

**City of Geneva Comprehensive Plan Comments Received from Community by  
6/20/16**

**For May First Draft**

- 1. Ontario County Planning Board (June 8, 2016):** Voted anonymously to recommend adopting the plan. No modifications suggested.
- 2. City of Geneva Planning Board:** Group comments may be completed at the June 20<sup>th</sup> meeting.
- 3. Tools for Social Change Letter and chart:** Letter and chart included next. Committee members met with Tools for Social Change on May 24<sup>th</sup>.
- 4. Comments sent via email or phone to Sage Gerling:** Included at the end as Comment 1, 2, etc.

## **Comments Received via email or phone**

### **Comment 1**

It seems there are an increased number of rentals in Geneva. Could there be a moratorium placed on the creation of rental properties? I see a huge number of rental properties. Landlords do not live there and see disinvestment and have transient populations. Often rental properties end up to have more people. One of the things about rentals is I think some people do not know what the rules are. Isn't it possible to educate people about what the rules are? What procedures for renting in the City?

The railway is very unattractive especially along the lake. The appearance is detrimental to the neighborhoods. Perhaps planter boxes could dress them up. For the railway, could be much more attractive. Can we do anything to help to clean-up? In other communities, the railway is cute. I have seen parks, flowers and benches. I do not why we have to have the railway look the way it does. Development overlooking the water on the downtown side.

Bicentennial Park there was an awful amount of money. Part of it is lack of shade. It is not a pleasant place to sit.

### **Comment 2**

I was reading the article about the comp plan in tonight's FLT, and it struck me immediately that XXX and I fit the demographic of "middle income people who have flown the coop" perfectly. As I read through the article, and reviewed the strategies for attracting and retaining that middle-income group, I realized that the reasons we left Geneva were only alluded to, and not addressed directly. In fact, there was no direct mention of it at all in the article (and seemingly in the plan itself).

Simply put, we left because, despite significant effort on the parts of many, the Geneva City School District was unable to meet our needs as a family. In Geneva, it's never a great political move to talk about the fact that the school system often fails its students for a variety of reasons. As soon as you head down that road, there is a contingent of cheerleaders who want to equate the extraordinary efforts of teachers with meaningful results. Unfortunately, despite incredibly hard work, there are several performance areas that the schools simply don't measure up in, and nearly \*all\* of those areas are the direct result of the increased percentage of students living in poverty based circumstances (hence the fact that I see the comp plan only tangentially addressing this major issue). The increase in amount of time spent dealing with behavior problems are consistent with larger urban areas. The shrinking tax base contributing to the school coffers coupled with the ridiculous allocation of state and federal funding have put Geneva in a position where the district is chronically understaffed, lacks the funding for specialized programs to meet the needs of the ever changing student population, and will be unable to retain quality teachers/administrators/support staff who \*will\* leave for greener (read: suburban, wealthier, and invariably less diverse) pastures.

When XXX and I moved to Fairport, we anticipated a significant increase in our overall cost of living, and were willing to accept that in exchange for an improved academic experience for our kids. We certainly did achieve an improvement in the overall academic experience. The variety and quality of options available at the three schools we've experienced since moving here has been nothing short of astonishing. What we didn't anticipate was that our

total cost of living in Fairport, despite a significantly more expensive home, increased only marginally (for a variety of reasons including tax rates/Fairport municipal electric/etc.).

To compare Geneva and Fairport schools is completely unfair in many regards. Tax base. Overall funding. Lack of poverty. Level of parental support and involvement. I could go on and on talking about the unfair advantages that Fairport has compared to my hometown. But none of those reasons make any difference whatsoever when it comes to making a decision about where to raise your family. Geneva is in direct competition for families with communities like Fairport, Victor, Farmington, and Canandaigua. Even Penfield, Webster, and Honeoye Falls-Lima, are within reasonable commuting distance from Geneva. My sense is that all of those districts are \*perceived\* as higher performing, and come with less baggage than Geneva.

It's not just XXX and me. I've had multiple conversations with families who are recent Geneva-Fairport transplants (it's amazing when you run into so many Geneva connections at the Rt. 31 Wegmans!). Every single one of them with children has said the exact same thing. It's all about the schools. That's why they left. And that's why they won't return-if at all-until their kids have graduated.

When you bring up these points in Geneva, it seems that you almost always experience a couple things. First, you're vilified for having the audacity to criticize some of Geneva's hardest working, most well-established people, the teachers (which I'm not doing in any way, to be clear). Then secondly, you'll get hit with a long list of what's \*good\* about Geneva schools-and it's a long and valid list. There are several positive things going on. But the bottom line truth is that despite the presence of those positive things, Geneva City Schools are underperforming, have more behavior problems in the classroom, and in short, experience all of the problems of more urban districts. That's in sharp contrast to the other districts that I mentioned above. Those differences are clearly enough to sway the opinions of potential (and current) residents.

I recognize that the City and the school district are distinctly separate entities. But it seems to me that the City of Geneva should be the district's most vocal ally when it comes to advocating for the needs of its students. The Mayor/City Manager/Council should be in regular contact with the State DOE, acting as a thorn in their side until appropriate funding is offered to insure a higher quality experience for Geneva families. Being the proverbial squeaky wheel has the potential to lead to results, and put simply, the Geneva schools need all the help they can get in that regard.

I strongly suggest that the comprehensive plan be expanded to include information and strategies to improve not only the actual quality of student experience in the Geneva schools, but to identify a role that the city can play in the following areas:

1. Formal methods of advocacy with the state Department of Education, the Commissioner, and federal representatives who have impact on the funding streams.
2. How to utilize city resources to increase the level of family and parental involvement in the schools, perhaps by increased cooperation between the schools and the city Rec Dept (which has always done a great job of working with the schools-we just need more of the same, with increased funding, and increased recognition of the positive economic and social impact of investing more heavily in those programs).

3. If it's not already happening, increased cooperation and assistance with regard to grounds and/or facilities maintenance. For example, should the city have to pay to insure that the school's lawns are mowed on a regular basis? Of course not. But when a prospective family drives by the elementary school and the already overburdened facilities staff haven't been able to get to the 6" deep lawn? That's a problem for Geneva in general, not just the schools.

4. Increased/regular communication between the schools and City Council. It would behoove the Mayor to request that the superintendent or other administrative representative provide a general report to City Council on a regular basis (live, in person, at Council meetings). Included in that report should be student achievements that are worthy of celebration by all, with direct recognition by Council of individual students when appropriate.

I'm sure there are several other areas where increased cooperation and communication between the City and the schools could/would be beneficial. But I suppose my primary objective is to insure that city planners understand that the reputation of the schools is a massive factor in any families decision on where to live, and that right now, Geneva does not stack up well in comparison to competing districts.

### **Comment 3**

The most hopeful thing I left with was the idea of an economic task force. I could see its value if a task force was used to develop jobs AND address the barriers that keep people from working, those barriers being transportation, child care, housing needs, training, etc. If a task force coordinated services to make all those pieces come together, city residents would benefit.

I'm seeing that happening in Yates County where there is a High School Equivalency class for FLCC. The Workforce Development Office provides students with a caseworker who counsels them with personal issues, sends them to trainings, helps them develop resumes, sets them up with jobs in the community with their salaries paid by the county, and offers incentives to come to class. The WF office itself also employs some students and trains them. I'm see the value of that kind of holistic approach, and I'm not sure if that's happening in Ontario County.

With regard to training, FLCC has a new president. It might be worthwhile to approach him - - introduce him to the city and talk about partnering with the city to offer more training programs here. As you know, the college has a program in Seneca County that trains machinists onsite, and in Victor, there's a mechatronics tech program. Geneva has the CNA program. I feel Geneva would benefit immensely from having more training programs here, particularly if the trainings were done in coordination with a particular industry.

The machinists program, for example, is offered onsite at different manufacturing facilities, and I believe 100 percent of the graduates were offered jobs, many of them at the sites where they trained. Perhaps those sites will no longer need to hire so many machinists and FLCC could partner with a site here?

### **Comment 4**

I read with interest today's [Finger Lakes Times](#) article of the proposed City of Geneva's comprehensive plan. Consultant Lombardi did a fair job of categorizing the city's strengths

and weaknesses but failed to mention the 500 lb gorilla that continues to obstruct the small gains the city has made in the last few years- The City of Geneva's tax rate, approximately \$17.50 per thousand is one of the compelling reasons that the middle class is leaving the City and why middle class house hunters are choosing other towns and villages in Ontario County. Not only a little less in taxes but a lot less. Seven years ago, the OC BOS changed the sales tax formula that greatly benefitted the City of Geneva. The change from distributing sales tax revenue from 100% property assessment to a formula of population and property assessment resulted in the City receiving millions of dollars more to operate. It was the golden opportunity to reduce the city's property tax but instead Geneva City council for years patted themselves on the back for "keeping taxes flat" while sticking their heads in the proverbial sand as people continued to leave for the town of Geneva and other places.

The good news is that it might not be too late to make the hard choices as sales tax revenue continues to stay steady and may actually increase slightly. These choices will remain difficult, contentious, and possibly unpopular but very little of the proposed plan will matter unless the City tax issue is addressed. It takes political will. It took twenty (20) years for the City to finally realize that the 911 system should go the County. Twenty years! Finally it will be done and it's noteworthy that the County will invest about \$1.5 million to take over the City's dispatch. Just imagine the savings if this was done many years ago.

#### **Comment 5**

Waste of money- a city staff person could have done that

#### **Comment 6**

Not enough in the plan addressing social inequality

#### **Comment 7**

Language of the plan does not reflect social justice

#### **Comment 8**

### **Some questions and suggestions for the City of Geneva Comprehensive Plan.**

#### Geneva's share of poverty:

According to the report in the plan Geneva has 12% of Ontario County's population, but has 25% of the county's residents who live in poverty. This is not tenable. What do Canandaigua and other cities do to keep their poverty rate below 10%? If Geneva maintains the poverty rate at such a high level, or even increases it, it will reach the point of no return. Before the city does anything else, in my opinion it should address the question of how to decrease the poverty rate to below 10%.

Some suggestions for this:

- a) the city of Geneva should restrict welfare eligibility based on length of residency: e.g. 1, 1 ½ or 2 years of residence before becoming eligible for welfare,
- b) limiting welfare to a 3 year term, with a possible review.
- c) Welfare could be conditional on some sort of return service.

Housing: Affordable prices, very high taxes. 60% of the city properties are off the tax roll. Some suggestions:

- d) Put properties back on tax roll
- e) Negotiate payments for road use, water and sewage use, use of the Geneva Police Department, Fire Department, etc.
- f) Require some return services in lieu of taxes.

Lake Front access:

To make Geneva a destination, the lake front has to have uninhibited access. This could be achieved by rerouting transient truck traffic to Pre Emption Road – Rt 96 – Rt 318 – Rts 5&20. For passenger car traffic installing roundabouts at Elizabeth Blackwell Drive and Lake St and limiting speed to 15 mph between them. Pedestrians should have uninhibited access to the lake front between the two roundabouts.

Set up a city owned building immediately East of the Visitors Center for a Bistro like restaurant with an outside beer garden, and another at the East end of the lake front where the State Park begins, also rental as a pastry shop and ice cream parlor, also with outside sitting with tables ,chairs and umbrellas.. This may ensure human traffic at the lake front. This kind of arrangement works in some American and most European cities, and would also bring in revenues.

### **Comment 9**

These are some roughly written suggestions:

1. Make every effort possible to reduce City of Geneva Taxes! They are very high compared to the Town of Geneva, as well as other cities that people are choosing to move to. We do not get the visible/identifiable benefits of such high taxes, that other locations might have.
2. Tighten discipline in the Geneva City Schools, and raise academic standards. There is a "reputation" that needs an extra lot of effort to rebuild, even though we have made much progress, on and off, through the years.

We also do not have as many BIG scholarships to college as other surrounding schools. (Real Estate Agents will tell you that Geneva Schools and Taxes are the biggest killers for home sales here.)

3. Stop expanding housing for low income. This sounds cruel, but we are overwhelmed with the challenge to help so many needy in our County.
4. Put many more picnic tables within the lake view, and maintain them. I went to the Trout Derby and found our gazebo and lake area in need of cleaning. There were very few benches and no picnic areas by the tent that they brought the trout to weigh.
5. Offer many more "advantages" for city of Geneva residents to feel they are getting more for their tax dollars and for choosing to live in and contribute to their city. Ideas: even loser rates for classes at the Rec. Dept, at the Library, use of rooms at the Community Center, entry to festivals, local restaurant discounts...etc etc. for CITY RESIDENTS. Have

an ID that we can carry and get benefits from...issued when we pay our taxes each year, maybe.

6. Tighten the housing mandates/zoning rules, etc. to put pressure on residents to keep up the exterior of their properties. Maybe incentives that are positives could work. Try contests to beautify, with prizes such as \$100 gift certificate to a restaurant in Geneva for the nicest garden, or the most attractive porch, or???

7. If there is any way, stop the continuous increase in the number of rentals in the City of Geneva. Can we regulate the number of people that can live in a certain square footage? or live in basements and attics? ..those who are renting "under the radar"? those rentals that are "legal" but not doing anything to increase the value of our community. Just one example is the increase in fences that give the neighborhood the feeling of separation and lack of neighborly relations. Maybe we can have a neighbor to neighbor counseling service for residents who need help negotiating over issues of noisy, messiness, animals, privacy, etc.

8. Teach swimming free to all city residents and offer the use of our pools for exercise to all city tax payers. I encourage more city resident use of the swimming pool at Geneva High School and at Hobart. Seniors citizens have to drive to the Chiropractic College or Midlakes School pool. Physical therapists in Geneva say that water aerobics are so good for weight management and orthopedic rebuilding, but the YMCA is too expensive and too small for the needs we have in Geneva.

9. Put more pressure on LANDLORDS to maintain their properties to a higher level of quality care, BOTH indoors and outdoors!!

10. Is there any possibility that more utility wires can be buried underground to help beautify the city? It is so much prettier to not have trees cut with big holes or trimmed on one side to keep them from growing into the wires that line our streets.

11. Annex South Lake Neighborhood to the Town of Geneva.

Seek answers as to how to get more people to WANT to move to Geneva and those who do own homes here, to continue to live in Geneva. What advantages can we say there are to living in the CITY OF GENEVA? (rather than the Town or in Canandaigua or Victor or????)

I am sure with brainstorming, there can be many more creative approaches.

### **Comment 10**

Also...although I'm not sure where in the document this should go, the complete terribleness of the farmer's market facility needs to be addressed. It can't be a chalked-off piece of parking lot any longer. It is an aesthetic nightmare without any features to attract shoppers to linger in a manner that is common in other markets...picnic tables/seating, etc. We were at the opening last week before school and the kids had nowhere to sit and eat the snack we bought...they had to sit on a curb while that friggin dog was trying to snag the muffins out of their hands. Please help with this! It is a super important piece of the downtown that is more of an embarrassment than anything...for the vendors and keeping them here and making it worth their while and for anyone visiting...Geneva resident or otherwise.

Also, I notice the document mentioned code changes for bee-keeping (and chickens?) on p. 38. Please see code here: <http://ecode360.com/10592327>. 100-1A is poorly worded and unfounded regulation and 100-1C is a wholly-abandoned enforcement objective by the

city...which begs for a lawsuit if there is any accidents in areas where sightlines are obstructed...of which there are MANY in the city. I've written to the code office about this and they declined to address it because it "would make people mad".

These are some of my garbled notes from the margins of Part 1:

Part 1 p. 19 More elaborate Shade tree, stuff (see attached report!), Can we include something about light pollution from unshaded street lights?

p. 26 new small businesses, We need to enhance our destination-ness by courting specific ethnic restaurants especially Asian spots like Thai, Indian (again!), Korean, Chinese noodle bar/wok joint. Genevans shouldn't have to drive to Ithaca or Rochester...those folks should all be coming here! Also, how about a nod to our history and the beverage-y future...a malt house!

p. 29 exchange st tree lawns, etc. please, more specific shade tree promo

p. 30 Are there examples of model senior/commercial developments to illustrate this? White springs road needs to be regraded at the south intersection to Hamilton to improve visibility. The Main St. overpass needs to be rebuilt and beautified. I'm all for medians but the left turn lanes help with turning into and merging out of side streets and driveways along 5&20.

P. 35 Castle Street Corridor Awesome ideas!

## **Comment 11**

Part 1

p. 10 last sentence: "... disinvestment and disorder."

Suggestion: Use less bias-loaded language. For example (and I am not necessarily an advocate of this): single hipsters drove gentrification in Brooklyn as 4 single college educated roommates could afford higher rents rooming together than could a family with one or two breadwinners. So, loss of families is not inherently linked with disorder and disinvestment.

p. 12: identify some amenities communities doing better on population growth or income-college education graphs have, that we don't, but perhaps we should offer as per the second paragraph on that page?

p. 19 "disrupt concentrations of poverty"

Suggestion: change to less bias-loaded language, and re-write as: "to ameliorate poverty levels."

p. 19, right hand column of "We Will Nots": second bullet point about Seneca Lake. Suggestion. Cut what comes after Seneca Lake. Insert following text: "while finding ways of improving accessibility and attractiveness of the lakefront for Geneva's residents and visitors." [This emphasizes themes found elsewhere in the Draft Plan and thereby brings this into alignment with those other recommendations found, e.g., in Part 2]

Part 2

p. 4 Endnote not punctuated properly. Also: I recommend switching all endnotes from Roman numerals to Arabic numbers.



p. 4 Endnote text: This finding -- that property tax rates are NOT the reason why middle class families choose to live in communities other than Geneva – is very important as it contradicts the assumptions of many people. Therefore, it should be in the main text and not tossed into a footnote. It would help if a reason or two for that conclusion were in the text, but that is a minor suggestion. The most important is that the text of the first endnote should be moved to the main body of the report.

p. 6 notes that in Geneva, poverty has grown as has those with high incomes. This is actually a nationwide trend, according to a PEW report issued in May, 2016. See: "America's Shrinking Middle Class: A Close Look at Changes Within Metropolitan Areas," Pew Research Center.

<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2016/05/Middle-Class-Metro-Areas-FINAL.pdf> (report)

<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/05/11/americas-shrinking-middle-class-a-close-look-at-changes-within-metropolitan-areas/> (press release summarizing key findings)

Does this help direct some families away from Pittsford and towards Geneva? Not so much. But, it lets us know that cities are competing for a dwindling number of middle class households (probably the result of macro-economic forces that have developed over decades).

p. 19 Notes that Geneva's infrastructure has been long neglected. Basic public infrastructure is a necessity, and the report itself notes that budgets have been cut to the bone and we probably offer fewer amenities than we should. Therefore, to refer to "demanded" public services is probably not correct or well-put. Change "demanded" to necessary.

p. 19 Throughout this page and p. 20 are references to "making choices." From reading the text, this seems no more than repeating a cliché, which one ought not do. The text indicates that Geneva MUST stop kicking the can down the road in terms of basic maintenance on public infrastructure, and not defer necessary maintenance. Instead, the report says Geneva must "catch up" (p. 19), and that everything has been "cut to the bone" (p. 20).

Suggestion: cut references to "making choices".

Endnotes.

Endnote #1: Move to main body of the text.

#2: end the sentence with a period.

#'s 1-3: change from Roman to Arabic numerals.

Larger Thoughts/ General Comments

Part 3

I noticed one problem for economically disadvantaged people in Geneva is the poor public transportation. People can't get to their jobs (or not without difficulty or risking being late) with what we offer. Taxis might not seem to cost much for someone who is middle class but that becomes a significant cost if one earns minimum wage. We need to think about expanding public transportation for economic equity reasons, if not ecological reasons. Bike

paths and racks may help with this in the summer, but this is obviously a seasonal fix due to winters in Geneva.

p. 18 Geneva attracts as many workers from outside Geneva as from within. That's good to have them potentially shopping here and eating lunch here. But: how do we encourage them to live here?

p. 18 Chain stores create a visuality that is homogeneous and works against our brand identity. So what can we do about this? How can we limit where they locate?

Would it be appropriate somewhere in the plan to encourage green median strips on lower Castle (the section of Castle Street near Lakedrum)? It would create a visual connection with landscaping that has been happening at Castle and 5 & 20, and if a green median is constructed to slow traffic on 5 & 20 (which I hope happens) there would be a visual connection to that.

Green median next time Seneca Street is due for repair?

I noticed that FLCC is not discussed as much as it could be as an institution that could really help our local economy, say, in terms of training for culinary arts (among other things).

## Part 2

p. 20 has punctuation problems right column, end of first full paragraph.

p. 28 right column, second para up from bottom: use of "however" is improper -- edit.

p. 29 Again, problems using "however" properly in left column, 4th para.

p. 30, right column, para beginning with "Recent demographic changes..." Need a comma after "some".

pp. 34ff pages mis-numbered.

Add period to endnote one.