



1st Public Workshop Meeting Summary

Meeting date: September 29, 2021



Introduction

The Tenafly Downtown Revitalization Plan is a Borough-led effort to create a plan to help revitalize and bring further investment into the downtown area. Tenafly has a variety of unique assets such as a rich history, vast amount of parks and open spaces, historic and cultural resources, great educational institutions, and more. The plan will look to build upon and leverage these key assets as they set Tenafly apart from nearby areas. Ultimately, the Downtown Revitalization Plan will provide recommendations on how the Borough could reinvigorate their downtown core through supporting existing businesses and attracting new businesses, enhancing building aesthetics and the pedestrian environment, and identifying opportunities for new development.

One of the Borough's goals is for the plan to be informed by a wide range of viewpoints. As part of the community engagement process, the Borough hosted a virtual opening public workshop, using the Zoom platform, on Wednesday, September 29 from 7-9 pm. There were approximately 75 participants in attendance. The recording of the meeting can be accessed via the project page: <https://www.tenaflynj.org/542/Tenafly-Downtown-Revitalization-Plan>.

In addition to the public workshop, the public could provide input through an online survey which includes a brainstorming tool (Ideas Wall). The survey could be accessed via the project page at the link above. The survey was open from September 1st through October 17th. After the workshop, the Steering Committee and the consultant team will spend the next few months developing recommendations for the downtown area based on the input received by the public and key stakeholders, the analysis of existing conditions and the market and business environment. There will be a second virtual workshop (date TBD) to gather feedback from the public on draft strategies and concept plan.

Project Team:

The plan is being led by a multidisciplinary team of planners, designers, and retail experts consisting of BFJ Planning, Perkins Eastman, and Streetsense.

The project is managed by a Steering Committee comprised to oversee project deliverables and ensure that the study meets the Borough's goals. The Steering Committee includes the following members:

- Daniel Zausner, Downtown Committee Member
- David Jang, Downtown Committee Member
- Mary Beth Wilmit, Borough Planning Board Chair
- Jeff Grossman, Borough Council President
- Craig Feinberg, Borough Planning Board Member
- Adam Michaels, Borough Council Member
- Mark Zinna, Mayor of the Borough of Tenafly

Presentation and Breakout Room Discussions

The presentation began with an introduction from Adam Michaels, the Steering Committee Chair. Representatives from the consultant team then discussed the existing conditions and preliminary ideas for the Downtown study area, organized by five topic areas. The topics were (1) Pedestrian and Vehicular Mobility, (2) Parking, (3) Development Opportunities, (4) Buildings and Streetscape, and (5) Arts, Culture, and Community Life. Throughout the presentation, there were poll questions to get participants thinking about their priorities and concerns for each topic area.

Following the presentation, participants were invited to participate in smaller breakout room discussions where community members had the opportunity to express their ideas, provide feedback on preliminary ideas discussed in the presentation, and voice their concerns. The consultant team and Steering Committee members moderated discussion at six breakout rooms. Participants in each breakout out room conversed for 30 minutes. Moderators took notes about the content of the discussion and then presented a summary of key takeaways back to the larger group of attendees. The summaries below reflect discussion topics that happened at each breakout room. A summary of the key takeaways from the group discussions is provided on the next page. Many of the comments were made in multiple groups. Topics which did not seem to have a consensus in agreement are represented as such. Notes from each of the individual breakout rooms are also provided at the end of this report.

Breakout Group Questions

- 1) *Introduce yourself and say what you think Downtown's biggest asset is.*
- 2) *Which ideas and issues should Tenaflly prioritize in the short term?*
- 3) *What is a big idea you would like to see in the long term future?*

Breakout Group Key Takeaways

Downtown Assets:

- Downtown is centrally located
- Huyler Park
- Surrounded by parks and green open spaces
- Train Station building
- The people
- Good schools
- Great bones
- Great place to live
- Residential in downtown
- Great downtown core layout with concentrated retail activity
- Ability to walk from one's neighborhood to the downtown area
- Desire to see Tenaflly become more vibrant

Development Opportunities and Business Environment

- Create an environment to attract more businesses to come and invest in the downtown which would give residents a reason to go into downtown
- Permitting process needs to be more straightforward so that businesses will come and invest.
- More variety of businesses (dining, entertainment, and shopping options) in the downtown area to encourage all Tenaflly residents to stay and shop local
- Desired businesses include coffee shops and restaurants with outdoor seating (no chain restaurants)
- Store hours should be extended past 6 pm
- The majority of participants are in favor of some development as long as it respects and responds to the community's concerns. The Borough should ensure that (1) new developments are compatible with the existing historic character/scale and (2) studies are conducted on impacts to traffic and schools.
- Some mentioned that mixed-use developments can be beneficial as they could bring in more pedestrian foot traffic to patronize downtown businesses. New apartments could keep Tenaflly young adults from staying where they grew up. Participants mentioned that it will be worth considering some height increase in the downtown area if on-site parking is provided.
- One key opportunity is to improve the appeal, ambiance, and cleanliness of the buildings and public realm. There is support to create consistency in the aesthetics of the building design.
- There is interest in creating more opportunities to bring seniors living downtown.

Arts, Culture, History, and Events

- General support for more year-round programming/events regularly in downtown (i.e. portable ice skating rink during the winter months)
- An idea was raised to create a permanent facility for year-round events.
- Some participants expressed the desire to see the historic Elizabeth Cady Stanton House highlighted as an opportunity to draw visitors into Tenafly.
- A suggestion was made to create a teen recreation center for the youth to gather and play sports all year round.

Parks and Open Space

- General support for the Northern Valley Greenway
- Participants would like to see the parks connected better.
- There is a desire to improve the programming and usability of all parks, especially Huyler Park.
- Improve the usability of the public space behind Tenafly's Public Library/Teen Center with multi-purpose seating or tables (for eating, sitting, and reading), sports fields, exercise equipment, and a walking path

Streetscape

- Overall, participants felt strongly that the pedestrian walking environment in downtown needs improvement and continuous maintenance, making it safer and enjoyable for residents and visitors of all ages and abilities. Desired improvements include: fix sidewalks, better and more lighting, more sheltered seating, and landscaping (i.e. trees and flower pots).
- There is general support to create a cohesive wayfinding design for all signage in Tenafly (not overly restrictive). A suggestion was made that the signage should reflect Tenafly's historic character.
- Street furniture should be consistent throughout Tenafly such as benches, trash cans, and street lamp color.
- Key gateways into the downtown area should be enhanced.
- All groups were in favor of the preliminary intersection design improvements presented. The improvements seek to make downtown a safer and walkable place for pedestrians and cyclists. It was noted that most problematic intersections should be prioritized first.
- There is a desire to make biking into downtown safer from nearby neighborhoods. Improvements could include adding bike lanes and bike racks at strategic locations.
- General support for creating an "Open Street" concept (temporarily open street for pedestrian use) potentially along Washington St between S Summit St and W Railroad Ave

Traffic and Parking

- Today's roadway network causes issues with the traffic flow. There is interest to have the recommendations from this plan paired with previous studies, and follow up with actual implementation of these plans.
- Support to close off Piermont Rd leading to E Clinton Ave, thereby expanding Huyler Park.

- There is interest to increase the parking turnover on Washington St without the addition of parking meters.
- The majority of participants indicated that parking is not an issue in TenaFly. Few participants were concerned about eliminating parking spaces because they think the spaces will be needed when additional businesses move to TenaFly.
- Create clear and consistent signage to guide where visitors can park

INDIVIDUAL BREAKOUT GROUP DISCUSSION NOTES

Breakout Group 1 Notes

Moderators: Noah Levine and Jeff Grossman

Downtown's Biggest Assets:

- Huyler Park – Centrally located park
- Parks and Open Spaces

Development Opportunities and Business Environment:

- Uses – Increase the dining and shopping options in downtown so Tenafly residents shop locally instead of traveling to Closter and Englewood (i.e. coffee shops and restaurants with outdoor dining)
- Hours – Extend hours in the evening
- Aesthetics – Improve downtown's appeal and ambiance including buildings and public realm
- Development – There is general support for some kind of mixed-use development in the downtown area as it would bring in more foot traffic to patronize businesses. New residential development will require a balancing act to ensure the size is compatible with the Borough's existing physical context and to study the impacts on the school system.
- Future Residents – New apartments would be a great way to keep Tenafly young adults from staying where they grew up. Young adults do not necessarily have children to add to the school district and the Borough could become more alive with the additional pedestrian activity. With more people working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, apartment size may need to be larger.

Parks and Open Spaces:

- Improve the usability of all parks especially Huyler Park

Streetscape:

- Improve the Borough's walkable pedestrian environment making it more safe and enjoyable
- Signage – Create signage guidelines that are not overly restrictive (balancing act)

Traffic and Parking:

- Today's road layout does not work causing traffic flow issues, which have previously been studied. Continue to build off work completed in previous studies and start to implement the work.
- Preliminary Ideas – Agreement that Piermont Rd should be blocked off at the intersection with E Clinton Ave
- Parking – Downtown is facing the possibility of losing parking spaces along Franklin St across from Elks Lodge as CSX has threatened to increase the lease cost for these parking spaces on their property.
- Parking Utilization Study –
 - Remove Borough Hall parking analysis from the study
 - For parking, the consultant team should investigate vacancies in commuter areas vs. non-commuter areas.
- Increase parking turnover on Washington St without the addition of parking meters (i.e. Add 30 minute or 1 hour only parking signs along with more parking enforcement)

Breakout Group 2 Notes

Moderators: Silvia Del Fava and Mary Beth Wilmit

Downtown's Biggest Assets:

- Former Tenafly Train Station sets us apart
- Two nice parks

Development Opportunities and Business Environment:

- Uses – More variety of businesses, including entertainment and food options (no chain restaurants), to attract people into the downtown area
- Aesthetics – Improve the cleanliness of the buildings
- Purpose – Create an environment for more businesses to come and invest in the downtown which would give residents a reason to go into downtown
- Vacancies – Under the vacancy ordinance, landlords are required to pay higher fees to the Borough.

Arts, Culture, History, and Events:

- More entertainment events on a regular basis in downtown (i.e. Huyler Park is a great central location for events.)
- Street fairs have been tried out in the past but stores do not like the street closure along Washington St.
- Create more opportunities for seniors to bring them downtown as they shop locally

Parks and Open Spaces:

- The Northern Valley Greenway – Support for the project as it will be used as a pathway

Streetscape:

- Aesthetics – Improve the cleanliness of the sidewalks
- Furniture – Need for seating accommodations throughout the Borough (i.e. Sheltered seating is needed along Tenafly Rd.)
- Signage – There is interest in developing a cohesive signage design for all signs in the Borough. One idea was to create signage that reflects Tenafly's historical character (i.e. blue slate and beige color).

Traffic and Parking:

- Parking – There is no parking issue in Tenafly but rather the issue is that there are no attractions.
 - Parking availability near the bus station area is difficult to find.
- Traffic Flow – Downtown Tenafly does not have enough pedestrian traffic for companies to invest and open a business downtown. Traffic mainly bypasses the downtown.
- Biking –
 - Need to make bike racks more visible for teenagers and other bike users (i.e. Bike rack needed at Stop & Shop.)
 - Make it safer to bike to downtown by implementing bike facilities (i.e. bike lanes)

Breakout Group 3 Notes

Moderator: Georges Jacquemart

Downtown's Biggest Assets:

- Good schools

Development Opportunities:

- Development – Most of the participants were not in favor of additional apartments as there will be more residents. There is concern that more residents would impact the school system.

Arts, Culture, History, and Events:

- There is interest to have a portable ice skating rink installed as an activity for the winter months.

Streetscape / Pedestrian Environment:

- Design Ideas for Intersections – There was support for the changes to the street layout and design illustrated in the presentation. The changes could be prioritized starting with the intersections that are the most problematic to the safety of Tenafly residents (based on NJDOT crash data).
- Open Streets – Participants would like Tenafly to have open streets (select streets closed to traffic on weekends and weekday evenings) throughout the year with seasonal activities to attract residents and visitors.

Traffic and Parking:

- Parking – The group was not in support of eliminating parking spaces. The vacant parking spaces are a result of downtown Tenafly not having the type of businesses that attract people. Once more businesses open, excess parking will be needed.

Breakout Group 4 Notes

Moderators: Susan Favate and Adam Michaels

Downtown's Biggest Assets:

- The people
- Ability to walk from one's neighborhood to the downtown area
- Desire to see Tenafly become more vibrant

Development Opportunities and Business Environment:

- Zoning – Need to make the process straightforward so that people will invest
- Development – There is some concern about future residential developments' impact on traffic and schools. There will need to be a balance.

Parks and Open Spaces:

- Connectivity – Better connect the parks
- Purpose – Improve the programming of parks in order to provide more value for residents
 - With the exception of events, Huyler Park is not an active space as there is no playground, no place to sit, and not big enough to exercise in.

- The space behind Tenafly's Public Library/Teen Center could be better utilized. Ridgewood has a similar space behind its library that has multi-purpose seating or tables (eating, sitting, and reading), a sports field, exercise equipment, and a walking circle path.

Streetscape / Pedestrian Environment:

- Create more bike and pedestrian paths
- Design Ideas for Intersections – Support for intersection design changes with importance to address difficult intersections first
- Aesthetics – Support for consistency among aesthetics in street furniture and in building design.

Traffic and Parking:

- There is a sufficient amount of parking.
- Parking Signage – Create clear and consistent signage to guide where one can park

Breakout Group 5 Notes

Moderators: Jonathan Martin and David Jang

Downtown's Biggest Assets:

- The people
- Great place to live
- Great bones

Development Opportunities:

- Aesthetics – Downtown is a “hodge-podge” lacking consistency and not “aesthetically laid out.”
- Uses – Downtown needs more variety of businesses to attract all Tenafly residents including the youth who currently travel to Closter Commons after school rather than stay in downtown Tenafly.
- Hours – Many stores close early
- Businesses – Attract new businesses as Tenafly has the clientele to support them

Arts, Culture, History, and Events:

- Youth – Need a teen recreation center that could accommodate year-round space for the youth to gather and for indoor sports (i.e. basketball, volleyball, etc.)
- Programming –
 - There is a desire to create year-round programming in the downtown area.
 - For the winter months, Tenafly could bring in a portable ice skating.
 - Build a more permanent facility for year-round events
 - Can we think about ways to attract the community throughout all four seasons?

Streetscape:

- Walkability – Improve the pedestrian environment in downtown
 - Fix sidewalks and crosswalks
 - Provide better or more street lighting
 - Add flashing crosswalk lighting to alert drivers

- Reintroduce elements such as trees and flower pots
- Furniture – Create greater consistency in street furniture including benches, trash cans, and street lamp color
- Design Ideas for Intersections – Support from participants
- Signage and Wayfinding Ideas – Support from participants to make it more consistent

Traffic and Parking:

- Improve traffic flow

Other Ideas:

- “Layout the basic infrastructure” to improve downtown, including solving the “scatteredness” of downtown, improving traffic flow, and pedestrian connectivity

Breakout Group 6 Notes

Moderators: Larisa Ortiz and Mark Zinna

Downtown’s Biggest Assets:

- Great downtown core layout with concentrated retail activity
- Surrounded by parks and green open spaces
- Residential in downtown
- Centrally located
- Great bones

Development Opportunities and Business Environment:

- Uses – Create a wide range of business options to encourage the community members to stay and shop local
- Future Developments – There is a desire to have more people living in the downtown area. To do so, it will be worth considering height increases for future developments if it allows for parking on site.

Arts, Culture, History, and Events:

- Create more activities and events in the downtown area
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton House – Desire to see this historic treasure highlighted as an opportunity to draw folks in to visit Tenafly

Streetscape:

- Design Ideas for Intersections – Support for the proposed pedestrian improvements and Huyler Park expansion
- Enhance the gateway entrances into the downtown area to make a good first impression
- Pedestrian Environment – Improve walkability conditions

Traffic and Parking:

- Parking is not an issue.

Appendix A

Meeting Recording

The recorded meeting can be watched on YouTube, which can be accessed via the project page:

<https://www.tenaflynj.org/542/Tenafly-Downtown-Revitalization-Plan>