



Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan

Notes of Meeting **Stakeholder Communities Plan Steering Committee Meeting #5** **NCCC Faculty Dining Room - Student Center G212**

Wednesday, June 25, 2008
5:00 pm to 7:00 pm

Topic – Educational Institutions

I. Introduction and Review of Website

- Project Manager Walt Kalina welcomed the Steering Committee members and other stakeholders and provided a brief summary of the Plan's current status. (Notes from the PowerPoint presentation that accompanied this update are available on the Project website.)
 - Next month's meeting (July 23) will focus on the Health and Safety element of the Comprehensive Plan, the fifth of the five Plan elements.
 - The August meeting will be a more interactive discussion of goals, opportunities, issues and visions.
 - The Planning process, public meetings and Steering Committee meetings have produced valuable information, including the list of issues and opportunities by planning sub-region and community profiles.
 - Issues and opportunities by sub-region have been compiled in a single document as they pertain to the Plan elements previously addressed by the Steering Committee.
 - Community profiles will be Chapter 4 of the Plan.
 - Working drafts of Plan chapters 1 and 2 are on the website. Mr. Kalina reminded meeting attendees to review these chapters and provide comments.
- As part of the status update, Mr. Kalina presented a map showing 32 "growth areas" around the County. The locations of these are based on communities' plans and are symbolized by uniform-sized circles, meant to illustrate locations for growth, not the amount or geographic limits of growth.
 - Input from communities on the location of these growth areas is very important.
 - These growth centers will form the basis for future CommunityViz analysis of the impacts of growth.
- Mr. Kalina also presented the population projection data collected to date.
 - The Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council anticipates +8.7 percent growth to 2030.
 - Cornell University's projections show a -9.5% decline countywide by 2030.
 - For this study, we have utilized CommunityViz software to allocate Cornell's countywide projection to the Traffic Analysis Zone level using the GBNRTC data.
 - Projections also have a CommunityViz "slider bar" attached to them, allowing an interactive look at population projections by TAZ at various growth rates.

II. Introduction of Topic, Maps & Instructions

As at the previous Steering Committee meetings, community representatives divided into five (5) groups, based on sub-regions of the County. Each group included about 2 or 3 Plan Steering Committee representatives and varying numbers of representatives from educational institutions throughout the County, who were invited to participate in the discussions. The groups discussed questions as found on the Detailed Agenda for the meeting relative to educational institutions in Niagara County. At the conclusion of the breakout session, each group shared its findings.

IV. Breakout Session

Discussion Question #1

*Based on your experiences and knowledge of your community what do you consider to be the most pressing **issue or challenge** facing your community today **relative to educational institutions**? Do not consider your sub-region at this time, only your community and refer to some consideration points below to help with the discussion.*

Each group was asked to provide the following:

- An overall list of the issues and challenges identified by the group.
- The top three issues and challenges (as voted on by the group) that represent shared issues or challenges with other communities in the planning sub-region.

Groups were asked to consider these points:

1. How well do current educational facilities accommodate the school-aged population in terms of capacity? How well suited are they for changes in the school-aged population over the next 20 years? [Recent projections from Cornell University anticipate an overall decrease in the school-aged population in Niagara County by 2035 and school enrollment surveys compiled over the past 10 years indicate significant decreases in some of the cities, but gains in other school districts in the County.]
2. How familiar are you with Niagara County school districts' performance relative to English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science achievement standards? Do any achievements or shortcomings stand out? Does the school district in your community provide any special or enhanced educational programming that may not be provided in other school districts? If so, what types of programs are offered?
3. School district consolidation has been mentioned repeatedly throughout this process as being needed to reduce the tax burden. Is this an issue in your community? Points to consider include:
 - i. Consolidation may mean greater distance from school facilities for some students, if consolidation results in school closures.
 - ii. Per student expenditures do not appear to be above statewide averages in any of the Niagara County school districts.
 - iii. Merging districts may mean that the consolidated district is able to provide more programs / activities than either could alone.

4. Are any capital improvements needed, planned, or being made in your community relative to educational facilities, including school districts and community-wide facilities? If so, what types of improvements?
5. Does your community need better access to:
 - i. Educational facilities (e.g. libraries, computer centers, etc.)?
 - ii. Higher education (colleges/universities)?
 - iii. Workforce development programs (e.g., Orleans/Niagara BOCES, Niagara County Employment and Training, etc.)?
 - iv. Other facilities or programs?

Discussion Question #2

What is the most significant asset or opportunity that currently exists in your community relative to educational institutions? Again, do not consider your sub-region at this time, only your community and consider the same points above.

Each group was asked to provide the following:

- An overall list of the assets and opportunities identified by the group.
- The top three assets and opportunities (as voted on by the group) that represent shared assets and opportunities with the other communities in the planning sub-region.

IV. Reconvened as a Group to Summarize Discussions

The Plan Steering Committee members and invited stakeholders reconvened at the end of the breakout session. Each of the five groups was asked to provide a summary of their discussions, conclusions reached, and the lists of issues and opportunities each created.

These are provided below by Group.

RESPONSES from GROUP A

Town of Hartland, Town of Royalton, & Village of Middleport

Issues and Challenges:

- Missing key component of the working population:
 - Agriculture classes (e.g., Future Farmers of America)
 - Tech. classes
 - Computer classes
- Taxes increasing as population is decreasing
- Need for additional computer (Wi-Fi)/ library / resource center
- Need for satellite school/facility - NCCC

Assets and Opportunities:

- Royalton-Hartland School District has plenty of room for expansion without additional construction
- School grounds – environmentally clean!!

RESPONSES from GROUP B

Town of Cambria, Town of Lockport, City of Lockport, Town of Pendleton

Issues and Challenges:

1. Too many administrators? School consolidation is a major issue.
2. Teacher salaries should be uniform; there should be a level playing field from one school district to another.
3. There should be other funding sources than taxes
4. Services are duplicated in each district

Assets and Opportunities:

1. More than enough school buildings (“The greenest building is the one that’s already built.”)
2. Tie education to tourism, canal & wine trails
3. Educational programs, especially at the Community College level, can be tied to the County’s marketing / business development (e.g., if you want to attract employers in a specialized industry, take time to discuss how NCCC can help develop a workforce in that industry).

RESPONSES from GROUP C

Town of Somerset, Village of Barker, Town of Newfane, Town of Wilson, Village of Wilson

Issues and Challenges:

- Issues are similar to those of a private business
- Fuel costs are a major issue, because of the dispersed nature of the population in this area.
- Need more diverse sources of revenue
- Need to stay ahead of workforce needs and keep up with changes in technology (e.g., agricultural industry trends)
- Satisfy capacity needs

Assets and Opportunities:

- Nearly all districts in Niagara County have seen improved scores in math and science
- Consolidation of administrative / business functions may be possible
- Schools are community centers
- School facilities promote / provide quality of life activities – they are safe and clean
- Each student can get personalized attention in a rural school district

RESPONSES from GROUP D

Towns of Lewiston, Town of Porter, Villages of Lewiston, Village of Youngstown

Issues and Challenges:

1. Academic programs that match community/industry needs and opportunities (e.g., hospitality): disconnect between career guidance and local economic development programs.
2. Tax levies and budget approval are a big issue each year
3. Schools need up-to-date technology and infrastructure (hardware, software, etc.)
4. Need coordinated business partnerships with academia
5. School facilities need to be maintained
6. Schools need to be community centers for sports and athletic activities

7. Boards of Education should be policy makers and understand that they impact enrollment and the degree to which people want to move into their school districts.

Assets and Opportunities:

1. We have two higher education institutions in the community (2-year, 4-year and graduate programs: good variety for a range of student needs)
2. Good schools and higher education feed the intellectual desires of the community and attract new people
3. The BOCES system facilitates individual districts in purchasing, staff development, etc. Niagara U. offers teacher training.
3. Schools are major employers in the County.
3. Educational institutions give back/promote much in the community (service learning, volunteerism, etc.)
4. Library system (NIOGA)
5. School test scores are reasonably good and consistent
6. The area has an abundance of professional educators (good workforce to draw from)

RESPONSES from GROUP E

City of Niagara Falls, Town of Niagara, Town of Wheatfield, City of North Tonawanda

[The following items pertain primarily to the Niagara Falls City School District. The Niagara Wheatfield and North Tonawanda School Districts are also in this subregion.]

Issues and Challenges:

- Economically disadvantaged student population: enrollment has been dropping. Over the last two years, the district has lost 2000 students and compressed its facilities.
- Buildings are being closed / re-used / sold for other uses.
- Improve economic base to retain current generation of students.
- Student population is “needy”: guidance counselors are available for students starting at kindergarten level.

Assets and Opportunities:

- Infrastructure and buildings very well maintained as a result of State funding: Niagara Falls School District has not had to raise its tax levy in many years. State funding has meant that the budget has remained steadily in the \$20 to \$25 million range, despite falling population and enrollment.
- Residency rule for teachers in the District means a pool of well-paid professionals looking for upscale housing in the City.
- School facilities contribute to quality of life in the City: school libraries are open to the community, buildings are open for adult education, etc.
- BOCES: education oriented around job opportunities
- Pride Program: after-hours (3-5 pm) classes for school-aged kids who just want a GED.

OTHER ISSUES / QUESTIONS RAISED:

Q (from floor): How are public libraries financed? Why are they an item in some City budgets?

A (from floor): Sometimes library districts are a separate part of the school district – they may have a separate line in the budget, but may be getting some portion of the school tax, not an additional tax.

ISSUE: What is lacking is a good foundation for students in civics. Without this kind of empowerment, future generations will lack motivation for civic engagement and the tools they need to recommend improvements to their community. This is input that is lacking in making the kind of quality of life improvements that could mean greater retention of students. Local history also needs to be part of the curriculum.

ISSUE: On the subject of politics, the reality of local politics is the source of many of the issues being discussed, countywide.

The meeting ended at approximately 7pm.