

The meeting was brought to order at seven o'clock by Chairman Jim Galvin. In attendance were Ms Nan Stolzenburg of Community Planning & Environmental Associates (CP&EA), her associate Don Meltz, and, Committee members John Fishman, Peter Nelson Snr., Larry Van Brunt, Aaron Groom, Frank Mendelson, Phil Trowbridge, Al Wassenhove, new member Janice Fingar, Chairman Jim Galvin and Town Attorney Ted Guterman. Messrs. Gil Raab and Nick Tipple later joined the meeting.

Ms Stolzenburg had been invited to address the Committee. She advised that to produce a viable and valuable Master Plan, three major topics should be addressed; and addressed in a linear fashion.

1. know the current characteristics of the Town of Ghent population and housing demographics, building trends, environmental resources, economic resources and governmental infrastructure
it is important in the early stages of developing a Plan to understand the public's concerns and desires; what the public see as the Town's future
2. development of a vision statement and a set of specific long-term goals for the Town
3. provide solid strategies and recommendations to the town so the goals can be achieved – abstract suggestions cannot be set into motion

There is some confusion in the community as to the makeup and purpose of a Master Plan Committee. It was agreed the public should be aware:

- the Committee is comprised of an integral sample of the Town; a cross-section of Ghent residents
- it is not an anonymous body
- the role of the Committee is that of educator; to provide a platform for development of the community's future.

Members of the Ghent community need to know decisions made by the Committee are not random. Therefore, it is strongly advised that a public record, indicating why and how decisions and/or recommendations were made, be maintained and available to the public.

A discussion of the positive and negative values of surveys occurred. It was noted that surveys provide for total public involvement. Several different methods of data collection were discussed.

ADVANTAGES

- everyone has the opportunity to participate

- provides for the identification of trends, issues, broad subjects
- provides an opportunity to learn how the community perceives itself
- general survey findings can lead to focus groups to address specific concerns such as agriculture, business, child-related, historic structures, and the elderly

CONCERNS

- potentially costly - need to balance the cost against total data/response
- according to Ms Stolzenburg, there is an approx 30-35% response to written surveys – returns are higher in the villages
- accuracy of holding an on-line survey and tabulation versus post card/only written responses – depends upon the make up of the population

While acknowledging the value of surveys, Ms Stolzenburg suggested the Committee not rely on them solely for garnering information. She spoke about the need to address timing issues; to ensure surveys and workshops are held simultaneously. Ms Stolzenburg recommended a minimum of two (2) public meetings be held, with one occurring during the initial scope of data gathering. Discussion of item 3 at the first workshop will be valuable in determining strategies and recommendations for the Committee's vision statement.

There was a discussion of the role consulting firm CP&EA could play in the development of the Town's Master Plan. CP&EA can assist with all aspects, including survey development, printing, mailing, as well as the tabulation and analysis of results and the facilitating of workshops. Committee members can visit the CP&EA website (www.planningbetterplaces.com) to obtain more information. It was suggested and agreed that a representative of CP&EA attend monthly meetings to facilitate the Committee's efforts and offer guidance as to various planning options.

Committee members inquired as to funds available to the Committee by the Town of Ghent. Information will be made available prior to next month's meeting. The need to incorporate regional information was raised. It was pointed out that the Committee cannot make determinations for the Town of Ghent, independent of regional issues and growth patterns. Possible methods of garnering regional data were discussed.

- hold regional forums
- request local towns share their information
- when collecting data, ask questions about surroundings, neighboring towns

It was suggested the Committee being the process by gathering profile information. Ms Stolzenburg suggested that CP&EA consultant Don Meltz can provide geographic information systems (GIS) maps based upon data available through various New York State agencies. Information collected from workshops can also be incorporated.

Committee members concurred with the need to address the following issues.

- determine the scope of the Committee's role in the production of Ghent's Master Plan
- determine what information will be collected locally
- decide how to best take advantage of CP&EA's consulting services
- discuss sequencing logistics

- what will be the best use available funds - the largest variable to consulting costs is the actual survey work
- issuing a press release explaining why the Committee has been formed
- while the Town is presently not in the financial position to develop its own website, one can be set up by CP&EA (through a link from their website)
- ensure residents understand ALL meetings are open to the public
- posting meetings in 'Calendar of Events' in Register-Star and The Independent

It was agreed to hold the next Ghent Master Plan (GMP) Committee meeting Tuesday 05 December 2006. An agenda will be provided in advance of the meeting. Mr. Meltz will attend as representative of CP&EA.

Members agreed to hold future GMP Committee meetings on the first Tuesday of each month.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.