Town of LaFayette Comprehensive Plan

August 2012

Onondaga County, New York

Prepared by:

THOMA
Development Consultants

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Chapter 1: Introduction

INTRODUCTION

The residents and governmental leaders of the Town of Lafayette have grown more concerned in recent years regarding development in the Town, the potential loss of open space, the condition of the LaFayette hamlet, and the lack of an up-to-date cohesive plan for the future of the Town. In every community, including the Town of Lafayette, various public agencies, private organizations, and individuals continuously undertake planning activities and make decisions that, individually and cumulatively, can affect a community's future and impact the quality of life. It is prudent to periodically review the big picture to evaluate the impact of emerging trends; address land use issues; ascertain the concerns of citizens and stakeholders; and, ultimately, decide whether policy changes are needed to chart the future course of the community.

The development of a new Comprehensive Plan is the result of the desire of the Town of Lafayette to become more proactive in guiding the changing conditions in the Town. This plan will serve as a blueprint for future action by the Town Board, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, and the community as a whole as it deals with growth and change. Comprehensive planning forms the basis of efforts by a municipality to logically guide the development of its natural and built environment and sustain and improve its quality of life. It is a guide to promoting the health, safety, and the general welfare of the people of the community. Significant decisions and actions affecting the immediate and long-range protection, enhancement, growth, and development can be influenced by the goals and implementation measures stated in its Comprehensive Plan.

It is important that a Comprehensive Plan be grounded in the values, concerns, and feelings of Town residents and landowners. Therefore, this Plan included a public participation process to ensure that local values were the foundation of the Plan. Public participation ensures that the plan addresses the needs of the community and allows the Steering Committee and local government officials to better understand the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and critical issues facing Lafayette.

Thoma Development Consultants was hired by the Town of Lafayette to assist in the development of the Town's Comprehensive Plan. Founded in 1980, Thoma is a community development consulting firm based in Cortland, New York. They guided the Steering Committee through the public participation processes detailed below, and met with them regularly throughout the development of this Plan.

Components of a comprehensive plan are suggested by New York State statutes that authorize local governments to prepare a comprehensive plan. The State recognizes that significant decisions and actions affecting communities are made at the local level. One of the most important powers and duties granted by the legislature to local government is the authority and responsibility to undertake comprehensive planning. New York State's definition of a comprehensive plan, the suggested elements that is may contain, as well as procedural requirements for development and adoption, are found in Town Law §272-a (Town comprehensive plan). The adoption of a comprehensive plan under these statutes is voluntary.

New York State statutes require that all land use regulations be in conformance with a comprehensive plan. Adopting land use regulations that conform to an up-to-date comprehensive plan provides significant legal protection for such regulations. Land use regulations are not limited to zoning that separates the community into zoning districts and specifies land uses, building dimensions, and yard requirements in each zone; but may also include regulations that protect trees, slopes, historic districts, and viewsheds, to name a few. Land use regulations can be adopted to implement the plan's vision, protect the locality's natural resources, and encourage economic development where desired.

PLANNING OVER TIME

"Urban" planning stretches back to the beginnings of organized human civilization. Ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman societies designed cities to address issues such as the movement of people and goods and for the health and welfare of residents. Modern planning can be traced to the latter part of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Major projects to update Paris and Barcelona were undertaken in the mid-1800's to improve transportation, create parks, improve access to sunlight and air, and improve aesthetics. In the early 1900's, a movement began to provide citizens, especially factory workers and tenement residents, with healthier environments than what was provided by 19th century industrial cities. Thus, the "City Beautiful" movement was born, a philosophy that using beautification and monumental grandeur in cities promoted beauty not only for its own sake, but also because if promoted moral and civic virtue among urban populations. Advocates of the philosophy believed that such beautification could promote a harmonious social order that would increase the quality of life.

Nationally, in 1916, New York City adopted the first zoning regulations applied city-wide as a reaction to the construction of the Equitable Building. This structure towered over the neighboring residences, diminishing the availability of sunshine to nearby properties and creating controversy. These laws set the pattern for zoning for the rest of the country. The constitutionality of zoning ordinances was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in the 1926 case, *Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Company*. The Village, a suburb of Cleveland, wished to prevent industrial Cleveland from growing into and subsuming Euclid and limit the growth of industry which might change the character of the Village. They developed a zoning ordinance based upon various classes of use, height, and area. A legal challenge to this ordinance ensued, but Euclid's zoning

ordinance was eventually upheld. Today, most municipalities still use “Euclidean” zoning, including the Town of Lafayette.

With the exponential growth of the automobile in the mid 1900’s, planning throughout much of the 20th Century focused on the need to accommodate vehicles, with little attention paid to pedestrians or mass transportation. New highways eased movement through and between urban centers and, for the first time in history, allowed people to live far from work, retail, and services. Traditional “urban” planning changed as suburbs grew up around cities, and commercial, industrial, retail, and residential uses were separated, partly as an unintended consequence of Euclidean zoning. For the first time, outlying, traditionally agricultural areas, were subjected to development pressures. The regionalization of goods and services also occurred as smaller, local stores servicing smaller communities and neighborhoods gave way to large malls and big-box stores. These changes began to impact rural communities as large tracts of open space were consumed by suburban sprawl development, while traditional downtowns and hamlets lost their business cores to larger communities.

Today, rising fuel prices, impacts on the climate created by fossil fuels, the loss of greenspace, traffic concerns, and the erosion of sense of place, the end of the 20th century has caused community planning to shift away from auto-centric, sprawl-promoting practices.

Recent planning concerns have revolved around the issues of sustainability, creating liveable and walkable communities, open space preservation and strengthening the sense of place and community. Smart Growth is a theory that concentrates growth in compact walkable urban centers to avoid the sprawl that has grown prevalent in many American communities. It also advocates compact, transit-oriented, walkable, bicycle-friendly land use, including neighborhood schools, complete streets and mixed-use development with a range of housing choices. The closely related theory of “New Urbanism” encompasses principles such as traditional neighborhood design, open space, context-appropriate architecture and planning, the balanced development of jobs and housing, safe streets, green building, and the re-development of brownfields and former industrial land and compact infrastructure.

As this Comprehensive Plan will detail, these latter planning movements closely echo to the concerns LaFayette residents Many of the issues and concerns that face the Town of LaFayette at this time are universal concerns. expressed in public forums, meetings, and surveys. These major issues include improving the hamlet, preserving open space, and preserving the community’s character and resources.

Previous Planing Initiatives

The Town of LaFayette and Onondaga County have undertaken several planning initiatives over the years. It is important to reference previous plans when developing new ones to ensure that goals set by the Town are being met and to understand any changes the region has undergone since the studies last occurred. These plans are summarized below:

TOWN OF LAFAYETTE LAND USE PLAN (1988) - The Town of LaFayette's land use plan was completed in 1988. It was prepared as an effort by the community to guide future physical development in the Town for a period of 20 years.

The plan issues four goals for the community: (1) Preservation of the quality of life and character of the community, (2) Protection of environmental resources, (3) Meet projected traffic requirements, and to (4) Encourage economic activities appropriate to the town. The plan predicts a decrease in the importance of agriculture in the town while single family homes will continue to be a dominate land use. Retail and commercial activities are recommended to be concentrated around existing hamlets. To meet the stated goals, the plan divides the Town into geographic areas and makes recommendations for each division

Based on the plan's self stated twenty-year lifespan, it is currently due for an update. According to public participation sessions, some of the plan's goals have not been met and will require further Town efforts. In particular, the goal for preservation of the Town's character has not been met.

ONONDAGA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL AND FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN (1997) - This plan was sponsored by the Onondaga County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board. It was created to assist in the maintenance of the economic viability of the County's agricultural industry and its supporting land base. It contains an overview of the agricultural industry in agricultural and farmland protection goals and objectives, and proposes a number of recommendations and strategies. The goals of the plan are to (1) Enhance the viability of agriculture in Onondaga County, (2) Protect farmland resources, and (3) Promote the economic and social importance of the agricultural industry in Onondaga County.

2010 DEVELOPMENT GUIDE FOR ONONDAGA COUNTY (1998) - The original 2010 Development Guide was prepared in 1990 by the Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency, and was updated in 1998 with two components: A Framework for Growth in Onondaga County and The 2010 Development Guide for Onondaga County. The first component focuses on the physical and economic setting within which the Development Guide functions, including demographic and economic factors which affect land development, land development trends, environmental considerations, and the fiscal capacity of the County to maintain and extend public facilities. The Development Guide then provides a vision and goals for Onondaga County, including (1) Economic Growth,

(2) An Attractive Community, (3) Diversity and Choice, and (4) Fiscal Strength. This is followed with strategies and recommendations for achieving these goals.

ONONDAGA COUNTY SETTLEMENT PLAN (2001) - The 2001 Settlement Plan provides a County-wide framework aimed at helping municipalities make wise development decisions. The objective of the plan is to convert the planning and zoning codes, and practices favored by developers, to limit future suburban sprawl and instead work towards the continuation of the County's tradition of urban neighborhoods, villages, and hamlets. The plan provides sections related to (1) Urban Structure and Municipal Framework, (2) Open Space Structure, (3) Transportation Policies, (4) Implementation. These are followed by eight Pilot Projects given as examples of ideal solutions to typical problems that municipalities in Onondaga County might face.

FOCUS 2010: A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR LAFAYETTE, NEW YORK (2005) - Building off of a 1991 planning effort, the Strategic Plan was finished in 2005. It features a study of the town with goals and recommendations to be completed over the next five years. Creation of the plan utilized a steering committee consisting of government officials and other stakeholders in the town, public town-hall style meetings, and a public survey.

Goals resulting from the efforts are as follows: (1) Creation of an Economic Development Committee, (2) Development of a master plan for the town to protect is rural character, (3) Utilize existing infrastructure in the creation of a community center, and (4) Address the concerns of Town senior citizens.

The plan recommends that it should be updated every 5 years with December 2010 marking this point.

ONONDAGA COUNTY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PLAN (CURRENTLY BEING DEVELOPED) - Onondaga County is in the process of creating a new County plan with a focus on settlement patterns that will foster sustainability and provide a region of opportunity for future generations. The Plan will include the following components: Understanding Our Region, Creating a New Community Vision, Defining Sustainable Actions, and Continuing Dialogue. It will act as a decision making tool for individuals, developers, businesses, and municipalities.

Public Participation

Community involvement in developing a vision for the future of the Town was critical. Thus, LaFayette created opportunities for the citizens, business, and property owners in the Town to provide input into the Comprehensive Plan. This fostered "ownership" of the Plan allowing residents to have a voice in determining the future of their community. Listed following is a description of each of the citizen participation venues and processes.

STEERING COMMITTEE

The Town of LaFayette Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee was appointed by the LaFayette Town Board and charged with guiding the development of the Town's Comprehensive Plan. The Steering Committee was composed of local residents, political representatives, Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals members, and representatives of local organizations. Membership of the Town of Lafayette Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee included:

Adrian Shute, Town Supervisor
Daniel Kuhns
Barbara Locke
William McConnell
Anita Minerd
James Nakas
Melanie Palmer
Peter Paul
David Prince
Thomas Scofield
Peter Tigh

SURVEYS

Prior to beginning the formal planning process, the Town conducted two surveys to help gauge citizen views on the current and future state of the Town. These surveys include:

Business Demand Survey – Conducted in 2007 by the Syracuse University Link Program. The goal of the survey was to collect information regarding the level of demand for various businesses, products, or services. Respondents were asked to rate 24 potential businesses on a five-point scale, from #1 being "very disinterested" to #5 being "very interested". The results, in decreasing order of demand are as follows:

1.	Restaurant	90% interested
2.	Grocery Store	83% interested
3.	Construction and Building Supply Store	62% interested
4.	Fitness Center	51% interested
5.	Banking	58% interested
6.	Handyman/women services	55% interested
7.	Healthcare provider & therapy services	52% interested
8,	Novelty item or gift stores	51% not interested
9.	Computer and Technical Services	58% not interested
10.	Children's daycare	59% not interested
11.	Cleaning services	59% not interested
12.	Educational products and toys	62% not interested
13.	Landscaping and lawn care	63% not interested
14.	Sporting goods	65% not interested
15.	Furniture store	67% not interested
16.	Home medical supply services	68% not interested
17.	Adult daycare services	68% not interested
18.	Beauty salon	69% not interested
19.	Attorney-at-law	71% not interested
20.	Interior design	74% not interested
21.	Investment and insurance	76% not interested
22.	Real estate	81% not interested
23.	Home security and alarm business	85% not interested
24.	Advertising/marketing firms	85% not interested

Residents were also asked if they preferred development in or near the hamlet of LaFayette, the hamlet of Jamesville, or "other". 86 respondents chose the LaFayette Hamlet, 12 chose the Jamesville Hamlet, and 12 chose "other", indicating a clear preference among residents for the location of future business development in the Hamlet of LaFayette.

Focus 2010 Survey – As part of the Focus 2010 Strategic Plan completed for the Town in 2005, a community survey was completed with the assistance of Carol Dwyer of Syracuse University. Surveys were sent to all businesses and residences in the Town. 272 responses were received, which is a 14% response rate. Regarding growth and development:

- 63% of respondents wanted LaFayette to "seek out both controlled residential and selected commercial development".
- 54% were not in favor of re-zoning certain residential areas from "agriculture-residential" to "residential only".
- 68% were in favor of expanding current subdivisions such as Meeker Hill Estates and Maple Grove on a controlled basis.
- 69% were in favor of encouraging development of new-home subdivisions on a controlled basis that would sustain the Town's rural character.
- 58% were in favor of further residential growth in and around the hamlet.

Regarding other issues, 67% of respondents stated they were in favor of development of sewer and water districts in the LaFayette hamlet. 58% of respondents were in favor of developing a sewer district only, and 47% were in favor of a water district only. Many respondents noted concerns about the cost for such infrastructure. Other popular community desires included a senior citizen assisted living facility, and a community center. 45% of respondents were not in favor of an indoor sports facility. The full survey and its results are included in the Town's Focus 2010 Report.

PUBLIC VISIONING MEETINGS

Two public visioning sessions were held in conjunction with the plan. Each meeting had a specific goal and outcome as detailed below:

Meeting 1 - The first public meeting included a review of the Comprehensive Planning process, followed by a facilitated SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis. At the conclusion of the meeting participants "voted" on those issues of greatest importance to them by placing stickers next to those items. The results of the SWOT analysis are provided below. The numbers in parenthesis indicate the number of votes the statement received.

STRENGTHS

Proximity to Syracuse and Routes 11 and 20 (18)
Beautiful/Green (14)
Terrain (13)
People working together, e.g., Apple Fest (8)
Agriculture (6)
Access to I-81 (4)
Small size population (3)
Local schools and community interaction (3)
Scenic views (3)
Onondaga Nation buffer (2)
Proximity to good health care/universities (1)
Closeness to Cazenovia and Skaneateles (1)
Community pride (1)
Available public parks (0)

OPPORTUNITIES

Greater development of hamlet area (14)
Opportunity to preserve the community (14)
Property around the hamlet provides opportunity (10)
Other uses for Apple Fest property (9)
Create a business park/district (6)
Wind power (5)
Agriculture and Tourism (4)
Proximity to Cazenovia and Route 20 antiques: capitalize on those dollars (4)
The Town has many entrepreneurs (3)
Develop Rt. 20 to be more like a destination in the Town (2)

Fall tourism opportunities, especially those tied to apples (1)
The Town has everything that someone could ever want (0)
The minimum lot size in the Town creates housing opportunities (0)

WEAKNESSES

Poor condition of the hamlet area/crossroads (19)
Lack of planning for commercial development (13)
Lack of vision for what people want (8)
Poor perception re: commuting distance, anti-business attitude, school (8)
Lacking needed services such as a grocery store (7)
Historically antagonistic toward businesses (4)
Lack of sidewalks (4)
Lack of non-residential tax base (4)
Need for creativity regarding development (4)
No place for teens to hang out outside of sports (3)
Condition of the older housing stock (2)
Need public facilities: water and sewer (1)
Taxes are high compared to the services provided (1)
Give developers a break such as a septic system financed by the Town (1)
Lack of public transportation (0)
I81 exit ramps bring trucks and strangers (0)
Lack of housing options: senior housing, assisted living, smaller housing (0)
No municipal parking in the hamlet (0)
No bike routes (0)
Government bureaucracy (0)
Eager Road access to the Land Trust: poor requirements imposed by County

THREATS

Loss of small town character (18)
Lack of a “big picture” plan (11)
Under-represented in the County and region; re-districting of County reps. (9)
Being dismissive to new ideas (9)
Hydrofracking (7)
Try not to be “everything to everybody”; don’t duplicate regional places (5)
Inappropriate development of the LaFayette Hotel and other places (5)
Lack of branding: defining who we are (4)
Lack of public access to scenic lands (2)
Poor perception of the school district (2)
Changing zoning to accommodate businesses is a big mistake (2)
Competition from Tully and Jamesville (0)

Meeting 2 - The second public meting included a review of the information gleaned from the SWOT analysis and a mapping exercise to determine a future vision for the Town. Participants were divided into three groups and were directed to “map” their vision for the future of the Town on base maps provided. Participants provided information spatially and graphically, along with written comments. Each group presented the results of their exercise to the group, and common themes were identified. These included:

GROUP #1 MAPPING RESULTS

- They love LaFayette the way it is.
- The Town needs to protect scenic roads, lands, and views.
- Consolidate commercial and industrial sites to specific areas of the Town.
- Hydrofracking is a big threat to water and scenic landscapes.
- The Town needs to pick and choose the type of commercial development.
- Demand that the Town benefit from commercial development.
- Revitalize the hamlet area.

GROUP #2 MAPPING RESULTS

- Clean up existing properties to attract residents and businesses.
- Get rid of zoning that scatters commercial development throughout the Town.
- Develop specific areas for specific development:
    1. Keep existing zoning
    2. Commercial property development should remain between Route 81 and 11; not west.
    3. The intersection of Routes 20 and 81 should be the hub of commercial development.
- Develop public access to natural resources:
    1. Creek walk
    2. Butternut Creek
    3. Onondaga Creek: Town should be involved with cleanup
- Windmills:
    1. Should not be on the highest elevations
    2. Should not create significant noise
    3. Should not destroy viewsheds
- Define Commercial Development:
    1. Restrict building heights
    2. Size of development

GROUP #3 MAPPING RESULTS

- Address the condition of the LaFayette Hotel.
- Hamlet development:
    1. Water and sewer must be available
    2. Improve aesthetics: sidewalks, street lamps, walkability
    3. Off-street parking
- Develop senior housing to keep this population from leaving.
- Strive for energy independence: green, biofuels.
- Create a community center for children: indoor facilities, pool, in Stafford Park.
- Create a high tech corridor: look into the feasibility of tapping into the Syracuse-based fiber optic line.
- Create a centralized tourist area: create a tourist center with quaint shops; a place where people visit and then want to come back. Where they spend their money.
- Outside the hamlet area, protect property values.
- Have a plan to develop residential and commercial property between Routes 11 and 20.

Vision Statement

Based on the results of the two public meetings, the Steering Committee prepared a Vision Statement that would describe LaFayette in 20 to 30 years. The Vision Statement is the touchstone for establishing goals and actions in future phases of the Comprehensive Plan development. The Town of LaFayette's Vision Statement is:

> *LaFayette is a beautiful rural town and a great place to live. Our vibrant hamlet, surrounding farmland, green spaces, and scenic views are preserved through thoughtfully managed development. Our proud community is supported by proactive leadership. We welcome a diverse population, encourage the development of compatible businesses, and strive to capitalize on our existing assets and historic identity as the Crossroads of New York State.*

Major Identified Issues

Utilizing on information generated from the public participation actions detailed above, the Steering Committee devised a list of the major issues/topics that should be the focus of the Inventory and Analysis that will be undertaken in future phases of the Comprehensive Plan development. As the Comprehensive Plan moves forward, these topics may be subject to change. The identified topics, in no particular order, are:

- Housing
- Land Use and Zoning
- Agriculture
- Open Space
- Hamlet Development
- Environmental Sustainability
- Parks, Trails, and Recreation
- Infrastructure, Utilities, and Telecommunication
- Intergovernmental Cooperation
- The LaFayette School District
- Transportation
- Economic Development

Summary

The public participation and visioning process detailed previously served as a foundation and guide as the Steering Committee worked to develop a new Comprehensive Plan for the Town. Despite the many opinions expressed during the public participation process, there appears to be significant unity among residents regarding the future direction of the Town: preservation of the community's rural sense of place, compatible development in the hamlet, and making LaFayette a great place to live and work. This shared vision will allow the Town to preserve what is important to it, capitalize on its many assets, and properly plan for new development.