

DRAFT
Town of White Creek
Comprehensive Plan and Ag Protection Plan
Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
February 19, 2009

Attendees: Ed Gulley, Rody Walker, Jim Perry, Peter Hetko, Sarah Ashton, Carol Moore, Adriano Manocchia., Don Sweet, Darryl Caputo , Richard Moses,
Absent: Tim Smith, Rupert Jennings, Bill Badgeley , J. Tudor

Minutes for the December 17, 2008 Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee were approved. Ed will post the hard copy at the County Store in White Creek.

Vision Statement Review and Development

The purpose of the February Steering Committee meeting was to review the draft Vision Statement that consultant Nan Stolzenburg had prepared based on the results of the Visioning Public Workshop held on January 21, 2009 in Jermain Hall. The draft vision statement along with thematic vision statements and information recorded by each table of participants at the Public Workshop (i.e., table vision statements, additions/subtractions to strengths and weaknesses) was shared with Steering Committee members prior to the meeting so that they would be prepared to share comments on it at the February meeting. Nan had also shared information describing what a vision statement was in advance of the meeting.

Nan started the meeting reiterating that she drafted the vision statement synthesizing and drawing from the vision statements developed by each ‘table’ of participants, feedback gleaned during the Agricultural Focus group, and strengths and weaknesses identified by the community throughout the planning process to date. She noted that the Vision Statement would set a direction for the plan; outline what the community wanted to accomplish in the long term, where it wanted to head, and provide a benchmark from which to judge progress. Nan noted that she took a stab at the statement in her words as a starting place. She noted that she felt no ownership to the words. The committee needed to make sure that it reflected the desires of the community and in the most appropriate words.

The communities priorities are articulated in the Vision Statement. She noted that the community had a dual task to create a vision for (1) agriculture (Agricultural Plan); and, (2) Comprehensive Plan. There are options for doing this. Nan suggested a broad paragraph offering a broad vision for the community and then specific sentences offering a vision/goals for various topics. For the meeting she sought to strive to reach consensus on the vision statement. It outlines the ideal, looks ahead many years and outlines what ultimately the community wants to be.

Jim P asked if we were going to have two vision statements—one for the Comp plan and a second for the Ag Plan. Nan suggested that the overall vision statement could cover

both and then one of the topical subdivision statements could focus more specifically on agriculture.

Town Board Residency Requirements: Don S. noted that he liked the Vision Statement as it was but felt that the biggest problem was maintaining the integrity of the Town Board. He suggested that in the end they control the Town and the people currently on the board have been here a long time and know the Town. Someone could run after 30 days of residency who does not know the town but may have an agenda contrary to the Comp plan or town residents generally and try to push their agenda through. Nan replied that the purpose of the Comp plan was to help and support the Town board in the context of their decision making. Don went on to describe the situation in the Town of Malta faced with developers. Carol M noted that it was the community's responsibility to hold the Town Board accountable (follow structure and rules). Don continued that the value of property is the most important issue to some who attended the public workshop. They want to be able to turn their property over. Eventually farmland may change. He suggested that the comp plan could not stop development—that the interests of the town board presiding would override the comp plan. He put forth an interest in creating a stricter minimum residency requirement. Adriano noted that currently the whole board was composed of local people. Don replied that demographics were changing and more people are moving in. To address Don's concern about residency requirements, Sarah A informally polled the Steering Committee to ask if the Steering Committee might recommend in the Comp Plan that the Town of White Creek Board consider stricter (longer) residency requirements for elected Council officials. Those present seemed to be in agreement.

Comments about Vision Statement: Don S. noted that the character of the community is the gift to the people. Carol M liked that the vision statement was a broad statement. Jim P confirmed that this is really what people think and getting the vision statement right would be key to building consensus around the plan. Rody W. suggested that farmers have the more at stake than an individual with an individual home. Nan replied that the vision statement was crafted based on what farmers themselves (as well as the broader community) told us—what kind of community they wanted. The direction outlined is based on what people have told us. There seems to be consensus on the direction moving forward—they like and want to perpetuate a lot of the community's existing qualities. The difficult part is 'How?' There will be lots of challenges to outlining 'How?' The "What the community wants to accomplish" seems easier.

Rody suggested that some sections seemed redundant and could be streamlined and others seemed in conflict with one another—there would have to be a willingness to compromise.

Hetko noted that the overall vision statement's tone was a peaceful, agrarian one—not striving to maximize profit. The quality of life was important. He observed that some of the topical vision statements were more general and others more specific and measurable. The devil would be in the details. Nan urged the group not to get ahead of itself. One can't write a plan if you don't know what you want to accomplish. Ultimately through the

development of the strategy to reach the vision one would explore the balance of regulations v. fewer regulations. How people accomplish it is the question. There are 15 ways to approach reaching any vision statement. She will help to generate and give us a laundry list of opportunities and as a community we can explore and pick from them and develop others.

Roady asked if the vision statement had to be based in reality and questioned if there would be a chance to achieve it. Nan confirmed that the vision statement should be realistic and attainable but offer a lofty point to which the community wanted to reach. Roady suggested that it was more difficult for small farms to survive. Like the Model T had to change, farms have had to change (shifting from the horse pulling plows) to be successful.

Old-fashioned and quaint: Don asked what local traditions and old fashioned values meant. Nan and Sarah replied that at the public workshop participants had outlined what this meant—and suggested phrases to collectively describe ‘old-fashioned community’ meant: don’t lock door, know neighbors, country store available, friendly, local businesses, helping and caring community, let kids play outside freely, good education system, gathering places, local festivals, local, have rights, self sufficient, no big box stores, barbeque, sense of community, ballfields, Jermain Hall.

There was discussion about this phrase in the vision statement. Ed G. noted that Shaftsbury and Lincoln hills have changed—adding houses to the hillsides. Nan suggested that perhaps Villages and hamlets might be more appropriate places for denser development. Sarah suggested adding an adjective to describe the quality of the village/hamlet—the group came up with ‘quaint’ which was added to the text.

Managing Land Uses and Change:

Nan noted that the second highest weakness identified by community members at the public forum was not being prepared for or managing change in the future. There would be a need to balance private property rights and community goals and it seemed that people wanted to strike this balance. Roady W. noted that this is strong language; farmers are prepared to manage land uses; farmers do want to see community goals realized but in balance with individual property rights. Carol M. noted that there were other land owners too; the plan had to capture everyone; farmers might be affected more; the Town’s assets need to be leveraged to be successful and continue to grow. Jim P suggested that the plan seek to protect farmers and manage change. There was discussion and consensus about deleting the phrase ‘land uses’ and just leaving the sentence: “We are fully prepared to manage change in a manner that balances community goals and private landowner desires.”

Agriculture and Employment: There was discussion about whether or not the sentence in the vision statement about agriculture fully embraced the diversity of the sector and the degree to which the vision statement captured a need for employment opportunities more generally. Hetko wondered if in the future they would be more acreage in farming—perhaps smaller farms of 80 acres each. Nan reminded the group that we needed to

define ‘agriculture’. Roady suggested that it would be hard to go smaller given costs of items like fertilizer, applications required for manure. He was looking into a digester system. George (a member of the public) asked ‘How many farmers could White Creek actually support? He suggested that farms with 400-500 cows made it difficult to live in the area—the Village/hamlet of White Creek was suffering given the proximity of farms. Farms do offer jobs but also a stench. In April and October it is unbearable because of the need to lay down the manure. Roady replied that his farm spent a lot of money trying to address the manure issue. He asked what size farms would be OK. George noted that farming raised concerns about water quality. Roady W noted that the Town of Greenwich has other large farms. George described that Easton had over 2800 cows and it stank. Jim P. noted that farms support the local economy—the local NAPAs, Salem Farm Supply and support the country store in White Creek. Roady suggested that his farm should not be isolated; large farms generate funds for the county. George asked about the impact on neighbors and the value of the Right to Farm Law—what if someone wanted to subdivide 11 acres. Daryll asked if anyone had more to say about this issue at this time and noted that we like to think that we are farming in an environmentally sustainable way. Roady confirmed that the sector was highly regulated. Following this discussion, it was suggested that the Committee add a phrase about the ‘quality’ of agriculture practiced. Following discussion the following was developed: “White Creek has diverse and thriving agriculture done in an environmentally sound way. Our farms and residents support a variety of locally owned businesses. Local job opportunities are available.”

Other Comments: Sarah suggested that the phrase ‘public services’ be defined; suggestions to this end were not offered. Sweet suggested and participants agreed to add the phrase ‘affordable’ to housing to ensure future generations could reside in White Creek; Sarah suggested adding ‘community members’ along with public officials who would use the planning tools to make decisions—and ultimately serve as implementers of the plan—steering committee members were in agreement.

A member of the Steering Committee sought clarification on the subtopic vision statements and Nan clarified that some were scant as little information had been provided to date but we would flesh them out. The Steering Committee would not have time to review them that evening but would differ it to the next meeting. Additionally Nan suggested that we share the vision statement and goals with the whole community through potentially a mailing or survey—inviting the public to another meeting. Ed G. mentioned the annual White Creek Barbeque May 1st at Jermain Hall might be a good forum to share information about the planning process. Adriano noted that Village of Cambridge residents, over half of whom are also residents of the Town of White Creek did not participate in the visioning workshop given its locale in Jermain Hall and suggested that the Committee plan a public workshop nearer the Village. Nan reminded the group that the Town of White Creek Plan can’t really focus on or address what happens in the Village as it is a separate municipality. Carol noted that there were some people who wanted to talk but would not speak up publicly; the steering committee agreed to publish the names of the committee members in the paper and in information packets and invite the public to talk with individual committee members with whom they

felt comfortable asking them to bring their concerns/questions/thoughts to the Steering Committee.

Next Meeting Weds. March 18th 7:30PM Town of White Creek, 28 Mountain View Drive to further discuss the vision statement (particularly the subthematic vision statements) and to plan for the next Ag. Focus Group.