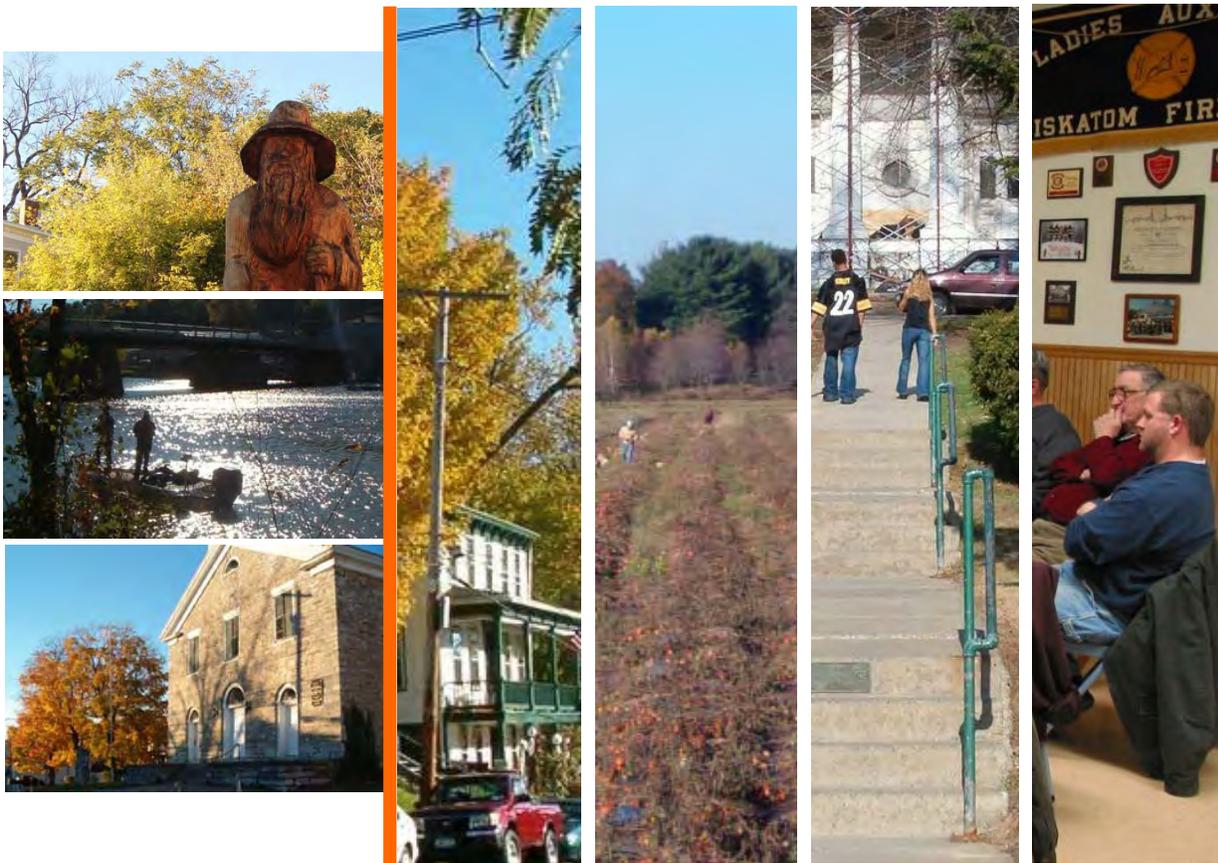


Shaping the Future Together

Village of Catskill

Town of Catskill

Joint Comprehensive Plan



Final Draft
June 12, 2007

(Document 1 of 2)

Acknowledgements

Joint Comprehensive Plan Committee

Frank Dedrick
Stephen Dunn
Larry Federman
Peter Gustas
Warren Hart, AICP
Dan Howard, PE – co-chair
Christine Jones
George Lackie
Barbara Margolius – co-chair
Peter Markou
Michele Pulver
Jack Rivituso
Harry Sacco
Brandy Segura
Warren Sheridan
Mitchell Smith
Allen Uhler

Mary T. Howard, AICP – recorder

Comprehensive Plan Consultants

SARATOGA
ASSOCIATES

Support for this project was provided by:



Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 1

THREE FOUNDATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION SUCCESS 6

THE COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING PROCESS 7

REALIZING THE VISION / ACHIEVING THE GOALS 9

GOAL: PROTECTION OF RURAL BEAUTY AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT 11

- Recommendation 1.1: Activate a joint Village / Town Conservation Commission 13
- Recommendation 1.2: Focus residential and commercial development in village and hamlet areas..... 15
- Recommendation 1.3: Zone density in rural areas appropriately 16
- Recommendation 1.4: Require conservation subdivision design for residential development. 18
- Recommendation 1.5: Zoning and site plan review around designated conservation areas should reflect and protect the character of these areas. 19
- Recommendation 1.6: Develop basic site design guidelines that protect rural cultural character..... 20
- Recommendation 1.7: Encourage landowners to use the Agroforestry Resource Research Center when developing plans to harvest timber. Investigate the development of a timber-harvesting ordinance to promote sustainable forest management. 21
- Recommendation 1.8: Develop environmental protection overlay districts for wetlands, floodplains, and steep slopes 22
- Recommendation 1.9: Require builders to protect most trees, especially large ones, on development sites..... 24
- Recommendation 1.10: Require a Habitat Assessment Report as part of the site plan review process for subdivisions and other large developments. 25
- Recommendation 1.11: Require a local stormwater discharge permit for construction activities disturbing over one acre of land..... 25

Recommendation 1.12: The Town and Village should work with the state to investigate whether dams along the waterways could be repaired.....26

Recommendation 1.13: Work with property owners along important waterways to permit public access at priority locations.....26

Recommendation 1.14: If wind resources were found to be significant, the Catskill community would welcome wind turbines, particularly in industrial and agricultural land, so long as rigorous studies were undertaken to ensure that they would have a minimum impact of birds, bats, and other flying creatures.27

Recommendation 1.15: Require that the construction of telecommunications tower be done in an inconspicuous a manner as possible.27

GOAL: ENHANCEMENT OF A VIBRANT, WALKABLE AND HISTORIC VILLAGE CORE 29

Recommendation 2.1: Revise the village zoning code to encourage buildings that fit into Catskill’s urban character and stress form over function.....30

Recommendation 2.2: Create a streetscape infrastructure plan that enhances downtown vibrancy by promoting walkability.31

Recommendation 2.3: Create a Downtown Working Group to coordinate revitalization efforts.32

Recommendation 2.4: Develop a commercial signage system to link the two main shopping areas and the village waterfront. Adopt the existing Catskill sign themes to reinforce local identity.....33

Recommendation 2.5: Improve village and downtown gateways.34

Recommendation 2.6: Develop a sidewalk standards and maintenance program.35

Recommendation 2.7: Ensure the integrity and safety of the rail bridge over Catskill Creek in the Village; paint structure to improve appearance.35

Recommendation 2.8: Develop a repair and maintenance plan for the footbridge.....35

Recommendation 2.9: Find ways to open public access to the waterfront.. 36

GOAL: STRENGTHENED SYSTEM OF PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY HAMLET CENTERS AND COMMERCIAL NODES THAT SERVE AS COMMUNITY FOCAL POINTS 37

- Recommendation 3.1: Focus commercial development and denser housing opportunities in the hamlets and designated commercial nodes37
- Recommendation 3.2: Enact clear, simple land use ordinances and guidelines, to encourage walkable, vibrant, and hamlet-scale (not highway-scale) commercial development in hamlet centers.....37
- Recommendation 3.3: Create streetscape infrastructure improvements plans for the hamlets that promote walkability.....40
- Recommendation 3.4: Improve hamlet and commercial core gateways.41
- Recommendation 3.5: Create public places where residents and visitors may interact and celebrate community41
- Recommendation 3.6: Establish a working group of citizens and public officials in hamlets to develop a revitalization plan for the hamlet’s “Main Street.”41

GOAL: PRESERVATION OF FARMING AND ENRICHMENT OF THE RURAL ECONOMY 43

- Recommendation 4.1: Enact “Right-To-Farm” laws at the town level.44
- Recommendation 4.2: Allow farm stands in rural areas zoned for residential or agricultural uses45
- Recommendation 4.3: Create an agricultural zoning district in rural areas.45
- Recommendation 4.4: Find ways to lower the property tax burden on farmers46
- Recommendation 4.5: Develop a local marketing brand for agriculture.....46
- Recommendation 4.6: Investigate ways to improve local and regional ‘buy local’ efforts47

GOAL: RESIDENTIAL, COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL GROWTH THAT RESPECT RURAL BEAUTY, HISTORIC CHARACTER AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT OF BOTH THE VILLAGE AND THE TOWN 49

- Recommendation 5.1: Finish the LWRP process with New York State49
- Recommendation 5.2: Institute parking lot standards for commercial developments that emphasize the shopper rather than the automobile.....49
- Recommendation 5.3: Conduct a downtown parking study for the village.52

Recommendation 5.4: Revise and update sign ordinances as needed in the village and the town to protect the community’s historic and rural characters.	52
Recommendation 5.5: Work with junkyards to reduce their visual impact on the community	53
Recommendation 5.6: Revise town highway standards to protect the rural character of the roads.	54
Recommendation 5.7: Require that utilities be placed underground for new developments and in priority travel corridors.	55
 GOAL: GREATER RANGE OF JOB OPPORTUNITIES	 57
Recommendation 6.1: Revise zoning and land use regulations and procedures to create an efficient development process that achieves the community’s goals.....	57
Recommendation 6.2: Designate certain industrial sites, especially within the new Empire Zone, as ‘shovel-ready.’	58
Recommendation 6.3: Develop land use rules and economic development policies to focus industrial development in and around proposed Empire Zone. Make sure all land within the Empire Zone is zoned industrial.....	58
Recommendation 6.4: Rebuild the railroad overpasses on Route 9W in Smith’s Landing to allow commercial trucks to pass.	59
Recommendation 6.5: Evaluate the extension of sewer lines to all industrial zones.	59
Recommendation 6.6: Increase broadband access in the community	59
Recommendation 6.7: Set site plan review and architectural design standards for industrial areas.....	60
Recommendation 6.8: Institute a brownfields program to reclaim contaminated land or land perceived to be contaminated.....	60
 GOAL: EFFICIENT INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SERVICES SYSTEMS THAT SUPPORT COMMUNITY GOALS	 63
Recommendation 7.1: Conduct a joint build-out analysis and cost of services study. Adopt it as an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan.	63
Recommendation 7.2: Coordinate infrastructure maintenance and improvements with planned development.....	65

GOAL: EFFECTIVE CODE ENFORCEMENT 67

- Recommendation 8.1: Require that development applications describe in detail how they advance the goals of the comprehensive plan.....67
- Recommendation 8.2: Devise checklists, based on zoning code and the comprehensive plan, to guide staff and officials to help applicants foster community vision.....67
- Recommendation 8.3: Change rules to make enforcement easier and clearer68
- Recommendation 8.4: Ensure appropriate town and village staff resources to make sure code enforcement remains consistent and thorough.68
- Recommendation 8.5: Add pictures, graphs and other visual representations to zoning and subdivision code to aid developers with an understanding of the community’s vision .69
- Recommendation 8.6: Make sure property maintenance ordinances are appropriate and make their enforcement a priority.69
- Recommendation 8.7: Variances should be rare.70

GOAL: A TOWN AND VILLAGE WORKING TOGETHER TO EFFICIENTLY RAISE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL 73

- Recommendation 9.1: Investigate opportunities to secure grant funding for town/village initiatives73
- Recommendation 9.2: Streamline appropriate functions between the town/village or the county.....73
- Recommendation 9.3: Hire a planner for the village and a planner for the town.73
- Recommendation 9.4. Identify youth recreation needs, and improve parks and facilities for enjoyment by Catskill’s youth74
- Recommendation 9.5. Improve parks and facilities in both the Town and Village to provide active and passive recreation for all of Catskill’s residents.....74
- Recommendation 9.6: Develop and implement policies that promote local workforce housing.....75
- Recommendation 9.7: Improve quality of life for residents of Smith’s Landing by reducing odors from solid waste railroad haulage.77

GOAL: PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC ASSETS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE 79

 Recommendation 10.1: Educate Village and Town residents on the value of
 the Historic Preservation 79

 Recommendation 10.2: Use “Neighborhood Design Standards” to protect
 certain priority neighborhoods in the Village and
 Town 79

 Recommendation 10.3: Locate, secure, and organize the Town and
 Village’s inventory of historic places and other
 historic documents 80

 Recommendation 10.4: Become a Certified Local Government, seek out
 federal support for preservation efforts, and become
 a destination for historically based tourism and
 business development. 80

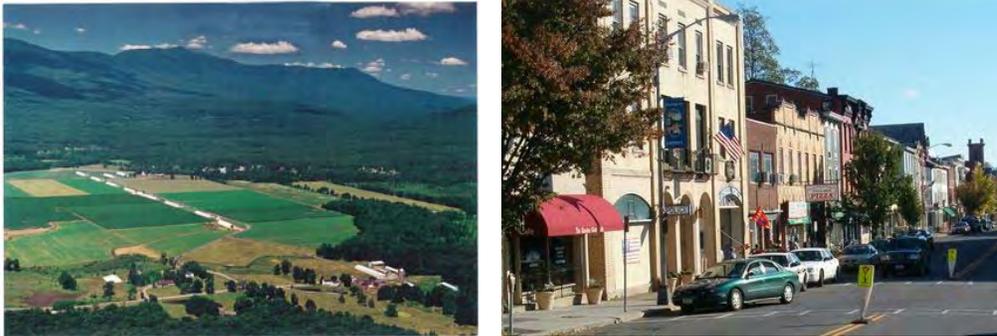
PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS MAPS 83

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 91

Executive Summary

The Catskill community is a village in the country. The village Main Street, with its brick buildings and surrounded by neighborhoods of elegant residences, tells the story of a vibrant past. Its location along the Hudson River between New York City and Albany made Catskill an important commercial, industrial and transportation hub. Today, the village remains a commercial core. Its historic authenticity makes it attractive to long-time residents and business people as well as new arrivals.

The town's rural beauty, framed by the mountains of Catskill Park, is a visual breath of fresh air in an increasingly sprawling region of New York. The working farms, growing here as agriculture collapses in other areas, remain a vital part of the local economy. The splendor of the natural environment – the fields, forests and waterways – attracts tourists, hunters and fishermen as well as endows residents with a spectacular quality of life.



(Photo Source: Left – Sunrise Farms, Inc. Right – Saratoga Associates.)

Catskill's location has isolated the community from much of the sprawling growth that pressures most of the villages and towns around New York City and around Albany. Communities to the north and to the south have seen land prices skyrocket and sprawl strip away distinctive character.

The losses and lessons of other Hudson Valley communities have crystallized the feeling that Catskill must create its own plan and present its own vision to meet the steadily approaching challenges. So, in 2005, the residents of Catskill took charge of their future and set out to create a comprehensive plan.

The Village and Town have decided that the two municipalities can better accomplish their goals if they work together. They recognize that some changes are welcome. Others are not. The comprehensive plan describes which are which. It is a fundamental way to promote orderly development and conserve resources in the community. The Town and Village began the comprehensive plan process in the fall of 2005 in order to update their old rules for the new realities.

With financial support from New York State Hudson River Valley Greenway and the Greene County IDA, the village and town hired Saratoga Associates to assist the joint Comprehensive Planning committee. The committee consisted of planning board members from both municipalities, plus some invited representatives from the business, farming and environmental communities. The committee met routinely throughout the comprehensive planning process. All meetings were open to the public.

Catskill Vision Statement

Some communities dream about what they could be, but never muster the resources or will to move toward that dream. Others act – without a vision – and find themselves dissatisfied with the results. The key to these predicaments is the union of vision and action. In the course of this effort and based on extensive public input the Comprehensive Plan Committee wrote the following vision for Catskill’s future.

Catskill remains a place where residents, business people and visitors feel connected to each other as well as to nature. The village core and hamlet centers thrive as distinctive focal points for community and commerce. The rural character – its farms, forests, waterways and mountains – remains fresh and unspoiled.

The town and village work together to create a diversity of economic, recreational, and housing opportunities for people at all stages of their lives. Catskill thoughtfully plans the location of neighborhoods, commerce, and industry, so as to create a healthy balance between the built and natural environments.

Out of that vision flowed a series of goals that point the way for the community to achieve its vision.

Goal: Protection of rural beauty and natural environment

Open spaces and scenic vistas give the Catskill community its distinctive character. Both the village and the town have a wide variety of flora and fauna, as well as open space vistas, mountain views, and access to the Hudson River. These important natural assets make Catskill unique. They are vital factors in our quality of life; crucial ingredients for maintaining the health of the entire region’s plant, animal and human life; and crucial components of our drive for economic development.

The thirteen recommendations to achieve this goal include the creation of a joint village/town committee to oversee conservation; innovative land use strategies to protect important natural places while allowing growth; and reinforcing environmental controls.

Goal: Enhancement of a vibrant, walkable and historic village core

At the core of the village, the entire Catskill community has an increasingly vibrant downtown. Its walkable streets and historic architecture strengthen the fabric of the community and are attractive places for residents and visitors. Business and property owners are working together to improve building facades, sidewalks, safety, and landscape features that boost commerce and create a sense of place.

Seven recommendations aim to promote walkability, preserve the historic fabric, improve the appearance of community gateways, and repair important structures.

Goal: Strengthened system of pedestrian-friendly hamlet centers and commercial areas that serve as community focal points

Outside of the village, community and commerce take place in the town’s hamlets and some designated commercial areas. By focusing development in these places, Catskill can boost its economic base, create pockets of neighborhood vitality and protect rural character. Pedestrian-friendly, somewhat compactly-developed hamlets offer the chance to diversify both the residential housing stock and commercial opportunities across the Catskill community. Each hamlet has its own distinctive character, but remains integrated with the greater Catskill community.

The six recommendations hope to focus commercial and denser housing opportunities in the hamlets, improve their gateways, and create a committee to plan for the hamlet cores.

Goal: Preservation of farming and enrichment of the rural economy

Farming has always flourished outside of the village and hamlet areas. Despite economic trends that indicate farming is pushed to the brink in many places outside of Catskill, agriculture thrives in Catskill. In fact, in recent years, figures indicate that the number of acres farmed has actually increased. In addition to the familiar crops and livestock, specialty farms produce goods for targeted markets. The continued success of agriculture is integral to the community’s economy, identity and quality of life.

The seven recommendations under this goal serve to protect farm operations, when they might come into conflict with residential growth, and seek to find ways to enhance the agricultural economy.

Goal: Residential, commercial and industrial growth that respect that rural beauty, historic character and the natural environment of both the village and town

A community as large and diverse as Catskill can easily accommodate growth while preserving rural beauty, historic character and the natural environment.

The six recommendations in this section provide basic, yet effective planning techniques to preserve Catskill’s quality of life, while allowing growth. These cover site design, road standards, utilities, and signs.

Goal: Greater range of job opportunities

Communities lacking in employment options for residents struggle with overall success. The goal is to create a range of opportunities for current and future residents. While all jobs have value, we hope to attract employers who want to invest in the community over the long term. This means we must work to effectively position our regulations, policies and incentive programs to attract high quality businesses. It means we must also maintain a high quality of life and a quality education system for youth.

The six recommendations under this goal aim to streamline the review process, coordinate land use rules with the new Empire Zone designation, and make physical changes to accommodate economic growth.

Goal: An efficient system of infrastructure and public services that support community goals

Growth increases demand for public services and infrastructure. We must invest in the infrastructure and services in a way that bolsters our quality to life and makes Catskill a successful place to do business. This means not building more than our infrastructure can support. Also, it means making sure that the right infrastructure is in the right place at the right time to support the growth we want. We must prudently decide where roads, water and sewer lines will be built or expanded to make the most of the tax dollars that go into building and supporting infrastructure.

The first of two recommendations in this section seeks the information needed to make decisions by means of a build-out analysis and capital infrastructure study. The second recommendation urges the coordinate of infrastructure with planned development – that is, run pipes and improve roads where the community wants building, do not run them where it does not.

Goal: Effective code enforcement

Clear, strong, and evenly enforced rules benefit many sectors of the community. Catskill communities benefit when these rules push development to realize community goals. At the same time, developers save time and money if they know, upfront, what a community demands of them. The alternative of going back and forth with public officials for approvals is costly and uncertain. It is important, too, that the rules are applied evenly at all stages of development. Both the village and town must make code enforcement a priority. The rules are only as good as our efforts to enforce them. Enforcing existing property maintenance codes helps maintain the quality of life in Catskill.

The seven recommendations here seek to make sure that the zoning and planning board members understand how development projects fit in with the comprehensive plan. They seek to make the permitting process more transparent and the enforcement of rules clearer and easier.

Goal: A town and village working together to efficiently raise the quality of life for all

Economic development and environmental protection do not stop at municipal boundaries. We realize that long-term partnerships based on shared interests between the two communities provide practical and important benefits for stabilizing municipalities and securing our future. Working together, the two communities can realize their joint vision for a better Catskill.

The nine recommendations in this section hope to build on the cooperation begun with this master plan in terms of securing grants, streamlining functions and duties, and enhancing amenities important to both the village and the town.

Goal: Preservation of historic assets and cultural heritage

The history and culture of Catskill are important keys to our future. Historic homes and barns, burial grounds and old industrial buildings give our community a character found nowhere else. Protecting these important places and weaving them into a plan for the future will help Catskill remain distinctive and desirable. Significant historic structures and places are also major attractions for tourists and this can act as yet another catalyst for economic success in Catskill. Important historic structures exist throughout both the village and the town.

The four recommendations in this section seek to education residents on the importance of historic preservation, establish neighborhood standards to encourage appropriate new construction in certain districts, and boost ongoing preservation efforts.

Three Foundational Recommendations for Implementation Success

The Committee made three foundational recommendations that would create the capacity to carry out the plan's implementation. These involve the creation of three citizen committees to coordinate particular action items in the plan. The Committee urges that these three recommendations be implemented immediately.

Recommendation 1.1 calls for the activation of a Joint Village/Town Conservation Commission. This could simply mean the reappointment of members to the existing "Town of Catskill Commission for Conservation of the Environment", which was created in 1972 and has been dormant in recent years. The only change would be to insure the inclusion of village representation. This committee's role would be to raise funds for conservation and stewardship efforts, oversee the creation of a long-term open space conservation plan, advise on development applications, and/or oversee studies and mapping endeavors.

Recommendation 2.3 calls for establishing a Downtown Working Group to encourage more involvement in Main Street activities. This committee would work with local merchants, the two municipalities, and Greene County to organize revitalization efforts, promote the business district, oversee the design of a pedestrian-friendly, vibrant streetscape, raise funds, and build the partnerships to ensure success.

Finally, it was clear by the response at the Palenville hamlet meeting that residents there wanted to revitalize their "main street" and build their sense of community. To carry that out, recommendation 3.6 establishes a hamlet working group of citizens and public officials. This committee would investigate opportunities in the hamlet, create a plan for revitalization, and find ways to implement their plan. The recommendation is broad in that it urges all hamlets to plan their futures. However, the Committee expects Palenville to take the first step.

All three committees would work on behalf of the Town and/or Village Boards. The Town and Village Boards would retain the ultimate authority to secure and spend funds as well as make policy changes. However, the committees would allow the cost-effective implementation of the Plan by tapping into an important human resource – talented and committed local residents.

The Comprehensive Planning Process

Communities must make choices. What kind of place do residents and businesses want in the future? What should the community to look like? What economic growth should we encourage and where should new jobs go? Where should new neighborhoods be built? Where should farming be preserved and housing growth controlled?

The plan gives decision makers (elected officials, planning board members, zoning board members, town/village staff and citizens) a guide as they create new policies and judge new development projects. It also helps the community increase opportunities for grant money since the state prefers to fund projects that fit into a plan for the future. Finally, New York State requires that agencies, such as the Department of Transportation, consult and take into account comprehensive plans as they undertake projects locally.

A comprehensive plan is not an instruction manual. This document has a broader purpose – to establish a vision and create the framework for a community’s growth. Many of the details, such as rewriting zoning code or analyzing build-out scenarios, will be specific undertakings that are beyond the scope of the current overview process.

The Catskill village/town comprehensive plan is a “living” document. The community must be alert to the need for changes and updates. Economic conditions change; different opportunities present themselves. Catskill must be willing to adjust to meet new challenges and take advantage of new opportunities. At a minimum, the town and village should review the plan at least every five years.

It is important to remember that adjusting the comprehensive plan does not mean lowering standards. The plan will not succeed if it is constantly changed to meet the demands of every particular project. A good test is to make sure proposed changes further the vision and accomplish the goals described in the plan.

Creating a comprehensive plan

The comprehensive planning process begins by understanding the present issues and conditions, gauging the likes and dislikes of the community, and measuring their concerns. Once these issues have been clearly identified, the plan looks ahead and asks what the community wants to see in the future: “What is its vision for itself?” Lastly, the comprehensive plan lays out the way to achieve this vision and creates an action plan for implementation. The plan to get from “here” to “there” may include devising new policies, incentives and/or regulatory revisions.



Public involvement is crucial to the long-term success of any planning effort. If local residents feel ownership of the plan, they are more likely to have the kind of commitment that pushes public officials to implement it. Public input for the plan was gathered at a series of meetings in the Town, Village, and hamlets. A report of the meetings is included in Appendix B of this report.

The joint town/village comprehensive plan committee also conducted a community survey. The public and private sectors pulled together to distribute the eight-page questionnaire to residents through libraries, firehouses, shops, post offices and other public places. A total of 159 surveys were returned to the committee. The total results can be found in Appendix C. These results provided input to the decision-making process and some specific references to the findings are found in appropriate sections of the recommendations. In addition, the Comprehensive Plan Committee held a public hearing to receive feedback on April 10, 2007.

