

October 3, 2018 Comprehensive Plan Committee Meeting with Town Board and Staff

Recorded by Nan Stolzenburg

What are the challenges/concerns facing the Town from your local government perspective? This question led to the following comments and discussion:

1. Budget and funding in general
2. Funding for ambulance in particular. Costs are up and reimbursements are down. Funding for maintenance of equipment and Town vehicles is an issue.
3. Elementary School was functioning in 2008 when first plan was done. Now it is not – consolidated in 2015. We do have some programming back in the building but it is a significant challenge to attract people to live here when there is no school locally. It is something that has to be overcome. The marketability of houses has decreased. School was center of community and now there has been a significant loss of sense of community.
4. Durham was a farming community – now farmers can't farm profitably. It transforms what people expect in the community. Has huge consequences.
5. Seniors and low-income seniors have trouble finding ways to stay in community. High taxes here may drive people out of their homes.
6. There is no Dr office in Durham or any urgent care.
7. There is lack of sustainable revenue from something other than single family residences.
8. Tourism industry has decreased. Not here anymore. Old buildings formerly tourist use are run down or converted to apartments.
9. Blight is a big problem. Houses poorly maintained, and many with extra vehicles on property along with lack of property maintenance detracts Durham as an attractive place for new residents.
10. Aesthetics and property maintenance is poor.
11. Second home owners are new residents that don't participate in community life.
12. There is a clash of cultures between long-term residents and newcomers. Decreases sense of community. There is a need to get weekenders/second homeowners to become part of the Town's community.
13. We are too far from larger population areas (Albany) and that makes it harder to attract business and industry. There is talk about attracting incubator businesses, but the distance to where markets are makes it difficult.
14. Lack of broadband and cell technology. Cable is available on certain roads. Poor cell network. This is connected to employment issue – lack of communication technology limits home based businesses and those that want to telecommute. Mid Hudson has improved with better coverage along Route 145 and backside of E. Durham and Cornwallville. Three towns are up and running now. Issue is both accessibility and affordability
15. Lack of a regional view – we need to become more involved in regional groups and efforts, and latch onto good things that are happening regionally. There is need to do more with Greene County agencies and organizations, especially in funding requests.
16. No infrastructure – while may not be needed for general residential use, it is a big problem for attracting business. GSK trucks water in and is building its own filtration plant. Lack of water and sewer does play part in business development. It is a big deal. Areas along the Creek are

also difficult as they are poor places for septic system use - Run-down boarding houses located along the creek are unable to be adaptively re-used.

17. Town roads are in good shape, but there is an ongoing issue related to dirt roads. To pave or not to pave.
18. Town has a simple minor/major subdivision law, which does require paved roads. Smaller bridges (under 30 feet?) are the Town's responsibility. Bridges over that length are the responsibility of the County. The Town has a few historic stone arch bridges.
19. As a result of Hurricane Irene, there was flooding in Oak Hill.
20. There is a loss of participation and loss of sense of community.
21. The website is in place but people don't use it. Lack of broadband is part of the reason. (Note from Nan – we should examine why people don't use it as in other places it is a prime method to communicate with residents. Might be a question on the survey).
22. Issues in the hamlets may be different from those in the whole town. The plan needs to address this and be flexible to identify different issues in different places.
23. There are a lot of conversions to Section 8 housing. Unless we change that it will continue to adversely affect Town. People are buying up properties to convert to Section 8. They can rent them by the week. It is one of the largest issues here. Some are not maintained well.
24. Brandow Park is not upgraded.
25. There is a need to market our town and in region. This led to discussion on the affects of growth and how we can keep our community values and character in the face of growth. The fear was expressed that the Town will lose what it is in the face of the growth they need/want. The question was posed as 'what do we want to be'. (Note from Nan – that is indeed what the plan should answer). Comment was made that 'I love it here but it stinks' followed up by 'would I still love it here if everything mentioned as challenges were fixed'. (Note from Nan – that is the crux of what the plan should offer the Town – how to find that balance.)
26. There is need for a strong action plan and the need to engage community more. We talked about how the Town Board needs to be given a plan and make an annual work plan to implement the recommendations in the Plan. People in the community need to remind the Town Board about the Plan. Concerns arose as to how to make the plan relevant - it needs to have actionable recommendations and 'sexy' things people can rally around.