

# Built to Work: Implementation-Ready Comprehensive Plans

*Presentation to New York Planning Federation Annual Conference*

April 21, 2026

*“We shape our communities,*
*and thereafter, they shape us…”*

*--Jeff Siegler*



# Zoom Out

- Comprehensive planning gives us the rare opportunity to pull back from the day-to-day and really think about where our community is heading
- It represents a unique chance to bring residents and stakeholders into the world of local government operations
- When done well, it results in a roadmap and accountability structure that can accelerate us toward our shared vision

# Cynicism/ Planning Fatigue

- Planning can get a bad rap – why invest in a binder that's going to sit on a shelf?
- Plans tend to stall for many of the same reasons
- The right process, with the right folks at the table, and a relentless focus on implementation can mean the difference between a recipe for success and an attractive doorstop





# The Recipe

- A starting point defined by actionable data
- Robust, authentic, and meaningful public engagement
- A clear, unified vision
- A defined, realistic implementation strategy
- Accountability mechanisms

# A Foundation of Actionable Data

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# You are Here

- The most successful plans start from a foundation of actionable data
- Painting a real-world picture of where the community is, recent and long-term trends, and other existing conditions provides a solid staring point from which to plan
- Data comes from a range of sources – government, subscription, and local information (critical!)

# Data to Consider



## Demographic

What is the current make-up of the community, and what are the trends? Are you diversifying, getting older/younger, wealthier/poorer, etc.



## Economic / Market

What is happening economically in the community? Where do people work? Where do workers live? What sectors are growing/not?



## Operations

What services do we offer and how are they used? Where do our revenues come from? What does our infrastructure look like (age, condition, etc.)?



## Land Use

How are our land uses allocated? How do uses interact with one another? How have development patterns changed over time?

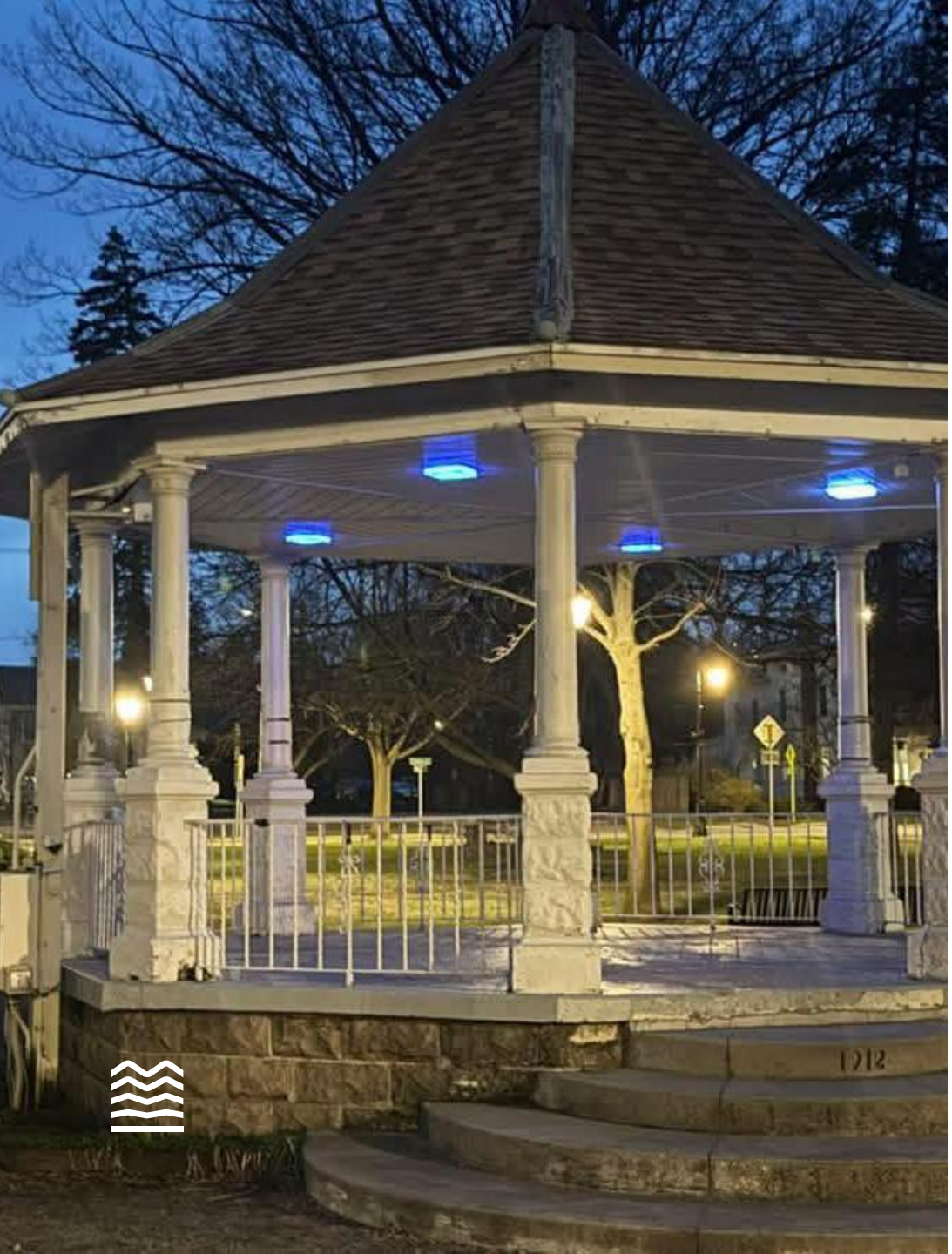
# So What?

- It’s critical to leverage your data findings to support the rest of the planning effort
- Current conditions are not destiny (nor should they be, necessarily)
- Don’t let disappointing data dampen your vision
- Be careful not to fall in love with good data (confirmation bias).  Look for trends
- Validate data – especially in smaller markets



# Village of Clyde





# It’s not what you don’t know…it’s what you know absolutely…

- Clyde began its comprehensive plan with a deep dive on traditional data – demographics, economics, etc.
- In early conversations around community assets, the schools factored prominently
- The sentiments were so strong that the consulting team accepted them as fact
- Early plan strategy frameworks treated the schools as a cornerstone of community health and potential

# A Raised Hand

- Deeper into the process, a Steering Committee member questioned whether there was data affirming the condition of the school system
- A review of performance data indicated that the schools were lagging in some key areas
- Community leaders determined that school performance should be elevated as a planning priority






# Takeaways

- Keep your eyes on your own paper:  Don’t approach plans with a cookie-cutter data approach – shape your data review to community priorities
- Do your homework:  Challenge assumptions – if it sounds too good to be true, prove it!
- Before the bell rings:  Identify issues early in the process to avoid duplication of effort

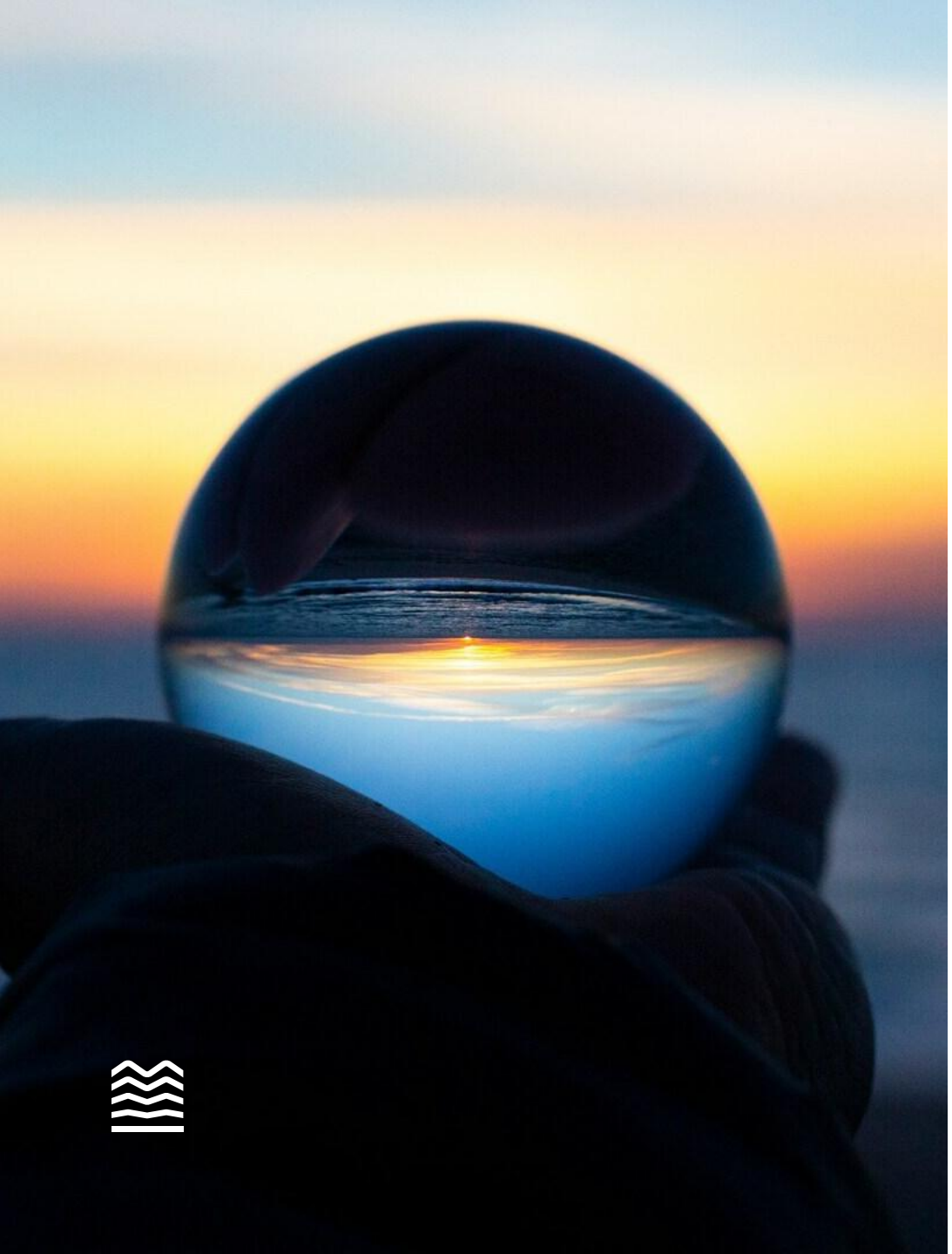
# A Clear, Unified Vision

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# Your North Star

- A vision statement is the narrative portrait of your community – 10-15 years from now – if the plan is executed effectively
- This serves as the plan's "North Star" – the point on the horizon that you are constantly pursuing
- It is critical to get this right – all other plan elements flow from it
- Leverage public engagement – shaped by data – to ensure buy-in and attainability





# Great Vision Statements

- A strong vision statement is:
  - Authentic
  - Aspirational
  - Concise enough to be remembered
  - Descriptive enough to paint the picture
  - Presently stated – “The Village of Perry is…” vs. “The Village of Perry will be…”

# Not so Visionary

- Great vision statements are NOT:
  - Taglines
  - Overly general
  - Developed in isolation
  - Ever-Changing



# Village of Perry





# “A Village that’s still a village…”

- Perry is a community that invests heavily in planning
- The Village is fortunate to have a planner as Mayor; who led the community’s Comprehensive Plan development
- The steering committee recognized the need for a vision statement that would leave no doubt as to the Village’s ideal condition

## Who we are and what we cherish

Perry is "a village that's still a village." It is a historic, charming and walkable place in a rural setting. We are a strong community of caring residents and business owners. We take great and justifiable pride in our regionally-renowned events, our independent school district, our top-notch recreational facilities, and our dynamic, locally-owned businesses. Our village is complex yet compact with a mix of land uses that signal a sustainable economy and social life.

Perry has a tradition of entrepreneurship and a storied history as a recreation destination and a magnet for artists and artisans. We treasure our identity as a gateway to Letchworth State Park and Silver Lake. The Village's history, people, Main Street and homes as well as the creek that bisects the Village and the farmlands surrounding it are cherished assets. All of this – our traditions, history, physical form and setting – require continual nourishment and attention.

## Our physical structure: Center and Edge

And so, the Village must be a celebrated place – edge to center, end to end, every block, and throughout. Our edges must be welcoming and send signals to those arriving in Perry that they are entering a *community*. Entryways into Perry must communicate the great pride we feel about Perry, illustrated through preservation and standards of care.

When residents and visitors arrive onto Main Street, they must come into an even more special place, one that is cherished, because it is our place. It is where we celebrate with parades, festivals and farmers' markets; where we gather and cross paths and greet one another. From Main Street, the contours slope up toward the surrounding residential streets, around which our Village's edges must be in sharp relief in their relationship to our marvelous countryside.

# Decision-making and priorities

To safeguard this character, we will make decisions that reinforce our sense of place and the character of our community. Our community will continually strengthen our neighborhoods and confidently enhance our corridors. We will provide direct investment to support Main Street while ensuring that our edges and surrounding lands reinforce our rural essence. In every way we will remain a Village. Our time, our money and our energy will be the tools to accomplish this. Our actions serve as the expression of who we are.

The Village will be physically special end to end. Underneath is our commitment to ourselves and our heritage as an independent community of farmers, entrepreneurs, skilled workers and strong families. Our priorities will reflect these values and ambitions.

# Outcomes

- Perry spend the better part of ten years “living their Vision”
- They took incremental steps, invested according to their prioritization rubric, and set aside things that were not priorities
- The community utilized their vision statement (and the successes in implementation) toward many grant wins, including a $10 million Downtown Revitalization Initiative award



# Built by the Community

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Elevating Communities



# Fingerprints and Reflections

- A plan should be reflective of the community it serves
- Residents should see themselves in plan elements
- Engagement strategies should be tailored to the community being served – how do you reach your residents?
- Effective engagement will draw out critical issues early, and result in smoother implementation

# Know
# Your Audience

- Your community receives and digests information in unique ways.  Strategies should reflect your community's communications preferences and tendencies.
- Engagement strategies should contemplate tactics that are:
  - Robust
  - Authentic
  - Meaningful



# Engagement Tools

### Project Website

A 24/7/365 digital storefront. In communities with high tech adoption, this can be your homebase. Must be updated regularly

### Focus Groups

Identify key constituencies and talk directly to them about core issues. Business owners, farmers, renters, new residents – tailored to your needs

### Surveys

Digital and paper-based surveys can be valuable. Ensure a sound distribution strategy, and avoid if the community is “surveyed out”

### Events

Interactive opportunities to bring the planning to the people. Work to identify opportunities for pop-ups where you know people will already be

# Town of Canandaigua





# Unique Constituencies

- Canandaigua is a community with a diversity of opportunities and challenges
- Town residents identified their rural setting and agricultural legacy as central to their identity
- Growth pressures have the potential to impact agricultural uses in the Town
- Community leaders wanted to ensure that the viewpoint of farmers and other ag stakeholders were reflected in the comprehensive plan

# Planning in the Field (or Barn)

- There are very few good times for farmers to engage in the planning process
- The comprehensive plan timing was particularly difficult (early fall)
- The Canandaigua team took the planning process to a centrally-located farm, and welcomed farmers from the region to participate
- Attendance was high, and the communication was meaningful





# Fieldwork as Learning Opportunity

- Site visits have value beyond the targeted constituency
- Neighbors and stakeholders from other sectors were able to learn about impacts of development on the ag community
- Canandaigua expanded this approach toward other stakeholder groups and assets, including downtown, the airport, etc.
- Residents were able to engage directly on the turf of impacted constituencies

# Outcomes

- The agricultural community felt heard
- Residents and stakeholders were able to engage directly with the ag community (and other constituencies)
- The plan reflected the values, challenges, and opportunities in the agricultural community
- Plan implementation has taken the needs of the agricultural community into account in a meaningful way



# Focused on Implementation

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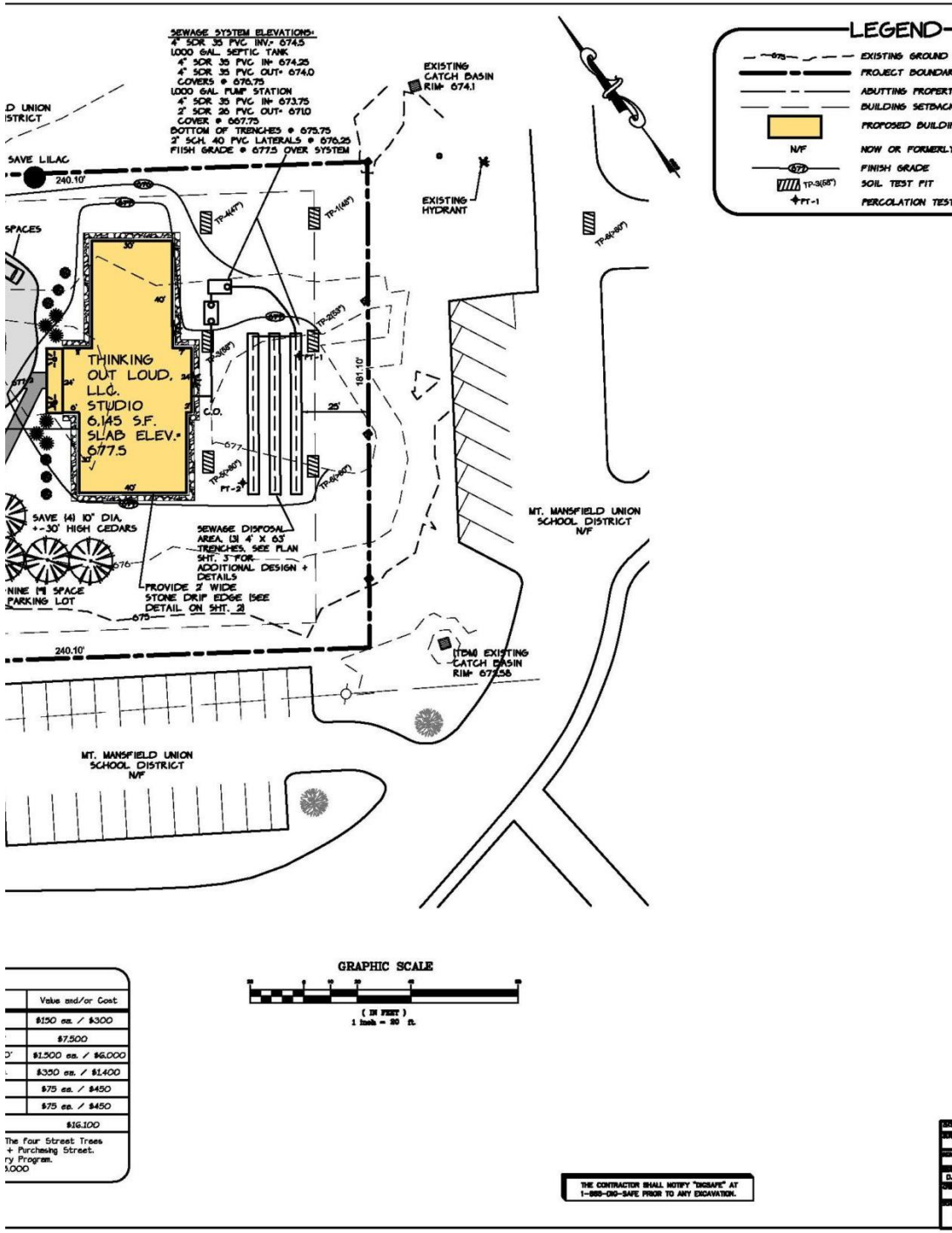


# The Roadmap

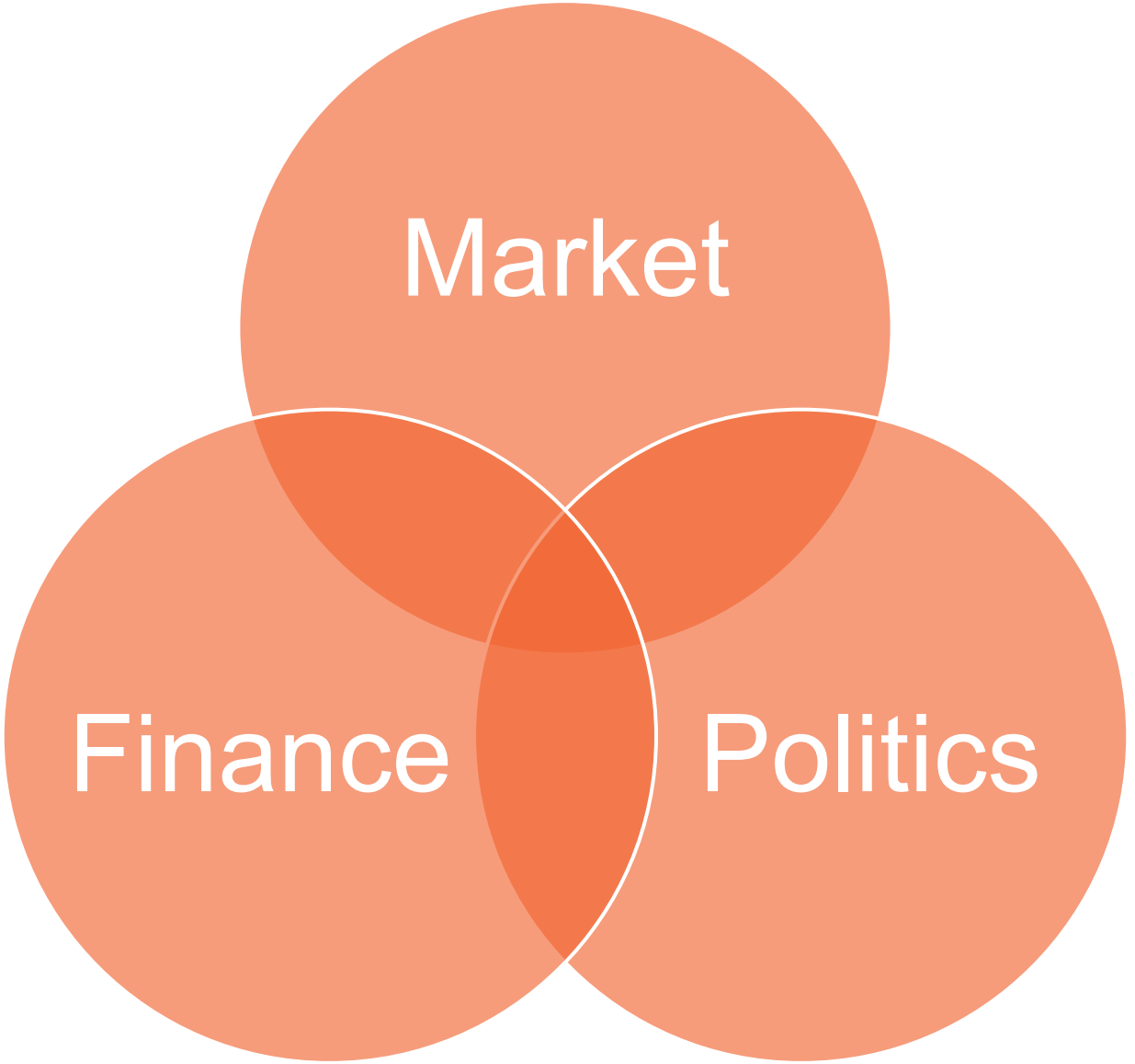
- The implementation approach can be the most debated element of the plan
- People tend to agree on higher-level, abstract concepts
- As we get closer to specifics, people tend to take more ownership
- Care should be taken to not just assemble a list of everyone's ideas; but to identify those actions which will add the most value / impact

# Building the Plan

- Consider action planning in a five-year window; leaving longer term objectives to future updates
- Fewer specific actions mean early wins and momentum; long lists can feel daunting
- Work to build consensus – forcing difficult conversations vs. accumulating non-critical items
- Early stage action items will likely take the form of planning, preliminary design, etc.  Don't avoid these – they are critical

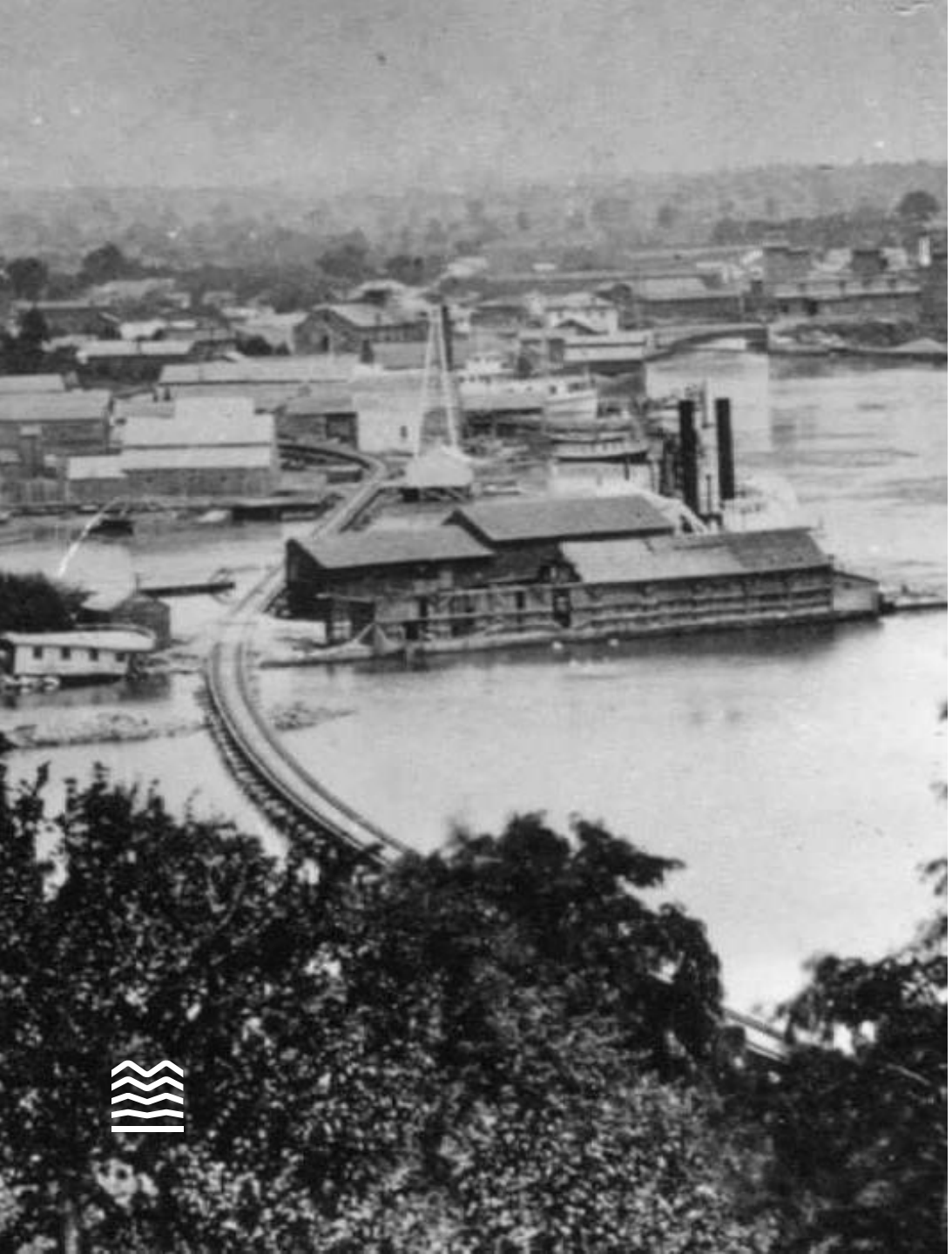


# Project Feasibility



# City of Geneva





# Big Plans for Big Projects

- The City of Geneva wrestled with its waterfront for generations
- A community-led strategic planning effort finally tagged the site as a civic resource
- The plan contemplated a 70-acre park, with a diverse set of active and passive amenities
- The $30 million price tag seemed unattainable to most residents and stakeholders


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# Think Slow
# Act Fast

- Geneva's planning team took great care to develop a phased implementation strategy
- The planning effort worked with community leaders to determine what size chunks made sense from a feasibility standpoint
- With a base number of $4mm - $6mm per phase, the plan set a ten-year implementation timeframe (6 phases)
- Each phase staged preliminary design, permitting, and construction along a critical path





# Momentum and Persistence

- The local planning team identified funding sources for preliminary plans, and developed these early
- With preliminary designs in hand, and funding commitments for Phase 1, the state saw the project as “shovel ready”
- Geneva made application for construction dollars for Phase 1 and was successful
- When the project was completed to standard, the state committed additional planning, then construction dollars
- Rinse and repeat across six phases

# Outcomes

- A solid foundation of public input, preliminary design, and phased implementation translated a monumental project into something manageable
- Funders appreciated the momentum and quality of development and continued to invest
- A solid project management framework ensured consistency of project delivery
- The final project result has been heralded across the region



# Stewardship and Accountability

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# The Real Work Begins

- Once the plan is adopted, getting down to the work of implementation begins
- Great plans are designed as community plans vs. city/town/village plans
- This requires a diversity of stakeholders to move plan elements forward
- Bringing the right people together, on the right cadence, and focusing on the right issues means that plans will move forward efficiently

# Accountability Backbone

- A well-curated stakeholder group is a great tool to ensure plan accountability and stewardship
- An implementation committee, made up of community decision-makers should own plan implementation
- This group serves as a resource to the governing body; meeting regularly to review plan progress and prioritize efforts
- The committee should reflect plan priorities



# Accountability Elements



## Committee

Charter a committee with diverse stakeholders, aligned with the priorities of the plan. Ensure that individuals tasked are decision-makers



## Leadership Engaged

Town leadership should have a role in the committee to ensure continuity between plan advancement and resource allocation



## Communication

Celebrate wins and keep the public involved along the way. Ensure that plan progress is trumpeted through a diverse communication strategy



## Evolution

As “to-do” items are checked off, be ready to move forward on the next set of priorities. Capture momentum and leverage it toward more work

# Town of Lyons






# A Plan Ready for Action

- The Town of Lyons adopted its comprehensive plan in 2021
- Priorities for the community included industrial development, downtown revitalization, and housing
- A stakeholder committee was established to guide plan implementation
- The committee has met nearly every month for five years, and has guided many successful project implementation efforts

# Leadership Commitment

- With plan priorities in focus, the implementation committee membership was clear.  The committee includes:
  - Local Government leaders like Town Board members, the Sheriff, County DSS, and local PB/ZB Members
  - Non-Profit partners like Lyons Main Street and the County Land Bank
  - Residents and business owners






# Priorities in Focus

- The implementation committee set to work identifying resources for priority projects
- Funding was secured to support downtown revitalization efforts, including blight clearing, preservation, and new development
- A feasibility study for the industrial park resulted in additional state design dollars for infrastructure
- Federal partners, including the EPA and NBRC joined to support environmental and infrastructure efforts
- Committee members regularly report to Town Board and the community on project progress

# Outcomes

- The Citizens Implementation Committee assisted the Town Board in prioritization of implementation activity
- Stakeholders remained engaged in plan elements, and advanced additional resources for implementation
- State, federal, and NFP partners recognized the sound planning and diversified engagement
- The community has been awarded over $20mm in state and federal funds, and design/construction is underway for multiple priority areas
- The Town is considering its five-year plan update to reflect progress and set new goals





# Conclusion

- Plans that begin with a clear picture of current conditions have a strong baseline from which to start
- An authentic, aspirational vision statement provides a target to work toward
- Robust, authentic, meaningful public engagement builds plan/project champions
- A clear implementation plan provides for early wins
- Establishing accountability frameworks means the plan lives on

Shameless Plug

# Municipal Bootcamp

Live and recorded training sessions for planners, board members, and other community development team members at no cost.

Ten sessions per year – live sessions on (most) 4th Thursdays at 6:00p.

Register at www.mrbgroup.com/bootcamp




## 2026 Municipal Bootcamp Schedule

### SESSION #4: SOAKING UP THE SUN – SOLAR AND BATTERY STORAGE AND THE LOCAL REVIEW PROCESS

April 23, 2026 | 6pm-7pm

New York State's regulations, and specifically those that allocate local authority are constantly evolving. How can planning boards, zoning boards, and local development staff address the growing popularity of solar energy solutions, while protecting the quality of life of your community? This session focuses on best practices for local regulations regarding solar and battery storage projects, and how to navigate the state's regulations on large scale alternative energy developments.

Register For Session #4

### SESSION #5: WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE – THE IMPACT OF WETLANDS ON DEVELOPMENT

May 28, 2026 | 6pm-7pm

Wetlands are among the most critical ecological assets in any community. New York State has taken a proactive stance on regulating development impacts that could threaten the environmental value of these key areas. Evolving regulations and best practices will drive review of projects with potential wetlands impacts. This session will overview the current regulatory landscape, and local government responsibilities related to development review.

Register For Session #5




# Contact Us:

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