



ALBANY EDUCATION DISTRICT ENHANCEMENT STUDY

City of Albany, NY

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City of Albany

Education District Enhancement Study

Prepared for:

The Capital District Transportation Committee in partnership with the City of Albany, the University at Albany and The College of Saint Rose



Capital District Transportation Committee



city of
ALBANY, NY

Funded by:

The Capital District Transportation Committee, the City of Albany, the University at Albany, SUNY and The College of Saint Rose

The College of Saint Rose PASSION. KNOWLEDGE. PURPOSE.



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This report was prepared in cooperation with the City of Albany, the Capital District Transportation Committee, The College of Saint Rose, the University at Albany, the Capital District Transportation Authority, the Capital District Regional Planning Commission and the New York State Department of Transportation. The contents do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of these government agencies or institutions.

The recommendations presented in this report are intended to support the City of Albany, College of Saint Rose and the University at Albany's efforts to improve the connectivity and safety of the District and to create a safe, welcoming and vibrant activity center. The recommendations are conceptual in nature and are presented to characterize the types of improvements that are desirable, and that may be implemented as part of future land use and transportation improvement projects. All transportation concepts will require further engineering evaluation and review.

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1. Executive Summary/Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Albany's Education District, which encompasses The College of Saint Rose and the University at Albany's Downtown Campus, hereafter referred to as the District, is home to more than one thousand students from several institutions, and to a core group of homeowners and business owners. This heavily utilized area has many strong and unique qualities, with densities and mixes of uses that make it lively, walkable and sustainable. The same qualities that make the District unique also pose challenges, which are consistent with off-campus neighborhoods across the country. The bulk of concerns referenced deal with safety, security and quality of life.

The Education District Enhancement Study was sponsored by the City of Albany, in partnership with the Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC), the University at Albany and The College of Saint Rose to address these challenges and improve the connectivity and safety of the Education District and to create a safe, welcoming and vibrant activity center. The study is partially funded through CDTC's Community and Transportation Linkage Planning Program, one of the most significant cooperative regional efforts in the nation.

The bulk of these concerns involve the impact and opportunities of student housing and activities in residential neighborhoods. This study seeks to provide recommendations for physical improvements and policy changes that will minimize the negative impacts and capitalize on the opportunities provided by the District's unique character.

The study's overall objectives are to supplement current Albany 2030 comprehensive plan efforts, address the tangible issues within the District and set the stage for physical revitalization projects. The Education District Enhancement Study builds off of the efforts made in the Midtown Colleges and University District Plan, focusing on the Education District outlined in the plan and studying it at a finer scale.

1.2. Process

The study sponsors selected a team of consultants led by BFJ Planning to work on the Education District Enhancement Study at the end of 2009. A Study Advisory Committee (SAC) guided the study and met with the consultants on a regular basis for more than a year. This committee included representatives from the City of Albany, The College of Saint Rose, University at Albany, Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC), Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA), Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC), New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), Albany County and other key stakeholders.

The consultant team provided an extensive analysis of existing conditions, described below, to provide a sound basis for recommendations and improvements. This existing conditions survey, which includes an assessment of street lighting, streetscape and building conditions, can also be used to measure and track success of the implementation efforts related to this study.

Unless otherwise noted, the data collected for this study was collected between January 2010 and March 2011.

Throughout the study, consultants worked with the Study Advisory Committee, City staff, and stakeholder representatives, to help ensure that the developed recommendations are supported to the extent possible by property owners, residents, the City of Albany and the major institutions in the District. In order to maximize participation, two workshops were held over the course of the study. The workshops enabled stakeholders to brainstorm issues and opportunities, discuss priorities for improvement, and comment on preliminary recommendations. Supplemental participation opportunities, such as stakeholder meetings and a survey, were also administered to engage more participants in the study. The full summary report from each workshop can be found in appendices A and B.

1.3. Summary of Recommendations

The District's lifeblood is its role as an activity center and the ease of use of multiple modes of transportation. Residents and visitors to the District frequently walk, drive, bike and use public transportation all in a single day. Because of the intensity of its use, the Education District Enhancement Study focuses on enhancing the network of connections between transportation modes, commercial destinations, residences, places of work and academic institutions. In addition to improving circulation, the Study addresses physical improvements to the built and streetscape environment, zoning and code enforcement, Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility and other opportunities to strengthen neighborhood character and identity such as wayfinding and branding.

In general, stakeholders felt that local streetscape quality; connectivity; crime prevention; neighborhood identity and quality of life; and sustainability were themes that needed to be pursued. The following recommendations were developed in accordance with the existing conditions survey, the Study Advisory Committee and input gathered by each of the aforementioned participation methods.

- *Adopt Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) standards to promote physical conditions that discourage criminal behavior and aim to make safer places in the community. The report includes a CPTED brochure which should be made available to the wider community.*
- Improve building facades, street trees, the bicycling and walking environment, transit access and streetscape amenities to improve the quality of life in the District. The study highlights locations where these amenities should be implemented or upgraded.
- Increase and improve the lighting of the district to increase safety and improve physical conditions. Where possible, pedestrian-scale lighting should be installed as opposed to auto-oriented lighting which dominates the District.
- Consider zoning code modifications to reinforce the essential form of the neighborhood and to provide an incentive for reinvestment. Expanding commercial zones to build areas of critical mass will encourage commercial hubs in the District. Any changes should focus on areas that are or have the potential to become important nodes of pedestrian activity.

- Strengthen maintenance standards and increase enforcement to mitigate the impact of student housing on the neighborhoods (town-gown regulations) and improve quality of life in the District. Creating a “Disorderly House” designation status within the Education District could reduce the incidence of recurring offending properties.
- Ensure that the parks and open space resources are well programmed for events and activities and are open to the public for use. Specific recommendations for Pine Hills Park and Beverwyck Park are aimed to re-assess and/or upgrade existing facilities to encourage additional use.
- Offer opportunities for a wide variety of institutional groups to partner on important issues in the District. The City should consider creating a façade improvement program for businesses and property owners. Sponsoring a Business Improvement District (BID), a Merchants Association or a public art program will help to foster a welcoming activity center.
- Develop a recognizable brand for the District which can serve to enhance the District’s image. The branding process should incorporate an integrated approach in which the community, officials and design professionals work together to distill a collective vision for the neighborhood.

The recommendations outlined herein will be considered by and reinforced by the Albany 2030 Comprehensive Plan project, the City of Albany’s first comprehensive plan. The implementation section of the report provides a roadmap which outlines a series of steps, identifies partners that can assist in moving the plan into action and locate funding sources. The recommendations outlined by the study will be phased in over time based on available funding and following further evaluation and feasibility study, where appropriate. The Implementation Plan (Figure 28) provides a concise listing of the recommended improvements along with order-of-magnitude cost estimates, potential partnerships, possible funding sources, and estimated timeframes.