

## **Chapter IV: Plan Recommendations**

This section of the comprehensive plan identifies the recommendations and policy statements that, when implemented, will guide development in the Town over the next 20 years. The recommendations provided in this section may be implemented through existing or new growth management techniques such as zoning and subdivision regulations, use of fiscal impact analysis, preparation of Town sector Generic Environmental Impact Statements, use of incentive zoning, and transfer or purchase of development rights, to name a few; or may require further study to define the issue in greater detail. The new plan elements have been categorized as Land Use, Transportation, and Natural Resources. A summary section is also provided that combines all the recommendations that are applicable to each geographic area of the Town, such as the various neighborhoods and land features (eg., Pine Bush, Watervliet Reservoir). These areas are referred to as Planning Areas within the summary section.

*...comprehensive plans are designed to serve a community for 20 years. However, to meet the needs of a growing community they must be continually monitored and updated...*

Typically, comprehensive plans are designed to serve a community for 20 years. However, to serve the needs of a growing community they must be continually monitored and updated, usually at 5 to 10-year intervals. Some rural communities have operated under the same plan for 20 years (or no plan at all) and never experienced any significant land use changes or conflicts. Today, however, even rural areas are affected by technology. With the use of the Internet and fiber optics, wireless and satellite communications, some industries do not have to locate in or near populated areas. They are free to locate where the land is less expensive. This results in a barrage of land use and community service impacts: influx of professional/technical personnel looking for a variety of housing, increased traffic on rural roads, the need for expanded sewer and water or potential groundwater impacts from septic systems and wells, increased demand for utilities and communications, and a myriad of other issues associated with development in rural areas.

The Town of Guilderland is both a suburban and rural community; but unlike the rural community example above, Guilderland's land use issues have been a function of its proximity to the City of Albany, excellent access to interstate highways, and its popularity as a residential community. The Town is experiencing suburban sprawl and business development pressure, placing a burden on infrastructure and community services and creating land use conflicts. Based on the quality of the residential neighborhoods and proximity to interstates and employment centers, the Town will continue to grow well into the future, requiring diligent planning.

Figure 16, *Comprehensive Plan*, illustrates the Town's vision, goals and objectives and is a compilation of the three new plan elements. Discussions to follow provide both specific and broad-base recommendations/policies to achieve the

Town's goals and address the impacts and mitigation associated with land use policy changes.

## **A. GROWTH MANAGEMENT TOOLS**

The basic premise of the plan recommendations is that the Town should continue to exercise control over development so that it occurs in a manner that is consistent with the Town's vision for a quality community; a place that is desirable to live, work, and play for an entire lifetime.

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. Zoning identifies distinct districts within which land use parameters are established for the type or use, density, and layout (setbacks) of development. Zoning can be an effective growth management tool when based on a community's comprehensive plan. However, zoning is just one of the tools available to local municipalities. Other tools falling into the regulatory category include subdivision regulations and various ordinances dealing with signs, landscaping, open space, noise, odors, and others depending on the needs of a particular community.

Regulatory tools are essential to ensure orderly growth in a community. However, other Growth Management tools, that rely on incentives and voluntary involvement by landowners, are also available to assist communities who understand the importance of managing their growth. Some of these tools include easements, purchase of development rights, transfer of development rights, voluntary land acquisition, and development guidelines in conjunction with community supported plans.

Current growth management tools have been effective to a point, however, it is clear that if development is allowed to continue only under the guidance and regulatory framework of current zoning, the pattern of development will be similar to other highly suburbanized areas of the State and country.

The following pages provide a brief description of some of the growth management tools and techniques that might be appropriate for Guilderland based upon the dialogue that has occurred during this comprehensive planning process. These tools are not direct recommendations. It is anticipated that future land use and open space studies will determine the appropriate growth management tools for the Town. The following information will provide some understanding and definition of these potential tools.

## A.1 Clustering

The general concept behind clustering is that density is separated from lot size. In this way, the same number of homes are allowed but there is more flexibility in where the homes are located. Currently the town regulates density by having a minimum lot size for each zoning district. The minimum lot size in a particular zoning district, for example, might be 1 acre. Under this regulation, each home must be placed in the middle of a one acre "box". Another way to express this density is that a person can build 1 dwelling unit (du) per acre - so on 10 acres the person can build 10 homes. However, by expressing the density in this way, the person is no longer confined to dividing the land into one acre lots. Smaller lots, as the capacity of the land can support, could be clustered on a portion of the site while the remainder remains open. In this way, the entire site is not divided into building lots and the homes can be sited in the most suitable locations. The example on the following page compares conventional and clustered subdivision options for the same piece of land.

There are many options for the remaining open lands derived from clustering. In all cases the open land should be restricted from any further development in some way. One method is through a conservation easement, held by the town, a land trust, or both. There are several options in terms of ownership of the open land under easement. For example, if the original parcel was owned by a farmer, the farmer could retain ownership of the remaining lands. In this case the farmer would continue to farm the land and would retain all the rights of ownership (including the right to transfer title) except the property's development rights which would already have been used. Or the large remaining open parcel could be sold for a large "estate" farm (as one of the housing units allowed based on the original lot count). In both cases, the open space would be managed by a private land owner.



Hamlet with appropriately scaled development (same number of units)  
© Copyright 1995 - 1996 Center for Rural Massachusetts, Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Clustering can be included in the town's land use regulations as an option or as a requirement. As an option, it is often ignored by developers who are unfamiliar with the concept and therefore are reluctant to try it. This is true even though they can often save money due to shorter road and infrastructure lengths. As a mandate, the town could simply regulate density in terms of dwelling units per acre, as described above, and require some minimum percentage of open space for any subdivision. The minimum percentage of open space should be significant - at least 50% to make a real impact in terms of protecting resources and rural character. It is important to reiterate that the overall allowed density with clustering would not exceed what is possible with a conventional subdivision.

## A.2 Conservation Development

The conservation development is a resource-based process for subdivision design. The Town should consider the design of conservation developments

instead of conventional subdivisions. The conservation design approach is quite simple and involves collaboration between the planning board and the applicant at the earliest stage of design - the concept or sketch plan phase. To determine the yield, or possible lot count for a site, subtract the lands which contain severe constraints to development (defined in the subdivision regulations - wetlands, floodplains, very steep slopes, etc.). The maximum number of housing units would then be based on the number of acres remaining and the maximum allowable density in the zoning district (for example, 1du/acre).

Once the number of housing units is established, the design process can begin. Start by identifying the resources present on the site (agricultural land, historic or scenic views, significant tree stands, etc.). Illustrated residential design guidelines, described below, could assist in this process. Once the analysis of resources is done, it is possible to identify lands where development is most appropriate. Locate the homes in these development areas, design road alignments to connect these homes, and then draw the lot lines. Because the area and bulk regulations used for conventional subdivisions are not applicable, the process is creative and not driven strictly by regulations. Randall G. Arendt, in his book *Conservation Design for Subdivisions: A Practical Guide to Creating Open Space Networks* (1996), provides excellent guidance in the use of this approach to subdivision design.

The important aspect of the conservation development is that it is an opportunity for a planning board to become involved very early on in the site development process. Under standard subdivision and site plan review procedures, a planning board or zoning board is in a reactionary mode and must wait for a concept plan to be presented. Under a conservation development procedure, the planning board is involved in the process of identifying developable and undevelopable land before sketches and concept plans are laid out. The process works well for standard subdivisions as well as cluster developments.

### **A.3 Incentive Zoning**

An incentive zoning program establishes a framework that derives community benefits from development activity. The incentive program would generally function as follows: in return for the provision of specified (in advance by legislation) public benefits, the town could permit some increase in allowed density (also specified by legislation). An example of a public benefit that the town might desire would be public access through open lands set aside as part of a conservation development. This access might be used for the development of walking, bicycle, or horse riding trail systems linking different parts of the community. Examples of other public benefits might be the donation of public open space for a park, the donation of public lake access, or the provision of low and moderate income housing. The amenities are given to the town at no financial cost in exchange for the density bonus incentive. The town would ensure that the amenities gained are "worth" the incentives provided as part of

the incentive zoning review process.

A specific example of the potential use of incentive zoning in the Town would apply to the protection of important viewsheds and environmental features. Incentive zoning would permit waiving of formal dimensional requirements provided that a conservation design is employed. This would allow flexibility in site design in pursuance of the goals of the incentive program. This growth management tool could be effective to protect the Pine Bush, Helderberg Escarpment, stream corridors, ravines, viewsheds and viewpoints, and other ecologically sensitive areas.

#### **A.4 Conservation Easements**

One way for the Town of Guilderland to protect scenic resources, open farmlands, and other resources of value to the community would be to encourage the use of conservation easements to protect open land. A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between the landowner and the town, or a third party such as a land trust, to protect land from development by permanently restricting the use and development of the property, thereby preserving its natural or manmade features. The legally binding agreement is filed in the Office of the Albany County Clerk in the same manner as a deed. The landowner retains ownership of the land, and all of the rights of ownership except the ability to develop the land. The specific restrictions are detailed in the easement agreement.

A land owner can choose to donate a conservation easement on all or part of his/her land. There are often income and estate tax benefits for the landowner associated with the donation of a conservation easement. As part of land development proposals, conservation easements can also be used to permanently protect open space set aside as part of a conservation (clustered) subdivision.

There are additional uses of conservation easements that can be promoted by the town. The town could consider taking a more pro-active approach to keeping specific parcels of land undeveloped. These are further described in the following three sections.

#### **A.5 Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program**

The community can take an active role in protecting open space and farmland using conservation easements. The development value of specific parcels of land can be purchased by the town or a land trust. Conservation easements are the legally binding document that ensures that once the development rights are purchased, the land remains undeveloped in perpetuity. If the development rights are purchased, the process is called Purchase of Development Rights. The cost of PDR depends on the specific parcel. It is calculated by determining the

current appraised value of the property and its appraised value as open or agricultural land without development potential. The difference between these two numbers is the value of the development rights.

Generally speaking, PDR programs are regarded as being fair to landowners because the landowners are compensated directly for their contribution to something the public desires. In other words the community must "put its money where its mouth is." The land remains on the tax rolls and is taxed at an assessed value that reflects its restricted use. These programs are also popular with residents because they achieve permanent land protection.

In order to implement a PDR program, the town would need to make a commitment to funding this activity. Initially this may seem to be a very large expense - and it is. However, through careful analysis, some communities like Guilderland have found that their investment will actually cost less in the long term than it would cost to provide services for new residences that might instead be built on that land. Communities have paid for these programs in various ways including bonding for the money to spread the cost over a period of years. There are also sources of state and federal grant funding available to assist communities in permanently protecting farmland and open space in this manner.

There are several important steps to establishing an effective PDR program that will be strongly supported by the community. They are:

1. Establish protection goals for the community. It could be recommended that Guilderland start by determining an acreage goal (x # of acres) of permanently protected farmland.
2. Identify and prioritize specific parcels for protection and develop protection strategies for each. Typically, there are a few key parcels of farmland that have the potential to significantly alter the town's character and fiscal condition in the future. The owners of these large, priority parcels should be included in the process at the earliest stages.
3. Use the town's fiscal model to determine the cost of protecting significant parcels through the purchase of development rights as compared to the cost of not protecting these lands in terms of the provision of community services to residences in the future. Residents and their elected officials will want a clear idea of the costs and benefits of a PDR approach. A detailed analysis helps build support from members of the community who will ultimately be paying the bills.

In Pittsford, New York, a PDR program was created to protect approximately 1,200 acres on seven farms. The average cost to a homeowner is estimated to be about \$50 per year. A fiscal model of the town developed prior to implementing the program estimated that the average cost to a homeowner would be \$250 per year if the PDR program was not implemented. Tax increases would be needed to pay for additional

services for new residents in that fast growing community. The savings from avoiding these tax costs total \$5,000 for the average homeowner over the life of the town's 20 year PDR bond.

4. Establish a funding mechanism to implement the program including the identification of outside funding sources. Sources of state grant funding exist from the Environmental Protection Fund and the Clean Water/Clean Air Environmental Bond Act, and from the federal government through the Farm Bill and other sources.

A Purchase of Development Rights program requires up-front planning to implement. Communities with well defined programs have a higher likelihood of receiving grants due to their competitive nature. The return on this investment in planning can be substantial in terms of both the community's fiscal situation and community character.

## **A.6 Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program**

Transfer of Development Rights programs use real estate market activity to focus development in suitable locations while protecting open spaces. To establish such a program, the town designates specific areas as "sending zones". Sending zones are places that the community seeks to preserve. The town also establishes "receiving zones". These are areas that are suitable for fairly high density development. Through the TDR program, development rights are sent from the sending zone to the receiving zone. Land in the sending zone will therefore be protected while land in the receiving zone will be densely developed.

Development in the sending zones is tightly regulated for natural resource and open space protection. However, landowners in the sending zones are allowed to sell a certain number of "development rights" to land developers at a price that they negotiate with the developer. Land developers who seek to build in the "receiving zones" can purchase those development rights in order to develop their land more densely. When the landowner in the sending zone sells development rights to the developer, the landowner is required to place his/her land under a permanent conservation easement. (Note: TDR can also be accomplished through incentive zoning.)

A TDR program also requires up-front planning. Sending and receiving zones must be carefully designated. In some cases it may be necessary to consider the development of public water and sewer infrastructure to accommodate the higher density development. In addition, the town must set up the administrative mechanisms to make the program work efficiently. Still, in Guilderland, it might be possible to make a TDR program work for portions of the town.

## **A.7 Term Easements and Tax Abatement Program**

This type of program, used by several communities in New York State, provides tax abatements for term easements on particular parcels of open space or farmland. As the name implies, a term easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and the town which is written to last for a period of years, most commonly for 5 to 20 years. Tax abatements are usually calculated on a sliding scale with a larger tax abatement for a longer term easement. If these protected lands are converted to development prior to the expiration of the term, the tax benefit must be returned and a penalty paid. While these programs are effective in addressing the loss of open space and farmland in the short term, they simply place these lands on hold. Long term solutions must still be developed for the future of these spaces.

## **A.8 Residential Development Design Guidelines**

The town could consider creating illustrated design guidelines for new development. Illustrated design guidelines complement the increased design flexibility allowed by conservation (clustered) subdivisions. No longer restricted to maximizing the number of X-acre boxes allowed by zoning's minimum lot size requirements, the designer of a subdivision can be more conscious of the natural features of the parcel(s) and the surrounding landscape. It is best for the community to provide guidance in this regard by describing what it values and what it seeks to protect. Illustrations make these guidelines more easily understood by developers, review boards, and the public. All types of items can be incorporated into a community's design guidelines depending upon what the community values. Design guidelines could include specific requirements that:

- Development along and/or projecting above ridge lines be prohibited, and that development at other visually prominent locations be discouraged.
- Homes be located adjacent to or within wooded areas instead of in the middle of open fields whenever possible.
- The builder maintain existing trees to the maximum extent possible during the construction of homes (as opposed to clearing the entire site).
- Homes be located away from rural highways and collectors, or that they be visually buffered from these roads in order to maintain their rural character. Frontage lots should be discouraged.
- Low volume local roads (including subdivision streets) be designed to an alternative rural road standard more in context with their setting. Examples of rural road standards are available from several sources including the Cornell Local Roads Program and the Dutchess County Department of Planning.
- Natural drainage ways, wildlife habitat areas, contours and land forms be respected and disturbance to these areas minimized.
- Cut and fill activity be minimized and that all disturbed areas be restored with vegetation.

A pre-application conference or sketch plan workshop between the applicant and the Planning Board becomes extremely important in order to creatively deal with design issues early in the process.

Design guidelines are generally informational and collaborative in nature. That is, the applicant has an opportunity to review the guidelines prior to designing a project in order to understand what the community and the Planning Board desires. The sketch plan workshop with the Planning Board is another opportunity to discuss initial design options before the more thorough and expensive design work begins. The workshop should focus on creativity and not confrontation. It will always be in the applicant's best interest to work cooperatively with the Planning Board because the board must ultimately decide whether to approve the final plans. Achieving consensus at the start can significantly reduce the time and cost of the review process for the applicant.

## **A.9 Generic Environmental Impact Statement**

The Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) is an important growth management tool. A GEIS is a component of the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR). It is used to evaluate non-site specific actions and programs or site specific actions that encompass a broad area and cannot be reasonably studied in great detail. Adoption of this Comprehensive Plan by the Town Board is a Type I Action under SEQR and requires the preparation of a GEIS, as described in Chapter I. The purpose of that GEIS is to evaluate the general impact of the Plan on community growth and character and to address future actions (e.g., Guilderland Neighborhood Master Plan). Providing these actions are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan GEIS and Findings, further SEQR analysis will probably not be required.

A GEIS can also be used to evaluate the cumulative impacts of a future growth scenario for a given area of Town. This is referred to as an "area specific" GEIS for the purposes of this discussion. The purpose of this type of GEIS is to create potentially "shovel-ready" sites for future development. The term "shovel-ready" refers to the completion of environmental review pursuant to SEQR. This term does not suggest that site specific concerns such as wetland delineation and permitting are complete. Those tasks would remain for the potential developer and therefore the site would not be truly "shovel ready" until those site-specific concerns are evaluated. However, there is great value in completing the SEQR process for an area since the process itself is time-consuming and expensive.

Another purpose of preparing an area specific GEIS is to create an equitable means of allocating the costs of mitigating impacts. For example, studies conducted for the GEIS may conclude that additional turning lanes and a new pump station will be necessary once development reaches a certain threshold. The cost can be identified for these improvements and distributed to all future

development within the GEIS study area through a mitigation fee. This approach has been used by the Town of Colonie and Town of Clifton Park for many years and has proven successful. There are a number of improvements that can be included in the mitigation fee, such as roads, water and sewer, and the cost of preparing the GEIS. The process allows the Town to be proactive towards future growth and to control when and how the improvements are made to ensure consistency and quality. The use of a GEIS for this purpose is most valuable in areas of Town where development pressure is high. In other areas that may not develop for many years, the cost of preparing the GEIS might not be justified.

The third way a GEIS is referenced in the recommendations is as a means of evaluating alternatives. For example, options for providing water to the western portion of Guilderland could be evaluated through a GEIS. Several sites may prove to be in need of municipal water. The GEIS would identify these sites and weigh their need against the feasibility of providing water and the environmental/land use consequences. The end result would be a plan for water resources and rural conservation that could be adopted by the Town. The scope of issues would be more focused than that of the development-oriented GEIS described above.

The GEIS is a versatile tool that can provide many benefits to a community. It is also a public process that encourages public input through scoping in the early stages and review and comment of the draft GEIS after the studies/analysis is completed. When used appropriately, the GEIS combines both planning and SEQR requirements into a single process, saving time and money and providing a vehicle for thorough review of environmental, land use, and social/cultural issues.

## **A.10 Fiscal Model**

A fiscal model has been constructed for the Town to compare the relative impact of land use decisions on the tax base. A full discussion of the model is provided in Appendix A. A fiscal model is a planning tool that can be used to identify the implications of current zoning and other future land use planning scenarios. The fiscal model prepared for the Town does not predict what the actual taxes in the Town will be over a period of time and should not be used for that purpose. It is intended as a means of comparing land uses, such as residential and commercial, to determine how increased growth rates would impact the fiscal budget of the Town and school districts.

The model includes a series variables that are model input. For example, a scenario might compare the impact of increased economic development against the current growth rates. The Town might also like to investigate the impact of land preservation, perhaps through a purchase of development rights program. There are many useful implications of such a model. Another benefit is that the model is open-ended, which means it is capable of expansion into a much more

detailed program without the need to rewrite the model. The Town of Guilderland is the first to have such a model in the Capital District.

The Town's fiscal model was used to compare several land use scenarios. The results of these comparisons show that increased residential growth rates, such that would result in a completely suburbanized community without growth management and open space provisions, would have a significant adverse impact on the taxes, despite some rather aggressive economic development incentives. The inputs to the model, as presented in this Plan, have come under considerable scrutiny and will be revised to reflect the most current available information. However, the design of the model will allow the Town to manipulate the inputs to evaluate the impact of any number of development scenarios. The scenarios presented in the Plan are only a few of the possible uses and are meant to show how the model works and the nature of the output.

## **B. LAND USE**

Land use in the Town is composed of suburban residential neighborhoods in the eastern third, rural residential and agricultural uses in western Guilderland, mixed commercial and office along the Route 20 corridor from the City of Albany west to Route 146 (Carman Road), industrial uses with the Northeast Industrial Park, village and hamlet development (Guilderland Center and Village of Altamont), and significant environmental features/resources (Pine Bush, Helderberg Escarpment, Watervliet Reservoir, stream corridors including floodplain and wetlands, parks and other recreational facilities). Despite the rather simple categorization of land use, the interrelationships and issues are complex. The Town of Guilderland is at an important juncture as an evolving community. A large portion (22%) of the Town is vacant land that may provide opportunity for future development. Another 28% of the total land area is comprised of agriculture, the Pine Bush, and recreational facilities. The other half of the Town's total land area is dominated by residential uses (32%). Bearing this in mind, the Town's policy decisions regarding the type and extent of growth will likely have broad reaching effects on the environment, visual and community character, traffic, and the quality of community services.

### **B.1 Plan Premises**

There are many factors to consider when developing the land use plan. The community outreach program provided tremendous insight into the concerns of residents as well as their expectations, hopes and dreams of the future. The Inventory & Analysis provided a necessary understanding of the Town's resources, opportunities, and constraints but also identified issues that may require further study to fully understand the complexities. All this information was then synthesized in the context of good planning practice to develop guiding principles by which the Plan would take form. Land use principles include the following:

- There were once distinct neighborhoods within the Town. Some of these neighborhoods have been impacted by sprawling development, both residential and commercial, which has blurred the boundaries and had a negative influence on neighborhood cohesion and character. Therefore, a basic premise of the land use plan is to restore and strengthen neighborhood distinction.
- The Town is primarily a residential community with quality homes located in close proximity to the major employment centers. It is a desirable place to live. Based on these facts, both existing and developing residential neighborhoods must be buffered from conflicting adjacent land uses, recognizing that not all non-residential uses are conflicting and that it is

appropriate to consider mixed uses in a hamlet or village scale setting that promotes the pedestrian environment.

- There are significant natural resources within the Town that are important on both a local and statewide level. Once developed, these resources could be permanently lost. Therefore, the Pine Bush, the Helderberg Escarpment and its foreground viewshed, the Watervliet Reservoir and watershed, and the numerous stream corridors should be protected and/or managed to avoid significant impacts.
- Agricultural uses are diminishing in the Town, partly due to rising land value but also related to other economic factors and diminished interest in farming as a career. Agricultural uses provide value to the Town. Although tax breaks are provided to qualifying farmers, their operations require few community services. Therefore, the basic premise for agricultural land use is to preserve and protect farms to preserve rural character, preserve the Helderberg viewshed, prevent significant tax increases, and support those who want to continue to be farmers.
- The ability to meet current water demand in the water district, especially during peak periods, is limited by treatment capacity and distribution. Likewise, there is very little capacity left within the sewer system to treat additional flows. Providing future capacity in either of the services will be costly. A significant increase in residential development will result in a significant increase in taxes, regardless of ambitious efforts to increase industrial/office/commercial uses. The provision of sewer and water to areas without these services typically leads to increased residential development. In fact, due to the cost of providing infrastructure, the provision of sewer and water services dictates the need for dense development.

The rural landscape provides value to the community at little cost. The loss of the Town's rural component would have many social and environmental implications that would impact residents and visitors alike. However, these concerns also need to be balanced by the apparent need for water in certain areas of the Town due to a lack of suitable groundwater.

- The Town contains numerous historic structures and includes the site of the Battle of Normanskill, an important event in our Nation's struggle for independence. The agricultural landscape in the western part of Guilderland is an important historic land use pattern. A guiding principle for historic resources is that these resources provide the necessary ties to the past, creating community character and pride.
- Commercial and office development in the Town is primarily located along Route 20 from the City of Albany to Route 146 (Carman Road). The size

and success of some of these uses have resulted in land use conflicts with adjoining neighborhoods. The corridor is dynamic, with areas of converting uses, areas of dense development and heavy traffic congestion, and areas that are developing and redeveloping. Route 20 is the primary arterial in the Town with the highest traffic volume, best access to interstates, and available sewer and water. Past and current development patterns have proven that this is a logical location for commercial and other mixed business uses. Therefore, most commercial and office development should be located within the Route 20 corridor, east of the CSX tracks. Vacant lands with access to Route 20 and the immediate corners of major State and County roads intersecting Route 20 provide opportunity for carefully planned commercial, office, municipal, and some low-impact light industrial uses that do not generate significant truck traffic. Management of the Route 20 corridor to address traffic, the pedestrian environment, and parcel access should be considered prior to permitting major new development along the corridor. This is especially important in the McKownville and Westmere areas where land availability, especially frontage, is limited.

- Light industrial development, warehousing, and business/hi-tech uses are currently concentrated within the Northeast Industrial Park. This facility has land area to support another potential 2.0 million gross square feet of development. However, the facility is not well located relative to truck traffic, which has resulted in impact on surrounding neighborhoods. A priority should be placed on the analysis of impact by the Northeast Industrial Park on the community to determine the reasonable magnitude of future development. The provision of industrial/business parks may prove to be an important land use component for the Town's economy and fiscal health. This can be analyzed by the Town's fiscal model. Locations for the provision of new business parks are limited by access, environmental constraints, and the availability of municipal sewer and water. However, the identification of areas that meet the criteria of good highway access, limited land use conflicts, and available sewer and water is important to be able to respond to opportunities when they arise. Once identified, preparation for future economic development and encouragement to locate at the appropriate sites can be facilitated through the preparation of an area specific Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS), taking into consideration land suitability, preservation of rural character and the viewshed, and the economic feasibility of providing municipal water and sewer service. The benefits of this approach include environmental clearance for many issues, provision of infrastructure under a scenario of equitable distribution of cost, and the ability to weigh the suitability of multiple sites, if desired. It also establishes important thresholds to prevent significant environmental impact and to achieve the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan.

Clearly, it is impossible to identify guiding principles for land use without incorporating transportation and natural resources issues. However, repetition

only emphasizes the fact that the elements of the Comprehensive Plan are interrelated with cause and effect relationships.

Based on the land use plan premises, the following land use recommendations were developed:

## **B.2 Residential Neighborhoods**

Residential neighborhoods in the Town are defined as both old and new residential subdivisions. They are characterized by medium to high density development and the availability of sewer and water. Some neighborhoods are old and well-established, such as McKownville and Westmere and portions of Fort Hunter. Others are new and developing and may be as small as a cul-de-sac. Land use issues facing residential neighborhoods differ based on their age and surrounding uses. McKownville is the oldest neighborhood in the Town which means it has the oldest roads and oldest infrastructure. For many, old implies character. The older homes and older landscaping (mature trees and shrubs) creates neighborhood atmosphere unique to McKownville. However, once primarily residential, even along Route 20, McKownville has experienced considerable commercial and office growth that has changed the character of the neighborhood. Development of the Northway and the Thruway have imposed significant visual and noise impacts, as well as effectively isolating this neighborhood from the remainder of the Town.

Heading west, Westmere was the next area to develop. This area has been less constrained by physical barriers and the rather dense, compact neighborhood has expanded considerably. Like McKownville, Westmere has experienced significant impact from commercial development both along and adjacent to Route 20. Crossgates and Route 155/20 Mall define the eastern and western boundaries of this neighborhood, contributing to the high traffic volume and associated congestion.

McCormack Corners and Fort Hunter are less defined residential neighborhoods. Fort Hunter is the older and better defined of the two areas, however, the boundary between these areas is not well defined. Developments are spread out and appear to lack any unifying character or theme. As the primary route to the Thruway and I-890, Route 146 (Carman Road) is congested with traffic, including truck traffic to and from the Northeast Industrial Park. The attractiveness of these neighborhoods is highlighted by new homes, available municipal sewer and water, proximity to the Thruway, I-890, and Route 20, and the proximity to the Pine Bush.

### Recommendations

Recognizing that the Town of Guilderland is a residential community and a desirable place to live, it is important to focus the recommendations on preserving and enhancing the residential character, addressing land use conflicts, and providing a means for neighborhoods to continue planning efforts at a neighborhood level.

- Encourage reinvestment and redevelopment of vacant/underutilized buildings and sites, especially in the McKownville and Westmere neighborhoods. This recommendation should be accompanied by repairs and upgrades to the existing infrastructure.
- Buffer residential uses from commercial, office and other conflicting uses that rely on vehicular transportation. Commercial development in neighborhoods should be limited to a corner store that is linked to a sidewalk or trail system. In existing neighborhoods, this can be accomplished through dialog with the business establishments and during the local review process for changes in use.
- Connect residential neighborhoods to shopping and recreational opportunities by providing sidewalks and/or trails. These connections should be carefully made in conjunction with landowners to prevent any unintended conflicts and nuisances.
- Improve the pedestrian environment, particularly along Route 20.
- Develop an access management plan (discussed in further detail under Transportation) as a tool to decrease traffic congestion.
- Encourage continued public meetings at the neighborhood level with the intent of developing a neighborhood master plan. This next level of analysis is necessary to better define neighborhood boundaries, identify residents' goals for their neighborhood, determine desirable pedestrian linkages, and to identify the theme that will direct design guidelines for future development and redevelopment.
- Concentrate higher density development within densely populated areas such as the Westmere/McKownville area, McCormack Corners and Fort Hunter. The higher density development is most suitable where public transportation is available, where both essential and non-essential services/products are available, and where pedestrian linkages to shopping, recreation, and cultural resources are well developed. Westmere and McKownville provide the most services and the best access to public transportation but are lacking in recreational facilities and a pedestrian environment.
- Pursue opportunities for the development of neighborhood parks. Based on the results of the Community Outreach program, there appears to be a deficiency in neighborhood-scale parks to serve developed areas.

### **B.3 Planning Areas**

To facilitate discussion on a geographic basis, the Plan Recommendations are summarized by planning area in Chapter IV.E (**Plan Recommendations by Planning Area**). Planning areas are conceptual geographic boundaries placed on areas of the Town with distinct or unique characteristics. They include the various neighborhoods, the Hunger Kill area, the Watervliet Reservoir and adjacent lands, the Village of Altamont, and the less developed area of the Town referred to as Rural Guilderland. Relative to the discussion of land use, specific discussion and recommendations for the Guilderland and Guilderland Center neighborhoods, the Village of Altamont, and Rural Guilderland are contained within Chapter IV.E.

### **B.4 Cultural Resources**

A listing of structures that have been identified on the National Register of Historic Places as well as other locally important buildings are provided in the *Inventory & Analysis*. Not only are many of these buildings well built and architecturally significant, they are the physical remnants of the past. History is important. It very often provides clues to the future.

In addition to the historic past, there is a prehistoric past that is equally important to understand. Prehistory includes the activities of early native Americans. Camps were typically constructed near food and water sources. Therefore, high points next to streams are potential sites for prehistoric cultural resources. Why are these resources important? Quite simply, they provide information on the evolution of the human species. The more we learn about our ancestors, the more we learn about ourselves and our potential to adapt.

#### Recommendations

- 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.

## **B.5 Economic Development**

Economic development within the Town is primarily concentrated along Route 20 (Western Avenue) with the exception of the Northeast Industrial Park, which is located near Guilderland Center. Route 20 is the primary arterial in the Town and provides the most direct access to the Northway and the Thruway. It is also the most direct route to downtown Albany. The Town has large retail centers which include Crossgates Mall, Stuyvesant Plaza, and the 20 Mall. Each of these retail centers has become very successful, drawing shoppers from the regional market. Office development consists of several large facilities, including 1450 Western Avenue, Executive Park, and Great Oaks. There are also a number of smaller professional medical offices located along Route 20. Most of these offices are former single family homes which have been converted. Lands along the CSX railroad (formerly Conrail) were once developed by the Army, favoring the remote location based on rail access. The choice of this area for the current use as an industrial park was probably based on the compatibility of use and the ability to reuse structures. The industrial park still benefits from good rail access, but its remote location is more of a hindrance given the current dependence on trucking.

The Town's transportation network enhances its competitive position and its tax base. The transportation network should be maintained and developed as an important component of the Town's attractiveness and quality of life. Maintaining the Town's transportation network as well as connections to the regional transportation system is important.

The following are general recommendations for economic development. More specific recommendations are provided for the various types of development.

- The Town should be proactive towards new economic development opportunities, supplemented by preserving the rural character of the western portion of Town and preserving open space in the eastern portion through growth management.
- A special committee of the Town, perhaps the Town's existing Economic Development Advisory Council, should be charged with a detailed study of possible sites for office or light industrial use. Such a study should consider infrastructure and transportation issues and impact on residential neighborhoods and community character. The goal should be to identify and subsequently market suitable sites for desirable business uses. The committee should also collaborate with economic development agencies within the County and State to aid in promoting the selected areas for economic development and to identify potential funding sources.
- Upon the identification of suitable light industrial/business use sites, the Town should conduct a GEIS to evaluate the development potential of these sites. For Rural Guilderland sites, this assumes, however, that the issue of water and sewer service to the desired economic development sites

has been resolved in the larger context of the Rural Guilderland Plan that addresses water and sewer service policy, land use, open space conservation, watershed protection, and visual impact. It is possible to evaluate one or several sites within the same GEIS. The purpose of the GEIS should be to evaluate the cumulative impacts of development within a specific area which, when completed, provides "shovel ready" sites satisfying SEQR requirements. The GEIS would evaluate both the type and amount of development suitable for the selected sites. The costs of providing mitigation for development should also be identified and allocated in an equitable manner. This approach will allow the Town to provide/pay for necessary improvements (e.g., road and utility infrastructure) as the need arises. Developers should be required to demonstrate compliance with the GEIS and to identify site-specific impacts (e.g., wetlands). The scope of the GEIS should be determined through a Public Scoping Session as encouraged in the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) regulations.

### ***Mixed Use Commercial Development***

The Town is experiencing continued pressure for new strip development, as well as redevelopment, along Route 20. As a primary transportation arterial in the Capital District, the Route 20 corridor is an attraction for retail/commercial uses. However, strip development results in a continuous and cluttered streetscape that lacks character. Multiple driveways contribute to poor traffic circulation and pedestrian conflicts. These driveways interrupt pedestrian linkages, resulting in an unsafe and undesirable pedestrian environment. This is most evident from the City of Albany west to Route 155. However, Route 20 east of the CSX tracks and the immediate vicinity is the most appropriate and logical location to consider further commercial and office development based on the availability of municipal sewer and water service and the generally good access to the Northway and Thruway, despite existing traffic and access management issues.

If traffic flow on Route 155 north of Route 20 is improved through the planned highway reconstruction project, pressure for development near the Route 20/Route 155 intersection will continue. Carefully planned commercial expansion, or redevelopment of existing commercial sites, may be appropriate in this area, as well as other areas along the Route 20 corridor east of the CSX tracks.

Mixed use development may include commercial and office uses and the possible inclusion of certain high-tech or research and development operations that have less impact on traffic and other environmental concerns of the community. A suitable balance of commercial and residential development will have a beneficial impact on the Town's tax base.

The Town currently has successful large shopping facilities that include Crossgates Mall, 20 Mall, and Stuyvesant Plaza. Additional large retail development and other high traffic generating commercial uses would exacerbate

the existing traffic conditions and land use conflicts and should be discouraged. Smaller scale retail development as well as other non-retail uses, should be subject to a plan for access management, pedestrian improvements, and streetscape beautification.

#### Recommendations

- Consider the use of incentive zoning (bonuses) and financial incentives to help facilitate reinvestment and redevelopment of vacant/underutilized frontage properties along Route 20. Any policies to facilitate redevelopment should focus on the following goals:
  - ♦ minimize frictional traffic congestion on Route 20,
  - ♦ preserve the general scale and character of existing structures, and
  - ♦ adequately buffer the use from adjoining residential properties.
- Prepare an access management study/plan to develop guidelines for shared access, shared parking, and the development of access roads. Guidelines should be developed within the existing regulatory and policy framework and utilized in conjunction with existing land use and zoning control mechanisms, such as site plan review, overlay districts, and subdivision regulations. Guidelines that evolve must be flexible enough to deal with the particular needs of various neighborhoods and the specific land use patterns surrounding them. The incentives and guidelines should be carefully developed so as not to promote consolidation of properties as the only solution to access management. Priority should be given to more creative solutions that provide common parking and shared access for multiple owners. Consolidation of parcels may result in a barrier of entry to small business owners which could ultimately reduce the diversity of the Town's commercial mix.
- Develop a pedestrian access plan for the Route 20 corridor that provides for continuous sidewalks and the development of appropriately located linkages to adjoining neighborhoods. New development should conform to these plans. Therefore, it is important to develop such plans prior to permitting new development so that right-of-ways can be incorporated into site design for future implementation.
- During site plan review for new development and applications for change of use, land use conflicts should be addressed through adequate buffering.

#### ***Westmere Commercial Area***

The Westmere Commercial area encompasses the Route 20 corridor between Fuller Road and Johnston Road. This area has the potential to realize significant land use changes.

The availability of undeveloped parcels that are adjacent to the corridor and the trend for continued commercial infill/redevelopment require creation of a long-term plan to address the type, location and density of growth. Quality of the

development, supporting infrastructure, design guidelines and traffic management are all inter-related program issues that must be considered to realize an effective plan.

All of the stakeholders in this area should be actively engaged in this cooperative planning effort. The study could be conducted as part of the Route 20 Redevelopment Plan (as described under the *Action Plan*) or as a separate undertaking.

The suitability of future development in the Westmere Commercial Area will be a function of good access and traffic circulation. To achieve this, the Town should consider utilization of some existing road infrastructure as well as new linkages. The Crossgates Mall Ring Road provides direct access to the Northway and, therefore, an excellent opportunity for a bypass to Route 20 and access management for new development. The Ring Road was developed as a bypass but does not appear to function as intended.

Crossgates Mall and Stuyvesant Plaza are major retail centers that are essentially bisected by I-87 (Northway). Currently, Rt. 20 provides the only convenient link between these two economic centers. Redefining the Ring Road as an alternative connector and physically linking it with Stuyvesant Plaza would have a significant beneficial impact to this area of the town by reducing the traffic pressure along the Route 20 corridor from Fuller Road to Rapp Road. Both Crossgates Mall and Stuyvesant Plaza would have direct access to the Northway and I-90/Thruway via the Northway. If any future commercial infill occurs along the north side of Rt. 20, the Ring Road should be used as an alternate means of access, thus enhancing the ability to implement corridor management techniques such as reducing curb cuts.

The following observations and recommendations are proposed to guide the Town until the further study has been conducted for the Route 20 corridor:

- A design charrette might be considered as a planning tool for this area. A charrette involves interactive sessions where individuals having a stake in the future of the area (residents, business owners, Town officials, and other government and special interest representatives) meet and discuss planning and design options. Issues that impact design are discussed and debated, usually resulting in several alternatives. The purpose of the charrette is to discuss and sketch out land use and design options for lands in the vicinity of Crossgates Mall. This would include Route 20 and other development in the immediate vicinity. A study area would have to be defined prior to the charrette. Many ideas can be expressed in terms of appropriate land use, vehicular access and circulation solutions, improvements to the pedestrian environment, and architectural standards or guidelines. It may be used as a precursor to a corridor plan for the Westmere Commercial Corridor of Route 20 or a neighborhood master plan for Westmere. A well planned charrette would involve the services of a landscape architect, a civil engineer,

and a planner to facilitate the process. This can be accomplished by retaining the professional services of these individuals or by soliciting volunteers from the professional community in the Town. It is important for participants to understand the major issues associated with the area prior to the charrette so that the process can focus on potential solutions. . Examples of potential solutions that could be addressed during the design charrette are provided in the recommendations to follow.

- The poorly functioning southbound access ramp to the Crossgates Mall from the Northway is a traffic issue of regional and local concern and should be addressed prior to further development that would utilize this point of access.
- Evaluate the Crossgates Mall Ring Road and require improvements as necessary to improve circulation and to achieve its originally intended function as a bypass, prior to future development of this area. Opportunities for access management and future linkages to Stuyvesant Plaza should also be evaluated.
- Enter into dialogue with the Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) to investigate potential solutions for improving the function of the road network serving the Westmere Commercial Area, including regional solutions. An example of a potential solution that might benefit the area is the Crossgates-Stuyvesant linkage discussed previously.
- Immediately south of Rt. 20, a service road or alley could be developed parallel to Rt. 20 east and west of Johnston Road to provide alternative access opportunities for future uses such as senior housing and business non-retail uses adjacent to Route 20. The service road would provide access to current and future development thereby eliminating numerous curb cuts along Route 20. This should translate into better traffic flow along Route 20 within this very congested segment. Any future development in this area should also include provisions for a pocket/neighborhood park to serve the Westmere neighborhoods.
- Initiate dialogue with the City of Albany, Village of Colonie, and relevant Albany County and State agencies regarding development issues associated with the Westmere Commercial Area.
- Zoning changes that would permit additional large-scale retail development in the area should be avoided.
- Future commercial development in the area must take into consideration traffic impacts on adjacent residential neighborhoods.
- Any proposed commercial development in the Gabriel Terrace residential neighborhood should be supported only with the consensus of the residents.
- To preserve the aesthetic quality and arterial function of Western Avenue, the open space set aside as part of the Crossgates Mall approval should be maintained.
- The Town should develop and maintain regular interaction with the City of Albany, CDTC, CDRPC, CDTA, SUNY Albany and other public or municipal agencies concerning issues related to the Crossgates Mall area and development along Washington Avenue Extension. Actions by the City of

Albany or NYSDOT in this area, such as zoning changes or highway improvements, have impacts on the Town, just as action by the Town can impact the City and the regional transportation network. Regional dialogue and cooperation are in the best interest of all parties.

### ***Northeast Industrial Park***

The Northeast Industrial Park (NEIP) is a NYS Economic Development Zone, providing tax, energy and employment incentives. It is zoned industrial and is located adjacent to an active railroad. It is currently developed with 2.5 million gross square feet (gsf) and has a potential to be developed with an additional 2.0 million gsf. Although successful and an important component of the Town of Guilderland, the industrial park is truck oriented which has resulted in unintended significant impacts on the residents of Guilderland Center. The industrial park is also located adjacent to Black Creek, a tributary of the Watervliet Reservoir. This area was also part of the Black Creek floodplain until it was modified by the Army to create a depot.

### **Recommendations**

- Require the preparation of a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) that addresses full build-out of the property and the associated impacts to determine the reasonable amount of development of the property that can be properly mitigated.
- Begin dialogue with the NEIP to determine alternative truck routes and funding options that would bypass the heart of Guilderland Center and the residential areas. The NYSDOT should also be engaged in this discussion that would include a broader bypass solution, redirecting most pass-thru traffic (both trucks and automobiles) around Guilderland Center.
- Cooperatively market desired tenants especially those that rely on rail rather than truck transport.
- Encourage the NEIP to have dialogue with the former Schenectady Army Depot Restoration Advisory Commission on the relocation of Black Creek and the protection of the creek until relocation occurs.

## **B.6 Recreation**

The Town contains numerous recreational opportunities including ball fields, soccer fields, a swimming pool, golf courses, trails, picnic areas, etc. The *Inventory & Analysis* provides a listing of all the Town-owned parks, their acreage, and recreational opportunities. In addition to the Town parks, there are six privately owned golf courses. There are also some large areas of State-owned/protected ecological areas including the Pine Bush, the Black Creek Marsh State Wildlife Management Area, and a portion of John Boyd Thacher State Park. Active recreation facilities are also provided at the Town's public schools within each of the school districts.

*The amount and type of recreation should be projected based on the community's needs rather than a generalized standard.*

Recreational resources are generally divided into two categories, *active* and *passive*. Active recreation includes those activities requiring constructed facilities and fields, such as basketball courts, baseball diamonds, and soccer fields. Passive uses provide no formal facilities and generally include those activities that do not require organization. They do, however, require usable open space.

There are several types of parks that a community can develop to meet its needs. The National Recreation and Park Association has classified parks based on size, area served, and uses (NRPA 1995). The Town can use the following park classifications as a guide:

- *mini-Park* - used for very limited areas and unique recreational needs.
- *Neighborhood Park* - Typically 5-10 acres in size and serving a population concentration within a ¼-½ mile radius.
- *School-Park* - School parks can serve as substitutes for neighborhood or even community parks if large enough and available for the general public. The optimum size is dependent upon intended use.
- *Community Park* - The community park serves two or more neighborhoods within a ½-3 mile radius. Optimum size is between 30 and 50 acres.
- *Large Urban Park or Town Park* - This park typically serves the entire municipality, with an optimum size of 75 acres.
- *Natural Resource Areas* - This designation includes areas with significant community resources, such as important landscapes, open space, and visual buffers or viewsheds.
- *Greenways* - provide linkages between parks and other open space. They differ from natural resource areas in that human use is emphasized.
- *Sports Complex* - Several programmed active uses are combined in one facility. This would include athletic fields and associated facilities. Such facilities should be properly located to serve the greatest population. Optimum size is 40 to 85 acres.
- *Private Park/Recreation Facility* - Privately owned parks and facilities that contribute to the public recreation system.
- *Pathways* - These include trails developed for a number of uses such as bikeways and nature trails.

A comprehensive study of community recreational needs should be conducted to determine the type, size and number of parks and other recreation space, as well as the need for purchase of additional open space. However, some generalizations can be made to help plan for immediate and future population over the next 10-20 years.

Neighborhood or mini parks should incorporate several active uses, located within the population centers. Playgrounds and similar facilities in walking distance from neighborhoods reduce traffic and subsequent pollution and help

to provide neighborhood identity. Project sponsors should be encouraged to incorporate parks or land for parks in their development proposals.

Stream corridors provide potential linkages between open space. The result is a network of open space providing important wildlife habitat, clean air, clean water, and the potential for trail development.

Recreation and Open Space recommendations include the following:

- Undertake a recreational needs study to determine the current and desired level of service for passive and active recreation within the Westmere and McKownville communities. This study should be conducted cooperatively with the school districts, potentially providing opportunities for shared facilities and greater opportunities for residents.
- Provide neighborhood and mini parks with active and passive recreational uses within population clusters, especially within Westmere and McKownville. A national standard of 1.7 acres per 1000 population can be used as a guideline, however, the information provided by the recreation needs study will better serve the community. The neighborhood park should be sited to allow pedestrian access to the greatest extent practicable and in conjunction with Guilderland Pathways, a recommended pathway study discussed under the *Transportation* section of this Plan.
- Investigate areas for future ball/soccer fields.
- Require new development to incorporate neighborhood and/or mini parks in their design, as appropriate for the area and the size of development. When park development is inappropriate, require new development to contribute to a parkland acquisition fund.
- Establish a recreation and open space acquisition fund to assist in the purchase of lands and their development for recreational purposes.
- Promote clustering and other innovative design measures that preserve open space.
- Investigate potential recreational access to stream corridors.
- Identify appropriate growth management tools that will assist in the preservation of open space for recreational purposes. Suitable growth management tools are identified in the *Growth Management* section of this Plan.

## **B.7 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. Initially, the wireless communications networks were developed within the large metropolitan areas. The corridors that link the cities followed. Such corridors as the Thruway and I-84 were some of the first to have networks completed, linking the major metropolitan areas. A network consists of a series of communications facilities, many times consisting of towers and

their associated antennas and radio equipment. The goal of the network is to create uninterrupted service throughout the network (e.g., the Thruway corridor from Buffalo to NYC). Coverage within a particular "cell" is dependent on topography, vegetation and other structures, all of which can cause "holes" or "dead spots" in the coverage. The number of towers and the proper location to complete the network is modeled by radio frequency engineers. Through their recommendations, site acquisition specialists identify appropriate sites to locate the towers.

Wireless service demand is increasing to the extent that additional carriers are expanding into already covered markets. New and emerging technologies, such as wireless data transmission, are and will continue to create demand for tower space. Wireless service is also beginning to expand into more rural areas, mainly along the major corridors like the Northway.

Network providers purchase the right to provide wireless communication service for a given region. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) grants a license to the network provider and mandates that provider to establish the network to provide good service to the region. This mandate is legally supported by the Federal Communications Act which prevents local governments from excluding the communications facilities providing the facilities will not cause significant environmental impact. It is this protection that, at least initially, has caused many communities to accept tower locations even though they believed the tower would compromise desired land use and visual resources.

Over the years, communities began to become more familiar with the Federal Communications Act and the rights of a community not to preclude communications facilities but to site such facilities in a manner that does not significantly impact land use. The Federal Communications Act does not preclude the network provider from undergoing local approvals as well as State and federal environmental review processes. It does not preclude a community from requiring the co-location of facilities on a single tower when such opportunities reasonably exist and are consistent with the network requirements. It also does not preclude the community from requiring an evaluation of other options such as the use of existing structures (e.g., water towers) or alternative tower design (i.e., "stealth towers"). Many communities have become proactive by incorporating communications facilities in their land use planning process, identifying appropriate zoning districts and specific sites that would be considered suitable for tower construction.

The network providers in conjunction with a community can work together to properly locate suitable facility sites. Presently, the wireless communications industry has turned to tower developers to develop shared tower facilities. These tower developers are working with communities to identify mutually beneficial tower sites.

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. Such siting should take into consideration visual resources, height thresholds, topography, land use, and opportunities for co-location and the use of other suitable existing structures.
- Review the current case law regarding the location of communications facilities and the rights of municipalities as dictated by judicial review.

## **B.8 Potential Adverse & Beneficial Future Growth Impacts**

Pursuant to the requirements of the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR), this section identifies the potential adverse and beneficial impacts associated with adoption of the Plan Recommendations.

The Plan recommendations focus on managing growth to minimize 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. Despite this, future development, especially within the Route 20 corridor between the City of Albany and Route 146 (Carman Road), may result in significant increases in traffic volume that could significantly increase delay and degrade intersection function. To mitigate this potential impact, the Plan recommends addressing traffic and the pedestrian environment first. Mitigation measures would include access management, signal coordination, and the possible reconfiguration of the Westmere Commercial Area to provide alternate routes to Route 20. From a land use perspective, open space buffers should be provided between the residential areas and the existing and emerging non-residential uses. In addition, future non-residential uses in the Route 20 corridor should include office, commercial non-retail, and possibly very low impact light industrial uses. Large retail uses should be discouraged since the existing malls/plazas provide ample shopping opportunity at a regional level. Small retail uses (neighborhood shops) may be appropriate, especially as a means of supporting a pedestrian friendly corridor.

Continued industrial development in the Northeast Industrial Park (NEIP) may have a significant impact on Guilderland Center. Past and current industrial activity has already created truck traffic impacts within this neighborhood. The plan recommendations call for a GEIS to evaluate the impacts of buildout of the NEIP on the natural environment and the community.

There are significant land use issues associated with extending sewer and water into Rural Guilderland. Subsequent residential development could change the character of Rural Guilderland. At this planning level, the Plan recommendations (identified in detail in Chapter IV, Section E.10) call for the preparation of a plan for Rural Guilderland that would address how development might occur taking into consideration the character of this area, the need to protect the water supply for the Town, and the potential ramifications (both adverse and beneficial) of providing utilities. If the Town plans for rural guilderland in this manner, the potential for significant impact on land use, community resources, and community character can be avoided or appropriately mitigated.

Through implementation of the Plan Recommendations, some potential impact will be unavoidable as a result of new development. Some resources will be lost (open space, habitat) and traffic will increase along with runoff. However, the extent of these impacts are mitigated through Plan Recommendations for the preservation of open space, protection of natural resources such as stream corridors and wetlands, and control of suburban sprawl through the use of growth management tools.

## **C. NATURAL RESOURCES**

Natural resources are seldom viewed as a land use unless there is a recognizable level of protection for the resources or if the resources are being utilized, as in the case of mining. The Town's natural resources are diverse and unique. They offer residents recreational opportunity, provide the open space necessary to identify rural character, and promote a healthy ecology. The latter is less tangible, but is a quality of life asset.

The Town has not lost its resources or the opportunity to preserve or conserve them. Open space preservation does not mean no growth. However, it does mean that a community must develop the incentives, guidelines and when appropriate the regulations to design around and preserve important resources. Some resources have been identified at a State or federal level as important and worthy of protection. For example, wetlands are important ecological communities that can have both federal and State protection. Due to the complexity of identifying some of these resources, it is not appropriate to attempt to map them. On the other hand, general policy statements can be used along with development guidelines to assist local decision-makers as they review site specific projects.

### **C.1 Plan Premises**

Guidance for the development of the Natural Resources Plan came from the basic premise that efforts to remove ourselves from the environment leads to stresses that eventually force us to seek what has been lost. In other words, we are an integral part of the environment, therefore a healthy environment means a healthy community. From this, the following guiding principles were developed:

- The Town contains some unique and important natural features, namely the Pine Bush and the Helderberg Escarpment. Efforts to achieve a sustainable, fire manageable ecosystem within the remaining portions of the Pine Bush are on-going. Many lands remain in private ownership in areas of continuing development. Although it is unlikely that the slopes of the Helderberg Escarpment would be developed, towers are being developed along the ridge line and views to and from the Escarpment may be compromised by future development. Therefore, the guiding principle for these unique resources is that the Town should support their protection through policies, development guidelines, cooperation with federal and State agencies, and local protection measures.
- Water resources are important to the Town. The Town relies on surface water and groundwater sources for its water supply. Ravines, floodplains,

and wetlands provide open space that promotes rural character but offer more important physical benefits such as water purification, stormwater management, and the diversification and connection of habitat. Impacts from the various land uses within and outside the Town have resulted in siltation and eutrophication (increase in nutrients that result in aquatic and emergent vegetation and algal blooms) of the Watervliet Reservoir. Although sufficient water resources exist in the Town, it is expensive to treat and distribute these resources. Therefore, the guiding principles for water resources are to protect streams, steep slopes, floodplains and wetlands to preserve water quality and to take advantage of natural flood storage; and to recognize that potable water supply is not an unlimited resource and that the greater the consumption, the more infrastructure and treatment capacity will be required at a higher cost.

The Comprehensive Plan does provide the opportunity to recognize major resources of importance; the Town has several and are discussed in the sections to follow.

## **C.2 Watervliet Reservoir Watershed & Groundwater Supply**

Interestingly, this is a natural resource that has become important through human manipulation and use. The Watervliet Reservoir was once the Normanskill until it was dammed for the purpose of creating a water supply. However, its status as a drinking water supply for the City of Watervliet and the Town of Guilderland require that it be protected from exploitation and misuse. A pleasant consequence was the creation of aquatic habitat and wetland accompanied by preserved adjacent upland, providing habitat to many wildlife species.

The Watervliet Reservoir watershed is approximately 115 square miles and includes three counties and eight Towns. Approximately 35 square miles of the watershed is located in the Town. A watershed is defined as an area of land that drains to a single point; in this case, the reservoir dam. From the very definition of watershed comes an important realization that the activities occurring on any given parcel in the watershed can have an important impact on water quality. For example, the use of fertilizers on a lawn multiplied by thousands of homes within the watershed results in a profound nutrient loading potential.

In addition to the Watervliet Reservoir and distributions from the City of Albany, the Town operates three wells in the Nott Road/Route 155 area. Although capable of producing up to 2.0 million gallons per day (mgd), these wells are primarily used for back-up during peak demand due to water quality issues. A well head protection plan is being prepared to protect the aquifers associated with the Town's wells. Given that groundwater is the only water source directly controlled by the Town, it is important for the Town to protect

its resources in case future conditions in other municipalities limit or preclude the provision of water to the Town.

#### Recommendations

- Begin dialogue with the City of Watervliet to create a partnership for the long-term management, use and possible expansion of the reservoir and to protect the quality of this water supply. This should also include discussion of the appropriate land use measures to protect water quality within the Watervliet Reservoir watershed and the mechanism by which these measures would be enforced.
- Preservation of critical lands adjacent to the reservoir can be accomplished through a number of open space preservation techniques discussed in *Growth Management*. However, for the best control, the Town should consider purchase of these lands.
- Dialogue should be established with the other municipalities containing a portion of the watershed to encourage them to support the Town's efforts.
- A draft Well-Head Protection Plan (Phase II of the Well Head Protection Study) has been developed for the Town to protect the aquifers that the Town currently utilizes for groundwater supply and other areas that may provide groundwater supply in the future. The Plan recommends the following to protect the Town's groundwater supply:
  - The Town should formulate a general Town-wide policy regarding the use, disposal and storage of hazardous materials. This should include local notification of any spills or releases which are reported to the NYSDEC.
  - Policies for the secondary well field management zones, consisting of the Pine Bush recharge areas, the Fullers recharge area, and the area immediately north and down-gradient of the Voorheesville delta complex, should include the collection of information regarding all storage of reportable quantities of petroleum and/or potentially hazardous materials. Notification should be provided to all occupants within this area, including potential concerns. Floor drains and other subsurface discharges should be eliminated with the exception of sanitary septic discharges.
  - Within the primary management area, defined as a radius of 4,500 feet from each well, gasoline retailers, industry and any activities relating to the use, storage or disposal of potentially hazardous materials should be restricted. Subsurface discharges from floor drains should be eliminated.

### **C.3 Drainage Corridors (Streams, Ravines, Floodplain & Wetland)**

There are numerous stream corridors in the Town of Guilderland. The drainage network is shown in the *Inventory & Analysis*, as well as appearing on the base map for the Comprehensive Plan. Each segment of stream is formed by the

physical characteristics of its own subwatershed. These natural drainage corridors carve the landscape and create the variations in topography that promote rural character. Streams provide habitat for many wildlife species, both aquatic and terrestrial. When permitted to develop naturally, streams form their own stormwater management storage through floodplains and other storage basins. Streams provide linkages between habitat and between human destinations. They can be used as wildlife corridors and hiking trails. They can also provide open space in developed areas. Perhaps most importantly for the Town of Guilderland, streams can provide a source of potable water if properly cared for and protected.

Recommendations (Streams and Floodplains)

- 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. The width of the buffer should not be less than 100 feet from the stream edge to prevent potential impacts of erosion and sedimentation. In the case of stream corridors with associated steep banks (ravines), the angle of repose should be used to define top of bank. The current 30 foot setback from the angle of repose (top of bank) as provided in the subdivision regulations should continue to be used. The 12 degree angle of repose is used to protect steep slopes and stream corridors from development.
- Direct impacts to stream corridors, wetlands, floodplains and other water resources should be avoided to the greatest extent practicable. New development should be required to design with the topography and other natural resources to minimize impact.
- Require the preparation of an erosion control plan for new projects. Erosion control measures may include:
  - Installing silt fence or silt fence in combination with staked hay bales, at the toe of slopes around the construction area.
  - Utilizing temporary drainage swales with hay bale check dams to direct water away from the construction area.
  - Upon completion of final grading, seeding all areas with a quick-germinating grass or other similar cover species.
  - Staging site development to minimize disturbed areas.
- Special consideration should be given to the streams that are tributary to the Watervliet Reservoir. Setbacks for specific uses identified in the document: *Rules and Regulation for Protection from Contamination of the Public Water Supply of the Watervliet Reservoir*<sup>1</sup> have been adopted by the Town. Other regulations, such as the new federal National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Water Pollution Control Program (Phase II) may prove to be useful in protecting the watershed from stormwater runoff from new development.

---

<sup>1</sup> Promulgated by the New York State Commissioner of Health under Section 1100 of the Public Health Law.

- Explore potential access opportunities to stream corridors at appropriate locations for recreational uses (primarily trails and fishing access). Emphasis should be placed on voluntary easements to achieve appropriate connections.
- Prevent encroachment into the 100-year floodplain. These areas have been generally mapped from the Flood Insurance Rate Maps prepared by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and are provided in the *Inventory & Analysis*.
- Revise existing flood control regulations and guidelines in accordance with State policies.

#### Recommendations (Wetlands)

- Encourage preservation of wetland areas through conservation easements and other methods of protection (see *Growth Management*). This would be aided by State and federal regulations, however, easements, deed restrictions and other local controls would compensate for the uncertain future of the regulatory environment.
- If wetland impacts are permitted, encourage project sponsors to limit impacts to less significant portions of the wetland and to avoid fragmentation.
- Require wetland delineations pursuant to State and federal regulations, as appropriate. State wetland boundaries are generally confirmed by NYSDEC. Federal boundaries are confirmed by COE upon request of the project sponsor.
- Wetlands should be protected from erosion and sedimentation through the use of silt fences, staked hay bales, diversion swales and check dams, and other erosion control measures as determined appropriate for the site.
- Require any conditions of permits issued by COE or NYSDEC, including conditions of Nationwide Permits, as applicable, prior to site plan or subdivision approval.

### **C.4 Pine Bush**

The Pine Bush was created thousands of years ago following the last glaciation of the area. As the glaciers receded, glacial meltwater formed lakes that covered large areas of the State. Glacial Lake Albany dominated the Capital District. The lake created beaches that would later become sand dunes. Interestingly, what was once an area dominated by water became a kind of northern desert, limiting vegetative species to those tolerating dry conditions, with the exception of an occasional wetland oasis. The pitch pine-scrub oak community became the climax (end of natural succession) forest type due to repeated fires. Many interesting and unique species inhabited this environment that comprised over 25,000 acres.

Today, development has consumed large portions of the Pine Bush resulting in a remnant ecology threatened by total extirpation. However, through the efforts of ecologists and other interested and concerned individuals, the State established the Pine Bush Preserve and the Pine Bush Preserve Commission, in which the Town is a member. Through greater understanding of ecology, the Pine Bush can exist as a sustainable community if at least 2,000 fire manageable acres of pitch pine-scrub oak barrens can be preserved. Efforts are underway to achieve this goal through the purchase of private lands. Presently, approximately 950 acres recommended for full or partial protection by the Commission have been preserved within the Town. There are only a few remaining parcels in the Town recommended for full or partial protection. These parcels are being actively pursued by the Commission.

The Town of Guilderland is fortunate to have the Pine Bush resource in the community. It is a significant piece of preserved open space, providing numerous passive recreation and educational opportunities. It is a suburban park that will increase in its importance to the community as the Town and region continue to grow in population and as increased development reduces the availability of open space. Given the uniqueness of the ecology, the open space value provided to the Town, and the high priority given to its protection on a State level, it is in the Town's best interest to support the efforts of the Pine Bush Preserve Commission, in its role as a member of the Commission, to continue preservation and management of the Pine Bush.

#### Recommendations

- Assist and cooperate with the Pine Bush Preserve Commission in implementing its *Management Plan* and *Protection and Project Review Implementation Guidelines*. This should occur by including a requirement in the site plan and subdivision review processes that new development occurring within the Project Review Area, as defined and illustrated in the *Protection and Project Review Implementation Guidelines*, undergo consultation with the Town and Pine Bush Preserve Commission in the early planning stages (sketch plan) of plan development. The purpose of this consultation is to provide the Commission an opportunity to comment on the site and proposal in the early planning stages to make suggestions that are consistent with efforts for management of the Pine Bush ecosystem. This will benefit both the Town's review process and the individual developer by providing early input.
- Promote the Pine Bush Interpretative Center as a local educational resource.
- 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.

## **C.5 Helderberg Escarpment**

Albany County's most unique and equally important geologic feature is the Helderberg Escarpment. The uplift and subsequent erosion of the coastal plain of an ancient sea resulted in this landform of high cliffs capped by hard, less erodible limestone. It is a geological and paleontological haven. It is also an important and impressive visual feature, forming the signature landform of the Capital Region and attracting visitors from areas throughout the State. The Town of Guilderland benefits from its presence which has provided spectacular views. It is one important reason that the Town is such an attractive place to live.

### Recommendations

- Prevent the development or other use of the Escarpment slopes for other than open space and passive recreational use.
- Protect the ridge line from the visual impact of development. The ridge line could be specifically identified as an important piece of open space and effort employed to protect it through conservation easements, expansion of the State park, or other growth management measures.
- Protect the views both to and from the escarpment, recognizing the State-wide/regional importance of the viewshed and the local value which has contributed to the attractiveness of the Town. Recommendations for viewshed protection include the following:
  - Identify areas of the Town deemed visually important. These areas might include sections of road with views of the escarpment and areas of the foreground view from the Escarpment that would significantly detract from the enjoyment of the view if developed.
  - Require visual impact analysis for all developments requiring zoning or planning approvals that are located within designated viewsheds.
  - All projects within viewsheds that are subject to SEQR should be required to prepare a Visual EAF Addendum.
  - The need for visual impact analysis for projects located outside the designated viewsheds should be addressed on a case by case basis. Criteria for establishing the need for a visual impact analysis should include the extent of potential impact on rural character, the extent of clearing and grading, site topography, proximity to other important community resources, and the aesthetic character of the proposed structure or use.
  - Utilize growth management tools such as conservation easements, purchase or transfer of development rights, and, as necessary, specific height regulations, to protect visual resources.

## **C.6 Potential Adverse & Beneficial Future Growth Impacts**

Pursuant to the requirements of the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR), this section identifies the potential adverse and beneficial impacts associated with adoption of the Plan Recommendations.

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. Since the Plan is an attempt to achieve controlled growth, not "no growth," impact to the environment is inevitable. There will be a loss of open space, natural habitat, wetland area, and agricultural lands. Runoff will increase as will the potential for water quality impacts and erosion and sedimentation. Suburban sprawl may continue, especially if water and sewer service is provided to undeveloped areas. The ability to identify appropriate measures to protect significant natural resources through the implementation process is crucial to prevent permanent impacts.

## D. TRANSPORTATION

Streets in livable communities serve all users – vehicles and pedestrians. Planted medians, well-defined crosswalks, and sidewalks ensure that the pedestrian realm is both pleasant and safe.  
Copyright © 2000 Behan Planning Associates



Transportation corridors in the Town of Guilderland are both an amenity and a source of continued anxiety. Few communities have the access to both north-south and east-west interstates. Residents can access the Thruway directly at Exit 25 and again at Exit 24 via the Northway. Northway access is available from Route 20 and from the Crossgates Mall. State Route 155 links two of the Capital District's major arterials, Route 20 and Route 5. Route 155 also provides access to the Albany International Airport and links the communities of Voorheesville, Guilderland, and Colonie. There are numerous County roads serving as collectors that link communities to major arterials. Throughout the Community Outreach process, people recognized that the Town's road system, which includes the interstates, provides them with quick access to destinations all over the Capital District and Saratoga region. 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.

It stands to reason that an impact such as excessive delay would have a major effect on the quality of life in the Town. Traffic is the Town's number one concern and, like most communities, the solution is not simple. This section of the Comprehensive Plan identifies the major traffic issues facing the Town and provides recommendations that may have some beneficial impact on traffic flow as well as improve the "streetscape" and pedestrian environment. However, before specific recommendations are made, it is important to understand the basic premises or guiding principles that were used to formulate this plan.

### D.1 Plan Premises

- Traffic volume and congestion issues in Guilderland, particularly in the eastern part of Town are primarily a function of development within the Town and some pass-thru traffic from adjoining communities. Therefore, traffic solutions should focus on controlling development and preserving transportation corridors, as well as seeking regional solutions.
- The Census tells us that the Town of Guilderland is a "bedroom community," meaning that the majority of people who live in the Town work elsewhere in the Capital District. Since the City of Albany and other primary destinations are located east of the Town, the majority of traffic is heading east in the morning and west in the evening during a peak hour period. Measures that would help reverse a portion of this traffic during the peak periods would be beneficial.
- The County road system was designed and intended primarily as a collector system. The Town has numerous collector roads that connect communities. Some of these same roads have been developed with residential uses, giving

the perception of a residential street and probably precluding future consideration as a collector.

- Public transportation is an important tool in relieving traffic congestion both at the origin and the destination. However, public transportation is not designed for rural or even suburbanized areas. It is most effective where populations are concentrated and there is a good pedestrian system. Therefore, it can only be reasonably assumed that future improvements in the public transportation system will benefit the developed areas of McKownville, Westmere and the McCormack Corners/Fort Hunter area.

The transportation issues and recommendations to follow are discussed in the hierarchy of use and capacity. It is also true in the Town that many of the traffic issues occurring on county and local roads are a result of bottlenecks at the arterials. Presumably, if capacity can be gained and/or traffic flow improved, many of the impacts occurring on the local streets would resolve themselves.

## **D.2 New York State Highways & Thruway**

The NYS Thruway (I-90) crosses the northern portion of the Town, providing an exit near NYS Route 146 and another major interchange just outside of the Town in the City of Albany (Exit 24). The Thruway continues southward through the Town, becoming I87. The intent of the Thruway system is to provide interstate travel with limited access. It is not intended as a means of relieving local traffic and may actually have the opposite effect of encouraging development around the exit.

Route 20 (Western Avenue) is the primary east-west route through the Town and the most heavily congested. However, heading west to east, Route 20 congestion is not significant until Carman Road (Route 146). This is further testament to the impact development has on traffic. Congestion significantly increases from Route 155 eastward. Like many of the collector roads, portions of Route 20 were initially developed with single family homes, each with their own driveway. As commercial development grew in response to the construction of the Thruway and Northway and in response to the growing residential population, commercial development began to dominate the road frontage but without addressing access. The combination of numerous driveways and increased traffic volume leads to congestion and delay.

There are no easy, long term solutions to the traffic problem along Route 20, Route 155 and Route 146. A southern bypass linking Route 155 with Schoolhouse Road and eventually with the Northway on-ramp was proposed several years ago but was voted down by the residents of the Town. Due to the extent of residential development in this area, it is unlikely that the bypass would receive a warm welcome if it were proposed today.

The Town faces two major traffic issues: local traffic and regional traffic. Local traffic is a function of land use and appears to be the largest cause of congestion in the Town. Solutions for this problem require good planning, access management, and the encouragement of public transportation and non-vehicular travel. Regional traffic issues are generally out of the direct control of the Town and must be dealt with at a regional level. Growth is likely to continue to occur in New Scotland and Bethlehem that may have impacts in Guilderland. Therefore, it will be extremely important for the Town to take an active role in the planning process with CDTC, NYSDOT, Albany County, and neighboring municipalities.

The recommendations to follow are designed to work in harmony and are not stand-alone solutions. Although each recommendation will have an impact on traffic management, it will require the combination of solutions to result in a significant reduction in congestion.

#### Recommendations

- Work with the NYSDOT and CDTC to achieve coordinated signalization along Route 20. A coordinated signal system adjusts signal timing to adjust to traffic volume to keep traffic flowing smoothly. In an ideal situation, vehicles traveling at a set speed that is coordinated with traffic signals would not have to stop for many of these signals.
- Prepare an access management plan for the entire Route 20, Route 155, and Route 146 corridors. Access management involves the evaluation of current access to major highways and provides solutions for minimizing access in an effort to reduce conflicts between turning vehicles and through traffic. Access management can result in combined driveways, shared parking, and new service roads. In some areas it may be suitable to consider a parallel service road thereby limiting access to the highway at intersections. Access management can be conducted in segments. If so, focus should be given first to the McKownville and Westmere sections of Route 20. An access management plan is also important to have in place for areas expected to undergo future development. This will prevent future traffic conflicts associated with land use that will certainly arise as development expands.
- Initiate dialogue with the Thruway Authority concerning the potential of providing additional access to the New York State Thruway. This will be a long term project. Discussions should also include the potential for toll-free access between Exits 23 and 25A. The Town should work with adjoining municipalities in promoting this effort.
- Improve the pedestrian environment along Route 20. A continuous sidewalk system along Route 20 should be provided from Carman Road to the City line. Additionally, sidewalks and/or trails should be provided to link the adjoining residential neighborhoods with the Route 20 sidewalk system. By improving the pedestrian environment, people may be more

- inclined to walk to shops, doctors offices, services, the library, etc., especially if they are living close by.
- In coordination with the pedestrian system, means of safely crossing major highways must be devised. Specific areas for crossings are identified in the *Route 20 Corridor Study* to follow. Crosswalks with pedestrian signals, medians used for pedestrian havens to shorten the length of crossing, or possibly the consideration of a pedestrian bridge are all methods to allow safe pedestrian crossings.
  - Provide additional park-n-ride lots, car pooling incentives and assistance, bus shelters, bike lanes and bike lockers at bus shelters. Emphasis should be placed on increasing the opportunity for public transportation and easy access to pick-up and drop-off points. This is also an important component of the pedestrian environment.
  - Become an active partner with CDTC to begin planning for local and regional traffic solutions.

### **D.3 Western Avenue (Route 20) Corridor Study**

Route 20 or the Western Turnpike was the primary east-west arterial serving New York State prior to the construction of the Thruway. Route 20 has served as the primary conduit for residential development in the Town of Guilderland. Commercial development followed, especially after the construction of the Thruway and Northway. As traffic and land values increased along the Route 20 corridor, residential development has given way to commercial and office uses. As a result, vehicles dominate the corridor but with some strategic planning the corridor can be transformed to accommodate traffic while providing an active and safe pedestrian environment bolstered by an active marketplace. A corridor study was initiated to identify issues along the corridor and provide possible solutions or recommendations for further study.

The purpose of a corridor study is to evaluate both the traffic and land use issues associated with a given roadway. As discussed previously, traffic and land use in the Town of Guilderland are inseparable issues. The Route 20 corridor is defined as the length of Route 20 in the Town of Guilderland from the City of Albany to the Town of Princetown. The width of the corridor is variable and includes the Route 20 right-of-way, those parcels of land fronting on Route 20, and adjacent lands that are primarily residential neighborhoods. Finally, the length of the corridor is broken down into segments based on the predominant land use. This facilitates the process of identifying issues of concern and solutions that are applicable to most uses in the segment. Each segment of the corridor is identified on the *Comprehensive Plan* map. The boundaries are meant to be general, representative of the study area. Access management studies will become more detailed (parcel by parcel) and will better define the study area.

The Western Avenue/Route 20 Corridor can be generally described as having a highly developed commercial and office component that extends from McKownville to Route 155. This area is heavily impacted by traffic due to the extent of development and the opportunity for access to the interstates. From the 20 Mall at Route 155 west to Hunger Kill, land use is less intense. Development in this area is hindered by the Pine Bush, a cemetery and stream corridors. However, this area is developing as a community center with a school, library and the YMCA. From the Hunger Kill to Town Hall and a bit beyond, the corridor is dominated by commercial uses, that are less intensive than Westmere and McKownville. Route 146 intersects the corridor at two locations, each representing separate traffic issues. The section of Route 20 from the Town Hall area to the CSX tracks is much less developed than the eastern segments but due to the provision of sewer and water, has potential for more intense development. West of the CSX tracks are rural features and significant resources that require separate consideration. The western end of the corridor may lend itself to future non-residential (economic) development.

Certain issues and solutions are applicable to most of the corridor and are identified as follows to avoid repetition.

General issues include the following:

- Lack of identity along any given corridor segment. This refers to the blurring of land use created by strip development and inconsistent landscaping and architecture. As identified during the Community Outreach Program, there are distinct areas of the Town but the boundaries and distinctions have become less obvious.
- Traffic volume on Route 20 from Carman Road (Route 146) to the City line is at or nearing the functional capacity of the road based on information provided in the NYSDOT *Highway Sufficiency Ratings* manual. West of Carman Road, there is less development and therefore less traffic volume.
- Land use conflicts occur in most of the developed portions of the corridor as a result of the proximity of commercial and office uses in close proximity to residential neighborhoods. Insufficient buffers and impacts associated with traffic congestion and the specific use create quality of life issues for residents in the adjacent neighborhoods. In the western portion of Town, there are few traffic issues but potential land use conflicts, such as the preservation of the rural character and the water quality within the Watervliet Reservoir, are important land use issues associated with the Route 20 corridor.
- Finally, pedestrian access is lacking in the entire corridor. The provision of sidewalks are very desirable in developed areas. Sidewalks in the western portion of Town would not be appropriate at this time.

General solutions to address the issues include the following:

- Investigate the opportunity for coordinated signalization to control and improve traffic flow.

The NYS Department of Transportation recently completed this road reconstruction project on NYS Route 9 in Saratoga Springs. The project included the installation of planted medians, new sidewalks and crosswalks, streetlights, and benches at this important gateway to downtown.



- Prepare an access management plan for each corridor segment. The plan should include the evaluation of existing access and related problems and the development of specific solutions to provide shared access, shared parking, new access roads, and possibly parallel service roads. This analysis will require parcel level planning.
- Prepare a streetscape beautification plan for each segment of the corridor. The plan will identify the character of the area through discussions with residents and businesses and will provide design guidelines for facade treatments, lighting, signage, landscaping, street furniture, and other decorations that will make the corridor a desirable place to visit and patronize.
- Integral to the beautification plan is the provision of a continuous sidewalk system in the developed portions of the Town. The sidewalks should extend from Carman Road to the City line. Sidewalks should also be provided on Carman Road, Route 155 (both north and south of Route 20), and along Fuller Road. Additionally, sidewalk easements should be incorporated along portions of the corridor from the CSX tracks to Carman Road to accommodate potential future development.
- Provide buffers to reduce land use conflicts between business uses and the residential neighborhoods. This does not mean that the neighborhoods should be completely isolated from the corridor.
- Provide pedestrian linkages to integrate the corridor with adjoining neighborhoods. These linkages will complement the streetscape beautification plan and provision of sidewalks along Route 20. Begin discussions with the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) and NYSDOT to determine the appropriate locations for bus stops, shelters and other amenities that will promote ridership.
- Consider gateways to help distinguish corridor segments.
- Consider future corridor studies for other major roadways. Route 146 (Carman Road) is one road segment that warrants further consideration. Small problematic corridors might be more easily addressed as part of a neighborhood master plan. For example, Fuller Road could be incorporated into the McKownville neighborhood master plan.

The general solutions identified above are the most significant recommendations of the corridor study because they will have the greatest effect on traffic and the pedestrian environment. The information to follow is a discussion of the characteristics of each corridor segment and any specific solutions that have not been previously identified.

### ***McKownville Professional Office Corridor***

This corridor segment extends eastward from the City line/SUNY campus entrance to Fuller Road. The predominant land use in this corridor segment is the professional office converted from residential uses. Commercial business also occurs within the corridor, however, the recommendations are applicable to

all uses. Resource values within the corridor segment include an urban environment (many uses in close proximity), the opportunity for linkages, readily available public utilities, and some opportunity for office and commercial infill development.

Major issues include a high volume, congested segment of road; potential for significant land use conflicts; and the lack of pedestrian access.

Specific solutions for this corridor segment include:

- Use streetscaping, medians and other traffic calming methods to design a gateway to the community. Use of the Northway overpass may also be considered to develop the gateway.
- Provide an efficient and safe crossing of Route 20 at the entrance to the SUNY campus. At a minimum this should include a pedestrian controlled signal and crosswalk. Consideration should be given to the use of a pedestrian median to shorten the distance of travel that would encourage use of this area. The appropriate method of crossing should be identified as part of the future Route 20 Redevelopment Plan (discussed in detail in Section C.3).
- Provide sidewalks and safe crossing points on Fuller Road to support the heavy pedestrian traffic from residential neighborhoods and the University to Stuyvesant Plaza.
- Add a sidewalk along McKown Road and a safe crossing of Western Avenue at McKown Road and Norwood Street to facilitate access between residential areas of McKownville and Abele Park off Schoolhouse Road.
- Provide safe pedestrian access to the CDTA bus stops on Western Avenue.
- Investigate upgrading the recreation potential of the McKownville Reservoir by adding pedestrian access.
- Upgrade storm drainage in the areas, both along the Krum Kill downstream from the Reservoir, and within the residential neighborhoods north of Western Avenue.

### ***Westmere Commercial Corridor***

This corridor segment extends from Stuyvesant Plaza to the western entrance of Crossgates/Johnston Road. This is a major commercial corridor with extremely high valued property and numerous traffic and land use conflicts. Despite the developed condition of the area there is opportunity for significant infill, especially if the remaining residential uses convert to commercial or office. A major attraction of the area for economic development is quick access to the Northway.

Specific solutions for this corridor segment include the following:

- Create a Town-wide gateway at the end of the Northway at Route 20. Design of this gateway/"Welcome to Guilderland" should be conducted cooperatively with the Chamber of Commerce.

- Prepare an access management plan as part of the Route 20 Redevelopment Plan for this segment of Route 20.
- Evaluate the function of the Crossgates Mall Ring Road for more efficient use as a bypass for Route 20 and to provide access management for future development on the north side of Route 20, adjacent to the Mall property. The ring road is owned by the Town and provides two widely separated access points to Route 20 as well as direct access to the Northway. It was originally intended to provide access to the Mall and to function as a bypass. Its function as both a bypass and mall access/service road is questionable and should be evaluated prior to further development within the Westmere Commercial Corridor. Currently, the road is inadequate to serve shoppers, especially during holidays seasons, resulting in a significant amount of traffic using Western Avenue.
- Immediately south of Rt. 20, a service road or alley could be developed parallel to Rt. 20 east and west of Johnston Road to provide alternative access opportunities for future uses such as senior housing and business non-retail uses. The service road would provide access to current and future development thereby eliminating numerous curb cuts along Route 20. This should translate into better traffic flow along Route 20 within this very congested segment. Any future development in this area should also include provisions for a pocket/neighborhood park to serve the Westmere neighborhoods.
- Provide an efficient and safe crossing of Route 20 at Johnston Road and Fuller Road. These crossings will likely require the use of a pedestrian median and other designations to ensure safety. In addition to the crossing, pedestrian access to both facilities should be improved.
- Work with the NYS Department of Transportation to improve pedestrian safety at the intersection of Route 20 and the end of the Northway.
- Work with CDTA to provide bus shelters, benches and other related infrastructure to facilitate bus use (applicable to all corridor segments east of the railroad tracks).

### ***Westmere Professional Office Corridor***

This corridor segment extends from Johnston Road (County Route 203) to Venezio Avenue and is predominantly comprised of professional offices with a commercial component. The issues associated with the western half of the corridor are similar to those of the McKownville segment in that residences have converted to other uses and these uses require individual driveways for access. Opportunities for access management are limited by the abutting residences. The other major challenge for this area is the identification of suitable uses along the frontage that will not result in land use conflicts with the residential neighborhood. The eastern half of the corridor appears to have sufficient room/lot depth to provide some access management solutions without impacting very many residences. In general, the larger lots provide an

opportunity for a variety of business uses and sufficient room to buffer adjoining incompatible uses.

Specific solutions for this corridor segment include the following:

- Prepare an access management plan as part of the Route 20 Redevelopment Plan for this segment of Route 20.
- Promote the continued use/redevelopment of small frontage lots as professional offices.
- Prepare access management plan to determine opportunities for combined driveways and a rear service road (alley). A right-of-way currently exists behind the small frontage lots on the north side of Route 20 (eastern half of corridor). This should be investigated for a potential service road.
- Protect adjoining residential neighborhoods from incompatible land uses through sufficient buffers except when employing well-designed, pedestrian friendly new urbanism/mixed use concepts.

#### ***Route 155 Commercial Corridor***

This corridor segment extends from Venezio Avenue to the 20 Mall located west of Route 155. This segment is highly commercialized, anchored by the 20 Mall and adjacent development. Like much of the corridor, there is a proliferation of individual driveways, high traffic volume, lack of architectural and streetscape cohesion, and a poor pedestrian environment. The solutions, therefore, are also similar to the other commercial segments. Given the large residential population located north of the corridor, pedestrian assistance crossing Route 20 and Route 155 appears to be appropriate. Pedestrian amenities may include crosswalks with pedestrian controlled lights and medians to reduce the crossing distance. Specific solutions for this corridor segment include the following:

- Pedestrian access along route 20 and 155 should be improved through the installation of sidewalks, as well as the provision of safe crossing opportunities, especially in the vicinity of 20 Mall and the Middle School.
- Prepare access management plan.

#### ***Guilderland Emerging Center Corridor***

This segment of the corridor extends from the 20 Mall/Route 155 to the Hunger Kill and includes lands that are constrained from development by the Pine Bush, cemetery and a school on the north side, and lands currently under development on the south side. This area contains the Town Library and the YMCA and is becoming a Town-wide destination. Currently there is no suitable pedestrian environment and traffic speed and volume are significant. As a developing area, the primary issues associated with access management and streetscape planning can be more easily incorporated into development plans. The following solutions should be considered for this corridor segment:

- Create greenways using the Kaikout Kill and the Hunger Kill to preserve the integrity of these stream corridors consistent with the *Natural Resources* plan element.
- Create access management and streetscape plans that can be incorporated into plans for new development.
- Develop a pedestrian access plan to safely cross Route 20 in the vicinity of the Town Library. Similar safe crossings should be created at Route 155 and at Willow. There may be opportunities to work with the topography and new development in the area to allow the development of a pedestrian bridge.
- Coordinate streetscape, pedestrian, and access management plans with the Neighborhood Master Plan as recommended in the *Land Use* plan element.

### ***Route 146/McCormack Corners Corridor***

This segment of the corridor extends from the Hunger Kill to Park View Drive. The corridor is dominated by commercial uses but less intensely developed than those in the eastern portion of Town. This segment is unique as it incorporates two sections of Route 146 that overlap on Route 20. Route 146 West brings traffic from Altamont and trucks from the Northeast Industrial Park. Route 146 East provides access to the Thruway in this portion of Town. Therefore, this segment experiences significant traffic congestion confounded by truck traffic. Road frontage is less developed and less intense than other corridor segments. Larger lot frontage provides the opportunity to successfully implement an access management plan. There appears to be significant opportunity for more growth and infill in this segment. There are examples of well designed development within this segment that pay tribute to the success of the Town's development guidelines and site plan review process. This is not surprising since this area was developed later than the eastern portion of Town. The following solutions should be considered for this corridor segment:

- Create access management and streetscape plans that can be incorporated into plans for new development.
- Develop a pedestrian access plan to safely cross routes 20 and 146 and to access the Pine Bush.
- Evaluate the potential for future development/infill within this segment of the Route 20 corridor.

### ***Growth Area Corridor***

This segment of the corridor is the last segment that provides municipal sewer and water service. The corridor extends from Park View Drive to the CSX tracks and contains significant opportunity for future growth, perhaps limited by the current termination point of sewer at the approximate mid-point of the segment. Major developments are currently being proposed for this corridor, primarily residential uses. There are a number of issues to be addressed in the

corridor before future opportunities are lost. Residential structures are built too close to the Route 20 right-of-way, thereby limiting opportunities for access management and the creation of a pedestrian environment. Subdivision of the remaining frontage will create future access issues. For these reasons, it is important to develop an access management plan. Solutions specific to this corridor segment include:

- Preserve views of the Helderberg Escarpment by limiting building height on the south side of the corridor.
- Provide signage that identifies the area as within the Watervliet Reservoir watershed.

### ***Reservoir Corridor***

This section of the corridor extends from the CSX railroad to an area just past the Normanskill. This is a very sensitive area of the Town since it is adjacent to the Town's water supply and includes lands that directly drain into the reservoir. Development in this area should be significantly limited. Specific solutions include the following:

- Measures should be developed to prevent impact to the Reservoir from spills along Route 20. This might include some type of containment system.
- Implement watershed protection regulations in accordance with an overall watershed management plan.
- Consider the use of the railroad overpass as an opportunity to create a rural gateway, celebrating the community's agricultural component.

### ***Rural Guilderland Corridor***

The Rural Guilderland Corridor segment is dominated by agricultural uses. The boundary between the Reservoir segment and this one is somewhat arbitrary since all lands in the western part of Guilderland are in the Reservoir watershed. However, the area defined as the Reservoir corridor is very close to the reservoir and certain land uses in that area could have direct and significant impacts on the water supply.

Resource values of this area include views of the Escarpment, active agriculture, and few traffic issues. Limiting issues include lack of municipal water or sewer service, some residential subdivision of corridor frontage, high speed roadway used by slow moving farm implements, and a major electric transmission line through Dunnsville.

Solutions/recommendations for this corridor include the following:

- Preserve the rural character and viewshed
- Develop a sign ordinance that promotes agricultural uses without detracting from the character of the area.

- Discourage subdivision along Route 20 frontage, especially for residential uses.

#### **D.4 Major Town & County Collector Roads**

Collector roads are a critical feature of the Town's transportation network. They collect traffic from residential and non-residential development alike and convey that traffic to the arterials. 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. High traffic volume and congestion impact the quality of life for residents along these roads resulting in complaints and strong opposition to enhanced use of the collectors to improve the overall traffic system.

Due to traffic volume and congestion on the major State routes, some local roads like East Lydius Street and Old State Road have become collectors, bringing congestion and, at times, excessive speed closer to densely populated residential areas. Based on the amount of residential development along these roads, it is unlikely that they could be improved and maintained to function solely as collectors.

##### Recommendations

- Because of residential development that has occurred along Johnston, East Lydius, and Old State roads it is unlikely that these roads could be dedicated to function solely as collector roads. However, there are opportunities to preserve the integrity and purpose of other collectors in less developed areas of the Town. As development occurs, strong consideration should be given to preventing the subdivision of land along the frontage of collector roads except when access is limited and sufficient setbacks from the right-of-way are provided. Developers should be required to clearly inform the buyer that the purpose of the main road is to be a collector and that traffic volumes will increase over time followed by the potential need for improvements. Portions of West Lydius frontage are undeveloped but could be developed in the future. This is a specific example where access control will be crucial to allow this road to continue functioning as a collector.
- In the past the Town has considered bypass roads but they have never been constructed. Generally, the introduction of a new road to a community presents many issues including impacts to the environment, land use and growth issues, and other social issues. The focus of the transportation recommendations is to reduce congestion along Route 20 and the other major roadways through access management, growth management, and the development of a trail system that would link residential areas to desirable destinations. However, as the Town and surrounding communities continue

to grow, the need for one or more bypasses may outweigh the issues that have previously prevented their construction. Furthermore, there may be an opportunity to incorporate a bypass in the plans of future development projects. The effectiveness of each bypass should be studied in greater detail before moving forward with plans. The following bypasses have potential to provide traffic benefits:

- West Lydius bypass – linking West Lydius/Old State Road at the Old State Road bridge with Carman Road at Fuller Station Road.
- Veeder Road bypass - This would involve an extension of Dr. Shaw Road through to Johnson Road, thus bypasses Veeder Road which is of 19<sup>th</sup> century design and lined with residences.
- Schoolhouse Road bypass – This would link Schoolhouse Road at McKown Road West/Trillum Lane with Krumkill Road in the Town of New Scotland.
- Sidewalks or paths should be considered along roads that are receiving considerable pedestrian use. This is an issue along both Town and County roads where development has occurred along the road frontage and where developments are isolated from activity centers in close proximity.
- An evaluation of the road system for a given area and the measures to ensure road function should be prepared for designated growth areas.
- Improve safety by adding sidewalks as they approach major arterials within Town.
- 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.
- If possible, new neighborhoods should be linked via subdivision road systems. This will relieve some of the traffic volume on the collector roads. Many subdivisions have stub roads that are intended to link with future development off site. These stubs should be incorporated into project plans for future development and should be clearly disclosed to buyers.

## **D.5 Rail Corridors**

Rail corridors can be important assets to a community. The Town contains two corridors: CSX (formerly Conrail) and the old D&H line. The CSX corridor is an active rail line serving primarily freight. The D&H corridor was inactive but has once again become an active freight line, now owned by CP Rail. As active lines, rail corridors provide opportunities for passenger service as well as possibilities for attracting rail based business. As abandoned corridors, they provide opportunities for regional trail systems.

### Recommendations

- Implement an incentive program for rail based business. This could be coordinated with a marketing effort for the Northeast Industrial Park.

- Continue to monitor the status of rail lines in the Town for the potential use of a corridor for light rail.
- The integrity of all rail corridors within the Town should be maintained now and in the future regardless of the use since they may continue to serve as rail or they may become available for other uses such as light rail and pathways. Continuous corridors are an important resource/opportunity for the Town.
- Work with the region (CDTC) to develop a regional passenger rail transportation system that includes Guilderland, Altamont, and connections to Amtrak, and the possible bus rapid transit along Route 5 with potential linkage to commuter rail systems.
- Investigate the potential for bus rapid transit or possibly light rail along Route 20.

## D.6 Guilderland Pathways

In connection with the recommendations for the improvement of the pedestrian environment along Route 20, consideration should also be given to the development of a trail system that provides linkages to important destinations in the Town. Such linkages might include neighborhoods to schools to recreational areas. As discussed in the *Route 20 Corridor Study*, linkages from neighborhoods to commercial centers may be appropriate. Trails are a welcomed recreational resource for a community. They have proven their worth in other communities and will likely be embraced by the Guilderland community. However, the introduction of trails in a community without a trail system can also be a challenge. The concerns over trail proposals are the same from town to town, county to county, and state to state: crime, vandalism, unauthorized use, dumping, safety, and conflict of use, to name a few. The answers to these issues is also universal: frequency of use, stewardship, and good local control. The latter might suggest a burden on the police department but the reality is that the frequency of use and stewardship by adjacent landowners and other "friends of the trail" result in self policing that limits the number of police department calls.

The most successful trails are those that are appropriately located to promote frequent use and high volume. These are trails that link with population centers and key destinations such as parks. In most cases, stewardship programs can be instituted that get landowners involved to watch over the trail and help police identify problems. There are numerous studies and success stories available to the public that provide guidance on trail development, including how to address the common issues. This information should be collected and summarized as part of an overall plan for trails in the Town.

Recreational resources can add tremendous value to a community. Multi-use trails and on-street bicycle systems, as envisioned by the Guilderland Pathways recommendation, provide for an alternate means of transportation and opportunities for residents of all ages to enjoy outdoor recreation.



Copyright © 2000 Environmental Design & Research

### Recommendations

- Develop a detailed "Guilderland Pathways" Master Plan that includes primary and secondary corridors, design standards, and a financing program.
- Coordinate implementation of trail projects with State, County, and local improvement projects.

## **D.7 Potential Adverse & Beneficial Future Growth Impacts**

Pursuant to the requirements of the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR), this section identifies the potential adverse and beneficial impacts associated with adoption of the Plan Recommendations.

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 or alleys that will need to be designed so as not to significantly impact residential neighborhoods.

Since the plan envisions future growth, infill, and redevelopment, it is important to recognize the linkage between growth and traffic and provide sufficient means of mitigating traffic issues. To achieve this, the Plan provides recommendations for traffic improvements as the focal point of new development, especially in the Route 20 corridor between the City of Albany and Route 146 (Carman Road). Any plans for development must be preceded or accompanied by plans for improving existing and future conditions.

Guilderland Pathways may result in some environmental and social impacts. As envisioned, the Pathways would include a network of paths and sidewalks and would support multi-uses and connect points of interest, providing a recreational resource as well as a means of lessening the dependence on motor vehicles. Although many linkages could utilize existing roadways, the ideal situation would involve a separated system that would provide safe recreational opportunity requiring the need for voluntary easements across properties.

## **E. PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS BY PLANNING AREA**

The following sections identify the plan recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan on a geographic basis. In accordance with the Land Use portion of this plan, the Town has been divided into Planning Areas. These areas are generally distinguished on Figure 17. The boundaries of each planning area shown on Figure 17 and the subsequent language describing each planning area is not intended to reflect the actual boundaries that would be identified as part of future planning studies for these areas. The boundaries shown and described are conceptual and are provided as guidance. After further discussion and additional data collection for each of these areas, there may be good reason to modify the boundaries from what is currently shown.

Each planning area includes a discussion of the characteristics that make the area unique. This includes the history, general housing characteristics, community facilities/services located in the area, and the area's economic components (commercial/office/industrial uses). Some recommendations span large areas, incorporating more than one planning area. An example of this is the recommendations for protection of the Town's water supply. Such recommendations are highlighted in the discussions with reference to the appropriate subsection containing details. All of the details and justification for the recommendations are not necessarily provided in the subsections below. When this occurs, reference is made to the appropriate section of the Plan where further information is provided.

### **E.1 General Recommendations**

Several recommendations within the Plan are applicable to activities in most planning areas. These recommendations have been thoroughly discussed under their respective topic areas and summarized in Chapter 1. Most relate to the conservation of community resources as future development occurs (eg., setbacks from wetlands and streams, identification and protection of important viewsheds, etc.). The following is a list of cross references for each topic area:

- Streams, Ravines, Floodplain, and Wetland (drainage features) – See **IV.C.3 Drainage Corridors**.
- Groundwater Supply – See **IV.C.2 Watervliet Reservoir Watershed & Groundwater Supply**.
- Viewsheds – See **IV.C.5 Helderberg Escarpment**.
- Highways and Town and County Roads (general recommendations) – See **IV.D.2 and D.4**.
- Public Transportation – See **IV.D.2, D.4, & D.5**.
- Pedestrian/Multi-Use Trails – See **IV.D.6**.
- Historic/Cultural Resources – See **IV.B.4**.

- General Economic Development Initiatives – See **IV.B.5.**
- Recreation – See **IV.B.6.**
- Wireless Communication Facilities (Towers) – See **IV.B.7.**

## **E.2 McKownville**

McKownville developed as part of the City of Albany's first suburban growth ring, dating back to the early 1920's. It is distinguished by its mature, tree-lined streets, single-family homes, and well-established neighborhoods consisting of long-time residents. Due to its proximity to the City, McKownville was developed with an urban atmosphere, very similar to that of other residential areas within the City of Albany. The general extent of this planning area is shown on Figure 17.

The residential character of McKownville has changed significantly over the years due to commercial and office development along the Route 20 corridor. Today this development consumes most of the frontage along Route 20 and is beginning to encroach on adjacent neighborhoods (first streets in from Route 20) through the development of larger buildings, more parking area, and traffic. Some homes remain along Route 20 but are expected to become commercial or professional office in the future. Increased traffic on Route 20 and associated road widening has created a pedestrian unfriendly environment, forcing neighborhood residents to use their vehicles for trips to nearby stores and services.

McKownville is serviced by aging water and sewer infrastructure. It contains a small park with a playground and softball field. Other community services within this planning area include three religious institutions, a fire station, a post office, and a portion of the SUNY Albany campus. Therefore, despite the limitations/impacts that have resulted from development over the years, McKownville offers an urban-like atmosphere with shopping, services, recreation, education, and community gathering places, all in close proximity. Efforts to improve pedestrian access and control land use conflicts will increase the quality and desirability of this area. Land use recommendations to achieve this include the following:

- Encourage reinvestment and redevelopment of vacant/underutilized buildings and sites.
- Repair and upgrade existing infrastructure.
- Buffer residential uses from commercial, office and other conflicting uses that rely on vehicular transportation, except when employing well-designed, pedestrian friendly new urbanism/mixed use concepts.
- Connect residential neighborhoods to shopping and recreational opportunities by providing sidewalks and/or trails. These connections

- should be carefully made in conjunction with landowners to prevent any unintended conflicts and nuisances.
- Encourage continued public meetings at the neighborhood level with the intent of developing a neighborhood master plan. This next level of analysis is necessary to better define neighborhood boundaries, identify residents' goals for their neighborhood, determine desirable pedestrian linkages, and to identify the theme that will direct design guidelines for future development and redevelopment.
  - Where appropriate and only after continued discussions with residents of McKownville, encourage higher density development here and in other developed neighborhoods to take advantage of public transportation, the availability of both essential and non-essential services/products and a pedestrian environment that provides linkages to shopping, recreation, and cultural resources.

Transportation recommendations specific to this planning area include the following:

- Use streetscaping, medians and other traffic calming methods to design a gateway to the community.
- Provide an efficient and safe crossing of Route 20 at the entrance to the SUNY campus. At a minimum this should include a pedestrian controlled signal and crosswalk. Consideration should be given to the use of a pedestrian median to shorten the distance of travel that would encourage use of this area. The appropriate method of crossing should be identified as part of the corridor beautification/pedestrian plan.
- Provide sidewalks and safe crossing points on Fuller Road to support the heavy pedestrian traffic from residential neighborhoods and the University to Stuyvesant Plaza.
- Add a sidewalk along McKown Road and a safe crossing of Western Avenue at McKown Road and Norwood Street to facilitate access between residential areas of McKownville and Abele Park off Schoolhouse Road.
- Provide safe pedestrian access to the CDTA bus stops on Western Avenue.
- Investigate upgrading the recreation potential of the McKownville Reservoir by adding pedestrian access.
- Upgrade storm drainage in the areas, both along the Krum Kill downstream from the Reservoir, and within the residential neighborhoods north of Western Avenue.

### **E.3 Westmere**

As the suburban ring moved outward, Westmere was the next neighborhood to evolve. Similar to McKownville's pattern of development, homes first built up along the Route 20 frontage and larger lots were later subdivided to create the neighborhood. Housing stock at the core of this planning area is 40+ years old with more recent housing radiating outward. As shown on Figure 17, the grid

pattern of streets demarcates the older neighborhoods while the cul-de-sac and loop roads identify the more recent neighborhoods.

Westmere and McKownville have been highly influenced by traffic and retail development. The Northway and Crossgates Mall mark the eastern limits of Westmere. Crossgates Mall and other retail development in the Route 20 corridor have been discussed by topic in other sections of this plan (IV.A.7, **Westmere Commercial Area**); however, both retail and non-retail commercial development within this planning area have a large impact on neighborhood character such that the interaction between residential and non-residential uses merits discussion. Large-scale retail development (20 Mall) also anchors the western portion of Westmere, encompassing the Town's most active commercial corridor.

Community resources within Westmere include Westmere Elementary School, Farnsworth Middle School, Christ The King school, a police station, Westmere fire station, Western Turnpike Rescue Squad, and three churches. Residents of Westmere find shopping, professional and medical services, and convenience stores in close proximity although access has been primarily limited to vehicles.

There are numerous recommendations for this planning area relative to land use, traffic, and economic development. Constraints include traffic generated by a concentration of residential and commercial development, as well as access to interstates; lack of road bypass options; poor pedestrian environment; and land use conflicts, primarily between large commercial uses and existing residential uses and significant environmental features. Conversely, good highway access, location along a major arterial, and a concentration of development create opportunities for very livable, vibrant neighborhoods where the use of personal vehicles can be reduced by encouraging public transportation and pedestrian access, where both essential and non-essential goods and services can be easily accessed yet buffered from residential neighborhoods, and where opportunities for future growth can contribute to the quality and distinctiveness of the area.

Recommendations include the following:

- Buffer residential uses from commercial, office and other conflicting uses that rely on vehicular transportation.
- Connect residential neighborhoods to shopping and recreational opportunities by providing sidewalks and/or trails. These connections should be carefully made in conjunction with landowners to prevent any unintended conflicts and nuisances.
- Encourage continued public meetings at the neighborhood level with the intent of developing a neighborhood master plan. This next level of analysis is necessary to better define neighborhood boundaries, identify residents' goals for their neighborhood, determine desirable pedestrian linkages, and to identify the theme that will direct design guidelines for future development and redevelopment.

- A design charrette might be considered as a planning tool for this area. A charrette involves interactive sessions where individuals having a stake in the future of the area (residents, business owners, Town officials, and other government and special interest representatives) meet and discuss planning and design options. Issues that impact design are discussed and debated, usually resulting in several alternatives. The purpose of the charrette is to discuss and sketch out land use and design options for lands owned by and adjacent to Crossgates Mall. This would include Route 20 and other development in the immediate vicinity. A study area would have to be defined prior to the charrette. Many ideas can be expressed in terms of appropriate land use, vehicular access and circulation solutions, improvements to the pedestrian environment, and architectural standards or guidelines. It may be used as a precursor to a corridor plan or a neighborhood master plan. A well planned charrette would involve the services of a landscape architect, a civil engineer, and a planner to facilitate the process. This can be accomplished by retaining the professional services of these individuals or by soliciting volunteers from the professional community in the Town. It is important for participants to understand the major issues associated with the area prior to the charrette so that the process can focus on potential solutions. . Examples of potential solutions that could be addressed during the design charrette are provided in the recommendations to follow.
- The poorly functioning southbound access ramp to the Crossgates Mall from the Northway is a traffic issue of regional and local concern and should be addressed prior to further development that would utilize this point of access.
- Evaluate the Crossgates Mall Ring Road and require improvements as necessary to improve circulation and to achieve its originally intended function as a bypass, prior to future development of this area. Opportunities for access management and future linkages to Stuyvesant Plaza should also be evaluated.
- Enter into dialogue with the Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) to investigate potential solutions for improving the function of the road network serving the Westmere Commercial Area, including regional solutions. An example of a potential solution that might benefit the area is the Crossgates-Stuyvesant linkage discussed previously.
- Immediately south of Rt. 20, a service road or alley could be developed parallel to Rt. 20 east and west of Johnston Road to provide alternative access opportunities for future uses such as senior housing and business non-retail uses adjacent to Route 20. The service road would provide access to current and future development thereby eliminating numerous curb cuts along Route 20. This should translate into better traffic flow along Route 20 within this very congested segment. Any future development in this area should also include provisions for a pocket/neighborhood park to serve the Westmere neighborhoods.

- Initiate dialogue with the City of Albany, Village of Colonie, and relevant Albany County and State agencies regarding development issues associated with the Westmere Commercial Area.
- Zoning changes that would permit additional large-scale retail development in the area should be avoided.
- Future commercial development in the area must take into consideration traffic impacts on adjacent residential neighborhoods.
- Any proposed commercial development in the Gabriel Terrace residential neighborhood should be supported only with the consensus of the residents.
- To preserve the aesthetic quality and arterial function of Western Avenue, the open space set aside as part of the Crossgates Mall approval should be maintained.
- The Town should develop and maintain regular interaction with the City of Albany, CDTC, CDRPC, CDTA, SUNY Albany and other public or municipal agencies concerning issues related to the Crossgates Mall area and development along Washington Avenue Extension. Actions by the City of Albany or NYSDOT in this area, such as zoning changes or highway improvements, have impacts on the Town, just as action by the Town can impact the City and the regional transportation network. Regional dialogue and cooperation are in the best interest of all parties.

Transportation recommendations from the Route 20 Corridor Study that are specific to this planning area include the following:

*Westmere Commercial Corridor*

- Create a Town-wide gateway at the end of the Northway at Route 20. Design of this gateway ("Welcome to Guilderland") should be conducted cooperatively with the Chamber of Commerce.
- Prepare an access management plan as part of the Route 20 Redevelopment Plan for this segment of Route 20.
- Evaluate the function of the Crossgates Mall Ring Road for more efficient use as a bypass for Route 20 and to provide access management for future development on the north side of Route 20, adjacent to the Mall property. The ring road is owned by the Town and provides two widely separated access points to Route 20 as well as direct access to the Northway. It was originally intended to provide access to the Mall and to function as a bypass. This function is questionable and should be evaluated prior to further development within the Westmere Commercial Corridor.
- Provide an efficient and safe crossing of Route 20 at Johnston Road and Fuller Road. These crossings will likely require the use of a pedestrian median and other designations to ensure safety. In addition to the crossing, pedestrian access to both facilities should be improved.
- Work with the NYS Department of Transportation to improve pedestrian safety at the intersection of Route 20 and the end of the Northway.

- Work with CDTA to provide bus shelters, benches and other related infrastructure to facilitate bus use (applicable to all corridor segments east of the railroad tracks).

Westmere Professional Office Corridor

- Prepare an access management plan as part of the Route 20 Redevelopment Plan for this segment of Route 20.
- Promote the continued use/redevelopment of small frontage lots as professional offices.
- Prepare access management plan to determine opportunities for combined driveways and a rear service road (alley). A right-of-way currently exists behind the small frontage lots on the north side of Route 20 (eastern half of corridor). This should be investigated for a potential service road.
- Protect adjoining residential neighborhoods from incompatible land uses through sufficient buffers except when employing well-designed, pedestrian friendly new urbanism/mixed use concepts.

Route 155 Commercial Corridor

- Pedestrian access along route 20 and 155 should be improved through the installation of sidewalks, as well as the provision of safe crossing opportunities, especially in the vicinity of 20 Mall and the Middle School.
- Prepare access management plan.

## **E.4 Guilderland**

Guilderland was an early hamlet in the Town, founded by a glass works industry in 1785. The glass works produced window glass, snuff bottles, and pocket bottles. This industry encouraged the establishment of homes for workers, a church, and a school house. Today, the focus of Guilderland has shifted eastward from the Foundry Road/Willow Street/Route 20 intersection to developing lands east of Winding Brook Drive. Town-wide community resources include the Town Library, Guilderland Elementary School, the Guilderland YMCA, Nott Road wastewater treatment plant and park, and the 20 Mall. Further development of this area is anticipated. Residential development in this area is sparse but new residential development is pushing northward from Nott Road and Route 155. The development of this area as a community focal point has created traffic safety issues as well as land use issues relative to the appropriate land use mix and the conservation/protection of environmental resources. To the north Guilderland is bound by the Pine Bush and to the east and south by the Hunger Kill stream corridor.

Land use recommendations for this area include the following:

- Create a Neighborhood Master Plan that addresses access management, pedestrian facilities, "streetscape" improvements, natural/scenic topographical features, environmental features, architectural/site design and mixed uses. The appropriate uses for this area of Town would be

determined by the Neighborhood Master Plan process, however several uses appear to be suitable and desirable based on current land use trends and Town-wide needs. They include: outdoor recreation, cultural and educational facilities, residential neighborhoods, senior housing, neighborhood-scale commercial services, offices, and a municipal/cultural/recreational center that would provide meeting space, a community center, and facilities for emergency services, to name a few of the possibilities.

- Depending on the outcome of the Neighborhood Master Plan, it may be appropriate to prepare an area specific GEIS.
- The extent of development should be limited by the Pine Bush to the North and the Hunger Kill corridor to the South. A minimum 100 foot buffer should accompany the Hunger Kill to prevent impacts related to erosion and pollutant-laden runoff.
- Create a pedestrian friendly environment. Sidewalk or trail linkages from the east and west will provide populated areas with access to current and future Town resources. Many YMCA members will desire to run outside. Current options are limited and somewhat dangerous. Trail and sidewalk linkages will provide safe havens for exercise. Pedestrian linkages to Farnsworth Middle School, Nott Road Park and the Pine Bush should be considered.

Transportation recommendations from the Route 20 Corridor Study that are specific to this planning area include the following:

- Create greenways using the Kaikout Kill and the Hunger Kill to preserve the integrity of these stream corridors consistent with the *Natural Resources* plan element.
- Create access management and streetscape plans that can be incorporated into plans for new development.
- Develop a pedestrian access plan to safely cross Route 20 in the vicinity of the Town Library. Similar safe crossings should be created at Route 155 and at Willow. There may be opportunities to work with the topography and new development in the area to allow the development of a pedestrian bridge.
- Coordinate streetscape, pedestrian, and access management plans with the Neighborhood Master Plan as recommended in the *Land Use* plan element.

## **E.5 Fort Hunter/McCormack Corners**

The Fort Hunter area developed as a residential neighborhood in the 1960's and 70's spurred by interstate access. It has continued to grow, seemingly limited only by utilities and State-wide preservation of the Pine Bush. Expansion has been primarily southward, blurring any distinctions from the McCormack Corners area. Community resources within the Fort Hunter area include the Fort Hunter Fire Station, a Western Turnpike Rescue Squad station, Pine Bush

and Lynnwood elementary schools, Fort Hunter Park, Volunteer Fireman's Park, Fusco Park, five churches, and the Town Hall and police station.

Commercial activity is centered around McCormack Corners which is the intersection of Carman Road (Route 146) and Route 20. From a land use perspective, commercial development has not infringed significantly on the Fort Hunter residential community. Most of the development in the McCormack Corners area is newer and underwent a more thorough site plan review process. However, the Fort Hunter/McCormack Corners community is significantly impacted by both commuter and commercial traffic due to the Thruway/I-890 interchange in the northern portion of the planning area. Truck traffic is of particular concern since much of the traffic from the Northeast Industrial Park utilizes Route 146 to and from the Thruway. This has created bottlenecks that impact local roads and influence residential character and safety.

The Pine Bush creates a unique and desirable rural residential atmosphere in a suburbanized community. This is a resource that should be enjoyed and conserved.

Recommendations for this planning area include the following:

- Connect residential neighborhoods to shopping and recreational opportunities by providing sidewalks and/or trails. These connections should be carefully made in conjunction with landowners to prevent any unintended conflicts and nuisances.
- Encourage continued public meetings at the neighborhood level with the intent of developing a neighborhood master plan. This next level of analysis is necessary to better define neighborhood boundaries, identify residents' goals for their neighborhood, determine desirable pedestrian linkages, and to identify the theme that will direct design guidelines for future development and redevelopment.

Transportation recommendations from the Route 20 Corridor Study that are specific to this planning area include the following:

- Create access management and streetscape plans that can be incorporated into plans for new development.
- Develop a pedestrian access plan to safely cross routes 20 and 146 and to access the Pine Bush.
- Evaluate the potential for future development/infill within this segment of the Route 20 corridor.

## **E.6 Hunger Kill**

The Hunger Kill planning area contains some very significant environmental resources, the Hunger Kill and the Pine Bush, as well as residential and commercial development. The Pine Bush provides the community with a large piece of unique open space, available for the enjoyment of the public. Unlike a town park, the Pine Bush preserve is not owned by the Town of Guilderland, yet the Town is a member of the Pine Bush Preserve Commission who oversees the management of the Pine Bush. All of the remaining Pine Bush ecology does not occur within the preserve and there is a concerted effort on the part of the Commission to see to it that all or most of this land will become preserve in the future. To accomplish this, the Commission is in the process of acquiring pine bush and important buffers. To ensure that these lands are not destroyed by other types of land use prior to being acquired, the Pine Bush Preserve Commission prepared a Master Plan and later implementation guidelines in hopes that communities (Commission members) would adhere to the recommendations.

Although there are arguments regarding property rights, the Town recognizes the importance of the Pine Bush and supports cooperation with the Pine Bush Preserve Commission staff, especially when incentive-based measures are taken to preserve lands. Existing development, including major transportation corridors have presented obstacles to the preservation of the ecosystem. Continued development pressure and the need to expand infrastructure will continue to impede the goals of the Commission. In an effort to support the preserve and in recognition of its importance to the community, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Assist and cooperate with the Pine Bush Preserve Commission in implementing its *Management Plan* and *Protection and Project Review Implementation Guidelines*. This should occur by including a requirement in the site plan and subdivision review processes that new development occurring within the Project Review Area, as defined and illustrated in the *Protection and Project Review Implementation Guidelines*, undergo consultation with the Town and Pine Bush Preserve Commission in the early planning stages (sketch plan) of plan development. The purpose of this consultation is to provide the Commission an opportunity to comment on the site and proposal in the early planning stages to make suggestions that are consistent with efforts for management of the Pine Bush ecosystem. This will benefit both the Town's review process and the individual developer by providing early input.
- Promote the Pine Bush Interpretative Center as a local educational resource.
- 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.

The Hunger Kill is a fine example of some of the Town's stream corridor resources. It is also an example of a watershed that has developed significantly over the years that has changed some of its characteristics. Recommendations for this planning area and other stream corridors and adjacent wetland areas include the following:

- 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. The width of the buffer should not be less than 100 feet from the stream edge to prevent potential impacts of erosion and sedimentation. In the case of stream corridors with associated steep banks (ravines), the angle of repose should be used to define top of bank. The current 30 foot setback from the angle of repose (top of bank) as provided in the subdivision regulations should continue to be used. The 12 degree angle of repose is used to protect steep slopes and stream corridors from development.
- Direct impacts to stream corridors, wetlands, floodplains and other water resources should be avoided to the greatest extent practicable. New development should be required to design with the topography and other natural resources to minimize impact.
- Require the preparation of an erosion control plan for new projects. Erosion control measures may include:
  - Installing silt fence or silt fence in combination with staked hay bales, at the toe of slopes around the construction area.
  - Utilizing temporary drainage swales with hay bale check dams to direct water away from the construction area.
  - Upon completion of final grading, seeding all areas with a quick-germinating grass or other similar cover species.
  - Staging site development to minimize disturbed areas.
- Explore potential access opportunities to stream corridors at appropriate locations for recreational uses (primarily trails and fishing access). Emphasis should be placed on voluntary easements to achieve appropriate connections.
- Encourage preservation of wetland areas through conservation easements and other methods of protection (see *Growth Management*). This would be aided by State and federal regulations, however, easements, deed restrictions and other local controls would compensate for the uncertain future of the regulatory environment.
- If wetland impacts are permitted, encourage project sponsors to limit impacts to less significant portions of the wetland and to avoid fragmentation.

- Require wetland delineations pursuant to State and federal regulations, as appropriate. State wetland boundaries are generally confirmed by NYSDEC. Federal boundaries are confirmed by COE upon request of the project sponsor.
- Wetlands should be protected from erosion and sedimentation through the use of silt fences, staked hay bales, diversion swales and check dams, and other erosion control measures as determined appropriate for the site.
- Require any conditions of permits issued by COE or NYSDEC, including conditions of Nationwide Permits, as applicable, prior to site plan or subdivision approval.

## **E.7 Guilderland Center**

Guilderland Center was a center of activity in the Town when agriculture played a much more important role in the community. It's proximity to the Village of Altamont provided Guilderland Center with close amenities that were not available within the hamlet. Homes were concentrated along Route 146 between the railroad tracks to the east and Depot Road to the west. Although a state route, Route 146 did not have the amount of traffic experienced along this road today. Residents in the neighborhood were able to interact with each other without traffic safety concerns.

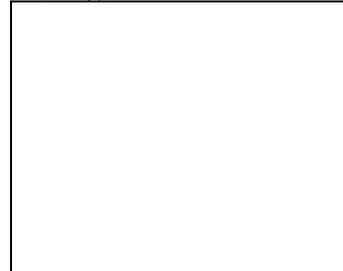
The area has changed significantly as a result of redevelopment of the Army Depot by the Northeast Industrial Park (NEIP), the construction of the Guilderland High School, the location of Town highway facilities, and other development south of Guilderland Center. Each of these uses have resulted in impacts to Guilderland Center, the most significant of which is traffic.

Despite these changes, residents have remained. The area includes many resources such as a Post Office, fire station, three churches, and Keenholts Park. Additionally, Tawasentha Park is in close proximity and, as previously mentioned, the Village of Altamont provides many goods and services within an easy commute.

Recommendations for this planning area include the following:

- Create a Neighborhood Master Plan that identifies neighborhood boundaries, opportunities to buffer residential areas from conflicting uses, access management along Route 146, pedestrian facilities, "streetscape" improvements, and architectural/site design issues. In order to accomplish this task, the neighborhood will need to continue discussions regarding their wants, needs and desires to determine a common theme for the area.
- Promote a mix of uses consistent with a hamlet setting. Commercial uses should compliment the residential neighborhood and be pedestrian oriented.

Community or neighborhood centers contain a moderate to high density of mixed-use buildings.



Copyright © 2000 Behan Planning Associates

- Require the preparation of a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) for the Northeast Industrial Park (NEIP) that addresses full build-out of the property and the associated impacts to determine the reasonable amount of development of the property that can be properly mitigated. This should be an open process involving public scoping and other input opportunities from the residents of Guilderland Center and the School District.
- Cooperatively market desired tenants especially those that rely on rail rather than truck transport.
- Explore options for protecting Black Creek.

Transportation recommendations for this planning area include the following:

- Reduce the impact of traffic through Guilderland Center by reducing the speed limit, providing crosswalks and medians (pedestrian havens) where feasible, and other traffic calming methods.
- Address alternative truck routes that would preclude the need to travel through the heart of Guilderland Center. This should include the evaluation of a bypass that would encourage both truck and other vehicular traffic use, thus diverting traffic around Guilderland Center. This should be accomplished through dialogue with the Northeast Industrial Park, the Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC), the NYS Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), Guilderland Center residents, and the Guilderland Central School District. Funding may be available for a bypass through the NEIP Economic Development Zone.
- Provide a continuous sidewalk system including crosswalks and other necessary means to allow pedestrians to cross busy roads safely and to access facilities.

## **E.8 Village of Altamont**

The Village of Altamont sprung from early agricultural times and particularly from commercial and passenger rail traffic passing through the heart of the Village. The Village is a self-contained community within the Town boundaries that is incorporated and thus functioning under its own local government system. For that reason, specific recommendations for lands within the Village were not made in this Plan since they would have no legal standing. Nevertheless, Altamont is a very important component of the Town and is the center of development and commerce within rural Guilderland. In addition to providing its residents with municipal services and utilities and goods and services, the Altamont Fairgrounds attract visitors county-wide and from adjacent communities in Schenectady County. Interaction between the Town and Village is significant, especially in terms of land use and issues over the conservation/protection of rural character.

Recommendations for this planning area include the following:

- Continue to support the Village of Altamont as the major anchor of residential and commercial development in Rural Guilderland.
- Cooperatively develop land use policies for land adjacent to the Village. These might include guidelines for the form and character of any Village expansion, under what circumstances the extension of Village utilities would be considered, and the general impact on Village supplied community services.

## **E.9 Rural Guilderland**

Rural Guilderland is made up of farmlands, wood lots, and open space. The farms are the surviving remnants of the agricultural community that once dominated the entire Town. Agriculture is still an important land use but agricultural uses are diminishing. Large parcels of vacant land (some former farmland) remain idle. As shown on the *Existing Land Use Map* provided in the *Inventory and Analysis*, most of the parcels are within the Agricultural District, but only a few of the parcels presently receive an agricultural assessment for tax purposes.

There are only eight full-time active farms left in Guilderland, four located in rural Guilderland. The economics of farming nationwide has driven out most medium sized farmers, leaving mainly large farms (none in Guilderland) and an increasing number of small, family operated farms producing “niche” crops and whose income is supplemented by work outside of agriculture. The farm land of Rural Guilderland is made up a of vineyard and winery, apple orchards, hay fields, a dairy farm, vegetable and small fruit production, and cut your own Christmas tree operations.

Much of the land in Rural Guilderland is owned by families who have been stewards of their land for generations. Many of these landowners are now retired or semi-retired, but continue to farm the land as a way of life and to supplement their income or pay taxes. A number of these landowners, although in the Agricultural District, do not qualify for the agricultural assessment for tax purposes, since they cannot raise the quantity of crops needed to meet the income level necessary (\$10,000 on 10 acres or more, or \$50,000 on less than 10 acres) for inclusion in this program. The reasons for this are as follows:

- With very little prime farmland in Rural Guilderland, it is difficult to produce the types and quantity of crops needed to be profitable in today’s agricultural economy.
- The limited number of acres available to most landowners for farming results in difficulties reaching the required income level at present commodity prices. The landowners who do qualify for the assessment either

have larger parcels available for farming or are fortunate enough to rent land from a farmer who does qualify. However, renting land is becoming more difficult as the number of commercial active farms in the area is declining.

Despite the difficulties mentioned above, agriculture in the Town of Guilderland is not lost and should not be abandoned as a viable land use. It forms the pastoral landscape that creates the foreground view from the Helderberg Escarpment, a view that has changed little since the development of the Indian Ladder Trail in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Agriculture provides a cultural link to the Town's historical roots. Agricultural land supports the tax base of the Town since it generates tax revenue but requires few community services, in contrast to the spreading residential development that threatens to replace agricultural uses. Agriculture provides fresh, locally produced commodities to the community. To remain viable in difficult economic times, the farmers of Guilderland have added many new experiences for the residents to enjoy, from pick-your-own crops and horse drawn wagon rides to harvest festivals, which has created what is now known as "agritainment." All these activities contribute to the quality of life in the community.

Rural Guilderland is also the home of the Town's primary water supply, the Watervliet Reservoir. Even though only a third of the watershed is located within the Town, it is significant since it is the closest portion of the watershed to the reservoir. Therefore, pollutants and sediments have less time and space to filter out of the water before it enters the reservoir. Opportunities for future development in Rural Guilderland should be carefully examined to conserve the character of the community, allow farming to continue by those who wish to farm, and to concentrate development to slow the current pattern of land consumption by primarily residential uses.

Recommendations for this planning area include the following:

- Prepare a Farmland and Open Space Conservation Plan for the entire Town that would support the preservation of appropriate parcels for open space or agricultural use. As envisioned, the Farmland and Open Space Conservation Plan would result in a program for land conservation that would be voluntary in nature, providing compensation to landowners in exchange for an agreement not to develop the land. The most successful approaches to land preservation are voluntary and incentive based, whereby the landowner is compensated for the lost development potential of the property while retaining the right to own and work the land. Farmers and other large land owners would have the opportunity to apply for these incentives. Consideration for judging applications to this program could be based on the following criteria which stem from the State's funding criteria:
  - ♦ Viability of farmland (soil type, productivity)
  - ♦ Development pressure

- ♦ Buffer for significant natural public resource containing important ecosystem or habitat characteristics. Examples include: the Pine Bush Preserve, the Watervliet Reservoir and its tributaries, the Helderberg Escarpment and its watershed, Town parks and other public recreation facilities and open space including a potential future townwide trail system, and important habitat such as wetlands
- ♦ Size of parcel
- ♦ Percentage of total farm acreage available for agricultural production
- ♦ Proximity to other farms which are already protected by a conservation easement or which might reasonably be expected to enter into a farmland preservation agreement in the future.
- ♦ Level of farm management demonstrated by current landowner, and
- ♦ Likelihood of property's succession as a farm if ownership changes.

Of these criteria, the State gives priority to parcels that preserve viable agricultural land, are located in areas facing significant development pressure, and serve as buffers for natural public resources.

The Farmland & Open Space Conservation Plan may also result in recommendations for modifying zoning and subdivision regulations to address new development. These would be categorized as regulatory tools designed to guide development, not to impact current uses. An example of such a regulatory tool is the conservation development (defined in Chapter IV.A.1) which is one of the recommendations to follow.

The distinction between regulatory and non-regulatory (voluntary, incentive-based) planning tools is important to understand. Programs that provide compensation for preserving lands for use as farms or open space are voluntary. The incentive for a landowner to participate would be the level of compensation for their loss of development potential. A landowner only participates if he or she wants to participate. Likewise, the Town does not have to accept into the program all who apply. The Town would evaluate parcels based on the criteria above in an effort to identify suitable parcels for funding. Other voluntary, incentive-based programs might include incentive zoning. This is actually a hybrid of regulation and voluntary program. It is regulatory only from the perspective that it must be established through a legislative action that would define the criteria necessary to define when the program is applicable. Otherwise, all who participate do so voluntarily.

Regulatory measures include the incentive zoning hybrid above as well as some non-voluntary measures that are directed toward the developer. The purpose of these tools, such as the conservation development process, is to guide development in a manner that is consistent with the vision for the Town and more specifically to the land use and policy decisions derived from plans for specific areas of Town. Rural Guilderland, for example, should undergo a planning process similar to the neighborhood master plans for other areas. This has been defined as the Rural Guilderland Hamlets

plan or study. The Farmland & Open Space Conservation Plan would be a part of the plan for Rural Guilderland.

Several growth management options are discussed later in this section.

- 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 or studies of the appropriate land uses for Rural Guilderland that would culminate in a land use plan for Rural Guilderland (referred to as the Rural Guilderland Plan in Chapter VI and discussed further in this section under *Rural Guilderland Hamlets*). This would address economic development, farmland and open space conservation and residential growth patterns. One of the most crucial factors is the current lack of sewer treatment capacity and limitations on water supply and distribution to serve new areas of the Town. Equally important is the expense of extending services. As with any capital improvement plan, the implications of extending utilities must be examined.
- If opportunities to receive municipal water or sewer service from other municipalities become available in the future, the Town should pursue the option through a GEIS or other planning study in the same level of detail discussed in the previous recommendation. Since the availability of such services will increase the development potential of lands within the Town, the Town should maintain its control over land use and the rate of growth through the growth management techniques previously mentioned (eg., Farmland and Open Space Conservation Plan and GEIS). Consideration of site specific extensions of utilities should not be entertained by the Town until the cumulative impacts and land use issues associated with such extensions have been thoroughly addressed within the context of Rural Guilderland.
- Opportunities for emergency intermunicipal water 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.

Transportation recommendations from the Route 20 Corridor Study that are specific to this planning area include the following:

- Preserve the rural character and viewshed
- Develop a sign ordinance that promotes agricultural uses without detracting from the character of the area.
- Discourage subdivision along Route 20 frontage, especially for residential uses.

### ***Rural Guilderland Hamlets***

Once all of the planning and engineering work for Rural Guilderland is complete, the end result may be a determination that water and sewer service should be extended to specific areas of Rural Guilderland. Should this occur, development potential will increase significantly. It is recommended that the Town concentrate this development potential to discrete areas consistent with the future recommendations of the Farmland and Open Space Conservation Plan to preserve rural character. The type of development envisioned for Rural Guilderland is hamlet style, where dense development (can be both residential and commercial) is permitted in a small area. Guilderland Center is an example of an existing hamlet in the Town, although land use and community character have been disrupted by surrounding development.

Dunnsville is a small area within Rural Guilderland, located at the intersection of Route 20 with Dunnsville Road (Route 397), that has developed lightly and was a small agricultural hamlet at one time. There are no significant community services in this area. Potential resources include land and high capacity road access. Currently, there is no significant pressure to develop this area, primarily due to the lack of development in the surrounding area and the lack of utilities.

However, Dunnsville is a logical focal point for future hamlet development due to the availability of land and access to Route 20. It has fewer development constraints than other areas of Rural Guilderland and is not within the Helderberg Escarpment viewshed.

A plan for Rural Guilderland is warranted to proactively plan for the future and to address potential development scenarios. Such planning also has the value of identifying critical community resources that the community wishes to preserve. This gives the Town an opportunity to identify means of preserving the resource, which will likely be through a program to compensate a landowner who is willing to participate. The Town can seek funding and/or raise funds specifically for purchasing land. By knowing where development is suitable, the Town can also establish other incentive programs that are regulatory in nature, such as incentive zoning, a completely voluntary program that allows the transfer of development rights from an important piece of agricultural land or open space to land suitable for development. Although this program is voluntary, it must be established through local legislation to be valid.

#### Recommendations

- Prepare a plan for Rural Guilderland that addresses suitable locations for potential future concentrated development. This should be conducted in conjunction with the Farmland & Open Space Conservation Plan, the Watervliet Reservoir Dialogue and Study, an economic development initiative that addresses key issues to properly located businesses, and an analysis of the feasibility of providing water and sewer either from Town extensions or from adjacent communities. The latter study is intended to identify the current major issues. Some of this work for water service will be addressed as part of the study to document water problems in Rural Guilderland. A detailed feasibility study for utilities would not be appropriate at this time since the major issue is sewage treatment capacity and water supply (hindered primarily by water treatment capacity and pipe sizes). However, it is important to establish a policy or policies for the provision of utilities to be consistent with the vision, goals and objectives, and plan recommendations established in the Comprehensive Plan. Clear utility policy will be critical to managing growth in a positive, smart growth approach that is exemplary of the State's Quality Communities initiative. As part of the plan for Rural Guilderland, it may be beneficial to divide the area into smaller planning areas or districts. Like other areas of the Town, Rural Guilderland has distinct areas that may be defined by natural features, transportation routes, rural land uses, among others.
- The critical consideration for the future land use plan for Rural Guilderland should be the preservation of the overall rural character of this area. As envisioned and stated elsewhere in this plan, the preservation of rural character can be achieved through a combined effort of land conservation through voluntary and incentive-based means, clear policy on the provision of utilities, and concentration of development patterns instead of the sprawl

development pattern encouraged/required by current zoning and subdivision regulations.

- The Town should not actively promote economic development within Rural Guilderland until the aforementioned plan is complete and the larger issue of the availability of utilities is addressed. Such efforts are more cost effectively applied to areas of current development activity and available utilities.

### ***Watervliet Reservoir***

This planning area is not a center of current or future development in the Town. It does not contain any significant community services but for one major resource, water. This is the heart of the community and the vehicle by which future development can be expected to proceed. With the exception of some wells, the reservoir is the only water source within the Town.

As emphasized by the name, the reservoir is not owned by the Town. It was created by the City of Watervliet who owns the reservoir and some of the adjacent lands. It is crossed by Route 20 and Route 158 in the northern portion creating potential contamination issues. It has experienced significant siltation from land use activities within the watershed that stretches over 115 square miles, 35 square miles of which is located within the Town.

Recommendations for this planning area include the following:

- Begin dialogue with the City of Watervliet to create a partnership for the long-term management, use and possible expansion of the reservoir and to protect the quality of this water supply. This should also include discussion of the appropriate land use measures to protect water quality within the Watervliet Reservoir watershed and the mechanism by which these measures would be enforced.
- Preservation of critical lands adjacent to the reservoir can be accomplished through a number of open space preservation techniques discussed in *Growth Management*. However, for the best control, the Town should consider purchase of these lands.
- Dialogue should be established with the other municipalities containing a portion of the watershed to encourage them to support the Town's efforts.
- A draft Well-Head Protection Plan (Phase II of the Well Head Protection Study) has been developed for the Town to protect the aquifers that the Town currently utilizes for groundwater supply and other areas that may provide groundwater supply in the future. The Plan recommends the following to protect the Town's groundwater supply:
  - The Town should formulate a general Town-wide policy regarding the use, disposal and storage of hazardous materials. This should include local notification of any spills or releases which are reported to the NYSDEC.

- Policies for the secondary well field management zones, consisting of the Pine Bush recharge areas, the Fullers recharge area, and the area immediately north and down-gradient of the Voorheesville delta complex, should include the collection of information regarding all storage of reportable quantities of petroleum and/or potentially hazardous materials. Notification should be provided to all occupants within this area, including potential concerns. Floor drains and other subsurface discharges should be eliminated with the exception of sanitary septic discharges.
- Within the primary management area, defined as a radius of 4,500 feet from each well, gasoline retailers, industry and any activities relating to the use, storage or disposal of potentially hazardous materials should be restricted. Subsurface discharges from floor drains should be eliminated.

Transportation recommendations from the Route 20 Corridor Study that are specific to this planning area include the following:

- Measures should be developed to prevent impact to the Reservoir from spills along Route 20. This might include some type of containment system.
- Implement watershed protection regulations in accordance with an overall watershed management plan.
- Consider the use of the railroad overpass as an opportunity to create a rural gateway, celebrating the community's agricultural component.