

Town of Ulysses Zoning Updates

CGC 39053/Contract #57602

Public Outreach Strategy

September 2015

Scope and Goals of the Process

The Town of Ulysses is currently updating selected zoning regulations in accordance with the New York State Energy Research & Development Authority's (NYSERDA) Cleaner, Greener Communities program. While this work will largely be reflected in updates to agricultural zoning, the Hamlet of Jacksonville and commercial areas, every attempt will be made to connect to the larger Ulysses community.

To create a document that appropriately regulates the Town, the zoning code update must receive input from every corner possible. Citizen involvement increases understanding of the benefits of planning while decreasing the uncertainty about the negative effects of planning on personal freedom and property rights. This in turn contributes to political acceptance of the planning and zoning process.

Interactive community engagement allows participants to learn experientially alongside staff and officials and is more useful and fun than conventional public meetings. Good public engagement breaks down the barriers between public and practitioner, demystifying the process, decoding the acronyms, and reflecting the values and needs of disparate constituencies. We are conducting a brief, but important public conversation to ensure the Ulysses comprehensive plan vision for land use and zoning comes to fruition.

Through clarity in communication, the Contractor Team will build on existing community partnerships and communication networks. We will develop, distribute and display high-

quality, innovative, user-friendly and community appropriate information. We will coordinate closely with community organizations and neighborhood organizations. We will respond in a timely manner to questions and concerns.

For the duration of this process, the Contractor Team will strive to interact with different groups of people from a variety of backgrounds. These groups will include:

- Elected Officials – These individuals perform a variety of tasks, including representing the community's interests, administering local statutes and receipt/ownership of all zoning products. Because of these factors it is important for elected officials to be actively engaged throughout the project. The type of elected officials involved may include (but are not limited to) the Town Supervisor and members of the Ulysses Town Board.
- Community Groups, Organizations and Non-Profits – Community groups, organizations, nonprofits and related stakeholders serve many functions in the community. These groups can be informal, such as neighborhood associations (like the Jacksonville Community Association) or formally recognized entities.
- Property and Business Owners – The zoning process will include discussions regarding future land use and reuse policies and concepts. As a result, property and business owners (direct stakeholders) associated with lands preliminarily identified, will be encouraged to actively participate in the planning process. As part of the outreach process, the direct stakeholders will be invited to meet with the Contractor Team to learn about the program and provide their ideas, recommendations, additional information about their property and to voice any concerns that they may have. The direct stakeholders will also contribute towards developing the project's goals.

Steering Committee

A Town of Ulysses Zoning Steering Committee is currently being established this September and October 2015. The committee serves as a sounding board for the broader community for the duration of the zoning update project. They play a key role in advising the Town Board and the Contractor team on zoning drafting direction, providing feedback and guidance throughout the planning process on objectives, documents, and milestones.

Steering Committee members:

Elizabeth Thomas – Town Supervisor, supervisor@ulysses.ny.us

Darby Kiley – Town Planner, kiley@ulysses.ny.us

Nancy Zahler – Town Board, zahler@ulysses.ny.us

George Tselekis – Chair, Board of Zoning Appeals, georgetselekis@hotmail.com

Rod Hawkes – former Planning Board member and Comprehensive Plan Committee member
rod.hawkes@cornell.edu

Susan Ritter – former Comprehensive Plan Committee member SRitter@town.ithaca.ny.us

The Steering Committee “kickoff meeting” will be held to explain the scope and intent of the zoning project and to solicit initial input on a vision for the study area, including goals, objectives, opportunities and constraints.

Steering Committee meetings will be held monthly in order to encourage regular formal communication with the project’s Consultants. This ensures open communication between all project partners and promotes a clear understanding of project tasks and timelines.

Public Participation

In addition to the Steering Committee meetings, the Consultant will organize and conduct public meetings in accordance with this Public Outreach Strategy. At the public meetings

(dates TBA) the Consultant will prepare and present a visual timeline illustrating and explaining the zoning amendment process to attendees. The Consultant will also present background information, including the zoning audit and Comprehensive Plan, and other existing Town documents that inform the zoning process. The meeting will include interactive exercises that relate to NYSERDA's Cleaner, Greener Communities program, which supports sustainable development and smart growth practices.

The Consultant will prepare and present scaled aerial visualizations on large plotted maps to assist participants with evaluating land use; the use of graphics and mapping techniques encourages a hands-on participatory process. The Consultant team will also use interactive tools like brainwriting and zoning character 'trading cards' to enable participants to visualize and respond to how development in the community could evolve while preserving rural character.

Brainwriting builds on the brainstorming process by removing fear of evaluation through eliminating the step by which participants publicly state ideas one at a time. Participants are focused on the questions presented rather than extraneous chat. With assistance from the Steering Committee, the Consultant will prepare several questions to pose to participants; asked to quickly (within two minutes) write down their ideas about the three pre-selected questions on three separate index cards. These ideas and answers will be collected, analyzed, and included in the documentation of public input and comment.

This approach will be used to further clarify the goals stated in the recent Comprehensive Plan, including but not limited to, defining appropriate development and preserving, protecting, and enhancing historically and culturally significant sites/features and strengthen existing sense of community. This emphasis on defining community character strengthens participants' sense of having a hand in directly affecting the design and feel of their built environment.

Public Information Meetings and Workshops

There are likely to be topics raised during the project requiring input from the community as a whole. In order to facilitate this communication process the Contractor Team will hold at least two public information meetings – one before work begins on the draft zoning amendments and one when the draft is complete. The general public should be involved in the process so that they can gain information on the project and provide input and their ideas about a vision to local leaders and the Contractor Team.

The intent of these public workshops will be to educate the public about zoning in general; and a more specific description of the project scope and boundary. The workshop can take place in an “open house” format, providing the public with an opportunity to casually visit and discuss the project with members of the Contractor Team during early hours prior to a formal presentation. The public will be solicited to provide input on subjects such as community goals and objectives and to discuss possible barriers and prospects regarding future uses. Details of the public workshops will be determined once the full Steering Committee has been established.

Public Hearing

In addition, one Public Hearing (date TBA) will be held prior to adoption in accordance with New York State Town Law to ensure full opportunity for community participation. The Town will advertise the public hearing. The Consultant will attend the Public Hearing and be available for questions and to receive citizen comment.

Public Notification

The Contractor Team will discuss and develop adequate measures to provide all members of the public with adequate notice of project events and important benchmarks. This will include the creation of flyers for local distribution, email notifications, website postings, and press releases to be issued to local media (with an emphasis on media outlets that have a large local circulation).

Public notification outlets:

- Email listserv announcements, including one that the Town Clerk maintains, and the Willow Creek neighborhood and Jacksonville Community Association;
- Post notifications and updates on the Town's website;
- Media: Issue press releases and legal notices (as necessary) to the Trumansburg Free Press and Ithaca Journal;
- Town newsletter is published twice a year and will include updates on the project.