

CRRC/Whitham Planning & Design/Joann Cornish
Reference Responses

CRRC

Summary of phone call with David West, City of Geneva Director of Planning & Economic Development (City of Geneva Economic Development Plan & Strategy):

Good experience, done a great job reaching out to stakeholders, early part of project, next project is drafting a strategic plan, next 3-5 years, interactions so far have been good, seems to know his field and is good at drawing out stakeholders and getting information and communicating with people; it was difficult finding funding and he has been helpful with this.

I may be biased since I am not a planner, but he is not a planner, his strength is economic development. I think of him as a downtown guy but he is a farmer.

Emails from Mack Travis, Downtown Ithaca Strategic Plans (2020, 2010):

On Jun 5, 2024, at 10:18 AM, Mack Travis wrote:
Mollie,

When Gary was first hired in 1999, he was chosen over 9 applicants. He had worked in 5 different states in their Business Improvement Districts.

His first move in Ithaca (the 22 blocks surrounding the Commons) was to interview major property owners, retail, and office tenants.

He came back to our board and suggested we do a feasibility study.

A major tenant (Thomas Associates) with 180 employees in the former Rothschild building wanted to expand. Our BID district had a 20% vacancy, and they weren't sure if downtown was headed up or down.

Gary suggested we hire Danter Corporation out of Columbus, Ohio. He had used them in his previous position in Dayton. Ken Danter came to town and assessed our downtown. He came back with the recommendation we could build 80-100 new apartments a year over the next 5 years; 175,000sf of new office, and 75,000 sf of new retail. It was a total surprise!!

Gary recommended we write a 10 year Strategic Plan. What did the downtown stakeholders want to see? We basically adopted Danter's recommendations.

At the end of the 2000-2010 Strategic plan we had exceeded the Danter recommendations—over \$500,000 had been invested in downtown. Gary led us through developing the 2010-2020 Strategic Plan some 90 pages of recommendations. It was successful and the 2030 plan was developed.

Major ideas: Create Density in the central core with building heights diminishing as you move out. Preserve your Architectural Heritage. Create pedestrian destinations such as the History Center. Expand Events on the Commons. All 3 Downtown Ithaca Strategic Plans are available online.

Gary's hand can be seen in virtually every downtown development—new parking garage with Coltivare on the ground floor, negotiating with the owners of the one story travel agency/camera shop to relocate so the Marriott Hotel could be built. His influence helped save the State Theatre and the Clinton House from demolition.

I would be happy to speak with you in person if you would like to hear more. You'll never regret getting Gary Ferguson involved in your Ulysses Development Plans.

Regards,

Mack Travis (607) 227-3429
Follow up email from Mack Travis:

Mollie,

You might have Gary look at the huge boost The Inn at Taughannock is providing the Town of Ulysses economy. The board tends to stonewall his plans to expand his Hotel—which in my opinion is a missed opportunity for our Town.

Carol and I live close by.

Thanks,

Mack Travis
Sent from my iPhone

Whitham Planning & Design

Summary of 6/4 phone call with Juliet Berling, Binghamton Planning Director:

They are also working on Deco district, large 2 phase project. They are responsive, good at research, and there have been no issues.

Summary of 6/4 phone call with Tito Martinez, Binghamton Planning Department:

Work products pretty good, designs are good, they are good at public outreach and manage this pretty well. City staff did not have to do a whole lot in that regard. That's pretty the only involvement I had with them, working with them for public outreach, and then working to come up with the designs they produced. The mayor's office may have more to say about contract negotiation, that sort of thing, the actual work is very good.

Email from Howard Kaufman, CEO & Principal, Leyland Alliance, LLC (East Hill Village Plan):

Hi Mollie - I'm happy to give Whitham Planning & Design a very positive reference. The firm was very professional, and all of their work was high in quality. We had a major public design charrette in Ithaca, with Scott Whitham's firm as our local planner, working in conjunction with Urban Design Associates. As you probably know, the project was planned in conjunction with Cornell University. Scott and his team were an integral and valued part of our team. Ultimately (and unfortunately), the University decided not to implement the project, due to needs they had in other areas. If you'd like to discuss, feel free to call me at (914) 443-6338.

Joann Cornish

Email from Lisa Nicholas, Director of Planning & Development for the City of Ithaca:

Hi Mollie,

I'd be happy to that.

I worked with JoAnn Cornish for 16 years in the City Department of Planning & Development. For 14 years of that time, she was the Director of the Department. During her tenure, the Department lead the creation of a Comprehensive Plan as well several Phase 2 plans: Collegetown, Waterfront, Southside and a Parks Master Plan. In addition, the Department spearheaded the adoption of multiple tools to implement the plans such as design guidelines and zoning amendments.

JoAnn is extremely knowledgeable and professional. She has the ability to communicate effectively with elected officials, staff at all levels, consultants, state, local and federal agencies, and residents. She was very skilled at balancing competing interests to achieve the best outcome for the City. She had very high standards for the quality and timeliness of the work coming out of the Department. Under her leadership the Department planned and executed multiple public engagement processes that were very well received.

I would unreservedly recommend her for any planning project. The positive impact she had on our community is truly remarkable and long lasting.

I'd be very happy to provide additional information or chat on the phone.

Sincerely,

Lisa Nicholas, Director of Planning & Development
Department of Planning & Development
607-274-6557

MRB/Highland Planning
Reference Responses

MRB

Email from Sharianne Wilson-Pearce, Village Manager, Village of Hilton 2030 Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code:

I have nothing but great things to say about MRB. They are currently working on updating our entire Zoning Code and doing a marvelous job.

We actually won Comp Plan of the Year from the NYS Planning Federation. MRB is timely, professional and engaged well with the public participation part of the plan.

If you have specific questions you need answered, please feel free to contact me directly.

Email from William Riddell, Town of Ontario Director of Economic Development, Town of Ontario 2021 Comprehensive Plan:

I found the team from MRB to be professional and well informed. They were well organized and held to the timeline set forth in our preliminary meeting. I also found them responsive to any request that I made throughout the project.

We attempted to get public engagement, but it was limited. Public input at public hearings and meetings was light. This was not MRB's fault, I believe it always been hard to get public to take a true interest. They did have good feed back through surveys and direct meetings with shareholders. I would recommend MRB.

If you have specific questions that I have not answered, please feel free to contact me.

Highland Planning

Email from Dennis Kennelly, VP T.Y. Lin International, Cayuga-Seneca Canalway Trail Project (public outreach/engagement):

Highland Planning (HP) is top notch on all accounts. They did a great job on the Canalway Trail project (as always).

TYLin/HP have worked together for many years, and we are currently working with them on several projects. I personally work with them on a regular basis.

I highly recommend them (as I did just yesterday on an upcoming project!).