

Town of Washington Comprehensive Plan Land Use Committee
Comments and Recommendations

Jesse Bontecou, Chairman
Tim Marshall, Chairman
Howard Schuman, Member
Julia Widdowson, Member

Submitted December 6, 2010

Regarding the request for comments and suggestions about the public statements from the community-wide May 22, 2010 meeting and based on the *Planning Session Notes 6-7-10.pdf* document, the Land Use Committee submits the following comments and recommendations for land uses as they would apply to carrying forward what we have learned about the community's desires for the future of the town and how residents' comments made at the May 22, 2010 public meeting fit into that.

So far the Land Use Committee has worked on its originally assigned task, which was to do an inventory of the land uses in the town.

Now that we have had an extended survey, and three public meetings, the committee is in a better position to work with the data given it by the public and come up with recommendations for carrying out what the community as a whole has expressed as their desires for the future. These Goals and Actions are to be based on the widely held community values ascertained by the survey and public meeting processes.

It is clear that there is a high degree of satisfaction throughout the town with the existing land uses and an equally strong desire for that to continue in the future.

These are the goals for our future that are strongly valued by all segments of our community.

- maintain a rural atmosphere and environment
- preserve and protect scenic beauty
- retain the look and feel of a small town community

Land Use is the backbone for implementing the visions, goals and actions that are in keeping with what we have learned from community input.

Land Use recommendations should work toward implementing what was expressed by the public. Recommendations contrary to that tenet should not be considered. The goals and actions of the Comprehensive Plan must be in harmony with the community's values.

COMMENTS

Highlights from the May 22 Public Meeting

John Holehan of River Street Planning & Development, said regarding the creation of new hamlets and business areas in the town, *“Basically overriding was, should new business areas be allowed? Almost everybody said no to that, so we got a loud and clear [answer to the] question. I guess the underlying thing was that most folks felt that they would like to see the town's effort go to support [Village of]*

Millbrook businesses and not start creating other business districts in town, including even Mabbettsville.”

Margaret Irwin of River Street Planning & Development, *“We talked a little about growth in general. I think the sense that I have is people feel like if it’s not broken we should not try to fix it. That quality of life here is very high and people want it to stay that way.”*

Margaret Irwin of River Street Planning & Development, *“I would say almost all of the groups I talked to said they thought affordable housing should not be provided by new development or by building of new development projects or homes; that we have a lot of opportunity to reuse buildings and to build on the strength of rental units in the village.”*

Comments from the May 22, 2010 meeting support the land use recommendations.

- Throughout the process the community has expressed a desire to protect and support open space, including agriculture, and the environment.
- A desire to maintain the look and feel of the community as it presently exists ran through most of the comments made at each separate table.
- Rural appearance was important, as exemplified by comments such as preserve dirt roads, protect ridge line views, and create a tree ordinance.
- Some ideas centered around making life more pleasant while at the same time having little if any impact on the look and feel of the area. Examples of this type were develop bike paths and walking trails, protecting existing historical structures and stone walls, and encourage the use of “green” technology for new construction
- The numerous comments about how to maintain the look and feel of town reaffirmed the widespread community support it had already received at the prior visioning meetings and the public survey.
- There was little if any support for new or denser zoning or a desire to make the town's housing stock denser or for creating new or increasing present commercial/business areas in the town.
- The question of affordable (diversity) of housing question was raised by the facilitators as they went around to each of the tables. Most participants questioned the need and indicated it was some thing that belonged in the Village and if a need for it in the town arose, it should be handled by adaptive reuse of existing buildings, which is in keeping with the general consensus that the look and feel of the town should remain the same as presently is.
- It was clear that most people were satisfied with the Village of Millbrook as the existing commercial, business, and residential center of the town and from a land use perspective did not see a need for any additional expansion of those same uses from what already existed in the town. This was in keeping with what we had learned from the survey and prior public meetings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In reviewing the public comments from the May 22 meeting, two overarching concepts or themes reemerged.

CONCEPT

There is strong community consensus that our natural environment, scenic and historical attributes, and farmland and open space resources are valued for our future. The visual and scenic attributes of the Town's varied landscape define this natural beauty and rural character.

GOAL

Preserve and Protect the Town of Washington's natural environment, scenic and historical attributes, farmland and open space resources.

ACTION

- Protect water supply and aquifers
- Protect stream corridors
- Identify and protect wetlands by means of a wetlands ordinance
- Protect rural character
- Identify and protect scenic views
- Prohibit building along ridge line viewsheds
- Use zoning to protect critical environmental areas
- Adopt best practices regulations to protect forested areas
- Preserve the agricultural character
- Protect Agriculture from the impact of development
- Preservation of agriculturally important soils
- Institute a Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements (PACE) program
- Prohibit fragmentation of important habitat as mapped by Hudsonia
- Require clustering as the preferred land use for new large scale subdivisions
- Offer incentives for private land conservation
- Plan for "green" technology and renewable power such as solar and wind

CONCEPT

There is broad community consensus to maintain the present look and feel of the Town.

GOAL

Maintain existing land use patterns in the town.

ACTION

- Maintain existing land use zoning types
- Do not rezone existing areas for new uses
- Do not create additional hamlets or mixed use districts
- Do not create higher density zoning and uses than presently exist
- Maintain the existing edge between the town and village
- Do not create village like zoning areas in the town

CONCLUSION

The natural beauty and rural character of the Town of Washington are important public assets. The visual and scenic attributes of the Town's varied landscape define this natural beauty and rural

character. Effective policies and regulatory controls are needed to preserve landscape character and scenic viewsheds and corridors, and to permit only compatible development in these areas.

Agrarian activities contribute immensely to the Town of Washington's economic and cultural fabric. The recommend goals and actions are part of what is needed for its protection and to ensure the benefits agriculture provides in maintaining open space, scenic vistas, water resources, and wildlife habitat are not lost.

Plan for the future by preserving the existing land use patterns of the present.

Conceptually, in the Comprehensive Plan process, it is essential to view the Village and the Town as one entity. We recommend that the Village be relied on in its traditional and historic role as, the center of commerce, government, entertainment, education, transportation, and housing for the Town and Village combined.

If the duality of the Village of Millbrook and Town of Washington concept is to continue to work, high density housing, commercial and business activities, should be constructed where it can be accommodated, in the Village. At such time as the Village is completely built out, the Town could consider permitting small scale higher density family housing on the periphery of the Village. If then needed, the Town could allow for this small scale higher density housing through the use of adaptive reuse of existing structures, such as barns and accessory buildings. At that time, higher density housing and uses could be woven very carefully into the fabric of the Town, at a small scale, and in a way that does not disrupt its rural character and appearance. The Town should remain largely a rural, open area that retains its agricultural economic base and serves as an aesthetic and recreational amenity to the Village and the County as a whole.

The approach of concentrating commercial, business, and higher density housing in the Village, and if needed, a scattering of higher density housing, on a small scale, in the Town by means of adaptive reuse of existing structures along with accessory buildings is consistent with the views expressed by most residents, orally or in writing.

The Town of Washington Comprehensive Plan Land Use Committee
Jesse Bontecou, Chairman
Tim Marshall, Chairman
Howard Schuman, Member
Julia Widdowson, Member