

Spring 2017
Volume 6, Issue 1
A quarterly publication

MSF Gazette

MAIN STREET FIRST • LITTLE FALLS • NEW YORK



HOW LAND BANK CAN HELP LITTLE FALLS FIGHT BLIGHT: AN UPDATE

“Little Falls wants to be a worthy partner of the Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank (GMVLB), and we have acted to prove it,” declared Little Falls Mayor Mark Blask. He spoke at an evening of presentations hosted by Main Street First on February 15 at Benton Hall Academy.

Blask said that the Common Council had passed resolutions in support of the Land Bank from the beginning. He pointed to the Council’s recent, unanimous support for the NYS Land Bank 5/50 statute. “The City will remit 50% of City taxes collected for five years to GMVLB for properties returned to the tax rolls by GMVLB.” Furthermore, “The Little Falls School District also passed the 5/50 resolution. Little Falls is the first city in the Land Bank’s multi-county region to do this.” “When the Land Bank funds flow, Little Falls wants to be at the head of the line,” he concluded.

Other speakers went on to explain the significance of the regional Land Bank. Among them was Michael Brown, Executive Director of Rome



Main Streets, a not-for-profit whose mission is to stimulate downtown and neighborhood revitalization in that city. He spoke of the role that not-for-profits can play by working to support municipal governments.

“We educate by hosting speakers on topics related to neighborhood revitalization,” Brown told the Little Falls audience. “We wrote a grant with the City, and we are working with Rome’s Codes Department to populate the Zombie Property list.” *(continued on pages 2-3)*

Curious? Have feedback or ideas for us? Want to help? PLEASE JOIN US!

Next scheduled meetings:

Monday, March 13 *

Monday, March 27

Monday, April 10

Monday, April 24

Monday, May 8

Monday, May 22

@ 6:30 pm

690 East Main Street,
Little Falls

* Meeting located at the LF Travelodge
(For more details about our group, please see the back cover/p. 8)

FIGHTING BLIGHT IN LITTLE FALLS *(continued from page 1)*

Land Bank Property Life Cycle:



He emphasized, “The important thing to remember is that fighting blight involves many partnerships, and not-for-profits and municipal governments can make much progress by working together.”

Mark Domenico, Rome’s Codes Enforcer, spoke of how Rome handles blighted properties. “For us, it’s every day, all day,” he said. “We use many different tools and treat each problem property in a way that is most effective for the owner.” His department meets regularly with property owners to listen to their problems and to offer guidance. “If they are income-eligible, we work with them to find resources.” The results are impressive. “We now have more than 85% compliance.”

(continued on page 3)

Unity is strength... when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved. —Mattie Stepanek



PO Box 65
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MSF Gazette
SPRING 2017
Volume 6, Issue 1

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MSF Gazette is published quarterly and distributed throughout the City of Little Falls, Herkimer County, New York. This issue, and an archive of back issues, are also available online at www.mainstreetfirst.com.

Suggestions and contributions (articles and art) are always welcome; please contact someone on the staff or write to mainstreetfirst@yahoo.com.

FIGHTING BLIGHT IN LITTLE FALLS *(continued from page 2)*

Domenico also praised the new (2016) state Zombie Property Law. “It requires banks to take responsibility for abandoned homes. If banks do not maintain the property, they face a significant fine each day the property is not maintained.” He also added that he believes that “a top-down approach is never effective in the long run. Citizens can take action on blighted abandoned properties.” *[please see sidebar below]*

There are many options for action. Tolga Morawski, interim Executive Director of GMVLB, gave examples. “We can rehab and sell, or stabilize a property until a qualified buyer is found. Also, we can recycle up to 90% of house materials if the property is too far gone for rehab, and, finally, after all other options are considered, we can raze a property and sell the land, perhaps to neighbors.” Over time, blight dissipates.

MSF's president Judy Wolf announced a follow-up meeting to be held on Monday, March 13 at 6:30 pm. Due to space considerations, it will be held at the Travelodge, 20 Albany St., Little Falls. Everyone is welcome.

—Robert Albrecht

Robert Albrecht is former Chair of the Keep Mohawk Valley Beautiful Board of Directors.



IS THERE A “ZOMBIE” IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

Zombie properties are defined as buildings that are long-vacant and abandoned. The new state law regarding these properties requires banks and mortgage services (lenders) to secure and maintain them or face large fines.

If you suspect a property in your neighborhood is indeed a “zombie,” you can report it to the state’s Dept. of Financial Services to make sure it gets on the state list (it may already be, but you never know).

New York State “Zombie” property hotline:
1-800-342-3736

In every community, there is work to be done. In every nation, there are wounds to heal. In every heart, there is the power to do it.

—Marianne Williamson

OUTGOING MSF PRESIDENT REMARKS

Back in 2009, I was shopping on Main Street and saw a flier about a meeting of a group called “Main Street First.” Intrigued, I went to the next meeting, joined the group, and started working alongside some of the most dedicated, community-minded people I’ve ever met. Soon after, I was elected president, a position I held for four years. This January, I stepped down from that role although I’m still a part of MSF.

I’m proud of what MSF accomplished while I was president. Most of those accomplishments had little to do with me directly, but instead were the results of the hard work of smart and energetic people in MSF. The scope of our work has changed over the years, but we’ve remained committed to helping Little Falls.

The group initially formed to express community concerns about the idea of relocating our downtown grocery store to a proposed development at the site of the old quarry. Believing strongly that such a move would hurt businesses on Main Street, we worked hard to promote alternatives. After the new

Price Chopper was built downtown, the group decided to shift focus and channel our energy into other projects. These included several large-scale cleanup projects around Canal Place and downtown; the installation of art benches along the canal; a composting toilet facility for the many climbers and explorers on Moss Island; the conception and amazing growth of our “Think Local” project and its “Third Thursday” events, and countless smaller projects.

Our new president, Judy Wolf, brings a wealth of skills and insight to the position, and I’m excited to be part of this new era for the group. Even before taking this position, Judy consistently added value to our discussions and ideas, and was quick to volunteer.

I’m very grateful to MSF for allowing me to serve as president. It’s been one of the most formative and satisfying jobs I’ve ever had. Thank you.

—Rob Richard



“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

—Margaret Mead

Main Street First's 2014 "Do Good. Have Fun" project with Keep Mohawk Valley Beautiful, Keep America Beautiful, and Bud Light was a huge success! Here are just some of the volunteers enjoying some free Bud Light after a day of clean-up work at Canal Place, Benton's Landing, and the road along the Canal to Moss Island. Rob Richard is 7th from left.



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PLEASE RECYCLE, DON'T LITTER!

INCOMING MSF PRESIDENT REMARKS

When I first moved to Little Falls, I asked some local friends for a good place to invest my time and energy to help build the community I was joining. They pointed me to MSF, describing it as an energetic and engaged grassroots organization with good ideas and momentum. They could not have been more accurate in their description!

MSF members have created something very special – not least of which is our deep dedication to keeping a primary focus on our membership and the good ideas percolating in our community. The organization itself serves as a support system, a sounding board, a place for those ideas to bubble up and find traction. Every single one of MSF’s impressive list of initiatives and accomplishments has been the result of someone’s passion and vision, shared in a forum where they could find support and backing.

Now that we are incorporated as a 501(c)3 not-for-profit, MSF is positioned to even more fully embrace our role as a facilitator of good ideas, initiatives, and citizen engagement and volunteerism – all with a focus on our primary mission areas of community building, revitalization, and sustainability.

Already this year, MSF has held events such as the recent Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank presentations that helped to educate our community about powerful opportunities to fight blight in our neighborhoods. MSF will likely play an important role in helping to position Little Falls to make the most of these programs and others such as NYSERDA and DEC initiatives focused on sustainability – all because we are made up of volunteers with a passion for these projects.



In my role as president, I would like to see us focus this year on strengthening our relationship with the City itself and with other local not-for-profits. The more we all work together to accomplish our shared goals, the stronger this community will become. As just one example, our active and growing Think Local Little Falls committee is collaborating this year with the City and other not-for-profits to maximize a \$72,000 Market New York grant supporting increased marketing for Little Falls.

My personal goal for this year is to work behind the scenes to help facilitate these conversations and create platforms for sharing information about programs and other initiatives to encourage all interested members of our community to get involved in whatever ways fit into their lives and schedules.

Together, we can make this community one that people increasingly want to visit and move to, a place where they want to raise their families, do their shopping, and live surrounded by diverse cultural opportunities – all in one of the most picturesque natural settings in the Mohawk Valley.

—*Judy Wolf*

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COMING TO TERMS: “COMPLETE STREETS”

In October 2014, the City of Little Falls adopted a Complete Streets policy, a commitment to "Consider Complete Streets design features and practices in the planning and design process," and to "accommodate and facilitate convenient access and mobility by all users, particularly pedestrians, bicyclists, and individuals of all ages and abilities." (Resolution No. 59) In other words, it is a commitment to creating living streets that are safe, and that welcome varied options for travel.

The cities we love most, that we pay to visit and long to engage with, are visibly alive. They have large windows that expose golden loaves of fresh bread or someone reading a book in a café. Parks are well-tended and teeming with happy children. Sharp spires cradle the horizon and point to a vast starlit evening. Fragrances of food and industry proclaim the air in full announcement.

Our senses can identify a place distinctly, but what each of these beloved cities share is visible life and activity. In these places, we choose to walk because great cities are compact and worth our full attention. We make eye contact. Little Falls is one of these great cities, but we could do more to make our streets safer for cyclists, pedestrians, and people of all abilities, without compromising any one form of travel. Living streets are made possible when we consider everyone's safety without compromising efficiency.

The first step in enhancing our beautiful city might be to ask ourselves: What is the purpose of a street? Do streets have the potential to be places where we not only move, but meet? How far are people

traveling within the city and by what means? What are the needs and dreams of small business owners, and how might improved infrastructure direct traffic to them? What are best practices of cities that are visibly alive, where tourists pay to travel and residents love to live and shop?

Our research might begin with observation. When considering design solutions and

innovation for our unique city, we cannot simply apply what has worked for someone else. But we can be inspired by their best practices. Adopting a Complete Streets policy means Little Falls understands well-designed roads that include active people will breed better behavior between all those who share the road. It means that we value a living culture that is welcoming and inclusive.

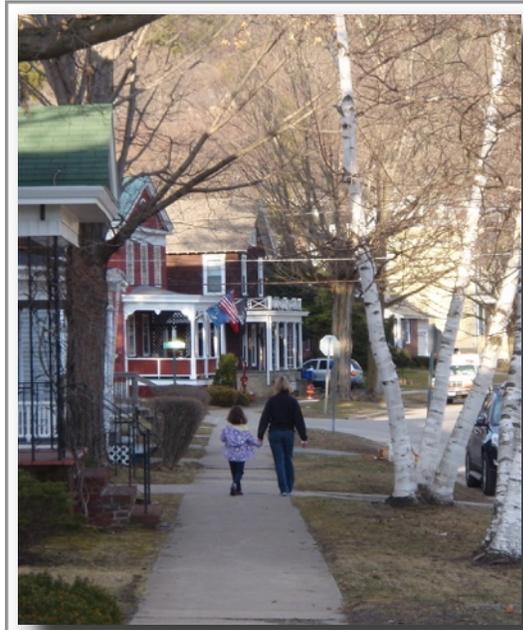
Upon accepting a Complete Streets policy, the City

received five bicycle racks that have been well-used; more have been requested. This summer, watch for signs that indicate recommended places to hike, climb, canoe, and bike – also a granted gift to the City.

Little Falls contains common areas only found in older, well-maintained cities, as well as lots of authentic places to shop and see. This is why we will continue to accommodate slower modes of travel, with a Complete Streets ethic in mind.

—Lisa Lauritsen

Lisa Lauritsen is the MSF chairperson for Complete Streets.



UPCOMING COMMUNITY EVENTS

MARCH 2017

- ❖ Saturdays, 3/11 and 3/25, 9 am to 1 pm. Little Falls Winter Farmers' Market, indoors at the Travelodge, 20 Albany St., "rain, shine, or snow." For more information, please visit and "friend" the Facebook page, [LFWinterFarmersMarket](#).
- ❖ Monday, 3/13, 6:30 pm. MSF meeting dedicated to the continuing Fight Blight discussion at the Little Falls Travelodge, 20 Albany St. All welcome.
- ❖ Thursday, 3/16. "Third Thursday - Feeling the Irish Spirit" at participating area businesses. Please visit www.shoplittlefallsny.com or the Think Local Little Falls Facebook page for full details.
- ❖ Saturday, 3/18 from 11 am to 1 pm. Herkimer County CSA ("Community Supported Agriculture") Fair. Travelodge, 20 Albany St. Learn more, meet the farmers, sign up!
- ❖ Saturday, 3/25 at 5 pm and Sunday, 3/26 at 3 pm. MVCA film series presents "Cafe Society" at the Valley Cinemas. Free to public; Donations to MVCA gladly accepted.
- ❖ Tuesday, 3/28 at 7 pm. Little Falls Historical Society meeting, WCA, 534 Garden St. All welcome.

APRIL 2017

- ❖ Saturday, 4/1 from noon to 3 pm. Have some April Fools' Day fun at the "Mad Hatter Tea" at the Overlook Mansion, 55 Douglas St. With Little Falls Theater Company (LiFT). Wear an Alice in Wonderland hat, enjoy hors d'oeuvres and tea/coffee. Please visit our website or Facebook page or call (315) 823-1907. Admission \$20.
- ❖ Tuesday, 4/4 at 7 pm. Monthly Common Council meeting. Little Falls City Hall.
- ❖ Saturdays, 4/8 and 4/22, 9 am to 1 pm. Little Falls Winter Farmers' Market, indoors at the Travelodge, 20 Albany St., "rain, shine, or snow." For more information, please visit and "friend" the Facebook page, [LFWinterFarmersMarket](#).
- ❖ Saturday, 4/8, 7 pm. Ole Sal's open mic night. Please visit [Ole Sal's Open Mic Night](#) Facebook page for details.
- ❖ Saturday, 4/15 from 2 to 4 pm. MVCA Opening Reception for Patrick Veeder, solo show, sculptures. Exhibit will run 5/20. 401 Gallery, Canal Place.
- ❖ Thursday, 4/20. "Third Thursday - Celebrating Earth Day" featuring a vegetarian/vegan Progressive Dinner, an interactive bottle cap mural, an indoor garage sale, etc. Visit www.shoplittlefallsny.com or the Think Local Little Falls Facebook page for details.
- ❖ Tuesday, 4/25 at 7 pm. Little Falls Historical Society meeting, WCA, 534 Garden St. All welcome.

MAY 2017

- ❖ Tuesday, 5/2 at 7 pm. Monthly Common Council meeting. Little Falls City Hall.
- ❖ Saturdays, 5/6, 5/13, 5/20, and 5/27, 8 am to noon. Little Falls Farmers' Market, moves back outdoors, M&T Bank parking lot, becomes weekly, and changes its hours. For more information, please visit and "friend" the Facebook page, [LFFarmersMarket](#).
- ❖ Saturday, 5/6, 7 p.m. Ole Sal's open mic night. Please visit [Ole Sal's Open Mic Night](#) Facebook page for details.
- ❖ Saturday, 5/13 at 5 pm and Sunday, 5/14 at 3 pm. MVCA film series presents "A Man Called Ove" at the Valley Cinemas. Free to public; Donations to MVCA gladly accepted.
- ❖ Thursday, 5/18. "Third Thursday - Health & Wellness" featuring a 2 mile run/walk with stops at local health & wellness businesses. Visit www.shoplittlefallsny.com or the Think Local Little Falls Facebook page for details.
- ❖ Tuesday, 5/23 at 7 pm. Little Falls Historical Society Opening Reception, 319 S. Ann St. All welcome.



upcoming FESTIVALS in Little Falls!

- * Saturday, July 8 *LITTLE FALLS CHEESE FESTIVAL*
- * Monday, August 7 to Sunday, August 13 *LITTLE FALLS CANAL CELEBRATION*
- * Saturday, September 9 *MOHAWK VALLEY GARLIC & HERB FESTIVAL*



PO Box 65
Little Falls, NY 13365

Main Street First, Inc. is an organization of Little Falls residents as well as other stakeholders in the cultural and commercial life of our city.

Main Street First, Inc. does not act on the behalf of individual businesses in Little Falls, but is dedicated to the interests of our residents in preserving and revitalizing the Little Falls City Center.

PURPOSES: The purposes for which the Corporation is formed are to combat community deterioration in the city by organizing the community to create sustainable initiatives to revitalize the city, by supporting city revitalization through smart growth principles, the creation of a comprehensive master plan, the participation of all interested parties in directing the city's future, citywide residential revitalization, the development of green and sustainable technologies throughout the city, to provide financial assistance and volunteers for the improvement and maintenance of the city's buildings and homes, and to increase recreational facilities. To do any other act or thing incidental to or connected with the foregoing purposes or in the advancement thereof, but not for the pecuniary profit or financial gain of its members, directors, or officers.

MSF'S SHORT-TERM GOALS

- ❖ Strengthen our relationship with the City, and with other not-for-profits
- ❖ Help coordinate community action to flight blight in our neighborhoods
- ❖ Collaborate on maximizing the Explore Little Falls NY initiative
- ❖ Plan and execute a major clean-up project in the City

These are the sorts of things we discuss and plan at our meetings. Join us! Bring your ideas, skills, and energy and help us reach these and other good goals for our community.



MSF'S LONG-TERM GOALS

- ❖ Support the development and implementation of a sustainability-based comprehensive plan
- ❖ Expand and engage our membership, especially young adults
- ❖ Find and pursue grant opportunities for projects aligned with MSF's purposes
- ❖ Hold educational community sessions on topics of interest that are aligned with MSF's purposes

HOW TO JOIN MSF

If you would like to get involved, have questions or ideas, or are thinking of joining, we invite you to come to our meetings — everyone is welcome!

Email us at:
contact@mainstreetfirst.org
Visit our website at:
www.mainstreetfirst.org

Facebook:
“like” the Main Street First page
“like” the Think Local Little Falls page

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