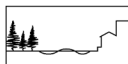


TOWN OF LAGRANGE OPEN SPACE PLAN



ADOPTED JUNE 13, 2007



Behan Planning Associates, LLC
Planning Community Futures

TOWN OF LAGRANGE OPEN SPACE PLAN

Adopted June 13, 2007

LaGrange Open Space Committee

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LaGrange Open Space Committee Members (clockwise from left to right):
Joe Salfelder, Gary Polhemus, Dieter Lucas, Judy Coffin, and Donna Shea.

LaGrange Town Board

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LAGRANGE OPEN SPACE PLAN

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHY ARE WE PLANNING FOR OPEN SPACE IN LAGRANGE?

The Town of LaGrange's 2005 comprehensive plan update analyzed the town's future growth and development potential and provided a forum for community members to participate in planning for the future of the town. Many town residents were concerned that the growth of the town, if not balanced with conservation, might affect the town's open space resources and rural character. The comprehensive plan recommended that the town develop an open space inventory and use it to prioritize conservation of important resources.

Following the comprehensive plan, an open space committee was formed to implement the open space recommendations of the plan. The first initiative of this committee was to conduct a survey to further evaluate the community sentiment towards open space. The results of the survey indicate that there is strong support for open space conservation, and that community members are willing to contribute financially towards conservation efforts. With this in mind, the open space committee and town officials initiated this open space plan.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THE OPEN SPACE PLAN?

The goals of this plan, and the process that has shaped it, are as follows:

- Identify the town's major open space resources.
- Prioritize resources for conservation and create a vision for the town's future.
- Keep the community informed and engaged in the planning process.
- Include landowners as key partners in the process.
- Provide recommendations and a plan of action for implementing the vision.

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THIS PLAN?

This plan provides an inventory of LaGrange's open space resources. It creates a vision for the future of open space resources in the town and sets forth a strategic plan of action for their conservation. It includes several key components, which are summarized below.

- **Resource Inventory and Analysis** of the town's natural systems; working landscapes; cultural landscapes and recreational opportunities (Chapter 2).
- **Open Space Vision Map** and summary, which identifies important elements of the town's open space vision and discusses recommendations for preserving these features (Chapter 3).

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- **A Plan of Action** for the town to begin to implement the open space vision (Chapter 4).
- **A Summary of the Townwide Survey** conducted by the open space committee at the start of the open space planning process (Appendix A).
- **Resource Inventory Maps** (Appendix B).

WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS OF THE OPEN SPACE VISION?

The open space vision map illustrates the town's resources as an interconnected system. For example, forests are important for wildlife and natural function but they also help to maintain clean drinking water. Farms produce agricultural products, but they also preserve scenic views and provide habitat for wildlife. Preserving the town's open spaces as a system provides exponential benefits to the environment and community. The components that contribute to this interconnected system are:

- **Core Farm Areas** such as in the northwest part of LaGrange and the farms along Sprout Creek.
- **Greenway Corridors** such as the lands adjacent to Wappinger Creek and Sprout Creek.
- **Natural Areas** such as the forest of the Taconic ridge and the wetland systems associated with Sprout Creek.
- **Trails** such as the one being implemented along the Wappinger Creek and the proposed trail that loops Freedom Plains.
- **Scenic Roads and Views** such as the exceptional views along Skidmore Road and Freedom Road.

The components of the open space vision are discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of this plan. Recommendations for implementing the open space vision are discussed in Chapter 4.

WHAT ARE THE PLAN'S MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS?

The plan's major recommendations are detailed in Chapter 4. The central feature of the recommendations is the creation of a comprehensive resource conservation program, which would, in the long term, include the following:

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- Establishment of specific tools for conserving land such as a purchase of development rights program, a local term easement/tax abatement option, and estate planning options for landowners. A local term easement or tax abatement option is recommended as an immediate step in implementing this plan.
- Securing a significant funding source for the town to implement conservation projects to achieve the open space vision. Additional study of the town's potential build-out and appropriate balance of land uses to achieve fiscal balance is recommended to guide funding decisions.
- Adoption of design guidelines to assist landowners and developers in creating development patterns that help to preserve the town's open space vision.

WHAT ARE THE PLAN'S CONSERVATION GOALS?

The plan sets forth short-term (5-year) goals for conservation of resources within each of the major components of the open space vision, as follows:

- Core Farm Areas: Conserve 500 additional acres of land in the core farm areas.
- Greenway Corridors: Conserve 250 additional acres of land along major greenways.
- Natural Areas: Conserve 500 additional acres of land in priority natural areas.
- Trails: Develop or secure easements for 5 new miles of trail (in addition to the Dutchess Rail-Trail).

HOW WILL THIS PLAN AFFECT ME AS A PROPERTY OWNER?

The plan identifies priorities for conservation such as core farm areas and critical wildlife habitats. The plan is based on voluntary landowner participation, with the goal of creating financial incentives for landowners to do so. If your land is located within a priority area on the vision map, and you own a significant amount of acreage, the town or a partner in conservation may approach you to see if you would be interested in conservation. Your participation would be voluntary and would be based on the availability of appropriate tools and funding sources. Criteria will be established by the town to set priorities.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING THIS PLAN?

Planning for open space helps to ensure that, as the town welcomes new residents and businesses, it continues to maintain the resources and quality of life that existing residents have come to know. This plan provides a blueprint for preserving open space by setting forth goals and a path for the town to follow towards the community's vision. Some of the many benefits of implementing the open space plan include the following:

Maintaining the town's agricultural lands. LaGrange's farms help to keep lands open and provide a source of local food and agricultural products. Many landowners in LaGrange are now faced with difficult decisions as land values escalate and it becomes difficult to hold on to the land. Currently, there are few options for landowners who want to retain their lands. Implementing this plan would help to set up the tools landowners need to continue farming, and to permanently preserve their lands for agriculture, if they choose to do so.

Sustaining the town's water resources. LaGrange's water resources are important to residents. Aquifers provide drinking water. Surface waters are important for recreational activities, and associated floodplains protect people and property from flooding. Conserving stream buffers and aquifer recharge areas helps to maintain the quality of these waters and the benefits they provide the town's residents.

Providing fiscal benefits to the town's taxpayers. Preserving open space and farmlands can help to keep local property taxes down. Cost of services studies have consistently concluded that dispersed residential development costs more to service than it returns in revenues. A 2002 report by the American Farmland Trust concluded that, nationwide, for every dollar that is received, farmland and open space require \$0.36 in services (such as schools, roads, water, sewer, police and fire services), while residential development requires \$1.16 in services.

When the costs of preserving open space are compared to the costs of developing the same land, there is typically a fiscal benefit in conservation for local taxpayers. For example, when the Town of Pittsford, NY reviewed the fiscal impact of their \$9.9 million dollar open space bond, it was determined that the approximate \$64 per year cost to the average household to pay for the bond would be far less than doing nothing, as the cost service that additional development would impact the average household by about \$250 per year for schools, road maintenance, and other community services. In Webster, NY, the fiscal model prepared for the town and school district showed that for every dollar invested in open space conservation, town residents would save an equal dollar in avoided costs associated with growth. Hence, in that community, there was no net cost of investing in open space land acquisitions. Open space protection can balance and reduce the future costs of growth.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Contents:

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- The Problem of Fragmentation
- The Town's Fiscal Health
- Community Values
- Open Space Planning Process
- Public Meetings and Workshops
- Plan Process and Goals
- Existing Open Space in LaGrange
- Regional Perspective
- Conclusion

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The Town of LaGrange is well-positioned to help protect many of its beautiful open space resources—if the community acts now. Attributes such as open and available land, scenic beauty, and proximity to the county seat of Poughkeepsie, are attracting people to move to LaGrange from places like New York City and Westchester County. Open lands are being converted to residential development at a rate that is concerning to many residents. In particular, the town’s farms are at risk of being lost if action is not taken to help farmland owners keep their land open and in production.



Open spaces in LaGrange include farms, forests, and stream corridors such as the Wappinger and Sprout Creek.

This increasing interest in open land development reverberates throughout the Hudson Valley, bringing many economic benefits. For LaGrange residents, there is a great deal of interest in ensuring a balance exists between development and protecting the farmlands and open spaces that comprise much of the town’s rural character and historic settlement patterns. There is a turning point at which the townspeople must decide to actively support land conservation—whether to support tax incentives to help maintain farmland or whether to purchase an easement for a multi-purpose trail. Communities that invest in open space conservation have seen their communities maintain that balance. For those that have not, the balance tips and the once-open spaces are lost—forever.

Finding a balance between conservation and development is a challenge for every community. The nation’s current system of land use, zoning, and taxation, more often than not, favors development over conservation. Farm and forest land owners have been maintaining open lands for generations. As development pressures increase, landowners face difficult decisions. Many local residents believe these landowners will “do the right thing” and keep the land open. Despite the fact that landowners often want to keep the land open, they also have other fiduciary responsibilities to their spouses, family members, and other parties and rightfully consider their equity in the land an asset—for retirement or other family needs.

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Landowners in LaGrange who simply cannot afford to continue paying taxes as land values escalate, or those who wish to cash in the equity in their land for retirement, have few choices but to sell the land outright. Once the “for sale” sign goes up, it is usually too late to turn the tide. Currently, there are virtually no economically viable long-term options for landowners interested in maintaining their land as open space. While the town can apply for state, county and federal grant programs for the purchase of development rights, the monies for these programs simply are inadequate for demand across the county, state, and nation.

This plan asserts the need for the LaGrange community to address this problem. To do this, a diverse set of options or conservation tools will need to be established and adequate funding will be needed to support these tools. Some farmland owners simply need their taxes reduced so that they can continue to afford to work the land. Other landowners may be looking to retire or transition the land, and may need options that can help to support retirement while maintaining the land’s conservation value. The plan recommendations (Chapter 4) are tailored to meet these diverse needs.

The Problem of Fragmentation

A major result of increasing development in LaGrange is fragmentation of the town’s agricultural areas and its natural habitats. Although fragmentation is typically a word associated with conservation biology, fragmentation of the town’s farmlands is also a major concern. Farmers in LaGrange have described their farms as an interconnected system of lands, all of which are important for production. A small handful of farmers are working both their home farm and renting nearby lands in order to maintain an economically viable farm business. When a piece of the puzzle is lost to development, for example, when a rented farm parcel is sold for subdivision, it becomes much harder for the system to function. As farms become surrounded by residential development, conflicts arise, such as concerns about spraying or the use of fertilizers, making it harder for farmers to do their job.

Fragmentation of habitat leads to similar results for wildlife. When a large area of forest is broken up into smaller pieces, for example by a road, the benefits it provides wildlife diminishes. For some larger animals such as the black bear, fragmentation may result in an area that is too small for its survival. Fragmentation of functioning natural communities, such as the connection between wetlands and uplands, can also have a significant effect on wildlife that depend on connected areas for feeding, breeding or other basic activities.

The concept of fragmentation may oversimplify the deleterious effects of development on wildlife. However, without comprehensive habitat and species data for the town and region, the concept of fragmentation provides a useful way to frame development activities to reduce fragmentation of natural communities. This is of particular importance for the town’s major forest system (the Taconic Ridge), its riparian (creek) systems, and its wetland systems, which include not only the wetlands but the surrounding upland areas.

The Town’s Fiscal Health

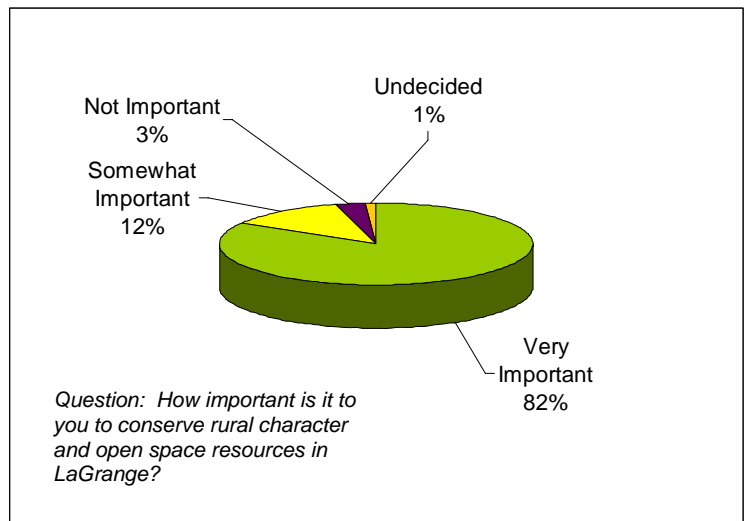
As open space is developed, there is another important point to consider; the financial costs of development to the town and its taxpayers. As the number of housing developments increase, so does the infrastructure that needs to be maintained and services that need to be provided. While an increase in residential development may appear to be a financial windfall, there is a point at which the cost of providing education and other services and maintenance actually becomes a burden to the taxpayers and taxes then must rise. There eventually comes a time when there is little or no open space for scenery or recreation, and the taxes are too high for long-time residents and other people who want to continue to live in the community.

Community Values

LaGrange is a community that cares about its open space resources. Town residents understand that open space provides many benefits to the community. Streams and riparian areas, such as those associated with Wappinger, Sprout and Jackson Creeks, perform critical “environmental services” such as maintaining clean drinking water. Farmlands in LaGrange produce vegetables, fruits, dairy products, landscape plants, and other essential products. Forest lands, such as those along the Taconic Ridge, are important environmental and recreational amenities. Each of these resources add to the character of LaGrange.

In the summer of 2006, the town’s open space committee conducted a mail survey to gauge the interest of town residents in preserving open space. Does the community think that open space conservation is important? What resources do they value? Are they willing to pay for conservation of open space?

The results were overwhelmingly supportive, with a 20% percent response rate (1,080 surveys returned), and 82% of respondents considering conservation of the rural character and open space resources to be very important. The results of the survey indicate that LaGrange residents want to conserve open space resources, particularly farmlands and water resources, and they are willing to contribute financially to accomplish this. Based on this strong evidence for support, LaGrange town officials and the open space committee decided to go forward with developing an open space plan to guide decision-making about where to focus efforts and what tools would be most effective.



Question 1 of the Town of LaGrange Open Space Plan Community Survey

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Among the major conclusions of the survey are the following:

- *82% of respondents said it is very important to conserve rural character and open space resources in LaGrange.*
- *Active farmlands and orchards were identified as the top priority for open space conservation in LaGrange, followed by aquifers and lands for water quality. Nature preserves and wildlife habitat were next in line.*
- *89% of respondents said that the town should protect open space resources as an investment in keeping the Town of LaGrange fiscally healthy and affordable.*
- *81% of respondents said they would feel comfortable spending \$15 or more per year for an average household for a local open space program; 54% of respondents would be comfortable spending \$31 or more.*

The survey form and a summary of its results are provided in Appendix A.

Open Space Planning Process

This open space plan is a continuation of work begun by the town's 2005 comprehensive plan update. One of the main goals of the town's 2005 comprehensive plan is to "balance growth and development with the need to protect natural resources and open space."

Some of the key objectives of the comprehensive plan include:

- Preserve and protect important natural features
- Promote recreational opportunities for all segments of the community
- Develop a conceptual trail network and expand passive recreational areas
- Identify and preserve open space and agricultural uses through a variety of techniques

Because the community's rural character and open space resources are important to residents, these objectives have been taken on by an open space committee, which formed in 2005 to help implement the open space plan. This committee, made up of volunteer members of the community, has been diligently working towards the completion of this open space plan.

The open space committee has been meeting monthly since its formation. They hired a planning consultant, Behan Planning Associates, LLC, to facilitate the planning process, conduct resource inventory and analysis, develop open space priorities and draft an open

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space plan with recommendations for implementation. The committee has taken a very active role in shaping the planning process and products and has served as a voice for the town and community in the planning process.

Public Meetings and Workshops

An important component of successful open space conservation is the support of the residents and landowners of the town. Town residents and large-acreage landowners often have different goals and concerns. Residents of the town often want to preserve the lands around them, the lands that they see and experience on a daily basis. Owners of these large tracts of open space land often feel “targeted” by the community in such efforts. Thus, a fair share of the planning process was devoted to working with landowners to understand their concerns and discuss the types of tools they might need to conserve open space resources on their lands.

On November 6, 2006, a public workshop was held to obtain feedback on conservation values and priorities within the town. At this workshop, participants were split into groups covering different geographic areas of the town and asked to identify resources and places that are important for open space preservation. The community expressed concern over the loss of farmland to development, helped to identify scenic areas and roads, and identified areas of importance for recreation. LaGrange Middle School students also attended this workshop and presented their recommendations for preserving open space in the central area of town.



LaGrange Middle School students share their vision for open space at the November 6th meeting.

Part of a successful open space planning process is to expand the lines of communication between town residents and town government officials with the landowners who are the stewards of the open space land enjoyed by so many. They include farmers who own and/or work significantly large parcels of land, or owners of private forests or other lands significant to habitat and/or scenic quality of the town.

By engaging key stakeholders in the process, the plan can target specific tools and recommendations that will ultimately assist landowners in conservation efforts, if they choose to do so. Likewise, the town officials get a better understanding of the challenges facing the landowners, and can work toward providing the best incentives and tools that are most helpful for landowners toward keeping their land open and undeveloped.

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This partnership and co-education between the town and landowners is the key to a successful town-wide open space system. On February 8, 2006 a meeting with large-acreage landowners was held. The purpose of this meeting was to solicit concerns and opportunities from landowners related to open space conservation and particularly farmland protection. This



LaGrange landowners have a dialogue with the town regarding tools that could help them preserve their lands.

meeting also provided a good opportunity to help land owners understand

conservation options and tools. The session proved useful on both counts, and the dialogue between the town officials, planners, and land owners continues to grow.

With the mutual support of the broader community and those that own large areas of the open space, LaGrange is poised for success in conservation of open space resources and wise management of its growth.

Plan Process and Goals

The main goal of this open space plan is to identify priority open space resources and develop a plan of action for their conservation. To do this, many steps were undertaken. A first, and important, step in developing an open space plan is to create an inventory of existing resources. These include natural resources such as the water and ecological systems in the town, as well as recreational and cultural resources like existing trails and historic features. Understanding the resource patterns is useful in determining priorities for open space conservation. For example, by noting where there are overlapping resources, or where large areas of conservation lands can be assembled, it is possible to identify for preservation those areas that provide the most benefit to the community.

The resources in LaGrange are discussed further in Chapter 2, and the process of prioritizing conservation lands and developing a vision for the town's open space resources is discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents a plan of action that is tailored specifically to the resources, priorities, and values identified throughout the planning process. Chapter 5 provides conclusions.

Land Use Patterns in LaGrange

The three most predominant land use types in LaGrange are residential, vacant land, and agricultural. At 44.3%, residential is the predominant use in the town, followed by 6,200 acres of vacant land (24%), indicating a town in transition from agriculture to residential. Development proposals have been brought forward to the LaGrange Planning Board for many of these vacant lands. Agricultural lands comprise about 14% of the town's land

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area. The remaining land use types (roads, community services, industrial, etc.) make up 17.6%, with no single use occupying more than 4%. The table below summarizes the land use acreages.

Land Use Summary Table (from the 2005 Town of LaGrange Comprehensive Plan):

Land Use	Acres	Percentage
Residential	11,428	44.3%
Vacant Land	6,200	24.0%
Agricultural	3,624	14.1%
Road Right-Of-Way	1,009	3.9%
Community Services	966	3.7%
Wild, Forested, Conservation Lands and Public Parks	809	3.1%
Commercial	625	2.4%
Public Services	499	1.9%
Recreation and Entertainment	289	1.1%
Industrial	262	1.0%
Unknown (no info. available)	78	0.3%
Total	25,790	100.0%

Existing Open Space in LaGrange

Currently about 1,422 acres of land in LaGrange are permanently protected in some way. Those means of protection include public parks, other publicly owned land, and permanent conservation easements held by the Dutchess Land Conservancy. Another 216 acres of open space are privately-owned recreation facilities such as camps and sportsman clubs.

Parks and Preserves

James Baird State Park, located in the center of LaGrange between the Taconic State Parkway and Freedom Road, encompasses 544 acres of land. It is located along the Taconic Ridge and provides recreation opportunities as well as valuable protection for rare plant communities. Town parks in LaGrange include Freedom Park in the northeast part of town, Stringham Park, LaGrange Park, and several town-owned



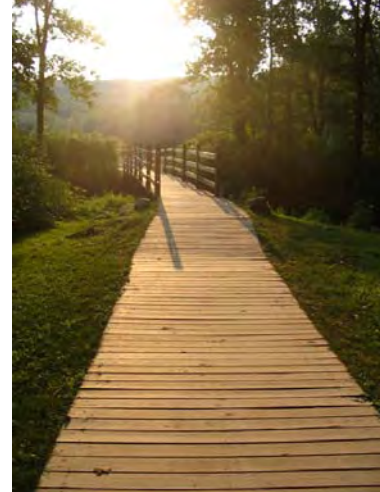
LaGrange's Stringham Park is a major asset for residents of the surrounding neighborhoods.

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properties that have the potential to become parks. The Overlook Preserve, owned by the Nature Conservancy, protects 139 acres of ponds, wetlands, and forest which provides valuable habitat for the Blanding’s turtle.

Conservation Easements

The Dutchess Land Conservancy, a land trust focusing their efforts on “preserving the rural character and open lands of Dutchess County,” holds easements on approximately 341 acres in LaGrange. One of those properties is the Sprout Creek Farm, which includes a market, creamery, and opportunities to learn about agriculture in the region.



Boardwalk in Freedom Park.

Private Open Space

Other existing open space in the town includes privately-owned recreation areas such as lands owned by Red Wing Properties, camps, sportsmen’s clubs, and golf courses. These private recreation lands contribute in different ways to the open space system of the town. While they may change hands and are not considered permanently protected, they do offer benefit of open space in that they contribute to scenic value, wildlife habitat, and recreation opportunities. For example, The One Ten Rod and Gun Club in the northeast corner of the town, provides over 100 acres adjacent to the Hereford-Taconic Multiple Use Area (MUA), adding to the size of the large forested area in that part of the town.

Existing Regulations

Open space in the Town of LaGrange extends beyond what is currently protected as parks or preserves. Much of the open space in the town, including farmlands or upland forested areas, has little or no permanent protection from development. There are existing regulations already in place that help protect resources like designated wetlands. These tools are discussed throughout this plan and include town zoning laws; existing local, federal and state regulations for stream and wetland protection; tax incentives provided through state programs such as through agricultural districts in the state forest tax law (480A). Opportunities to augment existing regulations to achieve conservation are discussed throughout this plan.

Existing Open Space Summary Table:

Owner/ Easement Holder	Acres
State of New York (James Baird State Park)	544
State of New York (Taconic-Hereford Multiple Use Area)	152
Town of LaGrange	246
Nature Conservancy (Overlook Preserve)	139
Dutchess Land Conservancy (Easements)	341
Total	1,422

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Regional Perspective

LaGrange possesses many regionally-significant open space resources, including the Taconic Ridge; Wappinger Creek, Sprout Creek, Jackson Creek and their watersheds; and farmlands that are part of the Hudson River Valley. Many regional efforts have already been advanced to conserve these resources. For example, the Taconic State Parkway is a state-designated scenic byway and has a corridor management plan that helps to preserve its scenic quality. Much of the lands of the Taconic Ridge are preserved by New York State (James Baird State Park, Hereford-Taconic MUA). The Wappinger Creek Intermunicipal Watershed Council has been formed to address common concerns related to the Wappinger Creek Watershed.

Dutchess County has taken many steps to help its communities plan wisely for growth and conservation. The county continues to provide invaluable support for its communities, for example through the landmark *Greenway Connections* report, the planned Dutchess Rail-Trail, and its Open Space and Farmland Protection Matching Grant Program.

Adjacent communities have also been involved in open space efforts. Particularly, the Town of Beekman adopted an open space plan in 2005 and town voters approved a \$3 million bond in November of that same year. The LaGrange Conservation Advisory Council (CAC) and Pleasant Valley CAC have been collaborating on trail planning efforts along the Wappinger Creek. Many other efforts in adjacent communities, from comprehensive planning to hamlet development, are addressing open space conservation and land use patterns.

While this plan is directed specifically at identifying priorities for LaGrange, it has not been done in isolation of the regional influences and activities. While the maps in this plan end at the town borders, mainly due to the availability of data, the resources do not. In the resource analysis and prioritization, the town's patterns have been examined in their regional context. There are many opportunities identified in this plan for intermunicipal and regional collaboration. In most cases, these intermunicipal opportunities will be more cost effective, will provide more effective results, and will reach a larger constituency. A regional approach to implementation of this open space plan should be taken whenever feasible.

Conclusion

This planning process and its resulting recommendations are based on a sound sequence of planning that was initiated as part of the town's comprehensive plan and continued as a dialogue between the community, landowners, and the town. The priority resources identified in this plan (Chapter 3) consider the town's resources from an ecological and agricultural perspective. However, the plan's recommendations, and the basis for future action, are grounded in community and landowner support and participation.

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CHAPTER 2: RESOURCE INVENTORY

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- Water Resources
- Ecological Resources
- Working Landscapes
- Cultural and Recreation Resources
- Conclusion

CHAPTER 2: RESOURCE INVENTORY

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of LaGrange’s existing open space resources. It briefly describes the water resources, ecological resources including wildlife habitats and species, working landscapes, and cultural and recreational resources. Each section of this chapter corresponds with a resource map located in Appendix B in order to orient the reader to the location and distribution of the resources. (Note: The Town of LaGrange 2005 Comprehensive Plan includes additional information on the town including land use patterns, etc.)

Water Resources

Water resources discussed in this chapter are part of a hydrological system. The components of that system depend on each other for correct functioning, and since they do not prescribe to political boundaries, they extend beyond the borders of LaGrange. The water quality in the streams and aquifers depend on the wetlands for filtration, and the floodplains provide space for overflow until proper filtration can occur. By understanding how the hydrological system works and where the main components exist, it becomes possible to maintain high water quality through responsible land use management and pollution prevention. The **Water Resources Map** in Appendix B shows the locations of important water resources in LaGrange.

The two main watersheds in the town are the Wappinger Watershed, which includes the Wappinger Creek and its tributaries, and the Fishkill Watershed which includes Sprout Creek and its tributaries. Both of these watersheds drain directly into the Hudson River.



The Wappinger and Fishkill are the two main watersheds in the Town of LaGrange. Both watersheds drain into the Hudson River.
Source: Dutchess County EMC

Rivers and Streams

The two main waterways in LaGrange are the Wappinger and Sprout Creeks. Wappinger Creek forms the border between LaGrange and the Town of Poughkeepsie, and represents a recreation opportunity for the town in the form of multi-purpose greenway for hiking, biking, and cross country skiing, as well as water recreation such as kayaking and fishing. By preserving lands along the Wappinger Creek, the town would also be protecting the water quality and fisheries habitat of the creek which eventually flows into the Hudson River. Sprout Creek is one of the main contributors to the Fishkill Watershed. One of its main tributaries, Jackson Creek, joins Sprout Creek just south of the LaGrange border in East Fishkill. The area near the Noxon hamlet forming the confluence of these two waterways is environmentally important due to the system of wetlands and floodplains contributing to a major aquifer recharge area.



The Wappinger Creek is an ecological and recreational asset in LaGrange and the region.

Floodplains

Floodplains occur along rivers and streams and other low lying areas where flooding occurs. Flooding is a natural process which contributes to sustainable land fertility and fish and wildlife habitat. The most notable area of floodplain occurs south of Noxon Road between Hillside Lake Road and Robinson Lane. Approximately 437 acres of floodplain occurs here within LaGrange near where Jackson Creek flows into Sprout Creek. Wappinger Creek also has significant floodplains occurring along its length through the town.

Aquifers

In 1992, Dutchess County contracted with Horsely, Witten, and Hegemann Inc. to conduct a Water Supply Protection Plan. Part of that process entailed delineating aquifer protection areas, or land areas that contribute water to the aquifers. The resulting map (Water Resources Map) shows three classifications of those areas. Zone 1, Primary Recharge Areas, includes those areas with the most permeable layer of soils and bedrock over the aquifer, meaning the water and any contaminants in it flow the most directly and most rapidly into the aquifer. Zone II, Secondary Recharge Areas, include less permeable deposits, and therefore the water has somewhat better filtration and more time before reaching the aquifer. Zone III, Tertiary Recharge Areas, are those areas that contribute to a stream and subsequently to the aquifer through infiltration of wetlands.

What does this mean for open space planning? It means that the land within those areas has an important role in maintaining water quality. The amount of development occurring in these areas should be carefully planned, and as much of the natural

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vegetation as possible should be retained, especially since the town's population obtains its water from wells that tap the groundwater system.

Wetlands

Wetlands provide filtration important for water quality as well as wildlife habitat. There are a total of 2,398 acres of mapped wetlands in the town, identified and regulated by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the National Wetland Inventory (NWI)*. In addition, Hudsonia Ltd, a non-profit research institute for conservation science, identified important kettle shrub pools and other wetland and stream habitats along Sprout Creek, providing a more detailed layer of information for that area of the town. *(Note: The NWI maps are indicators of wetlands that may be subject to federal regulation. Determination of federally protected wetlands is typically done only as part of a proposed development application and included as a wetland delineation study and survey.)

In LaGrange, there are several areas where wetlands interconnect and provide extensive networks of habitat and natural areas. One of these exists along the west side of Route 82 between Moores Mill and Billings for an almost continuous stretch of two miles. Along the central spine of the town there is a string of wetlands that runs in a north-south direction almost continuously, from the northern border to the southern, ending in an area near the confluence of Jackson and Sprout Creeks that is roughly 164 acres of wetlands and floodplains. The stretch of wetlands described above including the Overlook Preserve area to Rombout Road is seen as important by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and is described further in the following section.

Ecological Resources

Endangered and Threatened Species in LaGrange

The importance of many of the wetlands and surrounding uplands in LaGrange is highlighted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) study of significant habitat in the New York Bight watershed. The USFWS has identified an area in LaGrange as part of the Dutchess County Wetlands Complex. (See the **Ecological Resources Map** in



Blanding's Turtle is on the New York State Threatened Species list.
Source: New York State National Heritage Program

Appendix B for approximate boundaries). The study identifies this as an area where significant populations or habitat of a select group of species occurs, and gives particular importance to the existence of large habitat complexes with connectivity between habitat types. It is supported by the USFWS that

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the habitat and connectivity forming its network or system should be given high priority for conservation, and this should be taken into consideration when planning and funding open space conservation in the Town of LaGrange.

Within the area described above, as well as in other parts of the town, the New York State Natural Heritage Program has identified the locations of endangered and threatened plant and animal species. The most notable of those include the Blanding's turtle and Indiana brown bat. The Blanding's turtle is recognized as threatened by New York State, and the Dutchess Wetland Complex harbors the only known population in New York other than the Town of Wilton in Saratoga County and along the St. Lawrence River. The Indiana brown bat is listed as endangered on both the state and federal lists. Its required habitat consists of both the caves in which it hibernates and trees for birthing and rearing. While its numbers appear to be stable, there are very few caves which meet the requirements of this rare bat, and the loss of one due to development could be a devastating blow to the species. While the locations of these species are not indicated on any of the maps for the protection of the bat, they have been considered and included in the priority rating. They should be further considered in any site-specific development or planning activities in the town.

Other Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat

There are currently about 13,000 acres of habitat land cover types in LaGrange which includes bogs and shrub wetlands, forest brushland, forest land, and wooded wetland. Approximately 7% (900 acres) was lost between 1998 and 2004 primarily due to new residential development. Maintaining large patches of contiguous forest is important for many types of wildlife. As these patches become smaller and/or farther apart, their ability to sustain wildlife decreases.

The Ralph T. Waterman Bird Club has identified several public areas in LaGrange which are exceptionally good for bird watching. They occur in Freedom Park, James Baird State Park, and two locations in the Taconic-Hereford Multiple Use Area. This designation reinforces the importance of the town's open space for wildlife habitat.

Between 2003 and 2005, Hudsonia Ltd. undertook an effort to map ecologically significant habitats along the Fishkill and Sprout Creek corridors. As a result the Town of LaGrange has at its disposal detailed information on the location of valuable wildlife habitat that many communities do not have. This information is particularly



Forest and wetland habitat patches in LaGrange with minimal fragmentation. Large, connected patches are necessary to maintaining wildlife viability.

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pertinent to open space planning since it depicts the approximate location of important small scale habitats such as kettle shrub pools, calcareous wet meadows, and intermittent woodland pools along Sprout Creek which are integral to the survival of species such as the Blanding's turtle.

Working Landscapes

Working landscapes serve an important function. They include land which provides a harvested product such as livestock, timber, or crops produced by productive farmland. In addition to the products, they may also serve an important educational function, as does Sprout Creek Farm in LaGrange which produces dairy products and offers educational opportunities to the community through youth programs. Harder to measure is the scenic value that the open fields, barns, orchards, and grazing livestock offer the community. This value is a large attractor for new residents.

One issue affecting the viability of these productive farms is the ability to generate enough revenue through farm product sales to pay for taxes and other farm expenses. The agricultural district law provides some relief to landowners by providing real property tax abatements to those that are located within an agricultural district area or own a qualified farm and choose to enroll in the program. The **Working Landscapes Map** in Appendix B shows the location of these agricultural districts. This incentive helps to keep farms financially viable within the areas best suited to farming.



Farms in LaGrange are valued for the economic, agricultural, and scenic benefits they provide to the community.

The Working Landscapes Map also shows the Prime Farmland Soils and Soils of Statewide Significance as defined by the Soil Survey Geographic (SSURGO) database for Dutchess County. Originated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the location of these soils indicates areas where the soil is exceptionally good for crop production. Paradoxically, those soils which are good for crop production are also excellent locations for constructing houses. That, accompanied by the fact that farmland by its nature is usually cleared of trees, makes it ideal land for development. In addition, the challenges that farmers face in maintaining their livelihood through farming, creates a situation

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where the open scenic farmland becomes developed with housing and commercial developments.

In the Town of LaGrange, 1,909 acres of agricultural land, or 33%, has been converted to another land use type or abandoned between 1998 and 2004. As of the writing of this plan, the town has a total of 3,340 acres categorized as working landscape, including 11.4 acres under the Forest Tax Law (480A). This law provides incentive to landowners to sustainably harvest the timber on their property. Currently, in order to receive a tax incentive the tract of land must be at least 50 acres in size, and a management plan developed by a qualified forester must be implemented by the landowner. The 11.4 acres currently under this law in LaGrange is adjacent to over 100 acres of forest land owned by the same person. With approximately 7,900 acres of forest lands, this tool still has much potential within the town.

Cultural and Recreational Resources

The **Recreational Opportunities and Cultural Landscapes Map** in Appendix B illustrates many of LaGrange's unique historic features, as well as opportunities for trail connections within the town. These cultural and recreational resources are discussed further in the following sections.

Historic Resources

When considering open space conservation, it is important to recognize the history and culture of a place. One of the main objectives of an open space plan is to help a community maintain the existing character that long-term residents know as home, and new residents are attracted to. The character of a place is shaped by its history of land use and settlement. Unfortunately, the national trend has been towards commercial and residential development that robs communities of their individuality due to building and design patterns that persist regardless of geographic location. In the town's 2005 comprehensive plan, several buildings and other features have been identified as being historically significant. These resources should be considered as valuable to maintaining the character of the town, and thus incorporated into planning for open space.



Barns are an important part of LaGrange's working landscape history.

The settlement patterns in the Town of LaGrange have historically been influenced by two main forces: the topography and transportation networks such as the Taconic State Parkway. The topography of the town, with the steep slopes of the Taconic Ridge, kept most of the farm settlements of the 18th century on the flatter lands mostly west of the Taconic State Parkway and south of Route 55. With a long history as a farming community, LaGrange's character depends greatly on the farm lands and the architecture of the settlements that grew up as a result of the farming life such as barns, farmhouses, mills, schoolhouses, and churches. The accompanying

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landscape features include stone walls and open fields for growing crops and grazing livestock. Many of the historic buildings are located in the hamlet centers such as Freedom Plains, Moores Mill, and Lagrangeville.

The second major influence on settlement patterns was the building of the Taconic State Parkway in the 1930s. Designed and built as a park-like drive through the scenic Taconic Ridge, it acted as a conduit which allowed easy access to the town from points south, particularly New York City. The close proximity to Poughkeepsie has also encouraged the suburban development that has been characteristic for LaGrange. The good rich soils and flat ground was ideal for building homes, thus, the areas around Poughkeepsie (the west and south parts of town) have suburbanized the fastest. The historic Sleigh house was preserved by a developer willing to work with the town to preserve it and some surrounding acreage, while the Chorney Farmhouse built in 1830, unfortunately did not have the same good fortune. Partnerships between developers and the town are key to preserving the unique historic and natural character of the town.

Trails and Trail Opportunities

Providing recreation opportunities within a community goes hand-in-hand with conserving open space. The opportunity for people to enjoy the outdoors and get close to nature strengthens the desire to preserve it. By providing public areas for hiking, fishing, kayaking, or cross-country skiing, the community learns to enjoy natural resources and thereby becomes more likely to advocate for their conservation.

The 2005 Town of LaGrange Comprehensive Plan presents conceptual trail opportunities that seek to create connections between existing and proposed trails and public open spaces. Some of these conceptual trails include a continuation of the trail already created for the Wappinger Creek Greenway Trail; a trail connecting James Baird State Park with the Taconic-Hereford Multiple Use Area; and the Taconic-Hereford Multiple Use Area with Freedom Park. The Dutchess Rail Trail through the Town of LaGrange is currently in the design phase, and the comprehensive plan suggests several alternatives for linking it to other trails and destinations. In order to make this comprehensive trail system a reality it would have to be planned in conjunction with open space conservation since a trail requires that land is owned by a public entity or an easement is held on private property.

Trails already existing in LaGrange include the Wappinger Creek Greenway Trail, the Red Wing Nature Trails which are privately owned, and those trails that are within existing parks such as Stringham and James Baird State Parks, and the Taconic-Hereford Multiple Use Area. The Dutchess Rail Trail will be extended through the south west corner of LaGrange.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced many of LaGrange's open space resources. The associated maps illustrate their patterns throughout the town. The resources introduced in this chapter form the basis for the identification of priorities in the chapter that follows (Chapter 3). Ultimately, the plan aims to achieve conservation of the function of these open space resources, whether they are natural, agricultural, or recreational resources.

CHAPTER 3: A VISION FOR OPEN SPACE

Contents:

Part I: Introduction to the Vision Map

- Introduction
- Interpreting the Open Space Vision Map
- How Was the Vision Map Created?

Part II: Summary of the Vision Map Components

- Introduction
- Vision Map Components

Conclusion

CHAPTER 3: A VISION FOR OPEN SPACE

“A connected system of parks and parkways is manifestly far more complete and useful than a series of isolated parks.”

—JOHN CHARLES OLMSTED AND FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED, JR. (the Olmsted Brothers) in their Report to the Portland (OR) Park Board, 1903

Part 1: Introduction to the Vision Map

Introduction

When communities plan for the future, they often develop master plans that lay out where they want future roads, neighborhoods, commercial areas and other types of development. Sometimes this process includes the identification of parks or other protected features. Rarely, however, does a community create a master plan for preserving what already exists – their natural and agricultural systems. The first step towards creating this plan is identifying the systems that are important to the community’s long-term environmental, social and economic health. The open space vision map does just this. It identifies the natural, agricultural, and recreational features and systems of the town’s landscape. Expressing this vision is the first step towards ensuring that these resources are preserved for future generations.

This chapter presents the community vision for open space in LaGrange. The **Open Space Vision Map for the Town of LaGrange** (located on the following page) illustrates the five major components of the open space network, which will be discussed further in this chapter. These concepts are: core farm areas; natural areas; trails; greenway corridors; and scenic roads and views.

Interpreting the Open Space Vision Map

The open space vision map identifies a network of priority resources that can be preserved through several different techniques, if a landowner chooses to work with the town and other partners towards these goals. The implementation of conservation projects is voluntary and the recommendations in this plan are focused on developing incentives that will help landowners who choose to conserve open space resources.

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The vision map also helps to put site-specific actions into a larger context of open space conservation goals. For example, as lands are set aside within conservation subdivision development, the map can help to coordinate larger networks of open space that meet both community and ecological goals.

The vision map serves as a blueprint for future investment in open space by the town and other partners. For example, it can help to identify priorities for purchase of development rights or open space acquisition projects that the town could spearhead, working collaboratively with landowners and county, state, federal, and private partners such as nonprofit organizations.

The vision map can also serve as a blueprint for future land use and zoning actions that help to balance development with protection of farmlands and open space resources. For example, the town could provide additional zoning incentives to achieve protection of important resources or areas through the transfer of density. This type of incentive would require additional planning with the community to determine areas for focused development.

This goal of the vision map is to identify important open space resources and patterns. It would be incorrect to assume that the grey areas on the map (the areas without specific resources identified) should handle all of the town's new growth. Additional studies would need to be conducted to determine the best locations and densities for growth, in a way that balances the goals of this open space plan with the town's fiscal capacity, and also with the community's vision for development.

The resources identified in the vision map are those that are significant from a town and regional scale. Projects at the neighborhood or site scale will require additional analysis of open space resources and opportunities. Ideally, projects at the neighborhood or site scale would provide open space that connects to the town-wide network of open space. This is of particular importance in the western part of town, where much of the new growth is occurring. While there are few town-wide resources of priority that were identified on the vision map, there are many local resources important to neighborhoods and individuals who live in this area. As this area continues to grow, the need for green space and recreational opportunities will only increase. This analysis highlights the need for focused recreation/greenspace planning in the western part of town, which the town has already been working towards.

In summary, the vision map can serve as a guide for town actions and as a first filter for prioritization of town investment in open space. As this plan becomes implemented, the town will have several tools at its disposal to partner with landowners in conservation efforts. Resources identified on the vision map (such as farms located in the core farm areas or priority trails) would be prioritized by the town, working on a voluntary basis with landowners. The town would also most likely need to conduct a second-filter analysis of priorities that would include real-world factors that enter into decision-making. These factors might include, for example:

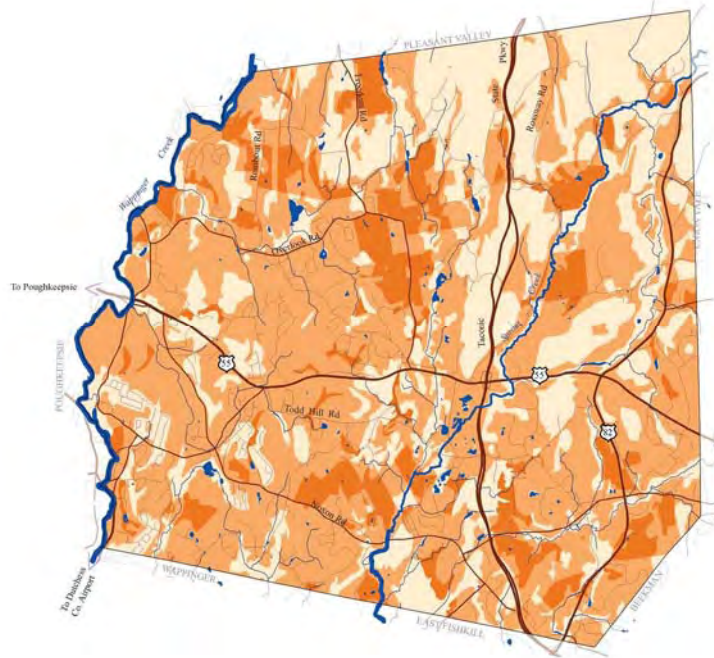
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- Criteria of available grant funds or other funding sources
- Criteria or requirements of project partners (such nonprofits, or other public agencies)
- Public support for the project
- The public costs and benefits of the project
- Geographic distribution of projects
- The distribution of projects within resource categories (farms, natural areas, greenways, trails, etc.)

How Was the Vision Map Created?

The vision map in this plan reflects the integration of a resource rating system with community and landowner input. The community participated through a town-wide survey, a visioning meeting, landowner meetings, and individual contact. The resource rating system identified important natural and agricultural resources based on scientific and ecological data and principles. The rating system examined three categories in detail: agricultural resources, natural systems, and water resources. These were the community's top three open space priorities according to the town-wide survey.

Important **agricultural areas** were identified based on soil quality, existing agricultural use and participation in the agricultural district. Large contiguous areas of active farms in the agricultural district with excellent soils generally scored the highest.



Agricultural Priorities Map. The darkest colors represent the areas that scored the highest.

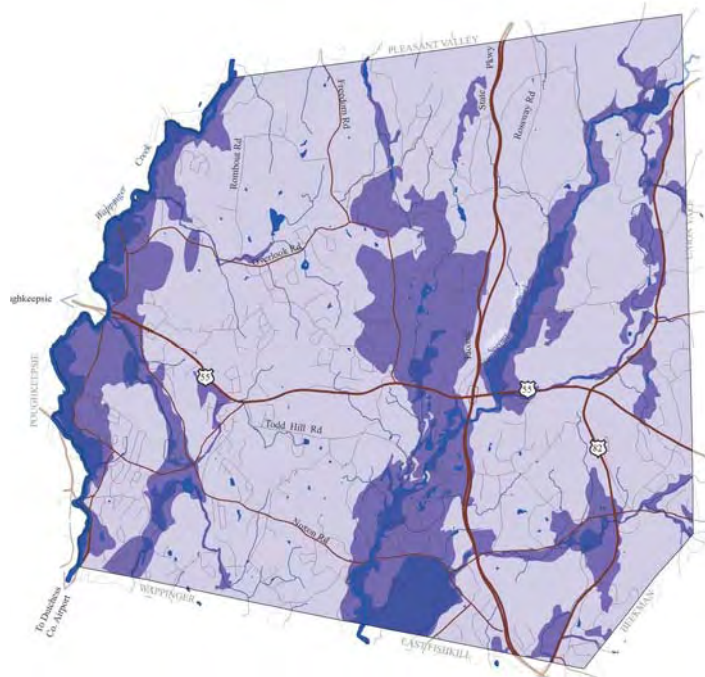
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For **natural systems**, large, unfragmented forests or other natural land cover were prioritized, along with smaller important habitat areas such as wetlands and kettle shrub pools. Floodplains, riparian corridors, and associated streams and draining channels were also prioritized. Habitat for imperiled species, where such data exist, was also prioritized.



Natural Systems Priorities Map. The darkest colors represent the highest scores.

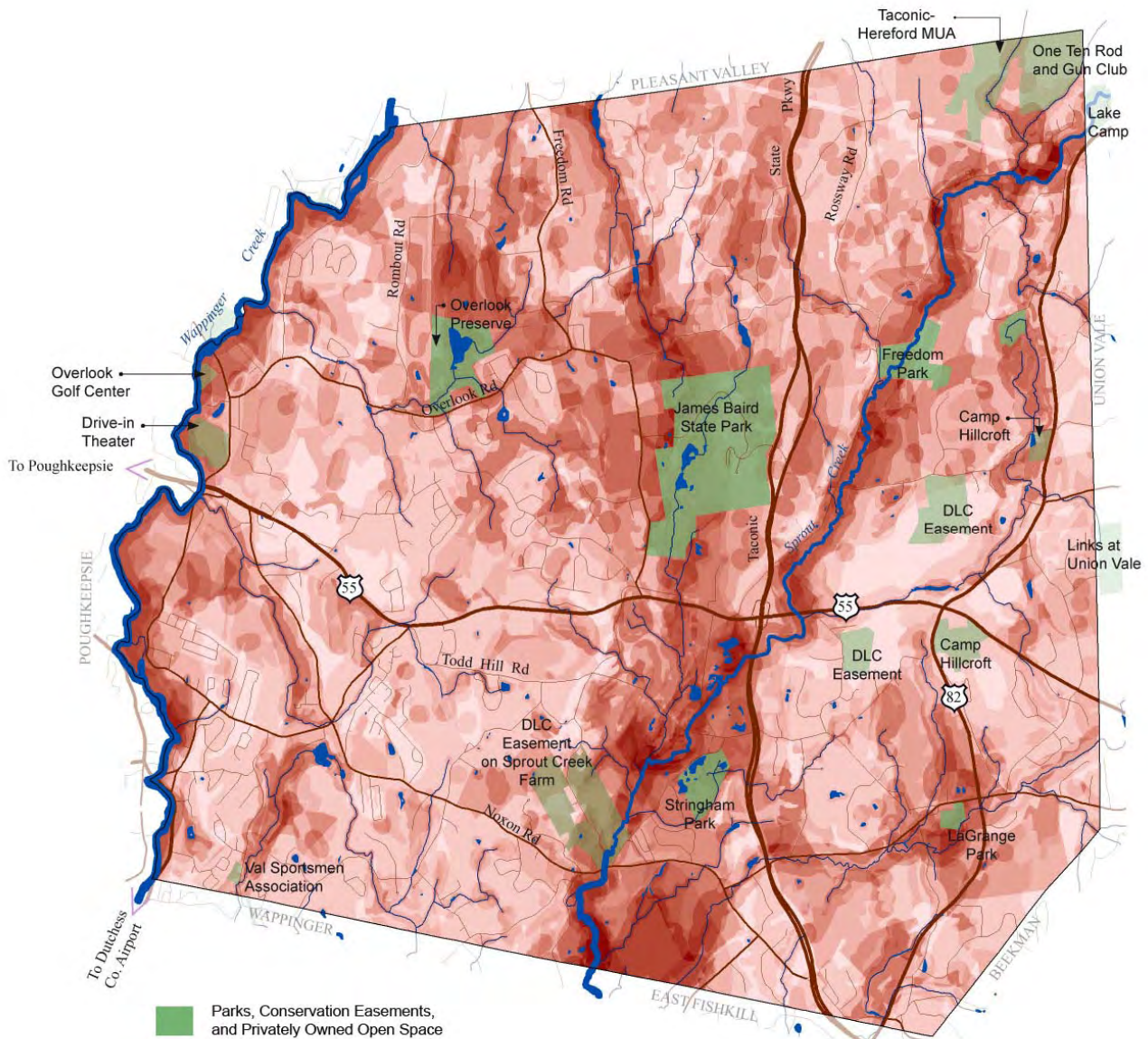
Water resources were further prioritized for the benefits that they provide to the community. Aquifer areas, which have already been mapped, were included in this analysis along with rivers, streams, wetlands, floodplains and other water resources that help to maintain clean drinking water and prevent flooding.



Water Resources Priorities Map. The darkest colors represent the highest scores.

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After lands within each individual resource category were rated, the results of all three categories were combined to identify areas that were of highest priority for the benefits they provide. This combined priority map was used as the base map for the open space vision map. However, after examining all of the scientific and ecological data and the resulting resource patterns, there was still a need to add a cultural component to the analysis, such as the trail corridors and scenic roads that were identified in the visioning workshop. **The vision map presented in this plan is a combination of the priority mapping (based on resource data and science) and the community's values.**



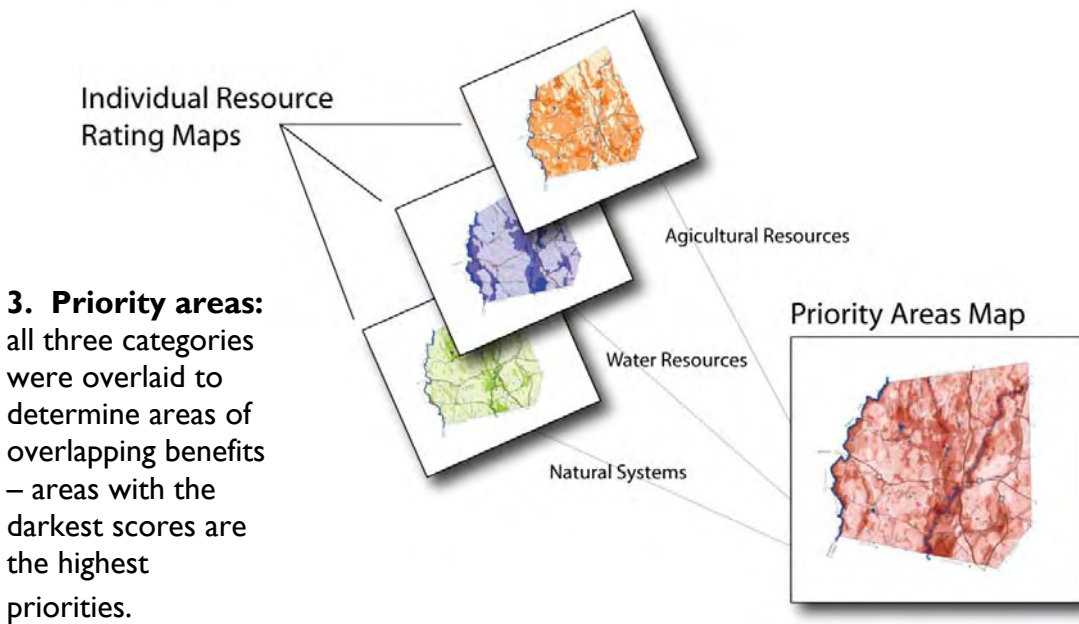
Combined Priority Map. The darkest colors represent the highest scores.

PROCESS FOR CREATING A VISION FOR OPEN SPACE IN LAGRANGE



1. Community survey and early visioning workshop: established resource categories for further evaluation- agricultural, water resources, wildlife habitats.

2. Resource rating: each resource category was rated individually to identify priority areas - agriculture, water resources, and natural systems.



4. Vision map: The priority synthesis map is combined with community priorities for trails, scenic roads and views and other resources.



Part 2: Summary of the Vision Map Components

Introduction

The **Open Space Vision Map** illustrates an interconnected open space network in LaGrange. The major goals of this open space vision are to preserve core areas of working agriculture; maintain and enhance water quality; protect wildlife habitats and connectivity; preserve scenic views; and create trail connections and provide public access to open space.

Vision Map Components

The components of the vision map that are discussed in the following sections are: core farm areas; greenway corridors; natural areas; trails; and scenic roads and views. A discussion of the priority resources is provided for each component, as well as existing tools that help to preserve the resource. Recommended future actions are also set forth. Resource areas are numbered in the plan to correspond with numbers on the open space vision map.

A. Core Farm Areas

One of the primary goals of this plan is to preserve large, working “core” areas of farmlands in LaGrange. These larger areas offer a “critical mass” of farmlands that are essential to maintain agriculture in LaGrange. LaGrange farmland owners have described their land as an interconnected system, where each piece is critical to the viability of the whole system. Farmers look for these areas with a “critical mass” to provide an economy of scale in land, production, and distribution, as well as a broader need for peer support and collaboration. Many farmers in LaGrange rent lands from other owners in the core

area. Smaller working farms are also important to the town, especially those that are highly visible and provide direct connections to the community (for example through a farm stand or pick-your-own operation).

The town can play a proactive role in preserving lands for agriculture in LaGrange.



According to the 2006 town-wide survey, active farms were the community's top priority for conservation.

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However, preserving the land alone will not secure a future for agriculture. Landowners are the key to farmland protection. Without landowners, and the people who work the lands, there is no agriculture. Future generations of farmers are needed, and current practices will likely need to adapt as the face of agriculture changes to compete in a global market. Regional efforts towards this end should be supported and advanced in LaGrange.

Below are major goals for maintaining agriculture in LaGrange:

- Conserve large core areas of working farmlands on a voluntary basis, working with willing landowners. Also conserve smaller working farms that are highly visible or provide community connections or other benefits, with willing landowners.
- Help to retain agriculture by providing a supportive economic environment for agricultural land owners. This includes helping to reduce the tax burden on agricultural landowners, who typically do not require the same level of services as other land uses, so that they can hold on to their lands. It also includes maintaining flexibility in zoning regulations to support agricultural business ventures and other compatible endeavors that help to keep the land open.
- Take a regional approach towards agri-business development and promotion.
- Enhance visibility and community ties to local agricultural products.

Priority Areas

The priority farm areas in LaGrange (referred to as “core farm areas” in this plan and associated maps) were identified based on the underlying resources, as well as their ability to support a future for agriculture. Soil data were used to identify the most suitable agriculture lands. However, many of the lands with the best soils in LaGrange are developed. Therefore, lands with good soils that are currently being farmed were prioritized. Lands enrolled



Farms provide many public benefits including the preservation of scenic views.

in the agricultural district were further prioritized. Once these priority lands were identified, the large “core” areas of contiguous high-priority lands were identified to help further refine areas of focus. Areas of farmland in adjacent towns that were contiguous to LaGrange were factored into this analysis. This analysis uncovered four major “core”

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areas in LaGrange: Northwest LaGrange, Sprout Creek North, Sprout Creek South, and Rt. 82 South.

The largest core area, **Northwest LaGrange**, is located between the Taconic State Parkway and the Wappinger Creek, and North of Route 55. This area contains lands associated with several working farms, including the Robb Brothers, Domin, Kondas, Dandenau, Tobin and Porter farms. Most of these active farmlands are within the agricultural district. This area contains the largest “critical mass” of agricultural lands in the town and is therefore the highest priority for farmland protection, as a whole.

The second core farm area in LaGrange, **Sprout Creek North**, is located along the floodplain of Sprout Creek in the northern part of town. This area includes the Pierson Farm and Wiltse Farm and surrounding lands. These farms are important not only from an agricultural perspective but also because they provide important habitat connections between the higher elevations of the Taconic Ridge, the foothills, and Sprout Creek.



The scenic views provided by farms are among the many benefits of preserving farmland.

The third core farm area, **Sprout Creek South**, is on the south side of Sprout Creek close to the town’s boundary with the Towns of East Fishkill and Wappinger. This core farm area extends into these adjacent towns and provides an opportunity to partner towards a regional effort. Major farms in this area include Secor Strawberry Farm, Sprout Creek Farm, Sleight Farm, and the Gagliardi farm.

The last core farm area, **Route 82 South**, is located along the southern portion of Route 82 on the east side of town. This core farm area includes the Cuneo Farm, Hitsman Farm, and Trade Farms and surrounding lands.

Although not within a “core” area, individual farms throughout the town such as the Red Oaks Mill Farm and others along the Wappinger Creek floodplain, and those along the north side of Rt. 82, are also important locally and should be considered for conservation efforts.

Existing Tools for Farmland Protection

Currently, in the Town of LaGrange, as well as in the state and region, there are very few tools available to help maintain farmland. As the town and region grow, property values and taxes increase, making it difficult for landowners to keep their land in agriculture when the development value of the land is so high. Currently, the tools being used to

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address this problem in LaGrange are the state property and income tax relief programs and local zoning provisions that allow for increased density in exchange for preservation of land.

In New York State, there are two major programs that offer tax relief for farmers: the Agricultural Assessment Program and the Farmers' School Tax Credit. The agricultural assessment program offers agricultural landowners that qualify a reduced property tax bill as the land is assessed for its agricultural value (based on soil quality), rather than the fair market value, which is typically the non-farm development value. To qualify for agricultural assessment, the property must be in a certified agricultural district (or the property owner for an eligible agricultural parcel outside of the agricultural district must sign a commitment letter) and must meet several other requirements.

Most agricultural landowners in LaGrange are currently enrolled in the agricultural assessment program. The agricultural assessment, however, is currently not applied to fire district taxes, which are currently creating a significant burden on agricultural land owners in LaGrange. For many landowners, especially those looking to retire or transition, the benefits of tax relief under this existing program are not commensurate with that of selling the land for development. Further, this added tax burden makes it very difficult to keep the land open and in production.

The Farmers' School Tax Credit program allows qualifying farmers to take a credit against personal income tax, or corporate franchise tax, equal to the school taxes paid on certain property, including farmland and buildings.

In addition to state tax relief programs, the Town of LaGrange has a **farmland preservation zone**, which is an overlay district based on soil designation. The farmland preservation zone allows for increased density in exchange for preservation of farmlands during a development project. While the farmland preservation zone is a good tool for protecting farmland resources once they are going to become developed, it does not stop the larger pattern of fragmentation of core farm areas that is occurring in LaGrange.

Between 1998 and 2006, approximately 1,900 acres, or 30% of LaGrange's farmlands were abandoned or lost to development. As of December 2006, another 1,700 acres were proposed for development, and were under review by the LaGrange Planning Board. While some of these lands would be preserved as farmland under the town's agricultural farmland preservation overlay zone, this pattern of development will still lead to fragmentation and reduction of the larger "core" farm areas as some of the interstitial lands would be developed. Likewise, the town's zoning regulations, which call for larger lots (approximately 2-3 acres) in agricultural areas will not end this problem of fragmentation of core farm areas.

All of these existing tools are important to LaGrange's efforts to protect farmlands. However, the town will need to supplement existing tools with additional incentives and options for landowners in order to proactively preserve and retain the core farm areas.

Recommended Tools

Local Tax Incentives

Fire Tax

A local tax incentive is recommended to help further reduce the tax burden on agricultural landowners. The most direct option would be to apply the town fire taxes to agricultural assessment. This would require a resolution from the town's fire district. As provided in Ag-Mkts §305(6), "the governing body of a fire, fire protection, or ambulance district for which special ad valorem levies or special assessments are made may adopt a resolution allowing the use of agricultural assessments in the levy of such charges."

Term Easements

The town could also create a local term easement program that would provide tax incentives for agricultural landowners to preserve their lands for a given term. The tax incentives could be applied to the full assessment to close the gap in the fire tax. The term easement could also be offered for other (non-agricultural) properties that provide a buffer to farms, as well as to agricultural properties that may not apply for the state agricultural assessment for reasons of size, income, or other factors. Term easements could also be offered for non-farm conservation lands, including scenic and historic properties. The term easement could be offered in addition to the agricultural district tax abatements.

PDR Program

The town can develop its own Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program to purchase development rights to priority properties. A local program could supplement the state, federal, and nonprofit grant funds and programs already in existence for this purpose. Under PDR, the development rights of a property are purchased but the property can otherwise continue to be farmed or used for purposes other than development. These restrictions are agreed to by the landowner and recorded at the county clerk's office in a deed of conservation easement. Easements can be crafted with flexibility to ensure that the landowner, for example, is allowed to add new structures for agricultural purposes or subdivide a small area for a future home. PDR can apply to agricultural lands as well as lands with scenic, natural, or other open space resources.



Lands of the Sprout Creek Farm are conserved by the Dutchess Land Conservancy and will continue to provide public benefits for future generations.

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Purchase of development rights is one of the most proactive tools that can be used to ensure that farmlands are conserved in perpetuity. PDR has been successfully implemented across the country, with the first program created in New York State on the east end of Long Island. PDR offers the landowner an opportunity to find equity in his or her property without having to sell it for development. For the town, PDR offers an opportunity to preserve important open space lands without having to purchase them outright. It also ensures that a private owner continues to own and steward the land.

Creative Tools

There are other creative tools that the town can utilize to protect farmlands (as well as other conservation lands). Private consulting for landowners to identify opportunities through estate planning is one of these tools. This type of process might lead to a limited development plan that helps a landowner meet his/her financial goals while still preserving open space lands that are of significance to the community. Other opportunities, such as a donation with reserved life estate and installment purchase agreements should also be considered by the town. Under a donation with reserved life estate, a landowner donates his or her land or estate to the town or a conservation organization now but retains use of the land/property through his/her lifetime. Installment purchase agreements (IPA) allow payments for a conservation transaction to be made to landowners over a certain timeframe rather than all at once, similar to the way a mortgage is paid through time.

Farm-Friendly Zoning

The town's zoning law should be reviewed and audited on a regular basis to ensure that it continues to be supportive of agriculture. As the face of agriculture changes in the Hudson Valley, new needs and uses will likely surface. For example, as more and more farms are looking toward serving community food (and other) needs through direct marketing, smaller-scale local processing facilities may be required on-site to service these needs. Additionally, businesses may require access, parking, or signs to attract local customers. Other changes on the horizon may include the potential for farmers to explore new markets such as those for alternative energy. These needs should be explored in the town's future planning, and appropriately processed and integrated into the town's land use regulations. Representation from the agricultural community in the town's planning and zoning activities is recommended, either on the existing town boards or by creating a new agricultural board of the town.

Also of note, many agricultural landowners in LaGrange own or rent lands in adjacent towns. Compatibility of zoning and land use regulations for landowners across towns should be addressed through cooperative planning efforts with adjacent municipalities.

Regional Agri-Business Development and Promotion Efforts

A regional approach to agri-business development and agri-tourism is recommended as many of the communities in the region are facing the same issues and opportunities. The economy of scale of a regional effort is not only cost-effective, but it would reach a broader constituency and may have a more significant impact. Opportunities for regional

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collaboration that have been discussed through this planning process include the following:

- A brochure highlighting local farm products and agri-tourism opportunities.
- A program highlighting locally-grown products and providing uniform signs along roadsides to inform the driver ahead of reaching a farm market, farmstand, or other business open to the public.
- A program that identifies agricultural lands available for sale or rent in the region and helps to connect landowners interested in selling or renting. There are many landowners in the region interested in renting agricultural lands for a specific purpose that could benefit from this type of program.

There may be opportunities for the town to collaborate with existing entities such as the Dutchess County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board, the Hudson Valley Agricultural Partnership, the Dutchess Land Conservancy and the Glynwood Center, towards some of these efforts.

Recommendations

Immediate:

- Work with the LaGrange Fire District to make the agricultural assessment applicable to fire district taxes for landowners in the agricultural districts.
- If necessary, draft and adopt local term easement legislation to further provide tax benefits to agricultural landowners. Term easement legislation could also be applicable to other open space resources in LaGrange such as forest land and historic resources.

Short-term:

- Create a town agricultural council (or seek representation on existing boards) to provide feedback to town planning and regional agri-business initiatives.

Long-term:

- Conduct a zoning audit for agricultural compatibility as part of the town's next comprehensive plan revision.

5-year Conservation Goal

- Protect 500 additional acres of land in the core farm areas (200 acres are currently protected). At least half of these lands should be through permanent protection (PDR).

B. Greenway Corridors

A greenway is a linear corridor of open space. A greenway can vary from an urban riverfront that provides recreation and open space in a built-up area to an ecological corridor such as a river or ridgeline that provides habitat for movement and dispersal of wildlife. In LaGrange, the major greenways follow river and stream corridors. They serve as ecological corridors and provide recreational opportunities such as low-impact hiking trails and waterfront access for fishing, picnicking and other purposes. Importantly, these river and stream corridors also provide flood protection and groundwater recharge benefits.

Greenways allow us to treat land and water as a system, as interlocking pieces in a puzzle, not as isolated entities.

—ED MCMAHON, Director, American Greenways Program, 1999

Priorities

The greenways that have been identified as priority in this plan include Wappinger Creek, Sprout Creek, Jackson Creek, and the Rail-Trail Linear Greenway. All of these greenways were identified as priority because they provide multiple benefits of water quality protection, flood protection, wildlife corridors, and recreational opportunities. Many of these greenways also contain significant areas of wetlands, significant habitats, and priority farms.

The **Wappinger Creek Greenway** is a linear open space corridor that serves as a recreational and ecological haven in the developing area of town. The Conservation Advisory Council (CAC) has been successfully working for over 15 years to create a trail along the east side of Wappinger Creek in LaGrange. Eventually, it is envisioned that this trail will connect an area near Red Oaks Mill with the ball fields in Pleasant Valley.

The trail corridor is discussed further in the trail section of this chapter. In addition to developing the trail along Wappinger Creek, it is recommended that the town explore the conservation of lands along the creek's edge for flood and watershed protection. The creation of public access areas and overlooks (visual access) to the Wappinger Creek is important for public education purposes.



The Wappinger Creek is an exceptional ecological, recreational, and scenic resource for the LaGrange community to enjoy.

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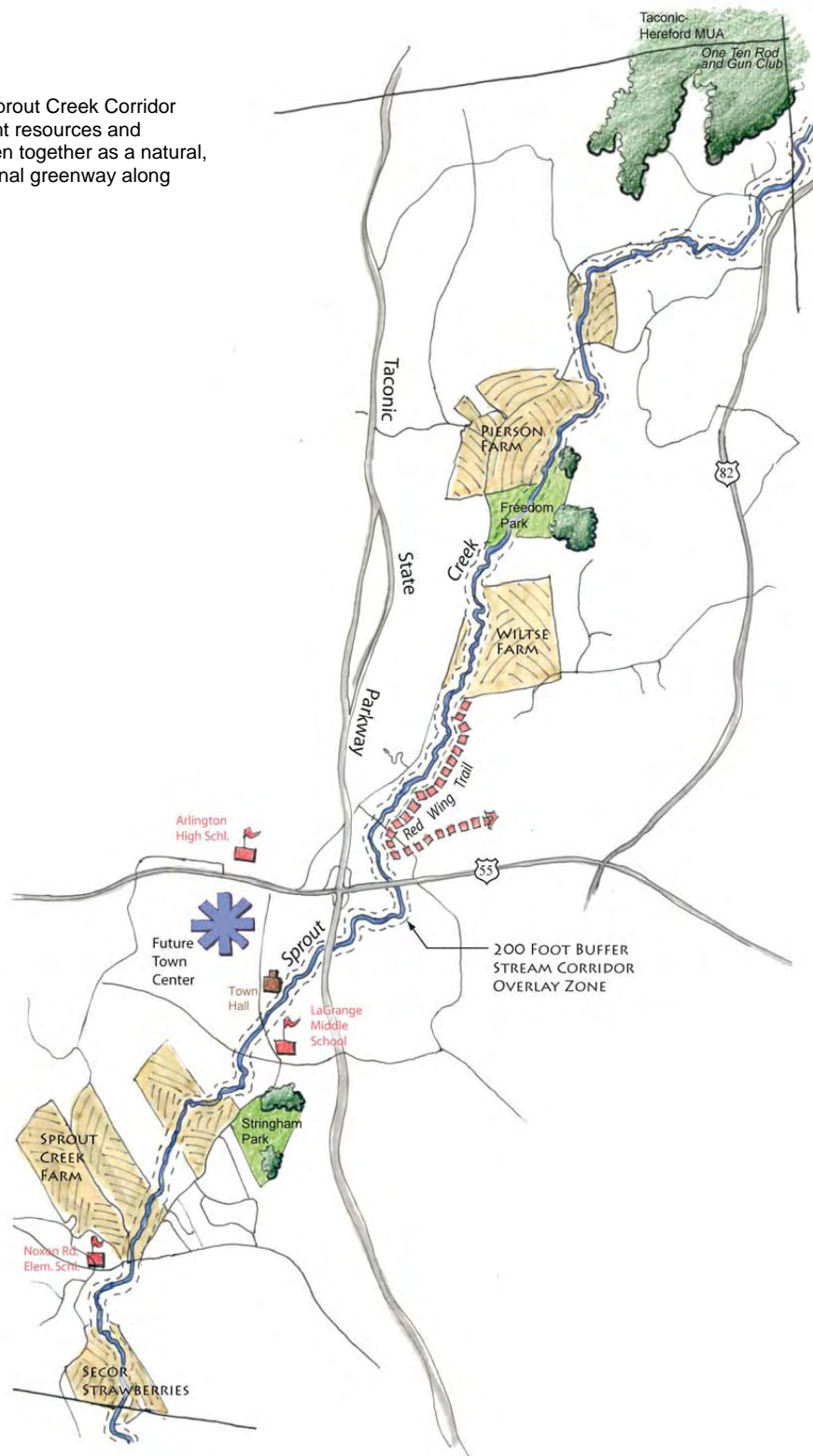
Sprout Creek Greenway is an ecological corridor that may provide limited opportunities for recreational access where appropriate. Wetlands, forests, wildlife habitat, and active farms abut Sprout Creek. Preserving these lands provides significant protection of water quality for the town. These lands also serve as a major corridor of open space for wildlife, and an ecological connection between the valleys and the forested habitat of the Taconic Ridge. Also along Sprout Creek are many existing and planned destinations and resources that could be connected to provide recreational opportunities. In LaGrange, **Jackson Creek Greenway** offers a similar ecological corridor, with farms and open lands abutting its edges.



Freedom Park provides access to Sprout Creek for LaGrange residents.

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Right: an illustration of Sprout Creek Corridor shows how many different resources and destinations can be woven together as a natural, agricultural and recreational greenway along Sprout Creek.



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The **Rail-Trail Linear Greenway** has the potential to serve as a recreational corridor in the fast-growing southwest part of town. The concept for this greenway is to reserve open lands along the Dutchess Rail-Trail (discussed further in the trail section of this chapter) as possible to create a linear park or greenway for residents in the area to enjoy. This concept was developed by town residents at the open space visioning meetings for this plan.

Below are major goals for conserving greenways in LaGrange:

- Conserve linear greenways of open space resources along stream corridors, including wetlands, farms, and forest lands.
- Preserve and enhance the water quality of the town's rivers and streams and associated floodplains and groundwater resources (aquifers).
- Create trail connections where appropriate between existing and future open space resources along greenways such as parks and preserves, and destinations such as neighborhoods, schools, and hamlets.
- Increase public access to the town's streams and waterways for recreation and public enjoyment.

Existing Tools

Currently, the town's zoning law includes a **Stream Corridor Overlay Zone**, which calls for a 200-foot buffer along Wappinger, Sprout, and Jackson Creeks. Activities such as construction, excavation, filling, and clearing and grading require a special permit from the Planning Board. The 200-foot buffer is a beneficial way to protect the stream and aquatic habitat. However, there are some areas where larger buffers may be needed to support healthy populations of wildlife or provide flood protection. Conservation of priority farmlands and natural areas adjacent to the greenways will help with this respect.

The town's zoning law also includes a **Groundwater Protection Overlay Zone**, with additional provisions for protection of water quality and quantity in priority aquifer recharge areas. The overlay zone contains general provisions that are applicable to existing and future development, as well as residential density regulations for new development. The provisions are critical to protecting ground water quality in LaGrange, which is important because homes in LaGrange are primarily served by wells.

Other tools that exist for preserving greenways include existing state, local, and federal provisions that protect wetlands, floodplains, endangered species, and streams. The town's provisions for open space subdivisions (also known as clustered subdivisions), which allow a developer to cluster homes in order to preserve important open space lands, also help to preserve greenway lands.

Recommended Tools

The town's existing stream corridor overlay zone and groundwater protection overlay zone are important tools for preserving priority greenways in LaGrange. These tools should be supplemented with additional tools, such as the purchase of development rights

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or fee simple ownership of parklands, which proactively seek to conserve the highest-priority parcels along the greenways.

In addition, development design guidelines or standards can be an important tool for assisting landowners and developers in minimizing the impacts of development on the town's water resources. For example, these guidelines could provide additional information for development in the groundwater protection overlay zone such as standards that relate to impervious surface, stormwater management, clearing and grading, and landscape planting. Design guidelines should also be accompanied by a process or outline for landowners or developers to identify and design with conservation resources of significance (conservation analysis).

In addition to preserving land within the greenway corridors and reducing the impacts of development, there are also opportunities for public education and participation in preservation of greenway areas. In many communities, local advocacy organizations are formed to advocate for protection of important resources such as a greenway or river corridor. These groups play an important role in communities by raising public awareness, fundraising, and holding events such as clean-ups or guided tours.

Recommendations

Immediate:

- Continue to work cooperatively with landowners to create the Wappinger Creek Greenway and the rail-trail linear greenway, as well as other greenway concepts identified in this plan.
- Explore the opportunity of working with adjacent communities to develop an intermunicipal agreement for Sprout Creek Corridor.

Short-term:

- Develop a master plan for the Sprout Creek Greenway. A conceptual diagram for the Sprout Creek Corridor has been introduced in this chapter. Refinement of this conceptual diagram into a master plan, and development of an action plan would be important next steps.

5-year Conservation Goal

- Conserve 250 additional acres of land along major greenways.

C. Natural Areas

Introduction

Preserving wildlife habitat in LaGrange is an important community goal. There are several major regional ecological systems that pass through LaGrange, such as the unfragmented forest system of the Taconic ridge, and the wetland and floodplain systems associated with Sprout and Wappinger Creeks. There are also many smaller, locally-important wildlife habitats such as the wetlands in the Overlook Preserve area.

Fragmentation of natural cover is a major threat to the integrity of LaGrange's ecological resources, and the species that depend upon them. The effects of fragmentation can be experienced in larger areas of habitat such as the forested areas of the Taconic Ridge. In these areas, fragmentation of forest habitat with roads and other development restricts the movement of larger wildlife species. Similarly, smaller habitat areas, such as wetlands, can be fragmented from the upland habitat that is required for survival of certain species such as the Blanding's turtle.



The Wappinger Creek floodplain is an important ecological system.

The main goals for preserving the town's natural systems are as follows:

- Preserve large, unfragmented areas of natural cover, often called “patches,” as well as smaller “stepping stones,” that connect large patches together.
- Preserve locally-important natural communities and habitats known to be important for rare species, imperiled species, or of high biodiversity value.
- Connect patches together with greenway corridors that provide for wildlife movement and dispersal.

Priority natural areas identified in this section include wildlife preserves for conservation purposes such as the Overlook Preserve, as well as multiple-use lands, such as the Taconic Hereford Multiple Use Area, that provide wildlife and recreation benefits.

Priorities

Priority natural areas and parklands in LaGrange were identified based on a variety of factors. Species data, provided by the New York State Natural Heritage Program, were included in the analysis of priority areas, as well as more general indicators of ecological

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integrity such as the presence of large, unfragmented forest systems and other natural cover “patches” and connecting corridors. Likewise, local habitats were of importance in defining smaller “patches.” The analysis resulted in several areas of priority, including large, regional resources such as the Taconic Ridge, and smaller areas of local importance such as the confluence of Sprout Creek and Jackson Creek. The nine areas identified as priority are discussed in more detail below.

1. Taconic Ridge

The Taconic ridge is the town’s largest, unfragmented forest “patch” and is home to many wildlife species that depend on large areas of unfragmented land for survival. The ridge is a regional resource that extends into adjacent communities. The ridge includes a significant block of Appalachian Oak-Hickory Forest located east of James Baird State Park. The Appalachian Oak-Hickory Forest is a hardwood forest with a mixture of tree oaks, hickories, and other species such as maples. There are also many clusters of forested wetlands within the ridge that are of significance.



This aerial image shows the large forest system of the Taconic Ridge, with little fragmentation other than the Taconic State Parkway.

Fragmentation of the forest lands within the Taconic Ridge should be minimized to maintain wildlife connectivity. This can be accomplished through development practices that minimize forest clearing for development, as well minimizing the construction of unnecessary roads and driveways. These development practices also help to protect drinking water quality by reducing runoff and erosion into streams.

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In addition to being a significant regional ecological asset, the ridge is also the town's most prominent visual feature and contributes immensely to the town's scenic quality. Views of the ridge should be protected from the lower elevations in town, and specifically from the town's scenic road network. Development along ridge crests and other visible areas should be avoided. The town's existing Ridge Protection Overlay Zone provides standards for regulating development along the uppermost 200 feet of any hill with a USGS elevation of 500 feet or greater.

2. Freedom Plains

The area surrounding Freedom Plains – including the existing LaGrange Town Hall and future town center – contains some of the highest-priority ecological resources in town, such as wetlands that support the Blanding's turtle (which is a threatened species in New York State). However, focusing development in this area close to Route 55, existing schools, town hall, and the Taconic State Parkway, is also a worthy goal. Therefore, it is recommended that as this area becomes developed, connections for wildlife (and people as indicated in the trails section of this chapter) are planned comprehensively.

Within this area are many important wetlands such as kettle shrub pools and riparian wetlands along the Sprout Creek Corridor, particularly between Stringham Road and the Taconic State Parkway, that could be protected as part of a larger wildlife preserve. Preserving the upland habitat and connections between wetlands is equally important. This area is also identified as priority in Hudsonia's 2005 report entitled *Significant Habitats in the Fishkill and Sprout Creek Corridors*.



This aerial depicts wetland systems associated with Sprout Creek between Stringham Road and the Taconic State Parkway.

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3. Overlook Preserve Area

The Overlook Preserve is a 139-acre preserve that is protected by The Nature Conservancy for its habitat value, particularly because it contains wetland and upland habitat that supports a significant population of Blanding's turtles. Surrounding the preserve, there are several farms and larger parcels that serve as a buffer from development. Many of these farms contain wetlands that also serve as habitat for the Blanding's turtle. If these farms and other lands were to be developed, this would place significant stress on the Blanding's turtle. Therefore, it is recommended that the town work with interested landowners to conserve parcels surrounding the Overlook Preserve to ensure permanent protection of the existing open space buffer. This could be accomplished, for example, by preserving farmland adjacent to the preserve through purchase of development rights or by maintaining existing working farms through tax abatements or a local term easement program. Preserving these farms would provide multiple benefits to the town: protection of land in the "core" farm area and protection of a buffer for the Blanding's turtle preserve.



Farms around the Overlook Preserve area help to preserve wetlands and habitat connections for the Blanding's turtle.

4. Sprout/Jackson Creek Confluence

The confluence of Sprout and Jackson Creeks is a significant natural area that provides water resource and flood protection benefits to the town. The stream confluence is also an area recognized for its biodiversity, and is identified by Hudsonia as a priority conservation zone due to the presence of riparian wetlands, kettle shrub pools, and other high-quality habitats.

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The confluence of Sprout and Jackson Creeks occurs at the southern border of the Town of LaGrange with East Fishkill. This area, which also includes priority farms, offers the opportunity for collaboration between the towns of LaGrange, East Fishkill, and Wappinger towards conservation goals.

5. Rt. 55 Hilltops

The hilltops adjacent to Route 55 (both north and south), between the Taconic State Parkway and Route 82, are an important visual resource. These hilltops were identified in open space visioning meetings as a scenic resource worthy of protection, as well as a potential future recreational resource. Much of the land in this area is owned by Red Wing Properties. The scenic quality of the hilltops should be preserved through enforcement of the town's existing ridgeline protection overlay zone, as they are above 500 feet in elevation. Future use of the site could be explored mutually with Red Wing Properties and the town.

6. Rt. 82 Wetlands

On the west side of Route 82, in the northern part of LaGrange, is a series of wetlands along a tributary of Sprout Creek that provide for wildlife connectivity and help to maintain the quality of Sprout Creek's waters. Also included within this natural area is Sunset Hill, which is a significant visual feature on the northwest side of Moore's Mill. The wetlands and hilltops are mostly protected through the town's existing zoning law, however their overall integrity as a system should be evaluated in the review of development proposals.

7. Davis Pond

Davis Pond is located in the western part of town between Noxon Road and the future Rail-Trail, south of Titusville Road. Community members identified this as an important neighborhood open space resource in the visioning workshop. Because this area is currently under the most development pressure, conservation of community open space is recommended. The town is currently working with landowners and developers in this area to identify open space opportunities. Preserving Davis Pond and an area surrounding the pond, and connecting it to the future rail-trail, is recommended.

8. Wappinger Creek Floodplain

While much of the Wappinger Creek provides floodplain and wetland protection, there is a large area between Titusville and Red Oaks Mill that is of high priority. This area includes Red Oaks Mill Farm and adjacent lands, which are of significance as working lands as well as for their scenic views. While much of the floodplain in this area is wet and inaccessible, there may be opportunities for passive recreation, such as trail connections, overlooks, and public access (for fishing or non-motorized boat access) in this area.

9. LaGrangeville Center

The area surrounding LaGrangeville hamlet is an important aquifer recharge area and also provides significant habitat. In particular, drainage channels of Jackson

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Creeks serve linear open space connections through an otherwise fragmented landscape. These connections should be maintained.



Green fingers of Jackson Creek provide wildlife connections through residential neighborhoods in the LaGrangeville area.

Existing and Recommended Tools

Natural areas are currently protected through wetland regulations as well as through the town's zoning law. Wetlands greater than 12.4 acres, and a 100-foot buffer, are regulated by the State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) under the state Freshwater Wetlands Act. A permit is required to alter, fill, or grade a wetland or its 100-foot buffer. The state regulations do not protect local wetlands, which are smaller than 12.4 acres. Local wetlands are regulated by the town pursuant to Chapter 124 of the town code, which requires that any threshold activity (such as draining or disrupting a wetland) obtain a permit from the Planning Board. Local wetlands include DEC wetlands, as well as wetlands greater than 1 acre identified by the presence of hydric soils or hydrophytic vegetation.

The 100-foot wetland buffer required by the DEC is not always large enough to protect wetlands and the species that depend upon them. For example, as discussed in Hudsonia's report, the Blanding's turtle depends on core wetland habitat (kettle shrub pools), foraging and drought refuge wetlands, and the upland areas in-between. Hudsonia's report recommends a 660-foot buffer of core wetlands (kettle shrub pools), in

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order to preserve the habitat assemblage required to effectively protect Blanding's turtle populations.

Other tools that help to preserve natural areas include the town's stream corridor overlay zone and groundwater protection overlay zone, both discussed in the previous section. The town's provisions for open space subdivisions (also known as clustered subdivisions), which allow a developer to cluster homes together in order to preserve important open space lands, also help to preserve open space. However, without a larger blueprint for connecting open space lands under open space subdivisions, the open space typically ends up becoming fragmented and surrounded by development and roads. The vision map in this plan offers guidance in the designation of open space lands within clustered subdivisions in that it provides a blueprint for creating an interconnected open space network. The process of conservation subdivision in the town should also be supplemented with guidance for evaluating the open space resources, both on site and contextual, and designing development in a way that preserves the most important resources.

Many of the same tools that have been recommended for the protection of farmlands and greenways are applicable for conserving natural areas. In particular, conservation easements, in-fee purchase of lands, and term easements can be used to conserve natural areas. Other tools discussed previously, such as estate planning and installment purchase agreements are also applicable. Coordinated planning for resource protection on public lands owned by the town and other public entities is also a major opportunity.

Recommendations

Immediate:

- The planning board already reviews development proposals for open space and trail connections as they come forth. The information in this plan provides more guidance in this direction. A process for transferring this data and referring to it during development review should be implemented upon plan completion.

Short-term:

- Develop a process to guide landowners in the conservation analysis process and create conservation development guidelines/standards for projects under the town's open space subdivision (clustered subdivisions) provisions. This process should require contextual as well as on-site analysis of open space resources and connections. See the text box on page 43 for more information on conservation development guidelines.
- Develop a master plan to identify important natural habitats and connections in the Freedom Plains area, including connections along town-owned land adjacent to Sprout Creek. Discuss opportunities for conservation and connectivity with the Arlington School District and other property owners in the area.

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- Develop guidelines/standards for development to guide the planning board in review of projects under the existing local wetlands law.

5-year Conservation Goal

- Permanently protect 500 additional acres of land in the priority natural areas (this can be through conservation easements, in-fee purchase and conservation development clustering, for example).

Conservation Analysis: A Four-Step Design Process

Conservation analysis is discussed in this plan as an important way to preserve open space resources during development. This technique places primary importance on preserving resources and the natural setting as the first step in the design process. Contrary to the typical process, in which lots, homes and roads are laid out and the remaining area (if any) is considered open space or natural lands, this process begins by identifying the important natural and cultural features for protection. The process includes several major steps, as outlined below:

1. **Create a conservation analysis map (or maps) identifying the site's most important resources and features to preserve, such as streams, wetlands, farms, wildlife habitats, scenic views or historic homes.** In addition, a map that indicates how the site relates to major regional features, such as wildlife corridors, greenways, trail linkages, and historic landscapes should be created (regional context map).
2. **Determine the site's conservation and development areas.** This step involves an important judgment process in which an analysis of all of the resources identified leads to identification of the most important resources for protection – these are the conservation areas. The remaining area is the development area.
3. **Identify a proposed layout for development that complements the conservation areas (conservation design).** This process should result in the protection of important open space and landscape character, as well as the creation of functional public open space and attractive residential development that is an asset to the community.
4. **Synthesize conservation and development concepts into a draft concept plan including detailed location of trails, preserves, houses, streets, etc.**

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Conservation Analysis Illustrated



Above: Site analysis leads to the identification of important natural and cultural features such as the stream and floodplain, ponds and other water features, steep slopes, the forested woodland stream buffer, open agricultural lands, and hedgerows.



Left: Conventional layout would have resulted in fragmentation of woodlands and encroachment of development on the stream corridor. It would have also led to the development of the open lands along the major roadway that contribute to scenic quality.

Right: Conservation design preserves a larger wooded stream buffer; it also conserves the farm fields along the major road that contribute to scenic quality, as well as the hedgerows that help to buffer the farm from the adjacent homes.

It also preserves a small pond as a community resource and creates trail connections for residents to enjoy the open space features.



D. Trails

Introduction

Trails in LaGrange can provide outdoor connections between natural, cultural, historical and agricultural destinations. There are existing trails in LaGrange, such as the Wappinger Creek Greenway (which is planned to be extended). There are also planned trails such as the Dutchess Rail-Trail in the southwest part of town, which is being implemented by Dutchess County. The town's comprehensive plan illustrates a significant town-wide network of trails. This open space plan supports implementation of the trail network, but recommends prioritization of several trails that have been identified as priorities at the visioning meetings.

It is important to note that trails discussed below are concepts. The concept is to connect several areas, or resources, together to provide the best experience for trail users. The specific alignments will need to be evaluated based on environmental constraints, costs, land ownership, and other factors. Sensitivity to landowner concerns and privacy issues is of importance in locating trails. Each trail concept below should be further evaluated to identify a preferred route by studying opportunities and constraints and working with property owners and developers.

Goals for trails are as follows:

- Connect existing parks, recreation areas, and other destinations.
- Provide links between neighborhoods and trails.
- Provide for a diversity of trail experiences (unpaved hiking trails, paved multi-use trails, snowshoeing and other trails for winter sports) to serve the community's needs.
- Provide alternative transportation opportunities (for example, biking or walking trails that link neighborhoods to work places, schools, or shopping areas).

Priorities

Trails were prioritized based on their ability to provide recreational opportunities to the LaGrange community, as well as their ability to connect destinations or provide ecological education. Trails that connect existing neighborhoods, schools, parks, and the Freedom Plains area were prioritized. Public input from the townwide survey, the open space visioning meeting, and individual communications has also helped to refine trail priorities. Priority trails include: Wappinger Creek Greenway Trail, Freedom Plains Loop Trail, the Dutchess Rail-Trail, and the Taconic Ridge Trail.

1. Wappinger Creek Greenway Trail

A concept for the Wappinger Creek Greenway, started in 1992, has been created by the LaGrange Conservation Advisory Council (CAC), in partnership with the Pleasant Valley CAC. The greenway is envisioned as a low-impact trail corridor that is adjacent to the Wappinger Creek. The trail would extend approximately from Red Oaks Mill to the ball fields in Pleasant Valley. Currently about 1.25 miles of the trail are completed in the northern part of town. The town's CAC is

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working with landowners and the planning board to obtain trail easements as development projects are advanced. The trail has been constructed at very little cost to the town, using donations and volunteer assistance.

2. Freedom Plains Loop Trail

Creating connections between the future town center, parks, and other open spaces in the Freedom Plains area would provide a major destination and activity for LaGrange residents. There are many resources that can be connected in the Freedom Plains area, including Town Hall, LaGrange Middle School, Sprout Creek, Stringham Park, Sprout Creek Farm, Arlington High School, Baird State Park, and the future town center.

3. Dutchess Rail Trail

The Dutchess Rail Trail is an 11.2 mile linear park that will extend through five communities, from Hopewell Junction to the City of Poughkeepsie. The rail-trail is being planned by Dutchess County Planning, in cooperation with the five communities, and will be constructed along the same corridor as the Central Dutchess Utility Corridor Waterline. In LaGrange, the rail-trail traverses the southwest area of town and meets the City of Poughkeepsie at the Wappinger Creek. A local connection between the rail-trail and the Wappinger Creek in the vicinity of Titusville is also recommended as a way for existing and future neighborhood residents to access both trail resources.

4. Taconic Ridge Trail

The town's 2005 comprehensive plan illustrates a trail linkage along the Taconic Ridge that has been identified by the community as a priority. This trail would connect the future town center/Freedom Plains area with James Baird State Park, Taconic Hereford Multiple Use Area, and town-owned lands in the east part of town such as Freedom Park. A local connection between Freedom Park and town-owned lands west of Rt. 82 (and continuing into Union Vale) is also part of this concept.

Existing and Proposed Tools

The town has been actively pursuing trail easements as it reviews development proposals. This approach is recommended for all of the priority trails in LaGrange. In addition, the town may consider approaching landowners of priority trail corridors to identify interest in providing a trail easement. In areas with obstacles to trail development, planning may need to be conducted to identify alternative routes.

Recommendations

Immediate:

- Create a trails committee, or sub-committee of the CAC, to continue to coordinate trails, including the Wappinger Creek Greenway and other trails identified in this plan.

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Short-term:

- Develop a master plan for the Freedom Plains Loop Trail.
- Create public access (park or trail) to the Wappinger Creek in the southern part of town.
- Refine plans for trails and conduct feasibility studies where necessary to catalyze development of priority trails.

5-year Conservation Goal

- Develop or secure easements for 5 new miles of trail (not including the Dutchess Rail-Trail, which is already planned).

E. Scenic Roads and Views

Introduction

There are many scenic resources in LaGrange that are important to the community for their aesthetic or economic benefits. For example, farms and open lands contribute to “rural character” that attracts many people to live in LaGrange. Views of the ridge are of similar importance. Creeks and water features are also of value to the community. Structures such as historic homes, barns, and stone walls also contribute to scenic quality in LaGrange. Many



Farmlands are valued for their contributions to the town’s scenic quality.

town residents experience these scenic resources by driving the town’s scenic roadways.

The scenic resources in LaGrange overlap extensively with other resources that have been identified in this chapter. Farms and orchards, wetlands, streams, and forested hillsides and ridges are all part of the scenic character of LaGrange and have been discussed in previous chapters.

Following are major goals for preserving scenic roads and views:

- Preserve resources and landscapes along scenic roads that contribute to the experience and rural character of the town.
- Preserve locally-important scenic views throughout town.
- Aim to preserve whole landscapes where feasible.
- Align with the town’s comprehensive plan to preserve the rural character of the town.

Priority scenic roads in LaGrange are listed below. These roads were identified through the visioning process for this plan.

1. Taconic State Parkway (TSP)
2. Rt. 82
3. Mountain Rd.
4. Freedom Rd.
5. Skidmore Rd.
6. Overlook Rd.
7. Noxon Rd.
8. Route 55 (East of TSP)

Existing and Recommended Tools

The town's zoning law includes a Scenic Area Overlay Zone, which requires site plan approval from the Planning Board for new structures or major exterior modifications to existing structures. In addition, the Historic Overlay Zone and Ridgeline Protection Overlay Zone also help to protect resources that contribute to scenic character in the town. In addition, the scenic resources of the Taconic Parkway are protected as part of the Taconic State Parkway Corridor Management Plan.

Many of the resources that contribute to scenic quality, such as farms and agricultural areas, creeks and water features, and ridges and forested areas are discussed in previous sections of this chapter (core farm areas, greenway corridors, natural areas). Conservation of these resources by implementing this plan would provide a substantial benefit towards protecting scenic quality in the town.

Additionally, scenic resources should be fully evaluated in the development process through a conservation analysis process that helps to identify and preserve scenic views to and from the site during subdivision and development.

Recommendations

Immediate:

- Adopt a scenic roads map as part of the scenic overlay provisions in the town's zoning law.

Short-term:

- Create a driving tour or other type of promotional material that highlights the town's scenic resources.
- Integrate scenic resources into a conservation analysis process and conservation development guidelines/standards for projects under the town's open space subdivision (clustered subdivisions) provisions. See the text box on page 43 for more information on conservation analysis and conservation development guidelines.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced each of the elements that compose the town's open space vision. Alone, each element is important for the benefit it provides community residents in water quality protection, agricultural and economic productivity, and recreational opportunities, to name just a few. Together, as illustrated in the vision, a system of connected open space will benefit the community and environment immensely. The town has already taken many important steps towards preserving the resources identified in this vision. The next chapter will provide a strategy for further actions that can be

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taken by the town and other partners to ensure that the community's vision for preserving farmlands, maintaining clean water, and protecting wildlife habitats is sustained.

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CHAPTER 4: RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

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- Introduction
- Creating a Resource Conservation Program
- Summary of Recommendations
- Financing Open Space Conservation
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- Opportunities for Regional Collaboration
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CHAPTER 4: RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Introduction

Throughout this planning process, landowners have voiced strong concern over the challenges of keeping land open due to rising land values, taxes, and other financial burdens of property ownership. Every effort to ensure that landowners that want to conserve open space lands, whether they are in agriculture, forest, floodplains, or other resources, should be pursued. Planning for open space will require sound investment of finances and efforts by many partners, but it will ultimately provide extensive benefits to the community's environment, economy, and quality of life.

This chapter provides a summary of the actions recommended for the town to achieve its open space vision. The central feature of this action program is a town-sponsored resource conservation program that will oversee financing, planning, landowner and public outreach efforts, among other necessary activities. Recommendations are provided for the immediate, short-term, and long-term. Following the recommendations is a more detailed discussion of the recommended financing strategy.

Creating a Resource Conservation Program

The resource conservation program is the foundation for implementing LaGrange's open space vision. It provides the tools, administrative support, and outreach necessary for proactive conservation of priority open space lands in LaGrange. Program administration might include a dedicated committee or board to make funding recommendations and achieve other key tasks such as community outreach. It might also include professional assistance with tasks such as landowner outreach and resource-specific conservation plans, or other technical tasks such as appraisals, drafting of legislation for tax or zoning incentives, or writing grant applications.

The goal of the **resource conservation program** would be to implement the Open Space Vision Map, working with willing landowners on a voluntary basis. The implementation "toolbox" would include a suite of options that would meet various landowners' needs. These tools have been discussed in Chapter 3, but may include, at a minimum, the conservation tools listed below.

Conservation Tools

- Term Easement or other Local Tax Incentive
- Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)
- Estate Planning for Landowners (would include options such as Installment Purchase Agreements, limited development plans, life estate)
- Fee Simple Purchase of Land
- Zoning Incentives for Resource/Land Conservation

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Advancing the resource conservation program will require its own set of actions, which will evolve through time and will likely include the following:

- Identify a committee/entity to oversee the resource conservation program.
- Develop program guidelines and project selection criteria to ensure that funding decisions are made equitably. These guidelines would identify program goals; list program partners and their roles; identify criteria for selecting projects; outline conservation tools; and formalize a process for landowner outreach and transactions.
- Develop a list of priority parcels (based on the results of resource rating in this plan and other important criteria such as those identified in Chapter 3) and conduct landowner outreach to identify interest in conservation. Landowners who have previously expressed interest, through the town-wide survey and landowner meetings held for this planning process, should be evaluated.
- Provide a dedicated landowner outreach process, which would include identifying and discussing various conservation tools and options with landowners.
- Develop a diverse set of conservation tools such as tax incentives, purchase of development rights, estate planning, and installment purchase agreements. Continue to refine the tools as landowner needs evolve.
- Work with landowners to develop and implement projects, which might include (for example), obtaining appraisals for land conservation projects or identifying and applying for matching grant funds.
- Provide outreach on the program's goals and successes to the community.

Summary of Recommendations:

Immediate:

1. **Identify an entity to coordinate and oversee implementation of the open space plan and development of the comprehensive resource conservation program (an implementation committee).** This open space plan was developed for the town by consultants, with leadership and oversight by the town's open space committee. The town board, planning board, CAC, planning staff, and others have participated in plan development, with the open space committee leading the process. The same type of leadership will be required for implementation of the plan. Ideally, the town would appoint a dedicated committee to begin to develop the comprehensive resource conservation program discussed in the beginning of this chapter.
2. **Identify an individual or individuals (committee, consultant, or town staff person) to serve as a dedicated contact for landowners.** This person should be available to discuss concerns, opportunities, and potential tools with landowners on a regular basis. He/she should also be knowledgeable of existing and future resource conservation tools and be understanding of landowner concerns and issues.
3. **Develop tax incentives that help landowners retain farmlands** and other important open space resources, including a local term easement (including abatement of fire taxes) for agricultural land owners. This is a critical factor in ensuring that the town's agricultural landowners can continue to keep their lands in farming.
4. **Continue to implement open space goals within the development review process.** The town planning board currently reviews existing development proposals to identify trail and open space opportunities. This plan provides more detail on the town's vision and goals for open space conservation that can be used to evaluate projects. Prioritize the conservation of open space resources and public access opportunities in the growing western part of town.
5. **Explore the opportunity to develop an intermunicipal agreement for Sprout Creek,** working with the adjacent towns of East Fishkill and Pleasant Valley to establish goals and standards for the corridor's conservation (such as flood protection/mitigation, agricultural retention, etc.).
6. **Meet with area land trusts to share the town's open space vision and goals, and vice-versa.** Land trusts will most likely become key partners in land conservation projects and should be aware of the town's goals and actions. As area land trusts may eventually hold easements for town conservation lands, it is also important that organizational requirements and processes for land

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transactions, stewardship, fundraising, and other activities are understood by the town.

7. **Designate a dedicated committee or entity to explore the costs and benefits of conservation financing options and develop a long-term financing strategy** that includes the appropriate balance of options for LaGrange. Financing options are discussed further in this chapter. Ideally, this financing strategy could be combined with the build out/fiscal analysis (see short-term recommendation #3) to identify the ideal balance of development and conservation for town taxpayers.

Short-Term:

1. **Explore the option of creating a town agricultural council** (or developing representation on existing boards). The agricultural council would serve as a town liaison for regional agricultural efforts, such as agri-tourism, business development, and promotion. The town agricultural council could also provide guidance in future planning and zoning activities.
2. **Develop a conservation analysis process and development design guidelines to guide conservation development.** The open space vision map and the recommendations in this plan can be used as a framework for creating a connected system of open space resources in LaGrange, specifically as the planning board considers open space lands under its conservation subdivision regulations. A process is needed to assist landowners/developers in using this plan information. A conservation analysis guidebook would outline a process for identifying and evaluating open space resources and for laying roads, lot lines, and houses to protect the most important resources both on-site and in the context of the town's open space vision.

Development design guidelines could also be created with this guidebook to assist landowners and developers in designing with sensitivity to open space resources. Many of the town's existing zoning districts require design guidelines for urban form; the same approach can be used to ensure that development conforms to principles and goals for the natural environment. Topics that might be explored include the following: reducing habitat fragmentation and other effects of development on wildlife, designing for wildlife connectivity, reduction of impervious surfaces, clearing and grading practices, and landscape planting practices. As an example, the Town of Wappinger, working with partners such as the DEC and the Wappinger Creek Intermunicipal Watershed Council, recently created *Recommended Model Development Principles* to serve as guidance for developers.

3. **Conduct a build-out analysis of the town under existing zoning regulations and examine the fiscal impacts on town residents.** A build-out analysis is a depiction of the future development capacity of the town, typically expressed by a quantity of new residential units as well as total commercial square footage.

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The study would identify fiscal impacts to town taxpayers (for example increased level of services in roads, schools, and fire district) as well as fiscal benefits (for example increased revenue through commercial build-out). Other impacts on town residents, such as those on traffic, water quality, housing affordability, and quality of living, should also be explored.

The build-out study can be used as a guide for evaluating the appropriate balance of land use types in the town and could ultimately direct future local land use and conservation laws (such as the creation of a transfer of development rights program or incentive zoning regulations), in the context of a Generic Environmental Impact Statement. The build-out analysis can also be used as a public information tool, helping to inform town residents of the long-term cost effectiveness of conservation on taxes as well as on quality of life.

4. **Continue to work with landowners to refine projects, apply for grants, develop conservation tools, and finance projects (create a “greenprint” for the town).** Essentially, this is the development of a “greenprint” that will identify specific projects for conservation. The costs of financing the package of projects in the greenprint could then be analyzed (and compared with the costs of not implementing the package) and the greenprint could be presented to the community for approval in a financing campaign.
5. **Conduct additional open space and trail planning projects as opportunities arise (for example, as grant funds are available to support projects).** In addition to implementing land conservation projects, several planning studies are recommended in this plan, including the following:
 - Sprout Creek master plan
 - Freedom Plains open space and trail planning
 - Additional trail corridor studies such as for identifying alternative alignment options where obstacles to completing the Wappinger Creek Greenway exist

Long-term:

1. **Develop an outreach program to share the goals and successes of the resource conservation program with community residents.** As the program is first established, this might include a brochure or materials on the town website informing community members about the program. As the open space plan is implemented, successes should be celebrated publicly, through press releases and other outreach methods. As an example, the Town of Clifton Park (in Saratoga County, NY) recently created an “open space report card” brochure that highlighted the town’s progress towards reaching its conservation goals. In other areas, signs are erected to inform the community that lands are permanently protected through purchase of development rights.

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2. **Develop promotional materials to help community members experience open space resources.** Projects towards this end will likely be catalyzed by community interest, but could include the following:
 - A scenic road/historic driving tour
 - A guide to local/regional farm products and other agri-tourism opportunities
 - A trail map or guide to completed trails
 - A series of interpretive/educational signs along the Wappinger Creek Greenway or Sprout Creek Greenway

3. **Conduct an agricultural zoning audit as part of the town's next comprehensive plan update.** Periodically audit and update existing zoning regulations with respect to the needs of the agricultural community. Zoning regulations should foster flexibility and profitability for agricultural land owners. Involve landowners in the discussion to ensure that their needs are balanced with the desires and concerns of the broader community. The agricultural advisory committee could help to guide this process (see short-term recommendation #1).

Financing Open Space Conservation

LaGrange community members have expressed strong support for conservation throughout this open space planning process. Community survey results have indicated that open space conservation is important to the community. LaGrange residents support open space conservation as part of the town's fiscal health, and they are willing to pay for some level of conservation.

Financing open space conservation in LaGrange will require a partnership approach. The more partnerships the town is able to build, the more the town's funds will be leveraged. This will not only help the town to advance conservation goals quickly, but it will ultimately help to reduce costs to town taxpayers.

The primary partners in land conservation projects are the landowners – without them there would be no project. Partners in conservation financing include all levels of government, including Dutchess County, New York State and the federal government. Partners also include land trusts and conservation organizations, which can help to develop and implement conservation projects, and often hold and steward easements. Lastly, developers can be key partners in conservation projects, both by helping to preserve land through development and also by preserving resources through conservation design.

There are many sources of funding available for implementing the town's open space plan. For example, the town may apply to federal grant programs such as the USDA Farmland Ranchland Protection Program or the New York State Farmland Protection Program for farmland projects. The Dutchess County Open Space and Farmland Protection Matching Grant Program is also a potential source of funds for both agricultural and open space protection. The Dutchess County grant program also provides municipal planning grants for open space planning and land use and zoning modifications, among other activities. Other grant programs established in the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund and the state Environmental Protection Fund provide funds for parklands and other conservation actions. The state Recreational Trails Program provides funding for trail development. New York State's Quality Communities Grant Program also provides funding for open space planning and other innovative activities such as intermunicipal resource planning.

Community Survey Supports Open Space Conservation

- 82% said it was very important to conserve rural character and open space resource in LaGrange.
- 89% said that the town should protect open space resources as an investment in keeping the Town of LaGrange fiscally healthy and affordable.
- 81% said they would feel comfortable spending \$15 or more per year for an average household for a local open space program. Of the 81%; 54% would be comfortable spending \$31 or more.

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Land trusts and other conservation organizations such as the Dutchess Land Conservancy, Open Space Institute, the Glynwood Center, and Scenic Hudson are also primary partners in conservation. They provide invaluable assistance in working with landowners, providing community outreach, developing grant applications, holding and monitoring easements, and long-term stewardship of the land. In order to build successful long-term projects, conservation organizations should be considered part of the team from the project start.

Landowners and developers are also important partners in conservation. For example, landowners can donate property or provide a bargain sale towards a conservation easement, which is factored into the financing equation. Developers can also help to achieve the green infrastructure vision by conserving quality open space, or by constructing desired trail connections on future projects.

This partnership of public and private investment can go a long way towards implementing the goals of the town's open space plan. However, in order for grant projects to be truly competitive, they should be significantly leveraged with local dollars. State, federal, and county programs are not meant to be a sole source of funding for local projects, and they simply do not have enough money available to fund every project that comes through the door. In fact, for every dollar awarded under the state farmland protection program, four dollars go unfunded. In fiscal years 04-05 and 05-06, the New York State Farmland Protection Program received approximately \$130 million in requests for \$26 million in funds. A similar situation exists for federal funding sources.

Local governments are increasingly investing in open space conservation, and they are doing this through a variety of ways. Some communities are setting up capital reserve funds or setting aside recreation fees to implement open space projects. Other communities have developed creative solutions to financing open space. For example, the Town of Clifton Park (Saratoga County, NY) recently adopted open space incentive zoning, which provides a density bonus incentive to landowners in exchange for open space amenities. For single-family residential increases under the incentive zoning, each bonus dwelling unit requires the preservation of three acres of open space or payment of \$30,000.

In addition, a significant number of communities in the Hudson Valley have brought conservation financing ballot initiatives to voters, asking them to approve funds for open space conservation. According to the Trust for Public Land's Landvote database, which keeps track of conservation finance ballot initiatives across the country, New York State voters approved \$781 million in conservation measures in November 2006, with a 100% approval rating. Most of the conservation measures approved in November 2006 were in the Hudson Valley, including one measure in Dutchess County (City of Beacon), three measures in neighboring Ulster County (Towns of Marbletown, New Paltz and Gardiner), and one measure in both Orange and Putnam Counties (Towns of Warwick and Southeast). Conservation measures have been approved by voters in Dutchess County in previous years, as well. For example, the Town of Red Hook passed a \$3.5 million bond in 2003 and the Town of Beekman passed a \$3 million bond in 2005.

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This plan recommends the establishment of a significant local funding source for resource conservation, so that the town can implement the open space plan. Ideally, the financing program will include a diversity of options from the recommended financing sources listed below. Please note that the sources below are *in addition* to all other opportunities for partnership with state, county and federal governments, landowners, conservation organizations, developers, and other private entities.

Annual Budget Allocations

The town can continue to allocate funds from its annual budget to implement open space conservation. Funds from the town budget can be used for soft costs such as additional planning or administration of conservation projects, as well as hard costs such as land acquisition or trail development. The town can also establish a capital reserve fund for open space projects. Funds could accrue over time and be used as needed to fund open space land or easement purchase.

Municipal Bond/Installment Purchase

The town can purchase lands and conservation easements with a municipal bond. This allows the town to stretch out principal and interest payments (like a mortgage). This is activated by the town through a permissive referendum process. Installment purchase agreements can be arranged in a similar manner.

As discussed previously in the chapter, many communities in the Hudson Valley, as well as New York and the rest of the nation, have asked voters to weigh in on conservation financing initiatives during elections. Placing a municipal bond referendum on the ballot allows voters to decide if they want to pay for open space conservation. Conducting a successful conservation campaign includes research, such as a community poll, to understand how much voters are comfortable spending, what types of resources they want to protect, and how the funds should be overseen.

Recreation/special Fees

The town already collects a recreation fee (in lieu of parkland) which can be used to support open space conservation efforts. In the future, the amount collected should be evaluated to confirm adequacy toward meeting the recreational needs of the town as it grows.

Real Estate Transfer Fee

Local governments can request the permission of the governor and state legislature for authorizing legislation, then local voters, to impose up to a 2% fee on real estate transactions to fund agricultural and open space conservation, recreational opportunities, and other important environmental benefits.

This option is interesting to local governments because it is a way to generate open space funds without charging the taxpayer. First-time homebuyers and purchases below the median home value in the town would be exempt from the tax. This strategy has been successfully implemented by five towns in the Peconic Bay, on the eastern side of Long

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Island, in the early 1990s, with a 2% real estate transfer fee. More recently, voters in the Town of Warwick supported a ¾ % transfer fee for the purpose of land conservation in the November 2006 election.

Development Mitigation Fees

Mitigation costs can be developed through a comprehensive Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) process under a town-wide build-out. This process would help to identify impacts of the full build-out of the town and create measures to mitigate such impacts. Several communities are using the tools developed through such a process to obtain funds for land conservation through the private (development) sector.

Open Space Incentive Zoning

Incentive zoning (or amenity zoning) allows a landowner or developer to work with a municipality to obtain specific incentives in exchange for providing desired community amenities such as open space conservation. Incentives may include modifications to density, allowed uses, setbacks, or other zoning controls. The landowner or developer may provide, in exchange, dedicated open space, trail access, park land, or potentially cash (in lieu of land) to contribute to a PDR program.

Private Fund Raising

Many communities have successfully raised funds to support conservation efforts through private fund raising events such as dinners, concerts, festivals, and other events. Partnerships with local land trusts and other organizations can be a successful way to raise funds through private sources.

Summary of Conservation Goals and Priorities

Goals for conservation of each resource category identified in the open space vision map were introduced in the previous chapter. This section summarizes these goals and provides direction towards priorities or catalyst projects to achieve these goals.

A. Core Farm Areas

Important Resources: All farms in core farm areas.

Top Priority: Northwest core area (because of its size, soils, number of active farms, and relative isolation from development).

Next Step: Create a local tax abatement/term easement program.

Catalyst Project: Permanent conservation of a priority farm working with a willing landowner and other conservation and funding partners.

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Future Actions: Develop a local funding source and create necessary tools for conservation of farmlands in core areas (comprehensive resource conservation program).

5-year Conservation Goal: Conserve 500 additional acres of land in the core farm areas.

Long-term Vision: Preserve core areas of working farms in LaGrange, working on a voluntary basis with willing landowners.

B. Greenway Corridors

Important Resources: Lands that are within, adjacent to, or integral to the natural function of greenway corridors.

Top Priorities: Sprout Creek; Wappinger Creek.

Next Step: Explore the development of an inter-municipal agreement for Sprout Creek.

Catalyst Project: Develop a conservation master plan for Sprout Creek.

Future Actions: Develop a local funding source and create necessary tools for conservation of greenway lands (comprehensive resource conservation program).

5-year Conservation Goal: Conserve 250 additional acres of land along major greenways.

Long-term Vision: Preserve linear greenbelt systems in the town and work with neighboring communities to do the same.

C. Natural Areas

Important Resources: Lands within the priority natural areas, specifically those that are of importance for species or habitat preservation or those that maintain larger areas of resource conservation.

Top Priorities: Freedom Plains; Overlook Preserve; lands within the Taconic Ridge; Wappinger Creek floodplains.

Next Steps: Conservation analysis guidebook and open space development design guidelines.

Catalyst Project: Master plan for preserving Freedom Plains open space resources.

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Future Actions: Develop a local funding source and create necessary tools for conservation of resources and lands within natural areas (comprehensive resource conservation program).

5-year Conservation Goal: Conserve 500 additional acres of land in priority natural areas.

Long-term Vision: Conserve the function of the natural systems in LaGrange (this means balancing conservation of lands within natural areas with development that preserves the function of the natural systems).

D. Trails

Important Resources: All priority trail connections.

Top Priorities: Wappinger Creek Trail, Freedom Plains loop trail (both provide opportunities for populated portion of town to experience natural resources).

Next Steps: Form trails committee/sub-committee of CAC.

Catalyst Projects: Master plan for Freedom Plains Loop Trail (could be conducted jointly with master plan for preserving Freedom Plains open space resources).

Future Actions: Trail easement acquisition, planning studies and construction, as process unfolds.

5-year Conservation Goal: Develop or secure easements for 5 new miles of trail (excluding Dutchess Rail-Trail).

Long-term Vision: Create a system of trails in LaGrange that connects residents to open space resources, links open space resources and other destinations together, and provides diverse recreational and educational opportunities for residents.

E. Scenic Roads and Views

Important Resources: All scenic views and roads in town.

Top Priorities: Views of farmlands and rural areas; views of the Taconic Ridge.

Next Steps: Adopt scenic roads map in town zoning law.

Catalyst Projects: Conservation analysis guidebook and open space development design guidelines (will help to foster design that preserves scenic views).

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Future Actions: Develop a local funding source and create necessary tools for conservation of resources and lands within natural areas (comprehensive resource conservation program) – conservation of other priority resources will help to preserve scenic resources.

5-year Conservation Goal: N/A.

Long-term Vision: Preserve whole landscapes and other scenic views that contribute to the town's scenic, aesthetic, and rural character.

Summary of Conservation Goals

This plan sets a short-term (5-year) goal for conservation of 1,250 acres of land and development of 5 miles of trail. This would more than double the town's existing protected land acreage, from 1,400 to 2,650 and would result in 10% of the town's land area in permanent conservation. The goal of 1,250 acres was established as an interim goal, based on the town's existing and future capacity for conservation (fiscally and organizationally). Further analysis of the land use and fiscal balance of the community, as recommended in this plan, will help to identify long-term goals for land conservation. This goal of 1,250 acres is the first step in that direction.

Opportunities for Regional Collaboration

As discussed in the plan introduction (Chapter 1), identifying and fostering regional opportunities is important to the community and town officials. Regional efforts are cost effective and make sense from a resource perspective. For example, maintaining the health of Sprout Creek locally requires maintaining the health of its entire watershed. Likewise, trail connections that do not end at the town boundaries are desirable to community members (who often do not know where town lines begin and end). Preservation efforts of core farm areas at the edge of the town will be greatly enhanced if the efforts extend beyond LaGrange (farmers also rent lands in adjacent communities so this makes sense for many reasons). Regional opportunities have been discussed throughout this plan. In addition to those major regional initiatives already under way (such as the Dutchess Rail Trail and the Taconic State Parkway Scenic Byway) some of these opportunities include the following:

- Develop an intermunicipal agreement for Sprout Creek, which forms the border of neighboring Towns of Wappinger and East Fishkill, and continues into the Towns of Union Vale and Washington (headwaters), and whose watershed drains all of these towns. This effort would help to address many significant intermunicipal resources, including the farmlands at the southern border of LaGrange, East Fishkill, and Wappinger, as well as the very large forest block at the northern border of LaGrange with Union Vale (this is one of the largest unfragmented forest blocks in the region).

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- Continue to work with the Town of Pleasant Valley towards implementing the Wappinger Creek Greenway trail.
- Participate in regional efforts for business development, agri-tourism, and promotion of agricultural products.
- Jointly (with the Town of Union Vale) explore the proposed trail connection between Freedom Park and other town-owned land in LaGrange and into Union Vale.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced a set of recommendations that would create a comprehensive resource protection program for the town, develop financing for the program and ultimately help to implement the program. The process will not happen overnight – it will take time, partnership, and support from community members, landowners, and government. But the investment will no doubt reap exponential rewards. The community's most important resources can continue to provide environmental and economic benefits for town residents – any they will persist for future generations to enjoy.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This plan has provided an inventory and analysis of the open space resources in the Town of LaGrange. It has prioritized those resources based on both the community's values (farms, water resources, and wildlife habitats) and ecological and scientific data. The priorities that have emerged are depicted in the open space vision map. The vision is one that preserves whole landscapes and systems in LaGrange.

Maintaining the resources depicted in the open space vision would ensure that there is a future for agriculture in LaGrange. It would help to maintain drinking water quality. It would preserve forest, wetland, and upland habitats and connections for wildlife. It would also provide parks, access and trail connections for LaGrange residents to enjoy the open space lands. It would preserve scenic resources, views, and the character of the town's rural roads. It would ensure that these resources that are appreciated by LaGrange residents, old and new, will continue to be enjoyed by future generations.

Implementing the open space vision can also lead to substantial fiscal benefits for the town. Conservation of the town's farmlands and open lands helps to maintain the town's fiscal balance. If these lands were instead developed with homes, it might cost the town taxpayers more to provide the homes with roads, schools, and other services.

Implementing the open space vision is a long-term endeavor. It is a "green" infrastructure project, and will require the same level of leadership, planning, investment and community support that produced the town's roads, developments, and other "gray" infrastructure. This plan and the process that created it is just the beginning of the endeavor, but the results will last forever.

Glossary

Agricultural District. Article 25-AA of the Agriculture and Markets Law is intended to conserve and protect agricultural land for agricultural production and as a valued natural and ecological resource. Under this statute, territory can be designated as an agricultural district. To be eligible for designation, an agricultural district must be certified at the county level for participation in the state program. Once a district is designated, participating farmers and farmland owners within it can receive reduced property assessments and relief from local nuisance claims and certain forms of local regulation. Farm operations within agricultural districts also enjoy a measure of protection from proposals by municipalities to construct infrastructure such as water and sewer systems, which are generally intended to serve non-farm structures and developments.

Aquifer. A saturated geologic formation that receives, stores, and/or transmits groundwater that can be withdrawn and used for human purposes. A *confined aquifer* (also known as an artesian aquifer) is bounded above and below by formations of impermeable or relatively impermeable material. An *unconfined aquifer* has its upper boundary at the earth's surface (known as the water table).



Trees and vegetation provide a natural buffer along a stream.

Biodiversity. The biological variety of plant and animal life in all forms, as well as their interactions with the non-living (abiotic) environment. Includes ecosystem diversity, species diversity, and genetic diversity.

Buffer. An area and/or a physical or visual feature that separates different land uses. The buffer may incorporate natural features such as woodlands, attractive fencing, stone walls, and hedgerows wherever feasible, or requires the creation of a planted landscape buffer where no natural features exist.

Build-out analysis. A projection of a community's future development growth that is based upon the maximum theoretical development of all lands under the current zoning and regulatory controls.

Cluster Development (Subdivision). A technique that allows flexibility in design and subdivision of land by allowing the



In this residential development, homes are clustered closer together and open space is preserved as a common area.

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developer to cluster buildings on a portion of a site to preserve a larger area of open space. Cluster development allows a municipality to maintain its traditional open space character, while at the same time providing new development. The use of clustering can help a municipality achieve planning goals that call for protection of open space, scenic views, agricultural lands, woodlands and other open landscapes, while placing development away from environmentally sensitive areas.

Comprehensive Plan. A document that is created and updated locally that helps to guide the long-term protection, enhancement, growth and development of a municipality. This plan includes text, maps, charts, reports and other materials that help to illustrate and describe the plan's goals and objectives, concepts, policies and guidelines.

Conservation. The use of a resource while not diminishing or damaging its natural resource value. This implies knowing the particular values that the resource possesses and having a specific plan in place to ensure the balance of its use and protection.

Conservation Design (or Analysis). A process for area planning, subdivision planning or site planning in which the natural setting and primary resources (for example streams, wetlands, wildlife habitat, historic buildings, scenery and viewsheds) are given high priority. This process differs from conventional design in that the resources are considered and integrated into the overall design before lots, roads, and the built environment are laid out.

Conservation Subdivision. A subdivision where a substantial portion of the open space resources are identified and set aside for conservation or recreation through a detailed site analysis process for open space resources.

Conservation Easement. A voluntary legal agreement between the landowner and the municipality, or a third party such as a land trust, to protect land from development by permanently restricting the use and development of the property, thereby preserving its natural or cultural features. The legally binding agreement is filed in the office of 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 are detailed in the easement agreement.

Cultural Resources. The cultural features of a community reflect the ways in which the people who have lived there have used their natural environment to suit their economic needs and social patterns, and may include such types of resources described as agricultural, institutional, historic, and archeological, among others.

Design Guidelines. Often illustrated concepts that help to guide new development or reuse with respect to the natural and built resources that a community values and seeks to protect. Design guidelines can address topics such as site and landscape design, architecture, materials, colors and signs. They are generally informational and collaborative in nature, creating an opportunity for project sponsors to review the

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guidelines prior to designing a project with the advantage of understanding the goals of the community and the planning board.

Farmland, Prime. As defined by the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), prime farmland is “land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops, and is also available for these uses (the land could be cropland, pastureland, rangeland, forest land, or other land, but not urban built-up land or water).”

Farmland, Statewide Importance. Lands with a good combination of physical and chemical features for the production of agricultural crops.

Fee Simple. The purchase of property outright with full rights.

Fiscal Impacts. The costs and revenues that will result from a particular proposed project, program or plan.

Green Infrastructure. An interconnected system of natural lands, parks, waterways and open spaces that helps to sustain environmental health, economy and quality of life.

Growth Management. The process of guiding development, through a system of land use techniques, in a direction that is environmentally and fiscally sound and that helps to preserve quality of life. The goals of growth management often include encouraging urban infill, reducing sprawl, and promoting economic development.

Hamlet. A cluster of dwellings and/or other uses, such as commercial and retail, often at a crossroads, that is much smaller in scale than a village or downtown.

Municipal Bond. A bond issued by a local government to pay for special projects, such as infrastructure improvements or open space preservation.

Open Space. Open space consists of farmland, woodland, and other ecological, recreational, and scenic land that helps to define the character of a community. Open space may be public or

privately owned. Some open space is **permanently protected** from development such as parks, nature preserves, and wetlands while other parcels are subject to development. A community’s definition of open space often depends on the context. A narrow pathway, a small pocket park, or even a cemetery surrounded by development can constitute open space in some communities.

Overlay District (or zone). The overlay zoning technique is a modification of the system of conventionally mapped zoning districts. An overlay zone applies a common



Farmlands are important open space components in a rural landscape.

Town of LaGrange Open Space Plan

set of standards to a designated area that may cut across several different conventional or "underlying" zoning districts. The standards of the overlay zone apply in addition to those of the underlying zoning district. Some common examples of overlay zones are the flood zones administered by many communities under the national flood insurance program, historic district overlay zones, areas of very severe slopes, waterfront zones, and environmentally sensitive areas.

Purchase of Development Rights (PDR). A purchase of development-rights (PDR) program involves the purchase by a municipal or other government agency or private land conservation organization of development rights from private landowners whose land it seeks to preserve in its current state without further development. The PDR system can protect farmland as well as ecologically important lands or scenic parcels essential to rural character of the community. Under PDR, the land remains in private ownership and the government acquires non-agricultural development rights. These development rights once purchased by government (typically) or a land trust, are usually extinguished. Landowners who participate receive payment equal to the development value of the property. In return, the property owner agrees to keep the land forever in forest, agriculture or other conservation-type use. The owner typically files property covenants similar to a conservation easement limiting the use of the property to conservation-based activities.

Performance Standards. Criteria established to protect a community's natural and built resources and quality of living through such matters as, but not limited to, noise, air pollution, emissions, odors, wastes, traffic impacts, and visual impact. Typically, land development and use are regulated through zoning by a series of such performance standards that provide criteria for limiting the impacts of development.

Permissive Referendum. An action that is subject to permissive referendum means that the Town Board may take an action without having a general vote of the residents. Registered voters may petition the decision of the municipal board – and require a ballot referendum for all voters to weigh in on the issue.

Preservation. An active process of stewardship with the goal of protection of a resource in its existing, natural or original state. An example is historic preservation of a building.

Real Estate Transfer Fee. A State or local fee paid when title passes from one owner to another.

Recreational Resources. Recreational resources may be described as areas in which the following types of leisure activities may occur: existing or planned hiking, biking, and canoeing; ball fields, tennis courts, basketball courts, golf courses, skating rinks, ski slopes, and swimming pools; and waterfront activities such as boating and fishing. Recreational resources also include nature preserves, community gardens, and other outdoor areas for quiet public enjoyment.

Town of LaGrange Open Space Plan

Riparian Corridor. A vegetated corridor along the bank and floodplain of a stream, river or other waterway; a transitional zone between a terrestrial area and an aquatic area.

Scenic Corridor. A scenic corridor is a viewshed that contains scenic vistas that may include natural and cultural resources.

Site Plan (Review). Site Plan Review is part of the development review process by which the physical elements of a proposed use are reviewed to ensure that they are compatible with the physical characteristics of the site, as well as with the existing and potential uses of the surrounding area. A site plan provides detail on the future development of streets, parking areas, underground utilities, building “footprints”, sidewalks, landscaping, etc. through a scale drawing.



This open farmland contributes to the scenic quality of the adjacent roadway.

Sprawl. Ever-expanding metropolitan strip and suburban areas consuming huge amounts of farmland, forestland, and natural resources that wastes lands and resources while often abandoning people, places and private investments at the center, in the hearts of towns and villages.

Subdivision Regulations. A set of laws or regulations for the division of land, lot, or parcel into units for the purpose of development and/or sale.

Term (Conservation) Easement. A term conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a municipality that is written to last for a period of years, most commonly for 5 to 20 years. A term conservation easement is not a permanent easement, and thus does not guarantee long-term protection of resources.

Viewshed. A particular panorama that is valued for its aesthetic or cultural attributes. Buildings, structures, places, or natural features may be considered to contribute to, or detract from the quality of viewshed experience.

Wetlands. Areas that are saturated by either fresh or salt water for at least a period of time during the growing season. In state regulations, they are defined chiefly by the forms of vegetation present. Wetlands provide a number of benefits to a community, including habitat protection, recreational opportunities, water supply protection, flood protection, and scenic beauty.

Wildlife Corridor. A continuous area, often containing critical vegetated habitat or cover, that facilitates the movement of wildlife through an urban, suburban, or rural environment.

APPENDIX A

4) Would you like to see the town actively pursue strategies for the concentration of growth in or near existing higher density areas? **Circle One**

- a. Yes b. No c. Undecided

5) In pursuing any level of an open space protection program, the Town of LaGrange will maximize all available sources of outside grants and funding, and existing planning tools and methods to protect open space. These outside funding sources are highly competitive; and these sources generally require **local matching** funds. What amount do you feel comfortable with spending per average household to initiate and implement the local share of an open space program?

Circle one.

- a. \$15 to \$30 cost per year per average household
b. \$31 to \$60 cost per year per average household
c. \$61 to \$90 cost per year per average household
d. Other _____

6) Active farmland still exists. Do you feel the Town should implement strategies that would help retain agricultural activity in the community? **Circle one.**

- a. Yes b. No c. Undecided

Farm names if known _____

7) As part of an open space preservation plan, a future land acquisition and/or conservation easement program could be developed by the town, based upon voluntary participation by interested and willing landowners.

If you are a landowner of 10 acres or greater, would you be interested in participating in a voluntary program to conserve your land? Yes _____ No _____

Owner / Contact _____

Phone Number _____

THANK YOU for your participation in this survey! Public input is vital to the plan's success.

Please mail your completed survey by Friday June 30, 2006, or drop it off at the town clerk's office, at the Town of LaGrange Town Hall, 120 Stringham Rd, LaGrangeville, NY 12540-5507

Town of LaGrange Open Space Survey Results July 23, 2006

Question 1: How important is it to you to conserve rural character and open space resources in LaGrange?

	Totals	% of Total
A: Very Important	493	82
B: Somewhat Important	66	11
C: Not Important	17	3
D: Undecided	4	1
Total	599	97



Town of LaGrange Open Space Survey Results July 23, 2006

Question 2: In order to help prioritize future choices for open space efforts in the Town of LaGrange, what most closely matches your preferences for future open space protection projects?

	Totals	% of Total
B: Active Farm Lands and Orchards	377	22.3
A: Aquifers and Lands for Water Quality	336	19.9
C: Nature Preserves and Wildlife habitat	306	18.1
F: Forsted Hillsides and Ridges	158	9.4
E: Scenic Roads and Views	150	8.9
H: Town wide Paths and Trails	134	7.9
D: Lands for Active Recreation	120	7.1
G: Historic Buildings, Hamlets and Sites	89	5.3
Other Hiking and x-country skiing	10	0.6
Other bike trails	6	0.4
Other Bridle Paths	1	0.1



Town of LaGrange Open Space Survey Results July 23, 2006

Question 3: Do you believe the town should protect open space resources as an investment in keeping the Town of LaGrange fiscally healthy and affordable?

	Total	% of Total
A: Yes	531	88.6
B: No	30	5.0
C: Undecided	28	4.7



Town of LaGrange Open Space Survey Results July 23, 2006

Question 4: Would you like to see the town actively pursue strategies for the concentration of growth in or near existing higher density areas?

	Total	% Total
A: Yes	362	60.4
B: No	112	18.7
C: Undecided	85	14.2



Town of LaGrange Open Space Survey Results July 23, 2006

Question 5: What amount do you feel comfortable with spending per average household to initiate and implement the local share of an Open Space Program?

	Total	% of Total
A: \$15 - \$30 per year	159	26.5
B: \$31 - \$60 per year	156	26.0
C: \$61 - \$90 per year	155	25.9
D: Other \$10	36	6.0
Other Zero	54	9.0
Other Whatever it takes	4	0.7
Other assess new homes	1	0.2
Other \$5	2	0.3
Other \$100	5	0.8
Other \$120	1	0.2
Other \$150	3	0.5
Other \$250	1	0.2



Town of LaGrange Open Space Survey Results July 23, 2006

Question 6: Do you feel the Town should implement strategies that would help retain agricultural activity in the community?

	Total	% of Total
A: Yes	504	84.1
B: No	28	4.7
C: Undecided	32	5.3



Town of LaGrange Open Space Survey Results July 23, 2006

Question 7: Landowners of more than 10 acres interested in participating in an Open Space Preservation Plan.

Result: 22 Interested Landowners



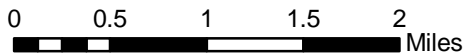
APPENDIX B

TOWN OF LAGRANGE, NY OPEN SPACE PLAN

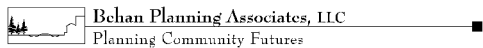
Existing Open Space Resources

Legend

- Hamlets and Centers
- Town Boundary
- ~ River or stream
- ~ Waterbody
- Roads
- Parks/ Preserves
- Other Recreation
- Conservation Easements



Maps created by:



Data Sources:

Town of LaGrange Planning Dept.
Dutchess County EMC

TOWN OF LAGRANGE, NY OPEN SPACE PLAN

Water Resources

Legend

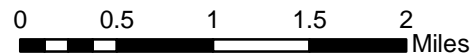
- Hamlets and Centers
- Town Boundary
- ~ Waterbody
- ~ River or stream
- Roads
- Wetlands
- FEMA 100 Year Floodplains

Aquifer Protected Areas

Source: Developed by University of New Hampshire GIS Lab for consultants to Dutchess Co. Water & Wastewater Authority January 1992

- Zone 1 - Primary Recharge Areas
- Zone 2 - Secondary Recharge Areas
Contribute recharge to the aquifer through both overland runoff and groundwater flow.
- Zone 3 - Tertiary Recharge Areas
Areas contributing to a stream which may subsequently be induced to contribute to the aquifer through infiltration.

Hillshade Elevation (Background layer)

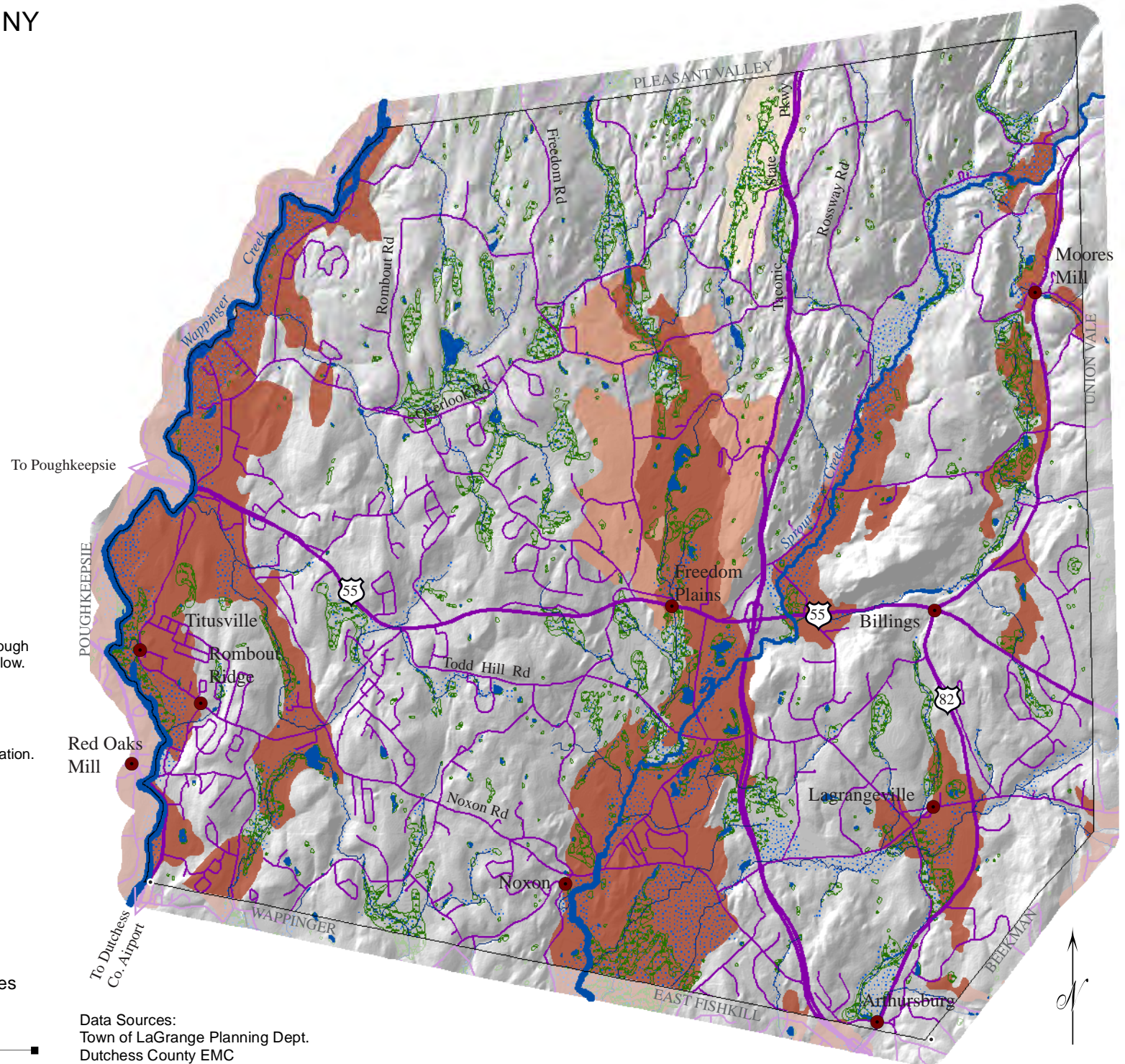


Maps created by:



Data Sources:

Town of LaGrange Planning Dept.
Dutchess County EMC



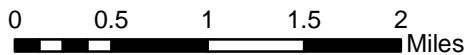
TOWN OF LAGRANGE, NY OPEN SPACE PLAN

Ecological Resources

Legend

- Hamlets and Centers
- Bird Viewing
- Town Boundary
- Waterbody
- River or stream
- Roads
- USFWS Significant Land Habitat Complex

- Natural Heritage Important Areas
 - Appalachian Oak Hickory Forest
 - Animal or Plant
- Bogs and shrub wetlands, forest brushland, forest land, wooded wetland (1998 land cover data developed by Dutchess County EMC, updated to 2004 aerial imagery)
- Hillshade Elevation (Background layer)



Maps created by:



Data Sources:
 Town of LaGrange Planning Dept.
 Dutchess County EMC
 New York Natural Heritage Program



TOWN OF LAGRANGE, NY OPEN SPACE PLAN

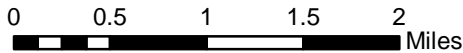
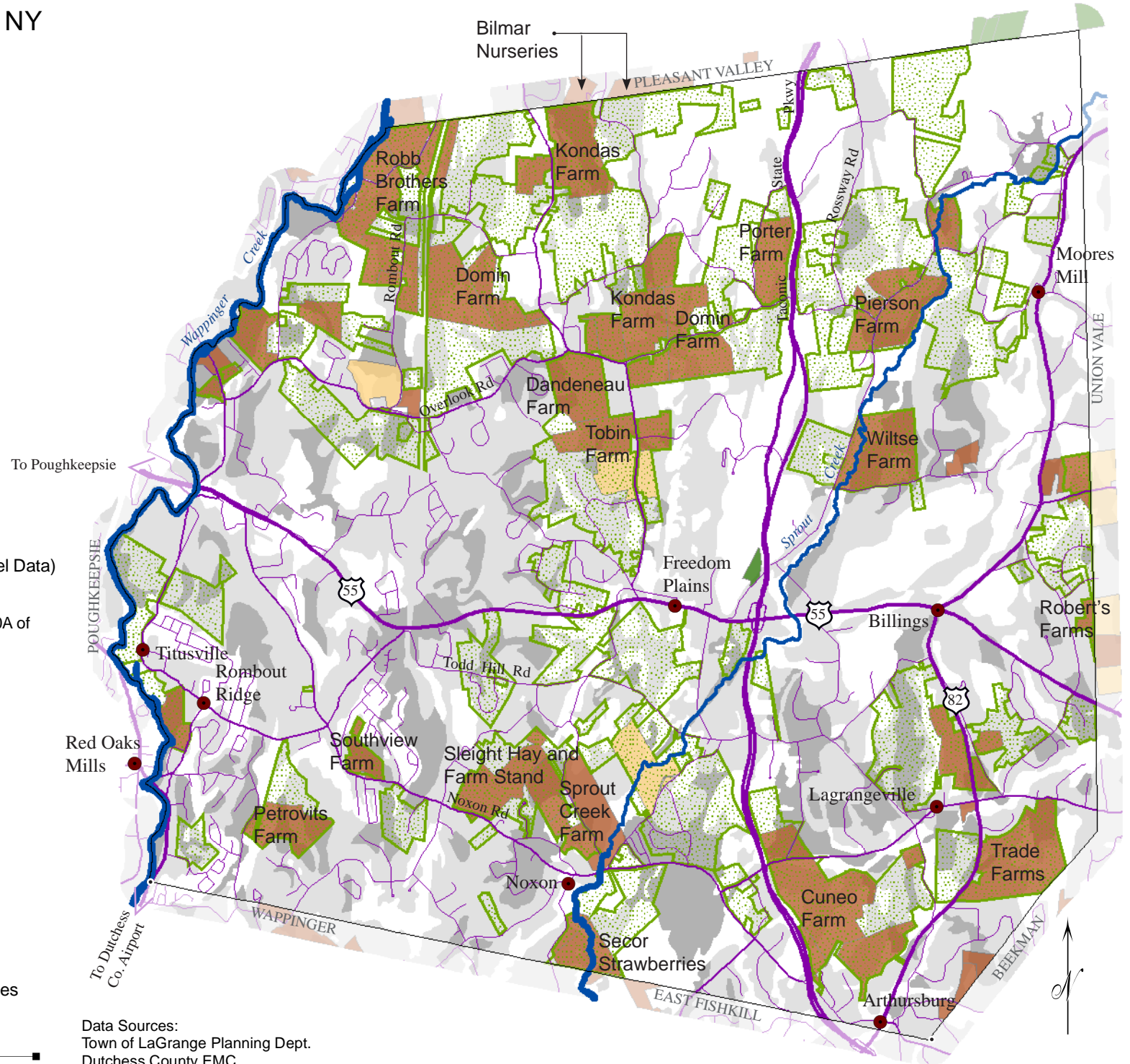
Working Landscapes

Legend

- Hamlets and Centers
- Town Boundary
- ~ River or stream
- Roads
- ▨ Agricultural District
- Prime Farmland Soils
- Soils of Statewide Significance

LAND USE (Based on 2006 Tax Parcel Data)

- Agriculture
- Private Forest (under Section 480A of the NY Real Property Tax Law)
- Residential with Ag Use



Maps created by:









Data Sources:
Town of LaGrange Planning Dept.
Dutchess County EMC

TOWN OF LAGRANGE, NY OPEN SPACE PLAN

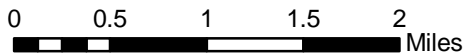
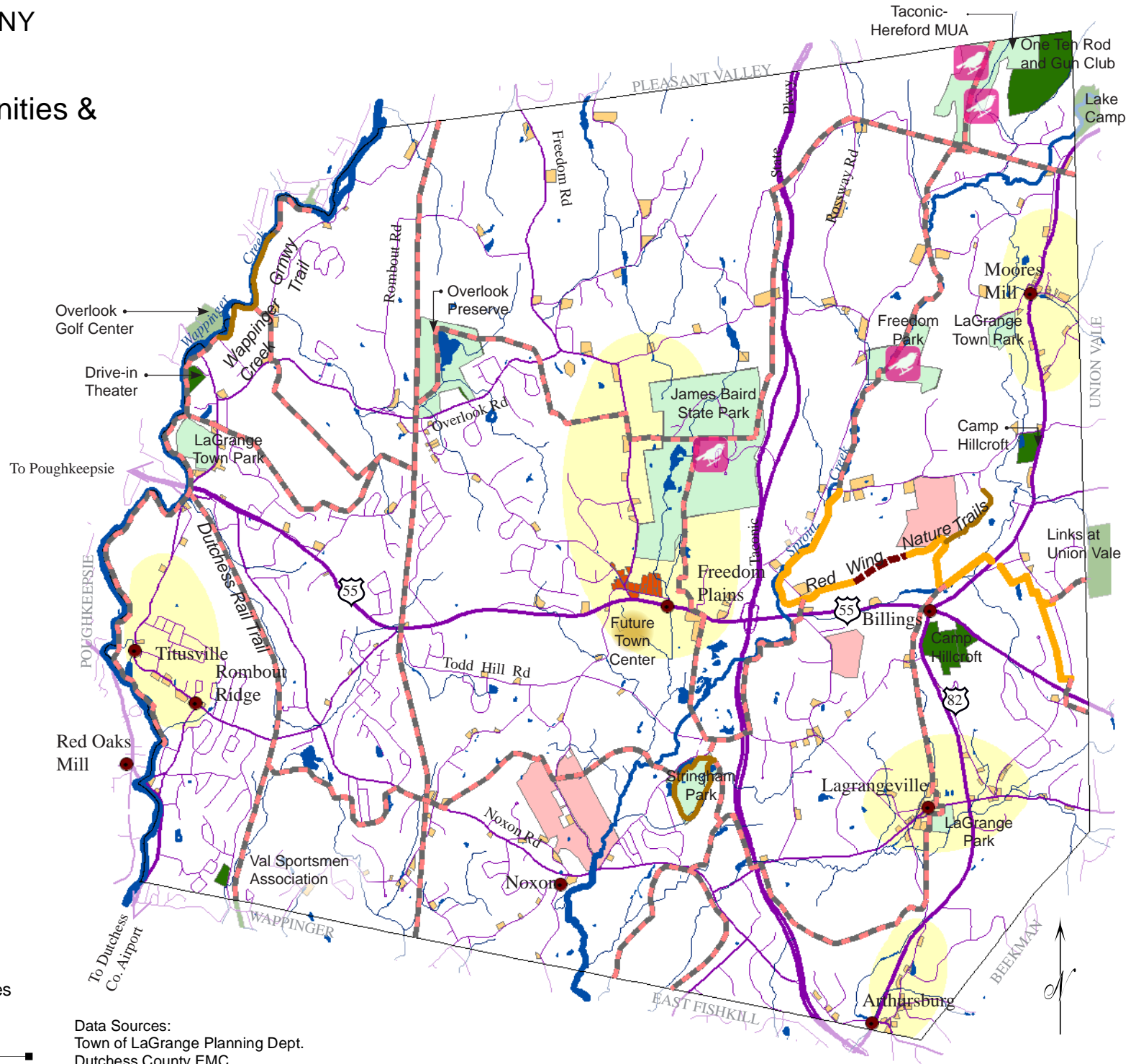
Recreational Opportunities & Cultural Landscapes

Legend

-  Bird Viewing
-  Hamlets and Centers
-  Town Boundary
-  River or stream
-  Waterbody
-  Roads

Trails

-  Concept (from Town of LaGrange Comprehensive Plan 2005)
-  Existing (Private)
-  Existing (Public)
-  Under Construction
-  Parks/ Preserves
-  Other Recreation
-  Conservation Easements
-  Proposed Historic Districts (Based on local planning)
-  Potential Historic Building Resources (Based on LaGrange Comp. Plan)
-  Historic District (Local)



Maps created by:

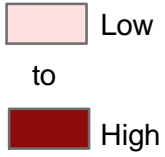


Data Sources:

Town of LaGrange Planning Dept.
Dutchess County EMC

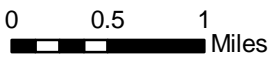
TOWN OF LAGRANGE, NY OPEN SPACE PLAN

Total Compiled Rating



- River or stream
- COUNTY
- STATE
- Parks, Conservation Easements, and Privately Owned Open Space

Value based on:
Farm "Area" Rating
Aquifer and Flood Protection Rating
Natural Areas Rating



Maps created by:
 Behan Planning Associates, LLC
Planning Community Futures

Data Sources:
Town of LaGrange Planning Dept.
Dutchess County EMC

