Groton Listening & Learning Session

4/18/2012

Attending: Steve Gobel, Pat Gaines, Glen Morey, Sarah Knobel, Glenda Abbey (TC Action host), George Ferrari, Amy LeViere, Mary Pat Dolan

George distributed materials for the session: Annual reports, one page summary of Foundation Rural Community Grants and the list of questions we’ve used to guide the conversation. He also provided a really nice intro summary of what the Foundation is and how it uses the resources of many to make grants to improve a place.

Economic Development

* Lack of a pharmacy and grocery store. Working on it, with some prospects, but detracts from viability of community.
* The community needs broad band in order for citizens to keep pace and for the community to be competitive.
* Dollar General is coming into town. That is a very good thing.
* The lack of adequate transportation in and out of Groton and its impact on people’s ability to find jobs.
* There is cable in the village but not in outlying areas.
* Hydrofracking is a very emotional issue in the town. The town board has been examining it very seriously for a good while. They are frustrated at the lack of leadership at the state level, leaving towns to each figure it out for themselves. People feel very deeply on the issue. The board recently received a 600 signature anti-fracking petition, but it also hears from people like the 3 or 4 farmers whose farms were saved because of leases they had signed.
* The recession has impacted Groton like many other communities. Young people have gone south, or moved in with family members because they can’t go it alone. Families are trying to make do with much less, giving up cable and coming to the library for entertainment. The bank has not had a foreclosure in over 20 years, but is now close with a couple of struggling families. Downtown business are doing their best and there are people who would really like to open businesses in the downtown storefront, but there is just not enough there to make the business viable – at least not yet.
* Thinking in a more regional, as compared with county specific mode, would benefit Groton. Gadabout will not go to Cortland even though most of the Groton community is much more oriented to Cortland than Ithaca.

School and Youth

* Groton has an excellent school that the whole community takes pride in. There is worry that continuing difficulties with education funding could force an examination of the prospect of the high school merging with another high school. Pretty strong feelings that it would be negative for youth, families and the community overall as it is the hub of the community. If the school is no longer the central organizing force in the community, the whole community could start to disintegrate.
* Youth leaving the area in droves because of the lack of employment.
Town could really use a youth center. The real estate could be easily identified, however, with requirements and renovation requirements- a $5K acquisition turns into a $70K project.

Preserving the Rural Character of the community

* The community wants to keep the rural character of the community. Development of CSA’s in the Groton area would be one way to enhance rural character. Development of a community garden and possible synergy between library and TCA was part of roundtable discussion.
* In order to keep youth in the community, it needs not only jobs but housing. The stock of housing that will accommodate growing young families is sometimes just not there and they are forced to move elsewhere.
* Government funds for home repairs have just about dried up over the course of the last 3-5 years.

Housing

* Many spots in the community could use sidewalk expansion, and perhaps even a bike path. In some places the sidewalks are really bad making it hard for the elderly, parents with children in strollers etc.
* There is concern about housing blight and dilapidation. One of those present talked about single mothers with infant children and the type of substandard housing they are thrust into. Also concern that many citizens may not know what help is available and where they would go to get it if they could. It was noted that the Groton rep, Brian Robinson, is working hard to try and get satellite services established in Groton for some of the major social services entities. TCA endorses those moves and sees their facility as something that could help facilitate such endeavors.

Volunteerism

* There is concern about the lack of volunteerism on the part of those between 25 and 45. The average age of community volunteers is up there and creeping higher. Who will coach little league and football? Who will make up the membership of the service organizations? Though there is also thinking that says some of the long timers just have to move aside and make way for the viewpoint, time and energy of younger people.