

Stakeholders Meeting 2 Summary Town of Easton Comprehensive Plan Update

Burton Hall, January 21st, 2023 10:00-12:00 am

Comprehensive Plan Committee: Justin Sievers, Planning Board; Scott Brownell, Town Board; Michelle Skiff, Planning Board; Kevin Schwenzfeier, Senior Planner, Laberge Group; Snehal Chavan, Junior Planner, Laberge Group (Not In Attendance: Dan Shaw, Town Supervisor; Margaret Brand, Planning Board)

Attendees: Shawn and Vance Bateman – South Dominion Vineyard; Liz Gordan – The Alleged Farm; Harry Booth – Booth’s Blend Compost; Ethan Allen – Allenwaite Farm; Meegan Keenan – Christ the King Center; Jordan Fruchter – Resident; Christian Morris – Washington County DA’s Office; Gerald Barnheart – Victory View Vineyard; Tom Borden – O A Borden Orchard

Discussion

South Dominion Vineyard, Cambridge (near border of Easton) – The Batemans:

- The previous Comprehensive plan did not speak about businesses.
- Dairy industry is very important and needs efforts toward sustaining dairy in Easton.
- Comprehensive plan should be structured in a positive way, for instance:
It is okay to do this if we do Rather than This isn't allowed ...
- Easton has an opportunity by being a part of the Upper Hudson AVA (American Viticultural Area).
 - Reinvent and encourage Wine trails.
 - Possibility to build on the existing facilities and strengths.
- Farm-to-table has been an emerging concept, that is liked by many, thus having an Easton market where farmers directly can sell to the consumers.
- Easton has a fair every year that is located at one location, instead of having a Geographical fair that is spread throughout the town and covers various agriculture destinations.
- Structuring the plan to foster business goals.
- If most residents agree upon a certain farming category is imported for the town, make it advantageous.

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Booth's Blend Compost – Harry Booth:

- Owns a 100-year business; dairy farm till the 2000s, now a compost and beef business.
- Born and raised in Easton; former Town Supervisor.
- Mr. Booth strongly agreed with the survey summary.
- Economic development should be referred to as “ Economic Preservation “ according to the Easton context where preserving what is existing is important.
- Industry that exist for years that are major taxpayers, need to be protected.
- Mr. Booth believed the concept of keeping about 50 Acres of land for parks and recreation as waterfront revitalization in the previous Comprehensive plan was extremely ambitious and difficult to manage.
- Mr. Booth is willing to share their boat launch with the neighbors and the community.
- Solar farms are welcomed if they allow livestock to graze beneath the solar panels, which is currently restricted for common array layout.

The Ledged Farm – Liz Gordon:

- Came to Easton 28 years ago to create a farming business and wants Easton to stay as is.
- Ms. Gordon agreed with many of the points discussed above and the summary of the survey.
- She was a part of the Comprehensive Plan update in the 1980s, helped to draft the revised Subdivision Regulations and served as Planning Board Chair.
- Ms. Gordon emphasized the fact that the previous Comp Plan was far ahead of its time, and the new Comp Plan should be an addition to the building of the old plan.
- Affordable housing is a need for Easton for the employers in Easton, furthermore people who visit for events at Easton, need to stay in nearby towns/cities like Saratoga thus short-term rentals are needed in Easton.

Victory View Vineyard – Gerald Barnhart:

- Mr. Barnhart worked for DEC and likes the way Easton was about 2 decades ago, Easton reminded them of the town where they grew up, and wanted the same for their children. Mr. Barnhart bought the land adjacent to their property when it came up for sale and finally decided upon growing grapes and creating a winery.
- There has been tremendous change in agriculture and diversity in farms. Recognizing that businesses are interrelated, diversity in farming should be encouraged.

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- Presently many products are prepared directly for consumers: for example, cheese, wine, cider, and vegetables. Easton should continue welcoming people to experience these products.
- Encourages a Chamber of Commerce for Easton, Cambridge, and Greenwich.
- Supports giving incentives to large property/land owners to share a part of their land for recreational opportunities, such as trails.

Christ the King – Meegan Keenan:

- The facility has 600 acres of land.
- They have walking trails, lakes, ponds, disk golf, boys scout activities, lodging, and much more.
- People visit to walk on trails with dogs.
- They want to create awareness that the site is open for free to all and not only for the church members.
- They genuinely want to support the community as much as possible.

O A Borden's Orchard – Tom Borden:

- Grow apples and cherries; 6th generation in the business.
- He supports keeping Easton as is.
- New businesses coming into Easton should be compatible with existing businesses.
- Can there be a right to small business law similar to the right to farm law?

Christian Morris, Washington County DA's Office:

- Encouraged ongoing discussions.
- Easton is a nice place to stay as the crime rates are very low.
- Businesses invite certain kinds and the nature of character of the people.

Jordon Fruchter – 15-Year Resident:

- Mr. Fruchter echoes to keep Easton a rural and natural town.
- Provide the ability for measured growth in Easton to have a healthy economy.
- Population is not growing since 2000, there is negative population growth.

Other Discussion Points:

- Multiple towns (Cambridge, Easton, and Greenwich) can come together to build up the wine trail.
- Grant applications can be more competitive when considering multi-town participation.

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- Groups-focused tiger teams will work for a particular project and dissolve eventually when the goals are complete.
- Suggestions to have the solar field on the former landfill area.
- Similar to the concept of the historic barn, the revitalization of small hamlets in Easton could be possible to increase housing.
- Outposts located on large farmers can be turned into housing for workers that work seasonally in these industries, the major issue is that the owner has to give a higher property tax on them, thus they do not use the outposts as short-term housing.
- The difference between zoning law, solar law, and site plan review law was discussed during the meeting.
- Easton needs a Post Office.