

## Section I: Background







## Section 1: Background

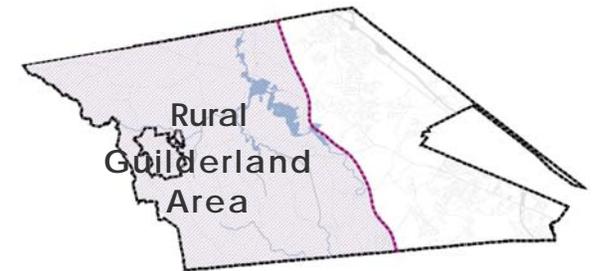
### INTRODUCTION

An implementation component of the town's 2001 Comprehensive Plan, this action plan for rural Guilderland takes a closer look at the 32 square miles (20,400 acres) in the western portion of the town. This study is designed to serve as a strategic action plan to expand on previous planning efforts and support the community's vision for rural Guilderland. This study and associated strategies and recommendations recognize the unique sense of place and history of the study area – the wonderful and diverse natural environment, active farmland and agricultural operations, rural residences and close-knit neighborhoods and hamlets, steep cliffs, hills and overlooks of the Helderberg Escarpment and Settles Hill, and the streams, creeks, and water bodies that contribute to local and regional drinking water resources – while remaining focused on a small number of significant actions that are implementable within a reasonable amount of time, effort and investment.

The main goal of the planning process is to build off of prior efforts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issues facing rural Guilderland and establish consensus on an action program for conservation and development. This plan synthesizes the community vision and provides recommendations and a strategy for realizing the vision. Included with this effort is the adoption of several local laws to help implement the plan.

### PLANNING PROCESS BACKGROUND

The rural Guilderland area has been the focus of prior studies including the town's Comprehensive Plan 2000. In addition, several plans and reports touch on issues facing Rural Guilderland, including the Watervliet Reservoir Watershed Protection Study, the Helderberg Escarpment Planning Guide, the Albany County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan, and the Guilderland Pathways Plan. This plan uses these works as a foundation for developing recommendations and strategies.



*Rural Guilderland is defined as the area west of the (former) Conrail line in the north, and west of the Normanskill in the*

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During the most recent town-wide comprehensive planning process, many residents raised concerns about the fate of the more rural, western portion of Guilderland. They did not want to see the open farmlands and natural features become heavily developed like the eastern portion of town. The comprehensive plan included a recommendation that the town create an open space and farmland protection plan, as well as a plan for rural Guilderland; the plan also suggests a potential merging of the two plans, which is essentially the scope of this plan. Thus, the town's comprehensive plan provides both the foundation and justification for this study.

### STUDY AREA BACKGROUND

Rural Guilderland today is a mosaic of farmlands, woodlands, and open space interspersed with hamlets and residential settlements. The rural Guilderland study area covers approximately 32 square miles or 20,480 acres (55% of the town's total 58 square miles or 37,120 acres). Of this land area, the most predominant land use is residential (11 square miles or 7,302 acres), followed by agricultural (8 square miles or 5,162 acres) and vacant land (7.5 square miles or 4,800 acres). Only a very small portion of rural Guilderland's existing open space lands are currently under permanent protection.<sup>1</sup> (Please note that these figures are based on tax assessment data associated with tax parcels and do not represent land cover.)



Residential land use in rural Guilderland primarily consists of single-family homes. While the average residential parcel size within the study area is about 5-acres, a wide range of density patterns exist. Higher densities are found predominantly in the eastern section and to some degree along the major roadways, whereas larger lots (over 5 acres) make up most of the western area (excluding the Village of Altamont and its environs). The

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Town of Guilderland Tax Parcel Data. Land use type based on tax assessment classification.

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majority of residential parcels in the rural Guilderland area do not have access to public sewer and water; those that do are located primarily around the Village of Altamont and along the southeastern edge of the study area.<sup>2</sup> Although the pressures of large-scale suburban development are apparent, the prominent settlement type remains rural large-lot homes. This plan aims to preserve this existing pattern by defining a conservation and development strategy for the future.

There are only a handful of farmers still working the lands of rural Guilderland and much of Guilderland’s former agricultural land has been converted to residential development. The town’s agricultural district contains approximately 5,490 acres<sup>3</sup>, with the major portion of these lands located in rural Guilderland. However, all of these agricultural district lands are not zoned for agricultural use, and conversely, some lands that are zoned for agricultural purposes are not included in the agricultural district.

The town’s parcel data show 5,162 acres in agricultural land use.<sup>4</sup> Field crops, such as hay, wheat, and corn, comprise over half of rural Guilderland’s active farmlands. Other uses include orchard crops (apples and vineyards); dairy products; livestock and livestock products such as cattle, calves, and hogs, sheep and wool, and poultry; and horse farms. (See Map 1: Existing Agricultural Land Use).

*Rural Guilderland aerial view showing traditional farmland settlement interspersed with large woodlands.*

A very small proportion of rural Guilderland’s open space is permanently protected. From development (e.g., there is some type of easement restricting most types of development of the

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<sup>2</sup> Analysis of tax parcel data indicates that approximately 31% of residential parcels within the study area utilize public sewer services and about 43% utilize public water.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Town of Guilderland Tax Parcel Data

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property). Permanently protected state lands in rural Guilderland consist of a portion of Thatcher State Park (128 acres) along the Helderberg Escarpment, and the Black Creek Marsh State Wildlife Management Area (287 acres). The town also manages the Guilderland Conservation Area (71 acres), which provides protection of important wetland resources. In addition, two town parks contribute to rural Guilderland's open space resources: Keenholts Park (54 acres) and Tawasentha Park (100 acres). Tawasentha Park is essentially protected by its open space zoning designation. ( See Map 2: Existing Open Space).

Private open space and recreational resources also contribute to the character of rural Guilderland. For example, some of these amenities include: Orchard Creek Golf Course, Frenchs Hollow Fairways, and the Albany Country Club.

Existing water resources, including the Watervliet Reservoir, and the town's streams and creeks also receive a level of protection through the town's steep slope and watercourse setback – which excludes all structures from within 100' of the water's edge of any water course.

## PLAN ORGANIZATION

The plan is organized into five sections: Background, Community Vision, Existing Setting, Primary Recommendations and Actions and Conclusion.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR PLANNING

In developing this plan, efforts were made to include broad participation and representation from the various interests, organizations, and

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individuals who live and work in rural Guilderland. These efforts included a series of public workshops and informational meetings to discuss needs, opportunities, and strategies. Highlighted throughout the process as well as within the recommendations of this plan is the need for a balance between landowner flexibility and the overall community vision. This concept forms the foundation of the plan's guiding principles (listed here).