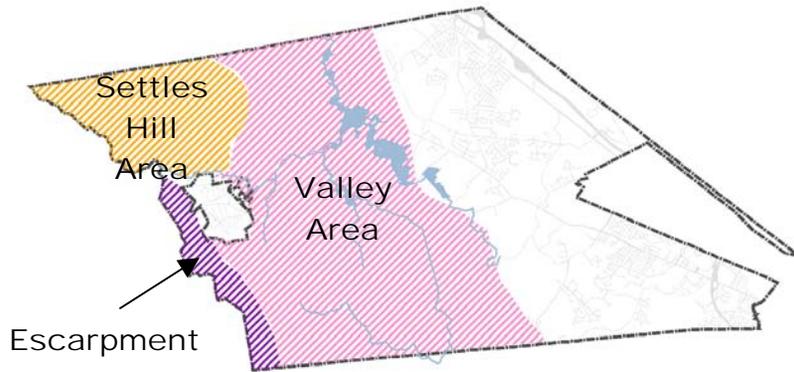


Section 3: Existing Setting



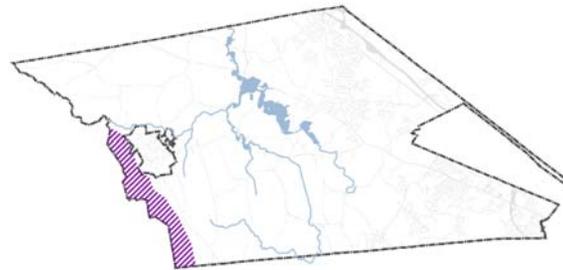
INTRODUCTION

The rural Guilderland study area includes a diverse set of natural and cultural features that stretch beyond the town’s borders. For planning purposes, the study area has been broken down into three character areas based on each region’s unique environmental features. These areas are: Helderberg Escarpment, Settles Hill, and the Valley Area. Each sub-area is briefly described below.



HELDERBERG ESCARPMENT

The Helderberg Escarpment is one of the most dominant landscape features of rural Guilderland. Some of the earliest studies in American geology were conducted along the Helderberg escarpment’s massive limestone cliff faces, which expose over a half billion years of geologic history. The steepest portion of the escarpment extends across 10 miles and provides expansive views of the Hudson-Mohawk River Valley, including Albany, and across to the southern Adirondacks and western mountain ranges of Massachusetts and Vermont. A small but significant portion of the Escarpment stretches along Guilderland’s southwest border.



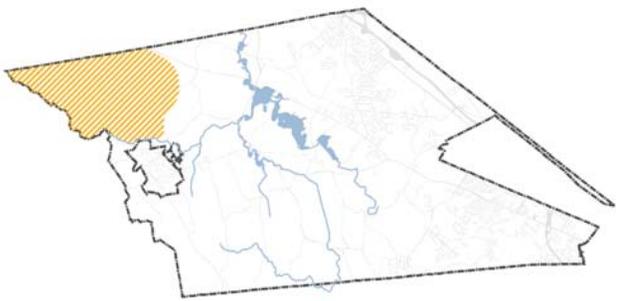
Section 3 : Existing Setting: Land Management Sub-areas

In addition to its fossil-bearing cliffs and karst terrain, the escarpment is characterized by dense woodlands and steep slopes (over 1,700 feet at the steepest) - in rural Guilderland the highest elevations are 1,200 to 1,300 feet. The escarpment has a long and narrow shape that provides both unfragmented interior habitat and a significant amount of edge habitat. As such it is a primary wildlife corridor recognized for its high biodiversity. Protection of the escarpment is listed as a priority project in the state's *Open Space Conservation Plan*. It is also recognized as an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society.

The Helderberg Escarpment's dramatic relief contributes immensely to rural Guilderland's scenic resources. Especially striking views of the escarpment can be seen along Route 156 (Altamont-Voorheesville Road) and Brandle Road. The escarpment can also be viewed from the northern portion of U. S. Route 20, and many of the town's residents have views of the escarpment from their homes and properties. The escarpment's cliffs also offer vistas for observing the town's scenic valley lands from above.

A portion of the escarpment in the southwestern-most corner of the town is already protected from development as part of Thatcher State Park. This area should be expanded upon to create a permanently-protected wildlife corridor along the escarpment and its edges. This area could also serve as a low-impact recreational destination for activities such as hiking and snowshoeing. There is also potential to create spur trails from the Long Path that would connect long-distance hikers to other town resources.

Minimal new development should be allowed along the escarpment and its edges. New development should be designed and sited to provide the least possible impact on views of the escarpment from above and below. Zoning regulations should be used to limit density in the escarpment area and any new large-scale development should be creatively designed using conservation subdivision tools. Many other tools for planning in this unique and special resource area are detailed in the *Helderberg Escarpment Planning Guide*, created by the Albany County Land Conservancy.



SETTLES HILL

The Settles Hill area is located in the northwest corner of the town. It consists of upland areas with steep slopes in some portions, especially along the western border of the town. Open lands and woodlands are the primary environmental features, scattered with sparse human settlement.

The Settles Hill area contains a few large patches of contiguous forest area. These unfragmented woodlands provide important habitat for wildlife. They also serve as a source of clean water. Numerous small ponds and wetlands (including two state-regulated wetlands), as well as the Bozen Kill and its tributaries, also provide key habitat for wildlife.

Farmlands, are an important part of rural Guilderland's agricultural heritage, some of which can be found in the Settles Hill landscape. Active farmlands consist of a vineyard and winery, field crops, sheep and wool production, and a cattle, calves and hogs operation. Some of the farmlands closer to the valley area are included in the county agricultural district.

Because of the remote and pastoral character of the Settles Hill area, many of the roadways offer scenic vistas. Scenic resources are especially abundant along Settles Hill Road and Furbeck Road.

In the Settles Hill area, great efforts should be taken to protect the natural features of the landscape, and promote farming. Large patches of woodlands should be preserved for wildlife habitat and low-impact recreation. Regulatory



This aerial image depicts a mosaic of open farmlands (such as the orchard in this image) and large woodland patches.

Section 3 : Existing Setting: Land Management Sub-areas

tools should be utilized (or continue to be utilized) to protect water resources. Innovative tools and programs should be use to encourage farming. The town should collaborate with land owners to manage and conserve these valuable resources.

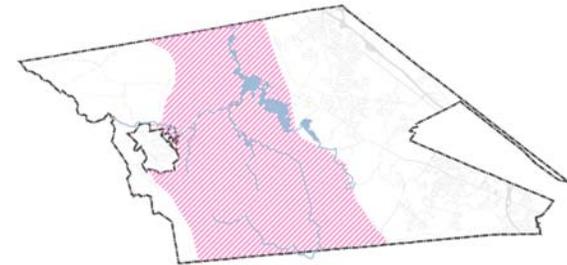


The valley area contains much of rural Guilderland's farmlands, yet, the potential for water supply (Watervliet Reservoir in top left corner) and flat lands with buildable soils also make it a

New development in the Settles Hill area should respect the natural setting and be of appropriate low intensity to fit into this area. The town's zoning regulations should be updated to more closely resemble the predominant rural development pattern in this area and new roads and driveways should be limited and consolidated where possible. Central water service is not feasible for the most part. A "design with nature" approach to new development should be utilized to take into account such factors as soils, slope, water resources and drainage.

THE VALLEY AREA

The valley area encompasses the remaining portion of rural Guilderland (the region not included in the Settles Hill and escarpment areas). The valley is a large area with gentle slopes and a mosaic of farmlands, hamlets, wood lots, and water bodies, and streams. It contains the Watervliet Reservoir and its three main tributaries: the Bozen Kill, Normans Kill and Black Creek.



The valley contains the bulk of rural Guilderland's agricultural resources. The majority of rural Guilderland's working farmlands are located here - including many within the agricultural district. Agricultural uses consist mainly of field crops, livestock, and dairy farms. However, the prime farming soils, gentle slopes, and potential for central water, also make the valley a prime area for development.

Scenic roads in the valley include Dunnsville Road, Route 397, Route 146 and Brandle Road. These roads offer views of Guilderland's working farms, and many offer views of the Helderberg Escarpment in the near distance.

Section 3 : Existing Setting: Land Management Sub-areas

The valley has been under higher residential development pressure than the Settles Hill and escarpment areas. Already, larger subdivisions are being proposed in areas that once contained farmlands. In some areas, there is the possibility for central water from the town or village, which adds to the growth potential. Growth pressures in the valley are expected to escalate in the next 5 to 10 years, and this growth has the potential to drastically alter the existing character of rural Guilderland. New development in the valley should preserve the open landscape character of the valley and support traditional rural development patterns.

THE WATERVLiet WATERSHED AND ALTAMONT VILLAGE

While not identified as distinct character areas for this plan, there are two resource areas that should be mentioned because they also contribute to rural Guilderland’s character and resource base. These are the Watervliet Watershed and the Village of Altamont and its environs.

THE WATERVLiet WATERSHED

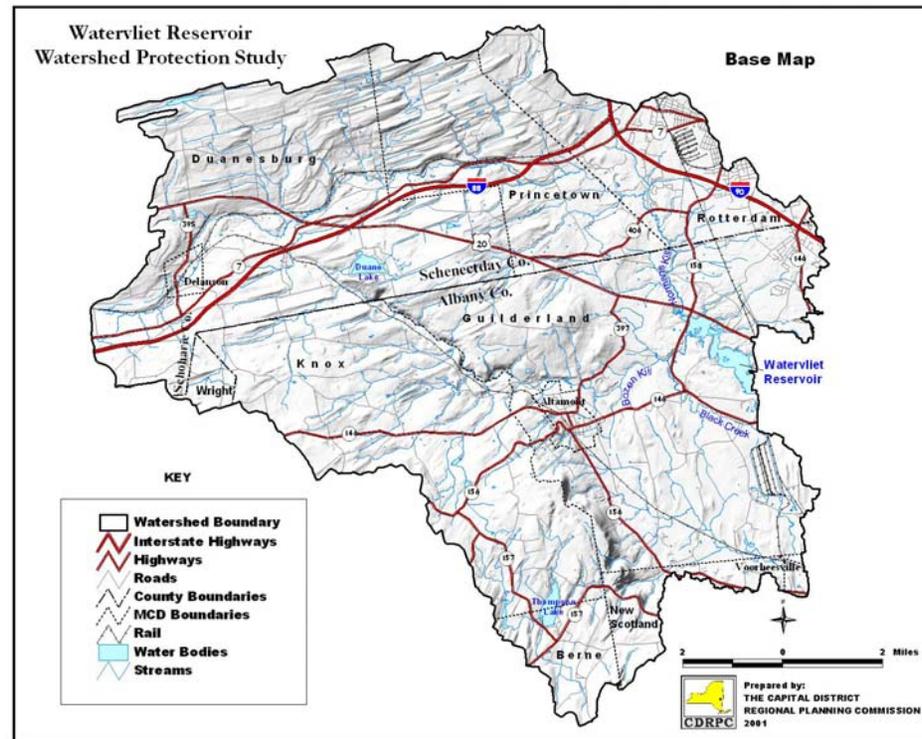


The Watervliet Reservoir supplies drinking water to the Town of Guilderland and City of Watervliet

Section 3 : Existing Setting: Land Management Sub-areas

The Watervliet Watershed encompasses all of the land of rural Guilderland upstream of the Watervliet Reservoir. The watershed is approximately 110 square miles and extends through three counties, eight towns and three villages (see Watervliet Reservoir Watershed map below). Three main tributaries flow into the reservoir: the Normans Kill, Bozen Kill and Black Creek.

The reservoir serves as the primary drinking water source for the City of Watervliet and Town of Guilderland. It also serves as a source of hydroelectric power for the Town. Protection of water quality continues to be of paramount concern. From a land use perspective, maintaining a predominantly natural landscape of well-managed farmland and woodlands is the best single approach to protecting water quality.



Watervliet Reservoir Watershed, courtesy of Capital District Regional Planning Commission

Section 3 : Existing Setting: Land Management Sub-areas

As rural Guilderland grows, increased impervious surfaces from roads, driveways, and rooftops will need to be addressed in the form of proper stormwater management. Erosion and sedimentation brings silt and nutrient loadings to the reservoir. These cause premature “aging” of the water body. Continued vigilance in providing best practices to reduce erosion and sedimentation will yield long-term benefits to reservoir water quality. Changes to the landscape that significantly increase impervious areas, and/or erosion and sedimentation should be avoided. All projects should recognize the need for protection of the reservoir and its watershed.

The town has a buffer requirement in the zoning ordinance for all major streams, including those that feed the reservoir. Stream buffers allow waterways to perform their natural functions such as erosion, deposition and flooding. They help to protect waterways from the impacts of adjacent development (and vice-versa); provide corridors for wildlife; and help to maintain water quality by acting as a filter for runoff.



VILLAGE OF ALTAMONT AND ENVIRONS

Although the Village of Altamont is not technically part of this rural Guilderland study, the village should be recognized as playing an important role in defining the character of rural Guilderland. Specific attention should be afforded to the edges of the village, where it meets up with rural Guilderland.

A “town and country” development pattern should be supported that is one that supports the historic village character with a greenbelt around the edge of planned development. The town should collaborate with village in defining development and greenbelt areas. The upland area around the village contains some smaller working farmlands and forested areas that contribute to the rural character of the area.

A view of Altamont Village from above highlights the importance of preserving the village’s “town and country” land use pattern. In this pattern, development is focused in a central village that is surrounded by