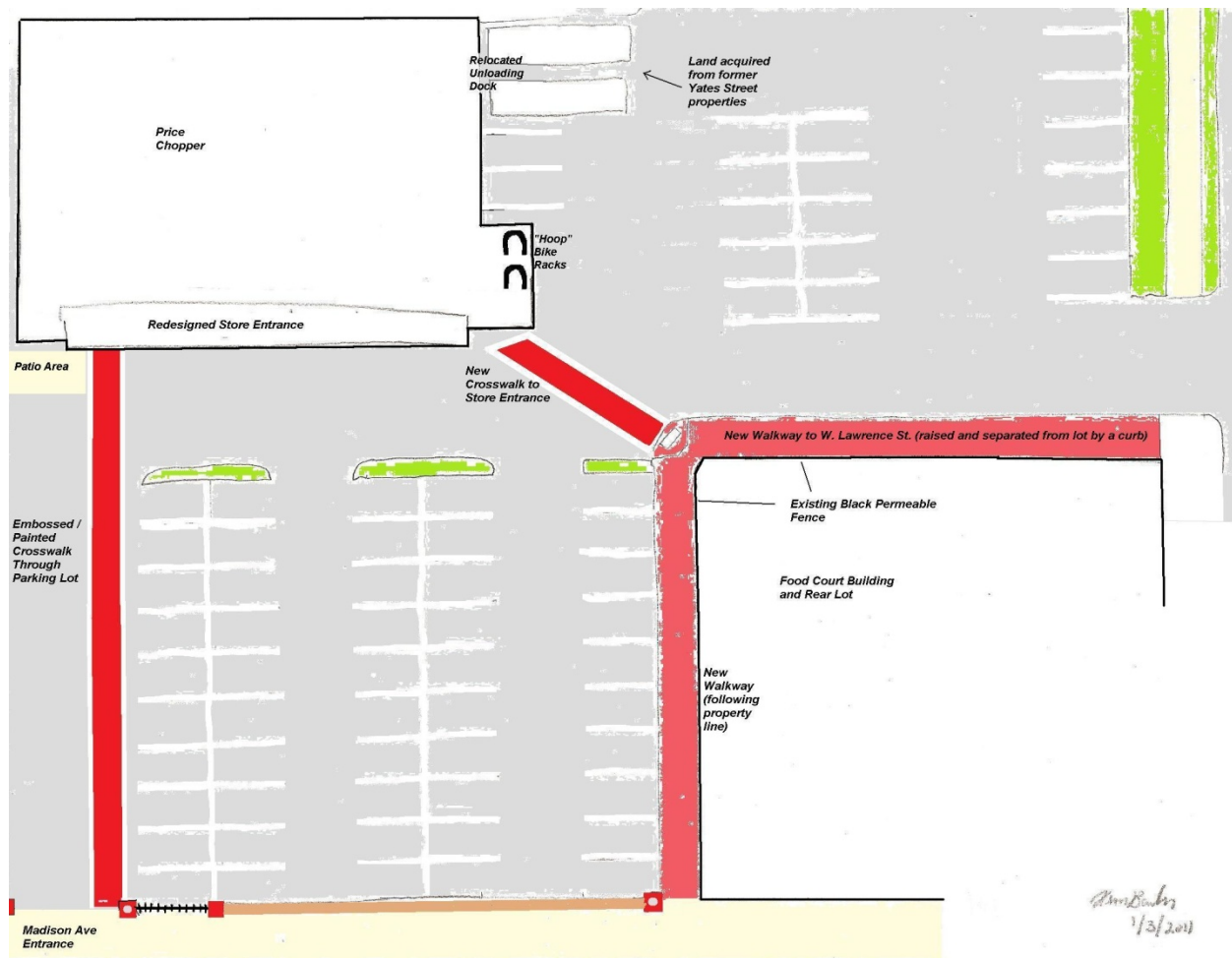


Illustration by Kevin Boucher

Some of these Price Chopper recommendations can be implemented relatively quickly and at fairly low-cost, whereas others will realistically need to take place over the longer-term. However, all of these ideas, including the walkway installation and proposed unloading dock relocation, should be presented to the Golub Corporation to capture their attention and get them engaged in contributing to the revitalization of the district. Hopefully, the activism and commitment of residents and businesses evidenced in these plans and ideas will persuade the company to invest in additional remodeling and upgrading this particular store.

C) Police Station and Steamer 10 Theatre Building

Built in 1891, the Steamer No. 10 building has long been a focal point for the Upper Madison neighborhood. In 1925, the Central Police Station addition was constructed, and the city eventually stopped using Steamer No. 10 as a functioning firehouse in 1989. Two years later, the empty fire station was first put to use as a theater venue when the Steamer No. 10 Theatre

moved into the space. To this day it hosts an active schedule of theatrical performances and programs.

The Steamer 10 building is an under-appreciated architectural masterpiece. In concert with the proposed redesign of the Triangle Park, this building can shine once again. Below are some recommendations, listed in order from the least to most costly to implement:

1. Clean up the grounds surrounding Steamer No. 10, including the area around the original firehouse door which is overgrown and littered with construction equipment, left-over building materials and debris.
2. Improve landscaping around the building, particularly along the Madison Avenue side. Viewed from businesses across the street, the Madison Avenue side of the Steamer 10 building has an uncared-for look during the summer, with overgrown grass adjacent to the building. Better care and additions of landscaping can make a big difference, which will hopefully occur in connection with the redesign of Triangle Park.
3. Install exterior lighting to highlight and draw attention to architectural details of the Police Station and Steamer No. 10 building. Spotlights can be installed either on the ground or shining down from the top of the building. According to Ric Chesser, this work could be accomplished through the Electrician's Union, and the best way to get electrical service to this area would be to first add exterior lighting for the War Monument, and then branch off of that to provide power to light the front of the building.
4. Finish Steamer No. 10 entrance. According to Ric Chesser, another \$150,000 is needed to complete this elaborate castle façade that has been undertaken at the Steamer 10 entrance. Attempts continue to be made to raise the needed money through local fundraising and grants, such as the recently-submitted application for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding. Hopefully the funding necessary to complete the project will be raised, so people don't have to continue to look at all-too-familiar half-brick, half Tyvek®-shrouded exterior.

Figure 64.



Taken by Kevin Boucher on 12/22/2010.

D) Pine Hills Library Patio

The newly added patio in front of the Pine Hills Library is a potentially important public space. Unfortunately, there are currently no furnishings for this area. To maximize use and enjoyment of the patio, a combination of permanent and movable seating and tables should be added to enable people to sit, read and socialize in this space—and say “hello” to their neighbors as they enter and leave the library.



Figure 65: Existing Library Patio. Taken by Kevin Boucher on 12/22/2010.

Proposed Layout for Pine Hills Library Patio (Figure 66)

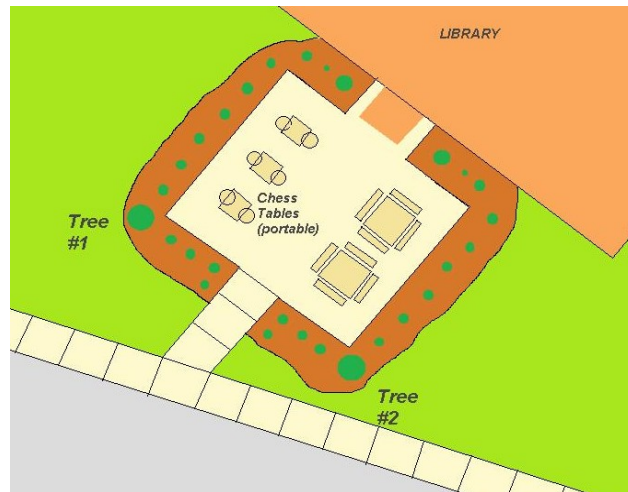


Illustration by Kevin Boucher

E) Suitable Green Space Venue for Summer Events

Currently there is no outdoor public space suitable and large enough to host outdoor neighborhood gatherings, summer concerts, art and craft fairs or other events in the Upper Madison area. Locations with the largest amounts of lawn space are listed and assessed below in terms of their advantages and disadvantages.

Citizen's Bank – This lawn is too small to accommodate most public events, and is made more problematic by a stone retaining wall that divides the area in half. However, this lawn could conceivably be used to accommodate a small event such as an arts and craft fair. Given its long rectangular layout, a circulation “corridor” could be laid out with booths along each side. The retaining wall provides a place where people could sit and watch the activity.



Figure 67: Citizens Bank lawn. Taken by Kevin Boucher on 12/22/2010.

Elk's Lodge – This fairly large lawn behind the Madison Avenue business district, within easy walking distance, would provide an ideal venue for outdoor concerts and neighborhood events. The idea of using the Elks Lodge lawn for such community events was brought before the Elks Lodge No. 49 Board in November 2010, where the idea was given initial approval. Member Mr. Herb Carle is enthusiastic about the idea of offering this space for community use, seeing it is as a “good way for us to connect with the community.” Mr. Carle even suggested that the Elks might provide some of the food and beverages at such events. The Lodge also has an adjacent parking lot that could be made of use during such events.



Figure 68: Lawn at Elk's Lodge. Photo taken by Kevin Boucher on 12/22/2010.

Emmaus United Methodist Church – They expressed little desire to accommodate community events. In any case, their lawn is quite small, and probably works best for a church-sponsored outdoor craft fairs and bake sales.

Massry Center - Being the property of the College of St. Rose, any proposed use of the lawn of the Massry Center, or the Massry Center itself, would have to go through a campus approval process, and effectively become a St. Rose sponsored event, not an Upper Madison one. The Massry Center lawn is also landlocked by St. Rose buildings.

Pine Hills Library – Because the new patio in front of the Library takes up a significant portion of the former lawn, there would not be enough space here to hold a significant event, unless Western Avenue were to be closed to traffic. The Library lawn could, however, benefit with a few benches installed along the edge of its butterfly garden.

F) Yates Street Parking Reconfiguration

The current arrangement of parking along Yates Street exerts a considerable drag on the commercial vitality of the district by restricting the overall availability of parking spaces to serve the needs of the district. The inefficiency and underuse of parking spaces is due to the fact that

the parking area is divided into a number of different privately owned parcels, each owned and managed for the benefit of separate, private entities rather than the benefit of the district as a whole. The fact that different portions of the lot are separately owned also makes it difficult to arrive at a plan that all entities can agree to. According to TAP's 2006 Final Report, the goal should be to establish one large municipal parking lot.

Creating a single unified lot would solve the problem of unused parking spaces at times when certain businesses are closed but others are doing their peak business. It would also unclutter the area by eliminating the various dividers and barriers that currently define the parking areas of separate businesses, thereby maximizing the total number of parking spaces available. The idea of creating a single, unified parking area should be one of the first action items on the agenda of the newly created Upper Madison Merchant's Association.

If a unified, centrally managed and patrolled parking lot proves unfeasible to implement in the near-term, then a continuation of the trend toward forming voluntary parking partnerships should be strongly encouraged. These "partnerships" have already been formed between and among a few businesses and groups in Upper Madison, such as between businesses which utilize their lots during the day, but allow patrons of other businesses to park there in the evenings. Doing this is a sensible, easy way of alleviating parking shortages along Madison Avenue and side streets during evenings and weekends.

Figure 69: Yates Street Plan

Majority of parking space in this plan to remain privately owned. *Source:* Clough Harbor & Associates.



Figure 70: Municipal Parking Plan



Source: TAP, Inc. (2006, May 12). Upper Madison Block Planning Initiative – Final Presentation [PowerPoint Slides].

G) Branding

Progress of Upper Madison Logo

In the fall of 2010, the Beautify Upper Madison Project committee embarked on a task of working in conjunction with a St. Rose graphics design course instructor, in which the students each create a logo for Upper Madison. The BUMP committee as well as the instructor then selected the “top 5” that best suited the area. In December, these five logos were displayed for a public vote at the Pine Hills Library, Citizens Bank, and in the BMT/Post Office lobby. There was also an online survey posted as well. After collecting about 250 votes, the BUMP committee agreed on one logo in particular.



Figure 71. Source: Andrea Kohl.

The logo, which may undergo some minor tweaking, will be placed on the letterhead of all flyers, Upper Madison bulletins, and promotional materials. It will also be used on possible lamppost and telephone pole banners, as well as on the new “Welcome to Upper Madison” sign that has been proposed to be placed in the new triangular flower bed in Triangle Park. Last but not least, the logo should be considered for adoption by the newly formed Upper Madison Merchant’s Association.

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Upper Madison / Western Gateway Improvement Plan of Action (Revised 7/29/2010).

Appendix 1: Upper Madison Businesses

Major businesses, not-for-profit, and service organizations in the Upper Madison/Western Gateway area

Albany Police Department, Center Station
Best Cleaners
Bruegger's Bakery
Café Madison
Citizens Bank
Curry House
CVS
David Ward Hair Salon
Dead President's Lounge
Dirty Harry's Laundromat
Dunkin' Donuts
Elks Club No. 49
Emmaus United Methodist Church
Junior's Restaurant
Madison Mobil
Madison Theater
Mahar's
Mobil Mart
Natalie's Tailor
Pine Hills Elementary School
Pine Hills Library
Price Chopper
St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
St. Peter's Children's Health Center
Steamer No. 10 Theatre
Subway
Tierra Coffee Roasters
The Point Restaurant
Trustco Bank
U S Post Office
Variety Pizza
XingLang