

# TOWN OF BALLSTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE



Welcome to  
**TOWN OF BALLSTON**  
A Farms First Community

## MEETING SUMMARY

**Purpose:** Virtual Focus Group Discussion  
**Date and Time:** Thursday, February 4, 2021, 6:00PM-8:00PM  
**Location:** Virtual via Zoom  
**Attendees:** See Below

Agenda Item	Discussion
<p><b>Welcome and Project Overview</b></p>	<p>The purpose of the Virtual Focus Group Discussion was to gather input related to specific topic areas including Hamlets, Targeted Growth and Land Conservation, and Clean Energy.</p> <p>The event included an overview presentation with background information about the topic areas. Following the overview, participants joined virtual breakout groups facilitated by members of the consultant team. Breakout group participants were asked to provide input on a series of topic-based questions. The information gathered from this activity will be used to help inform the development of the Comprehensive Plan Update.</p> <p>The event was publicized through a variety of methods, including a press release, hard copy and digital flyers, the Town’s social media and website and the project website at <a href="http://www.envisionballston.com">www.envisionballston.com</a>. Community organizations, businesses and local fire and EMS also helped to publicize the event by posting the meeting information on their social media and outdoor digital signs.</p> <p>Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Virtual Focus Group Discussion was held virtually via Zoom. Approximately 60 people logged on to participate in the meeting and over 100 pre-registered for the event. Participants had the opportunity to participate in the meeting and to leave comments following the meeting by utilizing the project email at <a href="mailto:EnvisionBallston@gmail.com">EnvisionBallston@gmail.com</a>.</p>

	<p><b>The following items were included on the meeting agenda:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome and Introductions</li> <li>• Overview Presentation</li> <li>• Virtual Breakout Group Discussions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Hamlets</li> <li>○ Targeted Growth</li> <li>○ Clean Energy</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Groups Report Back</li> <li>• Wrap-up/Next Steps</li> </ul> <p><b>Project Team Members Present:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jaclyn Hakes, Project Manager, MJ Engineering</li> <li>• Jenny Lippmann, Civil Engineer, MJ Engineering</li> <li>• Andrew Gillcrist, Planner, MJ Engineering</li> <li>• Sarah Starke, Planner/GIS Analyst, MJ Engineering</li> </ul>
<p><b>Overview Presentation</b></p>	<p>Ms. Hakes (MJ) provided an overview presentation which included a project overview and an explanation of the virtual engagement event and how participants could participate.</p> <p>Following is a summary of topics discussed during the overview presentation:</p> <p><b><u>Project Overview:</u></b>  The project is a targeted update of the 2006 Comprehensive Plan with possible zoning and GEIS updates to be consistent with the plan. The project is a Town Board led effort with professional assistance from MJ Engineering and Land Surveying, P.C. of Clifton Park, New York. The update is intended to reflect the needs of today and identify a vision for the future.</p> <p><b><u>Project tasks:</u></b>  The following tasks have been identified by the Town Board for the project:</p> <p><b>Phase 1 (ongoing)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visioning &amp; Engagement</li> </ul> <p><b>Phase 2 (ongoing)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehensive Plan Update</li> </ul> <p><b>Phase 3 (future phase)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zoning Update</li> </ul> <p><b>Phase 4 (future phase)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) update</li> </ul>

	<p>Phases 1 and 2 of the project are currently underway and include engagement with the Town Board and the Public. Following is a summary of engagement to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town Board Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Town Board Workshops and Updates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ July 16, 2020</li> <li>▪ September 29, 2020</li> <li>▪ November 10, 2020</li> <li>▪ January 26, 2021</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Report Card Exercise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Report Card Exercise includes a review of the existing 2006 Comprehensive Plan to evaluate the relevance and completeness of the recommendations in the plan. The goal is to identify which recommendations have been implemented or not, and which recommendations may still be relevant today to be included in the update.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• Public Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Community Survey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ August – October 2020</li> <li>▪ 800+ respondents</li> <li>▪ Online and hardcopies</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Mobile Visioning Workshops <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ October 1, 2020</li> <li>▪ October 3, 2020</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Student Survey (online) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Middle and High Schoolers</li> <li>▪ Closing February 5<sup>th</sup> (660+ responses to date)</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Project website: <a href="http://www.envisionballston.com">www.envisionballston.com</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Project Schedule</b>  The project schedule reflects a July 2020 start date with an anticipated completion date of May 2021 for the completion of Phase 2 and July 2021 completion of Phase 3.</p>
<p><b>Virtual Breakout Group Discussions</b></p>	<p>Ms. Hakes (MJ) then began the focus group discussion by explaining the format of the discussion. Following an explanation of the format, the three topic areas were identified which include hamlets, targeted growth and land conservation, and clean energy. An overview of each topic areas was presented by members of the project team including, Ms.</p>

Hakes, Mrs. Lippman and Mr. Gillcrist. Following is a summary of the topic areas discussed.

### Hamlets

#### **Hamlets Background**

Hamlet areas identified in 2006 Comprehensive Plan

- Hamlet Residential
- Mixed-Use Centers

Hamlet area characteristics

- Concentrated areas of commercial, mixed-use and residential development
- Walkable
- More intense development

#### ***Southern Hamlet (Burnt Hills)***

- Village-style look and feel

#### **Current land uses**

- Auto-oriented commercial along Route 50
- Small businesses
- Community services
- Single-family residential

#### **Challenges**

- Walkability
- Aesthetics of commercial areas

#### **Opportunities**

- Infill development
- New mixed use and/or commercial
- Improved walkability
- Design guidelines for consistent look and feel

#### **Prompt Questions**

- What types of land uses should be supported in the Burnt Hills area? (Residential, businesses, etc.)
- Where and what types of commercial development should there be in the southern hamlet area? (Retail, restaurants, offices, etc.)

- Should design guidelines be developed to create a more walkable and livable look and feel? What should this area look like?

***Northern Hamlet Area***

- Borders Village of Ballston Spa
- Centers around junction of Route 67 and Route 50

**Current land uses**

- Auto-oriented
- Commercial
- Community services
- Residential
  - Single family
  - Apartments
- Educational

**Challenges**

- Identity
- Walkability
- Aesthetics

**Opportunities**

- Infill development
- New mixed use and/or commercial
- Improved walkability
- Design guidelines for consistent look and feel

**Prompt Questions**

- What types of land uses should be supported in the northern hamlet area? (Residential, businesses, etc.)
- Do you associate the northern hamlet area with the Town or as part of Ballston Spa? Should this area have its own identity.
- Do you want this area to look and feel like an extension of the Village of Ballston Spa?
- Do you continue to support mixed-use development in this area?

**Targeted Growth and Land Conservation**

**Background**

- Ballston is growing faster than any other Town in Saratoga County
- Land conservation identified as priority in 2006 Comprehensive Plan
- Concerns about land conservation, protecting rural character and agriculture identified by community

#### **Challenges**

- Growing community
- Infrastructure to support development
- Housing supply
- Loss of open space and agricultural lands
- How to balance growth, land conservation

#### **Opportunities**

- Focusing growth to already developed areas
- Compact walkable neighborhoods
- Protect open space and ag lands
- Housing diversity

#### **Prompt Questions**

- Where should commercial and residential growth occur in Town?
- Where should land be conserved in Town? (open space, ag lands, etc)
- Should the Town focus on enhancing and expanding recreational opportunities like multi-use trails and parks?

#### **Clean Energy**

##### **Clean Energy Background**

- Topic not previously examined in 2006 Comprehensive Plan
- New and emerging technology
- NYS Initiatives for energy

##### **Local Initiatives**

- Clean Energy Committee

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing Clean Energy Communities Program</li> </ul> <p><b>Challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aesthetics</li> <li>• Decommissioning plan</li> <li>• Size and Location</li> <li>• Currently no regulation/protection</li> </ul> <p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creates clean energy</li> <li>• Protects farmland from permanent development</li> <li>• Revenue source for landowners</li> </ul> <p><b>Prompt Questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What opportunities exist for clean energy in the community?</li> <li>• As the Town prepares for community solar projects, what concerns do you have? Where should those projects ideally be located?</li> </ul> <p>After the topic overviews, the group was divided into four virtual breakout groups facilitated by members of the project team, utilizing the Zoom Breakout Room function. The purpose of the breakout groups were to engage in focused group discussions about the three topic areas identified (approximately 20 minutes per topic area). Prompt questions were provided to guide to help guide the discussion, which were made available during the presentation and on a participant guide available on the project website at <a href="http://www.envisionballston.com">www.envisionballston.com</a>. The groups were divided into approximately 13 people per breakout room. Room A was led by Jaclyn Hakes (MJ), room B was led by Jenny Lippmann (MJ), room C was led by Sarah Starke (MJ), and room D was led by Andrew Gillcrist (MJ). The participants had 60 minutes to discuss the topic areas and would reconvene for a summary report.</p>
<p><b>Breakout Room A (Jaclyn Hakes)</b></p>	<p>Following is a summary of the discussion of each topic area by breakout room. Please not that this is a summary and not verbatim meeting minutes.</p> <p><b>Hamlets Discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Northern part feels like it’s more of an extension of the Village</li> <li>• Sidewalks needed in the town to connect the Village</li> <li>• Route 50 has opportunities for infill development</li> <li>• Improved walkability throughout</li> </ul>

- Improved aesthetics to bring people in
- Light pollution is a concern with more development in the hamlets
- The development pattern does not feel like it has followed any criteria
- Additions of sidewalks would be welcome
- Southern Hamlet is a more historic part of the Town
- The architecture should match the historic aspect of the hamlet
- Route 50 feels very messy in the building and business type
- Development is being pushed to Route 50 and the traffic is becoming very heavy during peak travel times and it doesn't feel like it can support any more development
- Walkability and sidewalks near the middle school are great
- Historic aspect of Kingsley Road should be considered
- The newer developments are fixing the sidewalks or putting in new ones and that has been helpful
- Possibly a loop of walkability in the northern hamlet that connects to local bike trails
- Possibly use grant funding to increase walkability and connections if available
- Town may be acquiring a foreclosure property to potentially add a turning lane
- Small business vs. big business helping small businesses thrive in the area by not pricing them out or having so many restrictions that they cannot succeed
- You can't force people to invest in properties but need to create an atmosphere where they want to
- Some key intersections could be improved to help traffic flow

**Targeted Growth and Land Conservation Discussion**

- PUDDs allow for commercial space but the commercial space doesn't get used
- Maybe limit the use of PUDDs
- Should not allow for spot zoning in the Town
- Have controlled development
- Protect the agriculture district
- Changing zoning can affect property values to nearby residents
- PUDDs seem to be a way for developers to get around the existing zoning
- The housing should go next to the hamlets and be concentrated there
- People want to protect the character of the Town
- Understanding the price of land is related to how developable it is
- 2006 Comp Plan had a stipulation about a conservation subdivision aspect that did not get used

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold developers to a high standard of conserving land</li> <li>• Look at neighboring towns when updating zoning to make sure it is similar and not completely different</li> <li>• Would be good to coordinate the Village and Town comprehensive plans</li> </ul> <p><b>Clean Energy Discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't want to develop solar farms in areas with soils conducive to agriculture</li> <li>• Hide the solar farms with trees</li> <li>• Great opportunity for landowners to get a return on their property</li> <li>• Consider alternatives like geothermal and wind</li> <li>• Policies to establish rules for solar are a good idea to ensure safe practices throughout the process</li> <li>• For geothermal you would need open space and maybe developers would consider leaving some open space for this</li> <li>• By allowing solar this would allow development without the addition of traffic</li> <li>• There are a lot of programs that help with green energy implementation</li> <li>• Having small lots in new development will ruin chances of getting geothermal in the future due to size restriction</li> </ul>
<p><b>Breakout Room B (Jenny Lippmann)</b></p>	<p><b>Hamlets Discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intensify</li> <li>• Light industrial ok but industrial avoided</li> <li>• Smaller land plots</li> <li>• Condo apartments ok</li> <li>• History – Designate historic district – Kingsley road, FoCastle, etc. Historic nature should be maintained. Lake hill</li> <li>• Traffic impacts with development. Kingsley &amp; Blue Barns</li> <li>• Sense of place. Ties into historic character. Walkability. If intensive development, then need to protect and respect existing neighborhoods so that development does not affect those there</li> <li>• Sense of history. Kingsley &amp; Lake Hill. Design guidelines.</li> <li>• Design Guidelines. Walkability</li> <li>• When should building setbacks be reevaluated? Consistent building size</li> <li>• Worried about traffic increasing. Small businesses</li> <li>• Should feel like Town of Ballston</li> <li>• Feels like Village and strong connection to the Village. Extension of the Village will allow it to thrive more. Keep charm of Village</li> <li>• Strong zoning needed to protect development sprawl.</li> <li>• Niche businesses would be compatible with farms located there</li> <li>• Limit scale of buildings</li> </ul>

- Northern Hamlet part of Ballston Spa – Transportation
- Design Guidelines. Transportation – future bike lanes and/or turning lanes in the future.
- Traffic impacts are expanding
- Building setback distance
- Making sure space for future sidewalks and turn lanes, etc.

**Targeted Growth / Land Conservation Discussion**

- Targeted development along Route 50 – should be more like a dumbbell rather than all along Route 50. Should be less developed along the lake to prevent pollution
- Better public access along the lake
- Want open space but do not want to pay for it. Passive parks ok. No trails wanted. Concerned about access to private property
- Farmland is precious. Happy with parks now but not enough access yet. Preservation of farmland
- Well planned and thought-out development is ok. Looking for connected walking areas
- NY Connect, connecting Cornell, Morrisville, Cobleskill with land. Cannot pay developer prices for the land
- Need to implement the TDR program. To help preserve farmland. Be careful and cautious
- Natural buffer previously not considered
- Lake was polluted. Need to be conscientious of preexisting owners and what development does to the lake. Need access to the lake. Cleanup of the lake
- PUDD should go away
- TDR Program – targeted areas for higher density
- Concerns for traffic, water & sewer
- Infrastructure is a privilege, not a requirement
- TDR – receiving areas need to have the ability to increase in density and should come from the developer. By not supplying infrastructure we slow the rate of development
- Development between Burnt Hills and northern hamlet along the lake
- Do schools have the capacity for more students?
- Governance is a large factor in how the Town moves forward

**Clean Energy Discussion**

- Previously put up commercial solar and how that is taking care of. Looks at the community as a residential community with open space, not a rural community
- Need to look carefully at where solar can be
- Supports increasing solar infrastructure. Ballston should do its part. Community solar farms. Consider the visual buffers and setbacks
- Preserve actual farmland

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not like the term solar “farm”</li> <li>• Be proactive and thoughtful moving forward</li> <li>• As we do new things, need to be careful. Put it on a brownfield. Don’t put it on good farmland</li> <li>• Solar helps to preserve land and prevent development</li> <li>• Farmer and solar. How do they be used together to reduce energy bills</li> <li>• What about wind?</li> <li>• Solar and farming together</li> <li>• Should be a cap so only so much can happen.</li> <li>• Any major solar installation reclamation of land afterwards. Does not think residential solar is ugly</li> </ul>
<p><b>Breakout Room C (Sarah Starke)</b></p>	<p><b>Hamlets Discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preserve the history on Kingsley Road</li> <li>• Using zoning to preserve the character, look and feel</li> <li>• Maybe making it a Historic District</li> <li>• Walkability improvements, addition of sidewalks and enforcement of the speed limit</li> <li>• Historic preservation is important</li> <li>• There are limited connections for walkability so there are improvements to be made</li> <li>• Connect to the rail trail</li> <li>• Connectivity is missing in key areas</li> <li>• Some neighborhoods you can walk without a sidewalk but they are not connected to others</li> <li>• Protect the hamlet look and feel</li> <li>• Residential development is ok but small-scale</li> <li>• The vacant gas station is an eye sore</li> <li>• Speeding is issue</li> <li>• Northern area feels like an extension of the Village more than the Town</li> <li>• More recreation areas that are connected</li> <li>• Don’t want to be known as the fastest growing town</li> <li>• Cohesive development that creates connections everything feels separated</li> </ul> <p><b>Targeted Growth / Land Conservation Discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expansion of the Zim Smith might be a good opportunity to expand the local trails to it and create more connections</li> <li>• Small-scale retail with walkability</li> <li>• Growth should be contained on Route 50</li> <li>• We should protect farmland</li> <li>• TDR hasn’t been used very much to preserve</li> <li>• Dust off TDR and use it</li> <li>• Connections are important for trails and walkability</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design guidelines should be enforced to maintain a small town feel</li> <li>• Plan out where housing developments should go</li> <li>• Because of all the development the traffic is increasing</li> <li>• For development the Receiving areas should be developed from the TDR</li> <li>• Need public space on the lake</li> <li>• Need public access to the lake that's better than currently available</li> </ul> <p><b>Clean Energy Discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The farmland is being bought by developers not farmers</li> <li>• Solar farms if used should have a buffer to keep the look of farmland</li> <li>• Solar farms are a better option to keep traffic down and also preserve the land</li> <li>• Solar farm could be a quick solution to preserve the land and get it back in time</li> <li>• Zoning is crucial for setting guidelines to protect the town and residents</li> <li>• Do a wind farm potential study</li> <li>• Areas that solar would work would be less traveled areas</li> <li>• It would be a hard sell to some farm owners to put solar on their land</li> </ul>
<p><b>Breakout Room D (Andrew Gillcrist)</b></p>	<p><b>Hamlets Discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There needs to be a mechanism to reuse vacant and underutilized properties</li> <li>• The vacant gas station across from Stewarts is an eye sore</li> <li>• The town is in the process of trying to acquire the vacant gas station</li> <li>• Small-scale development. Kkeep the small town feel</li> <li>• Increase the lot size minimum on housing to prevent large-scale residential growth</li> <li>• Redevelop Route 50 to small-scale commercial</li> <li>• Should have a balance of having different types of housing options</li> <li>• Locally owned small-scale businesses would be ideal</li> <li>• The northern hamlet area feels established</li> <li>• Northern hamlet feels more like the Village than town</li> <li>• No apartment buildings in Town</li> </ul> <p><b>Targeted Growth / Land Conservation Discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The residential growth should come to an end</li> <li>• Enhance what we have</li> <li>• Preserve the agriculture district</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balance development or activities for all ages</li> <li>• Aging population</li> <li>• Housing inventory shortage</li> <li>• If there is a demand for housing it will keep expanding</li> <li>• More density means more money for the developer</li> <li>• Design guidelines could help keep the feel</li> <li>• Reduce the commercial development in an area if it needs something like residential</li> <li>• Nature preserves or passive parks are preferred to reduce maintenance costs and not raise taxes</li> <li>• Trail connections needed</li> </ul> <p><b>Clean Energy Discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having guidelines for solar to ensure the safety of the land and people around</li> <li>• Ensure the panels are disposed correctly (decommissioning plan)</li> <li>• Clean energy for the region should continue to grow and improve</li> <li>• Learn from the neighboring communities on the best practice</li> </ul>
<b>Wrap-up/Next Steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Survey</li> <li>• Finalize Report Card</li> <li>• Summarize input from Focus Group discussion</li> <li>• Public comments/input (ongoing)</li> <li>• Shape draft plan update</li> </ul>
<b>Public Comment</b>	<p>Public input is welcome!</p> <p>Comments related to the Comprehensive Plan Update can be directed to the project email at <a href="mailto:EnvisionBallston@gmail.com">EnvisionBallston@gmail.com</a>.</p>

This meeting summary conveys our understanding of the items discussed and agreements reached at this meeting. Please forward any additions, corrections and/or questions to my attention.

Submitted by:  
Andrew Gillcrist

cc: Project File, Town Board