

Downtown Revitalization Initiative Application (Round 4)

Dewey Avenue Corridor at Stone Road and Maiden Lane

Town of Greece, Monroe County

May 31, 2019

BASIC INFORMATION

Region: Finger Lakes

Municipality: Greece, Monroe County

Downtown Name: Dewey Avenue Corridor at Stone Road and Maiden Lane

Applicant Name: Town of Greece

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VISION FOR DOWNTOWN

Taken directly from the town's 2007 Dewey Avenue Corridor Revitalization Study ("the Corridor Study"), **our vision** for the Dewey Avenue Corridor, including the specific intersection, which is the subject of this application, is: *"Dewey Avenue will be a vibrant, safe, and active traditional mixed use neighborhood. The Dewey Avenue Corridor will be home to a sustainable and attractive balance of residential, commercial, and institutional land uses. The neighborhood will respect and respond to traditional patterns of use, and will strive to support and retain established neighborhood businesses. Dewey Avenue will be a walkable community that balances automobile use with pedestrian accessibility and safety. The Dewey Avenue Corridor will utilize a mix of renovation, revitalization, and redevelopment to provide commercial developments of appropriate quality and scale and a diversity of housing types. The Dewey Avenue Corridor will be an authentic place, with an integrated and balanced mix of uses that is designed not just for how it looks, but for how residents live, work and play."*

The specific subject of this application is the southernmost node of the Dewey Avenue Corridor; centered on the major intersection of Dewey Avenue, Stone Road, and Maiden Lane and the immediate surrounding commercial corridor. The Town of Greece envisions a Charrette-driven complete redesign and overhaul of the current intersection, with an eye toward a transformative, pedestrian-integrated environment, which will completely change the face of the neighborhood. The project would involve in-depth public engagement, engineering design, and construction. The Town believes that physical roadway improvements, specifically at the major intersection including on-street parking, curb bump-outs, elaborate cross walks and pedestrian amenities, pedestrian-scale decorative lighting, lane narrowing, curb relocation, access management and drastic lane geometry options all are on the table and are primary considerations of the project. As the program allows, the Town envisions similar improvements extending as far down the major roadways as cost will allow. We envision the kind of transformative infrastructure project that can only be done through a program like DRI.

The purpose of this overhaul is to kick start a stalled revitalization effort in this stretch of the Dewey Avenue Corridor by infusing public resources into an infrastructure project that will restore pedestrian connectivity in the neighborhood, make commercial areas more attractive to retailers by enhancing the pedestrian environment, make available housing options in the area more attractive to a greater cross section of our demographic including seniors and millennials, and provide a catalyst for private investment.

JUSTIFICATION

The section of Greece's Dewey Avenue Corridor which intersects Stone Road and Maiden Lane is referenced specifically as "Zone Two" in the town's Corridor Study. This node is the focal point of the Dewey/Stone Neighborhood which is among the town's oldest neighborhoods, with most residential structures constructed in the 1920's and 30's. The pattern of development is a classic urban grid, with close-knit residential streets intersecting main commercial corridors and a natural blending of pre-existing mixed use structures. Non-residential properties on the main corridors are small in scale and include retail, office, institutional, service, and civic uses.

The Town of Greece operates the only satellite branch of its main public library just two blocks south of the Stone Road intersection. Three town-owned public parking lots already service the commercial corridor (free of charge). Two active churches, traditional focal points of classic urban neighborhoods, are located immediately at the subject intersection (St. Charles Borromeo and Bethany Presbyterian). Between Maiden Lane and Stone Road, just west of the subject intersection, a former public school building is now occupied by the Rochester Talmudical Institute. A few blocks north of the subject intersection, the Villa of Hope, a human services campus, which includes some of the most significant historic structures in town, has been providing valued family services to the community for over 75 years.

The Dewey/Stone node of the Dewey Avenue Corridor is unique in the town, and even within the broader corridor, which has been the subject of ongoing revitalization efforts by the town for nearly two decades (discussed in more detail later). The other main nodes within the corridor (English Road and Latta Road intersections) exhibit different characteristics, including newer housing stock and a more suburban pattern of development. While not the subject of this application, the English Road intersection which is home to Northgate Plaza must be discussed because the Town believes it's success there (although different in scale and character) is illustrative of the need for **initial public investment** (rather than private) in the Dewey/Stone area. By the 1990s Northgate Plaza, one of the first large-scale suburban plazas in Monroe County had fallen into vacancy and disrepair. The resurgence of Northgate Plaza in the last 10 years, and more importantly, the secondary private investment in surrounding commercial areas (secondary development that was constructed under the town's new pedestrian oriented Dewey Avenue Mixed Use zoning district) was all brought about by a single major slug of private investment. Perhaps ironically, that initial private investment was made by a colossal national retailer named Wal-Mart, Inc. Northgate Plaza retained much of its original form and function as a suburban plaza, but with dramatic architectural and street scape improvements, along with major pedestrian accessibility improvements, including a transit hub that was closely coordinated with the regional transit authority. The town is certainly proud of Northgate's success, but it's what happened in the wake of that success that is pertinent to this application. Northgate's success, driven by a massive private investment, created gravity at this commercial node. An 80,000 square foot grocery store located immediately south of the English Road intersection, which had also fallen vacant, is now fully occupied. Additionally, four new developments have already occurred in the pedestrian-oriented, building-forward development pattern dictated by the town's new Mixed Use Zoning District.

Again, what is important about Northgate's story is the idea that transformative change is reliant upon an initial major shot of investment. Unlike the English Road node of the Corridor, where a major private investment provided infrastructure improvements and a catalyst for additional private investment, the small-scale pattern of development in the Dewey/Stone area offers little opportunity for a single major infusion of private development capital. During a recent presentation hosted by the Rochester Regional Design Center, President and CEO of the Congress for New Urbanism, Lynn Richards, *supported the need for a shot of substantial public investment to kick-start private investment in situations where revitalization might be stalled.*

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2017 American Community Survey, the Dewey/Stone neighborhood is less affluent and more diverse than any other neighborhood in Greece. Dewey/Stone has the town's highest concentration of single-family rental properties and homes that are valued below the town's median value of \$130,500; this represents opportunity as discussed later. Greece is an annual recipient of HUD Community Development Block Grants and all of its target area block groups are in the Dewey/Stone area. Block grant funds have been used in the area to restore aging infrastructure, and the Dewey/Stone area is a major recipient of Greece Residential Improvement Program grants (another CD program which directs funding straight to homeowners for needed repairs, thereby helping to sustain and improve the area's housing stock).

The Dewey/Stone neighborhood is starved of major private investment, but ripe for a major public infusion of capital for infrastructure and streetscape improvements for a number of reasons:

- 1) Ongoing Revitalization Efforts and Codified Requirements for Private Development. In a methodical and ongoing fashion, beginning with our 2001 Master Plan, the Town of Greece has planned for and implemented strategies for revitalization of the Corridor and the Dewey/Stone neighborhood in particular. As recommended in the 2001 town wide Master Plan, the Town completed the Dewey Avenue Corridor Revitalization Study by 2007. As recommended in the Corridor Study, the Town implemented some immediate actions including installation of public seating and planters in selected areas, and acquired funding for two follow-up studies. The Dewey Avenue Traffic Calming Study was completed in 2010 (and actually became the impetus for a town wide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan which would later be completed in 2014). During the same time, the Town undertook a study of mixed use zoning, which resulted in the 2012 adoption of the Dewey Avenue Mixed Use (DMU) zoning district. With the DMU district in place, the Town has seen success in northern sections of the corridor (as discussed previously), but the gravity for investment did not extend to the Dewey Stone neighborhood at the south end of the corridor. The DMU has positioned us well to guide private investment, but there is no land rush. A major investment is needed to create that gravity in the Dewey/Stone neighborhood.
- 2) Infrastructure as an Obstacle. Shoehorned into the heart of this otherwise walkable neighborhood is a major arterial roadway, expanded during and after the town's earliest building boom to convey a growing community's workforce to its primary employer; Eastman Kodak Company. Appropriations which were necessary for widening Dewey Avenue left adjoining small scale commercial properties with barely usable space for parking on the street side and little or no space behind. Residential properties were impacted by increasing traffic and many converted to commercial use as a result. The resulting vehicle access situation is awkward and redundant, compounding the already uncomfortable pedestrian conditions along Dewey Avenue. Dual signalized intersections in quick succession at the confluence of Dewey Avenue, Maiden Lane, and Stone Road create inhospitable pedestrian conditions which have cleaved the neighborhood and discouraged pedestrian scale development. Prior public investment in this infrastructure, guided by planning practices at the time, has had an unanticipated impact on the urban fabric of this neighborhood, affecting its desirability for residency and commercial investment. Ironically, the backbone of this neighborhood's infrastructure is also its greatest limitation in terms of revitalization. With the infrastructure acting as an actual deterrent to private investment, the only option for transformative change is public investment in a better backbone.
- 3) Good Fabric, Affordable Housing Stock, Disrupted Pedestrian Connectivity. As noted previously, the Dewey/Stone neighborhood contains the town's highest concentration of single-family rental properties and homes that are valued below the town's median value of \$130,500. The town's home improvement grants, code enforcement efforts, and property rental ordinances are

designed to sustain and improve this housing stock because it's seen as a viable and reasonably priced housing option for a good cross section of our demographic, including seniors and millennials. Seniors and millennials share a common desire for smaller, less costly housing with less yard to maintain, and they want walkable neighborhoods. According to the 2017 American Community Survey, Greece's median age has risen from 39 to 43.8 since 2000, indicating that the town is either aging, attracting fewer young families, or both. Best efforts to sustain this housing stock continue to be successful, but housing stock alone does not make a great neighborhood. A major public investment is needed to improve the pedestrian environment at the heart of this vibrant neighborhood and make it an attractive place for families of all ages.

- 4) Good Paying Jobs, Right up the Street. The Dewey/Stone neighborhood owed its early success to the economic powerhouse just down the street; Eastman Kodak Company. Dewey/Stone and a number of other nearby neighborhoods served as housing for tens of thousands of Kodak employees for literally decades. In fact, Kodak formed the Kodak Employees Realty Company (KERC) in 1921 (an outgrowth of the original Eastman Savings and Loan Association) to actually develop and constructed many of these homes. Kodak has declined, but the 1200 acre industrial park it left behind is rising from the ashes. Eastman Business Park has successfully marketed the extensive industrial infrastructure Kodak left behind and become the new economic powerhouse down the street from Dewey/Stone.

DOWNTOWN IDENTIFICATION

- 1) **Boundaries of proposed DRI area.** Broadly, we would define our DRI area as the southern node of the Dewey Avenue Corridor, bounded by the Dewey Avenue Mixed Use Zoning District (DMU), and centered (if not in a perfect geometric sense) on the intersection of Dewey Avenue (New York State Route 18/Monroe County Route 132), Stone Road (Local Road), and Maiden Lane (Local Road). See Figure 2. The Dewey/Stone/Maiden intersection would be the epicenter of the project, with streetscape improvements radiating out from there on the major roadways.
- 2) **Past investment, future investment potential.** The town has invested upwards on \$250,000 in planning studies including staff time to manage and implement such projects and follow-up actions (2007 Dewey Avenue Corridor Revitalization Study; 2010 Dewey Avenue Traffic Calming Study; 2012 Dewey Avenue Mixed Use Zoning). Follow-up private investment is tougher to nail down, but in the Corridor's English Road node, where revitalization followed a major slug of private investment at Northgate Plaza, assessed valuation of the involved properties has more than doubled since 2005 from \$9,384,700 to \$19,382,333. This increase of nearly \$10M in assessed value (~103% increase) is derived from a mere 3.5% increase in aggregate commercial floor space. The Town believes this is representative of what is possible in the Dewey/Stone Neighborhood as well.
- 3) **Recent or impending job growth.** As discussed elsewhere in this application, the resurgence of the 1200 acre former Kodak industrial park (now Eastman Business Park) continues to infuse the local job market with new, stable, well-paying jobs that are almost tailored to today's emerging high-tech workforce. The massive industrial infrastructure in Eastman Business Park has proved to be an asset for a number of fast growing industries including photonics, energy storage, plastics, food and beverage, and chemical and biopharmaceutical manufacturing. The number of jobs and companies operating in the park has more than doubled in the last 10 years. Eastman Business Park is little more than a mile up Dewey Avenue from the Dewey/Stone Neighborhood.

- 4) Attractiveness of physical environment.** As discussed, the urban fabric is in place in the Dewey/Stone neighborhood. The existing street and land use pattern grew organically out of a traditional, early 20th century urban environment. Dewey Avenue is “Main Street” to the Dewey/Stone Neighborhood. Community services are already an active ingredient, and the neighborhood is once again positioned to be a bedroom for one of the largest industrial complexes in the Northeast. Home prices are affordable, and the housing stock is in good shape. The town has ordinances and land use controls in place to maintain and improve the condition of available housing and guide private commercial investment. As discussed elsewhere in this application, the one obstacle that appears to stand in the way of this neighborhood’s desirability is its walkability to and from the business district along Dewey Avenue. The bones are in place for a walkable neighborhood, and a major public investment is needed to restore the once present “Main Street” environment, which originally defined the Dewey/Stone Neighborhood.
- 5) Quality of life policies.** As discussed throughout this application, the Dewey Avenue Corridor and this intersection in particular have been the subject of nearly two decades of revitalization planning and implementation. The studies noted here, which resulted in adoption of a mixed use zoning district and a refocus on the pedestrian environment, along with the town’s targeted efforts to maintain and improve the area’s housing stock, have all contributed to the health of the neighborhood. These codes, programs, and policies also position the town to guide future development and private investment toward its goal of a *vibrant, safe, and active traditional mixed use neighborhood*. The Town of Greece is now positioned for a transformative revitalization of this neighborhood, and it just needs a spark.
- 6) Public Support.** Throughout nearly two decades of revitalization planning, more than a dozen opportunities for public input have occurred including drop-in sessions for each of the major revitalization planning studies, public hearings associated with adoption of such plans, hearings associated with adoption of the mixed use zoning district, and hearings associated with specific development approvals within the Corridor. Public input has been robust with each of these opportunities as evidenced in public comment summaries published in the plans (links provided later in this application), and in the minutes of the various public hearings. Resident and business community support has been enthusiastic, but tinged with frustration due to stalled momentum in the Dewey/Stone portion of the Corridor. Genesee Transportation Council, the regional MPO, funded both the Corridor Study and the Traffic Calming Study. Agencies which have jurisdiction, primarily State and County Departments of Transportation, have been actively involved in each stage of revitalization planning.
- 7) Transformative opportunities.** As discussed, the Dewey/Stone/Maiden intersection would be the epicenter of the project, with streetscape improvements radiating out from there and onto the major roadways. The Town envisions a Charrette-driven, complete redesign and overhaul of the current intersection, with an eye toward a transformative, pedestrian-integrated environment which will completely change the face of the neighborhood. The Town feels that physical roadway improvements, specifically at the major intersection including on-street parking, curb bump-outs, elaborate cross walks and pedestrian amenities, pedestrian-scale decorative lighting, lane narrowing, curb relocation, access management, and drastic lane geometry options are all on the table and will be primary considerations of the project. This is the kind of transformative infrastructure project that can only be done through a program like DRI.
- 8) Administrative capacity.** The Town of Greece is one of the largest towns in New York State, with a land area of 42 square miles and population of over 96,000. The town has a \$58M annual budget

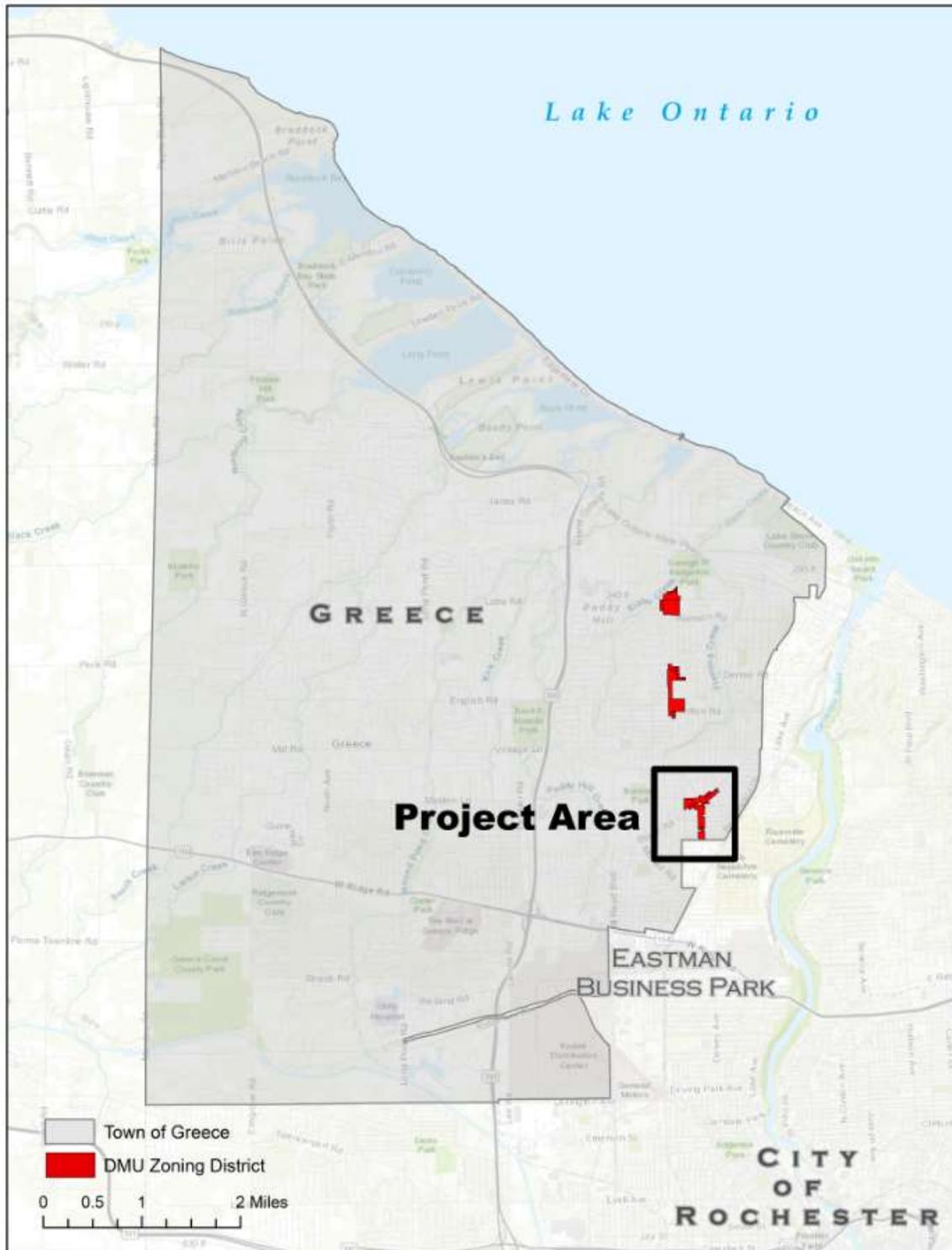
and employs more than 400 people. In addition to fully staffed planning, engineering, finance, and public works departments, the town also employs a grant administrator. Over the last five years, the town has administered \$3-4M dollars in state a federal grants, and works continually with county, state, and federal agencies on collaborative projects.

9) Other. Links to relevant planning studies and zoning codes:

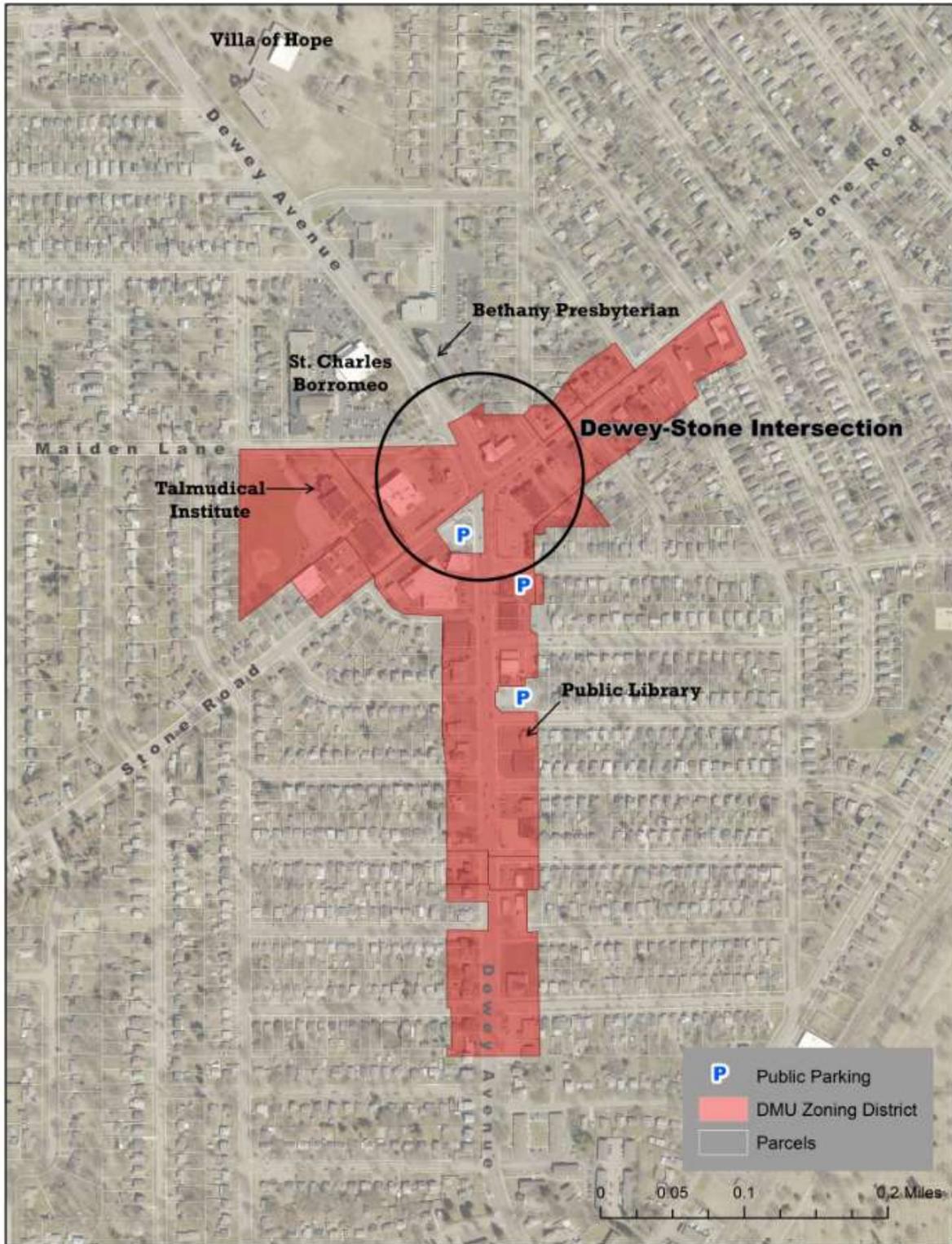
- a. 2007 Dewey Avenue Corridor Revitalization Study:
<http://greece.ny.gov/files/Dewey%20Avenue%20Final%20Report%20032807.pdf>
- b. 2010 Dewey Avenue Traffic Calming Study:
http://greece.ny.gov/files/Dewey_Avenue_2010-09-29_DACTCS_Final_Report.pdf
- c. 2012 Dewey Avenue Mixed Use Zoning: <https://ecode360.com/15941545>

10) Maps and photos attached

a. Project location.



b. Project intersection and corridor/neighborhood area.



c. Existing conditions in project area



Southeast corner of Dewey/Stone – facing north



Google Earth view – facing north



Southeast corner of Dewey/Stone – facing west



Northwest corner of Dewey/Stone – facing east



Maiden Lane – facing east toward Dewey Avenue



East side of Dewey Avenue – facing north



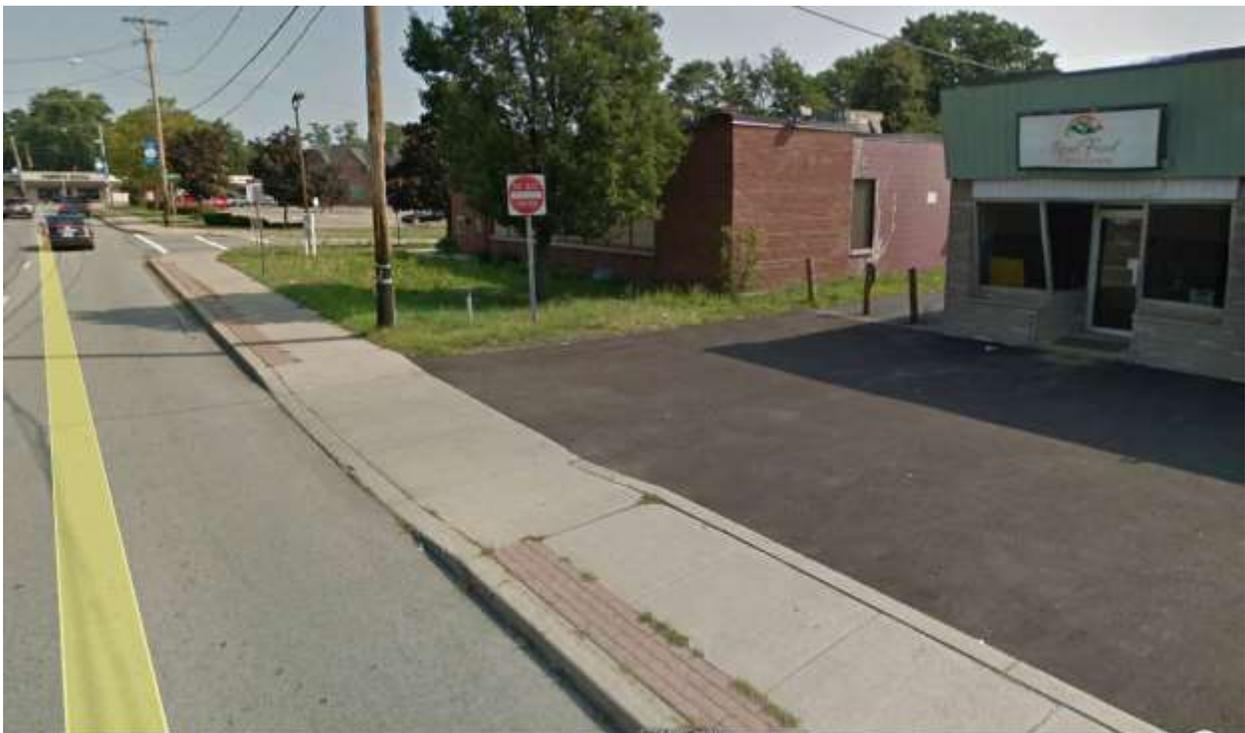
East side of Dewey Avenue at Beverly Heights – facing north



East side of Dewey Avenue at Beverly Heights – facing south



Dewey Avenue between Beverly Heights and Havaland Park – facing northwest



East side of Dewey Avenue, north of Beverly Heights – facing north

d. Northgate Plaza.

