Framework for Long Range Environmental Planning in Tompkins County

Prepared by the Tompkins County Environmental Management Council
February, 1996
What is the EMC?

The Tompkins County Environmental Management Council is the official advisory body on environmental matters to the Tompkins County Board of Representatives. There are 28 appointed voting members on the EMC, and many associate members, all of whom volunteer their time to serve on the Council. The EMC makes recommendations to the County Legislature and provides public outreach and education on many diverse environmental issues, including: unique natural areas protection, public environmental health issues, long range environmental planning, wetlands protection, solid waste, and transportation planning.

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Introduction

Approximately two years ago the Tompkins County Environmental Management Council established the Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) in response to long range planning discussions within Tompkins County government. The EMC's intent has been to support the county's efforts and to provide the Tompkins County Board of Representatives with informed advice on the environmental component of any comprehensive long range plan which may be developed. The EMC has adopted the result of the committee's work—the Framework for Long Range Environmental Planning for Tompkins County.

We provide in this document a framework for developing an environmental long range plan for Tompkins County. It is, in effect, a detailed guidance document for the development of such a plan. It includes recommendations about what kinds of information to include and what questions to address. It also includes general recommendations about what the county should do. It is the hope of the EMC that the Planning Department, the Board of Representatives and the EMC will work together to complete the details of the plan in the months which lie ahead.

The Framework starts with a vision of the future for the environment of Tompkins County and ends with a recommendation that a vision and a plan be adopted with the full participation of the citizens of Tompkins County. In between is discussed the quality of life in the County and the specific environmental issues. More detailed position papers are presented on a natural resource inventory, biological corridors, transportation options and citizen participation. Each section of the report, including the position papers, contains recommendations.

We look forward to what we expect to be exciting discussions on the future of the natural environment in Tompkins County.

Acknowledgments

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April, 1996
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Tompkins County Environmental Vision Statement

Planning for the long term future of the environment in Tompkins County requires that we develop a clear vision of what kind of natural world we want - for ourselves and for generations to come. This vision statement expresses what the EMC believes to be the wishes of a large majority of Tompkins County residents and forms the foundation for the recommendations which follow in this report.

The citizens of Tompkins County want an environment at least as good and enjoyable as the one we have enjoyed in our lifetimes. "It's a beautiful area" people say to us when we travel to other parts of the state, country and world. Students state the same thing as they decide to stay in the area, often times working far below their level of training just to be able to afford to stay here. "It's a beautiful area" declare the senior citizens as they return to Tompkins County to live out the rest of their lives. A healthy environment is more than beautiful, of course. A well-protected environment adds to our mental and physical well-being and adds to the economic prosperity of the county. It is hoped that a shared vision of what most people want for our environment will lead to a common purpose: assuring for future generations a natural world full of diversity, a full complement of native plants and animals, and beauty and wonder.

Tompkins County must remain beautiful. Nature's beauty often creates the first stirring of desire to protect the environment from further degradation. Hard core environmentalists may say that scenic vistas are not important in the long-term survival of the biodiversity upon which the earth depends, but natural beauty can bring people of very different points of view together in the common cause of environmental protection. Hard core business people may say that housing and jobs are more important than views, but the natural charm of the county encourages residents to remain and stimulates the casual visitor to return as a tourist or to settle in the county, becoming a new contributor to the economic prosperity of the area. Most importantly, beautiful views, meandering streams, dark forests, open farms and deep gorges daily inspire our thinking and positive mood and add inestimable value to our quality of life.

Tompkins County must continue to help provide us with healthful food. Tompkins County is not a major food-producing county. Yet, residents greatly appreciate the high quality, fresh food which is available. This is evidenced by the popularity of the farmers' markets, u-pick farms, roadside markets, and home and community gardens. For commercial farms to remain active, they will need financial incentives, protection from developmental pressures, and assistance in protecting the environment from the unintended effects of pesticide and fertilizer use and soil erosion. Increasing recognition of the value of a healthful diet will increase the demand for fresh, locally-grown produce.

Tompkins County must retain its biodiversity. The survival of all species is important to the web of life itself. If one element is removed, often other parts of the natural world suffer. As studies in chemical prospecting are discovering, the human life-saving drugs of the future may be found in the natural world we manage to save today. However, as we divide the land for housing and other purposes, smaller tracts of natural areas can no longer provide food, cover and water for all components of the ecosystem. Therefore, we must protect not just individual species or small, isolated patches of land, but connected natural parcels of sufficient size to permit the ecosystem to survive. The natural world must be accorded its right to prosper independent of its current or potential use to humans. Greenways, biological corridors, parks, private lands protected by conservation easements, and other strategies should be employed to provide proper protection of our land and waters.

Tompkins County residents must be able to walk, run, bicycle and watch nature in a safe, convenient manner. It should not be necessary to take the better part of a day to drive to a natural area to enjoy the outdoors. We want local greenways, trails, and pathways that provide a safe way
to get outside, and even, where feasible, get us to the store for groceries and other essentials. If another fuel shortage develops, proper planning now will allow us to still travel inexpensively via bicycle, wheelchair or by foot. We know that exercise, in addition to a proper diet, will keep us healthy; opportunities must be provided for us to conveniently exercise. Just as important, we need access to the natural world to refresh our minds and enhance our mental health.

**Tompkins County residents must enjoy a clean, safe environment.** Water is abundant in Tompkins County and that abundance often helps flush away our human-generated waste and chemicals. However, the earth has a limited capacity to cleanse itself from these environmental insults. Wetlands and their value for water filtration, flood prevention, and wildlife and plant habitat must be protected. Controls are needed on chemicals which threaten our water. Techniques are needed to prevent soil erosion and resulting siltation. Inappropriate land uses must be avoided. Controls are needed on herbicide and road salt use. Trees not only provide beauty; they cleanse and cool the air. Our forested landscape should be preserved and enhanced. We also want clean air. While we can not directly control all the air that we breath, we can minimize our contribution to pollution by reducing driving of automobiles, eliminating backyard burning of trash and soliciting and monitoring clean industries. Energy efficiency, including increased use of solar energy and other non-polluting technologies, should be encouraged. A clean environment will be a rarity in the 21st century, and investments now will assure Tompkins County's reputation as a wonderful place to live and work.

**Tompkins County residents must have transportation options.** Many more county residents would be eager to commute to work and other destinations by bicycle or by foot if there were safe ways of doing so. We want roadways to have sufficient space to permit bicycles to travel safety. We need linkages with public transportation to eliminate long or especially difficult portions of the commute. We want long, connected bike and walking paths for recreation and exercise. Our residents - and tourists - are increasingly active, and communities which offer extensive opportunities for outdoor life will be more competitive in the years ahead.

**Tompkins County residents must be able to continue to enjoy small town and rural life.** One of the remarkable advantages of Tompkins County is that residents can enjoy the amenities of the City of Ithaca and the intellectual stimulation of our educational institutions, yet in ten minutes time be enjoying a country atmosphere. That advantage can easily be lost. We want information to be provided to the surrounding municipalities to help them make appropriate land-use decisions to assist in the retention of our rural county nature. That information must include development patterns, unique natural areas, housing options, greenways potential, water and sewage line possibilities, scenic vistas, economic development opportunities, prime farmland, tourism assistance, watershed management, and much more. Tompkins County is of sufficient size to be able to provide the staffing and equipment to assist the smaller municipalities by providing this information for their use. Without assistance, poor land use decisions can lead to the unintentional destruction of the quality of rural life we hold dear.

**Public participation in the governmental decision-making process must remain a high priority for Tompkins County.** Long-term protection of the environment is possible only through the wisdom of the county’s citizens and the leadership of the county’s elected representatives. We are fortunate in having in place representative bodies to reflect the views of the entire county in the Board of Representatives and the Environmental Management Council and other advisory committees. These are valuable but not sufficient when considering the decisions which will determine the future health of our environment. Therefore, there should be an on-going process that involves Tompkins County citizens in the environmental decision-making process. With our citizens, elected government, and a multitude of talented advisory and private organizations working together, we can provide for future generations the joy of nature that we find so essential in our lives.
Quality of Life Recommendations

Residents of Tompkins County currently enjoy a high quality of life. One of the predominant attributes that adds value to life here in Tompkins County is our healthy and remarkable environment. Specifically, the abundance of unique natural resources as well as the clean air, water, and land benefit all residents. Cayuga Lake and numerous parks and trails are well known attractions that provide residents and tourists with readily accessible recreational activities. The myriad of farms, woodlands, wetlands and other ecosystems dispersed throughout the County constantly remind us that we live in a healthy environment. During this time of growing global concern for environmental protection, Tompkins County seems separate from other regions where the issue of the environment has become a legal and health necessity rather than a quality of life issue.

Part of our good fortune is the sheer luck of "central isolation" and part is due to the wisdom of our ancestors, who provided us with an impressive number and quality of parks, farms and woodlands. In either case, the residents of Tompkins County benefit from the environment in many ways. First, the community enjoys our natural resources, beautiful scenic vistas, and clean environment on a daily basis. Second, residents economically profit from our surroundings. The two higher education institutions are the County's largest source of income and our clean and scenic environment helps both institutions attract thousands of students. Two other major sources of income are agriculture and tourism. Although tourists are attracted to the County for a number of reasons, the beautiful natural resources and healthy environment are the primary factors that keep the tourist industry alive and growing.

Our environment and the high quality of life that results from living in a healthy environment are therefore crucial elements of our community that should be given important consideration in all long range plans. It is imperative that future development occur in the context of sustaining current levels of environmental health and quality of life. To protect our vital natural resources and safeguard our futures, all development must reflect responsible stewardship of the land, and take into account both our population growth and our industries. Responsible stewardship will ensure that we protect our vital natural resources and safeguard our own futures. We recommend that the County:

1. recognize the components of our high quality of life.
2. accurately assess each quality of life component.
3. consolidate quality of life information in one comprehensive report for town and village officials, community organizations and businesses throughout the County.
4. strive to integrate business into community projects that help protect our high quality of life.

1. Recognizing the components of our high quality of life. These include qualities such as a healthy economy; readily available and affordable recreation activities; a safe community; a closeness to nature; and healthy living conditions. By recognizing those qualities that enrich and vitalize our lives, their full contribution to our community's well-being becomes clearer. In addition, decision-makers are better able to weigh the importance of environment stewardship as well as understand the ramifications of irresponsible environmental behavior. Haphazard building of roads and dwellings, and uncontrolled population growth can have unanticipated effects on all residents and eventually deteriorate our high quality of life.

2. Assessing each quality of life component. Only by accurately assessing each individual element will we be able to protect them adequately from unsustainable development or
undesirable deterioration. These qualities include factors such as a clean Lake Cayuga; maintained and accessible parks, trails, and scenic vistas; isolation from multi-lane or heavily congested highways and throughways; safe drinking water; the proper collection and treatment of waste water; and ability to cost-effectively dispose of solid and hazardous waste; and an environmentally aware community that works together to solve environmental issues.

3. Consolidating this quality of life information in one comprehensive report for town and village officials, various community organizations, and businesses throughout the County. By explicitly identifying what constitutes and contributes to our high quality of life, people will be more willing to devote the time, money and energy to preserving and enhancing our surroundings. In addition, this information will help officials develop a long range vision for the communities.

4. Striving to integrate business into community projects that help protect our high quality of life. Businesses offer the community a source of expertise, funding, and support that most organizations and local governments cannot afford. By working together on environmental issues and projects, both the County and business benefit. The County can facilitate this synergetic relationship by providing all businesses with this comprehensive report of quality of life elements that highlight environmental projects that need support. A newsletter could be distributed stressing the benefits that the companies will receive if they participate. These benefits could include free promotion opportunities with the local newspapers, better community relations, higher morale and a more productive work force. Projects that could benefit from business support include the creation of new parks and trails, the upkeep of overused parks and trails, and the identification of Unique Natural Areas.
Environmental Issues and Objectives

In this section, the EMC identifies the major environmental issues the County Comprehensive Plan should address, and recommends some objectives for the county to adopt. We also suggest a target date for achieving each objective, and include this date in parentheses following the objective. Additional information may lead to new or more specific objectives, and the EMC stands ready to assist in gathering or interpreting that information.

Environmental concerns are present in many components of the comprehensive planning process, including natural resources, transportation, and land use. These concerns should be integrated into the relevant components of the Tompkins County planning document. Environmental protection will be best achieved by an integrated plan which considers environmental impacts concurrently with other goals. The structure of this document reflects this integrated view, as we have categorized environmental objectives into sections covering natural resources and the environment, development, and transportation.

Numerous organizations have resources that could contribute to achieving the objectives identified in this document. The EMC has assembled key information about environmental organizations in Tompkins County in the Environmental Directory, and we suggest that the County take advantage of these organizations in long range environmental planning efforts.

We have reviewed selected issues more thoroughly than most and include these discussions as Position Papers within this document. These Position Papers do not address the development of a natural resource inventory, a plan for biological corridors and greenways, tools for open space protection, low impact transportation options, and public participation.

I. General Objectives

1) Encourage cooperation among local municipalities on matters of environmental planning. The County should support and publicize mechanisms to facilitate this cooperation, such as the new Tompkins County Planning Federation and the EMC. Encourage the EMC, the Tompkins County Planning Department, Planning Advisory Board, and Planning Federation to communicate with the municipal boards, attend town meetings, and stay current with municipal board's activities. The local government newsletter that the Planning Department intends to produce will assist with this communication. (1996 and ongoing)

2) Provide information to the public and to local municipalities on the value of environmental conservation and the link between a healthy environment and a healthy economy. In particular, the County Comprehensive Plan should dispel the myth that economic health must be traded for environmental protection and stress that a healthy environment underlies the county's many prosperous industries, including education, agriculture and tourism. The Monroe County Comprehensive Plan includes a simple analysis of the current land availability and projected future needs to show that there is no need to develop environmentally sensitive land in the foreseeable future as there is more than enough suitable land available. An analysis of this sort in the Tompkins County plan would be useful. (1996 and ongoing)

II. Natural Resources and Environment

A. Open Space and Natural Areas

1) The County should complete a Natural Resources Inventory as outlined in Position Paper A. This would serve as baseline information for many important environmental planning and decision-making processes, including the designation of suitable and unsuitable areas for development, suggested below under Land Use and Growth Management. This inventory should include
Unique Natural Areas and Critical Environmental Areas, wetlands, floodplains, water bodies, streams including DEC classifications, stream corridors, current and future water supply storage and recharge areas, forested areas, old-growth forests, steep slopes, prime agricultural soils, active farmland, parks and public lands, trails, conservation easements, and air and water quality data. Much of the baseline information for this effort may already be available through the County Geographic Information System. (1998)

The County should update this inventory on a continuous basis, with a comprehensive review and summary at least once every five years. At set intervals, the County should present summary information on the status and trends of natural resources in the County to the Board of Representatives, municipal planning boards, and other relevant institutions. These periodic presentations could also serve as a basis for discussion, planning, evaluation, and goal-setting.

2) The County should identify and encourage the preservation of contiguous natural habitats within the County by adopting a biological corridor plan as outlined in Position Paper B. Other institutions in Tompkins County have completed much of the groundwork for planning a system of biological corridors in the region, and the County should work closely with these institutions to take advantage of their efforts and expertise, and to avoid duplicating effort. Preserving contiguous habitats will protect the health of our native wildlife and plants by allowing wildlife movement and plant dispersal. (1996)

3) The County should disseminate information regarding open space protection tools to local governments and encourage their use. The County should provide technical support services in the form of training, technical assistance and funding to local governments seeking to implement these tools. (1996)

4) The County should provide for parks and greenways within easy reach of County residents, and increase public access to Cayuga Lake. Our current municipal and state park systems are suffering from overuse and many municipalities do not have the resources to provide park facilities. (2010)

5) The County should carefully evaluate all lands that it owns or acquires for their environmental value, including value as parkland and wildlife and plant habitat. The County Draft Land Policy Plan indicates an intention to do so in 1996. (1996)

6) The County should encourage protection of Unique Natural Areas, and other natural or open areas. Relevant tools include working with land trusts, encouraging the use of conservation easements, and appropriate tax incentives. Work with land trusts could include public/private partnerships to fund acquisition of lands, where appropriate. (1996)

7) The County should discourage activity that significantly damages UNAs (e.g., off-road and 4-wheel drive vehicles, mountain bikes, horses, disturbance of groundwater and surface water flow in nearby areas). (1997)

B. Agriculture

1) The County should identify all high-quality farm land and develop tax incentives and land conservation strategies to keep those lands available for farming purposes. (1997)

2) The County should investigate whether current State tax policies force area farmers to shoulder an undue percentage of public school funding, and if so, how this situation might be remedied. Apparently Agricultural District 9 (which includes the eastern part of Tompkins County) is being reviewed in 1995, and the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board has been charged with

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1Position Paper B includes a discussion of the potential theoretical environmental problems with biological corridors and the reasons that those problems are unlikely to apply in Tompkins County.
writing an agricultural viability plan. The County should use the results of these efforts to inform
its review of agriculture in the context of comprehensive natural resources planning. (1997)

3) The County should identify particular agricultural sectors and geographic regions within the
County where the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) would significantly improve
environmental quality, and encourage use of such practices. The County should work together
with Cornell Cooperative Extension to provide information and training to farmers in these sectors
and regions regarding the environmental value of BMPs and the technical application of these
practices. One example of a BMP would be fencing stream corridors to minimize the impact of
cows on stream habitat and downstream water quality. (1998)

C. Water Quality

The EMC recognizes that the Tompkins County Planning Department has completed a Water
Quality Strategy Plan and recommends that relevant components be evaluated and included as
appropriate.

1) The County should compile water quality monitoring data for major streams, lakes, aquifers and
other water bodies. The County should support watershed management to prevent further
degradation of these water bodies, and restore impaired areas. (1996)

2) The County should set a goal of "swimmable quality" water that is both clear and contamination-
free at the south end of Cayuga Lake. This would require protection of major tributaries from
degradation due to erosion, agricultural runoff and development, close monitoring of sewage
discharges, and control of silt disturbance by power boats. Erosion, in particular, has been
identified as a major problem in the Cayuga Lake watershed and should receive close scrutiny in
planning for improved lake water quality. (2010)

3) The County should encourage the development of farm soil and water conservation plans which
protect water resources from runoff containing soil and pesticides (including herbicides). (1999)

4) The County should require least toxic management of County-owned buildings, lawns, turf-
grass areas, right-of-ways, County roads and bridges, and parks, both for the direct environmental
benefits and as a model for other land owners and land managers. (1996)

5) The County should encourage least toxic management of private and local government areas and
facilities including lawns, roads, and golf courses, in part by providing information and training.
In particular, the County might work cooperatively with local lawn care companies, lawn chemical
merchants, and homeowners to encourage least toxic management and prevent misuse of pesticides
(including herbicides). The County should also work with municipal highway departments and
private utilities to find alternatives to spraying road and utility right-of-ways. (1996)

6) The County should preserve wetlands and floodplains located in areas where water quality
preservation, water quality improvement, or flood control is a concern. (1996)

7) The County should encourage sound water quality management in urban areas. Possible tools
include giving special attention to management of road and parking lot runoff. (1996)

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2There are other reasons to protect wetlands having nothing to do with water quality or quantity, and we address them
elsewhere.
D. Air Quality
1) The County should monitor local air quality data and seek to prevent air quality degradation. Toward this end, the County should assess the air quality impacts of proposed development projects. It could also provide - or coordinate the provision of - information on the air quality impacts of various home heating options. Such information could include information on clean-burning wood or coal stoves, for example. (1998)

2) The County should encourage non- and less-polluting transportation options such as the use of public transportation, investment in non-diesel buses and dual-fuel fleet cars, car-pooling, bicycling and walking. More specific recommendations for increasing bicycling and walking transportation are outlined in Position Paper C. (2000)

3) The County should encourage municipalities to respect existing information (such as information about negative health effects of burn barrels) and laws that enable them to protect air quality. Apparently, some fire departments continue to permit (or engage in) burning for demolition, without regard for the attendant air quality impacts. (1996)

4) The County should provide or arrange for education about the environmental and legal reasons for engaging in environmentally responsible behaviors (such as alternatives to burn barrels and the use of clean-burning stoves). These educational efforts should be focused on relevant audiences including municipal government agencies and individual homeowners. (1996)

5) The County should consider enacting its own clean air laws, as allowed under the Federal Clean Air Act, for such activities as the removal of exterior lead paint. (1998)

E. Noise Abatement
1) The County should assess the noise contribution of current and future transportation and development projects, and mitigate excessive noise. Mitigation measures might include tree plantings along major roads. (1999)

2) The County should encourage reductions in on-site noise generation, for example on Cayuga Lake. Power boats have increased in both number and size over time, with attendant noise impacts to adjacent private and public areas. One step the Sheriff’s Department should take is to enforce motor boat noise limits on Cayuga Lake. (1996)

F. Hazardous Waste
1) The County should identify and monitor all current and past hazardous waste producing, handling and disposal sites within the County. The County should carefully consider the siting of future facilities in relation to current and future public water supply, and Unique Natural Areas. (2000)

2) The County should provide a dependable, regular and convenient household hazardous waste disposal system. The lack of such a system encourages the improper disposal of these items and subsequent environmental contamination. (1996)

III. Land Use and Growth Management

A. Development
1) The County, in particular cooperation with municipal governments, should identify and clearly designate areas most suitable and unsuitable for development, based on a variety of criteria including topography, soil suitability, ecological value, agricultural value and present patterns of development. As the County attempted one version of this in the 1976 Environmental Image document, this objective might begin by reviewing and updating the Environmental Image document. (1997)
2) The County should support compact, multi-use development and cluster zoning, and discourage sprawl and strip development in order to protect environmental amenities. Toward this end, the County should carefully consider the implications of selling County-owned lands. By including the land use intentions of land buyers as criteria to influence decisions about sales of County-owned lands, the County can prevent strip development and can exert considerable influence over emerging land use patterns. (1996)

3) The County should direct its economic development efforts to attracting environmentally friendly development, and to guiding new development to appropriate sites. The County should also work to help all industries dispose of waste in appropriate ways, and adopt energy-efficient technologies. (2000)

B. Transportation
1) The County should encourage the use of non- and less-polluting transportation options such as bus, bicycle and pedestrian travel, especially for commuting to work, as outlined in Position Paper C. Toward this end, the County should create bicycle lanes and sidewalks when replacing or repairing roadways and create separate paths connecting County greenways and abandoned railways. (2005)

2) The County should encourage traffic reduction by encouraging compact development and discouraging sprawl and strip development, as suggested above under development. (1996)

3) The County should require careful assessment of the environmental impact of new road construction near environmentally sensitive areas and into undeveloped areas. (1996)

4) To discourage pollution caused by excessive road salt and roadside herbicide application, the County should develop a plan for minimum road salt use, eliminate the use of all road-side herbicides, and investigate alternatives to road salt for winter road maintenance. (1996)

5) The County should identify scenic highways for inclusion in state and federal scenic highway programs. (2005)

IV. Utilities
1) The County should discourage the extension of water and sewer lines into areas unsuitable for development. (1997)

2) The County should encourage water and energy conservation, waste reduction, recycling and composting by providing information, educational services, and appropriate financial and non-financial incentives. (1997)

3) The County should continue to ban the spreading of septage and municipal sewage sludge on land. The County should investigate options for using constructed ecosystems to treat septage and sewage. (2000)

4) Evidence is mounting that electromagnetic fields (EMFs) associated with power lines cause biological effects in humans. Therefore, the County should discourage the placement of potentially hazardous EMFs near residential communities, particularly near schools. The County should also require that the safest possible designs of power line configurations be incorporated in the planning phase of new power line construction and existing line modification. Key design safety features may include shielding EMFs and designing power line geometry to minimize EMF strength. The County should also require that power lines and microwave towers on County right-of-ways be designed not to create potentially hazardous electromagnetic fields. (1996)
V. Energy

1) The County should encourage alternative energy use and production (e.g., by solar, wind) and energy conservation practices (as stated in IV-2). Examples of alternative energy use by the County could include the use of electric vehicles, compact fluorescent lights, and efficient heating. The County could also offer tax exemptions for alternative energy production. (1996)

2) The County should encourage implementation of energy conservation practices and explore alternative energy options. The County should work closely with municipalities to achieve this objective. (1997)

3) The County should establish criteria for periodic evaluations of energy use by government and the private sector. (1998)

4) Encourage the use of incentives (i.e., demand-side management) for public utilities and industries to conserve energy in the County as a whole. (1998)
Outline for a Natural Resource Inventory for Tompkins County
(Position Paper A)

Introduction

To plan for the future of the environment in Tompkins County, residents face two fundamental questions: "What kind of a County do we want?" and "What kind of a County can we realistically achieve?" The "Environmental Vision Statement" (part I of this report) addresses the first of these questions. As we discuss in that section, residents of Tompkins County are fortunate to live in a region rich in high quality natural resources. The continued quality of our lives, our children's lives, and their children's lives depends to a great extent on the health and stability of the land and the environment around us. In addition to playing a large role in defining the character of the County, many ecosystems (such as forests) enhance the air and water quality available to residents, and support the intricate web of life of which we are an important part.

Answering the second question, "What kind of a County can we realistically achieve?" requires that we recognize our ability to change our landscapes, to conserve what we decide is valuable, or to irreversibly alter what might be essential or highly desired in the future. The presence of the valuable resources and cherished landscapes of Tompkins County reflects decisions people have made in the past and is a tribute to the stewardship of the County's land owners. Their efforts have maintained the character of the County that is enjoyed by all who live in and visit this area. To decide what kind of a County we can get we also must acknowledge that we face levels of population growth, urbanization, and development pressure greater than previous generations; as a result, deciding what to preserve increasingly takes on dimensions of "how much?" and "to what extent?"

In order to decide how much and to what extent we want to preserve our natural resources, given the associated competing interests, we need to address a third question: "What kind of a County do we have?" A natural resource inventory answers this question; it is simply a status report of critical elements of the environment, a description of the ecologically significant features within the area of concern (i.e., Tompkins County). The main purpose of a natural resource inventory is to supply information that will aid deliberation (by residents, planners, and others) about what kind of a County we want and what kind of a County we can get. Without knowing the extent and pattern of natural resources in the County, it is difficult if not impossible to plan for their protection, nor for the closely linked question of appropriate development. The EMC recommends that Tompkins County conduct a natural resource inventory as part of its long range environmental planning process.

Purpose of the Tompkins County Natural Resource Inventory

The purpose of the Tompkins County natural resource inventory is to help County and municipal planners manage growth and development in an ecologically and socially responsible manner. It will assist in the decision-making processes relevant to activities such as:

- Site plan development
- Permit review
- Assessing projects' impacts on adjacent sites
- Planning to avoid project impacts on sensitive adjacent sites
• Protecting natural resources, open space, environmentally sensitive areas, and Unique Natural Areas for present and future generations.
• Voluntary land protection
• Planning and developing greenbelts and biological corridors
• Land acquisition
• Tourism development
• Evaluating the economic benefits to a community of preserving open space
• Land use regulation
• Protecting water quality by minimizing impacts from erosion, sedimentation, and drainage.
• Protecting stream corridors; designated 100-year flood plains; wetlands; steep slopes; woodlots; and Cayuga Lake and its shore.
• Enhancing public interest in and awareness of the County's natural resources.

The natural resource inventory will inform deliberations about natural resource management and will foster wise land use decisions because it will: (1) show persons involved of the decision-making process what resources exist; (2) illustrate trends in how those resources have changed over time; (3) enable people to see and understand the relationships between activities at one place and impacts at other (possibly nearby) places. The inventory will enable citizens and planners to see how to channel development away from areas within the County that are most likely to be harmed by such development, and towards areas that are most appropriate for development. Similarly, by steering development away from environmentally unstable areas with potential for flooding, silting, or erosion, it will enable taxpayers and developers to avoid unnecessary development costs during all phases of site selection, planning, and construction.

The benefits of explicitly addressing particular areas of concern and of understanding them in the context of surrounding land uses cannot be overstated. To protect valued natural resources adequately often requires attention to activities and land uses in surrounding areas. Buffer zones will generally be necessary between areas appropriate for higher levels of use and those targeted for protection. The extent of the buffer may vary, and for some unique natural areas appropriate land use in the entire watersheds may be critical to meet ecosystem protection goals. A natural resource inventory, if well-developed, will allow this kind of analysis.

Using such analyses, the natural resource inventory will also:

• Assist all applicants and reviewers of development proposals in environmentally sound planning.
• Support the comprehensive planning process, including policy formation and planning relating to the environment, natural resources, agricultural land use, parks, and recreational areas.
• Aid the municipalities in developing and refining zoning regulations, mobile home park ordinances, subdivision regulations, and other land use regulations.
• Guide the County in the designation of green belts and biological corridors to prevent habitat fragmentation and protect biological diversity.
The natural resource inventory will be used primarily by people and committees responsible for making decisions that pertain to land use; this audience includes:

- Landowners
- Developers
- County Board of Representatives
- Environmental Management Council
- Building permit applicants
- Land trust boards and staff
- County Planning Staff
- Comprehensive Planning Committee
- County Planning Board
- Site plan designers
- Municipal government staff
- NY DEC staff

This report will help the County Planning Department to conduct a natural resource inventory. It recommends how to structure the inventory, and it identifies the questions that planners will need to address at the outset in order to produce a useful, robust document.

**Defining the Task of Producing a Natural Resource Inventory**

To create the natural resource inventory, project staff will need to:

- Define and identify all open areas in Tompkins County.
- Define and identify the highest valued environmental resources in the County.
- Augment existing natural resource databases.
- Produce reports and hard-copy maps of key information contained in the database to make that information readily available to municipalities and citizens.

First, however, project staff will need to face some difficult decisions. For example, the natural resource inventory will identify the important ecological resources that give the County the special character cherished by its residents. Project staff, with input from appropriate agencies including the EMC (which has the production of an open space plan as part of its stated responsibilities), will need to decide which ecological resources are important relative to others. Although some plans rely exclusively on physical characteristics such as slope, gradient, and soil type, using such methods obviously ignores an essential goal of the inventory: to identify those ecological and environmental resources that give the County its special character.

The EMC recommends that the project staff begin by considering the following set of questions:

- How many (and which) aspects of the environment should be included?
- What level of spatial resolution is required (what level is useful; what level is optimal)?
- Is the same level of information required for each municipality?
- What information already exists at the Municipal and County levels?
- How much effort should be devoted to each municipality?
- How can information be acquired, and how was existing information acquired?

We recommend answers to some of these questions below, but we are not in a position to answer all of them. We want to stress the importance of considering all of them seriously in the course of developing a natural resource inventory for Tompkins County.
How many (and which) aspects of the environment should be included?

The EMC recommends that project staff use the following list as a starting point and exclude features included in this list only if their exclusion can be well-justified. The ordering of features in this list is NOT intended to imply any sequence of priority.

- Critical Environmental Areas (CEAs)
- Endangered and significant wildlife habitats
- Unique Natural Areas (UNAs)
- Flood plains and wetlands
- Ponds
- DEC-Classified Streams A, B, C, and Ct, and their corridors
- All DEC-Classified Streams D or "intermittent," and their corridors
- Current and future public water supply storage and recharge areas
- SCS Class I and II (prime) agricultural soils
- SCS Class III agricultural soils
- Steep slopes (>15% grade)
- Mature forest (5 acres or larger)
- Old Growth forest
- Active farmland
- Buffers (the size of which may vary tremendously according to land use types and site-specific geology and biology) to UNAs, CEAs, State Parks and other sensitive areas
- Aquifer and recharge areas
- Air and water quality

The residents and institutions of Tompkins County need to establish priorities for conducting a natural resource inventory. The task of completing a comprehensive, thorough natural resource inventory is simply too large to undertake and complete fully in the next year or two. However, it is clearly an important task for long range planning and one that we must address. One option is to identify items that will be included now and those that will be less relevant to near-term planning decisions but will be added later because of their relevance to decisions anticipated in the future.

What level of detail is required?

The level of detail included in a natural resource inventory can vary in a number of ways. For example, with regard to land use, we can choose the degree of spatial resolution to use; do we need to know whether a 0.25 acre forest is present or do forest patches become important to include only if they are 2 acres or larger? Information can also vary in terms of accuracy; do we need to know the location of a stream to within 1 meter, 10 meters, or 100 meters? Detail can also vary in terms of the number of land use categories we include.

For planning purposes, one criteria of spatial accuracy to consider is the ability to identify tax parcels upon which particular features lie. The level of accuracy needed for features close to parcel boundaries may be higher than the level needed for features which clearly lie within a particular parcel. The EMC suggests that the team which conducts the natural resource inventory adopt, if
technically feasible, a level of detail sufficient to identify unambiguously the tax parcels corresponding to natural resource boundaries 95% of the time.\(^3\)

As a last example of how detail can vary, consider air and water quality. Do we have measurements or air and water quality at those times and places where we expect them to be worst, or at those places where we expect air and water quality to be declining or improving? Project staff should avoid simply relying on current, easily accessible information without first seriously considering how much information - and exactly what information - is critical, relatively important, and less important to create a solid picture of the current state of the environment in Tompkins County.

Is the same level of information required for each municipality?

Because the various municipalities within Tompkins County differ substantially in their physical and cultural character, the EMC expects that different kinds of information - and different amounts of information - will be needed for different municipalities. However, because the goal of County-wide planning is to assist in the development and implementation of a collective vision for the County, the EMC recommends that the natural resource inventory include core set of information common to all municipalities.

The EMC recommends that project staff, in conjunction with representatives of each municipality, consider the following attributes of a municipality in deciding what type and extent of information may be needed.

- urban/rural character.
- extent of agriculture
- extent of public and privately owned forested land
- extent of open space
- extent of lake frontage and access
- degree of self-sufficiency compared to degree of commuting elsewhere for work
- water availability and quality

What information already exists?

The EMC recommends that project staff begin by listing in one place the environmental information available from all relevant sources, including:

- the County GIS system and other data sources within the County Planning office.
- each municipality within the County (to be gathered by contacting key people within each municipality).
- appropriate contacts at academic institutions.
- relevant commercial institutions.
- relevant state and federal government institutions (e.g., USGS, NOAA, FWS, EPA, DEC)
- reports of relevant research, such as those concerning potential lampricide application in Cayuga Lake, and hearings from major project permit reviews.

\(^3\) The resolution of current UNA boundaries on maps may preclude this possibility unless UNAs are remapped at greater than existing resolution.
existing or proposed municipal plans or surveys.

To the extent known, this list should indicate the accuracy of each data set and the scale at which it occurs (where appropriate).

**Format of the Inventory**

The EMC recommends that project staff develop the inventory to meet two goals: information flexibility and information accessibility.

Substantial environmental data for Tompkins County currently resides on the County's Geographic Information System (GIS)\(^4\). A GIS is a logical tool for compiling a natural resource inventory because it: (1) retains spatially explicit information; (2) facilitates manipulating, tabulating, extracting, and combining information; and (3) can produce easily understood visual displays (maps) of information. The EMC recommends that project staff use a GIS as the primary repository of information for the natural resource inventory.

The drawback of using a GIS is that the expense and complexity (or in some cases perceived complexity) of the technology severely limits accessibility of the information. We consider it imperative that the key information be made easily available to citizens and municipal governments. An example of such readily accessible information (although produced at a much cruder scale that we believe is necessary for a Natural Resource Inventory) is the Tompkins County Outlook, a publication of the County Planning Department consisting of a bound series of maps showing key features of Tompkins County, imposed upon a common base map. The EMC recommends that project staff use the Tompkins County Outlook as a starting point in considering how to make a GIS-based natural resource inventory widely accessible.

In addition to being widely accessible, it is important to provide municipal planning bodies with some ability to manipulate the information. The EMC recommends that Tompkins County meet this need in two ways. First, the EMC recommends that the County make available to municipalities a series of key data layers, on mylar, in large format, to enable residents and governments to conduct their own overlay exercises, and explore the combinations themselves. Second, the EMC recommends that the County have in place an explicit and well-publicized service to make additional, specific overlays and natural resource information available to municipalities and citizens actively participating in planning (formally or informally) upon request.

\(^4\) A GIS is a database that includes spatially explicit references for the information it contains.
A Biological Corridor for Tompkins County  
(Position Paper B)

Introduction To A Biological Corridor Plan

As the human population increases in Tompkins County, the landscape is progressively divided by roads, shopping centers, farms, channelized streams and urban districts. This continual development noticeably changes the plant and animal communities by fragmenting their remaining natural habitats into increasingly smaller, more isolated patches. As wildlife patterns are splintered, the dynamics of our local ecosystem are severely altered, reducing both species diversity and population sizes. It is imperative that Tompkins County protect its valuable ecosystems while there is still time.

Past conservation efforts in New York State have been dominated by forest protection or game management. These approaches are effective in protecting targeted species, but may not help other plants and animals. Environmentalists, conservation biologists, and other citizens from all walks of life are now asking planners to pay more attention to the impact of development and other land uses on all wild species. Corridors can help protect biological diversity, populations and interdependence while allowing appropriate development and other land uses. Wisely planned biological corridors are a sensible option in the attempt to preserve intact biological systems.

Plan Overview

Biological corridors are thoroughfares that allow for the safe passage of animals and the genetic exchange of flora and fauna between habitat blocks. Corridors also increase the aggregate area available to the affected plant and animal populations. Many stream corridors already provide riparian connections for some species movement. Biological corridors are designed to increase the types of connections to provide functional biodiversity of all wild species.

Biological corridors are not a panacea for our environmental ills, but they are a positive and attainable method of conservation for Tompkins County. They are still somewhat controversial regarding their effectiveness. Indeed, some argue that wildlife corridors may have a negative impact on the natural environment by providing new opportunities for contact between previously isolated populations or by allowing nonnative species to enter an area. While this concern may have been valid in some places, it seems unlikely to be a problem in Tompkins County because it is proposed not to connect previously separate lands, but to maintain and restore current and historic linkages.

The ideal for biodiversity protection would be very large parcels of appropriate land, tens of thousands of acres in size, free from intensive human intervention. However, the ideal is unlikely to be reached in a county as highly developed as Tompkins. Therefore, a biological corridor system, connecting relatively small, existing parcels and making the whole greater than the sum of its parts, seems a reasonable, attainable and thus practical alternative.

Biological corridors cannot abruptly stop at political boundaries. For that reason, Tompkins County must take the lead in identifying appropriate biological corridors and collecting the information for towns and other municipalities with land use authority to make informed decisions. The county is also in the best position to work with adjoining counties to ensure the viability of larger biological corridors.

No designated biological corridor now exists in Tompkins County, although the Town of Ithaca has proposed one for the Coy Glen watershed. However, the county is blessed with great
potential for wildlife corridors by virtue of state and municipal parks, state forest and wildlife management areas, and large institutional land holdings that include undeveloped land and designated natural areas. The Finger Lakes Land Trust protects over 1400 acres of land in Tompkins County by holding conservation easements or title to donated lands. A number of greenways exist in the county and the Tompkins County Greenways Coalition has developed a countywide plan which includes both biological corridors and trails.

The biological corridors being proposed follow natural features such as major creek corridors or ridgetops, or connect large tracts of protected lands such as state forests. The proposal emphasizes connections between sites known for their abundance of wildlife. The biological corridors would connect environmentally important areas such as flood plains, major streams, wetlands, gorges, steep slopes (over 15%), Tompkins County Unique Natural Areas, important geological formations, important wildlife habitat, and other designated natural areas. The corridor in the southern part of the county would parallel parts of the Finger Lakes Trail connecting Connecticut Hill, Robert Treman State Park, Lick Brook, Michigan Hollow in the Danby State Forest, Shindagin Hollow State Forest, and Potato Hill State Forest. Other corridors would connect the four Finger Lakes State Parks (Buttermilk Falls, Robert H. Treman, Treman Marina and Taughannock Falls), Gavine, Six Mile Creek, Fall Creek, Cascadilla Creek, Thomas Road Wetlands and Cornish Hollow.

Potential collaborators to assist the county with the development and implementation of a biological corridor plan include: other municipal planners, Tompkins County Environmental Management Council, Greenways Coalition, Finger Lakes Land Trust, NYS Parks, Cayuga Trails Club, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, Cornell Plantations, Cayuga Bird Club, university ecologists, and many others. Previous work by these groups should be built upon, not duplicated.

**Recommendations**

Tompkins County should establish a biological corridor plan. The plan should be developed with public input, both to increase the quality of the plan and to increase public awareness about the fragile nature of our ecosystems. The following steps should be followed:

1. Charge the Environmental Management Council or another knowledgeable organization with the responsibility for developing the plan in close cooperation with the county Planning Department and other interested parties.

2. List potential partnerships within the Tompkins County community and determine the resources which can provide assistance with education, biological and legal research, community dispute resolution, and publicity.

3. Refine a statement of reasons and goals for creating the corridor system.

4. Review legal issues pertaining to the establishment of biological corridors with the county attorney, the Cornell Plantations, and the Finger Lakes Land Trust.

5. Identify all land owners potentially included with the corridors and invite them to participate in the development of the plan.

6. With private landowners' permission, visit affected properties to confirm the value and location of proposed corridor boundaries.

7. Solicit participation of all interested parties and inform all of draft and final plans.

8. Produce final maps of the biological corridors.
9. Identify any potential costs for implementing the plan and seek appropriate funding.

10. Develop appropriate protection measures for the corridors.

11. Develop an outreach plan to educate the general public about the biological corridor system and to encourage volunteers to maintain and protect the corridors.

12. Design and implement long-range monitoring to help ensure success of the corridors and to modify goals and implementation strategies as necessary.
Transportation Options for Tompkins County
(Position Paper C)

Bicycle and pedestrian travel are the modes of transportation that most enhance environmental quality. They are the two major non-fuel consuming, non polluting forms of transportation in the United States. Millions of Americans bicycle or walk for a wide variety of purposes: commuting to work, as part of their jobs, shopping, visiting friends, and recreation. For these citizens, bicycling and walking are important, and in some cases the primary, means of transportation. Despite hilly terrain and the challenge of the weather, Tompkins County is a popular and viable community for bicycle and pedestrian travel. This popularity is not surprising given the high degree of environmental concern in the area. Environmental benefits of bicycling and walking include conserving roadway and residential space, saving energy now used to build, service and dispose of motor vehicles, and avoiding noise, speed, and pollution resulting from the internal combustion engine. The internal combustion engine also requires an over-reliance on fossil fuels, which require huge energy expenditures for extraction, transportation and processing. The environmental benefits of bicycle- and pedestrian- friendly transportation systems are even greater than they might originally seem because these forms of transportation are most often used for short trips, distances over which motorized vehicles are particularly inefficient and environmentally problematic.

Establishing a bicycle and walking network in Tompkins County will encourage county residents to use non-polluting transportation options to commute to work, complete their errands, and travel to social engagements. This network will also benefit the local economy by encouraging tourists to visit the area. The County should promote this planned and existing network (the Circle Greenway, Cornell Plantations trails, South Hill Recreation Way and the Finger Lakes Trail) to county residents and tourists. Several organizations within Tompkins County are currently working on components of such a network.

The Tompkins Coalition for Bicycle Transportation (TCBT) has proposed a county-wide system of bikeways using principal and secondary roads focused on transportation to and from the urbanized center of Tompkins County. This bikeway system would allow residents to bike or walk to the population centers of the county from most of the surrounding areas. The TCBT bikeway map displays both a recommended direct route and a recommended indirect route between most of the outlying areas and the population centers. Principal routes tend to be direct and have safe, wide shoulders, but are shared with heavy automobile traffic. Secondary routes tend to use narrow back roads which are not as direct, but have relatively lighter automobile traffic. The map does not yet address the potential trips from one outlying area to another.

The Greenways Coalition is planning greenways, some of which may be used for pedestrian walk ways. These greenways would connect points between and within outlying areas and urban areas. Some greenways, such as those within the county’s largest urban core, will be widely used and appreciated by the public, as is the South Hill Recreational Trail.

The Ithaca - Tompkins County Transportation Council, the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), has the charge of overall transportation planning in Tompkins County. The enabling legislation from ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act) establishes the MPO, and also requires planning for alternative transportation modes to qualify for federal funding. The 20 year Long Range Transportation Plan is complete, as is the Transportation Trails/Corridors Study. The Bike Plan is scheduled for completion in May, 1996.

These private and public agencies, along with the County Planning Department, will be the main players in determining the role of alternative transportation in Tompkins County. Public
participation should be encouraged at all stages of the planning process. The EMC can serve as a environmental monitor, and supply input to the evolving MPO plan.

The EMC recommends that:

1. The county encourage coordination of transportation planning with land-use planning. Future development should be encouraged in those areas with existing infrastructure (roads, water, and sewer), and away from environmentally important lands such as the Unique Natural Areas (UNAs).

2. The County incorporate the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians into the initial stages of highway improvement planning. Most of the principal highways leading into the urban area will undergo transportation improvements in the next several years. It is much easier and cheaper to establish a bikeway or pedestrian walkway while the road project is still in the design process. Retrofitting a road to have a bikeway or walkway is much more costly. Urban street design should consider bicycle needs and should include bicycle lanes and traffic calming techniques. Pedestrian considerations should include sidewalks, crosswalks and traffic light signals.

3. The County establish incentives for multiple occupancy vehicles and for using low-impact transportation options such as public transit, bicycle, and foot travel. Sufficient knowledgeable staff should be provided so that these options receive adequate consideration in the planning and implementation processes. Curb lanes should be widened to accommodate bikers by restriping the lane boundaries along existing multi-lane roads. The County should collaborate with the County’s large employers to provide positive incentives for their employees to use non- and less-polluting transportation options. Bicycle racks on buses and appropriate parking and shelter for bicycles should be provided.

4. The County actively support mixed-mode development to encourage foot and bicycle travel. People are more likely to bike or walk to work and other destinations if the distance is five miles or less (biking) or two miles or less (walking). Current planning and zoning laws may need to be amended to allow for residences and service facilities near workplaces.

5. The County coordinate local greenways plans and bike networks so that adjacent communities will have convenient links. Several towns and villages (such as the Town of Ithaca and the Village of Lansing) are already preparing local greenways networks.

6. The County discourage high-speed roadways which directly connect the outlying areas. Safe bicycle or pedestrian travel is impossible on these highways. Instead, the county should encourage back road connections or greenways which provide incentives for non- and less-polluting modes of transportation.

7. The County use a portion of the hotel room tax dollars already targeted for County development to improve low-impact transportation options in the ways discussed above.\(^5\)

8. The County advocate for using less polluting alternative (to gasoline) fueled vehicles, especially for mass transit and fleet vehicles.

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\(^5\) A percentage of all money paid as hotel room fees in Tompkins County is currently targeted specifically for development in the County.
Citizen Participation in Long Range Planning for Tompkins County
(Position Paper D)

Summary of Recommendations:

This document puts forth four primary recommendations concerning citizen participation in long range planning for Tompkins County: (1) Tompkins County should devote substantial thought and effort to citizen participation in long range planning; (2) Citizen participation should extend well beyond traditional opportunities for public comment on previously prepared documents, and should involve active recruitment of citizens likely to represent key stakeholder groups; (3) The staff charged with preparing a long range plan for Tompkins County should give careful thought to how extensive the citizen participation process be, and for which decisions it should be employed; and (4) At the outset, staff should define clearly how results of a citizen participation process will be used, and they should communicate those decisions to citizens involved in the process.

Explanation and Rationale for Recommendations:

1) Tompkins County should devote substantial thought and effort to citizen participation in long range planning

Three lines of reasoning argue for developing and implementing a strong citizen participation process in long range planning. First, a long range plan should reflect the vision of a community's desires for where it wants to grow and how it wants to work in the long term. The EMC's Long Range Planning Committee has drafted a vision statement for the environment in Tompkins County, and the LRPC believes this vision statement is a good starting point. However, given the diffuse nature of contemporary communities, including Tompkins County, government agencies and associated planning institutions cannot accurately represent the vision of their constituents without asking them directly. It is much better to ask - and be reasonably certain that the County has a clear picture of the community's vision - than simply to assume agency staff know that vision.

Second, including more people in the process of policy formation will result in more strongly reasoned arguments. This outcome can stem both from having more information and from having arguments subjected to greater scrutiny - and more types of scrutiny - than would occur in a less inclusive process.

Third, failure to include affected individuals and communities early in the planning process often results in poor support for policies - and in strong opposition to policies - when agencies begin to implement them. To achieve effective development and implementation of public policy requires an effective citizen participation process.

To sum up, a strong citizen participation effort should improve policy formation in terms of: (1) soundness of arguments; (2) completeness of information; (3) breadth and strength of support; and (4) accurate representation of community visions.

2) Citizen participation should extend well beyond traditional opportunities for public comment on previously prepared documents, and should involve active recruitment of citizens likely to represent key stakeholder groups.

Citizen participation processes can take many forms. Traditionally, government agencies have conceived of citizen participation as inviting comments on draft documents or on general topics under discussion. These forms of public involvement typically require individuals not already integrated with, and committed to, the policy formation process to exercise considerable initiative.
To provide informed comments on a draft document requires an individual to attain an unrealistic degree of literacy and familiarity with planning. This observation probably accounts, at least partially, for the observation that many persons who appear to hold strong opinions about public policy do not involve themselves in the policy formation process at an early stage.\(^6\) In any case, traditional citizen participation strategies often meet with a limited response, suggesting to coordinating agencies that other forms of citizen participation are appropriate, useful, and needed. The EMC recommends that Tompkins County adopt alternative, and more extensive forms of citizen participation in developing of a long range plan.

Alternative forms of citizen participation include: focus groups, in-depth personal interviews, task forces, mail surveys, telephone surveys, and group interviews. Each has its particular strengths and weaknesses; consequently, different aspects, and phases, of policy formation benefit to varying degrees from each strategy. For example, group interviews and open-ended telephone surveys can be useful for identifying the range of concerns that exist in a community.\(^7\) Because it is usually unrealistic to conduct large numbers of group interviews, this technique is not the best method for estimating how many persons in a municipality hold a particular view. Mail surveys enable planners to identify how a relatively large number of people perceive policy options and issues related to a narrow range of questions. A typical strategy employed by policy analysts is to conduct a series of open-ended telephone interviews to identify the range of ideas in the community of interest and then to implement a broad-based mail or telephone survey to acquire an estimate of the percentage of the population supporting particular policy options. A common criticism of this process is that it does not allow most participants the opportunity to interact or to modify their views based on new understandings of how other citizens view the issue. An alternative model is to rely primarily on citizen task forces, which give a small group of people extensive opportunities to interact with each other and with the constituencies that each member of the task force represents. Task forces also provide project coordinators with the opportunity to educate task force members about relevant technical material, historical information, relevant financial matters, and so forth. A primary weakness of citizen task forces is that they do not provide strong information about what the community as a whole desires. The EMC recommends that Tompkins County begin planning its citizen participation process for long range planning by considering these two models, and deciding which elements of each to prioritize. A successful effort will probably fall somewhere on the spectrum between these two extremes.

Many citizen participation processes provide the public with considerably more guidance than do requests for comments on a document or issue, both in terms of content and time commitment. For example, it is far easier for people to respond to a series of questions addressing their attitudes towards including bicycle lanes on major roads than to respond to a request for comments on a draft long range transportation plan. Moreover, the agency soliciting comments can target a particular point in time - and hence in policy formation - and can have realistic expectations of receiving useful feedback within the agency's planning time frames. The EMC recommends that Tompkins County provide sufficient education and guidance to citizens to enable them to participate effectively in the process of long range planning.

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\(^6\) Participation at town meetings is less limited, but that forum occurs late in the policy formation process, by which time the framework for discussion has already been determined and many options discarded. It also does not provide much time for thoughtful reflection.

\(^7\) Open-ended survey questions leave the respondent considerable room to answer as s/he wishes, without constraining the answer to particular choices or categories.
3) The staff charged with preparing a long range plan for Tompkins County should give careful thought to how extensive the citizen participation process be, and for which decisions particular citizen participation methods should be employed.

Comprehensive long-range planning will include numerous decisions. Some will affect the entire county; others will impact primarily a given town, neighborhood, or road. Tompkins County ought to consider the range of citizen participation options available at each point in the planning process. For example in general terms we may decide that it is most important to devote resources to citizen participation early in the planning process, to gain insight into the community's vision prior to writing numerous document drafts. Similarly, we may decide that we want to devote considerably less effort to public involvement during the middle stages of developing the Plan, and that we want to implement a moderate citizen involvement program as drafts of the Plan are released.

More specifically, at some points we may wish to request that persons from a particular community form a short-term task force to provide informal feedback as we develop one section of the plan. At others, we may want to conduct a single group interview with members of the agricultural community to make sure we have not overlooked information or attitudes in that community as we develop a section on best management practices. At others we may decide that implementing active citizen participation programs is neither feasible nor particularly necessary.

The EMC recommends that staff coordinating the long range plan utilize, at a minimum, the following criteria for deciding when to employ citizen participation strategies, and to what extent: 1) What are the potential consequences of deciding NOT to implement an active public involvement program at a particular point in time? 2) Is the risk of strong disagreement sufficient to justify the expense of time and resources now, in order to avoid wasting time and resources developing a plan - or a part of the plan - that could lack sufficient support? 3) Can we alter or reverse the particular decisions at a later point in time without affecting many other components of the Plan? 4) How much time and money would various citizen participation strategies require? 5) Would we expect particular segments of the public to have unusually strong concerns about a particular component of the plan, and do we believe that those peoples' views should carry particular weight? 6) Under which circumstances do the persons developing the Long Range Plan feel confident that they already know the community's preferred vision, and under what circumstances are they less certain? 7) For which types of decisions is particular education required for participants' input to be considered meaningful? 8) To what extent do the developers of the Plan view themselves as "the voice of the public," and to what extent do they view themselves as having a responsibility to act in what they believe to be the public's best interest, even when this differs from public expression? 9

Decisions about when to employ citizen participation efforts, and to what extent, should reflect the agency's goals in policy development and should take a long-term view. The EMC recommends that Tompkins County develop a citizen participation strategy using a framework that allows for different types and extent of participation at different points in the planning process.

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8 Of course, this question begs another: what do we consider sufficient support? At some level, sufficient support means sufficient to have confidence that the County will carry through with the Plan. At another it means achieving sufficiently broad consensus that we believe the entire County is more or less behind - and in agreement with - the Plan.

9 A classic argument, for example, is that technical decisions should be made only by people with substantial technical training because only they can understand the various options with sufficient depth to make informed, thoughtful judgments.
4) At the outset, staff should define clearly how results of a citizen participation process will be used, and they should communicate those decisions to citizens involved in the process.

Agencies sometimes exhibit a reluctance to conduct extensive citizen participation programs because they fear that by expanding citizens participation efforts they necessarily relinquish their decision-making authority. They fear that they will be obliged to follow some or all of the suggestions they receive, no matter how well- or ill-informed they appear, and they fear that citizens will be angry if they do not do so. In fact, the agency adopts no obligation to follow citizen recommendations or preferences unless the agency specifically states it will do so. The agency retains the mandate and responsibility for making the final decision based on its best professional judgment. Information received via citizen participation constitutes simply one kind of information that enters into that decision-making process. All agencies, including the Tompkins County Planning Department, that are considering how to use citizen participation strategies, must recognize that it is up to them (not the citizenry at large) to define how public input will be used.

If, in fact, an overwhelming majority of citizens disagree with the agency staff's best professional judgment regarding a particular decision, then it is much better for the agency to be aware of this discrepancy before issuing a decision than to find out afterwards, by way of poor compliance or strong public criticisms of agency policy. Knowing about such disagreements beforehand enables the agency to respond to public concern prior to issuing a final decision. Possible responses include: (1) discussions with key opposition groups to explain agency reasoning and, if possible, to reassure opposition groups about intended and likely consequences of the pending decision; and (2) educational activities to increase public literacy about an issue.

The most likely route by which an agency can unintentionally weaken its decision-making authority via citizen participation is to neglect to state clearly, from the outset, how it will incorporate citizen input into its ultimate decision-making process. Conducting citizen participation activities without a clear statement that the input will be used as part of a larger decision-making process could set the stage for citizens to believe that they have been given more power than the agency intended. To preclude such an occurrence, agencies should: decide clearly how they intend to use the results of a citizen participation process; state this decision clearly at the outset; and respond candidly to inquiries about how public input will be used.

The EMC recommends that Tompkins County: (1) develop criteria to decide how it will use the results of citizen participation activities involved in long range planning; (2) prepare a statement explaining how the results of citizen participation activities will be used in developing the long range plan; (3) communicate that statement clearly to all citizens who begin to participate in the planning process and (4) communicate any changes in this policy as clearly and early as possible, along with explanations for why these changes have occurred.

Some members of the EMC have expertise in citizen participation for environmental policy formation, and work with faculty at Cornell University who have more extensive experience in this area. The EMC suggests that these people be used as key resources in developing a citizen participation strategy for long range planning in Tompkins County.