

## INTRODUCTION

### A. *Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan*

A comprehensive plan (also called a master plan or comprehensive development plan) is a document prepared for a community, county or specific region which establishes an overall plan and recommended actions relevant to the current and future needs of the area. Comprehensive plans typically contain: maps, graphics, studies, reports and other descriptive material identifying goals, objectives, policies, guidelines, standards, and options for the immediate and long-range protection, enhancement, growth and development of the community.

As indicated in the following overview, State legislation (including Town Law section 272-a) recognizes the importance of Villages, Towns, Cities and Counties to prepare and adopt their own comprehensive plans:

- Significant decisions and actions affecting the immediate and long-range protection, enhancement, growth and development of communities are made by local governments;
- Among the most important powers and duties granted to a local government is the authority and responsibility to undertake comprehensive planning and to regulate land use for the purpose of protecting the public health, safety and general welfare of its citizens;
- The development and enactment by the local government of a comprehensive plan which can be readily identified, and is available for the public, is in the best interest of the people of each community;
- The participation of citizens in an open, responsible and flexible planning process is essential to the designing of the optimum comprehensive plan;
- The comprehensive plan is a means to promote the health, safety and general welfare of the people of the community and to give due consideration to the needs of the people of the region of which the community is a part; and
- The comprehensive plan fosters cooperation among governmental agencies planning and implementing capital projects and municipalities that may be directly affected thereby.

The primary reasons why the Town decided to initiate the planning process were:

- The Town's planning document was outdated and did not clearly identify the community's current conditions and current vision, nor did it contain specific initiatives to help achieve that vision;
- The Town Board wanted to have a vision, plan and guidelines for the community to refer to when addressing potential uses and proposed zoning actions within the Town; and
- The Town wanted to be pro-active in dealing with regional and inter-municipal issues, protecting its resources, and planning for community and/or service needs.

The primary mission of the *Comprehensive Plan* is to provide a balance between the need to accommodate anticipated population growth and the need to preserve the quality of life and natural resources that make Ramapo a special place to live.

The *Ramapo Comprehensive Plan* is a policy document that outlines a vision for the future of the Unincorporated Town of Ramapo. It focuses on protection of the Town's natural resources, current and long-range growth and development that is compatible with the Town's quality of life, and provides guidance to decision makers, residents and organizations.

The *Comprehensive Plan* is intended to provide a blueprint for the community's future. The *Comprehensive Plan* contains the goals and objectives applicable to various subject matters ranging from quality of life to natural resources to community services, which will guide public and private decision makers in the short and long term. In addition, the *Comprehensive Plan* identifies numerous specific planning recommendations and implementation strategies which the Town, residents, businesses, property owners and/or organizations can initiate to help achieve the future vision for Ramapo. The *Comprehensive Plan* also contains a Land Use Plan, a map intended to serve as a general guide for future development in the unincorporated areas of the Town of Ramapo, in terms of uses (e.g., residential or commercial) and density of development.

## **B. *History of Planning in the Town of Ramapo***

Historically, the Town of Ramapo has been a forerunner in planning. Ramapo is renowned nationally for its role in the Golden v. Ramapo case (1972) where the New York Court of Appeals found that the Town of Ramapo had the right to control

development based on the boundaries of its infrastructure. This case has enabled other communities to control development within their boundaries.

The *Comprehensive Plan*, once adopted, will serve as an update to previous plans and plan updates that have been completed for the Town. These previous plans include the 1993 *Limited Master Plan Update* and the 1978 *Development Plan Update*. These two updates are based on the 1966 *Development Plan*.

### ***C. The Basic Studies Component of the Plan***

Several major tasks were completed during the process of developing the *Comprehensive Plan*. These tasks helped compile the necessary data and information about various topics, issues and opportunities, as well as public opinion, which were used to establish the framework for the *Comprehensive Plan*.

The first task that was completed was the *Basic Studies* document. This document evaluated the significant factors which have historically impacted and that are currently influencing the Town of Ramapo. The *Basic Studies* document contains a wide range of data and information regarding the topics of: demographics, housing, land use, environmental resources, transportation, the economy, culture and recreation, and community facilities.

A public opinion survey was conducted. Approximately 7,600 public opinion surveys were sent to residential addresses in the unincorporated area of the Town of Ramapo. Residents were asked to respond to questions regarding a number of issues including: transportation; recreation; commercial development; and housing. Over 1,200 completed surveys were sent back to the Town Hall, an excellent return rate of 16.6%. The results of the survey were provided in the Basic Studies program.

A development potential analysis of the Town's residential development was performed and included as well within the *Basic Studies* document. The development potential study is an important part of the comprehensive planning process because it identified the potential location and amount of additional residential development that could occur in the Town based on the Town's existing zoning.

The *Basic Studies* document served as a foundation for discussions and decisions for the Citizens Advisory Committee, Town Officials, Town Staff and planning consultants regarding the *Comprehensive Plan* and comprises an important element of the *Plan*.

## **D. Public Participation**

Town residents participated in all phases of the Town's planning project in a variety of ways, including a public opinion survey, meetings of the Citizens Advisory Committee and public hearings. Numerous meetings with elected officials, the Citizens Advisory Committee and Town staff were held throughout the process.

### **Citizens Advisory Committee**

Early in the planning process, a Citizen's Advisory Committee was formed to help guide the planning process and to represent the interests of the residents of the Town of Ramapo. The members of the Committee represented residents from many of the neighborhoods in the unincorporated Town of Ramapo. The Citizen's Advisory Committee met on the following dates to discuss the progress of the Basic Studies document, and the public opinion survey: June 20, 2001 and August 30, 2001.

When the *Basic Studies* document was completed, the Citizen's Advisory Committee, Town Officials, Town Staff and planning consultants met on the following dates to discuss the goals and objectives and the content of the draft Comprehensive Plan: January 15, 2002; June 13, 2002; and June 25, 2002.

All of these meeting were open to the public.

### **Public Opinion Survey**

A public opinion survey was prepared for the *Comprehensive Plan* as a means of soliciting public input on specific topics and issues. The survey was mailed to every address within the unincorporated Town of Ramapo in late November 2001; copies of the survey were available at the Town Hall in Spanish, French and Hebrew. 1,267 surveys were sent back to the Town and tabulated; the results are included in the *Basic Studies* document.

### **Public Meetings**

As mentioned above, all meetings with the Citizens Advisory Committee were open to the public. The following meetings were specifically held to formally present information to the public and to seek their thoughts and feelings on the future of Ramapo:

- On January 7, 2002, the results of the *Basic Studies* document, the Development Potential Analysis and the Public Opinion Survey were presented to the public. Public comments and questions were elicited as well.
- The project schedule included a series of 4 community outreach meetings that were intended to elicit direct public comment on a variety of issues facing the Town. These community outreach meetings were held on the following dates:
  - Hillcrest Area - February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2002
  - Monsey Area - March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2002
  - Pomona Area - April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2002
  - Western Ramapo - April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2002
- A public hearing was held on the *Draft Comprehensive Plan* on Oct 9<sup>th</sup> 2002.
- A public hearing was held on the draft *Generic Environmental Impact Statement* on April 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of 2003.

### **Other Public Outreach Efforts**

Public outreach efforts also included newspaper articles; public announcements and interviews on local radio and television stations; distribution of documents; as well as mailings to residents, municipalities, elected officials, County departments and agencies, civic groups and various organizations.

Input from the public was an important part of the planning project. The interest and involvement of Town residents, elected officials, and various organizations provided a broad perspective on issues and recommendations shaping the contents of the *Comprehensive Plan*.

## **E. FUTURE PLANNING**

Preparation of the *Plan* should be viewed as an on-going planning process. Amendment of the *Plan* is likely to be necessary given shifts in demographics, market conditions, regional planning considerations and time. However, any amendments to the *Plan* should be undertaken in light of the overall goals and objectives stated in the *Plan*. The maximum interval at which the *Plan* shall be reviewed is 5 years.