

# Focus Group Summary

In October 2005, six different focus groups were held to explore specific topics of importance to Durham in more depth. These focus groups concentrated on each of the hamlets in Durham as well as agriculture and open space, and business development and tourism. The material presented below is a recording of the statements made by participants attending the focus groups. These statements do not represent a consensus of attitudes or opinions among the town or the participants, but is simply a listing of statements made by participants at the meeting.

## *Hamlet of Durham*

### **Statements Identified as a Strength By Participants**

- 1) 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings
- 2) Have historic buildings that could be restored
- 3) Has open land and ag that should be preserved
- 4) Gorgeous and beautiful
- 5) Nice rural area
- 6) Quiet and quiet and wants to see that maintained
- 7) Country
- 8) People very friendly
- 9) Mountains are beautiful
- 10) Has a wonderful history of place
- 11) People draw strength from the mountains
- 12) Close to the Hudson Valley
- 13) Close to New York City

### **Statements Identified as a Negative Feature By Participants**

- 1) Hamlet used to be beautiful and full of pride and it is not anymore
- 2) People do not care for their yards and homes like they used to
- 3) Loss of sense of pride
- 4) Sense of community and cohesiveness lost
- 5) So many new people that don't know anyone else
- 6) No respect for the places where people live
- 7) Renters do not have same level of pride in hamlet
- 8) Too much poverty
- 9) Hamlet does not have much role or standing in town overall
- 10) Not enough volunteerism
- 11) Junk cars are an eyesore
- 12) People do not want to improve their properties because they fear an increase in taxes. This is a big problem
- 13) There needs to be more communication
- 14) There is no interaction between people anymore

### **Statements Identified as an Opportunity By Participants**

- 1) Old Schoolhouse can be restored

- 2) Community festivities
- 3) There are still people who care about the place
- 4) We can get more people involved and volunteering such as a “Tidy Town” effort to clean up
- 5) We can help grow pride and self-worth
- 6) Give people incentives
- 7) Help senior citizens learn how to use computers
- 8) Get people helping the community
- 9) Have a welcome wagon to bring people into the community more
- 10) Find ways to help people tidy up homes and yards – volunteering is key
- 11) Town should sponsor a yearly clean up, a town-wide picnic, a volunteer recruitment program
- 12) Needs better code enforcement
- 13) Sponsor bulk trash pick up once a year
- 14) Have an Allen Teator Road party once a year to bring people together

### **Statements Identified as a Threat By Participants**

- 1) Lack of communication between neighbors
- 2) Unrestrained building in the area
- 3) Building is done not in context with the community
- 4) Concerned about water quality
- 5) No appreciation for people who live on the land; their contribution to the community, or there need to have their land as their retirement.
- 6) Taxes

### ***Hamlet of Oak Hill***

#### **Statements Identified as a Strength By Participants**

- 1) Oak Hill has gone from derelict to revived
- 2) Last 10 to 15 years has had a lot of love and energy put into it
- 3) Feels they are on the verge of being discovered and hope it will be a “hot spot”
- 4) Business center is oriented around antiques and businesses that service that
- 5) A very quiet place with no bars or gas stations or retail other than food and antiques
- 6) Lots of historic buildings
- 7) Not a lot of new construction and that was a good thing. Don’t want to see any infill
- 8) 10 properties on the National Register and there was an effort to list this as a national historic district
- 9) Largest single business district in Town
- 10) A wonderfully private community

#### **Statements Identified as a Negative Feature By Participants**

- 1) Historic buildings need to be preserved or they will be gone forever
- 2) Effort to list the National Historic District was very divisive

- 3) Oak Hill does not get the proper attention from the Town – E. Durham gets all the attention.
- 4) Can't get signage from other roads to direct traffic to Oak Hill due to DOT rules
- 5) Old sidewalks were torn up to widen road
- 6) E. Durham is getting sidewalks and Oak Hill is not
- 7) Speeding through hamlet is a problem
- 8) No lighting
- 9) Fear that if historic buildings are restored, taxes will go up
- 10) Lack of communication
- 11) There are no efforts to really talk and listen
- 12) No shared vision
- 13) Lots of misinformation
- 14) Lack of facilitation to accomplish goals

### **Statements Identified as an Opportunity By Participants**

- 1) Re-allocate some resources to Oak Hill
- 2) Divert truck traffic around Oak Hill.
- 3) Town needs to control assessor and find ways to overcome the tax issue
- 4) Elect assessor, not appoint
- 5) Trailer park can be improved, cleaned up, removed
- 6) Need to “bury the hatchet” and bring residents of Oak Hill together again for the good of the community
- 7) Stop light at 145
- 8) Make a historic loop in Town through Oak Hill
- 9) Improve signage
- 10) Encourage cottage industry on Route 145
- 11) Town board needs vision and have dedication to implement plan
- 12) Needs to have more social events for whole community

### **Statements Identified as a Threat By Participants**

- 1) Community is split on the historic district idea and that has caused rifts
- 2) Socioeconomic differences among residents contribute to rift
- 3) There are some aesthetic issues related to run down properties
- 4) Properties being sold for over-inflated values and that will threaten land values, affordability everywhere
- 5) The notion of “haves vs have-nots”
- 6) Potential gentrification of Oak Hill
- 7) People resent new people coming in and telling them what to do

### ***Agriculture and Open Space***

#### **Statements Identified as a Strength By Participants**

- 1) Some new residents are very favorable towards agriculture
- 2) There is still support for agriculture
- 3) Farms provide open space and visibility to the mountains
- 4) Wooded areas are good for hiking and access to the creeks

### **Statements Identified as a Negative Feature By Participants**

- 1) Dairy is dwindling – rules and regulations are a problem
- 2) Taxes are a problem, but ag assessments help
- 3) Influx of new people due to conflicts and nuisances related to farm operations
- 4) Lack of education about farming
- 5) Price for products
- 6) Long term contracts to rent land a problem if landowners decide to sell land for non-farm uses, then farmers are out of luck
- 7) Farms decreasing in size
- 8) Lack of farm stand on Route 145 or in E. Durham
- 9) Lack of interest among farmers for farm stand as it is too much work.
- 10) Land is a farmers retirement
- 11) Snowmobiles/ATV's/Dirt bikes are a problem (both with noise and passing through fields)
- 12) Lack of trails for these uses are a problem
- 13) Not a lot of walking trails
- 14) Lack of public access to open spaces (ex. Hiking to High Rock passes through private lands and it could be cut off)
- 15) Lack of places to swim

### **Statements Identified as an Opportunity By Participants**

- 1) Dairy farmers could have local milk processing plant, this would be tourist attraction too
- 2) Some interest in diversifying agricultural products
- 3) Agri-tourism Statements Identified as an Opportunity By Participants
- 4) Bed and Breakfasts
- 5) Non-traditional agriculture
- 6) Tax incentives to lower taxes to keep farms in place
- 7) Provide matching funds for grants
- 8) Right to farm law was seen as positive and acceptable
- 9) More horse farms
- 10) Use should be designated trails for horses
- 11) Easements for trails, etc. for public access
- 12) Long Path comes into Durham and we might be able to develop a spur locally to get to the Long Path
- 13) Canajoharie RR goes along the Catskill Creek and we can use this as a Rail to Trail program to connect Oak Hill, E. Durham and the mountains
- 14) Preserve places to swim – help landowners with liability issues
- 15) Build a community pool
- 16) Purchase land, buy or receive donated conservation easements
- 17) There was some interest in learning about new/different land use regulations such as rural zoning tools

### **Statements Identified as a Threat By Participants**

- 1) Zoning seen as a threat to farmers
- 2) Development
- 3) Loss of open farmlands will result in loss of diversity in landscape

## *Hamlet of Cornwallville*

### **Statements Identified as a Strength By Participants**

- 1) could be nice from a tourists point of view
- 2) No drive-thru business
- 3) Content with the way it is
- 4) Should preserve the wildness, which is part of the beauty of the area
- 5) Old school house (or 2)
- 6) There is a historic district
- 7) Farmers do want to farm
- 8) Homes here are more affordable to those looking to move up and out from city and parts south
- 9) Dan Clifton's book, historic resources of the town

### **Statements Identified as a Negative Feature By Participants**

- 1) Lost the "town Look", fire house is gone, no stores,
- 2) At the turn of the century, it was more of a center, extends from Sutton Roar to the stream at south
- 3) Would have to attract people off the beaten path
- 4) No sense of community with activities geared to seniors
- 5) Also concerned about preserving the "woods", becoming a patchwork
- 6) Like the "Railroad" bank in Cairo, not the new one

### **Statements Identified as an Opportunity By Participants**

- 1) Try to keep the agriculture that's left, very hard to do, big loss to tourists business
- 2) County might have a video on how to incorporate Ag and tourism into planning process
- 3) Not sure about benefits of new stores, not strip malls, need quaint country look, that's what was there previously
- 4) Antique stores preferred over bars
- 5) Prefer to see a cluster of development instead of large lots
- 6) Could combine cluster with senior housing with open space preservation
- 7) Plan for forestry, look into ways/programs
- 8) Like the "Railroad" bank in Cairo, not the new one
- 9) We can make incentive to improve instead of building new
- 10) Town government is somewhat involved in preserving an old house, there is interest, but also some resistance from people
- 11) Take an inventory of old vacant structures, promote them to investors
- 12) Keep it the way it is

- 13) Have to look at zoning, need legal system to enforce comp plan ideas
- 14) Preservation of open land
- 15) Incentives to farmers and/or developers to cluster housing units to preserve open space
- 16) Clustered housing with open spaces could be used for housing for the elderly, places for Durham's old folks
- 17) Website to help coordinate peoples interest in buying/selling/renovating homes
- 18) Issues of water as well, use wetland protection laws to prevent inappropriate development
- 19) Encourage sales of existing housing stock, preservation of old buildings, rather than building and clearing lots

### **Statements Identified as a Threat By Participants**

- 1) How can open land be maintained? Farms are not profitable
- 2) No place for seniors to live
- 3) What is to become of older folks who live here?
- 4) Too many places destroy the things that draw people to live there in the first place
- 5) The town can't mandate draconian laws to mandate how things look
- 6) Politics can prevent things from happening
- 7) Don't like what's happening in Cairo, center is pretty, periphery is ugly
- 8) Conversion of stores to apartments is the downfall of Cairo
- 9) Landfill proposed is not good, Nan should have info on this
- 10) Stress on water resources with over development
- 11) Haphazard development is a threat
- 12) Should the town get involved in the real estate business?
- 13) Concerned about preserving woods
- 14) Concerned about the development, can't stop it, but at least we can direct it

### ***Hamlet of East Durham***

#### **Statements Identified as a Strength By Participants**

- 1) Nice hamlet, changing from a resort area to more of a suburban growth area
- 2) Main road is on historic register, Susquehanna Turnpike
- 3) Durham's government is changing
- 4) Sidewalk grant sent in, waiting for a response

#### **Statements Identified as a Negative Feature By Participants**

- 1) Hard to come up with a "solution", started out originally as a series of bars, a satellite of the original town center
- 2) No dominant "theme"
- 3) Sidewalks being promoted, but where too? More businesses would help that
- 4) Hard to see what it can become

- 5) Located on a major road, but nothing to stop for now
- 6) Homes are falling apart, appearance that the town is falling apart
- 7) Dilapidated buildings, should condemn them
- 8) Absentee owners are not maintaining buildings
- 9) Political reality – will the town tear down buildings?
- 10) One investor came in, saw too much deterioration of the area, junk cars, etc. pools collapsing, and would not invest in the area because of the deterioration. Have to make the area more presentable
- 11) Need pride in the area, like Freehold
- 12) Frustration about the lack of activity, or progress, too much talk, no action
- 13) Founders day, little turnout for the event
- 14) How are things advertised? How do we get the word out?
- 15) Why can't town or businesses band together to build sidewalks? Why rely on grants?
- 16) People have to see something happen
- 17) Many businesses are spread far apart, interspersed with derelict properties

### **Statements Identified as an Opportunity By Participants**

- 1) Main street should be more developed for area residents, not much for children, seniors
- 2) Tourism would help stores to build, but small stores can't compete with big boxes, stores need to make a profit, which is difficult
- 3) What about Tannersville, was on its way out, but now rebuilding
- 4) Attracting outside money through tourism
- 5) What would draw the tourists?
- 6) There must be political consensus to do it
- 7) Use the power of example, find an identity to support tourism, to support businesses
- 8) Some businesses shouldn't be attracted, like strip malls
- 9) Rich Irish tradition, a drinking weekend from the Bronx
- 10) Other natural resources to take advantage of
- 11) Irish Center is underused
- 12) Start with little things
- 13) No coffee shop
- 14) Nicole's is good
- 15) Need capital, input of money, sidewalks, lights, etc.
- 16) Festival facility needs to be marketed
- 17) Some sidewalks exist, would be nice if owners would build walks on their own
- 18) A few very small things like flower boxes, but minimal
- 19) Plan can leverage grant money, combine with private investment
- 20) The landfill issue raised a lot of money, \$100,000
- 21) Leadership – task force has done things, they can't do it alone
- 22) Businesses will listen to the town if they supply the leadership (is leadership simply organization?)
- 23) Should identify a business district
- 24) Businesses will cooperate with the comp plan
- 25) Sidewalks involve drainage, not so simple, needs to be a coordinated effort
- 26) High speed internet, allow to work from home, also used to advertise town events

- 27) Cell phone service needed
- 28) Conservancy – how can it be encouraged and used to protect land from development?

### **Statements Identified as a Threat By Participants**

- 1) All shopping is being done in Albany
- 2) Where is the leadership to make things happen?
- 3) Sidewalks can also lead to liability fears
- 4) Could become strip-mall”ish”

### ***Focus Group on Business and Tourism***

### **Statements Identified as a Strength By Participants**

- 1) Irish Arts Center – very high quality, good bands, and good turnout
- 2) Very good music
- 3) Durham Center Museum, a gem
- 4) 22 miles of State designated scenic roads
- 5) Like preservation of area
- 6) Lots of positives, and lots of Statements Identified as a Negative Feature By Participants
- 7) Town has code now
- 8) There is a formal complaint system
- 9) Scenic roads, attract fall foliage tourists
- 10) Natural resources are here
- 11) Agri-tourism, tourism

### **Statements Identified as a Negative Feature By Participants**

- 1) The Durham Center Museum is a gem but has no support at all from the town - needs additional promotion. (FACILITATORS NOTE: The Durham Center Museum is in fact highly supported by the local community in terms of attendance, donations, and other support.)
- 2) Lacking promotion, resorts are doing it on their own
- 3) Big complaint – condition of rooms, and food quality, described as “dumps” by online reviewers
- 4) Need quality rooms and food
- 5) Why has condition deteriorated so much?
- 6) Key businesses are going out
- 7) Sidewalks in town, safety and aesthetics
- 8) Driving into town – unsightly
- 9) Low income housing becoming a concern
- 10) Face of town is not appealing
- 11) Junkyards are scaring people away
- 12) Zoning mentioned, or town ordinance, some resistance to enforcement
- 13) CEO comment - town has laws now, hard to enforce

- 14) Clover Motel – junk for sale, now a storage\repair shop. He is complying with laws now
- 15) Arts, Nature, Tourism – doesn't fit with Junkyards
- 16) Hard to get signage OK'd by DOT because of 145 historic significance
- 17) Not represented by the County for what small businesses do for the county
- 18) Legislature form of government is not responsive to the towns needs
- 19) County is focused on I-87ncorridor, not farther reaches
- 20) Is there a way to compel the county to act, and show support for the valley area?
- 21) Very political\one-party system, past supervisors not receptive to efforts
- 22) No capital to pay for a person to promote the area
- 23) Not enough people to get involved, need an upfront person to start transformation

### **Statements Identified as an Opportunity By Participants**

- 1) Need more marketing, in city
- 2) Important to support local businesses, afraid of them being taken off tax roles by not- Use of festival field could be more, added programs, outsiders could use the property
- 3) for-profits
- 4) Need capital, person to focus 100% of the time to the effort, marketing
- 5) Jewett and East Jewett attracted a slew of “arts” through a coordinated promotional system, similar effort has been launched by Irish Center
- 6) Entrances should be upgraded, put a good face on it
- 7) Laundromat and small stores
- 8) Senior center, playgrounds
- 9) Bandstand\gazebo (yes, yes, yes)
- 10) A town green would be really nice
- 11) Build a focal point, things for people to do, make a split in the road, or a green
- 12) Love to see the resorts rebuilt, antiques stores, need to cooperate with rooming\resorts
- 13) All need to work together to promote each other
- 14) Laundromat needed for other than low income
- 15) County level leadership is also needed
- 16) What is the economic engine of Greene County? It's tourism
- 17) County is doing comp plan?
- 18) Need to look at ways for resorts\businesses to cooperate. Don't work enough together
- 19) Look at “sister towns” to see what has been done elsewhere
- 20) Railroad bed and creek along back side of East Durham could become a handicap accessible trail for bird watching
- 21) Marketing and information
- 22) Encourage, keep existing resorts
- 23) Possible to attract arts organizations to the resorts
- 24) Clean up Route 145, abandoned homes, junk cars
- 25) Sidewalks and aesthetics
- 26) Becker building, do something with it, tear it down or rejuvenate it, huge eyesore
- 27) Identify business district
- 28) Identify natural resources and market them to people who want to come and visit the area
- 29) Junk ordinance, don't allow houses and businesses to go into such disrepair

- 30) Amenities for residents – park, courts, playground, senior and youth facilities
- 31) Leadership
- 32) Clean up 145
- 33) Infrastructure, high speed internet, pick up garbage
- 34) Cultural activities
- 35) Character/unifying themes