

Transforming the Remsen Neighborhood into a Thriving, Safe Community

**New Brunswick, New Jersey
January 2006**

Prepared for:
Catholic Charities, Diocese of Metuchen
Church of the Sacred Heart, New Brunswick
Housing and Community Development Network
of New Jersey

Prepared by:
Urban and Regional Planning Workshop
Woodrow Wilson School of Public
and International Affairs
Princeton University



Urban and Regional Planning Workshop Participants

Sherry Ambrose

Leo Chyi

Jill Feldstein

Rochelle Haynes

Karyn Lynn

Lorie McGee

Ginger Moored

Crystal Taylor

Madeline Squire

Paul Buckhurst, ARIBA, AICP

John Shapiro, P.P., AICP

Contents

I.	Introduction	1
II.	Recommendations	
i.	Housing	4
ii.	Remsen Avenue Revitalization	11
iii.	Community Spirit and Facilities	14
iv.	Parks and Recreation	19
v.	Design of the Neighborhood	23
vi.	Pedestrian Mobility and Safety	28
vii.	Public Safety	32

Appendices

A.	Report on Existing Conditions	
i.	Demographics and Survey Results	35
ii.	Land Use	38
iii.	Building Conditions	41
iv.	Housing Characteristics	43
v.	Community Facilities and Services	46
vi.	Transportation	51
vii.	Urban Design and Natural Features	54
viii.	City Context and City-wide Transit	58
B.	Lessons Learned from Case Studies	
i.	Pilsen and Little Village, Chicago, Illinois	63
ii.	Seattle, Washington	67
iii.	Project for Public Spaces, New York	70
C.	List of Individuals Interviewed	74

D. Graphics, Listings and Maps

Graphics

1.	Location of the Remsen Neighborhood in New Brunswick	75
2.	Combined Recommendations for Feaster Park	76
3.	Main Transit Routes from Remsen Neighborhood to Surrounding Areas	77

Listings

1.	Potential Vacant Lots and Abandoned Property Locations	79
2.	Underutilized Lots	80

Maps

1.	Potential Vacant Lots and Abandoned Property Locations	82
2.	Commercial Availability	83
3.	Traffic and Pedestrian Characteristics	84
4.	Commercial Activity, Streetscape and Safety	85
5.	Land Use	86
6.	Existing Building Conditions	87
7.	Building Clusters	88
8.	Buildings of Architectural Interest	89

I. Introduction

This report, produced by the 2005 Urban and Regional Planning workshop of the Woodrow Wilson School, provides the first draft of a neighborhood plan for the Remsen neighborhood of New Brunswick. Formation of this neighborhood plan has been a collaborative effort involving community residents, the Catholic Charities Diocese of Metuchen, the Sacred Heart Church, the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey and the Woodrow Wilson School.

The role of the Woodrow Wilson School group has been to amalgamate input from different participants and to put forward recommendations that will address concerns voiced by community members. Our hope is that, in implementing these proposals, it will be possible to work with existing community organizations who are already doing good work in the neighborhood.

The neighborhood for which this report has been written is located just south of New Brunswick's downtown area as shown in Appendix D, Graphic 1. Although we refer to it in this document as the 'Remsen neighborhood', the area remains to be officially named. A number of residents have suggested the name 'Remsen neighborhood' to the Woodrow Wilson School group and it is put forward in this report as one possibility.



The first meeting between clients, Nancy Finn and Michael Powell, and the Woodrow Wilson School team

As a nine-strong team of Woodrow Wilson School students, our participation in the neighborhood planning effort began in mid-September 2005. Once we had familiarized ourselves with the neighborhood, we researched the existing neighborhood demographics, land use, building conditions, housing, community facilities and services,

transportation, urban design, natural features and context of the Remsen neighborhood within New Brunswick.

The main sources for this work on existing conditions came in the form of (i) a community meeting on October 15th to discuss strengths and weakness in the neighborhood, (ii) a series of interviews with local stakeholders, listed in Appendix C, (iii) two walking surveys of the neighborhood one conducted by Woodrow Wilson School students, the other by the non-profit organization New Labor, (iv) the 2000 U.S. Census and (v) the results of a community survey organized by Sacred Heart Church.

On October 26th, a presentation of the existing conditions in the neighborhood was given to a selection of representatives from local community organizations and city departments. A written report, incorporating feedback given during this meeting, is included as Appendix A of this report.



Residents at the October 15th community meeting

In November and December, the focus of community meetings and work done by the Woodrow Wilson School was directed toward putting together proposals to address the problems identified by community residents and other stakeholders.



Residents at the December 14th community meeting

The community meeting on November 9th was an important stage in clarifying issues faced by residents and beginning the discourse on possible solutions. Based on this, and with guidance from our workshop directors and visiting speakers, we put together a set of proposals that were presented

to the community on December 14th. A fuller description of each recommendation is given in this report.

Research trips to Seattle, Chicago and the Project for Public Spaces in New York enabled us to see how similar problems have been tackled in other parts of the United States. Ideas inspired by these visits are found throughout this report and accounts from each location are found in Appendix B.

We would like to thank the following people for their help in guiding and supporting our work:

- Our delightful directors, Paul Buckhurst and John Shapiro
- Our clients, the Sacred Heart Church, the Catholic Charities, Diocese of Metuchen, and the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey, with a nod of appreciation to their representatives Nancy Finn, Marlene Sigman and Michael Powell, respectively
- Wachovia Housing Scholar Jessica Giorgianni and Erin Jones, Catholic Campaign for Human Development Intern for the Diocese of Metuchen
- The neighborhood residents, community organization representatives and city officials of New Brunswick with whom we met
- Martha DelRio for her help with translation
- Stephanie Cheung of Buckhurst, Fish and Jacquemart Inc.
- Speakers Frank Fish, Georges Jacquemart, Geoff Roesch and Steve Kazanjian
- The many community organization representatives and officials in Chicago and Seattle who made time to meet with us
- The Woodrow Wilson School for funding our workshop, most notably for our research trips

II. Recommendations

i. Housing

The following recommendations focus on creating housing opportunities within the Remsen neighborhood through building infill housing, acquiring existing properties as well as centralizing and expanding housing programs and resources. We recommend that the following housing strategies be carried out with the assistance of an experienced non-profit or community development corporation, such as the Catholic Charities, Diocese of Metuchen, which specializes in housing development and property management. Where possible, it is also recommended that the lead community development corporation or non-profit coordinate and form partnerships with other neighborhood organizations to maximize access to land or property and funding from public and private sources.



New housing should be constructed in a style similar to existing architecture

a. Promote Additional Housing Opportunities

The new housing opportunities in the Remsen neighborhood consist of developing infill housing, creating rental units as well as acquiring and renovating existing properties. It is highly recommended that there be several phases of the housing development strategy so

that the developer can gauge the market and make any necessary adjustments to the plans. A phased-in process also offers the benefit of lower upfront costs and creates an opportunity where one could potentially recapture the returns from smaller scale projects and leverage those funds for larger scale housing development.

To address the need for additional affordable homes and rental housing, we surveyed the neighborhood and identified several vacant lots for potential residential infill development. The lots range in size from large corner lots to vacant land adjacent to occupied homes.

On the large corner lots we recommend building multi-family rental units that are innovative in design and could accommodate at least 18 units, such as the rental housing on 175 Remsen Avenue. On the inner lots we recommend building ‘for sale’ homes similar in architectural style to the existing housing in the neighborhood. Prior to development, full-site evaluations of the vacant lots are needed that include (i) land ownership verification, (ii) environmental assessment, (iii) sewer and drainage capacity measurement, and (iv) utility equipment review. All newly constructed units should also be energy efficient and in compliance with state and federal regulations.

To complement the development of vacant lots in the neighborhood, we also recommend acquiring and renovating properties that are abandoned and for sale. The acquisition and renovation of existing properties could be a good starting point since they require lower amounts of capital than construction of new buildings. Development of buildings already in existence can also be beneficial for helping to estimate the potential proceeds from future ‘for sale’ properties.

There is great potential for the development of many affordable rental units and ‘for sale’ homes in the Remsen neighborhood but it is hard to quantify the number of units that could be built since it depends on the scope and longevity of the developer’s housing plan. A starting point for this assessment is given in Appendix D: Listing 1 identifies potential vacant lots and abandoned property locations, while Map 1 highlights the sites.

b. Expand Access to Housing Finance

Since land acquisition and assembly can be costly, it is important to identify various funding sources. The following are a listing of a few funding opportunities that could be utilized:

New Jersey Department of Community Affairs

- Neighborhood Preservation Balanced Housing
- Pre-Development Loan and Acquisition for Non-profits (PLAN) Fund

New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Financing Agency

- Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program
- Market Oriented Neighborhood Investment (MONI)
- 5-25 program

Private Sources

- Local Banks
- Special Purpose Lenders: Bank of America
Community Development Corporation
- Financial Intermediaries
- Foundations
- Pension Funds



c. Identify, Centralize, and Publicize Existing Housing Programs

There are many programs and resources in existence for both property owners and renters. Identified below are some of the current programs and resources available from both local and state government.

Programs for Property Owners

- BIFI Buy It Fix It
- Community Development Block Grant (CBDG) Emergency Repair Program

-
- CDBG Sidewalk Repair Program
 - HARP Homeowner Affordable Repair Program
 - HOME for Moderate Rehabilitation
 - NJ Refinance Rehabilitation Program
 - Reverse Mortgage for NJ Seniors

Resources and Programs for Renters

- New Brunswick Rent Control Office
- NJ Department of Community Affairs
- NJ Division of Codes and Standards
- NJ Winter Termination Program
- NJ Lifeline Program
- NJ Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program
- NJ Universal Service Fund (USF) program



More details about these programs can be found on the internet. The New Brunswick Department of Economic Development site is particularly good and has information on the local programs (<http://www.cityofnewbrunswick.org/depts/economicdev>). The state Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (<http://www.nj.gov/dca/hmfa/consu/owners>) and the Board of Public Utilities (<http://www.bpu.state.nj.us/home/energyAssistance.shtml>) also offer assistance programs. We recommend that an effort be made to develop a comprehensive list of housing-related resources available to the Remsen neighborhood residents from all levels of government as well as from the non-profit and private sectors.

Once all the resources are identified, it is important for the information to be centralized and easily accessible to residents in a written document. The eligibility requirements vary for different programs based on criteria such as income and age; we suggest that, for the benefits of residents, this information should be included in the comprehensive document. It is also important that the document be bilingual and distributed at community events or mailed to all residents.

Additionally, it makes sense to create a Housing Resource Center as part of the Community Service Center discussed later in this report. There should be more detailed, printed information about each program there and the person staffing the center should be able to answer questions to all housing-related inquiries, or at least know where to access the relevant information.

d. Expand Housing Programs and Opportunities

Create Neighborhood Referral Services

We were not surprised to hear in community meetings about many renters who are looking for an affordable place to live, but we were surprised to learn that there are also community members who wanted to rent out a room but had trouble finding quality tenants.

The New Jersey Housing Resource Center has a website where landlords can list and renters can search for housing (http://www.nj.gov/njhrc/find_housing.html), but we think that it still makes sense to establish a local resource, possibly a database at the Housing Resource Center, to help make the connections. At a minimum, a physical bulletin board could be an easy way to try and address this need. The benefits of such a localized resource are that it can promote community stability and that it could be easily accessible to those with limited computer and English skills.

Another referral resource that should be created is a listing of local certified contractors that could be a resource for property owners looking for people to do work on their homes. This supports local businesses and also increases accountability since the contractor is also a neighbor.



Develop Collective Community Assets

Building up community assets can be an important goal for the Remsen neighborhood. This can begin with small projects. A simple step would be to create a neighborhood tool

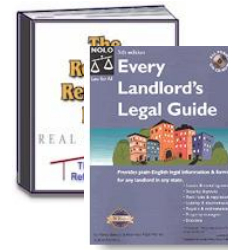
box, a lending library where people could borrow tools to do work on their homes. This allows people to do simple jobs without investing in equipment they are unlikely to need frequently.



An example of a larger scale project is to help residents acquire small loans. This could be done with a community revolving loan fund, possibly funded by a foundation. Such a fund could be used to provide short-term financial assistance to families during emergencies, act as supplemental financing for home purchases or help in the development of small businesses. Another possibility would be to convince a nearby credit union to open a branch in the neighborhood.

e. Train Residents on Housing-Related Issues

During our visit to Chicago, we learned about a program run by a non-profit organization, the Community Investment Corporation (CIC), that helps people to learn the basics of being a landlord. CIC focuses on “mom and pop” landlords who are considering whether to purchase and renovate abandoned multifamily homes. By supporting these people to become good landlords, CIC is benefiting the community by putting more residences back on the market than the government and non-profit sector could alone.



We believe that the Remsen neighborhood could benefit from having a scaled-down version of this property management training program. Topics that could be covered in a series of workshops include marketing, fair housing, landlord and tenant ordinances, maintenance, and budgeting. They should be led by experienced property managers, with guest experts volunteering their legal and financial expertise.

We also recommend workshops that help renters understand their leases and information sessions that include guidance on rent control policies. There is currently a great deal of confusion about renters’ rights and this important information needs to be made

available. There should be particular interest paid to ensuring that individuals with limited English proficiency are offered accessible information and materials that is targeted to their needs.

f. Create Home Ownership Opportunities for Community Members

Greater assistance for new home buyers in the form of mortgage financing support is also needed. Hosting regular workshops in the community that are run by the HMFA could help people understand the home buying process and answer questions about the many state homeownership programs. Many of the addresses in the Remsen neighborhood are

in HUD “Urban Target Areas” which allow prospective buyers to qualify for additional benefits, and HMFA could help people understand the complex, important details. If existing programs are not sufficient for the community’s needs, community members may



want to consider a longer term advocacy strategy to win supplementary home ownership assistance programs from the government.

In addition, we have heard from community members that it is important for there to be assistance offered to undocumented residents in getting credit. Such resources are particularly limited as many of the existing government programs are available to legal immigrants but not to those who are here illegally. While providing services to undocumented residents is a controversial issue, we heard in Chicago about a number of banks such as Second Federal Savings Bank that have started offering mortgage loans to customers using individual tax identification numbers (ITINs) instead of Social Security Numbers. According to the Credit Union National Association (CUNA), the Internal

Revenue Service has issued 8 million ITINs, including 900,000 in 2004. Use of ITIN numbers for mortgage loans has successfully taken place in a number of other states including New York and Georgia.

Furthermore, the Mexican government has been offering a *matricula consular* as an official identity card that many undocumented residents in the U.S. have chosen to attain. It is accepted by some states and CUNA writes that according to the Mexican Foreign Ministry “more than 400 credit unions, banks, and thrifts are accepting the *matricula* identification card and providing services to undocumented immigrants.” We recommend that non-profit groups look into whether banks in the area are accepting ITINs or the *matricula consular* as a way for the undocumented population to gain access to credit. If not, community members could choose to push banks for that type of policy change.



ii. Remsen Avenue Revitalization



Unattractive business currently on Remsen Avenue

Through both community meetings and surveys, neighborhood residents have expressed a strong desire to improve Remsen Avenue and transform it into a thriving commercial strip. Many residents expressed concerns about the current appearance of the street. In particular, they highlighted the lack of adequate lighting, the need for new businesses, and their interest in making Remsen Avenue more attractive and inviting.

Our proposals for Remsen Avenue revitalization, which stem from resident suggestions and team research, fall into three broad categories: street beautification, improving the mix and quality of businesses, and creating a center for the neighborhood that promotes community identity.



Attractive home and business on Remsen Avenue

a. Street Beautification



Well-trafficked neighborhood commercial strip

At present, there are a number of rundown and unattractive buildings scattered along the street, areas of general disrepair and litter that brings down the appearance of Remsen Avenue. To improve the look and feel of this important thoroughfare, we suggest the following: storefront and façade improvement, fresh painting of buildings, street cleanup, litter removal, the addition of more street trees, and the installation of pedestrian level lighting. These types of improvements will help to create a more attractive and welcoming commercial area. Those relating to urban design are discussed more fully later in this report.

It is possible that resources for these programs may be available through the City of New Brunswick and the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs. In addition, fraternities at Rutgers have expressed interest in providing labor for community clean-up projects. Tapping into these resources will help ease the financial burden of these important efforts.

b. Expand Mix and Quality of Remsen Avenue Retail

Neighborhood residents have voiced frustration with the limited retail services available along Remsen Avenue. While there are a number of bodegas and small groceries throughout the neighborhood, residents see a need for a larger grocery store, a pharmacy, and other new stores possibly located on Remsen Avenue.

We endorse the diversification of Remsen Avenue through the addition of a variety of new stores and services. In particular, we advocate the addition of a food co-op, laundromat, coffee shop, and small retail stores. Unfortunately, given the size of the neighborhood's market, a full scale grocery and pharmacy are unlikely to be sustainable though more research on this possibility could be done. Appendix D, Map 2 highlights potential locations for new Remsen Avenue businesses.

To help support the establishment of new stores and to strengthen existing shops, we recommend the creation of a voluntary business association for Remsen Avenue business owners. Business associations can advocate for the needs of their members, provide a forum through which members can cooperate and coordinate activities, and provide useful networking opportunities. The business association could promote beautification and community identity by painting a neighborhood symbol on their business signs, displaying student work in their window-fronts, and "adopting" the sidewalk in front of their store to ensure it is cleaned daily.

We also advocate greater utilization of New Brunswick's existing small business programs, including the following:

- Small Business Loan Guarantee
- Micro Loan Program
- Facade Improvement Program
- Business Plan Writing Assistance
- Site Location Assistance
- Small Business Seminar Series

-
- Redevelopment Planning

c. Create a Sense of Neighborhood Center and Promote Community Identity

We recommend that Remsen Avenue be used to create a sense of center to anchor the neighborhood. Remsen Avenue is the natural geographic center of the neighborhood and residents already visit shops and restaurants there. An effort should be made to capitalize on existing and future foot traffic to the area.

A sense of center can be created by opening a neighborhood service center on Remsen Avenue. As discussed later in this report, we believe that the old firehouse at the intersection of Remsen Avenue and Suydam Street would be an ideal location for this facility. Another way to create a sense of place while also highlighting the neighborhood’s cultural identity is by using murals and artwork to decorate



Murals by local artists can add color and impart neighborhood culture

Remsen Avenue buildings and facilities. More information on possible improvements to the appearance of Remsen Avenue can be found later in this report, in Section V on ‘Design of the Neighborhood’.

iii. Community Spirit and Facilities

The Remsen neighborhood is home to a diverse population of individuals and families. However, residents have noted that it is difficult to meet and get to know their neighbors. We believe that building dedicated community space and strengthening existing organizations would help build neighborhood cohesion among residents.



a. Build Community Service Center

In the survey conducted by Sacred Heart Church, 90% of the respondents indicated that a community center was the most needed recreation space in the Remsen neighborhood.

Inviting spaces encourage relaxation and mingling

During the community meetings, residents also said that a community center would improve the neighborhood by providing a central gathering place for residents. Based on these suggestions, we propose the creation of a community service center.

This recommendation also complements the work of the New Brunswick Community Center Task Force, which released its report in January 2004. The task force was formed by Mayor Jim Cahill to determine the interest in developing a community center in New Brunswick and the feasibility of such a project. Some of the task force's recommendations to the city include:

- Develop a community center with a pool that will be available to local residents
- Actively seek creative and alternative means to fund the development and operation of a community center
- Include space for community meetings and exercise equipment
- Hire a qualified consultant to undertake a more in-depth analysis of the costs of developing and operating a community center in New Brunswick

Based on community input and the recommendations of the task force, we suggest the following proposals for a community center:

Location: We propose that the community center be located at the New Brunswick Firefighter's Museum at 81 Remsen Avenue. Several residents supported the museum as an ideal location because it is on the commercial strip of the neighborhood and it works well with the recommendations to revitalize Remsen Avenue. Although this site may not be large enough for a pool, this facility could accommodate the other suggestions that neighborhood residents and the taskforce made, including meeting and recreation space.

The empty lot next to the fire museum could be redesigned as a garden or plaza, providing an outside seating area on Remsen Avenue.



The Fire Museum's location and history make it an ideal site for a community center



An outdoor area would complement the activities offered inside the center



Friendly, bilingual staff would serve community needs

Staff: The community center staff should be familiar with the residents of the Remsen neighborhood and their needs. They should also be knowledgeable about city and state agencies and programs in order to provide the most accurate information to residents.

Information and Referrals: One of the most important functions of the community center is to provide residents with information and referral services on issues such as immigration counseling, job training programs, and housing services.



Service agencies could advertise their programs



Community groups would have a central, permanent meeting space

Meeting and Recreation Space: The community center should also provide a permanent meeting space for the 2nd Ward Block Club, which currently meets at the New Brunswick Public Library. The meeting space can also be used for housing repair and homeowner training,

resume writing workshops, and space for students to complete their homework.

One very positive aspect of the community center is that meeting space, and the recreational space for children to play board games and watch television, will provide an opportunity for residents to get to know each other.



Recreation space would welcome kids of all ages



La Unidad es La Fuerza:
Unity is Strength

b. Strengthen Neighborhood Cohesion

During community meetings and interviews with residents, several people expressed concern about cultural and language barriers within the neighborhood and a lack of solidarity. In fact, 50% of the respondents to the neighborhood survey indicated they are not friends with their neighbors. To help build cohesion, we propose that the neighborhood build upon the 2nd Ward Block Club, which has a solid foundation in the community.

Expand the 2nd Ward Block Club

The block club was formed twenty-five years ago by a group of African-American women in the Remsen neighborhood and now includes approximately sixty, culturally diverse members who meet ten times a year and organize community events. The block club also invites a city official to each meeting, which fosters a connection between the City of New Brunswick and the Remsen neighborhood.

We talked with the block club president, Morris Kofka, and he stated that he envisions a block club “that opens itself to the diversity of the neighborhood and needs of the neighborhood.” The block club should continue its outreach to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood and consider the following initiatives to attract new members who may feel excluded because of language and cultural barriers:

i. Identify Block Social Chairs

By identifying social chairs for each block in the neighborhood, the 2nd Ward Block Club has an opportunity to develop new leaders in the community. These social chairs could lead efforts to clean up the streets in the block, introduce neighbors to each other, and organize block parties. The social chairs and the block club could also work together to plan summer events in Feaster Park such as movie nights, musical performances, and a farmer's market.



Outdoor concerts would attract residents

ii. Begin Peer English as a Second Language and Spanish Tutoring

Peer tutoring would be an informal opportunity for residents to break down the language barrier that exists between Spanish and English speakers in the neighborhood. The block club should help organize a peer tutoring program by identifying residents who want to learn the basics of English or Spanish and assigning residents to a peer who speaks the other language. The two residents can decide how often they would like to meet to begin the tutoring process. This program will help residents learn more about their neighbors and other cultures.

iii. Organize Community Service Activities

We recommend that the 2nd Ward Block Club spearhead a number of community service activities as a way to bring residents together and beautify the

neighborhood. Block club members could decorate school construction boards with murals, create community gardens in vacant lots, lead street clean-up initiatives, and build on-street display cases for the school work of local youth. Murals could be especially useful in areas with persistent graffiti problems.

iv. Strengthen Social Service Delivery

Conversations with residents and community service providers revealed a troubling disconnect between social service agencies and residents as reported in more detail in Appendix A. A strengthened 2nd Ward Block Club would be in an ideal position to help bridge this longstanding gap. One of the most acute needs in the Remsen neighborhood is for affordable child care. While child care is a complex problem, the block club could assist residents interested in seeking licensing for in-home daycare by providing education on daycare licensing requirements, available from the Department of Human Services Office of Licensing.

These are just four suggestions for building on the solid and historic foundation of the 2nd Ward Block Club. We are confident the members of the block club have their own ideas to attract new members and unify the community.

iv. Parks and Recreation

Community survey results show that 88% of residents believe that improving Feaster Park could enhance the Remsen neighborhood. In looking at this issue, we considered not only Feaster Park, which was often mentioned, but also nearby Pittman Park, located behind the car wash on Commercial Avenue. We recommend the following proposals for improving Feaster and Pittman Parks:



Residents currently consider Feaster Park to be an “opportunity”



Pittman Park's cemetery could be turned into a memorial

a. Create a Sacred Space

With its numerous trees and fresh greenery, Pittman Park is a very inviting space. To encourage usage of this location, we propose that the small cemetery in the park be sectioned off and formalized into a memorial. Low white fencing could surround the headstones. A plaque or pillar could be placed in the center identifying the location of the headstones and the cement that currently surrounds the graves could be replaced by brick, improving the appearance and creating the impression of formality.

b. Utilize Pittman Park to Enhance Feaster Park

Many residents expressed interest in having outdoor concerts and street fairs. While we propose using Feaster Park as the central location for these events, we suggest creating space for an outdoor café in Pittman Park with bench and table seating. We feel that this will help to enable people from different ages in the community to all feel part of a single event.



An outdoor café in Pittman Park would help attract residents to both parks

Connecting Feaster and Pittman parks would be further helped by leveling the hill that sits on the north side of Feaster Park. If this proves too expensive or otherwise not possible, combined use of both parks would be facilitated by having stairs cut into the hill. More information on calming the traffic along Handy Street, between the two parks, is given later in this report.

c. Make Feaster Park into a Neighborhood Asset

Feaster Park can be improved in a number of ways. What follows are a few suggestions based on community recommendations and the size of the space. While many residents

expressed interested in having a soccer field at the park, we believe the park terrain inhibits placing a field in any spot that would not inhibit other uses for the area. Ultimately, however, the decision of whether to include a soccer field is for the community to make. The following are a series of recommendations on how to revitalize Feaster Park:

Install a Gazebo in the Center of the Park

Currently, the park has six pathways, which tend to encourage people to cross through the park rather than linger and enjoy the park. One way to encourage people to stop is to place a gazebo or pavilion in the center of the park. The gazebo could be used by musicians or other groups and could provide seating when not in use.



A gazebo is ideal for both formal and informal gatherings

Use Greenery, Seating and Walkways to Liven and Section Park



Shrubs brighten the park and create nooks for relaxing and socializing



Seating areas encourage people to stay in the park



Brick pathways guide visitors through the park

In order to make the park more inviting, we propose the use of more plants, particularly shrubs and hedges, and pathways to separate sections of the park into distinct areas. These amendments to the existing park would create seating around the play area for parents, fence off and enlarge the area currently reserved for the community garden, and create alcoves or other spaces for people to sit and enjoy the park. We believe these proposed changes would make Feaster Park a more relaxing and inviting place to visit,

thereby encouraging residents to utilize this welcome recreation space in the neighborhood.

Update Existing Areas



New playground equipment would brighten the park



A more organized community garden would attract additional growers

The equipment on the playground is old and the paint is faded. Since Robeson Elementary used the park for recess when it was open, we recommend partnering with the school district to refurbish the children’s play area in the park. We also propose that the exercise station be replaced or removed as some of the equipment is old, rusted, and broken. In addition, we recommend reinvigorating the existing community garden by engaging community members in its renewal. We imagine the community garden would be especially attractive to residents that do not have sufficient space in their yards to plant flowers, fruits or vegetables.

Erect Welcoming Entrances for the Park



Grand entrances would beckon residents to enter Feaster Park

Feaster Park’s current entrances facing Commercial Avenue and Throop Avenue are fairly understated and do not invite people to enter the park. We propose the creation of more ornate archways at both entrances to create a visually stimulating entranceway to the park.

Improve Lighting

Currently, both Feaster and Pittman Parks are lit by medium- to tall-sized wooden posts. They serve a purpose in being sturdy and bright, but are not very attractive. We recommend that the community replace the current lighting with pedestrian level posts along pathways. Additional lighting would also make the park more user-friendly for positive nighttime activities, such as sports.



Improved lighting would make the park safer and more attractive

Introduce a Seasonal Farmer's Market



A farmer's market would appeal to residents who would like a large grocery store in the neighborhood

Many people expressed interest in a farmer's market. The state Department of Agriculture has an office that specializes in this area. The community could coordinate with this department to determine the feasibility of having a farmers' market located in New Brunswick in general, specifically at Feaster Park.

An alternative is for the community to check the feasibility of having weekly bus trips to nearby farmer's markets. Information regarding state contacts and locations of local markets can be found at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/States/NewJersey.htm>

Our vision for Feaster Park, incorporating the suggestions detailed in this section is included as Appendix D, Graphic 1 in the back of this report.

v. Design of the Neighborhood

The Remsen neighborhood is comprised of primarily two-way, one and two lane roads laid out in a traditional square block grid pattern. As noted in the report on existing

conditions, while these factors contribute to fairly effective traffic flow management and give the neighborhood a low density feel by breaking up street blocks with intersections, this sense of low-density and sameness also creates a lack of center for the neighborhood. We therefore recommend several infrastructure investments and visual improvement projects that will help create a series of interlaced focal points for the neighborhood.

a. Create Focal Points on Remsen and Throop Avenues



Bricking can make the crosswalk more visible and the neighborhood more distinctive



Bus shelter decorated with artwork done by local school children

Focusing primarily on the Remsen Avenue blocks bounded by Hale and Suydam Streets, we propose that Remsen Avenue be designed as a busy through-road with attractive amenities for both drivers and pedestrians. Proposed amenities include:

- enhanced bricked or painted crosswalks and sidewalks
- a neighborhood logo painted at the key intersections
- street trees with attractive iron planters
- matching iron benches and trashcans on the sidewalks
- attractive combination of street and pedestrian lighting
- lightpole banners showcasing a neighborhood-related or seasonal design

In addition, we propose that bus shelters be constructed at the bus stops along Remsen Avenue. These should be in keeping with the urban design of the area, colorful and durable. The wide sidewalks that exist along Remsen Avenue could also be used as an

outside eating area for cafes along the street. This would contribute to the feel of a vibrant neighborhood community.



Bricked sidewalks, pedestrian lighting, and decorative trashcans can spruce up a neighborhood



Lightpole banners welcome visitors and residents

Throop Avenue between Hale and Handy Streets could also feature some of the same design elements as Remsen Avenue for continuity of the neighborhood. However, Throop Avenue, designed to be the calmer, more pedestrian-oriented street, should also include additional structural improvements to help slow down traffic flows. This idea will be discussed later in the report.

While Throop and Remsen Avenues will be the foci of neighborhood beautification efforts, visual improvements must be made to other neighborhood streets.

b. Install streetscape amenities



Attractive iron trashcans add style to the streetscape

Decorative trash cans, benches, and street trees can improve the cleanliness and appearance of the neighborhood. Benches are especially important since they provide seating for



Gold medallions embedded in the sidewalk, like this one in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood can help promote neighborhood identity

residents, which can precipitate more positive interaction among neighbors; through our travels and research we have learned that

interaction between community members is essential for a thriving neighborhood. To strengthen community identity and cohesiveness, the community symbols used on Throop and Remsen Avenues can be stamped into the sidewalks of each neighborhood block. Pilsen, a Latino neighborhood we visited in Chicago, uses stamps such as these (pictured).

c. Plant Additional Street Trees



The strategic placement of street trees can profoundly affect the feel of a streetscape. A map of current street trees is given in Appendix D. Residents have said that having more areas planted densely with trees will improve neighborhood appearance. Seminal urban planning texts, such as Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), suggest that well-kept plant-life can even improve neighborhood safety since more residents use beautified streets and more people present on the streets can improve community policing. To maximize street safety, though, planners must ensure that street trees do not block pedestrian and street lighting and do not form a visual barrier between the street, sidewalk, and on-street buildings. For areas where planting new trees might be difficult, potted trees might be a more viable option.

After surveying Remsen Avenue we found only one or zero street trees on the blocks listed below. Because street trees can improve the appearance and safety of a neighborhood, we recommend that more trees be planted on the blocks on Remsen Avenue between Redmond and Townsend Streets, Suydam and Seaman Streets, Seaman and Handy Streets, Handy and Baldwin Streets (east side only), and Comstock and Delavan Streets (east side only). Additionally, we recommend planting more trees on the block bounded by Townsend Street, Suydam Street, Throop Avenue, and Commercial Avenue since this block has very few compared to other parts of the neighborhood.

d. Highlight the Neighborhood’s Historic Assets

Historic assets could also be used to increase a common identity. “Historic District” banners can be attached to light poles along Livingston Avenue and in areas with several historic landmarks. Also, we propose that buildings with historical significance have special lighting (such as on the top of the steeple of the Sacred Heart Church) and plaques describing the significance of the building or its

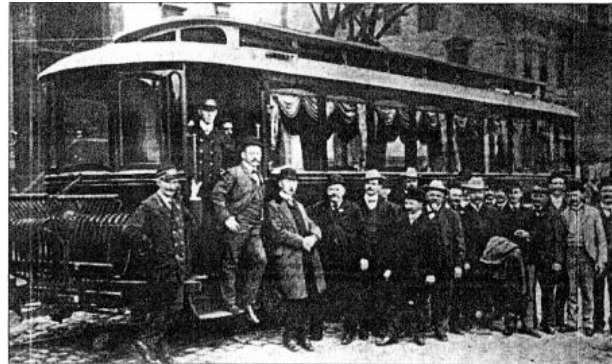


Image of a streetcar in historic New Brunswick

architecture. Perhaps older residents who grew up in the neighborhood can give architectural or historic tours of the neighborhood or can help create these tours in cooperation with newer residents or other history enthusiasts.

e. Improve Parking for Residents and Visitors to Remsen Avenue

Augmenting parking opportunities for visitors to the Remsen Avenue and users of Feaster and Pittman Parks is another opportunity. We have developed two options for meeting these needs. We suggest developing a one way street that provides access to reverse diagonal parking for area residents and visitors to the neighborhood. The slight drawback of diagonal parking is that people have restricted vision when pulling out of a space which can cause accidents. However, if properly designed, with *reverse* diagonal parking, vision is not so restricted and it can be a safer option.

Parking location options:

- Reverse diagonal parking on Seaman between Throop and Commercial; or
- Reverse diagonal parking on Handy between Remsen and Throop



Diagonal parking can act as a traffic calming measure as well as providing increased parking

vi. Pedestrian Mobility and Safety

Resident complaints about a notable lack of pedestrian safety, particularly for children crossing the street, and questions about available nighttime lighting, suggest that more pedestrian friendly infrastructure is warranted in the neighborhood. In addition, speeding traffic has been a concern that many residents have expressed at community meetings. We have designed a series of recommendations to improve the safety of residents and pedestrians as they move about the neighborhood.

a. Introduce Traffic Calming Measures Adjacent to Feaster and Pittman Parks



Traffic calming is especially important around the park area if this is to become a community resource for neighborhood residents. We propose including distinctive local traffic calming signage and planted medians (either full length or a series of smaller ‘islands’) with low-lying plants or perennials on Throop Avenue between Handy and Hale Streets (the western park boundary) and on Handy Street between Throop and Commercial Avenues (the northern park boundary). We recommend the use of low-lying plants instead of trees or taller bushes to avoid creating a visual barrier separating Feaster Park from its surrounding community.

The objective of these medians is to create an ‘obstruction’ in the road forcing cars to slow. Although the median along Delavan Street, shown in the photograph, features higher vegetation than would be appropriate along Throop Avenue or Handy Street, it gives an example of the type of traffic calming measure that is being proposed.



A tree-lined median can help slow traffic



An artist's depiction of Throop Avenue with the addition of planted medians

Replacing the street asphalt on Throop Avenue between Handy and Hale Streets with paving stones can also create a more pedestrian-friendly environment adjacent to Feaster Park. The paving stones can be similar to the ones used on the blocks of George Street in New Brunswick's downtown restaurant and shopping district. It is essential that the crosswalk joining Feaster and Pitman Parks is highly visible and repaired when in need.

c. Improve Crosswalks

With the goal of creating a more ‘walkable neighborhood’ we recommend the repair of existing crosswalks with high-visibility, painted designs particularly on Throop Avenue between Hale and Handy Streets and at the intersection of Commercial Avenue and Suydam Street because of the large number of accidents police have reported at this intersection. The crosswalks at the intersection of Suydam Street and Livingston Avenue (pictured) provide a model for additional crosswalks and repairs to existing ones. This



Highly visible, well-maintained crosswalks increase community safety

crosswalk is ideal since its wide, reflective white stripes are easy for both pedestrians and drivers to see.

d. Repair Damaged Sidewalks and Install Pedestrian Crossing Signals



Crosswalk signals can improve pedestrian safety

Repair of several damaged local sidewalks (in particular on Welton Street between Livingston and Lee Avenues; Welton Street between Remsen and Throop Avenues; and Seaman Street between Remsen and Throop Avenues) will each contribute to the ‘walkability’ of the Remsen neighborhood. Affixing a blinking pedestrian crossing signal on Remsen Avenue at Handy Street will also facilitate pedestrian safety.

e. Make Taxi Drivers More Accountable

Residents have also indicated that reckless taxi drivers often threaten their safety. To address this, the New Brunswick Police Department can require city taxis to have bumper stickers with a phone number residents can call to report unsafe taxi driving.



f. Reduce Accidents at Key Intersections

As shown in Appendix D, Map 3, there are a number of junctions with traffic lights that have also experienced a large number of accidents. The following junctions have proved particularly dangerous: Commercial Avenue at Suydam Street and Livingston Avenue at Sandford, Handy and Suydam Streets.

To increase the level of safety at these junctions, we propose that:

- at the Suydam Street, Livingston Avenue intersection there be a left-turn lane for cars driving north and turning west and driving west and turning south with a painted median to enable this

-
- and at the Suydam Street, Commercial Avenue intersection there be a left-turn signal and a 15 mph zone.

Part of the problem seems to be people pretending that there are two lanes and using part of the road closest to the sidewalk as a right-hand turn lane. This is not painted on the road and leads to confusion. Measurement of the width of the roadway suggests that road *is* wide enough to have two lanes, with a left-turn lane but this should be official practice rather than an unofficial ‘understanding’ between drivers.



Traffic-filtering median painted onto the road at the intersection of Suydam Street and Livingston Avenue

g. Improve the Mobility of Non-Driving Residents

As discussed in Appendix A, although there is little need to change the routes of the public transit services, there is need for (i) longer evening hours providing public transport to shopping and entertainment facilities, especially on the #814 bus to North Brunswick and (ii) a more frequent peak hour service on the Hub City Trolley, the #811 bus, the ‘DASH’, and the AWTS 8A Shuttle.

Another option for increasing the mobility of non-car users is to create bike lanes in the area. For residents who do not own cars, bicycles can offer a low-cost and flexible means of transport. Throop Avenue and Handy Street are suitable locations for bike lanes since they are main thoroughfares but not as heavily used by cars as Remsen, Commercial and Livingston Avenues.

The added advantage of bike lanes is that they can help to narrow wide roads, itself a traffic-calming measure as the visual horizon for drivers decrease causing a psychological influence on drivers to drive more carefully. Additionally, providing bike

racks at bus stops and on the front of buses would enable residents to get to routes farther from home.

One problem often cited with bike lanes is that their location can conflict with parking. Although the bike lane in the photograph above is clearly marked and well-designed, a more suitable design the Remsen neighborhood would be to have a bike lane on the non-sidewalk side of a six foot parking provision lane. In order for a system like this to work, it is necessary for both the bike lane and the parking ‘lane’ to be clearly marked.



One option for a bright and distinctive bike lane

To provide the Remsen neighborhood’s residents with low-cost bikes, Rutgers University and other nearby student institutions could give bikes abandoned on university property to Remsen neighborhood residents. Collection of abandoned bikes at the end of each summer and a day-long bike giveaway, where bikes are distributed on a first-come, first-served basis could work well in the Remsen neighborhood. Princeton University already runs a similar program, which could act as a logistical model for one in New Brunswick.

vii. Public Safety

As expressed at community meetings, a main concern of residents has been the level of crime in the Remsen neighborhood. Based on the issues that were identified by residents, below are a number of proposals to address the problem of crime.

a. Improve Lighting throughout the Neighborhood

From discussions with residents, local police officials, and reviews of police reports we recommend investment in improved street and pedestrian lighting in certain low-light, high police activity areas. The addition of street and pedestrian friendly lighting fixtures, as shown in the diagram, may contribute to improved sense of safety and reduced gang and other illicit activity in the neighborhood, especially along Remsen Avenue.

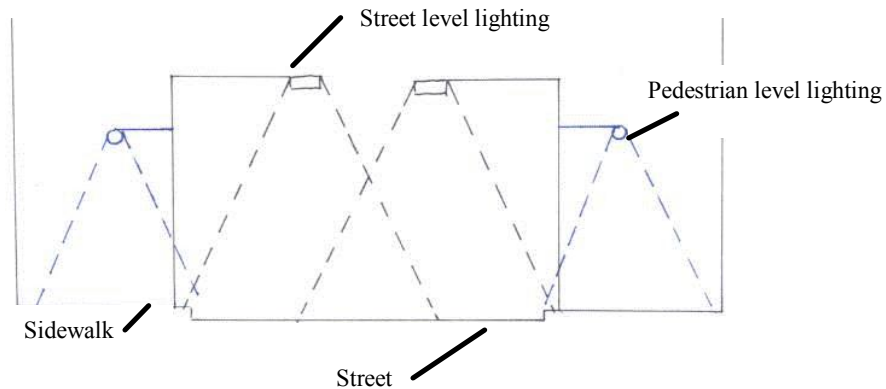


Effective lighting on George Street, just north of Remsen neighborhood

The particularly dark areas of the neighborhood at night time include

- Townsend Street between Livingston and Remsen Avenues
- Suydam Street between Remsen and Commercial Avenues
- Baldwin Street between Remsen and Throop Avenues
- Commercial Avenue between Redmond and Townsend Streets

A number of these coincide with areas identified by police as high crime areas, including Remsen Avenue at Seaman, Townsend and Handy Streets, and the intersection of Throop Avenue and Delevan Street. Dark areas of the neighborhood and the areas identified by the police as high crime areas are shown in Appendix D, Map 4.



An artist's depiction of recommended street and sidewalk lighting improvements

b. Improve Communication with Local Police

Communication between the New Brunswick Police Force and local residents could be facilitated in a number of ways. Most importantly, it is crucial that the number of officers that serve the community who have Spanish language skills is increased. In addition, the use of bike patrols to supplement car patrols in the neighborhood would help encourage one-on-one, positive community-police interaction. Educating residents, informing them of who to contact regarding their safety concerns, would also benefit those community members who do not already have this knowledge.



Relations with local police are an important component of public safety

Another possibility, for building on existing GREAT and DARE programs, would be to implement a youth liaison project between police and youth members to paint a mural about public safety in the Remsen neighborhood.