

The character of Pleasant Valley is a blend of hamlets, suburban areas, and rural countryside. Farms, hamlets, a town center, residential neighborhoods, businesses, and natural areas together create a landscape that is ecologically rich and scenic. The Town's undeveloped features such as wetlands, streams, lakes, and woodlands, along with managed areas such as farms, orchards, recreation facilities, the Taconic State Parkway corridor, and institutional properties collectively represent Pleasant Valley's canvas of greenspaces.

Pleasant Valley residents recognize the importance of the Town's rural landscape: the recreational value of parks and trails, the economic value of farms, the environmental value of greenspaces, and the cultural and aesthetic value of scenic views. Preservation of natural and scenic features received overwhelming endorsement



Plankenhorn Farm on Gretna Road

Town's rural landscape and its hamlets and town center remains clear. The key is encouraging commercial and residential growth in and around centers and discouraging development that envelops the countryside. It is imperative that greenspaces and development be considered together. The zoning code must reflect the needs for rural as well as hamlet-type zoning and the need to identify and prioritize parcels that are valued for their natural and environmental qualities.

Open space preservation is directly related to economic development. Parks, trails, historic sites, and recreational areas not only enhance the quality of life for residents, but also attract visitors. Farms and agricultural operations provide jobs and attract residents and visitors looking for local, homegrown produce and agricultural products. It has been well documented that open lands, including farmland, pay more in taxes than they consume in town services. Preserving open space, therefore, not only generates significant economic opportunities, but also helps stabilize local service costs.

One way to encourage mixed-use, hamlet sized development in centers, while encouraging preservation of rural areas, is to require developers to pay into an open space fund for the right to develop at a hamlet-scale in the appropriate areas. The incentive for developers to pay into a fund is the economic benefit of increasing the development potential in the hamlet centers. The Town benefits by concentrating growth in the centers and increasing funding available for open space preservation.

in the 2006 Community Survey. The Survey revealed that residents find rural character to be the main strength of their community and consider the protection of farmlands, natural areas, scenic vistas, and important wildlife habitats to be top priorities. Residents feel this is so important that 72% of those responding to the survey are willing to fund open space and farmland preservation through a local bond. It is essential that the Town work with community residents and potential developers to ensure that the most important natural resources are protected as Pleasant Valley continues to grow and change.

### **Balancing Preservation and Growth**

Pleasant Valley's character will only be maintained if the contrast between the

## Climate Change

The interrelationship between future climate change and human activity is becoming widely recognized. Although some of the solutions to this issue will come at the national policy level, and others will focus on advances in technology, each community has a responsibility to adjust its approach to planning and development in order to lessen the negative impacts of greenhouse gases and other forms of pollution.

Transportation and its associated pollution is a key component to address, which ties in to the larger question of settlement patterns. Recent settlement patterns typically consist of housing isolated throughout the landscape, requiring a majority of people to drive to every destination (work, shopping, recreation, services, entertainment, etc.). In terms of planning and development, no simple act will have a greater positive effect on the environment than locating new construction in areas that dramatically reduce the use of automobiles.

As an alternative approach that will address climate change as well as support historic settlement patterns, Pleasant Valley should encourage mixed-use development in and around existing hamlet areas. At the same time, improvements should be made to pedestrian and bicycle circulation systems that will enable residents to safely and comfortably walk from destination to destination in the central hamlet areas. The Town could also work with Dutchess County to coordinate public transit opportunities with these close-knit hamlet centers.

## Tools for Protecting Resources

Outlined below are some of the tools that Pleasant Valley should use to protect its important natural resources, including:

- *Saving Working Landscapes*
- *Recreation as Preservation*
- *Groundwater Resource Management*
- *Understanding Biodiversity*

### *Saving Working Landscapes*

There are both economic and preservation values in retaining and attracting farm operations. According to 2007 Real Property Tax records for Pleasant Valley, there are over 2,900 acres in active farmland and over 1,200 acres in vacant or abandoned agricultural land. One way to retain farmland is a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program, which is a voluntary farmland protection technique that pays farmland owners for permanently protecting the land for agriculture. In order to qualify for PDR funding under New York State's Agricultural and Farmland Protection Program, a municipality must have an adopted agricultural and farmland protection plan. This can be a component of a more inclusive open space plan, a component of the Town's Comprehensive Plan, or a document focused exclusively on agricultural business and farmland conservation. An active farmland protection plan identifies natural and economic agricultural resources, and recommends tools such as a PDR program for the support and expansion of farming operations. The Centers and Greenspaces Plan (see Graphic #1) suggests a pattern of priority greenspaces in Pleasant Valley, and this map should be augmented by action of the Town's Open Space Committee.

In addition to retaining farm operations, there is value in protecting greenspaces. The value to the Town and its residents is in the retention of rural landscapes, protection of scenic vistas, and an enhancement to the quality of life by retaining the beauty of the countryside. There are also financial incentives to landowners who protect lands through conservation easements. New York State offers a Conservation Easement Tax Credit to all owners of conservation easement-restricted land. The tax credit does not reduce local property tax revenues, so there is no negative impact on town and county budgets.



## Habitat Protection Goals

- **Protect large, contiguous, unaltered tracts of land**, wherever possible. Priorities include but are not limited to large forests, large meadow and shrubland complexes, and areas containing habitat types known to support species of conservation concern, e.g. kettle shrub pools (Blandings turtles) and intermittent woodland pools (salamanders).
- **Preserve links** between natural habitats on adjacent properties via broad connections, not narrow corridors, wherever possible.
- **Maintain buffer zones** between development and land intended for habitat.
- **Restore and maintain broad buffer zones** of natural vegetation along streams, along shores of other waterbodies and wetlands, in accordance with Pleasant Valley's Wetland, Watercourse and Waterbody Protection Ordinance, and at the perimeter of other sensitive habitats. Whenever possible, preserve smaller wetlands not protected by the ordinance.
- **Minimize extent of impervious surfaces**, and maximize on-site groundwater infiltration. This will help to protect groundwater resources as well as the water quality and quantity of nearby wetlands, streams and other waterbodies. Design new development such that surface runoff from the site during and after construction does not exceed pre-construction runoff volume.
- Encourage and provide incentives for developers to **consider environmental concerns early in the planning process**, and incorporate biodiversity conservation principles into their choice of development sites, their design sites and their construction practices.
- In general, **encourage development of altered land** instead of unaltered land wherever possible.
- **Concentrate development along existing roads**; discourage construction of new roads in undeveloped areas. **Promote clustered and pedestrian-centered development**, wherever possible.
- **Restore degraded habitats**, whenever possible, but do not use restoration projects as a 'license' to destroy existing high-quality habitats. Similarly, do not consider habitat creation as adequate mitigation for destruction of existing habitats.
- **Preserve farmland potential** wherever possible.
- **Protect habitats associated with resources of special economic, public health, or aesthetic importance to the town.** These include aquifers or other sources of drinking water, active farms, and scenic views.

Adapted from the NYSDEC Hudson River Estuary Program's "Draft Conservation Principles for Protecting Biodiversity," and Kiviat and Stevens (2001)

### *Recreation as Preservation*

It is important to identify areas for recreational use that can also promote the Town's scenic and natural resources. Examples of recreational efforts that can enhance natural resource protection and economic diversity include planning for bikeways, trails along the Wappinger Creek, enhanced fishing and canoeing access to the Creek, and improvements to existing town parks.

### *Groundwater Resource Management*

All residents and businesses in Pleasant Valley currently use groundwater as their primary source of water supply. There are steps that the Town can take to ensure future availability of sustainable groundwater resources. The 2007 Municipal Aquifer Report summarizes five water resource management strategies. A brief listing of the strategies is as follows:

- Use zoning or SEQRA so that minimum average parcel sizes in rural areas developed with individual septic systems and individual wells average at least approximately 3.5 acres;
- Adopt an aquifer overlay ordinance which provides Town-wide protection of all aquifers, and which provides additional protection for special aquifer areas;
- The Town Planning Board should review pumping tests for new regulated wells (either new community wells or new public water supply wells for larger commercial uses);
- Testing in new, larger subdivisions proposed with individual wells should be assessed as part of SEQRA analysis by requiring simultaneous and longer testing of pre-drilled individual wells;
- Where wells lie near roads, snow aprons or low-salt areas may be warranted at ends of cul-de-sacs or bottoms of hills where salty snow often accumulates and melts.

### *Understanding Biodiversity*

In order to make informed decisions about growth and preservation, it is critical that the particulars of the local biodiversity in the Town of Pleasant Valley are clearly understood. Biodiversity is the variety, as well as variation, of all living organisms in the context of their habitats and ecological systems. Pleasant Valley is rich in the variety of biological systems that support high local biodiversity including freshwater wetlands, ravines and ridges, and contiguous forest tracts and grasslands. Completing a town-wide biodiversity assessment would yield valuable information for local officials and volunteer Board members.

### **Greenway Systems**

In preserving open space and environmentally sensitive areas, it is critical to emphasize both the individual areas that are important to the community, as well as the systems that link those areas both within the Town and beyond municipal borders. The Centers and Greenspaces Plan (see Graphic # 1) illustrates three main greenway areas in Pleasant Valley:

- Wappinger Creek corridor,
- Area along the eastern corridor abutting the Taconic State Parkway,
- Rural area in the northwestern section of town.

These greenways have a mix of easement protected lands, publicly owned lands, and privately owned lands. Included in this mix are farms, both active and vacant, an ecological research center, and non-public recreational lands.

### Wappinger Creek Greenway

The first and perhaps the Town's foremost significant natural feature is the Wappinger Creek corridor that bisects Pleasant Valley from the northeast to the southwest. The creek itself, long valued by fishing enthusiasts, could play a far more prominent role in the Town's recreation system, business base, and identity if it were viewed as a greenway, and if a public access trail system was created.

The Wappinger Creek corridor is not only a scenic and recreational resource, but a water resource as well. Where development is allowed along the creek, buffer areas for the retention of natural vegetation must be enforced in order to maintain the health of the creek. The Town should take advantage of opportunities to create a creekside trail, and create fishing and boating access sites. Every development and re-development proposal which abuts the creek should include review for public right-of-way easements for a connective creekside trail system.



Little Wappinger Creek runs through the historic hamlet of Salt Point before meeting up with the Wappinger Creek further south

### East of the Taconic State Parkway Greenway

The second natural greenway system is the area east of the Taconic State Parkway where several public and private organizations have preserved a corridor of great beauty and environmental significance. From south to north, Taconic-Hereford State Forest, Rockefeller University Research Facility, Innisfree Foundation, and Cary Arboretum/Institute for Ecosystem Studies cover thousands of acres of scenic fields and woodlands devoted to environmental research, resource management, and public enjoyment.

This area includes 2,221 acres that have been designated a Significant Area of Dutchess County by the Dutchess County Environmental Management Council. This designation means that this area significantly contributes to the health, diversity, and enjoyment of the county's resource base. This greenspace system supports a variety of wildlife, particularly nesting ducks and geese, and is also designated as a New York State Significant Habitat by the N.Y.S. Department of Environmental Conservation. Well-known for its natural beauty, this area also supports substantial scientific research.

These lands are important to Pleasant Valley's greenspace systems and quality of life, but most parcels within this greenway area are not under permanent development restrictions. It is not only extremely important that this critical environmentally sensitive wildlife and forested area not be fragmented, but the preservation of this area is essential in order to retain irreplaceable natural resource and scenic qualities. These areas should be recognized as part of Pleasant Valley's resource base and steps should be taken to ensure that this greenway corridor is permanently protected.



Abundant flowers flank Tyrrel Lake at Innisfree Garden



### West of the Salt Point Turnpike and Hamlet Area of Salt Point Greenway

The third greenway area is in the northwest section of the Town, in and around the hamlet of Salt Point. With a small hamlet center, local businesses, and a uniquely pastoral setting, this area exemplifies the scenic and agricultural character that embodies the Town's rural traditions. The hamlet center is surrounded by farms and open land of exceptional beauty, which also contribute substantially to the Town's present agricultural economic vitality. It is in this area that large areas of land are still devoted to agricultural production. Protecting this farmland will require special attention.



Rural setting in northwest Pleasant Valley

Parcels in this area are ripe for development. Over the last few decades, this area has been zoned Residential 1- and 2-acre, but the area remains comprised of large, under, or undeveloped parcels and farmland. If this area were to be developed to its full build out potential under the 1995 zoning, there is the potential for over a thousand new residences. As the principal caretaker of the working landscape that is central to the Town's heritage, the Town should encourage agricultural uses and protect agriculturally significant soils. This is a prime area for efforts to encourage voluntary participation in permanent preservation programs, such as a purchase of development rights program.



Fields flank the western gateway into the hamlet of Salt Point

Currently there are approximately 500 acres of land in this area that are protected through private easements. These lands are shown in a dark green color on the Centers and Greenspaces Plan. Any future development that is adjacent to these protected lands should include plans to form contiguous greenspaces in order to foster animal and plant habitat connectivity.

### Directing Growth to Hamlets

Linking all of these natural areas are residential neighborhoods and hamlet centers. In order to preserve the greenspaces that are critical to Pleasant Valley's rural character and environmental well-being, areas designated for development are identified. Building around existing hamlets is key to preserving the surrounding areas.

Pleasant Valley's natural resources provide ample surface water, groundwater, open space, and arable soils. Some of its natural features, such as freshwater wetlands, steep slopes, floodplains, and shallow or poorly-drained soils, constrain development. Local controls should be carefully tied to the natural limits of the land so that the Town will not have to bear the burden of service costs and environmental damage caused by poorly designed or inappropriately located development.



Freshwater forested/shrub wetland on North Avenue across from O'Halloran Circle

The Town can do much to foster a greater appreciation of its environment by implementing comprehensive planning techniques that:

- Use the greenspace and farmland protection policies within this document to implement tools for protection, such as the PDR program
- Encourage public access to trails and waterways
- Uphold design standards that respect existing landscape features and water resources
- Discourage development in and around wetlands and other sensitive areas
- Encourage uses such as agriculture that depend on and care for the land itself.

Planning for natural resource and greenway corridors should be the first step in designing any development. It is well within the Town's authority to implement strategies that will protect Pleasant Valley's heritage and promote appropriate growth. With diligence and by using a variety of techniques including incentives, public-private cooperation, conservation development, careful subdivision and site plan review, easements, and acquisitions, Pleasant Valley will be able to preserve much of its important natural areas and farmland while accommodating future growth.

## Implementation Strategies: Environment, Open Space, and Farmland Protection

### *Short-term:*

- 1.1 Adopt a zoning map that reflects densities appropriate to the policies of the Comprehensive Plan, taking into consideration recommendations for the 2007 Municipal Aquifer Report and site specific data and characteristics.
- 1.2 Adopt zoning regulations that are needed to conform to the model ordinance for aquifer protection, as outlined in Appendix A of the 2007 Municipal Aquifer Report.
- 1.3 Adopt zoning regulations that promote the conservation of agricultural lands and prime soils, placing importance on connectivity of adjacent resources.
- 1.4 Adopt zoning regulations that protect the environment through the use of conservation subdivisions, and subdivision regulations that require the protection of environmental and cultural features.
- 1.5 Adopt zoning regulations that promote agricultural uses and direct marketing of agricultural operations.
- 1.6 Consider incorporating a net density lot count formula into the zoning regulations that excludes wetlands and other sensitive environmental areas from being included when determining lot count.
- 1.7 Create a priority list of parcels that could be protected and set a goal for the number of acres to be preserved within the next five years. Actively seek commitment from the landowners of those parcels to participate in preservation.
- 1.8 Contact landowners who indicated on the 2006 survey that they might be interested in placing a conservation easement on their property.
- 1.9 Conduct informational sessions within the community, with input from land conservancies such as the Dutchess Land Conservancy, to educate the public on farmland protection, purchase of development rights, tax incentives, and the easement process.
- 1.10 Establish a Farmland Protection Plan for the Town.
- 1.11 Once a landowner has given a verbal commitment to preservation, actively seek the funds to preserve the land through the New York State Agricultural and Farmland Protection Program and other funding sources.
- 1.12 With the help of outside sources such as The Trust for Public Land, the Pleasant Valley Open Space Committee should work with the Town to prepare a municipal bond vote to raise funds for open space conservation.
- 1.13 Encourage land use decision-makers to actively use the Comprehensive Plan maps for creating and maintaining trails, bikeways, park facilities, scenic roadway segments, water access, and for understanding important natural resources and development constraints.
- 1.14 Create a listing of parks, trails, and recreation facilities for distribution via the website or other means.
- 1.15 Encourage developers and homeowners to incorporate alternative energy and energy-efficient components into home construction and renovation.
- 1.16 Consider a program that requires payment to an open space fund for the right to increase the development potential within the hamlets.

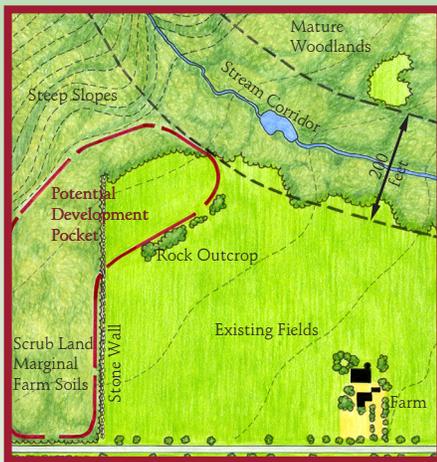
*Long-term:*

- 1.17 Passage of a municipal greenspace fund which can then be used to leverage State, Federal and County funds for the protection of important lands.
- 1.18 Complete a biodiversity assessment of the Town and use the resulting map in land use decisions.

## How to Create Conservation Subdivisions

### Step 1

Require a map of the open space system for the parcel and surrounding area.



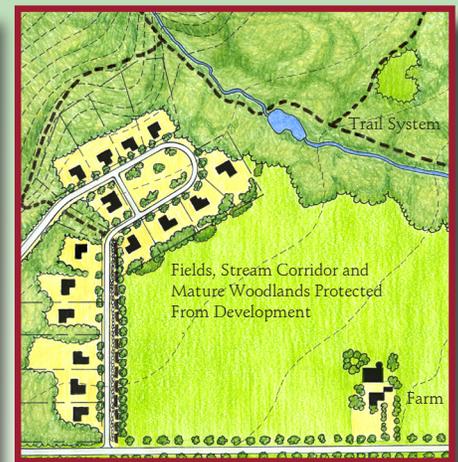
### Step 2

Conventional 3-acre sketch layout determines maximum lot count under existing zoning.



### Step 3

The same number of houses can fit into the landscape while preserving 80 percent of the open space.



### Locate Development Pocket

A sketch analysis of the area provides all the basic information to calculate how a development can fit into the landscape - what land should be protected and potential development pockets.

### Typical Superimposed Subdivision

- Productive farmland lost forever.
- Pleasant view from road eradicated.
- Stream corridor cut off by back yards.
- Large lots divide up and dominate the landscape.
- Individual road for each subdivision.
- Costly road and bridge construction.
- No chance for residents to enjoy special site features.

### Conservation Subdivision

- Large farm field protected.
- Rural view from road retained.
- Trail system allows access to stream.
- Smaller, but substantial individual lot sizes with central green.
- Potential connection to adjacent parcel.
- Less expensive construction costs.
- Residents have views of open field and direct access to woods.