

August 29, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Comprehensive Plan Committee (CPC)

CPC Chair Chris Foss led this monthly meeting at Caroga Town Hall from 6:00 PM to 6:45 PM.

Committee members present were: Chris Foss, Rachel Simonds, Anita Long, Jeremy Manning, Doug Purcell, Dave Cummings, and Jim Hale. No additional people from the Town Board or public attended.

1. Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes

- The committee voted 7-0 to waive reading and approve 8/1/2024 organizational meeting minutes.
- The committee voted 7-0 to post minutes on <https://caroga.town> and <https://townofcaroga.com>.
- Secretary Long will send final approved minutes to Town of Caroga Webmaster Linda Gilbert to post at https://caroga.town/comprehensive_plan. A folder and menu link have yet to be created there.
- In addition, Anita Long will manage the website https://townofcaroga.com/comprehensive_plan, where she will post final meeting minutes and other public information resources.
- Decisions were deferred about a public email newsletter with hyperlinks to minutes and information.

2. Old Business: Demographic Profile, Stakeholder Interviews, and Public Participation

- Chris Foss is working with the Fulton County Planning Department to review Caroga's census data. Scott Henze suggested simplifying the data presentation. Chris Foss will send an email with updates.
- Chris Foss noted need to reschedule with Kyle Price, given that he was not available August 29.
- Rachel Simonds followed up on examples from other towns, and she sent an email with links for Poestenkill, NY in Rensselaer County (<https://www.poestenkillny.com/town-comprehensive-plan>). Doug Purcell said Poestenkill is a rural town facing some similar infrastructure issues as Caroga, and he emphasized the web link to a survey for the community and a PDF flyer with a QR code survey link. Anita Long added that similar examples were also previously shared from comprehensive planning in the Mohawk Valley (<https://www.amsterdamny.gov/326/Comprehensive-Plan-Update>) and the Adirondack Park (<https://www.townoflakeluzerne.com/town-comprehensive-plan/>).
- Anita Long also said, "Scott Henze previously underscored that Caroga has an Adirondack Park Agency-Approved Local Land Use Plan (ALLUP). He suggested starting by clarifying that framework early by inviting APA people such as Robyn Burgess or Kate-Lyn Knight to talk with the committee." Chris Foss responded, "I deal with them somewhat frequently, and I'll talk to them about that."

3. Plan Review: The Vision

The 2011 *Comprehensive Plan* begins with a *Vision Map* and *Where We Want To Be in 2025* (see https://TownOfCaroga.com/comprehensive_plan/cpc_2024_prior_vision_and_maps.pdf).

- Chris Foss presented questions for discussion: **Are we there? Is it still where we want to be? Is there another way to get there? How have things changed since 2011? Is that Vision accurate now?**
- Jeremy Manning said, "There's a lot to do still. I read this through with a 10-year-old and asked, 'What do you think?' and he said, 'You're not even close. You're not there.' The point is that the *Vision* was a pitch for Town Center, and that Zoning District is a lot different now from what it was proposed to be. For example, Sherman's is different now than it was proposed to be. Yet, downtown looks largely the same as it did back in 2011, and it doesn't look a whole lot different after 13 years."

- Chris Foss agreed, “I think we’re not there. The elephant in the room is that there’s a major change there at Sherman’s in that downtown Town Center that nobody anticipated back in 2011.”
- Jeremy Manning also wondered if some of the *Vision* wording was too narrow in specifying new uses in Town Center including, “unique shops and boutiques, arts and crafts stores and related retail.” He asked, “Do we cut it or just change ‘2025’ to ‘2035’ and say, ‘Ok. Let’s get to work?’”
- Chris Foss added that a problem with proposing “boutiques” or “high tech industry” is that they often come without knowing how to get them, so it is “an out-there vision without a path to get there.”
- Chris Foss continued, “If you look at the second page about how to get there, it basically just says, ‘Work hard. It’s going to take a lot of people working hard.’ But the *Plan* does not have specifics about working hard doing what? Is it changing zoning laws? Is it getting grant money for implementation? And so on. What are the specifics about how you want to get there?”
- Jeremy Manning asked, “Does anyone know how this compares with *Visions* from other towns?”
- Anita Long noted, “Others tend to be more compelling. They create a sense of place. They describe existing assets. They are aspirational but also give a sense of what is workable. They clearly envision and link what the town is now, what it aspires to be in the future, and what strategies will get there.”
- Dave Cummings elaborated stating, “There’s a significant word: *aspirational*. This could be a proposal to launch to the future. People tend to be just one calendar year out, maybe. Feasibility tends to get knocked down...People have to be part of the program...With the aspirational, we have to think about the fiscal impact. If there is infrastructure, what is it going to cost? Economically, is it paid through real property tax? I would like this next document to step beyond what’s going to happen in 2025. The aspirational is very, very important. It should be a central theme to what the *Comprehensive Plan* ought to be...We need to keep an eye to the future versus what’s here today...It’s futuristic.”
- A smart growth aspirational framework is summarized with 3 Es: Effective Economy, Equitable Experience, and Enduring Environment, plus an emerging 4th E: Energy—clean and smart energy.
- Anita Long added, “The strength of this 2011 *Vision* was the Town Center concept. That was totally new in 2011. In the 50-year history of Caroga planning, none of the prior plans included this concept of Town Center. That was the thing that ultimately changed in the *Zoning Map* adopted in 2018. I think people like the idea of Town Center. At the same time, several details were off. For example, the defining boundaries of Town Center were not within what is allowable, and also the specifics of some proposed uses were not realistic. For example, in Caroga, one way people come together is uniting against something. When I talk with a lot of different people and remind them that the 2011 *Comprehensive Plan* aimed to turn Sherman’s historic Loeff carousel building into a new restaurant, almost everybody opposes that. Caroga’s carousel building and enduring experience are perhaps the most iconic parts of the Town. To turn it into a restaurant is to neglect an essential Town asset. All kinds of people now share the joy that Caroga Arts has created by reopening Sherman’s carousel and by bringing music back at that key anchor property and gathering place in Caroga’s Town Center.”
- Doug Purcell elaborated, “It’s going back to what Barb Deluca emphasized. This 2011 *Plan* did not have enough input from the public. It may have been a vision of those people working on it, but it was not the vision of the entire Town. If you look at some of the things that would have had to have happened in order for this to become a reality, then it would have been nice to have infrastructure to support it. Yet, when there were infrastructure things that had to go to the voters, what happened? It got voted down. So, there wasn’t buy in from the community for the 2011 *Comprehensive Plan*.”

- Anita Long replied, “That’s an important point. There was not buy in from the residents in the community. There was not buy in from the private land owners whose use changes were proposed. And there was not enough involvement with the Adirondack Park Agency to clarify what is actually allowed in Caroga’s established Agency-Approved Local Land Use Plan (ALLUP). The proposed 2011 *Land Use Plan Map* violated the *Adirondack Park Land Use and Development Plan Map*. That appears to be why the proposed 2011 aspirational maps were not adopted for Caroga’s 2018 *Zoning Map*... It did not attend closely to the basic APA framework that is legally required for development here.”
- Jeremy Manning noted, “Town Center is in the zoning now. It has to stay. It was created. It’s a new designation. They put it in the *Zoning Ordinance* based around the 2011 *Plan*. It should be in there.”
- Anita Long agreed and clarified, “In the 2011 yellow map *The Vision...Town Center*, there’s a brown line that reads *APA Hamlet Boundary*. To the right of that boundary is vacant land classified as R15 with a density requirement of 15 acres per principal building. That R15 land classification would not allow a 60-site RV Park that was proposed there. So, in the 2018 *Zoning Map*, the Town Center boundary was changed to stay within the APA Hamlet Land Classification that allows any density. The point is that this 2011 Town Center map was not accurate. Plus, the proposed 2011 *Land Use Map* in the back were not even close to possible. The only things that really changed from the 2005 to 2018 *Zoning Maps* that were consistent with the 2011 *Comprehensive Plan* were some commercial classifications plus the Town Center, but even the boundaries of Town Center could not be approved and adopted as proposed. They were rejected. It was not accurate back in 2011, let alone in 2025.”
- Jeremy Manning looked beyond Town Center to say, “This is a *Comprehensive Plan* for the whole Town. Most of the *Vision* statement talks about Town Center. The whole thing is about Town Center. That’s a small district, not the entire Town as a whole. It’s just based on a few parcels. It’s not really a town-wide plan. It’s just this small piece of it. Part of our job could be to expand this. Something aspirational and broader for the whole Town, not just this one zoning district.”
- Anita Long added, “To play Devil’s Advocate, there’s a case to be made for a focus and a center in the context of the whole Town. So, if there are grants in the future, some of them are specifically for downtown revitalization. The question, though, is, ‘How do we define *downtown*?’ Is it just this Town Center anchored at Sherman’s? Is it the whole APA Hamlet classification area? Is it the Route 10/29A corridor? Are there multiple neighborhoods with different recreation destination anchors? What description broadly captures a town-wide sense of place, but also how should its center be defined?”
- Chris Foss summarized, “Today I wanted to discuss the concept of **Town Center** and **Where Do We Want to Be?** As far as writing the **Vision** and where we want to be in the future, that can happen once we get through all the rest of it. It’s good to look at now, but we don’t need to rewrite this now. We don’t need to create this now. Let’s go through the rest of the plan, and then come back to it. Then say, ‘OK. This is what we’ve discussed. This is what we’ve looked at. This is more of where we are now.’ Then jump back and say, ‘OK. Here’s our *Vision* statement and what we’re looking at.’ We don’t have to use the title ‘Where We Want To Be in 2045’ or something. I think it will come together when we get down the road and really start looking at each individual part in the rest of the *Plan*.”
- Jeremy Manning agreed, “I think it could be limiting now to say, ‘This is our *Vision* statement, and we’re bound to it.’ It can evolve as the *Plan* revision evolves and as we get perspectives.”

4. Public Participation Survey

- Rachel Simonds shifted the focus by saying, “I don’t think we need to get into the weeds that much with the *Vision* statement. We can have a concept of having a gathering center to bring the Town into one spot. It doesn’t have to be the 2011 Map. I don’t know if that is something we have to do here. A *Vision* can emerge as we get input. I think our next focus should be to put together our survey of what we want to gather from the public. That will take a long time. So, if we can do that sooner rather than later, it will give them enough time. That way, we’re not going to get pigeon holed into this and put blinders on. It will give us more information to be creative and brainstorm.”
- Jeremy Manning replied, “I assume that we’re going to do more than one survey. Maybe something initially, and then something that is more focused once we’re down the path some more.”
- Chris Foss noted, “We’re not going to go to the County and say, ‘Come up with a survey for us.’ We need to write that survey together and maybe have them contribute. We all can view it and change it or add new things before we put it out.”
- Jeremy Manning asked, “How specific are surveys to that particular town? Is it specific or broad?”
- Doug Purcell said, “In Poestenkill, they asked questions like, ‘Do you have broadband? If not, why?’”
- Dave Cummings added, “That’s about systems and supporting systems: like infrastructure, water systems, and electrical systems.”
- Rachel Simonds continued, “Right. They have things about water and public sewer and cell service.”
- Dave Cummings emphasized, “The more defined the question, the more likely you’ll get an answer. If you leave it too open ended, then you don’t get anything back, typically. Like, ‘What would you like to see in 2035?’ is not going to get you a meaningful answer.”
- Rachel Simonds added, “The questions were ratings: strongly support, moderately support, not support. Some were yes or no. With infrastructure, we need to think about whether people have what they need to be able to live here successfully. With recreation, we’re also a recreation town. I’m not saying copy it word for word, but these are things to think about. They had 23 questions.”
- Doug Purcell noted, “My sense was that they are trying to maintain their rural character, as Troy and everything else starts creeping toward them.”
- Anita Long noted, “Another point made last time was that effective plans set priorities, like priority projects. I think it’s not hard to come up with Caroga’s major capital renovation projects that have been on the radar for quite a while but have not happened (e.g., Golf Clubhouse, Highway Garage, Town Hall, Wheelerville Trails, Sherman’s, and so on). Perhaps questions could ask about the assets and priorities specific to Caroga and have people do ratings about those targeted projects.”
- Jeremy Manning added, “Starting to work on the survey is important. We’re not going to get that done in a month. We can start hashing out questions and then refining and editing, and in a few months, we can have that ready. It can be broad but focused, taking into account projects we have and what people’s priorities might be. There are example questions, and they might trigger more.”
- Jeremy Manning continued, “Plus, talk with Scott Henze, to see what else they’ve got down there. They’ve done this before in the County. These first steps are crucial. The first steps we take are going to determine the direction. If we spend six months going down a path, hopefully it is the right one.”

- Chris Foss said, “I also know the Planning Director in Saratoga County. They have towns like Edinburg and Day that are lake communities in the Adirondack Park. They might have similar surveys.”
- Jeremy Manning asked, “How much do you just rely on survey data? Obviously, meetings too. At some point, you get the same 50 people responding. How much do you do? Online? Mailboxes?”
- Chris Foss responded, “That’s part of it. Invite the public to a meeting and say, ‘We’ve sent out these surveys. Now we’d like to talk about it. You might get people who would come but not fill out forms.’”
- Doug Purcell said, “The Poestenkill schedule had a lot of that in there.”
- Rachel Simonds said, “It’s more tangible to entice people.”
- Anita Long added, “With other examples, they actually developed a survey and invited the public to a meeting where they talked about several points of introduction and then launched the survey immediately from that meeting. Later they followed up with other public meetings to discuss results.”
- Doug Purcell agreed, “In Poestenkill it looked like what they were doing too. It’s a nice template.”
- Jeremy Manning said, “Making the first step public outreach is good. Just knowing the town people, some think things are jammed down their throats. The first step is public outreach. It’s a really good first move. It brings people into the process. The first step is that we want feedback right away. That’s better than saying, ‘Here’s what we’ve done.’ Even if it’s a 50-question survey. Get people thinking about it. A lot of people don’t even know this is going on. Not everyone tunes into Board meetings or reads the *News Flash*, so to get something out there that says, ‘Hey! This is what’s going on, and we want your input right away. I think that’s a good way to bring people into it.’”
- Doug Purcell continued, “Another challenge is between those who live here year-round and the property owners who may be here seasonally. Some vote. Some don’t. You’d try to get input from all of those people, and do it even if they are not here. So, they know about it and can participate.”
- Rachel Simonds responded, “With an initial launch, there could be in-person and zoom too. We don’t have to do it for every single one, but we could do it for that. I also wonder if there’s a way we could connect to the school district and how they disseminate their information? I don’t know if that’s allowed, but that would be a way to reach a group of people who have a big stake.”
- Jeremy Manning said, “There are students, but for tax votes they are just going off of whoever owns a land parcel. That’s probably what we should be doing too. It’s the same thing as property tax.”
- Rachel Simonds replied, “I was thinking of it differently. If we’re thinking of getting input from focus groups (like with Kyle Price or local businesses), then we could do something connected with the school too and say, ‘Hey. We want to get input from parents and families.’”
- Doug Purcell responded, “I’ve always tried to get the museum’s brochure to the school for them to send to the parents before the end of the school year. It’s good to involve them directly.”
- Rachel Simonds continued, “Or maybe if we asked them to host an information session there. They might be more comfortable going if they host it at the school.”
- Anita Long added, “Public participation in other places have included surveys as well as interviews—like stakeholder interviews. The school community or the school leaders are valuable stakeholders.”
- Dave Cummings said, “There’s got to be things that are not the obvious. Across the street, I deal as the anger manager. I was hired to promote good will for the golf course. It’s been a real challenge.”

- Dave Cummings continued, “It’s interesting how we phrase questions. People want to make complaints about many, many things. Sometimes, they’re not in my purview. So, focus groups might be formalized, but you have an undercurrent. It’s the kitchen stove commentaries. We don’t want to eliminate anybody to have input, saying, ‘Thanks very much. We can try.’ We want to convey that open attitude across the Town.”
- Chris Foss noted, “I also worked for the City of Johnstown for a while. The mayor would come up with all kinds of ideas. 30% of them were crazy. 35% were maybe but probably not. Every once in a while, there was one that was pure genius that you had to watch out for that would sneak in there.”
- Chris Foss summarized, “Do you want to start working on survey questions for the next meeting? Between now and then, we can each see what we can find, as far as suggestions maybe from other towns and maybe what the Planning Department already has from other towns. I’ll talk to them.”
- Rachel Simonds said, “We can all do our homework and each come up with what we think is important in an initial survey, so we can draft some questions and things for the next meeting.”

5. Next Meeting

- **The next meeting date will be September 26, 2024** at 6:00PM to discuss public survey questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Anita McMartin Long, CPC Member and Secretary

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