

Chapter 1 : INTRODUCTION

The purpose of comprehensive planning is to view and examine a community from a global perspective in order to see the “big picture.” Comprehensive planning enables municipal officials responsible for making governmental decisions to evaluate the existing state of the community, to determine what the goals of the community should be, and to develop both a strategy and course of action for achieving those goals.

Decision-making in municipalities is not vested in a single body, but is divided among different bodies, e.g., village boards of trustees, town councils, planning boards, and zoning boards of appeal. These boards, for the most part, operate independently of each other. This independence can result in incongruities in public policies and actions. The turnover of board members over time can also contribute to incongruity. A Comprehensive Plan, however, provides a well reasoned, articulated basis for municipal decisions and helps to eliminate, or at least reduce, incongruous public policies and actions. The comprehensive planning process provides a means through which the overall goals and aspirations of a community may be identified and shared among the policy- and decision-making bodies. A Comprehensive Plan not only articulates the goals, but also serves as the basis for land use control through zoning regulations, for constructing public improvements and for providing services and programs for the general health, safety and welfare of residents. A Comprehensive Plan assists a community to focus its efforts and to stay on a “steady course” in order to achieve its goals. In addition, a Comprehensive Plan serves as a tool for holding elected and appointed municipal officials accountable for the decisions they make and for moving their communities toward the goals articulated in the Plan.

This Comprehensive Plan document contains two Parts. Part 1 contains the policy components of the Plan, including:

- an overview of the planning process, the legal basis for the Plan, and the procedures for adoption and future revisions;
- a statement of the goals formulated to address the issues and concerns identified by citizens, focus groups, interested agencies and organizations, and the Comprehensive Plan Committee;
- a new land use plan, infrastructure plan, and recreation, culture and tourism plan, that present the vision of the community’s desired development patterns over the next twenty years; and,
- an implementation plan that contains recommended action steps to achieve the stated goals; assignment of responsibilities for carrying out the action steps; and a timetable for completing each.

Part 2 contains the background information that was compiled during the planning process. This Part includes:

- a review of existing laws, ordinances, regulations, plans, studies, and other relevant documents that control or otherwise impact and influence development in the three towns and two villages that comprise western Orleans County; and

- a review of existing conditions, an evaluation of past trends, and a projection of future trends and needs.

Legal Basis of the Comprehensive Plan

In the spring of 1999, the Towns of Yates, Ridgeway, and Shelby and the Villages of Lyndonville and Medina made the decision to join together to prepare a joint Comprehensive Plan. The decision to prepare a joint Plan was made in recognition of the fact that the five municipalities share many mutual interests and concerns. The responsibility for the preparation of a Comprehensive Plan rests with the municipal governing bodies as set forth in §272-a of the New York State Town Law and §7-722 of the New York State Village Law. These laws also permit the governing bodies to delegate this responsibility to either Planning Boards or to ad hoc committees established for the express purpose of preparing Comprehensive Plans. The decision was made to appoint and delegate the responsibility for preparing the western Orleans Comprehensive Plan to an ad hoc committee referred to as the Comprehensive Plan Committee (CPC).

Comprehensive Plan Committee (CPC)

The governing bodies of the five western Orleans County municipalities each appointed several persons to the CPC to represent their respective municipalities. The CPC was comprised of 39 members which included local elected and appointed officials, representatives of the agriculture and business communities, individual citizens, and representatives of County and Regional organizations. The names of the representatives appointed by each municipality are identified below.

Town of Yates CPC Representatives

Bradley Bentley	Roger Harrison	Louis Salen
John R. Fox, Sr.	Richard Kurz	Fred Stelianou
Stephen Freeman	Russell Martino	

Town of Ridgeway CPC Representatives

Theodore Dunn	Charles Pettit	Robert E. Waters
J.T. Gidley	Nelda B. Toussaint	Michael S. Wendt
Brian Napoli		

Town of Shelby CPC Representatives

David Bushover	David Green	Lee Roberts
Merle Draper	Eileen McElwain	Dale Watts
Roger Fuller	Kirk Myhill	

Village of Lyndonville CPC Representatives

Darrel Oakes	John Raduns	Joanne Whitney
Nick Partrick	Jim Whipple	

Village of Medina CPC Representatives

Marty Busch	Howard Hibbard	Howard Lake
David Feltz	Bill Hungerford	Wilson Southworth
Jean Hart	Don Kennedy	Craig Tuohey

County and Regional Representatives

James Bensley, County Planner, Orleans County Planning Department
Kelly Kiebala, Genesee/ Orleans Regional Arts Council (GO-ART!)

The CPC held its first meeting in June 1999 and met monthly through November 2000.

Residents Survey

In order to encourage broad public input into the planning process, one of the first decisions the CPC made was to survey all residents and residential property owners in western Orleans County. The CPC spent the summer months developing the survey questionnaire. In September 1999, the survey questionnaires were distributed through a saturation bulk mailing. Individually prepared mailing labels were used to mail questionnaires to residential property owners residing outside of western Orleans County. Each household received two answer sheets so that in households that contained two adults, both would be able to respond. Extra answer sheets were also made available, upon request, for households that contained more than two adults. Self-addressed, postage-paid envelopes were distributed with the questionnaires for respondents to use to return their responses. Drop-off boxes were also located in various businesses and public buildings throughout western Orleans County to provide an alternative means to return survey responses. Surveys were also completed by high school seniors at the Medina and Lyndonville High Schools.

Survey responses were tabulated and analyzed during the fall of 1999. The results of the survey were presented at a public informational meeting held at the Medina High School on December 1, 1999. During this meeting, the public was invited to provide both oral and written comments to the CPC. A summary of the Residents Survey results is included in Appendix A. The complete Residents Survey Report is available for review at the Town and Village offices.

Walking Tours, Focus Groups and Outreach Letters

In addition to the residents survey, additional activities were taken to obtain input for the planning process. These activities included walking tours of the business districts in the Villages of Lyndonville and Medina, focus group meetings, and the solicitation of input from interested agencies and organizations based and/or operating in western Orleans County.

The tours of the Lyndonville and Medina downtown business districts occurred in October 1999. The purpose of the tours was to develop ideas and suggestions for improving these two vital commercial areas. Members of the CPC, along with other local public officials and the general public, were invited to participate in the tours. After completing the walking tours, participants brainstormed to develop ideas and suggestions.

Six focus groups were formed in the spring of 2000. Separate focus groups were formed to discuss each of the following topics: tourism, arts and natural and historic resources; telecommunications infrastructure; agriculture and farmland; property maintenance and code enforcement; industrial and economic development; and intergovernmental cooperation and consolidation. Persons from within and outside the community with particular expertise on these topics were invited to participate, as were members of the CPC. The focus groups developed ideas and suggestions relating to their subject areas for inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan.

Outreach letters were sent to a number of agencies, organizations, and groups based or operating in western Orleans County in the fall of 1999. Governmental agencies and community-based organizations and groups were invited to identify their issues and concerns and to submit position papers and/or provide information on their programs and plans to the CPC.

Plan Preparation

Using the input obtained from the residents survey, the public informational meeting, the downtown business district walking tours, the focus groups, and interested agencies, organizations and groups, the CPC formulated Comprehensive Plan goals in the spring of 2000. Concurrently, the CPC developed an implementation plan. The implementation plan identifies the action steps to be carried out to achieve each goal, who is responsible for carrying out each action step and the time frame in which the action step is to be completed.

Public Hearings, County Referral, and Environmental Review

By September 2000, the CPC had completed most of its work and had prepared a draft Comprehensive Plan. In accord with New York State Town and Village Laws, the CPC held a public hearing on the draft Plan on October 4, 2000 at the Wise Middle School in Medina. During the public hearing, the draft Comprehensive Plan was presented to the public with particular emphasis on the Plan's goals. The public was also afforded an opportunity to comment on the draft Plan.

The CPC also referred the draft Comprehensive Plan to the Orleans County Planning Board in the fall of 2000 in accord with the requirements of § 239-m of the New York State General Municipal Law. The Orleans County Planning Board reviewed the draft Plan at its meeting on December 21, 2000, and recommended Approval. Subsequent to receiving the comments and recommendations of the public and the Orleans County Planning Board, the CPC met to consider what modifications, if any, the CPC would make to the draft Plan in response to the comments and recommendations received. The comments and recommendations of the Orleans County Planning Board are contained in Appendix B.

As adoption of a Comprehensive Plan is classified as a Type I action under New York State's Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) regulations, an environmental review was undertaken. The Village of Medina served as the Lead Agency for the environmental review; the Towns of Shelby, Ridgeway and Yates and the Village of Lyndonville participated fully in the environmental review as "involved agencies." Each of the Town and Village Boards reviewed the Full Environmental Assessment form that was prepared for the action and determined that

there would be no adverse environmental impact resulting from the adoption of the Plan. As lead agency, the Medina Village Board issued a Negative Declaration of Environmental Significance prior to adopting the Comprehensive Plan.

Finally, the governing boards of each of the five municipalities jointly conducted public hearings on the proposed Comprehensive Plan in accord with New York State Town and Village Laws. The public hearings were held on February 28, 2001 at the Medina High School and on January 16, 2001 at the Yates Town Hall. Subsequently, each governing body enacted resolutions to formally adopt the Comprehensive Plan.

Maintaining and Updating the Comprehensive Plan

It is important to remember that a Comprehensive Plan is a “living document.” Comprehensive planning is not an event isolated in time, but rather an ongoing process. As the conditions and priorities of western Orleans change over time, the Plan should be reviewed and updated in light of the changed conditions and priorities. This type of review and updating needs to occur periodically and involves the following steps:

- re-examining the existing conditions in the community;
- reconsidering the long-range vision of the community and the goals contained in the Plan;
- examining the recommended action steps that were actually carried out as well as those that were not carried out;
- determining the appropriateness of the long-range vision, the goals and the action steps that had not yet been carried out, in light of the changes in the community’s conditions and priorities; and
- amending or establishing a new Plan with revised goals and recommended actions to reflect changes in the existing conditions, priorities, and long-range vision.

The intent of the Towns of Yates, Ridgeway and Shelby and the Villages of Lyndonville and Medina is to periodically review the Comprehensive Plan and to make public their report on the relevancy of the information and premises contained in it. It is also the intent of the five municipalities to amend or revise the Plan as needed based on the review.

Circumstances that may warrant revising the Comprehensive Plan include the following:

- a finding of significant change within the municipalities (e.g., demography, traffic, building activity, the economy, the environment, institutional activity, residents’ opinions) or some other substantial unforeseen change of circumstances;
- a finding of significant public benefit associated with a proposed revision or a need to maintain and protect public investment and resources; and
- the need to comply with new laws, regulations, court actions, or other mandates.

Comprehensive Plan revisions should include the following criteria:

- the consistency of the proposed revisions with the goals and recommended action steps and the Future Land Use Plan. If changes to these are proposed, the governing bodies should justify and document the need for change; and
- the consistency of the proposed revisions with neighborhood character, community needs, and existing or emerging State and Federal regulations.

In the course of revising the Comprehensive Plan, the governing bodies must also adequately evaluate environmental effects, alternatives, and other possible impacts identified through the SEQR process.

The governing bodies, with the assistance of their respective Planning Boards and other municipal boards and committees as the governing bodies may request, should determine and authorize all Comprehensive Plan updates and revisions. As appropriate, revised pages should be prepared and distributed to each person or agency in possession of a copy of the Comprehensive Plan along with instructions. The instructions should inform the person or agency that the revised pages supersede the outdated pages, and that the outdated pages should be replaced with the revised pages. The revised pages should be dated so that the revisions and the time period in which the revisions were made can be identified at a later time.

Each time the Comprehensive Plan is revised, updated, or otherwise modified, the changes should be recorded in the Record of Comprehensive Plan Revisions contained in Appendix C. Entries in the Record of Comprehensive Plan Revisions should identify the pages affected and the dates of the revisions. A brief explanation summarizing the changes should also be provided.

Location of Comprehensive Plan Documents

Official copies of the Comprehensive Plan are filed in the offices of the Town and Village Clerks and county planning agency in accordance with NYS Town and Village Laws. It is recommended that copies of the Comprehensive Plan be distributed to various other local, regional, and state planning agencies, local libraries, and adjacent municipalities. It is also recommended that each member of the governing body, their respective Planning Boards and Zoning Boards of Appeals be provided with a copy of the Comprehensive Plan. As these public officials are in a position of making policy decisions and carrying out many of the recommended actions contained in the Plan, they should have ready access to the Comprehensive Plan for reference.