

# City of Watertown Downtown Reconstruction and Streetscape Enhancement Project

May 7, 2008

## Project Overview

The Downtown Watertown Streetscape Enhancement Project began as a \$1,500,000 project aimed at improving the aesthetic quality of the downtown streetscape. The project has since expanded in scope and is now a \$6,771,000 investment in the downtown. The project scope involves streetscape improvements, street reconstruction, sidewalk vault infilling and repair, sidewalk replacement, and utility replacement throughout Public Square and Washington Street up to Stone Street. Improvements will include new streets, curbing, sidewalks, brick pavers, street trees, tree grates, landscaping, ornamental streetlights, kiosks and street furniture. Other improvements include new water lines, sewer lines, improved crosswalks, event space, fountain repairs, modification to the existing channelizing islands and additional landscaping.

The project is being funded with \$1,100,000 in grants from the Transportation Enhancements Program of TEA-21, \$300,000 in NYS Senate Multi-Modal funding from former State Senator James Wright, \$100,000 in Community Capital Assistance Program funding from former State Senator James Wright, \$500,000 in NYS Assembly Community Enhancement Facilities Assistance Program funding from former State Assemblyman Darrel Aubertine, \$350,000 in Consolidated Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS) funding, \$25,000 in Main Street New York funding from Empire State Development Corp., \$2,400,000 High Priority Project funds through the Federal Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) and local match.

## Project History

Planning for the project began in 1999 when the City of Watertown applied for funding for a Streetscape Enhancement Project through the NYS Department of Transportation's Transportation Enhancement Program. The City was awarded funding through this program in 2000 and again in 2002. In early 2003, the City of Watertown entered into an agreement with Clough, Harbour and Associates to design the project.

As the preliminary design progressed, it became evident that many of the proposed streetscape enhancements would be located within the roadway area. Those improvements include a central plaza area, new channelizing islands, and improved crosswalks. Review of the preliminary designs led to discussion by the City Council and City Staff to consider expanding the scope of the Downtown Streetscape Project to include such items as paving and utility enhancements. The purpose of expanding the scope was to provide a more complete project that would better enhance the downtown area for both pedestrians and motorists. It was also hoped that by building a complete project, the City would avoid damaging improvements with changes that may be required after the streetscape enhancements were made.

Several additional improvements were considered including sidewalks and sidewalk vaults, street reconstruction, repaving and utility replacement. Further investigation and study was completed on each of the additional components and it was decided by the City Council and City Staff to expand the project from a streetscape enhancement to a full reconstruction project.

The additional work raised the estimated overall project cost to nearly \$4,000,000. City Staff then began exploring alternatives and seeking grant funding to cover the additional project costs. The City of Watertown committed \$350,000 in Consolidated Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS)

funding and former State Senator James Wright and former State Assemblyman Darrel Aubertine were able to obtain a total of \$900,000 for the project as detailed above.

Still short in project funding, the City approached Congressman John McHugh to try and obtain Federal Assistance for the project. Congressman McHugh was able to secure \$2,400,000 in High Priority Project funds through the Federal Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU).

After securing the last piece of funding, the design plans were completed and the project was put out to bid in February of 2006. The bid for the construction work was \$4,700,000. The total project cost was \$5,400,000 when the design and construction inspection totals were added in. The total amount of outside funding that the City was able to obtain for the project was \$4,775,000. The City's share of the project was therefore \$625,000.

Construction on the project began in May of 2006 but quickly slowed when the contractor encountered several unknown shallow electrical and phone lines. The City entered into negotiations with Verizon and National Grid to get them to agree to lower their conflicting utilities out of the contractor's work zone. An agreement was reached, but the project was essentially stalled for the remaining part of 2006 and all of 2007 while the utilities were lowered.

The delays caused by the utility work and other unforeseen change orders has caused the total project price to escalate. The total project cost now stands at \$6,771,000. This is an increase of \$1,371,000 from the original project cost, all of which will be paid by the local taxpayer. The new local share now stands at \$1,996,000.

Construction resumed on the project in April 2008 and the contractor anticipates that the project will be complete by the end of the 2008 construction season.