



Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan

Notes of Meeting **Stakeholder Communities Plan Steering Committee Meeting #4** **NCCC Faculty Dining Room - Student Center G212**

Wednesday, May 28, 2008
5:00 pm to 7:00 pm

Topic – County Services, Facilities and Infrastructure

I. Introduction and Review of Website

- Brief update from Project Manager Walt Kalina on what has been accomplished since the April 23, 2008 meeting. Notes from previous meetings are on the Comprehensive Plan website.
- Walt reminded Steering Committee representatives to continue to provide input by way of the community profile sheets. Community profile sheets were distributed to representatives.
- Niagara County Planner Ben Bidell provided a review of what has been added to the project website recently, including agendas and notes from the previous three Plan Steering Committee meetings and two public information meetings, GIS mapping, community profiles, draft chapters, and other planning documents.
 - Ben encouraged meeting participants to use the “Feedback” portion of the website to provide input on draft documents posted online.
 - Project website: www.niagaracounty.com/comprehensiveplan.asp
 - Project email address: comprehensiveplan@niagaracounty.com

II. Goals and Objectives

- Walt introduced the Preliminary Comprehensive Plan Goals for the first two focus areas of the Comprehensive Plan: Land Use & Environment and Economic Development. The Preliminary Comprehensive Plan Goals are presented as broad statements and will be followed by more detailed Objectives that will recommend specific strategies and action items.
- The list of Preliminary Comprehensive Plan Goals represents a synthesis of several data sources including feedback from Plan Steering Committee representatives at past meetings, Niagara County’s Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan, the County’s Economic Development Strategy, the Erie-Niagara Framework for Regional Growth, and other planning documents.
- Meeting attendees provided additional input on the list of Preliminary Comprehensive Plan Goals. Specifically, the goals should include:
 - Brownfields
 - Niagara Escarpment Viticultural Area/Niagara Wine Trail
 - Right-to-farm ordinances
 - Escarpment preservation

III. 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 3 or 4 Plan Steering Committee representatives and varying numbers of representatives of other stakeholder groups invited to participate in the discussions. The groups discussed questions as found on the Detailed Agenda for the meeting relative to Niagara County services, facilities, and infrastructure. 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 County services, County facilities or County infrastructure**? 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. Think about what types of County-provided services (social services, health services, economic development, public works, public safety, courts, emergency services, education, employment and training, election services, etc.) are available and important to you and your community and whether there are any issues relative to the need for:
 - Additional services
 - Access to services currently provided
 - Changes in services provided as a result of, for example:
 - Changes in your community's population
 - Changes in your community's economic base
 - "External" factors (including changes in technology, national/global trends, legislation, local providers, level of services provided by government, etc.)
2. Likewise, think about the types of County facilities and infrastructure that are available and important to you and your community and what issues there may be with the provision and/or maintenance of these facilities and infrastructure. Refer to the maps provided. The County is responsible for and maintains:
 - Administrative, service, and public safety buildings
 - 6 County parks (Oppenheim, Krull, Bond Lake, Royalton Ravine, West Canal Marina, and the County Golf Course)
 - 283 miles of roads, 89 bridges and 800 drainage culverts
 - Sewer, water and refuse districts

Discussion Question #2

What is the most significant asset or opportunity that currently exists in your community relative to County services, facilities or infrastructure? 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:

- Feeling of isolation from County
- Need better emergency service response times / greater police presence
- Desire to be included in more projects at the County level

Assets and Opportunities:

- A mobile DMV should be considered, providing monthly visits to outlying communities
 - Also election services [e.g., voter registration], social services, nutrition, etc.
- Opportunities for more shared services and improved efficiency
- County should consider decentralizing services to Towns and Villages

RESPONSES from GROUP B

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

Issues and Challenges:

- Redundant services / consolidation needed
- Being the County seat presents pros and cons for the City
 - Great access to services
 - Means a lot of non-taxable, public properties
- Size of County Legislature should be examined, many districts/legislators compared to other counties
- Greater efficiency in service delivery should be considered
 - For example: the Financial Recovery Division within County Social Services may be performing a function better left to State-level agencies
 - Are there other areas of County-State service overlap?

Assets and Opportunities:

- Potential for service consolidation, specifically water districts

RESPONSES from GROUP C

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

Issues and Challenges:

- Nothing on County services map in this sub-region [other than roads and bridges] except for Krull Park
- Geographically distant from services in Lockport, Niagara Falls and North Tonawanda
 - Given gas prices, driving distance becomes a more serious obstacle
 - Everything is a half hour drive away
- Police coverage is insufficient
 - Improved coverage is needed for Towns
 - Slow response times have been noted in the past
- There are “imaginary lines” running east-west [along the escarpment] and north-south [just east of the City of Lockport] separating these communities from the rest of the County.

Assets and Opportunities:

- County bus service and/or van service for seniors – more services for the elderly, rural population are needed
- Service sharing: Town of Somerset is served by the Village of Barker’s police
- More service consolidation is possible
 - Local water district consolidation is needed
 - Tough decisions need to be made to use tax dollars wisely

RESPONSES from GROUP D

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

Issues and Challenges:

- Sheriff’s Department patrols are sparse in the area; Village of Youngstown has a part-time police force
- Distance from County services in Lockport / Niagara Falls
- “We try to take care of ourselves” – Services are available when needed

RESPONSES from GROUP E

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

Issues and Challenges

- Road infrastructure – not much County highway mileage in this area; County roads are “just as bad” as town roads.
- County buildings and facilities
 - In poor condition
 - Should be setting a higher standard for the area, but instead they reflect their surroundings
 - Volunteerism by County needed
- Oppenheim Park is a run-down facility
 - There was a proposal to sell this facility to the Town of Wheatfield
 - Accessible to tourists / visitors to the area and could be a major attraction – seems to be a missed opportunity now
 - County should consider selling it or making a greater investment in it

- Water & Sewer
 - Cities have their own service
 - Could be a model of “competitive cooperation” – more inter-regional perspective, without giving up local sovereignty.
- Aging population
 - Need for more services / better access to existing services
 - Seems to be a larger issue in Wheatfield
- Robert Moses Parkway
 - Replacement prior to removal
 - Improve time, opportunity to capture traffic
- LaSalle Parkway
 - Parkway to nowhere

Assets and Opportunities:

- Roads
 - Cities could use help from County in maintaining and improving roads
- Oppenheim Park
 - Could be a major asset, since it is right on Niagara Falls Boulevard
 - Possible zoo site?
- Surplus of low-income housing – insufficient newer moderate or higher-income housing development
- Airport holds a great deal of potential, because of its long runway and capability to handle cargo loads
 - Improve connections between Niagara Falls International and Buffalo Niagara International
- Multi-modal center in downtown Niagara Falls
- Old railroad rights-of-way present opportunities for trails / revival of rail
- Vantage Centre – filling up; should be marketed more
- County’s Brownfields coordinator has been a major asset to Niagara Falls and Wheatfield
- Aging population in the sub-region could be an asset

The meeting ended at approximately 7pm.