

Town of Niles Comprehensive Plan Committee
Visioning Session III
Niles Town Hall
July 21, 2007 (9:00 – 11:00 AM)

Attendance: Approximately forty (40+) Town of Niles residents and guests were present.

A welcome to the group including a short history of the progress of the comprehensive plan process was given by Co-Chairperson, Diana Plue. Following her remarks, each member of the Comprehensive Plan Committee introduced him/herself.

Presentation: Overview of the Plan Process and Review of Previous Public Sessions

Kristy LaManche (CNYRPB) provided an overview of the comprehensive plan process stressing the fact that since it is a public driven process, input from the community is important. She stated that the plan will address a variety of issues that potentially will affect the whole Town of Niles but this meeting was focusing specifically on Skaneateles and Owasco Lakes and watershed issues. Ms. LaManche noted that the planning initiative funding was secured by Congressman James Walsh. She also briefly reviewed the proceedings of the two previous visioning sessions. Three points were raised by the audience during this presentation: (1) the need to address the seaweed problem in the lakes (2) funding for this project ultimately comes from “our” taxes (3) there is an urgent need to discuss lake issues now.

Special Topic: Lake and Watershed Issues in the Town of Niles

Dr. Joseph Wasileski, President of the Owasco Lake Association (OWL) presented a short history of the Association which was formed 15 years ago to address water quality that would be affected by the construction of a new prison in Moravia. Currently there are 400 members and one of the major issues today that OWL is addressing involves a fish farm which is dumping phosphates in the Owasco Lake Inlet and the need for improved sewage treatment in Groton to control this problem. Dr. Wasileski stated that Owasco Lake is considered the dirtiest of the Finger Lakes with the following major problems: increase in sediment, algae, and weed growth. The projects that OWL is involved with include water quality monitoring, partnerships to control soil erosion, boater safety and public education. He noted that a water quality inspector will be in place next week. He also stated that 70% of the Town of Niles is in the Owasco Lake watershed and land use planning needs to be a major part of the comprehensive plan. Dr. Wasileski ended by showing some pictures of good and bad development projects on the lake with respect to soil erosion which, in turn, affects the water quality. More information can be found on the website: <http://www.owla.org/>

Ms. LaManche provided a short overview of the Tri-County lake Pure Water Association which was formed in 1988 to address water quality issues in Skaneateles Lake. 30% of the town is in the Skaneateles Lake watershed and two of the projects of this group involve water quality monitoring and aquatic invasive species. This Association has standing committees to address the following: (1) education and public awareness about development that involves good stewardship (2) lake ecology – control the spread of Eurasian water milfoil and other invasive species (<http://www.skannilfoil.com/>) (3) watershed – helping people understand their role (4) government relations – assist with communication between the three counties and municipalities involved with the lake and (5) hazardous waste truck traffic.

Group Discussion of Issues

- The percent of property that needs to be kept “green” and size of setbacks when developing new sites. These regulations should be in the comprehensive plan. Any development in the Skaneateles watershed must be approved by the city of Syracuse.
- Taxes – have doubled in the past two years.
- Weed control in Owasco Lake is a major issue. A representative from the Sempronius Comprehensive Plan Committee gave an example of “buffer zones” (aquatic plants to decrease effluent) in mobile home sites in PA.
- Erosion – along creek/stream banks is a problem. The Comprehensive Plan can address this issue to minimize the erosion. Question: Is there a specific plan of what types of plants should be planted? Ans.: Check with Cornell Cooperative Extension or the Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) Office.
- Question: How far away from stream bank can you disturb the land (plow or build)? Concern was expressed that at one site, the land had been plowed up to and over the stream itself. Ans.: Residential issues can be addressed through setbacks.
- Question: Is there a recommended amount of land for a buffer zone? Ans.: There are many variables such as types of soil, land slope.
- Roadside ditch cleaning allows for an increase in erosion. Note: Cayuga County is trying to coordinate this cleaning with SWCD to hydro-seed ditch right after the process. At this time, a Cornell graduate student is compiling GIS coordinates on all roads to facilitate this.
- Being aware of all resources is important. Question: What else is available through Cornell to assist? Ans.: Soil testing. SWCD also offers a 0-phosphorus fertilizer.
- There are common issues between all towns involved in the watershed. Questions: Are there any efforts to coordinate efforts between the towns? Ans.: Yes, the “Water Quality Management Agency” meets the first Thursday of every month at the Cayuga County Office Building. Some of the agencies involved include: Cayuga County Planning Board, CNYRPB, Lake Associations, Cornell Cooperative Extension, SWCD.
- Should have a Town of Niles museum – there is a creamery next to the New Hope fire house, behind the antique store that could house the museum. Important not to tear it down – donations could come from the townspeople – farm equipment, household goods. (Note: this suggestion was offered after the meeting had ended.)

Ms. LaManche posed the following question about lake access to the participants: Would you like more public access to the lakes?

- Yes, let the public use it.
- If more people use the lake, then it will help them see the problems and become more involved in finding solutions.
- There are two places on Owasco Lake that the Town (Owasco?) will have the first option to buy, if they are put up for sale.
- Need to be concerned about “lake rights” – size of property (2nd wave of development).
- Taxes may make property become unaffordable.
- Rental properties on lake fronts may be an issue (i.e. Town of Fleming problems)

NOTE: The public is invited to a meeting on August 23, 2007 at 7:00PM at the Town Hall. The new Assessor for the Town of Niles will present information about agricultural assessments and a Finger Lakes Trust representative will also speak.

The visioning session was formally adjourned at 11:00 AM.

The next public visioning session will be held on Saturday, August 18, 2007 from 9:00 – 11:00 AM at the West Niles Fire House.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Abend
Secretary

The following notes were recorded by Ms. Kozlosky during the general discussion and summarized by Ms. LaManche.

Town of Niles Comprehensive Plan
Public Meeting #3

Niles Town Hall
July 21, 2007

Lake and Watershed Issues
General Discussion

- Taxes – raising taxes prohibitive
- Weed control is a big problem on both lakes (milfoil, invasive species, etc)
- Land use regulations to control changes with lakefront properties - lake rights, % of lot developed, buffer strips
- Lake and stream erosion
 - Education on specific species to plant for control, mowing practices to improve runoff filtration
 - Setbacks from streams (not mowing lawn to edge of property)
 - Owasco streams influence lake water quality greatly
 - Regulations for slope, % developed – could be included in site plan review regulations
- Roadside ditch cleaning causes erosion and road runoff
 - Current studies underway to determine best time, better way to manage ditches, etc.
 - Hydroseeding performed locally by SWCD after ditch cleaning
- Be aware of current resources and availability of assistance
 - Fertilizer and lawn chemical issues
 - What to do with lawn clippings
 - Where to get soil tested

- What to do with plants removed from the shore of lakefront property
- Coordinate neighboring towns land use regulations/comprehensive plans to benefit watershed and lake-wide issues (include east side of Skaneateles Lake)
 - Town of Spafford active in Tri County Skaneateles Lake Pure Water Association initiatives
 - Town of Skaneateles sub-committees to address water quality monitoring and weed problems
 - City of Auburn and Owasco heavily involved in Owasco Lake issues (due to water purveyor responsibilities)
 - Tie in work of other Finger Lakes to avoid “reinventing the wheel” – learn from their experiences and successful practices
- Public access to lakes
 - Potential for town to acquire Boy Scout camp if property is ever up for sale
 - Complete access to public on both lakes
 - Identify potential land for the town to buy for public land/lake access/parks
 - Litter issues to contend with when you have public land
- Lakefront property development moving on to second tier – property not on the lake, but with views (and potentially lake rights)
- Rental and seasonal home issues
 - Multiple cottages being purchased and one large house being built in its place
 - Out of town people buying property and doing what they want
 - Subdivisions and development with lake rights on narrow strips of land
- Town museum
 - Creamery next to firehouse
 - Do not tear down
 - Local donations: farm equipment/household