

# Public Domain

by Steve Krulick, Village of Ellenville Trustee

## Strolling Through the Park, Part Three: A Tale of Two Village Squares

*"People have been living around village squares for thousands of years... The degree to which such a "village square" is unavailable to people is, I maintain, the degree to which people are strangers to each other... I claim that we all have an inherent need for the function of the village square... The village square is a commons – it belongs to no one but is used by all." – Lee Felsenstein, Dr. Dobbs' Journal*

Here's a pop quiz, so don't peek below. I bet I could ask this of almost anyone in the US or abroad and get a near-identical, universal (hint) reply.

Picture in your mind *THE* quintessential, ideal, All-American village/town square. Think! Got it? Now, if you are near a computer, you can go to [www.factman.us/square](http://www.factman.us/square) and see if I read your mind!

If we are not in sync, you must have been avoiding movies and TV for the past 50 years! The pictures are from Universal Studio's backlot, and show Courthouse Square (formerly known as Mockingbird Square) in various guises throughout hundreds of Universal films and TV shows. If you've seen *Back to the Future*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Inherit the Wind*, *Bye Bye Birdie*, *The Music Man*, *Gremlins*, *Bruce Almighty*, *Leave it to Beaver*, *Knight Rider*, or numerous *Twilight Zone* episodes, you HAVE seen this location, and it is likely seared into your brain as the perfect village square.

First of all, it's, well, *square*! It's green (in olden days it may even have been called the "village green"), with grass and trees, plus walks, benches, usually statues or a fountain (some of the pictures show it "between-films," minus the accessories). It's anchored by one grand civic building, with other key shops and structures ringing it. It's probably in the town center, and may have been where the very first buildings went up.

Ellenville lacks a perfect match, but it has a reigning contender and a potential heir.

Liberty Square, has long been the heart of the Village and the Town. Before the Post Office... before the Hunt Memorial Building... even before the Wayside Inn, there was a fountain and a bandstand. And before that... before there was even a Hartshorn House or a Fairchild City, there was the first building, a log cabin at the corner of what is now Canal and Market, as memorialized by the PO lobby's mural.

This is where the community gathers to celebrate and commiserate... sometimes spontaneously, sometimes by design. The "front porch" of the Hunt Building has been the "stage" for many concerts and ceremonies through the years; the reviewing stand for the July Fourth parades (and, for many years, the

*Noonday Club Mardi Gras*, and the finish line for *Run Like the Wind*) would have been unthinkable anywhere but at the edge of the Square.

Unfortunately, besides not *being* square, it's not very large, and is open to auto traffic. Whenever the Square is used for events, it must be blocked off with police barricades. And anyone who has been on the Hunt portico knows it's not an ideal stage; it is too narrow, the columns take up too much space, and the floor is uneven and buckling. (Plans to fix the whole porch properly are quite expensive, so this is not going to happen any time soon.)

I think we could get more use from Liberty Square by closing off southbound traffic from where the road bends right, across from the PO. Fill in that triangle to Canal, level with the current sidewalk and area around the fountain, as one continuous plot. If the remaining road by Mountain Wings is wide enough for two-way traffic, let it handle the new pattern; but even if kept one-way, it could still let Canal Street traffic get to the PO, Main, or Maple.

It might even be worth considering blocking off that street, too, for an even larger pedestrian-friendly Square, letting Liberty Place just curve into Bogardus to Maple. Although there could still be parking in front of the PO (since this fix would eliminate what many consider a more-accidents-waiting-to-happen problem when cars back up into traffic coming from Canal or Main), maybe a trade-off for having more Square would be PO customer parking in the Hunt lot.

Whether this is pursued, here's another idea. The Village (and maybe the Town) will be setting up shop in a new Municipal Hall, across from the Farber Center and the Library. Next to the Hall is a large, rectangular, grass-and-tree-filled area (two trees blew over last year, and the rest need some trimming)... and it's for sale! It could be the perfect location for a new Village Square Park, with enough room for more features than can fit in Liberty Square *or* Resnick Park: fountains, statues, benches, tables, walks, kiosks, pavilion/gazebo, small playground, arches, gardens, flagpoles, monuments, displays, exhibits, etc.

This would be a relaxing place for employees at the three civic buildings to have lunch or take a break, as well as for visitors to those sites, making the total area a true civic campus. There's room for concerts (without having Liberty Square's traffic problems), particularly if a nice bandshell/stage is set up at the west end. Mini farmers' markets, craft/art shows, and other community events, could be contained nicely.

So, even if Liberty Square is enlarged, Berme Road Park is developed, and Resnick Park is enhanced, a new Village Square Park like this (more in the style of what's already in our heads *as* the archetypal Village Square) could have, dare I say, *Universal* appeal!