



Town of Willsboro Comprehensive Plan

Community Visioning Methodology & Results

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Purpose

A working consensus and illustrations of a vision for the future state of the community that serves to frame goals and recommendations is a common ingredient in most modern land use plans. But sometimes visioning can lead to poor results (Dobson). Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a participatory approach meant to reinvigorate visioning to be more practical and useful. It has had a great deal of success in encouraging citizen involvement and follow through that moves communities forward (Vision St. Louis and others). AI starts with an adopted mindset that Willsboro has strengths to build upon-- instead of thinking that Willsboro has problems that need solving. This positive mindset and approach still assumes that Willsboro cannot rest on its laurels. Therefore, using AI, what the Willsboro Visioning Workshops seek to achieve is to reveal and record people's stories about the peak experiences they've had and their ideal imaginings for Willsboro.

Using an Appreciative Inquiry approach means that the workshops will zero in on current strengths, "i.e. the best of what is," discover the ideal Willsboro, "i.e. the best of what could be" (Zakariassen, 2006). This positive, solutions based discovery should uncover themes and topics of value to the citizens and to the Steering Committee. The dialogue is as important as the results in this approach and the Steering Committee hopes to build momentum for the planning process.

Location, Attendance and Dates

The Willsboro Steering Committee used a series of decentralized outreach meetings to bring the workshops to community gatherings "where they happen" instead of a single point, centralized meeting. A final general meeting was also held where the steering committee and members of

the general public could attend. This is consistent with the AI approach. Meetings were coordinated through the social network of the Steering Committee and dependent upon volunteer leadership from within the group stepping forward to organize the workshops. An effort was made to reach out to particular interest groups in the community, such as the parent/teachers association, business and outdoor recreation stakeholders, however meetings with these groups were unable to be arranged.

- March 13, 2010 1-3 PM Whallonsburgh Grange Hall with the Agricultural Stakeholders (15 attendees)
- April 1, 2010 Noon-1:30 at the Senior Nutrition Site with the Senior Citizens (24 attendees)
- April 7, 2010 6:30-8:30 at the Methodist Church with the Ecumenical community (8 attendees)
- May 25, 2010 6:30-8:30 general meeting at the Visitors Center (8 attendees)

These workshops were facilitated by the Community Planning Advisor and a representative of the Steering Committee. They were attended by as many members of the Steering Committee as available to listen in. In total over 55 community and steering committee members attended the events.

In addition to utilizing the results from the four workshops, the Steering Committee distributed 1900 notices and received back 330 responses to the Community Survey. Included on the survey was a specific question regarding visioning (number 32). There were 246 responses to this question that were added to the database from the visioning workshops.

Approach

Appreciative Inquiry has a flexible structure to follow for what is called the “Discover and Dream” phases of the four phase cycle (Cooperider & Whitney, 2005). This structure was used as a guide for the workshop format and for the development of themes from the coding of responses. It generally includes discussions in a sequential, one-on-one, small, and large group format using a set of questions and dialogue to develop themes and topics related to the vision statements.

In all the workshops except at the Senior Nutrition Site (due to facility constraints) the Community Planning Advisor scribed participant comments and responses to the visioning questions directly onto a laptop projected onto a screen for all participants to view, edit and respond. Volunteer scribes also took independent notes and the sessions were audio taped.

The questions used for the March 13th Agriculture Workshop were different than those used for the remaining three workshops:

Questions for March 13, 2010, Agricultural Focus Group:

1. Tell us about a time when you found yourself describing Willsboro as a great place to live.
2. What are the core strengths of agriculture in Willsboro?
3. What does the community and government do best now with respect to providing support for agriculture in Willsboro?
4. What does the Willsboro agricultural community do best for themselves with respect to providing support?
5. How should Willsboro be involved to help transform the vitality and effectiveness of Willsboro's agribusinesses?
6. How will the global trends on the horizon with respect to agriculture (products, technologies or general trends) transform Willsboro's agricultural base? How could the community and government of Willsboro support what the world is calling for with regard to agribusiness?
7. If you left and returned in 10 years and found Willsboro to be a leading edge community, what new things would you like to see?

Questions used for the April and May Workshops:

1. Tell us about a peak experience you had in Willsboro.
2. When do you believe that Willsboro has been at its best--in all the time you have been here?
3. What do you value most about Willsboro?
4. What are the core factors that make Willsboro what it is today?
5. If you could transform Willsboro in any way you wished, what two or three things would you do to heighten its quality of life?
6. If you left and returned in 10 years and found Willsboro to be a leading edge community, what new things would you like to see?

Consolidation of Responses into Generative Themes and Topics

The 55 attendees and 330 respondents to the survey generated 587 responses to the visioning questions posed by the Steering Committee. The task of analyzing this data in order to look for patterns, themes and meaning applied the strategy of open/focused coding and generative themes. Open and focused coding enables the large amount of responses to be reduced down to a number of generative themes for further interpretation by the Steering Committee. A generative theme is topic of community importance (Freire).

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The “first run” of coding was completed by the Community Planning Advisor using open coding. Open coding allows the first set of responses to suggest their own themes or patterns. These become the generative themes for the data. Once the patterns emerge, the themes become established or “focused” for the next set of data that is reviewed. In this way, responses generate the first set of themes through open coding, they then become more or less fixed (focused), and are added to as new themes become apparent until the last response is analyzed.

In order to ensure reliability and validity of the process, a second (or third) person may review or conduct the data analysis, conduct the analysis in teams for feedback or proof one another’s work. In this case, after the Community Planning Advisor conducted the first run coding and theme generation, the Co-Chair of the Steering Committee volunteered to review the analysis and conduct a second run.

The review of the 587 responses resulted in the following Generative Themes:

- The singular and exceptional Willsboro experience as a sacred landscape of beauty, of home and of happiness;
- Willsboro honors the tradition of welcoming visitors and its seasonal residents; small town (Social);
- Four season, vibrant business and creative economy;
- Diverse mix of cultural and recreational facilities & events;
- High quality scenic resources, excellent water quality for swimming, drinking and boating, large biodiversity and habitat, large acreage of agricultural lands, woods and fields are maintained;
- Demographic mix Issues-changing to a different mix (younger/older);
- Small town (physical) effects of size and structure;
- Revitalized properties;
- Public facilities and services are diverse, maintained and responsive to the needs of the community;
- Property taxes should be examined;
- Growth is controlled, limited, managed and restrained so that the community's footprint and character doesn't really change and natural resources are really protected;
- Less regulation;
- More housing development;

These themes received the rankings with regard to the future vision of Willsboro as follows:

- 35.49% Four season, vibrant business and creative economy
- 13.43 % High quality scenic resources, excellent water quality for swimming, drinking and boating, large biodiversity and habitat, large acreage of agricultural lands, woods and fields are maintained.
- 9.62% Small town (physical) effects of size and structure
- 8.13% Diverse mix of cultural and recreational facilities & events
- 7.79% Willsboro honors the tradition of welcoming visitors and its seasonal residents. Small town (Social)
- 6.80% Growth is controlled, limited, managed and restrained so that the community's footprint and character doesn't really change and natural resources are really protected.
- 3.65% Property taxes should be examined
- 3.32% The singular and Exceptional Willsboro experience as a sacred landscape of beauty, of home and of happiness
- 3.32% Public facilities and services are diverse, maintained and responsive to the needs of the community
- 3.15% Demographic mix Issues-changing to a different mix (younger/older)
- 2.82% More housing development
- 1.99% Revitalized properties
- .50% Less regulation

Developing Themes and Topics into a Vision Statement

Based upon the Generative Themes, a Straw man Vision Statement was drafted by the Community Planning Advisor reviewed and edited by the Co-Chairman of the Steering Committee. Core topics are identified and integrated to reflect Smart Growth principles and sustainable planning's practice. The statement links issues to recognize interrelated impacts rather than siloing topics into functional areas such as housing, land use, open space, etc.

Town of Willsboro “STRAW-MAN” Vision Statement

Willsboro is a neighborly place where its full time and part time residents care deeply about its singular beauty, small town quality and the noble aspects of community life.

Willsboro honors the tradition of welcoming visitors and its seasonal residents both new and old to its working landscape of field, forests, riverfronts and lakeshores. It enjoys a diversified economic vitality, based upon an active agricultural community, four-season tourist attractions and several important industrial employers. Support services and retail businesses provide additional job opportunities for residents and commuters from neighboring communities.

Willsboro’s land use, natural resources, economic, housing, health, recreation and cultural sectors are deliberately integrated because citizens and government understand that the countryside, with its fields and trees, Lake Champlain, the Boquet River, the Adirondack Mountains, are what makes Willsboro such an extraordinary place.

Keeping in mind that the private lands in Willsboro are where this beauty resides, citizens and government work together to communicate about, consciously and carefully act and coordinate their projects. As a result of that cooperation and deliberate hard work, the physical and cultural environment mesh well for the visitor, the residents and the next generation, making the quality of life in the town very pleasurable and distinctively satisfying.

Willsboro takes full advantage of its strategic rural location, heritage, recreational advantages, and its scenic beauty to be an attractive destination for visitors and a good home to all its residents: seasonal, young and old. Its leaders have planned wisely so that growth will be controlled through innovative practices and approaches.

Willsboro offers opportunities for health, peaceful living in a spectacular scenic, but vital country setting that we are all proud to call home.

Core Topics:

Natural Systems and Built Environment

Willsboro’s land use and natural resource programs promote:

- *A walkable, vibrant central business district.*
- *Quiet and child-friendly residential neighborhoods.*
- *Attractive and informative signage.*
- *A visitor friendly environment.*
- *Development that considers the context of the site in its surroundings.*
- *Streamlined and understandable processes for zoning, site plan review and subdivision that protect the Town’s natural resources.*
- *Balance between shoreline and natural resource protection and waterway enhancement and use.*

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- *Viable agricultural businesses and protection of farmers and farming.*
- *Appropriate scaled residential development in keeping with Willsboro's small town character and interest in farmland preservation and open space protection by clustering development wherever possible away from farm fields and scenic vistas.*
- *The critical importance and protection of water quality, biodiversity and wildlife habitat when planning building projects and development.*

Society, Economy, Transportation, Public Facilities & Services

Willsboro's diverse community supports and sustains, in cooperation with state and local agencies:

- *An appropriate housing mix for all income and age levels.*
- *Respect and preservation for historic properties and structures, including stone fences and dirt roads.*
- *Maintenance of community character through design guidelines for buildings.*
- *Ample livable wage job opportunities.*
- *Public transportation.*
- *Well maintained existing public facilities, including water and wastewater systems.*
- *Expanded public services appropriate to the existing growth patterns in the community to avoid sprawl and that use the best available technology.*
- *Well maintained roads, bridges and sidewalks.*
- *A globally connected communication system.*
- *A multi-purpose school building and system.*
- *Health Center and Senior Living options.*

Willsboro's four-season business district:

- *Is filled to capacity with a rich diversity of retail businesses.*
- *Has sidewalks, parking lots and parks awash with color and art, benches and greenery.*
- *Offers shopping opportunities that complement its mix of cultural and recreational resources.*
- *Capitalizes upon its natural assets of the Boquet River and connections to Lake Champlain and the Essex Ferry.*
- *Provides an information infrastructure where residents and visitors can access and enjoy everything the community has to offer.*

The Steering Committee reviewed the Straw man statement at their June 1, 2010 Steering Committee Meeting. In a 90 minute session, nine members discussed, edited and revised the Straw man statement. They identified terminology and ideology that concerned them, and edited after rich and productive dialogue. The final vision statement for the comprehensive plan appears below:

Town of Willsboro Comprehensive Plan Vision Statement

June 1, 2010

Willsboro is a neighborly place where its full time and part time residents care deeply about its singular beauty, small town quality and the noble aspects of community life.

Willsboro honors the tradition of welcoming visitors and its seasonal residents both new and old to its working landscape of field, forests, riverfronts and lakeshores. It enjoys a diversified economic vitality, based upon an active agricultural community, four-season tourist attractions and several important industrial employers. Support services and retail businesses provide additional job opportunities for residents and commuters from neighboring communities.

Willsboro's land use, natural resources, economic, housing, health, recreation and cultural sectors are deliberately integrated because citizens and government understand that the countryside, with its fields and trees, Lake Champlain, Long Pond, the Boquet River, the Adirondack Mountains, are what makes Willsboro such an extraordinary place.

Keeping in mind that the private lands in Willsboro are where most of its beauty resides, citizens and government work together to communicate about, consciously and carefully act and coordinate their projects. The quality of life in the town is very pleasurable and distinctively satisfying as a result of that cooperation and deliberate hard work. The physical and cultural environments mesh well for the visitor, the residents, the business-owners and the next generation.

Willsboro takes full advantage of its strategic rural location, heritage, recreational opportunities, and its scenic beauty to be an attractive destination for visitors and a good home to all its residents. Its leaders use innovative practices and approaches to plan growth wisely.

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- A walkable, vibrant central business district.
- Quiet and child-friendly residential neighborhoods.
- Attractive and informative signage.
- A visitor friendly environment.
- Development that considers the context of the site in its surroundings.
- Efficient and understandable processes for Town-administered zoning, site plan review and subdivision that protect the Town's natural resources.
- Balance between shoreline and natural resource protection and waterway enhancement and use.

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- Viable agricultural businesses, protection of farmers, and all forms of farming, and supportive agricultural research facilities.
- Appropriate scaled residential development in keeping with Willsboro's small town character and interest in farmland preservation and open space protection by clustering development wherever possible away from farm fields and scenic vistas.
- The critical importance and protection of water quality, soils, biodiversity and wildlife habitat when planning building projects and development.
- Green communities technology including energy efficiency and local alternative energy development.

Society, Economy, Transportation, Public Facilities & Services

Willsboro's diverse community supports and sustains, in cooperation with state and local agencies:

- An appropriate housing mix for all income and age levels.
- Respect and preservation for historic properties and structures, including stone fences and dirt roads.
- Maintenance of community heritage and character.
- Ample and diverse attractive job opportunities.
- Existing businesses, industries and commerce.
- Public transportation.
- Well maintained existing public facilities, including water and wastewater systems.
- Expanded public services appropriate to the existing growth patterns in the community to avoid sprawl and that use the best available technology.
- Well maintained roads, bridges and sidewalks.
- A globally connected, best technology communication system.
- A multi-purpose school building and system.
- Health center and senior living options.

Willsboro's four-season business district:

- Is filled to capacity with a rich diversity of retail businesses.
- Has sidewalks, parking lots and parks awash with color and art, benches and greenery.
- Offers shopping opportunities that complement its mix of cultural, historic and recreational resources.
- Capitalizes upon its natural assets of the Boquet River and connections to Lake Champlain and the Essex Ferry.
- Provides an information infrastructure where residents and visitors can access and enjoy everything the community has to offer.

Benefits of the Mixed Methodology and Approach: Appreciative Inquiry, Decentralized Visioning, Open/Focused Coding, Generative Themes and the Straw Man Vision Statements

- Increased likelihood of success in encouraging citizen involvement and follow through that moves communities forward (Vision St. Louis and others);
- AI starts with an adopted mindset that Willsboro has strengths to build upon-- instead of thinking that Willsboro has problems that need solving;

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- An emphasis on dialogue as equally important to the data accumulated from the sessions;
- Rich data (500+ responses) and 13 Generative themes to support visioning as well as development of issues, strategies and recommendations;
- One or more vision statements for the various chapters or topics that integrate Smart Growth principles;
- Additional feedback on issues or topics of importance from stakeholders;
- Further outreach to the citizens on the plan process and product;
- Greater extent of stakeholder involvement than traditional centralized visioning workshops.

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<http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/uploads/McKnight%20final%20AI%20Commons.doc>

Village of Margaretville, New York Vision Statement, September 2007,

Vision St. Louis Park, St. Louis, MO.

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Water Conservation Planning Guide for British Columbia's Communities (2009) Digital copies and updates will be made available through the "Drinking Water" page of the Municipal Engineering Services Branch (http://www.cd.gov.bc.ca/lgd/environment/drinking_water.htm)

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