

May 21, 2007

Summary - Olney Town Center-Qualitative Analysis by OTCAC Members

1. What do you like best about the OTC, not one spot within it but overall? (walkable, safe, convenient, best merchandise, low building scale, vitality, civic functions, etc.).

It is close to my house and I can get about $\frac{3}{4}$ of my shopping and dining done without leaving Olney.

Building height restrictions have prevented excessive heights (maintained consistent profile and feeling); pedestrian safety features; landscaping; stormwater drainage grating prevents trash from flowing into SWM system; convenient retail.

I believe the best aspect of the town center is that it is contained in a small enough area that, if conditions were right, i.e. easy pedestrian, biking access, one can shop, eat, etc. very easily without having to drive from one point to another.

Low building scale; choice of coffee shops (and the "everybody knows your name" aspect of them); "home-town" type shops like Olney Toys, Paula's Boutique, Backyard Naturalist, and Changing Seasons where the owners and staff get to know the customers, plan their merchandising accordingly, and support local civic organizations.

Civic pride. There is a real sense of community in the Olney area. Also, with the Olney Theater and OBGC, as well as recreation facility on Georgia Avenue, there are a good bit of activity places.

Small town feel, convenience, all the community events by all the volunteer organizations.

We like the variety of business and are hoping for more.

Convenient.

Semi-walkable (have to be careful), Convenient

The height of the individual buildings doesn't overwhelm the surrounding area.

I like the sense of community – running into neighbors and seeing the same family merchants around town.

2. What do you like least about the OTC?

Too many cars, both moving and in surface parking lots.

Virtually impossible to walk easily throughout the OTC.

Left turn into the Olney Library from m108 can be difficult; The glare from parking light poles in the Olney Village Mart is an eye sore at night; There is only one Metro bus and Ride-on bus stop with a shelter and/or a park bench in the OTC area.

The split of the 4 quadrants by 97 and 108.

I don't like that a trip to the OTC often involves multiple re-parking of the car to get several errands done. Walking between centers is not safe or convenient.

There is no bonafide town center. While the places referenced above do act as social gathering spots, they are focused on their specific activities and there is not a town park or center that is a natural civic gathering place [other than the 3 cs].

Traffic, unfriendly for pedestrians, and excessively small parking spaces.

The things I like the least about the town center is (a) its inaccessibility to shops and businesses as mentioned in question one, (b) the "mish mash" inconsistency of building styles. ugly, old buildings (c) unattractive entryway as you approach the town center including the "welcome to Olney" sign (brown, wooden) , I believe it's just before or after Emory Lane, and (d) the "Sherwood" marquee sign on the northeast corner of 108 & Georgia. We have 3 public high schools that are attended by Olney residents and there should be representation from all of them or none of them. Also, it just says "Sherwood" so someone may think they're entering the town of "Sherwood".

Crossing 108, Georgia & Spartan Rd, Walking between upper and lower centers.

Very spread out, not walkable at all, doesn't feel like a community center.

Traffic and speed of traffic on GA and 108.

3. What is your most favorite spot in the Olney Town Center-indoor or outdoor- and why? (great views, good food/drinks, quiet, full of activity, family friendly...)

I have a number of favorites, Olney Ale House [warm, comfortable place], Starbucks and caribou [nice energy, usually people hanging out and i love coffee] and Olney theatre [love creative people and live theater].

Olney House/Ricciuti's—pretty setting. Good food, family-oriented.

Olney public library; California Tortilla-good food as a reasonable price plus a nice view; The corner of 108 and 97 where advocates of opposite end are positioned at opposing ends declare their support or opposition (Olney's de facto public forum).

My favorite spot is Ricciuti's restaurant for its wonderful, homemade food, its quaint atmosphere in an historic building and it's outside dining. I hope I'll be able to list more than one favorite spot when the town center is complete!

Caribou coffee. It has a comfortable interior setting, as well as outdoor seating (great for spring, summer and early fall), and creates an atmosphere conducive to quiet socializing, chatting with friends, reading a book, etc.

California Tortilla & Taco Bell & Chi Burger Chi Burger for the Food

California Tortilla/Caribou Coffee area due to its café style and family friendliness.

Indoor: Ricciuti's in the winter

Outdoor: Ricciuti's in the spring and summer

Reasons: good food, great atmosphere, quiet yet right in the OTC.

Also, the Olney Toys/Starbucks/Paula's row at the Shoppes. Something for everyone!

Finally, the Olney Theatre Center for its history as well as its well-earned respect within the artistic community and the community of appreciators of the arts

I like the look and feel of the Sandy Spring Bank Corp. HQ campus. Also like the Olney Elementary School as a social and community hub.

Ricciuti's—trees, outdoor dining, and historic architecture

Starbucks and library because they are calm places to sit and read and occasionally run into acquaintances.

4. What is your least favorite spot in the OTC, and why?

Olney Electric Building (unattractive building, difficult access.

The small businesses along the west side of Georgia Ave. between Morningwood and 3rd, just south of the Olney Shopping Center (which I also do not care for). The buildings are aesthetically unpleasing and inaccessible.

Bus stops exposed to the elements; unmarked crosswalks at Appomattox Avenue and Sparta at night (the lack of a pedestrian island makes it more dangerous for the pedestrian.

The few old strip commercial buildings right on Georgia Avenue in southwest quadrant of 97 & 108, especially when the guys are out there with sandwich advertising boards [feels like to worst of strip retail, reminds me of some of the same stuff on Rockville pike].

Georgia between Spartan and 108 for congestion and dangers crossings

I think the building on Georgia Ave. behind the former Madison's restaurant is my least favorite "spot" because it's old and ugly.

I don't like the area by the mattress store because it is a real eye sore and that area has poor access.

The parking lot at the Shoppes -- not enough room between the rows, difficult sight lines, seems like I see an "almost accident" happens each time I visit.

The shopping center beside the library. Exiting on Route 108 is a nightmare.

I dislike the area behind Fletchers BP Amoco and in front of Safeway-Its ugly.

The sloped drive connecting the upper and lower parts of the Olney Village Center.

5. Which three intersections are the most pedestrian friendly in the town center? Now score them on a scale of one to ten (one being the worst and ten being the best) for their pedestrian friendliness. The best in this case may not necessarily be a 10.

Spartan and Georgia Avenue (especially across Spartan): 3

Spartan and Appomattox: 5

Georgia and Buehler: 3

Crossing Spartan or Morningwood at Georgia, or crossing small streets like N. High St. is fairly smooth (maybe a 5), but most of the intersections are terrible.

A: 108/97 b: 108/Spartan c: 97/Spartan

*Spartan/Morningwood at Georgia Ave "6"
Spartan at 108 "6"
Prince Philip and 108*

- 1) 108 by Cal. Tortilla (rate 8),*
- 2) 2) Spartan & 108 (rate 3)*
- 3) Georgia & 108 (rate 2)*

All the intersections are difficult.

I really don't walk much in Olney, so I can't answer this.

108 and Spartan - 5

108 and 97 - 4

97 and Spartan - 5

Moving within any of the 3 major strip malls is okay because they provide wide colonnades or walkways to connect the stores. 7

None that we are aware of.

I only find one that would qualify as a moderate "most": the intersection of the Rt. 108 entrance to the "Triple C"/Dunkin Donuts and the little road between Bank of America and the Shoppes. Even that would only rate a '6'.

I am likely not the best resource on this, though i do frequently make to walk from Olney Village Center over to Starbucks. Top 2: (1) crossing from Olney Village Center to Starbucks center (usually cross near DunkinDonuts to bank and then cross street to center), rate a 5; (2) crossing from the Madison building corner over to jerry's corner, rate a 6.

6. Which three intersections are the worst?

Route 108 and 97, Route 108 and Town Center Drive, Route 108 and Spartan

*97 and 108;
Spartan and Georgia (across Georgia);
108 and Olney Village Center Drive*

*108 and Georgia -- terrible in all directions (1)
108 and Spartan – also very dangerous, light is too short (2)
108 and the entrance to the Village Mart Shopping Center (3)*

*a: Appomattox/Spartan b: 97/Queen Elizabeth
c: Camelback Village entrance along Spartan*

108 and Hillcrest – during rush hour, it's impossible to turn right onto 108 from Hillcrest and get over into the left hand lane in order to head south on Georgia. (This is a comment about vehicle traffic, not pedestrian)

108 and Olney Village Center Drive

*GA and 108 - 1
Queen Mary and GA - 1
The light at 108 one block east of GA and 108 where you can cross 108 from one shopping center to the other -3*

Depends on what you mean by worst. I think Spartan and Georgia and Village Mart Drive and 108 are the worst because there are no dedicated left turn lights, hence, there are many car accidents.

(1) Crossing at west corner of Spartan and 108 (going from Olney Town Center to gas station); (2) crossing at south end of 108 and 97 (going from 6 – twelve convenience mart to Saul center); and (3) crossing Georgia Avenue at Safeway heading west.

Georgia & High St, Spartan & Buehler, Crossing Spartan between Giant and Safeway,

All the intersections are difficult.

*Rt. 108 and Georgia gets a '2'
Georgia and Spartan gets a '2'
108 and Spartan gets a '4'*

- 7. Which block (the frontage on one side of the street between any two street intersections) in the OTC has the most obstacles/problems from a pedestrian point of view (too many curb cuts, not enough width for sidewalk, too close to the traffic, utility poles in the sidewalk...)?**

West side of Georgia Avenue between n108 and North High Street—too many curb cuts, difficult right turn from Georgia in Olney shopping Center

GA between 108 and Queen Mary (west side is worse than the east side)

*Judging from the number of jaywalkers and "almost accidents" that I see, it would be Georgia Avenue between 108 and Spartan.
Also, it appears virtually impossible to cross Rt. 108 anywhere between the Saul shopping center, the library, and the post office.*

The 2 intersections where cars can turn right on red. Route 108 turning onto southbound Georgia, and Route 108 turning right onto northbound Georgia.

I'm not sure, but I would guess most of them.

97 by mattress store is too exposed and is irregular.

On Georgia Avenue, the block between 108 heading south to Fletchers.

I unfortunately failed to make a note of this when I was out walking, but off the top of my head, I would say that the stretch on the west side of Georgia Ave. between North High St. and 108 has lots of curb cuts, feels close to traffic, and is generally unpleasant for a pedestrian.

West Side of Georgia between Spartan and 108

Both the northwest and southwest blocks are difficult for pedestrian traffic, with the southwest being slightly worse.

- 8. Which is the most beautiful building in the OTC? What is it that gives it that quality (old, charming, historic, beautiful architecture, unique setting, special features...)?**

Sandy Spring Bank...charming building, spacious area

Sandy Spring Corp HQ building – architecture and setting up on the hill.

Olney house, it looks historic and grounded

Olney House—historic, charming. Or Sandy Spring Bank (main building).

Olney House

Sandy Spring Bank (colonial brick), Olney House (colonial frame), Olney Public Library (modern brick), BP gas station (hi tech/solar energy)

Ricciuti's

Olney House, great architecture, historic sense.

Probably the Sandy Spring Bank building because of its architecture. They also keep the grounds very well kept and manicured.

My personal preferences are for the Olney House/Ricciuti's building and the Sandy Spring Bank building. Just outside of the OTC, I really like the Brookeville Inn and the Sandy Spring Museum.

Olney House for its quaint charm; Sandy Spring Bank for its stateliness.

Probably the Sandy Spring Bank.

9. Which is the least beautiful building in the OTC?

The entire Olney Shopping Center complex at the SW corner of Georgia and 108.

Olney Electric Building

The one I described in question 4 and the small building on the left going north on Georgia Ave. before you get to 108, housing Mattress Discounters,

Olney Safeway (modern brick), Backyard naturalist (colonial frame).

Olney House for its quaint charm; Sandy Spring Bank for its stateliness.

Building to the west of Jerry's (across Georgia).

Safeway and the water tower.

The office building on Georgia Avenue just south of Backyard Naturalist.

probably the Safeway.

One of the many strip commercial buildings.

Madison's.

The boxy fast food restaurants and shops in the strip malls are the least attractive (Taco Bell, Merchants Bank, McDonalds, mattress store, gas stations). They have little to add to the community architecturally.

10. Which is the tallest building in the OTC? (take a guess at number of stories and height in feet without looking at it first).

Willow Manor? 4 stories? 45-50 feet?

Willow Grove elderly housing—4 stories facing Georgia Avenue, 5 stories on the rear side. Height? don't know.

I would guess the office build on the left going north on Georgia, before you get to Morningwood Drive.

The former restaurant at GA and 108, which used to be cuckoos nest-I am guessing it is three stories high and maybe 50 feet tall.

Buildings without regard to elevation: Tamarron Apartments

Building with regard to elevation: The highest point of OTC-the old "Madison Stakehouse" restaurant/Sandy Spring Bank

Non-building structure: the water tower behind the Sandy Spring Bank.

New retirement building, 30 feet.

The green water tower by Sandy Spring bank, 4 stories.

Buffington Building, 3 stories.

Building to the west of Jerry's (across Georgia)

The office building on Georgia Avenue just south of Backyard Naturalist. I'm guessing 4 stories and 45 feet.

Madison's

The tallest building is probably the senior apartments on north 97, that are next to the Hails Art Gallery and back up to the Olney Village Center. I believe it is five stories tall.

11. Is there any building or structure in the OTC that should be preserved?

Yes-the historic looking building on 108 where Ricciuti's restaurant is located

Olney Ale House, Olney Theatre Center, Olney House/Ricciuti's, Sandy Spring Bank

Olney House; Sandy Spring Bank.

Sandy Spring Bank, Olney House, Good Earth Garden Market.

Olney House and Sandy Spring Bank

Olney House

The house where Ricciuti's is located and the old house that now houses the Montgomery General Hospital thrift shop

Any of the historic buildings.

Olney House.

12. Any other comments or observations that you believe would help us get a better understanding of the pluses and minuses of urban design, the physical setting, or the development pattern of the OTC?

Pedestrians should have priority over motor vehicles in the Olney Town Center

Create pedestrian friendly environment.

In the development pattern of the OTC, it needs to be kept in mind that it is a community, and not just an intersection of roads. As such, traffic patterns and volume need to be given careful consideration. It cannot be a walkable town center if it is overwhelmed with traffic volume.

Perhaps we can use elements of streetscaping, signage. Landscape furniture that visually connect the four major quadrants. I would like to see the colonial" feel of the older development as reflected in Sandy Spring Bank Building to continued as a design aspect—ties in w/the street names like Prince Phillip, Queen Elizabeth, etc.

We are already lucky enough to have a town center area that is physically small enough to be made walkable. If development from this point takes place within a context of increasing walkability, reducing the need to get in and out of a car for each stop in an hour's worth of errands (bank, dry cleaner, grocery store, coffee shop, etc.), and maintaining a cohesive "feel", the OTC has the potential to be a true "town center."

Can't think of any right now.

Along with adding all the nice environmental designs, improved parking and pedestrian bridges would be lovely.

Pluses: *The overall size of the Town Center is good...not too big, not too small. It has great potential as a center for the Olney community and could be made into a very pedestrian –friendly zone. The current numbers of townhouses and apartments located just outside the Town Center boundaries should make it a natural place for people to run errands, congregate and socialize without getting in their cars.*

The presence of the library (set back, hidden by large trees) on the periphery of the Town Center is good. People go to libraries for peace and quiet...it is far enough away to seem secluded, but close enough to be walking distance from the major businesses and the center of town.

Minuses: *It has no real character. It looks very haphazard and, frankly, rather “junky” in some areas. (McDonald’s, a mattress store, and Dominoes Pizza on the main street don’t help that image any). Why we have three large supermarkets clustered in the Town Center is something I have never understood...it seems like poorly- used space to me.*

Other random thoughts:

There would be great value to using trees and/or some other design feature to cut down on noise levels created by traffic along 108...and Georgia, for that matter.

Brick walkways and a plaza area made of brick or some other covering that is more aesthetically pleasing than concrete or blacktop would be great.

Creating a large public space with much greenery and perhaps some kind of water feature (fountain? Pond? Artwork that incorporates water?) would help create an peaceful setting which might draw people out of their houses and into a more social setting.

There is a major need for activities besides eating and shopping in the Town Center. The movie theatres need to be upgraded, a rec. center for teens and adults is needed, at least one large multi-purpose type space would be beneficial.

Any design improvements that get people out of their cars would be a major PLUS for a long list of reasons, not the least of which is general public health. For those who must drive to the center, parking lots should be structured and minimally visible.

- 13. Any examples of places, or special features of a place, you like outside the OTC that we should look at, if possible, or just talk about it (could be anything; from something as big as location and setting of civic**

buildings, to something as small as the design of tree planters and trash cans, curb cuts, paving material, etc).

Outside gathering place that accommodate outdoor concerts, festivals, etc.; restaurants with outdoor seating.

I like the look of King Farm.

I like the design aspects presented in the Walkability presentation done by the designer National Endowment before Park and Planning in February '07.

Some of the town centers in New England feature some of the elements that we've been discussing: mixed use, on-street parking as well as lots behind businesses, easy to complete several errands in a reasonably brief walk.

The Continent in Columbus Ohio. <http://continent2006.com/> They do lack green space.

Crosswalk lights need to change automatically

More crosswalk lines need to be paint at intersections were they currently are not.

Crosswalks need to be painted on all 4 sides of an intersection.

Open green space area

Playground

Street plaza area legal for bikes and shake boards

Don't build to narrow and give the OTC a Canyon feel.

Rockville Village Center, new development with the new Rockville library.

I like the waterfront area of Old Town Alexandria where there is a park right on the Potomac River and residential across the street and commercial a few blocks away. (Yes, I know. We don't have a river in Olney). I also like the interface between residential and commercial in the Rockville Court House Square area.

I'm afraid I'll have to take more time to think about this...and will keep my eyes wide open next time I visit other Town Center regions. Driving through Bethesda yesterday, I did notice some nice storefronts; however, the buildings are way too tall in that region for the most part. Three or four stories seems appropriate for Olney.

Clarendon Center in Virginia showed a lot of ideas that we could potentially use in the OTC (having a central garden/park, having wide sidewalks with lots of benches and trees, having the parking decks disguised with brick fronts, having the upper levels terraced so it doesn't feel so closed in and also so the smaller eateries on the second level can have a café, etc.)

OLNEY TOWN CENTER

