

Genoa Comprehensive Town Plan Meeting
Open Space and Recreation
October 14, 2010

Attending: Bob Ammerman (of Summerhill), Maria Bachich, Dave Baidon, John Berry, Dave Stillwell, Dan Thayer, Susan Tosto, Karin Wikoff, Connie Wilcox (of Lansing).

Dave gave an overview of our next few meetings: This one is on open space and recreation. We also want to have a business meeting to see where we are, a land use planning meeting, and then have Jeanie Gleisner in sometime after 1 January 2011 to help start writing the draft of the plan.

Agriculture is the primary land use in our town. When looking for available open space and recreational areas, we notice we have no public space at all except a little around the Town Hall. After the schools (one in each hamlet) closed, there was no place for people to get together – no playgrounds, no ball parks, etc. We are interested in hearing what other towns have done.

Connie Wilcox (from Lansing's comprehensive planning group) spoke about the focus on Myers Point. They have had a lot of success in coordinating volunteer efforts. The North Cabin which had been at the museum in Auburn was going to the dump. Some of it was original. It was sitting at the Town barns. They decided not to wait for public money, but instead put it at the park and fixed it up using all volunteer labor and donations of materials. We solicited donations. It was dedicated at this year's Harborfest, and the North family came to the dedication as well.

Their biggest accomplishment has been the new playground. There was some money in the budget, but not the \$130,000 needed. There were expenses for safety and meeting the codes. The Community Council raised the funds so it wasn't taken from the taxpayers, the donations of cash and materials were amazing. They raised \$140,000 and the playground is absolutely beautiful. Donors could have someone's name placed on a picket.

Another project is pathways. These are walk/bike trails in town, some along the Black Diamond railroad. They are working with the landowners for easements. They are starting from around the public land across from the Town Hall. This project has minimum cost.

A town needs a center, a nucleus. When Genoa lost its schools and sent all the kids to Southern Cayuga, there were no more recreation spaces. You have to get the community involved as stakeholders – it can't just be a small group – the community has to buy in; you have to get the ball rolling. You have to start with a core group, then others will step up – everyone is good at something.

The Community Council has recently been reactivated. They have received some money from United Way. This is an active group with members from churches and other organizations. They plan things and raise money. They work with the scouts and with businesses. They are involved in the Harborfest which brings in lots of people (which is similar to Genoa's Wheat Festival) – they have contests and bands and they bring in between 3,000-4,000 attendees. They are very fortunate to have the resources they have.

Aside from the park, the trails are their only public recreational space.

Another new plus in Lansing is the new public library. The old Town Hall was empty and going to be torn down. Volunteers saved it. They voted, got a charter, included it with the school taxes, and now it has gotten so big and is so well-used that they have hired a full-time librarian. They have issued 700 library cards. Lots of people go there to use the internet. They also host many events, such as historical talks and gardening talks.

Lansing applied for a \$1,200 grant for an Arts Festival. Local artists and craftsmen have to apply to have their works on display. It's a huge cultural event. They also have a wine tasting and hors d'oeuvres. The art is on display for 2 weeks.

They also have a Farmer's Market every Saturday from May through October. People come to see their neighbors and talk as well as to buy produce and goods.

Lansing is also requiring any developers to leave at least 5% open space. Any property with half an acre has to have sewer available, while any property of 40,000 sq ft has to have its own septic. There was a plan for a stand-alone sewer plant by Cargill, with the blessing of the DEC. It wouldn't serve the whole town, but it would cover the schools, along the lake and the state facilities. They could have had a \$15 Million grant from the State, but the Town wouldn't go for it and the plan was scrapped.

The population of Lansing is about 11,000, which includes the Village of about 3,000.

Lansing also has a rink with summer and winter activities. They have ice skating and indoor soccer seasonally. School buses run to and from the rink so the school can use the facilities. They also run a ski program through Greek Peak. And they have a cooking program which is so popular that there is a waiting list of kids.

Bob Ammerman spoke about the Town of Summerhill, which has a population of around 1,800 people. He used Groton's comprehensive plan as a model for the format. They are similar kinds of communities. They know they want to protect Lake Como and all the watershed for Lake Cayuga and Fall Creek.

The plan was mostly put together by Bob and the current supervisor, Charlie. They want one plan for the water and sewer district (85 people) and the municipal well. The supervisor is awfully good – he gave a dinner for the public, he pays for a lot of things out of his own pocket. They do raise money at the Route 90 sales. They have a historian, and some events, but there's not a lot going on.

We asked Bob if the impact of the State Forest were positive or negative? There is no tax base on the State Forest land, there are no businesses there. Do people come to use it? Summerhill would like to give a tax incentive to have someone buy the vacant restaurant. People come through – and just keep going. Groton is doing well with 2 restaurants and their spaghetti

dinners. Is there a need or no need? Is there enough traffic? When the previous restaurant raised their prices, it drove business off.

Summerhill also has children attending school in 3 separate school districts.

Summerhill has a growing Amish population, but they have not been involved in town planning.

Karin reported that Bruce Hatfield from the Scipio comprehensive planning group had said he'd attend tonight's meeting, but had to bow out at the last minute. He passed the word that open space and recreation were not issues for his town, and that they have 2 small public lakefronts, and one is almost never used (almost no one knows about it), but that overall, it's not an issue.

Then began a preliminary discussion of land use planning. This is a potentially controversial area for our town, and will surely be more emotionally charged, particularly where CAFOs and land use planning intersect. This is the issue we have left to explore last. We will want to think about where to allow development. Much is already set by the State Ag and Markets. A farmer could sell his land for development – you can't stop that. Fields which were formerly open could become a housing development. Lansing had an agriculture protection plan, including a \$25,000 grant from Ag and Markets, to help keep agriculture concentrated in the north of town and allow more development in the south of town and in the Village where the population is more dense. People come with proposals, like major or minor subdivisions; they can divide land twice then it becomes a major subdivision – these are much more regulated and once done, you can't do another one for 5 years.

Lansing: In our community “zoning” gets a bad rap – which is why we've been using the broader term “land use planning.” In Lansing, the people who were most against any kind of zoning are now very much for it and glad we put it into place. Once the growth started, if there were no regulations and no laws, anybody could do anything they want right next door to you. Local laws have more teeth than ordinances. Most people are now happy with our land use planning – they realize they are being protected. There is no more of the vocal opposition we had before. Originally, the Village wanted it, but the Town did not – but that has changed.

Summerhill: The whole town is an ag district. When it comes to ag issues, they have only one CAFO, but it's right at the head of Lake Como, which is why they want public sewer and water and more testing further upstream. They need more testing. Maria commented that it is more expensive, which is what holds local groups back from doing more testing, not lack of volunteers. Her group tests 4 streams, 2 tributaries, 16 locations and it costs more than \$4,000 for the 16 samples each time they test. Funding is tough. Tompkins County funds water testing, but Cayuga County would not fund it. Cayuga County was stunned by the results of what was found, but is still not willing to pay. Safe levels of e-coli has to be no more than 250 ml; they found 240,000 and 490,000, while the phosphates were off the charts. Only 2-3 properties in Genoa have beach wells, the rest bring in lake water. There was a discussion of e-coli in the water, some giving the opinion that the most likely source for which is runoff from the spreading of liquid manure. There's a professor at Cornell studying the DNA. It was also noted that human septic has been spread in Genoa in recent years, and may still be.

NOTE: Maria has indicated she'd like to give us a more detailed report on the water testing at a future meeting.

Connie: Twenty years ago when our previous plan was written there was resistance to land use planning. With time, more people have accepted and even embraced it. We could be 20 years behind other communities. What can we do to change people's minds faster? Bob: In Summerhill, the situation is that when the Board passed the plan, that's the way it is. For example, they allow no more than 2 junk cars in any yard. If there are more, the owner gets a warning letter, and if it isn't corrected, the town clears them out and the owner gets the bill. The elected officials are leading the way. In Lansing, the original Board was against zoning, which was how they came to have the Village split off, but that means that some folks have both Village and Town taxes.

Development pressure can creep up on you. Here in Genoa there is a sense that things haven't changed, and a belief that they won't. But they have and they will. Land is more affordable in Cayuga County, so there is incentive to move north. Genoa is in easy commuting distance from Auburn, Ithaca and Cortland. Development growth is enormous in Lansing. Lansing looked at Dryden – there was a lot of open farmland, but development exploded. Now there are all these huge houses. Changes like this make huge demands on services. Residential areas cost more in services than they bring in in taxes. When the water line went up 34B to Milliken, NYSEG put the line in. The estimate is that for every \$1 of taxes that come in, \$1.40 of services go out for residential areas.

Bob: In Summerhill, the deed restrictions on State lands were lifted. Connie: Now there are some town houses and a grocery store planned for next to the Dunkin Donuts. They plan to break ground by December 1st. The IDA tax breaks go down each year – they are not forever.

We'd like to see a little of this in the hamlets here, especially King Ferry. The owner of the property at the four corners was approached, but he wants too much money. We could use economic development plus a business group to prod things along.

Summerhill was looking for store recommendations. Did they want a gas station/convenience store? Where should they put it? There was very little interest in development. A diner would be just the ticket. They would also like a home for seniors.

Once you get your plan done, you can apply for grants. The community development grant available for the elderly and low income folks – they could help people make their homes more energy efficient, put on a new roof, put in a new furnace, even buy someone a new mobile home which would be up to code. The Town would have had to spend \$5,000 to get \$400,000 back in aid, but they Town Board decided it couldn't afford it. The way it works, the Town pays the start up, then they get \$400,000, and can spend up to \$25,000 per person or up to \$50,000 for a qualifying mobile home. There are still tons of grant money available.

Connie: Lansing found that local laws have more teeth; ordinances were too easy to challenge. Guy Crow, their lawyer (for Genoa too?) advised them to go with laws. Bob: Summerhill wanted laws added.

Lansing has a planning board which reports to the Town Board. They make recommendations. Their planning document is a working document – it is never quite done, and always being revised. Their planning board is appointed and is not ad hoc.

Summerhill and Lansing's planning efforts date to the 80s. Their plans have a lot of power. In 2007, Lansing wrote or re-wrote 14 laws. They have 2 meetings per month, 4 hours per month, helped write the plan plus the laws. They have training so they know the laws, all of which makes less work for the Town Board.

We can put it in our recommendations that Genoa should have a planning board. We can also ask Lori about a liaison to our group.

Engage with the public. Help them to understand. If you wait and try to retrofit once development begins, you'll just be ripe for the picking and will have no control over preserving the things you want to preserve.

Open and respectful communication between long time residents and more recent residents of our town has been limited and sometimes difficult; we should encourage all parties to listen to each other's points and concerns better.

Bob: Summerhill had 10 proposed points for their plan, and then they did a survey on those points.

In Genoa, we are getting ready to set down our goals. What will the public support? We may need a joint meeting.

Bob: Summerhill has height restrictions on building, including a tower law and a windmill law. However, the SEC can override their local laws. They can put limitations, but they can't stop them from being built. Wind turbines went in around Swazy and Lansing Stations Rd – again, there's nothing in the Lansing laws about them. They also have nothing about gas drilling. Tompkins County is expending a lot of energy on this issue.

In Genoa, people do not drink the water. Of the many calls that Maria has made to the households in the town only about 14 or 15 households drink the water whether they get their water from the lake, wells, cisterns or springs. The overwhelming majority buy bottled water to drink. She has put in a \$400 space technology filter that works wonderfully and now drinks her water.

Jeanie Gleisner of the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board had offered us assistance writing our plan. We will get back in touch with her to see when she is available. Susan Tosto also has been in touch with George Frantz of Cornell. He has graduate students who wrote the Town of Dryden's plan. Because they are students, they are independent – no politics. We will contact both and ask what they can do for us – Dave will make some calls.

Action items:

Dave will double-check with Geoff about the definitions on the tax maps (from a long-ago action item)

Dave will talk to Maria about where she is on the water source info project

Dave will schedule an Open Space/Recreation meeting for October.

Karin will type the corrections to the previous meeting minutes and get them to Tonya to go on the website

Karin – maybe the analysis of older census data to look for trends could be passed on to students?

Karin and/or John will get the information on Baltimore Woods in Marcellus

Karin will get Jeanie Gleisner's contact info to Dave

Dave will contact Jeanie and also George Frantz

Dave and Karin will contact a few local comprehensive planning committees to invite folks to come share with us on the subject of Open Space/Recreation

NOTE: Since the meeting, we discovered that the Town Board is meeting Wednesday 13 October and we are working on Thursday 14 October. Jeanie Gleisner is available after January 1, 2011 and George Frantz' students already have a project for the spring in one of the Southern Tier towns dealing with the Marcellus Shale drilling issue, but he would be willing to come for a one-time chat with us to give us advice and ideas.