

**Ballston Spa
Comprehensive Master Plan Steering Committee
March 3, 2022**

Present in Person: John Cromie, Josh Frederick, Karen Martell, Ellen Mottola, Jackie Pelliccia, and Marilyn Stephenson.

Present by Zoom: Scott Burlingame, Carrie Chapman; Monique Cohen, Jared Iacolucci, and Jon Taisey

Excused: Mat Ercoline and Nafessa Koslik

Observers by Zoom: Gabrial Larocque and Ben Baskin

Meeting was opened by Chair Karen Martel at 7:05 PM. Minutes of the meeting of February 17 were reviewed. Ellen Mottola moved they be approved as presented; Jackie Pelliccia seconded; passed.

Karen introduced Liz Kormos, who, with Karen, had prepared a handout for the committee describing village housing and demographics. The handout had been sent to committee members for this meeting's discussion. Liz presented a power point of the handout. Observations during and after the presentation were as follows:

1. The median house value was between two peaks in the bar chart, indicating housing in the village clustered around modest, affordable housing and larger more expensive homes. Few homes exceeded \$750,000.

2. A huge proportion of village home are pre-WWII, with very little building activity in the last 20 years.

3. 16% of the parcels in R-1 are other than single family. All other zones have a greater rate of non-conforming uses: Commercial, 32.4%; Manufacturing, 28.6%; and Central Business District, 18.2%.

4. An income survey found 51% of the village population is classified as low to moderate income, which opens up granting opportunities.

5. Multigenerational homes may become more common due to the costs of childcare.

6. There is visual evidence (on Bath Street) of out-of-state families coming into Ballston Spa. That neighborhood has more children than it has had in 40 years.

7. Other than realtors' experiences, there is no data on the demand for housing in Ballston Spa. At this point, there are so few homes on the market, it is difficult to measure demand. In the past, there have been a lot of families moving to different home within the village. Currently, it is difficult for renters to buy in the village due to the short supply of homes on the market.

8. The Existing Conditions Report concluded village home prices in the \$200,000 range make village housing affordable.

9. Predictions are large investors will be owning a larger share of the national housing stock. The village should temper that trend, encouraging local investment and discouraging large entities to prevent manipulation of rental rates.

10. The social-economic diversity of the village is an important quality, and it should be a goal to keep rents affordable to maintain our community's identity.

11. Accessory units in larger homes can be a source for moderate priced rentals. It would have to be determined what percentage of living area can be set off into one or more units in a residence. Something would have to be done to make those residences unattractive to non-resident owners. A technique might be for the government to make the resident of the larger unit responsible with the owner for maintenance and the like of the property. Most tenants would not want that responsibility.

12. A payment in lieu of taxes for resident-owners to fix up two family homes could be explored. Perhaps a "Homestead Act" giving an incentive to people to buy distressed housing with rental potential. However, a break in village taxes isn't as rewarding as a break in school taxes, which, given realities, is not very likely.

13. It would be beneficial if neighbors know or have a way of becoming acquainted with non-residential landlords. Especially when tenants may be misbehaving. This may be accomplished if the village has a registry of landlords, which exists in some communities, primarily for emergency purposes.

14. Providing a strict building code that is enforced to ensure landlords maintain buildings will encourage investment, much of which comes from out-of-town investors. Economic resources within the village were not large enough to rehabilitate what has been rejuvenated recently. It only happened because money from places like NYC or Connecticut were invested in Ballston Spa. Those investors want code enforcement to protect their investments.

15. Enforcement of minor maintenance code violations may seem insignificant, (shoveling sidewalks) but the cumulative effect of lack of enforcement allows owners to not be responsible and affects neighbors' property values.

16. Consistent enforcement requires maintenance codes be clear and unambiguous.

17. In the recent past it was relatively common for young families who rented or owned two-family homes to upgrade to single family housing in the village. That has virtually stopped because of increased competition in the housing market. These families must look outside the village and its immediate area.

18. The village has no condos, nor high-end apartments.

19. The downtown economic study identified a need for workplace housing where proprietors lived in the same buildings as their businesses.

20. There are varying degrees of home businesses that can be accommodated. There seems to be no need to regulate home offices that are used exclusively by the residents where there are no signs or employees. A service business in a home with one or two employees may need to be restricted to certain areas. Home retail establishments may be more restricted in location and operation.

21. When looking at accessory units, they may not be a part of the main structure on a lot. Should tiny houses or shipping container housing be allowed? Where does modular housing fit in, if at all.

22. The data prepared for this meeting underscores the decidedly middle-class nature of the village's population and the extent to which Ballston Spa is contrasted with Saratoga Springs.

23. Even though the Historic District overlay is not shown on the handout's zoning map, it is important.

24. Under the zoning law, for a non-conforming to be "grandfathered," in most cases, it has to be shown it existed before 1949. With the new code, perhaps that can be changed to classify a "grandfathered" use to be one that has existed for 20 years, with the idea if nobody has complained in 20 years, it must be OK.

25. The 2019 landlord/tenant law was developed by people who understand downstate landlord-tenant dynamics, where most rental housing is owned by large companies. It has changed the time for a landlord to gain possession from about 30 days or so to four months or longer. People who have a few units cannot take that hit, and the law will force them to sell to large companies, who can use percentages to absorb those costs. That law will discourage rental ownership by village residents.

26. Because such a large portion of our homes were built before WWII, they require a greater amount of time and energy than newer structures and are not designed to modern standards. For this reason, they should be cut some slack when it comes to applying codes and regulations.

27. The 20% jump in last year's median housing price indicates a potential change in the village's population makeup. Unless something can counteract it, many families who have lived in the village for generations may no longer be able to continue as village residents.

28. Housing in the flats is impacted by being in the flood plain, which makes it doubly expensive for home buyers. Not only must they pay mortgage interest, but also flood insurance premiums. A critical review of flood plain mapping will be helpful. Modification of the creek channel is possible.

29. The Town of Ballston has created two levels of home businesses. One is by right and the other requires a special permit.

30. The rental market in the surrounding towns of Ballston and Malta has a very low vacancy rate, even though so many units have been built in recent years.

Karen announced Behan Associates will be hired as our consultants, and they will be drawing up a contract for the village attorneys to review. The contract will be divided into two budget years. It is hoped next month.

Marilyn reported on February 28 she updated the village board on our activities. They expressed thanks and appreciation for the committee's work

Meeting was closed at 8:20.

Respectfully Submitted
John Cromie, Sec.