



Town of Charlton
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“We Need Your Help in Planning Charlton’s Future”

We are trying to get this message to every household in Charlton. We are using this mailing, the Charlton Web Site (www.townofcharlton.org) and posters throughout town in hopes of communicating with all Charlton citizens. There will also be an information meeting held at 7:30 pm, September 10 at the Charlton Freehold Church Academy. We encourage all our citizens to attend.

We are pleased to inform you about the startup of a “Grass Roots” initiative that should make a very positive contribution to our town and to all who live in it now and in the future. A comprehensive planning effort is being initiated which will allow Charlton citizens to plan for our town’s future and enable us to do it in a cooperative, organized and proven fashion. *The goal of this effort is straightforward: to ensure Charlton will be the kind of town its citizens want it to be. We need your participation and help in this “bottom-up” effort.*

What are the benefits of Comprehensive Planning? It respects landowner rights, helps preserve valued man-made and natural resources, supports farmers, and if and when growth occurs, it encourages smart environmentally sensitive development. It helps minimize the growth of taxes. It provides a positive, organized process for townspeople to determine a vision for Charlton and the ways and means of achieving it. It helps government establish priorities in an environment of shrinking budgets. And, it facilitates obtaining grants for environment and open space conservation and historic preservation as well as the preservation of farming.

How can you help to make this a successful effort? The fact is this cannot be done without you. A Comprehensive Plan for our town must be based on what our citizens want for Charlton. We will need to know your views, concerns and opinions at the beginning of this process – probably through a questionnaire — and then throughout the process in open meetings and possibly in some workshops or small group settings. Additionally, you will be provided periodic updates on the town’s web site. Look under “Comprehensive Planning Updates.” *We also need volunteers to serve on a steering committee to facilitate the entire effort. If you ever wanted to volunteer to do something worthwhile for your community, this is it.*

What does comprehensive planning entail? Based on your inputs and an analysis of the town’s resources a “vision” is created for the town’s future. Volunteer townspeople then establish goals and objectives for reaching it. The vision must be based on what you and other citizens believe the town should be. Likewise, you must also believe that the goals and objectives for achieving the vision are realistic and that they do not unfairly infringe on your rights as a citizen and property owner. *Be assured, our town board would not approve a plan that our citizens do not believe in.*

What might be looked at in this process? Basically, anything involved in the operation, services and appearance of our town or potentially impacting the quality of life. Sample items include: agriculture and open space preservation, environment and natural resources, transportation, recreation, education, taxes, public safety and security, community facilities and services, housing, historic preservation, business and employment and town infrastructure. *Keep in mind this is meant to be an “inclusive process.” Anyone in the town can suggest a topic and comment on how they would like to see it operate or appear in the future.*

SUPERVISOR
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TOWN CLERK
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Why Comprehensively Plan now when we like the way our town looks and our zoning laws have served us well so far? To date, Charlton, unlike some less fortunate neighbors, has been able to absorb growth at a manageable rate. The results are something to be proud of. There are several reasons for this, some of which were controllable and some not. The fact that we are relatively far from the Northway Corridor, have a constrained water supply, no sewer system and soil in many areas which is poor for septic systems has kept development pressure low in our town. On the controllable side, our very effective Zoning Laws have helped sustain the character of our town.

However, there are powerful forces at play that could significantly change our situation. Most of you are aware that Saratoga County is developing at an astonishing rate. Towns north, east and south of us are experiencing sprawl and all its unattractive byproducts. Improved transportation access, the potential of thousands of high paying jobs and a county water system all point to significantly increased development pressure in our area. Since the laws of supply and demand are always at work, as development fills up land around our town, Charlton land and property will become increasingly sought after and even more valuable.

There has been some confusion about the role of Zoning Laws and Comprehensive Planning. A few mistake Zoning Law as a planning tool, which it is not. Zoning Law has narrowly focused purposes and is not a planning tool. Rather, Zoning Law is an implementing tool that stipulates required parameters for areas, heights and uses of buildings and levies restrictions. There are penalties if a property owner violates this law.

On the other hand, Comprehensive Planning is just that, a means of planning. It is not an implementing tool. As mentioned earlier, it analyzes citizen attitudes and values and the town's resources to create a desired future vision. The goals and objectives established to attain the vision are recommended courses of action or programs. They do not carry the weight of law, and are not regulatory in nature. They are geared to focus and influence positive, voluntary action.

Towns that have conducted comprehensive planning have done so because of a perceived threat to the character of their town, open spaces, farming and an escalation of taxes. And, they all wished they started the process sooner. Probably the strongest point that can be made is that it is better to plan for an anticipated and significant challenge before it over-runs you and becomes a problem you are reacting too. ***Unfortunately, this is a lesson that has been learned the hard way by too many towns.***

Another very important fact needs to be mentioned. Charlton is the only town in Saratoga County without a Comprehensive Plan. It puts our town and its property owners at a tremendous disadvantage. Organizations and agencies providing grant money for preservation, conservation easements or farming want to see proof that the town has thoroughly considered and planned for the future (i.e., "Comprehensively Planned"). We greatly diminish opportunities or preclude landowners from getting grants by not conducting an organized comprehensive planning process.

We are at a point where it is wise to build on methods and practices used in the past. ***We need our Zoning Laws and we also need to comprehensively plan for the future.***

Needed: Volunteers for a Comprehensive Planning Steering Committee

To get this planning initiative started we must first get sufficient volunteers to serve on the steering committee.
The job of the group, as we now perceive it, is to

- Establish a roadmap to guide the Charlton Comprehensive Planning Process
- Facilitate the execution of the roadmap,
- Facilitate the approval of a Charlton Comprehensive Plan and the initial steps for its implementation.

Foremost in the process must be respect for the rights, perspectives and interests of all our citizens because the entire purpose of the effort is to plan a future for our town that our citizens desire.

We firmly believe the committee needs to be composed of representatives who come from all geographic regions and demographic elements of our community. ***We do not want to exclude adequate representation from any definable segment of our community that believes they are viable stakeholders in Charlton's future.*** ***Committee members most important job will be to accurately express the views of the group they represent.*** We would like to designate a "Primary" and "Alternate" representative for each slot. ***Examples*** of representative slots follow.

- Large Landowner(s), greater than 100 acres
- Farmer (s)
- Senior Citizen(s)
- Parent(s) with a child attending our various school districts
- Professional employee(s) from our various school districts
- High school student(s) from our various school districts and a high school level home-schooled student
- A parent home-schooling a child
- One representative each from Voting Districts 1-4 (i.e., the Charlton Heights area, the residential area south of Charlton Road, the area north of Charlton Road, and the West Charlton Area)
- Charlton business owners from different type businesses/services
- A Minimum of two Planning Board members, as prescribed by law.

Open communication is critical for effective planning. ***Please***, if at all possible, ***attend the Information Meeting on September 10.*** If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, or ***would like to serve on the Steering Committee***, please contact one of the co-chairpersons.

Steve Caine at 384-3948 or steve-catherinecaine@earthlink.net
or Deborah Herrin at 882-1009 or dherrin@direcway.com.

Please contact us within 30 days of receiving this notice, if you are interested in serving on the Steering Committee. Thanks.

Signed,

The Charlton Town Board, and
Steven Caine and Deborah Herrin, Comprehensive Planning, Co-Chairpersons.