

Community Input

The Comprehensive Plan process was guided by a 25-member planning committee with representatives of the Town Board, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Conservation Board, local businesses, and interested community residents. The planning committee worked with the planning consultant to develop the overall community vision and future land use plan. The committee was guided by the following additional types of community input

- Community Survey
- Developer Focus Group
- Senior Focus Group
- Youth Focus Group
- Farmer Interviews

The following summarizes input from each of these avenues.

Community Survey

The surveys were mailed to 1,996 households in the Town of Clarkson outside the village of Brockport in the spring of 2003. 321 completed surveys were returned, representing a 16 percent response rate.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents characterized Clarkson as rural and indicated a desire to preserve that character. The most frequently cited reason for choosing to live in Clarkson was a desire to live near open lands (25 percent). Other reasons for choosing Clarkson mentioned by 6 to 12 percent of respondents include schools, born/raised here, affordable housing, small community, safety, desire to live near agricultural lands, convenient to work. Fewer respondents cited affordable taxes or convenience to shopping as a reason for living in Clarkson.

Nearly three-quarters preferred that the pace of commercial and industrial development be slowed, but an equal proportion specified needed services. Respondents were divided about the pace of residential development

The survey asked respondents to identify potential municipal expenditures they were willing to support financially. Those receiving the highest level of support from respondents were:

- protect natural features
- acquire parkland/open space

Other potential expenditures receiving moderate level of support include:

- improve existing parks, trails, and recreation programs
- preserve historical buildings
- preserve agricultural activities
- improve fire and ambulance services

Other potential expenditures such as improving cultural arts, roads, drainage, sidewalks, the landfill, dog control, building a new town hall, attracting additional commercial development or providing affordable housing received lower levels of support.

A separate question was also asked regarding municipal priorities. Maintaining rural character was the most frequently cited top priority, followed by providing guidelines to carefully control growth.

Developer Focus Group

The objective of this focus group was to identify what is necessary to engage the development community in creating the community envisioned by Clarkson residents.

Methodology

The developer focus group took place from 4 to 6 pm on April 26, 2004 in the Dureya Room at the Seymour Library. Focus group participants were recruited by a Town Board member. Participants included current and former homebuilders active in Clarkson, as well as owner and engineering representatives. One participant is a resident of Clarkson. Collectively the group indicated familiarity with development procedures in Churchville, Greece, Hamlin, Parma, Perinton, Pittsford, and Sweden and one participant serves on a Planning Board.

Introductions

Town Board member Harlan Purdy welcomed participants and left. The facilitator established ground rules of confidentiality and speaking one's mind. Each participant was asked to describe their connection to development in Clarkson and what they hoped to gain from participation in the focus group.

Overview of Developer Perspective

The group was primarily concerned with maintaining home demand, the affordability of the product they offer, and the taxes homebuyers will have to pay. Discussion focused almost exclusively on their self-interest, with no reference to the importance of the specifics of their projects to the quality of life in the community as whole. However, participants were quick to identify local, county, and state actions necessary to allow them to continue to prosper. Participants value a clearly defined community vision and review process but did not comment on draft comprehensive plan materials presented.

Participants supported the northern alignment through Clarkson for the extension of NYS 531, though most expected the southern alignment to prevail given the vehicle volumes generated by uses such as SUNY Brockport and Route 31 commercial uses. Though the draft community vision distributed and the moderator's input identified a community desire for moderately paced growth, one participant repeatedly asked what was government going to do to "prevent the irrelevance (i.e. reduced home demand) of Clarkson given the likely southern alignment of the NYS 531 extension."

Input on Draft Vision Statement, Design Principles, and Future Land Use

Participants reviewed the draft vision statement and an example of urban and rural design principles. Participants seem to rely on town staff and planning board members to translate the descriptive language of a community vision into specific desired project features. Rather than considering whether the community desire for sidewalk and street system connectivity, maintaining natural drainage channels, and visually buffering development from existing public roads applies to their site, developers expect to be told directly what project features are necessary for approval.

Most participants seemed to have little previous exposure to planning documents. One participant was quite dismissive, expecting the plan to be abandoned in three to five years because it was not workable. This individual also had strong praise for the development

review process of area communities, such as Perinton, that have a strong commitment to planning.

The closest the group came to discussing planning was the fairness of a community vision depending on whether it was the vision of a strong leader or the result of a community process. Most participants do not see a link between a comprehensive planning process and a clear and predictable development review process.

Participants were divided regarding the need for major retail facilities such as a grocery store in Clarkson. Some felt such services were essential to future growth while others indicated nearby shopping in Hamlin, Brockport, and Greece was adequate. Participants were unwilling to indicate desired future land use on the maps provided. Although most promised to forward a marked-up map of future land use after the conclusion of the focus group, none have been received.

Town Review Procedures

Focus group participants were very concerned with the lack of clear direction from town staff and review boards. The overall sentiment was summed up, as “a fast no is better than a slow maybe.” Participants gave example of being given conflicting information or having new issues raised each time a project was reviewed. One participant considered an open, professional development review process as the key issue regarding planning in Clarkson.

Perinton was identified as having a desirable review procedure, a developer could get an early, definitive read on the match between the concept and the community vision and the town would then work with the developer to get an approvable project.

Town Revenue Generation and Infrastructure Planning Practices

Several participants expressed dissatisfaction with the equitability of the move to full value assessments. They felt new homes, but not existing homes, were being assessed at full value. Examples were also given of assessment not tied to the development potential of the land i.e., a lot with a 30-foot right-of-way connection being assessed as a building lot. There was also the perception that rising assessments were fueling land sales, as individuals could no longer afford to hold land. Participants also perceived large increases in assessed value as a backdoor way to raise taxes. Potential homebuyers compare not only the home prices but also taxes; taxes greater than 3 percent of price were identified as resulting in reduced home demand.

Several participants also indicated a need to balance residential growth with business use to fund needed school and utility infrastructure. Participants objected to paying sewer fees (\$350 per unit), when they were paying to install sewers, and they objected to paying the recreation fee.

Also with regard to infrastructure, some participants felt the trunk sewer in Clarkson operating at 25 percent of capacity was wasted infrastructure. Others indicated that the availability of the trunk sewer has created a monoculture of builder product offerings. To date, few builders in Clarkson have tested the market for products other than those targeted to price-sensitive family homebuyers. One participant reported recent success offering larger lots and partially wooded home sites with public utilities. Another stated, “You can’t afford to develop 5 to 10 acre parcels at a price people will pay.”

Subdivision Features

The discussion of subdivision features was couched in terms of the value to future homeowners. Builders felt money spent on sidewalks was not well spent because there are not sidewalks on the busy streets and the kids did not use internal sidewalks. One participant expressed a similar caution regarding spending on trees—“why spend money to plant trees, what if the homeowner doesn’t want them and cuts them down.” The concern was also expressed that trees in the right-of-way interfere with utilities.

There was general agreement that providing additional green space in developments is desirable, but the expectation was that such features would be trade-offs for existing requirements such as sidewalks.

Conclusions

The length and nature of the review process is likely to impact the type of builder attracted to Clarkson and their willingness to try new things. Though participants are very price conscious, they need to build to stay in business. Builders rely on town development review staff and planning board members to translate discretionary standards into concrete project features appropriate to their unique project site. A community with a clear vision and the ability to recognize the potential contribution of individual developments to that vision can ask for and get project features that make each new subdivision an asset to the overall quality of the community.

Overall, participants expressed a willingness to do what it takes to get a buildable project. If the perceived predictability of a timely approval is high, a businessperson can afford to provide project amenities that will increase the likelihood or speed of approval. Inconsistent feedback or failure to identify all issues and opportunities early in the process frustrates applicants. It also changes the risk-reward equation. When the predictability of a timely approval is low, a businessperson needs to be more cautious about agreeing to provide project amenities and pursue innovative designs that may further slow or complicate the review process.

Only one participant had experience with building “off-tract” homes. Attracting builders willing to “test the market” for a wider variety of development types is likely important to achieving Clarkson’s community visions.

Senior Focus Group

The senior focus group was held from 1 to 3 pm on Sunday May 23, 2004 at Clarkson Town Hall. Participants were recruited by the Town Clerk, a Town Board member, and notices at senior apartment complexes in the Town of Clarkson and at the joint Clarkson-Sweden-Brockport senior center.

Participants were asked to identify community strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, to draw a map of the uses they frequent in the community, and discuss changes they would like to see in Clarkson.

Strengths

Open land
Beautiful homes
 NYS 19 south to Brockport
 Ridge Road
Services – water, sewer, gas, cable
Wildlife

Weaknesses

Drainage – 70% of town north of 104 has poor drainage due to soil and slope
Lack of sewers on Ridge Road
Goal – water on all town roads
Not enough golf courses
Not enough dance places
Lack of senior housing – apartments especially middle income; have Wellington for low income,
Friend bought mobile home in Hamlin because few middle income senior options

Opportunities

Close to lake, Hamlin Beach
Close to Rochester – arts, sports
Close to Greece – shopping, restaurants
More housing
Close to Brockport
Balance open space / natural areas
SUNY Brockport
Walking paths
Purchase of development rights
Extend NYS 531

Threats

Higher taxes
Fewer job opportunities; Kodak employment has decreased

1982	60,000
1994	40,000
2004	20,000

Uses Frequented and Changes Desired

Uses included an several maps include the town transfer station, Clarkson restaurants, Tops and other retail in Hamlin, Wegmans and other retail and service uses in Brockport, the hospital (Lakeside Memorial Hospital). Other destinations identified included the library (Seymour Library), homes of family members, and a church in Brockport. All maps included walking routes with one also identifying location of sidewalks and natural features.

Participants would like to see a greater variety of housing, additional commercial services (golf, dining, and dancing), and the ability to walk safely near their homes.

Youth Focus Group

The youth focus group was held on Sunday May 23 at Clarkson Town Hall. Participants were recruited by a Town Board member and other members of the Comprehensive Plan Committee.

Participants were asked to identify community strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, to draw a map of the uses they frequent in the community, and discuss changes they would like to see in Clarkson.

Strengths

Quiet
Clarkson playground
Library
K&K convenience store

Weaknesses

Not enough stuff to do / ball fields
Sidewalk on Lake Rd. ends at playground
Not enough stores – more restaurants, movies, clothes
Stores spread out –most not in walking distance
Wooden playground was more interesting

Opportunities

Youth –dance/concert
Fields – tennis courts @ playground
Roller hockey on tennis courts

Uses Frequented and Changes Desired

Uses included on several maps include the school (Brockport Central School campus), K&K convenience store, park/playground, library (Seymour Library and Greece), homes of friends and relatives, Greece malls, movies in Brockport and Greece, other shopping in Hamlin (Tops, Kronys, Subway) and Brockport (Wegmans, Wal-Mart, “Main Street”, Burger King, pizza) and ice rinks in Brockport and Rochester. One participant indicated a church in Greece and another included a number of neighborhood streets, some with street labels.

Participants value commercial and recreation opportunities within walking distance. They would like to see more youth oriented retail and food businesses, opportunities for informal play, and an expanded sidewalk and trail system to get where they want to go.

Paths for walking and four wheeling
Pick-up recreational activities
Dance center
Improve good neighborhood – with youth entertainment & sales
Not much for kids in Brockport (used to walk to Collector’s Choice)
Want more places to eat in Clarkson
Pool w/ slide (High School and SUNY pools are crowded)
Sidewalks – Lake Rd. from Woodstock
Streetlights
Place for kids to hang out w/out parents
Arcade
Picnic tables, park w/ trails

Threats

Woods – where they play paintball threatened by future development
Youth won’t pay fees for recreation
Gas prices

Farmer Interviews

The following summary is based on phone interviews with three representatives of farm operations with major land holdings in Clarkson. Collectively those interviewed own 2,340 acres or 11 percent of town lands. All farm operators indicated a long-term commitment to farming. Clarkson farming operations are not dependent on rented land and Town of Clarkson lands represent 45 percent of their collective total land holdings.

The most frequently cited concern is difficulty moving farm equipment on public highways due to increasing traffic volumes. Commuter and farm vehicle conflicts are most serious on Sweden–Walker and Redman Roads. Farm operations are adequately served by existing access to public water or on-site wells. Other concerns mentioned include property taxes and the difficulty of enforcing laws to prevent crop destruction by those illegally operating off-road recreation vehicles on private lands.

One farmer indicated that some key lands with unique soils should be considered for permanent preservation as farmland.