

To the Editor:

I attended the public workshop on the draft New Scotland Hamlet Plan at the Voorheesville High School on May 23, 2012. While there are useful ideas presented in the plan, such as mixed use development, open space conservation, appropriate building design standards, and pedestrian/bike friendly traffic roadways, the scale of development set forth in the plan is clearly inconsistent with the rural/residential environment that New Scotland residents are seeking to preserve.

As stated in the draft plan, an “overlapping theme” in all previous studies of New Scotland development is that “Commercial development, while desired, should fit in with the hamlet in terms of scale, and should serve the local population – not be a regional draw.” A case could be made to accept small specialty businesses that draw on a regional customer base, for example, a musical instrument repair shop or an ethnic grocery store. Similarly, customer business from people passing through the hamlet could be another example of an acceptable regional draw. However, if the “overlapping theme” is to be taken seriously, the bulk of the commercial activity must be limited to serving the local population.

In addition, there is no indication that there will be significant population growth in New Scotland that would support the expansive development vision of the plan. Indeed, the plan projects relatively slow growth for the Town, compared to surrounding suburbs. (New Scotland’s population grew just one percent between 2000 and 2010 and actually declined seven percent in that period in the study area.) This being the case, it is all the more unclear how the commercial and residential growth described in the plan would be accomplished.

Appropriately, the plan makes the case that Routes 85 and 85A should not be widened, that is, they should remain as two-lane roads. However, the plan goes on to say that there is surplus capacity on both roads. A chart shown by the planners at the workshop for Route 85A between Voorheesville and the intersection with Route 85, indicated that up to 1000 vehicles during the peak hour would be acceptable by the NYS Department of Transportation. That would be about 1 car every 4 seconds. The plan acknowledges that quality of life issues would also have to be considered in determining appropriate traffic levels. However, it is disturbing to think that a discussion of traffic in the New Scotland Hamlet could start with the idea that 1000 cars an hour is a reasonable standard.

For a plan to be useful it should be both visionary and realistic. The plan is visionary but it needs to have a much more direct statement about the limits to growth that are essential if the rural/residential quality of life in New Scotland is to remain a reality.

Sincerely,

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