Chapter 4: County Character Area Plan

Lewis County Comprehensive Plan

October 6, 2009

Lewis County
New York

Hamlets & Crossroads Character Area

Overview

Lewis County contains numerous small population clusters, and those that are unincorporated are known as hamlets. The county’s hamlet areas range in scale from small village-like communities, such as Number Four (Beaver Lake), to simple rural crossroads with a small collection of homes, such as West Martinsburg. The more developed hamlets share similarities with villages, yet do have notable differences between their land use character. These hamlets are predominantly residential in nature, and do not have a strong central node of activity and commerce like Village Center Character Areas. However, these hamlets often include the occasional commercial, retail, or civic use. Many also contain churches, which were often the source of the enclave’s identity. Historically, these centers were important crossroads for surrounding farmsteads, yet likely never achieved the critical mass to emerge as notable villages.

While the village-like hamlets may be located along a main thoroughfare, other hamlets or crossroads may take on a more rural character. These areas are smaller in scale, typically focused around a single intersection, and in most instances are a collection of no more than a few dozen structures. Typical to all hamlet and crossroads Character Areas is a sense of place created by an easily defined neighborhood. The larger hamlets have a strong identity both to its residents and the surrounding areas, with this identity notably linked to churches, industry or natural features.

The Character Area Plan identifies Hamlets & Crossroads in the following locations:

- Lake Bonaparte
- Indian River
- Belfort
- Beaver Falls
- Deer River
- Denmark
- Naumburg
- Barnes Corners
- West Lowville
- Martinsburg
- West Martinsburg
- Watson
- New Bremen
- Number
- Four (Beaver Lake)
- Glendale
- Otter Creek
- Creig
- Brantingham
- Collinsville
- Talcottville
- West Leyden
- Oneida

* Recommendations in the Village Center and Village Living Character Areas are in some cases relevant to Hamlets and Crossroads, as some of these locations share a similar character to incorporated villages.

Hamlet Form

Hamlets take many different development forms, depending upon their location and the economic history behind their development. The following presents a cross section of hamlets within Lewis County, ranging from an informal collection of frontage lots along a state highway, to a more formalized development pattern complete with a small residential neighborhood.

Future Land Uses

Hamlet and crossroad areas are appropriate locations for single family residences, two-family residences, small scale mixed use buildings (residential/commercial), institutional uses such as a post office, firehouse, community center, or library, religious buildings, and small scale retail commercial buildings.

Indian River is a small, low density hamlet along Route 812 that formed as a collection of homes and farms, rather than a center of economic activity.

New Bremen has an increased development density and includes limited commercial and retail land uses, as well as more extensive transportation infrastructure.

Brantingham has commercial and public service infrastructure as well as a more established residential component, with the development form being dictated largely by the forest areas.
Design Considerations

Many of the design considerations discussed in the Village Living Area also pertain to Hamlets and Crossroads, yet at a smaller scale. The preservation of small lots, limited commercial building footprints, and traditional architecture are design goals for hamlet and crossroad settlements. The County and towns should work to extend the existing close-knit pattern of small lots and improve walkability within these areas through targeted infill development.

Existing architecture should be preserved wherever possible and new development, both public and private, should be designed in a style that is consistent and architecturally compatible with the heritage character of the area. Lewis County hamlets and crossroads have distinctive character, and their unique identity and sense of place should be preserved and enhanced through future development activities.

Design considerations important to hamlets and crossroads include:

- **Setbacks and frontages**
  - Retain uniform setbacks along a street frontage
  - Reduce or eliminate ‘saw-tooth’ lots created by vacancies or deep setbacks

- **Building heights**
  - Buildings should be no more than 2 ½ to 3 stories tall

- **Building and entry placement**
  - Parking lots should be placed in rear or side yards
  - Orient principal entrances to primary streets
  - Connect entrances to sidewalks (if present)

- **Building design**
  - Construction materials should be consistent with traditional building materials found in the hamlet
  - Architectural character should emulate traditional or vernacular styles within the North Country

- **Landscape**
  - New development should include significant landscaping
  - Retain specimen and/or mature trees, especially those along the roadside
  - Utilized only native and/or hearty species that will survive in the North Country

The addition of gateway or arrival signage can enhance the identity of a small hamlet, as seen above for the Hamlet of Ionia, NY. The images at left and right depict the influence roadway striping and shoulders can have on the appearance of a settlement. The image at left does not have any formalized striping, and no dedicated shoulders, which is in contrast to the hamlet at right. The added definition to the roadway through striping improves motorists visibility and provides a safety zone for pedestrian travel along the corridor.

Lewis County hamlets each have their own distinctive character and sense of place within the rural setting. Most hamlets formed at the junction of two roadways, transforming these intersections into destinations within the surrounding landscape. The limited density of development occurring at these junctions creates a distinct contrast to the surrounding sparsely populated rural countryside. While not formally recognized entities, each hamlet has its own identity and character, both important elements that should be maintained into the future.

Development pressure within Lewis County's hamlet areas is extremely low. As a result, this section provides recommendations on maintaining and enhancing existing hamlet areas through small, incremental improvements. An issue of primary importance in most hamlets is alerting motorists on their approach and travel through the settlement. Vehicle speeds in rural areas can become excessive, and in many instances there is little forewarning for travelers as they approach the hamlet and quickly pass through. Improved signage, striping, and shoulders can enhance the sense of arrival for motorists and help maintain County hamlets as high-quality places to live.

Lewis County hamlets widely differ in form and development pattern. Some hamlets are tightly clustered around a primary intersection, while others extend along a corridor for one-half mile or more. Regardless of a hamlet’s historic form, the primary element that gives each hamlet a unique character is the relationship between structures and the roadway. While communities and settlements change over time, the characteristics that give each a unique sense of place should be preserved and enhanced. Of particular importance is the orientation of buildings, building setbacks and yards, and the maintenance of consistent street frontage in both mass and height.