

MASTER PLAN

TOWN OF DECATUR

MASTER PLAN

DECATUR TOWN PLANNING BOARD

John Wool, Chairman
Dominick J. Reisen, Secretary

Nila L. Conover
Mary M. Kersman
Marilyn K. Flaherty

PAST PLANNING BOARD MEMBERS

Betsy Crowell
John Lum

PAST MASTER PLAN COMMITTEE

Bill Barth
Elmer Foreman
Tom Frampton
Curly Ives
Wendy R. Ludvigsen
Dorothy Mauro
Walter A. Schlierman

OTSEGO COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Diane Carlton, Director
Terry Bliss
Michael Osburn

Decatur, New York
March, 1992

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Prologue	
I:	Introduction	
	A. Intent and Rationale	1
	B. Legal Basis of Plan	1
	C. Planning Process	3
II:	Goals and Objectives	4
III:	Overview of Decatur	
	A. Past, Present, and Anticipated Future	5
	1. Introduction	5
	2. History of Decatur	5
	3. The People	12
	4. Seasonal Residents	14
	5. Economic Conditions	15
	6. Land Use	
	introduction	15
	parcel size	16
	agriculture	17
	assessments	17
	conclusion	18
	7. Decatur Aesthetics	
	Past	21
	Present	21
	Future	22
	Conclusion	22
	B. Land Use Laws	
	1. Introduction	23
	2. Legal Basis and Role	23
	3. Zoning Laws of 1975	24
	4. Subdivision Regulations of 1987	26
	5. 1987 Changes to the Zoning Law	27
	6. 1989 Changes to the Zoning Law	29
	7. 1991 Changes to the Zoning Law	29
	8. Conclusion	31
IV:	Issues and Concerns	
	A. Introduction	32
	B. Rural Character of the Town	32
	C. Environmental Quality of Decatur	
	1. Introduction	33
	2. Water	33
	3. Air	34
	4. Soil and Woodlands	34
	5. Large Scale Intrusions	35

6. Solid Waste Management	35
7. Conclusion	35
D. Economic Concerns	39
E. Specific Concerns of the Hamlet	
1. Past	40
2. Present	41
3. Future	41
4. Conclusion	42
V. Implementation Program	44
Appendix	
Planning Survey of 1990 and Results	

PROLOGUE

The land around us, its character and appearance, has changed drastically throughout time due to the forces of settlement and economics. The land which comprises Decatur was once dense woodland. With European settlement, these forests were cleared to make way for homes and businesses. Chief among these businesses was agriculture.

Due to the demands of agriculture, large tracts of land were cleared. When agriculture was at its height in this region, these fields and meadows were well kept for their purpose. However, with the slow decline of farming, acres of meadows have been transformed into various states making their way back to forest.

Concurrent with this agricultural decline have been expansionist population pressures. Tracts of land once devoted to agriculture have been converted to residential use. As population increases in Decatur, the character and appearance of the land becomes altered from its natural forested state again. Once scenic vistas devoted to grazing or crops have become dotted with houses, mobile homes, and trailers.

The rural character of our community, if deemed worthy, must be protected from haphazard development. Yet legitimate development pressures must be reconciled to all attempts to maintain Decatur's rural charm. The Town's various land use laws and regulations have sought to do just that. As development pressures increased, the community realized it needed a general statement of its land use philosophy. Years of research and dozens of people came together to enunciate such a philosophy.

Change is inevitable. This decade's pressures will probably not be the same as the next decade's. However, with the assistance of all the Townspeople, we can see to it that our Town is preserved at its best.

INTRODUCTION

Intent and Rationale for the Master Plan

This Master Plan is intended to summarize Decatur's natural assets, to describe the town's rural and agricultural character, to provide, based on the needs and desires of our residents, a guide for the decisions which affect the present and future of our town. The Plan should serve as the basic framework or consideration of Town regulations, such as revised land use laws, should guide the Planning Board in its review of development proposals and site plans, should guide the Zoning Board of Appeals in consideration of administrative reviews and variance requests, and should assist all of us in thinking about our Town and assuring that we will direct our future.

Legal Basis of Plan

The preparation, approval, and adoption of a comprehensive master plan by a local municipality are activities which are governed by legal requirements established by the New York State Legislature. A brief summary follows of the major and most important legislative requirements affecting this process.

Article 16 of the Town Law: Zoning and Planning

Section 263 of the Town Law requires that a zoning ordinance and map "...shall be made in accordance with a comprehensive plan..." It further requires that zoning regulations be "...designed to lessen congestion in the streets, to secure safety from fire, flood, panic and other dangers; to promote health and general welfare; to provide adequate light and air; to prevent the overcrowding of land; to avoid undue concentration of population; to make provision for, as far as conditions may permit, the accommodation of solar energy systems and equipment and access to sunlight necessary therefore; to facilitate the adequate provision of transportation, water, sewerage, schools, parks and other public requirements. It adds that zoning regulations "shall be made with reasonable consideration, among other things, as to the character of the district and its peculiar suitability for particular uses, and with a view to conserving the value of buildings and encouraging the most appropriate use of land throughout such municipality."

Section 272-a of the Town Law authorizes a town planning board to prepare "...a comprehensive master plan for the development of the entire area of the town, which master plan shall show desirable streets, bridges, and tunnels and the approaches thereto, viaducts, parks, public reservations, roadways in parks, sites for public buildings and structures, zoning districts, pierhead and bulkhead lines, waterways and routes of public utilities and such other features existing and proposed as will provide for the improvement of the town and its future growth, protection, and development, and will afford adequate facilities for the public housing, transportation, distribution, comfort, convenience, public health, safety

and general welfare of its population." It authorizes the Town Planning Board to hold public hearings on a proposed comprehensive plan and requires that any such hearings be advertised in a newspaper of general circulation through the town at least ten days before each public hearing. The law further requires that certified copies of the plan, and all modifications, be filed with the Town Engineer or the Town Highway Superintendent and the Town Clerk.

Article 12-B of the General Municipal Law: Metropolitan, Regional, or County Planning Board

Section 239-m of the General Municipal Law relates to certain zoning actions but not to the adoption of a comprehensive plan. It requires local municipalities to submit the following types of municipal actions to the County Planning Agency for review:

- 1) adoption or amendment of a zoning ordinance and/or map by a Town Board
- 2) issuance of zoning variances by a Zoning Board of Appeals,
- 3) granting of special permits by a Planning Board or a Zoning Board of Appeals, and
- 4) review and approval of site plans by a Planning Board

The above actions require submission prior to final town action if they affect property lying within a distance of 500 feet from:

- 1) a municipal boundary;
- 2) a boundary of any existing or proposed County or State park or other recreation areas;
- 3) a right-of-way of any existing or proposed County or State parkway, thruway, expressway, road or highway;
- 4) a right-of-way of any stream or drainage channel owned by the County or for which the County has established canal lines; and
- 5) an existing or proposed boundary of any County or State-owned land on which a public building or institution is situated.

The County Planning Agency has thirty days, "...after receipt of a full statement of such referred matter..." to report its recommendations to the referring municipal agency and that agency may not take final action during this period of time.

Article 8 of the Environmental Conservation Law: State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR)

This legislation was adopted to "...encourage productive and enjoyable harmony between man and his environment; to promote efforts which will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment and enhance human community resources; and to enrich the understanding of the ecological systems, natural, human and community resources important to the people of the State."

Section 8-0113 of the Environmental Conservation Law requires the Commissioner of Environmental Conservation to adopt rules and

regulations implementing the provisions of Article 8. These rules and regulations are Part 617 of the New York Code of Rules and Regulations and they classify the "...adoption of a municipality's land use plan or zoning regulations..." as a Type 1 action which is likely to require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement and which may require the holding of a public hearing. In any event, it is a legal requirement that the administrative procedures of 617 be followed prior to the adoption of a comprehensive master plan and zoning ordinance.

Planning Process

In May of 1990, the Planning Board convened a subcommittee of residents to draw up a Master Plan. As its first task it developed a community survey to gather some facts and determine what residents valued about Decatur and what they wanted to see changed. In conjunction with this, the subcommittee gathered information about the town which would serve as a basis for thinking about Decatur's history, its present and anticipated future condition, particularly with respect to how change is influencing population, economic and agricultural conditions, land use, and environmental issues. Based on the results of our survey, an analysis of the information and 2 years and 72 meetings and deliberations, the Planning Board/Master Plan Committee drew up a statement of goals and objectives, discussed issues and concerns raised by our residents and produced this Master Plan.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Our Master Plan for the Town of Decatur reflects the needs and desires of our citizens and landowners. As its first task the Planning Board sought direction from the Town through a planning survey and through an informational meeting. This part of the plan sets forth the community's goals.

The Planning Board, in accordance with the views expressed in the survey, considers the following goals to be instrumental in guiding the town's future.

- 1) To preserve our rural resources and quality of life by preserving the natural qualities which we now enjoy, particularly our peace and solitude, our open space and views, our clean air and water.
- 2) To preserve our agricultural land and promote the practice of agriculture.
- 3) To promote use of the land to preserve its value and enhance its rural character.
- 4) To provide for the practical needs of the town, such as solid waste disposal and road maintenance, without jeopardizing the above.

OVERVIEW OF DECATUR PAST, PRESENT, AND ANTICIPATED FUTURE

Introduction

In this section, the Master Plan endeavours to put the present and the anticipated future conditions of the Town of Decatur in historic perspective. This will aid the town in seeing how change and growth have affected Decatur. That is, in order to make rational recommendations in the area of land use, growth, and development it was necessary to examine trends in how the land has been used over the years, to examine the existing character of the land, to study information about housing growth, and to review facts about the community - who lives here now, what are present and anticipated future needs of the town. In seeking to identify certain trends in Decatur, the Planning Board consulted numerous primary and secondary sources of information, a list of which appears in the bibliography.

History of Decatur

Prior to European settlement in this area, Otsego County and its surroundings were inhabited by the Mohawk Indians. In 1664, when King Charles II of England gave the area to be called New York to the Duke of York that only included "all the land from the west side of the Connecticut River to the East side of the De la Ware Bay". This area did not encompass present day Otsego County. It was not until 1736, when the Mohawks began to cede some of their territory to the Europeans, ~~did~~^{that} Otsego County fall under the King's domain. It was shortly after that year, in 1741, that the Cherry Valley settlement was established.

The Treaty of Fort Stanwix of 1768 legally established a de facto line of demarcation between the Mohawks and the Europeans. This line gave the Europeans all territory east of a line running south from the confluence of the Canada and Wood Creeks (west of Rome) and the source of the west branch of the Unadilla River running into Pennsylvania. At this point settlements began in over a dozen places in Otsego County. However, it was not until February 16, 1791, that an area was set off and named Otsego. This included present day Otsego County, a large part of Delaware County, and the western half of Schoharie county. It only contained three towns, Otsego, Harpersfield, and Cherry Valley, but on March 3, 1797, the population of present day Worcester was deemed large enough to be made autonomous of Cherry Valley.

The Worcester of 1797 also contained all ^{the} present day towns of Decatur, Westford, and Maryland, all of which had their own fledgling settlements. The pioneer of Decatur was Jacob Kinney who constructed a house in 1790 near the Hamlet. He was soon joined by others: the Browns, the Prestons, the Searwards, the Parkers (who gave their name to one of the two principle creeks in Decatur), the Treats, the Youngs, and the Lansings.

As the settlement grew, commerce came. A Mr. Sloan, from Columbia County, opened a store in 1797 north of the present Hamlet on land which was later known as the Robert C. Lansing farm. This store was soon joined by a grist mill built by John Champion, who lived on Elliot Hill. There were also two wagon shops and three blacksmith shops, one of which, on East Street, was run, first by William Campbell, and later, by Charles Preston. A second store was opened on the corner of East and Main Streets (this was later converted into a cheese factory) and a third store opened on the lower side of the hotel. Connected to this store was a shoe shop operated by Delmar Van Voorhis. The hotel, built of brick by John Woodin, was owned by a Mr. Coats and run by Sawyer F. Pearson and his son, Eugene. On the second floor of this hotel was a dentist's room.

The religious community organized itself in these early years largely through the efforts of the Parker family (Timothy, Stiles, James, and Elijah). They were aided by Bigger Wright, Jesse Davis, Martha Howe, Martha Davis, Sarah Maple, Samuel Howe, J. Lewis, and N. Lewis. Primarily through the efforts of these people \$500 was raised to build the first church in 1807 and the congregation was given over to the care of Father Willis, followed by Timothy Parker.

The astounding growth of Decatur in terms of population and commercial activity is explained by two factors. The first is the rapid growth of Otsego County in general. In 1800 the Census Bureau reported the population of the county as being 21,636 persons. In the ten years to 1810 the population had grown by 45%, to 38,802 persons. This occurred largely because of the county's position on the Otsego Lake - Susquehanna water route. Via this route, agricultural produce could easily be transported to the large coastal cities.

The second factor pertains to Decatur specifically. Due to its situation between the two larger communities of Cherry Valley and Worcester, it became a convenient stopping point between these towns. Consequently, commercial activity was able to thrive. The result of this growth in Decatur's commerce and population (902 in 1810) was the need for Decatur to become an autonomous administrative unit. On March 25, 1808 this occurred when the towns of Decatur, Westford, and Maryland were set off from Worcester. Decatur took its name from Commodore Decatur, a famous American Naval Officer.

One year later the first town meeting was held. Over the store by the hotel, there was a large hall which became the regular town meeting place. At this meeting the following people were elected: David Tripp, supervisor; Lemuel Fletcher, town clerk; James Seward, Andrew Elliot, and Samuel Thompson, assessors; Elijah Bennet, constable and collector; Robert Crawford, Jonathan Davis, and Rufus Inglis, commissioners of highways; Andrew Elliot and Justice Lewis, poormasters; Brazilla Brown and Justice Lewis, fence viewers; Chauncey Parker, Orlando Kaple, James Bascomb, Robert Crawford, Alexander Alford, Daniel Brotherton, William Alford, D. Natch, Samuel Thompson, Gardner Brown, Phillip Stonematch, and Elijah Elliot, pathmasters.

Although its early history looked very promising, various national and state-wide occurrences retarded and, eventually, reversed this prosperity. The first was the War of 1812. When this war broke out, Captain Bella Kaple of Decatur was able to raise a full company of infantry in Decatur in three weeks. For this he was promoted to the rank of Major. However, for the years 1810 to 1814 the population of Decatur dropped by 83 persons, or 10%. Even though this was only a temporary decline (the

population was back up to 908 by 1820), other factors had more permanent effects.

By the early nineteenth century the foundations of the present network of roads were being developed nicely by local communities to fit local needs. However, at this time the federal government began to set guidelines on the quality of roads. These guidelines had to be met before Washington would approve a mail route through the area. Due to the expense this entailed, many communities could not construct such roads. Consequently, private companies sprang up and built turnpikes to meet the federal guidelines. Mail could then be delivered and the people had a good road. However, these companies set tolls on the roads to be paid by the user, which is what made these roads profitable to these incorporated stock companies. As a result, turnpikes were built along what was deemed the most profitable route.

The road system which these companies built in Otsego County was unfortunate for Decatur in that it skirted the town. This explains why there was never a Post Office in Decatur. Of most importance to this County were the Great Western Turnpike and present Route 7. The Great Western Turnpike was built in many sections, the first ran from Albany to Cherry Valley to Cooperstown to Sherburne, this last stretch on present Route 80. There was also a more direct route from Cherry Valley to Cazenovia via present Route 20. As to Route 7, that turnpike was in operation by 1812 and went along the southern edge of the County. The result was to put Decatur in a rather isolated position although Worcester and Route 7 were not very far away.

There was still considerable traffic between Cherry Valley and Worcester running through Decatur. Thus, even though there was no turnpike running through Decatur, the businesses were still able to thrive. Also, agricultural produce could easily be brought to Route 7 and sent to the cities. Because of the possibility to make a living, families grew and other people came to settle. Enormous population increases occurred in the years 1814 to 1830. In this period the population went from 819 to its historical peak of 1110, an increase of 26%.

However, in this period New York State began its ambitious canal projects. When the County lost its bid for a Mohawk - Otsego Lake - Susquehanna water route in favour of the Erie Canal Project, the County in general was destined to decline. The initial result was an exodus of people to go work on the canal. Between 1830 and 1835 Decatur's population shrank by 135 persons, or 12%. Upon completion of the Erie Project, the population did make a rebound to reach 1071 persons. Despite this rebound, the Erie Canal had ruinous long-term effects on local commerce and agriculture, though. With the Canal came great agricultural competition from western states. In essence, due to its distance from this waterway, Otsego County became considered a remote area.

The canal's long term effects to agriculture and commerce were not yet apparent. In 1839 the residents of Decatur were able to raise \$2000 to build a new Methodist Church in the hamlet on the site of that built in 1807. There were now two churches in Decatur, the other one being across from the intersection of present day Reservoir Rd. and Mravija Hill Rd. (this church on the property of Wally and Nila Conover, is in ruins and only the steeple remains). The following year a parsonage was purchased for the church in the Hamlet so the pastor no longer had to reside at the Worcester Methodist parsonage.

However, from this year (1840) can be traced 120 years of population decline. Furthermore, from this year can be traced a still continuing decline in agricultural activity. This also marked the beginning of the decline and eventual extinction of commercial activity in town.

At about the time to the Civil War, railroads reached Otsego County. There were several lines which came into Otsego, and there were rail endings in Cooperstown, Cherry Valley, Edmeston, and Richfield Springs. However, the Delaware & Hudson was the only line with considerable trackage in the region, and it closely paralleled the southern boundary of the County. This improvement in transportation led to a migration from the remote areas of the County, such as Decatur, to places that had access to a railroad. River traffic in Otsego disappeared with the coming of rail and communities which had no major land routes through them saw their populations and business flock to the rail lines.

Coupled with this was the Civil War and the quotas which needed to be filled. Decatur saw forty-seven men leave to fight in the Union ranks (see Attachment A). It is not known how many of these men came back. Judging from the 1870 census, their number could not have been significant since the population decline went uninterrupted.

These declines notwithstanding, a church bell was purchased in 1871 for \$200, and a new parsonage was built next to the church in the Hamlet in 1880, the former parsonage then being sold. However, around this time the stone quarry was sold (presumably due to decreased profitability). It was purchased by Mrs. Adelaide Bailey and converted into the "Quarry Flower Garden". Additionally, in 1890, the hotel was closed, again, due to reduced profitability. It was later torn down.

This decline of Decatur can be seen in the reduction in the number of schools needed in Decatur. In 1868, for example, there were nine schools spread across town; by 1903 that number was down to five. At present only three of those buildings are known to be standing, according to a map from 1903, these would be Schools Number 2, 4, and 5. Schools Number 2 and 4 are residences of Walter Schlierman, Jr. and Karl Klesin respectively; School Number 5 is used for storage by Frank Pavlick. On the site of School Number 1 is the house of John Archi. This school system had served the community well. In 1884, one Decatur native, Lewis E. Waterman, transplanted to New York City, utilized his education and invented the fountain pen. That first year he sold about 200 pens and founded the company bearing his name.

In 1901 the old Methodist church in the Hamlet was torn down and a new one built on the original foundation. Eleven memorial windows were purchased at a cost of \$25 each. However, a depression and two world wars only exacerbated an apparent trend. The wide-spread use of the automobile was the necessary final occurrence which dashed any immediate hope of a rebound in Decatur's prosperity. With this invention came the possibility of consolidating area schools into one larger, more efficient school. Worcester Central was opened in 1931 on its present site.

Perhaps more importantly, though, with the automobile came the removal of any further need for people to be subsistent. People could now do their shopping in the larger stores of Worcester and even Oneonta. From this point it was simply one of convenience to move to the larger towns and work there rather than on the farm. The great incentive to doing this was the possibility of raising one's standard of living. As testimony to the numbers of people who left town, in 1974 the Methodist parsonage was sold to Mrs. Helen Arnold; in 1986 it was torn down. The

decrease in population had affected the number of faithful who took advantage of the Methodist services, and, consequently, removed the need for a resident pastor.

The population decline of 120 years came to an end in 1960. In that year the population reached its historic low of 254. By 1970 the population had increased to 281 and by 1980 the population had increased by another 31 persons, or 10%; by 1990 it had increased by an additional 44 persons, or 13%. This increase was due primarily to seasonal residents becoming permanent residents and people retiring in Decatur. Improvements in transportation made it possible for people to live in Decatur and work a considerable distance away.

Unlike the mild rebound in population, nothing comparable occurred with regard to commerce and agriculture. The only attempt to resuscitate commerce came in the early 1980's. At that time Mr. Carlyle Ives considered opening a store in the hamlet of Decatur next to his house, but was not able to see the project through. Agricultural, although still carried on in Decatur, is presently experiencing a decline which commenced over 150 years ago. In 1875, for example, there were 9130 acres in agricultural use. This declined by 12% in the 104 years to 1979. However, in the nine years from 1979 to 1988 land in agricultural use declined by 21%.

The decline in population, agriculture, and commerce was due to numerous factors. Among these were a road system which skirted Decatur, a canal system which helped ruin local farmers, a railroad system which avoided town, and a decrease in traffic through town. Although initially the automobile hurt Decatur in these respects, it later had the effect of allowing people to live here and to work elsewhere. This became one of the underlying factors in the recent increases in population, but also added to the lack of interest in returning commerce to town.

Attachment A

Following is a list of names of men who enlisted in the Union ranks to fill the quotas for the Civil War. It was compiled by L.D. Davis, Esq. It is taken from The History of Otsego County, New York 1740 - 1878.

Nehemiah White, enl. Sept. 1, 1864.
 Albert B. Essex
 Edwin R. Waterman, enl. Aug. 9, 1861, in the Cavalry.
 Theron Treat, enl. in the Cavalry in 1864.
 Lorenzo H. Knapp, enl. in 1864.
 Charles Butterfield.
 Ide Hartwell, enl. in 1864.
 Owen B. Earl, enl. in the Cavalry in 1864.
 James H. Putnam, enl. in the Cavalry in 1864.
 Alfred Monroe, enl. in the Cavalry in 1864.
 John R. Dana, enl. in 1864.
 John D. Waterman, enl. 1864.
 P. Waterman, enl. in 121st Regiment in 1862.
 Charles H. Smith, enl. in the 76th Regiment in 1861.
 Otis Stoete, enl. in the Cavalry in 1864.
 David Wright.
 Levi Rory, enl. in the Cavalry in 1864.
 Alexander Rory, enl. in 1864.
 Joseph Jening, enl. in the Cavalry in 1864.
 George Crippen, enl. in the 121st Regiment in 1862
 Levi Crippen, enl. in the Cavalry in 1862.
 Alexander Bates, enl. in the Cavalry in 1864.
 William H. Bates, enl. in the Cavalry in 1864.
 Robert Skinner, enl. in 1864.
 David Cipperly, enl. in the Cavalry in 1864.
 Tobias Fletcher, enl. in the Cavalry in 1865.
 Lansing Van Voorhis, enl. in the Cavalry in 1864.
 Levi Van Voorhis, enl. in the Cavalry in 1864.
 Ray Maple, enl. in the 51st Regiment in 1861.
 Daniel Kaple, enl. in 1864.
 John Lovejoy, enl. in 1864.
 Stephen Platner, enl. in 1864.
 Carlton B. Shays, enl. in the 76th Regiment in 1861.
 William H. Darling, enl. in the 121st. Regiment in 1862.
 E. Brown, enl. in 1864.
 William H. Boom, enl. in the 121st Regiment in 1862.
 Thomas McCool, James Houston, Joseph Jening, John Lovejoy, Everitt
 Wooden, Eugene Parks, Orlando Bishop, Joseph Darling, Duane Marsh,
 Marvin Waterman, Daniel Dailey,

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Butterfield, Roy L. In Old Otsego. Cooperstown: Freeman's Journal, 1959.
- Hamilton, Hurd H. The History of Otsego County, New York 1740 - 1878. Philadelphia: Everts and Fariss, 1878.
- Land Use Classification and Summary, Otsego County 1979 - 1988.
- New Century Atlas of Otsego County. 1903.
- Otsego County Bicentennial, Frontier Days Committee. Frontier Days Otsego County 1776 - 1976. Edmeston: Bishop Printshop, 1976.
- Parcel Size Inventory, Otsego County, 1982 - 1988.
- United States Census, 1970, 1980, and 1990.

THE PEOPLE

At its founding the Town of Decatur had a population of 902 persons. This increased to its peak in 1830 with 1110 persons. At this point there occurred a steady decline reaching 559 persons in 1902 and 254 in 1960. In the period 1830 to 1960 this decline was interrupted only once. From 1835 to 1840 the population went from 975 to 1071 (this aberration is explained in Section IIIA, page 3).

The population of 254 reported for 1960 represents an historic low for Decatur. In 1980 the U.S. Census Bureau reported the population as being 312. This represents an increase of 31 persons or 11% over 1970. In 1990 this figure was reported as 356, an increase of 44 persons, or 14% over 1980. This represents an increase of 75 persons, or 27%, in the twenty year period 1970 to 1990. To put this in perspective, Otsego County gained 1442 persons, or 2% in the period 1980 to 1990 to reach a total of 60,517 persons. The neighboring Town of Roseboom, in this period, gained 38 persons, or 6% to reach 668 persons.

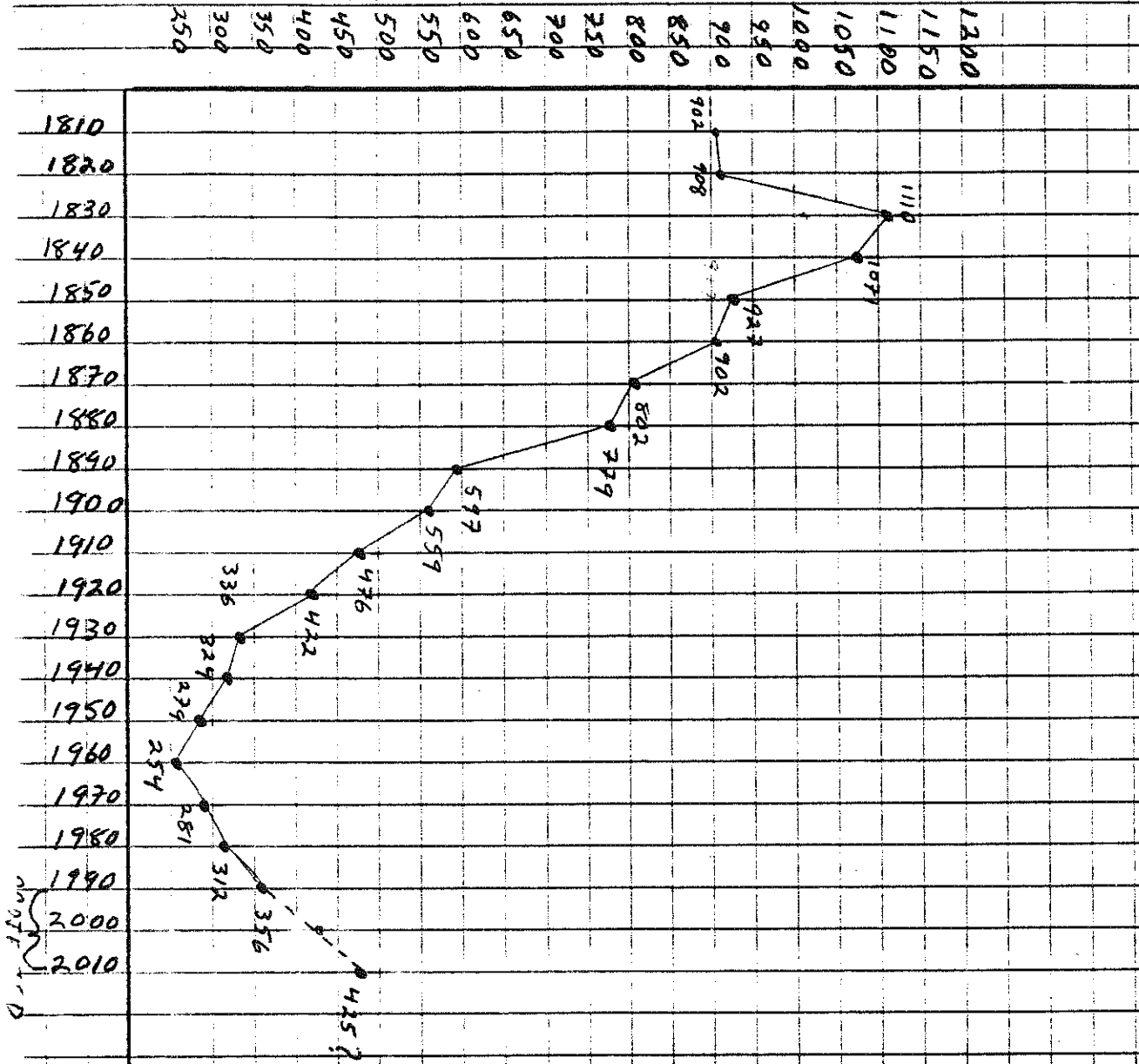
To account for these increases, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that the trends indicate that people are moving from cities such as Albany to the surrounding counties. Improvements in transportation by way of more fuel efficient cars have greatly facilitated this trend. Additionally, Decatur has witnessed an increase in population due to people retiring here, and seasonal residents becoming permanent residents.

The planning survey revealed that 51% of the respondents considered Decatur their permanent residence, while 49% had a permanent residence elsewhere. The majority of these non-resident landowners live in either southern New York or in New Jersey. This, coupled with federal mandates for more fuel efficient cars, lead to the conclusion that the potential for further population growth is present. That is, since the pressures which caused Decatur's population growth in the period 1970 to 1990 are still present, it must be considered likely that this slow, but steady population growth will continue. At the present rate of increase (75 persons over 20 years) the population would be 425 by the year 2010, an increase of 21% over 1990.

Attendant to this population is a below average income. As reported on the fact sheet attached to the planning survey, in 1980 the median family income in Decatur was \$14,107. This compared to a figure of \$16,230 for Otsego County, \$20,385 for New York State, and \$19,905 for the United States. At the time this was written, the U.S. Census Bureau had not yet released this information for the year 1990.

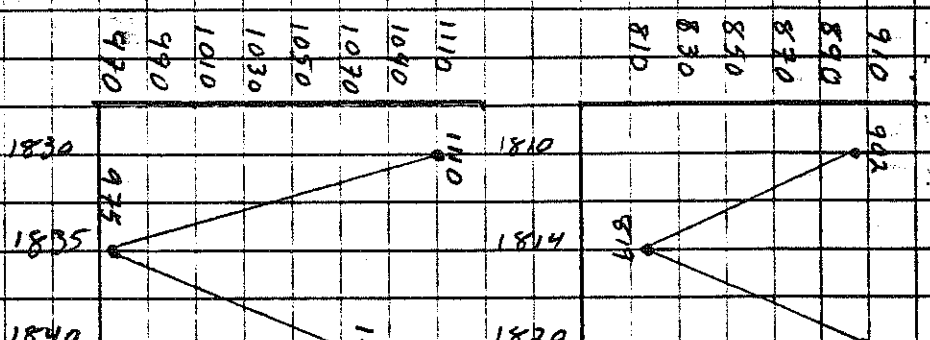
Due to these facts, the expansion of many Town services such as road maintenance and snow removal will be required. Since the increased cost of this expansion may not be off-set by an increase in the tax base, Town services will need to be streamlined. Further, sources of outside revenue for these services must be sought and used. This is particularly important because income levels in Decatur are not sufficient to allow the town to rely on increased taxes to pay for increased services. In essence, care must be taken to see that no undue burdens are placed on taxpayers and that the tax base may be broadened with as little increase as possible in the need for expanded town services.

POPULATION TRENDS



WAR OF 1812

1821 CANAL PROJECT



SEASONAL RESIDENTS

The planning survey revealed that 51% of respondents considered Decatur their permanent residence, while 49% had a permanent residence elsewhere. The majority of these non-resident landowners live in either southern New York or New Jersey.

Of these permanent residents, 62.8% have lived in Decatur for fifteen years or less. Coincidentally, 62.8% of respondents have owned property in Decatur for fifteen years or less. This represents a significant turnover in the population, which can only be explained by a concurrent exodus and influx of people. This could be explained by people of retirement age settling in Decatur, and younger people moving out of Decatur.

Of respondents, 19.7% reported having a second home in Decatur, while 22.3% reported having no dwelling on their land. This opens the possibility that second homes could become primary residences, while vacant land could become developed property. It, then, becomes plausible that the trend of people retiring to Decatur, or coming for other reasons, may continue. However, there is no reason to doubt that the current exodus of young people will continue.

This would suggest that the average age of residents would be increasing. Unfortunately, this can not be verified as an age question was not asked on the survey. If the suggestion be judged as correct, it would indicate the likelihood of an increasing percentage of residents with significant amounts of discretionary income. Alternatively, an increasing number of residents could be found to have fixed incomes. If the latter be the case, the Town must examine its system of tax exemptions for the aged. Either scenario, though, means a significant alteration in the economic status quo. Undeniably, the latter case would cause more profound effects than the former.

The issue of the expectations of seasonal residents in terms of town services must also be addressed. While these people, by their choice of second residence, clearly care for Decatur they may have less incentive or less opportunity to become involved in the community's present or future concerns. Their resources, their interests, and their time are shared with another community, that of their primary residence. The variety brought to the community by persons from another area is of benefit to us all. Yet, balance is critical. Our community will probably begin to suffer if too great a proportion of its property owners do not call Decatur their home.

Seasonal residents who have permanent homes in larger cities expect greater, more thorough, and more diverse services provided by municipalities. To a large extent these are people who wish to "experience" the rural way of life, but who do not wish to become a part of it. In this way they would be reluctant to go without accustomed services.

This has greater relevance to the town if and when seasonal residents become permanent residents. As tax payers, landowners, and voters of the town they will be in a position to expect and demand services to which they have become accustomed. This, too, would cause a significant change in the economic status quo of the town.

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The internal driving force for Decatur's economy has traditionally been agriculture. However, in recent years this has changed drastically. As of 1988 there were only 6,404 acres devoted to agriculture. This was down 21% from 1979. Furthermore, this land was farmed by approximately only ten families.

As a result, the primary spur to the economy in Decatur has come to be from outside forces. It has become very easy for people to live in Decatur and work elsewhere (see Section IIIA The People for a discussion of this). Also, there has been a significant number of people retiring here and bringing their pensions, investments, etc. This, coupled with the fact that Decatur lacks any means of attracting regional industries, leads to the conclusion that the Town will continue to be a residential community for the foreseeable future.

As a residential community in this region, however, its people suffer, and will probably continue to suffer, from a below average family income. In 1980 the average family income in Decatur was \$14,107. This compared to \$16,230 for Otsego County, \$20,385 for New York State, and \$19,905 for the country. This income configuration can be traced to the lack of industry, both producer and service, among other factors in the region. This causes a shortage in the number of available jobs. The end result being a potentially high proportion of single income families, and, hence, a lower family income.

This leads to the elementary conclusion that residents are markedly adversely affected by tax increases; more so than in more affluent communities. Consequently, care must be taken to see that no undue burdens are placed on taxpayers and that the tax base be broadened wherever possible with little increase in the need for additional town services. The Town government, also, needs to utilize outside sources of money to improve infrastructure and raise local standards of living. Continued participation in the CHIP's program admirably deals with the former; programs such as HUD could deal with the latter.

LAND USE

Introduction

The character of Decatur is the product of its natural resources and its land use composition. Historically, the character of most towns is a result of economic forces. As these forces change the way land is used, it also changes the character of the community. For most of its history Decatur has been shaped by agricultural activities which required a large amount of open land. As agricultural activity becomes less of an economic force, much of the land becomes potential brushland and eventually woodland. As population growth occurs, land which has gone out of agricultural use becomes significant as the most likely place where subdivision and residential land use will occur.

As discussed earlier, Decatur's population has been increasing since 1960. In that year it reached a historic low of 254 persons; in the years

1970, 1980, and 1990 population stood at 281, 312, and 356 respectively. This represents an increase of 29% over thirty years, (1960 to 1990); and an increase of 12% over ten years (1980 to 1990). Predictably, this has had a profound influence not only on the way land is used, but also on the size of parcels generally and the number of parcels of land in Decatur resulting from subdivisions of larger parcels.

Parcel Size

Dealing first with the number of parcels of land in Decatur, there has been a significant increase in this category in the period 1979 to 1988. Please note that in order to use 1979 as a base year it was necessary to add a factor of -39. This is due to the aberration which occurred in the Parcel Size Inventory in 1982 due to a re-classification of lands owned by the Fish and Game Club. As the figures stood, there were 103 parcels of less than 2.0 acres in 1979 and 315 parcels in total. With a factor of -39 those figures become 64 parcels of less than 2.0 acres in 1979, but only 276 parcels in total. In 1979 there were 276 parcels, in 1988 there were 373. This represents an increase of 26% over nine years. It would be logical to expect an increase in the number of land parcels in town when the overall population (men, women, and children) increases. However, if the overall population increases 12%, all other things equal, one would expect the increase in the number of parcels to be less than 12%. In order to account for a parcel growth of 26% one must look at seasonal residents. With these non-resident landowners come specific concerns which the Town will need to address (see the section on Seasonal Residents). These concerns will have greater effects on the Town socially and economically if a significant percentage of these non-resident landowners become full time residents.

With regard to the size of parcels, in the period 1979 to 1988 there has been a decrease in the number of parcels over 50 acres by 14%. This is down from 97 in 1979 to 83 in 1988. This is indicative of a community in which agriculture is playing less of a role. As farmers get out of the business of agriculture they tend to sell off portions of their farms both because these large tracts of land are no longer necessary and to reduce their land tax burden.

Looking at the other extreme of land parcel sizes, there has been a decrease of 2% in the number of parcels of less than 2 acres. In 1979 there were 64 such parcels, by 1988 there were 63. It is hard to explain this trend except to point to the effects of a Zoning Law adopted in 1975 which required that building lots be at least 2 acres. However, this does not explain an apparent consolidation of previously existing lots of less than one acre.

Interestingly, the average size land parcel in this period has remained the 10 to 24.9 acre category. That notwithstanding, the fastest growing category has been the 2.0 to 4.9 acre parcels. This group has increased by 143% from 21 to 51 lots. It must be mentioned, though, that lots 5.0 to 9.9 acres and lots 10.0 to 24.9 increased 113% and 129% respectively.

Approached from a different angle, parcels 2.0 to 4.9 acres made up 14% of all parcels in 1988 as opposed to 8% in 1979. This corresponds to parcels 5.0 to 9.9 being 18% rather than 10% of the total, and parcels 10.0

to 24.9 being 19% rather than 10% of the total parcels in Town. Parcels over 50 acres made up 22% of the total in 1988 instead of 31%; parcels less than 2 acres were 17% rather than 33%.

Regardless of the approach, the parcel size group 2.0 to 4.9 acres is the most rapidly growing segment even though there are large increases elsewhere. The only possible check to this trend is in the current network of roads in Town. That is, lack of adequate road frontage will eventually limit the number of parcels possible in Town, provided there is no construction of additional roads. This same factor could mean that certain persons will be left with relatively large parcels of land with relatively limited accessibility.

Agricultural Use

Corresponding to the increase in the population and the number of parcels of land in Town has been a decrease in farming activity and acreage devoted to the business of agriculture. During the period 1979 to 1988, 1699.27 acres have gone out of agricultural use. In 1979 there were 8103.50 acres devoted to agriculture; by 1988 that figure was down to 6404.23. This represents a decrease of 21% over nine years. This becomes even more striking when viewed over the long term. In 1875 there were approximately 9130.00 acres in agricultural use. Over the course of 104 years this declined by just 12%, as opposed to a 21% decline in the nine year period 1979 to 1988.

With the decline in land devoted to agricultural use, there has been an increase in the amount of land devoted to residential use. In 1979 there were 1476.90 acres of residential land. This number increased to 2300.51 by 1988. This represents an increase of 823.61 acres, or 36% over the nine year period.

Attendant to this increase in the amount of land in residential use and the increase in the number of parcels in Town, has been the increase in the number of dwellings in Town. In 1980 the U.S. Census reported 198 dwellings units in Decatur. Of these 136 were used year round while 62 were for seasonal use. For 1990 there were 228 dwelling units in Town. This represents an increase of 30 total units. (It is unfortunate that a reliable figure for year round and seasonal units does not yet exist.) On average there have been three housing units (including mobile homes and modular homes) built per year for an increase of 13% over ten years.

It is significant that the total number of parcels in Town has increased by 26% while the number of new homes has only increased by 13%. There are many parcels of land in Town which, although legal building lots, have not yet been developed. This again points to the potential of substantial development at a later date.

Assessment

In a discussion on trends in land use, it is important to look, not only at parcel size trends and land classifications, but also at the impact which these factors have on assessments. Assessments provide the basis for tax

revenue, and hence help to determine the services which a local government can provide. It is only logical that developed land will have a higher assessed value than undeveloped land. As a result, as land passes out of agricultural use and into developed residential use, total town assessments should go up.

In Decatur in 1979 the full assessment on agricultural land, including the land and buildings was \$2,076,100. By 1988 this figure had dropped \$206,350, or 10%. However, the full assessment on residential land over this period increased from \$1,281,850 to \$2,202,300. This is an increase of \$920,450, or 42%. Hence, the decrease in assessments on agricultural properties has been more than compensated for by the increase in residential assessments.

If there were no other factors to be considered, this would be excellent news for the Town from a fiscal standpoint. However, although developed land is assessed higher than agricultural land, developed residential properties require more services. These include such items as road maintenance and rubbish disposal. Thus, the question arises whether the higher assessments, and resulting tax revenue, compensates for the higher government expenditures.

Looking at assessments for all types of property in the whole Town, in 1979 the total full assessed value was \$4,573,289. By 1988 this figure increased by \$1,103,024 to \$5,676,313. This is an increase of 19% over the nine year period, and is due to development of previously undeveloped acres. Within this scheme, agricultural assessments accounted for 45% of total assessments in 1979 while residential assessments only accounted for 28% of the total. In 1988 the picture was quite different. Agricultural assessments made up only 33% of total assessments while residential assessments made up 39% of the total.

Conclusion

All this points to the diminishing importance of the business of agriculture to the Town in terms of its economic contribution. The fact remains, however, that agriculture makes a massive contribution to the rural character of the Town despite the reduction in the number of acres devoted to that business. It also remains notable that the fiscal contribution agriculture makes to the Town is still significant at 33% of total assessments. It is, therefore, important from a fiscal and aesthetic standpoint that the Town plan a way to deal with the business of agriculture. This plan must address the issue of assisting farmers so as to perpetuate the presence of agricultural businesses in Decatur in light of the substantial contribution which farm properties make to the Town from a fiscal and aesthetic perspective.

USE

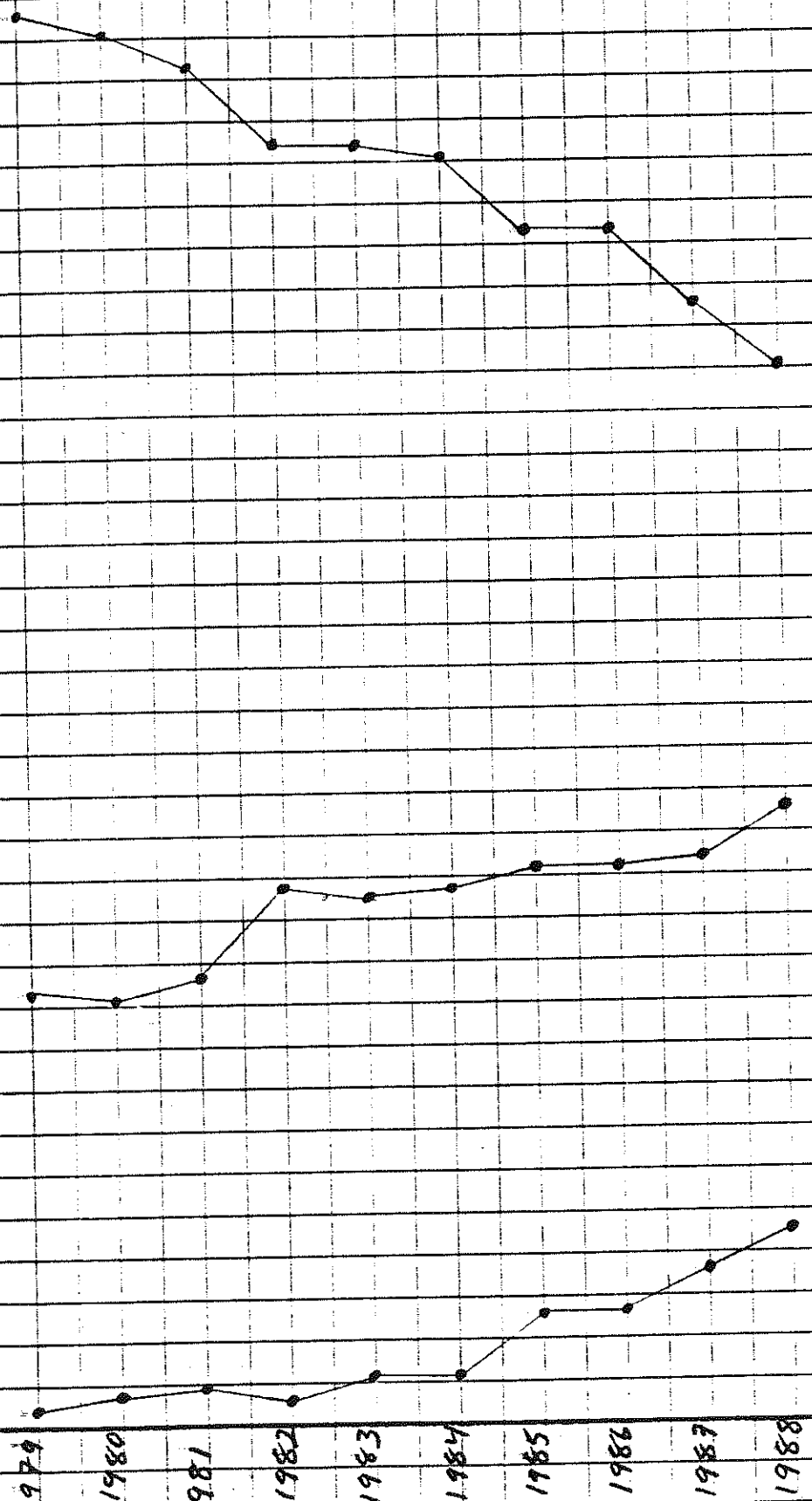
A - AGRICULTURE
 R - RESIDENTIAL
 O - OTHER

8200
 8000
 7800
 7600
 7400
 7200
 7000
 6800
 6600
 6400
 6200
 6000
 5800
 5600
 5400
 5200
 5000
 4800
 4600
 4400
 4200
 4000
 3800
 3600
 3400
 3200
 3000
 2800
 2600
 2400
 2200
 2000
 1800
 1600
 1400

A

O

R

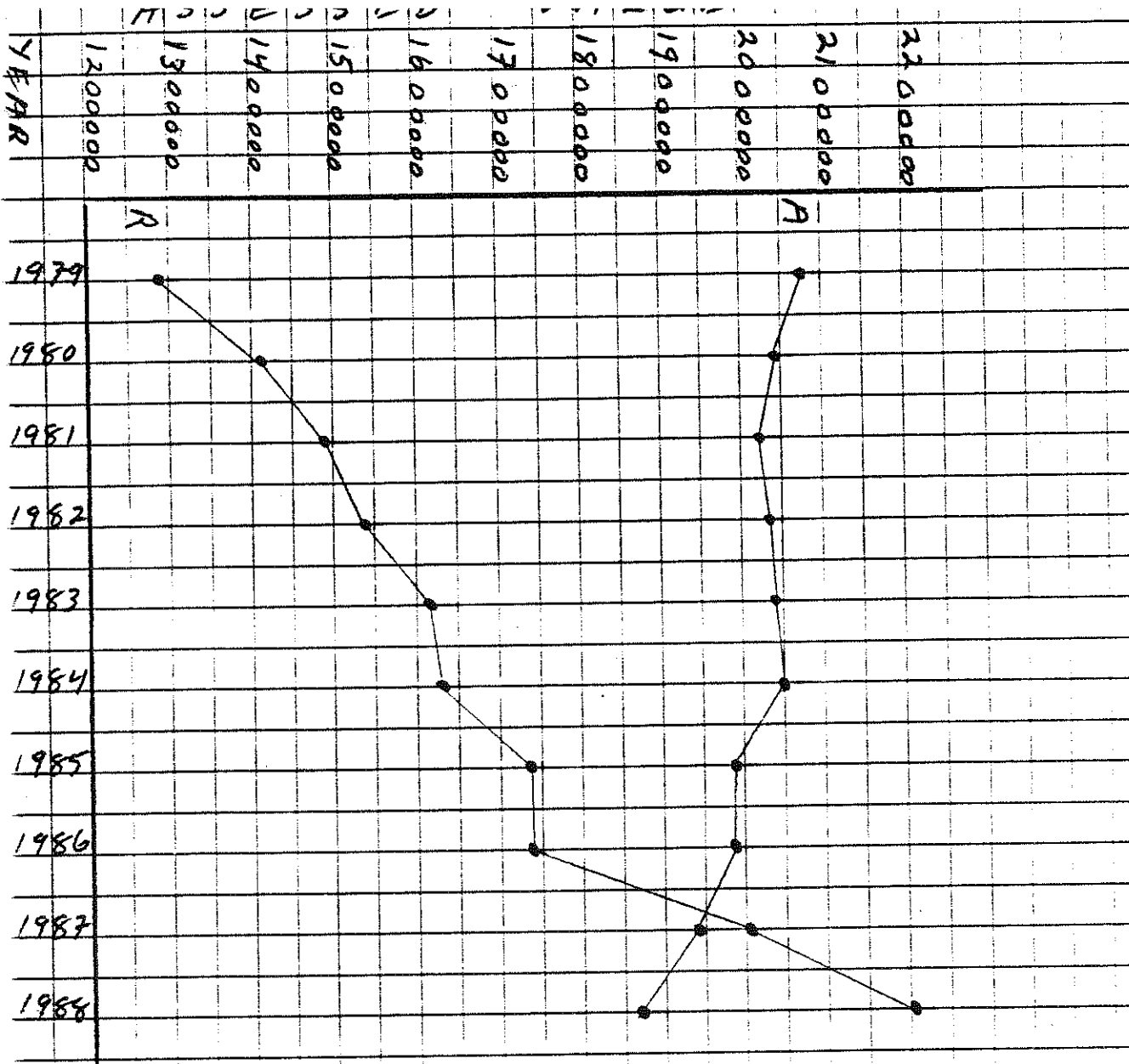


YEAR

1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986 1987 1988

ASSESSMENTS

A-AGRICULTURE
R-RESIDENTIAL



Decatur Aesthetics

Past

During the 1800's, Decatur was a pastoral delight. The land was being cleared by the pioneer farmers, who toiled their fields with horses and oxen. The timber removed from the fields was milled and used to build the homes and barns. Beautiful Maple trees lined the narrow wagon roads that criss-crossed the mountains and valleys. While clearing the fields the farmers also had the problem of rocks, this resulted in utilizing these stones by forming the fences around the perimeter. These fences also served as containment for their livestock. Most of the deeds describing boundaries are based on these old existing stone walls.

Agriculture was the primary industry, requiring long and arduous hours of extremely hard work. People took their pleasure by attending church, visiting their neighbors, or attending an occasional barn raising. Horse drawn wagons were the principal form of transportation.

The aesthetic past here was a time of peace, space, and an infinite love of the land.

Present

Decatur is a wide area of natural beauty. The countryside is, in general, rolling hills, allowing for a wide range of pleasing views. The activity of the farming industry provides pastoral settings in its own general vicinity. The past tree planting by the State gives a checker board effect of fragrant and stately evergreens.

The general terrain and soil conditions prove to be conducive to the creation of both natural and man made ponds. These bodies of water have multi-fold advantages. In addition to their great beauty they afford help for firefighters, water for both wild and domestic animals, plus adding real estate value. Migrating and resident waterfowl find these waters, regardless of their size, a haven for stop overs and nesting sites. Most of the natural and larger ponds have been formed by the beaver, who are native to the area and are found in large numbers in most streams where vegetation and young trees are available.

Forests account for a good portion of the town. Many trees are native to the area including the Sugar Maple, extremely important for its syrup; the Ash tree, much sought after for work implement handles; the Cherry for furniture; the Oak, which suffered a blight several years ago, now show a strong comeback growth for the coming generations. Other trees that grace our area are; Soft Maple, Beech, Birch, Poplar, Pine, Spruce, Hemlock, and Black Cherry.

Nature has been more than generous in providing the area with great visual pleasure with its wild flowers. It seems there is an endless blooming, starting in early spring until the late autumn frost. Walks along any dirt road or through open fields show an array of native species such as; Indian Paint Brush, Black-Eyed Susans, O Eye Daisies, Sunflowers, New England Asters, Golden Ragwort, Thistles, Squaw Root, Fox Glove, Mulleins,

Wild Carrot, Milkweed, Yarrow, Wild Strawberry, Dandelion, Birdsfoot Trefoil, Buttercup, Golden Rod, Butter and Eggs, and an endless list not to exclude the first welcoming of Spring, the Pussy Willow.

Throughout the many abandoned farms, a variety of fruit trees still flourish, attracting the Whitetail Deer so greatly sought after by hunters. Wild turkeys are abundant in the brushy areas; they find the corners of fields attractive for their mating strut. Since the Coyote has been re-introduced to the mountains, the turkey provides a part of their food chain. Sightings of fox, porcupine, groundhog, migrating birds, ducks and on rare occasions even a black bear still add a certain mystique to our environment.

Decatur, in general, proves to be a quiet and lovely place to live for the person who seeks pleasure in wildlife, space and a sense of peace and solitude.

Future

As the population in Decatur increases over the years, the general aesthetics should not change greatly. Fortunately the mountains will remain the same, some of the woodlands may disappear or alter, due to logging or development. We can hope that with the influx of more residents, new vistas and pond sites will appear.

Homes are in general widely scattered. The mobile homes for the most part are well kept, most having additions and/or garages. On several of the back roads there are numerous hunting cabins, many in disrepair and lacking electricity, running water, and even basic sanitary facilities. There is little question that the town is ideal for hunting, but future populations may question what positive value these cabins may have.

Unfortunately when lovely rolling hills feel the effects of years of neglect, the result is scrub bushes, and the young trees that take root. Over time, the views disappear with the pastoral setting as nature takes back the land.

Dotted throughout the town are many burned out and severely deteriorated houses, trailers, and barns. The half fallen timbers and rotted floors and ceilings appear to create a great safety hazard to anyone who might venture into these structures. This problem should be addressed in the name of safety as well as aesthetics.

Conclusion

Fortunately growth has been very slow during the past thirty years. The implementation of Land Use and Sensible Zoning Laws should keep any development properly limited and spread out enough to insure future generations their right to enjoy our rural character.

LAND USE LAWS

Introduction

It is an undeniable, long established, historical truth that the character and appearance of the land around us is a direct result of economic forces: local, national, and more recently, global. The recognition of this truth notwithstanding, over the course of the last fifty years state governments have granted local municipalities the power to reasonably regulate how the character and appearance of the land can change. This section of the Master Plan will explore the various laws and regulations which the Town Board has approved for this purpose. This section will also look at how those laws have been altered since their inception to accommodate changing desires and philosophies relating to land use.

Legal Basis and Role of Land Use Laws

In New York State, Town government is granted the authority to regulate the use of land within its borders. Neither the State nor the County retains any such authority, with two exceptions: when the use might compromise the health and safety of the population or the environment. The following are among the matters that may be regulated: size of buildings, size of yards, density of population, location and use of buildings, and the subdivision of land (New York State Town Law secs. 261 and 276). State law provides this authority to assure that the following goals are met: "...to lessen congestion in the streets, to secure safety from fire, flood, panic and other dangers; to promote health and general welfare; to provide adequate light and air; to prevent the overcrowding of land; to avoid undue concentration of population..." (Town Law sec. 263).

This responsibility, borne by our local officials, is one of the most important aspects of their role as public servants. The laws described in this section are the tools by which the Town government of Decatur fulfills this responsibility to its citizens.

The Decatur Zoning Law is the primary means of regulating the use of land for the benefit of the community. Ancillary to the Zoning Law are a Trailer Ordinance and a Flood Damage Prevention Law. These three laws taken together spell out how existing parcels of land may be used. Decatur's Subdivision Law, on the other hand, protects the community's interests in the creation and development of new parcels of land.

The Zoning Law divides the Town into three zoning districts. These are the Residential - Agricultural District, which covers most of the town; the Residential Hamlet District; and the Flood Protection District. There is also provision for the creation of Planned Development Districts, though none now exist. In each district, the Zoning Law spells out the uses allowed and the lot size, setback, and building size restrictions. It also describes the procedures required for complying with the law.

The purpose of the law is to give the Town local control of the forces which influence the character of the community. It is the foremost tool for achieving the shared goals of the citizens of the Town. These goals will be spelled out in the Master Plan. The Zoning Law should work to guide the Town toward achieving those goals.

Decatur's Trailer Ordinance works alongside the Zoning Law to more specifically address the issues involved in erecting and maintaining trailers in the town.

The Flood Damage Prevention Law more thoroughly spells out the requirements and procedures for construction within the Flood Protection District. Its goal is the safety of the occupants and others that may be affected by structures that are subject to flood waters.

The Decatur Subdivision Law gives the Town a role in the single most significant factor of change in the Town over the long term. The division of land into smaller parcels has a permanent effect on the economic, aesthetic, and pragmatic qualities of the Town. The law's function is to give the Town a say in guiding the division of land so that the above qualities are respected. The law identifies the procedures for subdividing land and gives the Planning Board a degree of flexibility so it may bring together the Town's interests with those of the individual property owner.

Zoning Laws of 1975

The Town of Decatur adopted its first Zoning Law on 15 December 1975 "under the authority of Section 261 of Article 16 of Chapter 62 of the Consolidated Laws of the State of New York". The official title of this law was Town of Decatur Zoning Law, Local Law No. 1-1975. The stated purpose of the law was, generally, to improve the quality of life in Decatur.

To facilitate the application and enforcement of this law certain words were given specific definitions to avoid confusion, and four distinct districts were defined for potential use in town. These districts were R-80, R-H, PDD, and FPD. All boundaries for these districts were printed on an official map. Where these boundaries might be considered ambiguous, Section 3.2 of this law set forth a system to interpret boundaries. Each district had permitted uses and specific regulations. It must be pointed out that of these four defined districts, only R-80, R-HD, and FPD were in use in 1975.

R-80 referred to the two acre residence - agricultural district. Permitted uses included residential, agricultural, public, and environmental areas. Upon the issuance of a special permit, uses could include outdoor public assembly and amusement, travel trailer park and campgrounds, and apartments to house people employed in agriculture. Specific area requirements in this district were two acres and 200 feet of road frontage. Buildings in this district had to be seventy-five feet from the center of the road, twenty-five feet from the side lot line, fifty feet from the back lot line, and no more than thirty-five feet high.

District R-HD referred to the Residential Hamlet Zoning District. Permitted uses included residential, certain commercial, and public areas. Further commercial uses, such as the retail sale of gasoline, were permitted upon issuance of a special permit. Lot area was to be a minimum of 5,000

square feet (exceptions could be made in accordance with Section 4.2 c 1) and there had to be at least fifty feet of road frontage. Buildings in this district had to be thirty-five feet from a road, ten feet from the side lot line, thirty feet from the rear lot line, and could not exceed thirty-five feet in height.

PDD referred to a Planned Development Zoning District. There was no such district in existence in Decatur at the time of the adoption of this law, nor has one been created since that time. Uses in this area were to include any uses of land permitted in town. The lot area requirements were a minimum of ten acres and at least 100 feet of road frontage. Buildings in this area had to be seventy-five feet from the road, forty feet from all other lot lines, and could be no more than thirty-five feet high.

Additionally, there were special requirements in these areas. All lands in a PDD must be held in single ownership and a development map had to be approved before a PDD could be approved. Anything not on this plan would be considered prohibited in this area. Furthermore, a permitted use in one PDD did not mean such use was acceptable in another PDD. Such a district could only be approved upon the completion of a community impact study which demonstrated that the development would benefit the community as a whole.

For safety purposes a Flood Protection Zoning District (FPD) was created. Within these districts, as marked on the official map, all general zoning laws to the underlying district applied. Additionally, there were special regulations designed to protect people who lived in or owned property in an FPD, as well as neighboring property owners.

In addition to the regulations specific to these four districts, there were general regulations which applied to all districts. Of great importance was the stipulation that only one principal building could be on a given lot. However, there could be additional principal buildings on a lot if each building, and an identifiable land area, was in accordance with "the district regulations applying to the district in which it is located". Exceptions to lot area (substandard lots) were permitted, but primarily through "grandfathering". Height exceptions could also be made, but these generally applied to structures not appropriate for human habitation; church spires, domes, chimneys, sky lights, water tanks, barns, silos, etc.

This local law provided the Planning Board with the power to "modify applicable provisions of this zoning local law simultaneously with the approval of a subdivision plat or plats...". However, before taking such action the Planning Board had to meet certain requirements. Among these, the Planning Board had to find that said subdivision was in the best interests of the town and district where it would occur. If this subdivision had the affect of creating "common open space", this had to be clearly stated on the plat and provision had to be made as to the maintenance, ownership, and dedication of this land.

Added to these general regulations were three others of importance. For all structures space must be allocated for off-street parking. Temporary uses in the various districts were allowed with an appropriate permit. Finally, there were requirements pertaining to signs vis-a-vis size, illumination, and wind resistance.

The law of 1975 created the post of Zoning Enforcement Officer to enforce this law. This person was responsible for seeing that residents built in compliance with this law and also to investigate citizen complaints. This officer also issued building permits as applicable (to buildings greater than 300 square feet) and certificates of occupancy. Penalties were

provided for use against violators. These included fines, imprisonment, and court action to halt construction of structures.

Disputes between the Zoning Enforcement Officer and a resident, or application for a zoning variance were to be referred to a Board of Appeals created by this law. Variances could be issued to avoid unreasonable hardship provided such variance was "consistent with the intent of the comprehensive plan and will not result in creation of a hardship upon neighbouring property owners". Also, it had to be found that the given situation was unique in some way. Above this Zoning Board of Appeals an aggrieved party could appeal to the State Supreme Court.

In addition to previously mentioned powers, this local law empowered the Planning Board to make recommendations on proposed amendments to this law to the Town Board. This board was also to review variances or special permits when these related to sites already under review by the board. The Planning Board would then make recommendations to the Zoning Board of Appeals. Approval of the site plan would become conditional upon variance or special permit approval by the Zoning Board of Appeals.

This law provided the basis for land use regulations and fit the needs of the community in 1975. As conditions in Decatur changed additional regulations became necessary and various changes to these laws were needed.

Subdivision Regulations of 1987

In 1987 the Town Board adopted regulations governing the manner in which subdivisions could be performed. Having recognized that Decatur was slowly changing from a predominantly agricultural to a more residential area, the Planning Board and the Town Board felt that it was best to regulate how these large parcels could be broken into smaller parcels. These regulations were meant, therefore, to be a tool used by the Planning Board in conjunction with the Zoning Law to help preserve the scenic quality of the Town and so that the land can be used safely for building without adversely affecting the environmental/aesthetic concerns of the residents.

Due to these weighty concerns, the Subdivision Regulations differentiated between minor and major subdivisions. A minor subdivision was defined as one which includes two to four lots without the construction or extension of a road; a major subdivision was defined as one which includes five or more lots and/or the construction or extension of a road. A major subdivision was subject to stricter review and supervision. This difference was based on the fact that a major subdivision would have a much greater impact on the community in terms of the environment, aesthetics, and traffic flow, hence road maintenance, to name but a few concerns.

In the case of major subdivisions very clear standards were set forth for the construction of new roads, if a new road was necessary. This was to insure the orderly and safe flow of traffic. To this end, extensive consultation with and inspection by the Town Highway Superintendent and/or Development Administrator was required.

planning
board
unnecessary
hardship

poor
condition

what
board

could

To insure coordination with the Zoning Law, these regulations provided that no lot shall be created which would be substandard according to the provisions of the Zoning Law. There are two exceptions to this provision: if the lot was labeled "unbuildable", or through the use of zoning modification. In the case of zoning modification it would be up to the discretion of the Planning Board to determine whether or not it would be in the Town's best interests to modify zoning specifications in any given subdivision. Such procedure could be used to try to preserve natural features and/or historic landmarks. However, the use of zoning modifications was not intended to allow for greater building density than may otherwise have occurred. Hence, use of this feature may result in the creation of "common open space".

Attention to environmental/aesthetic concerns was imbedded in these regulations so that conformity to the provisions of these regulations would help preserve the rural character of Decatur. Among these provisions were clauses to encourage the protection of "existing natural features which are of ecological, aesthetic or scenic value" to the residents (Section 4.7 a). These items included wetlands, stone formations (including walls), stands of trees, historic spots, and views and vistas which are deemed important to residents and worthy of preservation. Where possible, therefore, the subdivision regulations required that such features must be preserved.

Through a strict, yet humanized, application of these subdivision regulations the Planning Board was placed in a position from which it could insure that large parcels of land were split in a rational fashion. In this way the rural character and scenic qualities of Decatur could be preserved and reconciled to changing uses of the land.

1987 Changes to the Zoning Law

Twenty-seven changes to the Zoning Laws were adopted in 1987. Many were intended to clarify various points of law; others significantly altered the existing regulations.

For purposes of clarity a series of changes redefined "frontage" as "public highway frontage". This was to make clear that frontage was to be construed as only that bordering a public road. The effect was to preclude the subdividing of lots without sufficient public access, which was a serious problem for other communities. State law prohibits such building lots; this change was an effort to assure compliance with this law.

Also for clarity, certain inclusions were expressly made to various sections. Amongst structures subject to the zoning law were included satellite dish antennae. With the increasing popularity of dishes in Decatur came the recognition that their placement in the landscape impacted on the community in the same manner as the placement of any other structure. Similarly, "towers" were made subject to the zoning laws height requirement.

Included amongst objects subject to regulation as junkyards were "more than five inoperable vehicles or pieces of large inoperable machinery". This change heeded the concerns of an increasing number of people in the town that large numbers of unused vehicles were in many cases a detriment to the community at large. It was seen that, if not

properly screened from public view, they degraded the scenic quality of the town, and diminished the area's property values.

Two other changes attempted to fine tune the Zoning Law. One eliminated the act of "altering a structure" from the requirements of a zoning permit, and required a permit for "moving a structure". The former intended to increase the property owner's flexibility and the latter recognized the equality under zoning of building a structure with placing a moved structure on a site. The other change required a zoning permit (without fee) for structures with less than 300 feet of floor area. The intention was to encourage contact between the builder of even very small structures with the Zoning Enforcement Officer before construction began. Thus any conflicts with the zoning law might be avoided.

Three more significant changes were also made at this time. One added a new section concerning the disposal of raw and toxic waste. A second further restricted the number of principal buildings which might be built on a lot without subdivision. A third increased the minimum size for newly created parcels in the Residence-Agricultural District from two to five acres.

Reflecting the increasing awareness of the threat to public health and to the environment from the disposal of hazardous wastes, legislation was added regulating raw wastes and outlawing the disposal of toxic wastes in any form. As Decatur looked ahead to a shift from low density agricultural to higher density residential land use patterns, concerns for air, soil, and water quality grew. This new section took a step towards mitigating those concerns.

In Decatur's original zoning law, section 5.2 precluded the building of more than one principal building per lot only where there did not exist sufficient land to satisfy the zoning requirements for each building. The 1987 change increased the import of this section by requiring the creation of a Planned Development District prior to building further principal buildings on a single lot. The effect of this was to cause those who desired to build more than one principal building (who were not creating a multi-use site characterized by a Planned Development District) to create new parcels through subdivision; one parcel for each principal building. The intent was to insure that each building lot be satisfactory in terms of area, slope, sewerage, highway access, environmental concerns etc. as would be required under subdivision review. It was felt that the appropriate time to make this review was prior to the erection of a second principle building; and that the only way to insure a sound review was to require Planning Board involvement through the subdivision process.

Again, recognizing that Decatur was steadily changing from an agricultural to a residential community, and aware that such changes often occur quickly and with broad impact, a change was made increasing the minimum lot size for new parcels. This change was part of a broader strategy to give the Town more oversight over the forces of change. At the same time as these zoning changes were being approved, a Subdivision Law was being adopted as the principal tool of this strategy. Raising the minimum lot size was intended to assure significant open land around each new home. This was seen to have desirable aesthetic and environmental effects on the community. Another intention was to place controls on the speed of population growth in this rural Town. Further, this stringent zoning requirement intended to signal to those who wished to develop Decatur properties the Town's commitment to maintaining its open spaces, its low population density; hence its rural character.

1989 Changes to the Zoning Law

A series of changes increased the minimum public highway frontage in the Residence-Agriculture District from 200 ft. to 500 ft. There was a recognition that the lot size changes of 1987 were not in themselves achieving their goals. Further, a tendency to create "bacon strip lots" due to relatively low frontage being coupled with relatively high acreage requirements was feared. In addition, some neighbouring communities were experiencing rapidly expanding growth and development pressures, and were being caught without adequate means to safeguard the public's interests. It was felt that a renewed effort to achieve the goals set forth in the 1987 Zoning Law changes was needed. Therefore, a stringent frontage requirement consistent with the area requirement approved in 1987 was adopted. The overall intention to give the Town greater input in guiding the creation of new parcels (hence, guiding the pattern of change) remained the same.

A major aspect of the discussion preceding the adoption of this change involved the use of zoning modification procedures to guarantee flexibility in administering the zoning and subdivision laws. It was recognized that with stringent requirements came the obligation to provide alternatives to those whose development plans were in keeping with the community's interests yet were precluded by a strict adherence to the law. It was concluded that the zoning modification powers granted by state law and Town enabling resolution to the Planning Board would be available to provide the needed flexibility.

1991 Changes to the Zoning Law

In 1991 several changes to the Zoning Law, Local Law 1-1989, were adopted. This was a result of the wide-spread feeling that the strict regulations adopted in 1987 and 1989 were too onerous and heated public debate was triggered; it was decided that additional changes to these land use laws were necessary. Two changes, specifically those relating to certificates of occupancy and zoning permits, were simply for clarification and to eliminate bureaucratic red-tape. The two other changes, relating to acreage and frontage requirements, will have significant and long-lasting effects on the appearance and character of the town.

The change pertaining to certificates of occupancy was primarily a clarification and a correction. Section 7.2 b of the Zoning Law had read "No building or structure shall be occupied except after a Certificate of Occupancy has been issued, therefore, by the Zoning Enforcement Officer,..." It was deemed advisable to change the issuing officer to the County Code Enforcement Officer for legal reasons. A Zoning Enforcement Officer's authority is only to enforce zoning laws, not building code regulations. Since Decatur had granted the County the authority to enforce building codes in Decatur only the County Code Enforcement Officer could issue certificates of occupancy within the Town of Decatur.

Section 7.2 a.1 of the Zoning Law was altered to eliminate bureaucratic red-tape. Essentially, this alteration made it unnecessary for people creating a structure "having a floor area of less than three hundred

square feet" to get a zoning permit. For all intents and purposes this reversed the changes made to this section in 1987 (see page 25). Although it was felt to be beneficial to encourage contact between people building small structures and additions and the Zoning Enforcement Officer, this was outweighed by the general feeling among the residents that this requirement was odious and obnoxious. Furthermore, since the retention of this requirement was not obviously alleviating any gross evil or environmental/aesthetic adversity, it was thought to be prudent to reverse the 1987 decision.

A further change to the Zoning Law occurred to section 5.2 which deals with principal buildings per lot. Again this was a reversal of a 1987 decision (see page 25). It was felt that tying the creation of more than one principal building per lot to a planned development was a misunderstanding of the intent of a Planned Development District. Such a district's intent, it was determined, was to allow the construction of multiple buildings on a lot, each building having a different use, for example a gas station and a convenience store. It was felt to be legitimate to allow more than one principal building per lot which had the same use, for example two houses, provided that there was sufficient acreage and frontage to allow for no increase in the density of structures over what would have been possible through subdivision.

The debate in 1987 sought to mandate a solution prior to the construction of an additional principal building lot. The 1991 debate led to the conclusion that since there would be no net increase in building density, provided each building had recognizable standard lot dimensions, a subdivision was not necessary at the time of construction.

Two much more significant and far-reaching changes to the Zoning Law were made in 1991, both of which were reversals of changes made in 1987 and 1989. These both had to do with minimum acreage and frontage requirements in the R-80 Residence-Agricultural District (see pages 26).

The minimum acreage requirement was reduced from five acres to two acres, and the minimum frontage requirement was reduced from 500 feet to 200 feet. There were many reasons which were put forward in favor of these changes.

It was felt that the most likely segments of the population to grow would be the retired and the young segments. With this in mind it was thought to be detrimental to the aesthetic concerns of the Town to strap such people to large parcels of land. It takes time and money to properly care for a large parcel of land. Therefore, rather than compel people to purchase large parcels which they may not be able to maintain, hence allowing it to grow to brush, it was thought wiser to allow the splitting of smaller pieces in the belief that these would be better maintained.

Many residents, particularly farmers and large landowners, voiced another concern. They wished to be able to grant homesites to their children; homesites which could be small enough so as not to negatively impact their properties economically. That is, they felt that the breaking off of five acre lots with 500 feet of road frontage would too greatly diminish the value of their larger holdings. From the point of view of many farmers, it was felt that such a move would negatively impact on their agricultural businesses by taking too much land and frontage away from the main farm.

A third reason voiced in favor of these acreage and frontage alterations was largely an economic one. Due to economic tribulations and personal crises, it was recognized that some people might have a need to

sell a small parcel of land to help in a moment of economic adversity. Therefore, rather than make that person divide off a large piece of land from an otherwise aesthetically pleasing tract of land, it was thought better to allow the splitting off of a smaller parcel.

Conclusion

Local land use laws are the Town's chief means of affecting the real issues of concern experienced by the community. Local government has the authority, indeed the obligation, to use this tool in a thorough and responsible manner. Only in this way will the changing needs of the community, and the environment in which the residents live, be protected. In the seventeen years of their existence, the goals behind Decatur's land use laws have changed relatively little. Yet there have been a great number of changes in the laws themselves. This reflects wide differences of philosophy on the role of government and the means with which to achieve the community's goals. Doubtless there will be further changes in these laws and regulations, particularly in an attempt to implement and make effective this Master Plan.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Introduction

This section of the Master Plan will look at four specific areas of the Town which are of concern; namely, the rural character, the environmental quality, and the economic concerns of Decatur, and the specific concerns of the Hamlet. These four areas have been singled out either because they were listed as being of general concern in the 1990 survey or because of their overall importance to the well being of Decatur.

Each subsection will discuss the assets and problems viewed as being of concern within the context of the specific area. Suggestions for encouraging positive actions and attributes, and for correcting recognized problems have not been included in this section. This section only seeks to identify assets and problems, to recommend appropriate action is viewed as being above and beyond the scope of this Master Plan.

Rural Character of the Town

The rural character of Decatur is one of the main attractions to this area. The large open fields contribute to the views we all see when we drive through the Town. The survey showed that peace and solitude ranked first among the things people liked most about this area; this was followed by space and views, woods, trees and nature; clean air and water, and low population density. It seems to be the view of those surveyed that these five points are directly related to Decatur's current charm.

The rural charm of Decatur is directly related to the economics of the agricultural business since it was the needs of this business which are responsible for Decatur's present landscape. Dairy farming is the primary agricultural business in the area. Unfortunately, the current economic environment is not favorable to dairy farms. Without this industry, there are few alternative ways to maintain Decatur's rural charm as the population has come to know it. The decline of this business can already be seen on some of the back roads as unattended meadows and pastures become overgrown with weeds and brush. This is testimony to the fact that it is very hard to maintain large acres of land without the necessary machinery. Furthermore, without sizeable agricultural tax exemptions the tax burden on such acres can be overbearing.

The decline in agriculture has other effects also. Road miles, for instance might increase to make large tracts of land more accessible. As farmers need to sell lands and split large parcels there is increasing likelihood that such land will go into residential use. This could result in seasonal roads becoming year round roads, and eventually such roads may need to be paved. People seeking rural charm will want such charm to be accessible and will still want services to which they have become accustomed in suburbia.

When agricultural activity was at a peak there was not as great a need for paved roads as there is now. Farmers only needed to be sure that

the milk truck and the school bus could get to their houses; there was no need for accessibility upon demand. This was because most lands did not need to be accessed year round and farm equipment does not require that roads be maintained to the degree which a standard car needs.

With the slow decrease in agricultural activity, Decatur is going to lose its rural character and show an increase in residential use. This could bring with it certain aspects of development. Decatur may be fortunate in the fact that it is not easily accessible by large roads and, hence, not attractive to large businesses. This asset may help Decatur to preserve its present rural charm.

Environmental Quality of Decatur

Introduction

The environmental quality of the area effects, often subtly, all of what we are concerned with in planning for the future of our Town. Enveloping the community and its daily life, its economy, its social and aesthetic concerns, is an environment responding to the pressures of human activity. To a large extent the vitality of a community depends on the respect with which its members interact with their environment. And yet, environmental issues are regional, if not global; they know no political boundaries. This may limit what we as a Town might accomplish in solving our environmental problems, yet it accents the importance of an environmental awareness.

Water

Water quality is of particular concern because water is the source from which so much of the natural world develops. Decatur, as a rule, has a very high water table. This makes surface water a particularly important element in the local environmental system. It also makes the likelihood of water degradation by human activity particularly high.

There are twelve New York State protected freshwater wetlands in Decatur. For an area at such a relatively high elevation, this represents an unusually large percentage of the Town's land. Freshwater wetlands play an incomparably important role in the environmental balance. They are the wellspring of a temperate region's biological diversity. They purify the waters that constantly pass through them. They harbor and nourish wildlife. They play a role in moderating flooding. But because of the complexity and delicate balance involved in the wetland's biological system, they must be left alone and intact to function properly. In a system where single-celled animals play a crucial role, imagine the impact a bulldozer can make.

The threat of water degradation exists outside of the officially protected wetlands. Again because of the relatively high water table, aquifers supplying drinking water are susceptible. The greatest threat is from an improperly designed, constructed, or sited septic system. As Decatur becomes proportionately more a residential community, this threat

will increase and demands greater vigilance. For farm families and their near neighbors, the threat also exists of runoff of agricultural chemicals or wastes intruding on water systems.

Decatur contains headwaters that feed both the Susquehanna and Hudson watersheds. Many State protected streams flow through the Town. This protection against human incursion reflects their relatively pristine condition and their suitability for the spawning of trout, a significant environmental indicator. Unfortunately, some degradation of these waterways takes place in the Town. Runoff of salt from roads and soil and fertilizers from fields; effluence from septic systems; and toxic chemicals and heavy metals leaching from junked cars and appliances all contribute to this problem.

In short, water sustains the natural systems of our area. It has some ability to cleanse itself, but must not be stressed beyond its means by careless human activity.

Air

Decatur's air quality is, in general, extremely good. The low density of human settlement in much of the Town keeps human incursions on air quality relatively minor. In those areas more thickly settled, which often for historical reasons are also the most low-lying, there can be significant air quality degradation. This is true particularly in winter when a large concentration of pollutants from wood-burning appliances can pose a threat. Decatur is free of the dangers faced by other communities which are home to industries which often discharge concentrated destructive emissions. It must be remembered that air quality, high as it now is, can not be taken for granted. A single new source of emissions could significantly alter the picture.

Of course, there are subtle phenomena at work here, sometimes with global significance. The human practices in every community contribute to the health or destruction of earth-wide natural systems. The decisions made about heating one's home, the cutting or planting of trees, the burning of brush or garbage, effect, in a small but real way, the future of the planet.

Soil and Woodlands

From an environmental standpoint, the mix of fields and woodlands in Decatur provide excellent opportunity for the flourishing of biological systems. Though the area would naturally be fully wooded, a new ecological balance has been achieved. With the long decline of agriculture has come an end to the clearing of woodlands. Rather, many former fields are following nature's course back to forest. Other areas are being reforested intentionally. Each provides different results with different benefits. The former assures health through diversity. The latter achieves more limited gains, but does so incomparably quicker.

One of these benefits is protection against soil erosion. This is perhaps the single most serious threat to Decatur's healthy soils. Anytime

the soil is worked the threat of erosion exists. With proper planning and careful execution this danger can be minimized. Wooded field breaks and buffers along drainages provide significant additional protection.

Large Scale Intrusions

Most of the threats to the environment from human activity, though potentially serious in isolated areas or over the long term, are of a relatively small scale. The potential exists however for a single intrusion to catastrophically alter the environmental quality of the Town. Any practice or industry emitting toxic, radioactive, or infectious agents into the atmosphere would have such a large scale effect. Decatur very nearly had an infectious medical waste incinerator for an upwind neighbor. The low population density and relative economic poverty of the area makes Decatur particularly susceptible to such industries. Public awareness and the collective goodwill of the community prevented the incinerator; they will surely be needed for future protection against similar large scale intrusions.

Solid Waste Management

It is in the area of solid waste management that the Town and its individual citizens can be singularly effective in promoting environmental health. Everyday we make choices concerning what we buy and how we dispose of what we do not need. The two keys to effective waste management: reduction of use and recycling of raw materials, are controlled by these decisions.

Decatur has no landfill within its borders to remind people of the destination of its disposed waste. Our unrecycled waste is trucked to Montgomery County. The Town's longstanding and well-received policy of accepting household garbage has a benefit besides low cost and convenience: it minimizes dumping. It also has a drawback: it provides no incentive for reduction of use. The provision made for recycling is critical to reducing the wastestream and the vast environmental damage caused by continually procuring new raw materials. It should be extended to the limits of the market and made as convenient as possible for the public to use.

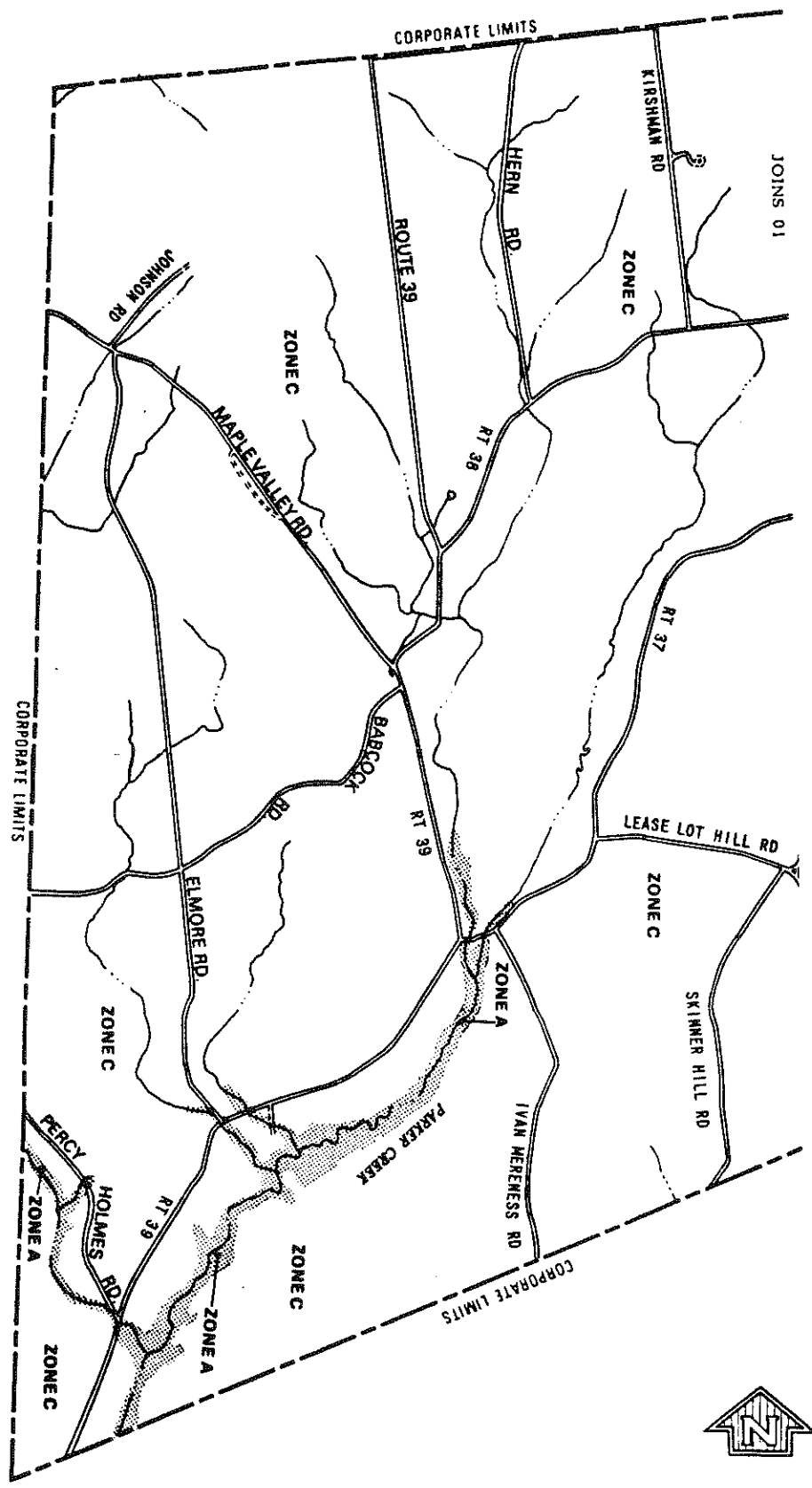
Conclusion

Nature takes care of itself, whether globally or in the isolated hills and valleys of Decatur. The activities of men and women sometimes outpace nature's ability to adapt to change. A balance exists, but it is in man's power to throw it desperately out of kilter. Also, it is in man's power to be steward to the natural world, to respect its complexity and share in the burden of its protection. Awareness of the issues, locally and globally,

should lead us to use our power to become stewards of the land, rather than its exploiters.

Wetlands Map

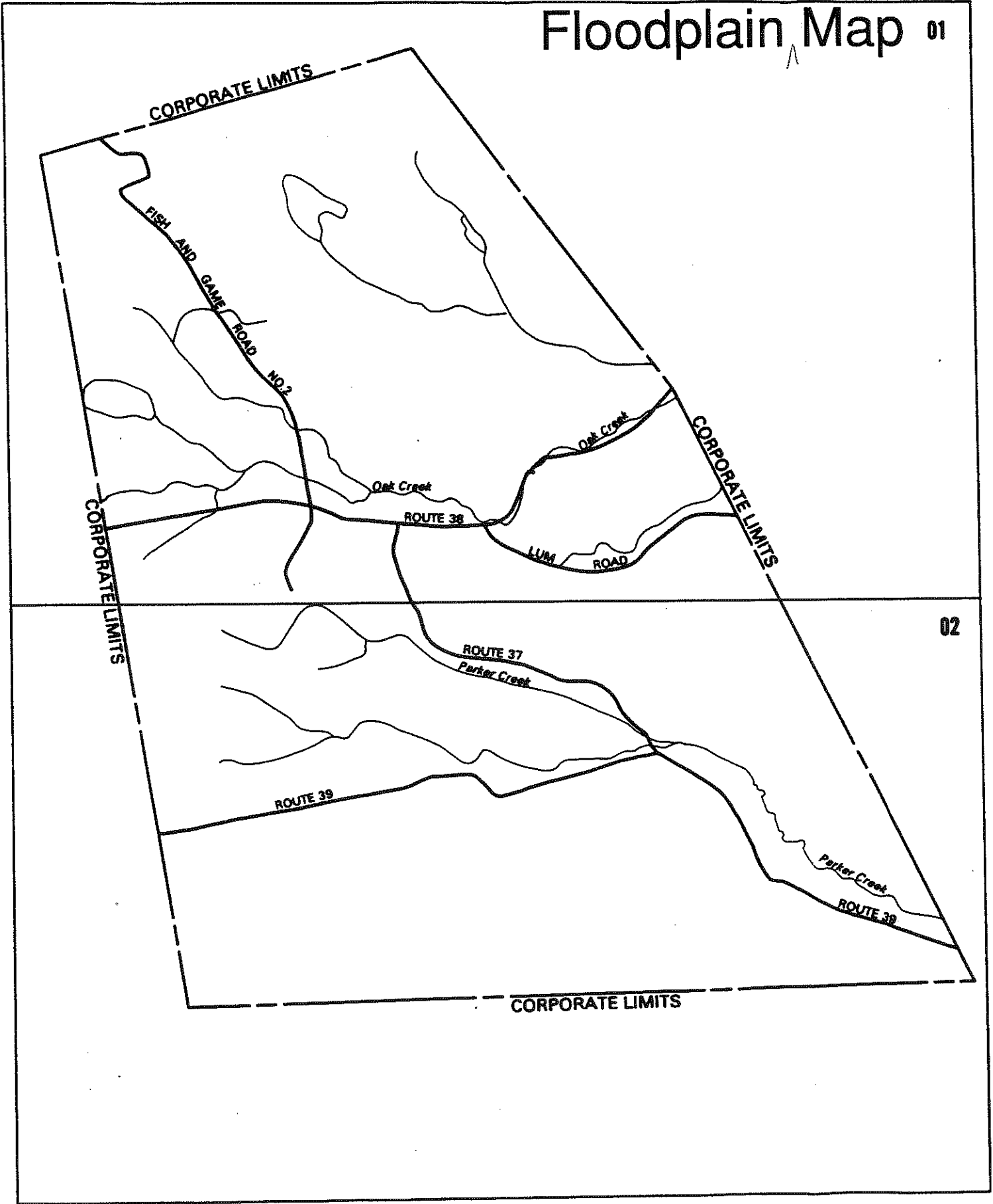
Flood Map



02	federal emergency management agency	APPROXIMATE SCALE 2000 0 2000 4000 6000 FEET	EFFECTIVE DATE JUNE 18, 1987
	TOWN OF DECATUR, NY OTSEGO COUNTY	FLOOD INSURANCE RATE MAP COMMUNITY NUMBER 381417	

Front Panel

Floodplain Map 01



Economic Concerns

As has been stated in previous sections, the median family income in Decatur in 1980 was \$14,107. This compares to a median family income in Otsego County of \$16,230, in New York State of \$20,385, and in the nation of \$19,905. Decatur's below average income can be attributed largely to the rural character of the community which is reflected in a shortage of job opportunities. Another factor involved is the level of education of residents, which is reflected in the types of jobs held by residents.

With this in mind one must look at income rate breakdowns for Decatur. This data comes from the 1980 census and is based on reported family income for 1979. Of respondents, 32% reported having a family income of under \$10,000, 43% reported family income at between \$10,000 and \$19,999, and only 25% reported family income at \$20,000 or greater. In this context it must be noted that in 1980, 19% of Decatur's population was living below the poverty line.

In terms of education, on the 1980 census only 65% of respondents stated that they had graduated high school (see note below). It must also be pointed out as a fact that the traditional agricultural based economy in Decatur has made, to a large degree, higher education economically superfluous. Traditionally, with offspring moving into the family business of agriculture, it has been more sensible and cost effective for these offspring to learn the business of farming from their more agriculturally astute parents. However, the fact remains that since, generally speaking, educated people tend to get better paying jobs, these low education rates help explain why Decatur's income rates are below the County, State, and national average.

As reported on the 1980 census 9% of respondents were employed in a professional capacity (executive, administrative, or professional specialty). At the other end of the scale, 20% were employed as laborers, (machine operators, fabricators, assemblers, material handlers, equipment cleaners, and helpers). Sandwiched between these two groups were skilled laborers (precision production, crafts, and repair), 10%, farmers (farming, forestry, and fishing), 29%, and service and support (clerical), 32%.

This indicates that even with a reduction in agricultural activity (see page 9) the community is still very dependent on this business. However, there is also a great economic dependence on service/support (clerical) and unskilled labor occupations. With approximately 80% of the employed population working at lower paid occupations due both to opportunity and education it is easier to understand why Decatur has a lower than average income rate.

¹Because of the lack of job opportunities in the immediate area, most people must travel considerable distances to work. Of respondents to the 1980 census who did not work at home, 62% traveled less than thirty

¹NOTE: According to the 1980 census, there was a 12% dropout rate from Worcester Central School. Of this, 6 students were Decatur residents.

minutes to work, 30% traveled between thirty and fifty-nine minutes, and 8% traveled more than sixty minutes.

This information taken together indicates that the reasons for Decatur's below average income is the result of profound social factors. Due to transportation routes there are limited job opportunities in the area; this shortage becomes even more acute in terms of higher paying professional jobs. Also, with the education level of residents being as low as it is these higher paying jobs are usually above the qualifications of residents. Furthermore, jobs that end to entail lengthy commutes would generally be unpopular. As a result, the income rates of residents will probably stay the same vis a vis the county, state, and nation.

Specific Concerns of the Hamlet: Past, Present, and Future

The Decatur Hamlet

The Hamlet of Decatur began to be settled in the 1790's and was officially established in 1808 (see page 6). Its location in central Otsego County with the surrounding rolling hills, lies midway between the Catskill and Adirondack Mountains. At its founding, the Hamlet and surrounding community, which was agri-based, was in a state of intense growth. It was the hub of activity; social events centered around the store, hotel, church, and school. There was also light manufacturing in the area including cooperage and blacksmith shops. Furthermore, the Hamlet was the site of a dam which was used to supply hydro-energy for milling. The Hamlet as well as the surrounding land was extensively used and the Town was able to support a population, at its peak in the 1830's, of over 1,100 people.

The present Hamlet belies its past. There were many structures in place other than residences and the Town building. These other buildings included, at various times, a school, a hotel, store, blacksmith shops, dentist office, and cheese factory. This can be evidenced by old maps, various foundations, water wells overgrown, and old pictures.

From the period of the 1830's until shortly after the Civil War the population was stable. However, the Industrial Revolution and interstate commerce, brought about first by canals, then railroads changed the picture dramatically. The population diminished rapidly as a result of the Erie Canal and the positioning of the railroad in the lower valley. There was an exodus of people from Decatur and a corresponding increase in the population of surrounding communities.

Additionally, Decatur's population was no longer aided by immigration as the onslaught of immigrants had slowed and the Industrial Revolution drew a great many people to the industrial centers. There was also a spread of settlements west as those lands were opened. Many farms, in time, fell into a state of disrepair due to abandonment, and during the Great Depression the land began to be swallowed up by the State due to tax defaults on this vacant land.

Present

The Hamlet of Decatur in the 1990's is a pleasant setting full of its rural character. No sidewalk or street lights exist to date, and the main thoroughfare is a paved macadam road that goes through the Town and Hamlet proper; this being County Routes 37 and 39. The speed limit on these roads is the standard 55mph. The Methodist Church still exists, but is used primarily in warm weather. Most non-residential buildings which were once in the Hamlet have been demolished, and with the exception of the Town Barn, most buildings are residential.

Some of the houses in the Hamlet have fallen into a state of disrepair, while others have undergone a facelift which has added to the charm of the area. There has been a movement within the community to improve private property, both in terms of cleaning up and structural renovation. There has also been an effort to get the Town Barn and recycling center improved as well as cleaned up.

At this point only a scratching of the surface has been accomplished in these areas, but there is an overall positive attitude in place. Great care has been taken not to offend private property owners. Those responding have been commended highly. The requests for HUD Grants from the Federal Government have not been successful, but continued efforts at securing these grants should be made.

The agri-based industry has diminished greatly due to economic reasons above and beyond local control. Overall, the community supports the farmers and farm lands adjoining the Hamlet as it adds to the rural character and makes for a pleasant place to live.

The Hamlet, however, must have its boundaries defined. Various codes apply within and without the Hamlet and with unclear boundaries this is a formula for confusion. Furthermore, the Hamlet is not marked nor is there a sign welcoming visitors.

The current Town and Planning Board seem to be sensitive to the community's desires and needs. A recent purchase of land within the Hamlet by the Town will allow the Town Highway Department to place its roadstocks and equipment within easy access of Town facilities rather than rent land. This land also has the potential for future development of a recreational nature and for improved town facilities.

Future

Many residences have fallen into a state of disrepair, largely through no fault of the owners. Outside sources of monies need to be utilized to help rehabilitate these houses. HUD Grants would play a significant role in this endeavor. Consequently, the Town government must redouble its efforts at securing such grants.

However, money is not the only factor involved. Local groups would be wise to band together to clean up each other's properties. Such actions would help foster a sense of community and friendliness. It would also help people to feel good about their relationships with their neighbors.

Along these lines the community must re-evaluate the importance of its historical buildings; former school houses, the church, and houses of historical significance, the Waterman residence for example. Such buildings could be marked with official signs.

In order for the Hamlet to regain its historical rural charm, steps need to be taken to preserve, and in some cases re-establish, its historical integrity. From numerous old photos one can see that the streets were lined with trees and the houses were well kept with neatly trimmed yards. In the modern era, in addition to houses in disrepair, many trailers have been placed in the Hamlet.

History has shown that residence and commercial/government structures can co-exist in the Hamlet. However, the current Town building is surrounded by broken down equipment and garbage. As a result, these two uses of the Hamlet do not blend together harmoniously and their inherent differences are accentuated. The Town needs to take steps to try to make the Town buildings blend in with the residences.

The recent purchase by the Town of six acres provides an excellent opportunity to both improve Town facilities and help make them blend in with the houses in the Hamlet. Potentially, Town building uses could be separated so that highway equipment and the recycling centre could be housed in buildings separate from the meeting building. Town lands devoted to the highway department use could also be screened from land devoted to other uses, e.g. recreational and meetings, through the use of shrubbery. Shrubby could also be used to soften the contours of Town buildings to help them blend in with residential buildings.

Conclusion

The Hamlet has been a wonderful and beautiful cluster of houses. However, it has, over years, fallen largely into a sad state of disrepair. With proper steps taken, its past charm can be recaptured and restored. Through hard work on everyone's part the Hamlet of Decatur can once again be a source of pride for residents.



*AYS
Freshwater
Wetlands
Map*

SOUTH VALLEY

Map of the AYS Freshwater Wetlands Area, South Valley, Georgia. The map shows the location of the wetlands in relation to the Etowah River and the Decatur Road. The wetlands are located in the area bounded by the Etowah River to the north and the Decatur Road to the south. The map also shows the location of the AYS Freshwater Wetlands Area, which is located in the area bounded by the Etowah River to the north and the Decatur Road to the south.

Map of the AYS Freshwater Wetlands Area, South Valley, Georgia. The map shows the location of the wetlands in relation to the Etowah River and the Decatur Road. The wetlands are located in the area bounded by the Etowah River to the north and the Decatur Road to the south. The map also shows the location of the AYS Freshwater Wetlands Area, which is located in the area bounded by the Etowah River to the north and the Decatur Road to the south.

Scale: 1 inch = 1 mile

RICHMONDVILLE

SCHAMBE TO OHSBIO CO

D E C A T U R

DECATUR

RESTORATION AREA

SV-38

SV-44

SV-29

SV-31

SV-30

SV-40

SV-28

SV-45

SV-21

SV-43

SV-21

Westford
Creek

Marble Fork
Creek

Schenemus
Creek

R D 30

DECATUR

DECATUR

RESTORATION AREA

SV-38

SV-44

SV-29

SV-31

SV-30

SV-40

SV-28

SV-45

SV-21

SV-43

SV-21

Westford
Creek

Marble Fork
Creek

Schenemus
Creek

R D 30

DECATUR

DECATUR

RESTORATION AREA

SV-38

SV-44

SV-29

SV-31

SV-30

SV-40

SV-28

SV-45

SV-21

SV-43

SV-21

Westford
Creek

Marble Fork
Creek

Schenemus
Creek

R D 30

DECATUR

DECATUR

RESTORATION AREA

SV-38

SV-44

SV-29

SV-31

SV-30

SV-40

SV-28

SV-45

SV-21

SV-43

SV-21

Westford
Creek

Marble Fork
Creek

Schenemus
Creek

R D 30

DECATUR

DECATUR

RESTORATION AREA

SV-38

SV-44

SV-29

SV-31

SV-30

SV-40

SV-28

SV-45

SV-21

SV-43

SV-21

Westford
Creek

Marble Fork
Creek

Schenemus
Creek

R D 30

DECATUR

DECATUR

RESTORATION AREA

SV-38

SV-44

SV-29

SV-31

SV-30

SV-40

SV-28

SV-45

SV-21

SV-43

SV-21

Westford
Creek

Marble Fork
Creek

Schenemus
Creek

R D 30

DECATUR

DECATUR

RESTORATION AREA

SV-38

SV-44

SV-29

SV-31

SV-30

SV-40

SV-28

SV-45

SV-21

SV-43

SV-21

Westford
Creek

Marble Fork
Creek

Schenemus
Creek

R D 30

DECATUR

DECATUR

RESTORATION AREA

SV-38

SV-44

SV-29

SV-31

SV-30

SV-40

SV-28

SV-45

SV-21

SV-43

SV-21

Westford
Creek

Marble Fork
Creek

Schenemus
Creek

R D 30

DECATUR

DECATUR

RESTORATION AREA

SV-38

SV-44

SV-29

SV-31

SV-30

SV-40

SV-28

SV-45

SV-21

SV-43

SV-21

Westford
Creek

Marble Fork
Creek

Schenemus
Creek

R D 30

DECATUR

DECATUR

RESTORATION AREA

SV-38

SV-44

SV-29

SV-31

SV-30

SV-40

SV-28

SV-45

SV-21

SV-43

SV-21

Westford
Creek

Marble Fork
Creek

Schenemus
Creek

R D 30

DECATUR

DECATUR

RESTORATION AREA

SV-38

SV-44

SV-29

SV-31

SV-30

SV-40

SV-28

SV-45

SV-21

SV-43

SV-21

Westford
Creek

Marble Fork
Creek

Schenemus
Creek

R D 30

DECATUR

DECATUR

RESTORATION AREA

SV-38

SV-44

SV-29

SV-31

SV-30

SV-40

SV-28

SV-45

SV-21

SV-43

SV-21

Westford
Creek

Marble Fork
Creek

Schenemus
Creek

R D 30

DECATUR

DECATUR

RESTORATION AREA

SV-38

SV-44

SV-29

SV-31

SV-30

SV-40

SV-28

SV-45

SV-21

SV-43

SV-21

Westford
Creek

Marble Fork
Creek

Schenemus
Creek

R D 30

DECATUR

DECATUR

RESTORATION AREA

SV-38

SV-44

SV-29

SV-31

SV-30

SV-40

SV-28

SV-45

SV-21

SV-43

SV-21

Westford
Creek

Marble Fork
Creek

Schenemus
Creek

R D 30

DECATUR

DECATUR

RESTORATION AREA

SV-38

SV-44

SV-29

SV-31

SV-30

SV-40

SV-28

SV-45

SV-21

SV-43

SV-21

Westford
Creek

Marble Fork
Creek

Schenemus
Creek

R D 30

DECATUR

DECATUR

RESTORATION AREA

SV-38

SV-44

SV-29

SV-31

SV-30

SV-40

SV-28

SV-45

SV-21

SV-43

IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM

This Master Plan is meant to serve as a general philosophical statement on land use; what we have in Decatur, what should be preserved and encouraged, and what should be discouraged. By itself it is not a program to accomplish the desired ends enunciated herein. As a result, by itself it can not influence or affect the course of events in Decatur. All depends on the willingness and resolve to residents to translate general philosophical statements into a concrete program.

Unless and until a commitment is made to the principles as herein stated, Decatur will continue to change in a haphazard, sometimes harmful, manner. The responsibilities for the Town's development is a local one, and rightfully so. Consequently, our goals must be accomplished through a local program.

The fact remains, however, that, regardless of our programme, individuals hold the key for this Master Plan implementation. Individuals still retain the decision to invest time and money to implement this Plan, not least of all through elections and the payment of taxes. To this end it is crucial that the statements and philosophies in this Master Plan be widely disseminated. In that way, people will become familiar with and more sympathetic to the trends and pressures affecting their community and the surrounding land. In this way all people will be able to understand the logic behind a programme to implement this Master Plan.

The completion of this land use milestone poises the Planning Board to embark on perhaps a more ambitious project. To carry through and fulfill the philosophy stated herein, the Planning Board intends to proceed to propose revisions to the laws and regulations currently governing the use of land in Decatur. Through this endeavour, it is our goal to bring such laws and regulations in line with the Master Plan. These changes will sometimes be subtle, sometimes grand and sweeping, but with general support the philosophies of this Master Plan will lead to the passing of laws and regulations which will make for a preserved and beautiful Decatur. In this way we can fulfill the age old maxim: it is proper for this generation to use, yet preserve, the land our fathers gave us, taking what we need, giving back what the land needs, and to pass this land to the next generation as we received it so that they may do the same, so the land can continue to sustain us.

Appendix

PLANNING SURVEY OF 1990 AND RESULTS

1) My permanent residence is:

- | | |
|-------------|----------|
| a) Decatur: | 76 (51%) |
| b) Other: | 72 (49%) |

2) I have lived in Decatur:

- | | |
|----------------|------------------|
| Under 5 years: | 22 (29.9%) |
| 6 - 15 years: | 25 (32.9%) |
| 16 - 40 years: | 21 (27.6%) |
| 40+ years: | <u>8 (10.5%)</u> |
| Total: | 148 (100%) |

3) I have owned property in Decatur for _____ years.

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| Under 5 years: | 48 (32.4%) |
| 6 - 15 years: | 45 (30.4%) |
| 16 - 40 years: | 45 (30.4%) |
| 40+ years: | 10 (06.8%) |
| Total: | 148 (100%) |

4) I own _____ acres of land in Decatur.

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| Under 5 acres: | 41 (27.9%) |
| 5 - 9 acres: | 15 (10.2%) |
| 10 - 49 acres: | 47 (31.9%) |
| 50 - 99 acres: | 20 (13.6%) |
| Over 99 acres: | 24 (16.3%) |

5) I use my land in Decatur for:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| a) permanent residence: | 73 |
| b) second home: | 27 |
| c) hunting/fishing: | 54 |
| d) farming: | 32 |
| e) speculative investment: | 7 |
| f) subdivision for lot sales: | 1 |
| g) timber harvest: | 16 |
| h) private recreational use: | 61 |
| i) other (specify): | <u>3</u> |
| 274 of about 137 respondents | |

6) If there is no dwelling on your land in Decatur, check here _____ and go on to question 8.

- | | |
|---------------|-----|
| no dwellings: | 33 |
| dwellings: | 112 |

no answer: $\frac{3}{148}$

7) Please show the number of buildings of each type which you own in Decatur and show year of construction:

a) House for year round use:	79
b) House for seasonal use:	15
c) Mobile home for year-round use :	15
d) Mobile home for seasonal use:	3
e) Other (specify):	3

8) What do like most about Decatur? Choose the five which are most important to you and rank them 1 (most important) through 5.

	<u>Scoring</u>	<u>Rank</u>
a) open space and views	254	2
b) peace and solitude	315	1
c) woods, trees, nature	229	3
d) clean air and water	207	4
e) wildlife	122	5
f) distance from larger towns	22	
g) nearness to larger towns	29	
h) one school, small class sizes	47	
i) fishing and hunting	91	
j) more participation in local gvnt.	16	
k) low cost of living	9	
l) investment opportunities (real estate, timber, etc.)	5	
m) farming, including timber	59	
n) lack of traffic	21	
o) low population density	100	
p) other (specify)	24	

9) What do you like least about Decatur? Please specify: (See printed comments)

10) Decatur's 1990 town budget is about \$175,000. Of this, 66% is budgeted for highway/road maintenance (\$2,000 per mile of road per year). Keeping in mind that improvements in town services cost more tax dollars in some cases, do you think Decatur should change its emphasis on the following? (Please mark one column)

	No Ans.	Increase Emphasis	Decrease Emphasis	Leave As Is
a) Highway rebuilding	27.0%	20.3%	8.8%	43.9%
b) Highway maintenance	21.6%	38.5%	3.4%	36.5%

a) Highway rebuilding	27.0%	20.3%	8.8%	43.9%
b) Highway maintenance	21.6%	38.5%	3.4%	36.5%
c) Snow Removal	11.5%	14.2%	2.0%	52.0%
d) Tax Assessment		26.4%	9.5%	25.7%
	38.5%			
e) Planning	27.7%	39.9%	10.8%	21.6%
f) Greater enforcement of Laws and Regulations	29.7%	29.1%	10.1%	31.1%
g) Garbage Recycling	30.4%	27.0%	4.1%	38.5%
h) More comments:				

11) Between 1982 and 1988, the number of parcels of land in Decatur increased by 17% due to subdivision. Do you feel that this increase makes Decatur:

a) A better place to live	29
b) A worse place to live	39
c) No different	68

12) Do you think that controlling the creation and development of new parcels of land has any of the following benefits?

a) Environmental	97
b) Economic	66
c) Social	59
d) Aesthetic	68

Comments: (See comments summary)

13) Do you feel that not controlling the creation and development of new parcels of land has any of the following benefits:

a) Environmental	16
b) Economic	28
c) Social	13
d) Aesthetic	13

Comments: (See comments summary)

14) The Decatur Planning Board would like to share ideas about plans for Decatur's future. would you attend one or more informational meetings?

All respondents	Yes <u>94</u>	No <u>25</u>
Decatur respondents	Yes <u>60</u>	No <u>19</u>

15) If there are any comments you would like to make about these questions or any issues in Decatur which you feel you would like the

Planning board to consider, please feel free to comment: (See comment summary)

Summary of Comments - General categories for further consideration:

- Need for more information about issues in the town
- Cleaning up the town and hamlet
- Attitudes of town officials
- Roads and traffic
- Controlling development
- Zoning, subdivision, and land use issues
- Economy

COMMENT ON QUESTION NUMBER 9

Control Number	Comment
1	Political unrest, unfairly high taxes and tax discrimination
2	Some of the power-hungry, small minded people who are appointed to positions such as tax assessor, building inspectors - these people tell tall tales and harass and beleaguer tax paying citizens who mind their business, are law abiding and care about their land and the town of Decatur.
3	The Hamlet of Decatur itself. It's an eyesore!
4	Unkempt and unclean properties.
5	Since 1958 I've spent summers and weekends in Decatur and have made Decatur my home for the past 14 years; and have seen Decatur go from a peaceful community with caring town officials to a town with officials who put their own best interests first over that of serving the people.
6	Zoning, people that don't mind their own business.
7	Junk cars, town garage, no road signs, high taxes
8	The condition in the Hamlet
9	Dirt roads
12	Need better road improvement - winter and summer.
15	The mess of some people's property! Also the way our roads are maintained. We were left a mess when they paved our road. We are still waiting for it to be cleaned up!
16	Not there enough to have any thoughts
17	These people who come from the city, and think that they can tell everybody what to do. They can build what they want but nobody else can. They change all the rules.
19	We have lived and raised our family here for 31 years. I have worked in Decatur for 44 years and hate to see so many restrictions on property. For the taxes we pay, we get too little to show for them and too much regulation of private property.
20	Unreasonable zoning rules.
22	The town building and vehicles look like a dump. More space is needed to put vehicles elsewhere and clean up that front area. Plant some trees, make the hamlet beautiful again.
25	Dusty roads
27	The misconduct of some of the town officials and their arrogance.
28	Nothing in particular.
29	Should be allowed more than 2 bags of garbage when more than 3 people in a family.
31	Set back off could be 50 ft. Road frontage should be 200 ft.
32	Unenforced leash laws for dogs.
33	General debris, junk cars, etc. Taxes.
34	Decatur is beginning to grow, populationwise and as such will continue to experience an increase of all the attendant

- problems (ie. crime, financial, political, etc.) that are inherent in crowded areas. (example - "downstate")
- 35 100% assessment.
- 38 Deteriorating residences; poorly maintained grounds; large machine equipment in view in residential areas.
- 39 Since we do not live in Decatur, we are not aware of the least desirable things in the area as we spend very little time there.
- 41 Distance to travel for shopping
- 42 Winter (cold)
- 45 500 ft. frontage, 75 ft. setback
- 46 Too many cliques. Too many speeders. Would like to see Town Hall improved.
- 47 Climate
- 49 The personality clashes. Thinking of a personal Advantage. We must work for the township and not money in any one individual's pocket. There is a great deal of hate over petty issues. This is immaturity and lack of knowledge of the world around us.
- 50 N-A All aspects of life in Decatur are all equally attractive.
- 51 The people who are in Govt. using the laws to control landowner's right to sell their land. Our Planning Board in general. Our Chairman of Assessors.
- 52 Local government needs to understand people (farmers) that have worked on the land all their life, if illness or sickness strikes, all they have to support them is their land and the farmer should be able to do what he wants with that land so it can support him.
- 53 Nothing
- 54 Okay as is
- 55 The junk that some people have on their property. It makes the town look like one big dump. The village could stand sprucing up. A few slobs give the place a bad name.
- 58 Mobile homes, garbage location, downtown area of Decatur intersection of 37 and 39
- 59 The people and the mountains
- 61 Hunting clubs on 2 acres of land, parts of the hamlet including the town barn, politicians that have their own economic interest at heart instead of the communities well being.
- 62 There is nothing wrong with Decatur. It is the people that generally cause our problems. Some want more than they are willing to pay for. Just remember Long Island. Over populated, over taxed and all they have to show for it is their rows of homes going nowhere.
- 63 Bad road
- 64 The way the town itself looks around the Town barn and surrounding area. Attitude of people when we needed help or information from, concerning permits, taxes and animal help.
- 65 Run down houses - hamlet of Decatur, trailers - junk left in yards.
- 66 The conditions of some of the houses by the Town Barn, especially the outside areas which are cluttered with all

- sorts of junk, including trash, junk cars, rusted machinery
- you name it!
- 67 I like Decatur, my great-grandparents were born there
and grandparents also lived there.
- 69 High taxes
- 70 Mobile homes.
- 71 No opinion
- 72 High taxes
- 73 Many miles of commuting for the working people/
74 The overbearing controls on land use. Outsiders trying to
dictate what the majority of the land owners can't do
with their own property.
- 75 The junk around homes where people just don't care!
76 500 ft. road frontage requirements. Please rethink this
one and change it. Lack of law enforcement.
- 77 Nothing at all. It's a very nice place.
- 78 Residents are strongly anti-progress, want to keep
everyone else out.
- 79 Bad roads and not much electricity on the roads.
- 80 High taxes
- 82 Unpaved roads (Maple Valley Rd.)
- 84 There should be some planning for future growth so that
everyone can have input and be happy with the results of
growth.
- 85 The way the main town looks.
- 86 Condition of roads and slow repair.
- 88 I'm too new a resident to have formed dislikes. So far the
beauty of the area and kindness of the people so impress
me that I have no complaints, although the village of
Decatur is more strewn with lawn front debris and
discarded possessions than desirable.
- 89 Hunting and trespassing on our property during this
season.
- 90 Special interest people trying to shape the town for their
own profit.
- 91 Those people who are too ignorant, greedy, arrogant, or
immature to respect the land and preserve our local
heritage.
- 92 Nothing
- 94 Area is starting to look run down
- 95 Taxes are kind of high.
- 96 Poor roads
- 97 Lack of services, high taxes, clannish people.
- 98 Unfriendly farmers
- 99 N/A
- 100 Frank Kersmanc
- 101 Petty politicians.
- 102 High taxes (real estate), also very poor conditions of many
homes and property.
- 103 High taxes, ignorance, blind eyes on improvement.
- 105 Lack of work - employment opportunities.
- 106 I believe the Planning Board is going over board on
planning. I think you are going to drive any future
growth out.

- 107 Unpaved roads.
- 108 No electricity where my camp is.
- 109 Outrageous taxes that go to state and over paid officials.
- 110 Lack of traffic control, people go fast and ignore stop signs. Lower speed through farm area. Lack of pride in homes in town; position or location of town barn.
- 111 Roads in winter, dirt roads.
- 112 Method of assessment of taxes.
- 113 People telling lies and making their own rules.
- 114 All the junk and junk cars in front yards. Different rules for different people.
- 115 Mind your own business
- 116 People not telling the truth.
- 117 Unnecessary and restrictive land use laws. There is a movement by certain People in power to create a division between old time residences and the new people rather than effort for continuity.
- 118 Restrictions on my land usage. I feel I should be able to do what I wish - after all I own it.
- 119 The attitude of town officials toward the property owner. All of the above is fine for those who can afford it. How long do you expect the land owner to pay taxes on land that has little or no resale value?
- 120 Taxes are too high, roads are not good.
- 121 Maintenance on my road in winter.
- 122 Unfair tax assessment.
- 123 The appearance of the village.
- 124 The least I like about Decatur is the taxes and the politics.
- 125 Taxes; since there are no services except for road maintenance, I can't believe the tax rate after living in various parts of the country and making comparisons.
- 126 The Town barn and dump and mess in the hamlet.
- 127 The town government/officials, excessive regulations.
- 128 Nothing
- 129 The seeming inability of the residents of our town to put aside petty issues and work for a better town.
- 130 So far we like everything
- 131 The town barnyard is a public disgrace, too much visible junk.
- 132 Trailers and poorly kept houses.
- 133 Zoning ordinances and excessive cost of local government.
- 134 Banks stick out too far when driving along on our road. Also other drivers do not stay on their own side of the road. Especially around sharp corners. The Fish and Game Rd. on the right side, brush sticks out too far.
- 135 The center of town, poor appearance.
- 136 Location is at least two hours away.
- 138 Garbage collection should be made easier so people don't throw garbage into the streets and highways.
- 139 Loss of farms, it's too much like what's happening in N.J.
- 141 Seeing it cut up into 5 acre parcels with a septic tank on each one.
- 142 The peace and solitude of the area and the friendliness of the people.

- 143 There are no dislikes.
 144 Abandoned vehicles (ie. cars, farm equipment, etc.) and
 other debris.
 145 High taxes.
 148 Land and school tax rate, unsightly surroundings in
 village (diesel fumes from town trucks), garbage truck
 parked in my front door, panoramic view of town junk.

COMMENT ON QUESTON NUMBER 10

- 2 Concerning "F" - Planning Board should assure that other
 Town Officials know what the regulations are and try to
 assist town persons with compliance by clearing up grey
 areas and no penalties or over tax those who are ill-
 prepared to look after themselves.
 5 On "F" - what laws
 7 Too picky on small things - assessments not equal.
 15 I think more emphasis on cleaning up the town. Junk car
 enforcement to be lowered to two cars. When you come
 into the Town of Decatur - at the highway garage - it is one
 big eyesore! Also abandoned houses or trailers to be
 removed (corner of Furnaceville Rd.) at owner's expense.
 16 Again not there enough for opinion.
 19 Just use the money wisely, more work per Hr. per man.
 More equitable and fair assessments based on property
 value and not sale price. The highway department is a
 very inefficient department and is not doing what it could
 to improve the appearance of Decatur.
 20 Cut brush along the highway
 22 Strict enforcement of zoning law, more thorough
 recycling, reassessment of ALL properties periodically for
 greater equality.
 27 Assessment should be made more equal. "F" people should
 be allowed to live in this town without such prohibitive
 regulations.
 31 Make more plans for building up Decatur. 200 ft. frontage,
 50ft. set back, 5+6 acres of land.
 33 A rural area - such as Decatur - roads, generally I find
 satisfactory. Route 39 speed limit too high, reduce max
 speed to 45 mph.
 38 Availability of garbage disposal on a regular basis for
 household garbage and a weekly basis for non-household
 garbage.
 39 Garbage is a problem all over the world. We should be
 conscious of the environment and start to worry about it
 even in a small town.
 43 Since I am an occasional (spring to fall) resident, I can't
 comment very intelligently. I don't know what you do
 with any type of trash. I've been taking it back to town
 after a few days in Decatur. I'd be glad to know what the
 town's disposal procedures are.
 46 Keep what we have in good condition all over! Not just a
 privileged few areas.

- 49 I definitely feel that Decatur is better off today than it was 30 years ago. The department of highway is very difficult especially in qualified personnel and the cost of equipment and parts. I feel however that the supervisor should keep a close catch and lend a helpful hand and advise when needed.
- 51 We would like to see some work done on the roads!! The roads are all washed out.
- 55 We don't need any higher TAXES! Bad enough for what you get!
- 62 But don't over do the planning stage, use common sense. Especially the restrictions done to increase taxes, both school and property.
- 63 Highway rebuilding on back roads.
- 69 Total town reassessment is needed.
- 74 The roads in Decatur as a rule are horrendous. They seldom get graded and the ditches cleaned even less often,
- 77 We have only been coming up for two years but I should hope recycling of garbage and keeping water and air clean stay on our minds.
- 82 Because we are not permanent residents, we are not able to voice an opinion.
- 84 A little regular maintenance can go a long way to save costs in other areas.
- 85 We are satisfied with the town government (god job).
- 88 (see #15)
- 89 Would be nice if the yellow line extended to our road.
- 91 Town roads should be legally posted with 30 mph. speed limit and enforced.
- 96 Reopen Algerine Hill Rd.
- 97 Increase emphasis on tax reductions. Increase emphasis on improving services.
- 106 I believe the 500 ft. minimum road frontage is way too much. 300 feet would be much better.
- 108 We like it to stay the same.
- 110 Roads and services are good at least in our area. Seems to be a lot of money per mile of road.
- 114 The time is long overdue for Decatur to have a constable of it's own - either full or part time.
- 115 How come we have such lousy roads?
- 118 We have more laws and regulations in Decatur than most larger towns - why? I feel they are mostly unnecessary and unwarranted.
- 119 Better care of Town equipment.
- 120 Should not have limit of 5 acres and 500 ft. frontage now t that most of the farmers are gone, should concentrate on summer homes or retirement homes that people can afford and maintain.
- 122 Good job now being done on a,b,c. Planning should be done with caution. Something should be done so that we can dispose of old tires, washers, etc. year round.
- 124 The town of Decatur's roads are the worse roads through the summer and especially during the winter. Never see any improvement on the roads.

- 43 Productive and responsible family farming should be encouraged, but I hope that quiet unpolluted open space will remain and galloping suburbia will never take over. I bought in on a piece of country and I hope it lasts.
- 46 Just cosmetic
- 49 You must control development, if not the developers, non-residents in particular will become rich and the permanent residents will suffer greatly in the environment, social, and economic issues. There is always the one that cares less for his neighbor or the environment as a whole.
- 51 The town does not need to control new building, because all new housing is inspected by the county to state code.
- 52 I feel people should be entitled to a home as long as they want it and people should not have to be put through a lot of hassle to get a home. After all a person has the freedom of having a home. There is no freedom when people are over regulated.
- 60 No
- 63 Within reason and guide rules to govern same.
- 65 Land use benefits in all the above ways.
- 66 All of the above, but we must be flexible and consider various circumstances at various times.
- 69 Young people can not afford large acreage. to attract them we need to be able to offer smaller parcels.
- 71 No benefit, it should be left rural.
- 73 Where are the jobs that can support the incoming people that help support the community?
- 74 Zone with a reasonable frontage requirement and lot sizes. With fair setback and boundaries.
- 77 We come from an area where they have developed the land too. I feel the maximum and we have to worry about drinking water and we can't even eat the fish we catch.
- 78 But requiring 500 ft. frontage for a parcel is absurd and unheard of in upstate NY in developed areas - this is not the remote Adirondacks - this ridiculous law should go back to 200 feet at once.
- 81 The Master Plan is a good idea but useless unless ordinances can ensure enforcement.
- 84 We fell controlled growth can benefit everyone. I've seen what uncontrolled growth can and has done to new Jersey.
- 88 See #15
- 91 No intelligent person can experience downstate communities and not agree that lack of effective planning destroys our quality of life.
- 96 Increase the tax base by controlled expansion and development.
- 97 No see #15
- 101 Can't answer absent a definition of "controlling".
- 103 As long as people are moving in and upgrading land - that is good vs. the town of Decatur = a dump.
- 114 Nothing seems to have been done to control some developments.

- 117 Very poorly worded and contradictory questions that can
not be answered.
- 119 130 years ago there were many more parcels of land and
three times the present population - It was perhaps as good
a place to live as it is today.
- 120 Retired people like peace and quiet so 2 or 3 acres seem
sufficient for them to maintain and be independent.
- 122 Certain commercial ventures should be controlled such as
junk yards, crematoriums, and trailer parks.
- 124 For other people's benefit it should be voted in for the
people of Decatur not just for the board members. Let
people know more about the subdivision.
- 125 It appears there is already more than enough control.
- 126 The beauty of Decatur will be destroyed if we don't control
our land. The big-time developers will control us in the
future. We should do it now - carefully - to keep what we
have.
- 127 We have enough regulations without the town adding to
them.
- 132 Depending on whether development is planned for more
subdivision or restrictive for less would determine
economic benefits or detriments.
- 137 It is easy to make laws like building 75 ft. off the road on
example, when most houses are right on the road. We don't
live in the state of Florida. Our founding fathers had
common sense, try shoveling 75 ft. of snow all winter long.
Also building on 5 acres is fine but it can still be a nice
town if there is a cluster of houses - exception (downtown
Decatur).
- 138 Zoning should be held to 10 acres minimum.
- 144 Planning for the future can only have a positive effect on
all of the above.
- 147 All of the above - too many restrictions are ridiculous, ie.
permit to build a dog house.
- 148 I feel that land control is fine if it doesn't get too
outrageous.

COMMENT NUMBER 13

- 1 Plan ahead or fail.
- 5 It's none of your business. Our town is not big like Albany
or Saratoga.
- 6 I feel that control of lands is way beyond reach. There
should be less control so that more people could be here.
- 14 Benefits in favor of control.
- 19 Only if a large development were to be built, which is most
unlikely in Decatur.
- 20 None.
- 22 There may be short term economic benefits, but they are
greatly outweighed by the long term negative effects of
uncontrolled development.

- 26 I am only in the area of my property 2 or 3 times a year. I like the rural area and the open space - nature atmosphere.
- 27 Some zoning is needed, however the ridiculous rules and regulations in Decatur discourage potential buyers and create economic hardship to landowners trying to sell property.
- 33 See question #12 above.
- 34 Not controlling development only benefits a few economic individuals. While it devastates others economically and emotionally.
- 39 By not controlling creation and development of land, we will lose the country setting by building TOO many homes. The only benefit being social.
- 40 Some type of plan is needed.
- 41 I would not want Decatur to become full of small lots and overcrowded. The open space and beauty is what attracted us to buy land, to relocate and live in Decatur.
- 43 Generally no. Not even long term economically. If yuppies drive property values (and taxes) beyond the reach of life-long residents.
- 46 Also cosmetic.
- 47 It will have a negative influence on the above.
- 48 We would like to see Decatur remain as rural as possible.
- 49 ABSOLUTELY NOT! Any individual that desires #13 not to be controlled has not been around this world very much or is a greedy person, looking out for himself and the hell with the township in general.
- 51 Without subdivision laws the landowners wouldn't have the expense and time consuming nonsense to sell land.
- 54 Yes
- 60 No
- 62 It will cause more problems for the people living here. While a 17% increase is small at the present time, but left unchecked, this percentage can increase and the town of Decatur's problems will increase by at least 50%.
- 63 No - previously there didn't seem to be any problems, but in the future the possibility for problems may occur.
- 65 Control is necessary.
- 69 No control will result in shanty towns.
- 70 I live in an area that once was very similar to Decatur. I have seen what uncontrolled growth can do to an area, ie. congested roads, pollution to name just two.
- 74 New buildings are required to be inspected by the county and meet state regulations.
- 75 None.
- 77 If we don't control the development of the land we'll be in trouble in the future.
- 84 Without some control, everyone loses.
- 88 No to all the above, with the provision.
- 90 While some controlled subdivision type development is inevitable, subdivisions generally diminish the overall quality of life for all.

- 91 It is time to blow the whistle on those who would exploit the land for personal financial gain.
- 94 This whole answer depends on what the individual owners would do or plan to do with the land. Some development has to be a plus for the area.
- 96 Must have reasonable controls.
- 97 No See #15
- 101 Same as #12 above.
- 103 Great!
- 105 Allows a ponderous box to be opened in our community.
- 110 We should preserve our wet lands and allow building about 4-5 acre parcels. Farmers who no longer use their land should be allowed to subdivide.
- 117 Same as above.
- 119 Decatur has 2000 acres of State Forest, many acres of wetlands; is that not enough of woods and trees and nature?
- 120 Some controls and laws are necessary for zoning - as to water and septic systems, etc.
- 122 People don't like to be told what they can do with their land. It's bad enough that, due to the tax laws, we really only "rent" our land from the government. You don't pay the "rent" and it is seized and sold.
- 126 NOT controlling land development is the same as turning our land over to the developers who are only about \$ \$ \$.
- 127 The town has gotten along since the 1800's without the "control" that is mentioned here.
- 132 Not controlling land development would create temporarily immediate wealth for the few and provide a larger tax base to draw on which may have social benefits provided by tax income.
- 137 How can you think of telling new people in the area what they should build, when every house and our own barn in the town itself is a disgrace - there are laws on the books now, but noone wants to confront the old establishment, there are other houses that use their yards as junk yards.
- 141 Sensible controls not excessive controls benefit all of the above.
- 144 None, see above.

COMMENT ON QUESTION NUMBER FIFTEEN

- 1 There will never be any improvement in the Town of Decatur until special interests are eliminated. There must be social justice for all residents, as well as the elimination of small time squabbles and groups. One town, one people, one purpose. Justice for all. Leadership that is looked up to and honored for good, faithful and loyal service.
- 2 This survey is a very good idea and well overdue. We own 5 acres of woods and do not plan to develop it. The town is quiet and the citizens are friendly and helpful. It is too bad that small towns in NY State are almost forced to subdivide and develop in order to broaden their tax base so

- that basic maintenance of roads etc. can be done. Good Luck!
- 4 How about lowering the property tax for the senior citizen?
- 5 ZONING STINKS! We don't need it!!
- 6 I have lived here most of my life. If you drive around town most buildings are kept up and decent. The Village of Decatur itself is a disgrace. Most families are low income or middle. Why haven't we applied for HUD programs or other programs if any are available to fix up some of these houses? I know that there is free money out there for low income people but the town has to apply for it.
- 7 Garbage day should be any day but Saturday. Why all the fuss about planning; don't see any rush for people to move to Decatur.
- 11 I no longer own property in Decatur. Please change your records.
- 15 Yes we do not fully understand the issue of subdividing. We would like more information on this.
- 16 I am only in Decatur for very short visits so I am not totally aware of changes.
- 17 500 ft. road frontage, is it necessary? 5 acres of land to build, why? You only need 1/2 acre. 200 ft. of road frontage is plenty. If people want to subdivide their land, I think they have the right.
- 19 Lot sizes in Decatur regulated.
- 20 Road frontage is unreasonable, 500 ft. and 5 acres is too much.
- 21 I don't feel qualified to make judgments.
- 22 We would like to see the Planning Board continue to enforce, with compassion, strong land use laws. The Town board should support them in that goal. continue to provide information to the people so that the misinformation that gets spread by the disgruntled citizens can be understood in context. Is there any way to convince the highway department not to cut so many trees along the town roads? The roads seem excessively wide. Thanks.
- 23 Abandoned trailers that are not maintained become an eyesore to the community.
- 27 This 500 ft. frontage to build a new house or to buy land is for the birds.
- 30 Erect a decent Town Hall.
- 31 If you have 200 ft. frontage and 5 to 6 acres subdivision that the town is controlling you may get more people to buy and live up here, that is if you are interested in building in the Town of Decatur.
- 33 On question #8, I believe we are losing some of these amenities. On question #11 depending on human attitudes! If one respects other's rights, no problem! People have to live somewhere.
- 38 Let's have a cleaner and healthier Decatur by asking everyone to do their fair share. A proud community is a clean community.

- 41 Since I do not yet live in Decatur, I am not familiar with
the issues involved. I would like to be kept informed since
I plan to become a permanent resident. What goes on
there is and will be important to me.
- 42 Create an interesting rural township. Encourage home
industry. Vitalize older historic sites, ie. water power
above buttermilk falls - that could be a nice pond. Vital
town needs could also be citizen inspired and supported.
- 43 For the sake of the record: I'm a woman now over 70 who
for the "escape of the city" reasons suggested above,
bought in '84 a piece of land with an unfinished house on
it. I've brought the house to habitable (though still
unfinished) condition and I'm still happily able to get into
my car and be out there in a little over an hour. I'm there
as much as my schedule permits, but I haven't the right of
a full-time resident to try and sway town decisions. I do
pay taxes and want to be a responsible contributing
member of the community. I love my place just as it is and
hope that out-of-control "development" won't destroy the
qualities for which I come there.
- 44 Leave the town as it is. Would not like to see it built up
into urban living.
- 45 Change frontage and set back, try and get more people to
buy and live up here. More people will bring in more
money for the town.
- 46 Questions 12 and 13 - There should be more input from the
people concerning their future. Is there a grandfather of
grandmother clause concerning the 5 acres and 500 ft.
implement? Any chance of adjusting the 500 ft. frontage?
- 47 All Decatur needs is a little clean-up and a few ordinances
designed to keep Decatur about the way it is.
- 49 I feel that the Planning board is heading the right way.
there can be changes and exceptions and one is the
frontage on a building lot. Each year the rules and
regulations should be reviewed, taking in consideration
any difficulties in the past year. However a small minority
should not rule. Developers should be a no-no. (comments
that we recently observed in the Advantage is uncalled
- 50 On question #11 - this is not a yes/no question, it would be
a better place because of the tax base, but it would be a
worse place because of traffic, garbage, related problems.
KUDOS to those who selflessly give their time and energies
to such worthwhile endeavors - keep up the good work!
And THANK YOU for taking ups the challenge.
- 51 I feel your questions are very leading. Your statistics are
very biased and inaccurate. How come the # of mobile
homes was listed and the # of homes built was omitted.
- 52 I feel that if a person wants to build a home that he should
not have to build on 5 acres of land if he does not want to 5
acres of land is a lot of land for people, especially with
some health problems to take care of. Also I feel that the
500 ft. road frontage should be abolished. I feel that
everyone should have to meet the same requirements.
Everyone should be treated equal.

- 53 I think everyone should should pay equal taxes except for farmers, it's not fair for the new people who move into old houses and fix them up, get their taxes doubled while people who live in run down houses pay nothing. Decatur will never be nothing if the people don't work together.
- 54 Yes. Here in Millertown NY, NY City is 96 miles away. People are moving here, buying houses and driving to work in NY City. They say it beats owning a home on Long Island and commuting. Also certain millionaires and home development companies have bought land and are trying to make "cookie cutter" developments and want village water and other "goodies" as well.
- 55 I think the town needs to restrict how many junk cars can be stored on a persons property. Like no more than 2 unregistered vehicles.
- 58 There should be a restriction on where mobile homes are placed. New mobile home next to church, old delapidated house, unoccupied should be removed and is a hazard.
- 61 Before the 5 acre, 500 ft. is eliminated, a study should be done on Decatur's aquifer and also Decatur should look into the problems New England and some New York towns have had as a result of 2 acre subdivision laws. One question #11 one or two acre splits detract, larger ones could have some value to the economy.
- 62 If we can maintain a low enough tax base for the property and especially the school tax. People won't be forced to sell instead of losing their properties. I stress again that increased population causes more harm than good. It is not just in Decatur, but world wide.
- 63 Please notify us of any meetings we would attend and feel there should be guide lines set so developers can be controlled but existing residents and home owners should be handled differently.
- 64 I feel that subdivision is all right if it is closely regulated so that we don't end up with condos and housing projects, etc. But I don't think the laws should be so strict that if some of the farmers in Decatur need to sell some of their land to pay taxes or just to survive that they can't do so. Perhaps a cleanup project would be helpful for Decatur and the cemetery; There may be some residents who can't do cleanup themselves and need help possibly from Boy Scouts or volunteers who would be willing to help them?
- 69 This survey is a step in the right direction and more communication of this sort is needed with your out of towners.
- 70 Would like to be able to attend above meetings, but I am from out of town and it would be difficult.
- 74 Why on question #8 was multiple choice and #9 was fill the blank? I question the validity of your statistics. How come there are no numbers of farms for 1970 and non-farm 1970? 1979 I recall more than 8 mobile homes.
- 75 Planning Board is doing a good job - keep up the good work. Clean up the town!

- 76 Planning is an absolute must in this day and age. Just remember to go slow and think about what you are doing. It must be what is good for everyone , not your own personal wishes. We wish you well.
- 77 We live on Long Island. We bought this property so in the future we could live in this area. We want to get away from pollution and crime and lots of traffic. should this area become built up like L.I. we would surely find some other place to live. Control it and keep it a place like it is now.
- 78 What about parcels that are uniformly shy. 500 ft. deep - the "idiot" law of 500 ft. frontage says no parcel less than 23 acres can be sold. Did the geniuses who thought the "idiot" law up consider this? do any of them own parcels uniformly deep? Several communities in Oregon tried stunts like this to keep outsiders out, and the U.S. Supreme Court slapped them down hard and fast.
- 81 Send landowners information on the specifics of the Master Plan, Zoning, etc.
- 84 I'm glad to see you are looking for input from all parties involved. I hope to some day make Decatur my permanent home. To the extent I can contribute at this time I would appreciate the opportunity. Please feel free to call me about the first meeting of the Planning Board after you receive this survey.
- 85 We feel the frontage should be changed to 250 ft. and the acres to 400.
- 86 We should monitor/control subdivision of property to limit investment of purchasing land for this sole purpose.
- 87 Work to repeal the 500 ft. road frontage. Work to repeal the 5 acre min.
- 90 Nice job on survey - this should give some good indication of community feelings about planning.
- 91 Who are all the presumptuous people who claim the land is theirs? No one can own the land, it owns them. And ultimately it will consume them along with all their pride and arrogance. The land is in our stewardship. How many can honestly say they are doing their best to honor this commitment?
- 92 We are unable to attend meetings, as we are not full time residents. Thank you for including us in the survey.
- 93 Not having lived in the town, it is difficult for us to answer some of your key questions. We enjoy visiting this area and think the area has a lot to offer. You are commended for sending this survey out to the property owners. It demonstrates to us you really care how the public feels about the area.
- 97 The object of the Board should be to reduce taxes. Is this the final objective or is it to reduce the influx of new blood?
- 98 People will speculate?? Large parcels of land only if they can be subdivided. The question is what is a reasonable size lot for building?

- 102 Since a good part of the town needs a good cleaning, why not offer jobs doing this to help some get off welfare and be independent?
- 103 Please check into expanding the population of this town and we need a more consistent form of assessment. THANKS.
- 104 You are working very hard for all of us in Decatur. Keep up the good work. Our environment needs it and so do all of us in Decatur. Save the Earth. THANKS. Development Environment Control Act True Urban Residents.
- 106 I would like to see the town grow economically. I also know there were 18 permits handed out in 1989 of which only 10 were for new construction. So I would say that all the lots that have been sold it hasn't hurt that much. If we cut down there will be no growth and that is not good.
- 108 We like the solitude where my camp is, the hunting is great. It's a nice get away and I hope Decatur doesn't have many changes.
- 110 I have only been here a short time, 4 - 5 years, but I see no growth in town. People in town should be given some incentive to improve their areas and make it a more desirable place to live. Raise the salaries of town workers and maybe get a post office and garage. Encourage a local store to move in.
- 111 I strongly oppose any plan which would encourage development and lead to large increases in population.
- 114 People elected to office should be responsible people and people who care for the well being of the inhabitants of the hamlet and not because of petty politics. Has Decatur or is Decatur becoming a used car lot town? If so, why shouldn't a substantial fee be paid to permit this practice? It will never happen!
- 117 The survey was a good idea, however your questions are worded to get the results that are wanted by the majority of the Planning board and the poorly chosen Master Plan committee (not a cross section of new and old residents, large and small land owners). Your fact sheet is not accurate and is presented in a way to mislead the reader, ie. mobile home court, did Decatur gain 50 acres in 9 years? Decatur at one time had 1100 people, they did not need a master plan or subdivision laws, you are making problems out of something that was not a problem. Perhaps you should back off.
- 118 When I was growing up everyone worked together to develop our town - we were proud. there were more people in Decatur than there are now and it seems we have more problems. I'm sick of people moving here from larger towns/cities and trying to take over. All they do is bring their problems with them and try to rule. Send them back where they come from and leave us alone.
- 119 We have federal regulations, state regulations, county regulations, environmental regulations, etc. We certainly don't need a local planning board making any more.

- way it is. If anybody wants more, let them move to a bigger town. Keep Decatur the way it is.
- 129 Pertaining to #11. This question is the most difficult to answer. Growth is a necessary part of continuing to survive. The town receives more revenue and some good citizens. On the other hand unorganized expansion could wreck havoc on our community in many many ways. One example might be if a large number of hunting camps sprang up on very small parcels of land. They would own a few acres and hunt the whole town. In summation: organized expansion overall will benefit the town. Unorganized expansion overall will hurt and possibly destroy our town.
- 130 Wh should try to control the speed of vehicles on Decatur Rd.
- 132 Not controlling the size of building lots will result in increasing subdivision and ultimate "Bacon Striping" of the entire town of Decatur. Don't buckle under to the immediate greed of the few beans one generation from now. Selling out Decatur's greatest asset - open spaces and aesthetic value for dollars is a crime and social breakdown. I don't understand why generational families would consider selling their parents legacy for green pieces of paper.
- 136 Nowadays it is difficult to condemn all developments as some have advantages to the town and area surrounding it (economic and social growth of a given area). However, environmental impacts are of a growing concern and certainly should be taken into account. Our acreage has no utility. As I would like to see this in the future, it brings with it environmental planning and responsibility.
- 137 To much has been made about new construction and subdivision. So far that's the only good thing that's happened to Decatur. More concern should be on cleaning up burnt and abandoned houses at the owner's expense. The new house has added to the beauty and economy, but little has been done to the roads for years. The only think positive was the paving of Fish and Game Rd. - not a very good record. All of the Board should take a drive in any direction and when you cross on the Decatur line see the difference. With the added tax from new construction, can we at least have good roads? What else are we offering?
- 138 My family uses property on weekends, we find we can not get rid of and dispose of garbage. Which I find very annoying since I am a taxpayer who takes pride in the beauty of Decatur and surrounding areas.
- 139 Growth and development are inevitable. If you don't plan and enforce building laws, eventually Decatur will look like central NJ.
- 144 We feel that your committee is on the right track; subdividing and controlling the creation and development of parcels.
- 146 Occasionally have Town Meetings on weekends.

- 147 Use the Planning Board to protect, not inhibit, people to the extent that they cannot use their property (which they paid for, and pay taxes on every year) within reason (which is common sense).
- 148 I feel that 500 ft. frontage and 5 acre plots will definitely prevent a lot of people from selling land and also prevent a number of people being able to afford to build if they so desired (at least it lets me out). I would have absolutely no use for this much land to pay taxes on.

TOWN OF DECATUR

MASTER PLAN

DECATUR TOWN PLANNING BOARD

John Wool, Chairman
Dominick J. Reisen, Secretary

Nila L. Conover
Mary M. Kersman
Marilyn K. Flaherty

PAST PLANNING BOARD MEMBERS

Betsy Crowell
John Lum

PAST MASTER PLAN COMMITTEE

Bill Barth
Elmer Foreman
Tom Frampton
Curly Ives
Wendy R. Ludvigsen
Dorothy Mauro
Walter A. Schlierman

OTSEGO COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Diane Carlton, Director
Terry Bliss
Michael Osburn

Decatur, New York
March, 1992

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Prologue	
I:	Introduction	
	A. Intent and Rationale	1
	B. Legal Basis of Plan	1
	C. Planning Process	3
II:	Goals and Objectives	4
III:	Overview of Decatur	
	A. Past, Present, and Anticipated Future	5
	1. Introduction	5
	2. History of Decatur	5
	3. The People	12
	4. Seasonal Residents	14
	5. Economic Conditions	15
	6. Land Use	
	introduction	15
	parcel size	16
	agriculture	17
	assessments	17
	conclusion	18
	7. Decatur Aesthetics	
	Past	21
	Present	21
	Future	22
	Conclusion	22
	B. Land Use Laws	
	1. Introduction	23
	2. Legal Basis and Role	23
	3. Zoning Laws of 1975	24
	4. Subdivision Regulations of 1987	26
	5. 1987 Changes to the Zoning Law	27
	6. 1989 Changes to the Zoning Law	29
	7. 1991 Changes to the Zoning Law	29
	8. Conclusion	31
IV:	Issues and Concerns	
	A. Introduction	32
	B. Rural Character of the Town	32
	C. Environmental Quality of Decatur	
	1. Introduction	33
	2. Water	33
	3. Air	34
	4. Soil and Woodlands	34
	5. Large Scale Intrusions	35

6. Solid Waste Management	35
7. Conclusion	35
D. Economic Concerns	39
E. Specific Concerns of the Hamlet	
1. Past	40
2. Present	41
3. Future	41
4. Conclusion	42
V. Implementation Program	44
Appendix	
Planning Survey of 1990 and Results	

PROLOGUE

The land around us, its character and appearance, has changed drastically due to the forces of settlement and economics. The land which comprises Decatur's woodland. With European settlement, these forests were cleared to make businesses. Chief among these businesses was agriculture.

Due to the demands of agriculture, large tracts of land were cleared. At its height in this region, these fields and meadows were well kept for the most part. With the slow decline of farming, acres of meadows have been transformed, making their way back to forest.

Concurrent with this agricultural decline have been expansion pressures. Tracts of land once devoted to agriculture have been converted to residential use. With population increases in Decatur, the character and appearance of the land became more natural forested state again. Once scenic vistas devoted to grazing or crops are now filled with houses, mobile homes, and trailers.

The rural character of our community, if deemed worthy, must not succumb to haphazard development. Yet legitimate development pressures must be recognized to maintain Decatur's rural charm. The Town's various land use laws and regulations must do just that. As development pressures increased, the community realized the need for a statement of its land use philosophy. Years of research and dozens of people have enunciated such a philosophy.

Change is inevitable. This decade's pressures will probably not be the same as the previous decade's. However, with the assistance of all the Townspeople, we can see the future preserved at its best.