

PLANNING ADVISORY BOARD
Wednesday, May 27, 2009
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
615 WILLOW AVENUE

MINUTES

Members Present – Martha Armstrong, Dick Coogan, Fernando de Aragon, John Gutenberger, Dave Herrick, Dooley Kiefer (Associate), Peter Penniman, Monika Roth, John Spence, Scott Whitham

Members Excused -- Rick Couture, Pam Mackesey, Gay Nicholson, Fred Wilcox, Andy Zepp

Others Present – Mina Amundsen (Cornell University Planner), Joan Jurkowich (Planning Dept.), David Kay (Cornell University), Ed Marx (Commissioner of Planning & PW), Martha Robertson (Tompkins County Legislature), Kathy Wilsea (TCPD)

Call to Order – The meeting was called to order at 9:08 AM by the Chair, Fernando de Aragon.

Changes to the Agenda – Order of items was changed to address the minutes at this time.

Approval of Minutes from April 2009 – Draft minutes were moved by Peter Penniman, seconded by Dick Coogan and approved by voice vote with no changes.

Nodal Development Plan for Tompkins County – Ed Marx began by introducing guests Mina Amundsen and David Kay. A handout was provided from the Planning Department. Ed said advantages of nodal development were mentioned during public interaction in the development phases of the Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan. Staff was careful at that time not to design a land use map for the County. Now two corridor studies have been completed. When the topic of nodal development comes up, residents in the identified areas always ask “why?” and “why here?” and we’ll probably never get away from those types of comments. Move needs to be made to community discussion, so a broader look can be taken, and that is where PAB comes into the process.

In the Route 96 Corridor Study, efforts were made to describe the potential site more. This was summarized on page 1 of the handout. Traditional hamlets could also develop as nodes. It is important to use existing infrastructure. Infrastructure can be enhanced while upgrading. This is an efficient use of tax dollars. Planning can minimize conflicts with things we want to protect, like farmland and natural areas. Page 2 of the handout shows existing and potential nodes. The potential nodes were identified in studies or through public discussion. Dryden, Groton and Trumansburg have sewer, some other areas have public water. Page 3 shows existing infrastructure, page 4 shows agricultural and natural areas. Page 5 is an overlay that shows we can accommodate development while avoiding Natural Feature Focus Areas.

The next phase is analysis, where potential is defined based on current infrastructure. The existing intensity in hamlets is pretty much what people want to see. A map like this shows we are not trying to develop West Hill. The Sewer/Water infrastructure study will provide information on capacity. Ed asked for ideas on going forward.

Mina suggested mentioning impacts of building heights and density. Ed thought maybe the urbanized map area could be expanded to show nodes within the urbanized area. He has already spoken with City and Town of Ithaca about housing potential. It’s clear we can’t get the targeted number of housing units in just those two municipalities. The Affordable Housing Needs Study showed a need for 4,000 affordable, non-student units. Fernando commented there are lots of underutilized spaces in the City and Town of Ithaca. Mina said housing in rural nodes would still be characteristic of those areas, not dense like the City. Fernando mentioned the City’s current work to update their Comp Plan will provide opportunities to bring this up.

Martha Robertson felt timing is important. She feels nodal development is great and makes sense, and these maps make it clear West Hill is not targeted for development. It would be great if the Sewer/Water study could come out first, as it is a logical pre-requisite. If this concept comes from the County, it looks like the County is dictating to municipalities, and there would be backlash. Ed said it wasn’t done earlier because we wanted the study results first, but we can’t afford to let this be stalled out. The Town of Ithaca fight over West Hill could stall everything. Martha Robertson thinks the NYSEG area is ready. The Town of Dryden likes the opportunity, and there would be no neighborhood battle. Dooley Kiefer felt it is important to get the concept out for discussion with municipalities, which will generate press coverage. Municipalities are aware this kind of infrastructure is important. This is really baseline information for municipalities, not the County taking action.

Dave Herrick asked if the three nodes in the Town of Ithaca fit with their long-term strategy. Ed said Carrowmoor on Route 79 is not on the map, as it was not in any municipal plans. Carrowmoor is not based on existing infrastructure. The nodes identified on the map are based on existing infrastructure. Dave said the map and plan are looking to the future, which helps deflect some of the criticism expected. Dick Coogan said municipalities see this as helpful. They can look around their municipality and see what you mean, and find it logical. Ed said the map is not our creation, but a reflection of sites already identified by communities in their own plans. Dick said looking at the map helps municipalities see that their neighbors have the same concerns.

Peter Penniman asked what would be the ideal allocation of housing? He doesn't see that the City wants to be more urbanized and the Town wants to be more suburbanized. Ed said the strictest efficiency would be accommodated in dense areas, which are already close to work and transit. He sees quite a potential in the Village of Lansing. If alternatives are offered in a supportive community, the market will sort itself out. Martha Armstrong said she found the maps clear and useful, and they build on the Comp Plan. She voiced frustration over the infrastructure study grant contract and reimbursement processes. She is starting to get data from the study, and may have enough to present in October. She said this is still a great community and people are coming to live here. Martha Robertson noted five existing and identified nodes are in the Town of Dryden. She sees this as a defense against Carrowmoor. It shows the need to plan so we don't get X number of units on a green field.

Mina said the real strength is as a vision. It communicates the concept. There are many interrelationships, and communities each have characteristics that can be strengthened and used in development. John Spence said mixed use is incredibly motivating. It is difficult to get mixed income into housing, and he asked if there might be incentives for funding. Ed said there could be incentives, and developers should see advantages and know they would have a built-in market. Transportation creates activity that encourages business. The development process and zoning need to encourage nodal development. Clear plans will build support in a community. Density can be part of plans in some areas. Mixed income can be 40% of a project, or smaller scale. Martha Robertson encouraged presenting the data identified in the housing study. People need to understand that the market must be developed rationally. David Kay suggested making the text on page 1 more concise, perhaps with the use of bullets, and pointing out advantages. Higher density can have character and be effective – get that message out. John Gutenberger said the materials need better connectivity, and map titles could be improved.

Ed pointed out that most of the municipalities endorsed the Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan. He expects long-term conversations will be needed to get some municipalities to support this. David Kay said municipalities will want to discuss the concept and turn it into their own document. Lead them to their own conclusions and their own specific target sites. Ed said the County can't do that level of planning. We need wide discussion in order to draw support. He would like PAB to sponsor workshops for planning boards and municipal officials. Martha Robertson suggested having workshops co-sponsored by Tompkins County Council of Governments.

Commissioner's Report – Ed Marx reported that he attended the national conference of APA in April. The EPA Smart Growth program is developing a Rural Smart Grown Guide, which would be suitable to Tompkins County. It includes ten principles, including a) Avoid the “devil's density”, i.e., anything between one unit per half acres and one unit per 20 acres; b) Strive for minimum density of four units per acre and one unit per 40 acres; and 3) Avoid “cluster sprawl”, e.g., clustering in the middle of ag land. Clustering should be used only at edge of an urban area. There is a net zero Science Center building in Minneapolis that has been operating since 2005, with 1,700 square feet. There is centralized hot and cold water for downtown St. Paul. There was discussion of returning to natural drainage systems. There are underground streams in areas that had previously been dug up and used for sewer and are now crumbling. The underground streams can be used for natural drainage. There are movements to minimize the amount of water that needs to be treated by changing use patterns. There was much focus on aging infrastructure, which will have to be rebuilt or replaced.

Announcements – John Spence commented on the difficulties Better Housing is having claiming grant funds. Officials at the Rural Housing Coalition agreed that government agencies are making it more difficult to meet requirements for funding and complete grant projects. John Gutenberger said the Town of Ithaca has formed its Comp Plan Committee.

Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned at 10:24 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Wilsea, Secretary, Tompkins County Planning Department
Minutes adopted by PAB on July 22, 2009.

Membership:

Martha Armstrong, Economic Dev.

Dick Coogan, Local Planning (non-urban)

Rick Couture, Education

Fernando deAragon, Transportation

John Gutenberger, Education

Dave Herrick, Facilities/Infrastructure

Dooley Kiefer, Associate Member

Pam Mackesey, Planning Committee

Gay Nicholson, At-Large

Peter Penniman, Business

Monika Roth, Agriculture

John Spence, Housing

Scott Whitham, Cultural & Historic Pres.

Fred Wilcox, Local Planning (urban)

Andy Zepp, Land Pres./Public Land Mgmt.