



Introduction

Burgy Revelation Day was held on September 9, 2017. It featured demonstrations of four village center improvement projects: a new pocket park (The Tea Garden); a 100' section of the Mill River Greenway; the footprint of a design for a new Public Safety Complex; and an open house at the Commons Coworking. Discussion areas for the Mill River Greenway, the Public Safety Complex/Town Facilities and the Commons, were filled with presentation boards, maps, drawings, etc. and provided opportunities for event participants to learn what is happening and provide feedback. The event was held in conjunction with a Town Picnic, several open houses, and the Grange Fair. The combined events drew more than 1/5th of Williamsburg's residents, generated a lot of enthusiasm and broadened public understanding of key village center planning topics.

Burgy Revelation Day

Burgy Revelation achieved its goal of revealing Williamsburg Center as a vibrant place with opportunities for improvement to public spaces and streets. The funding from Healthy Hampshire was essential to realizing the project and made a meaningful contribution to town planning efforts in Williamsburg.

It appears Burgy Revelation Day was a pivotal moment in the development of several projects that will impact Burgy Center—and its walkability—for generations to come, especially the Mill River Greenway and the increasingly likely creation of a municipal campus at the site of the former Helen E. James School.

On a more intangible level, Burgy Revelation Day and the related events of the day strengthened civic connections in Williamsburg. It highlighted, yet gain, the incredible capacity of volunteers in the community. The social connections that the event built and reinforced will benefit the community as it undertakes complex and controversial projects in the coming years.

Burgy Revelation was a clear example of funding leveraging additional contributions of volunteer time and dollars. Countless volunteer hours, and several thousand dollars of donations supported the events of the day and supplemented Health Hampshire's funding. It was also an example of the value of groups with different goals working together. When the organizers first imagined Burgy Revelation Day, we thought we would need to create a food and music related event just to draw people to

the Revelation Demonstrations. Luckily, the Town's Select Board independently decided to hold Williamsburg's first ever Town Picnic and so the two events were combined and then combined again with the annual Grange Fair. This mixing strengthened all three events. The picnic gained additional attractions from Revelation Day and the Grange Fair. The Grange events expanded their audience and sold more fundraising dinner tickets than in previous years. Burgy Revelation Day had a much bigger and more diverse audience than it would have as a stand-alone event.



Measures of Success

- An estimated 450 people attended the event—1/5 of Williamsburg’s population.
- Participants were overwhelming positive about the event. Survey results (n. 22) universally indicated that participants better understood key Town planning issues after the event and that their support of the projects on display increased as a result of the event. Both through the survey and in conversations, participants repeatedly said things similar to, “drawings and maps can be hard to understand. Seeing things at full scale is much easier to understand and more compelling.”
- The event brought out a diverse cross-section of Williamsburg’s population. It attracted people who do not normally participate in Town forums. These groups mixed during the event. Participants said things like, “I met lots of new people.”
- Numerous participants throughout the day indicated that they had not previously heard about the Greenway or Town Facilities projects—despite extensive previous meetings and publicity about both projects.
- Burgy Revelation Day motivated the physical removal of a section of hedges at the Helen E. James School. This “environment” change results in thousands of people per day having a view into the HEJ lawn. The long-term impact of this



change is yet to be seen, but it will likely contribute to Williamsburg residents’ knowledge of the greenspace and awareness of the tradeoffs related to building a public safety complex there. It may also result in increased physically active use of the space.

- The events of the day resulted in the creation of tangible products: handouts, drawings, maps, and presentation boards about the Mill River Greenway, Commons, Public Safety Complex project, and Helen E. James School. These materials will continue to be useful after the event.
- Over the course of Burgy Revelation, The

Tea Garden went from an idea that had not been discussed publicly, to something that people experienced first hand. Participants expressed a lot of enthusiasm for it and provided useful feedback about its design. A key question for the future of the Tea Garden is whether the Grange will allow its property to be used for that purpose. The demonstration project was an effective way to open that conversation with the Grange and to quickly show the benefits of the Tea Garden.

Lessons Learned

- Combining the demonstration events with other events (the Grange Fair, the Town Picnic) resulted in a bigger and more diverse audience for all events.
- The discussion areas for both the Mill River Greenway, Public Safety Complex and Commons Open House were well supplied with informational materials and passionate, articulate advocates. Preparation pays off!
- The volunteer effort that Williamsburg displayed was impressive. Williamsburg has a lot of capacity to get things done.
- It is unclear whether staking out and painting the Public Safety Complex Footprint was effective or not. A future demonstration would benefit from taller stakes (3' stakes were used) and construction fencing or similar to create the impression of “walls.”
- The demonstration of the Mill River Greenway was not as visible as we would have liked. Potted plants flanked by cones were installed in the road shoulder to signify future planting beds. A white line was painted on the property side edge of the Greenway to show its width. These elements showed the Greenway for those who were looking for it, but they probably didn't communicate the design to those had no context. The main challenge



with the Greenway demonstrations was that we were unable to find a suitable surface treatment for the paved path. We explored numerous materials but none was affordable, not a tripping hazard, and visually representative of paved surface. A 6' wide roll of rubber mat would be an excellent simulation of a paved surface, but was prohibitively expensive for this project (\$3000 for 100 feet). Roof underlayment is another material worth exploring further for pavement simulation, but tacking it down could be difficult. The lesson learned is that demonstrating trail or road improvements on unpaved surfaces is more difficult than demonstrating on-road improvements. In retrospect, we could have taken additional steps to make the Greenway more visible. Painting both edges and a center line would have helped. Adding painted bike path symbols to the surface of the Greenway simulation would have been effective (even if not MUTCD compliant). Adding benches would have been meaningful and in fact we had some loaner benches lined up but at the last minute we were unable to obtain them. Knowing it was going to be difficult to draw attention to the Greenway demonstrations, we held a mock-ribbon cutting and promenade. About 100 people walked down the Greenway during the promenade. This brief event accomplished the goal of drawing attention to the mock-up of the Greenway and "making it real." Future demonstration projects will benefit from similar theatrical events to increase their profile and fun factor.



- The Greenway Demonstration required an access permit from MassDOT. Our initial request was denied and it took some back and forth to arrive upon a treatment that was acceptable to MassDOT. The lesson learned is to leave ample time to negotiate access permits and to not give up if a permit request is initially denied; it may just need some tweaking.
- The Tea Garden was arguably the most successful simulation (in terms of physical presence). It clearly showed the potential of the space. As a participant said, "It just looks right." The lesson is that parklet demonstrations are worth doing. They are



relatively easy to pull off—tables, chairs and plants make a compelling space in the right surroundings. Wanzzyck Nursery lent plants to this event and previously lent them to the Northampton Complete Streets Demonstration Day. They appear to be a reliable partner. Giving away free tea, coffee and cookies definitely drew people to the space and gave them a reason to stay and enjoy it. This in turn motivated people to take the time to fill out a survey. Of the 22 surveys completed, 21 were done in the Tea Garden.

- While combining events was successful, it may have made it more difficult to attract visitors to all of the demonstrations.
- The Tea Garden was not as well attended as desired. Several factors contributed to this--it was outside the center of action; the Grange fair tables and tent hid its entry. The Tea Service was scheduled too late in the day. By the time it happened, many Picnic participants had already left. An announcement by an MC and improved signage may have increased visitation of the Tea Garden.
- The Commons open house also was not as well attended as we had hoped. To some degree this is a function of the HEJ building itself. Its entrance was not visible from other main activity areas. More signs could have remedied this. Again, an MC encouraging participation would have been a good addition. The lesson learned is that it is difficult to combine an indoor event with an outdoor one on a beautiful day. However, it had rained the Commons Open House



- would have been a hit!
- The funding limitation on renting tables, chairs, tents, etc was a challenge. In the end donations to the Town Picnic covered these rentals. It would be worth creating a regional bank for sharing materials for demonstration projects including tables, chairs, benches, traffic cones and barrels, temporary speed humps, pavement marking stencils, etc.
- The organizers of Burgy Revelation Day chose not to highlight potential conflicts



between competing uses of the Helen E. James parcel (e.g. public safety complex and town common). This contributed to goodwill on the day, but may have left some participants with an overly-optimistic view of the site being able to “do it all.” The event simultaneously showed the value of the HEJ greenspace for large town gatherings, and demonstrated the logic for using that space for a public safety complex. It demonstrated both the vibrancy of the Commons and the

attractiveness of relocating the town offices to the HEJ Building. It will be interesting to see how participants reconcile those experiences and whether they are aware of the potential conflicts between them. Some participants suggested that displays should have been more explicit about the difficult choices the town faces about use of the HEJ building and its greenspace. Others appreciated that, for one day, the HEJ site could be all things Burgy.

- One of the most challenging aspects of this project was determining exactly what the organizers wanted to get out of it. We discussed topics like: how much the demonstrations were about getting the word out about projects versus getting input versus shaping opinions. Demonstration projects are a compelling tool for planners, advocates, etc. They have an innate power to connect with people. Because demonstration projects are spatial and experiential, they speak about what could be. It is more difficult to transform a demonstration into a community conversation about how to implement what could be, to dig in to budget, timeline, and the tradeoffs required to bring a project from demonstration to permanent reality. In other words, one of the most difficult parts of a demonstration projects is ensuring that it is effectively tied into a broader strategic planning process, that it comes at the right time, that it communicates the right information, that it asks the right questions.



Design of the Tea Garden

The Tea Garden demonstration, in particular, was useful for refining the design concept. The initial concept for the design is shown at right. During installation of the demonstration, the design evolved. We determined that plants should be placed in the center of the space so they would mark the central path to Angle Park. Large pots of plants bookended the space and would be sensible for a long-term installation.

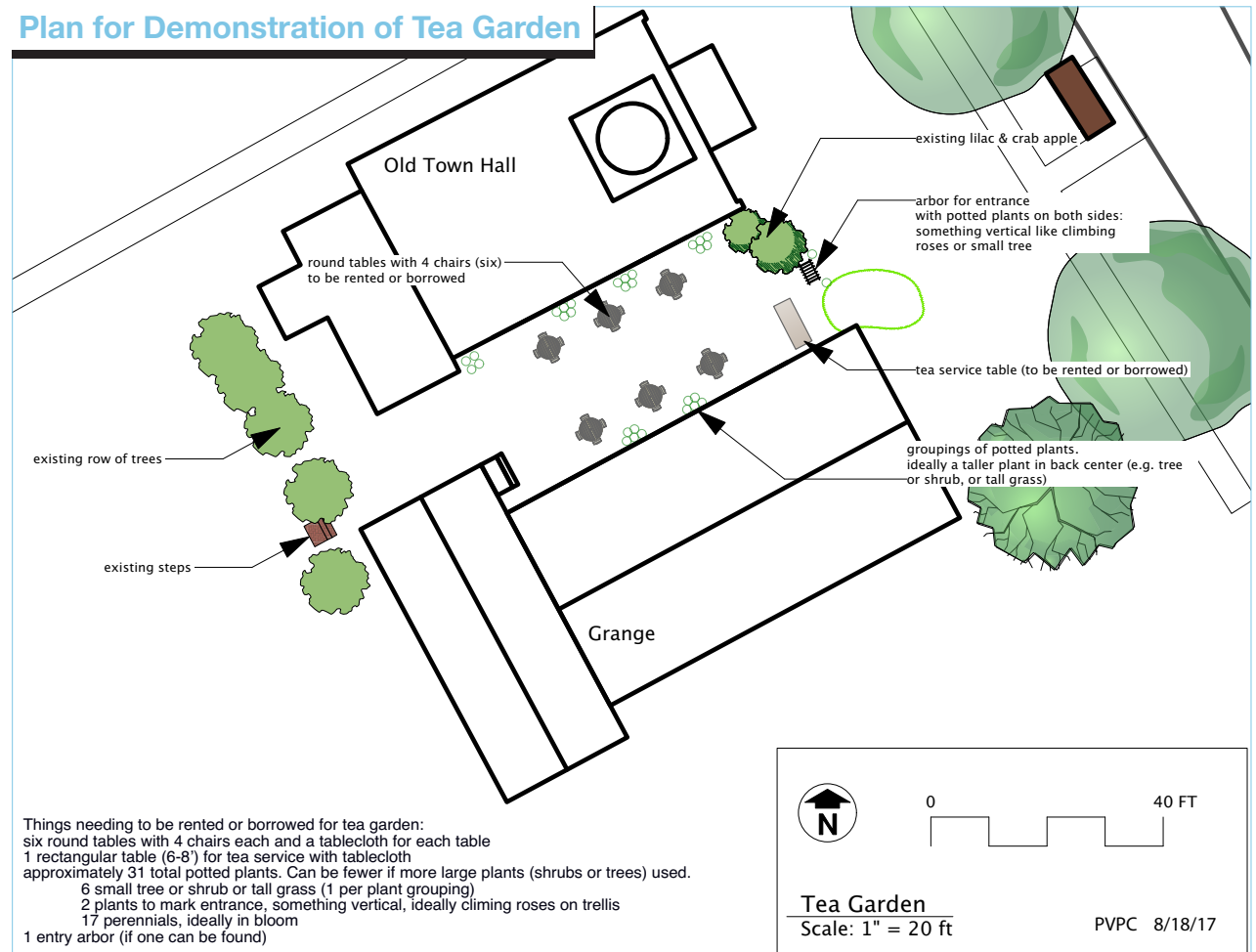
The following public input was gathered through the survey and one-on-one conversations. It will be useful for future iterations of this project.

- Several people commented about how the music in Angel Park was at a good volume in the Tea Garden. One could hear it but still converse. It seems like some people think that in general the music is too loud at Angel Park events. And that the Tea Garden would offer necessary “away space” during Angel Park events.
- Allow it to evolve (2). Don't fix everything in place
- Put an awning over part of it. [Note Tea Service was held during at a time when the space received direct afternoon sun. This is a short window of time across the course of the year. It is worth exploring sun shade

- patterns more and whether an awning or other shade structures would be necessary.]
- Provide accessible table, think about seniors
- Provide a stone path for better access
- Plant trees to break up wind tunnel
- Don't plant in the drip line
- Add a bench near the pachysandra patch [next to porch of Grange?] with the back to Route 9--facing Angel Park.

- [maybe the garden should not be permanent, just] at town events
- Add benches (2). [more “secluded” benches]
- Include artwork (2)
- I'd like to see the final design of flower beds, maybe a path and a couple more secluded benches

Plan for Demonstration of Tea Garden





Thanks!

This project was a collaboration between the Town of Williamsburg, The Commons, The Mill River Greenway, the Williamsburg Public Safety Complex Committee, Reelife Documentary Productions, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, and numerous other individuals and organizations. Burgy Revelation Day was largely funded by a grant from Healthy Hampshire. Donations from individuals and organizations also made it and Williamsburg's first-ever Town Picnic possible. In particular, we'd like to recognize:

- Wanzcyk Nursery for loaning the plants
- Smith College for loaning costumes
- Individuals whose donations supported rentals of tables and tents
- Marie Westburg for being the lead organizer, fundraiser, stage builder, sticker-maker, and get-it-done-r.





See you at the Williamsburg Town Picnic next year!