

Town of Niles Comprehensive Plan Committee
Visioning Session II
West Niles Fire Department
April 26, 2007 (7:00-8:45 PM)

Attendance: Twenty-nine (29) Town of Niles residents were present including Town Officials, County Legislator, Steve Cuddeback and Comprehensive Plan Committee members.

Opening remarks by Co-Chairperson, Diana Plue included defining a comprehensive plan as a map for the future of the town and stressing the importance of input from all residents of the Town. Each member of the Comprehensive Plan Committee introduced him/herself.

Presentation: Review of why the Town of Niles Needs a Comprehensive Plan

Kristy LaManche (CNYRPB) provided a review of the planning initiative and funding secured by Congressman James Walsh to work with the Towns of Owasco, Fleming, Scipio and Niles on the future of the Skaneateles and Owasco watersheds.

Ms. LaManche reviewed some basic information and statistics about the Town:

- Town is uniquely situated between two beautiful Finger Lakes.
- Population of the Town was 1,208 (2000 census)
- During 1990-2000, pattern of new houses equaled 10 new homes per year.
- There has been a loss of farmland in the Finger Lakes region and NYS, 1990 -2000.
- The average work commuting time for residents is 28 minutes.
 - The number of people commuting outside the county to work has increased 5%.
- Changes to the Town can mean:
 - Loss of scenic views
 - Loss of agricultural resources
 - Degradation of water resources

Finally, Ms. LaManche reviewed the definition of a comprehensive plan as a community driven process to provide a blue print to determine the future of the Town. The plan would give direction to the Town government to amend the land use regulations to ensure that the growth of the town is what the residents want.

Visioning Session I Review

Three Comprehensive Plan Committee members offered comments about the first visioning session. Ms. Rizzo stated that the answers to the questions brought up ideas/concerns that she had never previously considered. Mr. Hart mentioned that the agricultural community is important to many people in the Town. Mr. Scholl said that the comments indicated that good neighbors seem to be important to residents and this concept seemed to be tied to the farmers.

Participants were given a written summary of the answers to the questions posed at the first visioning session and Ms. LaManche provided a very brief overview. An invitation to provide comments on the questions by visiting the website or by writing a letter was offered to residents.

Special Topic: Land Use Regulations in the Town of Niles – Past, Present and Future

Bob Martin, Chairperson of the Niles Planning Board began with a brief history of the Town which included the fact that the area was first settled through Revolutionary War land grants given to soldiers who survived the war. In 1833 the Town of Niles was separated from Sempronius. The Town is an agricultural community and there is a state “Right to Farm” law which exempts land in designated agricultural districts from most of the land use regulations.

Mr. Martin then provided an overview of the Land Use Laws passed in 1987 and currently in place. The public does not vote, but residents can comment on rules changes. The Town Board has the authority to make changes to the land use regulations and it is important that people understand that these laws are not static. (The full text of the land use regulations may be found on the Town of Niles website.)

- (1) Chapter 123: Junkyards: Purpose is to license persons engaged in the business of operating junkyards, to regulate and control the location and to control and designate the paces where abandoned automobiles may be kept. Example: Only one unregistered vehicle is allowed to be visible on private property.
- (2) Chapter 135: Mobile Homes: Purpose is to preserve the health, safety and welfare of occupants of mobile homes and communities by ensuring that suitable plans are prepared and provisions made for their placement as to providing water, sewage disposal, recreation area and parking. Example: Minimum size of mobile home – 900 square feet; mobile home community must apply for a permit.
- (3) Chapter 164: Setbacks and Lot area: Purpose is to promote the health, safety or the general welfare of the town; to secure safety from fire, provide adequate light and air, prevent the overcrowding of land, to avoid concentration of population, and to ensure the purity of groundwater. Example: Commercial property – 50 feet set back from property lines; Residences – 25 feet setback from property lines; Lake front – 75 ft. frontage by 200 ft.
- (4) Chapter 170: Site Plan Review for businesses (store fronts) which would include setback, signs, parking, buffer with residences, lighting. Existing farm or agricultural land use is exempt from review.
- (5) Chapter 190: Subdivision: At the moment there is a moratorium (1 year) on major subdivisions in the Town of Niles and it will most likely continue for the length of the comprehensive plan process. A major subdivision includes five or more parcels of land or a subdivision that will be serviced by new public roads or other public infrastructure. A subdivision does not include the sale, transfer or development of land for agricultural purposes, open space or conservation. Any major subdivision will require a SEQR – environmental quality review.
 - The time frame for approval of a subdivision or add-on of land is approximately one month, if there is compliance with the land use laws. If not in compliance, the subdivision will not be approved; the applicant may then go before the Town Appeals Board.

Discussion about the land use laws by committee members and Town of Niles residents involved some specific questions or concerns:

- At this time, the Town currently has 33 miles of roads. Requests for new public roads will not be approved.
- People can be misinformed about laws. Example – some people believe that the Town of Niles has a law against a business having a liquor license. There is no such law in place.
- The Town takes a very small portion of the tax monies collected, but provides services and built the new Town Hall without the need for bonding.
- Discussion on septic systems and holding tanks for lake side properties.

Mr. Martin stated in closing that for the most part, the current land use regulations do work.

A summary of the meeting was provided by Ms. LaManche and Ms. Plue with a reminder that the next public visioning meeting will be held in June, in the Niles Town Hall. Appreciation was extended to The West Niles Fire Dept. and Judge Richard Winters for providing the meeting place and refreshments.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Abend
Secretary