

Keuka Lake Looking Ahead

The second round of the Keuka Lake Land Use Leadership Alliance (LULA) training was recently completed at Keuka College with 30 attendees from around the watershed graduating. This innovative 2 year pilot program is funded with a grant from the New York State Quality Communities Program and supported by the Keuka Lake Association, Keuka Watershed Improvement Cooperative (KWIC), Cornell Cooperative Extension, Cornell University Community and Rural Development Institute, Genesee Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council, Pace University Land Use Law Center, Yates and Steuben Counties. The KLA provided a generous \$5,000 cash match for the project as part of the grant application process which helped secure the grant.



Participants in the LULA 2 training held at Keuka College. "If you are involved in any stage of local government, this is a very valuable training."

A total of 60 local leaders from the watershed graduated from the first and second classes held in March and October of this year. According to one participant, "this class was highly valuable both for the skills participants garnered as well as the connections made both within a community and between communities." Fundamental to the land use training is an understanding of the laws that are the underpinnings of land use in New York State and how that power is delegated to local municipal governments. The class learned that without a current and up-to-date Comprehensive Plan, local zoning is typically problematic. State law requires that local land use laws be consistent with a comprehensive plan. Though circumstances vary by municipality, Comprehensive Plans are typically able to stay relatively current if updated about every five to seven years.

“Among the most important powers of local government is the responsibility to undertake comprehensive planning and to regulate land use to protect the public health, safety and general welfare.”
-N.Y. Town, Village, General City Law

One of the many keys of responsible land use is a term called Smart Growth. Its name alone alludes to its meaning. Fundamentally, it's identifying areas for growth and development, then focusing development on those areas. In addition, it includes designating and protecting areas for recreation, conservation and environmental protection. The class also learned about various land use tools such as clustering, stormwater management, floating zones, overlay zones and incentive zones. The training also included methods for dealing with the inherent conflict that can arise during negotiations for development or subdivision of land and the importance of realizing that at times outside expertise may be required to assist in facilitation and mediation.

“This is an excellent training to help you realize that collaborative decision making helps makes the best, informed decision taking or attempting to take the interest of all affected parties (not just primary stakeholders) into consideration.” LULA 2 participant

If you are interested in seeing some of the material from the LULA training, please visit the following websites: <http://counties.cce.cornell.edu/yates/LULA.html> and <http://www.gflrpc.org/keuka.htm>.

Since the March training, more than a dozen graduates from LULA 1 and other municipal volunteers in collaboration with local municipalities have been working with Genesee Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Yates County to develop a watershed land use plan. This planning guide is nearly completed and will include a wealth of information tailored to the watershed including GIS maps, assessments of local laws and gaps in those laws, best practice models, and laws/ordinances that local leaders can adapt for their municipalities. One of the key aspects of the program is the direct input from participants regarding their local challenges and the level of importance of those challenges. During the first day of training all of the participants listed their challenges and as suspected, many municipalities are facing similar issues. Some of the issues leading the list were steep slope development, the tradeoff between agriculture and development, the lack of full time regional governmental resources knowledgeable in development, preservation of the rural character of the region, and lake water quality.

Since the plan is truly a grass-roots effort, the next step in the planning process is to further share the draft plan directly with citizens and boards in each municipality and gather additional input on the concepts outlined in the plan. A presentation and an outreach plan is in the process of being developed in November. Public forums will be held in watershed municipalities in the next several months lead by LULA participants. After the public forums, the plan will be finalized and a process for facilitating moving the plan ahead will be initiated. Implementation of most concepts in the plan (i.e., updating a comprehensive plan, steep slope ordinances, etc.) will ultimately need to be done at the local level. The planning guide and the trained network of LULA participants

should provide tremendous resources not previously available to the municipalities to move ahead on land use initiatives.



Participants interacting at the first LULA training at Keuka College.

Effective and efficient land use is not a program but a process. It has no end point when local government leaders and residents can say “we are done!” Land use has evolved from early law and will continue to evolve to meet the needs of the local and regional population. This training is just a beginning for about 60 people representing all walks of life in the watershed. The training will hopefully lay the foundation for building a process of supporting and implementing effective land use around Keuka Lake and its watershed. As one attendee put it, “what a wonderful opportunity to gather together as watershed towns, plan for the future and share our problems and solutions.” Training is also a process, so look for additional updates on training opportunities and public forums on the “Keuka Lake Looking Ahead – An Intermunicipal Land Use Action Plan” in your community. For more information, please contact Peter Landre, Executive Director, Cornell Cooperative Extension Yates County, 315-536-5123.
