

## **ANALYSIS: Good planning essential for future**

**Colin Read: Everybody's Business**

September 06, 2009 06:43 am

— We can learn a lot from farmers.

For instance, consider the foresight exercised by apple-orchard owners or grape growers. These individuals must prepare their field not just for this year but for a planting that will mature over decades. They must choose a variety that will thrive in our North Country environment. And they must anticipate the needs of a market place that is still five, 10 or 20 years in the future.

Should we expect any less foresight in planning for our own communities?

Residents rarely have an insightful and individualized opportunity to directly influence their future. This is one such time.

The Town of Plattsburgh is engaged in a process that will define our town for decades to come. On the heels of similar exercises recently completed in Peru and Saranac Lake, the town will soon adopt a new ten-year plan.

Yes, these same communities have constructed such ten-year plans in the past. Things are different this time, though. The last time the Town of Plattsburgh created a ten-year plan, the community was wrestling with the closure of the Air Force Base. We were reacting to a major shock, rather than proacting in anticipation of a bright future that will entice a whole new group of future residents who have not yet imagined living here.

Of course, part of our current reality unavoidably influences our future. On the other hand, our future may realize possibilities we have never imagined in the past. Our past and present can inform, motivate and inspire our future, but should not constrain it.

While the term "ten-year plan" commends an exercise completed every ten years, its horizon is much longer than that. A successful ten-year plan will set in motion opportunities for our communities that will last generations.

This is the art of long-term planning. We commit to a process that taps into the best energies of our residents to produce a community not for us but for those that will follow us. We use our eyes and our experiences to create a community for those that have not yet contemplated living here. We must filter our own observations to address the tourist eyes of someone who will someday see our community for the first time.

When we imagine what will create a vibrant community a generation hence, our own realities and our current crises melt away. They are passing issues for a timeless town.

Each of us has a very real opportunity to participate in visions for our towns. There are many visionaries in the City of Plattsburgh that understand tourist eyes and are working tirelessly to create something special for

a city with so much to offer.

And the Town of Plattsburgh is embarking on a public process that permits its residents to place their stamp on our future.

A group of residents from the Town of Plattsburgh have been meeting for a year to prepare for this very moment.

Over the next couple of weeks, there will be meetings across the Town of Plattsburgh. These meetings, each starting at 7 p.m., begin at the Cumberland Head Elementary School on Thursday, Sept. 10. On the following Tuesday and Wednesday, Sept. 15 and 16, the public is invited to St. Joseph's Church in Treadwells Mills and Cadyville Wesleyan Church respectively. This first round of public meetings ends with gatherings at the South Plattsburgh Fire Hall on Sept. 22 and at the Town Hall on Sept. 24.

At these meetings, a consultant experienced in facilitating such visioning across many communities just like ours will offer us some possibilities for our town.

And the residents who have been committed to this process for the last year will speak to the jewels in our town — the recreational and community opportunities in South Plattsburgh, the lake access and parks in Cumberland Head to the north, the potential for a community of our making on the old Clinton County Airport site, and the lifeblood that flows along the Saranac River, joining the Town and the city, and passing by the university.

Each enclave in our town has something unique that its residents value. Each community in our town can offer their own vision of what we can someday be. And the residents of every one of our communities hope that we manage to create a lively and growing town that will lure our youth back once they have followed the inevitable attraction of the big-city lights, and eventually realize that there are few places on earth like our North Country.

Let us use this opportunity to cast aside the realities of today and imagine what tomorrow can bring. After all, it is our town, our city and our North Country. We know we are on to something here. In these challenging times, let us remind ourselves of what could be. Our children ask that of us, and the North Country deserves it.

After all, imagining what could be is far more satisfying than dwelling on what has been. It is this sense of optimism and possibility that is at the root of everything good our community has ever accomplished.

So come out and share your ideas that will allow our community to create good jobs, great communities and a high quality of life. The diversity of our communities creates a diversity of ideas and dreams. When we go through this process, the only bad idea is no idea at all.

In these times when our country is searching for a vision that will allow us to retain our global competitiveness, it is nice to see that the North Country once again is leading the way. Please come out and participate in our future. I will see you there.

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