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Public Hearing on Draft Comprehensive Plan

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[REDACTED]
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Hi Ms. Montgomery,

Would you please forward this statement of public comment to the Town Board regarding the updated Comprehensive Plan Draft.

I would also like to respectfully request that it be entered into the public record of submissions furnished by the public.

Thank you,
Iris Broyde

Supervisor Barber and Town Board Members,

I applaud the efforts of the Planning Board and Planning Department in their extraordinary diligence to furnish Guilderland with a thoughtful and relevant guideline for our future.

Reviewing what has been submitted, I do have some comments on the current incarnation of this document and what I see as an area in particular, that requires much more attention.

Starting at the beginning with Plan Organization on page 4, the segment begins with 'This update to the Comprehensive Plan establishes a framework for the future of Guilderland. The plan addresses a series of topics that impact overall quality of life in the community, at the present moment and for years to come.' As it should.

At the present moment, we are seeing a development project in Costco that will have town wide impact arguably not seen since the arrival of the Crossgates Mall in the 1980's.

The timing of our putting forth a blueprint for the next 20 years, at the same time that redefining development is at our doorstep, cannot be ignored. In this opportunity, we have the ability to establish how we will integrate what is coming within parameters that we define, rather than allowing ourselves to be defined by it.

Save for a secondary reference to 'major development and roadway improvement projects on parcels surrounding Crossgates Mall', is the Costco project, by my reading, even mentioned in the Comprehensive Plan. And yet, when the media announced the beginning of demolition to make way for construction back in March, the anchorman opened with a reflection that this was a happening that was going to forever change Guilderland.

That's how outsiders see it, and we who live here know it is true. The question then becomes, how do we accommodate and establish a solidity in who we are and what we will be going forward. To my mind, this is primarily about our town character.

I was very pleased to see this aspect of analysis reintroduced to the updated plan. However, as we seem to be in something of an era of transition, there should be greater emphasis on it as an area more specifically

defined with goals, objectives and recommendations that will provide zoning guidance, similar to the other 6 designated topics.

Yes, there are objectives that have been included with the current plan's discussion of Town Character. But they are lacking and in some cases, problematic.

1) Preserve Existing Character - protect unique architectural styles, historic buildings, and natural landscapes that contribute to Guilderland's identity.

Noteworthy in its absence of denoting areas that contribute to Guilderland's identity, are older neighborhoods. Those whose origins predate the suburban sprawl boon of housing developments and whose smaller and more individuated stylings served as the template for 'the American dream'.

Westmere and McKownville were highlighted in the discussion of Town Character, as neighborhoods of older residences, however the predominant focus in the segment was on the 'built environment'. Older residential neighborhoods have history and identity not to be found elsewhere. They should not be expendable and there needs to be language specific to recognizing their importance as places which should be preserved and protected.

To further the point, Recommendations D-.4 and D-.13 in the Neighborhood and Housing section, deals specifically with making zoning changes that would allow for the development of smaller and more modest, affordable homes. The types of homes that our older neighborhoods embody.

In addition to instituting zoning changes that encourage development of more affordable homes, it would behoove our town to include in the Comprehensive Plan, language that would discourage zoning changes that threaten our modest older neighborhoods out of existence.

2) Guide Future Development - The comprehensive plan update aims to ensure new development aligns with the town's desired character, whether it's through architectural guidelines, open space preservation, or other measures.

The terminology of a 'desired character', is very disquieting. As defined by who?

It is no secret that some of our most recent large development projects have moved forward despite fervent contention. The fact that they are now there does not in any way connote that they are desired where they now stand and that should not define what new development should proliferate in those areas.

I would refer the board to the goals and objectives that were outlined by the town appointed, Neighborhood, Housing and Town Character Subcommittee that expressly incorporated needed language while advocating for maintaining a proper balance between growth and preservation under the Town Character section. Some noteworthy examples are, paraphrasing:

'Preserve and enhance Guilderland's identity, image, and quality of life; and maintain and strengthen the distinction between the town's developed and rural areas, as well as the distinction between the town's neighborhoods and commercial areas.'

'Prevent any trends that move Guilderland towards the look of a city or large commercial town; namely, avoid putting all commercial businesses along the Western Avenue Corridor.'

'Establish guidelines to ensure that future residential and commercial development is of a scale and design that is appropriate from both a neighborhood and town-wide perspective.'

This subcommittee did exemplary work to clarify the standards by which we need to maintain who we are as a town as we stand at this crossroads that leads to the future. I would implore the board to incorporate their work into the Comprehensive Plan.

Moving on to the Vision Statement, which does not propose a vision or aspirations, this might have also been a place to mention redefining development, and a commitment to accommodate change while maintaining identity roots. Within the statement that might rise to the level of an aspiration, perhaps unintentionally there are these comments:

‘The Town is home to a balanced array of prosperous and well-loved businesses’, and ‘well-designed transportation corridors maximize safety for all travelers while facilitating efficient movement’.

What may have once been a balanced array of businesses has become decidedly unbalanced with the courting of larger chain establishments pushing out independent entrepreneurs and oh, here it is again, the arrival of Costco. It is a lofty vision to hope that a balance between large and small can sustain but by all means please let’s identify that and make it a target into the future.

Well designed transportation corridors facilitating efficient movement. Quite simply, no.

Probably the most universal consensus there is in Guilderland is that traffic along our busiest corridors is problematic and has become more so over the years of increased development. I attended every visioning workshop cultivating public input and no matter what the format the most dominant complaint/quality of life issue, was traffic. Again, by all means, let’s identify that as something that we want to try to alleviate moving into the future as we continue to grow. But let that also be within our visioning as something we need to actualize.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this conversation. It does not escape me that it is a privilege to live in a town where input is valued and efforts are made to ensure that the people who will be most impacted by decisions can be part of the discourse.

Iris Broyde
Westmere