

## Statement of Paul Burgdorf

### Comprehensive Plan Update Committee Meeting 8/24

Thank you to Supervisor Mahan and the Town Board for forming the Comprehensive Plan update committee, and providing a process for interested neighbors, neighborhood associations, civic groups and others to provide their recommendations and observations about our Town, its development and growth, and maintaining its quality of life. I am sure that there is no one who is here tonight who does not have the sincerest concern for our town, and its exceptional quality of life.

As an individual with over 16 years on the Colonie Town Board and as a past Deputy Supervisor and now in the Albany County Legislature, I have seen and lived through many transitions of land use to protect neighborhoods, provide environmental protection, encourage economic development, plan for further growth.

Today is no different, but our challenges are greater. Development and traffic have eclipsed our available infrastructure in many areas of the town, and stewardship requires that we rethink our existing zoning code and land use planning processes. Time is off the essence, as every day we add new development and traffic without a clear plan to protect the 82,000 town residents, we take a step backward. Economic Development is a key component of a vibrant community, and the balance between our commercial and residential tax bases provides residents of the town with some of the finest services in the Capital region at reasonable tax rates. Our challenge, as one of the most desirable locations to live and work in the region is to balance growth with quality of life.

I commend Save Colonie for their devotion to protecting the community and share most of their key beliefs and concerns. I have used their outline of major points in composing my suggestions. First and foremost:

**“Colonie’s residents’ vision and existing neighborhoods’ needs must be a top priority”**

While economic development is crucial, and development has provided us with a great community, the emphasis has to shift first and foremost to protecting neighborhoods. We have to minimize reductions in quality of life for existing neighbors and neighborhoods. We can no longer approve high density projects where there is inadequate transportation infrastructure, water, sewer, and we must

protect our environment. At a recent Save meeting, I heard a Town official say “We have to do what the developers want.” I disagree with that. We need to do what it takes to protect our quality of life.

**“Analysis of the Plan must rely on up to date data”** – The data used for Planning and Zoning decisions is woefully inadequate.

- The Airport Area and Boght Area Generic Environmental impact statements are based on 25-year-old data. I know, I was there in 1991 and helped put them in place. They formed assumptions for transportation volumes, infrastructure, zoning, buildout, and future needs. These assumptions are no longer true, and to base current development on them does a disservice to existing residential neighborhoods and business’s which rely on a reasonable traffic and needed infrastructure. Its great the Airport GEIS will be updated.
- Many neighborhoods are subject to intense pressures, like the one I represent. I am gratified that the Town of Colonie and Albany County are partnering with the Capital District Regional Transportation Committee to study the Shaker/Osborne/Old Niskayuna and Maxwell Road traffic and infrastructure. When the results of this study are complete, I hope the TOC will take steps to protect the neighborhoods in the area from overdevelopment. We have adjusted zoning before, we can do it again.

**“Be more demanding”**

Colonie’s location as the crossroads of the capital district and desirability for residences and commercial operations does not require incentives for development.

- Colonie and its development agencies can “cherry pick” development which offers us the least impact and the greatest revenue to assist taxpayers. We should be focused on helping developers reinvigorate vacant and abandoned parcels. Once again, impacts of the existing community should take precedence.
- Colonie should stop granting “senior” housing density to projects which are really luxury housing. Senior zoning was developed to give increased density for projects to provide modes income seniors with a place to live when they sold their Colonie home. It was never intended to allow 55 units of \$400,000 luxury townhomes on land which would accommodate less than 20 homes. Instead of age 55 for senior housing, ages in the 60s should be used as are required for senior citizen tax exemptions.

### **Zoning, signage and other codes need updating'**

Once we have the data, Colonie needs to update its zoning and land use codes. The new culture should be that zoning protects our existing communities and encourages smart economic development.

- Perhaps lot sizes should change, density adjusted for various classifications and buffers increased.
- The need for variances should be minimized, and all major land use decisions should be made by the elected town board.
- New zoning should minimize traffic generation and overdevelopment; we do not want to live in a gridlocked suburb.

### **"Methods to ameliorate traffic congestion must be included in the Plan"**

We can no longer say, we are Colonie, we have to live with the traffic. We need a culture change that recognizes that every traffic trip which we allow is one we have to live with forever. We can't rely on developers traffic projections or their plans to mitigate or make traffic vanish. We need independent traffic analysis. And something is wrong if we say we are doing this now with town appointed engineers. If it were working and our planning successful, why are we facing the overdevelopment and traffic gridlock in Colonie today.

In October of 2015 Jack Cunningham gave the Town Board an update on traffic studies conducted in relation to a number of development projects. The majority of the intersections in the Shaker Road corridor were rated D, one step from failure. We need plans to deal with existing problems, not make them worse.

### **"Planning and Approval Process needs improving"**

The planning and approval process needs to encourage public participation. Its needs to be transparent. Sometimes it seems that public participation is not wanted at all. Meetings have been cancelled or with little or no notice, agendas are unavailable to the public, the planning board contemplated limiting public input, and in one instance a resident (me) was prohibited from speaking at a ZBA meeting.

- All Town Boards and Committees be required to post their agendas on the town website with adequate notice to residents. No action could be taken on

late breaking agenda items.

- Public Notice for the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals should be expanded. 500 feet notice for the Planning Board and publishing in the Spotlight for the ZBA are insufficient notice to residents facing major developments impacting their homes.
- Special use permits should be rescinded or require approval of the Colonie Town Board, where elected representatives have the final say on major projects which do not meet required zoning and land use plans.
- The Public Operations Center should be outfitted with proper audio and visual systems so that the public can hear and see development plan presentations.

### **“Expand the Comprehensive Plan Review Committee”**

The Committee is made up of primarily town zoning, planning, economic development and elected town officials. With limited exception, there is no representation of your biggest community, the 82,000 residents of the town. Please add several neighborhood association and/or concerned citizens who have a demonstrated past of concern for town development.

### **“Slow down development while the Comprehensive Plan is updated”**

I do not support a moratorium while the Comprehensive Plan is updated. I believe that the Town Board, Planning Board, Zoning Board and the Planning and Economic Development Department have the ability to pace projects progression depending on their potential impacts across the town. Projects approved during the Comprehensive Plan process should fit zoning, be consistent with neighborhood protection, and limit traffic in areas which are under stress.