

COMP PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING & PUBLIC HEARING

Town of Ulysses

Nov. 5, 2025

The meeting was held in person at the Town Hall at 10 Elm St., Trumansburg NY as well as via Zoom videoconference. Notice was posted on the Town's website and Clerk's board.

Video recordings of meetings are available on Youtube at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWVIs--q9CpHlxdk9YxZyPw>.

CALL TO ORDER:

Ms. Weatherby called the meeting to order at 5:01pm.

ATTENDANCE:

In person-

Committee members- Liz Weatherby (vice chair), Katelin Olson (arrived 5:22pm), Karl Klankowski, Allison Weaver, Karen Meador, Roxanne Marino, Mo Klein, Diane Cohen, Kim Moore, Tai Basilius
Town Clerk- Carissa Parlato
Town Planner- Niels Tygesen

Via Zoom-

Ann DiPetta (chair)

OTHERS:

Via Zoom-

Jessica Geary & Matt Horn (from MRB Group), Linda Liddle, Leah Lea M., Warren's iPhone, Clara, Linda Liddle (PB & WSPPC member)

In person-

Richard Goldman, Michael Boggs, Helen McLallen, Sue Poelvoorde, Bob Howarth, Sarah Adams

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Ms. Marino expressed concern that items she requested to be added to the agenda are not. She would like to add discussion of the timeline, as well as committee comments on the 10/17 draft.

Ms. Weatherby requested to move approval of minutes to the end of the meeting and add discussion of timing and the 10/26 draft.

MOTION:

Ms. Weatherby moved to approve the agenda as amended. This was seconded by Mr. Klankowski.

Ms. Weatherby amended motion to include a discussion of all drafts. This was passed unanimously.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR:

Ms. Poelvoorde spoke. (See attached comments).

Mr. Howarth shared his history with the town- having served and chaired various boards. He said that the timeline for this project has been rushed and it appeared that the committee did not want public feedback. (See further comments attached.)

Ms. Weatherby suggested to the committee that the public be allowed 5 minutes to speak. Other committee members agreed.

Ms. Cail said that she has read the draft but feels that the timeline and process have made it difficult for meaningful public input, even for those like herself who have been reading and attending the events. She is concerned that these things can make the town vulnerable to litigation.

Ms. Weatherby asked if anyone else wanted to speak.

Hearing no further comments, Mr. Klankowski moved to close Privilege of the Floor. This was seconded by Ms. Meador and passed unanimously.

COMMITTEE RULES & PROCESS DISCUSSION:

Ms. Weatherby thanked the group for their hard work over the last 2 years. She said that after hearing concerns, she would like to consider more time for the project and can discuss this in more detail later in the meeting.

PUBLIC HEARING THE 2025-2045 DRAFT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (ALL CHAPTERS):

Ms. Weatherby moved to re-open the public hearing (from the 10/22 meeting). This was seconded by Ms. Weaver and passed unanimously.

Ms. Adams concurred with previous concerns about the timeline. She feels this draft is trying to please too many people and is hard to understand. She shared feedback on format and suggested a map near the beginning of the document and additional workshops. She feels that the plan relies too much on things that have not yet been done.

Ms. Liddle thinks this is a good reference document and a great tool for public engagement if the timeline is slowed. She suggested adding a page that shows the significant changes from the 2009 plan. Other concerns included removing the Conservation Zone, changing it to medium density, the lack of appendices, and lack of a recreation plan.

Ms. Ritter introduced herself as a planner who has served on Ulysses boards.
(See attached comments).

Mr. Howarth expressed concerns on the following:

- Industrial zones
- Protecting the lakeshore zone
- Errors on the map/data sources

(See additional attached comments)

Ms. Cail expressed the following:

- Shares Mr. Howarth's concerns
- Like the transportation priorities of the plan
- Disagrees with methods for protecting soils
- Need to look at hydrology to find out where water goes
- Shocked to see Development District in her area is commercial in new map. Wants DDs to be considered during this process

Ms. McLallen said that Mr. Howarth's comments resonated with her. Her property is rural/ag and in new map is low-density agricultural. It is actively farmed and is orphaned in current map and she wants to know why.

Ms. Poelvoorde spoke on behalf of her role as Cayuga Lake Scenic By-way Director. She expressed concern that the group was not notified of the hearing so was not given a chance to comment. She added that the By-way's management plan is cited in the plan and should be part of the discussion.

Ms. Liddle recommended that the plan needs to include more protection of private water supply. She also agreed with previous comments on the data sources used in creation of the map.

Ms. Olson moved to table the public hearing. This was seconded by Mr. Klein and passed unanimously.

At this time the group took a break.

DISCUSSION ON TIMING:

Ms. Weatherby invited comments from the committee on project timing. Discussion highlights included the following:

- Support for slowing the project but having a specific timeline and end date
- Cost of extending the project
- Making sure the public understands the document
- Potential legal challenges if the plan is not well thought out
- Map errors

Ms. Olson suggested another open house on 11/19 at Town Hall for additional public engagement.

MOTION:

Ms. Marino moved that the committee takes up to 3 months (by March 31) to continue meeting to come up with a draft. This was seconded by Ms. Cohen.

The group discussed taking on the document via subcommittees.

The motion passed unanimously.

MOTION:

Ms. Weatherby moved to hold an Open House on 11/19. This was seconded by Ms. Olson. Discussion: The group discussed what the focus would be and how to market the event.

Ms. Weatherby made a friendly amendment to include timing of the Open House (4-7pm). This was seconded by Ms. Olson.

All voted in favor except for Ms. Marino and Ms. Cohen, who opposed.

NEXT MEETING:

MOTION:

Ms. Weatherby moved to schedule the next meeting for Dec. 10th at 5pm. This was 2nded by Mr. Klein and passed unanimously.

DISCUSSION ON CURRENT DRAFT:

Mr. Horn noted that the committee gave lots of comments on the current draft. Due to the timeframe, MRB grouped comments by theme.

The group discussed the best way to share everyone's comments and the next steps.

MOTION:

Ms. Weatherby moved that the CPSC reviews the 10/17 draft in correlation with the 10/31 draft, and provide additional comments on the 10/17 version by 11/26, and "like" comments by others.

Ms. Weatherby made a friendly amendment that if 6 or more "liked" comments will get incorporated into that draft, and the others will be compiled into a list to discuss later.

This was seconded by Ms. Moore and passed by all except Ms. Marino, who opposed.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES of 10/22:

MOTION:

Ms. Olson moved to approve the 10/22/25 minutes. This was seconded by Mr. Klankowski and passed by all except by Ms. Marino, who abstained.

ADJOURN:

Mr. Klein moved to adjourn at 7:48pm. This was seconded by Ms. Moore and passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by Carissa Parlato, Town Clerk, 12/3/25

Sue A. Poelvoorde and Donald R. Murray
6350 Boyd Hill Road
Trumansburg, New York 14886

Privilege of the Floor – November 5, 2025

While I would absolutely like to adhere to your Rules & Guidelines for Public Comment with respect to giving verbal comment relative to items of CPSC concern NOT on the agenda, it is impossible to do so however considering that this may be your last meeting as noted at your October 22nd meeting by Ms. Weatherby.

The public received notice that the CPSC would hold a public hearing on the individual draft chapters that will become part of the final draft of the Comprehensive Plan. I received the first notice in the Town's e-newsletter delivered on October 24th, 3:32 p.m., but as I usually do I read it over my Saturday morning coffee. From that point, I now had 11 days (if I wanted to submit comments before the meeting) to read, digest, and prepare comments on 180 pages of text. If I had not gotten the email, I would have not gotten notice until either Monday or Tuesday of the following week when the postcard arrived in our mailbox, so using Tuesday that's now 7 days to do the same work. I also note that the public was not given access to any of the appendices, which are substantial components to the Comprehensive Plan.

As I attempted to begin my thorough review, I spent 2 ½ days listening to meetings of the CPSC and became even more concerned about the process and the speed at which this update was being finalized by the Committee. I contacted a member of the committee on Saturday, October 31st to discuss my concerns and learned at that time the committee had received a compiled full draft document on 10/17 to comment on, and then a further updated document with edits made by the consultants in response, on 10/31, after the chapters had been made available to the public for the hearing. So, in fact the public does not have the latest version of the chapters, and you will potentially be voting to move the document you have in your possession on to the Town Board tonight, not even considering the comments to be given by the public tonight and potentially incorporating them into a final draft document to go to the Town Board.

As the person who chaired the committees who prepared the last two Comprehensive Plans for this town, served as a Town Board Councilperson for 5 years, Deputy Supervisor for two years and a professional planner for 30 years(now retired) and my husband and I being residents of this town for 46 and 42 years along with having our employer's base of operation located here in the town, holding the public hearing tonight on the chapters that are at least two iterations old and then voting to move a document forward that the public has not seen is professionally unethical and far from showing concern that the public be encouraged to participate when we may have potentially wasted hours of our time going through outdated documents.

There is no need to rush the process to complete the update. You the committee have not even been given adequate time to review and discuss each of your comments for the 10 chapters let alone have had time to thoroughly review the final edited document you may potentially vote on tonight, less than 5 full days after receiving it. The Town Board will not be able to adopt this

plan before the end of the year having to follow the SEQRA process, which a minimum will take 70 days.

I take exception to MRB's position that if one person makes a comment on material in the plan it will not be considered substantive and not needed to be reviewed and discussed by the full committee. (10/22 meeting.) All comments are substantive and should be given equal weight to discuss. This is NOT MRB's Comprehensive Plan, it is the Town's. The Steering Committee should decide what is to be discussed and what is to be included in the plan, not the other way around.

Additionally, you will have two new Town Councilpersons joining the Board in January and they should be included in the review process before a new Comprehensive Plan is adopted because they will be charged with deciding how to move forward with elements of the plan. So, another public hearing of this committee should be set and the public provided with a complete compiled document to review and provide comments on before moving it on to the Town Board giving us adequate time to review the document.

Thank you for your time and thank you to those volunteering your time for this project.

Respectfully submitted
Sue A. Poelvoorde
Donald R. Murray

Susan Ritter
1194 Kraft Road
Ithaca, NY 14850

November 5, 2025

RE: Comments on the Town of Ulysses Draft Comprehensive Plan

Dear Town of Ulysses Comprehensive Plan Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this initial draft of the plan. I appreciate what a major endeavor the comprehensive planning process is and I applaud committee members for their commitment to this important undertaking. There has clearly been a lot of work that has gone into this document, but I urge the committee to continue to shape and closely scrutinize this plan so that it better reflects the concerns and visions expressed by residents and is a workable and is easily understandable document.

In the chapters I have had time to read (and I hope to have an opportunity to review more), I've offered a range of comments concerning data presentation and analysis, organization of the chapters, wording choices, confusing sections, etc. But my biggest concern lies with the proposed Future Land Use Plan and Map. This draft plan is proposing major changes that will have far reaching implications if implemented. I question how this proposal has taken shape. Were committee members provided with maps and resources to assist in their analysis and decision making, did a detailed and robust discussion about this proposal occur, does the committee have consensus on this proposal? The adoption of a comprehensive plan is one of the most significant land use actions taken by a municipality and I implore you to take the time that's needed, and to not feel unnecessarily rushed or harried, so that you can create the worthwhile document that the Town of Ulysses deserves. My comments are below.

Sincerely,
Susan Ritter

Introduction – Chapter1

- Pg 1 *“Comprehensive plans are usually developed for a 15 to 20-year horizon with anticipated periodic updates made every 10 years. Less extensive revisions and updates may, and should, be incorporated into the comprehensive plan on an **annual basis.**”*

The recommendation that the Ulysses Plan be updated annually is highly unusual for a small town that expects to see continued slow growth and possibly declining population (see pg.....). Plans are updated to reflect changing conditions. Frequent revisions are more typical in a fast-growing urban area where plan elements, such as neighborhood plans, road and transit plans, etc. need to keep up with growing demands. Suggesting that annual revisions will occur for the Ulysses plan, after a multiple-year endeavor, raises questions on the town's intent. Instead, perhaps, the town should consider holding annual discussions to conduct a review of the progress being made to meet goals/objectives and priorities for the coming year.

- Pg. 2 *“It is not possible to implement all policies called for by the Comprehensive Plan simultaneously.”*

Is there a section that outlines short, medium and long-term implementation? This prioritizing should be included so that boards and staff are able to move forward on short term policies immediately and not waste time going through the prioritizing process.

- Pg. 4 Throughout the draft plan the Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan (2015) is referenced. Why is there a heavy reliance on this County plan? It seems outdated.
- Pgs 6-9 Demographic comparisons:
 - *“The largest share of the Town’s population, 41.4% is over the age of 55, **which is the highest of any geography.** Similarly, **the Town has the smallest proportion of residents aged 25 and younger, at 24.7% compared to 39.6% in the County and 31% in the Region***
 - *“The median age **in the Town is 47.8, significantly higher than both the County and the Region median ages of 31.8 and 41, respectively.**”*
 - *“The Town has **the lowest percentage of low-income households, with only 10.2% of households earning \$25,000 or less annually and about a quarter earning under \$50,000.**”*

Using Tompkins County data to compare with Town of Ulysses data results in flawed assumptions that Ulysses is an outlier community demographically. The presence of a significant student population in the City and Town of Ithaca result in Tompkins County demographic data being skewed, particularly for age, economics, and housing related indicators. But when compared to the adjacent towns of Newfield or Enfield, disparities are diminished. For instance, according to the Census Report website (the U.S. Census website is not currently active due to government shutdown), the Town of Newfield median age is 46.7, with 45% of the population over the age of 50, and with 25% of the population having an income below \$50,000.

Comparisons using the County data should be limited to elements that are not statistically affected by the large student population. Much of the demographic and housing data could stand on its own and do not necessarily need a community comparison, while some may benefit from comparison with adjacent towns. This county data comparison problem occurs in the Housing and Economic Development chapters also, and perhaps elsewhere. This looks sloppy and is misleading and should be addressed throughout the plan.

- Pg 9 *“The **figure below** shows the industry sector composition of Tompkins County.”*
The figures are missing; there is nothing shown below.
Are there any employment numbers for the town that could be included here?

Chapter 2 Land and Rural Issues/Future Land Use Map

- The Land Use and Rural Character Element chapter is confusing given the large amount of information provided. Seemingly lost at the end of the chapter are the goals/objectives/policies largely directed at agriculture. Agricultural related goals/policies are also lightly scattered in other chapters. It is quite common for a comprehensive plan to have a stand-alone agriculture chapter. As a dominant land use in the town, it would be very appropriate to have a separate

chapter related to agriculture to give it more emphasis and to place all related goals/policies in one location. This would also help to make Chapter 2 easier to follow.

- The term "*Highway 96*" is used in Chapter 2 and possibly elsewhere. Change to State Route 96, Route 96 or Trumansburg Rd; no one calls it Highway 96.

- Pg. 3, *Map 1 Agricultural and Forest Subtypes*,

What is the source of this information? It appears to be only accounting for "*priv forest*" and there only appears to be one parcel that is owned by a nonprofit (Smith Woods). Other forested lands throughout the town are not included in the map, but should be. Or just call this an Agricultural Map.

- Pg 9, *Ag and Natural Resources: "Farms and **timber lands**..." "For these reasons, the Town is committed to preserving and enhancing a forest land base and **promoting a forestry industry**."*

The plan gives lip service to forestry and habitat protection, but inserting language that regards forested lands as simply "timber lands" and "promoting" a "forestry industry", (much different than say, cutting a few trees for a property owner's needs) does not suggest genuine concern. The only forested land example provided is that located "south of Glenwood Heights Road to the Town of Ithaca municipal line" (see pg. 9). This forested area is a designated Unique Natural Area by Tompkins County. Industrial harvesting of trees in this and other sensitive areas of the town will damage habitat needed for our local wildlife and birds that migrate through our region or nest locally. Timber harvesting on steep slopes will cause erosion and sedimentation in local streams and Cayuga Lake. This section needs to be consistent with its goals.

Chapter 2 - Future Land Use Map

- Why are Conservation and Lakeshore Zones being eliminated? The proposed Low Density Residential designation proposed along and adjacent to Taughannock Blvd is a major departure and inconsistent with the current zoning. The proposal for a 2-ac minimum lot size would subject many parcels to further fragmentation (non-lake front parcels). Those zones were established in recognition of the steep slopes, mature forests, fragile cliffs, plant and wildlife habitats, and numerous large and small streams that define the area. Much of this land is designated as Unique Natural Areas by Tompkins Country, which in addition to the reasons cited above, also recognizes the corridor's scenic and aesthetic significance. These UNAs connect with similar UNAs in the Town of Ithaca, creating an important biological corridor. Using Google Earth aerial imagery (free for users), one can see an almost contiguous swath of forest and open space (~7 miles!) from the City/Town of Ithaca municipal line to Taughannock Falls State Park; a truly unique and important biological corridor. Anyone living in the area (myself included), or walking the Black Diamond Trail, can attest to the amazing variety of birds species, as well as other fauna and flora that utilize this important area.

These lands warrant extra consideration in recognition of their important natural resource values. The steep slopes combined with an abundance of streams, both large and small (see Map 1 Ag & Forest Subtypes), poses risks for erosion and sedimentation impacts. The Future Land Use Map proposes this same land use designation to the upland parts of town, but these areas are not equivalent locations characteristically.

- The Medium Density Residential designation described as permitting up to 8 units/acre is a significant expansion of density in the town. Under this proposal well over 1000 acres would be eligible for potential upzoning in the town, many of this in the state-certified Ag District. Combining 8 unit/acre with a proposed requirement of $\geq 50\%$ undeveloped/open space requirement and spreading this designation throughout the town is a recipe for excessive sprawl, exactly what this plan suggests it is trying to prevent.

Increasing density makes sense, but only for targeted and limited areas of the town and it should be coupled with a much smaller open space requirement to make the most efficient use of land for development and to make expansion of utilities as cost-effective as possible.

There is little justification for accelerating this degree of development potential in the town when population projections cited in the plan indicate slow growth in the town. Nor does this seem in concert with a realist picture for how water and sewer expansion should take place in the town, again impacting areas designated as state-certified Ag District.

- Why is the entire ~118-acre Agard Road parcel, currently owned by Cayuga Compost/P&S Excavation, being designated in its entirety as “Industrial” when only approximately 15 acres is being used for the composting facility and the remainder is currently in mostly active field crops and woods? This appears to be a serious flaw.

Mike’s Marine, and Moore’s Marine are used as example areas, but they are not identified as Industrial on the Future Land Use Map.

- Why is the compost facility and auto salvage yard even designated as “industrial”. Was this determined to be the best future use for this land if these businesses cease operation? Does “industrial” fit the current use or would a different term(s) recognize current use and provide for a better future vision?
- "The Future Land Map/Plan and zoning regulations work in tandem to create a full picture of how land will be used. For this reason, it is important to provide an assessment of the current zoning to determine what changes may be needed to be implemented for the future land use plan. Where are the assessments and recommended changes?

Chapter 3 Housing Element

- Pg 11 *“The Town of Ulysses has the oldest housing stock after the Southern Tier Region. Over half, 56.9%, of homes in the Town were built prior to 1970.”*

This is another data comparison with Tompkins County data suggesting that Ulysses is an outlier. Ulysses certainly has a large proportion of older houses, but does the town really have the oldest housing stock?

- *Pg 13 Importantly, the price of constructing new housing has risen dramatically since 2000, more than tripling from around \$124,000 to \$428,000 in 2024 based on a survey by the National Association of Home Builders.*

What does this data even refer to – what size, how many bedrooms, what part of the US? It would be more applicable to have local figures; such the construction costs for single family homes (\$/sq.ft.) in Tompkins County over the recent years.

- *Pg. 17 “The median home value is \$363,085 in the Town, which **is over \$30,000 more than the County** and just under double the Region’s median home value.”*

Does this figure include homes located along Cayuga Lake and this may be the reason it is over the County median?

- *Pg. 30 “The Town also faces a shortage of overall housing supply. This scarcity, potentially exacerbated by the prevalence of **short-term rentals**,...”*

Should an objective/policy be written to leave the door open for some sort of future regulations of short-term rentals, if found to be a growing problem?

- *H.4.4 - Extend water and sewer to neighborhoods where housing growth is desired but not where land is intended to be protected*

H.1.5. Proactively advertise to regional, responsible developers, engineers, and financial institutions that the Town is open for housing growth within the proposed growth areas.

Where are these neighborhoods and locations? Does this refer to all of the Medium Density Residential areas? The plan is not clear on what is to be protected and where actual neighborhoods are desired.

Chapter 5 Economic Development Element

- **Genera Comment:** This chapter could be so much better if it were significantly revised. Its organization is confusing, it contains pages of data found in other chapters, and provides no real economic picture of the community.

This chapter lacks any clear picture of the local economy. There is no explanation of the Tompkins County economy and how the Town of Ulysses fits into it and it provide no specifics for the town itself. The major employers/industries in the county should be identified (i.e. Cornell, Ithaca College, BorgWarner, Ithaca City School District, Cayuga Medical Center, etc.) and a discussion of how it relates to Ulysses. Many Ulysses residents work/worked directly for these entities, and many who do not work or do business directly still benefit from their presence in the greater local community. Higher education tends to fluctuate less with market conditions

and this has provided a stable foundation for our local economy. Ulysses would be a much different place without these major employers.

The chapter lacks any description of who the major employers and employment sectors are in the town and/or adjacently in the Village of Trumansburg (Trumansburg School District, Rackers Center, service providers, etc). Page 20 contains the following statement “*the Town’s largest industries include education, healthcare, government, and retail, along with a robust tourism industry centered around the Town’s natural resources*”, but specific industries are never identified in the chapter. Are they referring to town industries or the greater local economy of Tompkins County?

Shouldn’t there be some mention of key businesses in the town? Aren’t we, as residents, very fortunate to have a large grocery store and drugstore located here. There is no mention of this. If Shur-Save was to close, that would be a huge loss for the community and surrounding area. How are they doing? Is there anything the town can do to make sure they maintain viability here? What about the existence and benefits of the services and businesses in Trumansburg?? This chapter really lacks a local picture of what exists and what is really happening and needed in the community. And what about the arts/music/cultural aspects of the economy? Is discussion about this important aspect of the community in a another chapter?

- Pg. 3 *Objective #3.1 Understand the role of agriculture in the local economy and support the businesses of local farmers.*

These action items would make more sense being placed in a separate Agricultural Chapter and referred in this economic section.

- Pg 7-16 The inventory section contains numerous pages with tables containing demographic data and housing data that are presented in previous chapters. These tables provide little support to this chapter and contain no accompanying narrative as to how they factor into the Ulysses economic picture. They seem superfluous and more appropriate for the housing section.

- Pg 13 A commuting map showing that 8,521 commuters enter the County daily, but there is no explanation as to why this map is included here, why it may be important, or where these commuters are going? (i.e. it relates to the strong job market here).

- Pg 17-18 *Challenges for Economic Development*

All these challenges were discussed in previous chapters. Couldn’t this be significantly abbreviated and reference where more information can be found?

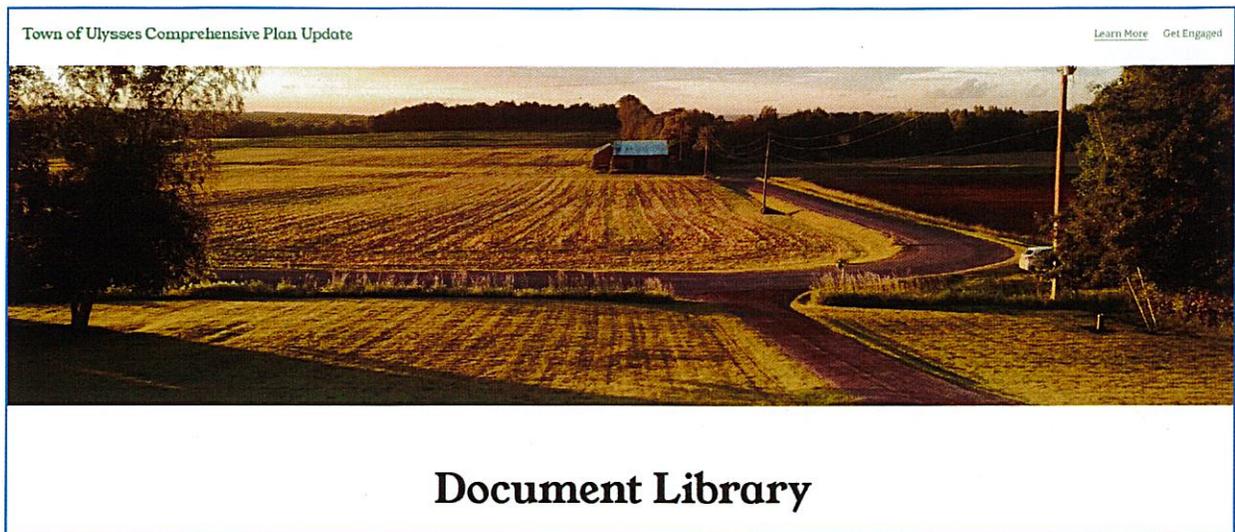
- Suggest that the Goals/Objectives/Policies section be re-evaluated after a thorough revision of this entire chapter

State Environmental Quality Review/Long Environmental Assessment Form

- Why has an incomplete (Part I only) SEQRA Full Environmental Assessment Form (FEAF) been provided for the public hearing? Is the purpose to indicate the town's intent to complete the SEQRA process in the future? And that completion of the FEAF Parts II and III will be forthcoming upon submission of a fully vetted version of the draft Comprehensive Plan, including consensus reached by the committee and Town Board on the Future Land Use Plan and map?
- The Full Environmental Assessment Form is required because adoption of a comprehensive plan is classified as a Type I action in the SEQRA regulations: "the adoption of a comprehensive plan is more likely to have a potentially significant, adverse impact on the environment, and, therefore, more likely to require the preparation of an EIS". The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and the NYS Department of State both recommend the use of the generic Environmental Impact Statement for comprehensive plans. "The generic EIS is specifically designed to analyze actions that call for a series of subsequent actions such as a comprehensive plan. In most cases, the comprehensive plan will set out a series of follow-up actions such as the amendment or writing of zoning laws or ordinances. Second, the adoption of a comprehensive plan can be one of the most significant land use actions taken by a municipality."
- If the Town is not intending to prepare a GEIS, there still needs to be a robust analysis of the impacts that result from the proposal. Under the scenarios presented in the current proposed Future Land Use Plan, which includes expanding development and residential density in large parts of the town from what is currently allowed via zoning, impacts listed in Part II of the FEIS will need to be analyzed and addressed in Part III in order to make a determination on environmental significance.

Statement of Bob Howarth to Ulysses Comprehensive Plan Committee, Nov 5, 2025

I've lived at 4124 Reynolds Road in the Town of Ulysses for almost 40 years, since 1986. With my wife Roxanne Marino, I own 93 acres of land. Most of the land (65 acres) is actively farmed and has been continuously since before the Civil War. Another 18 acres is managed forest land. Our house was built in the middle of the property in 1870 and ever since has been the only house on the property. Roxanne and I are recognized by Tompkins County, by the State, and by the federal government as active farmers and receive substantial property-tax breaks from the Town, County, and school district as a result. The photo below is from the first page of the Document Library for the Draft Comp Plan, and shows our property in the upper right corner.

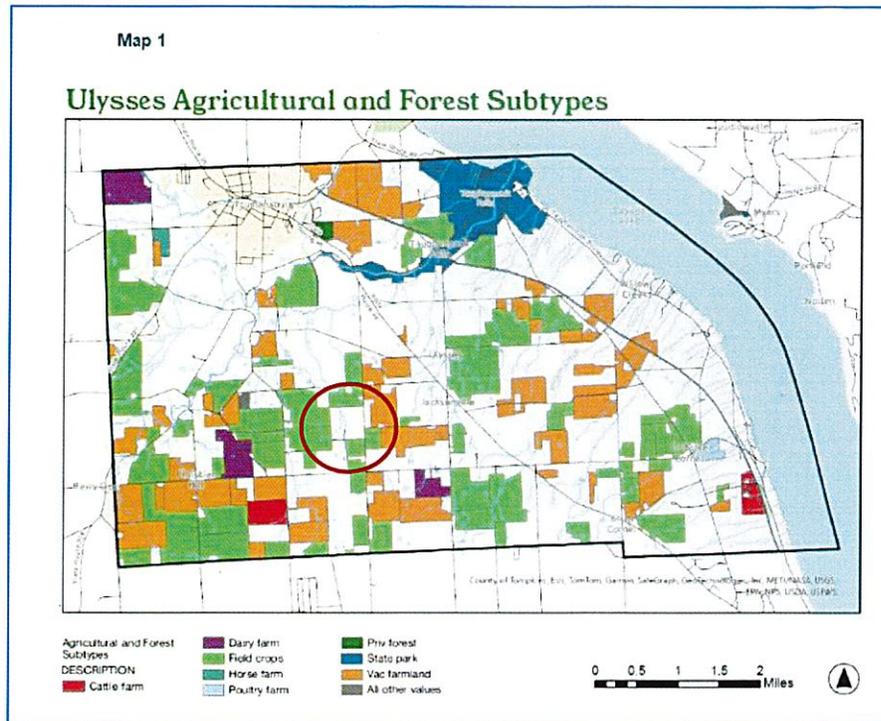


For the past many years, we've farmed our land in partnership with Thor Orchsner, as part of Orchsner Farms, growing organic grains. Our land is 5% of their total operation. Thor has just been recognized by NY State as this year's winner of the Leopold Conservation award and Roxanne and I are proud to be part of this.

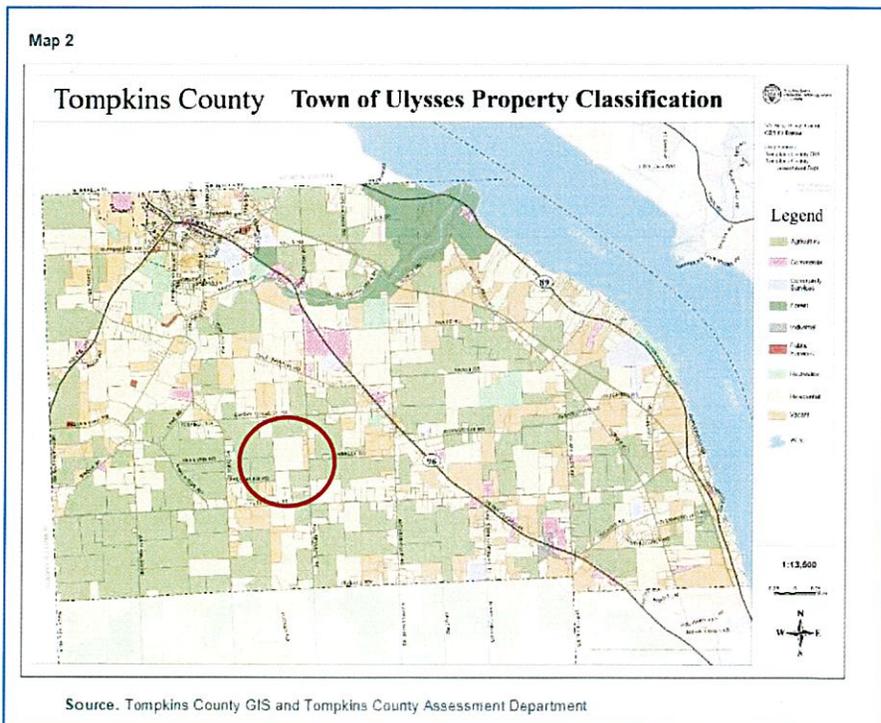


I served on the Town of Ulysses Board of Zoning Appeals for 11 years, until last January, and was BZA chair for 5 years, from 2015 to 2020. I also was a member of the Ulysses Ag and Farmland Protection Committee that produced the 2013 plan. And I was a member of the Town's Zoning Update Steering Committee (ZUSC) from 2016 to 2019.

I have carefully read only one chapter of the new Draft Comprehensive Plan, Chapter 2 on land use. I am very disappointed in this chapter, for reasons I will briefly outline below. Much of the information in the chapter is problematic, and I simply do not understand how the Town can approve a Comprehensive Plan when the basic underlying information on land use is wrong. I ask the Committee to slow down, go back, and revise at least this chapter, probably the whole plan.

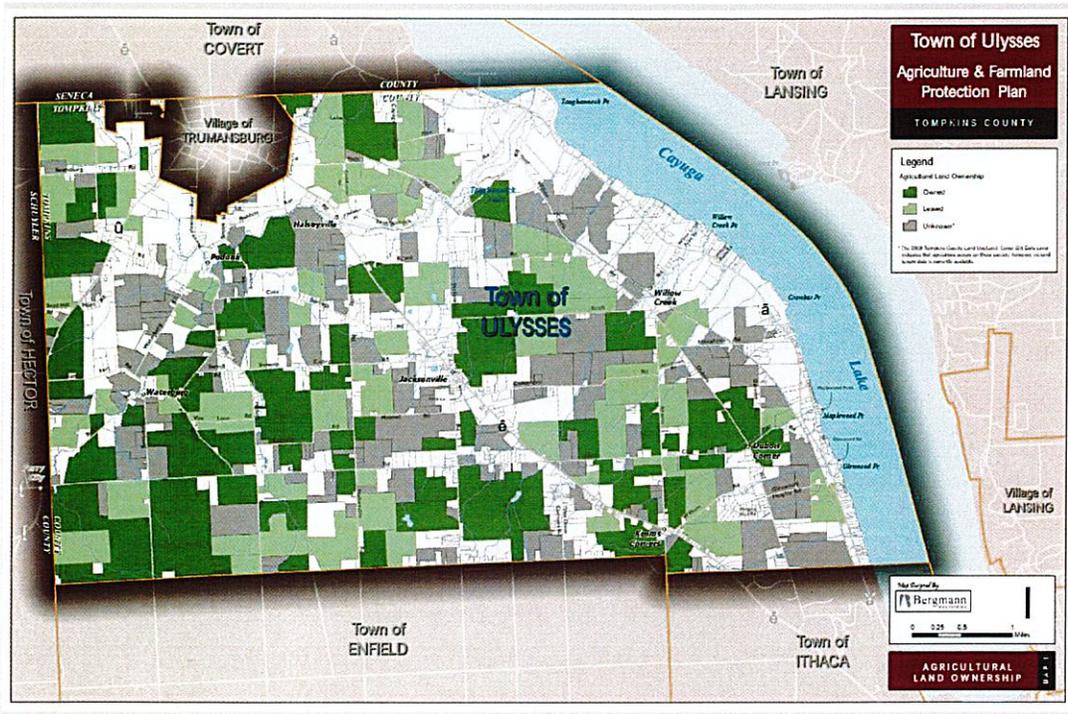


Let's start with Map 1 (shown left). The Draft Comp Plan gives no source for this, but it clearly has some major problems. For example, our property (the white rectangle in the red circle) is not considered farm land. But again, our parcel has been continuously farmed for at least 160 years, 40 by us. What other parcels are missed in this map?

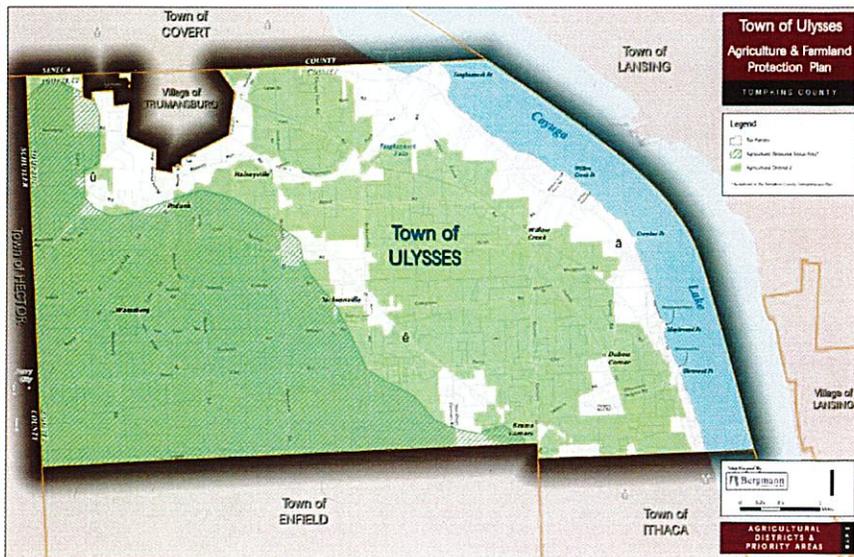


Map 2 (shown left, is attributed to 2024 data from the County, and it too is problematic. In this map, our parcel (shown in light yellow in the red circle) is described as residential, not farmland. Again please note that there is only one house on this land, it is the same house that has been there for more than 150 years, and more than 90% of the parcel is active farmland or actively managed forest land, with an agricultural exemption. Again, what other parcels may be mischaracterized?

The Draft Comp Plan refers to the 2013 Ag and Farmland Protection Plan, yet it seems to largely ignore the information and recommendations made in that report. The figure below is from that report, and shows a lot more agricultural land than shown in Map 1 above.

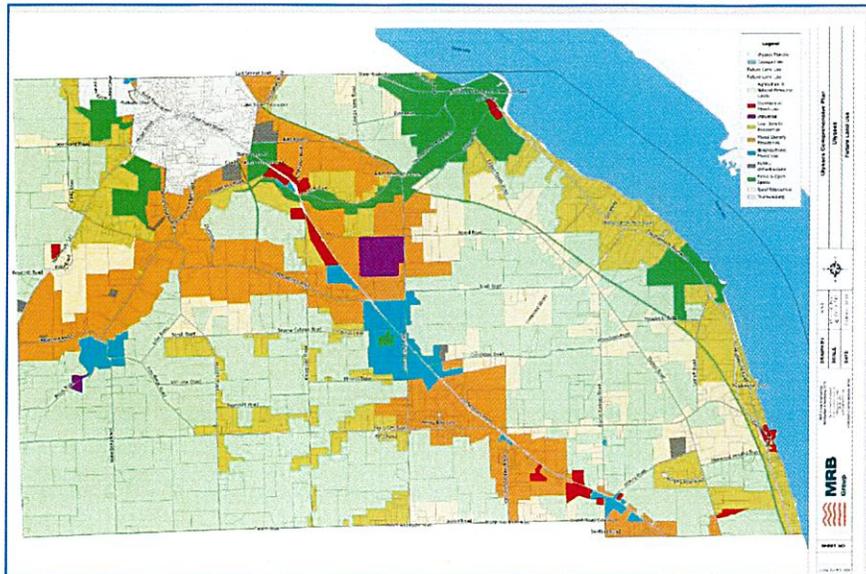


Importantly, this map shows that much of the farmland in Ulysses is rented rather than directly farmed by the primary farmer. This has important ramifications for future land use and protection. I urge your committee to update the information in this map, since there have been a lot of land sales over the past decade, and I urge you to use this information as you develop the new Comp Plan.



Another critically important figure (left) from the 2013 Ag and Farmland Protection plan shows the huge amount of area in the Town that is in the County's approved agricultural district #2. The Draft Comp Plan refers to this ag district, but does not indicate that it covers

more than 2/3rds of the land area of the Town, nor does it adequately convey what this means in terms of future land use. As noted on p 18 of the 2013 Ag and Farmland Plan, “New York State Agriculture and Markets Law allows for the creation of Agricultural Districts, where the purpose is to encourage the use of farmland for agricultural production and to discourage the conversion of farmland to non-agriculture uses” I believe the future land use proposed in the draft Com Plan, as shown in Map 3 (below) is not consistent with the intent of Ag District #2 and NY State Ag and Markets law. Of particular concern is the wide swath of dark orange



(“mixed density residential) in the western central part of the town. This map appears to promote a move from agriculture to moderate density housing along a water line. Yet as noted in the 2013 Ag and Farmland Protection Plan (p. 18), “in order to preserve farmland, the Town needs to carefully plan

for water and sewer infrastructure development and in doing so, help direct non-farm development to areas designated for more dense development. Department of Agriculture and Markets policy specifically discourages water main laterals in agricultural districts.” I am also concerned by the many parcel-specific areas shown in lighter orange (“low density residential”), including along Reynolds Road. At least one of these includes an active farm (Redbyrd Orchards).

Finally, in my brief time for a statement, I would like to address two further points: 1) the creation in the map above of areas labelled “industrial,” including an area that I believe is a junkyard that is illegal under the Town’s current zoning. I strongly oppose the “industrial” classification in any future land use in Ulysses. And 2), the proposed land-use map is a huge retrenchment from the current plan, which provides special protection to the lakeshore and to the steeply sloped area to the west of the lakeshore zone, because of the high potential of erosion and because of the high potential input of sediment and nutrients to Cayuga Lake from these areas. I was not part of the process that led to the creation of the lakeshore and conservation zones, but I do strongly support those zones, and I note that they were created after substantial study and debate. You should not lightly ignore this history.