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LaGrange weighs input on zoning

Development plan looked at

By John Davis

Poughkeepsie Journal

FREEDOM PLAINS -- The LaGrange Master Plan Committee wants to take into consideration concerns recently voiced by residents as the group tries to map the future of development in the town.

The concerns of more than 100 residents who sounded off at a May 19 planning workshop will be discussed as the committee revises the 1987 town master plan and develops suggestions for zoning changes.

At the workshop in town hall, residents brought up an array of issues, including some that seem to conflict, such as the need to preserve the town's rural character and a landowner's ability to develop the property.

"There was actually a lot of feedback from that meeting," said Councilman Joe Luna, the committee chairman.

A half dozen town residents also attended when the committee met recently in town hall. Although the meeting was not a public hearing, residents were allowed to speak at the end.

"I adore the fact that you want to go to five-acre zoning," said Brett Wilkens of Laurel Park Road of a rezoning idea being considered by the town board for the northern, rural part of LaGrange. That area is currently zoned for minimum lot sizes of two to three acres.

The next step for the committee is to identify in print the key issues raised by residents. The town engineering consultants, The Chazen Companies, are drawing up that report.

"That document, once the committee reviews it, will be open to the public," said Susan Blickstein, Chazen planning director.

A frequently mentioned concern was the possibility the town board may rezone the northern part of town to limit the number of new houses that could be built.

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"Large lot zoning was the major issue of concern," said Marianne Luhrs Pollay, Chazen senior planner. "That definitely seemed to be problematic."

The town board may soon enact a six-month development moratorium on the two- and three-acre zones in the northern terrain -- allowing consideration of rezoning to larger lot sizes.

Some residents also want to see a greater variety of housing lot sizes, including more affordable places to live, the Chazen planners said.

Goals need definition

But town planning board Chairman Jack Brewster, a committee member, said they need to better define issues like "affordable housing" and "open space" before adequately addressing them.

"Affordable housing is a tent," Brewster said. Then directing a question to the Chazen planners, he said, "Have you done any studies to determine the impact of affordable housing on taxes?"

Many residents also favored expanding the town's commercial tax base to ease the burden on homeowners.

Some residents were not aware the town board rezoned the town center last year. This will permit increased residential building density on 152 acres -- up to 12 units per acre -- as well as a mix of retail and apartments in other areas.

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If you go

The LaGrange Master Plan Committee will next meet at 7:30 p.m. July 27 in town hall on Stringham Road. The meeting is open to the public, but is not a public hearing.

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