

June 22, 2017 Town of North East/Village of Millerton Comprehensive Plan Update Committee

Committee Attendance:

Edie Greenwood	Debbie Middlebrook	Dale Culver
John Crodelle	Lance Middlebrook	John Midwood
Ed Downey		

Absent: Dianne Engleke

Guests: Willem De Vogel, Cathy Fenn, George Kaye, Chris Kennan, Jeanne Vanecko

Edie plans to invite Becky Thornton from the Dutchess Land Conservancy to our July 27th meeting. She announced that there will be no meeting for August.

Dale clarified what happened with the Harney's Tea application mentioned in the May minutes. Harney's only attended one meeting with the North East Planning Board regarding their bottling plant application. Ultimately the company went forward with a site in Hudson NY that had access to municipal water and sewer.

Edie announced the Hudson Valley Greenway grant proposal has a submission date of Sept. 8th. She will work with Amber Jordan, a village employee, on preparing the grant application.

Edie introduced guest speakers Ronald Hicks, Assistant Dutchess County Executive and Eoin Wrafter, Commissioner of Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development.

Edie gave an overview of the Committee's goals starting with developing a vision of where the communities want to be in the next 10-15 years. She felt the Committee needed to focus on things that are attainable. The updated plan will lead to a much needed update of the zoning codes. Edie asked what Dutchess County can offer us in help and guidance.

Ron Hicks gave a description of his background:

- He is responsible for economic development in the county;
- Is in the process of tracking economic indicators;
- Is in the second year of a marketing program;
- Serves on the governor's Regional Economic Development Council representing Dutchess County;
- His goal is to help us achieve our goals.

He said that a need in any community in Dutchess County is infrastructure. Dutchess is putting money towards infrastructure projects and is trying to get the State to change their way of thinking towards infrastructure. He handed out the first issue of "ThinkDutchess", a magazine that focuses on business in the County and that its focus is to change perceptions about Dutchess County and what is available here. He said the future is small businesses and that people want to live closer to where they work. There is a trend for young people to be in business, sometimes with a friend. He said in economic development circles, agriculture and tourism were always been dismissed because they were considered low-paying jobs. Agri-business is huge; a cooperage is coming into Pine Plains, five distilleries will be coming into the area. The County is doing an extensive marketing campaign and social media push to reach out to people. He talked about doing an extensive marketing program – he wants people to know who we are and what we have here, he wants information about our communities so he can promote us. Ron said updating zoning is very important. He encourages codes to include visual criteria in keeping with the community's vision; i.e. storefront design, lighting, etc.

He said housing is a problem; people can afford to buy a house but they can't afford the taxes. Agriculture is a targeted industry countywide.

Eoin Wrafter said a big part of economic planning is a discussion of what you want vs. what you don't want. When doing the comprehensive plan, be very clear about what economic development is to you locally and what you want to see. He said it's important to talk to businesses, the business association, bankers and brokers. He said be realistic in your expectation for the comprehensive plan; do a market analysis to see what the market can support. There are tools available to do a market analysis. Get statistics on sales and where they come from, how far people are traveling, etc. Given that Millerton has a strong weekend influx, Eoin said the market analysis results might not be completely accurate.

Zoning was talked about; what actions or activities you should be reviewed. Eoin gave the example of a space where a restaurant closed and another restaurant wanted to come in. Could the process be streamlined and not require the same type of business to go through a full site plan review? This type of action can make it easier for businesses to turn over quickly. He spoke about the PACE program that was started three years ago. It helps communities look at specific areas where it's a struggle to attract the development they want. He said Ron has elevated agriculture to a level where it's never been in Dutchess County. Agriculture is very strong in North East and it builds on a lot of what is here (McEnroe Organic, Irving Farms, Farm to Table, etc.). He said you need to know what your community vision is and his department will help with data analysis, GIS mapping and other areas as the needs arise.

Dale said we may think we know what to expect from a survey of residents opinions but we need to be open to reassessing what we have and may not have. As we gather community input we could learn that our vision may be too big or too small, based on the data we gather from the different tools. We need to be prepared to readjust our vision. Ron offered his department's connections to associations and professional services that could be of help to us.

Vacancies in storefronts were discussed. It was noted that Millerton's vacancies have decreased in the last 18 months to two years. The big concern last year was the possible loss of a grocery store which has been averted. Eoin said it has been a struggle all over eastern Dutchess to maintain storefronts in the past 8-10 years.

Ron mentioned that Red Hook has prominent unrented spaces and the Health Department was the reason it was difficult getting them filled. Using Red Hook as an example, he suggested that if you want to attract a business such as a restaurant that requires water and wastewater systems, let his department know as soon as possible and they will have a pre-application conversation with the Health Department.

Dale said it's nice to know that that Ron is in a position to help. He has had applicants submit data to the Planning Board with no response from the Health Department for 45 days. Given the Planning Board meeting schedule of every two weeks, the process is often stalled for a two-month period. He said people that want to develop a business want to take the process from inception to income, not to planning. They don't want all their money going to engineers and professionals.

Ron said there is usually a six-week turnaround with Health Department related issues and his department is doing everything to address these problems. He mentioned Health Department issues take up 20% of his day.

Eoin said in 2016, after years of work with the legal department, the Planning Department was able to exempt certain types of projects from county review. Now there is a list of potential projects types that are on the exempt list.

Lance said that every restaurant in Millerton has gone through hell and it's getting worse. Ron said if there are existing similar projects, let him know and he will do what he can to help.

John Crodelle asked if other towns with municipal sewer have fewer problems with the Health Department. Eoin replied yes. He cited the capacity of the existing system as the one problem. Every time a change is proposed, the applicant has to prove capacity and document it.

Ron said towns should be responsible for enforcing codes on projects that they signed off. Local enforcement would reduce the burden on the Health Department.

Ed asked Ron what is his perception of North East and Millerton. Ron replied to escape. Eoin said there is a very vibrant Main Street, there are lots of opportunities for recreation with the rail trail and it has a more rural lifestyle with accessibility. For people looking to come to the area Eoin posed the following questions:

- Is there any disconnect between long-term residents and having services that are here the entire week vs. just on the weekend.
- Are there enough jobs for my children to stay here after school, are there other employment opportunities, are there general services they need every day (banking, dry cleaners, etc.) We need to maintain the rural character while still allowing growth.
- The housing question is one that every community struggles with. Affordable housing – does it mean apartments, single family residences, condos. Are there a lot of second homes where people are buying and coming up for the weekend? Is this driving up the prices of land and housing in the area?
- He said there are opportunities here that other communities don't have (rail trail, access to Connecticut, active large agriculture).

Ed asked how to do an analysis of what it would cost to build a house under existing zoning. Is there a way of analyzing what we have that will tell us what it's going to cost to provide housing and then take that and compare it to income in the community? Is it going to produce affordable housing for people who live and work here? He said one of the issues is that it's hard to do anything without central sewer and that one of the basic problems doing a comprehensive plan is that a lack of a sewer system will foreclose opportunities. Eoin said there are several assessments that can be done for the availability of your housing stock versus the income in a community.

Ed said there is a not a lot of land left in the Village to build on. The opportunity to build in the village is limited by not having sewers; not only to build new but also the ability to repurpose existing structures to create additional housing.

Dale said there are plenty of places to build outside the village but you're not in close proximity to the village center.

Ron asked if anyone from the Committee has talked to the Water and Wastewater Authority about opportunities and the cost for sewer. Ed said he was a member of that board for several years and the Authority is aware of Millerton and its problems. He thought there was planning done within the last ten years. Ed said we're not at a loss for data and an analysis should be easily updated.

Ron asked if anyone on the committee has applied for CFA (consolidated funding application) money. Jeanne Vanecko of Townscape said it was used for infrastructure studies.

Ron asked who will lead any CFA opportunities. Debbie Middlebrook said the village will. He said he will look at the CFA application and tweak it and put it on his list of priorities.

Jeanne Vanecko said that Townscape has been partnering with the town to help with applications. Chris Kennan said the village had applied for the Mid-Hudson Region Downtown Revitalization grant in 2016. Ron said those are tough grants to win as the State has their mind made up on them before the process begins. Ron asked to look at our application.

Jeanne Vanecko said on the application that the transformative project was a sewer system. She will send Ron the application from last year and the one from this year; he will see what he can do.

Ed followed up on the point that communities need to be thinking about small businesses and that access to high-speed broadband is critical to develop small businesses. What, if anything, is happening at the County or State level to enable communities of our size to be able to upgrade broadband? Ron said there is someone in Didi Barrett's office available and she is aware of this issue. John Midwood, who is one of Didi Barrett's staffers, said in Columbia County they created a regional task force and they were able to get more attention from the State that way.

Ed asked if there is any capacity, capability or logic to using the rail trail as a conduit for running cable. Ron said absolutely. Eoin said it has been in done Ulster before the trail was built. Ron felt it would be ideal for a rail trail that goes through the center of town. In addition, the Department of Emergency Response needs to put in infrastructure for the 911 system. Ron asked who would be the contact person for the broadband issue; the Committee's response was John Midwood.

Cathy Fenn asked if the Planning Department knew anything about the plans and the design of the rail trail extension that will go through the center of Millerton. Cathy said that when David Whalen of Dutchess County Parks was here, there were no specifics on design. Ron said he wasn't sure where they are in the process. Eoin asked if Cathy was concerned about the design. She responded no but wanted the opportunity to have input into the design and wanted to propose additional composting toilets be added to the trail extension north of the Main Street crossing.

Eoin said he didn't know at what stage the design process for the crossing in Millerton is but he will check with Dave Whalen. He said his department won't be doing the design but they usually offer comments and suggestions. His department has been coordinating with the DEC on the rail trail extension project.

Ron asked Cathy to bullet point some of her concerns and he will bring them to a staff meeting with Marc Molinaro.

Eddie's recap:

- She has Ron and Eoin's contact information and will share it with Cathy, Jeanne and Chris Kennan.
- Eoin will send a link to the Referral Exemptions (IMAs) and all the project applicability and a second link to the referral identifier tool that you can use.
- He agreed to send us the most recent waste water treatment study done for Millerton.
- Eoin handed Eddie a market analysis for downtown retail areas that was done by the University of Wisconsin. She will make copies and get to Committee members.

Eddie thanked Ron and Eoin for attending.

Meeting adjourned at 6:00PM.