Town of Bethlehem
Comprehensive Plan Update

Committee Meeting #2
January 15, 2020, 6pm
Delmar-Bethlehem EMS Building

Meeting Summary

Committee Member Attendees: Jeremy Snyder, Bill Ketzer, Rad Anderson, Jim Grady, Georgia Fishburn, Giles Wagoner, Dania Flores, Chris Edwards, Tom Coffey, Brian Gyory, Anne Benware, Adrienne Mazeau, Kathleen Mannix, Paul Beyer

Public Attendees: Linda Jasinski, Scott Lewendon, Pattie Beeler, Nancy Neff, Ken Neff, Mike Waldenmaier

Staff: Robert Leslie, Elizabeth Staubach, Leslie Lombardo, Nate Owens & Town Supervisor David VanLuven

Welcome/Introduction- Robert Leslie introduced the topics for tonight. At the last meeting the group discussed the results of the community forums and what the community feedback was at those meetings. At tonight's meeting the discussion will be about the data collected on demographics and growth and linking the data to the information received at the forums from the public. Questions to answer include; what is the community sentiment? Does the data support what we heard from the community about growth perceptions?

Bethlehem Demographic & Growth Analysis – Power Point Presentation

- Rob Leslie gave a presentation summarizing the Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC) study on Demographic & Growth Analysis 1991-2018 for Bethlehem completed in December 2019.
- The study includes important baseline information on current conditions, analysis of trends over time and will assist the Town in providing emphasis or background to future goals, policy and recommendations. The study included a comparison to other communities in the Capital Region.
- **Residential Development Trends**: at the community forums staff heard from many residents that "the town is being overdeveloped", what does the data show?
- Data shows in the last 15 years development has slowed compared to previous years, why is that?
- Building moratorium was in effect in 2005-2006
- Economic downturn in 2008
- 2009, number of units go up, but not at the same level as seen before.
- The bar graph slide shows spikes, those represent large development projects like Adams Station and Beverwyk multifamily developments
- Senior citizen housing in 2015 represents spike
- 2016 shift was seen back to single family being built, reflects the zoning on land available
- Currently there are 1,500 units in the pipeline either approved or being reviewed by the Town
- Question- Are the projects today going to meet our needs in the future?
- What's being approved today will be built in next 5-10 years.
- The analysis looked at other municipalities in the region, charts show the comparison

- Where has development occurred? South of Delmar Bypass, Fisher Blvd, North Bethlehem, not as much in Southern part of Town (see slide with map)
- **Takeaways from the statistics:**
- In the 14 years since the 2005 Comprehensive Plan was adopted (2005 – 2018), Bethlehem has seen close to 35% of the single family residential development that occurred in the years prior, between 1991 and 2004.
- Total multi-family permitting was about the same between these two periods, but since the 2005 Comprehensive Plan was adopted, multifamily permit issuance occurred in a tighter timeframe during the period between 2011 and 2016.
- Housing growth has slowed for Bethlehem and other peer towns over the past 7 years compared to previous decades growth.
- Consider the breakdown of housing types in the development pipeline in relation to the demographic changes the Town expects to experience in the next 10 years. As the share of older adults (age 65+) grows, will residential development projects under review now address their housing needs? Do we wish to attract a younger generation, and if so, what are their housing needs?

<u>Discussion</u>: Key Takeaways from Analysis – Committee members gave feedback/reactions to Demographic & Growth Analysis presentation

- Questions about accessory apartments and whether or not they are factored into housing data.
- Question posed: Residents say the town is being overdeveloped, is this a perception? Or a misperception? What do you think?
- Misperception if you compare to other communities like Malta.
- Not a misperception, when density increases in our hamlet areas it's noticeable, building in less space, whereas Town of Halfmoon is building spread out over bigger area, not as noticeable there.
- Southern part of town is open, school district makes a difference so building in a concentrated area is correct perception.
- 1,500 units in the pipeline is a concern, thought hamlet from 2005 Comp Plan was good idea, let development happen in established areas, good to keep open space
- People have more cars today then years ago, Glenmont shopping opportunities are attracting people from outside of the town, adding to traffic
- Traffic is a concern, it keeps coming up at planning board meetings, is infrastructure at capacity?
- The Town itself is beyond the capacity to provide more services, not enough employees.
- Maintenance costs come with more infrastructure like sidewalks.
- Questions about multifamily units & traffic, perception that multifamily units produce more traffic, can't the Town require multifamily units to be owner occupied?
- Questions about market for duplexes?

- **Staff presentation on Housing and Population Characteristics:**
- Population of the Town in 2019 is approximately 35,000
- It's an aging population, Older adults, ages 65+, make up 17.2%. Projected to increase significantly by 2030
- **Takeaways from the statistics:**
- The large increase in the number of dependent population (children, seniors) in the town emphasizes the need for thoughtful planning for transportation, housing, and services to support the dependent population in the long term.

- The Town may want to attract more young and middle aged adults to the Town to balance out the polarization in the age distribution. Is this a goal for the Comprehensive Plan Update? What land uses, services, or activities do we need that we don't have to attract young and middle aged adults?

<u>Discussion</u>: Committee members gave feedback/reactions to Housing and Population Characteristics presentation

- Transportation park & ride lots are available in the northern part of town, but not in the southern part of town.
- Can we encourage smaller homes to meet the needs of certain population category, like middle age people or lower income population?
- Entry into the housing market is a barrier because of price.
- Change the zoning to get the housing we need.
- Developers are constrained by community pushback, NIMBY, don't want apartments next to them.
- Infrastructure costs factor into price, it's harder to get below $350,000 because of this, Newell Place subdivision for example $500,000 for less than 2,0000 square feet, it costs $500 for a foot of road.
- Is there a way to get developers to give you a mix of housing options? Certain percentage of units for more affordable units? Incentives for older homes to be invested in for renovation?
- Can we use zoning for a certain percentage of affordable units given?
- Code has affordable housing incentive, but it's not taken advantage of by developers.
- The base density issue given in the code is a problem when trying to encourage conservation subdivisions and incentives.
- Clustering is a solution for affordable housing, zone for smaller size lots, use the Hamlets.
- Where's the available land though, not in Hamlet zones.
- Example of Hamlet area (near Price Chopper) in Slingerlands available.
- Re-use of lands is difficult because it takes time to amass land.
- Do we have numbers on house sizes in Town?
- Make smaller house sizes, cluster and add open space and parks
- What is plan for Vista? Location for residential units maybe?
- Are there rural HUD incentives to use in the rural areas?
- Apartments are proposed on Thatcher Street in Selkirk, there should be incentives for 1st floor units reserved for seniors or the handicapped.
- **Staff presentation on more Housing Characteristics:**
- Mostly single family residences – 76.8%
- Fewer attached single family units – 6.5% (townhomes)
- More than 50% of owner-occupied homes with a mortgage pay more than $2,000 per month in housing costs
- **Takeaways from the statistics:**
- Bethlehem's ratio of single-family detached to single-family attached has remained consistent over the last 7 years. Developments such as Walden Fields and Chadwick Square provide single-family attached townhome housing options for residents. Do we need more single-family attached homes?
- Bethlehem's higher rates of single family and owner occupied units and lesser amount of multifamily and rental units may indicate a limited supply of attainable and affordable housing in the Town.

- What types of housing (single-family detached, single-family attached townhomes, multi-family) does Bethlehem need?

Components of Comprehensive Plan Update – Consultant Tasks
Task 1: Public Participation Plan – how to obtain public input to inform Vision, Goals, Policy and Project Recommendations, Land Use Revisions
Task 2: Build-Out Analysis – development growth scenarios Transportation assessment – future roadway improvements
Task 3: Comprehensive Plan Update document
Task 4: Town Code Amendments? – Zoning Law, Subdivision Regulations, Stormwater Management, etc.

Discussion:
- Several people volunteered to be a sub group of the committee to help Robert Leslie write the RFP for the consultant services
- Environmental has to be included in the RFP
- Sustainability should be included
- Will we repeat Chapter 7 Inventory & Analysis from the 2005 Comp Plan?
- Is there another town similar to Bethlehem to use as a benchmark?
- Need a consultant with experience doing comprehensive plans
- Need to address diversity of housing, natural resources, historic preservation
- Reminder to committee that members need to get out into the community & help get resident's feedback on the plan as well as working with the consultant.
- A growth scenario should be based on what changes we plan to make.
- Peer communities like Halfmoon, and Colonie, what's their development like? How they handled development? Look at that.

Public Comments
- Planning for the future is important, we paid City of Albany for water because we thought we were going to grow.
- Careful to make the Comprehensive Plan flexible
- Let capitalism do its thing
- Developments already have empty lots
- Problem of Planning Board making it difficult for developers and expensive, that's why no affordable housing
- Small lots mean you can't make additions to a house later on.
- Higher cost homes brings in higher paid people that's why median income is so high
- Apartments bring in taxes, so they are okay.
- If you've lived here a long time you have seen change
- Traffic connection of roads, rerouting traffic is a concern
- Farming what can that look like?
- Building moratorium was put to the Town Board in the fall, think that's important
- No sustainability, not needed in plan
- This town is a suburb designed for auto use, encourage people to move to cities
- Commercial base in Town is a concern, need more businesses to offset tax base
- Affordable housing and taxes need to be addressed
- Empty stores in town is a concern
- Need information on tax base comparisons to other municipalities

- The power plant used to represent a large portion of the tax base, but then it's full assessment was reduced. National Grid property/PSEG now, the energy industry caused assessment to drop on the plant.
- There are successful industries in town, Owens Corning, the Port wants to expand, helping to balance the tax base but residents don't want trucks that come with industry so that's a problem
- Hamlet idea in the last plan in 2005 doesn't work, need to change that.
- Historical property and wildlife corridors are owned by property owners who have rights, that is important to remember.

Next Steps

- Staff will prepare a draft RFP based on the tasks and work with sub-committee to refine RFP
- Sub-committee and staff will review consultant responses, attend interviews and select consultant

Next Meeting: February 19, 2020 at 6pm, Delmar-Bethlehem EMS Building