

Village of Rhinebeck Comprehensive Plan Committee - January 20, 2022

Notes from initial virtual meeting, 7:00 – 8:30 pm

Attending

Matt Johnston, Chair	Tim Decker
Elijah Bender	Lisa Fountain (had to leave at 7:30)
John Clarke	Louis Turpin
Jeff Cotter	Lydia Slaby, Village Board liaison

Introductions

Matt started the meeting with a proposed agenda and estimated timetable for discussion. Everyone then introduced themselves to the group in 3-5 minutes, providing relevant background information on work, how long they have lived in the Village, what attracted them to this place, and why they were interested in serving on the Committee. Matt had previous individual conversations with all the Committee members, so he did not repeat his introduction. The group has a mix of backgrounds, including two members who were born and raised in Rhinebeck, several who had lived in the Village for over 20 years, and a couple more recent residents. For this meeting, Louis volunteered to be the timekeeper, John agreed to be the notetaker, and Jeff would be the coordinator.

Process Discussion

Matt offered two general frameworks for moving forward. First, he asked the Committee to embrace a consensus-building process for decision-making. When a proposal is presented to the group, any objections will be sought out early in the discussion and concerns will be resolved one at a time before the group moves on to the next steps.

Second, he laid out a time frame for completion of a proposed draft plan, based on a three-season schedule. Matt urged the group to consider an ecological approach to the process, thinking of seasons rather than quarters, lunar cycles rather than calendar months. Spring would be for listening and learning, summer for understanding and integrating what we learned, and fall for making final decisions and a draft document. The goal would be to have a plan to pass along to the Village Board by Sinterklaas, so it could go through public hearings, revision, and adoption by early 2023.

Questions were raised about the possibility for hiring a professional planning consultant, given this ambitious schedule. Lydia said there are two existing partners - Gordon and Svenson, who are the Village Zoning Attorneys, and Tighe and Bond, the Village Engineers. The Village is pursuing grants and looking for ways to strategically deploy consultants to match available funding. The NRI process is already generating useful maps and the Dutchess County Planning Department may assist with certain mapping and other information as needed (e.g. census data).

Everyone supported this shortened time frame, although one member warned about the conflation of comprehensive planning and subsequent zoning changes. The Committee should not get bogged down in the details of possible Zoning Code amendments. Another member expressed potential concerns about the plan not being comprehensive enough if on a shortened timeline. We need to have time to hear all voices in the process. Discussion ensued. Matt wrapped the discussion by noting the Committee's two soft agreements: the consensus-building process will include early space for objections and the plan will proceed on a three-season or 9- to 12-month schedule.

Upcoming Meetings

Matt proposed one Committee meeting a month on the first Thursday after the full moon. This would be supplemented by a longer half-day meeting once a season. One member strongly agreed with the periodic half-day meetings because the Committee could pull together a lot of work in one session. Matt will send out a schedule for future meeting dates.

Between monthly Committee meetings, topic-based subcommittees would also meet once or twice to provide feedback to the full Committee. Matt suggested three subcommittees with combined concerns. An economic development subcommittee could look primarily at business district issues, including traffic and parking, so that a shop owner, for example, would be able to weigh in on all the issues facing the Village Center. An ecology subcommittee would include natural features, climate impacts, parks and community facilities, and an affordability subcommittee would consider housing, costs, and larger land use concerns.

When asked for reactions, one member preferred more traditional plan categories, such as land use, housing, transportation, economic development, and governance, with a side note that we make sure to work with the Town on common interests.

Another member asked whether we might need a separate communications subcommittee. Since there is no good coverage by a local paper, the Committee may need to rely mainly on the Village website for public notices and updates. Matt is working on outreach and communication issues. Generalized desire for more diversity on the Committee. Matt and Lydia said they were trying hard to make that happen and are hoping to add up to four new Committee members before the next meeting.

Matt ended the meeting on schedule at 8:30.