

NYSMPO

Integrated Transportation Planning &
Community Design Processes

VILLAGE OF
HORSEHEADS



Hanover Square Redevelopment Project

“It’s a good opportunity
for our little village. It
shows you that money
placed in a small village
provides a good
foundation.”

Bryan Samson, Village
Manager



*Hanover
Square
Redevelopment
Project*

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Significant Achievements

- ◆ Effectively restored role of Hanover Square as a vital and vibrant commercial, social and political center for the Village of Horseheads.
- ◆ Developed a solution that achieved historic preservation goals, enhanced aesthetics and improved safety and traffic flow.
- ◆ Adopted innovative traffic calming and management techniques.
- ◆ Revitalized the local economy and business climate in Hanover Square.

Previous page:
The Hanover Square in the Village of Horseheads is a historic resource, protected by the New York State Historic Protection Office.

Overview

Hanover Square, a five-legged intersection located in the Village of Horseheads, Chemung County, has been the Village centerpiece for over 200 years. The five-legged configuration, however, had become awkward for motorists and pedestrians as the types and numbers of vehicles using the Square increased. Over time, traffic conditions in Hanover Square had become increasingly confusing, unsafe and chaotic. As a result, Hanover Square lost its appeal as a commercial and social center.

The Elmira-Chemung Transportation Council (ECTC) set out to redevelop Hanover Square with specific goals of maintaining the historic character of the Square while improving vehicle, pedestrian and bicycle access and flow, making the square safer for all users and restoring the role of the Square as the Village centerpiece. Project costs included \$21,000 for the planning study and \$1.23 million for design and construction.



Visual improvements to the roadway organized vehicular movement, improved safety and enhanced the appearance of the Square.



The Success Story

Prior to redevelopment, Hanover Square had been the subject of several studies and proposals. These studies were primarily aimed at making the Square safer and improving traffic movements. In 1978, for example, the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) proposed placing a signal in the Square and modifying it to a four-way intersection. The plan for installing a signalized intersection, however, was met with fierce public opposition and was subsequently rejected.

In 1998, the Village of Horseheads Board of Trustees appealed to the Elmira-Chemung Transportation Council (ECTC) to conduct a study of Hanover Square. The resulting Hanover Square Planning Study, completed in 1999, analyzed existing conditions and safety problems around the Square, identified the goals for the project and developed alternatives for redevelopment.

The Study identified uncontrolled traffic movements that allowed vehicles into the Square in conflicting patterns as a key operational problem. These uncontrolled and conflicting traffic movements

confused motorists approaching the Square. The confused motorists, in turn, created congestion and a crash rate higher than the New York State average. The traffic patterns also significantly compromised the environment for pedestrians and bicyclists.

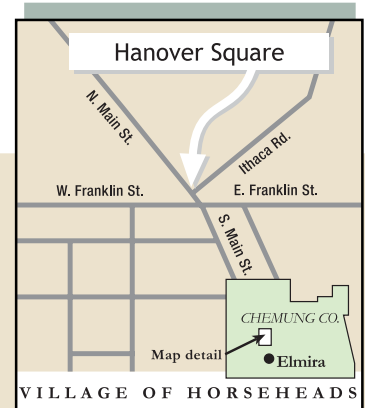


Hanover Square was a five-legged intersection with no clear organization or priorities for vehicle movements.



The reconstruction project improved the pedestrian environment by installing historically accurate lighting and street amenities.

Hanover Square Redevelopment Project



This analysis of existing conditions in Hanover Square resulted in six goals for redevelopment:

1. Improve safety for all users;
2. Improve vehicular capacity;
3. Retain as many on-street parking spaces as possible;
4. Maintain and enhance the economic vitality of the businesses;
5. Clarify/better define the traffic movements; and
6. Separate through-traffic from local traffic.

ECTC officials felt strongly that the redevelopment study should not only solve the technical problems facing the Square but also, due to the role of the Square in the village, be based on community consensus. ECTC's position, therefore, was that no work on Hanover Square would be carried out without the support of local elected officials, the business community located around the Square and the public. As a result, the community played an important role in all aspects of the project.

A key component of the public involvement process was the formation of a Steering Committee. The Study Steering Committee consisted of the City of Elmira Engineer, Village of Horseheads Police Chief, Village residents, members of the Village Traffic Commission, the Village Public Works Director, NYSDOT representatives, the Chemung County Public Works Director, Village Trustees and ECTC. The Village of Horseheads Board, Manager, Mayor and Merchants Association were also active in the decision making process.

Using the Steering Committee as a platform to engage the community proved to be a successful approach. The Steering Committee engaged the public throughout the review process in a variety of ways, including workshops, focus groups, mailings and

Historically Hanover Square was a regional center for commerce and trade.



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press releases. The Steering Committee assumed responsibility for reviewing and ranking each of the initial alternatives proposed for redeveloping the Square. Authorizing the Steering Committee to rank alternatives added transparency to the process and encouraged ownership of the project.

Given the project goals, the Steering Committee narrowed the initial alternatives into five distinct development options:

1. Adding a traffic circle/roundabout;
2. Converting East Franklin Street to a one way street;
3. Creating a four-way stop with a signal;
4. Changing and enforcing truck route regulations; and
5. Making general improvements to the appearance of the Square and traffic movements.

The Steering Committee carefully reviewed and evaluated each alternative to determine if it could effectively address the Hanover Square redevelopment objectives. Almost immediately, the Steering Committee rejected several of the proposals. The Steering Committee felt the shape of the intersection and misalignment of the five streets converging at the Square, for example, prohibited the use of a traffic circle/roundabout. Likewise, Steering Committee members were not in favor of one-way streets, fearing such restrictions would worsen already congested streets and further reduce access to the Square.



Improvements to the roadway included using textured crosswalks to clearly mark pedestrian crossings. These treatments both improve pedestrian safety and enhance aesthetics.

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Turning into Hanover Square required awkward vehicle movements, distracting drivers and creating potential for vehicular crashes.



The Steering Committee ultimately determined that the most feasible option for Hanover Square was the general improvement alternative. The challenge then became how to effectively use low-tech solutions to retrofit an existing historic village center into a facility that could accommodate the demands of modern transportation. Through the process of evaluation and analysis, the Study Team developed improvements that enhanced the physical aesthetics of the Square, managed the traffic and made the Square safer for all users.

Hanover Square's designation as a historic area meant that any proposed design changes had to be approved by the New York State Historic Preservation Office (NYSHPO) for historical consistency. The review process proved to be challenging as the Study Team worked to accommodate both modern transportation standards and NYSHPO requirements. NYSHPO rejected many of the initial proposals. For example, existing roadway edges and street alignments could not be modified because they would compromise historic integrity. The Steering Committee was able to accommodate this restriction by installing granite curbs along all intersection approaches. This technique more clearly defined the Square's entrance but avoided changes to the roadway alignment.

The final design proposed by the public and political leaders and approved by NYSHPO featured traffic calming measures such as high visibility crosswalks, pavement narrowing, landscaping, sidewalk extensions and curb line changes. Colored, textured



By placing a small island in the middle of the roadway, project designers clearly marked travel lanes, clarifying access and egress. Designers also used the traffic island to locate signage and street decorations, enhancing Square aesthetics.



By locating the crosswalk mid-block and clearly marking the crossing with curb and textured pavement, project designers improved safety for pedestrians.

treatments were also used on driving surfaces to alert motorists as they enter a pedestrian setting. A small island was added along West Franklin Street as a way to better define the traffic lanes at the entrance of the intersection. The pavement, rather than the roadway, was realigned at all intersections, which met NYSHPO standards and helped improve the overall safety of the Square.

The reconstruction used historically accurate lighting features, bollards and tree planting. Overhead utility lines were removed during reconstruction thus improving the visual integrity of the Square. The final design also did not significantly affect properties and structures of the Square; it instead relied on low-tech changes to improve and tighten the intersection in a way that allowed for better driver, pedestrian and bicycle sight distance at each of the five approaches.

Results

The Hanover Square redevelopment improved the aesthetics, safety and operation of the Square. Previous attempts to develop a final design that both met engineering standards and were acceptable to the community failed. In this case, project success rested largely in the process, which involved the community, the design team and study engineers working together to identify key cultural and social attributes, set safety and design standards and work within these parameters to identify an acceptable solution.

The primary procedural highlight was the organization and influence of the Steering Committee in the planning process. When the ECTC initiated the Hanover Square Redevelopment project, it immediately called on the Steering Committee to build consensus, evaluate potential alternatives and identify a solution

Steering Committee participants for the project included:

City of Elmira
Engineer

Chemung County
Public Works
Director

Elmira Chemung
Transportation
Council

Merchants
Association

NYSDOT
representatives

Village Public Works
Director

Village of
Horseheads Board

Village of
Horseheads Mayor

Village of
Horseheads Police
Chief

Village residents

Village Traffic
Commission
representatives

Village Trustees

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Before improvements, entering Hanover Square was confusing for motorists and unsafe for pedestrians.

that best met community goals and aspirations. Through this process, the Steering Committee encouraged the design engineers to be innovative, look for atypical solutions and research all potential resources. The result was an innovative design that achieved a variety of community goals.

Physical improvements to the Square are also noteworthy. The team was able to accomplish its goals of improving traffic flow through the use of “low-tech,” aesthetic improvements that maintained the historic integrity of the Square and effectively addressed transportation concerns. Traffic and pedestrian/bicycle movements through the Square are clearer, safer and less congested. The intersection crash rate has also been reduced significantly.

In addition, because the final design enhanced the usability and attractiveness of Hanover Square, it was a catalyst for economic development. The renovation helped revitalize the Square by attracting new businesses, shoppers and visitors. The revitalization has also contributed to an increased presence from the Merchants Association, which in turn has supported further economic development activities.

The project not only improved a hazardous intersection and enhanced a local landmark; it was completed within budget and on time.



Other improvements to the Square included designating ‘pocket’ parks, adding landscaping and creating public meeting places.

The renovation of Hanover Square has proven to be such a success that some of the recommended improvements incorporated by the project are being considered for additional projects in Chemung County.



Lessons Learned

- **Overcome challenges with creative and unconventional thinking.**

The redevelopment of Hanover Square presented significant challenges such as restrictions imposed by the historic elements of the Square. Many of the traditional traffic engineering tools and techniques, therefore, were not available to engineers and planners. Consequently, the Study Team was required to think creatively and look for new and unconventional ways to manage traffic, including using several incremental solutions to achieve their objectives.

- **Use transportation projects as a catalyst for other positive changes.**

The Hanover Square redevelopment project faced a multitude of project goals such as safety, aesthetics, economic development and historic preservation, many of which appeared incompatible. Transportation improvements were developed, however, that mutually supported several of the goals, and proved to be catalysts for improvements and changes in other aspects of the square, strengthening the effectiveness of the project overall.

- **Communicate openly and continuously with project and community stakeholders.**

Hanover Square is an important asset for the Horseheads community. Previous studies either overlooked this fact or did not adequately build consensus among stakeholders. As a result, there was a prevailing sense of distrust and

Textured shoulders are a particularly good treatment for transition areas. Drivers see only travel lanes as available road space, so the road appears more narrow than it is, helping to slow traffic and increasing the buffer between vehicles and pedestrians.

Project Details

Hanover Square
Horseheads, NY

Chemung County (Elmira
Chemung Transportation
Council-ECTC)

NYS DOT Region 6

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frustration in the community regarding planning for improving the Square. Recognizing this, the ECTC engaged the Steering Committee to build rapport and sense of trust with the community. The free flow of information and openness of the team encouraged involvement between the community and relevant agencies. Likewise, because the public was engaged early in the project planning phase and the involvement was sustained through to the design and construction phase, the project also benefited from widespread community support.



To avoid changing the historic square, designers used colored and textured treatments on the roadway as a technique to guide both motorists and pedestrians through the square.