



TOWN OF COLONIE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE
Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC)

Preliminary Plan Recommendations

For review and discussion by the CPAC on February 21, 2018

The Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) is charged with updating the Town of Colonie's 2005 Comprehensive Plan. Over the course of the last several months, the CPAC has reached out to the community at several public workshops and via a community survey. The committee has met regularly since the fall of 2016 and discussed existing conditions in the Town, identified issues and concerns shared by Town residents, and developed an updated Vision and Goals for the future of the community.

The CPAC is now in the process of developing plan recommendations and establishing priorities for implementation. These ideas will be presented to the public in the spring, and the resulting feedback will be discussed by the Committee and incorporated into its Draft Comprehensive Plan Update. Preliminary plan recommendations, organized by goal, are identified below.

Vision Statement

In the Year 2030...

The Town of Colonie is a well-managed and forward-thinking suburban community in the heart of the Capital District. It has an exceptional quality of life with strong, well-established neighborhoods, excellent schools, and generous amenities such as parks, trails, and conserved open lands. Its central location makes it both convenient and busy, yet the Town has worked with its regional partners to ensure that the impacts of traffic are controlled and that safe and attractive transportation options are available for all. The Town balances fiscal responsibility with long-term infrastructure maintenance and great community services. It protects its natural resources, promotes environmentally sustainable development practices, and carefully guides development and redevelopment in its existing commercial and industrial areas to support the tax base and create and retain jobs. Colonie's varied housing stock meets the diverse needs of the community and, in combination with relatively low taxes, the Town has retained its status as an affordable and desirable community for living, learning, and doing business.

Goals and Preliminary Recommendations

To achieve this vision, the Town of Colonie has established a set of goals to guide decision-making. These goals address a wide range of issues that have been raised through the public involvement process and through the development of an inventory and analysis of existing conditions. The goals, and a set of preliminary recommendations for each, are as follows:

- Accommodate the provision of a range of housing types in appropriate locations to meet the diverse needs of Colonie’s residents. Provide incentives for affordability and to encourage mixed-income developments and multi-generational neighborhoods.
 - Support reinvestment in the Town’s older housing stock and the neighborhoods where such housing is concentrated.
 - Develop an inventory of “zombie properties” and consider working with the Albany County Land Bank to facilitate the reuse and redevelopment of these properties – getting them back on the tax rolls and possibly providing additional opportunities for affordable housing.
 - Review incentive provisions in current zoning and ensure that incentives (i.e. density bonuses) are targeted to the provision of affordable, workforce housing and/or other community benefits that are difficult to obtain in the marketplace without such incentives.
 - Work with the Senior Resources Department to develop strategies for addressing the housing and transportation needs of the Town’s senior population as part of the Town’s planning and zoning approach. Opportunities for mixed-income, multi-generational neighborhoods designed to facilitate independent living may be found in the Town’s mixed-use nodes.

- Protect existing neighborhoods from encroaching commercial and higher density residential development. Work with neighborhood groups to identify and address quality of life concerns.
 - Create provisions in zoning to better address the transition from commercial, mixed-use, and higher density residential zones to adjoining residential neighborhoods. Careful attention to building and site design, including the preservation of existing vegetation as appropriate, should be incorporated into the project review process.
 - Given the town’s large size and diverse neighborhoods, it might be appropriate to prepare neighborhood area plans focusing on more specific local issues on a neighborhood by neighborhood basis.

- Improve mobility throughout the Town. This includes thoughtful investments in roads and highways to relieve significant impacts of traffic congestion and to enhance the safety and attractiveness of active transportation modes (walking and biking). Continue to expand and improve access to public transportation. Coordinate with our partners at Albany County, CDTC, CDTA, and NYSDOT in addressing these mobility issues.
 - Establish a point person at the Town for transportation issues – this person would be responsible for coordinating with partners at CDTC, CDTA, Albany County, and NYSDOT.
 - Utilizing the Albany Shaker Road Corridor Study as a model, undertake land use / transportation studies for targeted corridors – especially those where neighborhood quality of life and thru traffic concerns appear to conflict

- Work with CDTC to develop and disseminate information about “Complete Streets” and the benefits that this approach provides for all users of the transportation system, including automobiles. As one of the core features of *New Visions 2040*, the region’s long-range transportation plan, complete streets will continue to be a focus of the region’s transportation investments in the coming years; and therefore, more dialogue about this approach and how it can be applied in Colonie would be beneficial.
 - Consider applying to CDTC for funding to prepare an Active Transportation Plan for the Town of Colonie. An Active Transportation Plan would create a vision and recommendations to guide the development of a network of sidewalks, on-road bicycle facilities, and trails that allow for safe and convenient travel in and around the Town of Colonie. A number of communities in the Rochester region have prepared such studies in partnership with the Genesee Transportation Council, that region’s Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).
- Focus commercial and industrial growth in existing areas that are designated for these purposes and where infrastructure already exists. Encourage the reuse or redevelopment of existing commercial sites and buildings. Provide incentives and create opportunities for increasing the value of underutilized commercial areas by permitting higher density mixed-use development/redevelopment, and emphasizing pedestrian friendly, high quality design, in these areas. Facilitate reinvestment in older industrial areas for future industrial and light industrial use, or a wider array of mixed uses if appropriate.
- Utilize the Railroad Avenue Area Transportation and Revitalization Plan, and the Lincoln Avenue BOA (Brownfield Opportunity Area) Study currently underway, as models for future redevelopment planning in underutilized commercial/industrial areas.
 - Reevaluate the manner in which the 2005 Comprehensive Plan’s “mixed-use nodes” were implemented as the NCOR and COR Zoning Districts in the rezoning that followed adoption of the 2005 plan. Specifically, the plan recommended specific areas for redevelopment as higher-density, mixed-use, and walkable centers of activity. The zoning that followed applied this concept to entire corridors (such as Route 5 and Route 7 – Route 2). The application of the 2005 Comprehensive Plan’s recommendations for mixed-use centers should take into consideration the specific characteristics of each location where this is applied. The process for developing the Town of Clifton Park’s Town Center Master Plan and resulting form-based code provide a good example of how this can be accomplished.
 - With the changing nature of the nation’s retail sector – particularly the growth of e-commerce and the resulting challenges to brick and mortar retail – the Town of Colonie needs to develop a long-term strategy for addressing vacant commercial space. Providing more flexibility in terms of future land use, as described in the 2005 Comprehensive Plan for the “mixed-use nodes”, may provide an incentive for redevelopment in some locations. However, the Town may want to investigate a more

direct response to the potential abandonment of large-format retail (big box stores) in particular.

- Ensure an efficient and fair development approval process that is predictable, transparent, and protective of the Town's environment and the residential character of its neighborhoods.
 - The Town's zoning should be refined immediately following adoption of the Comprehensive Plan Update. In addition to subjects discussed elsewhere in this list of preliminary recommendations, some of the specific zoning items that have been identified for further consideration include:
 - Revising parking requirements to reduce the amount of parking required and to provide for shared parking
 - Update the sign regulations to account for newer technologies such as LED signs and consider moving the sign approval process from the ZBA to the Planning Board.
 - Reevaluate the Planned Development District (PDD) regulations to ensure that the Town is obtaining desired benefits in return for the development flexibility and higher potential densities that PDD's provide. As discussed above, ensure that existing neighborhoods that adjoin proposed PDD's are adequately protected.
 - Work with the Albany County Airport Authority to incorporate appropriate language related to the airport's Runway Protection Zones (49 CFR Part 77) into the Town's zoning.
- Provide a business-friendly environment that is supportive of local businesses and that encourages entrepreneurship. Recognizing the Town's locational advantages, critical regional assets, well-developed infrastructure, and attractive quality of life, target economic development initiatives and incentives to industries that generate quality employment and diversify the community's economic base.
 - Building off the Industrial Development Agency's (IDA) Economic Assessment Study that is currently underway, the Town should develop a Town-wide Economic Development Strategy.
- Protect the Town's important natural resources such as stream corridors, steep slopes, floodplains, wetlands, and unique ecosystems. Manage development activity to ensure that necessary clearing and site disturbances are minimized and implemented consistent with approvals.
 - Strengthen standards regarding the clearing and grading of land in anticipation of development to ensure that such activity conforms to a plan approved by the Planning

Board. Create appropriate limits on clearcutting. Expand the town's capacity to monitor and enforce development activity.

- Conserve a Town-wide network of open lands including, but not limited to, viable farmland, wildlife habitat, special or unique environmental resources and potential trail corridors, river access, and recreation areas.
 - Establish an Open Space Conservation Program
 - Identify what entity should take the lead in developing this program – perhaps a committee comprised of the CAC, Planning Board, Planning Department and Parks Department staff, regional conservation partners (Pinebush Commission, Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy, etc.) and someone representing the agricultural community in Colonie.
 - Based on the inventory mapping of existing open space and recreation resources and opportunities initiated during this process, develop a vision for a town-wide network of conservation lands through an open, community-based process.
 - As part of this community-based process, provide information about conservation tools and techniques to large landowners and to interested members of the public.
 - Identify appropriate sources of funding for a Colonie Open Space Fund – from the town budget, an open space bond, a Community Preservation Program (real-estate transfer tax), mitigation funds under the Town's Area-wide GEIS studies, etc.
- Enhance and expand active and passive recreational resources available throughout the Town to meet the growing and changing demand for these amenities.
- Continue to maintain and enhance the Town's extensive water, sewer, and local roadway infrastructure. Work with utilities and providers of fiber optic and other communications infrastructure to ensure that high quality services are available to meet the growing needs of residents and businesses. Consider adaptation strategies to ensure the resiliency of the Town's infrastructure in response to a changing climate.
 - Consider supplementing existing funding for water and sewer infrastructure maintenance through a Community Preservation Program (see Open Space financing)
 - Review Albany County Hazard Mitigation Plan for suggestions about adaptation and resiliency measures in Colonie
- Encourage low-impact development techniques and green infrastructure to address stormwater management.

- Incorporate provisions in the zoning for the use of green infrastructure / low-impact design techniques to address stormwater management. Incentivize or require the use of these techniques as appropriate.
- Maintain the Town’s high level of public safety services.
- Maintain the Town’s high level community services for youth, seniors, and the public at large.
- Protect and promote the Town’s significant cultural and historic resources.
- Promote energy efficiency and conservation, the use of renewable energy, and waste reduction in the Town.
 - Consider participating in the NYSDEC’s Climate Smart Communities program and NYSERDA’s Clean Energy Communities program.
- Expand opportunities for sharing information and for encouraging community involvement. Promote volunteerism and community service.
- Cooperate with the Villages of Colonie and Menands, the school districts, and other neighboring and regional municipalities, agencies, and organizations on issues of mutual concern. Look for opportunities to share services when appropriate.
 - Increase the frequency of meetings between the Town and the North Colonie and South Colonie School Districts to once every six months.
- Establish an identity for the Town of Colonie that transcends the Town’s size and diversity while maintaining the integrity and distinctiveness of individual neighborhoods. Encourage and support efforts to beautify Colonie.