

Verplanck Neighborhood Profile Summary

The Verplanck Neighborhood was the site of the chief village of the Indian tribe of Podunks which was located on Olcott Street about where the Verplanck School stands now. The most important of the Indian trails, called the Great Trail was located on Center Street. Love Lane and Olcott Street were other trails located in this neighborhood. Love Lane is a shortened form of Indian Lover's Lane. In 1673 a saw mill was built at Hop Brook and a small village grew up around the present Verplanck School.

The present Verplanck Neighborhood signifies an important change in Manchester's overall development pattern. In contrast to the large home/multi-family/small lot/grid street pattern which dominates the older central neighborhoods like the East and West Sides, Verplanck consists of mostly small, single family detached homes on medium lots, on a curvilinear street pattern. The neighborhood is relatively young compared to the other central neighborhoods in town. Most of the homes (44%) were built between 1940 and 1949.

This war-time and post-war development ushered in the suburban development pattern which has come to define most American metropolitan areas. Still, Verplanck is well integrated into Manchester's development pattern. It is convenient to highway access and has a well developed sidewalk system and is pedestrian friendly. The land use pattern is predominantly residential, with commercial uses limited to Center Street, West Center Street, and Hartford Road, (another post-war development trend). There are few institutional uses located in the residential areas, the only notable exception being Assumption Church.

The Verplanck Neighborhood described in this report is really a group of neighborhoods. (See Neighborhood Boundaries map in Appendix A.) The planning department had originally defined two neighborhoods here: the "Parkade Neighborhood" bounded by Love Lane on the east, Manchester Parkade commercial area on the west, Center Street on the south and Middle Turnpike West on the north, and the "Olcott Neighborhood" bounded by Olcott Street on the east, McKee Street on the west, Center Street on the north, and Hartford Road on the south. As we began preparing for the discovery workshops we felt neighborhood residents may have more of a sense of community with the Verplanck Elementary School, which included both of these neighborhood boundaries, and so we combined them into the Verplanck Neighborhood. The department was surprised to learn that the residents perceive their neighborhood in smaller units. Residents at the discovery workshops identified 10 sub-neighborhoods. These were usually defined by housing type and street pattern, and often these sub-neighborhood boundaries coincided with major east/west or north/south streets. In spite of these relatively small neighborhood units, there is a common appreciation for the overall neighborhood. Residents identified friendly neighbors, well-kept properties, attractive homes and convenient access to shopping, recreation, and services as neighborhood strengths. The variety of housing, the range of housing costs, and access to bus service help to make the neighborhood diverse in terms of age, income, and ethnicity.

The land use pattern in the Verplanck Neighborhood presents a fairly rigid separation of uses. This again is in contrast to the early settlement pattern in town. For instance, single family detached residential homes, two family homes, and larger apartment complexes are located in distinct districts. As a result, while 40% of the housing in the neighborhood is rental, these units are found in a handful of larger projects such as Brook Haven condominiums, the South Adams apartments, and the Thompson Road condominiums. Another large group of multi-family projects are dedicated to elderly housing, in particular the Manchester Housing Authority's Bluefield Drive neighborhood, the Arbors, and Manchester Manor which are clustered near each other on West Center Street.

Because the neighborhood is relatively young and predominantly residential, physical conditions are very good. Houses and yards are well maintained. There are some isolated areas where relatively poor housing conditions are evident, such as the older neighborhood around Griswold and Lilac Street (early 1900's housing), Seaman Circle (predominantly 1940's two family housing), and the area of Ridgewood and Roosevelt Streets. The Brook Haven condominiums, which are still largely rental units, have been the site of many housing and building code violations although the exterior appearance is generally good.

While the physical conditions of private property are generally very good, the same cannot always be said about the public infrastructure. Sidewalk conditions in particular are a concern here. Some of the sub-neighborhoods have mostly poor or very poor sidewalks. Of greater concern, and greater overall importance, are the poor conditions or lack of sidewalks leading to the Verplanck School. Poor conditions on Olcott Street between Adams and Center, missing sidewalks on Love Lane near Olcott Street, and missing sidewalks along Olcott Street from Spencer Street to Love Lane are critical because they break the otherwise safe pedestrian access to the Verplanck School and grounds.

The Verplanck School and grounds provide the focus for the neighborhood: there are open fields and playground equipment (some in disrepair and possibly unsafe), while adjacent town land includes Little League fields and the Swanson Pool.

Verplanck School and grounds are part of a larger institutional land use group which form the western edge of the neighborhood. The town sewage treatment plant, highway garage, and landfill provide invaluable community services. On the other hand, they attract truck traffic and, under certain climatic conditions emit noticeable odors.

It is possible that careful joint development of the open space land of the town and the school can provide a neighborhood focus for recreation and socialization. It is also possible that the natural features remaining on the Verplanck site, and the school's proximity to the Laurel Marsh hiking trail as well as the sanitary landfill and sewer treatment plant, could provide an environmental education focus and relationship between recreational activities and educational activities at Verplanck School.

Overall, the Verplanck Neighborhood has been quite stable. Home sales between 1991 and 1993 have represented about six to seven percent of the total home sales in Manchester. In 1994 and 1995 home sales in this neighborhood represented over ten percent of the home sales in Manchester, but most of this is attributed to heavy sales of Brook Haven condominiums by investors.

Demographically the Verplanck Neighborhood, in terms of race and ethnicity, age of the population, and income, is similar to Manchester town-wide percentages. There are some notable exceptions however. One is that about 51% of the households in the Verplanck area earn less than \$35,000 and approximately 19% earn less than \$15,000 as compared to 42% and 13% town-wide respectively. There is a higher percentage of very low income households in the Verplanck Neighborhood than there is town-wide. Also, there are almost twice as many households on social security and more families on public assistance in the neighborhood than town-wide. Much of this relatively high level of assisted households can be explained by the presence of so many elderly housing units in the neighborhood. This elderly population would tend to skew the income and public assistance numbers, and also obviously accounts for a far greater percentage of elderly age persons in the neighborhood.

Several arterial or minor arterial streets run through the Verplanck Neighborhood area. Major east/west streets include Middle Turnpike West, Center Street and Hartford Road. Olcott Street serves as a collector and an access road to the municipal facilities such as the landfill and highway department and to the Verplanck School area, and so serves heavy truck traffic as well as automobiles. While these streets are operating at an acceptable level of service, there is occasional speeding and there are relatively high volumes of traffic since they are major east/west connectors to the Interstate 84 exit ramp.

Adams Street, in particular between Olcott Street and Middle Turnpike, is a heavily traveled north/south arterial street. This street is narrow and built to residential street standards, and at certain times there are severe traffic delays on Adams Street at the Middle Turnpike West intersection. However, any major improvements to the street here would be extremely expensive and disruptive because any acquisition of land for road widening to increase travel lanes would require the acquisition of many residential properties and the relocation of residents.

