

**Genoa Comprehensive Planning Group Notes:
Business Open House
Monday 8 March 2010**

Committee Members Present: Maria Bachich, John Berry, Peggy Bradley, Sjana McClure-Berry, Anto Parseghian, Barb Patchen, Dave Stilwell, Dan Thayer, Susan Tosto, Karin Wikoff.
Members of Public Present: Lori Bacht, Brent Chidsey, Jonathan Eld, Rhonda Fessenden, Tim Fessenden, John Gloss, Dorothy Lonsky, Dana Mandel, Felicity Miller, Glenn Miller, Melissa Miller, Ken Patchen, Lori Beyea Powers, Kathy Vreeland, Connie Wilcox.

Dave Stilwell opened the meeting by explaining that a comprehensive plan is a guiding document for our local lawmakers which can be revised as needed. The Comprehensive Planning Committee is currently in the “inventory” phase of drawing up the plan. We are gathering information on the history of our community, on where we are now and then projecting forward into the future. We want to know what we as a community value, and what the people want our town to look like in the future. We are looking for input and recommendations. When we have a draft of the plan, we’ll put it before the public for feedback. If the plan then gets an OK from the Town Board, it goes to the County for approval. They check on the impact our plan has on neighboring communities. Having a comprehensive plan will also allow our Town to apply for certain grants.

Dave explained that we are here tonight to talk about business in our community. What are the driving factors, the challenges and future developments for businesses here?

Tim (and Rhonda) Fessenden have a dairy farm and sell compost. They would like to see the Town pursue plans which will bring vitality back to the community because King Ferry is withering away.

Carin and Bruce Kopp could not make the meeting, but Carin asked Maria Bachich to speak for her. Carin says that she feels the community has lost its vitality. She feels that the four corners in King Ferry look like Sarajevo. She is concerned about the appearance and vitality of the Village of King Ferry. As owners of the King Ferry Golf Course they joined the Aurora Arts and Merchants Association and have had some success. She said that in the past they have worked with the Triangle Restaurant and the King Ferry Hotel to offer Golf and Lunch specials. She feels that an excellent school system attracts and keeps nice families in our town. She would like to see a more vibrant community. (Bruce and Carin returned to the King Ferry area to raise their children in a safe, rural community).

Ken (and Barb) Patchen have a dairy farm on Tupper Rd. They produce milk, and their son produces maple syrup. They feel the same as the others.

Connie Wilcox of Genoa Sand and Gravel says she feels there has been a shift and now the Hamlet of Genoa looks pretty good but the Hamlet of King Ferry does not. The Four Corners does not look good at all.

Brent Chidsey of Stone Well Bodies and Equipment (aluminum). He lives at home here and

enjoys being in Genoa. The people, the zoning, the Town Highway Department and the Fire Department have all been great. We have to grow to find people who are skilled with their hands; it's a small place so it's not as big a pot. The things his company manufactures goes all over the world.

Glenn Miller of Miller Tilling (home building, furniture and cabinets) says we have nowhere to go but up. His business does not own their own building at the Four Corners but they may try to purchase it. They have been in the space 10 years. He was involved with the Comprehensive Planning Committee for a time. Now there is a great push and he is 100% behind it. We are coming out of hard times with the economy. There has been little activity, but there is some hope. He is committed to the Four Corners and is going to stay and prove it, and his company will help out as they can.

Felicity Miller has a paper and fabric design business out of her home. She and Glenn are committed to the area and its beauty. They love the good things as well as the challenges and feel we can do better – we can uplift the “bombed-out zone.”

Sjana-McClure Berry (and John Berry) are organic crop farmers with a rental business. They are struggling with the decrease in people who want to live here.

John Gloss has a rental property. He has a hard time renting when people ask about the infrastructure, as we are lacking in adequate internet and television access, when there is open burning despite the laws – it's hard when you live close, when there is no municipal garbage pick-up, and when prospective renters notice the accumulations of trash in backyards in the area. He also mentioned smudge pots in NYS.

Dana Mandel has a physical therapy business and rental properties. He had lived here for 23 years. He values clean air, clean water, the beauty and that it is a safe place to live. He feels that outdoor wood boilers next to your home or business are a detriment to the quality of life and the value of property, as is open burning (which is now illegal). Wood boilers need to be a greater distance from neighbors. The through-truck issue is a safety issue. If the proposed law passed it would not affect local businesses and agriculture – the Town should express support of the law. King Ferry and Genoa are in the heart of the affected area.

Jon Eld of Community Propane has storage facilities in both hamlets. He likes what the Town of Genoa does not have – zoning laws and high taxes. He also likes the rural quality. He'd like to see King Ferry add on.

Melissa Miller Fedrizzi has a real estate business and is co-owner of Northville Hall, which is a place and a project including a Community Market. Currently the market is advertised mostly by word of mouth. The plan is to stay local to the area. They have 15 vendors, 10 of whom are regulars, and 30 more who have expressed interest. She has lived here 17 years and used to work at the King Ferry Hotel. When selling properties issues of quality of life and services available and so forth come up. She has a vested interest in seeing the Town do well.

Lori Bachta of Smith's IGA, a struggling mom-n-pop grocery store which is in its 120th year of

business. She says the Town has changed a lot over the past 10 years. People are more mobile; most work in Ithaca or Auburn and they do a lot of their business in those communities. The IGA has stayed in business providing things people forgot to pick up elsewhere.

Lori Beyea Powers of Dodge City Clippers (hair salon) grew up here. The income levels of her clientele are less as the economy has slacked. Her assessment has more than doubled, which does not reflect the quality of life. To get more business, she needs more people. If she tries to reduce her hours, it affects people coming into the salon.

Dorothy Lonsky's children have a business in the Town of Genoa. She'd like to see something wonderful come out of the old school. She has lived here since 1970 and has seen a lot of change. The communities were vital, but when they took out the schools, they all sank into black holes. It's a shame and she'd like to help if possible.

Dan Thayer has a small diversified farming business growing and selling vegetables and perennials, dried and cut flowers and wreaths. Running such a business here is inexpensive compared to even a short distance away. Here we are rural and left alone and don't have all the regulations of more populated areas. He and his family moved in 15 years ago and he doesn't think they would have purchased here if they had known they wouldn't be able to get internet. That's a big limitation on business development directions. He also notes that water is a big issue. He sees no hope of public water expanding to reach his business any time soon. But the internet is still more important to his business. He would like to see less sliding backwards, and less abandonment of homes and businesses. He'd like to see things nicer and more attractive, but not so much development as to be too overwhelming.

Anto Parseghian of Abiding Branches (natural furniture design) has never marketed his products. He grew up in Los Angeles where the bureaucracy was crazy – life here is liberating. The area is virtually crimeless; it can be taken for granted; you don't even have to lock up your lawn mower. He had hoped to hire but then the economy went downhill, though it is now picking up. The lack of internet is a huge frustration. He has to send the large image files of his work when he is on a project in the middle of the night in order to get them to send. He doesn't know how much this has hurt his business.

Karin Wikoff moved to the Town of Genoa a year and a half ago from the Aurora area because on Academy St she was away from liquid manure spreading and there was little traffic. She is not happy both of these things are already changing.

Peggy Bradley, Town Supervisor spoke on the subject of high bandwidth internet in the Town of Genoa. She reports that we have been turned down again, and that this is round three of the campaign for internet. For the past 3 years, the Town of Genoa alone has been trying to get someone to bring high speed internet to the area. The only ISP willing to do the work is Clarity Connect. A grant is needed to help with the price of installing the infrastructure. Individuals would pay for the service and there would be no cost to the Town. They tried in 2008, but did not get the grant. They joined with Niles and Scipio and sent out surveys. They collected data and applied again with Clarity Connect in an expanded plan and were turned down again. That was when New York State still had funds (more than a million dollars). So they went back to the

drawing board. The federal government has recovery funds for use to bring utilities to rural areas through the USDA and the NTIA had money for broadband. We applied for both, and did not get either. Peggy had a call with RUS (Rural Utilities Services) and they advised including anecdotes, all very professional, and letters of support – we still didn't get the grant. So we went to Verizon and other big companies and came back only with frustration. So they went to see Congressman Mike Arcuri. By this time we were at the begging stage, and representatives from Cayuga County went as well. They had a good exchange and are hoping the squeaky wheel will get us what we want. It's another round and we are trying again with another grant the end of this month. Other areas, such as Aurora and Venice, would benefit from this deal as well. They have talked about the possibility of a bond. It's just going to take lots and lots of money to build the infrastructure. Temporary jobs would be created. They are just going to keep trying. Peggy asked any and all business owners to send her a letter describing how lack of quality high speed internet is impacting their businesses (losing business, etc) – she can use these to help the application. Get her address and send a hard copy letter to Peggy. They are looking at wireless internet, radio, off towers. It would take 12 towers, including 1 across the lake, but would get us 90% coverage – it will get it to your home. As for the 911 system, the Motorola deal is back on the table. We are investigating getting together to have the internet component added, but we won't drop one for the other but keep trying on both fronts. But please do send those letters – they really resonate for the application.

Dave Stilwell did a little sum-up of the themes we had heard today, with 2 standing out. One is the lack of sufficient internet services. The other is quality of life issues. Among these were community things like schools, playgrounds, parks, ballfields, community centers – a central place is necessary for the vitality effect. Liberty, lack of regulation, ease of doing business is another thread. The traffic issue is tough. Aside from agriculture, many people work elsewhere – looks like about 70%. There is concern with how the community looks, particularly to people with rental properties. Regulations is another area of interest. Wood boilers are an issue in terms of placement and tracking. With more people and more interactions, there will be a need for some regulations – if someone moves a business next door, it can destroy your quality of life. There are unwelcome changes as well as welcome changes and we need to think ahead. The community may grow. South Lansing, as an example, was growing too fast. It had many impacts which were never anticipated or planned for – people were freaking out. If you don't think ahead, once you are there, you can't do anything about it. When public water was extended up 34B to Milliken Station, residential development grew like crazy. Change will happen, and we need to guide growth for the future. Business owners, tell us your vision of what makes a good business environment. What would you like the Board to do, to encourage and to discourage?

Maria Bachich had some more comments from Carin Copp. She reminded us about Nan's Place on 34B, which is no longer there, and how a plan to build a "gentleman's club" there was fought. Someone bought it and tore it down.

Peggy commented on the Four Corners. She wants to bring the County into the discussion. She'd love to have ideas. The perception in the community is that the owner just wants money.

Dave Stilwell commented on zoning: It is not an all-or-none proposition. If you wanted to have

zoning in just some areas, you could localize it, such as just at the Four Corners. Think about zoning for compatible uses – it takes some forethought.

Dave also noted that we have panels on the environment and on open spaces coming up. We'll be looking at a Marcellus Park example. We'd like to see a similar group as has turned up here for the business meeting to help facilitate what are our needs in terms of a public park / central gathering place – do we want our government to do it? Do we want to do it ourselves?

Glenn Miller commented on the public park issue – we definitely need that. There's a game in this town – how to make your property look bad to reduce your taxes. People really stop and think about that before making improvements. They don't want to be penalized. The old store in King Ferry is a flaming example. We all pay the penalty for that – we should try to turn that on end.

Sjana McClure-Berry said a friend of hers from Europe, upon viewing our Town, said it looks like France after World War II – that's how we look in other's eyes. When talking about this area in financial terms, we are the 5th highest taxed county in the United States. When our assessments double, we can't afford it. Why is it that Internet providers don't want to come here? Because there aren't enough people to pay the monthly fee. Forbes has branded New York State as the "moocher state."

Maria Bachich mentioned the example of Trumansburg as a town which used to be broken down. A bunch of young people painted houses for free and turned the town around. People started moving in because of a group of volunteers. The junk around here is a major problem – we should have a law against it. It takes community pride. We need a nucleus of people who get excited about something. It can be done. In Lansing, they are building a park. It just takes a nucleus of people to get things started.

Dana Mandel mentioned zoning and a low tax base as things which attract people. The concept is that you pay less. But why would you want to invest in a place with no protections for your investment? Chaos is not the answer. We have need of some regulation – some assurance that our investments will be sound.

John Gloss noted that it is a perception that taxes are high.

Sjana McClure-Berry replied that we should do a data analysis of a comparable community which is doing just as much with less taxes. The taxes are why a lot of people move out and others won't move in.

Dave Stilwell commented that we are losing our youth. (Brent Chidsey chimed in "skilled labor" as well). The young people are leaving the community, which affects quality of life, what's here and the vitality of the place. As the community ages, its characteristics change. We need excellent schools.

Dan Thayer said that's not the only factor.

Dorothy Lonsky noted that the seller wants \$60,000-\$70,000 for the closed businesses – what happened?!?? The population went down. There aren't enough kids. They had to consolidate the schools.

Anto Parseghian commented on the businesses which have closed and that the school is the nucleus of the community.

Tim Fessenden noted that the Town Board and the School Board are two different entities. Something needs to take place, something that works, and it takes interested PEOPLE.

Dave Stilwell remarked that Northville hall could be a spark that gets things going. We could ask the Town to invest our tax money in land, for example. We would have to have a community build.

Melissa Miller noted that the land around the Town Hall is 5 acres. She also commented that she thought it would be better to say she was from New Jersey when she first moved here than to say her family was from Aurora. There are still strong prejudices between communities here. The central school is NOT a nucleus (the way the individual schools in the communities were).

Dave Stilwell commented that the Fire Departments are having talks about joining together and that the younger members of the community are more cooperative and less turf-oriented.

Melissa Miller said there are half as many Generation Xers than Baby Boomers, and that the Generation Y group is a bigger group than Generation X.

Peggy Bradley said something about the geography and Anto asked if it were about zoning.

Maria Bachich commented that commercial zones with lower taxes would encourage businesses.

Dave Stilwell brought up “Buy Local” movements and encouraged us to capitalize on this. Local is sometimes more expensive, but it supports your neighbors. We need to get the message out.

Dorothy Lonsky said there is a resurgence of small communities.

Felicity Miller urged thoughtful growth and development, such as having SOME zoning which would take that into account. It would be encouraging and attract the right kind of people.

Anto Parseghian would like to see people's liberties preserved and a coordination of life functions.

Glenn Miller noted a penalty for selling ag land for non-ag use – 8 years of taxes is the penalty. The land is locked up in farming. Self-government is impacted by Albany. New York State has Home Rule. The Towns have more rules than in many other states. In Lansing, it's hard to find land for crops. The property values rose and farmers could not afford to lease the land, because people were able to sell it to developers for more money. It can be a turning point.

Peggy Bradley noted that people here don't want to see development, they want the area to remain farms. Bringing in more people and development is not everyone's ultimate goal.

John Gloss commented on the friction between ag and non-ag interests. We need to be careful of concentrations of residential areas.

Dave Stilwell asked what do you do to protect soils and agriculture? Farmland trust is an example. There are way to protect what you value – development rights, conservation easements, etc – it's a matter of finding the balance.

Melissa Miller noted that the Zoning Board has nothing to work with. We could use more rental properties in the Town, but we must have water.

Sjana McClure-Berry urged the Town to use local vendors, to put our taxes back into the community.

Glenn Miller suggested we look at communities which are successful.

Peggy Bradley challenged business owners – she respectfully asks them to consider coming to Comprehensive Planning Committee meetings and give us ideas. They are creating some economy – could the Town by the King Ferry Building? The seller wants \$350,000, but it needs an appraisal. What are the reasons people aren't buying?

Respectfully submitted,
Karin Wikoff, Secretary, Town of Genoa Comprehensive Planning Committee