

TOWN OF CANTON, VILLAGES OF CANTON AND RENSSELAER FALLS 2018 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

Stakeholder Meetings Round 2 - February 2018 Meetings Summary

The Town of Canton and Villages of Canton and Rensselaer Falls, as part of the public engagement component of the Comprehensive Plan Update process, held a second series of Stakeholder meetings on Monday, February 5 and Tuesday, February 6, 2018 at the Municipal Building at 60 Main Street, Canton. The purpose of these meetings was to listen and learn from community leaders and key stakeholders on a variety of topics to help understand needs and opportunities over the next 5, 10 or 20 years. In some cases, a phone call or separate meeting was held to accommodate schedules of the participants.

The Canton Comprehensive Plan Committee (CPC) assisted the project team to identify key stakeholders. All stakeholder groups were also encouraged to participate in the ongoing planning process and help spread the word about public engagement opportunities.

The project team met with following stakeholder groups:

1. Recreation - Taylor Park
2. Agriculture
3. Planning and Zoning Board Chairs
4. Health and Human Services
5. Tourism and Hospitality
6. Business Owners
7. Internet Access/Connectivity

Along with these stakeholder groups, comments and ideas were gathered at meetings with the Canton Rotary Club and the Free Will Meal sponsored by the Campus Kitchen Project at the Unitarian Universalist Church.

The following summary represents comments and input received.

RECREATION - TAYLOR PARK

Participants: Town/Village of Canton Recreation Department; Canton Central School District; St. Lawrence University (SLU) Rowing; At-large Community members; Maple Run Half Marathon Organizer

Challenges/Needs:

- Seasonal park schedule limits recreational opportunities

- Availability of lifeguards - mostly college students, which limits the duration of beach access during the season
- Allow use of park for events while lifeguards are not on duty
- Aging playground equipment needs upgrading
- New swim docks needed - the Town received a grant to install a new swim dock that will create a more clearly defined swim area
- Bathrooms need repair and upgrading
- Need for larger covered/sheltered space to provide an alternate rain location for events and shade
- Potable water availability a concern. Current well is a limiting factor. Shallow at 40' and not enough capacity
- Lack of an outdoor shower
- Much of the park is within a floodplain. Flooding/drainage an issue and will need to be carefully evaluated when considering locations for future structures and fields.
- Limited parking (formalized) especially for events
- History of park unknown to many in the community. History of family who leased land to Town is an important message to share perhaps with a kiosk. Many visitors do not realize the Park is on private property.
- More shaded areas needed near beach
- Electrical limitations
- ADA accessibility/accessibility for all
- Fishing not allowed in current lease agreement

Opportunities:

- The beach and swimming area are driving most of the use in the Park.
- Pavilion is a great feature; built by an eagle scout. Pavilion could be doubled in size to accommodate demand
- Food trucks
- Improved ball field
- ADA accessibility
- Collaborative programming (i.e. schools and parks dept)
- Fishing
- Create a "Friends of" organization for maintenance and improvements.

Programming:

- Adventures in Learning; move to Taylor Park
- Paddling lessons; limited supplies; need for storage of paddling equipment
- BOCES Construction crew can be utilized for improvements
- PE class/kayaking

- Yoga on beach
- Music events and food events
- Use for environmental education classes
- Bussing opportunity from Village
- Canton Kids Triathlon to come back
- Volleyball/basketball courts underutilized
- Storywalk with Library
- Picnics, parties and family reunions

AGRICULTURE

Participants: Cornell Cooperative Ext.; Town/Village of Canton farmers

- Dairy makes up majority of the revenue from agriculture products
- A lot of local support for farms on the edge of Village
- Opportunities for agritourism
- Zoning: applied in a way that makes more sense for large-scale farming operations.
- Current zoning does not focus on small scale farming. People do not necessarily want to live next to large scale farm, but will live next to small scale farms
- Need a balance between large and small-scale farms
- Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE)
 - CCE was originally aligned more with large-scale agriculture but has changed focus to align with small-scale farming trends/needs.
 - CCE was able to fill three new positions with funding from the state.
- Big issue for farmers is support for infrastructure (processing, marketing, transport of produce, etc)
- Gap in availability of commercial kitchen space. CCE has stepped in to fill this gap.
- Local foods/agriculture relate to wholesale and direct sales
- Commercial kitchen space is being used most by mobile food vendors
- Mobile vending is limited in Town Code
- Technical Assistance Program
- Harvest NY grant
 - Can have a 3rd party private packer freeing up time and money for farmers
 - Partnership with BOCES
- There is a lack of production, recruitment and education
- Not enough young people coming up in agricultural industry
- There are programs being put in place by the state and CCE to help farmers, but there are not enough young farmers to take the place of retiring farmers.
- A lot of the younger folks who are being educated in agriculture in the area are moving away to places like Vermont where there is a stronger market for local foods

- State regulations are a barrier for small-scale farming operations, particularly for start-ups. Many leave for Maine or Vermont where regulations are looser for small scale farms
- Winter markets might be possible, but on-site cold storage would be needed
- Agriculture Academy
 - All day, year-round senior program. Alternative to regular curriculum to give kids exposure to different career choices
 - Students learn at CCE's learning farm
- CCE's learning farm can be used as a center for learning and agritourism
 - 400 acre farm
 - Center for agritourism and agricultural education
 - Historic farm
 - Leases to SLU Sustainability Program
 - Land available for trails/recreation
- Zoning
 - Plan should focus on small-scale farms and utilizing good farmable land
 - Need more dynamic zoning
 - Town needs a public space to host farmers market
- Local farmers need to be experts in business and marketing, and value added food production while also being a producers - difficult challenge
- Split zoned parcels a challenge in some instances
- Educate public about what farming is and what it could be

PLANNING AND ZONING BOARD CHAIRS

Participants: Town of Canton, Village of Canton and Village of Rensselaer Falls

- Focus development in Village and avoid unnecessary sprawl
- There is plenty of vacant space available downtown
- Climate change resilience is important to address especially in areas that are flood prone like in Rensselaer Falls
- A need for parks and recreation planning in Rensselaer Falls
- St. Lawrence River levels do not have impact on Village of Canton but they do on the Village of Rensselaer Falls
- Ice jams and flooding issues in Pyrites
- Inadequate protections for riverfront property
- Regulate Air B&B's
- Regulate sprawl of college housing
- Definition of family in code doesn't prevent college kids from sharing a house
- High priority items include Jubilee Plaza and former McDonald's Building
- The Town does not get many use variance requests

- Lack of market demand an issue
- Strengthen the enforcement of the Zoning Code
- Housing stock an issue
 - Houses are overvalued on the market but require significant amounts of money for rehab
 - Houses tend to degrade and become student housing
- Not much demand for second story office space in Canton
- Most second story office/apartment space not ADA accessible
- Town/Village worried about losing investment opportunities
- Boutique shops are important downtown. Need more of them.
- The town-gown relationships with all colleges and the communities could be improved
- Town/Village DPW facilities should not be located directly in village.
- Village of Canton Planning Board
 - Village should be a primarily high density residential area with limited suburban sprawl; Apts./Condos. Higher density is less taxing on infrastructure
 - Millennials should be targeted demographic to grow population
- Colleges provide a great source of art and culture. Those amenities already exist
- Canton Village goal should be to increase taxable property to help reduce household taxes
- Process to annex portions on the Village of Canton should be more streamlined
- Canton Community is already strong in the arts; a great selling feature.
- TAUNY is an important draw. Need a way to build on this asset.
- Need for more services like tailors, shoemakers, clothing stores, etc.
- Heritage Island is the perfect place for an interpretive center
- Barriers to drawing people to community
 - Distance/accessibility
 - Not enough public transit options
 - Lack of restaurant options
- Jubilee Plaza presents a number of redevelopment opportunities
- Issues of aging building stock
- Many of the buildings on Main Street have nice firsts floors, but upper floors need renovations
- Traffic on Main Street creates an unfriendly pedestrian environment. Bypass could help relieve traffic and improve pedestrian experience, therefore helping businesses
- Need for more hourly wage work in the Village of Canton
- There hasn't been any new housing permits brought to the Village of Canton Planning Board in nearly five years
- Most of what comes before the Village of Canton Planning Board are small permits or variances; changes from single to multi-family; hotel project; sign issues; Changes to Historic Business district
- There tends to be more development in Town since taxes are cheaper
- Village of Canton Zoning Change Recommendations

- Within Village, R1 should not be expanded
- R2 should be expanded within Village
- B1 and C1 should be located along main road corridors
- Change manufacturing zones to something more useful for today's economic climate
- Clean up little spots that are spot zoned
- Zone the waterfront for uses that protect the waterfront while encouraging mixed-use development
- Riverfront
 - Access is key; boat launch, parking area for paddlers
 - Focus on passive recreation; passive recreation like canoeing is more likely than white water rafting given the slower flow
- Downtown design guidelines would be a good thing
- Agriculture should be encouraged on edges of the Village of Canton
- Sign regulation need to be better codified
- Town Planning Board (Issues, Opportunities and Concerns)
 - Guiding document has been the Canton Community Action Plan; designed more for Village but Town has also adopted it
 - Town has created more leniency in zoning to allow small animals (chickens, goats, etc.) in residential areas
 - Code has not been revised since 2002
 - Agriculture should be a focus of the Comprehensive Plan
 - Common cases that come before the Town Planning Board
 - Sign issues
 - Applications for business
 - Most development in recent years has occurred east along Rt. 11
 - Have had some requests for duplexes in Residential Zone
 - Zoning was changed to allow for duplexes
 - Not many requests for housing in Town
 - Barriers
 - Location of Town
 - Businesses need to be actively recruited
 - There has been more work done for community development than economic development
 - Grasse River is a great selling feature to draw people to the Town/Village
 - Localities should be working together to campaign for the Community as a whole
 - Promote recreational opportunities in Town
 - Biggest hurdle is Rt. 11 Corridor/traffic
 - Canton is a whole community not just three separate municipalities
 - Not too many issues with current town zoning code but changes should be made if necessary

- Concerns with Universities; drain on Town/Village resources
 - Tax exempt properties
- Rensselaer Falls
 - No churches anymore
 - Very generous community
 - Active library and fire dept.
- Fire and Police Departments provide good service; an asset to community

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Participants: United Cerebral Palsy/Community Health Center of the North Country of the North Country; St. Lawrence Health Systems; St. Lawrence NYSARC; United Helpers

- Coordination of services
 - Providers generally operate independently
 - Leadership at state level lacking
 - Push towards consolidation of services in St. Lawrence County
- A lot in flux at the moment with changes at the state/federal level
- In general we spend a lot on healthcare than other countries and get less
- Stable affordable housing and childcare are critical
- A lot of food insecurity in the area
- Overall health of community is determined by certain social determinants like income, housing and childcare
- There is limited affordable housing close to village. Transportation limitations the farther you get from canton village
- **Important:** having stable housing stock. Knowing you have a place to go home to.
- Issues of economies of scale in regards to development a housing to accommodate developmentally handicapped
- People generally have to move out of the area to access certain health care services
- Policy makers at the state level do not always create regulations for the rural scale.
- When it comes to healthcare, the number of people equals money which equals power
- There is a public education component missing when it comes to educating the public about what services these healthcare and non-profit organizations offer
- If there was one consolidated hospital/system, people would not move away from the area as much
- NYSARC pays substantial fee to be able to stop at Jubilee plaza
- When Rite Aid moved it hurt the Amish community who use NYSARC's transportation services. Once it moved so too did the bus stop.
- Density is important. Some zoning doesn't allow for two and three family homes.

TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

Participants: Village of Canton; St. Lawrence County Chamber; TAUNY

- Recreation Committee oversees the golf course (Village)
- Events are packaged at golf course
- Restaurant at municipal golf course is underutilized
- Village owns the restaurant facility but is run by another entity
- No venues in the area for large weddings (200+)
- Weddings generally use many local services (bakeries, florists, hotels, restaurants, tailors)
- Need for more restaurants
- Businesses have difficulty staying open year-round. Once college students leave, many businesses only open certain days of the week.
- End of May, Town loses around 6,000 people
- Summer tourism is key
 - White water park
 - Tap into Canadian Paddling network
 - Historic and adventure tourism
 - Access to riverfront is key
 - In terms of a regional attraction, 3 level of white water difficulty available between Canton (easy), Potsdam (medium) and Colton (hard)
- Utilize parks more
 - TAUNY can use parks for programming
 - Porch fest- a festival utilizing porches around village. Spaces for artists and merchants
 - Parking is an issue for event planning
 - County does a lot of promoting of golf to Canadian market. Golf expensive and long waits for tee times in Canada. Creates demand for St. Lawrence County courses.
- Cycling
 - Cycling is another big Canadian draw
 - Canton has extensive bike routes
 - 35% of Canadians consider themselves bicycling tourists
 - Could do a Bike the Barns type of event
- As a year-round destination
 - Obstacles for businesses
 - Do not have consistent open hours with regular programming
 - TAUNY gets good turnout for events/programs on Sundays, yet many places are closed on Sunday.
 - There should be a pathway trail system through village that allows pedestrians to avoid truck noise
 - Very noisy to walk through village due to truck traffic. Hard to have walking tours
 - Sackets Harbor has a similar system

- Jubilee Plaza
 - Canton should enact a law like Potsdam's for dealing with neglected buildings
- Canton needs a sporting goods store
- Idea to have mixed used building with upper floors for student housing and lower floors for municipal uses (police, office)
- Park street
 - Might be more desirable for retail than main street
- Hodskin Street would be a good to consider as a pedestrian street.
- TicToc
 - Used to be a good eatery and hang out many years ago
- Canton needs more reliable experiences downtown
- Not enough places for community gathering spaces

BUSINESS OWNERS

Participants: Luna Boutique; Frazer Computing

- Housing is relatively cheap for middle income people which can be a draw for bringing in a workforce
- Frazer Computing
 - Computer software for auto-dealers
 - Employees 90 people. Expecting 100 by end of year
- Vision for Canton is a great community where people like to live.
- Should have a variety of shopping and food establishments for varying incomes. Chain restaurants and locally owned.
- Town Planning board usually overrules the County Planning Board
- Need a way to engage students with the community
- More of a local customer base than student base
- Hard to retain employees
- Truck traffic a problem downtown
- Too many establishments selling duplicate items. Businesses would do better if they found a niche and stuck to that.
- Shouldn't be duplicating but diversifying
- Issues
 - Landlords often not helpful to business owner's needs (commercial space)
 - Need for development on waterfront
 - Nightlife is better in Potsdam
 - Truck traffic on main street a barrier

INTERNET ACCESS/CONNECTIVITY

Participants: SUNY Canton; Community Members; Business Owners; Town of Canton; Alltech Integrations

- Slic primarily serves underserved areas
- Slic applies for grants to serve underserved areas
- They can only build out in those specific places.
- Slic is most likely to go where there is no competition
- No cell coverage on Irish Settlement Road. Not far outside of Village
- Verizon hotspot only access for some. Not reliable with spotty cell coverage
- Unreliable DSL
- Very little information available about areas where different providers serve
- Internet access is now a basic necessity. Lack of internet access is a barrier to economic growth
- DANC/location of cable/wire

Note: This above information is a summary of input gathered during stakeholder group discussions. It is not intended to be a verbatim account.

List of stakeholder group participants:

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