

## A Planning New Year's Resolution

By: Jennifer Coccozza, Senior Planner

Celebration of the New Year is a time to reflect upon the past and think about the future. Many of us take stock of our lives and make resolutions to do better. Whether we resolve to get in shape, be more organized, make more time for family members or get our finances in order, the New Year provides an opportunity for a fresh start and a clean slate.

Why not make a New Year's resolution for planning in our communities? There is no time like the present. Today's slowing economy gives us a chance to pause and prepare for the future. Take a look at your land use regulations to see if they need improvement. Starting with the Comprehensive Plan - from which all else flows - consider the following:

### How Old is Your Comprehensive Plan?

Comprehensive Plans should be reviewed every few years to make sure they are still applicable to the community. You may want to put a committee together to review the recommendations and see if any changes are necessary. The committee should represent a wide range of interests and could include people from the municipal board, planning board, zoning board of appeals, conservation advisory council, local business people, engineers, architects, students, and other interested citizens.

### Is Your Community Dealing With Any New Issues?

Do you have traffic issues that seem to have gotten out-of-hand? Do some people feel that the sense of community is being lost? Is your town board receiving a lot of complaints about a certain issue? Answering "yes" to any of these questions suggests that a review and study of the issues may be necessary.

## The Planning Top Ten

*A List to Get You Thinking*

1. **Hamlets and Centers** – Do you have village-scale, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use areas that encourage economic development?
2. **Better Design** – Would your community benefit from architectural guidelines or standards?
3. **Sign Ordinance Review** – Have you noticed that new signs don't always reflect your community's values and aesthetics?
4. **Rural Road Standards** – These can be environmentally-friendly and cost-effective if used in low traffic areas.
5. **Farmland Protection** – If farming is a time honored tradition in your community, have you taken sufficient steps to preserve it?
6. **Pedestrian and Recreation Planning** – Trails, Sidewalks, Bike Routes — Do you have enough sidewalks and do they all connect to each other? Would a trail plan

## Is Your Municipality Receiving Numerous Applications for Similar Variances?

If there are a lot of variances being granted for the same situation, the regulation may be too strict, the Zoning Board of Appeals may be granting variances without meeting the standards for variance, or there could be a problem with the definition section of the Code. Also investigate whether the Zoning Board of Appeals has to make a lot of code interpretations. A visit with your municipal Building Inspector and/or Zoning Administrator could reveal whether or not your zoning law needs work.

and designated bike route be an asset to your community?

7. **Landscape Standards** – Is there too much asphalt and not enough green space where you live, work and shop?
8. **Housing Availability** – A healthy mix of housing options (single-family, condos, apartments) is vital for community success. Do your laws allow it?
9. **Traffic Calming** – Are cars driving too fast in your hamlet or commercial areas?
10. **Environmental Considerations** – Water infiltration, aquifer protection, water quality, habitat protection — are all your bases covered?

## Is Your Community Getting the Type of Development it Wants?

Answering “no” to this question prompts a second question — why not? Maybe the right zoning and review standards are not in place. Think about it from a developer’s standpoint to determine if there are impediments that are essentially preventing the ideal type of development from even being proposed. Does the community lack necessary water or sewer improvements? Are the allowable lot sizes and setbacks too large or too small? How about the permitted uses in the zone - are they up-to-date? Are signs too big? Does lighting glare off-site? Is there always an abundance of unused parking spaces? A tailored amendment to your zoning law may be all that is necessary to correct these deficiencies.

## What do Your Local Planning And Zoning Members and Board Clerks Think?

A conversation with the individuals who face planning issues on a frequent basis may reveal things that others might not anticipate. Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals members regularly discuss applications pending before their boards, but rarely do they have the opportunity to discuss larger issues. They often can offer insights regarding what would be best for the community, shortfalls they may see in the zoning law, or suggestions for possible improvements to the regulations. In addition, municipal board clerks might offer ways to streamline office procedures and improve efficiency.

## Getting Started

Now that you’re ready to take on this challenge, how do you start? All changes to land use regulations must go to the town board for review and approval, which is a good place to start. Put together a list of concerns and approach your local town board for its feedback and to initiate a plan for action. Having their support is vital if you want the work to pay off.

So there you have it — a quick list of questions and some food for thought. Taking a step back to gain some perspective is never a bad idea. With a little thought and a bit of group effort, you can be assured that your community is on the right track for 2009 and beyond.

Happy New Year!

## More Information

NYS James A. Coon Local Gov't Technical Series on [Evaluating Zoning Regulations](#)

[CLICK HERE](#) to view past issues of the DCPF's newsletter, *Plan On It*.

This newsletter was developed by the Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development, in conjunction with the Dutchess County Planning Federation.

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