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Re: Comments on the Dryden 2045 Draft Comprehensive Plan

The Dryden 2045 Draft Comprehensive Plan is an attractive, beautifully produced document containing an impressive wealth of key information about the town. It forms a good framework on which to base a plan for the future. My compliments to the Planning Board, the Steering Committee, and the E.D.R. D.P.C. consultants on producing such a readable document.

That said, the rest of my comments are focused on the problems I see in the recommendations in the Plan for moving forward toward building a Dryden that is closer to what we all desire.

1. With regard to the future land use map for Varna, where I live, it is hard to understand why the nodal area is drawn as large as it is. The west side of Turkey Hill Road all the way from Rd 366 to the solar panels Cascadilla Creek is exactly like the Neighbor Residential on the east side of the road. It makes no sense to designate one side of the street to be more intensive development than the other side.

The area of Turkey Hill Road from the solar panels to Cascadilla Creek, and along Stephenson Rd to Game Farm Rd likewise should not be designated as part of the nodal district. Does anyone want to see the Solar Farm vanish by 2045? This area, bordering the Rail Trail creates a scenic recreation corridor and green buffer to the denser development to the west. Implying that this area should become a densified section of the Varna node should the Game Farm disappear and Cornell abandon its farm activities there would drive toward the loss of productive farmland and appropriate solar installations that few people would think is a good idea in 2045.

2. Designating the full extended corridor around Rd 366 from Pinkney Rd to Freeville as a “nodal corridor” is a recipe for strip development. Driving that route now, one experiences the beautiful rural character of Dryden, with lovely streamside environments and open farm fields, spotted periodically by homes on substantial lots. If encouraged to develop as a nodal corridor, by 2045 someone driving this route would get the impression that Dryden is just one big suburban development. That is not what the residents want to see. Nodes should be areas centered around an intersection that already has some density of housing and commercial, not a strip development corridor. That was the original intention.

Further, the town needs to put more and more effort into buffering Fall Creek from intensive uses in its vicinity that would add to the erosion and delivery of pollutants into the stream. With the new state-designated TMDL requirements to limit the input of phosphorus into Fall Creek, a plan that pushes for intensifying development adjacent to the Creek will make it harder and harder to keep these pollutants out of the Creek. The town has no specific requirement to prevent development right up to the streambank or in a floodplain. No prohibition exists in the Zoning.

Through its Storm Water Management, Control, and Sedimentation Law, the town states lofty goals such as “Prevent accelerated erosion and sedimentation so as to avoid its deposits in streams and other receiving water bodies” but does not require the authorizing board to deny a permit if a development is done in such a way (such as building right up to the edge of the Creek) that might increase erosion.

Consequently, an additional paragraph should be added to the Plan that specifies any development or increased densification occurring in nodal areas must be done in a way that protects streams, creeks, and lakes in the town. Examples of such protection would include buffering the water body through requiring any development or land modification be set back from the edge of the high-water bank by an appropriate distance, perhaps 50 or 100 feet. I understand that the aim of the comprehensive plan is to provide a broad brush about future development areas in Dryden. However, the danger of the document leaving the impression that any and every type of increased densification in these areas is to be favored and allowed with little restraint is significant, and therefore requires an accompanying statement of warning against intruding on water bodies.

In addition, to maintain the attractiveness of any corridor, any extended nodal corridor should be broken up into a series of nodes with each centered around an intersection with existing development. It is imperative that we do not allow Dryden to become a place of strip development if we are to maintain our rural character.

3. Page 43 – Drivers for Planning

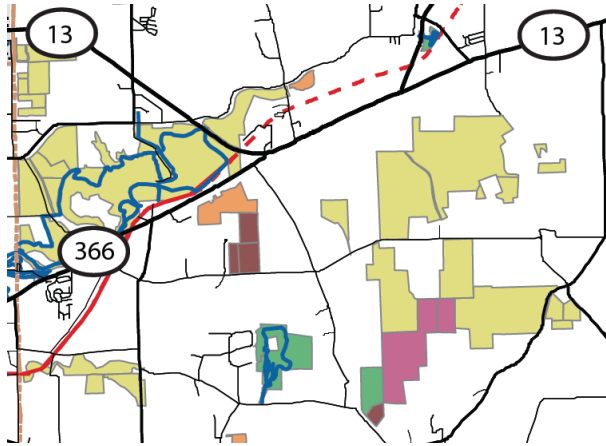
In the first paragraph of this section the document states, “Community members identified the lack of existing water and sewer infrastructure in many areas of the town and that such infrastructure is a critical need...” The document should state that there is a trade-off between the benefits that adding water and sewer to new areas brings and the densification and possible erosion of quality of life that comes with it. It is widely known that adding sewer and water systems can lead to higher assessments and taxes and can lead to a rapid change in community character.

As such, adding these systems runs counter to one of the Guiding Principles in the Plan, “Promote development in a manner that enhances the existing character and livability of the Town of Dryden...”, unless the actual intension of this Principle was to say that we should save the character in some sections of the town by sacrificing character and livability in other sections. No question in the survey directly asked whether the addition of sewer and water was worth sacrificing the character of some areas of the town so that they could densify to theoretically provide affordable housing. Most people responding to the survey said that new residential development should happen in the existing hamlet and village (63%). Although 38% said it should occur near major roads, it is unclear whether they were largely thinking of the hamlet and village as opposed to promoting strip development on Rt 366 and Rt 13 outside of these areas. In fact, only ¼ of respondents said they preferred new neighborhoods, which these nodal strips would essentially be.

Note that none of the recent residential developments that have happened in the town outside the village have provided affordable housing despite being in areas serviced by water and sewer.

Page 52-

It is not clear why some of the areas on the west side of the town shown in the following excerpt from the map on page 53 were not listed as Natural Features Focus Areas with Connectivity Potential:



Although these areas, such as Monkey Run (left), Mt Pleasant (upper center), and Ellis Hollow Swamp (lower center) are smaller, they still connect substantial amounts of natural lands with migration potential for plant and animal populations. In the case of Monkey Run, it is connected to a streamside corridor that runs all the way to Cornell in the Town of Ithaca.

Page 54 –

The Plan states that steep slopes and wetlands create development challenges that are natural barriers for development. While the Plan states that these barriers “create a greater need to focus development within concentrated nodes and areas of existing development”, it should include a statement that makes it clear that any developing on steep slopes or in wetlands should not be considered. These are not challenges to be overcome, but areas to be avoided.

Page 61-

Aren't map 3 and map 7 the same thing?

Page 62-

No mention is made in this section about the town's active promotion and approval of conservation easements connected with new cluster developments (e.g. Dryden Lake area, Ellis Hollow Rd area). These are major mechanisms being employed to preserve open space within the context of residential development. The town-accepted conservation easements are not even shown on maps 3 or 7.

Page 83-

My comments previously have identified the flaw in “ACTION FC 1.2.2 Expand public water and sewer connections in areas designated for nodal development to support more intense land uses.” It is not clear that we currently have significant barriers to more intense development in nodal areas, nor have barriers come from a too restrictive use of special permits. The criteria that we currently have in place protect the town's character and allow for a reasonable increase in population growth in keeping with protecting our special

environment. Fifteen hundred building permits in the last 6 years, increasing the amount of housing stock by something like 20%, is not restrictive. Contrast this with the growth in Lansing during the same period, where much more lenient development controls have led to a development pattern that is much less attractive. Note that over 70% of residents indicated they wanted current growth levels to continue, not accelerate. Removal of growth restrictions would lead to an acceleration, and an associated deterioration in the environment that residents hold so dear.

Page 86-

This section once again supports the idea of expanding sewer and water without discussing the negative repercussions that such expansion inevitably brings in loss of neighborhood character, one of the things the guiding principles indicate needs to be maintained. The discussion on page 89 confirms that sewer service jacks up assessments by 15%, and water service increases assessments by 20%. Intelligent decisions about expanding these services should not be made without making all the benefits and costs clear every time it is talked about.

The same comment pertains to the proposed actions presented on Page 89, Action EL 4.1.1 and 4.1.2.

Page 109-

See my previous comment (point #1 above) concerning the inappropriateness of designating The Stevenson road area as an area for nodal growth. In addition, the statement “NYS Route 366 corridor between Hanshaw Road and Stevenson Road between the border with the Town of Ithaca and the NYS Route 13 intersection” doesn’t make sense, since Stevenson Road doesn’t intersect Rt 366. The area east of Varna to the Rt 13 intersection along 366 is appropriately mapped as Neighborhood Residential. Anything beyond this would be a promotion of strip development.

As mentioned previously, the area on the west side of Turkey Hill Rd to Stevenson Road should be Neighborhood Residential, and the area bordering Stevenson Road to the Game Farm and Game Farm Road should be Open Space Conservation.

Page 116-

The discussion of nodal corridors continues the faults in this concept that were mentioned previously. In fact, it doesn’t make sense to designate a long linear development as a node. It should be called what it is – strip development – something that has been understood for at least the last 50 years as a negative to a community. Nodes should be concentrations of development around a central point of road intersections.

I commend the plan for recognizing “The Dryden community strongly values its viewsheds and open spaces, which should be considered when reviewing design proposals for these areas.

Page 117-

The concept behind Neighborhood Residential was never to promote multifamily dwellings with more than 2 or 3 units in these areas in order to keep the long-standing character of the neighborhood intact. Any mention of multifamily dwellings should make this restriction clear.

Page 121-

At least 45% of the land in Open Space Conservation should provide open space for new development. The number should probably be closer to 75% to effectively reduce the impacts to scenic views and environmentally sensitive resources.

No mention has been made about cluster subdivisions in any of the Use areas, giving the impression that this vehicle, which was one of the more innovative features of the last zoning, hasn't worked and shouldn't be encouraged in the future. This impression is incorrect.

Pages 128-159-

My impression is that each set of two pages were intended to open side to side and be a continuation of the rows of each other. It doesn't work well as pdf on consecutive pages. The reader has to print them out and manually put them side to side to follow a given row.