

Town of LeRay commercial corridor planning

How a small town in northern New York is getting what they planned for

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Introduction and Town Overview

Located near the center of Jefferson County, the Town of LeRay, N.Y., is an hour and a half drive north of Syracuse, just south of the Canadian border. Nearly 40% of the Town's land is occupied by Fort Drum—home of the 10th Mountain Division and approximately 17,000 military personnel.

The Town's proximity to both the City of Watertown and a growing Fort Drum has led to significant commercial and residential growth in LeRay in recent years, particularly along US Route 11.

Over the last several decades, starting with the activation of the 10th Mountain Division in 1985 and continuing with the latest and ongoing Fort Drum expansion, the Town of LeRay has undergone a change from a largely rural, "small town" community, dominated by family farms, to a local commercial and residential hub centered on activities at Fort Drum. The current fort expansion has brought many benefits to the Town including new jobs and shopping choices, and stronger ties between the Fort and the Town of LeRay. This increase in population has created an increase in traffic and the conversion of a rural landscape into a commercial corridor. US Route 11 is the principal travel corridor for traffic bound for Gouverneur, Potsdam, Malone and Plattsburgh. Commercial traffic serving Fort Drum utilizes the Gasoline Alley gate on NYS Route 26, east of US Route 11. This increased local traffic, as well as regional travel, is creating huge demands on both the highway system and the local commercial district. Realizing the full benefits of this growth and market, a positive contribution to the Town's quality of life for many



Holbrook Road looking east (2004)



Same location showing new commercial spaces and newly-constructed street (2011)

years to come has been a major theme of this corridor planning effort.

Goals of the Town

The Town established a series of goals

for the overall corridor planning project. These goals include:

- Contain growth within the corridor while protecting existing conditions

in the remainder of the Town. The Town has sufficient investment in water and sewer system in this area which can support the growth.

- Develop growth strategies and structure to provide for needed and desired growth.
- Maintain relations with Fort Drum. Support their mission. The majority of the troops living on base are also residents of the Town.
- Expand the tax base.
- Maintain transportation capacity and safety for through traffic while providing commercial opportunities on local streets which join the state highway at signalized intersections.
- Provide alternate means of travel to automobile travel on state highways.

Proactive Actions by the Town of LeRay

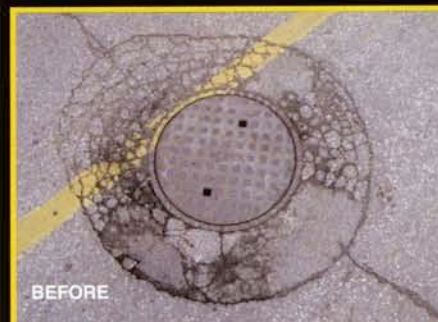
In order to achieve these goals, the Town started a series of proactive actions beginning in 2005. They hired a Community Development Coordinator and created a Planning Department. This experienced staff brought an elevated level of professionalism to what had historically been a Volunteer Board. Through an outreach program with the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), the staff conducted a corridor study with NYSDOT, FRA Engineering and Peter J. Smith & Company. This study recommended limiting access to the state highways, modifying zoning regulations, and developing design guidelines for new development within the corridor. Each of these recommendations is being implemented. The design guidelines have been developed and incorporated into the Local Zoning Law. NYSDOT constructed the median barrier and traffic signalization project along US Route 11, and is in the middle of constructing the \$80 million Northern Connector road which will provide interstate highway service to the main entrance to Fort Drum. The Town also developed a new Comprehensive Plan and is rewriting its Zoning Law.

These actions were intended to maintain planning control at the local level,

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and empower the Planning Board and Planning Department to be the keepers of the community vision for this area. The cooperative efforts with NYSDOT guided both the planning efforts at the local level, as well as the NYSDOT's capital project development. The median project provided greater safety along the corridor while the Northern Connector will carry through traffic di-

rectly to Interstate 81, reducing traffic congestion and giving regional travelers a more direct option.

Next Steps

The Town's work is not complete. The Northern Connector will be complete and start diverting traffic by the end of 2012. Work has just started on the Zoning Law update/rewrite which will be

completed in the spring of 2012. The Town is currently working with several housing developers and the County Highway Department to construct the local commercial frontage roads. These roads will form the basis of a local commercial road grid to provide safe, convenient access to the growing commercial area. Current housing projections in the area show continued demand for more than 1,000 new housing units over the next few years. The Planning Board has approved 400 within this corridor study area.

Measures of Success

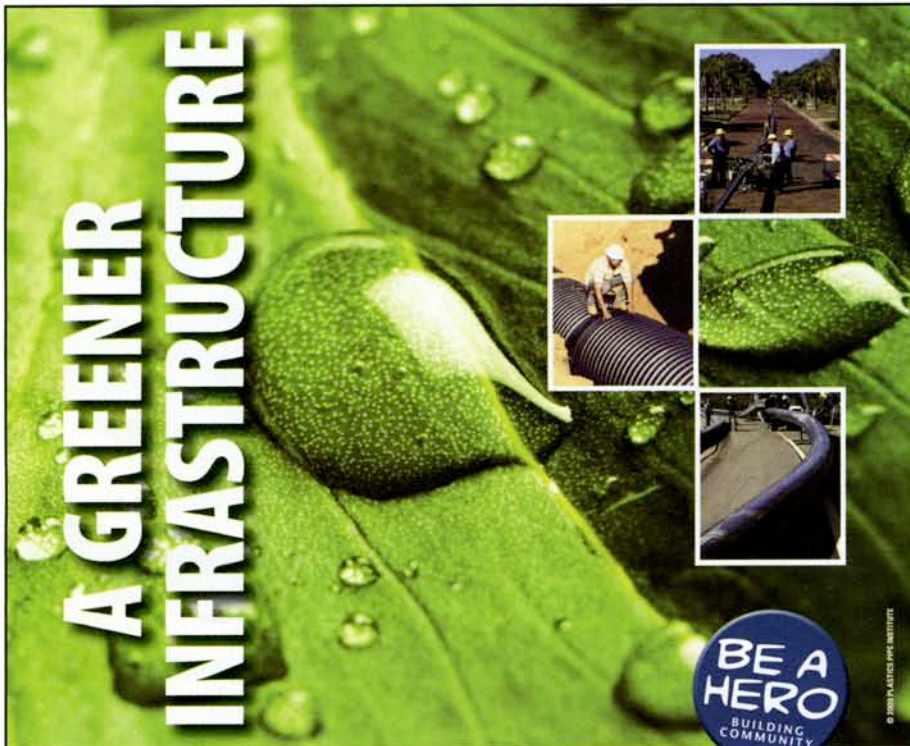
While this is a continuous process, the Town has been able to measure their success to date in the following ways:

- The local NYSDOT accident statistics show the median barrier and signalization project has reduced the number of accidents and the number of injuries. The local support of the Fort Drum mission remains strong. The Fort Drum Community Outreach Office regularly participates with both the Legislative and Planning/Development Boards to provide coordinated efforts both inside and outside the gate.
- Through this time, the private sector investment has been significant. The total commercial construction has exceeded one million square feet along the corridor. Projects currently in the Planning Board queue could easily double that volume over the next three years.
- The assessed value of both developed and undeveloped properties has increased dramatically as well. Town assessment records show an increase in total assessment for the corridor from \$1 million in 2005 to \$125 million in 2011.

These metrics validate the Town's efforts to provide a safer, more carefully-thought-out approach to rapid development along a dynamically changing road corridor.

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