

Town of Pleasant Valley Comprehensive Plan



December 2009

Pleasant Valley Comprehensive Plan

Dutchess County, New York

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Adopted by the Pleasant Valley Town Board
December 16, 2009

Special thanks to the many town residents who completed the 2006 Community Survey, attended the public information sessions and workshops, and offered comments at the public hearings.

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INTRODUCTION TO PLEASANT VALLEY

According to legend, campers near the Wappinger Creek saw fish jumping and the sun glinting off the water. One remarked, “This is a pleasant valley.” The campers were correct.

Pleasant Valley was first settled in the mid-1700s when people moved west to take advantage of the Wappinger Creek for water power. Farming and milling were the main industries at the time. In 1788, when precincts were divided into townships, Pleasant Valley went from being part of the Crum Elbow Precinct to being part of the Town of Clinton. It wasn’t until 1821 that a separate Town of Pleasant Valley was established.

Today, the Town of Pleasant Valley is a rural-suburban community distinguished by its three main hamlet areas: Pleasant Valley (the town center), Salt Point, and Washington Hollow. The hamlets are surrounded by a landscape of farms, scenic vistas, parkland, residences, and forests. Approximately 9,716 residents live within the Town’s 21,140 acres, or 33 square miles.

The combination of small town charm, central location, and close proximity to major transportation routes has helped turn Pleasant Valley from a farming community into what is known as a bedroom community, i.e. one whose residents, for the most part, work outside the corporate limits. Agriculture remains an important part of the Town’s landscape and business mix, but residential developments have taken the place of many Pleasant Valley farms. A plan for the future must address the development potential of the existing undeveloped lands, the existing farmlands, and potential enhancements to the hamlets.

Many non-residents, who commute through Pleasant Valley every day, may see the town as more of a corridor than a distinct community. The challenge for Pleasant Valley is to manage growth and preservation, and to shape and promote itself as an attractive, diverse community even as it continues, because of its location and infrastructure system, to act as an important service center for commuters and visitors. Pleasant Valley should be seen as the distinct community it is, an economically viable, thriving small-town with residents who are proud to live there. Now is an excellent time for Pleasant Valley to reevaluate its vision, chart a new course for the future, and embrace its distinctive character.

Pleasant Valley Hamlet

The hamlet of Pleasant Valley, also known as the town center, is situated in the southwest corner of town on NYS Route 44. This is the primary business hub and the densest settlement area. Early settlement of the hamlet centered on the mill industry. Using the resources of the Wappinger Creek, grain, cotton, and fulling mills were abundant in the early years of the hamlet. The last mill to survive was a cotton and grain mill, first built in 1808. Most of the mill buildings have since been lost to fire. The one remaining structure houses the Pleasant Valley Historical Society, and the remainder of the mill site has been redeveloped as a public park at the eastern edge of the town center.



Town of Pleasant Valley Mill Site



Photo Credit: Teddi Southworth

Town of Pleasant Valley Mill Site

The core of the town center has a mixture of locally-owned businesses, public facilities, and a variety of shopping and dining choices. Driving through, a visitor might not realize what a “small town” Pleasant Valley still is. But stop in any of the local establishments and talk awhile and you’ll find that most people still know their neighbors. One of the top strengths mentioned in the 2006 Community Survey, conducted as part of the process for updating the Comprehensive Plan and zoning, was the community spirit, nice people, and small town feel, and it is apparent even in its most built-up area.

Salt Point Hamlet

The smaller hamlet of Salt Point is located on the northern edge of Pleasant Valley along the Salt Point Turnpike. Salt Point is unique in this part of the County as it is a compact hamlet whose core of historic buildings is directly adjacent to land that is actively farmed. This was an agricultural community right from the start in the 1700s, where access to Little Wappinger Creek also lent itself to a saw mill and grist mill. By the 1800s, small residential lots and local businesses were cropping up. The establishment of this small community exemplifies what one thinks of when picturing a hamlet. Of the three hamlets, this one has remained the most unchanged for the last 100 years.



Local business in Salt Point Hamlet

Washington Hollow Hamlet

The hamlet of Washington Hollow is a commercial crossroads hamlet east of the Taconic State Parkway on Route 44, at the Town of Washington border. It is situated at a major gateway entrance to the Town. This was the original hamlet in the Town of Pleasant Valley. It was the site of the first Dutchess County agricultural fair, which centered on a hotel at the intersection of Route 44 and Route 82, the current site of the State Trooper barracks. Wet soils, steep slopes, and public service uses, such as the trooper barracks and the church cemetery, bound the Pleasant Valley portion of the hamlet immediately north and south of the Route 44 corridor.



Western entrance to Washington Hollow Hamlet

IMPORTANCE OF A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

A Comprehensive Plan should be a readable, clear document that is used often, rather than being adopted and put on a shelf. It is expected that decision makers within the Town be knowledgeable in every aspect of the plan's policies. More than that, though, it should be required reading material for anyone looking to develop in Pleasant Valley. Too often the Zoning Code and Subdivision regulations take the place of the Town's Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan forms the basis and reasoning for regulations. It is not enough to know what is or is not allowed; one must understand the reasoning behind the laws. This plan identifies important elements of the Town's natural and built environments, and provides policies intended to preserve the natural environment while supporting growth that is compatible with the rural qualities residents have identified as important.

The Comprehensive Plan includes two major sections: Planning Policies, Goals, Recommendations and Implementation Strategies; and the Centers and Greenspaces Plan and Districts Map.

Planning Policies, Goals, and Recommendations and Implementation Strategies

This section examines the following policy areas:

- Environment, Greenspaces, and Farmland Protection
- Population, Economic Base, and Growth of Centers
- Historic Preservation
- Housing
- Transportation
- Community Facilities.

Each area is broken down into two parts. The first outlines the "Planning Policies, Goals, and Recommendations" that support the community's vision for its long-term development. The policies were the result of the 2006 Community Survey, several public meetings, and discussions initiated by the Comprehensive Plan Committee and consultants. These are the agreed-upon planning principles which the Town will use as general standards for making important land use, design, and development decisions in the future. Anyone reading the first section should have a clear idea of what the community feels is most important.

The second part summarizes the "Implementation Strategies" that can make the land use recommendations a reality. A Comprehensive Plan is still only another document on the shelf unless it is implemented. In order to make it a useful document, both for setting policy and as a legal tool to enforce regulations, the Town must enact the recommendations of the Plan. This section includes both short-term and long-term implementation strategies. Some are achieved through zoning regulations, while some will be carried out by local committees, such as the Open Space Committee or Water Committee. Short-term strategies are to be enacted via the corresponding updated zoning code, and by immediate local committee action. Long-term strategies should be acted upon by the appropriate local committee, and should be based on the policy goals as outlined in this Comprehensive Plan.

Centers and Greenspaces Plan and Districts Map

The second major section is a detailed explanation of the zoning recommendations based upon the policies and implementation strategies outlined in the first section. This is sometimes considered the most important section of the Plan, as it is the basis for creation of the zoning districts, which in turn direct the future development of the Town.

PLANNING POLICIES, GOALS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This document, which reflects recommendations from the 2006 Community Survey and several public input sessions conducted during the planning process, provides the rationale for the following planning principles. Some of these principles are statements of long range Town policy, while others are more specific recommendations for future action. They are the core elements of the Plan. These planning policies have been developed by the Comprehensive Plan Committee and residents of Pleasant Valley, and adopted by the Town Board on December 16, 2009. The collective concerns of the community are reflected in this document, and implemented by the Zoning Code and other actions by the Town.

In the time since adoption of the 1995 Town Plan, the Town has moved forward on many important initiatives including:

- Joined the Greenway Compact Program in October of 2004,
- Adopted the Pleasant Valley Wetland, Waterbody and Watercourse Protection Ordinance in June of 2004
- Signed the Intermunicipal Agreement for the Wappinger Creek Watershed in June of 2004,
- Authorized and received the completed Pleasant Valley Aquifer Study in May of 2007.

In the 2006 survey, residents were overwhelmingly attracted to the natural beauty and rural, small-town qualities of Pleasant Valley. Protection of historic structures, agricultural uses, and the natural landscape rated very highly among respondents. Almost everyone thought that new development should be compatible with the remaining historic characteristics of the community. Overall goals for the community include:

- Preserve the rural character of the Town
- Protect natural resources, including water and natural habitats
- Protect and maintain scenic resources
- Develop a mechanism to provide public (County, State, and Federal) and private funding for the preservation of open space and farmland protection
- Concentrate development in and around hamlets
- Enhance the hamlets as walkable and well-designed centers
- Coordinate efforts to improve traffic flow in the town center and other critical areas
- Establish architectural and site design guidelines for new, and proposed renovations to, non-residential buildings
- Provide a variety of recreation opportunities and park enhancements
- Encourage the development of a variety of housing options