

PLANNING ADVISORY BOARD
Wednesday, January 26, 2011
SCOTT HEYMAN CONFERENCE ROOM
125 East Court Street

MINUTES

Members Present – Mina Amundsen, Martha Armstrong, Todd Bittner, Dick Coogan, Sue Cosentini, Fernando de Aragon, Dave Herrick, David Kay, Dooley Kiefer, Pam Mackesey, Gay Nicholson, Kathy Schlather, John Spence, Scott Whitham, Andy Zepp

Member Absent – Rick Couture, John Gutenberger, Monika Roth

Others Present – Joan Jurkowich (TC Planning Dept.), Ed Marx (Commissioner of Planning & Community Sustainability), Kathy Wilsea (TCPD)

Call to Order – The meeting was called to order at 9:05 AM by the Chair, Mina Amundsen. There were no changes to the agenda.

2011 Planning Department Work Program – Ed Marx provided an overview, stating the document was organized to match the County's new budget process, as explained on page 2. Joan Jurkowich walked through the document with members. Feedback is welcomed, and the document next goes to the Legislature's Planning, Development & Environmental Quality Committee. The work program reflects the budget, with a general reduction and two specific increases: the Planner working on gas drilling, funded mostly by the Park Foundation grant, and the anticipated hiring of a Senior Planner to work with the tourism program coming from County Administration. Several work items are noted to start in the second half of the year. A staff person will be hired to fill a vacancy caused by the resignation of Jeanne Leccese, and Leslie Schill is expected to return to working full time later in the year.

Work on the Development Focus Areas will wrap up in the first half of the year with public outreach and completion of design studies. The Adaptation Plan for Climate Change, an action item of EGGE, will become part of the Hazard Mitigation Plan. Seneca County is the lead agency for the Blueway Trail, and that will kick into high gear in 2011. Conservation Strategies I and II are complete, and a strategic approach to conservation will be drafted and taken to the County Legislature for adoption. The Community Housing Fund has some delay from the agreements with other funders, but Ed expects it to move along when that is in place. The Pre-Retirement Study came out of the Affordable Housing Study, and TCPD is now finding it may piggyback with another study planned by the Downtown Ithaca alliance. The Affordable Housing Study's needs assessment identified people retiring in the next ten years as having the largest impact. Mina Amundson pointed out the economic downturn is also affecting the ability of citizens to pay for preferences, and Ed expects the study design to include that.

New funding is unlikely from NYS for several years for Purchase of Development Rights projects. Tompkins County has some already authorized, but not funded. All but one of the Energy Program items are new. The potential roof replacement CDBG program would provide roof work, since a good roof is needed to qualify for other energy efficiency grants. The District Energy project on West Hill is something that Cayuga Medical Center is working with NYSERDA to explore. The Planning Department will probably participate in that. The area is not defined yet – CMC and Paleontological Research Institute and maybe some new development. If it proceeds, the scope will need to be determined quickly. The Planning Department is responsible for management of the County's 558 acres of forest. A FSC plan is in place, and a forester has been hired.

Other new roles for Planning will be the tourism program and coordination of the Green Fleet Policy. The County has no centralized fleet, but there are three groups of vehicles – Public Works, Sheriff, and general. The Department will be working with the Town of Ithaca concerning the Biggs B property development. Ed hopes the project can demonstrate good planning practices of density, clustering, edge, and nodes. He also hopes to incorporate transfer of development rights – increase of density in the housing area traded for protection of open space, thus equaling neutral impact. This is a parallel discussion to the district energy, and Pam Mackesey noted TCAT is working on a Park&Ride site for nearby development.

Ed returned discussion to the goals on page 3 and pointed out how the work items would achieve them. Right now TCPD is reaching out to potential lead agencies for action items in the Comprehensive Plan update, working to increase sustainability issues, and anticipating the arrival of the tourism program. In terms of the Development Focus Areas, Ed

said the Biggs B project can be a tangible example of what we can have in our community. Joan said staff is going through the focus areas and developing implementation plans, and will meet with appropriate groups in the municipalities. The key piece is the Town of Ithaca, and TCPD will meet with their staff. Then it will come back to PAB for input in developing a 5-year work program. Design strategies will be developed later. Joan said the time line for pilot projects is not clear yet – that will happen as we can afford to proceed and depend on which municipalities want to participate. There was discussion on how PAB members can help in educating the public and supporting the principles through anticipated periods of controversy. Ed said there are also some property owner groups on East Hill and West Hill that are speaking together in support. David Kay serves on the Town of Ithaca Comprehensive Plan Committee and lives on West Hill. He feels the key issue on West Hill would be exhibiting that traffic wouldn't be made worse. This would concentrate, not increase development. Having this greenhouse gas initiative being led by major businesses will have a compelling impact. Andy warned that if citizens perceive opposition to development, they will seek housing in the next municipality out and yield more traffic. He offered an example of going to Enfield instead of West Hill. Joan warned it will take a long time to develop the desired characteristics – ten years or more to see impact. Ed said the Route 96 Corridor Study answered and addressed issues, but people didn't believe it. There will be discussion at PAB in the future on ways to demonstrate tools to achieve the Development Focus Areas.

Finger Lakes Region Rural Sustainability Proposal – Ed explained this is a strategy for sustainability in rural areas that need viable economic opportunities. Future sustainability will put pressures on rural lands, and this is also a viable economic opportunity for landowners. The project as proposed is currently being presented to PAB and PDEQ, then contact will go out to the Finger Lakes communities and collaboration sought. The quality of life in the Finger Lakes is what high tech companies and workers want. If partners are gathered, further work will be done with existing regional groups, like Cooperative Extension, Finger Lakes Land Trust, and Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance. Dooley Kiefer suggested acknowledging and including the state-designated regional economic development groups. Ed said the region is formed from the corners of four regional boards, none of which is centered in the Finger Lakes. In this proposal, the rural focus provides common ground, although the economies differ. Any boundary is artificial, but for project purposes Ed has selected counties that contain lands in the Finger Lakes watershed. This can provide a regional focus besides gas drilling.

Downtown Sustainability Center – Ed reported Gay Nicholson is working with Sustainable Tompkins and other agencies on this concept. They think it has a real chance of launching. The learning center will provide an opportunity for more consistent interaction with student skills and provide added attraction for students and faculty. The gallery will be an opportunity to educate, inform, and engage visitors to our region as well as residents. It will cover energy conservation, local foods, etc. There is also the possibility of private sector participation in providing information and perhaps opportunities for sales. A business plan is being developed to cover location, basic staff to keep the building open and work with volunteers, and items to offer. Sue Cosentini suggested finding a new name. Ed invited members to send him ideas, saying this is another opportunity for PAB members to be a transformative influence in the community.

Commissioner's Report – Ed said PACE financing is roadblocked in Washington and Albany, so the Planning Department is working with Sustainable Tompkins and Tompkins County Area Development to approach the banking community to find ways to help with energy financing. This will highlight the abilities of property owners to pay back loans for energy efficiency projects because of reduced energy bills.

Approval of Minutes from 12/8/2010 – Minutes were moved by Dick Coogan, seconded by Martha Armstrong and accepted with no changes.

Announcements – Andy Zepp distributed copies of “A Vision for the Canandaigua Lake Watershed” which was prepared by Betsy Landre and FLLT. He announced a blueways conference that is being targeted to the Syracuse and Rochester region. David Kay announced a Land Use Leadership Alliance training, sponsored by Cornell, Pace University and Albany Law School. He urged interested members to contact him quickly, as space is limited.

Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned at 10:31 AM.

Respectfully submitted, Kathy Wilsea, Secretary
Tompkins County Planning Department
Minutes adopted by PAB on March 23, 2011.

Membership:

Mina Amundsen, At-Large

Martha Armstrong, Economic Dev.

Todd Bittner, Natural Environment

Dick Coogan, Local Planning (non-urban)

Sue Cosentini, Business

Rick Couture, Education

Fernando de Aragon, Transportation

John Gutenberg, Education

Dave Herrick, Facilities/Infrastructure

David Kay, Local Planning (urban)

Dooley Kiefer, Associate Member

Pam Mackesey, Planning Committee

Gay Nicholson, At-Large

Monika Roth, Agriculture

Kathy Schlather, Human Services

John Spence, Housing

Scott Whitham, Cultural & Historic Pres.

Andy Zepp, Land Pres./Public Land Mgmt.