

## **Introduction to What a Comprehensive Plan Is and Why It Is Needed**

The following outline was adapted from a presentation on the NY Planning Federation website: <http://www.nypf.org/> The Newfield Town Planning Board is a member of the federation.

### **What is a Comprehensive Plan?**

- A document that sets forth a community's goals and strategies for achieving these goals
- A guide to decision-making on important land-use issues
- An outline of what needs to be done and how to do it in order to ensure that the community grows in an orderly and well thought-out fashion
- Plans should be routinely reviewed for relevancy and assessment of adherence and effectiveness. Plans should be updated and revised as necessary.

### **Why prepare a Comprehensive Plan?**

- To establish a community vision
- To ensure economic stability
- To coordinate growth and development
- To protect and conserve valuable natural resources
- To provide direction to other governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations
- To back up land-use tools

### **What Does the Comprehensive Plan Do?**

- Identifies the community's present status regarding several key topics and issues, such as economic development, natural resource inventory, etc. This is the purpose of our base-line document.
- Identifies status of those topics and issues 15 to 20 years in the future
- Provides a conceptual road map for getting to this point

### **Community Outreach and Solicitation**

- Involve the public
- Conduct issues identification workshop
- Conduct community survey
- Hold workshops or focus group meetings
- Hold public meetings – at midpoint and at end of comprehensive plan development

### **Content of the Comprehensive Plan**

- Introduction and regional setting
- Demographics and population projection
- Existing land use and land-use regulations
- Adjacent town, county, and regional planning
- Natural, historic, and cultural resources
- Housing
- The local economy
- Public utilities, facilities, and services
- Parks and recreation
- Environmental concerns including pollution, water resources, energy development
- Transportation
- Future land use

## Chapter Format

- Inventory of existing conditions
- Analysis of future needs
- Goals and objectives
- Action strategies/Recommendations

## Prior to Adopting the Plan

- Planning board is required to make the draft plan available to the public for review and to hold a public hearing
- Governing board is also required to hold its own public hearing
- Plan must be referred to the county or regional planning agency for comment (*239-m review*)
- Plan is subject to SEQR procedures
- Plan must consider applicable county agriculture and farmland protection plans, and agricultural districts, where such exist
- Plan must include maximum intervals for periodic review or update

## Implementing the Plan

- Distribution and availability
- Land-use regulations
- Capital improvements
- Volunteer efforts

## Sources of information, advice and assistance

- Tompkins County Planning Department
- Adjacent Town Planning Boards
- NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Finger Lakes Land Trust
- NY Planning Federation
- NYS Dept. of State Div. of Local Government
- NY Conference of Mayors and Municipal Officials (NYCOM)
- Cornell Dept. of City and Regional Planning
- Cornell Community and Rural Development Institute (CaRDI)
- NYS Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA)

## **How Newfield will Benefit by Having a Comprehensive Plan**

Many people would describe Newfield as a quiet, rural town and village where time moves slowly and change is slow. To many residents, those are desirable characteristics of the town. Others may view those same characteristics as being undesirable. The truth is that indeed Newfield is relatively stable (from many perspectives), but there are many factors or influences primarily from outside the town (county, state, national and even international) that may bring about significant change and in a relatively short time frame. Most people agree that change is inevitable. Foreseeing, preparing for and managing that change for the betterment of the town is the purpose of The Comprehensive Plan.

Newfield is very fortunate to have varied and abundant natural resources that provide opportunities for prosperity and reasonable growth; e.g. open land, water resources, forests, and agricultural land. Similarly Newfield is fortunate to have an involved, experienced and well-educated populace that volunteer and participate on public service boards and committees. Developing a comprehensive plan BEFORE resources are

scarce and before issues become contentious is highly desirable, compared to the alternative. Having resources and having capable citizens will make the process of developing a well-crafted and well-supported comprehensive plan much easier.

One of the primary goals of the town planning board is to survey the citizens regarding many key development and land-use issues so that the board ideally can define a consensus of opinion on many issues. Where a consensus can be identified, the board will be in position to move ahead to find information and resources to help guide change or preserve the status quo as the case may be. For example, the majority of citizens will likely support the preservation of viable farms in the town. This is a common concern throughout NYS and consequently state government policies (NYS Agricultural Districting Law) and funding exists to help communities protect farming and farmlands (Municipal Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan). A common prerequisite of receipt of such funding is the necessity of having a comprehensive plan that specifically states the desirability of maintenance of farmland. Such grants typically make available funding whereby willing farmers can enter into a land easement that protects their right to farm, while typically providing an economic incentive to do so by purchasing development rights. Some towns in the county have secured farms in this manner.

For many issues, a comprehensive plan can define a vision of a desired goal that can only be achieved via change. How that change comes about, its timing, cost, and impact will require input and guidance of the town board, with support of the planning board. An example here might be how the town desires to deal with opportunities for renewable energy resources.

Unique characteristics of Newfield include good farmland, private and public forests, a wildlife refuge, and wetlands and lands owned by local colleges and universities. There are also various protected lands included that encompass about 30% of Newfield in the western third of the Town. There are additional areas that have been identified by the Tompkins County Planning Department as Unique Natural Areas in their Comprehensive Plan. In addition they have identified areas that are Important Bird Areas. All these areas, when added to the currently protected lands, will encompass almost 50% of Newfield. These facts and observations will be considered when developing Newfield's Comprehensive Plan. We encourage all residents of Newfield to become familiar with these lands.