

WHY PLANNING WORKS

Previous editions of *Thoma's Developments* have focused on the City of Cortland's South End Neighborhood Strategic Plan which Thoma developed with the assistance of South End residents and business owners in 2007. The City completed both the strategic planning process and the plan, which was subsequently adopted by the Common Council. It was funded with Technical Assistance funds from the NYS Office for Small Cities. As the plan details, this neighborhood was once dominated by Wickwire Brothers, a foundry which mass produced wire screen and other products in 40 buildings on 40 acres. The South End also included a railroad which shipped Cortland manufactured goods to distant markets. Residents both lived and worked in the same tight knit community. The demise of the City's manufacturing base, and the abandonment of the railroad in favor of truck transport, proved to be devastating for the South End. This was compounded by the discovery of significant industrial contamination on half of the former Wickwire compound, which resulted in the Environmental Protection Agency declaring the area a Superfund site. The remediation process took 10 years. In the meantime, some of the most developable land in the City was deemed unusable. This situation devalued surrounding residential properties, and made much of the area ripe for the conversion of single family homes to rental properties that were often ill-maintained.

The completion of the Strategic Plan, with its many recommendations for change, has already resulted in benefits to the City and the residents of this neighborhood. A \$650,000 comprehensive Community Development Block

My wife Michelle and I started our coffee roasting business in the South End Neighborhood because we see a great business potential here. We are also committed to making the neighborhood a better place to live. We are happy to be working with the City and Thoma on improving the right-of-way of the vacant lot we own next to our business with a sidewalk and landscaping. Eventually, we would like to have a farmers market or community garden on the site. – Craig Brooks

Grant (CDBG) award was made to the City which addresses many of the plan's recommendations (See also the story on page 2). Additionally, the City sought and received \$467,000 in HOME Program funds to rehabilitate owner occupied, single family homes in the South End.

Based on the increased attention being paid to the area, Cayuga Press relocated to the neighborhood and attracted a tenant, Cortland Plastics, a bottle manufacturer. Cortland Plastics was the recipient of \$350,000 in CDBG economic development funds which we helped to secure. With Thoma's assistance, the City captured \$75,000 in Environmental Restoration Funds from the Department of Environmental Conservation to study suspected environmental concerns for five additional acres of the original Wickwire site. Further, we assisted the City with a successful Build-Now NY application. Build Now NY is a State-wide database of "shovel ready" industrial sites and includes funds for future marketing and needed site improvements.

In most grant applications today, funding sources almost always ask how the project focused on in the application is compatible with an existing community plan. Let Thoma Development assist you in developing and completing your community plan and let us prove to you how well-conceived plans can result in leveraging grant dollars for neighborhood revitalization.



SPECIALIZING IN:

- Grant Preparation and Management
- Planning
- Market and Feasibility Analysis
- Inspections

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*Partnering with
Communities for
a Better Tomorrow*

PLANNING AHEAD!

Thoma has been busy with its planning work, with the Town of Sennett, the City of Cortland, and the Village of Homer working hard on their respective Comprehensive Plans.

Because Thoma believes firmly that strategic and comprehensive plans be citizen-driven, when we are hired to guide the municipal planning process and write the plan on behalf of our customers, we encourage significant citizen participation as part of the work scope. This is accomplished by incorporating mail surveys, public visioning sessions, focus groups, and the ability to submit written commentary via the internet as part of the overall process to solicit public input. In each of the communities we are presently working with, a Steering Committee appointed by the local government guides our work and provides significant input into the final document. This hopefully ensures that the final plan emanates from the residents and community stakeholders and is not a plan that we "impose" on the municipality.

We look forward to our continued work on these important community documents that will serve as tools for future direction and management of change. If your community needs to update its comprehensive plan, Thoma will propose a comprehensive planning process that will meet your needs as well as your budget.



Town of Sennett Steering Committee members review important data collected as part of its comprehensive planning process.

MAKING COMMUNITIES BETTER WITH CDBG FUNDS

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) awards are made to communities that demonstrate severe needs for eligible community development activities. The program regulations state that 70% of the funds requested must benefit a low-to-moderate income population which includes those persons living at or below 80% of the county's median income. We are happy to report that three of Thoma's customers were awarded 2007 CDBG awards:

Town of Truxton - \$400,000 for town-wide housing rehabilitation. This is the second such award that Thoma helped the Town secure. The first was in 2003 when the Town rehabilitated 16 units of owner-occupied homes located throughout the community.

Village of Port Byron - \$400,000 for village-wide housing rehabilitation. Similar to Truxton, this 2007 grant is the Village's second such award. They also received a similar grant in 2003 and subsequently rehabilitated 16 owner-occupied homes throughout the Village that were owned by lower income households.

City of Cortland - \$567,000 for the South End Neighborhood. As noted in the story on page 1, the City completed a Strategic Plan for this neighborhood as part of an effort to identify and prioritize activities needed to bring about a revitalization of this targeted area. Based on the recommendations in the South End Neighborhood Strategic Plan, Thoma submitted a successful CDBG application on behalf of the City. The grant program includes a number of interrelated activities including needed repairs to owner-occupied and income properties; funds for code enforcement; microenterprise assistance (businesses of five employees or less); water and sewer improvements; street repaving; right-of-way improvements; and sidewalk repair.

Thoma was hired to administer all of these awards. We are starting the intake process for participants. The 2008 CDBG applications are due April 21, 2008. Communities interested in submitting a 2009 application should contact us as soon as possible, as the work needed to submit a competitive application takes many months of preparation.



The City had been very fortunate to receive millions of dollars in CDBG funds since 1980 by working closely with Thoma. This includes funds for housing rehabilitation, infrastructure, and economic development, in addition to many other types of community services. This latest award for the City's South End will address a number of deficiencies in a needy City neighborhood. The people of the South End voiced their concerns, and we responded --- Mayor Tom Gallagher, City of Cortland

JUST FOR THE RECORD

One of the more popular grant applications that Thoma typically writes on behalf of its customers is to the New York State Education Department under its State Archives Program. Our success rate in securing these funds is 85%.

More and more, municipalities are charged with the responsibility of preserving and maintaining tremendous volumes of paper and other records. Local municipal records keepers realize how important these State Archives grants are in assisting with the proper management of these records.

During the 2007-2008 funding round, four of our customers received five records grants. These include:

- City of Cortland - City-wide electronic records disaster recovery plan, and funds to finish a phase two inventory and re-organization of its highly confidential police records room. In total, the City received \$29,389.
- Village of Groton - \$11,025 to purchase a Laserfische Electronic Records Management Program to digitize its records. This project will greatly reduce the time needed to search and retrieve records.
- Town of Cortlandville - After having captured a \$13,000 State Archives grant last year for a Geographic Information System (GIS) Needs Assessment, the Town of Cortlandville received \$48,025 to implement a GIS. This includes the necessary hardware, software, training, and technical assistance needed for the successful launching of this map-based records management program.
- Town of Montezuma - \$6,851 to create an electronic database of its historic and vital records. This grant will save wear and tear on the original paper records and reduce the time needed to access these records to a matter of minutes.

When Thoma originally started writing State Archives applications, many municipalities needed to inventory, purge, retain, and re-organize their paper records. In keeping with current trends, they are moving more and more into the realm of electronic records management. As mentioned, electronic management of records can be a tremendous time saver. In many cases, the electronic records can replace paper records, thus providing better use of valuable floor space.

Electronics records management can vary according to the needs of the local municipality. Technologies such as laserfische, GIS, microfilming, and database management need to be carefully researched before a successful grant application can be submitted. We highly encourage municipalities to start this process now so that they can be prepared for the next funding round which is typically February 1. Municipalities should note that under a new ruling, they can only submit one grant application or participate in only one joint application (there is an exception for county governments). Call us if you would like to discuss your records management needs. There's no time like the present.

Sergeant Penny Guerrero of the City of Cortland Police Department organizes records in the Department's confidential records room. The Police received two rounds of State Archives funds for labor costs related to this project.

BERNIE INVITED TO SPEAK AT DHCR CONFERENCE

Senior Consultant Bernie Thoma was recently invited to speak at a conference sponsored by the NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal. The day-long workshop was held in the City of Geneva, and focused on presentations by DHCR personnel and persons representing not-for-profit agencies that have developed and administered model New York Main Street projects in conjunction with other funding sources. New York Main Street funds are administered by DHCR. Thoma Development partnered with the Cortland Housing Assistance Council (CHAC) and the City of Cortland in capturing two \$200,000 awards for the City's downtown area and used these funds in concert with a comprehensive 2004 Community Development Block Grant. Bernie spoke on behalf of this partnership, addressing the issues that arise when blending Main Street and CDBG funds on the same project.

New York Main Street dollars can be used for bricks and mortar projects (Continued on page 4)



BERNIE INVITED TO SPEAK...*(continued from previous page)*

that include façade renovations, building improvements, streetscapes, and downtown anchor projects. Total grant awards from all sources in the City’s Downtown Revitalization Initiative project exceeded \$1.1M. Changes to the facades of buildings such as Mark’s Pizzeria (right) demonstrate the visual transformation taking place in the City as a result of this funding.

Currently, eligible applicants for New York Main Street funds have to be not-for-profit organizations. Soon the Office for Small Cities will be taking over the program and hopefully municipalities will be able to apply directly for these funds. Due to the success of the Cortland program, we are providing input on the program to the Office for Small Cities regarding possible future changes.

We will continue to stay abreast of all Main Street New York developments. We encourage communities to call us once the next round of funding is announced.



Before



After

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY, PAM AND ANN!



Thoma employees Pam LeFever and Ann Hotchkin recently celebrated their 20th anniversary with the company. Pam (pictured left) is our bookkeeper and is responsible for both the company’s bookkeeping and payroll. In addition, Pam maintains the bookkeeping records for our municipal grant customers. Ann (pictured right) is a Program Manager on the Grant Writing and Planning Team. She is responsible for writing grant applications and providing service to our Grant Writing Customers. She lends support to municipal program development, and the development of strategic, comprehensive, and other planning projects. We congratulate Pam and Ann on their longevity and loyalty to Thoma Development Consultants.

Mission Statement

It is the Mission of Thoma Development Consultants to provide services to our customers and their clients that meet or exceed expectations. The cornerstone for our relationship with our customers and fellow employees is respect and trust. As an organization and as individual employees, we shall continually seek to improve our abilities to benefit our customers. This mission is the shared responsibility of all employees.