

I. VISION FOR NEW LEBANON'S FUTURE

New Lebanon will be an attractive, friendly, and well-maintained community that values its diverse population, rural character, scenic beauty, natural resources, and cultural and historic heritage. In response to the needs of the entire community, it will promote carefully thought out commercial and residential growth, responsible land use, public services, and social and recreational opportunities.

II. INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

A town's "comprehensive plan," according to Section 272-a of New York State's Town Law, is a document that identifies "the goals, objectives, principles, guidelines, policies, standards, devices and instruments for the immediate and long term protection, enhancement, growth and development of the town." A town's comprehensive plan includes general statements of policies, goals and objectives. It reflects consideration of the following: existing land use patterns; agricultural, historic, cultural, natural and sensitive environmental resources; population and population trends; existing infrastructure and future infrastructure needs; and economic development.

A comprehensive plan takes a broad approach to planning. It takes stock of the town's condition as it exists today and assesses how town residents and property and business owners evaluate the town's present strengths and weaknesses. It addresses the community's sense of how the town should change and how to preserve what is best about its present condition. Finally, it provides guidance on how to achieve those goals.

Once a comprehensive plan is adopted, all town land use regulations must be in accordance with it, and plans for capital projects by other governmental agencies (such as New York State Department of Transportation) must take the comprehensive plan into account.

Section 272-a of the Town Law states that:

Among the most important powers and duties granted by the legislature to a town government is the authority and responsibility to undertake town comprehensive planning and to regulate land use for the purpose of protecting the public health, safety and general welfare of its citizens.

WHY IS NEW LEBANON UPDATING ITS PLAN AT THIS TIME?

The town's present comprehensive plan was adopted in 1965. Revised plans were drafted in 1994 and 1997, but not adopted. In 2001, the Town Board discussed proposed changes to New Lebanon's zoning ordinance. By resolution the Board decided to authorize a new comprehensive plan prior to considering proposed changes to the zoning ordinance.

The existing plan was adopted nearly forty years ago. The Town of New Lebanon and the entire region are facing significant changes in population and population make-up, economic pressures, land values, and a host of other matters. New Lebanon will benefit from having a new plan embodying the goals and hopes for New Lebanon's tomorrow in the face of these changes. In its interactions with state

government, private businesses, neighboring towns, and residents, the town will be able to point to its new comprehensive plan as the best statement of its goals for the future.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

Formation of a Comprehensive Plan Committee:

The New Lebanon Comprehensive Plan Committee was organized during the Spring of 2002 by the Planning Board of New Lebanon to begin a process of community discussion of the future of New Lebanon. The outcome of this discussion would be the creation of a new Comprehensive Plan for New Lebanon to replace the current one. The Plan would serve as a statement of the vision residents have for the future of the Town and as a plan for achieving that vision.

The Committee is made up of five members from the New Lebanon Planning Board and six volunteers from the community.

General Description of the Planning Process:

The planning process included data research, gathering input from the public about the community's present strengths and weaknesses, consultation with a professional planner, and public participation in identifying goals for the community's future. Plans were made for a survey and a series of public meetings to gather input from the community. A professional municipal planner, Nan Stolzenburg, AICP, from Community Planning & Environmental Associates of Berne, N.Y., was hired to guide the process of gathering data, designing the survey, tabulating, summarizing, and publicizing its results, organizing and running a series of workshops, and overseeing the compilation of opinions and data. The Committee viewed this process of gathering comments and opinions from as many people as possible as critical to the success of the effort.

The Plan took shape through a series of public bi-weekly Committee meetings at the Town Hall. It progressed through the stages of gathering data, creating a **Profile**, drafting a **Vision Statement** based on public input, generating a statement of **Goals** and **Objectives** from the issues identified by residents, and identifying **Strategies** for achieving the Objectives.

Financing:

A combination of grants, in-kind services, and Town funding provided support for hiring a professional planner and printing and mailing costs for the survey, for postcard notices of workshops and public meetings, and for posters and flyers.

In September 2002, the Committee received \$7,500.00 from the Hudson River Valley Greenway Communities Council to assist with the Plan. The Council Director cited the agency's interest in helping communities like New Lebanon develop

comprehensive plans that would help preserve and protect their unique historic, natural, and cultural resources.

In December 2002, the Town of New Lebanon received a \$2,500.00 grant from the Our Town Fund of the Berkshire-Taconic Community Foundation to support its Comprehensive Plan development.

Community Participation:

This plan is derived from the ideas, hopes, concerns, and values of residents and landowners. Significant effort was made to include all members of the community and to document their ideas. Public participation allowed the Committee to better understand the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and critical issues facing the Town. Contact and regular communication with the community took place through a web site, a comprehensive survey, a series of public workshops, local postings, press releases and word of mouth.

Web Site:

By July of 2002, the web site was up and running, accessible at www.newlebanonplanning.org. The site contained up-to-date minutes of all Plan Committee meetings, survey and workshop results, drafts of the vision statement, goals, and objectives, and provided the means for e-mail communication between the public and the Plan Committee.

The Survey:

On October 23, 2002, a cover letter and an eight-page survey concerning planning issues were mailed to 2,127 registered voters and property owners. From the 569 surveys (27%) returned, a wealth of data was gathered about residents' concerns and hopes. In late January, 2003, the tabulated responses were made available to the public on the website, at the Town Hall, in the Library, and in other public locations. Copies of the survey and the survey response summaries are found in Appendices A and B.

A second survey was distributed to 220 students in the High School, and 81 responses were gathered. Their responses are included in Appendix B.

Public Workshops and Meetings:

In an effort to reach as many residents as possible, two identical public workshops were held in the fall of 2002, one on Tuesday evening, **October 1**, and another on Saturday morning, **October 5**. Ninety-eight residents attended these workshops, where participants were led by Nan Stolzenburg in exercises to identify and communicate individuals' ideas about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and

threats facing New Lebanon. Out of these ideas came sixteen draft vision statements for the future of New Lebanon.

Smaller and more informal workshops were held at various locations throughout the Town in order to reach and gather data from organized groups. A Business Workshop was held on **October 22**. Input was gathered from a Historical Society meeting on **November 18**. The Senior Citizens Group was sampled on **December 6**.

The results from all of the above workshops are detailed in Appendix C.

After a draft of the Vision Statement and the Goals were completed, a public information meeting was held on **May 15, 2003**. Postcards announcing the meeting were sent to each mailing address in town, and a press release, posters and flyers, as well as a posting on the web site also publicized it. At the meeting Nan Stolzenburg and the Committee explained how the Vision Statement and Goals had been derived from public input. The Goals were outlined, and at a series of workstations, residents were encouraged to comment on them. These comments were incorporated into the next draft of the Goals.

Press Releases and Postings:

At regular intervals throughout the planning process, the Committee issued press releases and placed posters and flyers in multiple locations in Town. Press releases were sent to The Chatham Courier, The Independent, and The Berkshire Eagle. Press releases were sent out to announce the formation of the Plan Committee, to publicly promote attendance at the workshops, to announce that the results of the survey and workshops were available, and to give notice about the May 15, 2003 public informational meeting. In addition, flyers were distributed, and posters were put up in popular locations throughout the town for each of those notices.

Press releases were issued and posted on the website on the following dates: July 24, 2002, September 19, 2002, October 24, 2002, January 1, 2003, January 27, 2003, and April 29, 2003.

Data Research and Creation of the Profile:

Sub-committees were formed to research and report on the current conditions in New Lebanon. Drawing on local, county, state and federal data sources, as well as local interviews, this "snapshot" became the **Profile** section of the plan. Included here are descriptions of historic and cultural resources, recreation, population, economic conditions, housing, education, geography, community facilities and services, local government, traffic and transportation, the environment, commercial and industrial activity, agriculture, and tourism.

How the Vision Statement was developed:

At the **two public workshops** in October, 2002, attendees identified and discussed both the positive and negative features of the Town as well as ideas and solutions for maintaining the positive and mitigating the negative qualities. Workshop attendees were then given the task of writing up their “vision” for New Lebanon 15 to 20 years into the future. Sixteen working groups wrote out their statements of this vision. Each group shared its statement with the others, and from these, one unified vision statement was drawn up. Vision elements are listed in Appendix C.

After the **additional workshops** were held with seniors and business owners and after comments were gathered from high school students and the Historical Society, the Committee felt that adequate data had been gathered from the public. When the results of the **survey** were completed and tabulated, the Plan Committee met to consider all this input and to draft a comprehensive vision statement. This vision statement would serve as an overall guide to the rest of the planning process.

How the Goals were developed:

Using the results from the workshops and survey, Nan Stolzenburg organized and **summarized the issues** facing the Town. The Issues Table in Appendix D shows how responses to the survey and workshops generated each issue. This clear linkage between an issue and its underlying rationale form the justification for the series of goal statements. For example, both workshop responses (available in the Appendix C) and responses to survey question 24 (available in Appendix B) generated this issue: “residents expressed a strong desire for a community center to serve youth and/or seniors.”

Deriving the list of issues from **direct public input**, including past studies, and consolidating them into larger categories allowed the Committee to discuss and clarify key issues and, from them, develop a set of goals to be achieved. These **eleven goals** are designed to address the issues that concern the residents of our Town.

Sub-committees were formed to develop goals for the following general subject areas: Natural Resources, Community Appearance, Historical Resources, Economic Development, Housing, Tourism, Agriculture, Traffic and Transportation, Recreational Facilities, Community Facilities and Services, and Land Use.

How the Objectives were developed:

The Committee identified specific aspects of each of the eleven goals that could be formulated into separate objectives. In a process of teasing out the particular aspects of each goal and of considering the suggestions that the public made, the Committee continued to ask the question, “How does our community go about meeting this particular goal?” Again, the Committee looked to the survey and workshop results,

the lists of issues, and the ideas put forth by residents for maintaining what is viewed as positive about New Lebanon and correcting what is viewed as negative.

The draft statements of goals and objectives were added to the website (newlebanonplanning.org) and copies were made available to the public at the Town Hall, the New Lebanon Library and other public locations. They were also shared with the public at a workshop conducted in May 2003.

How the Strategies and Actions were designed:

The objectives served as the basis for drafting a set of concrete recommendations. The Committee **examined each objective** and used language that was as specific as possible to identify **strategies for action**. In many cases, the ideas came directly from survey responses about “allowing,” “prohibiting,” or “encouraging” specific conditions. Other ideas came from the workshops, where attendees wrote out their specific ideas for improving the Town (See Public Planning Workshops Summary in Appendix C).

At the workshops, the public urged the Committee to use the strongest language possible in tailoring these strategies. The Strategies convert a “wish list” into specific, practical and concrete actions. They are meant to help guide the Town in specific ways toward amendment and enforcement of the zoning laws, discharge of planning responsibilities, future town initiatives and other practices.

Going Forward:

This plan serves as a model for planning for the future of New Lebanon. It has in it ideas, hopes, and a vision for shaping our future. The flow from residents’ ideas and concerns to the identification of issues, to the writing of a vision statement, to the setting down of goals and objectives and to the detailing of strategies and actions is well documented, compelling, and logical.

This Plan offers the residents of New Lebanon a chance to be proactive about the future of our Town. In many instances, very specific recommendations are made; in others, a general “road map” to the future is proposed. It offers planning techniques, maps, zoning recommendations, research sources, a menu of ideas for every subject area, and guidance for executing each action. However, this Plan is only a starting point. A concerned and committed citizenry is required to carry it out, to vote these action strategies into our laws and to convert these words into actions.