

**Ballston Spa
Comprehensive Master Plan Steering Committee
Review of Written Comments
March 21, 2023**

Members Present in Person: Scott Burlingame, Bob Bush, John Cromie, Karen Martel, Pete Martin & Marilyn Stephenson

Members Present by Zoom: Carrie Chapman, Monique Cohen, Mat Ercoline, John Hearn

Public in Person: Liz Kormos, Donna Martin & Frank Rossi, Jr.
Amy Fitzgerald of Behan Associates, by Zoom

Meeting was opened by Chair Karen Martel, and Amy was asked about methodology to include comments and the committee's reactions in the draft plan. Amy noted Jared Iacolucci's written observations of the comments could be a stepping off place. His comments are appended to the minutes.

There was a concern expressed that many of the comments focused on the nitty gritty of accomplishing goals and the plan should clearly state its purpose is to lay out guidelines and goals in a broad sense. It is the role of future decision makers to determine how resources will be used to accomplish those goals.

The suggestion from the Historic District Commission should be incorporated in the Community Goals Section.

The transportation suggestions should be included in the Community goals section, excepting elements that detailed methodology for achieving the goals. It was noted that the Master Plan was light on transportation because of the existing recent study. Amy will beef up the transportation portion of the Community Goals Section using the language offered in Jared's email and reference the pedestrian/ transportation study.

It was noted the committee has been working on themes, guidance, and objectives rather than dictate or edits. The committee has determined EV charging stations are important to have. They will serve visitors and are integral to Ballston Spa becoming more of a destination. EVs will become more plentiful, and it is important that charging stations be included in the plan. How and where they will be placed is something left to future decision makers to figure out.

After discussion, it was determined that stated goals not be further ranked beyond short, medium, and long-term. The committee cannot predict when money may become available for a project, how immediate needs may change, or what events may make a goal irrelevant. Further setting of priorities can create inflexibility or result in the plan being discredited if a goal loses its importance. Future decision makers should be free to work among the goals as they feel best. The Plan is to inform decision making not to make decisions. Stated another way, the Plan is presenting the "Why" and leaving the "How" and "What" to decision makers.

It was the consensus that the term, "Smart Growth," is given too many connotations. Rather than using the term, the Plan should describe actual reasons behind a given idea as it relates to Ballston Spa.

The committee felt the question of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) was well laid out in the plan and it is up to future decision makers to figure out how to handle them. The questions revolving around ADUs are tied into the fact that there are a wide variety of differences among neighborhoods a couple blocks away from each other and they are all lumped into one R-1 without recognition of the differences. It will be up to people re-writing our zoning and planning code to figure out solutions, so the needs of varying areas addressed.

Similarly, transition zones between downtown and neighborhoods and along Rte. 50 have been identified as needed by the Master Plan. Some of this transitioning is happening despite current zoning. It is up to the people redoing zoning to determine where zones should be, and the intensities of commercial/retail uses in them. The Master Plan adequately addresses this issue and does not need further refinement.

A couple of comments received dealt with the flood plain in the village. It was recognized the area around Kent Street and up to Liberty Street have seen flooding, but not other areas. Based on Blue Niels' assessment, the flood plain east of the village accepts water at a rate that minimizes the possibility of flooding on much of the village's Flats. Flood plain restrictions appear unnecessary in much of that area. The Committee decided to add a reassessment of the village's flood plain by FEMA as a long-term goal under "Transportation, Infrastructure, Village Properties, and Staffing."

The misinterpretation of "climate refugee" in comments suggests the term should be changed, perhaps "climate induced

relocation," to describe people of affluence who do not wish to live with climate uncertainties and will bring their work with them to the Northeast. Among the areas upstate, Saratoga County will be the most attractive. It is the best positioned county for growth in a declining state. If the job market increases (e.g., expansion of Global Foundries) even more people will be attracted to the area.

The committee came to the consensus the Master Plan should emphasize the importance of county government in Ballston Spa as an economic driver and the importance of fostering communications with county leaders to enhance the benefits of the county presence.

It was noted the comments about needing more street names on maps and to use more contrasting colors to define areas, uses or housing ages are correct. Anything to do to make the illustrations easier to use is important.

The concern about ensuring seniors can age in place relates to the section on ADA requirements. The language can be modified to underscore the inclusion of senior needs.

A suggestion was made that Native American use of the area before European settlement be included in the history. The history will be modified to include the area's use prior to European settlement.

After a brief discussion, the committee felt that its suggestions that positions be created to carry out particular functions may have extended beyond the committee's role of defining needs and goals and into the realm belonging to future decision makers. Instead of stating that positions be created for IT and community communication or a city manager type position be created, the roles and functions be described and the means of execution be left to future decision makers.

An intense exchange over public bathrooms resulted in consensus that public bathrooms are needed to keep shoppers and visitors downtown and especially for family events which include children. Many communities handle the problems which may accompany public bathrooms. The execution of providing and maintaining public bathrooms is outside the scope of the Master Plan and belongs with future decision makers.

Comments on the parks dealt more with policing than planning and the plan's depiction of the cemetery is consistent with the policies of the Cemetery Board of Directors.

It is expected these modifications, as discussed, will foster a better understanding of the role of the Master Plan and that of decision makers over the next 10-15 years.

The modified Master Plan will be circulated among committee members for their approval and then made available to the community again in preparation for a Public Hearing. The Village Board has to go through the SEQA process before the plan's passage. There is no deadline. Only after it is adopted by the board can RFPs be prepared to seek a zoning consultant.

Amy Fitzgerald was asked to highlight changes made to the Master Plan when it is presented for committee review.

Meeting was adjourned.

From: Jared Iacolucci jared.iacolucci@gmail.com

Sent: Tuesday, March 21, 2023 4:38 PM

Good afternoon all,

As I won't be able to attend the meeting this evening, I wanted to share some thoughts on the feedback we received. Overall, I appreciate the thought and consideration that the interested parties put into their remarks. Some of the comments are more specific than what we sought to deliver (eg. how to implement a new sidewalk code) but get at the larger issue of sidewalk maintenance that we did not initially include in our goals. Taking that and other comments into consideration, please see below for my thoughts (I apologize for the wall of text!).

- Multiple comments on Sidewalks - Can we add a Short-Term goal to the Transportation, Infrastructure, Village Properties, and Staffing section to address this? Potentially something like:
 - *Short Term*
 - *Improve walkability of the village by addressing issues with unmaintained or nonexistent sidewalk coverage through review and revision of the sidewalk code. Increase pedestrian safety with more painted crosswalks, signage, and signals, where applicable.*
 - *Medium Term*
 - *Repair and replace sidewalks in accordance with the enforcement of a newly developed sidewalk code.*

- Climate Change - Based on the comment shared, the existing language may not match our intentions for its inclusion. My understanding of our discussions on this topic was that our geography/climate/history may make us a desirable place for climate refugees (anecdotally confirmed by one resident that attended our workshop over the summer) and that the village may therefore experience unexpected growth and resource strain. As the comment points out, the village is not currently an ideal haven for climate refugees and the development of infrastructure in order to so is a large undertaking. The majority of the goals we have laid out in the plan do seek to address some of those needs, though potentially not all (specialty legal services in particular). With that in mind, I think we should still include this section, but potentially add to the second paragraph of the section on page 11 the following:
- *Demographic changes arising from climate migration may add to the wear on infrastructure. Plans for infrastructure maintenance and improvements should consider this possibility.*
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- ADUs - I see several comments opposed to the inclusion of guidance on ADUs, instead wishing to continue the status quo of requiring case-by-case consideration through the zoning board of appeals. Our discussions in committee emphasized that ADUs are already being developed (at times without permitting/inspection being done) and that a consistent "context-based" zoning approach could identify areas in which ADUs would be allowed based on the neighborhood's characteristics. This fits into the larger rezoning initiative as discussed in the plan and should remain. Additionally, I don't see a causal link between codifying ADUs in zoning--thereby addressing the current state where people have converted garages/carriage houses to ADUs without permitting and/or applying for permission after construction--and expanded absentee landlording. Those absentee landlords may already have done this work without permit.
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- EV Charging Stations - As a non-EV owner, I understand the concerns about parking spaces being utilized for EVs only. However, the adoption of EVs will continue to increase, both by village residents and visitors coming to the village. We already identify a need to address parking in the village as a whole and EV charging stations should be included in that. To that end, I suggest we add to the existing language in Long Term Goal #23 something to the effect of: "...select

areas for long term parking and identify locations for EV charging stations."

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- I support the addition of the goals from the Historic Preservation Committee.
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- Social considerations - one of the comments notes that more participation and involvement is good, but objects to recent actions undertaken by the board to require an application for committee consideration. Setting aside that objection (I don't think our plan should weigh-in that specifically), I do think we should add an Ongoing goal in the Social Considerations section that addresses what we identify as issues on page 17. This goal could be high-level and simple, but ensure that the village board does seek avenues for more robust participation. We could start with something like: *The village should continue to explore ways to encourage broader participation on village boards and committees, including: enhanced communication of committees, their charters and membership, and openings; an appointment process that provides for equal consideration of any interested parties; and expanded accessibility to all committee/board meetings through video conferencing technology.*
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- Marijuana dispensaries - I suggest updating the language from marijuana to cannabis to better align with current language. More to the point, I think it is short-sighted to opt out of cannabis sales in the village. We could miss out on additional tax revenue from residents and visitors alike who would instead patronize dispensaries nearby.
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- "Smart Growth" -- Some comments object to this term as politicized. The term itself is not inherently partisan or political, but some local political action organizations do use the term. That should not disqualify its use in the plan, particularly as we consider opportunities for grants in the future. As has been discussed in our committee, this plan will serve as context for future grant applications. As "smart growth" is a term used by organizations from the Environmental Protection Agency to the American Planning Association, including this term in the plan can help with future grant applications with a federal government that explicitly recognizes principles of smart growth.

Looking forward to listening to the meeting recording to see where y'all end up tonight! Thank you, Jared