

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The comprehensive planning process included many opportunities for the public to voice their concerns, opinions, and beliefs regarding the future of the Town of Sennett. The following activities were conducted with participation from residents, business owners, landowners, and stakeholders in and around the Town:

- Numerous Steering Committee meetings
- Steering Committee SWOT Analysis
- Town Resident Mail Survey
- Public Visioning Sessions
- Visual Preferences Survey
- Public Hearings

These are more fully described below.

STEERING COMMITTEE

A Steering Committee of 14 persons was appointed by the Supervisor to guide the planning process, and serve as a conduit for local opinions. This Committee convened numerous times during the course of the Plan development. All Committee meetings were open to the public. As detailed below, the Steering Committee completed a SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis of the community and developed a Vision Statement to guide the future of the Town. They also worked to develop goals, and reviewed Plan drafts.

SWOT ANALYSIS

As part of a regular Steering Committee meeting, a SWOT Analysis of the community was completed. The process was facilitated by Thoma Development Consultants. The purpose of the exercise was to encourage the Steering Committee to discuss the built and natural environment in which residents live, and to shed light on the issues that are important to the community. The results of this exercise follow in random order.

Strengths

- School districts (four districts)
- Highway maintenance
- Location and proximity to Syracuse, Rochester, Ithaca, and Watertown
- Diversity of land use
- Open, undeveloped land provides opportunity for development
- Infrastructure

- Town government
- Good financial management at the Town level
- Multi-town cooperation with highway department projects
- Fire protection

Weaknesses

- Lack of water and sewer
- Uncontrolled growth – lack of adequate management policies
- Poor first impression – unattractive community gateways
- Resident apathy
- Lack of zoning clarity
- Lack of drainage regulations
- Drainage conditions, and need for drainage improvements
- Lack of enforcement of current regulations

Opportunities

- Open space
- Business expansion of Route 5 corridor
- Service business clusters
- Unique businesses and services
- Population diversity
- Incorporation policies and standards that result in energy efficiency

Threats

- Control of water and sewer by the City of Auburn
- Control of water by Skaneateles
- School and County taxes
- Too much growth
- Speed of drivers on various roadways

VISUAL PREFERENCE SURVEY

A photo preference survey was conducted at a public meeting. Participants were shown a series of photographic images from other communities. The purpose was to have the participants rate contrasting images of the built and natural environment. Participants rated photos on a scale ranging from -10 (extremely dislike the image) to +10 (very much like the image).

The scores for each slide (total 40) were tallied to determine the average score of the members of the Steering Committee: a quantified collective opinion for each image. The images with the highest negative and highest positive averages indicated where there was the most consensus in the group. The slides were then shown again, and the

participants were told the average score for each slide, and asked why they had rated the images the way they did - an activity which generates spontaneous, high-energy discussion and debate.

The purpose of the exercise was to have Steering Committee members define what was most important to the overall character of the Town, what assets were important to preserve, and what were the characteristics of an asset. Negative influences that needed to be changed were also discussed in tandem with the characteristics of these liabilities.

Images of open space, farmlands, and rural development were most highly rated by the Steering Committee, while urban, sprawl development typically rated low. See Appendix III on page 109 for complete results of the visual survey.



VISIONING SESSIONS

Two public Visioning Sessions were held as part of plan development. Each meeting was conducted in a similar manner. Participants were asked to identify positive and negative attributes of the community. Subsequently, participants provided words and phrases that described future desired characteristics of the Town. All responses were recorded on large sheets of paper for the public to view. Following the information-gathering stage, participants “voted” on which attributes were most important to them by placing stickers next to those items. The results of the two meetings are detailed below. The number shown in parentheses beside each attribute indicate the number of votes each received. The attribute/characteristic with the most votes was found to be the most important to the community.

Meeting # 1

POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES

1. Preservation of agricultural land (31)
2. Balanced mix of agriculture and more developed areas (26)
3. Quiet, peaceful (19)
4. Lots of open space (18)
5. Great fire department (17)
6. Single-family homes in country atmosphere (15)
7. Wildlife (9)
8. Lack of strict zoning (8)
9. Safe (7)
10. Town officials are approachable (6)
11. Good highway department (6)
12. Great schools (4)
13. Ample land within Town for parks/recreational areas (4)
14. Closeness to shopping (3)
15. Cost of living (3)
16. Water and sewer (3)
17. Historic barns, churches, county home (2)
18. Accessible to larger cities: Syracuse, and Auburn (0)
19. Access to healthcare (0)
20. Railroad (0)
21. Diversity of populations and thoughts (0)

NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTES

1. Agricultural land being consumed for development (38)
2. Development negatively impacting wildlife habitat (22)
3. Not enough high speed Internet (14)
4. Road network sometimes lacks shoulders (12)
5. Lack of zoning and code enforcement (10)
6. Speeding traffic (8)
7. Lack of police coverage (6)
8. Cost of infrastructure expansion on community character (5)
9. Businesses that generate truck traffic (5)
10. Open drainage ditches and water (5)
11. Poor road conditions (4)
12. Minimum lot size concern (2)
13. Town communication (2)
14. Lack of housing choice (2)
15. Lack of municipal park space / proposed location of park (0)
16. Gas Infrastructure (0)
17. Increased traffic due to Welch Allyn's growth (0)

DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS

1. Continue single-family housing
2. Stronger community identity
3. Create more senior housing
4. More walkable / bicycle friendly community
5. Less government interference with private property rights
6. Maintain quiet, pristine environment
7. Maintain wildlife habitats and nature
8. Limit mining operations and mining impacts on community
9. Well-planned commercial development, with adequate traffic control
10. Promoting agri-business: local farms and produce
11. Green energy buildings
12. Community functions to bring people together

Meeting #2

POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES

1. Quiet environment (11)
2. Open space and rural atmosphere (10)
3. Accessibility to larger cities: Rochester, Syracuse, etc. (7)
4. Town services (6)
5. Agriculture (6)
6. Tax base (5)
7. Businesses supporting tax base (4)
8. Road conditions, and network (3)
9. Slow pace of living (2)
10. Growing real estate values (2)
11. Community pride in well-maintained properties (2)
12. Choice of living atmosphere: urban vs. rural (2)
13. Railroad (2)
14. School system and school districts (1)
15. Structured growth (0)
16. Distinct residential areas (0)

NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTES

1. Speeding traffic on narrow Franklin Street Road, and missing signage for school bus traffic and pedestrians (20)
2. Inadequate width of State Route 5 for existing traffic volume (6)
3. Lack of design guidelines in the commercial corridor of Rte. 5 (4)
4. No Sennett Post Office (3)
5. Speeding on US Route 20 (3)
6. No park (1)
7. Lack of water and sewer infrastructure (0)

DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS

1. Recycling station
2. Park and wildlife preservation
3. Farmland protection
4. Maintain rural atmosphere
5. Planned, concentrated growth without sprawl
6. Large lot requirements for residential uses
7. Reduction of stormwater runoff
8. Governmental limits over control of private property

VISION STATEMENT

After a review of the data gathered at the public visioning sessions, the Steering Committee developed a Vision Statement for the Comprehensive Plan. The vision statement would not only set the tone for the work related to the Comprehensive Plan, it would serve as a statement of what the Town would be like 20 to 25 years from now. The Steering Committee was provided several vision statements from other communities to review. The fact that the statements from the other municipalities were very different, reassured the Committee that there was no single path or template for developing its own unique vision. Steering Committee members contributed key words and phrases which were typed into a laptop computer and displayed on a screen in the front of the room. The group discussed the ramifications of some of the words and added, deleted, and edited words and phrases until they were satisfied with the final product:

VISION STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR 2025

The Town of Sennett's future will embody a progressive community, and a responsive, forward thinking local government. Both community and government will strive to support a healthy mix of well-planned, environmentally friendly development and open space preservation. Sensitivity to the natural environment and pleasant rural atmosphere will guide the location, density, and style of the built physical environment. These diverse features will contribute to a people-friendly, residential community that supports agriculture and that accommodates aesthetically pleasing business development. The quality of life for our future will be enhanced by a well-maintained infrastructure of multi-modal transportation systems, cost effective utility infrastructure placement, and the presence of recreational facilities.

RESIDENT SURVEY

Thoma Development Consultants created a written survey in consultation with the steering committee. The survey was mailed to all 1,150 Town households. The mailing included the survey instrument, a letter from the Town Supervisor, and a stamped envelope to return the survey. The mailing list was generated by the Town Office in cooperation with the Cayuga County Real Property Tax Office. Income property owners were contacted in a few instances to determine the number of units in a particular income property. There were no survey responses from renters. Four hundred and eleven (411) surveys were returned, which is equivalent to a 36% response rate.

The survey was conducted to measure particular values and characteristics of Sennett residents. The survey included closed-ended questions on such topics as community character, community services, and land use management. Respondents were also provided the opportunity to answer open-ended questions in order to better represent their concerns.

The complete survey and results, including the answers to open-ended questions, can be found in Appendix I on page 86. Please note that any percentages shown in the survey responses are based on the number of responses to each particular question, as not all respondents answered all questions.

GOALS AND ACTIVITIES DEVELOPMENT

For the Sennett Comprehensive Plan, a series of goals and activities were presented to the Steering Committee by Thoma Development Consultants. The goals were based on input from previous public meetings, plus those of the Steering Committee, and the information derived from the mail surveys. The Steering Committee members reviewed draft goals and implementation actions and determined the comprehensiveness and appropriateness. Language and wording of the goals and activities were topics of concern for the Steering Committee. These were discussed with the consultant, and changes were made until Committee members were satisfied with the final product. Steering Committee members were fully apprised of the adoption process including the required reviews and public hearings.