

**Town of Ossining Comprehensive Plan  
Public Workshop 1  
Combined Meeting Notes  
December 2, 2020**

**Summary**

The Town of Ossining held its first virtual public workshop on the Town's Comprehensive Plan on November 19, 2020 at 7:00 pm. Close to 100 people joined the workshop. The Land Use Law Center (Center), along with WXY Architecture + Urban Design (WXY) facilitated these meetings. The meeting opened with a welcome by the Town Supervisor, Dana Levenberg. Valerie Monastra, the Town Planner, presented an overview of the importance of a comprehensive plan and presented the planning process and framework. Staff from WXY presented an overview and summary of the existing conditions of the Town of Ossining. The Land Use Law Center staff then explained the breakout room discussion questions, process, and the ground rules for participation. Participants divided into small groups to enhance effective conversation with facilitators. A trained facilitator led each small group of approximately 12-15 participants, asking the same questions in each breakout room. The small groups discussed each topic for 10-15 minutes. For each discussion topic, a recorder recorded all responses using a shared Word document. The small groups discussed the following questions:

- Why do you love living in Ossining? What makes our community so great?
- How do we become a more sustainable community? What does that mean to you?
- What types of development do we want to encourage and how can this development enhance Ossining?
- How do we promote walkability and access to services to enhance the well-being of Ossining residents?
- Where can we maintain and extend spaces for physical activity and healthy lifestyles within the Town?
- How do we connect to our neighboring municipalities?
- How did COVID change the way we live in our community?

After the breakout room discussions, the public meeting concluded, and participants were provided the Comprehensive Plan website address and email address for any further input and for a copy of the evening's presentation. Participants were thanked and attendees were encouraged to visit the website for future meeting dates.

After collecting the notes from every breakout room, the Land Use Law Center staff compiled the notes into one document. Below, presents the combined comments. Staff grouped similar comments together under topic areas under each discussion question.

## **Why do you love living in Ossining? What makes our community so great?**

### **Sense of Place**

- Mix of large town, get anything, open spaces, on river. Lovely place to live
- Feel like country, near everything needed. Breath of fresh air.
- Size of the place, not too small but not a city
- Mix of ages, diversity of backgrounds
- Not over developed/overpopulated
- Great neighbors
- Low-key and comfortable
- Enjoys the current balance between neighborhood types
- Diverse community – mix of people
  - Socioeconomic, racial, religious backgrounds that come together in a small-town setting.
- Adequate level of density exists at the current moment
- The government and community are really run by citizens, a lot of public engagement and involvement in volunteer departments (Fire, Elk, school system)
  - Communication at the town planning meetings is very fluid, and it's great to have the opportunity to effect change
- Affordable townhome communities with a wooden aesthetic, concerned about *Homestead* impacting affordability
- It is a community! Here, we know our neighbors, and the sense of community and friendliness throughout the town
- Young people in the town are proud to live here, with a healthy culture of enthusiasm in the schools.

### **Commute/Connections**

- Great commute to NYC
- Proximity to NYC
- Ossining is close to everything.
- Walkable
- Flow from downtown area to less developed neighborhoods
- Transportation links are important during more “normal” times.

### **Open Space/Nature**

- Open space, parks, trails, Teatown
- Proximity to river and waterways
- Wildlife that calls Ossining home – birds, owls, deer
- Croton Point Park
- Environmentally great place to live
- Encourages sustainability and green practices

### **Things to Do**

- Restaurants
- Dynamic town, know shops/shop owners
- School system
- Ossining Public Library for its programs, staff, community services, sustainability
- Great music scene – Jazz, cafes, Risiko music school
- Blossoming arts community
- Opportunity to ride bikes around the area
- Farms/farmers markets are nearby.
- Hiking opportunities are close.
- Business is largely word of mouth. Longstanding business relationships. Customers are like family and we patronize each other's' businesses.
- Community events like food trucks, craft fairs are appealing.
- The riverfront is used well for events like fireworks, concerts which increase quality of life.

## **How do we become a more sustainable community? What does that mean to you?**

### **Transportation**

- Less traffic in areas (9, 9A, 133, Croton Ave all heavy at times)
- Alternative transportation (bicycles)
- Traffic – caused in part by development, cluster residents

### **Infrastructure**

- Are solar panel a viable alternative
- Energy offline soon – possible rise in electric – solar panels on gov't bldg., stores, places with few/no trees
- Community solar projects (currently being proposed – over parking lot)
  - Addition of solar energy on existing buildings, not in open spaces or where tree removal is required.
- Club Fit added solar panels
- Underground power lines v. above ground lines
  - Visually appealing
  - Power outages
- Water supply and availability of electricity are sustainability issues that need to be looked at for climate change and population increase resiliency
- Not increasing infrastructure - with development
- On infrastructure, town maintenance on the roads and light poles as an example (worried for safety).
- Waterfront area needs to be looked at for flood prevention (especially after hurricane Sandy).

### **Open Spaces/Natural Environment**

- Preserve environment
  - Rules to preserve natural features (steep slopes, wetlands, etc.) are adhered to
- Too many bright lights outside homes
- Preserve open spaces and an adequate density level
- Open space does not only mean parkland, but the space allotted for individual lots under current zoning (goes to concern about putting higher density developments into current low-density zones)

### **Waste/Recycling**

- Reduce trash pickup, less garbage trucks in town

### **Food**

- Need more readily available food source
- Food forest – not so dependent on CA and overseas
- More community gardens

## **Demographic Factors**

- Unsustainable factor – young people in the population are diminishing, and curious about whether young people are leaving the town? Also agree with the point that there are not too many social venues/opportunities, and this could be an unsustainable factor
- Age of the population graph was interesting. Young people may not stay here because it is expensive and cannot afford to pay taxes. Ossining needs more affordable housing options, to encourage a more demographically diverse population. Take care of the existing green space.
- Care for the Town population 65+ and Over. Establishment of a Senior Advisory Board that will provide the senior population a direct channel of communication with the Town and focus on necessary services that will allow the population to thrive.
- Need a nice balance of demographic to be sustainable, does school population reflect this growth?

## **Housing**

- Affordability, especially a degree of affordable housing across the board. Tax burden as a result, and potentially being priced out of the area. Worried about the sustainability of staying in the town
- Renting – people who want to be here should be able to remain
- Whether your kids can afford to leave here when they move out, or if they have to look elsewhere.
- Zone specifically so that high density housing isn't sporadic.
- Make sure it remains affordable, housing developments on river and in open lots
- Need more density – more people to keep local economy to keep going

## **Tax Base**

- We need to bring more businesses into the area to help the tax base.
- Need a liaison for small businesses, small funding for businesses here
- Local economy dependent
- Open more businesses
- Local workforce that feeds community
- Happiness - a good mix of income and fun. Employment opportunities are important, what are the companies in Ossining? Maybe work to facilitate new business and new opportunities. Social life is incredibly important as well, as mentioned above in previous comment.

## **Education/Community Services/Government**

- School is very important. Loss of school programs, art, extracurriculars etc., but worried about the increase in school population. Also worried about taxes, and not sure what the sustainability opportunities/incentives there are to stay here
- Town youth programs – need more organization and potentially funding

- More power for citizens to approve/disapprove of development, particularly high-density projects
  - Concern over recent developments that ended up with different dimension and density than those originally approved; felt the end product was very different than what the community believed was agreed upon. Multiple community members expressed concern that plans are not upheld.
- Services – we need volunteer fire/ambulance

### **Other**

- Lower carbon footprint
- Big complexes = more pressure on infrastructure, school, businesses, food supply
- Balance between development and community
  - Local ecosystem
  - Preserve enviro and economy that works for all
- Kemey's Cove, in early 2000s Briarcliff wanted to build a parking garage for Scarborough on a part of Kemey's Cove, believes the land was designated as parkland
- Equity, environment, economic, add education – environment on point, employ Westchester county people, including paid students

## **What types of development do we want to encourage and how can this development enhance Ossining?**

### **Single Family Residential**

- Single family home is less environmentally friendly, must be a middle ground
- Single-family houses = less open space, less trees
- Move back to single-family homes – fits town character

### **Mixed Use/Proximity to Services**

- Connected dwellings – don't have to drive everywhere
- High density development in last 30 years – not near services
  - High density development should be near services – will reduce traffic
  - Put dwellings near services or build together
- Currently no place to put buildings near service

### **Commercial**

- Increased density draws retail (Gap)
- Year-round indoor market
- Boutique hotels/B&Bs for easy access to the area's natural sites; possibly renovate older, historical homes with a lot of character
- Attract mom & pop, boutique businesses – the Town should bring in someone with a strong background in local economic development, need for local shops and businesses that are able to serve broader segments of the population; the Town could create programs to attract young entrepreneurs
- Development of “big draw” event spaces that can help support local business by bringing in crowds (when crowds are allowed)
- Add additional restaurants, entertainment, create that draw to Ossining. Keeping people in Ossining is important, and drawing people to the town is very important
- Keep and/or expand commercial businesses for tax base and attract young people and keeping all people here
- Watch downtown redevelopment working video, reimagining downtown Ossining – good ideas in there
- Would love to see different types of businesses enter the town (corporation business, e.g. Trader Joes, larger corporations etc.).
- More job opportunities in the area, and also additional businesses moving to Ossining.

### **Condos/Townhomes**

- Regardless of the type of development, not supportive of homestead taxation programs for condominium and townhome style residential units
- condos have been a burden

### **Affordability**

- Much development for upper income/high end – needs more of a mix

### **Transportation and Connectivity**

- Everyone needs a car in Westchester
- Electrical vehicles charging infrastructure
- Greater emphasis on pedestrian mobility, alternative forms of transport, tough with the topography, but more walkability!
- There should be connectivity between the schools and the town. For example, fields are utilized at the schools, but the infrastructure doesn't support easy access to the schools from the town center.

### **Design Standards and Locational Considerations**

- Focus development on lots that are vacant or suffer from blight instead of on undeveloped land
- Making sure that high-density development is appropriate for the area's character, locations in already higher-density areas considered prior to low-density areas where a rezoning would be required
- Green building standards implemented in single family homes – energy usage, net zero by a date certain. Also, would like to see a substantial buffer between residential zoning and commercial zoning, as possible
- Actually take an effort to preserve/enjoy the older buildings in the town
- Also incentives for the preservation of historical buildings, so its viewed as a benefit and not a burden

### **Challenges/Impacts**

- More residents = more strain on resources, also more customers for businesses
- Development – no longer about single-family homes
  - Less single-family homes
  - Condo complex
  - Apartment building
- More people mean more services – school, police, etc.
- Parth Knoll multi-family development came about due to rezoning to MF for an anticipated B&B, and the developer built a residential complex instead – goes to concern with the process, desire clear rules about what is actually allowed to be built in certain zones
- Expansion of infrastructure, as infrastructure has not necessarily grown to support the expansion of development over the years

### **Other**

- Town could partner with local organizations (Scenic Hudson, land trusts) to purchase properties that should be protected from development
- Does the Town allow for Airbnb rentals?
- Disinterested in any new development, spoke specifically about proposed development at prior mental health hospital that went from single-family to now a possible multi-family development
- Distinction between municipalities – Ossining unincorporated town comp plan

- Hard to look at unincorporated town development without looking at village, interacting now as one entity, including shared school system

## **How do we promote walkability and access to services to enhance the well-being of Ossining residents?**

### **Mass Transit**

- A trolley from train to town, loop
- Bus routes along 134

### **Bicycles**

- Need bike racks
- Electric bikes will be better than cars
- Biking is difficult in a hilly town
- Bike-ability ends at Albany Post Road/Rt. 9, could be extended into the Aqueduct/Village past Mariondale; general need for extension of pedestrian and bikeways, whether between neighboring municipalities and within the Town itself
  - Not in favor of proposed bikeway along Rt. 9, heavily trafficked, safety issues

### **Safety/Walkability**

- Sidewalks needed – dangerous walking around now
- Create safe ways to get around
- Specific places to improve for walkability
  - Chappaqua Rd
  - Morningside
  - North State Rd
  - Hawks Ave/Route 134
  - Fox Hill
  - Need for extended walking access from this area to the Village – possible walking space through the Cemetery, along Sing Sing Brook
- Speed bumps on certain streets where speeding is frequent
- Crosswalks can be safer and pedestrian-centered, seems to not be physical protection for pedestrians
- All about safety. Reduction of speed limits, or additional enforcement of speed limits. Expansion of roadways and sidewalks/crosswalks
- Parents and students – kids must walk to school within 1 mile of campus – no sidewalks in Indian Village, consider walking along with bussing
- Briarcliff Peekskill Trailway, we live in a rural community so hard to be walkable

### **Connectivity**

- Connecting individual neighborhoods to an area that has a park, a center, a business/restaurants/bar area makes more sense.
- It would be nice if there was a bridge that went over route 9a like they do in Croton. Something that connects these disjointed areas.
- More destinations to walk to is important, provide an incentive to drive less. Coffee shops etc.

- Community Garden? There is one, but hard to get to aside from driving. Pose the idea of implementing a new garden with accessibility, or add some way to access the existing one without driving.
- Greenway/riverway in greater Ossining area could connect village, Engle Park, Croton River

## **Where can we maintain and extend spaces for physical activity and healthy lifestyles within the Town?**

### **Open Spaces/Parks**

- Ryder Park trails need to improve trail space (trees, vines)
- Connect trails at Ryder Park
- Parking at trail needed
- Preserve land – enhance environment
- Buy up open spaces if possible (grants, redevelopment)
- Open space v. developed space – what is a healthy balance
- 16 acres on Hawks – what to do- develop or open space
- Macy Park could be better utilized
- A lot of garbage in town areas, parking lots, destroys some of the aesthetic nature of the town, can't exercise as well with trash everywhere.

### **Recreation/Outdoor Gyms**

- The town is missing a good outdoor gym for adults
- Need better maintenance of the outdoor recreation courts (tennis, basketball, etc.).
- Outdoor public pool

### **Biking/Walkability**

- Extend bike racks at stores (Mrs. Greens)
- Approach walkability from a neighborhood-to-neighborhood perspective. Curious about the Millwood trail system, whether motivated by walkability or connectivity or recreational outdoor space
- Sidewalks to get to parks would be healthier for everyone.

### **Dog Parks**

- Cedar Lane dog park needs to be maintained

### **Waterbodies**

- Ryder Park pond needs clean out/dredging (someone looking into this)
- More improvement along the river. Kayaking program was great, and expanding upon that would be exciting. Would love to see access to and improve connectivity to AMD.
- Work on connectivity and the River Walk!
- Access to river for fishing, kayaking, boating, and swimming but not in exclusive way, connectivity
- Sing Sing Kill not used due to water quality – clean up!

## **How do we connect to our neighboring municipalities?**

### **Local Government Planning, Decision-making, and Schools**

- Town/Village become one municipality
- School district in Village of Ossining
- Gov't of surrounding communities meet?
  - Legal regulations restrict municipalities meeting
  - Areas of the Town closer to either Village should coordinate more closely with that Village
  - Coordination in terms of zoning to increase compatibility
- Committees to meet like-minded people (ex. EAC)
- Duplicate committees could work together (Parks)
  - Coordination between municipalities about development of new/clean energy infrastructure for community energy development
- So inter-connected, where do I live?
- Inter-municipal boundaries can be clear, expressed desire that they work through the planning and development processes together, a number of development projects happening at the same time in neighboring communities give the appearance that there is need for better communication and collaboration between and among the neighboring communities
- Cooperative discussions when it is determined a proposal will have impacts on neighboring communities (school taxes/enrollment, public services, access to train stations [parking availability])

### **Mobility**

- Bike trails/sidewalks to connect communities
- Walkway that connects Ossining to Croton at Croton Park area to be extended to go farther north
- Walks along river to Croton, Sleepy Hollow Tarrytown
- Need for a trolley between towns

### **Commercial Needs**

- Connected through shopping in surrounding communities
- Food shopping and restaurants in Croton, Ossining Village, New Castle
- Banking lacking in our town
- Target in Mount Kisco, Trader Joe's in Hartsdale – want convenience, but keep small town feel
- Gas stations in Sleepy Hollow, Croton, less expensive
- Library – Briarcliff, walkable, ridable
- Farmers markets

## **How did COVID change the way we live in our community?**

### **Open Space and Parks**

- Usage of public parks, trails has increased (great part of community)

### **Economy**

- More people working from home
- Brick and mortar shopping down
- Businesses has failed
- Repurpose office space after Covid
- Needs of business owners changed
- Not reliant so heavily on retail and office space
- Fortunate that lifestyle in Ossining has preserved way of life in some ways

### **Infrastructure and Services**

- Many more delivery trucks
- More cognizant of working on utilities as more people working from home
- Present public services have changes tremendously, traffic into public bldgs. down

### **Socialization**

- Senior population is more evident now – walking, deliveries
- Not seeing the same people on a regular basis, not eating indoors, wearing masks everywhere we go.
- Children are attending school remotely, so working from home, economic changes, health issues. Dramatic changes.
- Drastic change in socializing. Can't see family as often, and people are rearing to get out of the city, housing boom, hopefully driving people to Ossining
- Attached to a computer screen all day, isolated.
- Community dynamics may be changing, and this needs to be addressed. Not trusting the people in your community is a big issue.