

Comprehensive Town Planning

Vision Statement

Cohocton is a quiet and peaceful place, rich in local history and surrounded by natural beauty and open space. We cherish the quality of our natural environment and acknowledge our dependence upon healthy, intact local ecosystems for the clean air and pure water, food, fiber, and fuel we require to sustain our health and our spiritual and emotional well-being. We cherish the rural character and small town atmosphere of our community and embrace sound planning as a tool to balance growth and conservation. We are proud of the friendliness and diversity of our residents, our strong sense of community, and especially the quality and talent of our young people. We seek to preserve these qualities that we love and which make Cohocton a unique and special place.

Our vision for the future of Cohocton is one in which we will conserve its open space, preserve our farmland, and promote sound and responsible development through pro-active planning. We will continue to search for, adopt, and employ ways to preserve and protect our natural resources and their biodiversity. We will endeavor to improve safety, improve access to infrastructure, and provide a quality of life atmosphere within the entire Town. We hope to create a unified community with an abundance of programs and activities for residents of all ages. In seeking change, we hope to improve our community in ways that will benefit everyone, making it a better place for generations to come.

Planning for the Future

Most rural communities like the Town of Cohocton were originally established without comprehensive plans, review boards, or regulatory controls. The historic hamlets, natural features that shaped growth, and the rural road system remain from the era of initial development and combine to create a picturesque environment.

By carefully examining current conditions and issues in the context of citizen involvement, a community can prepare a plan to guide its future. The plan should establish community goals and include recommendations intended to preserve the environment, while supporting growth that is compatible with community standards.

Legal Basis for the Plan

New York State Town Law (§272-a) authorizes preparation of a comprehensive (or master) plan by a town and sets forth the procedures to be followed. The law includes a statement of “legislative findings and intent” that emphasizes the importance of the planning process to the health, safety, and general welfare of Town residents and the essential need for open citizen participation in the design of the comprehensive plan. The law goes on to define the comprehensive plan as follows: “town comprehensive plan means the materials, written and/or graphic, including but not limited to maps, charts, studies, resolutions, reports and other descriptive material that identify the goals, objectives, principles, guidelines, policies, standards, devices and instruments for the immediate and long-range protection, enhancement, growth and development of the town...” The Reform Cohocton Town Plan is intended to fulfill the requirements for a comprehensive plan for the Town of Cohocton.

Scope of The Plan

We recognize that future actions in the Town of Cohocton are dependent on a variety of factors and inter-related decisions by both government agencies and residents, many of which cannot be predicted in advance. In addition to this, external political, economic, and demographic changes frequently require the amendment and updating of aspects of the Plan. The Town Plan must therefore contain a balance of flexibility as well as of specificity that will help clarify the community's intentions.

At the same time, we understand that the collective action of many of our local boards, committees, organizations, and citizens activist groups represent the research and implementation of many practical elements of the Town Plan itself. Therefore, the Cohocton Town Plan must recognize the entire spectrum of visioning, planning, research, deliberation, budgeting, ratifying, and implementing within the scope of the Town Plan itself. These collective endeavors on the part of all residents and town officials will henceforth be recognized under the single document of the Town Plan.

This expanded scope is one of the principle innovations of the Reform Cohocton Town Plan, and requires a larger structure in order to organize the many ongoing efforts of town residents and government effectively.

Structure of the Plan

For both practical and legal purposes, therefore, the Town Plan will be structured in two parts: a "Core Plan" and a "Working Plan."

1. The Core Plan is that portion of the Plan that contains the vision, goals, policies, and strategies that have been ratified by the Town Board and therefore contain the force of official policy for the Town of Cohocton. It is principally the elements of the Core Plan that will serve as a guide for the practical implementation of its policies and form the basis for meeting legal requirements under of New York State Law. The Planning and Zoning Boards will maintain the Core Plan, and their recommendations for changes will be made to the Town Board periodically as they become necessary and evident through the activities and actions within the Town. Cohocton's current hard-copy Comprehensive Plan will serve as the initial Core Plan, and the policy elements in it will be updated, extended, and more fully detailed by working committees as time goes on. These policy elements can be used to evaluate future proposals for action by public and private entities and will serve as a guide for decision-makers.
2. The Working Plan is that portion of the Town Plan that contains and facilitates the practical implementation of the policies, goals, and priorities of the Core Plan. It is hosted on a web site to facilitate the progress of each of the ongoing activities of the various agencies and volunteer committees. These activities are known as "Action Items," and the process and product of their work will be available to interested residents online. Much of the Working Plan will be updated and managed by active members of the various volunteer committees, and it is hoped that their work will become the attention and locus of additional constructive contributions by the diverse citizenry of the Town. More specific rules for citizen participation in the Working Plan can be found in the section "How to Use the Town Plan Online."

Renewal of the Plan

In order to maintain its relevancy and usefulness, the Town Plan will no longer be a static document but rather one that continually evolves as the community uses it. To accomplish this, a format for renewal of the Town Plan has been designed to allow ready updating, modification, and expansion through the continuing process of review. The new format involves the following planning process.

Initial Adoption of the Plan:

1. Planning and Zoning Committee (PZC) prepares draft plan.
2. Plan is presented to public via meetings, posting on the web, etc.
3. Plan revised based on public input.
4. Public hearing.
5. Adoption of plan by Town Board.

Ongoing Public Input:

1. Action Groups established to pursue specific tasks.
2. Opportunities (meetings, chat rooms, data exchange, etc.) provided for dialogue on goals, issues, concerns, progress, etc.
3. Repository established for data, agency contacts, funding sources, progress reports, etc. and updated on continuing basis for access by Town residents.

Periodic Review of Plan

Regularly scheduled review of the Plan will follow the following process:

1. The PZC will prepare a summary of progress on action tasks and current issues for public dissemination.
2. A Town Vision Meeting will be scheduled every two years to discuss status of action tasks, review Plan visions and goals, suggest next steps, and establish an agenda for the next two years. Additional formal reviews of the plan, including public comment, may occur more frequently if desired.
3. Committee meetings and public dialogue will be followed by preparation of proposed amendments to the plan.
4. The Town Board will conduct public hearing(s) and adopt the revised Plan and action tasks as necessary.

Goals and Strategies

The future of the Town of Cohocton is tied to its unique natural and man-made resources. These resources – woods and mountains, clear streams, abundant wildlife, spectacular views, historic hamlets, and rich agricultural lands – provide the raw material for a healthy, peaceful life style for the Town’s residents and a successful economy based on environmentally sensitive development to sustain them. To achieve this vision, the Town Plan outlines goals and strategies to be embodied and applied through town initiatives, ordinances, and laws.

The Town’s future also depends on its people. The residents of Cohocton are a diverse mixture ranging from those whose ancestors farmed here hundreds of years ago to recent arrivals who came because the Town offered an attractive rural environment and appealing quality of life. Preserving these qualities while maintaining Town residents’ financial capacity to keep their roots here is a difficult challenge and will be a significant measure of the long-term success of the Plan.

Regional Context

Many of the goals and strategies set forth in this Plan will be influenced by factors and/or agencies that transcend the Town's boundaries. The ability to recognize such external factors and to coordinate and collaborate with other agencies is extremely important if the town is to achieve its objectives. In particular, opportunities for productive partnerships should be pursued with communities in the Finger Lakes Region and surrounding Townships.