

Bethlehem

Comprehensive Plan

Report of the Comprehensive Plan Oversight Committee (CPOC)



Planning for our future

Town of Bethlehem, New York

Autumn / 2007

Web Edition

Letter from the Supervisor Autumn 2007



John Cunningham
Town Supervisor

Just over twenty-four months ago, Town Supervisor Terri Egan and her associates on the Town Board adopted the Town's first-ever Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan). This historic moment culminated an intensive eighteen-month conversation among Town residents and stakeholders regarding our future. The Comp Plan is a dynamic document that provides policy guidance regarding the growth of our community and must be periodically revisited and adjusted as appropriate.

Among the Comp Plan recommendations was the establishment of an oversight committee to assist the Town Board in guiding implementation of the plan. In April of this year, the Town Board established the Comprehensive Plan Oversight Committee (CPOC) and directed it to assess implementation progress to date. It also requested that CPOC develop recommendations regarding further implementation activities.

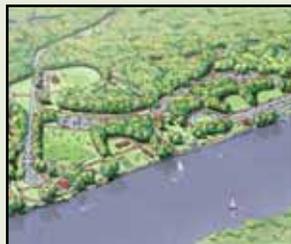
The Town Board accepted the CPOC report at its September 12th meeting and the full narrative report has been posted on the Town's web site. In the interest of reaching as many of Town stakeholders as possible, CPOC has published this summary report for broad distribution throughout the Town.

To be sure, we are very pleased with the progress made to date in implementing the Comp Plan recommendations. We appreciate the active involvement of so many of our residents in plan implementation activities and we encourage continued public participation in the many planning initiatives that are underway in Town. I also want to extend our gratitude to the members of CPOC who have contributed to the development of an excellent report. On behalf of my colleagues on the Bethlehem Town Board, I want to assure you of our commitment to continuing a highly proactive and transparent planning program that will ensure the retention of the unique character of our community and the quality of life we enjoy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John H. Cunningham". The signature is fluid and cursive.

John H. Cunningham
Town Supervisor



Section I - Comprehensive Plan Oversight Committee (CPOC)

In August 2005, Bethlehem adopted its first-ever Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan) as well as substantial amendments to its Zoning Law and Subdivision Regulations. The adoption culminated an eighteen-month public process and conversation about the future of the community. Dozens of public meetings were held to gather opinion and achieve consensus on the key elements of the plan. The Plan's recommendations were organized in the following manner:

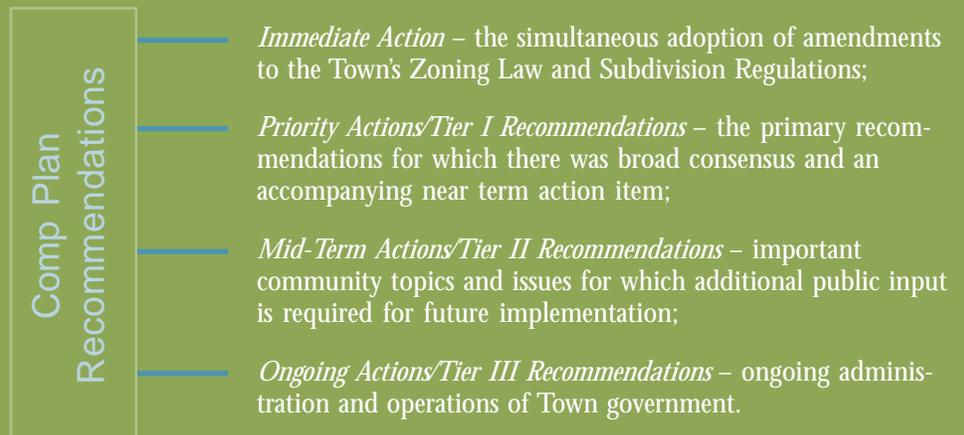


CPOC

Included as a Tier I recommendation of the comp plan was the establishment of a Comprehensive Plan Oversight Committee (CPOC), to “assist the Town Board and help guide the plan implementation effort.” The Comprehensive Plan Oversight Committee (CPOC) was established by the Town Board at its meeting of April 25, 2007. CPOC was charged with preparing a status report on comp plan implementation progress and with developing recommendations for consideration by the Town Board.

The following persons have been appointed to the CPOC:

Karen Beck, *Citizen Representative*
Nicholas Behuniak, *Citizen Representative*
Jack Cunningham, *Town Supervisor*
Erik Deyoe, *Town Engineer*
Howard Engel, *Former BPAC Member*
Mike Hodom, *Zoning Board of Appeals Chair*
Kyle Kotary, *Councilman*
Nan Lanahan, *Parks Administrator*
George Leveille, *Director of Economic Development and Planning*
Parker Mathusa, *Planning Board Chair*
Mike Morelli, *Assistant Director of Economic Development and Planning*
Gregg Sagendorph, *Town Highway Superintendent*
Patricia Salkin, *Former BPAC Member*



Section II - Status of Major Planning Initiatives

A) Amendments to Town Zoning Law and Subdivision Regulations:

A substantial redrafting of the Town's Zoning Law and Subdivision Regulations occurred simultaneously with the adoption of the Comp Plan. Among other things, a variety of new zoning districts were created to implement the recommendations of the Comp Plan. Other highlights include the following:

- Creation of regulations to protect stream corridors, wetlands, steep slopes and flood plains;
- Creation of regulations for grading, erosion and sediment control;
- Introduction of design guidelines and standards throughout the zoning law; and,
- Creation of sign regulations.

A second round of amendments, including the following, were made during 2006:

- Creation of regulations for the overnight parking of commercial vehicles in residential districts;
- Creation of a new residential district requiring large lot (2 acre minimum) residential development; and,
- Establishment of supplementary regulations for senior citizen housing.

B) Route 9W Linkage Study:

The 9W Linkage Study was a Tier I recommendation of the Comp Plan. The purpose of the study is to assess needs and develop preferred alternatives for both transportation improvements and land uses in the 9W corridor. A key element of the study is a feasibility analysis of a possible “north-



Major Planning Initiative
Vista Technology Campus

ern alignment” for the Selkirk Bypass. The Comp Plan process broadened community thinking about the project and expanded its objectives to include traffic mitigation and economic development. The committee and the consulting team lead by Wilbur Smith Associates and Capital District Transportation Committee will be formulating a draft plan for public review and consideration by the Town Board in autumn 2007. In addition to representatives from involved state, regional and local agencies, the following citizens are members of the advisory committee:

Keith Bennett, Mike Daley, Tom Dolin, Linda Jasinski, Nancy Kuivila, Peter Lauricella, Darlene Valet

C) Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP):

The preparation of a LWRP was a Tier I recommendation of the Comp Plan. The purpose of the LWRP is to develop recommendations and policy guidance related to future land use in the riverfront corridor. The adoption of the LWRP and the designation of a Waterfront Revitalization Area (WRA) by the Town will require the consistency review of proposed development projects within the WRA. As part of this initiative, a

master plan concept is being developed for Henry Hudson Park. The draft LWRP will be published for public comment by October 2007. Preparation of the LWRP has been supported by a grant from the NYSDOS. In addition to representatives from involved state, regional and local agencies, the following citizens are members of the WAC:

Charlotte Buchanan, Ken Daves, David DeCancio, Tom Donovan, Lisa Evans, Ted Jennings, Paul Murray, Theresa Pillittere, Howie Vagele, Sr.

D) Vista Technology Campus/New Scotland Road Hamlet Master Plan:

The Comp Plan established as a matter of Town policy the importance of expanding and diversifying the Town’s tax base. There was strong consensus among community stakeholders and leaders that leveraging the public investment in the Slingerlands By-Pass Extension was a priority and the development of the **Vista Technology Campus** emerged as a Tier I recommendation. The Town Board made its State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) findings in June 2007 and approved the master plan for the project in July 2007. The project

entails the development of 1.4 million square feet of office, technology, research and development, and small-scale retail services on a 400-acre parcel that will have direct access from the Slingerlands By-Pass Extension. The Vista will be submitting the site plan application for the project’s first phase in autumn 2007 and plans to break ground in early 2008.

In conjunction with the Vista environmental review, the Town initiated the **New Scotland Road Hamlet Master Plan** process in 2006. Utilizing the intensive, interactive workshop methodology known as a planning “charrette”, the Town organized two major public events for New Scotland Road stakeholders in early autumn 2006. Input and ideas were gathered from the public and area landowners and utilized as a basis for a design workshop held over a two-day period. More than 100 residents and land owners participated in the program and an illustrated master plan concept for the hamlet area was developed by the end of 2006. Key features of the master plan concept include mixed-use development (apartments over storefronts), public gathering places, and a pedestrian friendly design and scale.

E) Citizen's Advisory Committee on Conservation (CACC):

The establishment of the CACC was a Tier I recommendation that was implemented in January 2006. The CACC is an advisory body that provides advice and recommendations to the Town Board. It does not have independent regulatory powers, but plays a critical role in the Town's discussion of open space protection and environmental concerns.

The CACC has completed three tasks to date. The initial task was to assist in planning for an integrated pedestrian network in the Slingerlands area. CACC assisted the Department of Economic Development and Planning (DEDP) and its consultant Edwards & Kelcey in developing the plan. The report, entitled *Slingerlands Pedestrian Network, a Pedestrian Mobility Plan for the Slingerlands Hamlet* was completed in December 2006. The plan was designed so that it could be incorporated into an application for Federal grant funding for pedestrian improvements.

The second task undertaken by the CACC was the preparation of a report identifying programs and methods to support open space protection projects. The CACC presented its report *Open Space Protection Programs-Funding and Tools* to the Town Board on October 25, 2006. The report is a comprehensive "toolbox" of funding opportunities, methods and techniques for protection and acquisition of open space and also lists several next steps.

In spring 2007, the Town Board assigned a third task to the CACC, the preparation of a map identifying existing recreation and conservation lands in the Town. The CACC completed Task 3 in August 2007.

The following citizens are currently members of the CACC:

Libby Liebschutz, Chairman, Mike DiPaolo, Jeff Freedman, Nancy Heinzen, John Mead, Valerie Newell, Ted Putney, Paul Sieloff, David Erik VanLuven, Mike Waldenmaier, Caleb Wistar

Section III - Development Activity and Trends

In the years leading up to the Town Board's decision to prepare a comprehensive plan in 2004, there was growing sentiment in the community that haphazard growth and the lack of a long term plan for managing growth would compromise the unique quality of life that Town residents had become accustomed to. The Comp Plan identifies the need to diversify the tax base by encouraging quality commercial development in appropriately planned areas of Town. The Comp Plan also recognizes the changing demographics of the Town and encourages a more diversified approach to meeting the community's housing needs by encouraging a variety of housing types including, senior housing, cluster style design and mixed-use housing in hamlet zones. As part of its responsibilities, CPOC reviewed development trends in the Town to see if there are any indications of movement towards the diversification identified in the Comp Plan.

A) Status of Projects Affected by the Residential Building Moratorium:

The establishment of the residential building moratorium in April 2004 affected nineteen prospective residential

development projects. The following are some highlights of the status of the affected projects:

- One project that entailed the development of more than 400 housing units has been reconfigured into an application for a zone change to Mixed Economic Development District (MEDD) and is now proposed as more than 50% non-residential uses;
- Applications for projects entailing more than 900 housing units have been withdrawn;
- Five applications that were originally conceived as single family subdivisions are in various stages of conversion to townhomes, condominiums and courtyard style homes;
- Four applications for single family homes are proceeding, accounting for approximately 150 lots;
- One project is proceeding with the development of 202 senior citizen rental units.

There is a strong indication that these projects as a whole are transforming in a manner that is consistent with the recommendations of the Comp Plan. There is a substantial reduction in the amount of single-family development proposed, and an increase in the variety of housing types as well as an overall reduction in the amount of development proposed.

B) Planning Board Activity:

A review of Planning Board activity since the enactment of the moratorium in 2004 points to some potential trends that support the growth management recommendations of the Comp Plan.

- **Approved Subdivisions:** Since April 2004, the Planning Board has approved nine subdivisions that only account for 34 residential building lots which is less than 12 lots per year.
- **Approved Site Plans:** Since April 2004, the Planning Board has approved 22 site plan applications for what are

Major Planning Initiative Citizens Advisory Committee on Conservation



Development Activity and Trends

principally commercial projects. This accounts for approximately 165,000 square feet of new commercial development.

According to the DEDP, the development community is showing increasingly strong interest in alternative housing types such as townhomes, condominiums and apartments.

C) Building Permit Activity:

CPOC's review of building permit activity demonstrated fairly consistent commercial development activity and a dramatic downward trend in one and two-family housing activity.

- **Commercial Building Permits:** Since August 2002, there has been a slight upward trend in the number of commercial building permits issued on a monthly basis ranging from approximately 4.38 permits per month in the pre-moratorium period to 4.91 permits per month in the post-moratorium period.

- **Residential Building Permits:** Since 2000, there has been a dramatic decrease in residential building permit activity. In 2000, the Town issued an average of 15.17 one and two-family building permits per month. This decreased by 12% to 13.33 permits per month in 2001. In the pre-moratorium period of 2002 until March 2004, permits decreased by 5% to 12.67 per month and then during the moratorium, decreased by another 63.8% to 4.58 permits per month. Since the lifting of the moratorium, permits have increased by 33.8% to 6.13 permits per month, still less than half of the average activity in the early 2000's.

D) Conclusion:

There are clearly positive trends regarding Town growth based on the development activity quantified above. These trends are consistent with the growth policies established in the Comp Plan. However, this data reflects development activity over a relatively short period of time (5-7 years) and is clearly being influenced to some degree by external factors such as a general downturn in the housing market. There is an ongoing need for the continued diligence of the Town in both managing and monitoring growth and development activity to ensure long-term consistency with the Comp Plan.

Town of Bethlehem



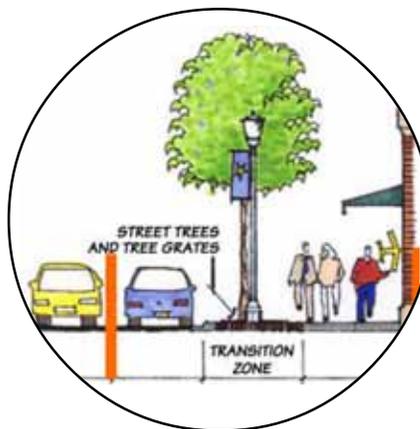
New Scotland Road Hamlet Master Plan

Key features of the master plan concept include mixed-use development (apartments over storefronts), public gathering places, and a pedestrian friendly design and scale.



Vista Technology Campus

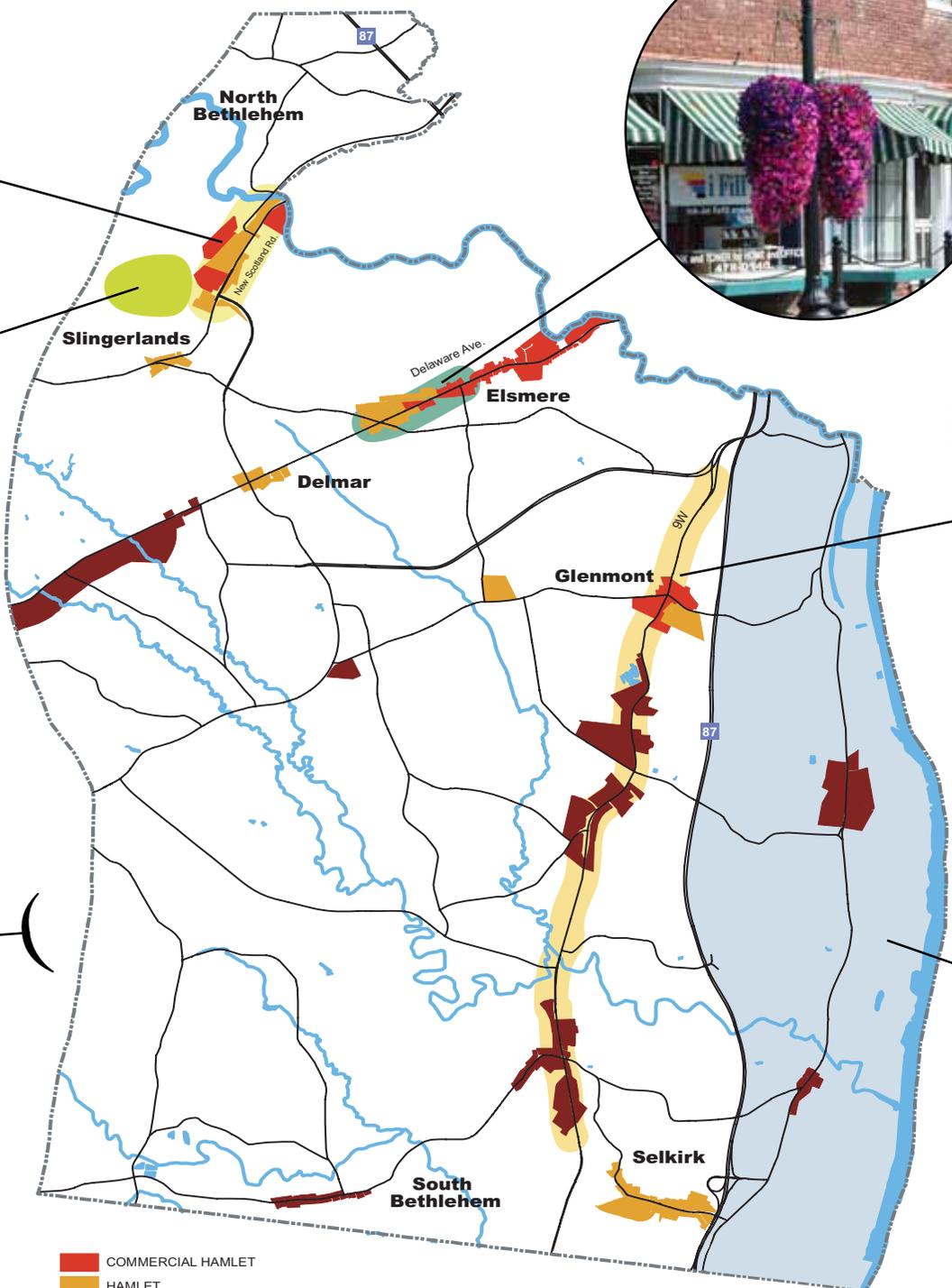
The project entails the development of 1.4 million square feet of office, technology, research and development, and small-scale retail services on a 400-acre parcel that will have direct access from the Slingerlands By-Pass Extension.



Citizen's Advisory Committee on Conservation (CACC)

The CACC is an advisory committee that provides town-wide advice and recommendations to the Town Board related to open space and environmental protection matters.

Major Planning Initiatives Map



- COMMERCIAL HAMLET
- HAMLET
- RURAL HAMLET
- VISTA TECH CAMPUS
- NEW SCOTLAND ROAD
- DELAWARE AVE.
- ROUTE 9W
- LWRP



Delaware Ave. Linkage Study

CPOC recommends the start of this study as soon as possible and to expand the study's impact on areas to the east extending to the municipal boundary with Albany.



Route 9W Linkage Study

The purpose of the study is to assess needs and develop preferred alternatives for both transportation improvements and land uses in the 9W corridor.



Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP)

The purpose of the LWRP is to develop recommendations and policy guidance related to future land use in the riverfront corridor.

Section IV - Comprehensive Plan Oversight Committee Findings

The following is CPOC's assessment of the Town's implementation activities to date:

A) Immediate Action Recommendations: The immediate action recommendation of the Comp Plan was the update of the Town's Zoning Law and Subdivision Regulations to reflect the recommendations of the Comp Plan. A substantial re-drafting of both the Zoning Law and the Subdivision Regulations occurred simultaneously with the adoption of the Comp Plan in August 2005. A second update was accomplished during the first eight months of 2006 and adopted by the Town Board in August 2006. CPOC concluded this immediate action recommendation has been substantially accomplished.

B) Priority Actions/Tier I Recommendations: There were nine Tier I recommendations in the Comp Plan. Overall, CPOC finds that substantial progress has been made in implementing the Tier I recommendations. At the forefront of this has been the approval of the Vista Technology

Campus master plan, the establishment of the CACC and its completion of three major tasks to date, the nearing completion of the 9W Linkage Study and the LWRP planning initiatives, and the improvements to the Planning and Building Department information systems.

C) Mid-Term Actions/Tier II Recommendations: There were eleven Tier II recommendations in the Comp Plan. Several Tier II recommendations have advanced including the New Scotland Road Hamlet Master Plan, which is completed, and a successful application for funding the Delaware Ave. Linkage Study, which will commence shortly. The CACC's work in preparing the report *Open Space Protection Programs — Funding and Tools*, and in assisting DEDP in preparing the report *Slingerlands Pedestrian Network—a Pedestrian Mobility Plan for the Slingerlands Hamlet*, are both critical steps related to implementation of Tier II recommendations. Excellent progress has been made in advancing the Tier II recommendations of the Comp Plan.

D) Ongoing Actions/Tier III Recommendations: In framing the Tier III recommendations, the Comp Plan identified a series of ongoing operational actions that could be taken by the Town government in furthering the goals, objectives and recommendations of the Plan. Among the items advanced to date are the following:

- Maintaining and enhancing pedestrian connections;
- Implementation of Phase II Stormwater Management Regulations;
- Coordination with fire and emergency services;
- Providing educational services related to septic system maintenance; and,
- Coordination with the Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce to promote local business and employment.

Overall, CPOC finds that very good progress has been made in implementing the Tier III recommendations of the Comp Plan.

Major Planning Initiative

New Scotland Road Hamlet Master Plan





Major Planning Initiative
Local Waterfront Revitalization Program

Section V - CPOC Recommendations

A) Zoning Law and Subdivision Regulations

1. Continue annual technical reviews commencing in autumn 2007.
2. Re-evaluate the conservation subdivision and incentive zoning regulations.
3. Consider amendments to the MEDD regulations based on the Town's initial experience with the Vista Tech Campus application.
4. Consider extension of design standards to additional districts, especially the hamlet district that will be the subject of the Delaware Ave. linkage study later this year.
5. Request formal input from the Town's Planning Board (PB) and Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) regarding their experience with the new land use controls.
6. Consider rezoning lands that are in proximity of the Selkirk By-Pass once the Town establishes the preferred route.
7. Review ZBA and PB procedures and approval documents for consistency with the Comp Plan.
8. Revise and adopt the "General Conditions Applying to Subdivisions" to ensure consistency with the Comp Plan.
9. Continue to refine design guidelines and utilize at an early stage in project review.

B) Route 9W Linkage Study

1. Complete the study and take official action to adopt and proceed with implementation of recommendations including the selection of the preferred alignment of the Selkirk By-Pass, access



management guidelines, intersection improvements, and pedestrian/bike improvements.

2. Commence action to understand and mitigate any adverse impacts on residents and property owners resulting from the establishment of the preferred alignment of the Selkirk By-Pass.

3. Formulate strategies to implement and finance study recommendations including the Selkirk By-Pass and intersection improvements at Feura Bush Road and the intersection of 9W and Rt. 32.

C) Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP)

1. Complete the LWRP and take official action to adopt and proceed with implementation of recommendations.
2. Seek financing to implement recommendations of the LWRP including the park master plan for the Town owned land on Simmons Road, and shoreline improvements at Henry Hudson Park.

D) Planning and Building Department Information Systems

1. The Town has invested in a new automated system of managing projects through the land use approval process. The Town is strongly encouraged to fully utilize this module as an integral part of its commitment to improving the development review process as recommended in the Comp Plan.

Section V - CPOC Recommendations

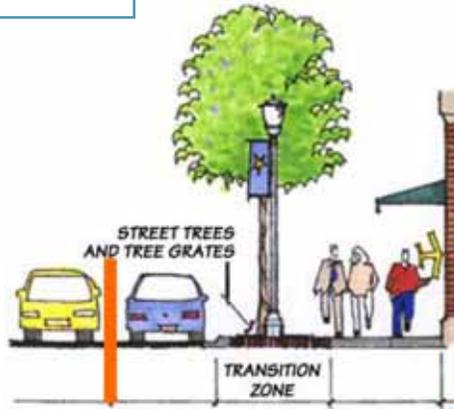
E) Vista Technology Campus and New Scotland Road Hamlet

1. The Town should continue to assist in the implementation of the **Vista Tech Campus Master Plan** project by:

- Assisting the developer in the process of extending, financing and building public improvements for the project.
- Working with the developer and regional economic development and real estate interests to market the property.

2. The Town should continue to advance the **New Scotland Road Hamlet Master Plan Concept** by:

- Encouraging continued cooperation of the principal landowners in the hamlet in implementing the plan.
- Encouraging consolidation of the site to increase potential for hamlet-wide planning and coordination.
- Encouraging the owners of 1251 New Scotland Road (former Blue Cross Blue Shield Building) to advance redevelopment of the property.
- Considering the development of an incentive program in conjunction with



Major Planning Initiative

Slingerlands Pedestrian Mobility Plan

the Bethlehem IDA to assist in advancing the master plan concepts.

F) Creation of Official Map

1. The Town should consider establishing an Official Map, as recommended in the Comp Plan, as a means of preserving the key transportation corridors for the installation of public improvements.
2. In considering the adoption of an official map, the Town should also consider both short and long term potential impacts on property owners and consider ways to mitigate any negative impacts.

G) Citizen's Advisory Committee on Conservation (CACC)

1. CPOC recommends that the Town Board re-consider Resolution No. 28 of 2005, which defined the limits of authority vested in CACC by the Town Board. The Town Board can clarify and reaffirm the limits or revise them as deemed appropriate.
2. CPOC recommends that the CACC be given more flexibility to independently carry out the tasks assigned to it by the Town Board.

H) Citizen's Guide to Land Use and Development Regulations

1. The Town should continue to educate the community on its land use controls through public meetings and workshops, use of the Town's web site and publications, and through meetings with community organizations, citizens, and the development community.
2. As part of the recommended 2007 technical review, the Town should revisit the notion of a "Citizen's Guide" and recommend methods, perhaps including a glossary of key terms and other publications, to familiarize the public with Town land use controls in a non-technical manner.



Major Planning Initiative

Local Waterfront Revitalization Program

I) Comprehensive Plan Oversight Committee

1. The CPOC believes that its formation and function are important to the continued implementation of the Comp Plan. It also recommends that it be charged with meeting on a semi-annual basis to monitor progress in implementing the Comp Plan.

2. The CPOC should also be charged with developing an annual progress report and by 2009, it should begin considering the need for a formal Comprehensive Plan update.

J) Identification of Areas for Infill Development and Re-development Activities

1. The Town should continue to identify and encourage new investment where infrastructure capacity and development, including buildings, already exist. With the impending completion of Slingerlands By-Pass Extension project and the development of the Vista Tech Campus, the former Blue Cross – Blue Shield building at the intersection of New Scotland and Maher Roads in Slingerlands is a leading candidate for adaptive re-use.

K) Delaware Ave. Linkage Study

1. With several major planning initiatives nearing completion, CPOC strongly encourages the Town Board to commence the Delaware Ave. Linkage Study as soon as possible.

2. CPOC also recommends that the Town consider further steps to expand the study's impact on areas to the east extending to the municipal boundary with Albany.

L) Hamlet Master Planning

1. The use of an intensive planning charrette (workshop) to develop the New Scotland Road Hamlet Master Plan Concept proved to be a very affordable and effective method of consensus building and idea generation.



CPOC Recommendation
Development of Town-wide Recreation Master Plan

CPOC recommends that the Town identify an additional hamlet district for a similar master planning effort during 2008.

M) Creation of a Farm and Open Space Protection Program

1. CPOC recommends that the Town Board take steps to initiate the open space planning process. A Town of Bethlehem open space plan should be uniquely suited to the desires, needs and values of the Bethlehem community. A key element of the plan should be a consensus definition of what the term "open space" means to Town of Bethlehem residents. The process should also carefully consider the Comp Plan's guidance as it relates to the involvement of willing land-owners.

2. As part of the open space planning process, the Town should inventory and map all parkland set asides associated with approved development projects in Town. The Town should also formalize policy with regard to trail and open space corridor objectives, which can provide a guide to the Planning Board in reviewing new development projects.

N) Maintain and Enhance Pedestrian Connections

1. Continue to make pedestrian and bicycle improvements in strategically located areas including, among others, Maple Ave. (Selkirk), Elsmere Ave., Feura Bush Road, lower Kenwood Ave., Rt. 9W, Wemple Road, and Delaware Ave. (from Fisher Boulevard to the Bethlehem YMCA).

2. Consider development of a Town-wide pedestrian/bicycle/bridle path master plan to guide decisions and prioritization of improvement projects. As an initial step, the Town should develop an inventory of existing sidewalks, multi-purpose paths and other similar facilities and digitize any record drawings for future mapping and planning needs.

O) Coordinate with Fire and Emergency Service Providers

1. CPOC strongly encourages continued investigation and implementation of productivity measures related to both Town and related municipal services including fire and emergency services. It remains very important that the Town's fire and emergency service providers consider efficient and effective ways to provide future services tied to the Town's planned patterns of growth.

P) Development of Town-wide Recreation Master Plan

1. Consider development of a town-wide recreation master plan. This Tier III recommendation of the Comp Plan would be timely given the Town's interest in advancing open space and pedestrian facility planning.



CPOC Recommendation
Creation of a Farm and Open Space Protection Program

Bethlehem



Bethlehem Town Board: Daniel Plummer, Sam Messina, Supervisor John Cunningham, Joann Dawson, Kyle Kotary

Vision Statement

In the Year 2020, the Town of Bethlehem is a community of attractive residential neighborhoods, vibrant hamlets, successful mixed-use commercial centers, modern industrial facilities, and productive rural lands. These are well connected by regional highways and local streets, adequately serviced by public transportation, and linked by a network of sidewalks and trails. Situated at the heart of the Capital District, Bethlehem offers convenient access to all that the region has to offer. It is recognized for the excellence of its schools, the quality of its public safety and community services, the abundance of its recreational opportunities, the productivity of its local businesses, ten miles of Hudson River waterfront, and the beauty and health of its natural environment. This exceptional quality of life contributes to the economic growth and prosperity of the town and the region, assuring that the community can continue to meet the increasingly diverse needs and expectations of its residents in a fiscally sustainable manner.

Comprehensive Plan Oversight Committee (CPOC)

c/o Town of Bethlehem Dept. of Economic Development and Planning

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