

## FOCUS GROUP MEETING NOTES

### Washington Comp Plan Update

#### Meeting Notes

#### Focus Group Meeting 1 - Citizens Group

Dec 6, 2021 5:30pm

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#### ATTENDEES:

- Nan Stolzenburg (Host)
- Michael Allen (Co-Host)
- Betsy Shequine
- Howard Schuman
- Nancy Hathaway
- Adelaide Camillo
- Lea Cornell
- Skip Ciferri
- Victoria Salikoff
- Jennifer Donnelly
- Shannon LaDeau
- Charles Pierce

Committee Members Present: Tim Mayhew, Margaret Schneible, Fernanda Kellog, Claudia Heunis

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#### Preliminary Questions:

- General question about Comprehensive Plan process. How does it work, when should it be updated?
  - Last comp plan adopted 2015. Typically updated every 10 years or so. Next update may be due in a few years. This effort is considering if a minor/interim update is needed.

#### Concerns/Issues with Hospitality Uses in Area

- Petition issued by Migdale caused a furor, which was a blessing because it forced issue to be addressed. We have a “so-so” hospitality situation now. We do need more hotel rooms here locally, could use a couple of restaurants. There are certain times when we need a lot of hospitality, and time when it is not as needed. Schools need places for parents to stay when visiting students. Current inventory is limited and scattered.
- Great opportunity for a re-make of the old Cottonwood Inn. Potential for 15-20 room facility. It may be grandfathered by old zoning.
- Overall concern is big = never had before. Town does not want new chain business. Do not think that a large hotel or resort would bring any benefit to local business or merchants because no need to leave property to get things - is self-contained.
- Most people who live here appreciate the way the town is right now - not looking for change. Last comp plan looked at commercial uses in the greater town and decided that it was not in keeping with rural vision. Preferred to keep any new business limited to village and established commercial hamlet (Mabbettsville). Once you put infrastructure in, it doesn't come out. If a large business fails, it just sits

there. Not a lot of activity here to support a lot of hospitality year-round, so there is risk of failure if overdone. Suggest start out very small and carefully.

- Current comp plan may cover this issue sufficiently. We may be getting ahead of ourselves. If the resort proposal hadn't come along, this issue wouldn't be on the minds of people at all.
- Do not want to go down the road of what happened in Pleasant Valley. They used to be like us, now they are very different. Most people would like town to remain pretty much the way it is now.
- We need a little bit of hospitality, but do not want to go overboard. Need to preserve rural character of the town. Cottonwood remake is good idea. Used to be zoned commercial many years ago. Other areas may be Daytop Village, 32 acres there, close to village. Bennett Park - maybe an area could be carved out in the park, great location.
- Potential problem could be if things got too big. Problem is with zoning - nothing is allowed by right, only by special permit/use.
- Large influx of AirBnB in the area, as many as 40 places, but we don't know where they are. This is something that the town needs to look at, there are no regulations on the books right now. This should be something that is looked at as part of this effort. It may be that with 40 AirBnB, we don't need any additional capacity.
- Love the idea of the other locations available that have been mentioned. Market capacity is the question - we are not a destination town, we don't have nearby ski mountain or other attraction to support industry, people come in for events. Keeping it small makes sense, don't want something large which fails.
- Millbrook is very seasonal. Not a year-round need, more dependent on events such as winery or Orvis. The right scale is important. People are very concerned about AirBnB issue, rented night to night, parties, large RV's parked outside which impact local quality of life. AirBnB's did not exist when last plan was written. We do need hospitality here - popularity of AirBnB proves this. There are no standards for an AirBnB, which compete with local established hotel/motel businesses.
- Minor hospitality issue here - there is a need, but more importantly is the broader issue of the environment. Bennett Park, Cottonwood are good ideas, near the village and within the existing character. Larger hotels are not right. Aquifer needs to be protected - Migdale was proposed right on top of aquifer. There is more work to be done on comp plan recommendations, this effort may be getting ahead of ourselves on this particular detail. There are logical places to put hospitality uses, and there is a small need for them.
- There is a need but need to keep it small. Should be within the commercial area around Millbrook. There should be balance of what can be supported. Cottonwood is small enough scale that it could be successful. Hospitality could be improved in the area. There may be more local events if there were more local places to stay. Slow and steady is the way to go.
- Keep it small. Keep rural character and keep the village character. Village is a magical place, can walk everywhere. Need some sort of hotel/motel here. Love idea of Daytop, Cottonwood, even Little Aerialia(?). Concerned about proliferation of AirBnB.
- In a job where we need to bring people in to stay locally, conferences, but limited locations to put people up. Have had to rely on AirBnB sometimes. Have used Cottonwood. There is a need but would not support a "Resort" because it does not translate into local "trickle-down" benefits - too insular. Even if we had a 100-room hotel here, would not have the restaurants to feed those people. There is a

maximum size which would benefit local economy. Not enough local food to support, would need to grow slowly.

- Chains and franchises not in character with the community.
- I support the go-slow process. Agree that there is a need for some control of the AirBnB issue. Status of Bennett Park is important issue, in process of being torn down, going to be completed by April. Will need to talk to community about how park will be used - some incidental suggestions already, want to make it splendid and appealing space. Location next to village

### **What is the right scale/Size/Character/Intensity for the Area?**

- Can this committee get some input from a market capacity / market analysis for what the local community is able to support? Something that looks like a small boutique hotel would fit in. Could there be a property set aside within Bennet Park for a hotel, like Halcyon?
- Comp Plan is a "To-Do List" lots of things which need to be done. 8 years long process, a lot that did not get done. Need a long-term committee to push through some of these efforts to see them through. Half the people here do not understand the difference between the town and the village - it is very important to educate the public about this relationship and the real facts about how the two entities operate. Need a tutorial to distinguish the difference.
- Cottonwood talked about 20 rooms. Maybe 50? Site like Daytop Village, 32 acres could support maybe 30 or so rooms, would not want to see much more than that. Bennett Park, which had Halcyon Inn back in the days, and Millbrook Inn, was part of the 32 acres in the park.
- Bennett Park is fully within the village.
- Want to support the village as the commercial center of the town, but keep it separate. What we are talking about would all need to be approved by the village. Need to start out small. These changes will be permanent. Things start small, but they grow. Re-purposing of Cottonwood Inn as going back to hospitality uses would be a good small start. Town is in a good place - not a lot of need to make big changes, we already are in good shape.
- Bennett Park already has village infrastructure, Daytop Village already has infrastructure.
- Agree we need expert economic input to find what the community needs and can support in terms of market. I think we need something small and elegant. If people were shown a series of different scale hotel operations, they would probably find a lot of examples of what they would not like to see here locally.
- Don't use the term "resort" - that is a non-starter. You lose people right there. People are frightened by the word.
- Important consideration is that whatever comes needs to be viable to survive. If we have 40 AirBnB, does that mean we have the need for 20 hotel rooms? Needs to be attractive to the private market. Migdale proposal grew too big because he needed to keep adding size to attract investors, but it grew too big for what people were comfortable with. Need experts to tell us what is sustainable.
- AirBnB needs to be looked into, how to regulate. A lot of empty houses, now getting rented out. A new 20 room facility might be right size for community, 30 may be too big. Scale should be small. Old Millbrook Hotel in Bennett Park idea - that what historically they have been, should build on that

concept. When you look at development on the outskirts/rural areas of town, that's when you run into environmental issues/concerns. A lot of wetlands and sensitive resources. This stuff should stay in the vicinity of the village.

- Gold standard is Troutback. Love idea of adaptive reuse, and Daytop, Cottonwood. Can't undo what we have already done, so let's keep it small.
- Reusing sites that already developed is the way to go. Start small is good. 20 units seems like a good maximum. Being in the village is good because you can walk to stuff, support local businesses. But also, there may be a place for something which wants to be much more rural. It makes sense to have both options.
- What concerns me is there is a need for some type of committee to be formed which talks to the 40 or so people who run the local AirBnB's. This needs to be looked at.
- A nice size might be maybe around 30 rooms, any larger than that and it starts to become too big. Love the size of Troutback, but recently heard they are expanding, and sorry to hear this because it will lose something if it becomes larger. These things if they are successful tend to grow, and we need to recognize that. 30 rooms becomes 80 rooms someday. It should be contained or limited, where it is no longer a quaint, boutique hotel. Like idea of something in village where it would benefit local stores, walkability. Large resort outside of town no one is going to walk somewhere.

**Are there any situations for adaptive reuse in a more rural setting would have potential or appropriate, outside the village?**

- Depends on if there is infrastructure to support it, fire department, etc.
- Migdale property/estate is beautiful. Could have been a beautiful small inn, but it turned into something too large, and was on the local aquifer. Adaptive reuse of structures like that would be good but need to consider the environment. (Route?) 44 is bucolic, may be a location for this. Love Troutback, private estates like that becoming small inn are nice, but would need to be clearly defined and regulated, with people willing to do what is right for the community.
- Migdale was originally supposed to be limited to small hotel in main house, but investors pressured it to become much larger. That wasn't the right person/project for the area. May be possible for this property to still be viable as a small operation.
- Support the idea of adaptive reuse, rather than building something new. And how are we going to limit what goes into a facility? The types of activities and intensity. May grow to include things later that we might not like to see. Current uses are very broad.
- No regulations for AirBnB's right now - needs to be addressed in some way. Will probably only become a larger problem if not addressed.
- Millbrook Country House - near the fountains - this has a self-imposed limit of only 30 guests for events. This is a lovely scale for a facility but is in the wrong place - too far out. Too far southeast. Concerned about Migdale as a building. Troutback is expanding, could grow to a size which is not good, getting too big. Need to design the laws which help to contain things within reasonable limits.
- Hard to contain growth or expansion of an operation "once camel gets nose into the tent". Large operations can fail and leave behind empty shell.

**Are there survey questions which people like to see later in this process?**

- How do we know when enough is enough? If Cottonwood is built, how will we know when we have met the local need and don't need any more? It is important that planning board keeps an eye on things.
- Hospitality tax. AirBnB's pay into the county, but county will not provide info on who they are. Can we FOIL info on this?

**Are there people in the community who hold different views than this group?**

- There are people in the village who support projects like Migdale because they feel they will get supporting business from it. I don't personally think they are right. This group does not represent a full cross section of opinions in the community.
- We should invite people to this discussion which have these Inns, Hotels and get their insight into what can be supported locally. Are they surviving enough? We don't know what the market can sustain.
- Focus Group tomorrow night is with business owners, which might cover that question about what the market can sustain.

**Other Questions or Discussion**

- Questions that explore how we know when enough is enough.
- What are the needs of the community?
- We need Planning Board and Town Board that are watching and taking control of reigns (Not a question but a comment made at this point)
- Look into how the hospitality tax Dutchess County gets, but that we get no benefit from (Not a question but a comment made at this point)
- How people feel about Air BnBs and whether they should be regulated somehow.
- How can we communicate the many events that are taking places and going on? There are lots of things to do, but o information that is collated and easily organized.
- Be proactive in asking about what businesses are needed and desired and seek them out instead of waiting for businesses to come on their own (again a comment, not a survey question).

## Meeting Notes

### Focus Group Meeting 2 - Business Group

Dec 7, 2021 5:30pm

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ATTENDEES:

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|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| ■ Michael Allen (Host)    | ■ Zack Hampton      | ■ Oakleigh Thorne |
| ■ Ellen Pemrick (Co-Host) | ■ George Whalen III | ■ John Dyson      |
| ■ Teddy Briggs            | ■ Maddie Dugan      | ■ Becky Thornton  |
| ■ Kevin McGrane           | ■ Debra Coddington  |                   |

Committee Members: Tim Mayhew, Margaret Schneible, Fernanda Kellogg, Buffy Arbogast, Claudia Heunis, Tim Bonticou

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#### In what ways do hospitality uses benefit the town?

- There has always been tourism in the area, question is, how do we support it. Main role or benefit of tourism is that it creates a 3rd population in town. You have the full-time residents, part time residents and then the tourism visitors. High frequency short term guests. Need to determine what the town wants.
- Long history of resorts/hotels/estates in the area in the past, going back to the 1890s. Millbrook was a recreational community. Halcyon Hotel, Millbrook Inn. Peaked in the 1970's, then Bennett closed, and it has gone downhill. Lost places like the Altamont, Cottonwood Inn. Town is missing something which is higher-end lodging, would help to drive tax revenue, affluent tourists who will spend money in the village. There are hospitality solutions now which are less high-end, a lot of AirBnBs. Many people who come to events stay at B&Bs. Attendees of horse show events might not be spending money downtown, but the sponsors of those events certainly are. Need to attract them with something high end.
- There are venues which bring people into town, but it is spotty, not steady. There is no ongoing source that brings people here more regularly. We do have hunting clubs, horse events, Orvis. This place has a lot to offer environmentally. AirBnB isn't helpful with supporting local business. There aren't enough of them to support the lodging needs for a small wedding.
- Cottonwood revamp is very exciting. Thorne Building and Bennett are wonderful gateways into town. Thorne Building has been a problem for so long but will bring growth to the area. Need to find ways to increase the capacity of the area without compromising the community but enhancing it. Environmentally sensitive ways, in logical places. Mabbettsville used to be a thriving hamlet.
- 37 year old business, town has been very helpful with supporting it. Need to be thinking of something smaller. Village should reexamine its own zoning, make it more coherent; could be a hospitality area.. We send tourists into town to go to local restaurants. The scale of this is important. Glad you are looking at environmental issues such as aquifers. Rhinebeck has made a mistake with the way they have developed. Carefully sized hospitality would be good, similar to Cottonwood.
- Being centrally located in Dutchess County, with the Village of Millbrook, there is a lot to do around here (farms, sanctuary, winery, zoo, sportsmen's activities), with beautiful scenery. What is lacking is places to stay. Don't know how many AirBnB's there are, or if there are enough. If the goals of

hospitality are to bring in local money to support local business, then we have to ask what we want. Tax revenues come in from this (AirBnB), but may not be directly supporting local businesses.

- People come into town for day trips, and they come to Orvis, etc., but then leave. How do we get them to stay? With the right size place, if we can keep a percentage of them here, it will directly benefit the local businesses.
- I am an AirBnB guest suite owner, owner-occupied. Always booked. Every time an event is in town, get 4-5 calls. Not enough places to stay in the area. Recent wedding guests had to stay down in Poughkeepsie because there weren't enough rooms locally. Joined local business association - members complain that locals do not shop in their stores. However, our AirBnB guests do shop locally, which is what local business owners need. Support the idea of more hospitality in the area.
- Attracting high-end guests would be good, but need to find good places to stay, at AirBnB or a higher end small hotel. Have heard it said that locals do not shop in local stores, there is a reason for that. It needs to work both ways. Locals need to be able to afford to buy things in the shops.
- Tourism in this area is quite strong, Winery, Orvis, Millbrook School, etc. bring many visitors. Millbrook Zoo 40,000 visitors this year. Weak link is overnight accommodations. Daughter getting married next year, but had to reserve rooms far outside of town in order to accommodate everybody. Clearly there is a need.

**What are your concerns, if any, about hospitality in the area? Any negative impacts?**

- Public opinion and community support are the challenges to hospitality. Goal is to find the right balance. Before Migdale proposal, had no idea there was opposition to local accommodations. Do we have the infrastructure and municipal services to support? Will it be sustainable? How much occupancy can we support? Will there be enough business coming into town in the slow times of the year? What are the tradeoffs - as demand and prices rise, will we lose opportunities for affordable housing? No doubt there is a shortage of accommodations. Need to consider these things.
- Number #1 concern is we all value our open land, would not want to spoil this with large development out in the countryside. Scale is an issue. Don't want to be Lenox, MA, surrounded by large hotels. Want to maintain country character, so hospitality uses should be near the village and hamlets.
- Baffled that we can be looking at hospitality issue by itself - there are so many issues in a comprehensive plan, difficult or impossible to separate them as a single issue. Concerned about scope, size and scale of new development. There are many factors to consider, including the environment. Need to look at this as part of the big picture. Don't know how you are going to carve out this single issue.
- Agrees with comments above, tourism and hospitality encourage growth. Town needs to consider how much growth it can accommodate. Increased traffic and noise are considerations. What does the town really want to look like in the future?
- Issue for me in the village is parking. If you go through some streets during the day, can barely get a car through. Don't want this area to become a "destination" only, where only tourists come and shop. Need to still have our own lives where the community also supports locals.
- Only barrier is everybody may agree we need more hospitality, but nobody wants it in their backyard. We need to figure out whose backyard it is going to be in.
- Something small would be great, protect rural character. It's a very difficult balance. Parking is indeed an issue in the village - would underground parking be possible?



- Size and scale is tricky. It has to be big enough to be economically viable/worthwhile for owners to invest in the effort for it to work. AirBnBs don't really fill the need. BlueBarn B&B, which had 5 rooms, reverted back to a private residence; wasn't enough revenue to make it work. Cottonwood has 20 rooms. New place would need to be in on a main road, in or near a commercial district and be able to handle deliveries, not out in the countryside. Location is key, so is the right size and scale.

### **Can the town support more hospitality?**

- Yes, there is a need for more accommodations, but the question is where and at what scale.
- Scale, scope, and location are the big questions. Are we talking market-wise? Understanding the economics. How big must it be to work? If it is too big, you won't get local support for it, so the question is what can the market support.
- I think the town can support more hospitality. It doesn't have to be one single venue but could be a couple of smaller venues. There are many ways to tackle the problem.
- Village has sewer and water. Location is very important, village has infrastructure. If it is located in the wrong place it won't work.
- Agree it doesn't have to be just one venue, but perhaps two smaller ones.
- I think it needs to be more than just 2 or 3, we need to have a number of Bed & Breakfasts, need to add more AirBnBs, need more rooms for people to stay for events, concerts, and weddings. About to open up Thorne building - this will draw more people who will need a place to stay. Need to change the zoning.
- Agree it needs to be smaller scale, better in village not town.
- Agree we need several entities rowing the boat. Not promoting a large venue, but facility needs to be large enough to be economically viable. Don't think that small B&Bs or AirBnBs are enough to meet demand. Needs right size and scale for investors.

### **Are there types, sizes, forms which would be appropriate for the town? Do you have specific examples which would work locally?**

- Not a Quality Inn. Maybe 20-30 rooms, near or in Village, or maybe in Mabbettsville.
- Troutback is a great example, would be appropriate, but difficult to do in the village. Or transform the Cottonwood Inn.
- Need to think outside the box of preconceived ideas, stay open to the idea of smaller, multiple entities which respect the environment. Some of the hamlets have historically had development.
- Needs to be in or near commercial areas – Mabbettsville, village or around the Cottonwood Inn. In the village - where would you find the acreage to locate something? Must attempt to facilitate the process.
- There is no place in the village to locate a small hotel of 20 rooms. Only way to do it is to take existing homes and convert them. People suggest adding rooms to the Cottonwood, but it is on east branch of Wappingers Creek, potential pollution issue (is on septic).
- People need to look at environment constraints. Where are the fragile areas in town that can't be developed?
- One of the barriers is the lack of suitable places in the village to locate it. Great to stay in quaint walkable village. Beekman Arms has a great character which fits well into the village of Rhinebeck.

- What about locating in Bennett Park?
- Bennett Park idea - wish this had been raised a few years ago - that ship has already sailed. Would be very hard to turn back from turning it into a park, would need to return everybody's money. Too far down the road on that.
- Not in favor of something right in the village. Would worry about driving up housing values which would make it hard for families to live in the village. Also worried about parking.
- On the range from motel-to-high end, would want to aim for something more high end. Parents of students at Millbrook School and members of its board could stay there and would spend money in the village.
- Acknowledge at we don't know the suitability of these areas, but potential locations include Washington Hollow, where Cottonwood is, may be opportunity. County Home area @ in the south end of the town, north of Dysons but south of light. Daytop is also a possibility.
- Migdale property may be a possibility, but not with the cottages or 94 rooms. A room inn which can protect the aquifer could work if screened.
- Potential model/example - Wheatley, next to Lenox, maybe 20-25 rooms, old mansion. Can walk to Tanglewood but must drive to downtown. Doesn't have a lot of entertainment to keep you there, so you have to go off campus to do things, which is what we want to support local business.
- [suggested example of Taconic Hotel in Manchester VT, with guest houses providing capacity in village setting]
- Not sure how good an idea that is, as someone who lives in village - potential issue with new people staying at the house next door to you every day, different people. Don't like the idea of strangers always living next door to me.
- I like idea of multiple venues to split up the total capacity of beds/rooms, maybe 20 in one and 30 in another...not 50 in one place. There's no place for a 100-room hotel. Must figure out sustainable number of units. Could be just outside or within the periphery of the village. Needs to be coordination/dialog between places.
- There are a number of Airbnb's in village - never heard of a problem. We have owner-occupied suite airbnb, and live next door to guests. Very different relationship than non-owner occupied.
- Airbnb very dynamic category, things are changing. Red Hook example - required that you have to register, but only has to be owner occupied.
- Only 3 Airbnb in village are owner occupied. 12 total.

#### **What questions do you think should be asked as part of the later community survey?**

- Does the community want higher frequency of visitors coming to the town? What if they are needed to support local retailers?
- Since COVID, a lot more people are around, not just on weekends. Are the people who moved here because of COVID planning to stay, or leave?
- Need to ask the question about what is the vision for the community? Need to have the big picture of the comprehensive plan, this somehow needs to be part of this conversation.
- Ask people to give an example of a nice hospitality place you know of which would be a nice addition to Washington - where have they stayed that they would like to see here locally?

- Planning process is dominated by people with the time and means to participate in discussions like these - a community survey would be good to include a wider audience.
- Used to be kids here - they all left when they grew up because there are no jobs. it is possible that new hospitality uses will help to provide jobs which will help retain younger people from leaving.