

Greenprint for Pittsford's Future

In 1996, Pittsford realized that it had reached an important fork in the road for determining what this community should look like into the 21st Century. One of the forks continued the community on the same development path we had been experiencing for the last decade. The resulting land use pattern would be new subdivisions interspersed with open space.

The other fork in Pittsford's future altered the current development pattern. This allowed the community to have direct input into what resources the community felt were important and should be preserved. The resulting land use pattern would be large expanses of open space interspersed by development.

On January 23, 1996, John Behan, the Town's planning consultant, introduced the Greenprint for Pittsford's Future to the Town Board. This plan provided for an alternative land use policy by projecting open space and development patterns. Essentially this plan allowed us to look into the future to see what the "finished" landscape would look like.

The "Greenprint for Pittsford's Future" is based on recommendations contained within the Comprehensive Plan Update, adopted in April 1995, to save 2000 acres of land in the undeveloped portions of the community. This plan is a statement of the community's future land use policies based on a process that includes extensive community input.

The Comprehensive Plan attempted to balance community planning issues with the fiscal impact that those policies would have on future property tax rates. To achieve this, the community plan established three primary land use strategies: economic development within ten existing non-residential areas; the preservation of 2,000 acres of open space and continued residential development on the remaining 1,600 acres of undeveloped lands.

A methodology had to be established which would make open space vs. development decisions. To accomplish this, a citizen's committee was formed to develop an objective and rational system for ranking and rating the community's agricultural, ecological and other open space and cultural resources. A field inventory of undeveloped parcels was then accomplished to gain the necessary information to complete the resource ratings.

The "Greenprint for Pittsford's Future" is the result of this process. The Greenprint encompasses all the undeveloped lands within our community and establishes preservation priorities for the highest rated agricultural resources, ecological resources and open space and cultural resources.

The final step in the process was to identify how the Greenprint would be carried out. The agricultural resources were to be protected through the Purchase of Development Rights. The balance of resources would be protected through the existing planning process. The Planning Board has several tools available to them including current zoning, which requires the preservation of 50% open space on new development, and Incentive Zoning which allows the flexibility of planning between multiple parcels as long as community open space benefits are achieved.

The Greenprint was never intended to stop development. Instead it was intended to guide development in the way the community thought made most sense. The Greenprint provides the Planning Board with an established set of priorities for resource preservation on individual parcels. The Greenprint also provides the Planning Board with an overall open space plan that establishes continuity and connectivity between the various resources intended for preservation.

Most important of all, the Greenprint provides a tool for all residents to understand what land use decisions may be expected in the vicinity of their homes. Open space priorities and development potentials are communicated in a graphical manner to help provide an understanding of what may be expected.

This ability to predict the community's future is the most important aspect of the Greenprint. While zoning establishes community standards for the type of development that will occur, it is also provides an unclear vision of what the community will look like at full development since it is completed over many years by many different people.

The process we have gone through to establish the "Greenprint for Pittsford's Future" allows us to take zoning to a more detailed step. It has allowed us to put a completed painting of Pittsford before our residents, volunteer boards and local developers to develop a consensus on what this community should look like when we are fully developed.

In the end, we know that approximately 2,400 acres of open space resources will be protected due to the Greenprint initiative. This represents 67% of the undeveloped lands that remains in Pittsford. All of this has been accomplished through building important community partnerships and consensus of Pittsford residents.