



Neighborhoods and Neighbors First!

August 23, 2016

Comprehensive Plan Committee Members
% Joseph LaCivita, Chair
Town of Colonie Operations Center
347 Old Niskayuna Road
Latham, New York 12210

RE: Comprehensive Zoning and Land Use Plan Update

Dear Committee Members:

Our community group, SAVE Colonie: A Partnership for Planning (SAVE), seeks a major role in the work of revising and updating the Town's 2005 Comprehensive Zoning and Land Use Plan ("the 2005 Plan"). We are comprised of more than 200 Town residents who are dismayed by the recent changes in our Town. We see revision of the 2005 Plan as an opportunity to assure that *the Town's 80,000 residents* are represented in both the development of the revised Plan and in the planning process going forward. After all, it is these residents who have chosen to live in Colonie, who care about the Town's future, and who pay the taxes to support the government here. It is the government's job to represent these residents' interests.

These are Save's priorities:

1. Review and updating must begin with the 2005 Plan's goals. Have the stated goals been achieved, and if not, why not? Are those goals still appropriate today?

The Committee appointed to review and update the 2005 Plan is heavily weighted with administration-affiliated members. There are few, if any, independent Colonie residents on this Committee, a serious failing. Additional members should be appointed to the committee reflecting the views of neighborhood organizations.

2. Colonie's residents' vision and existing neighborhoods' needs must be the top priority. Before new developments are approved, local area infrastructure, ambience, and community character must be considered. For example, approval is often given to projects in neighborhoods with serious existing drainage, water pressure, or traffic issues, without adequately addressing their potential negative impacts. Similarly, projects discordant in scale and scope with the neighboring community should not be approved. The Planning Board has the legal authority to be able to make proposed projects acceptable to both neighborhoods and project applicants.

3. Analysis of the 2005 Plan must rely upon up-to-date data. Clearly, sound planning decisions cannot be made without accurate and complete data. Before further decisions are made, it is imperative that the Town compile a list of development activity which has occurred since 2005 and undertake an inventory of current undeveloped parcels. Comprehensive town-wide traffic studies of Colonie's pressure points must be completed. The Generic Environmental Impact Statements (GEIS) must be updated for the Airport and Boght Road areas. Decisions based on old information are not good

for the Town or its residents.

4. Planning and Approval Process needs improving. All meetings regarding planning and development impact the community, so members of the public should be included in meetings of the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee. We expect the public to be invited to attend all meetings where any decision regarding town development may take place so that communication can flow both ways earlier in the process. The entire approval process for development in the Town must be made more open, inclusive, transparent, and participatory. Public meetings should not merely constitute an announcement of a prior decision, with lip service given to the public's comments.

5. Be more demanding. As one of the most attractive, desirable, and livable communities in the area, Colonie does not need to provide incentives for development, with the possible exception of redevelopment of abandoned parcels. Rather, the Town should be setting criteria for development based upon how it might affect the community at large. Proposals that do not add to the community's quality of life should be discouraged. The Comprehensive Plan effort that has just begun should establish those values for the future. Developers will adapt and the value of their developments will be enhanced.

6. Budget town funds for leveraging state and federal grants. Funding for sewer and water infrastructure maintenance and upgrades, various other community improvements, and conservation of natural areas is available, if we were equipped to apply. There is no reason a community as large, rich and diverse as Colonie cannot budget to take advantage of the multitude of grant and low interest loan opportunities that exist. A variety of mechanisms are being used successfully in other towns both in the state and elsewhere.

7. Zoning, signage and other codes need updating. If variances are frequently sought and granted, and if existing codes and regulations are ignored by regulators, there is an underlying problem that must be addressed. Rather than ignoring the problem or developing a work around, the Town needs to identify these problems and amend the codes and regulations to address them.

8. Methods to ameliorate traffic congestion must be included in the Plan. Traffic congestion is not merely commuter-caused. Residential development adds considerably more trips than generally estimated by developers. Walkable communities with sidewalks and bike trails, nearby shopping, schools and recreation must be the goal of every project. Further, the cumulative effect of developments within a traffic corridor must be considered as part of an overall development plan rather than waiting until congestion has overwhelmed existing traffic capacity.

9. As the Town moves forward with the review process, it should impose a development moratorium. Previously predicted efforts by developers to rush projects through the process ahead of any such moratorium would need to be carefully managed by Town authorities. From October 1989-January 1991, the Town imposed a building moratorium while the 1991 Airport Area GEIS was finalized. Similarly, in 2004, a building moratorium was imposed for projects along the Route 7 and Boght Road corridors. In 2010, the Town imposed a development moratorium for new hotels and motels on Route 5. There have been several significant development projects on the Town Planning Board agendas since the Town made its announcement in June, 2016. A moratorium is even more critical now, since the Planning Board has erroneously stated that it has no or little authority to alter development proposals in response to neighborhood concerns.

As SAVE reviewed the 2005 Plan, we noted with interest that residents' concerns in 2005 were the same ones we are hearing expressed now, eleven years later. We think it's time to address them.

SAVE looks forward to partnering with the town government and the Comprehensive Plan Review

Committee to create a community that reflects the desires and vision of the Town's residents, that exemplifies best practices in planning, and that recognizes that Colonie is a most desirable place to live and to grow a business.

Wendy Allen

Chair, Comprehensive Plan Task Force

SAVE Colonie: A Partnership in Planning

cc: Supervisor Paula Mahan

Planning Board members