

THE SARATOGA SPRINGS COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

CITY OF SARATOGA SPRINGS
NEW YORK

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Executive Summary:

This Comprehensive Plan is a unified set of policies for guiding the physical development of the City of Saratoga Springs. The plan presents a map depicting how and where development should occur throughout the City. It also specifies policy statements with recommendations on how specific issues should be addressed.

The Comprehensive Plan is a document that articulates the City's goals for land use development, design and enhancement. The Comprehensive Plan also provides the justification for planning and regulatory policies that encourage desired development and efficient growth patterns to maximize the City's social and economic potential.

The Plan is based on the following vision:

This Plan is based on the "City-in-the-Country" concept, meaning a city with an intensively developed urban core and an economically vibrant central business district, with well-defined urban edges and an outlying area comprised of open lands, a landscape or rural character and low density residential development. The overriding philosophy that will guide future development of our "City in the Country" will be sustainability. Sustainable development is development that enhances economic opportunity and community well being while protecting the amenities upon which our economy and our community depend. A sustainable-growth policy recognizes that unlimited growth is not right for our City; nor is no growth at all. Through sustainable development, we aim to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The Comprehensive Plan provides a practical and useable set of recommendations addressing selected issues of concern. This Plan's goals are to:

1. Enhance the vitality and success of the City's downtown core area. .
2. Promote a broader mixture of uses in selected areas to encourage social, business and residential interaction and diversity.
3. Implement land use and design policies to enhance our quality of life, balance the costs of municipal services with revenues, protect sensitive environmental resources, and preserve traditional community character.
4. Promote pedestrian and bicycle access, transit services, and traditional neighborhood design in order to reduce dependence on the automobile.

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5. Continue investing in the amenities that contribute to our community's success.
6. Support the City's sense of history and the "City in the Country" by preserving the quality of, and linkages among, cultural and open space resources.
7. Encourage and increase housing diversity and affordability as well as neighborhood vitality.
8. Work with other communities in the region to address issues that transcend jurisdictional and other boundaries
9. Invest in infrastructure improvements and encourage public/private partnerships that support the Plan's goals

MAJOR POLICIES OF THE PLAN:

The following is a summary of the major policies presented in the Plan:

- ◆ Downtown is the key to the City's economic health. Maintaining a compact downtown with adequate parking and supporting infrastructure is essential for businesses to prosper.
- ◆ Saratoga Springs' open space resources constitute a vital economic component and a valuable aesthetic and recreational amenity. It is this unique open space character that creates the ambiance of the "City in the Country".
- ◆ The City provides excellent services; however, such services have a cost. The City must provide for adequate revenue sources if it is to continue to maintain and enhance services.
- ◆ The City has a fairly diverse mix of housing types and price levels; however, there are signs that this is changing. A diverse community requires a similar diversity of housing variety and affordability.
- ◆ Saratoga Springs has a unique mix of social, cultural and recreational resources. Maintaining, enhancing and investing in these amenities is essential to the City's economic and social dynamic.

The following are the major transportation policies presented in the Plan:

- Strict enforcement of laws regarding trucks, to discourage truck trips through the city while prioritizing public safety.
- Implement the other SSTAR truck traffic improvement recommendations that include: synchronization of traffic signals on Church Street, Van Dam Street and Broadway; signage plan to direct trucks to Grande Industrial Park; adjust property assessments for land owners significantly adversely impacted by truck traffic; request designation of all of West Avenue for

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special dimension vehicles, and; restrict east bound truck traffic on Lake Avenue (between Broadway and Henning Road to 5 tons except for local deliveries.

- Complete the 2-stage upgrade of South Broadway. A boulevard-style roadway, including a planted median, turning lanes and pedestrian/bicycle paths from West Fenlon to Crescent Avenue was completed in early 2000. The improved drainage, road and pedestrian improvements from Circular Street to West Fenlon have a projected finish date of 2004.
- Upgrade northern Route 50 (arterial) to a boulevard-style roadway, including a planted median, turning lanes and pedestrian/bicycle paths. NYS DOT activity finish is projected for 2003.
- Complete the upgrade of West Avenue. NYS DOT activity, finish projected for early 2002.
- Complete the rehabilitation/upgrade of the rail station on Station Lane.
- Complete downtown pedestrian improvements - finish projected 2003.
- Continue pedestrian and automobile improvements particularly to major activity areas including Skidmore College, Embury/Wesley apts., Spa State Park and the racetracks.
- Develop a comprehensive sidewalk plan that identifies priority areas for new sidewalk construction and rehabilitation including links to City recreation/ice rink along Lake Avenue and connections under the Northway to Bog Meadow nature trail.
- Develop a comprehensive citywide multi-use (to include bicycles) trail plan that integrates existing pedestrian, bicycle, road, and open space systems, and provides critical linkages.
 - Evaluate additional parking needs downtown.
 - Continue to participate in regional commuter and local bus and park and ride services.
 - Investigate possible alternative locations for the bus station that would provide improved links with other transportation modes.

The following are the major utility and public safety policies in the Plan:

- Coordinate infrastructure improvements based on the Plan's land use vision – concentrate on the City's downtown and other Special Development Areas as the highest priorities.
- Mandate, in the zoning ordinance, that underground utilities be utilized for services to all new, redeveloped, or substantially renovated buildings, and work with the local utility companies to resolve other aesthetic issues relating to utility installations with particular attention to the careful placement of electric and gas meters and transformers. Establish priorities in conjunction with initiation of undergrounding in selected areas of the City.

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- Embark on a capital improvements program to upgrade and replace aging utilities, in accordance with an overall plan and priority system, with a focus on the older sewer and water pipes within the Inner District.
- Protect existing water sources through the implementation of a comprehensive watershed management program and City acquisition of land, where feasible, in cooperation with neighboring communities.
- The City should work with adjacent municipalities to encourage the adoption of watershed management rules and regulations. To meet the City's increasing water supply needs the City should, as a priority, continue to undertake studies to provide an adequate quantity of its water supply through pursuit of alternate sources, particularly including Saratoga Lake.
- A citywide stormwater management plan should be funded and implemented. It should be designed to identify rehabilitation needs and areas for new storm system development. The plan should include standards for stormwater detention, retention, infiltration and water quality consistent with NYS DEC and USEPA guidelines.
- Implement the recommendations of the 1998 Smart City Task Force to ensure that our technology dependent businesses are adequately served with the appropriate infrastructure.
- Review the need for expanded police and fire protection east of the Northway.

The following are the major open space and recreation policies:

- Promote concentrated, compact growth in the "City" while protecting and enhancing the rural quality of and access to the "Country" and maintaining a sharp edge between the two.
- Use open spaces, natural features, institutions, recreational facilities and regional transportation features to form a well-defined edge to the City's urban core.
- Provide linkages between existing areas of protected open space and natural resources.
- Preserve and protect important open spaces and natural areas including stream corridors, wetlands, agricultural resources and viewsheds of aesthetic value.
- Ensure adequate buffers and encourage unique forms of development for commercial and industrial growth. Enhance rural views along roadways and entranceways to the City.
- Establish creative mechanisms to protect historic properties and key farmland parcels.
- Continue with systematic and timely implementation of the recommendations in the City's adopted Open Space Plan.

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- Promote development that contributes to new or existing open spaces.
- Develop adequate and diverse active and passive recreational facilities and encourage their frequent use through placement and design. Such facilities should meet the needs of as diverse a range of age groups and interests as possible. The City should concentrate first on facilities for which there is an actual shortage. The City should establish new recreational areas in under-served areas of the City.
- The City should pursue public/private partnerships to meet identified recreational needs, for example, providing access to Saratoga water bodies or working in conjunction with the YMCA.
- The City should establish an on-going dialogue with adjacent communities and the school district on opportunities for intermunicipal recreational programming and facility use.

The following are the major housing policies presented in the Plan:

- Encourage a range of residential opportunities that will be available to all residents to promote the social and economic diversity vital to a balanced community.
- Encourage new housing development to be consistent with the human scale, historical context and design characteristics of traditional Saratoga neighborhoods. Promote the upgrading, infill and preservation of existing housing and neighborhoods, particularly in areas of predominantly low and moderate income.
- Encourage the development of higher density residential alternatives within the urban core. Promote the conversion to residential use of upper floors in commercial districts.
- Support collaborative efforts to develop additional affordable housing. Reconstruct and rehabilitate existing housing to revitalize neighborhoods, maintain affordability, and reintroduce decent affordable units into the City's housing stock.
- Actively promote affordable housing of all types and tenure throughout the City to avoid over-concentration in any one area and to reduce the potential for isolation of income groups. One area of particular concern is the West Side neighborhood.
- Promote greater education and awareness of the need for affordable housing and try to destigmatize "affordable" / "low-moderate income" labeling.
- Rehabilitate and develop affordable housing via a "whole-site approach" with attention to site location and layout, façade design, pedestrian movement and accessibility, adequate infrastructure provision, and sensitivity to historic preservation.
- Make greater use of City-owned properties for affordable housing and acquire additional properties for this purpose.

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- Promote more aggressive enforcement of housing codes and zoning regulations to ensure decent, safe housing units.
- Review zoning, subdivision, building codes and development policies to actively encourage affordable housing construction or redevelopment through mechanisms such as:
 - More effective development incentives (density bonuses, relief from building setback and parking requirements, etc.)
 - Higher density rezoning where appropriate
 - Permitting conversion and permanent residential use of accessory buildings such as carriage houses and garages for affordable housing
 - Providing infrastructure subsidies for developments with affordable units
 - Establishing a dedicated fund (e.g. development fees, non-profit PILOT programs, etc.) or land trust for affordable housing development, land acquisition, construction subsidies, etc.
- Promote the implementation of the City's "Consolidated Plan" to achieve identified community development objectives and increase the availability of safe, affordable housing.
- Maximize participation in Federal and State funding programs for the construction and rehabilitation of affordable rental and homeowner units.
- Encourage construction of senior housing in proximity to transit service as well as health and community services.

The following are the major economic development policies presented in the Plan:

- Maintain the downtown as the economic center of the community, including the primary retail and commercial center. Encourage infill to ensure a well-defined urban core.
- Encourage new development in specifically defined Special Development Areas to complement, rather than duplicate, downtown.
- Maintain a diverse property tax base and accommodate a broad range of land uses while minimizing conflicts.
- Support the viability and growth of the community's unique institutions (i.e. Skidmore College, Saratoga Hospital, SPAC and the racetracks) and community-based art and cultural programs.
- Encourage a range of job opportunities for residents and promote land uses that encourage long-term fiscal sustainability.
- Develop a forward-looking strategy to accommodate the increasing prevalence of home office activities due to the electronic revolution and changing business/community needs.

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- Support the diverse entertainment amenities of the City. Promote and accommodate increases in visitors during fall, winter and spring.
- Encourage industrial, technology and office-based businesses to locate within the City.
- Encourage the creation of business incubator sites and encourage IDA support of downtown redevelopment projects.

The following are the major procedural policies in the Plan:

- Enforce existing land use regulations.
- Create clear design examples and development standards.
- Enhance development review and approval information materials.
- Illustrate zoning standards graphically.
- Provide adequate staffing for processing development proposals.
- Prepare and maintain an inventory and analysis of existing land uses, market and community needs.
- Continue quarterly review meetings for development boards and city staff.
- Appoint alternate members for the Planning Board, Design Review Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals.
- Initiate preliminary review of development proposals by City departments.
- Limit the use of Planned Unit Development (PUD) districts.
- Review paper streets and eliminate those that have no future purpose.
- Implement creative design provisions within the land use regulations.
- Encourage governmental compliance with zoning regulations.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Saratoga Springs – A Great American Place

The City is nationally recognized as a “Great American Place” largely due to its commitment to historic preservation, its vibrant downtown and the amenities it offers. This heritage combines

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with our community's excellent quality of life and strong sense of place to create a balance of physical, economic and social assets.

- ◆ We are a safe residential community with world-class recreational and tourism attractions
- ◆ We combine an industrial, retail and office center with architectural beauty and historic charm
- ◆ We are host to respected institutions of higher education
- ◆ We have an award-winning downtown
- ◆ We have a unique open space "greenbelt" surrounding an urban core
- ◆ We have an enthusiastic citizenry that actively participates in a multitude of community, service and governmental activities.

It is this diversity, this momentum, this balance of economic and sociological assets that makes Saratoga Springs an attractive destination with an active, year-round residential and business community.

Saratoga Springs originally gained fame during Colonial times as word spread of the springs and curative waters found in the community. This natural occurrence, and subsequent resort attraction, initiated the construction and development of what is now the valued downtown area. The advent and prosperity of the racing and wagering industries not only provided the City with a colorful historic legacy but also reinforced the concentrated and compact form that is the key to the success of our downtown. Indeed, horse-related industries including thoroughbred and standardbred racing, polo and dressage events, horse sales and equine services remain important contributors to the economic, cultural and social makeup of our community.

Following a period of deterioration in the 1950s and 1960s, Saratoga Springs rebuilt itself into an award-winning community and celebrated resort destination. In fact, while most cities have experienced serious decline, Saratoga Springs has maintained and increased its momentum as a vibrant community.

Incorporation of the City in 1915 joined the urbanized area of the former village with an expansive and largely undeveloped countryside. Now the fourth largest City in New York State in total land area, Saratoga Springs, "the City in the Country", continues to have significant open space resources. A 1994 City evaluation estimated that over one-half of the total land area can be classified as "open space".

The City's open space resources provide both active and passive enjoyment and are maintained through a combination of public and private ownership. Institutional examples include Yaddo and Skidmore College; the City offers Congress Park and several neighborhood parks; State and private-sector holdings include more than 2000 acres at Saratoga Spa State Park, the equine polo fields, harness and thoroughbred tracks, and a growing number of golf courses. These public and privately owned open space resources are complemented by three lakes and an abundance of state and federally regulated wetlands.

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The City's population in the 2000 Census was 26,186. During the last century the City mostly had a slow but steady population increase with annual growth rates near or below 1%. That rate doubled during the late 1980s but leveled back off in the 1990s. Today it is estimated that the annual growth rate for population is about 0.5%.

1.2 This Plan's Visions and Goals for the Community

Saratoga Springs is a unique and special place to live and visit. We owe this to our City's historic architecture; our lively downtown; our beautiful parks and other open spaces; our mixed-use neighborhoods; our diverse economic base; and dozens of other amenities, including the mineral springs, the racetracks, Yaddo, Skidmore College, and the Saratoga Performing Arts Center.

With this in mind, the overriding philosophy that will guide future development of our "City in the Country" will be sustainability. Sustainable development is development that enhances economic opportunity and community well-being while protecting the amenities upon which our economy and our community depend. A sustainable-growth policy recognizes that unlimited growth is not right for our City; nor is no growth at all.

Through sustainable development, we aim to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The Comprehensive Plan provides a practical and useable set of recommendations addressing selected issues of concern. This Plan's goals are to:

1. Enhance the vitality and success of the City's downtown core area.
2. Promote a broader mixture of uses in selected areas to encourage social, business and residential interaction and diversity.
3. Implement land use and design policies to enhance our quality of life, balance the costs of municipal services with revenues, protect sensitive environmental resources, and preserve traditional community character.
4. Promote pedestrian and bicycle access, transit services, and traditional neighborhood design in order to reduce dependence on the automobile.
5. Continue investing in the amenities that contribute to our community's success.
6. Support the City's sense of history and maintain the "City in the Country" by preserving the quality of, and linkages among, cultural and open space resources.
7. Encourage and increase housing diversity and affordability as well as neighborhood vitality.

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8. Work with communities in the region to address issues that transcend jurisdictional and other boundaries.
9. Invest in infrastructure improvements and encourage public / private partnerships that support the Plan's goals.

These goals are to be implemented by the recommendations presented in this Plan.

1.3 Process, Community Involvement and Supporting Documents

The development of this Plan began in 1998 with the appointment of a 9 member Comprehensive Plan Committee by the City Council. The Committee met nearly weekly between May 1998 and May 1999 working with the community at large and relying heavily on the assistance and support offered by the sponsors of numerous focus group studies completed since the adoption of the City's 1987 Master Plan.

The Committee conducted detailed analyses of the City's current growth trends and financial conditions. It met with many residents and experts and heard from a wide variety of citizens. This Plan represents the Committee's effort to synthesize the diverse opinions it heard and respond to the issues facing the City.

- ◆ The first step in the Comprehensive Plan Committee's process was to review the 1987 Master Plan. The 1987 plan contained an extensive inventory and analysis of the City's physical resources. These resources remain largely intact; therefore, this Plan does not attempt to revisit these studies. Rather, this Plan makes use of the findings of the 1987 plan as well as the numerous planning studies conducted since that time.
- ◆ On May 4, 1999 the 1999 Comprehensive Plan was adopted and it replaced the 1987 Master Plan as the City's official long-range planning policy document to guide future growth and development in our community.
- ◆ On November 21, 2000 an amended Comprehensive Plan was adopted that updated and replaced the 1999 Comprehensive Plan.

The most valuable resource afforded by the Comprehensive Plan Committee during this Plan's development was the input provided by the City's residents through neighborhood associations, advisory groups, coalitions, authorities and committees. Appreciation for the many hours of labor and insight provided by these groups cannot be measured nor condensed into the few lines offered here. A list of the contributors in recognition of their efforts during the development of the 1999 Comprehensive Plan is presented in Appendix A:

The Committee that prepared the 1999 Comprehensive Plan was chaired by William Dake and had the following other members: James Grande, Richard Hoffman, Cindy Hollowood, Brian McMahon, Robert Pasciullo, Steve Sullivan, Lorraine Power Tharp, and Charles Wait.

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The 1999 Comprehensive Plan was adopted by the City Council on May 4, 1999. It was followed by a series of zoning text and map amendments that were adopted by the City Council on August 3, 1999.

In March, 2000, the Mayor of Saratoga Springs appointed a Comprehensive Plan Review Committee that was charged with the task of reviewing the 1999 Comprehensive Plan and making recommendations for its refinement, modification and implementation strategies.

The Comprehensive Plan Review Committee was chaired by Jeff Pfeil and had the following other members: Nancy Butcher, Jacinta Conway, Richard Dunn, Robert Israel, Brian McMahon, Lisa Nagle, Lorraine Power Tharp and Michael Welti.

As noted previously, the City and various concerned citizens have commissioned a number of planning studies since the development of the 1987 Master Plan. These studies have been relied upon in the preparation of this Comprehensive Plan and are presented in Appendix B of this Plan:

2.0 ISSUES IDENTIFICATION

This section of the Plan identifies the major issues currently facing the City. This Plan is intended to respond directly to these issues.

2.1 Maintaining a Balance

The key to the City's success has been maintaining the balance of land uses, economic forces and social diversity. Continuing to keep this balance is the central purpose of this Plan. Sustaining a community as attractive and desirable as Saratoga Springs involves a combination of factors that is more than the sum of its parts. Key considerations include the following.

- ◆ Downtown is the key to the City's economic health. Maintaining a compact downtown with adequate parking and supporting infrastructure is essential for businesses to prosper.
- ◆ Saratoga Springs' open space resources constitute a vital economic component and a valuable aesthetic and recreational amenity. It is this open space character that creates the ambiance of the "City" in the "Country".
- ◆ The City provides excellent services; however, such services have a cost. The City must provide for an adequate revenue source if it is to continue to maintain and enhance services.
- ◆ The City has a fairly diverse mix of housing types and price levels; however, there are signs that this is changing. A diverse community requires a similar diversity of housing variety and affordability.

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- ◆ Saratoga Springs has a good mix of social, cultural and recreational resources. Maintaining, enhancing and investing in these amenities is essential to the City's economic and social dynamic.

2.2 Financial Considerations

The recent growth that the City has experienced may be partially attributable to the robust national economy. However, many believe it is more significantly attributable to the attractiveness of the quality of life enjoyed by our residents. While cities in our region are still experiencing stagnant growth rates, an ever-increasing number of people are discovering the advantages of our community.

Sustainable growth, therefore, implies maintaining our quality of life while continuing to attract commercial and industrial development with the accompanying promise of jobs and increased tax revenues. Sustainable growth also implies that the cost of services provided by the City is offset by the increased tax revenues realized from proposed projects.

While there is legitimate public purpose in encouraging growth and development that may not directly enhance public revenues, such as affordable housing or public parks or green space, sustainable growth would imply that a majority of new development, after an analysis of quantifiable public costs (such as, schools, fire, police, etc.) result in a positive income stream.

Some sustainable growth occurs as a matter of course such as upscale "empty nester" housing. Other developments may enhance the City's revenue stream with recreation and utility fees, public grants, etc. The manner in which development occurs also affects its economics. Traditional neighborhood development, that minimizes road surfaces and increases pedestrians access, concentrates growth in urban settings and discourages urban sprawl, also helps to achieve sustainable growth.

The first principal to recognize, however, should be that our quality of life drives the City's economic engine. Quality of life considerations should be a paramount financial consideration. Sustainable growth requires it.

The basic principles enunciated above require further study and documentation. When development is proposed our City planners need objective financial standards to use in evaluating development to determine whether it is revenue positive or not. These standards will provide guidance about the benefits and costs of the proposed projects brought before them.

During the decade of the 1990's the city generally struggled in its attempt to have revenues match anticipated expenses. Through the use of a combination of revenue sources and the close monitoring of expenditures, the City successfully met the challenge of achieving a "balanced budget". However, during the 1990's the City's debt also rose to approximately \$10 million. The City's self-imposed debt ceiling is 1 percent of the total taxable assessed property valuation, hence, based on the 1999 revaluation some additional debt could be incurred if

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required. During the early part of the 1990's the assessed valuation grew at an annual rate of about 1/2 percent per year. The growth rate for 1999 was approximately 1.5 percent and the preliminary figures for 2000 are even higher. However, despite the encouraging increase in growth during the past 2 years, it is imperative that the City focus on sustainable growth in assessed property value or find some other revenue sources if we are to adequately fund increases in expenditures that have approximated 5 percent annually. Of course, some of this increase is attributable to automatic salary increases and inflation. However, an annual assessed taxable property growth rates of less than 5 percent will result in property tax increases for the individual taxpayer.

Appendix C provides several historical financial statistics that relate to sales taxes, property taxes and assessed property valuation, City revenues and expenditures, and building permit statistics. While no single statistic can be taken in isolation, when considered in total these figures provide an understanding of the City's continuing need to focus on sustainable growth. Appendix C also briefly presents an analysis of several optional new sources of revenue that could be considered in the future.

2.3 Traditional Zoning Constraints

Since the establishment of local zoning in Saratoga Springs more than 50 years ago, the natural combination and mixing of activities based upon pure social, community and economic forces has been replaced by the categorization and separation of land uses. The effects of this separation of land uses also separated people from their places of work, recreation and shopping places, contributing to the growth of costly, inefficient development. Traditional zoning regulation inadvertently promoted many of the problems in our communities today.

- Inflexible separation of uses of land may result in sprawl development that creates costly, inefficient use of land, infrastructure and services. Innovative communities are returning to a more traditional mixture of uses to encourage more dynamic social and economic interaction.
- Business and commerce are constantly changing, particularly in response to communications technology improvements. As a result, satellite offices and telecommuting have become more important; modern businesses have land use needs different from those covered by present conventional regulations.
- Emerging land uses make traditional categorization complicated, limiting and outdated. The number and nature of new businesses is rapidly changing, and it is impossible to successfully anticipate and regulate all future uses.
- The imperfect ability of conventional zoning to anticipate new businesses limits its viability, particularly as a promoter of economically desirable new development.

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The general purpose of land use regulation is to make development compatible with adjoining uses and to create an overall benefit for the community. Unfortunately, conventional zoning regulation and ever-more land use categorization is often the defensive reaction to unanticipated issues caused by emerging land uses or changing community needs.

A community hoping to thrive in the future must take an innovative approach to encouraging a dynamic mix of compatible uses to improve its economic stability and to enhance community diversity and interaction.

2.4 Growth Patterns

The success and activity level in Saratoga Springs, as well as the amount of development in the adjoining Towns of Greenfield, Malta, Milton and Wilton, has led to the widespread, yet inaccurate, perception that the City is growing rapidly.

- ◆ Because of the high growth rates in the mid-1980s, the population forecasts listed in the 1987 Master Plan were too generous. In fact, population has increased by only about ½% per year.
- ◆ The average household size is decreasing and the number of automobiles per household is increasing. These trends create higher demand for housing, services and roadway access even with limited population growth.
- ◆ The City's land use pattern reflects the historic consolidation of a village with a surrounding rural town. The more densely developed core area contains opportunities for in-fill, replacement and vertical expansion. Much of the City's outer area, under increasing residential development pressure, has significant environmental limitations including wetland and floodplain restrictions.
- ◆ The assessed value of City's taxable real property has grown about 1/2% per year over the past decade. However, between 1998 and 1999 it increased 1.5% and the draft figures for the 1999-2000 indicate a 4.2% increase.
- ◆ Recent rapid growth in adjoining towns has created pressures for similar growth in adjoining areas of the City. The City has no control over development in adjoining towns, although such development directly affects the City.
- ◆ Region-wide issues such as traffic, schools, and housing are heavily influenced by development trends and activities outside of the City's boundaries and are beyond the control of the City. Solutions to challenges presented by these issues will not be found entirely within the City and will require cooperation with the adjacent communities.

2.5 Local Complexities

Layered on the constraints imposed by traditional zoning are certain local complexities, which include the following.

- ◆ The City has a complex “commission” form of government with distinctly separate functional areas. In addition to the planning, design review and zoning appeals boards, proposed projects may undergo further review by multiple offices and departments including Department of Public Works, Department of Public Safety, Building Inspector, City Engineer and City Planner. In July 2000 the Mayor appointed a Charter Revision Committee to review these issues. The Committee’s recommendations are expected to be presented in mid-2001.
- ◆ There has been a growing number of Planned Unit Development (PUD) and zoning variance requests to counter the inflexibility of current zoning regulation. Continual zoning regulation changes and PUD proposals require City Council legislative approval thereby lengthening and often politicizing the approval process.
- ◆ The City’s zoning is complex. A number of overlapping regulatory districts and oversight jurisdictions further complicates the process.
- ◆ The City has limited staff faced with often lengthy, complicated review processes that demand ever-greater technical expertise. Partly as a result of this, the process can be lengthy, complicated and expensive.
- ◆ There is a need for more flexibility in the types of allowable land uses and a need to clearly identify what the City wants and expects from a completed project. Such provisions will allow a developer to know up front what is expected and the City will know what it can expect from a completed project.
- ◆ There is a need to increase communication among all parties to clarify the development approval process thereby decreasing time and cost to both the City and applicants.

3.0 POLICY AREAS

The Comprehensive Plan expresses the City’s commitment to careful, economic long-term management of land and community resources. This section sets forth the City’s specific planning policies, goals and objectives towards achieving this vision. In preparing these policies, goals and objectives, the City has relied on the many planning studies conducted during the last decade as well as additional analyses conducted as part of this planning process.

3.1 Transportation

The City is a transportation hub. Located at the southeast edge of the Adirondacks, an unusual number of roads connecting the Mohawk and Hudson-Champlain valleys converge in the City. In

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fact, all of these roads pass through the center of the City between the Spa State Park and Skidmore. This situation is further complicated by the fact that the City was planned to grow to the west, taking advantage of the flat terrain and sandy soils in this area. However, the Northway was constructed in wetlands on the east side of the City, requiring much daily commuter traffic to pass through the downtown area to access the Northway.

Truck traffic through the city continues to be a serious problem. Several truck bypass alternatives have been met with opposition from various groups within the city. Finding solutions to the truck problem must remain a high priority. Traffic safety laws and other laws governing use of trucks in the city must be strictly enforced.

This Plan also recognizes the importance of improving transportation gateways to the City. A section of South Broadway near the Spa State Park entrance has recently been reconstructed as a boulevard. Major improvements in the West Avenue corridor are underway. The New York State Department of Transportation also is designing improvements for the Route 50 Arterial between the downtown and Exit 15. The City is working on plans to improve South Broadway between West Fenlon Street and Circular Street. Another major issue is the possible introduction of commuter rail service via a two-year demonstration project and a tourism train service. This would create an opportunity to encourage additional development in the vicinity of the train station.

The City should continue the development of alternative transportation modes, especially pedestrian and bikeways. These bike facilities can be on-street, but also should also be integrated into the City's open space system. Similarly, commuter and local bus service, as well as park and ride facilities should continue to be supported and subsidized where appropriate. The implementation of alternative local transportation such as a local trolley between downtown, the racetracks and Spa Park should also be considered.

Additionally, the Plan recommends the following transportation policies:

- Strict enforcement of laws regarding trucks, to discourage truck trips through the city while prioritizing public safety.
- Implement the other SSTAR truck traffic improvement recommendations that include: synchronization of traffic signals on Church Street, Van Dam Street and Broadway; signage plan to direct trucks to Grande Industrial Park; adjust property assessments for land owners significantly adversely impacted by truck traffic; request designation of all of West Avenue for special dimension vehicles, and; restrict east bound truck traffic on Lake Avenue (between Broadway and Henning Road to 5 tons except for local deliveries.
- Complete 2-stage upgrade of South Broadway. A boulevard-style roadway, including a planted median, turning lanes and pedestrian/bicycle paths from West Fenlon to Crescent Avenue. The first phase of the project was completed in early 2000. The improved drainage, road and pedestrian improvements from Circular Street to West Fenlon have a projected finish date of 2004.

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- Upgrade northern Route 50 (arterial) to a boulevard-style roadway, including a planted median, turning lanes and pedestrian/bicycle paths. Completion is projected by NYS DOT for 2003.
- Complete the upgrade of West Avenue. Completion is projected by NYS DOT for early 2002.
- Complete downtown pedestrian improvements. Completion is projected for 2003.
- Continue pedestrian and automobile improvements particularly to major activity areas including Skidmore College, Embury/Wesley apts., Spa State Park and the racetracks.
- Develop a comprehensive sidewalk plan that identifies priority areas for new sidewalk construction and rehabilitation, including links to the City recreation/ice rink along Lake Avenue and with connections under the Northway to Bog Meadow nature trail as well.
- Develop a comprehensive citywide multi-use (to include bicycles) trail plan that integrates existing pedestrian, road, and open space systems, and provides critical linkages.
- Evaluate additional downtown parking needs (study underway).
- Continue to participate in regional commuter and local bus and park and ride services.
- Continue to participate in the design and development of the new train station to ensure its long-term viability, its potential as an asset to the community, and its integration in transportation facilities for the rest of the City.
- Investigate potential alternative locations for the bus station that would provide links to other transportation modes.
- Take steps to prevent congestion on all transportation systems by implementing various management techniques that could alter peak demands.

3.2 Utilities and Public Safety

The location and capacity of the City's utility infrastructure strongly affects growth patterns, community character, housing affordability, economic diversity and fiscal stability.

Water

The City has 3 independent water resources: Loughberry Lake, the aquifer-fed Geyser Crest water system, and the Bog Meadow system which is currently undergoing an upgrade to connect directly with the City water plant. Approximately 95% of the City's population is served by this system, consisting of more than 85 miles of pipe.

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Recent efforts to enhance these water sources, including the employment of a weed harvester in Loughberry Lake and other City efforts, have significantly upgraded the quality of City water. A revised study by Barton and Loguidice P.C. Consulting Engineers documents that the City has increased and improved its sustainable yield to 5.5 million gallons of water per day. Continuing water service expansion to close the loop at the east edge of the City along Staffords Bridge Road will be done at developer's expense.

Sewage

Sewage is conveyed to, and treated at, the County Sewage Treatment Plant in Mechanicville. The Sewer system serves approximately 90% of the City's population. The County owns the trunk lines while the City owns the local collector lines. Although the treatment plant has capacity to treat greater flows, the cost of sewer extension may delay or forestall development in some cases.

Stormwater

Stormwater is collected via mains that have been mostly separated from old combined sanitary/stormwater systems. The stormwater system is discharged to Village Brook, Putnam Brook and Geyser Brook. There are a number of areas of the City, particularly the West Side and South Side, that experience flooding due to inadequately sized pipes or lack of an adequate overall conveyance system. The City will continue its efforts to improve the general stormwater drainage system, with particular attention to the Washington Street drainage area.

The Plan recommends the following utility policies.

- Coordinate infrastructure improvements based on the Plan's land use vision – concentrate on the City's downtown and other Special Development Areas as the highest priorities.
- Mandate, in the zoning ordinance, that underground utilities be utilized for services to all new, redeveloped, or substantially renovated buildings and work with the local utility companies to resolve other aesthetic issues relating to utility installations with particular attention to the careful placement of electric and gas meters and transformers. Establish priorities in conjunction with initiation of undergrounding in selected areas of the City.
- Work with local utility companies (electric, phone, cable, etc.) to develop a plan for placing existing overhead wires underground in priority areas of the city.
- Embark on a capital improvements program to prioritize, upgrade and replace aging utilities, in accordance with an overall plan and priority system, with a focus on the older sewer and water pipes within the Inner District.

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- Protect existing water sources through the implementation of a comprehensive watershed management program and City acquisition of land, where feasible, in cooperation with neighboring communities.
- The City should work with adjacent municipalities toward the adoption of watershed management rules and regulations.
- To meet the City's increasing water supply needs the City should, as a priority, continue to undertake studies to provide an adequate quantity of its water supply through pursuit of alternate sources, particularly including Saratoga Lake.
- A citywide stormwater management plan should be funded and implemented. It should be designed to identify rehabilitation needs and areas for new storm system development. The plan should include standards for stormwater detention, retention, infiltration and water quality consistent with NYS DEC and USAEPA guidelines.
- Implement the recommendations of the 1998 Smart City Task Force to ensure that our technology dependent businesses are adequately served with the appropriate infrastructure.
- Review the need for expanding police and fire protection east of the Northway.

3.3 Open Space and Recreation

A primary assumption of this Plan, and indeed prior plans, is to encourage quality development that can be clearly balanced with the preservation, protection and enhancement of open space. In fact, economic growth and open spaces are interdependent and there is compelling evidence that the presence of ample and accessible public open space increases community property values and contributes to economic growth.

Furthermore, the provision of diverse and high quality indoor and outdoor recreation areas and facilities and a community that is linked by walking and bicycle trails adds immeasurably to quality of life. Saratoga Springs is unique in its distinct edge between the "city" and the "country".

There are several types of open space/recreation resources worthy of protection and enhancement to preserve the image and experience of Saratoga Springs as the "City in the Country". These general types of resources are described in the "Open Space Plan for Saratoga Springs 1994" adopted by the City Council in 1994. These resources include:

- ◆ **Natural Features** such as stream corridors, wetlands, and important habitat.
- ◆ **Rural Viewsheds** of particular value along selected roadways and entranceways to the city.

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- ◆ **Linkages** provide natural corridors for wildlife, accommodate the city's growing trail and recreational system, and promote greater accessibility to existing areas.
- ◆ **Farmland**, while taxed at a rate less than developed property, does not require services, provides visual beauty, and contributes to a balance integral to the City.
- ◆ **Private Recreation Lands** provide essential leisure services, tax revenue and jobs.
- ◆ **Public Recreation Areas** include parklands, trails and open spaces in public ownership primarily put to passive use.

The Country Overlay Area map, Figure 1, is a graphic representation of these resources for comprehensive planning purposes.

The following policies are proposed to maintain, promote and enhance the City's open space and recreation resources without diminishing private owners' property value or resulting in a "taking" without compensation. These policies are intended to be achieved through the techniques discussed in Section 4.3.

- Promote concentrated, compact growth in the "City" while protecting and enhancing the rural quality of and access to the "Country" and maintaining a sharp edge between the two.
- Use open spaces, natural features, institutions, recreational facilities and regional transportation features to form a well-defined edge to the City's urban core.
- Provide linkages (such as trails, bikeways, recreationways, wildlife corridors, greenways) between existing areas of protected open space and natural resources.
- Preserve and protect important open spaces and natural areas including stream corridors, wetlands, agricultural resources and viewsheds of aesthetic value.
- Ensure adequate buffers and encourage unique forms of development for commercial and industrial growth. Enhance rural views along roadways and entranceways to the City.
- Establish creative mechanisms to protect historic properties and key farmland parcels.
- Continue with systematic and timely implementation of the recommendations in the City's adopted Open Space Plan.
- Promote development that contributes to new or existing open spaces.
- Develop adequate and diverse active and passive recreational areas and facilities and encourage their frequent use through appropriate location and design. Such facilities

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should meet the needs of as diverse a range of age groups and interests as possible. The City should concentrate first on facilities for which there is an actual shortage.

- The City should pursue public/private partnerships to meet identified recreational needs, for example, providing access to Saratoga water bodies or working in conjunction with the YMCA.
- The City should establish an on-going dialogue with adjacent communities and the school district on opportunities for intermunicipal recreational programming and facility use.
- The City should establish new recreational areas in under-served areas of the City.

3.4 Housing

The dynamic social and community structure that is so highly valued in Saratoga Springs is a direct product of the diversity in our population. We are fortunate to enjoy a variety of ages, heritages, educational backgrounds, professions, cultural backgrounds and interests. A fundamental building block in attracting and maintaining this diversity of population is the availability of housing options affordable to the full range of city residents. Owing to Saratoga Springs' historical development and strong market demands, the City faces unique housing challenges.

- City housing is nearly equally divided between rental units (46%) and owner-occupied (54%) units. Between 1980 and 1990, the number of rental units rose 22.8% while owner-occupied units rose 6.7% (*source: 1990 Census*).
- More than 50% of the City's housing is over 40 years old (much of it 100+ years old) indicating a continual need for maintenance, repair and reinvestment.
- Recent residential construction trends have changed from the historical development of a densely urbanized core to construction addressing the continuing demand for upscale single-family detached housing. Roughly 94% of all residential units built during the last decade were single family homes in residential subdivisions in the outlying areas of the City with steady increasing construction costs.
- Environmental limitations, existing land development patterns and housing market forces have limited recent development of affordable housing. General land use policies, building codes, utility connections, environmental and historic/design review may present additional, although often necessary, obstacles to the development of affordable housing.
- The combination of substantial seasonal, student and naval populations seeking short-term residences in the City places great pressure upon the availability and price of housing for year-round residents. Tourists and seasonal workers dramatically increase the demand for rental housing in particular.

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- While Saratoga enjoys a vibrant downtown and expanding tourist season, greater than 41% of the City's total households qualify as low and moderate income under federal guidelines (*source: 1990 Census*). In early 2000, a family of 4 would be defined as "moderate income" if their total household annual income was below \$41,050 and defined as "low income" if their total household annual income was below \$25,650.
 - ◆ Housing is considered "affordable" if it costs no more than 30% of one's household income. The 1990 Census showed that the followings specific household types (elderly, renters, low-moderate income) within the City were spending significantly more than 30% of their income on housing 28% of all households spend more than 30% of their income on housing 1% of renters spend more than 30% of their income on housing
 - ◆ 25% of elderly households spend more than 30% of their income on housing
 - ◆ 54% of low and moderate income households spend more than 30% of their income on housing; 24% spend over 50% on housing

Given these unique circumstances, the following policies are proposed to promote and enhance the City's diversity of housing options.

- Encourage a range of residential opportunities available to all residents to promote the social and economic diversity vital to a balanced community.
- Encourage new housing development to reflect the human scale, historical context and design characteristics consistent with traditional Saratoga neighborhoods. Promote the upgrading infill and preservation of existing housing and neighborhoods particularly those areas of predominantly low and moderate income.
- Encourage the development of higher density residential alternatives within the urban core. Promote the conversion and residential use of upper floors in commercial districts.
- Support collaborative efforts to develop additional affordable housing. Reconstruct and rehabilitate existing housing to revitalize neighborhoods, maintain affordability, and reintroduce decent affordable units into the City's housing stock.
- Actively promote affordable housing of all types and tenure throughout the City to avoid over-concentration and to reduce the potential for isolation of income groups.
- Promote greater education and awareness of the need for affordable housing and de-stigmatize "affordable" / "low-moderate income" labeling.

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- Rehabilitate and develop affordable housing via a “whole-site approach” with attention to site location and layout, façade design, pedestrian movement and accessibility, adequate infrastructure provision, and sensitivity to historic preservation.
- Make greater use of City-owned and acquired properties for affordable housing.
- Promote more aggressive enforcement of housing codes and zoning regulations to ensure decent, safe housing units.
- Review of zoning, land use, building codes and development policies to actively encourage affordable housing construction or redevelopment through mechanisms such as:
 - More effective development incentives (density bonuses, relief from building setback and parking requirements, etc.)
 - Higher density rezoning where appropriate
 - Permitting conversion and permanent residential use of accessory buildings such as carriage houses and garages for affordable housing
 - Providing infrastructure subsidies for developments with affordable units
 - Establishing a dedicated fund (e.g. development fees, non-profit PILOT programs, etc.) or land trust for affordable housing development, land acquisition, construction subsidies, etc.
- Promote the implementation of the City’s “Consolidated Plan” to achieve identified community development objectives and increase the availability of safe, affordable housing.
- Maximize participation in Federal and State funding programs for the construction and rehabilitation of affordable rental and homeowner units.
- Encourage construction of senior housing in proximity to needed health and community services.

3.5 Economic Development

Maintaining a healthy balance of economic activities will ensure a sound future, encourage a diverse community, and help our community to avoid making rash decisions based upon immediate financial need. The City’s focus is on appropriate development to improve and contribute to a balanced economy; that is, better and more creative development, not necessarily bigger development.

Clearly the most important policy is to maintain Downtown as the City’s economic center. It is imperative to strengthen our successful, compact and defined commercial and pedestrian center rather than succumb to unbounded geographic expansion of the City’s primary commercial area. Efforts to strengthen and enhance this area through infill development and replacement are

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integral to the overall success of the City and the City has established a “485B” tax incentive program to attract business downtown and a real property relief program for owners who improve historic properties. Furthermore, the current demand to be downtown naturally promotes the increased attention to enhanced construction standards that is desirable throughout the community.

At the same time, there is a significant need for additional, balanced and compatible development to help pay for the amenities and services upon which residents and businesses depend. A balanced approach to encourage development in specific Special Development Areas that is complementary, rather than competitive, with Downtown will strengthen the overall long-term economic stability of the City.

There are other areas of economic potential for the City. Our community’s proximity to the Northway and other transportation links provides the City an advantage in attracting businesses. The City also has the opportunity to further promote tourism related land uses. As discussed in Section 2.2 and Appendix B, hotel, bar and restaurant taxes may provide a significant source of expanded revenue for the City.

In each of these instances, the City’s natural resources and its intrinsic desirability as a destination location play a major role in providing this economic opportunity. Therefore, development to utilize this potential to improve the City’s long-term financial situation must also ensure that these activities are attractive additions to both the community and natural environment.

The following economic development policies have been identified.

- Maintain the downtown as the economic center of the community, including the primary retail and commercial center. Encourage the infill of a well-defined urban core.
- Encourage new development in specifically defined Special Development Areas to complement, rather than duplicate, downtown.
- Maintain a diverse property tax base and accommodate a broad range of land uses while minimizing conflicts.
- Support the viability and growth of the community’s unique institutions (e.g. Skidmore College, Saratoga Hospital, SPAC and the racetracks) and community-based art and cultural programs.
- Encourage a range of job opportunities for residents and promote land uses that encourage long-term fiscal sustainability.
- Develop a forward-looking strategy to accommodate the increasing prevalence of home use activities due to the electronic revolution and changing business/community needs.

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- Support the diverse entertainment amenities of the City. Promote and accommodate increases in visitors activity during fall, winter and spring.
- Encourage industrial, technology and office-based businesses to locate within the City.
- Encourage the creation of business incubator sites and encourage IDA support of downtown redevelopment projects.

4.0 THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

We must recognize that there is no one perfect answer to the many challenges posed by long-term financial trends, our local complexities, and the increasing constraints of conventional use zoning.

If we are to be successful in preparing for the future, we must have increased flexibility to accommodate the rapidly changing needs of business, commerce and our community, and we must have increased accountability to ensure and enhance the physical, cultural and social amenities that make Saratoga Springs such an attractive and vibrant locale.

Fortunately, Saratoga Springs is currently in a good position to capitalize on our collective strengths and enthusiasm at a time when many other communities cannot. We can move beyond a traditionally limiting defensive posture to a positive and creative approach to changing land use and community needs. It is proposed, therefore, that the City harness its current momentum to implement the following recommendations addressing previously identified issues and advance the Plan's overall goals.

The Development Plan show in Figure 2 is a graphic representation of the growth and development policies set forth in this Comprehensive Plan.

The various land use categories shown on the map represent in a general way the intended uses and densities desired or anticipated for the community in the future. There are a number of important points to note about these land use categories:

- ◆ The land use categories in the Development Plan are not zoning districts. The land use categories are broader and more general than zoning districts.
- ◆ The land use categories are just general guides to future zoning or development changes. State law mandates that zoning must be in conformance with the policies of the Comprehensive Plan. This means that the zoning for a particular area must be equal or less than that stated on the Development Plan map of this document. When areas are to be rezoned the uses and densities permitted within the zoning district must be compatible and exceed the ranges presented in the land use category of the Development Plan.

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- ◆ The land use categories reflect a vision for the City in the future. It may take many years for the proposed changes to occur. Because the future is not certain, some of the changes proposed may not occur but it is hoped that many will. The vision is something to aim for and to work toward. Since zoning is the primary tool to implement this plan, the zoning for an area may be changed or upgraded several times in an effort to direct development where and at what time the City wants it to occur.
- ◆ The boundaries for each of the land use categories are intentionally non-precise. The boundaries of the zoning districts are far more specific and detailed. The Development Plan is meant to be more fluid. It provides the overall objectives and policies for a given area without the details.

4.1 “Special Development Areas”

Seven distinct geographic zones are identified as Special Development Areas based upon their present characteristics and their individual need for infill and enhancement, their potential for future development and/or the need for creative solutions to topographic, physical and environmental complexities.

The intent is to provide creative solutions obtaining the positive results of enhanced in-fill construction, more efficient infrastructure, better services, better design and an improved tax base while mitigating any adverse effects of noise, traffic, etc. The seven selected Special Development Areas are:

- Downtown
- Excelsior Ave – inner area
- Excelsior Ave – outer area
- Weibel Ave – northern area
- West Ave – northern area
- West Ave – southern area
- “Northern” South Broadway

Within each Special Development Area, a mixture of uses will be encouraged with the objective of enhancing these areas through improved site design, greater economic activity, and more dynamic social interaction.

Rather than allowing an activity “as of right” based solely on a use definition, activities within the Special Development Areas would undergo a more thorough evaluation through the “special use permit” process. This evaluation will consider the balance between an activity’s positive contribution to its site, the street, neighborhood and City, and the potential effects of such items as traffic, lighting, sound, etc. The City Council may, at its discretion, elect to assume final authority over projects brought before the Planning Board.

Furthermore, descriptive design guidelines and performance standards will be developed with consideration of the unique characteristics of each Special Development Area. These criteria

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will ensure that new development is designed and constructed with greater sensitivity and compatibility with the adjacent man-made and natural environment, and that it is also consistent with the Comprehensive Plan vision for that area.

The intended result is to encourage a dynamic mix of complementary land uses, a more efficient development process, a clarification of desired development and construction practices, and improved compatibility with surroundings.

Establishing this innovative approach to these selected Special Development Areas would:

- ◆ Improve underutilized parcels through appropriate redevelopment or new in-fill/replacement development.
- ◆ Improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of infrastructure and service provision within more concentrated areas.
- ◆ Preserve the City's open space resources by focusing development in selected areas and limiting urban sprawl.
- ◆ Encourage more desirable development by providing incentives for higher design standards.
- ◆ Enhance visual/pedestrian environment, architectural design, building construction, parking, buffering and general site compatibility through more defined and creative urban design.
- ◆ Improve the City's flexibility in contending with emerging complex land use activities.
- ◆ Encourage "revenue positive" development and increase the City's "jobs to housing ratio" to enhance revenue opportunities and minimize negative impacts on the school district. Applicants for large scale residential projects should provide information about the requirements of the proposed development projects for public services (schools, police, fire, roads, etc.) and about anticipated tax revenues from the project.
- ◆ Improve long-term financial stability through a broader, more highly-valued tax base.
- ◆ Reduce the growing number of Zoning Board of Appeals applications and Planned Unit Development proposals that require Council approval.
- ◆ Provide additional latitude for more creative development options by giving the Planning Board with greater flexibility through the "special use permit" process to reject or modify projects that are not consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, design standards and guidelines and specific criteria for each Special Development Area.

4.2 Identification of Specific Special Development Areas

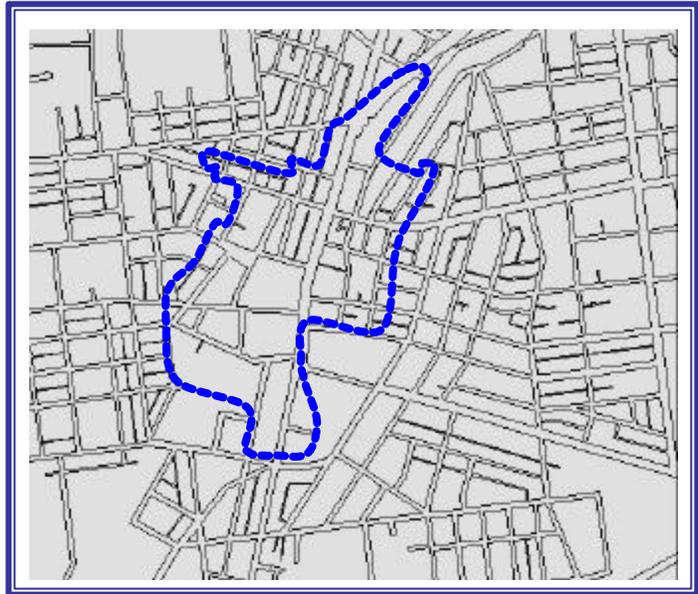
Special Development Area

Downtown

Location

Generally the existing “Central Business District”, this area represents the City’s primary retail and service area.

Current Characteristics



Saratoga Springs’ Downtown has a very special quality that many believe is the key to the City. In addition to its prominent role as the City’s social, commercial and retail center, it also represents a significant portion of the City’s taxable assessed value. Given its inherent importance, its success may also be attributed to its broad-based community support system. As illustrated by the 1998 report by the Downtown Comprehensive Plan Committee, “many divergent constituencies act in a singularly unified voice when it comes to protecting and promoting Downtown.”

A virtual prototype of the flexibility and standards envisioned within these Special Development Areas, this combination of mixed land uses working in concert with strong design guidelines contributes to the vitality of this destination location. The downtown area should be both strengthened and kept compact in order to maintain the necessary critical mass of business.

While the bulk of this area is generally constructed, there exists substantial land area and vertical space for significant in-fill-, replacement, redevelopment and vertical expansion within the Downtown core. The construction of the Phila Street parking deck addresses some parking issues, but further steps are required in the near future. Other necessary infrastructure is present, although aging and in need of improvement in some areas. The truck by-pass study recommendations may help alleviate and/or divert truck traffic from downtown.

Comprehensive Plan Vision

To preserve, protect and enhance the image and vitality of downtown by encouraging mixed-use in-fill development with strong pedestrian elements in a compact and concentrated form. To enhance the balance and diversity of activity through a combination of national and incubator retail establishments, high density residential opportunities and commercial services.

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Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

1. Maintain and enhance primary retail/service area with a diversity of mixed commercial, office and high-density residential land uses.
2. Require some of the current “advisory” development guidelines in the adopted “Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines”, developed by the Saratoga Springs Design Review Commission, to be mandated through incorporation into the zoning ordinance. Guidelines should encourage the maintenance and creation of public open space within general site development in the Downtown Special Development Area.
3. Require new development to meet minimum density (height, bulk, etc.) requirements to sustain and re-capture historic Downtown densities, and to complement adjacent structures. Promote use of first floor space for retail/office and promote upper floors for office/residential use.
4. Continue to improve and / or add parking areas and structures in convenient locations and integrate such new facilities with nearby land uses.
5. Recognize the range of architectural diversity that makes Downtown unique and vital. The range of Downtown architecture is much more broad than solely Victorian.
6. Support pedestrian and destination emphasis with enhanced pedestrian circulation to, and within, Downtown.
7. The City shall provide assistance and guidance to applicants through development approval process.
8. The City shall conduct a lot-level analysis of land ownership, use and occupancy to identify available areas for infill, improvement and expansion and the subsequent analysis of community and consumer needs to promote marketing of available areas.
9. Conduct analysis and evaluation of overlapping regulatory areas for consolidation opportunities.
10. Encourage public, private and non-profit creative development strategies designed to continue the success of Downtown.

Special Development Area

**Excelsior Ave
- inner area -**

Location

The inner extent of Excelsior Ave south of the Route 50 arterial from the former Van Raalte mill to the brewery and Quality Hardware.



Current Characteristics

Historically, a railroad/industrial avenue of the City, this area contains prominent structures including the the Van Raalte knitting mill and the Niagara Mohawk facility.

This area contains a combination of separate land use zones including mixed business and light industry; highway/general and tourist-related business; and 1/7-1/4 acre residential zoning. Topographic constraints limit development in certain parts of this area.

Comprehensive Plan Vision

Given the diversity of topography, current land uses and lot sizes, this area is targeted as an Special Development Area to encourage a more efficient and useful development pattern transitioning from the high density mixed use Downtown core to the more residential surrounding areas.

A premise of this Plan is that this area represents an opportunity to create development complementing downtown, including a neighborhood center in the vicinity of East Avenue and Excelsior Avenue. The intent is to maximize the economic and development potential of this area adjacent to the city core, encourage improvement in certain areas through infill/replacement and redevelopment, protect and enhance the City's entranceway along NYS Route 50, and promote a mixture of uses compatible with surrounding residential neighborhoods. Development along the Route 50 arterial shall not be allowed a curb cut or a break in access onto or off of the arterial.

Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

1. Establish a higher to medium density transition Special Development Area through a diversity of mixed commercial, retail, office, light industrial, high tech manufacturing, and residential land uses.

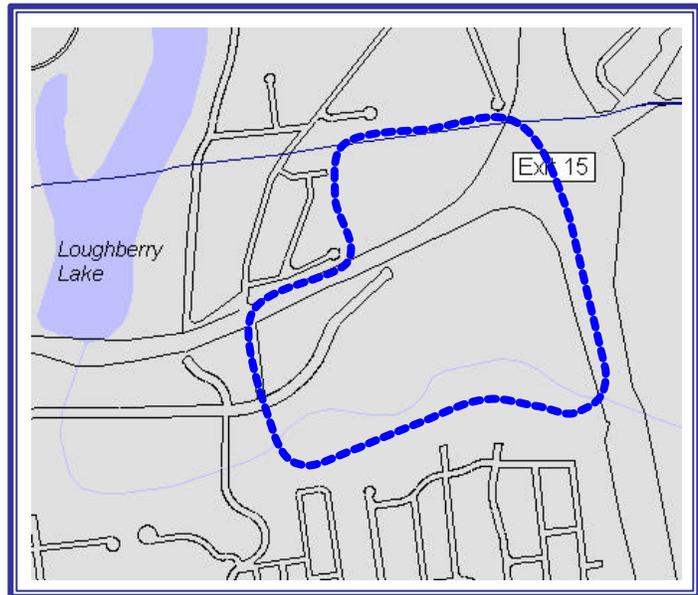
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2. Establish strong design standards to ensure that flexibility in allowable uses is balanced with improved compatibility with surroundings.
3. Create a more vibrant neighborhood atmosphere with new development created in walkable blocks.
4. Encourage construction of multi-story buildings with main entrances fronting on primary and secondary streets. Promote construction to establish enhanced connection with neighborhood.
5. Building height, construction, mass and scale to transition from Downtown core to surrounding areas.
6. Promote use of first floor space for retail/office use; upper floors for office/residential use. Encourage the creation of business incubator sites.
7. Require new parking areas to be located behind building, or within the interior of a block sufficiently buffered from street. Large pavement areas to be divided by planted islands. Encourage on-street parking.
8. Advance pedestrian/bicycle emphasis with enhanced pedestrian/bicycle circulation to Downtown. Completion of the proposed Spring Run Trail and the proposed Route 50 improvements should be strongly promoted.
9. Conduct a lot-level analysis of land ownership and occupancy to identify available areas for infill, improvement and expansion. Conduct subsequent analysis of community/consumer needs to promote marketing of available areas.
10. Investigate solutions to correct drainage problems in this area.

Special Development Area
Excelsior Ave
- outer area -

Location

The outer portion of the Excelsior Ave area from Veteran's Way to the Northway and Exit 15, including the north side of Route 50 and the Spring Run area.



Current Characteristics

Currently zoned for light industry, this area contains distribution facilities (Fed Ex, Ryder) and Tarrant Manufacturing as well as the proposed Spring Run trail. Municipal water is available; soils have generally good drainage with sanitary sewer service at Veteran's Way.

Comprehensive Plan Vision

This Special Development Area was designated in 1999 after a major controversy over a proposed retail development for the site, and with consideration of its current zoning, proximity to the Northway, and its impact upon a primary entranceway to the City.

The intent is to allow for reasoned and compatible expansion of existing businesses, and to allow flexibility in development options within this desirable area while protecting and enhancing the City's entranceway along NYS Route 50 and surrounding neighborhoods. Facilities are envisioned with an orientation towards internal circulation significantly buffered from their surroundings. Development either north or south of the Route 50 arterial shall not be allowed a curb cut or a break in access onto or off of the arterial.

Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

1. Establish a Special Development Area allowing a mixture of land uses including mixed residential, office, light industry, high tech manufacturing, institutional, service and distribution. General retail uses are excluded with the exception that ancillary retail uses may be allowed only when directly related to primary permitted uses.
2. Ensure that flexibility in allowable uses is balanced with significant buffering and improved compatibility with surroundings.

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3. Encourage construction of buildings with a low visual profile, oriented to facilitate internal circulation. Building height, construction mass and scale to be compatible with surrounding areas. Extensive buffering should be employed.
4. Require buildings to be significantly buffered from Route 50 and the Northway. Facilities are envisioned with an orientation towards pedestrian and motorist convenience. Parking areas shall be sufficiently buffered from street. Large pavement areas to be divided by planted islands. On-street parking is encouraged.
5. Advance pedestrian/bicycle emphasis with enhanced pedestrian/bicycle circulation to Downtown. Completion of the proposed Spring Run Trail and the proposed Route 50 improvements should be strongly promoted.

Special Development Area

Weibel Ave

- northern area -

Location

The upper portion of Weibel Ave area east of Exit 15, including the municipal and institutional lands, south to the former railroad right of way.

Current Characteristics

Currently the site of a planned unit development (PUD) and rural residential zoning, this area contains a large shopping plaza, an indoor recreation center and a variety of vacant land parcels. The approved PUD includes plans for a hotel or offices. Athletic fields at the PBA site are currently under construction. Immediately, to the east of this area, low density residential and open lands predominate.

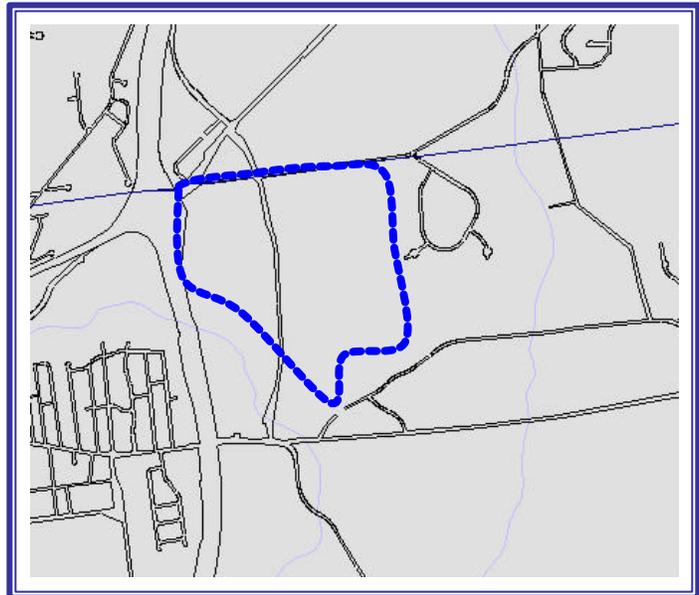
Comprehensive Plan Vision

The premise of this Plan is that this area provides an opportunity for mixed residential and commercial development with limited access and internal circulation.

Given its proximity to Exit 15 and commercial development pressures and opportunities, the intent of this Special Development Area is to encourage the consolidation of land to maximize the area's economic and development potential to broaden the City's tax base. Facilities are envisioned with an orientation towards pedestrian and motorist convenience with significant buffering with surroundings. Specifically, development along the eastern side of this Special Development Area shall transition to medium / low density residential, and include substantial vegetated buffers to protect the character of existing residential neighborhoods to the east.

Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

1. Establish a Special Development Area allowing a mixture of land uses including residential, commercial service facilities. Development in this area should generally be oriented around an internal grid-style road network. Parking should be oriented to facilitate pedestrian activity, convenience and circulation.
2. Ensure that allowable uses are compatible with surroundings.



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3. Encourage consolidation of individual land parcels to maximize development opportunities.
4. Encourage building orientation to facilitate internal pedestrian and automobile circulation. Building height, construction mass and scale to be compatible with surrounding areas.
5. Parking areas shall be sufficiently buffered from street. Large pavement areas are to be avoided. On-street parking on internal roads is encouraged.
6. Provide pedestrian/bicycle access from Lake Avenue to existing and planned future recreational uses. Promote linkages to Spring Run and Bog Meadow Trails.
7. Improve the appearance of city owned land and the Weibel Avenue right-of-way. Develop a master plan for city lands in this area.

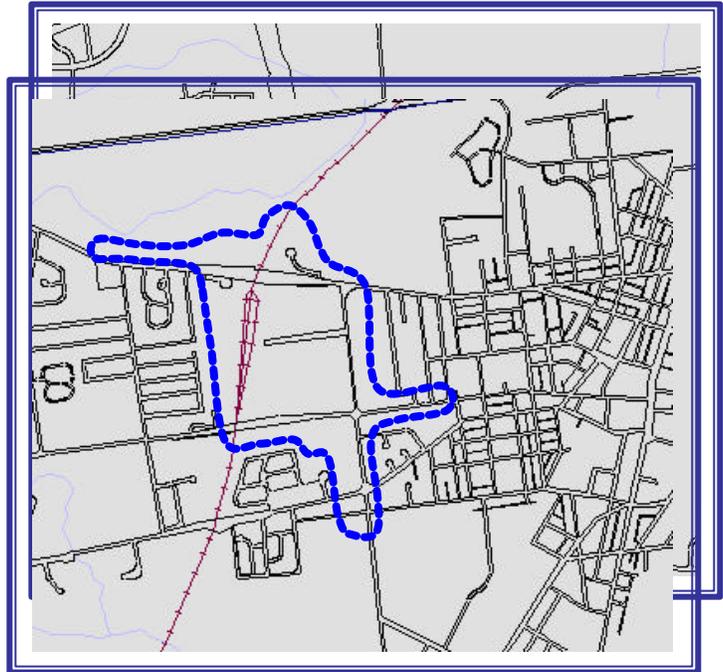
Special Development Area

West Ave

- northern area -

Location

West Ave runs north and south stretching from just north of Church Street to south of West Circular Street. This area extends west to include the railroad station and areas along Washington and Church Streets, and east along Washington Street.



Current Characteristics

This generally commercial area currently is zoned for highway, office/medical, warehousing and general business uses. This area also contains many retail and professional establishments and is adjacent to several residential neighborhoods.

Comprehensive Plan Vision

The Plan's premise for this area is that it is appropriate for secondary commercial development complementary to downtown.

The "West Avenue Concept Development Plan & Site Design Guidelines" prepared by the Saratoga Springs Planning Board describes the vision for this area as a neighborhood service and shopping area mixed with medium and high density residential (especially above ground floor commercial and service uses), reflecting a form of the "traditional neighborhood" with greater pedestrian use of the street. This emphasis on neighborhood services and enhanced pedestrian circulation and is also reflected in the West Side Neighborhood Association's "West Side Master Plan and Action Plan".

Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

1. Establish a Special Development Area encouraging a diversity of neighborhood-oriented commercial/retail uses mixed with medium to high density residential land uses (especially above ground floor commercial and service uses), and warehousing along the railroad tracks.
2. Establish strong design guidelines and performance standards to ensure that flexibility in allowable uses is balanced with improved compatibility with surroundings.

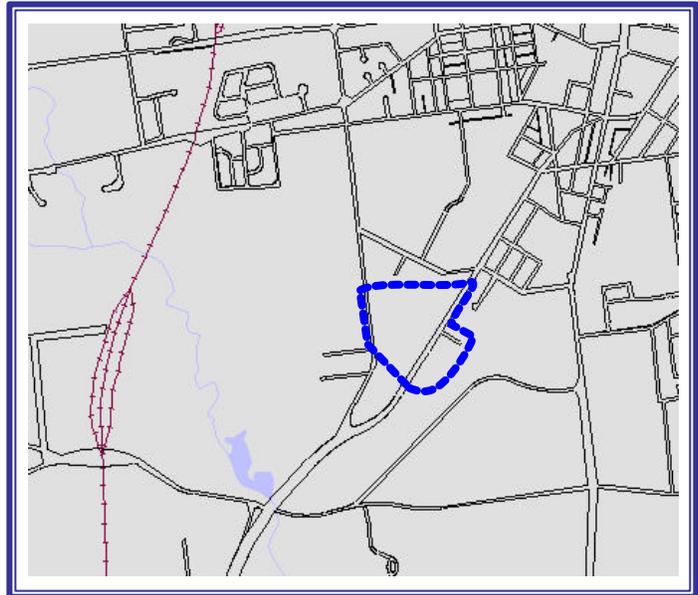
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3. Encourage the creation of business incubator sites.
4. Create a more vibrant neighborhood atmosphere with new development created in walkable blocks.
5. Encourage construction of multi-story buildings (residential uses above commercial on main streets) with main entrances fronting on streets. Require buildings to be close to the edge of the road and prohibit large parking expanses in front of buildings.
6. Building height, construction, mass and scale to complement adjacent structures. Diminish side setback requirements to promote a continuous edge of structures along street.
7. Buffer commercial and warehousing activities from neighboring residential areas by screening with fences, berms and trees at rear of lots.
8. Promote shared driveways and use of rear alleys to minimize congestion along West Ave and reduce the number of congestion-creating curb cuts.
9. Require new parking areas to be located behind building, or within the interior of a block sufficiently buffered from street. Large pavement areas are to be avoided. Encourage on-street parking.
10. Advance pedestrian/bicycle emphasis with enhanced pedestrian circulation within Special Development Area and improved access to Downtown.
11. Participate in master planning for the train station to achieve integration with transportation facilities in the rest of the City.

Special Development Area
West Ave
- southern area -

Location

The land to the east of lower West Ave approximately between the juncture with Route 50 in the south and Congress Ave to the north.



Current Characteristics

This Special Development Area borders on the school, contains some housing and additional open land, and extends to Ballston Ave behind the current Espey industrial area. The area is between two important open space resources -- the northwest corner of the Saratoga Spa State Park on the east and south, and the Pitney Farm on the west.

Comprehensive Plan Vision

The Plan's premise for this area is that it provides a unique opportunity for creative land uses developed in an integrated fashion.

This Special Development Area is envisioned as an extension of a the higher density urban fringe. Mixed institutional, light industrial, high-density residential and recreational land uses would be encouraged to be compatible with the surrounding areas. If possible, the area should be developed as a whole.

Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

1. Establish a Special Development Area encouraging a diversity of high-density residential, recreation, light industrial and institutional land uses. Creative options compatible with surroundings are to be encouraged.
2. Establish strong design guidelines and performance standards for this Special Development Area to ensure that flexibility in allowable uses is balanced with improved compatibility specifically within the unique characteristics of this Special Development Area.

Extend the adjacent higher density neighborhood atmosphere with new development created in walkable blocks. Encourage construction of multi-story buildings with main entrances fronting on streets

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3. Building height, construction, mass and scale to complement adjacent structures.
4. Diminish side setback requirements to promote a continuous edge of structures along street, and mandate a maximum front yard setback (or “build-to” line) that is close to the street. Buffer commercial activities from neighboring residential areas by screening with fences, berms and trees at rear of lots.
5. Promote shared driveways to minimize congestion along West Ave and reduce the number of congestion-creating curb cuts.

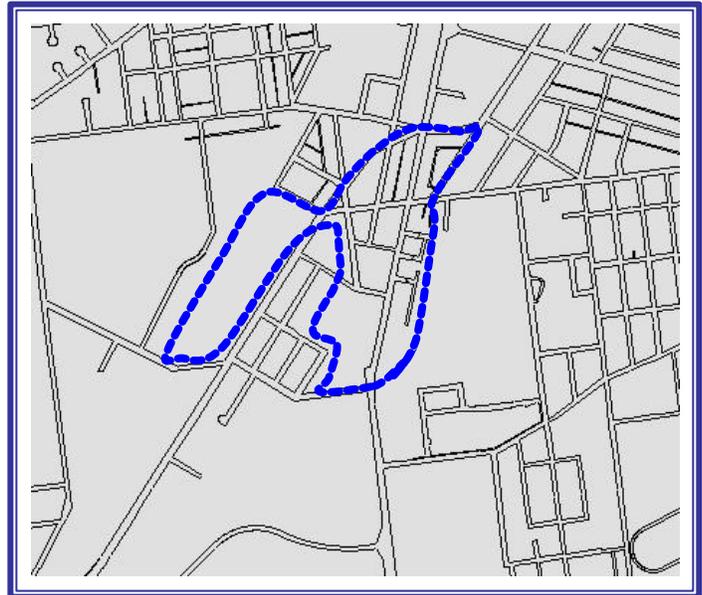
Require new parking areas to be located behind building, or within the interior of a block sufficiently buffered from street. Large pavement areas to be divided by planted islands. Encourage on-street parking.

Enhance pedestrian access and circulation within the Special Development Area and improved access to Downtown. Promote opportunities to link the Railroad Run Trail with the Saratoga Spa State Park, and to create linkages to the High School Campus.

Special Development Area
**“Northern”
South Broadway**

Location

The upper portion of South Broadway from Circular to Fenlon Streets including adjacent portions of Ballston Ave.



Current Characteristics

This area contains a combination of separate land use zones including urban residential and mixed general/highway and tourist-related business including a preponderance of auto-related facilities.

Comprehensive Plan Vision

The Plan's premise for this area is that it is a transitional area which should be complementary to downtown. Significant transportation and pedestrian improvements are planned in future. This area is targeted as a Special Development Area to encourage a more efficient and attractive development pattern transitioning from the higher density Downtown core along the City's entranceway to the lower density areas to the south.

The intent is to maximize the economic and development potential of this area adjacent to the city core, enhance a major entranceway into the City, and promote a mixture of uses compatible with surrounding residential neighborhoods.

Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

1. Establish a mixed use Special Development Area allowing a diversity of commercial and residential uses including hotels. Promote commercial uses including retail and offices along South Broadway with residential opportunities along the further eastern and western edges of the primarily commercial corridor. Along commercial corridor, promote use of 1st floor space for commercial use; upper floors for office/residential use. Prohibit auto-related sales and service land uses.
2. Establish strong design guidelines and performance standards to ensure that flexibility in allowable uses is balanced with improved compatibility with surroundings, and to enhance the entranceway to the downtown core area.

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3. Create a more vibrant neighborhood atmosphere with new development created in walkable blocks.
4. Building height, construction, mass and scale to transition from Downtown core to surrounding areas. Diminish side setback requirements to promote a continuous edge of structures along street. Establish a consistent "build-to" line close to the sidewalk. Require new buildings to have an appearance of two stories.
5. Buffer commercial activities from neighboring residential areas by screening with fences, berms and trees at rear of lots.
6. Promote shared driveways to minimize congestion and reduce the number of congestion-creating curb cuts.
7. Require new parking areas to be located behind building, or within the interior of a block sufficiently buffered from street. Large pavement areas are to be avoided. Encourage on-street parking.
8. Enhance pedestrian circulation within Special Development Area and improve access to Downtown.
9. Conduct a lot-level analysis of land ownership and occupancy to identify available areas for infill, improvement and expansion. Conduct subsequent analysis of community/consumer needs to promote marketing of available areas.
10. Encourage the creation of business incubator sites.
11. Beautify the South Broadway corridor with attractive street furniture and tree plantings particularly as buffering between pedestrians and street.
12. Encourage the development of pedestrian/bicycle linkages to the existing State Park system to the south.

4.3 Establishment of “Country Overlay Area”

Because the balance between the “city” and the “country” is fundamental to the general health, welfare and economic viability of the community, this plan sets out to define and enhance the “country” within the City's jurisdiction. Since the development of the towns surrounding Saratoga Springs is indeed beyond the city's control, the city must take proactive measures to preserve the greenbelt surrounding the urban core.

The state of open space in the city has changed dramatically during the last decade, with new development threatening to blur the distinction between the “City” and the “Country”. Several farms have ceased operations, and numerous parcels have been subdivided for suburban residential developments. Major entranceways to the city have experienced commercial and retail growth. Recent prolonged controversies regarding development proposals at key city gateways speak to the need for comprehensive planning in the “greenbelt”.

The map of the Country Overlay Area illustrates the open spaces that remain and that are important to be considered in the preservation of city character. In a general way, the Country Overlay Area depicts a nearly contiguous “greenbelt” around the urban core which defines and shapes the “Country” in the “City in the Country” vision of this comprehensive plan. The map illustrates the diverse open space resources that collectively convey a sense of the traditional settlement pattern – a dense urban core with a distinct edge surrounded by open lands – that characterizes the historic settlement pattern of Saratoga Springs.

The Country Overlay Area includes:

- Private recreational lands and institutional open space resources such as the Saratoga National Golf Course, Yaddo, and the racetracks.
- Public recreational lands including the Saratoga Spa State Park.
- Designated wetlands and stream corridors
- Rural and scenic viewsheds including Exit 14, Union Avenue, Route 9P to Saratoga Lake, Adams Road, Locust Grove Road, Geyser Road near Route 50, Route 9 south, Lake Avenue, Ballston Avenue, Route 50 north to Exit 15.
- Linkages to provide natural corridors for wildlife, to accommodate the city's growing trail and recreational system, and to promote greater accessibility to existing areas.
- Farm land, including lower West Avenue, outer Lake Avenue, and the northwest agricultural area of the city.

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Within the Country Overlay Area, the enhancement of natural resources and the open space values present on a site, along with development tools to effect this enhancement, should be added as items to be considered by the Boards when evaluating development proposals. This evaluation will consider the balance between an activity's positive contributions to the city and the potential negative effects on natural resources and open space character.

Establishing this innovative approach to the Country Overlay Area will:

- Improve the City's open space resources by encouraging development in the other Special Development Areas and limiting suburban sprawl.
- Clarify the City's wants and expectations for the preservation of open space character, make the approval process more efficient and clear, and encourage general community interest and participation in the planning process early rather than confront later reaction to development proposals inconsistent with the "City in the Country" vision.
- Improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of infrastructure and service provision in the outer district by limiting suburban sprawl.

The intent of this section is not to prohibit or permit any land use activity but instead is to reaffirm that open space values be taken into consideration in development proposals within the Country Overlay Area or in adopting any zoning amendments for areas included in the Country Overlay Area.

4.4 Conservation Development District (CDD)

In order to achieve a balance between well designed residential development, meaningful open space conservation, and natural resource protection, most but not all of the land within the Country Overlay Area has been designated as a Conservation Development District. The boundaries of this district are indicated on the Development Plan map. It is the intent of this Plan that, with rare exception, uses in the Conservation Development District will be limited to residential, recreational and other open space uses, with the understanding that there is land adjoining this district where "village" retail uses might be developed.

Within the Conservation Development District, residential development will correspond to the following provisions:

- Base density: 0.5 dwelling units / acre of unconstrained land (equivalent to 1 home per two acres of land).

Note - unconstrained lands are areas of the site that do not contain lands with severe constraints to development such as: wetlands, very steep slopes, stream corridors, floodplains, etc.

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- ❑ Minimum lot size: Could be quite small -- perhaps 5,000 SF with sewer and water. Also, significantly more flexibility in lot area and bulk requirements.
- ❑ Conservation subdivision design required (mandatory clustering)
In subdivisions served by public sewer, a minimum of 50% of the unconstrained land, and all of the severely constrained land, will remain permanently protected open space (under conservation easement). In subdivisions that must utilize individual septic systems, a minimum of 25% of the unconstrained land, and all of the severely constrained land, will remain permanently protected open space (under conservation easement). Under extraordinary site-specific circumstances, the Planning Board may allow a conventional subdivision (special permit or waiver process to be developed as part of zoning and subdivision amendments) in place of a conservation subdivision.
- ❑ Incentive Zoning Option for Public Benefits - density bonuses (up to a maximum increase of 20% in the number of permitted units) for the donation by the developer of significant public benefits such as: public access to open lands (note - permanently protected lands do not automatically allow public access), development of trails or public parks, "affordable" housing units, etc.

The conservation subdivision 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 (to be defined in the subdivision regulations). The maximum number of housing units would then be based on the number of acres remaining and the maximum allowable density in the Conservation Development District (0.5 du/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.)¹. These open space resources will be designated as the conservation lands of the new subdivision. At least the minimum percentage of unconstrained land outlined above (50% for subdivisions with public sewer and 25% for subdivisions with individual septic systems), plus all of the severely constrained land subtracted out earlier, shall be set aside as permanently protected open land. A conservation easement will be used to ensure that this land remains undeveloped.

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. 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.

¹ Note: An update of the city's adopted Open Space Plan is currently being prepared. The update will include a detailed map of "Lands of Conservation Interest." This map will guide the Planning Board, the applicant, and the public in understanding the open space resources present on individual sites. This information will form the basis for designating conservation lands for new subdivisions in the Conservation Development District.

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There are several advantages to the approach outlined for the Conservation Development District. They include:

- ❑ Open space conservation and natural resource protection guide the subdivision design process. Because the area and bulk regulations used for conventional subdivisions are not applicable, the design process is creative and not driven strictly by arbitrary minimum lot size requirements
- ❑ Significant networks of open land are created through the development process – the value of homes within these subdivisions are enhanced as are the value of the surrounding neighborhoods, and the quality of life of all city residents is improved
- ❑ Developers can provide homes on a variety of lot sizes in response to market demand. This allows for a more diversified housing stock to meet the needs of our changing society. In addition, the density bonus incentive can lead to the provision of more affordable housing options in this part of the city.

It is recommended that the City amend its zoning and subdivision regulations to reflect the provisions outlined for the Conservation Development District.

Additional Open Space Conservation Tools for consideration by the city are discussed in Appendix D.

4.5 Low Density Residential (LDR) District

In order to achieve a balance between well designed residential development, meaningful open space conservation and natural resource protection, additional areas of the city have been designated as a Low Density Residential (LDR) District. The boundaries of this district are indicated on the Development Plan map.

Within the Low Density Residential (LDR) District, residential development will correspond to all of the provisions outlined for the Conservation Development District (CDD) in section 4.4 above, except:

- ❑ Base density: In the LDR, the maximum density shall be 1.0 dwelling unit / acre of unconstrained land (equivalent to 1 home per one acre of land).

Note – unconstrained lands are areas of the site that do not contain lands with severe constraints to development such as wetlands, very steep slopes, stream corridors, floodplains, etc.

It is recommended the city amend its zoning and subdivision regulations to reflect the provisions outlined for the Low Density Residential (LDR) District.

4.6 Additional Areas of Special Concern

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A. Existing Commercial Gateways on southern sections of Route 9 and Route 50:

New development design standards should be developed for all existing commercial areas that line the City's important entrance highways. This includes the areas designated COMM-2, COMM-3, and COMM-5 along southern sections of Route 9 and Route 50. The goal for these areas is not to foster a more intense or dense land use development, but rather to improve the physical appearance and attractiveness of commercial uses. It is recommended that the city:

1. Establish specific and detailed design guidelines and performance standards for architectural and site design quality, signage and lighting.
2. Require that existing vegetation along these State highways be retained as a natural buffer to the maximum degree possible, and require that new vegetation be planted to soften the visual character of development in these corridors.
3. Promote shared driveways to minimize congestion and reduce the number of congestion-creating curb cuts.
4. Require new parking areas to be located behind buildings. Large pavement areas are to be avoided.
5. Enhance pedestrian circulation and improve pedestrian/bicycle connections to nearby residential areas and to the Spa State Park.

Other Gateways:

The City should also develop design guidelines that would guide or control development along all the gateways to the community. These guidelines should contain recommendations on where curb cuts should be allowed, where natural vegetative buffers should be retained, and where structures should be sited on specific sensitive parcels.

B. Marion Avenue (Route 9):

To reduce the adverse impacts of the high volume of traffic on existing residential neighborhoods on Marion Avenue between Route 50 and the Greenfield Town line the City should work with the NYS Department of Transportation to implement some traffic calming techniques. Some possible physical improvements along the corridor might include narrowing the pavement, additional tree planting and the installation of sidewalks.

C. IND-2, Light Industrial District

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Due to the proximity of the IND-1 (General Industrial) area on the northwest corner of Washington Street (NYS Route 29) and Brook Road to residential neighborhoods to the east and south, development in the IND-2 (Light Industrial) area shall be required to retain, and perhaps enhance, significant vegetated buffers on the eastern and southern boundaries of this land use area. In addition, a curb-cut onto Washington Street (NYS Route 29) from the IND-2 shall not be permitted.

D. Stream Corridors

Due to the increasing importance of protecting water quality in the Saratoga Lake and Loughberry Lake watersheds, the city should strengthen provisions for minimizing the impact of development on our water resources. To accomplish this, it is recommended that stream corridor overlay zones be established to:

1. Limit all development within a certain distance from the stream. Currently the city has a 50-foot “no development” buffer. The city should consider increasing this buffer. Neighboring communities such as Wilton and Milton have already adopted, or are considering more substantial 100 foot “no development” buffers.
2. Limit soil disturbance activities and require a substantial vegetated buffer (no cutting) within a certain distance from the stream. The city’s adopted Open Space Plan recommends a 75 foot vegetated buffer.

4.7 Other Non-Special Development Area Land Use Recommendations

No comprehensive plan can anticipate all of the site specific conditions that may apply to every individual parcel or area. Individual areas should therefore be subject to continuing review as conditions warrant, amending the Plan and zoning ordinance as necessary.

5.0 PROCEDURAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to encourage development that looks to the long-term sustainability of the City, the regulatory and project review process should be clear and streamlined. This will help encourage investment in the City by reducing time delays and extraordinary costs to both the project sponsors and the City. These creative solutions will help address some of the issues identified earlier in the plan.

5.1 Enforce Existing Land Use Regulations

The City should improve its ability to enforce existing zoning and other land use regulations. Enforcement should be consistent, equitable and swift. The City needs to maintain adequate procedures and provide appropriate staffing to ensure effective enforcement.

5.2 Create Clear Design Examples and Development Standards

The refinement and development of clear mandated design standards for each of the Special Development Areas and other areas of the community will provide applicants with specific direction as to the form of development desired. Projects that propose designs incorporating the guideline ideals will have a greatly expedited review process.

Particularly needed are improved standards for the historic and architectural districts. New development guidelines and recommendations for reviewing development proposals in the “Country Overlay Area” are another key priority.

5.3 Enhance Development Review and Approval Informational Materials

The City needs to provide applicants with an easily understood guide booklet to its review processes, including submittal requirements and time frames for each step. Similarly, application and informational materials should be streamlined and simplified.

5.4 Illustrate Zoning Standards Graphically

The greater use of design examples and guideline graphics will help the public and applicants visualize the form and appearance of desired development. Conversion of the use and area schedules to a chart format will assist everyone in understanding what is allowed and where.

5.5 Provide Adequate Staffing for Processing Development Proposals

With development proposals increasingly complex and time consuming, it is recommended that the City provide the necessary staffing levels to assure timely reviews of development proposals and building permits. The City should use creative and flexible procedures to deal with the seasonal fluctuations in the review process. All applications should have equal access to the review process.

5.6 Inventory and Analysis

The City should conduct and maintain an inventory and analysis of existing land uses, market and community needs, and the creation of more user-friendly informational materials.

5.7 Quarterly Review Meetings

The City Boards and officials involved in the development review process (e.g. the planning board, the zoning board of appeals, the design review commission City Council members and department supervisors) should continue to meet on a quarterly basis to share ideas, concerns, schedules, etc.

5.8 Appoint Alternate Board Members

The appointment of two alternate planning, design review and zoning board members will ensure that full boards are present to make decisions when board members are absent or have to step down for conflict reasons.

5.9 Initiate Earlier Development Review by City Departments

To expedite the development process and encourage better coordination within the often complex framework of the commission form of government, this Plan recommends establishing and maintaining specific timeframes for City department review. City Departments should respond to developer inquiries early in the application process. Efforts to develop and coordinate development policies among departments should be encouraged.

5.10 Limit the Use of Planned Unit Districts (PUD)

PUDs should be discouraged in most areas of the City. This will serve to further reinforce the role of the Special Development Areas and the Conservation Development District as the preferred channel for growth and will help remove many political considerations from planning actions.

5.11 Review Paper Streets

The City has a number of “paper streets” (unconstructed streets appearing on the City’s official map) on which individual lots have been subdivided and sold. The existence of paper streets tends to greatly complicate the development of areas in which they are located. This Plan recommends the City undertake a study of the best way to manage and develop areas with paper streets.

5.12 Implement Creative Design Provisions

The City's zoning ordinance should specifically allow and encourage creative design provisions, including traditional neighborhood development, clustering and buffering with limited incentive provisions.

5.13 Encourage Governmental Compliance

The City and other levels of government (State, County, School District, etc.) are generally exempt from local zoning regulations if their activities involve an exercise of their governmental function. However, the City should encourage its own actions, and those of other governments operating within the City, to voluntarily comply with the development policies of this Plan. The City's development boards should, if requested, be prepared to facilitate projects for other governmental entities with prompt and constructive advisory opinions.

6.0 IMPLEMENTATION

This section lists a series of recommendations for the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. Some of these recommendations require immediate implementation while others will be accomplished over a longer period. Although it would be preferable to implement all of the recommendations as soon as possible, there is a limited pool of resources on which to draw that will allow the immediate implementation of action items. Recognizing this situation, the City must focus on an implementation strategy that will allow the most efficient implementation of the recommendations.

The action items range from formulating and implementing regulations that are necessary to shape the development and preserve neighborhoods to completing infrastructure improvements that are necessary to accommodate future growth.

Immediate Actions

(To be initiated immediately following adoption of the amendments to this plan)

1. Amend the city's land use regulations to be consistent with the recommendations in this plan. Primary elements of these amendments should include:
 - Rewrite goals in zoning ordinance to be consistent with those in the Comprehensive Plan
 - Create a Conservation Development Zoning District consistent with the provisions outlined in this plan (see section 4.4).
 - Create a Low Density Residential Zoning District, or modify existing zoning districts, to be consistent with the provisions outlined in this plan (see section 4.5)
 - Complete other map and text amendments consistent with this plan

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- Review and strengthen existing illustrated design guidelines and performance standards for all seven Special Development Areas – in certain SDA's (such as downtown) convert all or most “guidelines” to standards
- Prepare design guidelines for infill residential development
- Prepare design guidelines for the existing commercial gateways on southern sections of Route 9 and Route 50 (see section 4.6A) and for other city gateways as well.
- Create a Stream Corridor Overlay Zone as described in section 4.6D
- Mandate underground utilities for all new, redeveloped or renovated buildings
- Review the boundaries of the Historic and Architectural Review Districts for possible expansion along such areas as Nelson Avenue and Woodlawn Avenue.
- Incorporate recommendations to encourage affordable housing consistent with this plan:
 - Development incentives (density bonuses, relief from building setbacks, etc.)
 - Higher density rezoning where appropriate and consistent with this plan
 - Permitting conversion and permanent residential use of accessory buildings such as carriage houses or garages
 - Providing infrastructure subsidies for developments with affordable units
 - Establishing a dedicated fund (e.g., development fees, non-profit PILOT programs, etc.) or land trust for affordable housing development, land acquisition, construction subsidies, etc.
- Re-structure zoning ordinance to make it more user friendly.
- Prepare guide booklet for the City's development review process.
- Develop fiscal impact analysis forms for large scale residential projects.

Strategy – This immediate action should be initiated by the City Council. The council should identify funding to retain the services of a professional planning consultant to assist the city planning department in this critically important implementation activity. In addition to planning and zoning expertise, the selected consultant should have design capabilities appropriate for the creation of new, and strengthening of existing, design guidelines as described above.

2. Prepare and adopt an update to the Open Space Plan (in process)

- Identify all natural resources, agricultural lands, archeological resources, recreational lands, waterways, scenic roads and viewsheds, and potential trail linkages and water access. (Complete)
- Create a map of “Lands of Conservation Interest”. This map should include all known constrained (for development) lands within the city.
- Recommend financing mechanisms for permanent open space resource protection
- Develop other non-regulatory incentive based approaches/options

Strategy – This immediate action has already been initiated by the Saratoga Springs Open Space Project with support from the City Council. It is anticipated that the updated plan will be completed by the summer of 2001. The City Council should review and adopt an updated Open Space Plan.

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3. Prepare master plan for area Gilbert Road/Weibel Avenue intersection Area

A consultant should be retained to assist the City with the preparation of land use plan for the area near the intersection of Gilbert Road and Weibel Avenue. The plan should be developed with significant public participation. It should address design standards, traffic calming actions, road realignment and mixed land uses.

Short-Term Actions Items

(To be initiated within one year of adoption of this plan)

1. Neighborhood Focused Master Plans

Particular neighborhoods within the city's inner district should be the focus of detailed Neighborhood Master Plans. Examples include Dublin Square, the south-side, the northwest neighborhood, Marion Avenue (north of the Route 50 arterial), etc. Neighborhood Master Plans should:

- Promote active participation from neighborhood residents and business owners
- Enhance distinct neighborhood identities
- Encourage the rehabilitation of existing structures, or the development of new structures that are consistent with the neighborhood's traditional urban and architectural design characteristics
- Promote mixed-uses including neighborhood-scale commercial and a range of housing options to provide for a diversity of housing needs in our community
- Develop strategies to fund capital improvements in infrastructure, streetscapes, and other necessary enhancements

Strategy – The City Council should seek partnerships with neighborhood associations and civic groups to initiate these neighborhood master plans. The Office of Community Development and the City Planning Department should help organize these efforts, however, the services of professional planning consultants should be considered to facilitate and complete these neighborhood plans in a timely fashion.

2. Initiate Infrastructure Support Plan

- Evaluate public safety services to the outer areas of the community with special attention for fire apparatus response time in the areas east of the Northway.
- Develop a comprehensive sidewalk plan that identifies priority areas for new sidewalk construction and rehabilitation, and recommends a variety of options for financing improvements.
- Prepare a citywide stormwater management plan.
- Develop plan to place overhead wires underground.

Medium Term Action Items:

(Initiate within two or three years from adoption of this plan).

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1. Citywide Transportation And Mobility Study

- Acquire CDTC grant to conduct study
- Focus:
 - Moving people among activity centers (i.e., Skidmore, train station and West Avenue business district, Welsley, the race tracks, the Spa State Park, and the downtown)
 - Bicycle accommodations
 - Sidewalk development and maintenance
 - Consider roadway improvements to enhance pedestrian movement:
 - Union Avenue
 - Lake Avenue
 - South Broadway
 - Rt. 50 (NYSDOT)
 - Ballston Avenue
 - Congress Street (including its) intersection with Broadway
 - Church Street
 - Washington Street
 - Van Dam
 - Spring Street
 - Grand Avenue

2. Initiate Detailed Downtown Master Plan – an update to the “Plan of Action”

Initiate a detailed “downtown” master plan to address:

- a parcel-by-parcel investigation of opportunities for further infill development and redevelopment;
- downtown housing;
- pedestrian connections and public spaces;
- transportation and parking; marketing,
- business development, and business recruitment;
- design guidelines / standards and the development review process;

Must include an intensive public participation strategy (charrette). The definition of “downtown”, for the purposes of this study, should be fairly broad – Henry Street on the east, West Fenlon Street on the south, Railroad Run and perhaps Beekman Street on the west, and Van Dam Street on the north

3. Citywide Parks and Recreation Plan

- Comprehensive examination of city’s parks and recreation resources

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- Implement the recommendations of the updated Open Space Plan.

4. Plan for City-owned Properties

Develop a master plan for City-owned land on both sides of Weibel Avenue, including a re-use plan for the landfill site and identification of needs for land acquisition for future public works facilities or recreation lands and facilities.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS TO 1999 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN:

The Saratoga Springs Comprehensive Plan

ORGANIZATION

- Concerned Citizens of Saratoga Springs
- Downtown Comprehensive Plan Committee
- Eastern Corridor Study Committee
- Grande Industrial Park
- Lake Lonely Association
- New York State Spa Park
- North Side Civic Association
- NYRA-Saratoga Racecourse
- Saratoga County Affordable Housing Coalition,
Saratoga Neighborhood Preservation Foundation,
Shelters of Saratoga
- Saratoga County Planning Board

- Saratoga Equine Sports Center
- Saratoga Hospital
- Saratoga Lake Protection and Improvement District
- Saratoga Open Space Project
- Saratoga Springs Building Inspector
- Saratoga Springs City Planner
- Saratoga Springs City School District
- Saratoga Springs Downtown Business Association
- Saratoga Springs Housing Authority
- Saratoga Springs Preservation Foundation
- Skidmore College
- Town of Greenfield
- Town of Milton
- Town of Saratoga
- Town of Wilton
- Wesley Health Care Center
- West Avenue Advisory Group
- West Side Neighborhood Association
- Additional design input

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Joseph Miranda
Robert Hall
Roy McDonald
Neil Roberts
Matt Jones
Gene Corsale
Catherine Johnson
John Muse

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APPENDIX B: PAST PLANNING STUDIES AND DOCUMENTS

- ◆ *2000 Consolidated Plan and Entitlement Action Plans*, Saratoga Springs City Council prepared by the Office of Community Development. Defines City's housing and community development needs and identifies strategic plans to accomplish objectives.
- ◆ *Affordable Housing: Program Options*, 1993, by Geoff Bornemann, City Planner and Rachel Jagareski, Community Development Coordinator. This study attempts to define the local affordable housing problem and identifies programs that the City might select to solve the problem.
- ◆ *The City of Saratoga Springs Eastern Corridor Inventory and Analysis*, 1998, Eastern Corridor Commission, prepared by Behan Planning Associates with Environmental Design & Research. This study provides a comprehensive inventory of the resources of that part of the City lying east of the Northway
- ◆ *City of Saratoga Springs: Loughberry Lake/Bog Meadow Brook Water Source Capacity Analysis*, November 1997, prepared by Barton & Loguidice, P.C.
- ◆ *A Downtown Pedestrian Improvement Program for the City of Saratoga Springs, New York*, June 1995, Special Assessment District, prepared by Muse Architect/Planner and the LA Group, P.C.. A pedestrian improvement and implementation plan designed to maintain, strengthen and expand the downtown area with strong pedestrian focus.
- ◆ *Draft and Final Generic Environmental Impact Statement for the 1999 Comprehensive Plan for the City of Saratoga Springs*, March and April, 1999.
- ◆ *East of the Northway Study Recommendations for Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Amendments*, 1996, by the Saratoga Springs Planning Board.
- ◆ *Excelsior Avenue Corridor Study*, 1998, by Catherine Johnson, Architect & Town Planner, Middletown, CT. This study presents the results of a public planning workshop held to study and explore options for the Excelsior Avenue corridor.
- ◆ *The Open Space Plan for Saratoga Springs*, 1994, by The Saratoga Springs Open Space Project. The Open Space Plan provides the guiding principals as well as specific recommendations for open space protection in Saratoga Springs. Its recommendations were approved by the City Council in 1994 and incorporated into subsequent planning documents.
- ◆ *Report of the Special Committee to Study the Operations of the Building Inspector's Office*, March 1998. Mayor J. Michael O'Connell and Commissioner Thomas J. Curley appointed a 5 member special committee to study the current operations of the City Building Inspector's Office relative to the delivery of services under its jurisdiction.

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- ◆ *Saratoga Springs Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines*, 1997, Saratoga Springs Design Review Commission, prepared by Michael B. Allen, A.I.A. This study presents specific design guidelines for the downtown historic district.
- ◆ *Smart City Task Force Report*, March 1997, prepared by a special task force appointed by Mayor J. Michael O'Connell to identify how the City may participate in, and encourage, the development of future technologies in this region.
- ◆ *South Broadway Studies and Proposals* – ongoing evaluations and proposals conducted by the Saratoga Springs Planning Board on development opportunities and alternatives along the South Broadway.
- ◆ *West Avenue Concept Development Plan & Site Design Guidelines*, 1995, Saratoga Springs Planning Board, prepared by The LA Group, P.C. This study sets forth an overall master plan as well as specific design guidelines for the upper West Avenue corridor.
- ◆ *West Avenue Corridor Design Guidelines*, 1996, *Saratoga Springs Design Review Commission*, prepared by Michael B. Allen, AIA . These guidelines assist property owners and the City in developing a coherent and attractive architectural identity for the West Avenue commercial corridor.
- ◆ *West Side Master Plan and Action Plan*, 1997, by the West Side Neighborhood Association. This study presents the recommendations of residents of the West Side neighborhood for the preservation of the historic character of the West Side and to restore, redevelop and revitalize the area.
- ◆ *Saratoga Traffic Alternative Route Study*, 2000, by the STAR Committee. This study was prepared by the consultant firm of Edwards and Kelcey and it identified alternative and preferred solutions for truck traffic in the greater Saratoga Springs area.

APPENDIX C: FINANCIAL BACKGROUND

In addition to the limitations caused by current zoning regulations and related local complexities, the City must also confront an endemic financial problem that directly effects its economic future. Current land use development patterns may not provide sufficient long-term revenue necessary to support the expenditures for the municipal services required to support such land uses.

Given that the increase in total taxable assessed real property have only grown at an average annual rate of approximately ½% per year during the past 8 years, this level of growth may not be sufficient to balance City expenses without seeking alternatives such as increased debt, higher property taxes, new revenues from other sources or reductions in municipal services. The financial issue may be illustrated as follows:

- ◆ The annual total City expenditures now are about \$20 million. These expenses have been growing at roughly 5%/year over the last 7 years. These are mostly costs associated with personnel, mandates, and inflationary increases to necessary investments in community amenities. Salaries and benefits have historically accounted for 75% of annual expenditures.
- ◆ City revenue resources may be divided into 3 categories. Since each category is roughly equivalent in the revenue it produces, each category should shoulder an equal share of the growth in expense (5%).
 - 1) Sales tax - largest of the 3 categories
 - once the source of a greater percentage of our revenue - it has only been growing an average of about 2.2% for the past seven years
 - formula-driven distributions are declining due to low growth of City population & assessed value relative to growth rates in adjacent municipalities
 - leaves City with about 2.8% annual shortfall (2.2% revenue vs. 5% expense)
 - the “segmentation” distribution alternative would give the City a 3% portion of sales tax receipts on hotel, restaurant, bar & utility income, and a portion of County sales tax based on total population and assessed value. This approach would take several years before attaining desired 4-5% growth.
 - 2) State Aid, racing-related income, grants, fees and other misc.
 - a volatile category - City has little control over it
 - recently, this category has grown proportionate to the 5% increase in expenses
 - revenues fluctuate from year to year - often the least available when most needed
 - 3) Property tax - directly related to assessed value of City land
 - the annual increase between 1998 and 1999 was 1.6%, the increase between 1999 and 2000 was 4.0% and the increase from 2000 to 2001 was 2.7%. The average three year increase was 2.8%.
 - less than 1/2% annual growth in assessed value for over the past decade. However the annual increase in total taxable assessed value for the City has risen in recent years. The

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annual increase between 1998 and 1999 was 1.5% and the preliminary figure for the increase between 1999 and 2000 is 4.2%

- some significant recent construction (Skidmore, Empire State College, Quad Graphics, etc.) is currently not taxable due to not-for-profit or IDA status
- during the last 10 years the City has averaged 95 new residential units per year. However, in 1999 there were building permits issued for 194 new residential units. The reported value of all building permits issued (both residential and commercial) was about \$54 million.
- with only an average of about 1/2% annual growth in property values, property taxes would need to be increased by 10% annually to meet the annual 5% increase in expenses

Taxes on \$100,000 House	2000	Tax as % Assessed Value	% % of Total Tax Collected
City	\$559	0.56%	20.03%
County	\$307	0.30%	11.16%
School	\$1,749	1.75%	63.55%
Library	\$137	0.14%	4.98%
Total	\$2,752	2.75%	100.00%

* Inside Tax District
Source: City of Saratoga Springs

Adopted Revenue - all amounts (\$) in thousands -	Budget Annualized % Increase Past 7 yrs.	1999	1998	1997	1996	1995	1994	1993	1992	
Adopted Revenue	Budgeted	5.08%	\$19,347	\$18,379	\$17,358	\$16,641	\$16,309	\$15,743	\$14,816	\$13,771

Source: City of Saratoga Springs

- In 1999, Sales tax actual revenue was \$6,822,000; State Aid, racing-related income, grants, fees and other misc. actual revenue was \$9,180,000; and Property tax actual revenue was \$7,304,000.
- "State Aid, racing-related income, grants, fees and other misc. revenue" was comprised of 1999 budgeted revenue including: State aid \$1,662,000; OTB revenue \$369,000; Mortgage

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tax revenue \$862,000; PILOT revenue \$255,000; Utilities gross receipts tax revenue \$452,000; and “other” revenue such as recreation fees, grants etc. \$5,580,000.

Actual Property Tax Revenue - all amounts (\$) in thousands -	Annualized % Increase Past 7 yrs.	1999	1998	1997	1996	1995	1994	1993	1992
Actual Property Tax Revenue	10.98%	\$6,350	\$5,464	\$5,235	\$4,617	\$4,914	\$4,249	\$3,400	\$3,547
Total Taxable Assessed Valuation (1998 equalization rate was 5.75%)		\$1,338,730	\$68,748	\$67,970	\$68,336	\$68,369	\$67,873	\$67,746	\$66,328
Tax Rate (inside district)		\$5.44	\$90.68	\$84.30	\$77.10	\$70.10	\$54.30	\$58.70	\$53.70

Source: City of Saratoga Springs

- Assessed value has been very flat except for the last year or so.
- Re-valuation added over \$100 million (>10%) to our assessed value but that is increased value on existing property not new property.
- Estimated 2000 total Full Value Assessment is about \$2.1B - 35% or \$0.77B is non taxed
- Between 1999 and 2000 the total taxable assessed value increased by \$57million – a 4.2% increase.

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Actual Sales Tax Revenue - all amounts (\$) in thousands -	Annualized % Increase Past 7 yrs.	1999	1998	1997	1996	1995	1994	1993	1992
Actual Sales Tax Income	2.18%	\$6,787	\$6,511	\$6,402	\$6,215	\$6,067	\$6,027	\$5,794	\$5,840
County Sales Tax Income	4.2%	\$58,757	\$55,959	\$54,329	\$51,668	\$49,474	\$49,020	\$45,636	\$44,055
County Distribution to Municipalities ¹		\$32,439	\$31,040	\$30,284	\$28,895	\$27,790			
City's % of Distribution to Munic. ²		20.92%	20.98%	21.1%	21.5%	21.8%			

¹ – 56% of County Sales Tax is distributed to municipalities
² – The City's population and assessment is approximately 14% of the total County.

Source: City of Saratoga Springs and Saratoga County

- The City gets \$4 million plus approximately 7% of the County Sales Tax (1/2 the County's income times % population and assessed value of 14%).
- Our % of this is decreasing as the Towns increase faster than we do in population and assessed valuation.
- The City can also opt to take 3% of hotel restaurant, bar and utilities income plus the State regulated percentage of the County distribution. This may equal the current amount sometime in the future.
- The City had its own sales tax in the '70's. The County initiated their sales tax in the early '80's with a generous split with the City. That formula was revised in the early '90's and has been trending downward. It would appear that at some point we may be better off going with our own separate tax.
- During this period, the City has incurred nearly \$10M of bonded indebtedness with extensive annual debt service. Debt service annually is about \$650,000 for just the repayment on the principal.
- The City could also investigate more use of taxes or revenues from the tourists or visitor-related businesses.

APPENDIX D: ADDITIONAL OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION TOOLS

The following land use tools should be considered for use by the City in its ongoing efforts to protect and enhance the natural and open space resources in the community. The City could take a more pro-active approach to keeping specific parcels of land undeveloped, and to protecting important resources, through any or all of the following approaches:

Acquisition

The City may acquire land in fee title interest or in partial interest from willing sellers at fair market value. Acquisition of fee title may be appropriate for parcels of land that are intended for active or passive public recreational uses.

Conservation Easements

One way to protect scenic resources, farmlands, and environmental resources would be to use conservation easements. A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a municipality, or a third party such as the Land Trust for the Saratoga Region, 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 with the 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 or other stipulations are detailed in the easement agreement.

A landowner also can choose to donate a conservation easement on all or part of his/her land. Income and estate tax benefits may accrue to the landowner. Conservation easements can also be used to permanently protect open space set aside as part of a conservation subdivision.

Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program

When development rights alone are purchased using a conservation easement, 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. 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.

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In order to implement a PDR program, a community needs 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 of their fiscal situation, some communities 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 issuing revenue bonds 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 other open space in this manner. Local conservation organizations should also be considered as partners in this type of program.

Implementation of a Purchase of Development Rights program requires a fair amount of planning to implement. In terms of grant funding, communities with well defined programs tend to fair much better due to the competitive nature of these grants. The return on this investment in planning can be substantial in terms of both the community's fiscal situation and community character.

Term Easements and Tax Abatement Program

This type of program, used by several communities in New York State (including the Town of Clifton Park), 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 municipality 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 in full 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.

Environmental Protection or Scenic Special District

The municipality could also establish special districts to protect specific scenic or natural resources. For instance, the district could include all land within a specified distance from a stream or lake. Specific provisions or standards for protecting the quality of these water bodies could be incorporated into special use permit provisions for all development within the overlay district.

Develop an Alternative Road Standard for Low Volume Local Roads

An alternative road standard for local streets (including low volume subdivision streets) could be considered. Such a standard would complement the character of subdivisions developed in the Conservation Development District. A local road standard does not sacrifice accepted engineering practice but, rather, takes into consideration the actual

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function and expected volume of local streets. The Dutchess County Department of Planning, in a publication entitled *Alternative Road Standards* (February 1992), states that, "Smaller, well designed roads have less of everything: less pavement, fewer and smaller drainage structures, and fewer curbs, and as such are less expensive to construct and maintain." Later it notes that, "In addition to cost benefits, more flexible standards can also improve aesthetics. Wide roads with deep bases require extensive grading and cutting of vegetation. Frequently the construction of standard roads leaves the landscape barren, robbing it of its more rural and scenic qualities." With an emphasis on street connectivity, another benefit of a rural road standard is that narrower streets deter speeding and can offset the perceived loss of safety resulting from the reduced use of cul-de-sacs.