

To: McKownville Improvement Association Officers and Board members

From: Don Reeb

Subject: Guidelines for Land Use Development

Along McKownville's Four Major Traffic Corridors

Date: August 27, 2005

There are four major traffic corridors in McKownville—Western Avenue, Fuller Road, Schoolhouse Road and McKown Road. Three of these, Western Avenue, Fuller Road and McKown Road, are currently under pressure for more commercial or business development. While the south side of, Western Avenue is experiencing the most pressure, the other three corridors include non-residential property uses. Also, there are plans filed with the Town to construct a mixed use, religious building and home, on Fuller Road.

It is the desire of the McKownville Improvement Association to keep the four corridors residential. Attractive residential properties along heavily used traffic corridors are not uncommon. There are numerous high traffic corridors in nearby communities where attractive residences are the rule. For example there is Route 7 from the Schenectady line to Balltown Road, Western Avenue from Colonial Avenue to Manning Boulevard, New Scotland from Manning to the City line, and nearly all of Madison Avenue in Albany.

There are several reasons for this preference. Many of the lots in McKownville along the corridors are quite small in comparison to current space requirements of businesses. To overcome the small lot size, often very large variances are requested of the Town. The extra costs these variances impose on nearby neighbors are burdensome. It is common to see dumpsters and parking on a commercial property up against the property line of a residential neighbor. These small lots and large variances lead to too few parking spaces with overflow parking occurring in front of nearby residences. Additionally, turning lanes on the four traffic corridors are scarce. Left turns are more dangerous—for everyone. Also, loud noises and unpleasant smells are common problems experienced by residents living near some businesses. And, along the corridors, it is common for the commercial buildings to be less attractive and less well maintained than the residences.

Western Avenue in McKownville is predominantly residential on the north side and nearly the entire side is zoned R10, small residential lot. This is also true for Fuller Road and McKown Road. Schoolhouse Road is zoned mostly R15 and MR, multiple residence.

On the south side of Western Avenue there are now seven residences where there were five more some forty years ago. The zoning is a mix of R10, LB (local business), GB (general business) and BNRP (business non-retail professional).

On the south side of Western Avenue there are seven properties for rent, for sale or seeking permission for development--the empty lot next to Christ Lutheran Church, the corner property on McKown and Western, the property next to that, Taco Pronto's, Across the Street Pub, the home at

1210 Western, and the multi-family property next to it at 1204 Western.

The development plans that two of these have filed with the Town display the problems which plague business development on the small lots along the corridors. These include overuse of the site with significant costs imposed on neighbors, requests for sizable variances for setbacks and/or parking, unimaginative building design and dangerous traffic patterns.

The active market for properties in McKownville--homes and commercial buildings--presents an opportunity to improve the quality of the street scape along the corridors. And the Town and the County have acted accordingly.

Recognizing that the street scape needed to be improved in McKownville, the Town of Guilderland brought forth the Western Avenue Corridor Study. Its recommendations include roadway improvements such as curbs, wider berms, sidewalks, better storm drainage, more attractive street lights, improved traffic lights, improved pedestrian crossing signals, new shelters for bus patrons, and a host of other improvements--on both sides of Western, of course.

Schoolhouse Road is presently undergoing similar roadway improvements, financed by the County, including new sidewalks, curbs and more attractive lighting. Fuller Road, another County highway, is slated for like improvements in 2006. McKown Road, the fourth traffic corridor, is to have a new sidewalk constructed yet this year.

The next step is to bring about more complementarity between the planned roadway improvements and the land uses along the corridors--the entire street scape. To promote this, the following suggestions are offered.

1. The Town should adopt the position that variances for commercial property development in McKownville should no longer be granted.
2. Strenuous efforts should be put forth to begin the implementation of the Western Avenue Corridor plan immediately.
3. The Town should rezone the smaller lot properties along the south side of Western Avenue to the most restrictive uses possible--residential, multiple residential or LB.
4. Zoning enforcement efforts including the issuing of special use permits and other regulatory actions should be restudied to more effectively reduce the negative effects from commercial property uses.