

Committee Attendance:

Edie Greenwood	Dianne Engleke	Mimi Ramos
John Crodelle	William Kish	Patti VandeBogart
Dale Culver	Debbie Middlebrook	Steve Waite
Ed Downey	John Midwood	

Chair Edie Greenwood opened the meeting by handing out a presentation called Observations on North East/Millerton Survey that was prepared by planning consultant Nan Stolzenburg. There were 345 responses and Nan organized them into SWOTs – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. She explained that SWOTS is an organizing method for updating a comprehensive plan.

Strengths – look at ways to protect them;

Weaknesses – develop strategies to address them;

Opportunities - ideas for new projects, programs, activities, etc. to address strengths and weaknesses; and

Threats – external factors that prevent the committee from reaching its goals.

Nan reviewed the survey results and results from the January workshop and identified the top concerns/comments that were most prevalent.

Nan also prepared a presentation called Town of North East Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats but only included the strengths and weaknesses which she wants the committee to focus on.

She wants to make sure the vision statement reflects what the committee wants the community to be in the future.

She asked the committee for comments and observations on the results from the survey.

She noted that the survey underrepresented the young families and young individuals. Overall, she commented that the results were representative of the community.

Dianne: It was interesting that at the January workshop, a lack of a sewer system was very important, but it was not a high priority from the survey.

Edie: Should the committee get an additional focus group such as younger parents with children in the Webutuck School District and the PTA? Nan said that was an excellent idea.

John M: Reviewed his results from the discussion with Webutuck students: more businesses, cheaper products, Dunkin Donuts, Spring for Sound, missing McDonald's, more recreation but none mentioned jobs.

Edie: A theme that recurred with Webutuck students was they don't know what is going on locally. She commented we need to have a local platform for local events.

John M: Mentioned social media is a tool that the kids use; he created a Facebook page for the Town of North East.

Bill: He found all sections useful and informative, but questions that asked for one or two words or phrases to describe the community were contradictory. How do we tabulate those responses?

Nan: You would have to weigh them, you don't want to discard anyone's comment. There will always be contradictions; you try to find the consensus. The committee needs to decide if they need to explore those opinions.

John C: The consensus should have the say.

Nan: That's where we try through multiple levels of public input to confirm the consensus and not just rely on the survey.

Bill: After looking through the 94 pages and the questions that asked for a deeper level of input, those were very informative, but the one-word visions of what people see in the community that they didn't seem very useful. As we review the data and try to pull out the key take-aways, this section is going to be very difficult to use.

Nan: If you see things that get repeated from all the focus groups, you start to see a pattern of the same kind of sentiments. There's always going to a minority opinion. She agreed the open-ended questions are difficult to work with. With questions 8 and 9, she explored the important issues. She asked people to pick the top 3 of those issues. She pulled out the business owners to see how they answered those questions. Then she pulled out just the part-time residents and the full-time residents. She said there was consistency between the different types of people in the community.

She asked committee members if they had any questions or concerns from the results of the survey.

Mimi: Thought it was interesting that the lack of sewer and job opportunities were identified as two of the top priority issues; said they are directly related.

Nan: That came up louder to her in the workshop than in the survey; not quite sure why. People were more vocal about it in person.

Dale: When you're in a group and somebody mentions it, you immediately realize it's a problem. If you're not in the village all the time, it doesn't jump out at you if you don't deal with it every day.

Nan: It was striking to her that when you look at just the business owners in town (people who don't live here) they put availability of high-speed internet far ahead of other issues. They were looking at from the perspective of what their business needs.

Ed: One observation that was surprising to him was there was no mention of housing costs. He thinks that this is due to the younger people not responding to the survey.

John M: Only 9% of the people that responded were renters.

Bill: Asked if there was any demographic information on renters vs. homeowners.

Nan: Replied yes but she didn't have the information at hand.

Nan: Questions 17 (strategies and actions) & 24 (open-ended questions) were kept separate to keep the members focused on the visions and the goals.

Nan: Asked if any major issues were missed.

Dianne: Interesting that a lot of things were lacking - parking, senior services. People were looking for a way to bring those things here.

Steve: One of the things that jumped out at him was mention of chain stores. He commented that CVS is a chain store that is needed for medications with the elderly population, Four Brothers Restaurants has several locations, Agway is needed for the agricultural businesses, Herrington's for hardware and building supplies. He thinks chain stores and big box stores are being confused.

Nan: Maybe people mean chain stores as on a big scale (Home Depot, Lowe's, Wal-Mart, etc.).

Nan: When used in zoning, the definition is typically a business that has more than five locations with similar products.

Dale: He thinks it's the big box things that people don't want. A big box in a small town changes the flavor of the town.

Ed: It's important to read through what the community is thinking about.

Nan: It's how we end up interpreting them.

Nan asked the committee if there are things in survey that they want her to sort through and look at.

Bill: Asked if one response that mentioned a grocery store meant does the town need a second grocery store or a different store?

Ed: After filtering through reality, the community can't support two grocery stores.

Mimi: It seems like valuable input, especially as it is a new market. She asked if talking to the store owner is something that should be considered. How do we use that information?

Nan: One of the strategies that could be used is go to the owner and have a discussion of what the community is looking for.

Mimi: She shops locally but goes out of town for items she can't get in town. She feels the store is open to suggestions and wants to do things right. If they don't have the tools and the information, she doesn't know if the store will go in the right direction.

Nan: After the grocery store receiving the information that the store was #2 on a list, they could figure out how to address the people's concerns.

Nan: These strengths and weaknesses do lead to the opportunities and strategies.

Steve: It's not surprising to him that a grocery store is mentioned a weakness.

Dale: Thinks the store is trying to do their best.

Mimi: A good grocery store can be a foundation for a vibrant town.

Dale: Since the store isn't a chain, it might be more responsive to what the community's wants.

Nan: She hoped that the strengths and weaknesses is not just comments from the survey, she tried to include all the information. It includes information from the workshop and the various focus groups.

Taking this to the next step, you can funnel comments and questions after going through the survey results.

We're pretty much done with the Phase I process that was data collection. We're still working on maps. The public input and demographics are done.

Moving into the second phase is the vision statement. The task before moving onto the goals is to come up with a statement or statements that reflect what you have heard and what you know of the community. Sometimes what we do is we have a broad statement that is two or three sentences and then we have a vision that is by topic. She gave the committee what she saw as the core subjects and values. The committee needs to discuss the tone, the direction and the emphasis.

John M: Three words that were touched on were sewer, broad-band and cellular service.

John C: Asked what were you getting at when she mentioned social diversity?

Nan: There were lots of comments in the workshop and the survey about having a diverse community.

John C: Asked if this meant being a financially diverse community?

Nan: Diversity in all respects - age, culturally, religion, race.

Edie: She talked to people who appeared to have hurt feelings; weekenders who felt they had been ripped off by locals and locals who felt they had been disrespected by weekenders.

Dale: The vision would then be to make that better and lessen these tensions.

Bill: Thinks that the weekender vs. local/newcomer vs. old-timer dispute is a key issue that won't be addressed by legislation or zoning but it's a separate issue from diversity in general.

Nan: Do we need to convey tolerance and not diversity?

Bill: If the two sides of the coin don't talk to one another, then you're not going to get this feeling of oneness that we want. It needs to a little bit more active than tolerance.

John M: Irving Farm has a different crowd on Saturday mornings. Suggested having spaces and community events to get these people in the same room that would lead to a more accepting environment.

Debbie M: There's no way to make people get along and socialize together. We can't regulate that in a comprehensive plan. Maybe offer events that attract weekenders and the locals.

Nan: A comprehensive plan doesn't regulate, it just sets the stage for the kind of community you want. There are strategies to promote community events.

Ed: To have a diverse community, the community must have the capacity for the diverse people to live here and there are challenges that come with that.

Steve: A community needs to be welcoming, diverse, with opportunities, and offering a sense of belonging.

Dale: We need the ability to communicate what is going on in the community so that people know events are happening. There is no central place to get information on what is going on.

Steve: Mentioned recreation and that would include jobs.

Dale: We want a thriving community. But its appearance may change over time and you always want it to be sustainable.

Patti: She feels a vision statement should be short and then it gets elaborated on later in the document.

Nan discusses format of vision statement. Can be either bulleted or in paragraph form.

Dale: Likes the bulleted form; would like it paraphrased into a statement.

John M: Likes the bulleted form; makes it easier to talk about and should be a one-page document.

Nan: Those bullet points could be left as bullets or write them in a narrative paragraph. They form the vision elements. Think we need to go bullet by bullet and decide if the committee wants to do those things. The group must decide if they all heard the same thing.

Bill: Ed sent out a link to community plan document that had a vision statement stating it (the city) is a diverse, sustainable city known for success, urban lifestyle, world class economy, agricultural heritage, welcoming friend and family community for an outstanding quality of life. etc.

Ed: He said a vision has two statements: it captures the comprehensive way that a community sees itself and what it sees for the future.

Mimi: What she liked is that it gave you progress and what was being implemented, what's ongoing, what hasn't started yet.

Edie: Asked if the bullets on the bottom of the page (Vision for our Future) are really the committee's goals.

Nan: They could be turned into a goal statement, but you still must capture the inspiration. She tried to give the committee the topic and the direction that she heard people say; that's where you start.

John M: Should have a half- or three-quarter page vision statement in the beginning of the document. Thinks most of the people are only going to read the first few pages of the document.

Nan: You need an executive summary so that someone reading it gets a real feel in the first one or two pages. An executive summary is a feel for what the community wants, where you're going and what your priorities are. She thinks the vision statement is one of the most critical pieces of the whole plan. In five years, certain projects can be accomplished, but the vision statement of where you're heading is to keep you in the right direction. In her opinion, a vision statement is hard to write. She noted they are often left out of plans.

Ed: There are three stages: (1) collect the data; (2) synthesize the data; (3) extracting the data.

Nan: She disagreed. She thinks the third stage is the specific - what is the town board going to do? What is the village board going to do? When are they going to do it? The vision statement sets the stage for why you're doing those things.

Nan: Asked if all the bullets in the Vision for the Future document resonated.

Everyone agreed.

Nan: Asked if the bullets be rewritten to be a more inspirational statement.

Bill: Doesn't see why it's not possible. It will get more detailed as we get further along.

Nan: **There are lots of steps between the vision and getting to strategies. She recommends that you focus on what do we want, what is our vision and goals. Once that is accomplished, those next steps of how will flow much easier.**

Edie: She circulated what she and Dianne worked on a long time ago. The Comprehensive Plan should strive to retain the rural character of North East while supporting and enhancing the vitality of the village of Millerton. She added challenges to be addressed included job creation and the economy, activities for youth, affordable housing and infrastructure needs.

John C: If you talk to people that have recently moved here from other locations, the rural character is the main reason why they came here.

Dale: The vision statement needs to be positive, forward thinking and concise enough where everyone can wrap their brain around it. Then the executive summary can flush out some more. The plan will have pieces that no one will read unless it's a piece that they need. The strategy is to sustain where we want to be. The statement must be about getting where we want to be and doing it in a way that we can all understand.

Nan asked what are the values of the community?

John C: Rural character.

Mimi: Great walking village and what it has to offer. Maintain the small-town feel.

Patti: Strong community.

Dale: Need shops that people need.

Nan: Suggested going through bullets, pull out a word or two that you think are accurate and highlight key points that can be knitted together into a statement.

Ed: Three factors that have impacted development here are the natural landscape, an entrepreneurial spirit and the proximity to one of the largest, wealthiest metropolitan areas.

Dale agreed with Ed's three factors.

Debbie M: Feels the old Comprehensive Plan addresses most of the goals we will end up with. They just need to be modernized.

Mimi: She feels our agricultural heritage, being a regional commercial center, a sense of diversity and being forward thinking are four important and strong ideas to include in the vision statement.

Ed: Mentioned social and economic diversity.

Nan: Asked members to look through the survey information. Ed will work on the vision statement and it will be the focus at the next meeting. Nan will review bulleted points against existing goal statement.

Public comment:

Mary Lynn Kalogeras spoke about the Millerton Market: The shelves are getting stocked; the café is happening. She asked if the public has access to the papers on the members' table. Edie said not yet because it's very much draft material. She will put more on the website. Edie asked Mary Lynn if she wanted the 94-page document on the website; she replied yes.

Nan said when documents get updated, the old ones will be taken down and the new ones posted.

Mary Lynn continued by encouraging the committee to think about what the minority said because they may have very important things to say. Most of the town is very different from the minority. She said diversity is important and a better word for tolerance is acceptance. She thanked the committee and Nan for their work.

Matt Hartzog: Mentioned looking at how we are diverse from neighboring communities and what is different about Millerton. That's one of the reasons why we have the vitality that we do.

Peter Greenough: It's unusual to hear concerns from people who haven't been here long. Mentioned something he wrote about Rudd Pond a long time ago, but it got deep-sixed. Edie asked if he shared it with the Recreation Committee. He answered no.

Edie asked him to send the report to her and she will forward it on.

Peter said people haven't addressed the opportunities that the largest metropolitan economy down the road has to offer. He said the we are not a pretentious community. People don't dress up to go get a paper, drive shiny cars. Said where he grew up there was a Welcome Wagon that had items to welcome newcomers.

Edie said Townscape is exploring that idea. Peter said it's a way of breaking down the hostility, a way of getting to know the new people.

Peter Greenough commented the gist of the plan is to impact zoning.

Edie: Announced that the next meeting will be May 24 at the Annex at 5:30 (Subsequently the meeting date has changed to May 31). She also said that the town has video equipment and John Midwood offered to video future meetings.

Meeting was adjourned at 6PM.