

Town of White Creek
Comprehensive Plan and Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan
Background to Scope of Work
(10/14/08 DRAFT for DISCUSSION)

In advance of the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee Meeting, the following serves as background information regarding the development of a Comprehensive Plan and Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan. It provides an overview of the comprehensive planning process, data gathering efforts of the Town of White Creek to date, and a broad outline of the next steps. This document is accompanied by a scope of work for the consulting firm Community Planning & Environmental Associates; a brief biography of Nan Solzenberg principal consultant at CP&EA; and the successful grant application to the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets for the completion of the comprehensive plan and development of an agriculture and farmland protection plan.

What is A Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan is a policy guide that sets forth directions for the future of a community. It is not a law or regulation. Rather, it is a blueprint to help guide the future. Like any blueprint, it is subject to change and revision with the passage of time and events.

The plan sets forth goals and implementation strategies to guide the physical development of the Town. Local officials daily undertake actions, enact regulations and approve development, all of which are likely to have long-term implications. To ensure that these daily decisions ultimately benefit the whole community, the decision making process should be undertaken within the context of a considered evaluation of the Town's objectives for future growth and its desired character.

The ten steps proposed to develop a Comprehensive Planning Process include:

1. Plan to Plan
2. Structure and Schedule the Process
3. Gather and Analyze Data
4. Identify Problems, Issues and Concerns
5. Develop a 'Vision' for the Plan
6. Develop Plan Goals and Objectives
7. Generate and Evaluate Plan Alternatives
8. Select and Develop a Preferred Plan
9. Adopt the Plan, Set and Implementation Schedule
10. Monitor for Results and Impact

Diverse community involvement through public workshops and outreach within the community is a key to plan development and success.

Data Gathering Phase of a Comprehensive Plan

In 2005, the Town of White Creek launched the ‘data gathering phase’ of a comprehensive plan with support from the NYS Quality Communities grant program (Steps 1 – 4). The Town Board appointed a fifteen-member steering committee to assist with data collection and community outreach. This committee met monthly for nearly a year and its members were asked to gather data about the community.¹ As part of this process, the Township gathered and analyzed data on the ‘current state’ of the Town of White Creek and through community outreach identified some of the Township’s strengths as well problems, issues and concerns of the residents of the municipality.

The Steering Committee produced a draft report to the Town documenting the ‘state of the state’ of the Town of White Creek. The report includes information about the Town’s history, land use patterns, demographics, natural resources, infrastructure, economy, agricultural sector and recent development. A synthesis of the Town’s strengths and weaknesses as defined by residents engaged in the planning process is also included.

Overwhelmingly throughout the process there seemed to be a concern that change was incrementally occurring and would continue to do so and as a result a keen interest among residents of the Town of White Creek to be prepared for the future and develop a comprehensive plan through a highly participatory process.

Hence, the Town of White Creek board expressed interest in moving forward with the development of a Comprehensive Plan and applied for funding under the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets to complete its comprehensive plan and develop an agriculture and farmland protection plan.

NYS Department of Agriculture:

The Town of White Creek has been awarded a \$25,000 grant from the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets. With a grant from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, the Town of White Creek seeks to complete its comprehensive plan and develop an agricultural and farmland protection plan to respond to the on-going, economic, social, and cultural changes that are shaping the community. The Town’s planning process will:

- be founded on a community-based / community-driven process;
- include residents, businesses, institutions, the farming sector, and community organizations to collaborate on plan development; identify assets, opportunities, and needs;
- result in a coordinated vision for the future of the community; and
- provide the strategic direction for change by outlining specific actions to achieve the community’s vision, protect farmland and promote agriculture.

¹ A \$3,000 grant from the NYS Quality Communities grant program facilitated hiring of Chazen Companies to assist with data collection primarily and to facilitate a public meeting to solicit community members thoughts about the Townships strengths and weaknesses. (The Committee modeled the report format after the Town of Greenwich’s that was developed with the assistance of Chazen).

More specifically with NYS Department of Agriculture support, the Town of White Creek seeks to:

- complete its community-driven comprehensive planning process—which to date has had a significant focus on agriculture;
- identify high priority agricultural lands and opportunities and challenges faced by the agricultural sector;
- devise an agricultural and farmland protection plan which and lays out strategies to protect high yield land involved in agricultural production and enhance the economic viability of agriculture, including through increased access to markets.

Next Steps:

Funds from the NYS Department of Agriculture will enable the Town of White Creek to hire a consultant to work with a Comprehensive Plan and Agricultural Protection Plan Steering Committee to guide the broader community in the development of these two plans. It is anticipated that this Committee will meet monthly for over a year (during nonpeak agricultural months).

It is proposed that the Community Planning & Environmental Associates led by Nan Solzenberg serve as the Town of White Creek’s consultant on these important planning tasks. To compliment CP&EA, the Town of White Creek has secured in-kind services from professionals at organizations such as the Agricultural Stewardship Association, Cornell Cooperative Extension and County Soil and Water Conservation Department.

Additionally to promote community involvement and participation, the Township would strive to appoint a diverse member steering committee to guide Comprehensive Plan and Farmland Protection Plan development.

Attached please find a draft scope of work for the consultant for your review and comments.