

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF THE

TOWN OF READING, NEW YORK

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TOWN OF READING COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

INTRODUCTION

This plan is based on the results of a mail survey of registered voters in the town, conducted in 1991, a 3 day public workshop (Charrette) held in June 1993, and a number of public meetings held from time to time over the past several years. All of these activities were conducted by the town to attract maximum public participation from all segments of the community. This comprehensive plan summarizes the goals agreed upon by most Reading residents and outlines preliminary community plans.

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS

The Town of Reading is a diverse community which includes a wide range of different land uses. Most of its population lies within the eastern and southeastern parts of the town, near Seneca Lake and the Village of Watkins Glen. The portion of the Town which is inside the Village of Watkins Glen is not being actively considered in this planning process, since it is within the planning and zoning jurisdiction of the Village.

Reading's development has been and will continue to be shaped by its infrastructure. Two state highways (14 and 14A) and two active freight railroad lines are located in the eastern portion of the Town. The Watkins Glen water and sewage systems extend a short distance beyond the Village limits into the Town. With excess capacity in the systems, these water and sewer lines represent an important resource for attracting and concentrating new development.

The Village of Watkins Glen is limited by topography and wetlands from expanding in any direction except to the northwest, into Reading. This has and will continue to place development pressure on the southeastern corner of the Town. Reading therefore needs to develop a strategy for incremental extension of water and sewer lines to serve high intensity land uses, while protecting the lakeshore and the rural open space further away.

Reading may also need water and sewer infrastructure in the hamlets of Reading Center and Irelandville, but this will be more difficult to provide because of their distance from Watkins Glen. Reading Center, which needs infrastructure more, is also much further away. This makes it unlikely that an extension of water and sewer services to Reading Center will be economically feasible.

Reading has a well-balanced tax base because of such non-residential properties as the Nobel-Akzo salt plant, the Texas Eastern gas pipeline facilities, the two railroad lines, and several tourist businesses. In addition, Reading has considerable woodland and some farmland, although it appears that much farmland has been growing back to woods.

Geographically, Reading functions in many ways as an extension of Watkins Glen, with many residents served by the Watkins Glen Post Office, and most served by the Watkins Glen school system and fire company. The character of the western part of Reading is more rural and sparsely populated than the eastern half. However, Reading's people expressed a strong desire to become a more cohesive community with a stronger identity.

Southeastern Reading is suitable for large-scale development that could change its character because of the availability of infrastructure and easy access to Watkins Glen. Without any planning regulations, Reading is therefore vulnerable to the impacts of such development. Recognizing this, many residents feel a sense of urgency about planning in order to make development fit into Reading's existing character.

COMMUNITY GOALS

Residents of the Town of Reading expressed the following as community goals:

1. Strengthen the sense of community and improve communication within the Town.
2. Where possible, keep agriculture economically healthy.
3. Preserve open space.
4. Allow flexibility of uses without harming neighbors.
5. Encourage non-polluting small business and industry growth that provides year-round employment.
6. Maintain an economically diverse community with affordable housing.
7. Revitalize old buildings and hamlets with businesses and housing.
8. Discourage large-scale development that changes the Town's character.
9. Protect Seneca Lake water quality and other important environmental resources.
10. Balance the property rights of individuals with community interests, maintaining rural traditions of freedom of land use.
11. Increase citizen involvement in local government.
12. Keep the Town rural, with moderate growth.
13. Establish a flexible system to regulate development.
14. Provide better access to the lake.
15. Improve the appearance of the Town.

COMMUNITY PLAN

The challenge of implementing a community plan is to reconcile development and conservation objectives in a way that respects rural traditions. A plan does not need to spell out specific land uses for each portion of a town. Rather, it can establish an appropriate framework for making decisions on land use and development, striking a balance between landowners' property rights and community goals.

The most important elements of a plan for Reading are flexibility and responsiveness to individual and community needs and desires. Based upon the goals and priorities expressed by residents of Reading at the charrette, Reading appears to be ready to begin drafting a set of development regulations tailored to its needs. This report outlines the major points that such a plan and regulations would cover. The Town could choose some combination of these elements, modify them, and/or invent new ones.

1. Allow one-family, two-family, agricultural, and most small-scale business uses "by right" throughout the town. Small-scale businesses can be defined by square footage (for example, under 2,000 square feet of floor space and 5,000 square feet of total coverage of land in active use). Businesses that manufacture, store, use, or dispose of hazardous materials, tires, junk, etc., would not be allowed by right, regardless of their size.
2. Allow new medium-scale businesses (up to three times the size of the small-scale ones mentioned above) by right, subject only to site plan review by the Planning Board. Site plan review would cover issues such as road access, traffic impact, parking, building layout, appropriateness of design, drainage, waste disposal, environmental impact, provision of buffers, minimum distance from nearby residences, and protection of neighbors from harmful effects of the use. Existing medium-scale businesses would be "grandfathered," but their expansion by more than 25% would require site plan approval.
3. Allow new large-scale business uses, as well as those that manufacture, store, use or dispose of hazardous materials, tires, junk, solid waste, etc. only by special permit, which would include site plan review. In determining whether to grant a special permit, the planning board would follow specific criteria relating to the suitability of the use to its proposed location, its impact on the surrounding area, the availability of rail, highway, water, and sewer infrastructure, its proximity to existing industrial uses, its compatibility with the town goals listed above, its impact on town infrastructure and fiscal capacity, and its environmental and social impact. Existing large-scale businesses would be "grandfathered," but expanding them by more than 25% would require a special permit. If legally possible, out-of-town waste would be precluded from being dumped at a facility in the Town of Reading. Conditions necessary to assure fulfillment of developers' infrastructure construction responsibilities would be imposed.
4. Allow multi-family use of existing buildings by right. New buildings for multi-family use (3 or more units) would be allowed with site plan review for up to 5 units. For more than 5 units, a special permit would be required.
5. Allow individual mobile homes meeting state and federal standards for new mobile home construction by right. All others (including two or more homes on a lot or in a subdivision) would require site plan review. Mobile home parks with more than 10 units would require special permits.

6. Establish density guidelines (not minimum lot sizes) limiting the number of residential units allowed by right within a given tract of land to, say, one unit per two acres in areas that lack water and sewer service. This could be varied by special permit, provided that all applicable impact criteria are satisfied. Areas with water and sewer could have considerably higher density, provided that they satisfy special permit performance standards.
7. Establish minimum setbacks from lot lines for by-right uses. These could be varied according to the circumstances in the course of site plan and special permit review.
8. Pass subdivision regulations to allow the planning board to review land subdivisions. Review of subdivisions of less than 5 lots would be expedited as "minor subdivisions." Subdivision regulations would enable the planning board to ensure that subdivided land was suitable for development, that proper roads are constructed, and that such roads are either properly constructed or bonded prior to final approval. Narrow, unpaved country roads would be allowed with a suitable base and drainage, provided that the developer committed to permanent low density. Clustering would be encouraged but not required unless water and sewer service is available.
9. Offer the option of resolving all site plan, special permit, and subdivision controversies through a mediation process involving the applicant and neighbors. The agreed settlement would be submitted to the planning board for approval.
10. Create a lake area "overlay" with more stringent criteria for land lying within 1/2 mile of Seneca Lake or within 100 feet of designated major streams flowing into the lake (see SLPWA recommendations).
11. Adopt storm water and erosion control guidelines for site plan and special permit uses (see SLPWA recommendations).
12. Establish a volunteer community organization to do some or all of the following:
 - ▶ Publish a community newsletter and directory of businesses.
 - ▶ Seek funds for housing and building improvements.
 - ▶ Seek funds for the construction or extension of water and sewer infrastructure.
 - ▶ Investigate possible sites and funding for a lakefront town park.
 - ▶ Plan for tree planting and other civic improvements.
 - ▶ Sponsor a community day social event and organized flea market.
 - ▶ Develop a voluntary community consultation process (or design guidelines) so that new development is consistent with the special character of the Town.
 - ▶ Investigate possibilities for hamlet revitalization, business retention and expansion, and attraction of new businesses.
13. Improve administration of the Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code (possibly sharing staff with another town) and use the same personnel to administer a land use law. Interpret the Code in a flexible manner to encourage reuse of old buildings.
14. Work with the Farm Bureau and Cornell Cooperative Extension to establish an agricultural district to provide tax relief and right-to-farm protection for farmers.

