**Rural Listening Learning Brochure Text Draft**

**A Qualitative Sense of Responses from 8 Rural Townships in Tompkins County**

**From Individual Town meetings conducted Fall 2009-Spring 2012**

Pride of Unique Place Identity – Forging a Future in Uncertain Times

**Major Summary Issue Clusters**

The following five major summary issue clusters are one way of organizing many comments shared during Listening Learning sessions.

**1-Connection and Pride of Place**

Pride in Unique Sense of Place and Rural Values

Town Gathering Place

Multipurpose Community Center Building

Transportation

E-connectivity

Pedestrian and Vehicular Infrastructure

Recreation Assets

**2-Opportunity**

Vision for Community Building in New Economic Era

Development of New Leaders

Volunteers

Economic Development

Employment

Housing

**3-Land and Water**

Land Use Planning

Water and Aquifer Studies

Preservation of Unique Rural Character of Land

Next Generation Planning for Agricultural Land

**4-Future**

Youth

Schools

Libraries

Population Retention and Growth

**5-Care of Neighbor**

Basic Needs

Food

Heating

Health

A basic **overall theme** expressed in many ways in all places is the desire to **preserve current rural ways of life and values** with the need to adopt **new strategies** to provide opportunity for **growth** in an **uncertain future and unprecedented economic challenges**.

State and federal funding cuts for important programs were followed by county funding cuts and the property tax cap has strong impacts on reducing town resources and staff.

There are **significant differences** and **striking similarities** across the 8 rural towns of Tompkins County.

In Caroline, Danby, Dryden, Enfield, Groton, Lansing, Newfield and Ulysses residents are eager to share their values, their assets, their challenges and opportunities for partnering with the Community Foundation. Some towns have important internal rural-suburban divisions. Community Councils are important assets as are local town and village elected officials.

Some towns have their own county legislature representative and others share legislators with other towns making expressing their unique town voice at the county level more complex.

**1-Connection and Pride of Place**

There is a **strong sense of pride** and **specific town identity** in each of the eight rural towns of Tompkins County.

The town residents’ levels of **creativity**, **collaboration**, and **volunteerism** are commendable and valuable social capital assets.

**Sharing** of **resources**, **equipment**, **buildings** and **service delivery responsibility** across town lines and within towns between government and schools was expressed as an important future opportunity.

**Thinking more regionally beyond Tompkins County** borders, for example Dryden and Groton with Cortland County, may have strong positive new results.

Many town residents are more likely to respond to a request for volunteering to help out rather than an increase in taxes. Town residents know who they are; they know when something is a success. Success is celebrated.

In towns without a clear physical center or village downtown, such as Caroline, Danby, Enfield, and Lansing there is a **strong desire to develop more visible, publicly accessible common gathering places** such as a park or town center.

In towns with historically identifiable village centers such as Dryden, Groton, Newfield and Ulysses there is a **focus on preserving and growing existing areas to continue services** such as a pharmacy or a grocery store since most residents relate much more to their respective village centers than to Ithaca.

All towns expressed the importance of a **building** which could be used for a **multipurpose variety of community events**. Some towns have this asset, many others need it or want to improve or upgrade what they currently use for this purpose.

All towns lamented the far less than **needed** amount of **public transit options** and flexibility available. Walking paths, bike paths and sidewalk expansion were mentioned as important means of connectivity.

Many talked about the need to make **internet connectivity** more universally accessible.

Some talked about need to **improve communication** among various groups about what is going on within the town.

**2-Opportunity**

Growth of **employment opportunities** for all, especially for **youth**, in terms of training and **retention of young families** was a universal concern. This was often expressed along with a need for more **affordable housing**. Concern was expressed with the **aged housing stock** in need of repairs, energy conservation improvements and lead paint removal.

Residents are worried about young people leaving and never coming back and what that would mean for volunteer dependent activities such as food pantries, firefighting and EMT services.

**3-Land and Water**

Since planning happens at a local town level, the need for **land use plans** which balance preservation of natural resources such as water with economic development opportunity was a concern expressed.

Variable well **water quality** was mentioned.

The **Marcellus Shale formation hydrofracking** potential was recognized and each town takes a particular approach ranging from bans and moratoria to a more welcoming position. The divisiveness and conflicts about hydrofracking were recognized as putting pressure on town staff time and money taking them away from usual town business.

Sewer expansion was a concern in some but not all of the towns.

**4-Future**

The role of a **school** district and a school building along with split school district enrollment within a town were all discussed.

In those towns such as Dryden, Groton, Lansing, Newfield and Ulysses with an **indigenous school district** there was a **strong sense of pride**. Also mentioned was some concern about the tax resources needed to maintain these independent districts being in jeopardy which would force **undesired consolidations**.

Enfield residents send their children to four different districts. Caroline has an Ithaca City School District building with students heading home to a number of other places far away from the building which makes after school activities and transportation challenging.

Danby has neither school building nor library. Public **libraries** present in Dryden, Groton, Lansing, Newfield and Ulysses are important, if currently over used resources which could benefit from expanded hours and programs to serve more residents.

General loss of governmental support for **youth programming** was mentioned with the sense that the lower level is the new normal.

**Future energy use** and alternatives to fossil fuels such as biomass and wind were mentioned as concerns.

**5-Care of Neighbor**

How to provide for the **food and shelter needs**, such as heating expenses, of residents along with a desire to promote healthy nutrition and exercise habits were all expressed as concerns.

A myriad of **food issues** such as increasing CSAs, food stamp utilization and senior nutrition were also mentioned.

With many services’ points of access and eligibility determination located in Ithaca, many town **residents forgo signing up for assistance** even though they would qualify and benefit.

**Questions for the Future**

What is the best way to grow resources controlled at the town level to make change possible?

How does the Community Foundation encourage effective and efficient use of philanthropic assets in the eight rural towns?

How can the Community Foundation maintain and grow relationships over time with rural residents?