

**Ballston Spa
Comprehensive Master Plan Steering Committee
Review of Draft Plan
November 17, 2022**

Present in Person: Scott Burlingame, Bob Bush, John Cromie, Jared Iacolucci, Karen Martel, Ellen Mottola, Jackie Pelliccia, Marilyn Stephenson, John Behan.

Present on Zoom: Carrie Chapman, Mat Ercoline, Amy Fitzgerald.

Excused: Monique Cohen, Peter Martin

Public in Person: Liz Kormos

Karen Martel called the meeting to order. Minutes of October 18 were reviewed. Ellen noted her name was among those present and it shouldn't be. Marilyn moved the minutes be accepted as corrected; Scott seconded; passed.

Karen introduced John Behan to go through the draft comprehensive plan, which was released yesterday. Before beginning, Mat noted the draft is well done and expressed kudos to Amy and her team who put the draft together. John began noting the presentation can be used to explain the draft to others and laid out the agenda of a presentation and acknowledgements. It was noted, in acknowledgements, members should be placed in alphabetical order and need not have "member" after their names. Trustees may be listed alphabetically or by seniority. John went on to explain that a comprehensive plan is to provide long-term (10+ years) goals, visions, and perspectives to guide future actions by the government. John noted the recent survey provides a basis for obtaining our community's view of itself. The village's survey was successful with 808 responses, and its results provided various conclusions, including an overwhelming percent of respondents lived and owned a home in the village and wanted better sidewalks and use of alternative energy sources.

John underscored the four-paragraph vision statement contained in the draft and proceeded to review the rest of the document. It was suggested rather than grouping all R-1 residential areas together, there should be separation of at least three different neighborhood types: suburban, 19th century worker housing, and Victorian and early 20th century larger homes. It was also noted the village cemetery, while available for passive recreation, may be better labeled as something other than "park and open space." The presentation continued describing the various use areas of the village. It was noted that commercial building renovations should also trigger landscape design changes to foster a greener business corridor. It was noted transitional areas next to downtown are suited to light commercial uses that would remain compatible to residential living, though lower Malta Ave. may become more commercial than residential. Ballston Spa's village character makes it important that a zoning code is not taken "off a shelf" by a consultant but molded to the village's needs.

John outlined the goals the committee had come up with and classified them as short-term, medium-term, long-term, and on-going. The draft offered possible funding sources for each goal.

It was suggested that sidebars be created to show other communities have achieved what is suggested by the plan. That technique may encourage people to act who would otherwise think creek trails and gateway regulations are “pie-in-the-sky.” More representational photographs within the text will help in that regard also. It is also apparent gateway improvement will involve cooperation with each town.

It was also noted the document could be more critical of the village and point out what has not worked with the expectation that methods will change, even though it may be difficult to change the long-existing culture. Budgeting and reallocation of resources will be necessary to fund inclusion of IT and management experts in village government. There are many facets to this plan and it may be important to include a user’s guide. A question arose if the discussion was going beyond a plan into implementation. It was felt there have to be suggestions that will lead to a change in doing things or this plan’s suggestions may become unachievable. Funding such positions in other municipalities has been tied to grantsmanship. Interestingly enough, when ideas finally come to fruition, the government is often the last party in the game. That is the way it was with the Zim Smith Trail and Saratoga’s Railroad Run. That is not always the case; the Town of Milton spearheaded the Town Center Concept including sidewalks and taking over the County highway at Geyser and Rowland. The common denominator is there was a groundswell that fostered action. There is a need for this master plan to create such a groundswell, somehow. The goals section does contemplate each area of concern will require planning groups, which, if followed, will get more people involved in government and community planning.

A discussion ensued concerning emphasis of form over use. It was noted the concept only would apply to downtown and refer to new construction. In fill would have to be compatible with adjoining structures. The size and shape may preclude some uses, but many uses compatible with the structure would generally be allowable in the district.

There was a concern that the committee had not yet drawn a consensus on how to handle existing illegal uses in the new code. The idea in the draft is that those uses be “grandfathered” if they had existed 20 years and caused no harm. It was felt the amount of time may not be relevant and the text state the use be in existence for years.

There is a concern property owners in R-1 want uses or signs that are not permitted and the Zoning Board may feel compelled to grant variances, creating another level of non-conforming use, which is little different from the illegal non-conforming use. While letting sleeping dogs lie, may be a more peaceful path, if illegal, non-conforming uses are not able to become legal under the new code, there will be little expectation of the new code being enforced any better than the existing code. It was opined, without professional staff and a budget to support them, it is expected the village will continue to enforce the code against some but not others, new zoning will not be enforced, and people will do what they want or need to do, unless

it does so much harm to others, there are complaints. However, that ignores the need to finance properties through banks. Banks check for zoning violations and if there are they will not finance. It can be expected this requirement will become more stringent in the future. Unless zoning allows a relief valve, property owners could face real financial problems. Addressing this problem will be facilitated by breaking up the R-1 into separate zones as discussed earlier. In some neighborhoods non-conforming uses will be OK, in others many should go away.

It was suggested, in the language relating to IT, emphasis be added that the village must ensure its operations be constantly updated and remain current.

John went over subsequent steps in the process of plan adoption, expecting it will be concluded this coming winter. Committee members are to have their comments concerning the draft to Karen by November 28, and she will forward them on to John and Amy. The final draft will be completed before Christmas. That draft will have more maps, especially in the PDF version, meeting minutes, perhaps videos to memorialize committee discussions. Recent plans which informed this committee could be included or linked through the PDF version.

There may be no need for the committee to meet again, unless our individual reviews of comments create a need. Liz Kormos noted the next task is revising the zoning law and she invited committee members to continue by sending in requests to be appointed to the Zoning Committee when the time comes.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.