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Award-Winning West Orange Streetscapes and Safe Streets Plan Presented to Public



By JOE RICCI

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WEST ORANGE, NJ - More than 50 people braved the rain, wind and fog Wednesday night to attend a West Orange Streetscapes and Safe Streets presentation on the "Complete Streets Concept Plan" for West Orange, which was developed by the graduate students of the Rutgers University School of Public Planning\Edward J. Boustein School of Planning and Public Policy. The event was held at Liberty Middle School.

Audience Members Credits: Joe Ricci

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The event served as a venue to celebrate that the [American Planning Association-New Jersey Chapter](#) recognized the 2015 West Orange Walking and Cycling Graduate Studio of the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University with the "[Outstanding Student Project Award](#)" on Friday, Jan. 29. It also served as a way to share the award-winning plan with the community.

The plan focuses on three areas: Northfield Avenue, Pleasant Valley Way and Main Street, and outlines ways the town can include vehicle traffic, pedestrian walkways and bicycle paths into these areas. It also incorporates specific statistical information on the elderly, young children and people with disabilities in creating the recommendations.

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A public comment meeting on the plan was held last year on October 15. Comments and suggestions from

that meeting were incorporated into the final plan, drawn up by the West Orange 2015 Walking and Cycling Studio Graduate Class.

Councilman Jerry Guarino, who led the evening's presentation, said the plan is important for West Orange and will be incorporated into the town's master plan.

"This plan, developed in conjunction with the West Orange Pedestrian Safety Advisory Board, will have a positive impact on pedestrian safety, quality of life for residents, and economic development," he said.

In reviewing the program, the graduate students noted areas for improvement and how they may be addressed. Among the issues they found were areas with no sidewalks, inadequate pedestrian lighting, no shoulders to separate pedestrians from cars and no access to bike lanes.

Also noted were problems in town "walkability" in the areas studied, including partially open utility covers, broken or uneven sidewalks, unmarked crosswalks, and some disability crosswalks that were put in incorrectly and point into the intersection instead of across the street.

In "before and after" concept drawings, the students described how narrowing traffic lanes can help traffic from speeding, and provide the space needed to add the proposed shoulders and bike lanes.

In addition to those changes, the students also looked at ways to upgrade the areas that go beyond the initial survey. These included "Wayfinder" signs, which include the well-known "you are here" spot, along with neighborhood businesses, local attractions and local history. Also suggested were benches, bus shelters, planters, well-maintained trash containers and bike stands.

During a question session after the presentation, one audience member asked what the next steps would be. Councilman Guarino said it is now in the Town Council's hands to "put a plan together and create partnerships with state partners, as well as to seek grants that are known to be available."

He added, "The sooner this is done and we can secure these items and grant money, the sooner it can all happen."

Guarino also took time during the evening to give citations of thanks from West Orange to the students who participated in creating the plan.

Brown, told the audience that his students had actually completed the course with him last year. But he said he told them, "When you are good at what you do, people call you back—that's the lesson learned here."