

Innovative Clarence Greenprint Wins a 2014 NY Upstate American Planning Association Award

The Clarence Greenprint program received the 'Planning Excellence Award for Implementation' from the NY Upstate Chapter of the American Planning Association on September 18th, 2014 at the Memorial Art Museum in Rochester, NY. The 2014 NY Upstate APA Chapter Awards recognize outstanding work being done by planners, planning firms, elected officials, and citizens to advance the science and art of community and regional planning in upstate New York. The Planning Excellence Award for Implementation recognizes an effort that demonstrates a significant achievement in accomplishing positive changes as a result of planning. Nominated efforts need to have been in continuous effect for a minimum of five years. Winning efforts are distinguished for originality and innovation, quality, thoroughness, degree of public participation, effectiveness and results, and degree of community support. The program's design efforts began in 1998 and were implemented in November of 2002 when Clarence residents overwhelmingly approved a \$12.5 million bond authorization to fund the protection of open space, riparian corridors, scenic vistas, and farmland in the town. To date, the funding has been used to protect 1,315 acres of irreplaceable land in perpetuity. The President of the NY Upstate APA Chapter, Ellen Parker, said that, "The Greenprint is the best example of a municipal open space preservation program in New York State, if not the country. The amount of forests, meadows, stream corridors and working farms protected is impressive. Making protected farmland available to farmers is a unique feature of this program and an effective way to enable the transfer of land to the next generation of farmers. It is a model that should be emulated in other communities." Wow! While we knew that the Greenprint program would help Clarence rural, what we didn't know that the program would also have such a positive economic impact on all of the other residents in the Town. After 10 years' experience with the Greenprint and prior to renewing it in 2013, the Town of Clarence conducted a study to determine the program's impact. Jim Callahan, Clarence Director of Community Development and an integral part of the program, advised that "the study revealed an average increase of 15% in the sale price of properties adjacent to preserved properties. Countywide data showed the average appreciation rate of properties in Clarence following adoption of the Greenprint to have been five times that of comparable towns in the region and Clarence's tax rate was 30% lower than in comparable communities in the area." In addition, Moodys Investor Service cited our Greenprint program as one of the many reasons that they raised our bond rating to Aa1, one of the highest municipal bond ratings in Western New York. Wow! As I watched Peter Wolfe, Chairman of the Recreation Advisory Council and Nancy Smith, Executive Director of the Western New York Land Conservancy accept the award on behalf of the Town of Clarence I was taken back to the early days of the program in 2002 and marveled at how far we have come. From a zero start in 2002, the Greenprint program now includes the Eichorn Farm, 180 acres on Salt Road, The Ball Farm, 120 acres on Greiner Road, The Spoth Farm, 102 acres on Lapp Road, The Christner Farm, 90 acres on Salt Road, The Owen Farm, 90 acres on Rapids Road and many, many more. This is land that will never be developed, and most of it is available to Clarence residents who want to hike, bike, run or just stroll through it on weekends and enjoy the view. Property in the Greenprint program is

protected in two ways. The Town of Clarence can purchase the land outright from its original owner or the town can purchase the development rights and put a conservation easement on the land. A conservation easement is a legal agreement that prohibits building of single family homes, apartments or commercial businesses on the land, and it protects scenic views, wildlife habitat and/or farmland from being developed. No one is forced to enter their property into the Greenprint program. Owners are paid for their land based on an appraisal and comparison of market values of the property. As such, the program is designed for interested and willing landowners. Priorities in selecting land for protection of the Greenprint program are based upon the number of acres of the parcel, proximity to other protected lands, natural feature of the land and anticipated acquisition costs. All Greenprint monies were approved during a town-wide referendum more formally known as the "Open Space Bond Act". The last survey that we conducted in 2012 showed that the Greenprint program is still the most popular program in the Town of Clarence, with the vast majority of respondents citing the need to protect open space and keep Clarence rural. This is essential because the pressure on residential development in the Town of Clarence is tremendous right now. The town was recently looking at buying a piece of property that was over 100 acres in Clarence Center. A developer came to us and wanted to buy it. He was one of many developers who were looking at building either single family or multifamily housing in the hamlet. He thought that he could build about 300+ new homes on that parcel. Clarence Center is so small that 300 new homes would have changed the Center forever. The added traffic generated by the extra homes as well as the additional burden on the schools (elementary, middle and high) made buying the parcel a high priority for the town. While this particular piece of property was not purchased with Greenprint money, most of it will be eventually rolled into and protected by the Greenprint program. The 2012 survey also showed that there were very few complaints about the Greenprint from among the thousands of residents who completed the survey. After reading through every one of these surveys that you all so kindly sent in, I realize that the **majority of people in Clarence want Clarence to stay just the way it is**. Not to become another Amherst, but to keep that rural, farm based, county feel that so defines Clarence and separates us from our more urban neighbors. The Greenprint program helps us to accomplish this action.

If you have property that you would like to see preserved, please feel free to call me at Town Hall and I will make sure that an analysis of your property is completed. All property that is considered for purchase is ranked by the Nature Conservancy, an independent organization based in Western New York that is dedicated to keeping New York green. They will visit your property and provide the Town of Clarence Recreation Advisory Committee with a ranking. The highest ranking pieces get purchased first and the latter remain in the queue pending additional funds.

Should you have any suggestions for future columns and/or comments on this column, please feel free to call, email dhartzell@clarence.ny.us or stop by and visit. My door is always open!