

DRAFT
Town of White Creek
Comprehensive Plan and Ag Protection Plan
Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
June 16, 2010

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

Minutes: The minutes of the May meeting were approved on a motion by Jim Perry.

Letters to the Editor: The Committee noted that in the last few weeks there had been several letters to the editor of The Eagle that mentioned the Comprehensive Plan including one from Nancy Lee (dated June 10), Will Moses (May 20), Nancy Mabeus (May 20), Jim Perry (May 6 and 20) and Bruce Rollerson (May 13) and Farm Bureau (June 3). Collectively these articles talked about elements of tourism, agriculture and junk regulations/enforcement. The Committee encouraged these individuals to participate in Steering Committee meetings; the Committee will keep in mind the range of public comments received from a variety of forums in crafting the plan.

Review of Draft Goals and Recommended Actions: In advance of the Steering Committee meeting members received a laundry list of potential goals and recommended actions for the Comprehensive Plan. Nan noted that she provided this list of potential recommended actions for the Steering Committee to review and determine which ones they collectively thought should be kept, modified or rejected. The purpose of the June meeting was to do just that—review them one by one as a committee.

Overall the Committee reviewed about nine pages of goals and recommended actions mainly about agriculture. The following changes were recommended:

- Include ‘horticulture’ in the definition of agriculture
- Add the goals “Retain agriculture and diverse, successful and family owned farms.” (Rody noted that some family owned farms are large and can be multi-family owned but are not disconnected from local roots.)
- Modify the Objective: “Market the Town to NEW (rather than young) farmers and farm RELATED entrepreneurs”
- Add the Objective: “Promote and sustain farms and farm support businesses and organizations.”
- Clarify first recommended action about establishing an agricultural implementation committee that efforts might be taken to identify existing organizations to help convene the group like Cornell Cooperative Extension or to identify a grant to have a person to service multiple farm communities. Nan noted that the most successful of such committees have a dedicated staff member. In point b: add ‘Continue to fund an ag-economic development specialist and/or circuit rider staff person to assist local farmers in expanding and retaining their farm operations.’ (referring to Cornell Cooperative Extension...)
- With regard to Agricultural Economic Development:
 - To the bullet about “Ensuring that the Town Assessor, farmers, and farmland owners have up-to-date information on all tax relief programs available and make this available to farmers.” Add: “Enforce penalties for conversion of lands.’ Jim noted that penalties are not being enforced. If land owners convert land within eight years of holding an ag assessment there are penalties. Land owners need to be more aware of this and there

- needs to be better education about the benefits and responsibilities associated with the agricultural assessment. Real Estate agents need to inform new land owners. (It was clarified that it was the land owner that converts the land that has to pay the penalty at time of conversion not necessarily the farmer.)
- Delete phrase in parentheses ‘such as fuel cooperatives’ in bullet on promoting agricultural buying cooperatives.
 - Rephrase ‘Establish ag economic development AREAS (exchange for zone) to promote agri-businesses in White Creek.’ Nan noted that there are examples of such agricultural industrial parks which have the appropriate roads and energy systems in place in the Rochester/Syracuse area around Genesso that include cheese processors etc..
 - Add a recommended action about “Work with agricultural entities and utility companies to promote opportunities for development of clean energy (e.g., methane digester) that could provide energy to local businesses and clusters of homes.” (This recommended action following a comment by Rody about working with other farms to install a methane digester to provide electricity to homes in White Creek. It would also reduce manure odors. Difficulties with National Grid obtaining three phase power have partially inhibited the effort. Don noted that additional 3 phase power could promote business development.
 - Add as a recommended action: Promote businesses and organizations that support agriculture.
 - Nan will provide the committee with and potentially include as a footnote the ‘agricultural economic development strategies’ Washington County outlined in their 2007 Washington County Economic Development Strategic Plan.
 - Delete recommended action regarding the Empire Zone program which is being dismantled by NYS.
 - Modify #8 to ‘Encourage Cornell Cooperative Extension to create an easily accessible clearinghouse of information including
 - Add recommended action: “Support local farmers’ markets in Southern Washington County.’
 - Add ‘schools’ and promoting ‘Farm to School’ programs to the section about promoting buy or sell local food products to local restaurants;
 - Find a different word for ‘value added’—regarding ‘promote value added farming’
 - Modify bullet about slaughterhouse “Work with Washington County and surrounding towns to SUPPORT EXISTING and develop SUFFICIENT USDA slaughterhouses to support area farms. (Acknowledging existence of slaughterhouses in Eagle Bridge—which recently expanded—and Argyle but noting that they still can’t meet the volume demands of larger farmers. Nan noted that there is a mobile slaughterhouse that was developed for the Hudson Valley which has yet to come into use due to wastewater disposal issues.
 - Revise bullet about community kitchens to acknowledge existence of the Battenkill Kitchen in Salem and promote its use and development. See <http://www.battenkillkitchen.org/>
- With regard to Farmland protection
 - Revise bullet about agricultural community having an increased voice in area local chambers of commerce to include Washington County IDC (No Washington County Chamber of Commerce exists.)
 - Revise bullet regarding PDR program to acknowledge and solidify establishment of Town PDR program. (Jim has donated his salary to establish a White Creek PDR

- program...) in Bullet a. revise “The Farmland Priority map SHOULD (delete ‘can’) be used to identify critical parcels so that the PDR program...
- o In b 2 delete recommended action about ‘No-net-loss program’.

The Steering Committee decided to resume a discussion of more specific land use strategies in July. In advance of departing there was concern raised about the impact that land use regulations might have on large land owners and discussion followed. Asked by Nan how he would like to subdivide his 1000 acres to accommodate 100 subdivisions, Rody described how in the most ideal world he could subdivide his land for 100 houses if not able to farm—trying to protect that good farmland for future use and subdivide that land which was not as good for farming into the lots. He would try to design the housing lots to minimize new roads and cluster the houses. It was noted that he described a ‘conservation subdivision’ which could be a land use tool encouraged by White Creek to help protect good farmland and open space but still allow for development on lands less suitable for farming—trying to strike a balance.

The group was reminded that the purpose of the presentation in May and the accompanying hand out entitled ‘Planning Options for White Creek’ was to educate and provide information to the Committee about the range and variety of land use tools available to communities generally speaking to meet plan goals. The Presentation itself was not the consultant’s recommendations for the plan. It is the Steering Committee’s job to consider which of such tools might be appropriate for the Town of White Creek and which ones might not be appropriate. The hand out includes a list of a variety of options/a laundry list from which the Steering Committee members can collectively choose or not choose from. Committee members are urged to review the handout that includes actions about land use tools and the draft laundry list of goals and recommended actions and think about which ones might have relevance to the community to meet the community’s goals and recommendations and which ones do not have relevance. Nan noted that there is always a tension between balancing individual land owner desires with community visions and needs and the Committee’s goal should be to have the plan find this balance.

Next Meeting Weds. July 21st at 7:30pm in the Town of White Creek Mountain View Drive Offices. Purpose of the meeting is for the committee to continue to review laundry list of land use tools for Town of White Creek and review and discuss sub-topic thematic strategies.