

A VIEW OF THE FALLS

Office of the Mayor - Richard B. Milne

November 4, 2008

Dear Friends;

The following document was recently created through a collaboration of the ten mayors of the Villages of Monroe County. We feel that it is imperative that we note and state our beliefs of the importance and significance of Villages in the State of New York.

The rolls Villages play are as significant today as yesterday and we feel that this needs to be communicated to our residents as well as to New York State. A signed copy of this document will be sent to Governor David Patterson and his staff as well as to our local and State Representatives.

Sincere Regards,
Richard B. Milne
Mayor, Village of Honeoye Falls

The Past, Present, and Future of Our Villages

During the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century, new settlements sprang up in upstate New York at the convergence of transportation routes and adjacent to water power. For over one hundred years, agriculture, immigration, transportation, and industry sustained growth in our villages.

Citizens organized village governments to provide services to larger settlement centers. Early services included streets, sidewalks and streetlights. By 1920, many villages provided paved streets, street trees, municipal water, sewers, fire protection, libraries, and parks. The lack of services and access to transportation kept the population concentrated within incorporated municipalities.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the popularization of automobiles, the development of the highway system, and the extension of services and utilities to rural areas resulted in the dispersal of population. State and federal policy and government subsidies accelerated the decentralization of housing, retail business, and industry producing the largely suburban society we live in today.

Suburbanization and the concurrent socioeconomic changes have resulted in unanticipated consequences including traffic congestion, loss of community character, and unattractive anonymous townscapes. Because the movement of motor vehicles has dominated planning and capital investment in our society for the last sixty years, we have neglected other fundamental purposes that contribute to our quality of life. These include pedestrian movement, the public realm, and fostering a sense of community.

Today, our villages provide services precisely targeted to residents' contemporary needs. To improve efficiency, most communities have consolidated some services with adjacent towns and share or trade labor and/or equipment. Legislative authority, zoning, planning, public works, and discretionary capital investments have been maintained by villages because these powers are essential to preserve and improve the unique qualities that define village character and lend them their appeal. Reclaiming streets as comfortable and safe walkable environments, traffic calming, street trees, and streetscape improvements are just a few examples of the policy focus of contemporary village governments.

Villages anchor and stabilize the communities that surround them. Main Streets provide a home for local businesses and social gathering spots. With sidewalks and parks, villages provide places to exercise, stroll, and see friends. Villages have evolved over many years and contain concentrated historic resources. Their physical form represents a community's identity. Our historic village centers provide a tangible link to our past. They are a source of community pride and they foster a sense of community that can not be found in modern shopping centers or suburban housing developments. It is no accident that "new" mixed-use developments are attempting to copy the look and feel of our historic village centers.

Villages remain the closest and most responsive level of government. If your village board members don't live next door, they most certainly live down the street or around the corner. Village government is responsive because Village officials drive the same streets, walk the same sidewalks, and live in the neighborhood. They understand the level of detail and care required to maintain livable neighborhoods, comfortable safe streets, and vibrant downtowns. Because village officials receive modest pay or are volunteers, they are usually more driven by care for the community and a sense of civic duty rather than ambition or politics. The experiences of the representatives and residents are the same. Villages don't provide a sense of community, they are a community.

Perhaps because of this, our villages have kept taxes in check. In most Monroe County villages, tax growth over the last fifteen years has been at or below the rate of inflation. The dense development pattern of villages enhances the efficiency of providing services.

In Monroe County we are fortunate to have ten villages. Although varied in size and character, each forms the nucleus of the surrounding community, preserves a sense of history, and possesses unique assets. Honeoye Falls' great stone mills, Scottville's Greek Revival architecture, Churchville's Black Creek dam and park, Hilton's Apple Festival, East Rochester's Edmund Lyon Park, and the leafy turn-of-the-century neighborhoods in Webster all contribute to the quality of life in Monroe County. Four of our villages

have created vibrant waterfront districts along the Erie Canal. Their efforts have spurred the statewide revival of this historic waterway.

We are once again in a time of change. Across the nation there is renewed appreciation of traditional neighborhoods and town centers. The “educated class” and young professionals leading the growth of the modern service economy seek the qualities embodied by traditional villages. Preserving and enhancing traditional neighborhoods should be an essential element of any well targeted economic development strategy for our region. Villages provide the most responsive form of government, at the most efficient cost, and provide tangible and intangible benefits for their residents and those of surrounding communities.

Mayor Morton Wexler, Brockport

Mayor Nancy Steedman, Churchville

Mayor Jason Koon, East Rochester

Mayor Frederick May, Fairport

Mayor Larry Gurslin, Hilton

Mayor Richard Milne, Honeoye Falls

Mayor Robert C. Corby, Pittsford

Mayor Michael F. Souers, Scottsville

Mayor Theodore E. Walker, Spencerport

Mayor Jake Swingly, Webster

January 24, 2009