

Introduction

The Town of Avon is updating its current comprehensive plan to better address the challenges and opportunities the Town faces today and in the future. The planning process will be divided into three main phases: a Listening phase, Visioning phase, and Action phase, which is followed by adopting and implementing the plan. This three-phase approach will help define Avon's vision for the future, establish goals, and set a framework for future decision-making. The goal of this Plan is to be a blueprint for the future of the Town of Avon that is flexible, adaptative, and is in harmony with the vision residents have for their community. To ensure that the Plan addresses the desires and concerns of the public, opportunities will be provided to engage Town residents and stakeholders in the development of the Plan's content.

May 14, 2024, Open House

The first public engagement event for the Plan Update occurred on May 14, 2024, at 7 pm on the third floor of the Opera Block (17 Genesee Street, Avon, NY). The purpose of the Open House was to explain the planning process and how public input will be collected. A prioritization exercise was also conducted.

Attendees:

J. Loewenstein of the Genesee/Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council, with approximately 20 attendees. Attendees included Steering Committee members, and Town and Village residents.

Agenda:

- Welcome activity: Share your favorite thing about the Town on the poster at the front of the room
- 30 minutes: What is a comp plan and why are we updating it?
 - Avon's process
 - Ways to engage
- 10 minutes: Questions
- 30 minutes: Prioritization Exercise
- 20 minutes: Discussion
- 5 minutes: Closeout

Presentation

A presentation was given by consultant Regional Planner Jenny Loewenstein from Genesee Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council. Notes on the presentation are as follows:

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan represents the stated goals and vision for future growth and development in a community and is the backbone of any community planning effort. The comprehensive plan outlines challenges facing the community, identifies solutions, and provides guidance to Town officials on planning-related decisions. The plan helps inform several Town functions such as:

- Budgeting and capital improvement
- Cultural and economic development efforts
- Grant acquisition
- Zoning, subdivision, and land development

A comprehensive plan is not:

- An end, but the beginning of a process
- A reason to expect immediate change
- A substitute for action or strong leadership
- Permanent or rigid
- Zoning or land use law
- Intended to take away property rights

The Town of Avon's current Comprehensive Plan was adopted on December 29, 2016, and may not reflect the challenges and opportunities the Town of Avon currently faces today or will face in the future. It is important to review and update comprehensive plans periodically to ensure that they remain relevant and adaptable to changing priorities in the Town. Comprehensive plans are intended to be living documents that grow and change with the Town.

Benefits of a Comprehensive

There are many benefits to having a comprehensive plan.

- Provides direction for Town decision-makers.
- Increases the Town's standing in the face of legal challenges.
- Increase the chance of funding from outside organizations, particularly the state. When awarding funding the state may look at having an up-to-date comprehensive plan that includes resiliency and smart growth principles as a basis for an award.
- Foster economic development and growth that reflects the goals of the community and can help strengthen community partnerships and communication among residents, businesses, community organizations, and the government.

Comprehensive Plan Topic Areas

As part of the comprehensive plan, several topic areas will be addressed. The Plan will review the existing conditions, identify challenges, and provide an overview of the feedback received on each topic. Each topic area will conclude with the goals and solutions that can be implemented by the Town. The anticipated topic areas of a comprehensive plan include:

Municipal and Community Services- what services does the town provide and what can be improved or expanded upon?

Housing- Is there enough housing available in the town and is it affordable for current and future residents? Does the Town need to construct new housing units? If so, where and what type of housing?

Transportation- Do residents feel that they can get around Town easily? Do transportation alternatives need to be expanded and improved upon? Are there transportation safety issues that need to be addressd?

Economy and Economic Development- What types of businesses and employment opportunities exist in the Town? What types of businesses should the Town be recruiting and encouraging?

Agriculture- How many farms and agribusiness exist in the Town? How important is it to support and protect agriculture?

Natural Resources, Parks, and Recreation- What are the important natural resources that need to be protected, and are there recreation opportunities that need to be added or expanded on?

Energy- What type of renewable energy is appropriate in the Town (if any), where should they be located and how should they be regulated? Review of the new Town solar regulations

Current and Future Land Use – What are the current land use patterns and are potential land use pattern changes over the next 5-20 years? Evaluating the current land use and zoning maps to determine where uses are appropriate in the Town and where development should be located (if any) will help ensure that any future growth and development fits the desired character of the Town.

Smart Growth

Smart growth covers a range of development and conservation strategies that help protect our health and natural environment and make the Town more attractive, economically stronger, and more socially diverse. The goal of smart growth is to help communities become more economically prosperous, socially equitable, and environmentally sustainable places to live, work, and play helping everyone flourish.

Smart growth looks different from place to place, but its overall approach to development includes the following principles that can be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan update. Smart growth principles include:

Mixing land uses- Building homes, offices, shops, restaurants, and other types of development near one another, on the same block, or in the same building.

Compact Development and Developing in Existing Neighborhoods- Making more efficient use of land already developed on existing neighborhoods. Building on empty or underutilized lots within an existing neighborhood can attract more people to jobs, homes, and businesses, and make the most of public investments (water and sewers, roads, and emergency services). Compact development can also help preserve open space and farmland.

Housing Choice- Building quality housing for families in all life stages and income levels and providing different housing options within existing neighborhoods can give everyone more choices about where to live. This may help people stay in Avon even if their circumstances change.

Walkable Neighborhoods and Transportation Choices- Providing transportation choices such as driving, walking, biking, or taking the bus supports healthier, safer, and more affordable lifestyles, and can help attract new talent to an area. Transportation choices may also help people stay in Avon if their circumstances change.

Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place - Unique, interesting places that reflect the values of the people who live there. What makes Avon, Avon, and how does the Town enhance it and capitalize on it? Projects and neighborhoods that incorporate things like natural features, historic structures, and public art can help distinguish a place from its neighbors to attract new residents and visitors.

Preserving Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty, and Critical Environmental Areas- This is important for both the environment and economics. Access to natural recreation areas is important to residents and visitors. Preserving open spaces can make communities more resilient, protecting them from natural disasters, combating air pollution, providing erosion control, and protecting water quality, all while making sure that our farmland is producing high-quality products.

Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair, and Cost Effective- Developers play a crucial role in how towns are built. Having predictable and fair regulations and approval processes can encourage growth and development that fits the goals and vision of the Town.

Encourage Community, and Stakeholder Collaboration in Development Decisions- Smart growth is about building a future for a community in which everyone can participate and gather ideas, feedback, and support. Making sure that development decisions meet the goals and vision of a community is paramount.

Planning Process and Timeline

The Plan update will take about 15 months to complete and will include three phases:

Listening: Where are we now? Hear from the community about their challenges and values, understanding existing conditions in the Town.

Visioning: Where are we headed? Develop a vision for the future of the Town.

Action: How do we get there? Develop strategies to realize the vision

These three phases are followed by adopting and implementing the plan.



Ways to Engage

Visit the [Town website](#) or the [Engagement website](#) for updates and event announcements. If you haven't already, please fill out the survey which can be found on both the Town and Engagement websites.

Upcoming Events: August 13 Workshop #2: Goals and Visioning Workshop

Preliminary Survey Responses

The survey opened on March 11, 2024, and remains open. As of May 9, 2024, 167 survey responses have been recorded. All survey responses can be found in the Slide Deck starting on slide 15.

What We Heard

Q: Who do we want to fill out the survey?

A: The survey is for residents of both the Town and Village residents, but it is more geared toward Town residents. Surveys should be filled out by all members of your family.

Q: How long will the survey be open for?

A: We would like to get up to 200 survey responses, so the survey will continue to remain open.

Q: Will the slide deck and presentation be on the website?

A: Yes, the slide deck and presentation will be posted on both the Town website and the engagement website.

Q: One of the strategies you highlighted was Smart Growth. Can you be more specific about what that means?

A: Smart Growth is a term for a policy that NYS likes to see incorporated in comprehensive plans. Smart Growth does not necessarily mean population growth and is more about physical development and where you would like to see this development happen within your Town. Smart Growth in Avon would support the rural landscape by keeping working lands viable and conserving natural lands, helping existing places thrive by taking care of investments already made, and creating great new places by building lively and enduring neighborhoods where people want to live.

Q: Does the Scope of the planning include public water throughout the Town?

A: Water will be touched upon in the plan, and expanding public water can be something that the committee recommends to the Town in the comprehensive plan that the Town could then act on.

Q: Can you briefly summarize the new solar laws?

A: The solar laws were updated in February. The Town takes a very balanced approach, in allowing solar and having strict regulations for the solar developers to follow especially as they relate to viewsheds and setbacks.

Q: Can you clarify the differences between zoning and the comprehensive plan?

A: The zoning code and the comprehensive plan are two separate documents. The zoning code is a legal document, and the comprehensive plan is a plan of recommendations for the future. The zoning code is one of the methods for implementing the goals of the comprehensive plan.

Comments:

The Town should not be pursuing tax-funded commitments

Growth for the sake of growth needs to have financial and fiscal responsibility. Growth will impact water and sewer resources.

Concerns were raised about becoming Henrietta.

At the core Avon is a farming community. There is plenty of room within the Town to add industrial growth without impeding farms and agriculture. We need to direct any potential new development away from important farming lands.

Prioritization Exercise

Attendees placed their six (6) red dots onto the following topic areas to indicate that they were a priority for them in the Plan update.

- Housing
- Economic and Business Development
- Infrastructure (transportation, renewable energy, broadband, and utilities)
- Natural Resources (land use, agriculture, parks, and recreation)
- Town Services and Government
- Other Issues

Housing

Housing received 12 dots.

- We need options for aging in place, and for independent aging. Single-family, freestanding houses are the preferred type of development.

Economic and Business Development

Economic and business development received 26 dots.

- We want small local businesses that provide "priority services within the region"
- It's more important to keep the "small town charm" than necessarily staying a "small town"

Infrastructure (transportation, renewable energy, broadband, and utilities)

Infrastructure received 26 dots.

- People are interested in learning more about the new solar laws.
- The water tower and related issues came up.

Natural Resources (land use, agriculture, parks, and recreation)

Natural resources reviewed the most dots, representing the top priority to the group (43 total dots)

- "Don't invade the farmland with development"
- Avon should be an "experiential place" with lots of outdoor recreation opportunities
- We are "blessed with vistas" and should protect them.
- We should emphasize our "streams, woods, and the relationship with nature that has been fostered for generations"
- The east Avon wetlands should get attention
- There's a big interest in 'protecting farmland' and in getting local farm goods sold here in Avon.

Town Services and Government

Town services and government received 14 dots

- "Our ambulance and fire are currently volunteers and we're going to have a problem"
- Expand public water and sewer

Other Issues

The other category received 2 dots. This category was reserved for starting conversations about topics that were not on the other posters.

- People responded better to 'resiliency' to other 'green development' language.
- We want to be a place of choice and one with choices.
- People interested in 'legislation and the benefits from the 'What IS a comp plan, and what is it NOT' slides.

Next Steps

Please continue to visit the Town website and engagement website for upcoming events and engagement opportunities <https://engage.gflrpc.org/TownofAvonCompPlan>

Join the Town of Avon's Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee for a Visioning Workshop on August 13, 2024, 7pm at the Town Hall, third floor.