

Port Comprehensive Plan Heads Into Hearings

By Ken Baumel

PORT JERVIS — The Common Council recently hired Barton & Logiudice, architectural engineers and land-use planners, to develop the city's Comprehensive Plan, the first in decades, and rewrite part of the Port Jervis City Code.

Last week, the firm, one of the 100 fastest growing planning firms in the nation, held the first public hearing at City Hall to gather input from the council-appointed committee that is working with the consultants on the plan development. Deputy Mayor David Bavoso chairs the committee, which is comprised of a few council members, stakeholders (the city Tourism Board) and members of the public.

Community Development Agency (CDA) Executive Director Valerie Maginsky, the city's chief grant writer, recommended the comprehensive plan and code review to the council back in 2015. Maginsky showed the council that the impact of the proposed Port Jervis waterfront-district development and the city's proposed White Water Park project could have such far-reaching impacts on the city and the region that the comprehensive plan and code reviews had to be in place. Then, the city could qualify for grants that it could not otherwise access. As a result, the revitalized waterfront, White Water Park, other downtown revitalization projects and citywide revitalization could all take place in an environmentally sound manner and be fully supported under city codes. Downtown development could then be more user friendly for public and private development.

Maginsky said many proposed projects concurrently moving along such as the White Water Park, the Pike Street Plaza redevelopment, reviving the city's railroad heritage, the downtown promenade project, and positioning the city's historic resources, such as the railroad, as a public attraction. Planning and code initiatives facilitate the zoning, permit processes for the city and developers, and would help protect the environment.

Maginsky previously secured for the city a William Penn Foundation grant that will finance a professional review of Port Jervis city codes.

The comprehensive plan must be in place first before the codes can be fully revamped. Maginsky has been attending seminars given by national land use experts to learn about conservation tools that promote creative green development

that is environmentally and economically sound.

The Port code review and subsequent code enhancement would be under Smart Growth standards, which are designed to facilitate smarter, greener and more sustainable development.

Such Smart Growth strategies help communities with the following:

- Use its unique historic and natural assets to attract economic opportunities;
- Improve landscaping and create green spaces that preserve water quality;
- Enhance access for pedestrians and bicyclists;
- Improve economic viability and attractiveness;
- Manage stormwater to emphasize groundwater infiltration and aquifer recharging;

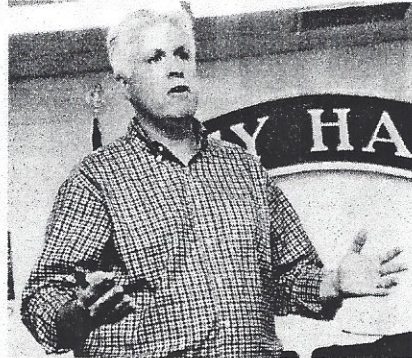
• Using native species in landscaping, minimizing water requirements and capturing the distinctive "spirit of the place."

In a related matter, Mayor Kelly Decker and council had recently developed the city logo that highlights its railroad heritage and gives a sense of its extraordinary natural resources setting. At last week's hearing, Barton Logiudice's Senior Land Use Planner Michael Welti and marketing specialist Patrice Courtney Strong of Courtney Strong asked committee members and members of the public for feedback on problems and strengths of the community.

The preliminary discussion identified problems as crime in some neighborhoods, absentee landlords, transient population, aging buildings and negative perception of the city by some residents, as well as low average per-capita income, which limits city revenue stream. On the positive side are the rich city history, well-managed city departments, culture of community service, access to major transportation routes (railroad and highways), excellence of police/emergency services and the resurgence of downtown economy.

Welti said the next step is to hold several public hearings over the next month to gather input. After that, the consultants would work with the committee to develop a plan that would include an overriding vision and mission statement. Then the process of land-use prioritization starts.

That uses would be relevant for the following:



(Photo by Ken Baumel)

Port Jervis's land-use consultant Mike Welti of Barton & Logiudice, briefed Council's ad hoc Comprehensive Plan Committee members, which includes members of the public, on how the proposed city comprehensive plan development would begin, the need for public input on major issues facing the city, and outlining the future direction of city planning priorities.

- Residences, commerce, business, and industry;
- Infrastructure, utilities;
- Transportation options;
- Streets, parking and related design;
- Community facilities, public grounds;
- Natural resources;
- Historic resources;
- Stormwater mitigation, special hazard areas, such as rivers, and related issues, such as flooding;
- To meet present and future housing needs;

Maginsky previously noted that a statement of the interrelationships among the various plan components might include an estimate of the environmental, energy conservation, fiscal, economic development and social consequences on the municipality.

Short and long range strategies might include capital improvements needs, new or updated regulations, and identifying funding sources.

According to Maginsky, the comprehensive plan includes such matters as regional impacts of land-use (including waterfront) proposals, historic preservation, reliable water supply, energy conservation, surveys, studies and analyses of housing, demographic and economic impacts.

The plan would include categories and interrelationships of land use, natural, historic and cultural resources, and prospects for future growth.

The next hearing for public feedback is 7:30 p.m. on August, 10 at City Hall.