

DRAFT
Town of White Creek
Comprehensive Plan and Ag Protection Plan
Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
October 22, 2008

Attendees: Ed Gulley, Rody Walker, Jim Perry, Adriano Manocchia, Sarah Ashton
Absent: Peter Hetko, Carol Moore, Tim Smith, Richard Moses, Donny Sweet, Rupert Jennings

Introduction: Supervisor Bob Shay welcomed the group, thanked members for their participation and reiterated a commitment to the Town of White Creek developing a comprehensive plan given potential development pressures.

Background: Ashton reiterated a bit of background about the effort. In 2005 a Steering Committee was established by the Town of White Creek board to launch a data collection phase of a comprehensive plan. In April 2007, this Steering Committee presented the board with “A Comprehensive Plan: Data Gathering Phase Report” which provided information on the Town’s history, land use patterns, demographics, natural resources, infrastructure, economy, agricultural sector and recent development. The report was informed through the gathering of data by a 15-member steering committee and public workshops facilitated by Chazen Companies with the support of a \$3,000 grant from the NYS Department of State Quality Communities Grant Program.

In response, 2007 the Town Board approved applying for a grant to the NYS Department of Agriculture to complete its comprehensive plan and develop and agricultural and farmland protection plan. In August 2008, the Township was awarded a \$25,000 grant to this end. Funds from the grant will support hiring a consultant to work with the Steering Committee to develop a Comprehensive Plan and Agriculture/Farmland Protection Plan. Three agencies including Cornell Cooperative Extension, Agricultural Stewardship Association, and Washington Soil and Water, have each agreed to contribute \$1,500 of in-kind services to assist with the plan development.

Engaging the Community in a Participatory Process and Adopting a Communications Strategy

The group then brainstormed ways to actively engage, involve and keep the broad community informed of the comprehensive planning process. Ideas generated by the group included:

- providing information about the planning processes at polling stations on November 4th;
- seeking input of older generations (noting that History is a good teacher—and could provide insight on ‘what has made the town go and made the town viable.’) Marilyn Robinson the Town Historian would be important to contact.
- Hold many public meetings and hold them in a variety of places including the Mountain View Town Offices and Jermain Hall in the White Creek hamlet

- Place articles regularly in newspapers announcing and inviting the public to attend each Steering Committee meeting and providing a summary of the past meeting. Ask the Town Board to approve the Bennington Banner as well as an official newspaper as this might be read by more people in the hamlet of White Creek than other publications.
- Website—ask the Cambridge Valley Chamber of Commerce if we could post notices through their website.
- Develop a planning process which is based on information gleaned from participatory public meetings and gatherings
- Define issues clearly and identify those which might concern town residents and go out and solicit input (through meetings and steering committee member engagement with residents)
- Engage farmers and seek their opinions on issues and the future of the Township;
- Respect and seek to understand one another's positions in meetings
- Keep large land owners informed
- Engage the assessor in the process
- Adopt a consensus building approach to developing a comprehensive plan
- Promote dialogue and understanding
- Establish a liaison with the Town Board to keep the Town board abreast of developments on a monthly basis. (Jim Perry was suggested to fill this role.)
- Ensure that the plan defines goals and what the Township's residents want to accomplish clearly.

Consultant Scope of Work: The committee then reviewed the draft scope of work and schedule for the completion of the Comprehensive Plan and Agricultural/Farmland Protection Plan submitted by the consultant Nan Stolzenburg. The Committee noted that Nan would meet with the Steering Committee ten times over the course of the next 18 months—to contain costs once the committee and Nan got to know each other Nan could participate in some of these Steering Committee meetings by conference call. Nan will also facilitate four meetings with the agricultural community to discuss the current state of the agricultural sector, prioritizing farmland, identify potential strategies and solutions to strengthen agriculture and review draft plans. With regard to the comprehensive plan three-six meetings will be held engaging the public to review the communities strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, develop a vision and goals for the community, and explore potential recommended strategies for implementation moving forward.

The Steering Committee recommended advancing for consideration the scope of work to the Town Board to contract with Stolzenburg—adding a sentence to the scope of work specifying consultant deliverables (that is the Comprehensive plan and agricultural/farmland protection plan).

In the course of conversation about the scope of work, Walker noted that at one point the Steering Committee had suggested taking a regional approach--engaging the Towns of Cambridge and Jackson in the process. He advocated a regional approach given the similarity of land use. Shay volunteered to consider talking with Supervisors Trinkle and Brown about the potential. Additionally concern was raised about engaging different

publics including farmers and avoiding pitfalls of other planning processes—the Committee reiterated its commitment to a participatory process and it was pointed out that the consultant was selected because of her experience working with and engaging agricultural communities in the development of Comprehensive Plans and Ag protection plans and the discussion of hard/complicated issues. Concern was raised about seeking legal advice regarding the overall planning process and it was thought that the consultant could provide the steering committee and Town Board with appropriate information as well.

Walker described the large farming operation he manages (as well as noting a bit about the scope of investments, regulations, debt, book-keeping/testing, income generated). He noted that he had a desire to better understand the goals and objectives of the comprehensive plan and what the community wanted as far as the agricultural economy was concerned to help him chart the future of his farm. It was noted that though answers to his questions could not be offered in the short term, the data collection phase suggested that residents value the Town's agricultural economy. Through the participatory planning process moving forward the Town's vision, goals and objectives would be discovered and defined. The Agricultural and Farmland Protection plan developed and integrated into the Comprehensive Plan would focus specifically on defining goals and objectives with the engagement of farmers for the agricultural sector.

Steering Committee Membership: Several members involved in the data collection phase of the comprehensive plan process could not continue to serve on the committee including Bob Somers, Kristen Narkiewicz, and Ben Niles (deceased). Several new members were recommended to join the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee to diversify the committee and engage local business including: Jack Alexander, Steve Farrara, Ken Townsend and Lisa Pembroke. Perry agreed to ask Fararra and Townsend and Ashton ask Alexander and Pembroke.

Additionally with regard to the development of the Agricultural Protection Plan, additional farmers were identified to help facilitate the Ag Protection Plan development. Four participatory public meetings targeting farmers will be held specifically to focus on the development of the Ag Protection Plan. In addition to the farmers already on the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee (including Jim Perry, Rody Walker, Ed Gulley, Rich Moses and Carol Moore) other farmers identified included Skip Clark, Howard/Jay Andrews, and Bill Badgely. Calls will be placed to these farmers—Perry/Walker will contact Andrews, Gulley will contact Badgley and Ashton will contact Clark.

It was also noted that 14% of the Town's land mass was dedicated to State Forest and it is close to a newer state forest in the Town of Jackson adjacent to Route 313 and the Battenkill. It was suggested that a small committee of foresters, naturalists, outdoors enthusiasts etc could be engaged to help inform the comprehensive plan with regard to the use of these State lands—(and ultimately DEC's Unit Management Plans for the State forests). Ashton offered to set up such a meeting if participants could be identified. In addition to Committee Members Peter Hetko and Adriano Manocchia, residents suggested for such a committee included: Mike Bodner (State Forester), Neil and

Stephanie Gifford (The Nature Conservancy), Jerry Jenkins (naturalist), Bill Badgley (forester), Ron Kaju (sp?).

Next Steps:

- The Steering Committee will advance the scope of work to the Town Board at its November meeting.
- Next Steering Committee Meeting is Weds. November 19, 2008 at 7:30PM in the Town of White Creek offices at 28 Mountain View Drive. The purpose of the meeting will be to meet the consultant and develop a more detailed schedule for the planning process with her. An agenda will be forwarded in advance of the meeting.
- Notification of the meeting will be placed in local newspapers.