

**Ballston Spa
Comprehensive Master Plan Steering Committee
June 23, 2022**

Present in Person: Monique Cohen, John Cromie, Karen Martell, Mathew Ercoline, Ellen Mottola, and Jackie Pelliccia
Present on Zoom: Bob Bush, Carrie Chapman, Jared Iacolucci, Marilyn Stephenson, and Amy Fitzgerald
Excused: Nafeesa Koslik, Scott Burlingame and Peter Martin
Observers in Person: Bernadette VanDeinse-Perez
Observers on Zoom: Liz Kormos and Anne M.

Meeting was opened by Chair Karen Martell at 7:06. Minutes of the June 2 meeting were reviewed. Marilyn moved they be approved as presented; Ellen Mottola seconded. Passed.

Karen introduced Ellen and Monique Cohen, who continued last meeting's discussion by proceeding to the 2019 Economic Development Plan's fourth goal: "Foster supportive conditions and offer valuable resources to help small businesses and proprietors prosper and grow throughout the village."

Topics to explore are collaboration and communication within the business community, co-working spaces, home businesses, capitalizing on those who work from home, and short-term rentals.

A recent episode illustrated the need for collaboration and communication where businesses were unable to proceed with a plan because of a lack of clarity of rules for use of Wiswall Park. Businesses feel there is a lack of clarifying communication especially from the village. It occurs over signage, display of items on the sidewalk, and, until recently, outdoor dining among other issues. Policies of the village often lack specificity, and there is no established system of communication between the village and business owners. In addition to marketing the village, another BSBPA role is to help businesspeople understand governmental policies and how to navigate them, but the role is difficult because village policies are vague and do not cover many of the questions that come up. Also, for many of the business owners, primary contact with the village is regulatory in nature, when something is wrong. Very few village officials drop in to visit the owners.

An effort can be made to make policies more specific to provide greater guidance. BSBPA and the village could be proactive

and develop policies that anticipate requests rather than treating each situation that comes along separately. In addition, a set process can be established to address questions unanswered by the written policies. Establishing policies without addressing real-life concerns can result in rigid, unworkable requirements. Because of the unlikelihood of being able to cover all the bases, rather than trying to do that through policy-making, procedures can be established to workout arrangements beneficial to the village and the business entity. Once similar situations continue to occur, then a policy covering those needs can be articulated.

There seems to be a lot of interest in co-working space. The idea is based on a belief that there is a demand from those working from home for business services unavailable in their homes and for meeting space. The availability of co-working space will encourage the development of more home offices in the village. An increase of home offices and businesses can impact parking and other neighborhood amenities. Village infrastructure must be able to support more businesses, especially a more powerful internet service than that provided by Spectrum, which has a lock on the village. It will be worthwhile to look for competition.

Short-term rentals are not necessarily neighborhood friendly, with people going in and out of a house, creating noise or disruption. They also may take away affordable housing in the village. They provide housing in the village for visitors which is preferable to the construction of a motel, which would likely result in tear downs. Short-term renters will be introduced to the village and may return to shop or live here. The village has no regulations governing short-term rentals and people take advantage of that. If special permits or licenses were issued, they could be taken back for bad behavior.

Ellen and Monique highlighted a statement from a business owner relating to that person's interaction with village government.

It sure would be nice if any village officer would stop in to learn about my business. (Other than one trustee) the only interaction with the village is to make sure I'm complying with zoning and fire ordinances- necessary and I have no issue with that. But it should not be my only interaction with the village in such a small village. It would be appropriate for our police force to reach out to businesses. We are their eyes and ears on their streets. A few months ago, the liquor store was robbed, and I heard about it on Facebook. As a business two doors down, I would have loved if someone had made an effort to touch base with me. And obviously our motto, "Village of Friends," is not being embraced by our local government. I am not calling anyone out, but I will hold all of

them to seek a spirit of collaboration and working to improve our village and not divide our village. I can't honestly feel the village really wants businesses to succeed. I feel they are more interested in policing us. If businesses feel the village doesn't want them to be successful, why would we stay here?

This perspective underscores the need for a liaison between village government and businesses. Someone is needed to work with and communicate with business owners and ensure their needs are addressed when it comes to interaction with the village. In addition, it would be very helpful to foster an awareness among village officials, staff, and volunteers of how important their actions are as representations of our village.

A determination at the last meeting was that the sphere of economic influence from which businesses draw is about a 30 or so mile radius around Ballston Spa. The economic health of village businesses is dependent on the overall economy of the greater capital region.

Two other factors that affect business is the school district with its 800 or so employees and the county offices. It was felt more had to be done to attract those people into the downtown. For some reason there seems to be a barrier between people working around the village and downtown businesses. The recent discussion in the county of moving its offices to the former State Farm offices at Exit 12 is a major threat to the village economy. More work is needed to market village businesses to those who may work three or four miles away from it.

Charts from last year's existing conditions report done for the steering committee indicate the largest employment group among village residents is the service industry (Education, Health, etc.). A bit less than half of the employed are scattered among other working groups. Many of those employed in education are probably working for the school district. But others in education can work for area colleges. Many of those in services and government can be working in Albany. It may be important to ask people how far they travel to their workplace. It may well be that a large number of residents travel 30 or 40 miles from Ballston Spa. It can probably be assumed people work along the Northway Corridor from Albany to Glens Falls, but, primarily to the south.

An interesting statistic from the Existing Conditions report is that the age group with the highest percentage in the labor force is those from 25 to 29. Age groups 20 to 24 and 31 to 34

follow right behind. This indicates a very active, young workforce in the village.

The information indicates Ballston Spa is not a company town and its families are supported mainly by health, education, and government. Those areas are generally stable employment sectors. With a wide range in other occupations, Ballston Spa is relatively protected from economic downturns.

Over a quarter of families make between \$100,000 and \$149,999, as do over a third of married-couple households. The educational level among working adults in Ballston Spa is not as high as among Saratoga County or state residents. Almost half of non-family households live on \$35,000 or less. This includes people living on social security, social services, and subsidized housing (Doubleday Woods). These statistics underscore the wide range of economic levels in the village.

It appears most employed residents of Ballston Spa travel within a 30 or so mile radius from the village. That is the same area from which downtown businesses draw their customers. It is fair to say that Ballston Spa's economic health is tied directly into that of the Capital Region. The model can be described by drawing concentric circles emanating from the village. But it doesn't mean closer circles are more important. For instance, Saratoga Springs and Clifton Park are probably more influential than the immediately surrounding towns.

However, due to social media, it is not uncommon for people to come into the village from the Boston area, Long Island, NYC, Washington D.C., or Mid-NYS. They may not be regular customers, but they show the reach the village has.

Facilities and techniques can be developed that will encourage visitors to stay a few days, including lodging, to more shops, to promoting unique characteristics of the community and surrounding area. Parking areas available for longer-term parking will be helpful.

The conversation reverted back to the topic of the need for a liaison between the village and downtown businesses. It was felt a position could be hired by the village to perform this function. Rather than marketing, the function should be focused on public affairs and communicate with residents as well as businesses. The ideal would be an apolitical person who understands the ins and outs of the village and is not only able to help people navigate policies but advocate for changes when

needed. [Secretary's note: this description resembles the manager form of local government]

The economic drivers that bring money to Ballston Spa are primarily in Saratoga Springs, Clifton Park, and Albany, but are really throughout the Capital Region.

The committee in its discussions over the months keeps coming to the same conclusion. We need to understand what makes us unique. Geographically, Ballston Spa is centrally located among the region's economic activity. Saratoga County is prosperous; it is one of the few counties in the state that is growing. Yet, Ballston Spa must distinguish itself. It is a residential oasis in which people can still afford to buy a home. The fact that our residents value the village, the school, the community is something that should get out and be promoted. In many ways, the Capital Region is defined by Northway Exits. The population has moved up the Northway from Albany to the point where Exit 12 is an acceptable drive to and from the Albany area. These factors support our downtown and determine demand for housing. The continued economic health of the village requires we build on these strengths.

It was noted the village webpage does not have an updated list of steering committee members. That should be corrected.

Jackie and Jered will lead next month's discussion on social considerations. Because concerts at which we wish to distribute surveys happen on Thursdays in August and the general difficulties of meeting in August, the visioning sessions will be merged into one on September 1 for two hours. Discussions of land use and restrictions of reality can be compressed in one meeting each in October.

Amy will develop surveys to be distributed at the concerts and filled in electronically. She will send drafts to committee members. The surveys will draw questions from each of the topics discussed over the months. In addition to the village website, Facebook and other social media, the survey can be handed out through the BSBPA table at the Farmer's Market.

Based on the need for more powerful internet service, the question was posed if there ought to be an effort to contact Green Light and find out what their criteria may be for extending it service to Ballston Spa as a competitor to Spectrum. Members were asked to get the word out, even though the effort would not be part of the committee's work.

Amy has added information to the steering committee's webpage, but the site is restricted as to colors and techniques and cannot send a link to Behan's website for interactive questions. It was noted there has been no press release on the village's web site announcing that Behan has been hired or that a planning process has been going on. Producing informational releases for the village is no one's job. If they are to be done, they will have to be supplied by someone involved in the Master Plan process (over and above those done by Ellen announcing our meetings in the press).

There being nothing further, the meeting was adjourned 8:15.