

Stakeholders Meeting 1 Summary Town of Easton Comprehensive Plan Update

Burton Hall, January 11th, 2023 6:00-8:00 pm

Comprehensive Plan Committee: Dan Shaw, Supervisor; Justin Sievers, Planning Board; Margaret Brand, Planning Board; Scott Brownell, Town Board; Michelle Skiff, Planning Board; Kevin Schwenzfeier, Senior Planner, Laberge Group; Snehal Chavan, Junior Planner, Laberge Group

Attendees: Mike & Lisa Borden – O A Borden Farm; Andrew Weber – Northern Cross Vineyard; Jessica Ziehm – Farmstore at Tiashoke; Frank Ziehm – Tiashoke Farm; Elizabeth & Sean Quinn – K A Sunset View Farm; George & Ethan Allen – Allenwaite Farm; Doc Rymph – Kernel Acres; Karen Kehn – Windy Hill Golf Course; Aaron Strasswimmer – Aubuchon Hardware; Erika Colson – Washington County Fair

Discussion:

- Agriculture easements are present in the Town of Easton to protect farmlands. Should be included on maps.
- Current development environment: high land rents, need incentivization to maintain farming community, easy to purchase and redevelop business properties, lack of food stores, benefit from strict siting laws in Greenwich Town.
- Addresses with the wrong Zip Codes need to be fixed; want people to know where they are located.
- How much money will come from grants for the Comprehensive Plan? Currently \$55,000.
- In the past Easton has been an agricultural hub – supporting surrounding towns and counties: Washington, Saratoga, and Warren. Want to continue that trend.
- Development is not limited. The atomic facility described in the previous comp plan could not be built, due to the small bridge on the south and north.
- Economic Development Grants received by the county also help Easton. There is a big push for industries to come into the area. ARPA money is to be distributed eventually for Broadband throughout the county. A free gap assessment was completed.
- For businesses that have been through thick and thin, the town should work on how to support and retain them.
- Business and farmers are interrelated, not two separate groups or uses.

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- Easton's strength is that it's close to many places: Albany, Saratoga, Clifton Park, & Glens Falls.
- Driving to get to things is a normal way of life.
- Neighboring towns have various facilities that Easton residents can use thus Easton does not need to have every facility.
- Need to better compete with neighboring communities.
- Easton has remained the same over the years, want to keep it that way and not turn into Malta or Schaghticoke.
- Waterfront is extremely important, so keep it open to the community.
- Protect Easton's open spaces; they are an asset to the community.
- Park or playground is a nice idea but it requires maintenance and can become a liability to the town.
- All stakeholders were in support of tourists coming to Easton for day trips and utilizing the town's businesses: winery, brewery, farm, orchards, stores, and restaurants.
- COVID has been a boon to the town, as the residents of surrounding municipalities had time and money to visit Easton and get out into the countryside.
- A sum of money through Washington county is utilized for the advertisement of parks and recreation.
- Easton needs a variety of restaurants in town.
- Currently, farmers are trying to reinvent and diversify their farms.
- Easton needs a post office and postal address.
- Need continued support from the town for the growing businesses and not fighting them.
- New businesses are welcomed; if non-agricultural businesses come, then that could be a concern.
- Incentive agriculture owner when someone wants to exit, incentives for Easton farmers.
- Hardware store owner: mentioned many accidents took place on a cross-section near the store at NY 29 and NY 40.
- Subdivisions should be allowed sometimes in order to draw more people to the town.
- Do not want the Greenwich issue: people cannot afford to stay, empty stores, and no parking.
- Amenities needed in Easton: Food, Restaurants, Stores.
- Laws for electric lines needed to prevent expansion and upgrades.

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- Need for Green renewable energy law: restrict volume and location, such as the solar, battery, and cell tower.
- Need some restrictions in place to help with the ongoing solar pressure; this is a Stakeholder PRIORITY.
- Every month the stakeholders receive letters from businesses like timber industries, solar, and housing. Solar is the most pressing issue.
- Cell phone service and broadband lines are laid in some areas but not yet connected to households.
- Utilize the County Tourism Department to a greater extent.
- Work closer with trade organizations.

Conclusions

1. The Stakeholders present were mostly content with how the community has controlled development over time. They support the continuation of protection over their way of life and scenic/natural assets, but not through strong government means or increased spending of taxpayer dollars.
2. Solar is a threat to their values, however, it's also a means to retire and people should have the right to do what they want with their lands. Strong support was demonstrated for some level of regulation over the siting and development of solar throughout the town as well as for other large-scale development pressures.
3. Would like to be able to subdivide their lands when necessary, but are not in favor of large multi-lot subdivisions. Allow for more business locations and large-lot single-family home locations for relatives to stay in the community.
4. Town is working with the county on broadband expansion through federal funding; prioritized in order to allow for both economic growth and household access.
5. Not in favor of increasing taxes for greater community services. The residents of Easton help to support the surrounding villages. Greenwich is the hub for the area, most amenities are found there, but don't want to be like Greenwich.