

Coming Together for Consensus:

A Working Statement of Goals and Objectives to Guide Agawam into the Future

The Initiation of a Community-Wide Planning Effort

October 27, 1993

LandUse Inc.

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Working Statement of Goals and Objectives

Town of Agawam LandUse, Incorporated

I.

Introduction

This Working Statement of Goals and Policies for the Town of Agawam was drafted during three working sessions attended by more than 70 representatives of the Agawam community. Consultant assistance to the meetings was funded by a grant from the Strategic Planning Program of the Executive Office of Communities and Development. These meetings, the Working Statement, and subsequent working meetings are part of a community planning project called "Coming Together for Consensus". The intents of this effort are:

1. To bring together residents and business people who represent different points of view about life in Agawam.
2. To achieve open, thoughtful discussions about Agawam's current situation and desired future.
3. To identify what these representatives of the community agree on.
4. To express that agreement in goals and objectives to guide Agawam's planning and management efforts, and;
5. To initiate frank discussions about the practical steps that will be necessary to implement these goals and policies.

At the third meeting in the "Coming Together for Consensus" series, the Consensus Group met in working sessions with members of the Town's administration to talk about how this Working Statement might be improved, and what it would take for the Town to move toward achieving these goals and objectives. The Group then met with elected officials to discuss what has emerged and where this broad-based planning effort should go from here. By a show of hands all who were present confirmed that this draft working statement is on the right track, and efforts should be made to continue the planning effort along the lines that have been outlined. Participants in the Consensus Group have committed themselves to a fourth meeting in July, when follow-up tasks will be assigned.

The purpose of the Working Statement is to initiate a new period of inclusive, constructive, proactive community-wide deliberation about the future we all want for our town. Agawam is in a time of changes. It is up to residents and business people to step forward and share the work of guiding our town in the direction desired by townspeople.

Participants Who Drafted This Working Statement

The "Coming Together for Consensus" Projects Advisory Committee worked to gather a broad-based group of participants to represent the varied viewpoints in town, including: long-time residents and newcomers, and individuals active in -- or experienced in -- farming, business, construction,

education, recreation, churches, civic groups, and older residents.

The individuals who have been involved so far in drafting the Working Statement are:

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[** = Advisory Committee Member]

The Consensus Group wishes to thank the following Town administrators for taking the time to attend the third working meeting and helping to refine the Draft Statement:

Jack Stone, Superintendent of Public Works
Donna Campbell, Chief Librarian
Bernard Ryder, Superintendent of Schools
Jack Kunasek, Director of Parks and Recreation

The Consensus Group also wishes to thank the following elected officials for coming to the third working meeting to hear recommendations:

Mayor Christopher C. Johnson

Members of the Town Council:

Walter A. Balboni
George Bitzas
Edward A. Caba
Thomas J. Ennis, Jr.
Jessie D. Fuller
Nancy E. Gravel

Gary E. Suffriti
James D. Taylor
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Members of the School Committee:

Linda M. Galarneau
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The Project Officer for "Coming to Consensus" was Deborah S. Dachos, Director, Office of Planning and Community Development for the Town of Agawam.

Consulting assistance to the "Coming Together for Consensus" Project was provided by LandUse, Incorporated:

Jeanne H. Armstrong, Principal in Charge
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Assistance to this community planning project was funded by the Town of Agawam and the Strategic Planning Program of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Executive Office of Communities and Development.

II.

How We See Agawam: A Vision of Our Town

Agawam is a place of tradition and opportunity. Convenient location, affordable land and buildings, and low tax rate allow us to build good lives for ourselves. People are attracted to buy a home or set up a business here. The highway system and near-by airport link us to the surrounding region's opportunities, too. From Agawam's rural past we've retained a sense of being a small town where friendly people with a wide range of incomes know each other and participate in civic activities, school affairs, and sports events. There are many recreational opportunities at the State Park and golf courses. This is a good place to raise a family in a nice neighborhood with lots of other children, and then enjoy retirement years. Agawam is a safe community with family values and good schools.

Looking around us we see a physical setting that still reminds us of Agawam's traditional agricultural fields, historic homes, and village centers. Mountains, rivers, streams, and wetlands are also part of the sense of quiet open space that is so appealing.

Looking ahead we see that Agawam still has room for new residents and businesses, but we sense that our community is approaching thresholds of development and population size that may cause our town to lose the characteristics that we value so much. Already our wide open pattern of development is causing friction at the seams - between business and neighboring residents, between farmlands and expanding neighborhoods. There is a growing mismatch between our traditional rural

level of taxes and municipal services, and the rising requirements of serving our growing population.

Our greatest challenge right now is to work out new ways of organizing ourselves and working together to manage our town and its growth. Our local government needs a clear, shared purpose and a practical growth management plan that balances the needs and resources of our growing community.

Working together to answer this challenge, we can make Agawam a place of:

Village centers whose historic character is preserved, where traffic is controlled, and there is no more commercial sprawl along roadsides;

Safe, friendly neighborhoods whose distinguishing characteristics are respected and protected, where sidewalks and trails link homes to schools, play-lots, parks, and other family recreation facilities;

Strong, attractive, well-maintained business centers, each with its own identity and clear boundaries, where parking is landscaped;

Parks for a broad range of people accessible through trail systems, with parking at entry points, and multiple uses for enjoyment by different groups;

Rural views of farmlands, forest areas, and the mountainside;

Town facilities and services that strive for excellence with well sited and constructed schools, fire station, DPW building, library, and possibly a community center.

III. A WORKING STATEMENT OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

A. Growth Management: Land Use and Zoning

Goals to Guide Our Growth Management Efforts:

1. Agawam should be a clean, well-kept town.
2. Agawam should seek to maintain its small town character where it still exists and encourage a small town feel in places where it has been lost.
3. Agawam should encourage business areas to feel like small centers with characteristics that are appealing.
4. Agawam should strengthen cooperation (and understanding of the issues) among the business, resident, and town hall communities.
5. Agawam needs to promote and strengthen pride in Agawam's appearance, purpose, and character.
6. Agawam should have a land use pattern and zoning that strengthens business areas.

7. Agawam should work to diminish the negative impacts of businesses on neighborhoods.

8. Agawam should work to understand the impacts of future growth and set policies based on that understanding.

Objectives and Actions to Achieve These Goals:

Highest Priority:

GM-1.

*Develop programs to reduce and control littering and roadside trash in order to improve the appearance of the town.

A. Create a Town-sponsored cleanup/community pride program that includes education and the placement of Town-owned and decorated trash barrels around town.

B. Establish a program whereby businesses empty and monitor these barrels.

C. Consider how commercial trash regulations might be modified, if in return the business community takes responsibility for improving town cleanliness.

GM-2.

*Make an effort to educate the public about the status of zoning in Agawam today.

A. Produce a pamphlet on zoning and distribute it to homebuyers.

B. Produce materials explaining how areas are zoned in Agawam, and distribute these to citizens.

C. Get more public input into the process of strengthening the Zoning Bylaw.

GM-3.

* Perform a careful review of Agawam's zoning to determine whether:

A. Allowed uses are appropriate for different areas,

B. the Town wants to allow business development on all the vacant business zoned land (for example, South Westfield Street),

C. Businesses are overly constrained by current regulations,

D. Above objectives can be addressed better in the zoning regulations.

E. Strengthen the Zoning Review Committee, and ensure that there is broad representation from the community on each type of zoning issue being considered.

* Focus on a narrow area rather than the whole town, for example:

The Main Street Historic District: The Rocky's Hardware intersection: Springfield Street:
Feeding Hills/South Westfield Street.

** [GM-2 and GM-3 should proceed in tandem.]

GM-4.

*Review the effectiveness of current enforcement policies and regulations. Also review means to improve the level of courtesy and respect among public officials, businesses, and citizens on issues of land use and zoning.

Next Priority:

GM-5.

*Encourage owners to improve the appearance of their buildings.

A. Consider incentives for facade improvements (for example, loan programs, facade grants, tax breaks).

GM-6.

*Separate business impacts from residential areas.

A. Review the zoning regulations to see how they might be revised to better accomplish this.

B. Have the business community develop design guidelines for their specific business areas.

GM-7.

*Improve the image of the business community among residents by examining and publicizing the financial and other benefits provided to the town by businesses.

A. Establish a better line of communication between Town Hall and newly organized business associations.

B. Perform a fiscal impact analysis of residential and non-residential property to understand the impacts of business on the city (!).

GM-8.

Longer Range:

*Seek to physically define and separate streets from parking areas.

GM-9.

*Increase the amount of landscaping on all business properties, but recognize the importance of avoiding situations where landscaping interferes with day to day business or residential activities.

A. Form working committees to focus on troublesome business areas to explore public actions and private sector/property owner actions that could create curbs, sidewalks, and street side landscaping.

B. Review the zoning to determine if current zoning sufficiently controls curb cuts and the area between the street and parking areas.

C. Encourage the formation of business associations representing specific areas, and encourage those groups to focus on landscaping.

D. Review landscaping provisions in zoning.

E. See action 8.a, above.

GM-10.

*Beware of over-regulating properties or giving too much power to government. Seek a balance between regulation and collaborative efforts between government and property owners.

B.

Open Space and Recreation

Goal:

Open Space is an essential attribute of Agawam's traditional rural character. Use zoning, acquisition, and management to manage growth and preserve our quality of life.

Objective #1:

Create an open space system that provides benefits throughout the town and through all four seasons of the year.

Strategies:

Acquire large parcels for active and passive use, and resource conservation.

Actions:

Update the Open Space Plan, identify resources, and classify open space/recreation areas by needs

and uses.

1. Implement the current Open Space Plan, including acquisitions, giving priority attention to acquiring Tuckahoe.
2. Provide zoning tools to encourage open space preservation, including:
 - Cluster development
 - Larger lot sizes
 - Planned Unit Developments (carefully designed mix of housing types, possibly combined with neighborhood business to serve the residents)
 - Open Space Zone
 - Landscaping requirements
3. Actively pursue gifts and bequests of open land.
4. Inventory and monitor large open tracts of land.

Objective #2:

Ensure that access to open space areas is available consistent with their intended use.

Strategies:

- A. Publicize and inform residents about existing open space and recreation areas: where they are, when they are open, what they offer.
- B. Provide safe routes to existing and proposed facilities, including a bike and foot path system, with parking support.
- C. Provide access at existing and proposed facilities, including parking, entrances, maintenance, and sanitary facilities.
- D. Manage resources for the maximum range of users consistent with the purpose of the resource.

Actions:

- A. Use the Agawam Advertiser to spotlight parks and other recreation facilities.
- B. Solicit business sponsorship of the educational outreach.
- C. Form a task force to work with the Town Council, Open Space and Recreation Plan effort, and schools on issues of management and access.
- D. Launch an Adopt-A-Park program for maintenance and cleanup efforts.

Objective #3:

Preserve valuable natural resources/and habitat systems

Strategies:

- A. Provide incentives to landowners to manage and/or develop in an environmentally sensitive manner.
- B. Educate the community about land management techniques.
- C. Purchase land or development rights (or long leases).

Objective #4:

Provide adequate recreational facilities to serve the variety of needs and users in Agawam.

Strategies:

- A. Work for geographic balance by providing facilities accessible to all neighborhoods.
- B. Manage existing resources--such as schools' ball fields and play-lots – for multiple user groups (consistent with the purpose of the facility).
- C. Provide incentives to private businesses to support public recreation.
- D. Provide additional facilities for organized sports--such as playfields and tennis courts- throughout town.
- E. Provide additional play-lots and family-oriented facilities in neighborhoods.

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Priority Actions:

OSR -1

Publicize information about Agawam's open space and recreation resources.

- A. Continue publicity through the Union News and other media.
- B. Produce and distribute to all Agawam households a pamphlet that lists all open space and recreation resources, how to find and enter them, the activities and facilities they offer, their hours of operation, and other useful information.

OSR-2

Maintain and improve existing facilities, and mobilize the potential resources listed in #3 - #5 to help do this. Acquire additional sites and facilities when possible.

Build community relations. Establish a Citizens' Open Space and Recreation Council to help the Director of Parks and Recreation set priorities for use of limited funds. Charge this Committee to mobilize broad-based community assistance, for example through an Adopt-a-Park program for businesses, volunteer clean up and construction days, and approaching civic and other organizations who own recreation resources to see how they might be able to help the community increase public use of these facilities.

OSR-3

OSR-4.

Hire a professional staff person to concentrate on open space and recreation. Charge that person to coordinate different activities, improve resource utilization, and get as many people involved in the effort as possible.

OSR-5

Make use of volunteer and/or other inexpensive sources of assistance, for example through student interns from the Springfield College Recreation Management Program and the University of Massachusetts Sports Management Program. Student community service through the Agawam High School curriculum is also a possibility.

C.

Schools and Other' Town Facilities and Services

Goal:

Over the long term update and expand town facilities and services to accommodate current needs and future growth.

What it will take to achieve this goal:

Continuous short term and long range planning with regular updates.

A financial commitment from the community to make the investments necessary.

Achieving shared attitudes that support this.

A balance of meeting needs of different groups in town.

Working for excellence over time through continuous practical steps.

Accountability.

More involvement of parents and input to the School Committee

Objective #1:

Meet the needs of all students.

A. Achieve continuity in curriculum from Kindergarten through High School. Support and carry out the Curriculum Committee's report. Support the work of the Curriculum Coordinator.

B. Provide the space needed by the schools.

C. Balance the funding available for regular education and special education.
Lobby the State for adequate and fairer funding.

Objective #2:

Create a good working relationship between the school administration and the community:

A. Between the Administration and Parents.

B. Openness, listening, respect, encouragement, cooperation, acceptance, accountability.

C. Take the time

D. Be involved

E. Educate selves on issues values training at home show up for programs

Interchanges among "school people" and "other people"

"School people"

Others

-Outreach

-Community Center, Boys/Girls Club

-Information effort

-Advisory groups to tell schools about the real world

-Schools should respond to the links between social service
needs of the community groups and schools

-Adjust to serve others

-Congratulate young people who do well

-Community service in curriculum

-Social service outreach

Unanswered Questions:

How do we know and agree what School Committee members, the Superintendent, and school principals are supposed to do and hold them accountable?

How do we get more people to care, to get involved, to hang in and not get discouraged or burnt out?

Objective #3:

Achieve and maintain adequate staffing.

A. Evaluate the number and skills of staff.

B. As necessary, bring the number of staff up to standard.

C. Achieve and reward quality, caring teachers.

D. Adopt a Town-wide evaluation process.

1. Review national standards and write out a clear set of performance expectations.

2. Carry out for each employee a regular evaluation process that is fair and constructive

3. Inform townspeople how we are doing, and what we need.

E. Inform the community about personnel hiring policies, how quality is to be determined and rewarded, who is accountable and how to communicate with them.

F. Publish School Committee and other committees' agendas in the newspapers.

[Note: The school administration is working to achieve the attitude that schools are a service industry, and they agree with these objectives. School administrators point out that they need to hear townspeople's questions and complaints, so that they may resolve them.]

Objective #4:

Expand and upgrade Town facilities as necessary.

A. Locate and construct a new Fire Station.

B. Locate and construct a new DPW Building.

C. Expand the Town's library facilities. The Library has a plan that specifies what is needed. The Town needs to invest in a preliminary design plan so as to be ready to apply for grants that might become available.

D. Extend the sidewalk system, giving priority to connecting neighborhoods with schools, playgrounds and other recreation facilities, and the open space and parks system.

Objective #5:

Improve the maintenance of all Town facilities.

A. Shovel sidewalks in winter.

Objective #6:

Meet the needs of older residents.

A. As possible, link services to older residents with services to others, for example through a community center.

Objective #7:

Resolve the trash disposal problem.

A. Inform people of options now open to them.

B. Schedule and support community clean up days.

C. Develop and adopt a comprehensive program for trash management, disposal, and recycling.

D. Consider establishing a composting facility for leaves, grass clippings, and other garden waste.

Objective #8:

Monitor the towns' needs for additional services, and plan proactively to meet those needs.

A. Consider how and when to provide transportation alternatives to private automobiles.

Priority Actions to Begin Progress Toward These Objectives:

TF-1. Inform the general citizenry about the questionnaire that the school administration is distributing to seek community input regarding the High School. Urge the public to participate in

this survey, and make the results of the survey known.

TF-2. Advertise how advisory committees are to be constituted and elected for each school under the provisions of the State's Educational Reform Act. Work for a broadly representative, energetic set of advisory committees to work for the community's objectives.

TF-3. Establish a "Friends of the Agawam Library" organization to serve as an activating liaison between the community and our library.

TF-4. Establish a PTO Council to gather all the PTOs together to exchange information and support each other's efforts. Build this on an expansion of the current Council of PTO Presidents. Include a representative from the High School, and move to form a High School PTO.

Longer Range Priority Actions:

TF-5. Broaden the base of community involvement in Town facilities and services. Create opportunities through the groups and activities recommended in all sections of this document. Reach out to newcomers, and engage their participation.

TF-6. Strive for excellence. And publicize progress along the way. The community will be interested in--and support--what they can be proud of.

TF-7. Achieve the community-wide understanding and support necessary to gain voters' approval of needed budgets and capital investments. Voters need to have confidence that budget and capital requests are based upon solid thinking that reflects residents' needs, priorities, and choices. They must know that other resources have been used as much as possible, for example grants and volunteerism. They must believe that investing in Town facilities will increase the value of their property and will also add to their safety, comfort, and enjoyment.

IV.

Next Steps in Planning for Our Town's Future

A. What It Will Take to Accomplish These Goals and Objectives

Town officials, the business community, and the general citizenry must work together to achieve better communication among all members of the Agawam community.

Specific recommendations include:

A. Write and publicize the agendas of all Town councils, boards, and committees in terms that clearly describe the substance of matters to be discussed. Do not merely list numbered propositions.

B. Produce and distribute the pamphlet describing open space and recreation facilities, as described in Priority Action OSR-1.b on page 11.

C. Produce and distribute the explanatory booklet about the Town's zoning, as described in Priority Action GM-2.a on page 7.

D. Form the advisory and action groups recommended in this document (see #2 below), and reach out for broadly representative participation in each group.

E. The inclusion of residents and the business community in management, making choices, planning needed actions, and implementing them. Specific recommended ways to do this include:

1. The Zoning Review Committee (see Priority Action GM-3.a. on page 7).

2. The business area working committees (see Priority Actions GM-8.a. and GM-9.a. on page 8).

3. The Citizens' Open Space and Recreation Council (see Priority Action OSR-3 on page 11).

4. The School Department's evaluative questionnaire about the High School. Subsequent questionnaires about other parts of the School System (see Priority Action TF-1 on page 15).

5. The Advisory Committees mandated by the Education Reform Act (see Priority Action TF-2 on page 15).

6. The "Friends of the Agawam Library" (see Priority Action TF-3 on page 15).

7. The PTO Council (see Priority Action TF-4 on page 15).

8. The elder citizens (see Objective #6 page 14).

F. Mobilizing the resources that are needed. Specific recommendations and examples include:

1. A community-wide spirit of volunteerism:

2. Residents serving on working groups and advisory committees.

3. Business people and other knowledgeable residents serving as visiting instructors during school classes and after school programs.

4. Students doing community service as part of the schools' curriculum.

5. Businesses adopting a park, buying uniforms, and/or paying for electricity for night games.

6. Businesses taking on the responsibility for emptying public trash barrels.
 7. Civic groups and churches making their facilities and members available to help community programs.
 8. Clean up days.
 9. Inexpensive outside resources:
 10. Student interns from relevant college and university programs. Grants
 11. Paid professional staff:
 12. A staff person to concentrate on coordination of open space and recreation facilities, resource utilization, getting people involved (see Priority Action OSR4 on page 11).
 13. An experienced full time grants writer whose only responsibilities are to search for potential sources of funding and apply for that funding.
 14. The school system's new Curriculum Coordinator.
 15. Voters' support for operating budgets and capital investments (see Priority Action TF-7 on page 15).
- G. A constructive tone of public interactions and deliberations that respects different points of view and seeks a fair balance through moderation and compromise.

Date(s): July 20, 1993

B.

Next Steps to Initiate Action

Tasks

Discuss and refine the Working Statement. Agree on priority actions. Sign up for working groups.

Who Should Spearhead

Consensus Group

July -August 1993

PTO Council

Publicize importance of townspeople's filling out the evaluative questionnaire about the High School.

August, -September 1993

Gain formal adoption of the Working Statement as a guiding policy document. Seek actions by Mayor, Town Council, School Committee, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, and other relevant boards and departments.

Delegation(s) from the Consensus Group

August 1993

Delegation from the Consensus Group

Work with the Director-of Parks and Recreation to organize the Citizens' Open Space and Recreation Council.

August -September 1993

Plan and organize working meetings to focus on priority business areas. Include business owners, Town officials, and residential neighbors.

Delegation(s) from the Consensus Group, New business associations, according to interest in the different business areas.

September -October 1993

Publicize the importance of the new PTO Council school advisory committees. Gain broad based representation.

Fall 1993, Winter 1994

Update and seek adoption of the Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Director of Planning, Director of Parks and Recreation, Conservation Commission, Citizens' Open Space and Recreation Council.

Fall 1993

Citizens' Open Space and Recreation Council.

In conjunction with the Open Space and Recreation Plan, produce and distribute the pamphlet about the Town's facilities and resources.

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