

PLANNING ADVISORY BOARD
Wednesday, September 22, 2010
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
615 WILLOW AVENUE

MINUTES

Members Present – Mina Amundsen, Martha Armstrong, Dick Coogan, Fernando de Aragon, John Gutenberger, Dooley Kiefer, Gay Nicholson, Scott Whitham, Andy Zepp

Members Absent -- Rick Couture, Dave Herrick, Pam Mackesey, Monika Roth, John Spence

Others Present – Joan Jurkowich (Planning Dept.), Jeanne Leccese (TCPD), Ed Marx (Commissioner of Planning & PW), Kathy Wilsea (TCPD)

Call to Order – The meeting was called to order at 9:11 AM by the Chair, Fernando de Aragon. There were no changes to the agenda.

Introductions – Ed Marx introduced David Kay and Todd Bittner, incoming members for PAB. Introductions were also made around the room.

Status of the Development Focus Areas Strategy – Jeanne Leccese provided a PowerPoint presentation. The public meeting held on June 14th had good turnout and good participation, and comments have been posted on the Planning Department website. Content of the final report will be preliminary information, background, definitions, benefits, types, design principles, planning issues, individual focus areas, and action items both countywide and specific to each focus area. Reports will be prepared for individual focus areas with existing demographics, economy, housing, employment, vacant land/infill opportunities, services, infrastructure, local plans, and natural features. These will include maps and specific suggestions for action items.

Jeanne outlined the four types of focus areas: urban center (City of Ithaca), established nodes (villages with potential for infill), emerging nodes (have some combination of components), and hamlets. There was discussion on hamlets, which are more residential in nature and lack infrastructure or some other component that would be necessary for development. Varna is not on the hamlet list because development is restricted by the surrounding natural features. The thresholds used by TCPD for inclusion as a focus area were potential for 1,000 housing units, 200 to 250 jobs, and some community services within an area having a half-mile radius. Ed Marx pointed out we are trying to work in countywide discussion to tell people what's realistic. Planning for hamlets will be left up to community planners, as that is appropriate in a municipal comprehensive plan. The importance of acknowledging hamlets is so we can distinguish between what they are and what we are trying to do with this strategy.

Working with maps showing colored dots representing proposed focus areas, Joan Jurkowich discussed potential development. She noted some areas meet the definition of established nodes better than others, and some have traditional downtowns. Staff found a possible need for another category, and discussion centered on the Village of Lansing/ Cayuga Heights/ Northeast Ithaca area. A split screen of two maps was used for discussion purposes, showing three dots on one map and one large circle on the other map. Discussion included access by transit and bike, ability to function separately from the City, lack of interest in change within Cayuga Heights, and interest among residents for their community to have a "center". Ed Marx pointed out the need for support from the communities – the goal is to get consensus on the Development Focus Area Strategy, and if there is no buy-in, the strategy will not be successful. Joan cautioned that different development and services would be recommended for different types of nodes, so action items would differ based on the type of focus area. Discussion then turned to consistency of using dots and including transit/shuttle/ bike links. Ed pointed out some areas are overbuilt for businesses and underbuilt for housing. Joan said staff will be meeting with involved municipalities about placement of the circles.

Joan next moved to how to identify the urban area – a larger circle or the exact City boundaries? Comments were that use of the circles as conceptual areas or bubbles was suitable. Related areas were then shown on the map as outlined circles, which would link and identify them without including them.

Upcoming steps will be contacting municipal planning boards, giving names to the focus areas, relating them to existing or developing local comprehensive plans, and establishing action steps. Countywide actions include promoting the strategy, preparing details, providing impact analysis, and developing models. One particular comment from the public meeting about amending state regulations to allow community water and sewer will be examined. Update will be provided to PAB at the end of the year. Members asked to be notified of the schedule for municipal meetings. Andy Zepp said this is an aggressive timeline, and asked about how work will develop with the City. Joan responded that staff will acknowledge the urban focus area, but will not be providing custom designs for the City. The City is updating their comprehensive plan, and has concerns about what the County is promoting outside the City. Several members said it will be important to provide visualization of the mixed use concepts for City residents.

Comprehensive Plan Update – Joan provided a handout with 56 proposed action items. She said the next step is to take the action items to the proposed lead agencies to see if they will agree to undertake the project as part of the Comp Plan. Many are already working on or planning items that are listed, but have not agreed to be part of the Comp Plan listing. She said items 15-18 are from the Conservation Plan for Agricultural Areas. Item 21 concerns the County's capital fund for aquifer studies through USGS. We are now having delays getting municipalities to participate in aquifer studies, which provide examination and prioritization concerning use as a public water supply. Gay Nicholson asked if the reports can relate to gas drilling. Joan said some municipalities are examining them in terms of gas drilling, but that is not the intent of these scientific studies. Some municipalities can't afford the municipal portion of the cost share. Gay suggested providing information to the public, and citizens might then support a study in their area.

Joan moved on to number 22 on the action items list, which is development of a regular maintenance program for onsite wastewater systems. The Health Department has recently contacted Joan to state continued support for this item. Energy and Greenhouse Gas Emissions action items were agreed upon in 2008 during EGGE development, and will be included in the update without further contact with the lead agencies. For item 55, the proposal to examine feasibility of a joint City/County administration building, Tompkins County Administration is developing the process for this. It is also in the Downtown Ithaca Alliance plan.

Schedule November/December Meeting Date – Rather than meet the 4th Wednesdays in November and December, it was agreed that one meeting will be held on December 8th.

Approval of Minutes from July 28, 2010 – Draft minutes were moved by Martha Armstrong, seconded by Andy Zepp. Guest Liz Walker will be added to the attendance chart, and location of the Aurora Dwelling Circle will be further identified. Amended draft accepted by voice vote.

Commissioner's Report – Ed Marx reported that the County Administrator has recommended a change in Ed's job to Commissioner of Planning and Community Sustainability. Many of the sustainability projects are things he is already working on. Public Works division directors would report directly to the County Administrator. The Legislature has created a planner position for tourism, funded by room tax dollars, and Ed expects the department to fill that job this fall. A department budget was submitted to meet the target reductions. The proposals are: TCPD will contract for work with municipalities with full municipal reimbursement (has been 50%); 239 development reviews will no longer provide any technical recommendations, meaning suggestions will only be made for projects considered to have negative inter-community or county-wide impacts; and inquiries about Census data will only be referred to the Census website. Ed said rollover funding was requested for some projects, with defined timelines. In response to an inquiry about the tourism job, Ed said it is open to existing staff. Also, Darby Kiley has accepted the one-year planner position to work with municipalities on Marcellus Shale drilling issues.

Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned at 10:46 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Wilsea, Secretary, Tompkins County Planning Department
Minutes adopted by PAB on December 8, 2010.

Membership:

Mina Amundsen, At-Large

Martha Armstrong, Economic Dev.

Dick Coogan, Local Planning (non-urban)

Rick Couture, Education

Fernando de Aragon, Transportation

John Gutenberger, Education

Dave Herrick, Facilities/Infrastructure

Dooley Kiefer, Associate Member

Pam Mackesey, Planning Committee

Gay Nicholson, At-Large

Monika Roth, Agriculture

John Spence, Housing

Scott Whitham, Cultural & Historic Pres.

Andy Zepp, Land Pres./Public Land Mgmt.