

## Notes from Community Character and Public Services Focus Group

12 participants representing this topic. See sign in sheet.

### How would you define Durham's community character now?

- Strong sense of community
- Beautiful
- Fun, small town, rural pastural
- Downgrading visually – property maintenance improvements are needed
- Historic, beautiful, well positioned to get more
- Good people and family
- Close knit, whether family or friends
- Has a good agricultural feel even though agriculture has decreased
- Challenge is to maintain rural and small feel
- Not as prosperous as it was – many people are struggling
- Beauty – strong agricultural base, but people have to work 2-3 jobs to keep farming. Need to be more supportive of family farms.
- A strong community. But hard to make connections between different groups – Irish, Fire Company, Grange, Hamlets – all are different 'silo's. There are divisions – people come from different backgrounds.
- Community character is great.
- We could have more economic activity – real need to shift minds and generate engaged dynamic to change things.
- Family oriented – put children first
- People have little money to clean up their properties. Older people can't due to physical challenges.
- An aging community.
- Division between youth and seniors and within other groups. There is a us vs them, city vs rural, hamlet vs other issue.
- Nothing for kids to do. It was a shame the swimming hole was closed.
- Love seeing hay wagons in the Village
- Businesses are removed from the area – it must look aesthetically pleasing to get people to stop and we have work to do in that area.
- There is an undercurrent here of us vs them (Cairo vs Durham)

### What do you want to see in the future?

- New developments that have guidelines and promote our aesthetic character
- Not enough volunteers – there is not the public interest in it as some people are involved in everything.
- Aging population doesn't help.
- Volunteer Fire Department has no junior members anymore. We need to figure out how to get kids interested in Fire Department volunteering.
- Might need to go to more paid services
- Invite people to participate (look at how well individual invitations worked for focus groups)
- Develop volunteer job descriptions showing what, when, how and time needed. That might help recruit more volunteers.

- Old school building is there but not there for community to use. It is hard for people to get in and out and that should be addressed to benefit the community more.
- Establish more of a sense of place. Have a community fair with a BBQ. Have all organizations in town there to show what they are doing. Build 'esprit de corps' first as the important step. This is a foundation for all other needs such as beautification, volunteerism, cleaning up the roadsides, enhanced property maintenance. (Note everyone thought that building this esprit de corps was the most important thing to do first.)
- Better communication – there is a need to get the word out better. Need a package, list, or something else that would put it together and make communication more effective. Perhaps a community email list. Or use the reverse 911?
- Better communications infrastructure is needed – phone, cell – this underpins all other needs. People won't stay here without this. People won't come without it. Must figure out what the broadband issues and opportunities are first and then figure out how we can address them. Currently people don't understand either the issues, challenges, or opportunities for expanding here. Invite Mid-Hudson cable here as well as Warren Hart to help research and gather information about this topic.

#### **Describe volunteerism in Town.**

- Get volunteers to help with property maintenance.
- No volunteers are available now for any meal delivery in Town.
- Talk to the School to develop program where kids can get credit for volunteering in community. This could be to assist seniors, veterans, etc. Town could generate a list of things that are needed.
- Too much training required from NYS for fire department. Advocate at State level for changes.
- Start a job shadow program that links students with Town Board members so they can work side by side to learn how a Town is run, etc.
- Do team building with lots of volunteers for a big project – that will bring people together and build community

#### **What public services exist and where are there needs?**

- Lighting
- Snowplowing of roads
- Not many services
- Lack of broadband, good land line phone, cellphone are all issues.
- No urgent care – it is very much needed.
- Telephone lines drop calls all the time – it is an issue.

Note from N. Stolzenburg – when asked, the group listed building that sense of togetherness with activities, improving communication, and getting cell/broadband updated were the three most important priorities related to community character and infrastructure.