

Chairman Galvin opened the meeting at 7:05 p.m. In attendance were members John Fishman, Peter Nelson, Larry VanBrunt, Aaron Groom, Jim Beal, Gil Raab, Nick Tipple, Frank Mendelson, Mark Clarke, Jonathan Walters, All Wassenhove, along with Ghent Town Attorney Ted Guterman and Chairman Jim Galvin. Absent were Janice Fingar, Phil Trowbridge and Kyle Wilber.

Frank Mendelson was thanked for writing and issuing the press release relating to this evening's meeting and guest speaker.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Chairman Galvin introduced Mr. Bruce Levine, of 3d Development Group, LLC, Amherst, NY, who has been asked speak about affordable housing techniques and opportunities.

As Mr. Levine noted, the term 'affordable housing' applies to the availability of safe, up-to-code facilities, with the cost of monthly rent and utilities equal to 30% or less of income. Available affordable housing for an aging population was also discussed. Mr. Levine addressed the various types of residences available and the factors of owning versus renting, along with available income levels within Columbia County. As pointed out, the availability of housing – any form of housing – is based upon the local municipal, county and state comprehensive planning, wages being paid in the area, local businesses and an analysis of the housing market as required by lending/financial investment firms.

Mr. Levine stated that barriers to affordable housing include inflexible zoning, the actual cost of the land, lack of public water, general, local opposition, as well as the costs of financing. As was suggested at the June meeting, the availability of public water is the greatest deterrent facing the Town of Ghent to allow for higher-density housing, including affordable units. It was pointed out that conventional financing does not apply to the development of affordable housing. Succinctly put, financing must be heavily subsidized through government aid.

Mr. Levine also spoke about the need for involvement by local government. He suggested that a town should consider the following actions.

- have municipal services, such as water (and sewage), available to developers
- waive or reduce building, and permit fees [at this time, Ghent does not require an impact fee]
- amend zoning and planning ordinances to encourage development of increased density multi-family and elderly cluster-style affordable housing units
- consider donating Town-owned land, or selling it below market price, as locations for affordable housing developments
- initiate a program of 'Payment in Lieu of Tax Agreements' (PILOT) – this program encourages monies to stay in the local economy – with a PILOT program, all future payment amounts are known in advance
- have local governmental procedures in place that will not hinder or delay an approved development

The need to make a town's decision to provide for increased housing development, including that defined as 'affordable,' absolutely transparent to current residents of the town, was emphasized.

Mr. Levine also suggested a municipality should consider:

- incorporating/supporting first-time home buyers programs,
- applying for US Department of Agriculture grants or loans relating to available water and/or sewage programs, and/or
- requesting assistance from federal and/or state government for the development of affordable housing, especially multi-family projects.

Mr. Mendelson questioned what the 'cost' of not providing affordable and/or senior housing might be to a town. It was stated that lower income people and seniors would be forced to either sell their homes and leave, or constantly struggle to retain their homes. Mr. Levine referenced an ordinance that specifically addresses housing for people 55+ years of age. He will provide Chairman Galvin with a copy. When a question was raised by Mr. Clarke about possibly restricting housing based upon a geographical basis; that only local people would be able to take advantage of the special housing, Town Attorney Guterman pointed out that, in accordance with New York State law, a county cannot tax separately or restrict housing. When questioned, Mr. Levine suggested, that based upon his experience, the smallest development that could possibly provide a return for investors would be 24-units.

Chairman Galvin thanked Mr. Levine for speaking to the Committee. The information provided will serve Comprehensive Plan Committee members well as they proceed to investigate the subject of housing.

MINUTES

A motion, to approve the minutes of the 05 June 2007 meeting, was made by Mr. Wassenhove, seconded by Mr. Clarke and unanimously carried.

WEB SITE

Ms Barrie reported on the development of the Town's web site. It was estimated that the site should be available within 1-2 months. At this point in time, people can access a temporary Town of Ghent Comprehensive Plan site, provided by Community Planning & Environmental Associates. Individuals may go to www.planningbetterplaces.com and open 'current client pages.'

SURVEY DRAFT, v2

A copy of the survey draft, version 2, was distributed, and members took a few minutes to review the material.

QUESTION 16

A request was made to broaden the scale of responses to line items by offering the following categories 'very satisfied, satisfied, not satisfied, don't care.' Committee members agreed to the request.

QUESTION 17

The question was raised whether the Town of Ghent should encourage the use of alternative energy sources. It was noted that 'The Right to Farm,' in relation to county Agricultural Districts, provides for the usage of power-generating wind mills.

QUESTION 37

This question provoked some heated discussion. Mr. Nelson reported that the 'rail trail' question had been discussed at the 21 June 2007 Town Board meeting. **He made a motion to reconsider the question. The motion was seconded by Mr. Clarke. Messrs. Fishman, Mendelson, Tipple, Walters, Beal, Galvin and Groom voted to not reconsider the rail trail question. Those voting in favor of reconsidering the 'rail-trail' question were Messrs. VanBrunt, Nelson, Raab, Clarke and Wassenhove. The motion to reconsider question 37 failed.**

A discussion, relating to public comment, was held. A couple Committee members believed the Comprehensive Plan Committee had previously approved to accept questions and comments from the attending public. Chairman Galvin noted ten (10) minutes will be set aside at the end of each meeting for public comment.

A motion was made by Mr. Beal, seconded by Mr. Fishman and unanimously approved to amend question 17, by eliminating the word 'regulate' and replace it with 'encourage development of alternative energy sources.' Chairman Galvin will provide consultant Nan Stolzenburg with the requested changes to **questions 16 and 17.**

Chairman Galvin referred to the next agenda item – distribution of the actual survey, including whether the survey should be in a paper and/or electronic format, should control numbers be used, and who should receive the survey

The subject matter turned to build-out and GIS work. Chairman Galvin reminded members that the Committee's consultant Nan Stolzenburg did not recommend bringing in experts, such as engineers, until a later point and time within the development of a Comprehensive Plan.

Committee members discussed whether the Town of Ghent can sustain growth, of any form, without supplying basic services such as water supply and sewage disposal. Is it financially viable for the Town to put water and sewer systems in place? Mr. VanBrunt offered that all available grants for improving or installing water systems are determined, based upon median incomes in the Ghent area. Chairman Galvin will contact a representative of the Columbia County Department of Health and the Town of Ghent's Engineer, Ray Jurkowski regarding these service questions.

Thought was given to distributing two surveys to each household in Ghent. Should residents require additional forms (such as for an 18 year old child) they may visit the Town Hall and request them. Discussion also took place with regard to usage of control codes to determine the number of surveys distributed or returned. There was a general discussion of who should received the surveys - residents of nursing home facilities, such as Whittier, property owners in accordance with the tax assessment roll, voter registration, etcetera.

It was agreed public notice regarding the survey should be placed in local newspapers and on cable television public access channels. The use of electronic-format (web site and/or download-able surveys) and potential security issues were voiced.

It was **also** agreed that Committee members should consider these issues and be prepared to offer solutions and/or recommendations at next month's meeting. However it is eventually worded, formatted and distributed, it was agreed the survey must be accurate, valid and reliable, respect the diversity of the Town, and be a combination of both electronic and paper formats.

Chairman Galvin informed members that he will not be attending the Committee's next meeting. He asked Frank Mendelson to chair the meeting being held on Tuesday, 07 August 2007.

The meeting was opened to public comment. Mrs. Carolyn Stark stated her concern about the inclusion of rail trails in the survey. Both Messrs. Fishman and Wassenhove expressed opinions. The public comment period was closed.

There being no further business, a motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mr. Fishman, seconded by Mr. Walters and approved. The meeting was adjourned at 9:09 p.m.