

TOWN OF SCHROON RECLASSIFICATION PROCESS FOR A RESIDENTIAL SMART GROWTH INITIATIVE INCLUDING AN AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMPONENT

THIS GRANT APPLICATION REQUESTS FUNDS FOR THE FOLLOWING

The focus of this grant application is hamlet expansion in the Town of Schroon and the need for an Adirondack Park Agency (APA) reclassification permit. The Town of Schroon's hamlet expansion plan applies and implements many of the Smart Growth recommendations and principles discussed in the recently released "Hamlets 3" by Roger Trancik.

This grant application requests: 1) funds to conduct an analysis by the LA Group (Environmental Planners from Saratoga) to assist the Town of Schroon, the Town of Schroon Planning Board and the not-for-profit Housing Assistance Program of Essex County (HAPEC) in studying the proposed hamlet expansion area for compatibility for reclassification and 2) a detailed engineering proposal that will determine how to bring municipal sewer to the project area. This is a vital component since according to the APA when a community has municipal sewer, a hamlet reclassification generally mandates that sewer be brought to the expansion area. In addition the scope of the engineering report will also include: 1) a large critical environmental area on the lake side of Rt. 9 which currently does have municipal sewer and 2) the Town's Commerce Park and an area (contiguous to both the Commerce Park and to the area to be reclassified) currently proposed as a future extension to the Commerce Park.

This project brings together a unique public-private partnership in which the players are the: Town of Schroon; Housing Assistance Program of Essex County; Town of Schroon Planning Board; Essex County Planning; LA Group (a landscape architecture & engineering firm); AES Northeast, PLLC (engineering firm for sewer expansion) and several private property owners: Slaterpryce and Stapley (land to be reclassified for the affordable housing initiative), Trudsoe (owner of the remainder of the Town's former Commerce Park) and Shiell (owner of land currently earmarked for expansion of Town's Commerce Park).

THE TOWN OF SCHROON'S HISTORY WITH AN EMPHASIS ON HAMLET IMPROVEMENTS

For the past decade and a half the Town of Schroon has focused on Smart Growth hamlet improvement with a goal of making the core of the community more vibrant, bring more people to the superb assets of the community and trigger economic development. These improvements include: finding and developing a groundwater source for the Town's municipal water system; building a new wastewater treatment plant with huge capacity for future growth including significant work on the collection system; comprehensive upgrades to the Town's iconic waterfront park area including the bandstand, Boat House Theater (resource reuse),

boat launch & boat trailer parking area, bathhouse, lakeside esplanade and the Veteran's Park. Several years ago the Town installed a ski tow the municipal golf course which has become a focal point for winter recreation for many residents of the community and the general area. There is no charge at this facility.

In 2009 the Town completed a brainstorming study and is in the process of implementing a Tourism Destination Blueprint a direct result of the Smart Growth grant awarded to Essex County in 2008 -- <http://www.essextourismplan.com>. The Town's Tourism Destination Blueprint underscores the need for 100 new lodging rooms for tourism to be effective. Currently within the hamlet area there are 2 separate hotel projects in the planning stages. One of the hotel projects is a replacement of a former motel (resource reuse) and the other is hamlet infill within walking distance to the downtown. There are many other activities geared to make the Town more attractive (architectural standards) and bring new activities and opportunities to the Town's residents and visitors not just in the summer months but during the entire year.

Of utmost importance is the fact that while the Tourism Destination Blueprint emphasizes that there is need for change within the community, there is the unique chemistry and culture of the community that must be preserved.

The Town is in the process of purchasing an older building (former firehouse) - resource reuse - adjacent to the Town Hall with the goal of it becoming the new town library since the current facility which has seen huge success, has simply run out of space.

Finally, Schroon Lake Central School is in the finishing phases of a \$13,000,000 rehabilitation and expansion project.

TOWN OF SCHROON PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE APPLYING SMART GROWTH PRINCIPLES

OVERVIEW

For years local officials in the Adirondacks have been sounding the alarm about a looming crisis concerning the overall condition of many Adirondack communities and contrary to what many environmental groups have led us to believe this is not about over development or reduced environmental quality, it is about the very viability and sustainability of these communities.

The crisis includes: lack of jobs, affordable housing, shrinking school enrollments, an aging population, diminished economic infrastructures, limited community services and utilities, demise of the timber industry, poor maintenance of Forest Preserve lands and the list goes on.

The recently published Adirondack Park Regional Assessment Project (APRAP) provides the first comprehensive baseline data for understanding trends, projecting future outcomes and planning for the Adirondack Park. It is incumbent upon each community in the Adirondacks to develop strategies and plans that are goal oriented that will serve as a blueprint for the future of that community.

TOWN OF SCHROON'S NEED FOR AREAS FOR RESIDENTIAL GROWTH

The Town of Schroon enjoys a relatively large hamlet area which for the most part is linear starting at Hayes Road to the south and extending to the Rt. 9 / Rt. 74 junction to the north. The hamlet area extends from Schroon Lake to the east and crosses Rt. 9 and extends to the Adirondack Northway. Much of this area had already been developed in late 1800's and early 1900's.

Just under 70% of the land mass in the Town of Schroon is owned by the State of New York and part of the Forever Wild Forest Preserve. The Town of Schroon has seen incremental residential growth in which land on the Lake or closer to the lake sells for a premium price, while off lake properties have also seen significant increases in value.

Development in the Adirondacks is largely incremental because hamlets tend to build out slowly relative to less rural communities. However, in planning for the future it has become apparent that the Town of Schroon has very few areas for future residential growth. After reviewing all properties currently classified as hamlet in the Town of Schroon with the availability of town water and possibly town sewer, there was only one property of approximately 46.9 acres that could be suitable, however the owners of this property have no desire whatsoever to develop or sell this property. There are several other areas in the hamlet with proximity to the downtown area but for the most part they are impacted by wetlands and/or poor soils.

Two contiguous properties (Stapley - 42.26 acres per survey and Slaterpryce - approximately 20 +/- acres) have been identified and appear to have ideal "hamlet type" characteristics for the Schroon Lake initiative: 1) the terrain is relatively level, 2) the soils appear to be compatible for septic systems, 3) town water can be available, 4) according to Town of Schroon's zoning the area is currently an R-20 (20,000 square feet for a single family dwelling) and 5) these properties fit the Smart Growth concept for residential development. The plan will enable the town of Schroon to integrate land suitable for development into the fabric of the existing hamlet. Furthermore, the plan creates opportunities for sustainable Smart Growth expansion of its hamlet area by improving its physical and economic environment: affordable housing, jobs, improvement of community facilities and infrastructure expansion.

However, there are 2 obstacles: 1) municipal sewer is not currently accessible to this area and 2) for some reason the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) has classified this triangular

shaped property as Low Intensity (3.2 acres for a single family dwelling) although it is surrounded by hamlet on the south, east and north. It is the opinion of several people who have reviewed the land use classifications in this area, that the Low Intensity designation was either an error or oversight. It should be noted that in a 1977 Comprehensive Plan done by ENVICO and the Town of Schroon Planning Board it was recommended that the Adirondack Park Agency's Land Use and Development Plan in which this area -- the "Low Intensity area between the Hamlet area and the Northway" -- be changed to Hamlet. According to the APA, reclassification would include the entire triangular shaped Low Intensity area on the east side of the Northway.

RECLASSIFICATION

The Town's plan for hamlet expansion is both inward and outward. It extends the hamlet footprint to vacant, adjacent land which is only a short stroll or bike ride from Schroon Lake's downtown area. A unique feature is that this area is second tier and will not be visible from the main travel corridor on Rt. 9 and will have a natural buffer from the Adirondack Northway. Moreover, since this area is bordered by hamlet on the north, south and east it could easily be considered infill or inward expansion. The proposed hamlet expansion is a blend of Ring A and Ring B as shown in "Hamlets 3": Inward Growth – 1/4 mile radius that approximates 5 minute walk and outward expansion with a 1 mile radius roughly a 5 minute bike ride or 20 minute walk.

The first step in implementing this initiative is to have the APA reclassify the area of the two contiguous properties (or the entire Low Intensity triangle as shown on the APA map) from Low Intensity to Hamlet. In order for this to happen there is an application process in which it must be shown that the resource (the subject properties) can sustain hamlet type development which would be 20,000 sq. ft. for a single family dwelling and with both town water and sewer as low as 10,000 sq. ft. per single family dwelling. The hamlet expansion is predicated on the fact that the resource (the land that needs reclassification) is suitable for hamlet type development.

The lead agency for this APA map amendment is the Town of Schroon in partnership with the Housing Assistance Program of Essex County and the Adirondack Community Housing Trust both not-for-profit organizations. HAPEC will submit the reclassification application to the APA and will administer the affordable housing community trust. The application process includes a portion of work that can be completed by local government and the Town's Planning Board, while a portion is to be performed by the L.A. Group. The results of the L.A. Group work will be incorporated into the reclassification application and submitted to the APA.

The engineering firm AES Northeast, PLLC, that has engineered the Town's previous 2 sewer projects, has the task of determining how municipal sewer will reach the hamlet expansion area and as previously mentioned to several other hamlet areas currently not serviced by town sewer. This will be described under the benefits of this comprehensive Smart Growth planning initiative.

The owners of these properties have agreed that in exchange for reclassification (Low Intensity to Hamlet), that at a minimum 20% of all created future lots will be allocated for affordable housing that will be in the framework of a community trust under the auspices of the Housing Assistance Program of Essex County. The Town of Schroon Planning Board has been an advocate of this reclassification process and has considered a wide range of flexibility depending on future needs of the community. Besides single family dwellings this flexibility might include multi-family units (apartments) for low to moderate income residents or senior housing.

At this point in time the owners of these properties to have no plans to develop their properties, but the successful reclassification process would most likely facilitate further planning on their part. Due to the extremely high costs and risks associated with land development which include but are not limited to subdivision engineering and design and the installation of roads, water, sewer and power it is assumed that the future development will have a master plan but implementation would be on a section by section basis. It is assumed that build-out might take 10 – 20 years.

It seems to be a safe projection that similarly to other Schroon Lake neighborhoods, this area will be have a blend of year round residents, second home residents and those using their Schroon Lake home 6-9 months out of the year and retreat to warmer climates during the winter months. Proximity to the downtown area will be a convenience for the residents and beneficial to the Town of Schroon.

The affordable housing initiative should attract mostly (but not limited to) younger families ranging from school teachers, Town of Schroon and county employees, employees of new businesses as they might develop in the area and families that are looking for a quality community and prepared to commute to work.

THE RANGE OF BENEFITS GO WAY BEYOND AFFORDABLE HOUSING!

AFFORDABLE HOUSING. This proposed plan is an opportunity for the Town of Schroon to provide a perpetual affordable housing element in the form of a community trust. The affordable housing initiative will create a vehicle for young families to reside (and remain) in the community. The subject area is contiguous with the existing hamlet of the Town of Schroon -- a Smart Growth principle of allowing for residential growth near the core of the community. The dilemma of rising energy costs mandates that new construction must be energy efficient that makes new construction that much more affordable.

RESIDENTIAL GROWTH. This proposal identifies what may be the only remaining area in the Town of Schroon with “hamlet” characteristics (according to the Adirondack Park Agency standards) with immediate proximity to the downtown portion of the community. Per “Hamlets 3” according to Cornell University one of 3 ways for a rural community to increase

its economic vitality is to grow in population. The Town of Schroon's reclassification process goes hand in hand with the success of tourism revitalization that is projected in the next few years in the Town of Schroon in which a significant number of new local jobs will be created from the 2 planned hotels as well as new jobs, i.e. Adirondack crafters, guides and eco-tourism, created from successful entrepreneurship from the expanded tourism.

SEWER UNITS. The sewer rates in the Town of Schroon are excessive in relation to the low median income of the residents of the Town which acts as a deterrent to growth and economic development within the sewer district leaving the possibility of undesirable sprawl along Rt. 9. The rates are high due to the fact that several years ago local government had no option but to proceed with a complete replacement of its antiquated sewer plant since it was doomed to fail with dire environmental consequences for Schroon Lake at a time (just after Hurricane Katrina) that construction costs skyrocketed and grant money vanished.

The new wastewater treatment plant has a huge capacity that will be able to handle all future growth within the sewer district and future extensions of the district. The Town was also awarded over \$3,000,000 in ARRA grant funds to finish the sewer project. However, this grant money had no impact on the exceedingly high user fees for municipal sewer. One of the Town's goals is to add new sewer units and when municipal sewer is brought to the hamlet expansion area, the new sewer units will help alleviate the current steep user fees for this service and at the same time trigger economic investment within the downtown area. The expanded sewer will further protect and improve the environment.

BOOST THE RETAIL COMMUNITY. What is more important than to preserve the downtown area – the core of the hamlet. The current economy of Schroon Lake, although predominantly tourist related, can be defined as not much more than subsistence. During the past few years the Main Street has had a mini-Renaissance. Several new businesses have opened, new street lighting installed and many significant upgrades to the contiguous lakeside park have been completed. This plan, which creates a new neighborhood, will help bolster the Main Street business area, the local economy and will be a catalyst for energizing hamlet activities. Furthermore, the expansion area ties right into the village core -- within walking and/or an easy bike ride. The hamlet expansion area ties directly into the quaint Main street area of Schroon Lake. The multiplier effect of new dollars into the community will be a shot in the arm to the community.

SCHOOL. Most Adirondack communities are seeing a reduction in school enrollments and Schroon Lake Central School is not immune from this situation. A desirable result of the Smart Growth initiative would be to have new families with children move into Town and help bolster the enrollment at Schroon Lake Central School. The almost completed comprehensive upgrades to the school prepare the school for any growth that will occur.

HOT SPOTS ON SCHROON LAKE. For many years, the waters of Schroon Lake have been annually tested. Although the lake has a rating of "AA" (the highest designation), nonetheless there has been a "hot spot" (coliform) in an area where the current owners would

love to have access to municipal sewer. With the installation of municipal sewer to the proposed expansion area, municipal sewer should also be installed to reach this “hot spot” to resolve this chronic issue. In addition, municipal sewer should be extended to all of the properties on the lake side of Rt. 9 from where municipal sewer now ends and continue up to the expansion area. In 2010 the Towns of Schroon, Chester and Horicon; the Schroon Lake Association; the East Shore Schroon Lake Association; the Lake Manager and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Essex and Warren Counties partnered to complete the Watershed Master Plan for Schroon Lake which is currently in the implementation phase.

COMMERCE PARK. Currently the remainder of the Town’s Commerce Park is owned by a single entity and immediately to the north of the Commerce Park and immediately to the south of the area that needs to be reclassified there are approximately 20+/- acres currently used as a sand pit. It has been suggested that in the future the Town and/or the Essex County IDA acquire this property for a Commerce Park. Thus, with the installation of infrastructure for the residential initiative, municipal services, i.e. water, sewer, would be available for the new Commerce Park.

TAXES. Since most Adirondack communities have such a limited commercial tax base, the one thing that has countered rising taxes has been residential real estate development. No matter what side one takes on the “real estate” debate, the bottom line is that real estate development – the creation of new lots and the construction of new homes – expands the tax base. This plan should provide well over \$10,000,000 in new assessed valuation to the tax rolls of the Town of Schroon.

SNOWMOBILE TRAIL. This area contains a portion of one of the Town of Schroon’s snowmobile trails. This plan will attempt to make this portion of the trail permanent that can be used for walking and biking in the non-winter seasons.

GREEN ZONE. It is the intent of this plan to create a buffer area towards the rear of the property towards the Adirondack Northway. If possible, a pedestrian/bicycle easement in this area could be linked to a scenic wetland area to the south which connects to walkways and roadways into the downtown area. In addition this area is in close proximity to 9 mile Schroon Lake, Schroon River and the hiking trails in the Mt. Severance area. Thus in direct proximity to the hamlet expansion area are opportunities for boating, kayaking, canoeing, fishing, biking, hiking, walking, tennis, pickleball and basketball.

REDUCED TRAFFIC. Currently Cedar Hill Drive, a residential street serves as the only access and exit for the fire department, emergency squad and the Commerce Park. This plan will create at least one if not two other access and exit points.

IMPACT ON OTHER NEIGHBORING HAMLETS. Since local economies are so interconnected the Town of Schroon’s future success will have positive benefits for the cluster of hamlets in our region: North Hudson, Paradox, Pottersville, Chestertown, Adirondack and Brant Lake.

SUMMATION

The Town of Schroon's plan most definitely respects the positive attributes of the Adirondacks and is focusing on how to improve the quality of life in the community by hamlet expansion. Through the Smart Growth model the Town of Schroon will be able to retain its hamlet culture and will find the right balance between development and preservation. The objective of the Town of Schroon's plan mirrors the objective as stated in "Hamlets 3": integrate expansion projects into the structure of existing hamlet, promote smart sustainable physical and economic growth of the hamlet and prevent sprawl by protecting natural resources in and around the hamlet. There is no doubt that good planning and design does matter and will lead to investment and economic development.

The Town of Schroon's Smart Growth hamlet expansion plan allows the Town's hamlet to remain compact, walkable and well defined. This plan will provide affordable work force housing for Adirondackers, steer new economic development toward the existing hamlet core and facilitate new infrastructure investment. This plan concerning the future residential growth of the Town of Schroon "impacts the way people live and has a long-lasting legacy."

The Town of Schroon has made a serious investment in the comprehensive rebuilding of the entire Town's infrastructure and the table is set for good things to happen. Although there are no immediate miracle cures to counter the ongoing Adirondack trends highlighted in the Adirondack Park Regional Assessment Project, the above described proactive plan will allow our community to retain its balance and optimistically face the future. The joint Smart Growth initiatives (hamlet infill, tourism destination and hamlet expansion) should aid in the most pressing need of the Town of Schroon which is to replace jobs lost over years with the decline of tourism and forestry businesses.