

Resolution ____ of 2020. Findings Statement of the Caroline Town Board Regarding Environmental Impacts of the Updated 2020 Town of Caroline Comprehensive Plan

The action under consideration is the adoption of an updated Comprehensive Plan, which is not truly a Type I Action as the amendments and their reorganization, as well as updated sampling and census data, are not really “new” or a significant reordering of land use plans or priorities. Yet, a Type I Action review was selected as providing the most comprehensive look at the plan, including the two areas where most significant changes have occurred: (1) the promotion and advancement of agricultural goals; and (2) the reordering of developmental priorities using new zoning and land use management techniques, encouraging development where infrastructure already exists, and proposing integrated community areas with complete streets and multiple forms of interconnectivity. Overall, there are literally hundreds of changes, including correcting typographical errors and cross-references, but for purposes of environmental analysis these issues, as well as the removal of redundancies, paragraph or heading re-numberings, updated or new definitions, relocated textual references, and updated census and factual data shall be discounted, except where clearly relevant, as such changes are individually and cumulatively not likely to produce any negative environmental impacts.

Instead, changes that have the potential to trigger land use issues that affect Part 2 analyses will be the potential impacts that are the focus of this examination under SEQRA, as partly summarized in this Findings Statement per 6 NYCRR Part 617 and ECL Article 8. Thus, consistent with § 617.7(c), speculative future impacts are not given great weight in this analysis. As well, impacts that are designed to be analyzed as site or project specific impacts, such as air quality, are not a special focus. Nor is any meaningful weight given to other changes that were or could have been considered or included, as this review is focused on the Comprehensive Plan as written. The Comprehensive Plan is not a law or a binding statement or restatement of political or social goals; it is a guideline, a roadmap that helps identify how to achieve a certain future vision in recognition that change and development are constant pressures upon any community.

Thus, objections and concerns about matters that could also be changed will not be re-considered at this time, and the focus will rightly remain upon the potential environmental impacts of this plan. Thus, while there are things that any given individual or group may believe is good or bad, or right or wrong, this review is not focused on critiques but impacts--mainly in recognition that this plan is not perfect, will grow, and is but a snapshot in time of a shared community plan and vision that seeks to balance all such competing views and goals into one document. This review is then an impact analysis of such plan, and not an indictment of what is not included or could or should be there (or not be there, etc.).

Thus, in respect of this analysis the process of the Town included, among other things, the following: (i) the development by the Planning and Town Boards of a subject matter list of items for land use and the Comp. Plan that needed attention; (ii) the creation of a special committees and surveys, and consideration of their recommendations in results; (iii) input from County Planners and consulted professional planners and landscape architects to provide area-specific input; (v)

input from various town and regional constituencies, and significant input and review from the public; (vi) public meetings, public information sessions, and a public hearing; (vii) a formal referral by such committee to the Town Board; (viii) work for over 12 months at several public meetings by the Planning Board, in each case subject to public input; (ix) a public hearing held by the Planning Board upon September 24, 2020; (x) and the Planning Board held a further public meetings to review and respond to all comments (by category); and (xi) the matter was formally referred to the Town Board and the Plan unanimously recommended by the Planning Board on November 11, 2020; and (xii) the Town Board duly noticed and held its formal public hearing on the plan upon December 10, 2020, allowing for public comment and further discussion as to the final form of this plan; and (xiii) the Planning Board and Town Board duly considered and implemented 239 reviews and recommendations of the County and did further conduct an environmental review under SEQRA to assess environmental issues and impacts, most or all of which are deemed positive overall impacts that will reduce the number and severity of actual and potential negative environmental impacts that could otherwise arise if no comprehensive plan and regulatory tools were in place to try to guide and temper development.

Further, and as noted by Environmental Conservation Law Article 8 and 6 NYCRR Part 617, an environmental review should take into account many factors, including: (i) the probability of each potential impact occurring; (ii) the duration of each potential impact; (iii) the irreversibility of each potential impact, including permanently lost resources of value; (iv) whether each potential impact can or will be controlled or mitigated by permitting or other processes; (v) the regional consequence of the potential impacts; (vi) the potential for each impact to be or become inconsistent with the Town's master plan and local needs and goals; and (vii) whether any known objections to the project relate to any of the identified potential impacts. Therefore, in this review the actual historical land development patterns will be weighted and deemed more reliable relative to potential impacts than mere speculation as to the potential future impacts arising from allegations of unchecked growth. Yet, the risk of growth and the conformance of these amendments to this updated Comprehensive Plan will still be weighed given the potential for impacts as identified and discussed in FEAF Part 2. Towards this end, it is noted that the environmental protection of open areas, agriculture, steep slopes, riparian, littoral and wetland areas, and other natural resources have been materially enhanced throughout this plan, from direct goals and recommendations to indirect effects, like zoning, overlay districting, smart streets, nodal development, and meeting County and State smart growth initiatives, etc.

Based thereupon, and in light of all identified impacts and matters and the attached summary outlining how the Comp. Plan addressed the key areas of the FEAF Parts 2 and 3, and as none of the matters listed in Part 2, or as are or were deemed to be or become moderate or significant actual or potential impacts as would cause a positive declaration to arise in relation to the consideration or adoption of this updated Comprehensive Plan, a negative declaration is thus declared and ordered prepared.

**Attachment 1:
Town of Caroline 2020 Comprehensive Plan
Summary Addressing Environmental Impacts**

Impact on Land: The 2020 Town of Caroline Comprehensive Plan (hereinafter called “the Plan”) addresses the need for future planning and development policies to minimize impacts on the land, especially in regard to protecting open space and agricultural lands. Among other recommendations, the Plan calls for regulations to promote livable communities, where residential development is concentrated in or near the hamlets, protect Prime Agricultural Lands, and discourage sprawl.

Impact on Geological Features: The Natural Resources chapter of the Plan calls attention to the 18 Unique Natural Areas in Caroline, recognized by their outstanding geological and biological features. The Plan also calls attention to Caroline’s limited Prime Agricultural Lands and expresses the Town’s vision to protect these lands because of their value as a key natural resource based on their intrinsic geological properties.

Impact on Surface Water: The Plan highlights the importance of Caroline’s surface waters for local municipal water supplies (Six Mile Creek for the City and Town of Ithaca) and recharge of aquifers that supply water for Caroline residences and business via private water wells. The Plan’s call for wise development policies that build livable communities concentrated in the three hamlets, as well as responsible protection of natural resources, will work to minimize impacts on surface waters. The Plan endorses Caroline’s history of proactively addressing potential flooding and erosion by enacting a stormwater management local law and implementing natural stream-stabilization measures.

Impact on Groundwater: The Plan calls attention to Caroline’s freshwater streams and wetlands and notes the federal and state protections that currently exist to protect surface waters that contribute to recharge of groundwaters that provide the Town’s water supply. Aquifers are highlighted in the Natural Resources Chapter as critical for the Town’s drinking water supply.

Impact on Flooding: The Plan endorses the Town’s policies and practices in mitigating stormwater impacts through local laws, proactive mitigation projects, and responsible siting of developments.

Impact on Energy, Air, Transportation: The Plan encourages adoption of energy conservation and renewable energy technologies. The Plan recognizes that wise development to reduce the need to travel long distances for products and services, encourage public transportation, and transition to renewable energy sources will reduce air pollution, especially greenhouse gas emissions, from fossil fuel extraction and combustion. Caroline has made notable progress in promoting adoption of renewable energy technologies by the Town itself (solar PV and geothermal heating and cooling at the Town Offices and Historic Town Hall) and by the efforts of its volunteer committee, Energy Independent Caroline, to educate and support residents throughout the county

in adoption of solar photovoltaics, heat pumps, and insulation improvements through the Solarize model of community outreach and installer engagement.

Impact on Plants and Animals: Protection of the natural environment was highly ranked as a priority by Caroline residents and is highlighted in the Plan. The 18 Unique Natural Areas in Caroline have been designated by the Tompkins County Environmental Management Council for their unique geological and biological features. The Plan articulates a high priority of protecting the environment upon which plants and animals depend.

Impact on Agricultural Resources: The Plan calls attention to the decline of dairy farming in Caroline and increasing growth pressures that pose a threat to our agricultural lands (see Agriculture, in Snapshot of Changes). The Plan calls for the adoption of development guidance tools that promote development in the three hamlets and the implementation of alternative farming approaches and incentives for preserving agricultural lands.

Impact on Aesthetic Resources: In addition to the overall rural character of Caroline, the Plan notes Unique Natural Areas and Scenic Views as important natural resources. The important theme of the Plan in encouraging wisely designed and situated development will promote the protection of the aesthetic resources of Caroline.

Impact on Historic and Archeological Resources: The Plan implicitly encourages attention to preserving the historical features and sensibilities of Caroline by preserving its rural character.

Impact on Open Space and Recreation: The rural nature of Caroline that is a consequence of its abundant open spaces will be protected by judicious planning measures to promote concentrated residential communities. Measures to promote agricultural livelihoods will be critical to maintaining the rural nature of Caroline. The Plan recognizes the value to the community of recreational resources and encourages development of trails.

Impact on Critical Environmental Areas: There are no Critical Environmental Areas in Caroline. The Plan call attention to the 18 Unique Natural Areas. Although they receive no regulatory protections, residents and developers can be made aware of these areas.

Impact on Noise, Odor, and Light: The Plan notes that “visual appearance, noise and light pollution, and air and water quality” need to be addressed in the development approval process.

Impact on Human Health: The Plan promotes policies that protect human health (See Impacts on Energy, Air, Transportation, and Plants & Animals).

Consistency with Community Plans: The 2020 Caroline Comprehensive Plan is in harmony with the 2006 Caroline Comprehensive Plan: the “20-year Vision” of the 2006 Plan was retained in its entirety. The Plans principles and policies are consistent with existing community plans of neighboring towns and Tompkins County (2015 Comprehensive Plan). The Tompkins County

Plan, as in Caroline's Plan, envisions for rural areas "a working landscape of farms and forests providing products and jobs that support a strong rural economy..."

Consistency with Community Character: Development of the Plan was based on six years of careful work by Caroline's Planning Board (Committee) to elicit feedback to ensure full opportunity for community input. This included three initial Community Cafes, followed by a survey mailed to every resident, and three ensuing Community Meetings to solicit input on particular focus areas. The Plan explicitly recognizes the diversity of cultures and philosophies in the community, as well as the rural and residential areas of the town. The 2020 Plan is in harmony with the 2006 Plan, strengthening the conclusion that the Plan is consistent with Caroline's community character.