
TOWN OF COLONIE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

TOWN OF COLONIE
ALBANY COUNTY, NEW YORK
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CPAC) MEETING



To: Town of Colonie Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC)
From: Michael Welti, AICP – Barton & Loguidice, D.P.C.
Re: December 20, 2017 Committee Meeting - Summary Notes
Date: December 22, 2017

Meeting Location: Town of Colonie Public Operations Building
Meeting Time: 6:00 pm – 8:00pm
Meeting Attendees: Committee, Barton & Loguidice, and several members of the general public

Summary Notes

This was the thirteenth meeting of the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) for the Town of Colonie Comprehensive Plan Update project. The meeting was attended by the CPAC, consultants (B&L), and several members of the general public.

The meeting began with a review of the agenda (attached).

Update – Status of Related Projects

Mr. Welti and Mr. LaCivita updated the Committee on the status of several other projects that are ongoing and that are related to the Comprehensive Plan Update:

- Airport Area Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) – work on scoping for the GEIS will begin in 2018. The recommendations from the Comprehensive Plan Update will help to inform the GEIS process.
- CDTC – Albany Shaker Road Corridor Study – Mr. Welti reviewed a brief summary of the November 16th Public Workshop that he received from Don Adams, Project Manager for CME. There was quite a bit of interest and discussion about the Albany Shaker Road Study and its relationship to the recommendations that the CPAC will include in the Comprehensive Plan Update. Several members of the Committee noted examples of Road Diets and Complete Streets that have been completed in the region (Van Rensselaer Boulevard, Broadway in Menands) in recent months and years that have been problematic in their view. Some members believe that these projects resulted in roads that were less safe and which over-emphasized bike and pedestrian travel at the expense of vehicular travel (the good for one does not outweigh the bad for the other). There was considerable skepticism about this approach and whether it is really practical in Colonie, a community that is dependent on cars for transportation, where the weather is cold for much of the year, etc. There was also skepticism about the notion that slowing down traffic on Albany Shaker Road was an appropriate goal and whether this would

really discourage pass-through traffic. Instead, many felt that such a goal would just make things worse for area residents. Finally, there was a question about whether the CDTC or DOT have done follow-up evaluations of the Road Diet / Complete Streets projects that have been completed to measure their actual results in terms of safety, traffic congestion, and bike/pedestrian use. Mr. Welti will follow-up with CDTC and CME to find out what information is available.

- Lincoln Avenue BOA (Brownfield Opportunity Area) – Mr. LaCivita noted that the Town received an extension on the grant from DOS. Initial work was submitted to DOS for review and will be made available to the public via a project website once the DOS signs-off. The Town is hoping to add some additional members to the project Steering Committee and will likely schedule a second committee meeting in January.
- IDA Economic Assessment Study – Mr. LaCivita noted that the IDA had discussed the initial draft of this report with its consultants (Camoin Associates) on Monday night. The assessment focuses on retail and hospitality at this time, but the IDA may ask for other sectors to be evaluated – warehousing, office and technology. Information from the study will eventually be shared with the Town Board, Planning Board, CPAC and business and property owners. There was some follow-up discussion about the summary findings, questions about the data, etc. Mr. Rinaldi noted that one possible concern for consideration in the Comprehensive Plan might be what happens to older product when businesses move into newer product. It was suggested that for retail, zoning flexibility may be needed for these sites to allow for their redevelopment; though it was noted that the mixed use zoning currently in place in some of these areas might already provide that flexibility. Mr. Shamilin said that he is more concerned about vacant warehouse and office space – these are harder to redevelop than retail. Retail sites are more likely to redevelop because of the market along the town's commercial thoroughfares. Mr. Daggett noted that the conversion of older office spaces to residential in Albany has resulted in unforeseen stresses on infrastructure downtown.

Community Outreach Process

- There remains interest in scheduling a Business Roundtable in January. Committee members would like to have the input of the business/development communities prior to finalizing its recommendations. It was suggested that this could be a joint effort between Camoin Associates (the IDA's consultant) and B&L.

Revised Draft Vision and Goals

Mr. Welti reviewed the changes to the Draft Vision and Goals that he made following the discussion at last month's CPAC Meeting.

In discussing the mobility (transportation) goal, it was suggested that a recommendation for the plan could be that the Town establish a point person for transportation who would be responsible for focusing on these issues and coordinating with partners at CDTC, CDTA, Albany County, and NYSDOT. It was noted that traffic was one of the highest concerns expressed by the public at the public workshops and through the community survey. It was opined that the trend in transportation has gone too far toward alternative modes and that there needs to be more balancing of interests between bikes/peds and automobiles. There was also discussion about the types of comments that the Planning Board gets from the CDTA and NYSDOT and how their suggestions are often unhelpful. For example, the CDTA is sometimes reluctant to allow pull-offs for buses on Central Avenue, preferring instead to have buses stop in the right lane of traffic. This causes traffic backups. Another example is when the NYSDOT prevents the town from allowing

more than one access point from a new commercial project onto a state road, forcing the secondary entrance to the commercial development to be provided on a local, residential street.

The Committee approved of the changes to the draft Vision and Goals that Mr. Welti presented and it was agreed that these would be made available to the public for review and feedback via the project website.

Plan Recommendations

Following up on the discussion of major initiatives at the last CPAC meeting, the Committee identified some areas of concern related to the town's zoning. Mr. Magguilli was concerned about commercial encroaching on residential neighborhoods and described a couple of recent examples (Cumberland Farms, Stewarts) where the zoning allowed for too much commercial right up against residential neighborhoods.

There was discussion about the Planning Board's experiences in reviewing projects in some of the Mixed Use zones. The PB has granted many waivers for specific provisions such as the small front yard setback, requirements for parking in the rear of buildings that, in their opinion, do not really make sense in some of the traditionally commercial areas that were zoned for mixed use after the 2005 plan. There were also questions about whether allowing residential above commercial was always appropriate in the NCOR and COR Districts – especially on smaller parcels. Mr. Welti wondered whether part of the problem was the way in which the 2005 comprehensive plan's concept of nodes was eventually implemented in the zoning. He noted, for example, that the 2005 plan graphic showed mixed-use nodes at specific points along Central Avenue that were coordinated with the locations that had been identified for BRT Stations in an earlier Route 5 Corridor Study that was completed by CDTC. However, in the zoning that was created following the Comprehensive Plan, the mixed use zones were applied end to end across the entire corridor.

The Committee discussed parking requirements in the current zoning. It was suggested that the required parking is often too high and there should be better provisions for shared parking.

The Committee discussed the Town's current sign regulations and whether these need to be revised. Though some of this should be updated to account for newer problems such as LED signs, the main problem appears to be that the Sign Review Board, which is under the ZBA, simply grants too many variances. It was suggested that sign approval could be shifted to the Planning Board as part of Site Plan Review.

The Committee also discussed the Open Space Conservation initiative. Mr. Welti reviewed some initial mapping of existing and potential open space resources that B&L had prepared with the Town. There is still some data that needs to be acquired, but it was agreed that this was a good start for the Comprehensive Plan. Ms. Mahar made a number of suggestions about other entities in the region that might be willing to partner with the Town as it works to prepare a comprehensive approach to open space conservation in an open, community-based process. Ms. Weed noted that the CAC would be certainly be interested in participating. It was agreed that the Comprehensive Plan Update should outline a process for moving this important initiative forward.

Next Steps

Mr. LaCivita stated that he has a couple dozen public comments that have been received via the website. He will put these together and make them available on the project website.

The Committee agreed that the next CPAC meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 24th.

Public Comments

Mr. Welti opened the floor for comments from members of the public in attendance.

Wendy – commended the committee for its great, meaningful conversation tonight. She also commented about the need to take a new approach to sign review and to address concerns about digital signs.

Lisa – suggested that the idea of lowering speeds on Albany Shaker Road, to discourage pass through traffic, may not work for residents who live in the corridor. She believes that there are some good aspects to the Complete Streets concept – for example, the provision of medians to provide pedestrian refuge on longer street crossings is helpful. She also supports having more street trees. However, she suggested that the Town look for other ways to make its streets more attractive and useful.

Paul – commended the Committee about its discussion of the Albany Shaker Road Corridor and transportation issues generally. He agrees with the Committee and is not in agreement with CDTC's philosophy. He noted that a letter that he recently submitted to the Committee via the project website (which will be posted Mr. LaCivita along with the other comments received) covers many of the same points that were made tonight.

Curtis – expressed some confusion about the committee's reaction to anything that would inconvenience cars. He suggested that the committee think long-term about these issues and suggested that we will not all be using cars the same way in the future. He also suggested that the Committee consider municipal broadband. This approach is being tried in many places across the country and he believes Colonie would be a good candidate for such an approach. He agreed to send some examples of what's being done elsewhere.

Wrap-up and Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned around 8:00 pm.



**Town of Colonie
Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC)
December 20, 2017, 6:00 PM
*Agenda***

- I. **Welcome and Agenda Review**

- II. **Update – Status of Related Projects**
 - Airport Area GEIS
 - CDTC - Albany Shaker Road Corridor Study
 - Lincoln Ave. BOA (Brownfield Opportunity Area)
 - IDA – Economic Assessment Study

- III. **Community Outreach Process**
 - Business Roundtable – joint effort between B&L and Camoin Associates – perhaps late January

- IV. **Revised Draft Vision and Goals**
 - Revisions from the November meeting

- V. **Plan Recommendations**
 - Initial discussion of major initiatives

- VI. **Next Steps**
 - Upcoming CPAC Meeting: January 17th or 24th , 6:00 PM

- VII. **Public Comment**

- VIII. **Wrap-up and Adjournment**