

Planning Board Profiles: Viola Miller

If zoning is enacted this year in Lansing, it will as much as anything else mark the culmination of a unrelentingly courteous 30-year campaign by Viola Miller, of Bush Lane.

"I knew *everyone* from Bush Lane to Forest Home in the 40s," recalled Miller, who moved to Lansing in 1938. As postwar expansion began in the 50s, Route 13 was built through the edge of Lansing in the 60s and "development hasn't stopped since."

1970s Zoning Attempt

Long before the environmental movement was born, the construction of the Ca-yuga and Triphammer Mall complexes troubled Miller. No one considered the effects of filling farm ponds and paving the fill as mall parking lots back then. "There was no planning; no one cared how it looked," said Miller.

Miller and some neighbors went to the Town Board in September, '67 about the need for zoning and planning. "To me, zoning was 'planning,' not taking away," said Miller. "Planning so we could count on the future and know what our neighborhoods would be like." By the end of '67, the Town Board formed a town planning board and in '68 the Lansing Planning Board began drawing up zoning.

"Supervisor Harris Dates supported the Planning Board by giving it powers over subdivisions," said Miller. A committee of 18 (as she recalls) spent years trying to satisfy people in the different parts of town. Lansing's first proposed land use ordinance reflected the north:south divide by recommending a variety of land use controls south of Peruville Road, but declaring everything north of this 'Mason/Dixon line' as "Rural" with no restrictions whatsoever.

However, changes in Tompkins County's political organization intervened before the zoning was enacted. When county government shifted from a Board of Supervisors to an elected Board of Repre-



Viola Miller

sentatives, Supervisor Dates became a county representative. The new Town Supervisor, Charles Howell, was a fervent believer in property rights and a philosophical opponent of zoning.

When then-Assemblywoman Connie Cook got the NYS Legislature to pass legislation authorizing the Town of Lansing to have partial zoning, the Town Planning Board was limited to developing zoning criteria for the southern portion of town up towards, but not including, Peruville Road.

Though the partial zoning was enacted in the beginning of the 70s, the internal stresses within the town became acute. "The people in the south end were upset that they lived in a town that had no feeling for them at all," said Miller, "particularly as this was where the growth was coming."

She vividly recalls the end of a Planning Board zoning committee meeting in 1972 with members still chatting on the steps of her patio. Member Fred Bent turned around to the group and said, "There's one way we can take care of this and govern ourselves by forming a village." This off-



MOVING UP - Lansing Cub Scouts had their annual Blue & Gold banquet at Lansing United Methodist Church where eight Webelos made the move to Boy Scouts. Pictured are Webelos leader Richard Vaughan with Landon Cook, Brian Vaughan, Billy Wright, Dustin LeBlanc, Jonathan Selby, Ben Munson and Matt Ravas. [Not pictured: Webelos Seth Tucker.]

the-cuff comment took hold and became the impetus for forming the Village of Lansing. Efforts to zone the northern part of the town languished and the Planning Board was limited to its subdivision functions.

1980s Zoning Attempt

Pro-zoning and anti-zoning are two currents in a river, smiled Miller, but neither is the river. When Phil "Pheep" Munson became Town Supervisor in the late 70s, the tide turned. He and his board were supportive of land use planning.

"Perhaps they were too supportive," said Miller, "because they included proposed restrictions on some agricultural land uses." Informal conversations around town were lively and the net result was that zoning was not enacted and much of the sitting Town Board was defeated.

1990s Zoning Effort

With the passage of another decade, the growth of residents' requests for water, public sewage, recreation programs and other government services paralleled clear demographic shifts in the town.

"Everyone on the Board saw the need and reason for looking into zoning," said Miller. "Folks had different ideas about where it should be and how it might be structured, but all agreed that zoning merited another review."

The Planning Board went about things differently this time. Former chairwoman Linda Hirvonen started the long public planning process with large informational meetings and asked people to sign up for topics that interested them. The topic groups became working committees under the umbrella of the 2010 Committee.

The Planning Board sifted the recommendations and ultimately developed a Comprehensive Town Plan for Lansing in the next century. This plan has been adopted by the Town Board and serves as the policy blueprint for the Planning Board's current zoning efforts.

The current proposal is not much different from the 1972 proposal, said Miller. The rural agricultural (RA) part of town has virtually no restrictions on land use while the areas south of Buck Road are zoned to maintain the current character of these areas.

"Our current Planning Board works well together," said Miller. "We argue because we have different philosophies, but we strive for consensus on what's best for the town."

"We've tried to develop a plan that everyone can live with and that will be acceptable for the safety, welfare and benefit of the town."



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