

Chapter 6

The Next Step

Marketing the Hamlets

What does the hamlet analysis indicate? What conclusions can we draw? The hamlets of the Adirondacks have enormous potential hidden beneath a blanket of missed opportunities. What is needed more than anything else are effective marketing strategies that will attract investment to the area — financial investments as well as investments of human and cultural resources. Part of this strategy involves telling the story of settlements in the Adirondacks, an interpretive story which highlights the unique characteristics of the region as seen by the human eye. This report is the first installment toward achieving this end.

The new emphasis in the Adirondacks must be on the **people** as well as on the natural resources of the region. Humankind and nature are capable of coexisting as they have throughout history. In this day and age of rapid urbanization, the synthesis of human and natural resources remains the Adirondack's unique and major asset. It is the region's selling point and will provide the grist for sensitive marketing strategies in the future.

While the hamlets have been both grouped and described in this study, the central issue really becomes what amenities, attributes and qualities an individual hamlet or a group of hamlets can build upon in the future. It is already understood that the majority of communities in the Adirondacks are either too small, too poor or too disorganized alone to do much about their current dilemma. This is precisely where the importance of the groupings come into play — where several hamlets with common characteristics can join forces and through a variety of political and administrative channels (county planning offices, rural preservation companies, etc.) collectively begin marketing themselves. This overall marketing approach requires first identifying the amenities to be marketed; second, the development of marketing strategies to communicate the amenities to outside interests and third, organizing a network of human resources to carry ideas through into implementation.

Ideas for Action

Locating and interpreting key amenities and resources of a hamlet or group of hamlets is an important part of the marketing approach. This involves the analysis of unique characteristics of the hamlet, many of which have been identified in this publication: people, spaces, buildings and special districts; the regional environment, context and landscape setting; and the history of a hamlet's life as a place.

Developing specific marketing strategies which capitalize on the resources of a hamlet or group of hamlets is the next step and is the work which can attract future economic development to an area. This may not be possible in all hamlets and some hamlets may in fact decline in their attractiveness and viability. Even so, the majority will have an excellent chance to thrive once again. Marketing should be carefully aimed at developing a unique mix of uses in a community's center which will attract shoppers and users from the larger region. A part of the marketing strategy is tourism and recreational development, potentials for infilling sites and recycling vacant buildings, and ways to rehabilitate community infrastructure such as sewer and water.

A total marketing approach will, in addition, include methods of improving the visual appearance and maintenance of public landscaped areas within the hamlet; developing a unified design vocabulary for signs and facades which respond to the traditional architectural vernacular of the Adirondacks and; suggesting ways to screen undesirable images and commercial architecture which may detract from a place. The overall welcoming image that a hamlet presents when a visitor enters is also an area in which a marketing approach coupled with sound physical planning can have a beneficial impact.

Preserving the visual integrity of edges and gateways to settlement areas is a particularly important aspect of a strategy for the Adirondacks. Sprawl or strip development has too often in the past been a tempting alternative in the region. Strip development has been regarded as convenient, inexpensive, and quick to implement. Where it has occurred the linear hamlet has resulted. Development patterns have simply followed the roads which thread through valley corridors, resulting in conditions in which one settlement bleeds into the next and the traveler is left wondering when he has left one hamlet and arrived in another.

In order to reverse this trend the center of a hamlet should be strengthened and smaller areas encouraged to take on a richer mixed use character where living, shopping, working and recreation are combined. This type of contained diversity of activities can then be linked together by pedestrian space. By encouraging both infill development on vacant sites and the adaptive reuse of vacant buildings in the hamlet center, the core can be revived as a social and community oriented place — a notion which over the years has been unfortunately lost as business establishments moved out to the fringe.

The final aspect of a successful marketing approach for the settlements of the Adirondacks involves the development of an organized network of people and human resources to achieve results. Local confidence and support must be solicited in approaches which facilitate action and do not merely dictate results. Human resources, even though they are often in short supply in the hamlets, must be organized and generated at the local level in order that sound decision-making concerning future development can occur.

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Steps have already been taken in the right direction in the Adirondacks through the establishment of organizations which address one or many of the ideas outlined above. Organizations such as Historic Saranac Lake, Essex County Heritage Organization (ECHO), Friends of Keeseville (all funded by the Rural Preservation Company Program of the NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal) and the Adirondack North Country Association (an amalgam of public and private interests) have begun to address these concerns. Strategies and more detailed plans for accomplishing various levels of a marketing approach as outlined above is the subject of Phase Two of this project. However, there are certain aspects of such an approach which should be elaborated at this time. These include the concept of amenity frontage and its subsequent impact on the economic and historic/cultural enrichment of the region.

Amenity Frontage Concept

In major urban centers, the land abutting parks, open spaces, and other natural amenities, such as waterfronts, is called amenity frontage. It has substantially higher market value and is more attractive for development than sites without amenity frontage. For example, the property values directly adjacent to New York City's Central Park are some of the highest in Manhattan, because of both the park's central location and its green open public space. Just about every major city in the U.S. has a comparable example of this relationship. Based on this principle, it is suggested that we formulate a **quid pro quo** between landscape preservation and economic development for the Adirondacks in much the same way that it occurs in more urbanized settings. The suggestion is based on the idea that by limiting development and preserving land for recreational use abutting, the actual value of land increases. Because fewer sites are available for development, each one is actually worth more. The realities of supply and demand that take hold after a period of time increasingly cause land values to rise.

For the hamlets of the Adirondacks the principle of amenity frontage could be a boon to local economic development, because they are located next to areas of restricted land use and outstanding open space resources. To stimulate development in hamlet areas we need to improve the amenity frontage and access to forever wild lands — making these lands in essence the region's Central Park. Hamlet properties which benefit from amenity frontage will increase over time if other supportive development strategies are put into action. Recreation and tourism are such supportive strategies creating economic development opportunities in the Adirondacks and maximizing the hamlets' amenity frontage.

Recreation-based industries, while the most obvious, are not the only ones that could potentially benefit from the concept of amenity frontage. Light manufacturing, high-tech research and development companies, and the housing industry could stand to gain as well. These economic development strides can only be realized if the hamlets develop clear marketing approaches, both individually and together. A regional effort must be made to coordinate such activities into a park-wide interpretative plan that presents the amenities including important landscape features, the history of settlement patterns in the Park as well as the region's unique cultural and wilderness qualities. The next plan for the Adirondacks should be 'bullish' about the special attributes and opportunities that exist in the Park for prospective year-round residents and seasonal users.

Getting the Funds

A variety of federal, state, and private programs are designed to carry out redevelopment strategies. Use of such programs will enable the hamlets to market themselves more effectively and to secure financing for community revitalization.

These programs include New York State's Rural Preservation Company Program which provides funding for staff activities in support of efforts needed to redevelop the hamlets, as opposed to dollars for actual project construction. The federal Community Development Block Grant program administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), also called the CDBG Program or the Small Cities Program, provides grants for many community development activities including rehabilitation of private housing. The Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) program is a second major HUD program and is applicable **only** under circumstances entailing "leveraging" of private financing (more about this concept subsequently). Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) provides long term, low-interest loans (and grants under certain circumstances) for housing, community facilities, water systems and waste disposal systems. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in conjunction with New York State, finances sewage disposal systems. The Economic Development Administration (EDA) has programs which can mirror what is possible through HUD, FmHA, or EPA funding. However, EDA financing is strictly contingent on private investment commitments which produce jobs, usually **long term** jobs. In addition there are numerous lesser federal and state programs with similar objectives not always funded in a given federal or state fiscal year.

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Quasi-public organizations such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation and private foundations also occupy a place in the wide and diverse spectrum of financing possibilities. Though in the latter case one's skill at marketing the need, uniqueness and merit of a proposal or other remarkable quality becomes paramount.

Finally there are a variety of federal and state programs not discussed here which depart from those mentioned above for the construction or repair of public facilities or housing. These programs finance labor force training, working capital, etc. for new or expanded business activities. Since hamlet redevelopment must entail private as well as public investment, such sources of financing need to be known, understood and effectively utilized.

The Concept of Leveraging

An important concept, indeed a requirement for use of UDAG or EDA financing, is **leveraging**. Generally leveraging is use of funds to induce supplementary investment. In the form of a public dollar investment, leveraging stimulates private investment, thereby multiplying the impact of what would have been possible with only the public dollars. In the case of EDA, a needed public improvement (such as a water line extension) is used to leverage the establishment or expansion of a job-creating business activity (or vice versa). Without the one, the other cannot occur as EDA will not participate unless job creation results (usually one job for every \$10,000 of EDA investment). In using scarce, highly competitive resources, it is important that communities utilize the leveraging concept even if it is not a funding requirement. For instance, it is often possible to install new sidewalks, street trees or other public amenities adjacent to private property in exchange for a restored facade financed by the owner.

Some of the Funding Problems

Securing public funding in small rural communities is not without major problems that must be redressed through new legislation, new regulations, new partnerships in working cooperatively to bring needed public investment to the hamlets, and above all, new attitudes in understanding the unique qualities and needs of small Adirondack settlements. It is beyond the scope of this prospectus to provide a comprehensive criticism of such problems, but a few examples are discussed below.

In general, public financing programs are designed to be applied in communities of another order of magnitude in size than the hamlets of the Adirondacks. Competitive application for CDBG funds necessitates "targeting," an urban concept often not applicable in small rural communities because of the dispersed nature of need. Competitive application also requires a community to **direct** a significant benefit to low and moderate income people. A competitive application designed by a clever "grantsman" responding to such requirements does not necessarily address the most pressing and fundamental needs of the hamlets and/or low and moderate income people. New York State now proposes to take over administration of the CDBG programs, and promises to be more responsive to the needs of rural areas. This would be a beneficial change.

Two other examples are worthy of note. Although there exists a surfeit of functionally obsolete structures and oversize "white elephant" housing in the hamlets, there is insufficient policy direction to encourage rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of such structures to meet housing (especially rental and elderly housing) and other space requirements. Such needs are met too often through architecturally incompatible new construction at a hamlet's periphery, while an historic or architecturally significant

structure suitable for adaptive reuse languishes in the hamlet's center desperate for a new use. The Farmers Home Administration's Section 515 program for rural, rental housing is a potentially useful program to combat this **problem** if rehabilitation were to be promoted and facilitated to the extent that new construction is.

Many if not most of the hamlets have sewage disposal problems due to their location near rivers and lakes and the prevalence of small lots. The community's limited size typically precludes conventional central collection and treatment systems. Unfortunately, EPA, FmHA and New York State, all of which have funds to solve sewage disposal problems, have no protocol to deal with the particular scale of sewage problem of the Adirondack hamlets. In most funding instances a further complication must be overcome; that is the complex process of applying for funds and wading through the red tape of mega-bureaucracies and administrative procedures that are so cumbersome that only the large, well-staffed projects can actually afford to pursue this assistance. Finally, with the recent elimination by New York State of the Local Planning Assistance Program in the Adirondacks, all aspects of community development planning and programming will be curtailed in the future.

To overcome many of the special problems of the Adirondacks outlined in this report, the State should consider establishing a **rural community development district** for the region that could be monitored and implemented by a broad-based organization representing state, regional and local concerns. Such a body could function as a catalyst or **clearinghouse** for development planning, marketing and investment in the region. Its mandate would go beyond that of single-purpose agencies by charting the course for a **comprehensive** development and preservation program. Numerous organizational models that might be referred to as good examples, such as the Appalachian Regional Commission, exist throughout the country.

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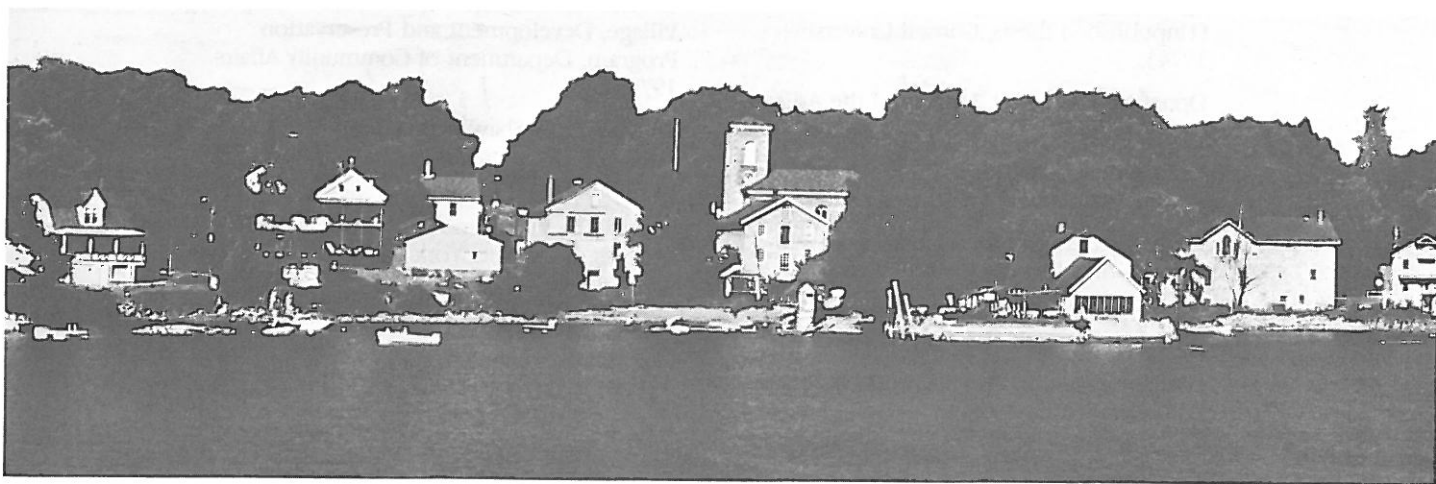
Phase Two

It is necessary to revive not only the physical and economic fabric, but the inner spirit of the hamlets of the Adirondacks. Community organization and networking are vitally important in directing planning for the future into the public arena — where the people who are affected by decisions can be actively involved. Community-based approaches should involve locally accessible field offices, educational workshops and goals identification programs, as well as communication through area newspapers and other publicity techniques. Plans for the future grow and change, and can never be **etched in stone**. Therefore, the process and product are equally important in assuring the survival of the hamlets of the Adirondacks.

Development alone does not always mean progress. An important element of the Adirondack hamlet survival kit during the period of national retrenchment is the ability to accomplish more with less. The mistake often made is to rush into development propositions borrowed from somewhere else, that do not fit a local formula. The prescription for one region may not be the solution for another and short term gains may be costly in the long run, unless we no longer care if every place looks the same!

Many hamlets of the Adirondacks need help. They share common ills which have actively and passively led to their decline: the single industry towns that have lost their mine or mill, their only livelihood; crumbling infrastructure that must be rebuilt at great expense; local administrative skills and human resources that are lacking and the physical and economic deterioration of the community core that is everywhere evident. The information presented in this publication provides a foundation for addressing these factors directly in the next phase. Policy plans developed in the twelve sample communities will be applicable to all settlements in the Park and will focus on these key problem areas. A handbook aimed at assisting hamlets and villages in interpreting their amenities and building on their individual investment potential will be prepared in Phase Two.

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but the inner spirit of the hamlets of the Adirondacks."*



Hamlet of Essex on Champlain

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