

Executive Summary

Comprehensive planning is the process by which data and opinion are synthesized into a vision for the future of a community, laying the framework for a series of recommendations based on good planning principals that will map a procedure for achieving the vision. In other words, a vision leads to recommendations that lead to an implementation program. Success is ultimately measured by the ability to implement the recommendations, therefore, it is important that the Comprehensive Plan identifies achievable projects/tasks. Since it is the residents and business owners of the community that will pay for or undertake projects/tasks their support is necessary. There is no better way to gain this support than to involve as many people as possible in the formulation of the plan. This can be a tremendous effort and the Town of Guilderland was equal to the task.

A. Community Outreach

The basic vision and guiding principle for the Town's Comprehensive Plan was to create a community-based plan that would provide the public with the greatest opportunity to assist in its preparation. This was accomplished through a Community Outreach Program. Different forums were established to provide different opportunities for input. At the grassroots level was Study Circles. This program provided residents to chat about their Town and how it should look in 20 years. Although facilitated (by trained residents) the process was much more relaxed. Other components of the process included a written survey sent to 12,000 homes (approximately 3,000 returned), a phone survey (sample group of 100 people), Focus Group Workshops, Neighborhood Meetings, Community Work Sessions, Advisory Board Meetings, and Fact-Finding Outreach. Focus Group Workshops concentrated on specific issues that included economic development and housing; natural resources, open space and agricultural land preservation; transportation and infrastructure; and recreation and cultural resources. Community Work Sessions were conducted as an opportunity for the public to review and comment on each step in the planning process. Neighborhood Meetings were conducted to get the planning process out of the central location and into the various communities in the Town. Fact-finding Outreach was also an attempt to actively seek information from the public outside of a public forum. This program involved conducting interviews with key organizations, agencies and individuals that can have a significant impact on the community and may provide unique insight. Most all the meetings occurring at the Town Hall were broadcast through cable. A web site was created and the media was used to the greatest extent practicable.

B. Inventory & Analysis

An Inventory & Analysis of the Town's resources was conducted concurrently with the Community Outreach Program. Both are information gathering process that are essential to develop the framework for the Plan Recommendations. Much of the basic information for the inventory was obtained from the Town's database, prepared by the Planning Department. This information was supplemented by further data collection and analysis.

As a component of the Comprehensive Plan, the Inventory & Analysis is an information resource for the Town, providing valuable data on historic and cultural resources, population and housing, land use and zoning, agricultural resources, physiography and topography, water resources, ecology, community services, transportation, utilities, recreational resources, economics, and fiscal resources.

C. Community Vision, Goals and Objectives

The Community Outreach Program, supplemented by an Inventory & Analysis of the Town's resources, provided the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Board and its consultants with the information and direction necessary to create a vision statement and prepare goals and objectives that would guide the preparation of the Plan. The Town's vision of the future is perhaps the single most important guiding principle used throughout the planning process. The vision states:

The Town of Guilderland envisions itself as a distinctive suburban and rural community within the Capital District. It is a desirable and attainable place for families and individuals of all ages to live and work - with a large assortment of local and regional opportunities for high-quality employment, education, recreation, and cultural activity. These opportunities are easily accessed within the town and throughout the region by a varied and efficient transportation system that emphasizes mobility and safety for all residents. Guilderland's settlement patterns are focused around attractive and vibrant neighborhoods, and are based on a recognition of, and shared sense of responsibility for the town's natural, agricultural, open space, and scenic resources and the value of these resources to the current and future health, culture, and economy of the community. It is a community that looks to the future in the belief that through continued community dialogue and action it can manage and shape change for the better.

The associated goals and objectives include the following topics: growth management; transportation and mobility; public utilities; business, employment, and fiscal resources; housing; town character; agriculture, natural resources, and open space; cultural resources; recreation; governance; and implementation.

D. Plan Recommendations

The Town of Guilderland is both a suburban and rural community whose development issues are a function of its proximity to the City of Albany, excellent access to interstate highways, and its residential qualities. The purpose of the following recommendations are to provide potential solutions to resolve the issues of current and future development based on the Town's vision for the future. Some issues are so complex that several steps may be required to ultimately solve the problem, the first of which may be to identify the problem in greater detail through additional study. In order to focus discussion, recommendations are grouped into three general topics or "new plan elements" that include Land Use, Natural Resources, and Transportation. The section "Growth Management Tools" is provided as an introduction to planning concepts and terms used elsewhere in the document. The final section of this chapter summarizes the Plan Recommendations on a geographic basis defined as planning areas.

D.1 Growth Management Tools

Growth management is a process by which a community develops the methods and means (tools) to control the type, location and amount of land development (growth) in the community. The most common growth management tool is zoning. This is a regulatory tool. Regulatory tools are essential to ensure orderly growth, however, other measures that rely on incentives and voluntary involvement by landowners are also available and can be very effective. Some of these tools include term easements and tax abatements, purchase of development rights, transfer of development rights, and development guidelines in conjunction with community supported plans. In some instances the Plan Recommendations identify specific growth management tools but the purpose of this section is to provide the Town with a comprehensive list of growth management tools for consideration in implementing future plans, such as the Rural Guilderland Plan recommended under Rural Guilderland.

D.2 Land Use

Residential Neighborhoods - The Town is comprised of numerous residential neighborhoods with many attributes that make the Town of Guilderland a desirable place to live. Growth in the Town and in neighboring communities has resulted in traffic impacts and a growing lack of neighborhood identity as neighborhoods expand outward. Primary recommendations include:

- Reinvestment in older neighborhoods.
- Use of buffers to reduce land use conflicts.
- Improvement of the pedestrian environment and traffic calming measures.
- Access management along Route 20.
- Neighborhood meetings to discuss the need for the Neighborhood Master Plan.

Concentration of higher density development within densely populated areas such as the Westmere/McKownville area, McCormack Corners and Fort Hunter.

Provision of neighborhood parks.

Cultural Resources – Numerous historic structures and locally important buildings have been identified in the Town. Preservation of these structures is important not only for their architectural significance but also to preserve our understanding and connection with the past. Primary recommendations include:

Institute an historic preservation policy to prevent the loss of historic structures and sites deemed important by the Town.

Consider coordination with the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (NYSOPRHP) for all projects on or in the vicinity of historic structures or sites and prehistoric resources. The need for such coordination typically occurs when there is State or federal involvement in a project. To protect the potential impact to cultural resources by projects that do not have federal or State involvement, the Town might consider making NYSOPRHP coordination a requirement of local approval for projects subject to site plan review.

Establish an historic resources education program in the Town. Conduct tours of historic properties and highlight their importance.

Economic Development – Current commercial development in the Town is concentrated along Route 20, primarily in the Westmere and McKownville areas. This development is very successful and is a significant contributor to the Town's tax revenue. Industrial development is primarily located in the Northeast Industrial Park that has significant room for future development. With improvements to traffic flow and the pedestrian environment, further development and redevelopment is suitable within the existing commercial areas of the Town and would benefit these areas. Suitable areas for industrial development and business parks are limited by access to the interstates. Prime areas have been consumed by commercial, office and residential uses. Continued development of the Northeast Industrial Park appears appropriate but not without an environmental analysis to address major issues such as truck traffic. Primary recommendations include:

Identify potential sites for industrial/business park development and consider the preparation of a GEIS for the sites to identify development potential and cumulative impacts in an effort to attract development but at the same time protecting the environment and community character.

Consider the use of incentive zoning (bonuses) and financial incentives to help facilitate reinvestment and redevelopment of vacant/underutilized frontage properties along Route 20.

Conduct a design charrette for the Westmere Commercial Area. Please refer to the Glossary for a more detailed description of the term charrette.

Prepare an access management plan for Route 20 to develop guidelines for shared access, shared parking, and the development of access roads.

Buffer residential areas from non-residential development but provide linkages that would improve the pedestrian environment.

Prepare a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) for the Northeast Industrial Park that will address buildout and associated impacts.

Create development guidelines that would apply to both business parks and other industrial development.

Recreation – The Town contains numerous recreational opportunities including ball fields, soccer fields, an outdoor swimming pool, golf courses, trails, picnic areas, and unique natural areas. Public open space appears to be sufficient in the Town for the current population. There does appear to be a deficiency in small neighborhood parks to serve densely developed residential areas such as Westmere and McKownville. Primary recommendations include the following:

Undertake a recreational needs study.

Provide additional neighborhood and mini parks.

Establish a recreation and open space acquisition fund.

Identify growth management tools that will assist in the preservation of open space for recreational purposes.

Tower Management - With the growing popularity of cellular phones and other wireless communication options the number of towers placed on the landscape has increased significantly. The Town of Guilderland has and will continue to face pressure for the development of various types of communications facilities. Some facility locations are/will be tolerable but others, such as along the Helderberg Escarpment, may cause significant impacts on the Town's visual resources. A proactive approach to the siting of communication facilities is recommended. Steps to achieve this include the following:

Prepare an inventory of potential suitable sites for the location of wireless communication facilities.

Review the current case law regarding the location of communications facilities and the rights of municipalities as dictated by judicial review.

Potential Impacts of the Plan – The Plan recommendations focus on controlling growth to control the impacts on the environment, utilities, community services and the tax base. Infill development and redevelopment are the most environmentally sound and energy efficient means of growth. Recommendations for future economic development in undeveloped areas of Town are based on the assumption that further study is necessary to evaluate the issues associated with providing utilities and the impact on existing neighborhoods.

D.3 Natural Resources

Guidance for the development of the Natural Resources plan component came from the basic premise that we are an integral part of the environment, therefore a healthy environment means a healthy community. The

Comprehensive Plan provides the opportunity to recognize major resources of importance; the Town has several and are discussed in the sections to follow:

Watervliet Reservoir Watershed & Groundwater Supply – The Watervliet Reservoir is an important municipal water supply source for the Town. The reservoir is owned by the City of Watervliet so the only water supply controlled by the Town is the groundwater beneath. Primary recommendations include the following:

- Preserve critical lands adjacent to the reservoir.
- Develop a partnership with the City of Watervliet for the future use and development of the reservoir and its watershed.
- Identify and protect potential groundwater sources.

Drainage Corridors – Natural drainage corridors are an essential component of the Town. They convey stormwater, providing natural detention/storage through floodplains that prevent impacts to property and lives. They contain important wetland ecology and provide essential linkages between different habitat that promotes species diversity. Primary recommendations include the following:

- Buffer all stream corridors from development.
- Require stormwater management and erosion control plans for all new development.
- Explore opportunities for recreational uses along certain stream corridors.
- Prevent encroachment into the 100-year floodplain.
- Preserve wetland areas.
- Support federal and State regulations for the preservation of wetlands.

Pine Bush – This ecological community is unique in New York and contains many rare species of plants and animals, including the federally listed endangered Karner blue butterfly. Plans for the creation and management of an ecologically sustainable Pine Bush have been developed by the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission. Primary recommendations include the following:

- Cooperate with the Pine Bush Preserve Commission.
- Consider the use of Growth Management techniques such as the Transfer of Development Rights, as a method of preserving important Pine Bush habitat or open space.
- The Town should continue to invest in the voluntary acquisition of the few remaining parcels located within the Pine Bush Primary Protection Area.
- Encourage continued agricultural operations within the Pine Bush.

Helderberg Escarpment – The escarpment is a result of uplift and subsequent erosion of the coastal plain of an ancient sea that has resulted in high cliffs capped by hard, less erodible limestone. It is a geological and paleontological haven. It is also an important and impressive visual feature. Primary recommendations include the following:

Prevent the development of the Escarpment slopes and ridgeline.
Protect the views both to and from the Escarpment by identifying the areas of visual importance and requiring visual impact analysis.

Potential Impacts of the Plan – In most cases the preservation of open space and significant environmental features are beneficial impacts. The Plan calls for recognition and preservation of the Pine Bush, Helderberg Escarpment, stream corridors and associated features, the Town's water supply sources, and open space in general.

D.4 Transportation

Transportation corridors in the Town are both an amenity and a source of continued anxiety. Few communities have the access to both north-south and east-west interstates. It is apparent that the designation of Guilderland as a desirable place to live is as much a function of access as it is the residential character. However, increased development in the Town has created significant traffic congestion in selected segments of the highway system.

Highways & Thruway – Since the Thruway limits access, traffic must utilize specific routes in order to gain access, creating congestion and limiting solutions. There are no easy, long-term solutions to the traffic problems along Route 20, Route 155 and Route 146. Widening and the development of new roads are always an option, but a costly one. Additionally, such measures typically only have short-term impacts, especially if development is not controlled. Primary recommendations include the following:

Establish a coordinated signal system along Route 20.

Conduct access management studies for developed and developing portions of highway corridors.

Improve the pedestrian environment by providing sidewalks, safe means of crossing busy roads and linkages between neighborhoods and points of destination.

Become an active partner with CDTC to begin planning for local and regional traffic solutions.

Emphasize public transportation by making access to bus stops more convenient to the pedestrian.

Prepare a streetscape beautification plan for the various corridor segments identified in the Route 20 Corridor Study that includes a continuous sidewalk system on both sides of Route 20.

Major Town and County Collector Roads – Collector roads are a critical feature of the Town's transportation network. Since their primary function is to convey traffic, development along these roads is generally inconsistent with this function. Unfortunately, development has occurred along the collectors within the developed portions of the Town to the extent that they are perceived as residential streets. Primary recommendations include the following:

The function of collector roads in the Town should be preserved by limiting development along these roads.

Prepare a benefit-cost analysis to determine the feasibility of reconnecting roads through bridge reconstruction. These bridges are not owned by the Town and any such analysis should involve the owner.

Consider the construction of sidewalks and/or trails along roads developed with residences.

Continue to consider potential bypass options that include new road segments that would bypass portions of West Lydius Street, Veeder Road, and Schoolhouse Road.

Identify proposed through roads on the project plans for new development and clearly disclose this information to those who will be impacted by the future roadway extension.

Rail Corridors – The Town contains two rail corridors: CSX (formerly Conrail) and the old D&H line through Altamont. Rail provides the Town with opportunities. Even abandoned rail corridors are valuable for their recreation potential. Primary recommendations include the following:

Implement an incentive program for rail based business.

Work with region to develop a regional passenger rail transportation system.

Guilderland Pathways – Consideration should be given to the development of a trail system that provides linkages to important destinations in the Town. Trails are a welcomed recreational resource for a community. The most successful trails are those that are appropriately located to promote frequent use and high volume. The primary recommendation for trail development in the Town is to develop a detailed “Guilderland Pathways” Master Plan that includes primary and secondary corridors, design standards, and a financing program.

Potential Impacts of the Plan – The Plan recommends addressing traffic issues through land use measures, growth management, access management, pedestrian linkages, and promotion of public transportation. These are typically beneficial impacts or mitigation measures. Access management may involve the introduction of new parallel access roads and alleys that will need to be designed so as not to significantly impact residential neighborhoods.

D.5 Plan Recommendations By Planning Area

To facilitate discussion on a geographic basis, the Plan Recommendations are summarized by planning area in Chapter IV.E. Planning areas are conceptual geographic boundaries placed on areas of the Town with distinct or unique characteristics. They include the various residential neighborhoods and neighborhood centers, the Hunger Kill/Pine Bush area, the Village of Altamont, and the less developed area of the Town referred to a Rural Guilderland.

Neighborhoods – The residential neighborhoods and their associated business, service and governmental components were divided into three Planning Areas: McKownville, Westmere, and Fort Hunter/McCormack Corners. The recommendations for each of these areas are similar but with some important distinctions.

McKownville is the oldest of the neighborhoods and is different in character than the other areas. Primary recommendations include:

Reinvestment in this area is recommended to renew infrastructure and deal with drainage issues.

Buffer existing residential areas from commercial and other intensive non-residential uses but provide pedestrian linkages to the commercial areas and improve the pedestrian environment along major roads.

Conduct neighborhood meetings in anticipation of a future neighborhood master plan.

Westmere is a much larger neighborhood or planning area and is highly influenced by Crossgates Mall and other commercial development along Route 20. Primary recommendation for this area include:

Dialogue with residents, mall owners and other businesses in this area, and regional planning agencies is recommended to identify potential solutions to issues of traffic, pedestrian environment, and land use. This should occur in anticipation of preparing a future neighborhood master plan. A design charrette should also be considered as a means of beginning to address land use, pedestrian and traffic issues in the Crossgates Mall area.

Prepare access management and streetscape plans for the Route 20 corridor.

Investigate opportunity for a park.

The Fort Hunter/McCormack Corners area has several important influences including the Pine Bush and the Route 20 and Route 146 corridors. Development patterns have blurred the once distinct boundaries between these two areas. Connectivity between neighborhoods, particularly for pedestrians is an important issue. Primary recommendations for this area include:

Provide pedestrian linkages to the commercial areas.

Conduct neighborhood meetings in anticipation of a future neighborhood master plan.

Neighborhood Master Plans are recommended for each of the neighborhoods in the long term. However, to begin the process, dialogue should occur between the Town and the neighborhoods to define opportunities, issues and potential solutions. A more grass roots approach to this might occur through the example provided Study Circles in the Community Outreach component of the Comprehensive Plan.

Neighborhood Centers – Guilderland and Guilderland Center are two areas of the Town that exhibit characteristics and issues that are unique to their neighborhoods. Guilderland is a developing area with community service facilities that serve both neighborhood and Town-wide needs. Primary recommendations for this area include:

- Create a Neighborhood Master Plan.
- Preserve major natural features including the Pine Bush and the Hunger Kill corridor.
- Create a pedestrian friendly environment.

Guilderland Center is an older Neighborhood Center whose character has been impacted by surrounding development and increased traffic, especially truck traffic. Despite the impacts, it retains its sense of place. Primary recommendations include:

- Create a Neighborhood Master Plan.
- Divert truck traffic away from the main street and use traffic calming methods to reduce vehicle speeds.
- Significantly improve the pedestrian environment.

Village of Altamont – No recommendations have been made for land use within the Village since it is its own municipal entity. However, land use decisions within the Town may impact the character of the Village. To address these concerns, the following recommendations are made:

- Cooperatively develop land use policies for lands adjacent to the Village.
- Reinforce the Village as the residential and commercial anchor of Rural Guilderland.

Hunger Kill Planning Area - This area contains the Hunger Kill and a large portion of its watershed; the Pine Bush, a unique ecosystem with State-wide importance; and various residential and commercial developments. The Pine Bush offers a significant open space/passive recreational component to the Town but also induces controversy over efforts to protect it from further development. The planning area is designated on Figure 17 and is the same area designated on the Comprehensive Plan map (Figure 16). Primary recommendations for this area include:

- coordinate project review procedures with the Pine Bush Preserve Commission, of which the Town is a member.
- Provide voluntary incentives to protect the few remaining parcels in the Pine Bush Primary Protection Area.
- Buffer all stream corridors from development to protect the integrity of the stream corridor to maintain water quality, promote wildlife corridors, provide potential recreational opportunity, and protect the health, safety and welfare of the community from slope failure potential.

Direct impacts to stream corridors, wetlands, floodplains and other water resources should be avoided to the greatest extent practicable.

Require the preparation of an erosion control plan for new projects.

Explore potential access opportunities to stream corridors at appropriate locations for recreational uses.

Encourage preservation of wetland areas through conservation easements and other methods of protection.

Require wetland delineations pursuant to State and federal regulations, as appropriate.

Require any conditions of permits issued by COE or NYSDEC, including conditions of Nationwide Permits, as applicable, prior to site plan or subdivision approval.

Rural Guilderland – The Town of Guilderland's rural community consists of agricultural uses, large residential lots, vacant lands, the Watervliet Reservoir, and significant environmental resources. Agriculture is a decreasing but still important land use in the Town from both a fiscal and Town character perspective. Primary recommendations include:

Prepare a plan for Rural Guilderland (referred to as the Rural Guilderland Plan) that addresses suitable locations for potential future concentrated development. This should include a farmland & open space conservation plan, dialogue with the City of Watervliet regarding the protection of the Watervliet Reservoir and an eventual plan for the reservoir watershed, an economic development initiative that addresses key issues to properly locate businesses, and an analysis of the feasibility of providing water and sewer either from Town extensions or from adjacent communities.

Modify zoning and subdivision regulations and review procedures to increase the consideration of open space, natural resources, and agricultural operations in the development review process by including a conservation development process.

- Conduct a study to identify areas of Rural Guilderland where there is a demonstrated need for water due to the lack of water or health related impacts of poor groundwater quality. Potential solutions should be identified.

Consideration for the future extension of water and/or sewer service beyond the current service boundaries to address water quality issues or to provide for planned development should only occur following a study of the appropriate land uses for Rural Guilderland, as recommended in the Rural Guilderland Plan.

If opportunities to receive municipal water or sewer service from other municipalities become available in the future, the Town should pursue the option in accordance with the Rural Guilderland Plan or independently through a GEIS or other planning study.

Opportunities for emergency intermunicipal connections with the towns of Rotterdam and Princetown and the village of Altamont should be explored. The Town should also consider the use of Wastewater Management Districts for new development. The purpose of the Wastewater

Management District is to provide local control over septic systems to ensure their proper function through periodic inspections and required improvements as necessary.

Identify the type and character of small business enterprises that would contribute to the tax base yet maintain the rural character. Examples of such businesses include: country inns, rural retreats and conference centers, home business, and similar facilities that would utilize existing structures or possibly construct structures similar to traditional farm houses and barns.

Establish performance standards and design guidelines for rural businesses that maintain the character of the area.

Adopt a local Right-to-Farm Law.

Promote and celebrate the agricultural community through fairs, educational opportunities, and advertising.

Provide flexibility in zoning regulations to allow for certain processing operations at the farms to achieve "value added" products.

Encourage farmers to consider "agritainment" options to their normal operations. Typically, this means adding a dimension to the farm, such as a petting zoo, providing hay rides, holding craft fairs, and similar activities that are consistent with the rural experience and which attract people.

Begin dialogue with the City of Watervliet to cooperatively develop measures to protect the water quality of the Watervliet Reservoir. This will be an important component of the Rural Guilderland Plan.

E. Other Plan Components

The Plan also addresses alternatives and an action plan. The alternatives were developed based on different land use scenarios evaluated or considered during the comprehensive planning process. The No Action alternative is also considered which would continue development in the Town under the current land use guidance and regulations.

The Action Plan identifies the key tasks that lay ahead of the Town in order to implement the Plan recommendations. These tasks are then prioritized based on the urgency of the issue and the feasibility of carrying the task out.