

**Town of Stanford
Master Plan Committee**

Final Report to the Town Board
January 2, 2007

The Stanford Master Plan Committee was established in August 2006 in response to a Town moratorium on major subdivisions. Our goal, as we understood it, was to review the 1980 Master Plan and recommend any changes that we think are necessary to update that plan. The committee, which consists of Jeff Blouse, Stephan Gotovich, Gene Likens, Gary Lovett, Sean McCarthy, Harry Reinhardt, John Royall, and Virginia Stern, has met regularly since mid-September. First, we reviewed the current Master Plan and the Diagnostic Report produced by planning consultant Joel Russell in 2002. We then discussed a range of issues including development of the Town center, preservation of farmland, and protection of natural resources.

In this report we list consensus statements and recommendations that arose from these discussions. In keeping with the Master Plan, we kept our focus on a general vision of the Town's future as opposed to specific recommendations regarding zoning or other ordinances.

1) Affirmation of the Master Plan's vision for the Town. We believe that the general vision and goals articulated in the 1980 Master Plan are still relevant and appropriate today. The Master Plan sets out three principal goals:

- i) Preserve the rural character of Stanford
- ii) Elevate ecological issues to an equal level with other planning issues
- iii) Require new development to capitalize on natural assets, avoid landscape hazards and minimize environmental impacts.

The Master Plan goes on to make four key recommendations involving where to locate new development and where to discourage it, what kinds of industrial activity should be allowed, and keeping the Stanfordville-Bangall area as the "social and political hub of the Town."

Thus the Master Plan sets out a vision for the Town that includes a vital rural center in the Stanfordville-Bangall area and a strong focus on protection of our natural resources and rural character. The members of this committee are in complete agreement with that vision, as are an overwhelming majority of the citizens of Stanford as reported in the results of a Town planning survey in 2001.

2) Problems with the Master Plan. Although its vision is still relevant and appropriate, the Master Plan needs some updating. In particular, all of the maps are difficult to read,

and we now have updated information and new mapping technology that could and should be used to improve them. In addition, the recent maps of significant habitat types prepared by Hudsonia should be included to bolster the natural resource information, and the six Critical Environmental Areas designated by the Town should be included in a map.

The principal problems we discussed lie not with the vision presented in the Master Plan itself, but with the failure to implement that vision fully through the zoning code and other Town ordinances. For instance, the Master Plan discusses maintaining the Stanfordville-Bangall corridor as a rural center of the Town, but the current zoning regulations do little to promote that vision. Likewise, the current 5-acre zoning throughout most of the Town offers scant protection for large blocks of forest or farmland.

3) **Town center.** The committee discussed the Town center at length, and we are in agreement that current zoning does not allow adequate housing density to realize a coherent Town center. At present we have a strip development along Route 82. Our vision of how Stanford's Town center should look in the future includes these characteristics:

- It should be a central area that includes a mixture of retail space, office space, and housing that encourages a broad spectrum of residents, including young people and seniors.
- It should be located somewhere in the Stanfordville-Bangall area, off Route 82 (that is, Route 82 should not run through the center of it) and avoiding ecologically sensitive areas such as the Wappinger Creek, wetlands and steep slopes.
- It should be a pedestrian-friendly area with a pleasant character that encourages people to visit and interact with one another.
- The density of housing should be higher than is currently allowed, probably with multiple units per acre, and a mix of single-family and multiple-family housing.
- This density will probably require a central water and sewer district, and the Town should begin planning for them.

The Town should engage a professional planning consultant to work with a Town committee and local landowners to develop a detailed plan and propose options for implementing it.

4) **Other ways to accommodate increased population.** To provide other options to accommodate increased population in addition to the Stanfordville-Bangall area, the Town should allow further residential development in the historic hamlets such as McIntyre, Attlebury and Stissing. In addition, the zoning code should be changed to encourage mother/daughter units, garage apartments and similar housing options that provide affordable housing for young people and elderly residents in the Town. The Town should encourage local employment including home businesses.

5) **Protection of farmland.** We should strive to protect farmland in Stanford because of its visual and historic value to the Town and to provide the basis for a continued or resurgent agricultural industry in Stanford in the future. There is also an economic argument for farmland protection—in general, conversion of farmland or forest land to residential development costs more in services than it recovers in taxes, thus raising the tax burden for all residents of the Town. Most residents list the mix of forested and agricultural lands as one of the features they most like about the Stanford landscape. We do not think it is possible to specify exactly how much farmland should be protected, but we can identify and map the prime agricultural soils and have the Planning Board make preservation of that prime farmland a priority in the site planning process.

Another measure that would be helpful in preserving farms and other large lots is to allow additional housing for employees, guests, caretakers, etc. on large parcels in exchange for deed restrictions that would guide development on the remainder of the property.

6) **Protection of forest land.** Forest land should be protected because it provides wildlife habitat, watershed protection, and a source of wood products. Hudsonia has mapped several important forest habitats in Stanford; these maps provide an important start in forest protection. The Town should follow up the Hudsonia study by identifying the most critical habitat types and the largest remaining blocks of forest and important connecting corridors. The Town should make protection of these critical habitats a priority.

7) **Increase lot sizes in areas outside Town center.** The increased density of development in the Town center should be accompanied by a decreased density in the outlying areas of the Town. This decrease in density could be accomplished by increasing the lot size requirements in the zoning regulations.

8) **Surface water and wetland protection.** The Town should protect its lakes, streams and wetlands by requiring any new development bordering these surface water features to include riparian buffer zones. Riparian buffers filter sediment and nutrients from runoff water and provide shoreline habitat for wildlife. The Town should identify and map wetlands and enact regulations to protect them. Hunns Lake and Upton Lake have substantial housing development in their watersheds, and water quality has suffered as a result. The Town should minimize further housing development in the watersheds of these lakes and take steps to limit the pollutant input to the lakes from residential sewage and agricultural runoff.

9) **Groundwater protection.** Groundwater provides the drinking water for all Stanford residents, so the protection of groundwater quality and quantity is crucial for the health and welfare of the residents. Several of the recommendations listed above would help to protect groundwater, including a central wastewater treatment system for the Town center and decreased housing density in the outlying areas. In addition, Stanford should take other steps to protect its groundwater supplies, including (1) initiating a monitoring program to track the quality of the groundwater, (2) implementing Town-wide controls

on hazardous material storage (using secondary containment systems), and (3) encouraging removal of residential underground oil storage tanks. Further, the Town should identify and protect the site of a municipal well that may be needed in the future to serve the Town center.