



TOWN AND VILLAGE OF LOWVILLE VISIONING WORKSHOPS 2021

Master List of Themes

Overview

The town and village of Lowville's comprehensive planning committee hosted two one-hour visioning workshops (January 26, 2021, at 6:30 p.m. and February 2, 2021, at 10:00 a.m.) for the community. In these workshops, the Tug Hill Commission facilitated discussions around strengths and weaknesses of the communities, opportunities to improve the communities, and barriers to those opportunities, which are outlined in this report. Note that the themes are randomly numbered and are in no particular order.

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Strengths

1. Safe place to live
 - a. Safe community to live in
 - b. Can leave car/house unlocked
 - c. Low crime rate
 - d. Can walk or run under streetlights
 - e. Generally, walkable
 - f. Family friendly
2. Farmer's market
 - a. Access to fresh and local products, though cooperation is needed
 - b. Coordination and collaboration to allow this is a strength
3. Sense of community
 - a. Close connections within the community
 - b. Community feel/vibe
 - c. Good neighbors
 - d. Networking opportunities, such as connections with people, developing ideas, promoting, good community involvement and different programs in which to get involved
 - e. Lots of volunteers
 - f. Community support like helping each other
 - g. Amish/mennonite communities are good neighbors, and add charm and diversity to the area
4. Clean and beautiful environment
 - a. Access to fresh air and clean water, i.e., no pollution
 - b. Scenic area
 - c. Spring cleanup
5. Good elementary and high schools
 - a. Fantastic school
 - b. Great school district
 - c. Small town that is welcoming kids to the school and transitioning new kids into the school
6. Hospital
 - a. Fantastic hospital
 - b. Hospital right in the community
7. Shared governmental services
 - a. Municipalities are sharing services at all levels, including state, county, town and village
8. Recreational opportunities
 - a. Snowmobile trail in backyard
 - b. Bowling alley, ski area, movie theater, race track, sliding hill, and a lot more that the Lowville area has to offer
 - c. Lots of things to do, especially with a small population
 - d. Hockey rink
 - e. Recreational opportunities (for many groups)
 - i. Fairgrounds
 - ii. Physical activity
 - iii. Walkability is key, such as being able to walk to a movie theater
 - iv. Kayaking and hiking opportunities close to town
 - v. Playgrounds are a one-stop shop for parents offering many outdoor opportunities and can be found at the local schools and Veteran's park, and include picnic tables, tennis courts, free parking, basketball courts, etc.
9. Community centers and gathering places
 - a. Fairgrounds (though, underutilized) is a great space for the community and it has an "open-door policy"
 - b. Access to the following venues for gathering
 - i. Historical society
 - ii. Via the Chamber of Commerce
 - c. Don't have to travel far to gather
 - d. Double Play Community Center's opportunities
 - e. Cornell Cooperative Extension's 4-H program
10. Economic strengths
 - a. Village with retail shops
 - b. Large manufacturing facilities
 - c. Employment in schools and hospital
 - d. Many businesses are providing opportunities
 - e. Retail opportunities
11. "Feels" like home
 - a. "It's comfortable and it's home"

- b. Kids go away for schooling, but come back when they have kids to live
 - c. It's some people's hometown, so they grew up here
- 12. Community resources and utilities
 - a. Infrastructure
 - b. Services, such as water, sewer, brush pickup
 - c. Drop spots and transfer stations to get rid of rubbish
- 13. Small town atmosphere
 - a. Town with agricultural and forested areas
 - b. "Country"/rural setting
- 14. Low cost of housing
- 15. Access to organizations
 - a. Pratt Northam, etc.
 - b. New access to Jefferson Community College
- 16. Ideal location
 - a. Proximity to hospital, jobs, schools, restaurants, Double Play Fitness and Community Center
 - b. NYS Routes 12 and 26, 177 and 12, which are important regional crossroads where there could be an opportunity to bring in travelers
 - i. "Gateway" community both a crossroads of major highways, but also "the middle of nowhere"
 - c. Scenic area
 - d. Don't have to travel far to get the things you need
- 17. Transportation options
 - a. New transportation options to Watertown and Utica
 - b. Village loop for public transportation
- 18. Good quality of life and cost of living
- 19. Social life and community events
 - a. Outdoor dining opportunities, such as food truck Fridays
 - b. Different events scheduled, like Cream Cheese Festival

Weaknesses

1. Downtown revitalization needed
 - a. Downtown businesses don't work together, communicate, or coordinate enough, like a downtown business district theoretically would
 - b. Would like to see more done in the downtown area that makes people want to visit
 - c. Community blight, such as the Old McDonalds building
 - d. Lack of free parking (i.e., there could be more free parking and signage to direct people)
2. Poor zoning
 - a. Zoning and codes are not strong enough and must improve the look of downtown
 - b. Incentive needed for building owners follow zoning
 - i. Lake Placid as a case study of all the buildings following a design standard
3. Poor streetscape and walkability
 - a. Sidewalks are in poor condition and lack consistency, for instance in some places there are no sidewalks
 - b. Streetlights don't go all the way to Walmart, thus making it hard to walk there with no lighting or sidewalks
 - c. Sidewalks are too narrow
 - d. Not a walkable community (i.e., sidewalks need improvements)
4. Poor coordination and communication of services
 - a. Unclear leadership for public safety
 - i. Who's in charge of what? Who addresses problems, i.e., town police vs Sheriff?
 - ii. Residents must call too many different places to get answers
 - b. Poor countywide or North Country-wide communication between villages and towns (Are the websites up-to-date? Information and contact information is difficult to find. Better communication is needed. No Facebook page.)
- c. Need to be able to pay taxes online as this is an expectation these days, and bills should be emailed to residents
5. Poor housing quality and availability
 - a. Housing options could be improved
 - i. How to find a place to live if you're moving in? This can be difficult and information is not centralized.
 - b. Availability of rental housing and affordable housing that is good quality, especially for couples or individuals without children
6. Lack of community connectedness
 - a. New families do not feel welcome
 - b. Hard to assimilate if you don't have family and/or friends in the area, and some people don't feel like they belong
 - c. Remote working has allowed more people to live here, but people need to find ways to help newcomers feel more welcome and connected to the community
 - i. "Where are the groups I can connect with?"
7. Economic hardships and poverty
 - a. Poor economy and lack of jobs right now, especially for young adults up to age 25
 - b. Hard to find jobs in the area if you don't know someone or have connections
 - c. Poverty rate is high
 - d. Lack of private sector jobs
 - e. Not business friendly (i.e. site plan reviews discourage new business development)
 - f. Food insecurity and food shortage linked to poverty
8. Need more recreational opportunities
 - a. Rails to trails never materialized, and should be developed
 - b. Need for rails to trail, walking trails, and biking trails

- c. Parks need to attract people without kids and families with kids within the village, including adding:
 - i. Dog parks;
 - ii. Walking trails;
 - iii. Public space to showcase artists; and
 - iv. Self-guided walks around town using smartphone applications like [this one](#)
- 9. Lack of higher education opportunities other than Jefferson Community College
- 10. Limited broadband accessibility
- 11. Need more places to socialize and host social activities, such as
 - a. Evening cafes or something similar that stays open past 8 pm;
 - b. Places that consider people with kids, 30-somethings, and not just people with families;
 - c. Concerts for all age groups;
 - d. Activities tied to school or fairgrounds, which has been limited during the pandemic; and
 - e. Senior-friendly spaces (e.g., indoor walking opportunities)
- 12. Need more public transportation

Opportunities

1. Community organizing and events
 - a. Veteran's memorial park should be utilized more
 - b. Fairgrounds should be utilized more
 - c. Maple Ridge has more potential and should be utilized more
 - i. Broaden the utility of Maple Ridge that strengthens the area
 1. Need to identify options
 - ii. Maple Ridge can bring people in
 - d. More community events, such as movie night in the park, that bring the community out together to enjoy
 - i. Food truck Fridays should strive highlight "local" vendors (i.e., it should contrast the cream cheese festival, which is great but focuses less on "local" food and has a more corporate feel)
 - e. More family-friendly opportunities are needed besides bowling and movies
 - f. Snow Ridge has new ownership and could host new events
 - g. Resources could be shared between organizations
 - h. Local leaders should reach out to local organizations (i.e. Lions Club, Elks, etc.)
 - i. Potential for more arts opportunities
2. Promote public transportation
 - a. Public transportation system should be promoted as this is an opportunity to get people out of their homes
3. Improve downtown
 - a. Downtown revitalization can make buildings look nicer and be more utilized
 - b. Downtown green space could be improved
 - c. Signage for parking for visitors could help
 - d. Better parking downtown
 - e. Downtown revitalization opportunities through the DRI Program should be capitalized
4. Housing beautification
 - a. City of Oswego incentivizes homeowners to improve their homes/exterior, which could be good for the Lowville community to implement
5. Community connectedness
 - a. Have a welcoming packet for new families and maybe a mentoring program for new families
 - b. Help people with their utilities, list of people to call
 - c. Develop a Facebook page or group for welcoming new families
 - d. A countywide or North Country Facebook page and/or social media accounts
 - e. Encourage "neighborhoodness" through
 - i. Holiday lights; and
 - ii. Things that cause people to celebrate where they live
 - f. The village should give folks the opportunity to lead these efforts, e.g., develop a community steering committee
6. Recreation
 - a. Snowshoe opportunities
 - b. Kayaking opportunities
 - c. Mountain Bike trails and walking trails could be developed
 - d. Rails to trails projects
7. Tourism
 - a. Build on cream cheese festival for tourism
 - b. Agritourism opportunities
 - c. Need more places for people to stay, such as hotels and AirBnB-- especially for younger crowds
8. Streetscape

- a. Need to identify walking and running routes and how to incorporate them into road upgrades
- b. Potential for road biking
- c. Signage for parking for visitors could help
- d. Extend sidewalks so that businesses can spill into the open space, i.e., “streateries” (move parking off the street fronts), including
 - i. Patios as an option; and
 - ii. Welcoming spaces where people can gather

9. Food security

- a. Take advantage of locally grown produce so people can eat fresh
- b. Expand on food truck Fridays
- c. Develop rail area by food pantry (i.e. community center and/or hub for community activities)
- d. More cooperation for the Farmer’s Market
- e. “Bridges Out of Poverty” is helping and should continue to assist the communities

10. Location

- a. Fort Drum should be leveraged to create an economic boost
- b. Lowville as a “gateway” community at the crossroads of four major state highways
 - i. Capture the people driving though to stop, shop, eat, and/or stay
 - ii. Need public parking signs (arrows) to direct people into the community and to points of interest
 - iii. Branding and marketing of “best kept secrets”
 - 1. Being in the middle of nowhere is a strength
 - 2. Way of working is different now
 - 3. As an example, rails to trails can be highlight cycling opportunities

- 4. Internet in the village allows folks to live and work here, locally or remotely

11. Housing

- a. Housing is not necessarily affordable for single people
 - i. Apartments for 18-39 year olds
- b. Create design standards and alternatives for new and existing buildings to be more “green”, such as:
 - i. Solar energy systems; and
 - ii. High energy efficiency
- c. Create a tiny house or micro house community
 - i. Niches are assets and can add layers to the housing stock
 - 1. Conduct a housing needs assessment in with Lewis County Planning Department
- d. Encourage and promote mixed housing (by type, size, affordability, etc.)

12. Existing transportation system can be built upon

- a. Collect feedback on potential additional routes and destinations
- b. Lewis County is open to suggestions and needs

13. Business development

- a. Promote and encourage women in business
- b. Growing entrepreneurship
 - i. What role can the village/town play in this using policies, partnerships, support, and/or tax incentives?
- c. Establish or promote Grub Hub and grocery delivery
- d. Town “land” resources could be an asset to the village for the expansion of village businesses to the town

14. Environment

- a. Black River and Mill Creek
- 15. Public safety
 - a. Need better coordination of services and maybe a more succinct website to direct people

Threats/Barriers

1. Outmigration
 - a. At the state-level, many people are leaving the state, which doesn't help small individual communities
 - b. Need to lay out a community vision and implement policies, especially since people are leaving
 2. Funding
 - a. Lack of funding sources for would-be incentive programs (i.e., how to fund programs?)
 - i. Town and village need to think creatively about their community investments that:
 1. Go beyond infrastructure and vehicles;
 2. Include green space, weekly concerts, unique events that bring the community together;
 3. Improve the sense of community connectedness; and
 4. Provide liquor permits for the fair and waive open container for concerts under the right conditions
 - b. No grant writer who would work toward common goals between organizations
 3. Policy implementation
 - a. Need to have the right people involved for implementation
 - i. Plans seem to sit on a shelf, nothing comes of them
 - ii. Effective communication needed for implementation,
- change, and getting things done
 - b. What are the differences between the town and village? Is there overspending? Duplication of services? Appears to be a lack of coordination between the two.
 - c. Personalities are getting better, but can complicate well-intentioned efforts
 4. Zoning
 - a. Zoning could be a barrier in the future if businesses don't know how to navigate the local laws.
 - b. Communication with developers needs to improve. How do they get assistance?
 5. Economic issues can be barriers
 - a. So many things cost money
 - b. Loss of manufacturing or hospital would significantly impact the local economy
 - c. NYS taxes are high (consider upstate and downstate issues)
 - d. Poverty, which impacts food security
 6. Food insecurity
 - a. Need food program for kids (i.e. during summer)
 - b. Stigmas on kids that receive food
 7. Volunteerism and civic engagement
 - a. Lack of volunteers and participants in events
 - i. How do you appeal to young people and get them involved?
 - b. How do you cultivate and keep good leaders
 - i. Can paying more to keep good leaders?
 - c. Young people don't have opportunities to see "what's out there"
 8. Sociocultural and political limitations
 - a. Traditions can be hard to overcome and change isn't always easy
 - b. Drug problem, especially meth and opioids
 - c. Incompatible and divisive politics

9. Broadband availability
10. Unforeseen emergencies and emergency preparedness, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic
11. Lack of communication in the community and perceived barriers in communication
 - a. Younger people communicate differently than others
 - b. Instagram vs Facebook, the benefits and drawbacks of each
 - c. Share webpage for town and village for sharing news
- d. Getting people to believe they have a say in their own lives or be interested in their own lives (i.e., they don't necessarily look for news or opportunities to engage)
 - i. Simplify access and make it easier to find
 - ii. It's a very small group that looks for opportunities to engage
 - iii. Are they really busy?

Headlines

What would you like to be said about the community in 5 to 10 years?

1. Lowville becomes entrepreneurial hub of NYS
2. Downtown revitalization a success in downtown Lowville
3. Lowville becomes recreation hub of Lewis County
4. Lowville sees brain gain after decades of brain drain
5. Lowville in Top 10 best small towns to raise a family in NYS
6. Downtown Lowville sees rejuvenation
7. Lowville is the best kept secret
8. Lewis County is the healthiest county in NYS
9. Access to recreation is the best in the country
10. Mural/community art featured
11. Lewis County is your home away from home
12. Space for the old and the new
13. 10 best rural places to live (be at the top of the list)