

# COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

## Town of Amenia, New York

July 19, 2007

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**Town of Amenia  
Comprehensive Plan Update  
To the 1991 Amenia Master Plan**

**July 19, 2007**

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## **Reference Documents**

These documents, while not part of the Comprehensive Plan Update, are to be used as reference documents. They are available at the Amenia Town Hall and the Town of Amenia website: [www.ameniany.gov](http://www.ameniany.gov)

- I. Recommended Action Amendments to the Amenia Master Plan, December 15, 2003
- II. Town of Amenia Conservation Advisory Council, Natural Resources Inventory, 2005
- III. Mapping of Significant Habitats in Amenia, Hudsonia, Inc. 2007
- IV. Town of Amenia Recreation Plan, July 2006
- V. Route 22 Corridor Management Plan, Poughkeepsie Dutchess County Transportation Council, July 2002.

## **Introduction**

### **WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?**

A comprehensive plan or master plan is a statement of a community's goals and a conceptual road map for how to achieve them. Its purpose is to present, in an easily accessible and readable format, a guide to decision making on important land use issues. A comprehensive plan expresses a vision of what the town residents want the community to be and become over a specified time period, usually around 20 years.

In reading and using a comprehensive plan, it is also important to understand what it is not. It is not a detailed instruction manual that tells exactly what to do or what will happen. It does not predict the future, although it does look ahead and express the Town's goals for the future. It does not prescribe exact courses of action, because these must be developed with care in response to a wide variety of situations that may arise. It would be short-sighted to mandate only one way to accomplish a community's goals in a comprehensive plan, when creativity and responsiveness to public input and evolving community needs may result in better solutions.

A comprehensive plan is not the law. It is an understandable and common mistake for citizens to confuse a Comprehensive Plan with the zoning code that implements it. They are two different things. The Comprehensive Plan sets the direction and goals for the community and recommends in a general way how these can be accomplished. In contrast, the zoning code is a detailed document that translates the goals into law. All too often, communities think they have gained control over their future merely by adopting a Comprehensive Plan. Although they have taken a major step in the right direction, the adoption of a plan does not change anything. Amenia learned this the hard way in 1991, when the Town adopted a Master Plan, but never followed through with zoning changes and other actions to make the Plan a reality.

### **PUTTING THE PLAN INTO ACTION**

A Comprehensive Plan is an important first step, but to have effect its recommendations must be translated into zoning laws, budget allocations, public investments, and other actions that have the force of law. That is why it is so important that the Comprehensive Plan accurately reflect community consensus. Without strong community support, a Town Board will be reluctant to pass implementing legislation. While changes to the law must be consistent with the guidance provided by the Comprehensive Plan, the Plan is not by itself a legally enforceable document. This Plan provides guideposts to observe as the Town conducts the complex process of implementation, but it does not provide the details of the implementation process. The Plan is like a sketch of what a house will look like when it is built, not the house itself or the blueprints that tell the builder exactly what to build. The zoning code is the document that actually says what is and is not allowed, and it is the day-to-day decisions of local boards, officials, and citizens that determine what is actually built and what land is preserved. The zoning should reflect the guidance in the Comprehensive Plan, but should not be confused with the Plan.

This Comprehensive Plan is comprehensive in its scope, not its detail. It is intended to integrate many related issues so that their connections are clear and understandable. The community should, however, have realistic expectations of what a Comprehensive Plan can and cannot accomplish. It can guide the future, but not determine it. It can recommend actions, but it cannot ensure that they will occur. Only the people of the Town of Amenia and their elected and appointed officials can chart the future course of the Town. Their commitment to fulfilling the goals of the Plan through specific actions will be the chief determinant of its success. This success depends upon the willingness of the citizens of the Town to work together to make it happen.

## **AMENIA'S COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING PROCESS**

In August, 2002, The Town Board of Amenia established a Master Plan Revision Committee (MPRC) to review the 1991 Amenia Master Plan and to make recommendations on what should be changed, added to or deleted from the plan. The MPRC made many efforts, through meetings and workshops, to include everyone in Town who wanted to participate and contribute to the review process.

The Master Plan Revision Committee concluded that, overall, the 1991 Amenia Master Plan is a sound document and does not need to be re-written. It needs to be updated, modified in places, expanded in others, and translated into specific action recommendations that the Town Board can enact and enforce. The only serious flaw in the 1991 planning process was not a problem with the Plan itself. The main problem was that many of the most important recommended actions were never acted upon. As a result of this conclusion, the MPRC focused on action steps and prepared and submitted to the Town Board a document entitled "Recommended Action Amendments to Amenia Comprehensive Plan" (Action Amendments) on December 15, 2003. The Action Amendments stressed the need for the Town to take action, particularly with respect to amending land use regulations to implement the existing plan.

Upon completion of the work of the Master Plan Review Committee, the Town Board appointed a new Committee, the Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee (CPIC), for the purpose of refining and implementing the Action Amendments. The Town then retained a professional planning and zoning consultant, Joel Russell, who reviewed the Action Amendments and recommended that they be used as source materials for the Comprehensive Plan Update but, primarily for technical and legal reasons, not become part of the Plan Update itself. The Action Amendments contain most of the ideas and concepts that are presented in this Comprehensive Plan Update and are considered a Reference Document to this Plan. They are not an official part of this document and will not be formally adopted by the Town. They do contain considerable background and much of the rationale for the Plan Update recommendations and several of the maps prepared by the Master Plan Review Committee for the Action Amendments are included in Appendix I of this Comprehensive Plan. Pages 3 and 4 of the Action Amendments describe in more detail the process followed by the MPRC to develop these recommendations.

A comprehensive plan is a living document and its refinement and modification should be a continual, dynamic process. But the real measure of success of any Comprehensive Plan is its implementation. Without implementation, a Comprehensive Plan is merely an empty promise. The most important first step in implementing a Plan is revising land use codes (especially zoning) to bring them into conformance with this document. Because this vital step was never taken after the adoption of the 1991 Master Plan, CPIC focused its attention on developing a new zoning code that will implement the recommendations of the 1991 Master Plan and the vision and goals for Amenia that emerged from the Master Plan Review process. The process of revising land use regulations has occurred concurrently with writing this Comprehensive Plan Update, with the intention that the Town Board will adopt a new zoning code at the same time as it adopts this Comprehensive Plan Update.

This document therefore is not a new Comprehensive Plan. Rather, it is an update, expanding upon the vision and goals that were expressed or implied in the earlier plan, while recommending action steps that largely follow the direction of the 1991 plan. In those cases where the proposed action steps may conflict with the 1991 plan, this Comprehensive Plan Update is intended to supersede those conflicting recommendations. For those with limited time to review all of the documents, this Update has been written so that its vision and action recommendations can be read and understood as a stand-alone document. However, to fully understand it, the 1991 Plan should also be consulted.

## **EFFECT OF CHANGES IN STATE LAW**

In the years since the 1991 Master Plan was adopted, state law affecting comprehensive planning has changed in three significant ways:

1. The legal name for this type of document is no longer “Master Plan,” but “Comprehensive Plan.” Therefore, what was formerly called a Master Plan is now referred to as a Comprehensive Plan. Because the original Master Plan remains in place and is being updated, this document is called a “Comprehensive Plan Update.” This explanation should help alleviate some confusion over terminology. The recommendations in this Update build upon the 1991 Master Plan, but add to it by making specific action recommendations.
2. The original 1991 Master Plan was adopted by the Planning Board, as required by state law at that time. The law now requires adoption by the Town Board. Therefore to ensure the legal validity of the existing Master Plan, the 1991 Master Plan, together with this Comprehensive Plan Update are being adopted together by the Town Board and designated as the “2007 Amenia Comprehensive Plan.” The Town Board’s resolution accepting this Comprehensive Plan Update technically constitutes a readoption and amendment of the 1991 Master Plan.
3. In 1991, a Master Plan was considered an advisory document that was not binding on the Town or its boards. Under current law (Section 272-a of the Town Law), all Town land use regulations must be in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan. This is an important substantive change in the law. Also, plans for capital



projects undertaken by other levels of government, such as County and State agencies, must take into consideration the recommendations of an adopted Comprehensive Plan. This could be especially important in connection with this Plan's recommendations for state Department of Transportation improvements to Route 22 and any state construction of facilities at the Taconic Developmental Disabilities Services Office Campus (Taconic DDSO).

## **HUDSON RIVER VALLEY GREENWAY**

In the year 2000, the Amenia Town Board endorsed the Hudson River Valley Greenway Principles and thereby became one of the first communities in Dutchess County to embrace these principles of smart growth. A summary of the Greenway principles and procedures is attached in Appendix B of the Action Amendments, pp 57-58. These principles are consistent with the Town of Amenia's vision and goals as expressed in this Comprehensive Plan Update. The intention of the town in endorsing these principles was to use them in making day-to-day decisions about development of land, preserving open space, and regulating the siting, appearance and impacts of new businesses. One of the reasons behind the review of the master plan and the repeated recommendation that the zoning law be brought into agreement with this Plan is to strengthen the Town's commitment to fulfilling the Greenway principles.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THIS PLAN**

Many comprehensive plans are written in a formal official-sounding language that makes them difficult and uninteresting to read. This Plan Update deliberately adopts a more informal tone intended to make reading this document more pleasant and conversational. It starts by presenting the vision and goals for the Town, as gleaned from citizens who participated in the process, and then proceeds to make action recommendations to bring the vision and goals to fruition.

The Plan Update starts by articulating the Town's vision and goals for its future in Chapter I. Chapter II describes changes in the Town that have occurred in the past 15 years, since the adoption of the 1991 Master Plan. It explores the implications of these changes and makes policy recommendations in response to these changes. Chapter III makes specific action recommendations for the Town to follow to implement the vision and goals in Chapter I, the policy recommendations in Chapter II, and the recommendations from the 1991 Master Plan that remain valid today. Chapter IV contains background information and data relevant to understanding the Town's current situation, referencing other plans and documents that provide additional information.

Although the Comprehensive Plan is a living document that should be reviewed and updated as needed, state law requires that a Comprehensive Plan explicitly state the maximum intervals for a review of the Plan. Accordingly, this Comprehensive Plan shall be formally reviewed in its entirety by the Town Board at intervals of no more than ten years, and adjustments and revisions will be made as needed and deemed necessary at such intervals. This shall not preclude review and revision at any other time.

## Chapter I: Vision and Goals

### VISION

As a result of the public participation process that occurred in 2002 – 2003, the following vision statement emerged and was endorsed at several public meetings.

**What Amenia can and will become:**

**We want Amenia to grow into a diverse, vital and business-friendly community of agriculture, small businesses and homes all located in an appealing setting with great natural beauty; a unique unity of six different, clean, well-preserved historic town hamlets (Amenia, Wassaic, Amenia Union, South Amenia, Smithfield, and Leedsville); and amenities that attract residents, travelers, shoppers, diners and vacationers.**

### GOALS

In order to fulfill the community's vision as stated above, it is important to articulate specific goals that will guide actions to be taken by the Town government and its citizens. The goals listed below have been reviewed at several town meetings in 2002 and 2003, and enjoyed widespread endorsement.

1. To achieve a broad-based balance between the rural, historic, and agricultural beauty of the town as it is and the need for appropriate and smart economic growth and development.
2. To establish a business-friendly<sup>1</sup> attitude and commitment that:
  - a. will attract and support the development of retail, small business, service businesses and even light industry,
  - b. will create employment opportunities (especially for young people), and
  - c. will increase tax revenues.
3. To develop and encourage the growth of agriculture as a profitable business within the context of preserving open space.
4. To encourage more housing – low, affordable, moderate-income, high-end, and rental – to create a genuinely multigenerational community:
  - a. a vital place with good schools for growing families, and
  - b. a safe place for young people to grow up and to which they will want to return because of the employment opportunities they have here;
  - c. an attractive, safe place for elderly people.

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<sup>1</sup> See the Recommended Action Amendments in Appendix I for a further discussion of what being “business-friendly” means and of what kinds of businesses Amenia wants to attract.

5. To maximize our strengths and attract tourists, shoppers, athletes, lovers of good food and wine, historians, and other money-spenders.
6. To forge a strong positive public consensus about the future of Armenia so that we will live up to the commitments we make, enforce the laws/regulations we have, and consistently support community pride.

## **Chapter II: Changes in Amenia since 1991 and Current Policy Implications**

### **OVERVIEW**

Amenia in 2007 appears to be much the same as the Amenia of 1991, yet much has changed over the past 16 years. Some of the important changes are: the extension of the Metro-North railroad line to Wassaic; the sale to a private owner by New York State of the northern portion of the campus of the Taconic Developmental Disabilities Services Office; the related expansion of state and private not-for-profit community based homes for the developmentally disabled; the opening of the Harlem Valley Rail Trail from Wassaic terminal to the North East town line; the preservation of many acres of land by the Dutchess Land Conservancy; and the continuing turnover of dairy farms to other uses, primarily other forms of agriculture, but some conversion to residential development and some reversion to forestland. In addition, the closure in 1994 of the Harlem Valley Psychiatric Center in Wingdale resulted in 1600 layoffs and the subsequent closure of the Harlem Valley Division for Youth facility in 2004 added another 200 layoffs. All in all, the community is transforming from a formerly agrarian community with a strong economic and employment base in three major state institutions, to a community that is especially attractive for outdoor recreation and second-homeowners, with a more diversified economic base that includes one major state facility (Taconic DDSO), several agricultural operations, and a number of smaller employers, including Pawling Corporation, public and private not for profit service providers, and many small private businesses offering a range of products and services.

### **SPECIFIC CHANGES AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

#### **1. Demographic Changes**

##### **A. Population**

The Town has seen a considerable increase in weekend, commuter, and telecommuter populations and a decrease in local jobs due primarily to the closure of Harlem Valley Psychiatric Center and Harlem Valley Division for Youth in the Town of Dover. This has led to a decrease in residents who earn their income locally. The loss of local jobs and lack of affordable housing have made it increasingly difficult for long-time local residents to afford to live in Amenia. The actual population of year-round town residents has increased 1.5 percent from 1990 when adjusted to account for the significant overall population loss attributed to the reduction in resident population at the Taconic DDSO. Census data do not provide any estimates of the town's seasonal population, but observed trends indicate that more people are using Amenia as a weekend destination. At the same time, incomes are up, school populations have stabilized or decreased slightly after the growth of the 1990s, and there has been relatively slow growth in housing and businesses. (See Chapter IV for more details about Amenia's changing demographics).



The character of the community is changing. The new population (year-round and weekend residents included) coming into Amenia tends to be more affluent families with fewer or no children. The changing demographics affect the kinds of stores and services the town attracts as well as the sense of community and types of activities that occur. Affluent part-time residents rarely participate in the volunteer emergency services that are essential to the community's welfare and also constitute an important part of its social life.

The growth in the retired population and second homeowners means less demand on schools, at least in the short-term. If these groups are replaced in the future by families with children, this picture could change dramatically. Such a change is difficult to foresee, but it has happened to other communities, and is already happening immediately to the south, in the Town of Dover.

## **B. Housing**

There is a housing boom in Dutchess County; housing has been the strongest industry in the county in recent years, creating thousands of jobs and new homes. While there remains a supply of existing affordable housing within Amenia (many of them mobile homes), a significant percentage of households are paying more than 30 percent of their income for housing. Approximately 22 percent of home-owners are paying more than 30 percent of their income for housing, while approximately 34.5 percent of renters are paying more than 30 percent. New housing construction is geared toward the higher end of the market and does not provide housing options that are affordable to existing residents of the Town or to middle-income new residents.

Amenia now has a serious housing affordability problem, as the overall increase in prices in the region and the upward pressure on prices from new residents who come from other areas has adversely affected the availability of moderately priced housing. This will have significant impact on the social and economic diversity of Amenia if the community does not take action to deal with it. In addition, this lack of affordable housing is creating a serious recruitment and retention problem at the Taconic DDSO, the Town's largest single employer. The Taconic DDSO has gone so far as to have the Dutchess County Loop Bus System run a special bus for each shift at the facility, and many other employees have had to carpool.

## **C. Social and Economic Issues**

Partly because of the housing affordability crisis, there is growing concern that Amenia is losing the traditional economic diversity of its population. This diversity is reflected in a wide variety of incomes, occupations, and backgrounds. Amenia is the kind of place it is because of the solid corps of middle-class families who work in the local economy and staff emergency services and volunteer activities. As this segment of the population is priced out of the market, Amenia is at risk of losing its historic identity. History is not just about buildings and landscapes; it is also about the generations of families and the organizations and businesses that occupy those buildings and landscapes.

Amenia has managed to maintain much of its rural appearance and beauty, but the composition of its population is changing, and many long-term local families are feeling squeezed by increased property values and a shortage of local jobs. They are also finding it hard to build and operate local businesses because of the lack of suitable locations. This has exacerbated tensions between those who have come to Amenica from elsewhere to enjoy its rural tranquility and those who grew up here and seek opportunities to make a living locally.

The conflict over local business development has erupted in controversy over where to put new businesses: the Route 22 corridor is a prime location for these businesses, but it is also the scenic byway that carries the most traffic and provides an experience of rural beauty to residents and visitors alike. The most logical place to put new businesses is in the existing hamlet, but the lack of sewers makes this virtually impossible. Thus, Route 22 zoning has been and continues to be the major source of conflict within the Town. Resolution of this conflict depends upon finding a solution to the sewer issue. The success of this Plan therefore turns more on installing sewers in the hamlet than on any other single action. With sewers in the central hamlet, it could become a vibrant place capable of attracting business and having a level of activity, services, jobs, and entertainment that would enable the Town to attract people from surrounding towns and to retain its young people.

The community needs to hold onto its core population of working families who own and work in local businesses and provide public services to their fellow citizens. This means maintaining and enhancing a diverse economic base and offering a climate conducive to the success of businesses and other organizations. There is also a need for economic incentives to make housing more affordable and especially to keep emergency services volunteers in town. Such volunteers cannot be long-distance commuters who work in Westchester or New York City. They have to live and work nearby so that they can respond quickly to local emergencies.

The Town needs to do as much as it can to keep middle-class families in the community and attract new ones that have a stake in the Town. They are its backbone and its future. One type of measure that might be considered, to the extent legally permissible, would be incentives for emergency services volunteers, including moderately-priced workforce housing, property tax relief, subsidized or free health insurance, and discounts or free permits for town services such as the transfer station and the use of recreation facilities. Another incentive, that would also help farming, would be to lease development rights or make payments in other forms to full-time farmers in return for their important “service” in keeping the landscape open and beautiful for all to enjoy.

While the Town needs to keep its middle-class families, it also benefits from the presence of a large number of second-home owners and retirees, who pay taxes but do not send children to school. These residents generally contribute more in taxes than they consume in municipal services. They also employ many local service workers and spend money in the community.

## **2. Large-Scale Resort and Second-Home Development Proposals**

Since the completion of the 1991 Master Plan, the then proposed golf course on Route 22 which occupies much of Delavergne Hill has been built and has undergone three changes of ownership. The current owners are hoping to add a large resort development to this golf course. At the time of adoption of this Comprehensive Plan Update, this proposal was still under review by the Town Board and Planning Board and is subject to modification as a result of the SEQR process and changes in the zoning code that are intended to implement the recommendations of this Plan Update. In addition to this proposal, the Town more recently received a proposal for an equestrian-oriented “farm community” development on Depot Hill, which faces Delavergne Hill across the Harlem Valley. These two important proposals close to the hamlet center are at a scale that is unprecedented for Amenia and could dramatically change the Town’s character.

The addition of guest rooms in Amenia will encourage more tourists to visit, shop, and eat in Amenia. This will further enhance the Town’s reputation as a location for vacationing and for country homes that are easily accessible to New York City. It will provide needed local employment opportunities and a boost to the community’s tax base. With the right mix of uses and with sewers in the Hamlet of Amenia, it will also add economic synergy between the existing population and businesses in the Hamlet of Amenia and the new residents and businesses that will locate on the golf course property. This synergy will be good for business in Amenia.

It is important to the other goals of Amenia’s Comprehensive Plan that these developments be designed in a way that does not detract from the scenic character of the community. Protection of most of the landscape as open space, either as recreational land for golf, or forest lands, or for farming and equestrian activities, will help maintain the scenic character of what is widely regarded as the Town’s most important viewshed, i.e. the views from the top of Delavergne Hill, down the Harlem Valley, and across the Valley to Depot Hill. Where possible, configuration of development as a traditional neighborhood development (TND) is recommended as the best way to achieve a compact pedestrian-oriented layout that preserves open space and reduces driving. With such a layout, residents would be able to arrive by train from New York City and take shuttles to the new developments and to the revitalized Hamlet, where they could meet most of their needs on foot.

## **3. Metro-North Extension: Wassaic and Ten Mile River Railroad Stations**

The completion of the Wassaic and Ten Mile River railroad stations has already had a significant impact on the town and will continue to offer an important opportunity for economic growth. The filled parking lots at both sites indicate the numbers of people who come in and out of Amenia on a weekly basis. This Comprehensive Plan Update recommends finding ways to attract more visitors to stop, linger and spend money in Amenia. The existence of these stations also makes it easier to attract light industry and “back-office” development to the community.

The Ten Mile River station offers an especially good opportunity to build a new mixed-use transit-oriented hamlet that takes advantage of railroad access to create a walkable community with a sense of place. Such developments do not increase traffic as much as single-use residential subdivisions and are highly recommended in this Plan Update and in “Greenway Connections.” The Ten Mile River station is the best site in the Town for such a development (and one of the best in the County). The Dutchess County Department of Planning has provided the Town with a conceptual sketch of the site that illustrates how such a “transit-oriented development” (TOD) might be designed. The portion of the site that would be involved in the TOD is not essential to the functioning of the DDSO, and this Plan Update calls for cooperation among the State, County, Town, and private investors to maximize the economic potential of this area. For a fuller discussion of this issue, see #2 under “Unfulfilled Opportunities for Change” below.

#### **4. Harlem Valley Rail Trail**

The development of the Harlem Valley Rail Trail from Wassaic station to the North East town line and beyond adds another feature to the Town’s recreational attractiveness. This 15-mile trail will eventually be part of a 46-mile Rail Trail extending all the way to Chatham. It has the potential to stimulate development of more recreational facilities and related service industries to service the hikers, bikers, runners, dog-walkers, skate-boarders, bird-watchers, and others who use the Rail Trail. It is also one of several attractive features that make Amenia an even more desirable community in which to live, vacation, or spend weekends. The possible extension of the Rail Trail into Wassaic hamlet offers an opportunity both to develop nature trails and walks and to entice tourists to the historically interesting and unique hamlet of Wassaic.

#### **5. Proposed Relocation of Town Hall**

The quest for a new and more suitable home for the Town Hall continues. It is a major goal of the Town to keep the Town Hall as an anchor civic use in or near the center of the Hamlet of Amenia. This is important because it adds vitality, convenience, and a sense of civic identity to the hamlet center. It also provides public parking and brings in foot traffic that support the commercial uses the Town wishes to attract and retain in the hamlet center. If the proposed consolidation of schools in the Webutuck District takes place, the possibility exists that the Town Hall might move into the Amenia Elementary School. This would keep this key government office close to the center of the hamlet. Other potential options include expansion on the current site if the firehouse moves or relocation to a more central spot in the Hamlet after sewers are installed in the Hamlet.

#### **6. The Taconic DDSO Campus**

Since the adoption of the 1991 Master Plan, two major changes have occurred at the Taconic DDSO Campus. In 1999 Metro North extended service to Wassaic and added the Ten Mile River Train Station. In 2000 the northern half of the Taconic DDSO was sold by New York State to a private owner.

The future value to the Town of redevelopment of the privately owned parts of the North Campus makes it potentially one of the most important factors in the Town’s future.



Because the Taconic DDSO campus includes both a Metro-North commuter railroad station and water and sewer facilities, this is a prime site for mixed-use high-density transit-oriented development. (For a fuller discussion, see below under “Unfulfilled Opportunities for Change.”)

## **7. Old Amenia Landfill**

The Old Amenia Landfill now belongs to the Town and when all the work to mitigate the presence of PCBs is completed, the land may provide many opportunities for recreational uses and some municipal uses if visual impacts are limited. There is also an opportunity to link the Rail Trail to Silo Ridge via a nearby underpass under Route 22.

## **8. Land Preservation**

Before 1991, only 522 acres in Amenia were protected by conservation easements granted to the Dutchess Land Conservancy. In the past 15 years there have been voluntary donations of 34 more conservation easements totaling 3,031 acres, bringing the total preserved land in the Town to 3,553 acres. This is private land that remains on the tax rolls and is in addition to the land preserved by the state and county. The Conservancy remains active in the Town and is assisting the community in achieving its land preservation objectives, at no cost to the Town’s taxpayers. Preserved private land that pays taxes will never demand municipal services or add students to local schools, and studies have shown that it is generally beneficial to the property tax situation in a Town. In addition to existing federal and state income tax incentives for conservation easements, there is now an additional state income tax incentive that provides a tax credit to partially offset the property taxes paid for conserved land. (See below under Agriculture.)

In addition to the private land preserved through conservation easements, there are approximately 600 acres of land protected through state ownership or dedication as town parkland.

The Town is in danger of losing much of its open landscape to development. A combination of proactive planning by the community and cooperation by landowners and conservation organizations is needed to keep Amenia’s landscape beautiful and productive.

## **9. Agriculture**

Agriculture is a distinguishing feature of Amenia, responsible for much of its rural beauty and bucolic charm. This has attracted the weekenders, commuters, and retirees who have become the fastest growing part of the community. Thus, in addition to the economic value it adds for its products and jobs, farming has an independent and possibly even greater economic value contributing to the appeal, beauty, and property values of the Town as a whole. It is the single most important and easily lost feature that distinguishes Amenia’s landscape as a rural community.

Changes in the nature of agriculture in Amenia are leaving a profound imprint on the Town, socially, economically, visually and environmentally. The number of dairy farms in Amenia continues to decline. Dairy farming is a capital- and labor-intensive industry, which sustained a vigorous agri-business support industry that has also declined. A different kind of farm industry, which is more diversified, is replacing dairy farming throughout Dutchess County. It includes horse farms, sheep farms, organic vegetable farming, and raising other animals and crops for specialized niche markets. The traditional dairy farms and the families that operated them are increasingly part of Amenia's history as the nature of farming changes.

However, the retention of agriculture as a viable industry offers significant benefits to the Town and has regional ramifications. Since many farms operate in more than one town, Amenia's land use decisions affect agricultural enterprises in neighboring towns. Also, as energy and transportation costs increase, and farming in other parts of the United States suffers from drought, flooding, and soil depletion, Amenia's farmland may someday prove to be a resource that is of greater economic value for its crop and livestock production. Preservation of this land from development therefore has potentially great value to the future economy of the Town and the region. Large intact parcels, many currently kept open by farming, also have great value for biodiversity.

Voluntary techniques, especially the use of donated conservation easements, have become an important and useful tool for preserving farmland. Many of the wealthy newer owners of farmland who value the rural landscape of Amenia have been donating conservation easements on their land to the Dutchess Land Conservancy. A large number of these landowners lease the land at little or no cost to local farmers who are able to farm it without worrying that it will someday be sold for development. This is a win-win for both the landowner and the farmer, as it adds to the farmer's land base at little or no cost while enabling the landowner to take advantage of agricultural district property tax incentives. Federal and state income tax deductions have provided additional incentives for this form of land preservation since the 1980s. A new state conservation easement income tax credit instituted in 2007 provides a further incentive by offering an income tax credit for property taxes paid by owners of land protected by conservation easements. This costs the Town nothing, helps keep land in agricultural production, and relieves some of the property tax burden on owners of agricultural land.

On the other hand, some local property tax policies are encouraging the sale and subdivision of this land resource. Such policies include the over-assessment for property tax purposes of agricultural land and buildings, despite the state's requirements that land and buildings in an agricultural district have preferential assessment. The practice of valuing agricultural buildings at their replacement cost rather than the depreciated cost of their construction makes agriculture less economically viable. The Town assessors should use the discretion that they enjoy under state law in valuing agricultural land, wetlands, and forestland to make it possible for the owners of large tracts of land to afford to keep these lands intact and to use as much as possible of them for farming.

Please see Chapter IV for a fuller description of trends and changes in agriculture in Amenia and Chapter III for specific action recommendations on how to keep agriculture viable as an industry in Amenia.

## **10. Sustainability**

Most of this Comprehensive Plan Update is essentially about making Amenia more sustainable: that is, enabling Amenia to grow and prosper without depleting or destroying the environmental, historic, and visual resources that form the basis of that prosperity. All of the above discussion in this Chapter is aimed at building a more sustainable future for the Town. Some other objectives worthy of mention include the following:

- Sustainable energy policies, by encouraging the use of wind power in appropriate locations, encouraging energy-efficient buildings, especially buildings that meet LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standards, and an energy efficient land use pattern that reduces private automobile usage, encourages walking and bicycling, and takes advantage of commuter rail services.
- Careful attention to all environmental and habitat protection issues in the review and approval of all development. This requires the creation of detailed environmental inventories and a system of ensuring that the Town's environmental resources are adequately protected when development occurs.
- Protection and adaptive reuse of historic structures.
- Use of Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) as a model for development in higher density areas of the Town, especially the hamlets of Amenia and Wassaic, and other large-scale developments that may occur, such as the suggested Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) at Ten-Mile River Station. TND refers to the development of compact complete communities that include single-family homes, apartments, townhouses, workplaces, shops, restaurants, inns, hotels, community facilities, and recreational facilities. Its goal is to create a pedestrian-oriented environment in which residents and those who work in the area can walk comfortably between different land uses and minimize the use of automobiles. There is a large literature on TND (also known as "new urbanism" and "neo-traditional development") which is available through the website of the Congress for the New Urbanism ([www.cnu.org](http://www.cnu.org)). The Charter of the New Urbanism, available on that website, is an expression of the principles of this type of development. This approach has gained currency since the 1991 Master Plan as the preferred way to achieve sustainability through mixed use development that reduces dependence on cars and allows higher density development to be attractive and diverse.

## **11. Safety and Security**

The Town of Amenia wants to ensure that there will not be any New York State Department of Correctional Services facilities located in the Town.

## **UNFULFILLED OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE**

Sometimes what does not change is as important as what does. Changes that are desired and expected but that fail to materialize, can affect a community as much as planned and unplanned changes that actually occur. There are two important examples of this:

### **1. Sewers in the Hamlets of Amenia and Wassaic**

The single most important thing that has *not* happened in the last 15 years is the same one that has been talked about for at least 30 years: the need for a sewer system in the Hamlet of Amenia. This has been a keystone of planning for the Town and remains so. Yet, despite several efforts over many years to create a sewer system for the town center, it has yet to happen. Without a sewer system, most of the planning goals in this Plan and in all prior plans will be frustrated. This is because the key to a successful, prosperous, and beautiful Amenia is a sewer system in the center of the hamlet to support a vibrant and economically robust town center surrounded by countryside that remains scenic, historic, and appealing to visitors.

One of the key issues in finding a solution to the sewer problem has been obtaining land on which to locate a facility. A number of parcels have been under consideration in recent years, including land at Silo Ridge, land near Freshtown shopping plaza, and the Allen Sand and Gravel parcel south of the hamlet. A study committee has been actively researching this issue and continues to pursue it. A Comprehensive Plan cannot prescribe the solution to this critical problem – it can only highlight its critical importance and call attention to it.

The proposed large-scale developments close to the Hamlet offer the best opportunity the Town may have to solve this problem for the foreseeable future. In order for these developments to provide maximum benefit to the Town (Silo Ridge alone will likely have a population larger than the current population of the Hamlet itself), they should also contribute significantly to providing public sewer service to the Hamlet. There are many ways this can be accomplished, including but not limited to the construction of a sewage treatment plant by a developer or developers with extra capacity to serve the hamlet, extension of the collection system into the hamlet, providing funds to assist in hooking up hamlet units to the new system, and providing land for needed sewage treatment facilities. The developers of these projects can also work with each other and the Town to share the cost of providing sewage disposal facilities. If the Town and the developers work together on the sewage issue, they can finally solve the perennial problem of providing sewers in the Hamlet of Amenia. This will benefit the developers as well as the Town by making it possible to upgrade and beautify properties in the Hamlet, while making them far more economically productive. It is to the advantage of the Town and the developers to do this, since the Hamlet is their front door, and they are gateways to the Hamlet.

Water and sewer service are also badly needed in the hamlet of Wassaic to protect water quality in the Wassaic Creek and to enable that hamlet to absorb future growth. Although not as pressing or as chronic a problem as in the hamlet of Amenia, this is also a critical element of the Town's Comprehensive Plan. There are several possible ways to address



the need for sewers in Wassaic: (1) construction of a sewer plant at the Allen Sand and Gravel site, which might be able to service both hamlets; (2) construction of a sewer facility just outside the hamlet of Wassaic in connection with large-scale redevelopment of land there (such as the former livestock auction/gravel mine property); or (3) connection to the existing sewer plant at the Taconic DDSO, which has considerable excess capacity but is more than a mile away.

## **2. Future of the Taconic DDSO Area**

The Taconic Developmental Disabilities Services Office (DDSO) was at one time slated to close permanently in the 1990s, but has changed its course. The Taconic DDSO is a regional agency of the NYS Office of Mental Retardation & Developmental Disabilities. The Taconic district includes Columbia, Dutchess, Greene, Putnam, and Ulster counties. The DDSO has offices in each of the five counties and a large campus in Wassaic. It operates a network of residential and habilitative programs throughout the region, as well as providing clinic services and service coordination. It also provides support services which enable families to keep their family member with a disability at home. Taconic works closely with many private voluntary agencies which provide related services. Taconic provides them with technical assistance and training. The DDSO and the private sector plan and work together to ensure the best quality of life possible for people residing in the Taconic district who have developmental disabilities. Taconic DDSO's mission is to ensure that persons with developmental disabilities living in Columbia, Dutchess, Greene, Putnam, and Ulster Counties and their families are provided services and supports of their choice that promote participation, integration, and independence. The quality of care and therapy offered is highly regarded and the facility continues to attract top level therapists, sometimes from far away, whose care enables the most disadvantaged members of our society to live in good health and with dignity.

At its peak, the Taconic DDSO campus in Wassaic housed as many as 5,500 residents and was practically self-sustaining, with a large farm operation and on-site processing and production of most of the basic food-stuff and other domestic needs. Policy changes and advances in treatment resulted in the dramatic decrease of utilization to the point at which, in the late 1980's, total closure was contemplated.

In the 1990's, concern over the future of the Harlem Valley Psychiatric Center in Wingdale, led the Taconic DDSO to begin an in-depth public planning process to determine the best use for the entire facility if the state decided to close it and reintegrate all developmentally disabled citizens back into their communities. Due to changes in prevailing treatment and philosophy, many developmentally disabled citizens were successfully reintegrated into their communities or mainstreamed in the community. However, it also became apparent that there would continue to be an ever-changing population that needed more intensive campus-based care. Therefore, the State decided to sell only the northern half of the facility. It has continued to operate the southern campus with approximately 750 staff and approximately 200 citizens at any given point in time.

Taconic DDSO remains an important element of the local economy. Although it is not as active as it was in its peak years, it is still the Town's largest employer and provides both

high quality jobs and important services to people in the Town and the region. As such the Town wishes to see the DDSO remain and thrive as a vital institution that employs local residents and provides services to them. It is an important part of our community and its payroll helps to support many local businesses. The approximately 273-acre site retained by NY State has well developed infrastructure, with a high-volume water plant, a large, modern sewage treatment facility with a capacity adequate for several thousand residents, a large emergency electricity generator, a 23 million btu/hr low pressure central steam heating system and a high-voltage three phase electrical supply and transformer-station.

The entire site, including State and privately owned land, comprises approximately 350 acres and covers the crest of a prominent and evenly sloped hill in the middle of the valley. The entrance of the facility is shared with the Ten Mile River Metro-North Commuter Rail Station, alongside of which flows a delightful reach of the Ten Mile River. Well located for vehicular access, the site is within 1000 feet of Route 22 and easily accessible from I-84, I-90 and I-95. The site also contains a visually prominent hilltop and hillsides, some of which are undeveloped and should be preserved as scenic open space.

Currently, the buildings in the privately owned north half of the campus are unused and in very poor condition. On the South Campus, the DDSO has plans for an \$11 million, 37,000 square foot Local Intensive Treatment facility and has made improvements and upgrades. More could be done with the portion of the site that is now privately owned. The Town's goal is to find a mutually beneficial solution that results in private investment in economic development on the privately owned portions of the campus.

While the existing facility is an important economic asset to the community, the unused privately owned portions of it represent a unique opportunity for future economic development. Owing to the facility's advantages of location and existing infrastructure, planners have since the 1990s identified this site as being highly suitable for economic development. The rail station provides an ideal opportunity for a "transit-oriented development," discussed elsewhere in this Plan. The Dutchess County Planning Department has developed a conceptual plan for a "transit-oriented development" at the Ten Mile River Metro-North station, which would be a mixed-use hamlet center with a small main street, multi-family housing, and single-family housing on the hillside to the east of the station. Small-scale retail, service commercial, and benign light industrial uses that fit in with a hamlet context would also be included. This Plan represents one desirable future for this area, but it will require an active public-private partnership involving the private owner, the Town, the County, the Taconic DDSO, and Metro-North Railroad to fulfill this or any other similar vision.

In addition, a full-service retirement community, offering medical- and frail-care could be located on a portion of the site. The same could be true for light industry such as a biomass energy plant, a vocational education and training facility, or some other type of school, office, or institutional campus. These would provide valuable, well-paid new jobs accessible by commuter rail, a broadened tax-base, and the security of a more

diversified economy. As sustainability becomes a household word and the goal of all communities, these opportunities are important. For significant capital investments to be made on or near the Wassaic campus, there is a need for cooperation and predictability so that the State, the Town, and private investors can work together to make the best use of the land and facilities. In addition to using the sewer plant to provide public sewer service to the north campus and Ten-Mile River station area, the excess capacity of this facility could, if financially feasible, also help to solve long-standing sewer problems in the hamlet of Wassaic, the densely populated portion of the Town along the Dover border, and the hamlet of Dover Plains in the Town of Dover.

**The Town encourages the creation of a dynamic public/private partnership with the State that will do the following:**

- **provide for the consolidation and modernization of facilities,**
- **maintain the traditionally excellent forms of care for the developmentally disabled,**
- **attract private capital investment by making key infrastructure, including the sewage plant and water system, available to surrounding areas.**

Full realization of the enormous potential benefits to all residents of Amenia, including employees and residents of both group-housing and the traditional facility, from the joint and optimal use of this unique asset, can be achieved only with mutual cooperation. The alternative is an extraordinary loss of opportunity for economic sustainability that would benefit the entire community.

## **RECENT ISSUES NEEDING RESOLUTION**

Every community has issues that evoke strong feelings. Amenia is no exception, and this section attempts to grapple with two issues which the Comprehensive Plan cannot ignore. However, such issues should not be the driving force behind the planning process nor should they be allowed to capture or divert the process from its main function, which is to envision the future for the Town as a whole and lay out a path toward fulfillment of this vision. The broad principles, vision, and goals of the Comprehensive Plan establish a policy framework within which these contentious issues can be resolved in a principled way that benefits the community as a whole and avoids favoring or discriminating against individuals.

### **1. Automobile-Oriented Business Uses in the Route 22 Corridor**

One of the more controversial issues in recent years has been where to locate new commercial development and the extent to which such development should be located along the Route 22 Corridor. This issue needs to be resolved in the context of the overall planning process.

The Town of Amenia faces a number of dilemmas in relation to this issue:

- A. The Town wants to be business-friendly and encourage needed businesses, especially a department store and movie theater, but it also wants to preserve and enhance the scenic and historic character of the Route 22 corridor, focusing new commercial development in and adjacent to the hamlets, while maintaining and enhancing the visual quality of rural stretches of road and of hamlet gateways.
- B. The Route 22 corridor is a favorable location for businesses from a commercial standpoint, because it provides access, large amounts of customer traffic, and visibility. This potentially conflicts with the Town's desire to maintain the scenic character of Route 22, especially in the "gateway" areas to the hamlets. It also conflicts with the Town's desire to manage access to Route 22 so that there are not too many curb cuts which create safety hazards and impede traffic flow.
- C. In order to accomplish the Comprehensive Plan's goal of concentrating business in the hamlets, there must be adequate infrastructure, especially sewers in the hamlet of Amenia.
- D. The most commercially advantageous locations for business uses, in the absence of sewers in the hamlets, is exactly where the Comprehensive Plan says they should *not* go, i.e. along Route 22 outside of the hamlet centers.

How can the Town resolve these dilemmas?

In the long-term, the Town would like to see the hamlet of Amenia become a vital and strong town center. This can only happen if there is a sewer system to support a wide variety of commercial and residential uses. The Town would also like to see most of Route 22 kept free of strip commercial development. The existing commercial strips (such as Cousins, Fudgy's, and the Amenia Archery Shop) would remain and would be upgraded over time, but further commercial development would be located close to the hamlet centers, and in a hamlet configuration rather than a "strip" development pattern. A hamlet configuration pulls buildings close to the street, with parking in the rear or to the side, creating a walkable streetscape. Strip development is characterized by stand-alone buildings surrounded by parking, especially in the front. It is not conducive to walking.

In the short-term it may be difficult to achieve the goal of a stronger hamlet center because of the lack of sewers. As a result, short-term development pressure will continue to mount in locations along Route 22 outside of the hamlet center. If the Town yields to this pressure, it will violate a fundamental tenet of the Plan, i.e. to avoid commercial strip development along Route 22. Also, once strip development starts to increase along Route 22, it will be hard to stop. As more and more property owners seek to develop their properties as commercial strips, it becomes difficult for a Town Board to say "yes" to some and "no" to others in a similar situation. It also becomes more difficult to make the case for sewers in the hamlet center, since much of the business activity in the Town will have moved out of the center. This movement of businesses from the center to the strip has been the death knell for countless historic town centers and is not consistent with the goals of this Plan. If the Town resists this pressure to allow strip commercial development along Route 22, however, there will be continuing difficulty in locating businesses, especially those catering to auto-oriented uses.

One solution that was explored in the course of the Comprehensive Plan deliberations was the idea of creating a second mixed-use hamlet center in and around the Freshtown Shopping Plaza on the east side of Route 22. This would involve adding streets south of the existing shopping center and adding at least one additional access point on Route 22. The north end of this parcel could be used for mixed-use commercial and auto-oriented development, and the south end primarily for residential. A pedestrian (and possibly eventually a vehicular) linkage to Route 343 could also be part of such a plan. This would provide an area where there could be increased business and residential growth, near the existing hamlet center but off of Route 22. This area could either have its own sewage treatment system or be linked to a centralized system in the hamlet. Such an approach would continue the growth of the hamlet center in the organic way that towns have historically grown, provided that the environmental constraints of the site allow it.

The area on the west side of Route 22 is more problematic, because Route 22 is a high-speed through road in this location, north of where it narrows down and enters the central hamlet area. The current configuration and design of Route 22 does not lend itself to a pedestrian-oriented mixed-use place because of the speed of traffic and design of the highway. However, with proper planning and improvements to the highway and its intersections, both sides of Route 22 could be harmoniously developed to create a safe and memorable place using the principles of Traditional Neighborhood Development described in Chapter II. This place would offer a range of shopping, commercial service, living, and recreational opportunities, and would complement and enhance the existing central hamlet. This Plan Update recommends that a specific planning effort begin immediately to determine how to accommodate a wide range of commercial and residential uses that support the goals of the Comprehensive Plan following the principles of Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND). The specific plan would include reconfiguring Route 22 and adding a network of side streets. It would allow commercial development to occur on the west side of Route 22 across from Freshtown in a pedestrian-friendly manner consistent with the goals of the Comprehensive Plan. Because of the wetlands in the area, and its environmental sensitivity, an environmental analysis should be the first step to ensure that plans are based upon a sound understanding of the environmental constraints of the area.

Route 22 is not friendly to pedestrians or conducive to hamlet style development in its current state. However, it can be redesigned according to a sound plan to look, feel, and function like Route 22 as it passes through the center of the Amenia hamlet: narrower, with sidewalks and crosswalks, a traffic light, and slower traffic. It could even have on-street parking and the feel of a true “main street,” like Route 44 in Millerton or Millbrook, or Route 9 in Rhinebeck. If Route 22 could be redesigned in this manner, then the two sides of Route 22 in the vicinity of Freshtown Plaza could be knitted together into a coherent main street district, with side streets, and a mix of residential and commercial uses. This will add long-term value to all of the properties in the area and to the Town as a whole. When the plan is sufficiently fleshed out, it should be adopted as part of this Comprehensive Plan and presented to the NYS Department of Transportation for consideration whenever any road improvements are to be made in the Route 22 Corridor.

Eventually Route 22 will be rebuilt by the state, and when it is, it should be done to the Town's specifications based upon this detailed plan.

## **2. Soil Mining**

Mining has historically been an important part of the Town's economy. The materials produced from the mining of sand and gravel are needed for construction of roads, septic systems, homes, and other desired development. Mining also provides jobs for local residents. The Town is well-endowed with sand and gravel deposits, primarily in the stream valleys that run north-south through the Town (see map of sand and gravel deposits). Peat may also be a product that can be mined in the Town in the future.

However, mining is also a land use that conflicts with the rural tranquility and residential character of much of the Town. For this reason, the opening of new mines has been a source of increasing conflict in recent years. The primary negative impacts of mining are noise, vibration, dust, heavy truck traffic, and scarring of the scenic landscape. Where quarrying occurs, the noise and vibration are especially objectionable. Under state law, there is very little a town can do to control mining. The primary tool is zoning, through which a town can determine acceptable locations for mining by establishing zoning districts where it is and is not permitted and by requiring a special permit for establishing a mining operation. A town can also intervene in the DEC mining and mined land reclamation permit process, but all decisions regarding the operational characteristics of the mine (including some matters frequently regulated by zoning such as setbacks, depth of excavation, water quality protection, and hours of operation) are pre-empted by DEC.

Mining is a highly lucrative land use in the Town of Amenia. Most parcels that have significant deposits of sand and gravel are worth far more as mining sites than as development sites, because the current market value of the gravel deposits is far greater than the current market value of the land for development. The value of these deposits is increasing all the time, as more and more towns in the region have either exhausted their resources or zoned very restrictively against mining, reducing the amount of mining that can occur in the region. In recognition of the need for sand and gravel and of its very high economic value, the Town's policy toward this resource extraction industry has the following key elements:

- A. Mining should be allowed only where it can be done in a manner that does not annoy residential neighbors, detract from scenic views, harm the environment, damage town roads, or destroy valuable agricultural land.
- B. The best way to accomplish the approach outlined in A above is to institute a soil mining overlay district, limiting mining to specified locations that meet the criteria in A above and C below.
- C. These overlays should only be mapped in areas that are not visible from major roads, that are reasonable distances from residential neighbors and environmental resources such as streams, wetlands, and important habitats, that have convenient and direct access to state and county highways, and that have readily accessible sand and/or gravel deposits. While screening and berming may be used to mitigate impacts of

mining, parcels where this would block scenic views should not be included in the mining overlay.

- D. Although the Town has very little regulatory control over a mining operation itself, because under state law DEC pre-empts local regulation, the Town has the right to comment on and try to influence DEC's permitting decisions. It also has the right to enforce DEC permit conditions. Therefore, the Town should seek to ensure when DEC reviews a mined land reclamation permit, that groundwater resources are adequately protected. Where mining occurs under farmland soils, the permit should require that at least 12 inches of stockpiled farmland soils are reclaimed.
- E. Because DEC's staffing limitations have made it very difficult for the agency to provide adequate monitoring and enforcement of mining permit conditions, the Town should use all legal means available to obtain funds from mining applicants to pay for long-term inspection, monitoring, and enforcement of the conditions imposed in DEC permits and Town special permits for mining. This can be done through the rezoning and special permit application processes by which mines obtain approval from the Town.
- F. In consideration of the very valuable privilege granted by the Town in allowing mining of land, the post-mining use of reclaimed land should be restricted to agriculture, recreation, and nature preserves. A landowner derives a very significant return from the mining, and the restriction of future uses is not a significant deprivation in value in comparison to the value added by permission to mine. The preservation of this land should be accomplished by a permanent conservation easement on the land to preclude future development. There should be an exception to this "no future development" principle where the land is particularly well-suited to a more developed use, such as land lying close to a hamlet center that would make a good extension of the hamlet, land that would be a suitable site for a school, sewage treatment plant or other needed public facility, or land that is ideally located for light industry or service businesses that are badly needed by the town and for which suitable locations are difficult to find.

## **SUMMARY OF CHANGES AND THEIR POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

Amenia is becoming a more upscale community with higher land values and a more affluent population. Its year-round population has been declining, although this trend could reverse as development pressure advances from the south. Amenias job base has also declined, and the economy has changed from a base of agriculture and state institutions, to an economy that still relies substantially on a major state institution, but that also services a robust second-home and tourist market as well as commuters who live in the Town and commute to jobs elsewhere in Dutchess County and the region. Agriculture remains a viable part of the economy as it makes the transition from traditional dairy farming to more profitable niche markets, while adding value to all of the property in Amenias. The Taconic DDSO campus remains a mainstay of the economy, although not as significant as in past years. However, it also offers an unparalleled opportunity for sustainable economic development.

Amenia faces the dilemma of how to provide jobs and business opportunities for local residents, given that the hamlet center is the preferred location but that it lacks sewers.

There is also a need for commercial development to increase the non-residential tax base and support municipal services. This creates pressure to build in less appropriate locations such as the farmland along the Route 22 corridor and hamlet gateways, which this Plan seeks either to preserve as open space and/or to transform into attractive entries into the community. The necessary solution is to provide sewers in the hamlet center. This has been discussed for over 30 years, but it is difficult to achieve. There is no more important priority of this Plan than to install a sewer system in the hamlet of Amenia.





## **Chapter III: Summary of Action Recommendations**

This Chapter summarizes the action recommendations of the Amenia Comprehensive Plan in a concise format that is easy to follow. The rationale for these actions is contained in Chapters I and II of this document, the 1991 Master Plan, and the 2003 Action Amendments.

### **PRIORITY ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS**

A Comprehensive Plan is not just a wish list of all the things that would be desirable for a community. It should set priorities that are important, realistic, and achievable. Three priorities have emerged above all others in the process of developing this Comprehensive Plan Update. They have been discussed above, but will be highlighted in this section of the plan.

#### **1. Sewers in Amenia Hamlet**

There is nothing more important to the future of Amenia than the installation of a sewer system in the hamlet of Amenia. This is the keystone on which the rest of the Plan stands or falls. Creating a vital and economically robust center is necessary both to preserve the countryside and to strengthen the Town's economy. This cannot be done without sewers. The Town must work with the County, State, and private developers to find a solution to this most important problem facing the Town. Proposed large-scale developments close to the hamlet provide a one-time opportunity for a public-private partnership that would solve this problem. This opportunity should not be missed.

#### **2. New Zoning Code**

The major failing of the planning process that culminated in the 1991 Master Plan was that it never resulted in changes in the land use laws that establish the pattern and placement of future development. Adopting new zoning that truly embodies the Town's vision for its future, as articulated throughout this Comprehensive Plan Update, the 1991 Master Plan, and other planning documents, is as important as putting sewers in the hamlet, and more easily accomplished. Indeed, to put in sewers without also putting in appropriate zoning creates the risk that the sewer system will encourage development that is not consistent with this Plan.

For this reason, the Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee has focused most of its efforts over the past two years on revising the Town's antiquated zoning law. A new zoning law, which implements the vision and goals of this Plan, has been circulated for public comment and is being formally introduced concurrently with this Plan Update. Adopted together, the Comprehensive Plan and the new Zoning Law will complement one another and the Zoning will implement the Plan. The promise of the 1991 Plan will finally be fulfilled.

In addition to a new zoning law, revisions to the Town's subdivision law and certain other chapters of the Town Code will be needed to ensure consistency and alignment among the various town laws and planning documents. This will establish a system of rational planning for the future that embodies the hopes and wishes of the majority of the residents of Amenia.

## **ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS BY TOPIC**

### **Hamlet of Amenia**

The development of the Hamlet of Amenia is the Town's first priority, and a sewer system and new zoning are essential for any of the other needed changes to occur. However, assuming that these pieces are going to be put into place, then there are other important actions that should be taken to make the hamlet as successful as possible.

1. Create a detailed development plan for the Hamlet, using the principles of Traditional Neighborhood Development, that allows organic growth along a more fully developed and interconnected street network, consistent with the site's documented environmental constraints. The first phase of this planning effort should begin as soon as possible, and should focus on the area around the Freshtown shopping plaza, including both sides of Route 22, as described above in the section on "Automobile-Oriented Businesses in the Route 22 Corridor." The planning process would be a cooperative effort involving the Town, landowners in the affected area, neighbors, and the community at large. Such a plan would include the creation of new streets, redesign of existing streets and intersections, and the conscious creation of a walkable, pedestrian-friendly downtown with a sense of place, as described in Chapter II. A major feature of this concept is the use of ground floor storefronts, with apartments and office spaces on upper floors lining the main streets. This would be a specific area plan for the center of town, following the principles of traditional village center development (similar to Millbrook, Millerton, and Rhinebeck). The overall planning area would extend from approximately Serevan Restaurant on the west to Mygatt Road on the east, and from Maplebrook School on the north to the large complex of wetlands and former site of Lake Amenia on the south. A new road system would be laid out, with certain areas identified for mixed-use residential and small-scale commercial, larger-scale commercial uses, residential neighborhoods, and recreational areas.
2. An important element of any long-term plan for the hamlet includes protection or improvement of the integrity of the visual gateways into the hamlet from the north, south, east, and west. This means that existing natural conditions should either be maintained or if development occurs it should enhance these gateways.
3. The development plan should include detailed plans for future improvements to Routes 22, 44, and 343, so that they become pedestrian-friendly main streets as they pass through the Freshtown area and the existing hamlet center. These plans should be written so that they can guide the New York State Department of Transportation in making future changes to the state roads. Important priorities should be to narrow the travel lanes as they pass through the hamlet, to include

- on-street parking on both sides of the road, to line the streets with sidewalks, planting strips, and street trees, and to provide other streetscape amenities. Fountain Square is an outstanding example of improving the streetscape and the public realm, and the principles used to develop it should extend up and down the state roads that intersect in the hamlet. Route 44 in the Villages of Millbrook and Millerton and Routes 9 and 308 in the Village of Rhinebeck provide good examples of how this can be done effectively.
4. The development plan should take account of phasing issues, because it will most likely take 10 to 20 years to implement. Some of the critical steps that will need to be phased carefully include:
    - Water and sewer systems
    - Zoning changes (should be done before any of the other steps are taken)
    - State road improvements, including sidewalks along Route 22 between the Hamlet center and Freshtown
    - Expansion of the hamlet road system, especially the creation of new side streets that lend themselves to commercial and automobile-oriented uses; creation of a street network for the addition of residential neighborhoods; possible use of an “official map” under state law to establish the location of future town roads and public parks
    - Siting of recreational uses.
    - Encouragement and cooperation in the protection and development of Brickyard Pond in a way that integrates this unique resource into the recreational and tourism fabric of the hamlet while safeguarding its natural rustic beauty and biodiversity.
    - Location of commercial and mixed land uses, most likely in the existing central hamlet area and at the Freshtown shopping center node; however, until the alignment and design of Route 22 is changed, the addition of most kinds of commercial and mixed uses across Route 22 from Freshtown will be problematic.
    - Connecting the Harlem Valley Rail Trail with neighborhoods and other amenities in the hamlet.

### **Hamlet of Wassaic**

There is strong desire to celebrate the historic buildings in the Hamlet of Wassaic and to ensure that future development and redevelopment respects its history as an agricultural crossroads with a coherent assemblage of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century structures. Some of the actions that could help fulfill this goal are:

1. Include the hamlet in an historic overlay district in the zoning law.
2. Consider establishing an “historic district” under state law to provide further regulatory protection for the hamlet.
3. Allow a more flexible mix of uses that is reflective of the agricultural history of the hamlet and that will encourage economically feasible adaptive reuse of the historic structures.

4. Recognize and improve the hamlet with historically appropriate signage, lighting, sidewalks, and landscaping, especially to make it recognizable as a “place” from passing trains.
5. Request that Metro-North Trains slow down and/or have a “flag-stop” in the Hamlet of Wassaic.
6. Continue the rail trail to connect to the sports field and town park.
7. Explore the possibility of linking Wassaic Hamlet to the existing Sewer Treatment and/or Water facilities at the Taconic DDSO.

## **Natural Resource Protection**

The protection of natural resources and the environment is a major priority of the 1991 Master Plan, and it is an even greater priority in this Comprehensive Plan Update. The importance of this issue increases as development pressures in the community intensify, community awareness of this issue becomes more focused, and regional, national, and international perspectives provide further evidence of the need to protect the functioning of natural systems upon which we all depend. This section lists a variety of actions that need to be taken to achieve the Plan Update’s natural resource protection goals.

1. **Preservation of open space generally.** Outside of the areas that are designated for growth, particularly the hamlets of Amenia, Wassaic and the site of the Taconic DDSO, protection of undeveloped land as open space should be accomplished using a combination of regulatory techniques through zoning and subdivision regulation, as well as non-regulatory actions such as the voluntary donation of conservation easements to conservation organizations and the purchase of open space land and development rights.
  - A natural resources and open space plan should be prepared by the Town and incorporated into this Comprehensive Plan in order to set priorities and protect open space in the most efficient and appropriate manner. Such a plan would inventory and prioritize resources such as agricultural land (see, for instance, the map prepared by the Master Plan Committee and included in the Map Section of this Comprehensive Plan delineating Agricultural Development Districts prioritizing areas for farmland preservation), scenic viewsheds, steep slope areas, areas important for habitat and biodiversity, wildlife corridors, areas important for water quality protection, and potential recreation sites and trail corridors. Recommendations made in the January 2007 report by Hudsonia on “Significant Habitats in Amenia” should be a major consideration in drafting an open space plan.
  - The Town should consider having the Conservation Advisory Council take the next step beyond a natural resource and open space plan and prepare an “open space index” consisting of an open areas inventory and an open space map. This would enable the CAC to become a conservation board under General Municipal Law (GML) 239-x and 239-y, taking advantage of a provision in state law that empowers CACs to have a greater role in protecting the environmental resources of the community.

- Various forms of “open space development” should be used to protect important open space resources in Amenia. One of the most common and effective is “conservation subdivision,” in which a percentage of identified priority open space land is permanently protected in connection with development projects.
- Open space development includes, in addition to conservation subdivision, the strategic use of flag lots and limited development subdivisions to reduce density and protect open space in areas designated for protection. These techniques involve a trade-off in which a landowner makes voluntary reductions in allowable density and restrictions on the location of house sites in return for more flexibility in road frontage and road construction requirements.
- The requirement of a **conservation analysis** at the very beginning of project planning is essential, so that the Town can ensure that the land of greatest conservation value is protected through the development review process. All of the materials and environmental resources referenced above would come into play in a conservation analysis, including the biodiversity map, wetlands mapping, recreational plans, scenic overlay, aquifer overlay, watercourses, historic buildings and sites, and agricultural land, to ensure that project planning takes account of environmental, scenic, and historic resources. This should occur as a dialogue with the Planning Board before development planning begins, and before any SEQR documents are submitted.
- The Town should continue to support private and public efforts to protect open space resources through the use of voluntary and purchased conservation easements. All lands identified as worthy of conservation through the Town’s natural resource inventory and open space planning processes should be protected as much as possible in this manner, which costs the Town nothing and contributes greatly to its character. Collaboration between the Town and land conservation organizations, such as the Dutchess Land Conservancy, is helpful both in securing voluntary donations of open space land and conservation easements and in making the conservation analysis and conservation subdivision process work well.
- The Town should support adoption at the state level of the Community Preservation Act, which would enable towns to enact a transfer tax on real estate to be used for purchasing development rights (conservation easements) on farmland and other important open space land. This would create a source of funds to protect land and could be used as the local match for county, state, and federal programs that currently exist or that may be created in the future. If the state law enabling this transfer tax is passed, the Town should follow through by enacting such a tax locally and using it to pursue its open space protection goals.
- Taxation of wetlands, steep slopes, floodplains, and other environmentally constrained land should reflect these constraints which impact their market

value to provide property tax relief to landowners. Property tax assessments should reflect all natural resource constraints.

2. **Protection and Enhancement of Agriculture as a Business.** Agriculture has historically been an economic mainstay for Amenia, although its character has changed significantly in recent years. The changing face of agriculture is described briefly in Chapter II and the background data are presented in Chapter IV. It is important to recognize what local government can and cannot do about agriculture. The Town has no control over commodity prices or most of the costs of doing business, especially labor, energy, and supply costs. It cannot overcome the effects of state or federal regulation. The best it can do generally is to stay out of the way of farming by not over-regulating or over-taxing it at the local level. There are some other measures that the Town can and should take to help the farm economy, including the following:

- Allow flexible land uses to enable farms to diversify and engage in economic activities in addition to farming. Under current zoning farmers have few choices other than either farming or residential development. Allowing operation of a variety of small-scale businesses such as recreational uses, bed and breakfasts, agri-tourism businesses, equipment repair, crafts, antique shops, and other low-impact business operations on farms can enable a farm family to stay on the land and continue to make a living by supplementing farm income derived from farming.
- Adopt property tax assessment policies that keep taxes low and are more conducive to keeping farmers on the land. These include avoiding “assessment creep,” in which farmland assessment goes up automatically every year based on state recommendations on assessment practice, which the Town is not obligated to follow. The Town should also follow the spirit of the state’s Agriculture and Markets Law Article 25AA and methods prescribed in the Valuation Reference Manual published by NYSORPS which bases land assessment on soil types and values land for its current use, not its potential use for development. The valuation of farm buildings should be based upon depreciated replacement cost methods prescribed in the manual or by those that may be established in the future by NYS Agriculture and Markets. In addition, the Town should encourage the assessor to do everything else legally permissible under state law to minimize agricultural taxation, since property taxes tend to drive farms out of business.

Lands constrained by conservation easements and, as mentioned above in Section 1, environmentally constrained lands, should receive property tax assessments that reflect those limitations.

Land should be accurately categorized according to the code that applies to its current use, eg., agricultural land should not be coded “vacant land,” rather “crop land” or another specific use.

- Another incentive would be to lease development rights or make payments in other forms to full-time farmers in return for their important “service” in keeping the landscape open and beautiful for all to enjoy.
3. **Wetlands.** Amenia has significant wetland resources, which have been identified in various mapping document described in Chapter IV. Wetlands are regulated at the state and federal level, but the Town should consider adopting its own stand-alone wetlands law to better protect these resources, especially smaller wetlands and isolated wetlands that may be significant but not regulated by the state or federal regulatory schemes. Taxation of wetlands should be based on their market value, which is minimal, to provide relief to landowners who own wetlands.
  4. **Steep Slopes.** Due to the steep topography covering portions of the Town, and the risk of soil erosion and habitat destruction from excessive disturbance to steep slopes, the Town should consider adopting regulations governing land use on steep slopes.
  5. **Scenic Preservation.** Amenia’s extraordinary scenic resources are a major factor in making the Town a popular location for second homes and tourists. In order to allow growth that does not compromise the Town’s scenic character, this Plan update recommends that the Town adopt a Scenic Overlay District, encompassing highly visible hilltops, hillsides, rolling terrain with farms and fields, and other scenic features of the Town. This overlay district would not preclude development, but would subject most development to a visual impact analysis requirement and site plan review to ensure that development occurs in a manner that protects scenic character. The Scenic Overlay District would be mapped based upon the visibility of areas from multiple public vantage points and the value that certain identified viewsheds have to the community’s residents. Many of these were identified in the 1991 Master Plan and are described in Chapter IV. They have also been identified at several public workshops. The view from Delavergne Hill at the turnout on Route 44 is the viewshed that has been mentioned most often
  6. **Scenic Town Roads.** In order to preserve scenic qualities of small town roads such as Deep Hollow, Cascade, and Tower Hill, the Town should consider a scenic road designation and maintenance ordinance.
  7. **Aquifer Protection and Overlay District.** The Town has identified groundwater as a key environmental resource requiring protection. This finding is supported by the “Harlem Valley Watershed Investigation, Dutchess County, NY,” a report prepared in 1998 by the Chazen Companies. This report provides background information and protection recommendations for the aquifer system in the Harlem Valley Towns of Pawling, Dover, and Amenia. Chazen Companies followed up this report with the production of an aquifer map in 2004, which divided the Town into four types of aquifer districts, with recommendations for aquifer protection in each. The Dutchess County Water and Wastewater Authority



prepared a model aquifer overlay protection district provision for consideration by Towns in their zoning laws, and the Town of Amenia has used this model, together with the Chazen study and map, as the basis for a new section in the proposed zoning law on aquifer protection. The Town should continue its vigilance to prevent and clean up point-source pollution such as old and illegal dumps and raw sewage discharge.

8. **Surface Water Protection.** As important as groundwater, the streams, lakes, and ponds in Amenia need to be treated with special care when there is development near them. A stream corridor overlay district, floodplain overlay district, or similar measures, can help to protect the water quality of these resources by imposing additional review requirements on development that occurs in locations where it could be harmful to surface water. This should also be included in the revised zoning code.
9. **Biodiversity and Forestland.** The importance of biodiversity to a community's ecological and social health is only just beginning to be fully appreciated. This should be a major consideration in the Town's open space protection plan. Protection of biodiversity and the forests that contain much of the Town's biodiversity should be a major consideration in all development review decisions. Hudsonia, Inc., a non-profit environmental research organization, has completed a detailed map showing significant habitats that is included as part of this Comprehensive Plan Update (see Appendix I). It should be consulted by landowners, developers, and reviewing boards and officials whenever land use permits are under consideration. Biodiversity studies should be conducted on all large development properties before any development planning occurs, through the conservation analysis process described in (1) above. Unlike wetlands, which enjoy considerable legal protection, forestlands do not have such protection and therefore must be studied carefully to determine which ones contain important biological resources that should be protected.
10. **Soil Mining.** The Town needs to establish a soil mining overlay district in its zoning, as described in detail in Chapter II, to ensure that soil mining occurs only in appropriate places and in a manner that is environmentally sound.
11. **Timber Harvesting and other Extractive Industries.** Logging and associated timber processing are important elements of the management of Amenia's landscape and produce economic value for the Town. It is therefore necessary to have a system of logging regulation that makes it easy for sustainable timber harvesting to occur, but that prevents the type of logging that could lead to deforestation, destruction of biodiversity and scenic quality, and erosion and sedimentation. Amenia needs to have simple and straightforward timber harvesting regulations, which would require logging operations to be done pursuant to a forest management plan prepared by a qualified forester and reviewed by a qualified forestry management consultant retained by the Town. Proper performance guarantees should also be required to ensure that logging

does not damage roads, streams, or hillsides where trees are cut and where harvested logs are transported. There is also a need to regulate in a minimal way certain other extractive activities, such as the removal of stones from the surface of the land and soil mining under the DEC permit threshold of 1000 cubic yards per year. These activities, if done with care, are not generally harmful in themselves. However, the access roads that are built for them and the potential for erosion, sedimentation, debris clutter, and other unattractive or dangerous conditions are of concern to the Town.

12. **Need for a Town Environmental Inspector.** If all of the above recommendations are to be successfully implemented, the Town will need to retain a qualified environmental inspector who can oversee implementation of wetlands regulation, conservation analysis, mining regulation, stream corridor protection, timber harvesting, and other environmental protection provisions in the Town Code. This inspector could be retained as a consultant or staff member or as a staff person shared with neighboring towns that have the same need. Without such a staffing capability, the provisions in the Town Code are likely to go unenforced.

## **Historic Preservation**

The protection of Amenia's historic resources is an important priority of the 1991 Master Plan, which carries over into this Plan Update. Action steps that need to be taken include:

1. **Identification of historic resources.** Considerable work on identification of historic resources has been done. See Chapter IV for a listing.
2. **Measures to protect these resources.** Identification and designation of historic resources, by itself, does not protect them. The Town should take the next step and enact protections in one of more of the following forms:
  - Historic overlay districts in zoning
  - Listing individual structures to protect outside of overlay districts
  - Historic districts administered by a separate historic district commission
  - Design standards, specific to districts, or more generic ones that require alterations and new structures to be compatible with the historic fabric of a specific hamlet or, if in an isolated location, the historical traditions of the Town as a whole.
  - Demolition restrictions which impose a delay or other restriction on demolition to help ensure that historically significant buildings are not torn down without a deliberative process and an opportunity to save them from demolition.
3. **Measures to encourage economically feasible reuse of these resources.** In addition to regulatory protection, there need to be incentives in the form of use flexibility and density increases to allow for the economically productive reuse of historic properties and their surrounding land. Many of these buildings are expensive to restore, repair, maintain, and operate, and it is sometimes necessary

to allow architecturally and historically appropriate development of land on a large historic property in order to make it economically viable. Similarly, as long as the building's historic integrity is maintained, there is no reason not to allow a wide range of uses of it.

## **Economic Development**

The economic development goals of the Town of Amenia have been and still are:

1. To maintain diversity in economic opportunities by increasing the diversity of the economic base.
2. To create a business-friendly attitude in Town government
3. To encourage those sectors of the economy that do the most to support local agriculture and forestry, produce a range of jobs for the local population, provide needed local services, offer shopping and entertainment opportunities for local people, and take advantage of the Town's scenic and rural character to attract second-homeowners and tourist businesses.

As mentioned elsewhere, there are a number of projects and actions already in progress intended to do this, including the proposed Silo Ridge development and the Harlem Valley Rail Trail. Zoning that protects the unique character of the Town while encouraging compatible businesses will support the Town's economic development goals. Some specific recommended action items include:

1. **Revising the zoning law so that it is both business-friendly and protective of the Town's natural environment.** More specifically:
  - Creating a resort development overlay zone to give added flexibility for businesses that contribute to the second-home and tourist economy, while protecting significant scenic, agricultural, and environmental resources and provide specific public benefits including sewers for the hamlet and public access to open land and recreational resources.
  - Simplifying the approval process so that zoning approvals can combine special permit and site plan approvals in one board, reviewing small projects in a streamlined manner.
  - Encouraging transit-oriented development at the Ten Mile River Metro-North Station
  - Revising the rules for home occupations to encourage those home occupations that do not disturb neighbors but add economic value to the Town. Amenia is an ideal location for home-based businesses and for telecommuters who work one or two days per week in the City and spend the rest of their time in the countryside.
2. **Reusing portions of the original Taconic DDSO property** by developing a public-private partnership to make economic use of this site which is ideally located for redevelopment. This will enable the site to fulfill many of the Town's economic development objectives.

3. **Providing adequate water and sewer services** to places designated for growth, especially the hamlet of Amenia. The granting of special zoning privileges such as the resort development overlay should be done in conjunction with a public-private partnership to accomplish this top priority.
4. **Supporting agriculture and forestry** as local businesses that provide economic value and enhance the economic value of all of Amenia's land because of their contribution to scenic landscape character.
5. **Finding good locations for service businesses** that are needed in the Town but that are difficult to site because of environmental constraints, lack of sewers, and concerns for scenic protection. A more detailed plan for the Hamlet of Amenia, where many of these businesses can be located if appropriately planned, will help solve this problem.

## Housing

As described elsewhere in this Plan Update, Amenia faces an impending crisis in housing affordability. There are several concrete steps that the Town should now take to address this situation. They include the following actions.

1. **Zoning revisions.** Changes are needed in the zoning code to encourage the production of housing for those who can no longer afford to live in Amenia. These changes include the following:
  - Allowing high density housing in hamlets that have water and sewer services, both existing (hamlet of Amenia with a new sewer) and new (transit-oriented development at Ten Mile River station using the state's existing water and sewer systems).
  - Allowing accessory apartments in single-family homes town-wide.
  - Allowing two-family, multi-family, and other multiple housing types, such as apartments and townhouses in more locations, subject to appropriate siting and design controls. Such housing should be part of a larger community and make a positive contribution to its design, rather than standing alone in an isolated compound.
  - "Workforce housing" set-asides in new developments. This is housing that is restricted in price or rental cost, and that is maintained at a below-market rate in the future through deed restrictions. Workforce housing units can be required in developments above a certain size and/or they can be encouraged through density incentives. They can also be required in connection with any large-scale commercial or resort development. It can be helpful to provide developers with alternatives, such as payments in lieu of providing the housing, providing infrastructure to enable affordable housing to be constructed in desirable locations such as the hamlets, or allowing employee housing to count toward the workforce housing requirement.

2. **Institutional and administrative changes.** In order for the workforce housing provisions to be effective, the Town will need to institute a program to administer a workforce housing program, selecting eligible owners and tenants, and ensuring that the housing continues to be affordable and occupied by qualified owners and tenants in the future. The Town can and should favor those who provide important municipal services, such as emergency services personnel, teachers, and municipal employees, in allocating such housing. The Town should establish a committee to work on this and should consider a cooperative venture with other towns and/or the County to administer a complex program of this type.

## **Infrastructure**

As emphasized in this Plan Update, infrastructure development is a key element of achieving the Town's planning objectives. Sewers in the hamlet of Amenia are the clear first priority. However there are other important infrastructure needs, which the Town should begin to plan for, including:

1. Water and sewer services elsewhere, especially Wassaic
2. Transportation infrastructure, especially an enhanced road network in the Hamlet of Amenia as described in the section on the Hamlet of Amenia.
  - Long-term planning should begin for making Amenia more transit-friendly and pedestrian-friendly, especially by connecting the rail station nodes to local shuttle or bus systems.
  - The Town should consider implementing certain recommendations of the Route 22 Corridor Management Plan prepared by the Poughkeepsie Dutchess County Transportation Council.
  - All road design and reconstruction projects should be conducted with special attention to making them safe and attractive to pedestrians and bicyclists. Especially important is the provision of sidewalks in the hamlets of Amenia and Wassaic.
  - Maintaining and improving truck access to the Hamlet of Wassaic. The existing "jug handle" at the north end of Old Route 22 (81) where large trucks driving north sometimes need to veer left in order to turn the sharp right on their way to making deliveries in Wassaic Hamlet should be retained.
3. Public services, such as needed facilities for emergency services personnel, schools, the highway department, recreation facilities, town offices, etc. In particular, the highway garage and salt shed are too close to the Wassaic Creek and better sites are needed for these structures. The Town should engage in a capital planning process to plan for these and other municipal facilities.
4. Planning for the school districts should be better coordinated with development planning in the Town.
5. Expansion and/or relocation of Town Hall.
6. In addition, the Town needs to proactively acquire property for future municipal needs as opportunities arise.

## **Recreation**

The Town adopted a recreation master plan in August 2006. That document is a Reference Document used in the preparation of this Comprehensive Plan Update and is hereby incorporated by reference.

## **Land Use Regulation**

Many of the most important recommendations in the Comprehensive Plan Update can only be accomplished through changes in zoning, subdivision regulations, and other land use regulations. This issue will not be covered here, since it has been extensively discussed elsewhere, and the Plan Update has made redrafting the zoning one of the three highest priority actions of the Town.

If the Town continued to develop according to the rules in place under the old zoning (i.e. the zoning existing prior to the adoption of the Plan Update and accompanying new zoning), the results would substantially conflict with the goals and vision articulated in the 1991 Master Plan and this Plan Update. The primary conflicts relate to the overall pattern of development, which would likely be suburban sprawl that covers most of the landscape with houses on relatively large lots, rather than clustered settlements surrounded by open space. In addition, the old zoning is not business-friendly, requiring an arduous approval process generally involving both the Planning Board and the Zoning Board, which does not necessarily produce a good result, but does make it difficult to receive an approval. The old zoning has neither adequate design standards for new commercial and multi-family development nor needed use and dimensional flexibility. The old zoning does not include incentives for development in the hamlets that would be sufficient to encourage development with a sewer system, nor does it do anything to address the emerging crisis in housing affordability. It also lacks meaningful environmental review processes and standards, which forces the Town to rely exclusively on the SEQR process. If the Town continued to build out under the old zoning, the long-term consequences would ultimately destroy the rural and hamlet character and diversity that the 1991 Master Plan and this Plan Update seek to protect.

The manner in which the vision and goals in this Master Plan will be achieved through zoning are best explored through a reading of the new zoning law. It represents a substantial departure from the old zoning, and is designed to fit Amenia's unique circumstances as it moves into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, seeking to preserve its heritage and environment while adapting to significant changes in demographics, development pressure, and economic forces.

***Note: The proposed zoning maps are included in Appendix II.***

## **Other Levels of Government**

Successful implementation of a town's comprehensive plan depends not only on actions by town government, but also actions of the private sector and of other levels of government. Often actions of the County or State have profound ramifications for a Town, particularly those actions that involve highways, water and sewer infrastructure,

and state institutions. Since an adopted Comprehensive Plan must be taken into consideration for capital projects by county and state agencies, this Plan Update can help the Town in negotiating with these agencies to fulfill the Town's goals.

Therefore, it is critical that Dutchess County and New York State take particular consideration of the following elements of this Comprehensive Plan:

- Infrastructure development, especially roads, but also water, sewer, the rail trail, and the railroad. All decisions on these matters by agencies at all levels of government should take the recommendations of this Plan into account.
- Special attention needs to be paid by the New York State DOT to traffic calming and sidewalks in the area of the hamlet center extending from Fudgy's north to Freshtown plaza and Maplebrook School. The Town wants this to become a pedestrian-friendly community center, where traffic slows as it passes through, and where there are frequent, well-marked crosswalks, wide sidewalks, street trees, appropriate lighting fixtures, and on-street parking in front of buildings that are close to the street. The Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) is promulgating new standards for "context-sensitive solutions" in road design and management issues in hamlet areas, and such a solution is clearly needed in this part of the Town. This Comprehensive Plan should be further updated by developing a more detailed plan for this area of Route 22 to give guidance to DOT. A similar plan should also be developed for Routes 44 and 343 as they pass through the Hamlet from west to east.
- In addition to traffic calming to make the Hamlet more pedestrian-oriented, safety improvements are needed along Route 22 between Maplebrook School and Sharon Station Road. This section of the road is dangerous and especially hazardous for school buses.
- The Route 22 Corridor Management Plan prepared by consultants for the County and State contains access management recommendations for all towns in the Harlem Valley. This study seems to be virtually unknown to anyone in the Town. However, its recommendations should be reviewed for consistency with this Comprehensive Plan. If the Town's planning recommendations are inconsistent with the County and State plans, the Town should communicate its concerns to appropriate County and State agencies.
- The New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) should work in close cooperation with the Town, County, Department of Transportation, Department of Environmental Conservation, community at large, and private investors to redevelop portions of the site no longer used for state services to developmentally disabled clients. The access roads and water and sewer facilities at the site should be made available to any new development there, as well as to the surrounding area, including the hamlet of Wassaic if economically feasible.

## Chapter IV: Background Information

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides background information that informs the analyses and policy recommendations in Chapters II and III. Information contained in the town's 1991 Master Plan has been updated, as necessary, to reflect current conditions. This chapter also includes information from the town's Conservation Advisory Council (CAC), which prepared a town-wide natural resources inventory in 2005.

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Demographic information can be used to portray the characteristics of residents of the Town of Amenia. This section reviews the population composition, growth and decline of the population, and the various factors involved with changes in population. In addition, a description of data on education, household income, housing, and the labor force for the town is provided.

#### Population Change

Since the 1991 Master Plan, the Town of Amenia experienced a net loss of population of nearly 22.1 percent, decreasing from a 1990 population of 5,195 to its current total population of 4,048 residents. This was inconsistent with Dutchess County as a whole, whose population increased steadily from 1990 to 2000. As shown in Table IV-1, the County's growth rate has exceeded that of the Town during the past decade.

**Table IV-1**  
**Population Trends 1990-2000**

Area	1990	2000	1990-2000 % Change
Town of Amenia	5,195	4,048	-22.1%
Dutchess County	259,462	280,150	7.4%
<b>Sources:</b> US Census Bureau, Census 2000 and 1990 Census of the Population, SF-1			

However, the precipitous decline in the population of the Town of Amenia indicated in Table IV-1 is primarily due to the decrease in number of Amenia residents living at the Taconic DDSO. This is indicated by the steep decline in the number of persons living in institutional or non-institutional group quarters and the decrease in population density of the census block group that includes the Taconic DDSO. As shown in Table IV-2, in 1990 a total of 1,262 persons in Amenia resided in group quarters, including the Taconic DDSO. With the decline of the number of consumers residing in that facility, the number of group quarters residents in Amenia has dropped by 95.5 percent, to 57 persons.<sup>2</sup> While the group quarters residential population declined, the number of persons living in

<sup>2</sup> This number represents the Town of Amenia group quarters population reported by the US Census in 2000. Employees of the Taconic DDSO have indicated that this number is an under representation of the current number of people living at the Taconic DDSO.



households increased from 3,933 persons in 1990, to 3,991 persons in 2000, a net increase of 1.5 percent.

**Table IV-2**  
**Population Trends Adjusted to Reflect Non-Group Home Residents**

<b>Town of Amenia</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1991-2000 % Change</b>
Persons in Households	3,933	3,991	1.5%
Persons in Group Quarters	1,262	57	-95.5%
Total Population	5,195	4,048	-22.1%
<b>Sources:</b> US Census Bureau, Census 2000 and 1990 Census of the Population, SF-1			

While the number of persons living in households, and the number of households in the Town of Amenia, increased slightly from 1990 to 2000, the average size of households has decreased (see Table IV-3). This decrease in household size was also experienced regionally. As of 2000, the average household size in the Town of Amenia was 2.46, down from 3.24 in 1990. The County currently has a larger average household size of 2.63, down from 2.66 in 1990. These declines generally reflect the aging of the population, as older populations generally have fewer children living at home. In addition, the sharp decline in the average household size in Amenia reflects the decline of the institutional and non-institutional group quarters residents. Currently, the average household size in Amenia is similar to that found in surrounding communities, with Dover averaging 2.74, North East averaging 2.5, and Washington averaging 2.37 persons per household.<sup>3</sup>

**Table IV-3**  
**Household Trends**

<b>Area</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1990 – 2000 % Change</b>
<b>Number of Households</b>			
Town of Amenia	1,620	1,625	0.3%
Dutchess County	89,567	99,536	10.0%
<b>Average Household Size</b>			
Town of Amenia	3.24	2.46	-24%
Dutchess County	2.66	2.63	-1.1%
<b>Sources:</b> US Census Bureau, Census 2000 and 1990 Census of the Population, SF-1			

### Population Distribution by Age

According to the 2000 Census, the median age of Amenia's population is 40.2 years old, slightly older than the median of 38.0 identified in the 1991 Master Plan. The rise in the median age in the Town of Amenia is consistent with the trends reported in the 1991 Master Plan. The median age in Amenia has steadily increased over the past twenty years from 36.2 in 1980, to 36.9 in 1989, and to 38.0 in 1994.

<sup>3</sup> US Census Bureau, Census 2000.

Currently, the highest proportion of residents in the community falls within the 35-44 and 45-54 age categories. However, as shown in Table IV-4 the remaining age groups have fairly consistent percentages of the total population, averaging between 9 and 14 percent. The proportion of town residents 65 years of age or older was 13.2 percent in 1994, and 17.15 percent in 2000. Therefore a large percentage of the town's total population falls within the retirement age category.

The increase in median age from 1991, and the large proportion of town residents within the retirement age category, is consistent with observed trends that the Town of Amenia has attracted retirees and empty nesters from the more urban areas of New York. Combined with national trends of the aging "baby-boomer" generation, longer life expectancies, and lower birth rates, the median age of Amenia has risen higher than the County as a whole, whose median age in 2000 was 36.7 years.

**Table IV-4**  
**Population Distribution of Amenia and Dutchess County, 2000**

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Population of Amenia</b>	<b>Percent of Amenia's Total Population</b>	<b>Percent of Dutchess County's Total Population</b>
0-5	222	5.5%	6.2%
5-9	296	7.3%	7.3%
10-14	274	6.8%	7.4%
15-19	263	6.5%	7.4%
20-24	168	4.2%	6.2%
25-34	456	11.3%	12.5%
35-44	661	16.3%	17.1%
45-54	598	14.8%	14.2%
55-59	223	5.5%	5.1%
60-64	193	4.8%	3.9%
65-74	379	9.4%	6.5%
75-84	233	5.8%	4.0%
85+	82	2.0%	1.5%
<b>Sources:</b> US Census Bureau, Census 2000, SF-1			

### **Median Household Income**

As shown in Table IV-5, the median household income of the Town of Amenia increased from 1989 to 1999. During that decade, the Town's median household income rose almost 25.7 percent, as compared to an overall decline of 6.7 percent across the County and 1.8 percent decline across all of New York State.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that one factor affecting the increase in median household income is that the new population coming into Amenia tends to be more affluent. This new population is generally comprised of weekenders, who upon retirement may become full-time residents. The increase in Amenia of this type of resident has also affected the school age population which, as mentioned in Chapter II, has decreased (changes in school enrollment from 1991 to the present is also discussed later in this chapter, under "Schools").

**Table IV-5**  
**Median Household Income**

<b>Area</b>	<b>1989</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>1989-1999 % Change</b>
Town of Amenia	\$31,136	\$39,231	25.7%
Dutchess County	\$56,615	\$53,086	-6.7%
New York State	\$44,173	\$43,393	-1.8%
<b>Sources:</b> US Census Bureau, Census 2000 and 1990 Census of the Population and Summary Tape, SF-3			

## Employment

Approximately 50 percent (1,030) of the Amenia labor force was employed by the government in 1980, which clearly indicated the importance of the Taconic DDSO as a major employer. However, since the significant downsizing of the center, the distribution of employment has changed. Tables IV-6 and IV-7 show the current employment distributions of the Town of Amenia and Dutchess County.

**Table IV-6**  
**Town of Amenia and Dutchess County: Employment by Occupation, 2000**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Amenia</b>		<b>Dutchess County</b>	
	<b>Employed Population</b>	<b>Percent of Employed Population</b>	<b>Employed Population</b>	<b>Percent of Employed Population</b>
Management, professional, and related occupations	463	23.7	50,232	38.4%
Service	496	25.4	20,441	15.6%
Sales and Office	435	22.2	33,028	25.3%
Farming, fishing, and forestry	64	3.3	587	0.4%
Construction, extraction, and maintenance	235	12.0	13,221	10.1%
Production, transportation, and material moving	236	13.4	13,284	10.2%
Total	1,929	100.0	130,793	100.0%
<b>Sources:</b> US Census Bureau, Census 2000, SF-3				

In 2000, the greatest proportion of the Amenia labor force was employed by the educational, health, and social services industry (35.3 percent), while the information sector employed the least amount of people (0.8 percent). Amenia's significantly larger farming and forestry industry, as compared with Dutchess County overall, indicates the region's rural character and agricultural importance. Although agriculture is a vital industry in this area, it only comprises 3.3 percent of the labor force, a decrease from 6.2 percent in 1980.

**Table IV-7**

**Town of Amenia and Dutchess County: Employment by Industry, 2000**

Industry	Amenia				Dutchess County	
	1980		2000		2000	
	Employed Population	Percent of Employed Population	Employed Population	Percent of Employed Population	Employed Population	Percent of Employed Population
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	152	7.4%	133	6.8%	1,341	1.0%
Construction	100	5.0%	157	8.0%	8,904	6.8%
Manufacturing	208	10.2%	151	7.7%	16,084	12.3%
Wholesale trade	223	10.8%*	36	1.8%	3,319	2.5%
Retail Trade	NA	NA	183	9.4%	14,894	11.4%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	59	2.8%	103	5.3%	6,410	4.9%
Information	NA	NA	15	0.8%	4,258	3.3%
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing	45	2.2%	77	3.9%	7,690	5.9%
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	1,139	55.5%**	118	6.0%	11,842	9.1%
Educational, health and social services	NA	NA	691	35.3%	34,542	26.4%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services	48	2.3%***	102	5.2%	8,271	6.3%
Public administration	80	3.8%	96	4.9%	7,165	5.5%
Other services	NA	NA	94	4.8%	6,073	4.6%
Total	2054	100.0%	1,929	100.0%	130,793	100.0%
<b>Notes:</b> *Includes retail **Includes Health and Education ***Defined as "Personal Services" in 1991 Master Plan <b>Sources:</b> US Census Bureau, Census 2000, SF-3						

Much of the Amenia labor force works in professional, service, sales, and office type positions which constitutes over 70 percent of the employed population. Farming, fishing, and forestry make up the smallest proportion. The Amenia labor force is actually divided fairly similarly to the Dutchess County labor force, except for the agricultural and professional/management sectors.

## HOUSING

The recent rapid escalation in housing prices focused attention on housing and its affordability. This section reviews current housing conditions in Amenia and discusses techniques and alternatives for meeting housing demands in the coming years. This section also includes goals and objectives for guiding decisions on housing issues.

## Adequacy of Existing Housing Stock

The US Census provides the most detailed data regarding Amenia's housing stock. The statistical portrait of the housing stock in 2000 showed that there were 1,814 dwelling units in the Town, in which 4,048 Town residents lived. Another 57 persons were living in group quarters at the Taconic DDSO. Table IV-8 describes the type of housing in which residents were living in 2000.

**Table IV-8**  
**Housing Stock, Town of Amenia and Dutchess County, 2000**

Type of Unit	Number of Homes in Amenia	Percent of Homes in Amenia	Percent of Homes in Dutchess County
Single Family	1,191	65.7%	69.2%
Mobile Homes	329	18.1%	4.1%
Multi-Family (2-9 unit)	246	13.6%	19.0%
Multi-Family (10+ units)	48	2.6%	7.8%
Total	1,814	100.0%	100.0%
<b>Sources:</b> US Census Bureau, Census 2000, SF-3			

As shown in Table IV-9, Amenia's housing stock is predominantly owner-occupied. When compared with statistics for Dutchess County, Amenia has a slightly lower percentage of owner-occupied housing (61.6 percent versus 69.0 percent in 2000).

**Table IV-9**  
**Town of Amenia Housing Ownership Status, 2000**

Type	Number	Percent
Owner-Occupied	1,118	61.6%
Renter-Occupied	507	27.9%
Vacant	189	10.4%
Seasonal*	(77)	(4.2)%
Total	1,814	100.0%
<b>Notes:</b> * Seasonal units are included in the vacant units count and are not counted separately in the total housing units calculation.		
<b>Sources:</b> US Census Bureau, Census 2000, SF-1		

A high percentage of Amenia's housing stock was built before 1960. Of the total number of units, 862 (47.5 percent) were built in this period, with 486 (26.8 percent) being built prior to 1940. This is generally true, however, for most of the communities in the Harlem Valley with the exception of Dover, which has a higher percentage of mobile homes.

Finally, the median value of owner-occupied units was \$127,700 in 2000, a significant increase from \$42,300 in 1980, reflecting regional increases in home prices. Only Pine Plains and the City of Poughkeepsie had lower values among Dutchess County municipalities, while North East had a nearly equal value of \$127,900. The median in the County itself was \$154,200. The median gross rent of \$607 was lower only in the Village of Red Hook, but has increased dramatically from \$244 in 1980.

## **Housing Trends and Costs**

The housing situation in Dutchess County has changed significantly over recent decades. Lower- and middle-income people wishing to stay within, or move to, the community have had a difficult time affording homes. The rise of housing prices has created an affordability crisis among some segments of the population. The high cost of housing is also reflected in the rise in land prices which, as noted in the 1991 Master Plan, has limited farmer-to-farmer sales of agricultural land.

A review of current real estate offerings on the Multiple Listing Services (MLS) for the Town of Amenia in November of 2006 showed the majority of three- to four-bedroom homes on one- to four-acre lots averaging roughly between \$200,000 and \$500,000 depending on size, condition, and location. However, it was not uncommon to see properties listed between \$700,000 and \$3,000,000. These high-priced homes were generally renovated farmhouses or new construction at least 3,500 square feet in size, and were located on large lots. In several cases, the high prices of these homes appear to be driven by the profit potential for the development of the land, as opposed to the size and quality of the existing home. In accordance with this, there were several tracts of land for sale in the \$1,000,000 to \$3,000,000 range, depending on location and acreage. Mobile homes represented the most affordable housing type ranging between \$20,000 and \$70,000, generally depending on the condition of the home and the size and location of the lot. These figures derived from the MLS are asking prices only. The actual sale prices of property are often lower, but sometimes substantially greater.

Rental rates have not increased quite as substantially over the past couple decades. Gross rent for nearly 45 percent of Amenia's rental units is between \$500 and \$749.

## **Housing Development Alternatives**

A number of housing styles are common in a rural area such as Amenia: single- and two-family homes, multi-family dwellings, accessory apartments, upper-floor apartments in mixed-use buildings, residential care facilities, and mobile homes and parks. Different patterns of housing developments, such as conservation subdivisions, including limited development subdivisions and flag lots, provide some alternatives. A variety of housing types, including two-family, multi-family, apartments in mixed use buildings, and single-family detached are also necessary for a balanced housing stock. To address affordability concerns it is important to have both higher density housing in hamlet areas served by public water and sewer and housing that is dedicated as "workforce housing" for people who live and work locally. These housing options are described below.

### ***SINGLE-FAMILY DETACHED***

The most prevalent housing type in Amenia, single-family homes on individual lots, will continue to represent the greatest number of housing units in the Town. Single-family detached housing can be arranged in several different patterns to achieve various planning goals.

### *Conventional Subdivision*

Conventional subdivision of land is focused on providing the maximum number of lots within a parcel by breaking the land into lots according to the minimum lot size prescribed by zoning regulations. All land within the parcel is divided into private ownership with little meaningful open space and no significant protection of natural resources. The resulting pattern of development has contributed to the “sprawl” pattern of communities in which large pieces of open land lose their character.

### *Conservation Subdivision*

Conservation subdivisions are an alternative to conventional subdivisions. In Conservation subdivisions, units are clustered or sited on those portions of a property most suitable for development, while leaving substantial portions as undeveloped open space. Conservation subdivisions may include a variety of lot sizes, ranging from large farm or estate lots to small hamlet-size lots. Conservation subdivision results in the preservation of significant blocks of open space, wildlife habitat and corridors, and other important environmental resources, while allowing compact development, more walkable neighborhoods, and more flexibility than conventional subdivisions. The undeveloped land must be protected by a “conservation easement,” which is a perpetual restriction on the use of the land, created in accordance with the provisions of Article 49, Title 3 of the Environmental Conservation Law or § 247 of the General Municipal Law, for the purposes of conservation of open space, agricultural land, and natural, cultural, historic, and scenic resources.

Conservation subdivisions can be used where preservation of open space, agricultural land, and natural, cultural, historic, and scenic resources is important. Its use generally reduces the road and utility costs, and allows for smaller lot sizes and sometimes smaller, more affordable, houses; however, unless there is an alternative way of treating sewage effluent, the clustered units must be sited so that septic systems function properly on the smaller lots.

Two-family or multi-family homes can be included in conservation subdivisions, as can accessory apartments (see below) The allowance of other housing types not only increases the amount of additional open space that can be saved, it also increases the types of housing that are generally more affordable to lower and middle income residents.

### **LIMITED DEVELOPMENT SUBDIVISION**

A Limited Development subdivision is a very low-density subdivision in which the average lot size is at least four times the minimum lot size for a conventional subdivision in the zoning district or 20 acres, whichever is greater. House sites and densities are regulated by a permanent conservation easement. The incentive for this permanent density reduction and land preservation is the allowance of inexpensive unpaved private roads to provide access. This option helps to preserve open space by keeping large amounts of land permanently undeveloped. Its purpose is land preservation, not the provision of affordable housing.

### ***FLAG (REAR) LOTS***

Flag lots are lots where most of the land is set back from the road and access is gained through a narrow access strip. Where carefully planned, flag lots can enable landowners to develop interior portions of parcels at low density and low cost, preserving roadside open space, and avoiding the construction of expensive new town roads.

### ***SINGLE-FAMILY ATTACHED AND MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING***

Single-family attached housing units are commonly known as townhouses. Each unit is attached to one other unit on either side. Multi-family units take many forms including garden apartments or older homes divided into separate apartments. Either of these housing types allows an opportunity to provide a more affordable choice when compared to single-family detached homes.

Construction of multi-family units is effectively limited by the requirement for public sewer. Because projects at multi-family densities can only be developed with sewer, or in limited cases on a common septic system, careful attention must be paid to their siting.

### ***RENTAL HOUSING***

Rental housing may take many different forms. Single-family homes can be rented as can apartments above garages (accessory apartments), townhouse units, or apartments in an apartment building. A diversified stock of rental units can provide a greater selection of housing options for people on limited incomes (e.g. young adults and the elderly). The following strategies can achieve greater numbers of rental units:

- Conversions of large structures (including large houses, barns, and other buildings) into multi-family dwellings
- Upper-floor apartments in mixed-use buildings
- Accessory apartments in residential and hamlet zoning districts

### ***ACCESSORY APARTMENTS***

An accessory apartment is a unit created within an existing residential structure or in an accessory structure which is subordinate to the main unit and in which complete cooking and plumbing facilities are provided. Accessory apartments are a way to provide rental housing without the construction of multi-family units. A concern with accessory units, however, is that they must not impose burdens on the septic or water systems.

### ***MOBILE HOMES***

Mobile homes currently comprise 18.1 percent of Amenia's housing stock and represent the lowest cost housing available to community residents. They are found on individual lots and in mobile home parks which range from well-designed to poorly and haphazardly laid-out.

The allowance of mobile home parks and mobile homes in specific mapped zoning areas, or as special permit uses, is one method a town can use to preserve this affordable housing option without detriment to the community.



The use of mobile homes by farmers for worker housing must be allowed as-of-right under the New York State Agriculture and Markets Law to ensure affordable housing for workers and their families in this industry. The temporary use of mobile homes by a land owner, who intends to build a permanent residence within one year, may also be considered permissible by a town.

### **SENIOR HOUSING**

As discussed in the 1991 Master Plan, Amenia currently lacks specialized senior housing. Senior housing can be publicly or privately owned, or owned by a non-profit corporation. Whatever the method of ownership, however, elderly housing expands housing options for senior citizens. Many elderly residents of Amenia may be occupying houses which are too large, have stairs, and/or cost too much to heat. Many of these residents also have a great deal of equity built up in their homes. They may be willing to move to specially designed apartments more closely attuned to their current housing needs.

Seniors often benefit from being close to community facilities with the convenience of shopping and other services nearby. Therefore locating senior housing near hamlet centers can be advantageous for the elderly. However, senior housing, because it is usually multi-family, typically requires a sanitary sewer system or a common septic system, which is not currently available in any of Amenia's hamlet centers. Another possible solution to the senior housing issue, which does not require a sanitary sewer system, is the use of accessory apartments in the hamlet areas.

### **Affordable Housing Issues**

As discussed in Chapter 2, Amenia has a housing affordability problem. A comparison of Tables IV-10 and IV-11 shows that renters are generally forced to spend a greater percentage of their income on rent than homeowners are required to spend on their mortgages each month. According to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), "the generally accepted definition of affordability is for a household to pay no more than 30 percent of its annual income on housing. Families who pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing are considered cost burdened and may have difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation and medical care."<sup>4</sup> Another term for "affordable housing" is "workforce housing" – housing that is affordable to a large majority of the workforce in any region. In the Town of Amenia, approximately 34 percent of renters reside in housing that is considered "unaffordable" to them, as compared to 22 percent of homeowners. The dichotomy between renters and home owners indicates a greater need for affordable rental housing. As indicated in section 5.3 of the 1991 Master Plan, the demand for affordable rental housing is primarily from young families and the elderly.

As the demographic analysis suggests, the median age of Amenia is increasing, indicating a growing population that is likely to increase demand for affordable housing. Oftentimes aging individuals or couples prefer to "age in place" and retire in their hometown, because that is where their friends, family, place of worship, community, and general support system is. In order to do this, they may also wish to "downsize" from their

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/affordablehousing/>

existing home to something more manageable in terms of affordability, size, and maintenance. This increases the demand for smaller, more affordable housing in a community that may already be experiencing rising housing costs and an aging population, and where market forces are producing large houses on large lots which do not serve the population that wants to downsize.

**Table IV-10**

**Selected Monthly Owner Costs as a Percentage of Household Income in 1999**

Percentage of Household Income	Number of Households	Percentage of Households
Less than 15.0%	227	31.1%
15.0 to 19.9%	118	16.2%
20.0 to 24.9%	131	17.9%
25.0 to 29.9%	84	11.5%
30.0 to 34.9%	41	5.6%
35.0 % or more	116	15.9%
Not computed	13	1.8%
<b>Sources:</b> US Census Bureau, Census 2000, SF-3		

**Table IV-11**

**Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income in 1999**

Percentage of Household Income	Number of Households	Percentage of Households
Less than 15.0%	98	21.1%
15.0 to 19.9%	73	15.7%
20.0 to 24.9%	49	10.6%
25.0 to 29.9%	62	13.4%
30.0 to 34.9%	42	9.1%
35.0 % or more	118	25.4%
Not computed	22	4.7%
<b>Sources:</b> US Census Bureau, Census 2000, SF-3		

The limited supply of affordable housing is a problem discussed in the 1991 Master Plan and continues to be a problem today. Among the groups most affected by this problem in the Town of Amenia are school teachers, town employees, emergency services volunteers, and the elderly.

At the local level, zoning revisions can respond to the housing affordability problem by encouraging accessory apartments, higher density housing, especially multi-family housing, smaller units, and senior housing. These housing options increase the range of housing choice, and, through the introduction of smaller dwelling units, reduce housing costs as well.

Inclusionary housing is a zoning technique that goes further in promoting housing affordable to the local workforce. Inclusionary housing programs have been developed in several communities in Westchester County and Connecticut in response to severe pressures on housing prices. Inclusionary housing programs allow a developer a density

bonus in exchange for the provision of a certain percentage of housing units affordable to low and moderate income households or can require provision of the same. Mandatory programs are often the most successful. The affordable unit's selling prices are indexed to the median income of the residents of the area or to the average salary of municipal or school district employees. Town or school district employees, or current Amenia emergency services volunteers can be given preference or priority in the sale or rental of such units. The difficulty with such a program, however, is that it requires substantial oversight at the municipal level.

## **LAND USE AND ZONING**

### **Land Use Pattern**

The overall land use pattern in Amenia has not changed significantly since the last land use survey was conducted for the 1991 Master Plan. The biggest changes have been the creation of several subdivisions and the decline in the acreage devoted to active farms. Previous development tended to fill in along existing Town roads. The creation of subdivisions, particularly those outside the existing hamlet areas, lends a somewhat suburban atmosphere to some areas of Town.

Land use surveys were conducted for both the 1969 Comprehensive Development Plan (in 1968) and the 1991 Master Plan (in 1989). The most notable change between 1968 and 1991 was the decline in the amount of land devoted to agriculture, which decreased by 3,874 acres or 25 percent over that twenty year period. Since 1991, the amount of land devoted to agriculture has decreased another 12 percent.

Amenia still has significant amounts of land available for development. Most of the farms that have gone out of business are still vacant, having been purchased by single owners with no need to actively farm the land, although many of the new landowners lease the farmland to local farmers in order to keep the land open and to maintain agricultural value taxation. An increasing amount of this land is being protected through voluntary conservation easements. Some lands have been purchased by investors and lie fallow, awaiting some form of development. It is anticipated that the decline in traditional farming will continue, although some of it will be replaced by horse farming and specialized niche agriculture.

Amenia is still a rural Town with development primarily in and around the hamlets of Wassaic and Amenia, as well as in the southern end of the Town near the hamlet of Dover Plains. The smaller crossroad areas of Amenia Union, Smithfield, Leedsville, and South Amenia, also have some concentrated development—although the development in these areas is primarily comprised of older single-family homes. The areas surrounding these hamlets and crossroads are largely rural. This development pattern has prevailed in Amenia for the better part of 200 years.

### **Zoning**

Although Amenia's zoning code has been updated over the years, it is primarily based on the 1969 Master Plan, which recommended that the Town adopt a zoning ordinance. The

Town is divided into seven zoning districts: Agricultural, Residential—Medium Density, Residential—High Density, General Business, Highway Business, Industrial, and Flood Hazard. The current zoning map (see Appendix II) reflects many of the land use concepts that were discussed in the 1969 Master Plan, namely concentrations of residential and commercial areas around the hamlets with industrial areas being encouraged along State Highway 22 from Amenia to Wassaic. As Chapters II and III point out, the zoning is not consistent with the 1991 Master Plan or with this Plan Update. If left unchanged, it would lead to the pattern of suburban sprawl and commercial strip development that is found in the towns and counties south of Amenia along the Route 22 corridor. The 1991 Master Plan had recommended zoning changes; however, for the most part, these were never adopted.

## **COMMUNITY CHARACTER, OPEN SPACE, AND HISTORIC RESOURCES**

### **Scenic Resources**

The many hills and valleys of Amenia create spectacular views throughout the Town. The rural roads and scenic vistas that are considered most worthy of preservation were originally inventoried, evaluated and mapped by the Amenia Master Plan Committee and the Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development, and described in the 1991 Master Plan. That map has been updated in this Plan to identify a potential Scenic Protection Overlay District.

Among the factors that were considered in the designation of scenic roads were the following:

- The roads were older and generally narrow;
- The roads were lined with trees, stone walls or open meadows;
- The roads ran through scenic countryside or offered scenic vistas; or
- The roads were lined with farms and farmhouses or forests.

Scenic roads can be important because of the surrounding landscape, the way they fit into that landscape, and/or the way that they are constructed. The lands and land uses on either side of a road are part of what make it scenic. In Amenia, the scenic roads often have views of bucolic farm lands and tree covered hills. Specific view spots and view corridors can also qualify a road as scenic, and in some cases, a view may be the most important feature identified and may justify its inclusion as a scenic road. The way in which a road was constructed is another factor that can make it scenic. Street trees, the curvature of the road, and whether the road is paved, dirt, or gravel, all contribute to the scenic qualities of a road. Land use controls and road construction standards can both contribute to the preservation of scenic roads in Amenia.

Under New York State law, a municipality may adopt regulations to protect the scenic character of roadways. A town can adopt a local law that includes guidelines for widening, paving or repaving or installation of drainage improvements on scenic roads or for new development that occurs off of scenic roads. The local law could also provide

guidance on the preservation of stone walls and specimen trees, which oftentimes enhance a scenic roadway.

A list of scenic roads identified in the 1991 Master Plan with a brief description of their scenic features and history is outlined below.

***US 44 - DE LA VERGNE HILL. (FROM THE AMENIA TOWN LINE TO LAKE AMENIA ROAD).***

One of Amenia's greatest views is from De La Vergne Hill. As US 44 curves around the hillside, a vast panorama of the Harlem Valley is visible. From this high point, hills, farms, fields and forests can be seen stretching east to Connecticut and south to the Hamlet of Wassaic. The view is especially spectacular with seasonal foliage and atmospheric conditions. A local church along this hillside holds Easter sunrise services to take advantage of the early morning scene. Visitors are often struck by the beauty of the foothills and valley as they enter the "Gateway to the Berkshires."

Built in 1805, this road was originally called the "Dutchess Turnpike." It connected Poughkeepsie with Sharon, Connecticut. The house at the junction of Routes 83 and 44, at the top of the hill, was the original toll house. The old turnpike cut more sharply down the hill and did not swing out in a wide curve as the current highway does. Just below the curve in the road is "Squabble Hole," an old iron ore pit enlarged and converted into a golf course lake.

***CLARK HILL ROAD***

Clark Hill rises to the east out of the Oblong Valley through corn and hay fields and ends up as a wooded lane at the crest of a ridge. Several houses stand along the one mile road but they do not detract from the view of nearby hills and fields. The most impressive feature of the road is at its summit where it curves and affords an impressive view to the north and south of the Oblong Valley and Rattlesnake Mountain to the west. Limestone formations, including a natural bridge, along the western end of the road are unique features. The view changes as the light changes during the day and during the year. A setting summer sun causes the whole valley to glow with a purplish light, contrasting greatly with the deep blue sky above a snow-covered scene in winter.

***DEEP HOLLOW ROAD***

Deep Hollow Road is a gravel Town road between NY 22 in Wassaic and US 44 near Lithgow. The 2.4-mile portion of the road within the Town of Amenia is characterized by deep forests that emerge into broad fields. The road ends in the Town of Washington.

At the NY 22 terminus, there are two stone charcoal kilns that once supplied fuel for Noah Gridley's Iron Furnace in Wassaic, which is no longer in existence. After negotiating through a narrow passage of rock outcrop, the road crosses the Wassaic Creek over a steel-decked bridge, continuing uphill as it follows the creek which lies far below. The remains of the historic road from Wassaic to Smithfield, via Turkey Hollow, are visible one tenth of a mile beyond the bridge. About a mile and a half from NY 22, the road crosses Wolf Brook and continues along the mountainside several hundred feet above the gorge. Access to Turkey Hollow can be gained from this road.

Unspoiled forest, wildlife, mountain streams, foliage, and seasonal views make this road an important scenic resource.

***TOWER HILL ROAD (FROM THE FIRST BRIDGE AT THE BOTTOM TO THE TOWN LINE)***

Tower Hill Road is a narrow road that winds through dense forest for much of its length, providing access to Wassaic State Forest. This road largely follows natural contours, paralleling a brook, of which there are frequent views. Water often rushes over small falls of rocks along bends in the road, especially during the spring. Though the hills along this road are of modest height, they produce a distinct chasm effect at several points. Combined with deep woods on either side, this effect creates a cloistered atmosphere. Proceeding westward, this route climbs slowly uphill, offering many scenic vistas.

In addition, there are Old Cellar Holes in the area, as well as abundant wildlife, including rattlesnakes.

***FLINT HILL ROAD (FLINT HOMESTEAD TO VINEYARD)***

On this steep 1.3 mile road, there is a mile of breathtaking views. The Catskill Mountain Range is visible, as well as Stissing Mountain, Silver Mountain, Cascade Mountain, and the beautiful hills surrounding Smithfield Valley. The scenery is intensified at sunset and during the autumn when the foliage is brilliantly colored. There are many species of wildlife on Flint Hill. Deer often feast at a huckleberry patch near the reforested section of the hill. This area is also a home to quail and wild turkeys. The road was named for the Flint family who originally owned four farms in Smithfield. One pre-Civil War home originally owned by the Flint family is located on this road. The old name for the road was "The Bowery," meaning 'farm' in Dutch. A row of sugar maples, near the 1814 Flint homestead, was planted by the grandfather of Catherine Flint Leigh, a town historian. About half way up the road is the site of a hand dug ice pond. The ice had been used in the past to refrigerate milk before it was brought to market. At the top of Flint Hill Road, the vineyards of Cascade Winery are visible.

***SMITHFIELD VALLEY ROAD—ROUTE 83 (132 SMITHFIELD VALLEY ROAD TO SMITHFIELD CHURCH)***

Smithfield Valley Road extends 2.6 miles with expansive views of the valley, including large wetlands and active horse and dairy farms. Many deer and wild turkeys inhabit the area. A stream with waterfalls runs alongside, once the site of a grist mill. Several large farms with gracious old homes are located on Smithfield Valley Road. The Smithfield Presbyterian Church, built in 1847, is the third church erected on this site. The manse behind the Church was built for the sexton, in front of which is an Indian grinding stone. A pre-Civil War schoolhouse is still standing with two large maple trees in front of it. The boy's outhouse in back is now attached to the building by an addition.

Smithfield was originally called "The City." There is a graveyard near the Church and an old oak tree under which an outdoor sermon was preached in 1770 by the Rev. George Whitefield, as the church was not large enough to accommodate the crowd.

#### *COUNTY ROUTE 5 (ROUTE 83 TO TOWN LINE)*

Extending off Smithfield Valley Road, County Route 5 generally continues in a northerly direction, winding through a valley of large farms next to a small brook. Several old houses are present, including the Parshall House and the Albert and Mary Lasker Estate. Although not a road of spectacular distant views, this short stretch is a continuation of the Smithfield Valley and its agricultural atmosphere. The large estates and quiet pace of this road make it a significant scenic resource.

At one time, a road called "Three Cabin Lane" connected County Route 5 and Morse Hill Road.

#### *LEEDSVILLE ROAD (AMENIA UNION TO ROUTE 343-- COUNTY ROUTE 2)*

Distant hills, including Rattlesnake Mountain, are visible from this two lane road curving through canopies of trees, scattered houses, and occasional cornfields. The road is on the Webatuck Creek floodplain in the northern part of the Oblong Valley. Views on each side differ with hills, fields, and woods alternating.

Among the houses along this road are several that were built in the early nineteenth century. One of the oldest houses in Amenia (the Delemater house, est. 1761) is located on the grounds of Troutbeck (former Spingarn Estate), where the famous Amenia conference of the NAACP took place. St. Thomas Episcopal Church, home of a notable organ, is of historic importance. Lewis Mumford's house, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Preservation, is located on the west side of Leedsville Road. Significant historical sites, on which noteworthy buildings once stood, are the Grist Mill and the Buckley Forge. In addition, there is a cemetery which is not visible from the road.

#### *SOUTH AMENIA/AMENIA UNION ROAD (FROM STEELWORKS CIRCLE TO AMENIA UNION—COUNTY ROUTES 3 AND 2))*

This road is marked by open views of actively farmed fields, stone walls, and hills, such as Rattlesnake Mountain. Dotted along this route are horse, sheep, and dairy farms, old houses, and picturesque farm buildings.

A historic mileage marker is present at Clark Hill Road, as well as archaeological sites and a cemetery. The British used this road on their retreat to Fishkill. The Hamlet of Amenia Union has a Buckley plow as a commemoration of the local iron ore industry.

South Amenia Road is characteristic of a typical country road, cutting through wetlands and forests. Contributing to its beauty are numerous wild flowers, brilliant fall foliage, stone walls, and gentle sloping turns. Wildlife sightings in the area have included deer, bobcats, raccoons, foxes, wild turkeys, and other various bird species ranging from great blue herons to bluebirds.

#### *SHARON STATION ROAD (FROM NY 22 TO TOWN LINE)*

The road was named for a once active railroad station. This road runs from NY 22, past an old flooded ore pit, then through a small settlement around the railroad station. Just past the settlement, in the Town of North East, is a large and active dairy farm. It crosses the railroad at the Town line. As it continues into the Town of North East, it winds

through pastures where sheep, cows, and horses graze. It also navigates through fields with outstanding distant views before finally crossing the New York/Connecticut State line into Sharon Valley.

Interesting points along this road are the iron ore pit (now a pond), the old railroad station, and an old hotel called the "Old Roxy." The latter two are both now being used as residences.

***BOG HOLLOW ROAD (COUNTY ROUTE 3 FROM A QUARTER MILE EAST ON SINPATCH ROAD TO STATE LINE)***

Scatacook Indians lived in this area.

***OLD ROUTE 22 (COUNTY ROUTE 81 FROM CULVER FARM TO 464 OLD ROUTE 22)***

Beautiful views of the west side of the Harlem Valley reveal some remaining deposits from the last ice age, as well as wetlands and farmlands. The beauty of this road is marred by gravel pits and heavy traffic.

Along this road are the Monroe house and the Birdman house. One of the houses is dated 1855.

***DEPOT HILL ROAD (FROM WATER TOWER TO OLD ROUTE 22)***

Traveling south and looking eastward, a patchwork of textured fields sloping gently uphill toward forest-covered summits fills the landscape. To the west is a broad view of mountain tops over the horizon, including De La Vergne Hill. A large old farm sits at the half way turn of the road, which then crests to the well-manicured Keane Stud Horse Farm. At the western end of the road is an immense view of the valley and the Silo Ridge Country Club, with Wassaic to the south.

***SEPARATE ROAD (FROM THE CHURCH TO BANGALL ROAD)***

Separate Road was named for the parishioners who separated themselves from the Smithfield Church. This two-mile road contains an old cemetery, (the Kinney burying ground), a view of the Smithfield Church, a dairy farm, and ruins of the Separatist Church. This road, which winds along the edge of a large wetland, offers many opportunities to observe wildlife. Much of the road is heavily forested, with leaves overhanging the road.

The naming of the road indicates its historical perspective. In addition to the Kinney burying ground, another graveyard is situated on the Belaire Farm. An old road that once cut across the swamp is no longer used.

***POPLAR HILL ROAD (FROM THE TOWN LINE TO SINPATCH ROAD)***

Poplar Hill Road (Dutchess County Route 4) starts at the north end of Sinpatch Road and runs to the Town boundary at the intersection with Benson Hill Road. (This is not to be confused with Benson Road which is a side road between Wassaic and South Amenia). The scenic part of Poplar Hill Road is about two miles long. East Mountain parallels the road, rising approximately 600 feet above it. In the valley to the west of the road is Swift



Pond. The ridge on which the Taconic DDSO is located forms a backdrop to the pond. On both sides of the road are fields that are farmed and used for growing Christmas trees. There are good distant views from the top of Poplar Hill north to Rattlesnake Mountain, South Amenia, and Peaked Mountain. The whole aspect is one of contrasting ridges and valleys.

***CASCADE ROAD (FOLAN ROAD TO THE WINERY)***

This is a wooded country road which follows the contours of the land. Traveling north, the road ascends uphill until its terminus, with mountainous terrain on the left and deep ravines on the right. Masses of ferns grow alongside sections of the road. Most of the road is densely wooded with some clearing for a few driveways leading to houses set back from the road. During the winter, parts of the road offer views into the valley near Perry Corners Road.

***PERRY CORNERS ROAD (FROM NORTH EAST TOWN LINE TO HALF MILE SOUTH)***

Although only a short stretch of the scenic portion of this road is in the Town of Amenia, open views of the valley and hills around Kildonan School provide scenic vistas. Deer and wild geese are often found here. This road could continue as a scenic road into the Town of North East.

***NY 22 (NORTH EAST TOWN LINE TO PERRY CORNERS ROAD)***

Traveling south on NY 22, beginning at the North East Town line, provides views of distant mountains. Still an agricultural area, there are several dairy farms along this short stretch and beautiful views to the east. Often times, early morning mist lies in the valley, accentuating its beauty.

***BUTTS HOLLOW ROAD***

The scenic section of this road in the Town of Amenia is quite short (less than one mile) and is not particularly scenic when traveling westward. The view of the valley traveling east is quite spectacular for a very short distance, but is marred by electric wires crossing the view and two obtrusive elements: the turquoise water tower of the Taconic DDSO and the junkyard behind Whitey's Garage. The 1991 Master Plan recommended that this road not be considered as scenic.

***MYGATT ROAD (OLD NORTH ROAD) (FROM NY 22 TO 47 MYGATT ROAD (OLD BENHAM LAND))***

This quiet back road travels through the original heart of the Town of Amenia, once called "Amenia Center". Until the Dutchess Turnpike was built in 1805, this small settlement was the center of town. It boasted several churches, including the Old Red Meeting House (1758), a cemetery, and several trade establishments. Today, old houses remain along the road, as well as the stone-walled cemetery and an old schoolhouse. The road winds past homes through open fields and wooded areas. Sheep are raised at one farm, and wild birds, including heron, are often visible at the "Benham Pond".

***ROUTE 22 (FROM RTE 81 TO MAY LANE)***

This stretch of Route 22 is a scenic corridor that contains three significant view points.

***ROUTE 22 (FROM LAKE AMENIA ROAD TO HALF MILE NORTH OF DEEP HOLLOW ROAD)***

This stretch of Route 22 has a scenic trail corridor adjacent to it.

***AMENIA-WASSAIC ROAD (COUNTY ROUTE 81--HALF MILE SOUTH OF DEPOT HILL RD)***

Amenia-Wassaic Road has a view point approximately one half mile south of Depot Hill Road, however the road in its entirety is not considered scenic.

***ROUTE 343 (FROM SHARON STATION ROAD TO TOWN LINE)***

This stretch of Route 343 is a scenic corridor that contains one significant view point.

***KENNEL ROAD***

Kennel Road has a view point approximately one half mile east of the Amenias Town Line, however the road in its entirety is not considered scenic.

## **Open Space**

To residents and visitors alike, Amenias presents itself as largely undeveloped. This section discusses the preservation of one of Amenias most important visual resources: its open space. Open space can serve many different functions including recreation, preservation of ecological systems, agricultural production, flood control, and protection of historic character, water supply, water quality, and scenic character.

Older master plans were more concerned with the provision of recreation areas and parks than with the preservation of open space for other purposes, especially the conservation of environmentally significant areas and resources. In the Town of Amenias, open space includes farms, forested areas, wetlands, parks, and trails. When considering open space, it is important to be aware of the many different functions that open space serves, which has consequences for how it is to be owned, managed, and regulated.

Open space is held in a variety of ownerships. Public agencies, such as town, county, and state governments, have title to parkland. Quasi-public agencies, such as institutions and churches, often own open space, although such open space is not necessarily protected as such. However, the greatest amount of open space is owned by private individuals who hold title to farms and forests throughout the Town. They are the stewards of the Amenias open space resources.

Amenias currently has a natural resource inventory prepared by its Conservation Advisory Council. Chapter III makes specific recommendations concerning next steps in open space planning and conservation. Rural communities, such as Amenias, often seek to protect open resources because they define the character of the town. Amenias has been a farming community throughout its history and the interplay between the fields, forests, hills, and valleys throughout the Town create spectacular images for visitors and residents alike.

Preservation of open space is difficult to separate from the preservation of farmland and farming. Hence, a variety of techniques for protecting agricultural uses, or for preserving agricultural lands, are also discussed as methods for open space preservation. Protection of scenic resources is another reason for preserving open space. Scenic vistas and roads contribute to a community's character and give aesthetic enjoyment to visitors.

#### ***WHAT ROLE CAN GOVERNMENT PLAY?***

##### ***Town Role***

The role of a town in open space preservation is limited by fiscal constraints. However, a town can utilize its zoning and subdivision regulations to require the protection of open space as part of the development approval process. A town can also encourage private efforts to protect and preserve much of the town's open space resources. Amenia has consistently supported the use of private land conservation tools such as conservation easements.

Zoning regulations can be used to protect the most important and sensitive environmental features from inappropriate development. For example, they can be utilized to designate and protect priority conservation areas for biodiversity and to protect steep slopes, wetland, and floodplain areas from adverse effects of development. Along with subdivision regulations, zoning can be used to require buffer zones along streams and to direct development away from ridgelines.

Other supplementary techniques can better help preserve open areas. For example Conservation Subdivisions, which are discussed in the “Housing Development Alternatives” section, allow homes to be placed on smaller lots while protecting significant open space areas.

##### ***County and State Role***

As discussed in the Introduction of the Plan Update, in the year 2000, the Amenia Town Board endorsed the New York State Hudson River Valley Greenway Principles and became one of the first communities in Dutchess County to embrace these principles of smart growth, including the preservation of open space. As a member of the Greenway Compact Program, the Town of Amenia is eligible to receive state grants to preserve open space.

Dutchess County has developed conservation programs of its own. Greenway Connections supplements the Hudson River Valley Greenway by encouraging cooperation among communities within Dutchess County to develop in a regional context and protect the area's scenic resources. The County also implements the Open Space and Farmland Protection Matching Grant Program, adopted in 1999, which allows local municipalities to apply for grants to be used for the protection of agricultural lands and resources.

##### ***Private Land owners***

Private land owners can contribute to the preservation of open space by voluntarily donating conservation easements on their property to nonprofit land trusts such as the Nature Conservancy or the Dutchess Land Conservancy. These easements contain

perpetual restrictions on development and may permit limited amounts of development in carefully selected locations.

#### ***AMENIA'S OPEN SPACE RESOURCES***

Major open space resources in the Town of Amenia include Beekman Park and the Wassaic Multiple Use Area. As discussed in Chapter II of the Plan Update, since 1991 the Harlem Valley Rail Trail from Wassaic station to the North East town line has been developed, and is a significant addition to the open space resources of the Town. Only a small portion of open space is provided permanent protection through public ownership.

The 1991 Master Plan identified several specific resources worthy of protection which should continue to be protected. The Natural Resources report prepared by Dutchess County had identified Turkey Hollow and Swift Pond as significant natural areas. The same document also noted the importance of Bog Hollow and Rattlesnake Mountain as natural resources, and identified the view on US 44 from De La Vergne Hill as a scenic view of countywide importance.

The tract along Turkey Hollow Road is designated forest land, and much of Amenia's active farmlands are within an agricultural district. However, these classifications do not provide permanent protection to these lands.

A comprehensive biodiversity inventory has been prepared by Hudsonia, Inc., a non-profit research organization. This map and description of important habitats will be an important tool in protecting the biological resources of the Town.

#### ***OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION***

Open space within a community may be preserved through several different approaches:

- Preservation of environmentally constrained and environmentally significant areas such as steep slopes, wetlands, floodplains, and priority biodiversity conservation areas.
- Preservation of agricultural uses or, failing that, of agricultural lands, including prime and important agricultural soils.
- Development of a hamlet-based settlement pattern with sufficient infrastructure to support anticipated development.
- Preservation Overlay Districts (Agriculture, Aquifer, Environmental, and Historic) which are mapped over existing zones and which trigger special precautions and permits to protect agriculture, aquifers, environmental and historic resources.
- Transfer of Development Rights.
- Purchase of Development Rights.

## **Historic Resources Listed on the National Register of Historic Places**

The following five properties are listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.<sup>5</sup> (A sixth property, the Hendrik Winegar House, was demolished in the 1990s. This house was occupied well into the 20th century and was one of the last remaining early 18th century German style homes in Amenia, leading to its designation as a historical landmark). This designation affords an honorary recognition and some protection when state or federal agencies consider an action that might affect the resource. It also triggers a heightened level of review under the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR) and may make available tax incentives or other funding for historic preservation or restoration. However, only local regulation can protect the integrity of these resources comprehensively.

### ***BETH DAVID SYNAGOGUE***

In the early 20th century, people of Jewish faith who had emigrated from Eastern Europe to the Lower East Side in New York City began moving upstate to pursue country life and agricultural practices. The proximity of the Harlem Valley railroad made Amenia a desirable location to settle. In 1929, the Beth David Synagogue, located on East Main Street, was constructed to serve the 12 to 15 Russian Jewish families who had settled in the area. Although the congregation fluctuated over the years, dwindling to only 12 members in the 1970s, it remains a significant representation of Eastern European Jewish architecture and a place of worship.

### ***INDIAN ROCK SCHOOLHOUSE***

Constructed around 1850 along Mygatt Road, the Indian Rock Schoolhouse educated children in Amenia until about 1927. Having remained intact to the present, unlike the other 11 one-room schoolhouses in the area, it is architecturally significant as it exhibits the Gothic Revival style implemented in many 19th century schoolhouses. It is also a representation of the educational movement that took place across New York State during the mid 1800s, particularly in a rural farming community.

### ***LEWIS MUMFORD HOUSE***

In the small hamlet of Leedsville sits the home of renowned writer and humanist, the late Lewis Mumford. Mumford is best known for his books and essays on urban design, architecture, and culture. He was presented with numerous awards including the National Book Award (1961), the National Medal for Literature (1972), and the Smithsonian Institution's Hodgkins Gold Medal. Mumford received other honors such as the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1964), and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 1975. After visiting friends in Amenia and being drawn to the country life, Lewis Mumford and his wife Sofia purchased a summer home in the area in 1929. By 1936, the couple moved into the home permanently and lived there until their deaths in the 1990s. Although several renovations were made over the years and some modern homes have been constructed nearby, this property retains its historical integrity and architectural significance as a mid 19th century house.

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<sup>5</sup> New York State Department of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. Document Imaging for National Register. [Online Documents.] Available at [http://www.oprhp.state.ny.us/hpimaging/hp\\_results.asp](http://www.oprhp.state.ny.us/hpimaging/hp_results.asp). Accessed November 14, 2006.

### ***ST. THOMAS' EPISCOPAL CHURCH***

St. Thomas' Episcopal Church, located in Amenia Union on Leedsville Road, is a sophisticated, stylistically advanced church constructed between 1849 and 1851. It was designed by renowned architect Richard Upjohn and remains a prime example of Gothic Revival ecclesiastical architecture in Dutchess County. Its presence in this small, rural community can be attributed to the influence of Reverend Homer Wheaton, a prominent minister of the Episcopal Church in Columbia and Dutchess Counties. His connection with the New York Diocese introduced him to Richard Upjohn. St. Thomas' Episcopal Church has been noted by scholars to be one of the best American representations of the rural English Gothic church.

### ***MAXON MILLS GRAIN ELEVATOR***

The Maxon Mills Grain Elevator, located in the center of Wassaic Hamlet, was added to the New York State Register of Historic Places in 2006. It is one of the last remaining studded wood crib elevators in the United States. The grain elevator, which is at the crossroads of the historic agricultural industrial area, was an integral part of the railroad corridor. However, the loss of railroad freight service has made the milling of grain in this area no longer feasible. After sitting empty for approximately five years, the Maxon Mills Grain Elevator is currently undergoing restoration.

### **Locally Significant Historic Places**

There are numerous historical sites and districts in Amenia that have local significance and deserve consideration for protection. These places, combined with the area's scenic beauty, add to the Town's charm and tourist appeal. In 2001, the Town declared its churches and cemeteries "Sacred Sites Worthy of Recognition," the first step in having them nationally recognized. The phrase "worthy of recognition" reflects the fact that the community believes the particular historic site is important enough to the community that it be recognized by outsiders and that its preservation be considered in future planning and development. "Worthy of Recognition" is a local designation and carries with it no restrictions such as paint colors, uses, expansion or renovations aside from those already prevailing in town zoning. It also carries no funding for restoration or maintenance of the building or site. Although congregations of Temple Beth David and St. Thomas' Episcopal Church completed the processes necessary for a National Register designation, others are still eligible.

Aside from sacred sites, each hamlet of Amenia contains a surprising number of houses, commercial buildings and barns of historic significance which, along with the scenic beauty of the Town, are of great value to the growing heritage tourism market in the Town and in Dutchess County.

The Dutchess County Department of Planning 1986 Survey of Historical Resources identified 145 sites in the Town of Amenia, 53 of which were in the Amenia Hamlet and 20 in Wassaic Hamlet. The purpose of the survey was to identify "districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects" that are of importance to the Town and it "aid in the longer term task of planning for the protection of these resources".

In 2001 when the Amenia Historical Society was researching and preparing the material on Sacred Sites, the intention was that in 2003 the focus would be on Amenia's historic public buildings which help define the character of the hamlet: the bank building at Fountain Square, the old E. Colin Smith store in Amenia Union, and Indian Rock School in Amenia Centre are just a few examples. The intention was to follow that with recognition of historic homes.

The Amenia Historical Society has compiled a list of specific sites with historical importance.<sup>6</sup>

- First Presbyterian Church and Manse
- Amenia Library
- Willson/Eaton remaining buildings (now Ducillo)
- Benham House
- Mygatt Pond
- Palmer Houses
- Wassaic House (in the center of Maxon Mills)
- Wassaic Post Office
- Native American sites
- Robert Blinn House – Wassaic
- John Delamater House
- Troutbeck
- Old Amenia Fairgrounds property
- Iron ore pits
- Amenia Burying Ground and Amenia Island Cemetery
- Dr. Jerome House
- Sheffield Mills Factory
- Two stone charcoal furnaces in Wassaic
- The Borden Plant (now Pawling Rubber)
- The Steelworks site in Wassaic
- Former Reed/Smith/Ketcham/Hoadley (now Jones) Houses in Wassaic
- Former Chaffee Cabin (made of chestnut) in South Amenia
- Site of Captain James Reed Mill in South Amenia
- The South Amenia Presbyterian Church
- Deacon Barlow House in South Amenia (pre-Revolutionary War)
- Swift Pond
- Sinpatch (World Peace site) and Benton House
- Wassaic State School
- The Railroad and Rail Trail
- Willowbrook School site
- Old Post Office building in South Amenia
- Shundi's (former Methodist Church, Grange Hall) in Amenia Union
- Hitchcock House, Amenia Union
- Barnum Cigar Factory and Stationary Business (being renovated)
- Episcopal Church in Amenia Union

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<sup>6</sup> Linden, Ann. Historic Resources – Town of Amenia. Amenia Historical Society. Amenia, New York. October 14, 2005.

- Rudy Eschbach's House (formerly Captain Delamater's)
- Delamater/Reed House
- South Amenia Cemetery
- First settler cemetery in Wassaic
- Amenia Union Cemetery
- Delamater Cemetery
- Cemeteries on NY 22 (Knickerbocker and Perry among others)
- Historical markers (R. Sackett's, NY 343)
- Morehouse House (Kroeger's)
- Rowe House
- Swift House (was Jobe, now Lopane)
- Swift House (Captain Boyd's)
- Evarson House (part of Smithfield Farms)
- Smithfield Presbyterian Church and Cemetery
- Separate Cemetery
- Old houses in Smithfield
- Adams Mills (Bel Air) and Kinney burying ground (one stone left)
- Old school in Smithfield
- Old Road markers (one on Amenia Union Road, one on Tower Hill Road)
- Butts Hollow Road (at top near Town line)
- Old farm house at the foot of Butts Hollow Road
- Old Baptist Church in Amenia (now KJ's)
- Gridley Chapel
- Old Wassaic School House

A historic building inventory by Betsy Strauss lists several additional locally significant sites. On Perry Corners Road, she included the Maplebrook School Farmhouse (originally Ingraham), the property on which is located the Marge Finger House. To the north of this site sits Mr. Lomb's place, formerly owned by author/artist DeCost Smith, and previously by H. Peters. Along the same road is the Mead Farm, on which Nathan Mead, who moved to town in 1740, built a house in 1800. The red "tenant house" just to the south is possibly even older. Perry's Corner is a small collection of homes and barns built between 1740 and 1770. Once part of Amenia, they are now within North East's borders. On Rt. 22 just north of the Maplebrook School, Ms. Strauss mentions the Maplebrook Headmaster's home.<sup>7</sup>

Amenia is also part of the Upper Housatonic National Heritage area. This includes the hamlet of Wassaic which used to be an industrial center. Noah Gridley, an iron industrialist, owned a large portion of Wassaic, including several nearby ore pits and mines. Gridley's home, chapel, office, and remains of his hotel still exist, as well as ruins of old charcoal kilns. Another industry in Wassaic was the Borden Condensed Milk Factory<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Strauss, Betsy. Historic Buildings Inventory. Personal Inventory. September 30, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Amenia Historical Society. The Walk in Wassaic on October 7. October 31, 2006.



Additionally, the hamlet of Leedsville is historically significant in its own right. It was named after Leeds, England, because of the presence of the woolen industry in both locations. Myron Benton, a 19th century poet, and Joel Benton, founder of the Harlem Valley Times, resided here. The Benton family also owned Troutbeck before Joel Spingarn assumed ownership. Spingarn, noted friend of Lewis Mumford, played an integral part in establishing the NAACP. Amenia's character is rich in history, the preservation of which is crucial to many local residents.

Historically significant structures can be protected through local ordinances. Historic Preservation Overlay Districts, which require certain considerations to be made when construction, alteration, or demolition might affect historic landmarks, can be implemented through zoning to protect historic resources. Historic Preservation Overlay Districts could protect buildings included on the National or State Register of Historic Places, as well as structures deemed locally significant. Regulating identified resources of local historical significance would be necessary to ensure their protection.

## AGRICULTURE IN TRANSITION

Amenia's agriculture is its longest surviving industry. However, farming has been in decline in recent decades. There are currently 37 farms operating on 10,704 acres of farmland in the Town of Amenia. This is a twelve percent reduction in the acreage of farm land since 1989. A summary of the percentages of land devoted to agriculture is presented in Table IV-12.

**Table IV-12**  
**Percentage of Land Devoted to Agriculture**

<b>Area</b>	<b>1989*</b>	<b>2006**</b>
Total land area of Amenia	26,795 acres	26,795 acres
Total land in agriculture districts	17,455 acres (65%)	NA
Total crop land, agriculture soils	4,150 acres (15%)	NA
Total farm land (gross acres)	12,188 acres (45%)	10,704.26 acres (40%)
Of this total farm land in Amenia:		
Devoted to crops	49%	26%
Devoted to dairy farming	36%	18%
Agricultural endeavors	15%	15%
Vacant agricultural land (land that is part of a productive farm, but is not utilized)	NA	41%
<b>Sources:</b> *1991 Master Plan **Dutchess County Real Property Tax Service Agency, Parcel Data, Town of Amenia		

Dairy farming was the primary agricultural activity in Amenia for over 100 years. However, there are currently five operating dairy farms in Amenia, as opposed to the nine reported in the 1991 Master Plan. The decline of the dairy industry is consistent with the predictions of the 1991 Master Plan. Table IV-13 shows the decline in dairy farming over time.

**Table IV-13  
Dairy Farms**

	<b>1959*</b>	<b>1964*</b>	<b>1989*</b>	<b>2002**</b>
Dairy Farms in Amenia	55	42	9	5
<b>Sources:</b> *1991 Master Plan ** CPIC				

As dairy farming has decreased, other forms of agriculture have developed in Amenia, namely, horse, beef and sheep farms as well as vineyards, nurseries, and other cash crops. At the present time, 4,446.3 acres or 16.6 percent of the total land area in the Town is actively utilized by these forms of agriculture (see Table IV-14). A more recent addition to Amenia's agricultural economy is horse farms. Keane Stud is one of the largest breeding farms in New York State and employs between 20 to 25 people. Other farms in Amenia are devoted to raising crops or to harvesting hay. Together, all farms in Amenia occupy 10,704.26 acres according to the Dutchess County Tax records.

One of the trends in agriculture in Dutchess County is toward specialization into niche products that take advantage of local or New York City markets. The Cascade Mountain Winery is one such operation that sells most of its production at the winery. Venison, goat, sheep, organic beef, organic vegetables and pick-your-own are some of the other types of farming that have developed in recent years. Christmas tree farms and nursery growers are local viable businesses that take advantage of the land resources.

**Table IV-14  
Agricultural Land Use, 2006**

<b>Type of Agriculture</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Percent of total Agricultural Land</b>
Agricultural Vacant Land (Productive)	4,342.05	40.6%
Livestock and Products	443.90	4.1%
Dairy Products: milk, butter and cheese	1,915.91	17.9%
Cattle, Calves, Hogs	388.50	3.6%
Horse Farms	631.44	5.9%
Field Crops	2,834.47	26.5%
Vineyards	147.99	1.4%
Total Agricultural Land	10,704.26	100.0%
<b>Sources:</b> Dutchess County Real Property Tax Service Agency, Parcel Data, Town of Amenia		

### **Agriculture's Opportunities and Constraints**

Agricultural uses in Amenia face a number of constraints which are reflected in the 2002 Census of Agriculture for Dutchess County. The census showed that although the number of farms has increased since 1982 (from 635 to 660); the amount of farmland has decreased (from 137,963 acres to 112,400 acres). In addition, the total value of agricultural products in the County has continued to decline, from \$37,500,000 in 1982 to \$31,712,000 in 2002.

A number of factors contribute to the decline. First, the profit margins continue to shrink as costs rise and farmers face increasing competition. This is the particular case with dairy farms which face competition from out-of-state farms and dairies. As the agricultural sector has shrunk, the support services for farms have also contracted.

Perhaps the biggest pressure on agricultural land has been the rapid escalation in land values. The escalation is the result of several factors. Amenia is experiencing some subdivision development as it becomes a home for those who work in Poughkeepsie, Danbury or the northern portion of the New York City metropolitan area. In addition, Amenia's popularity as an area of second homes has kept upward pressure on land prices. Second home buyers are often interested in purchasing large tracts of land but not necessarily in keeping the land in agricultural production.

As discussed in the 1991 Master Plan, farmers are affected by increased land values in several ways: the agricultural value assessment on their farmland is not protected against tax increases, and the high land value limits future purchases of agricultural land—farmers must rely on land that is already owned by the family or try to lease/rent land for farming purposes. The problem is particularly acute when there are not any heirs interested in taking over the farm operation when their adult relatives retire.

All these factors have contributed to reduce traditional farming operations in Amenia. Some new agricultural uses have appeared, such as horse farms and vineyards to replace some of the farms lost. Agriculture is in transition, and its future is uncertain. However, the strong desire of residents of Amenia to keep agriculture thriving can help the Town craft policies that will improve the future prospects of agriculture.

In the 1991 Master Plan, 81 percent of the respondents to the townwide opinion survey agreed or strongly agreed that agricultural lands should be preserved. Maintaining the rural character of the Town was also seen as an aim of any economic growth and development program by over 70 percent of the respondents. It is reasonable to assume that these opinions are still valid. Residents of the Town clearly feel that agricultural lands should be preserved. Agriculture is still a very important part of Amenia's economy, employing almost 7 percent of its workforce. Perhaps just as importantly, agriculture and its interplay with the natural landscape create the image that is Amenia to its residents and visitors alike. If Amenia is to remain a Town of open fields and natural areas, agricultural preservation is critical. The preservation of agriculture requires, in particular, emphasis upon maintaining "prime farmland soil" in large, contiguous parcels.

Ultimately, the decision to farm or not to farm is an economic one. Financial incentives to farmers may not be within the Town's financial capabilities. However, there are various other techniques that can be used to retain and preserve the Town's agricultural land, farm operations, and rural character. Some preservation techniques include conservation subdivisions, transfer of development rights, limited development subdivisions, and flag (rear) lots. These are included in the proposed zoning law that accompanies this Comprehensive Plan update.

In addition, voluntary techniques, especially the use of donated conservation easements, are a useful tool for preserving farmland. See Chapter II for a fuller discussion of how the increasing use of this tool has been preserving farmland in Amenia and will likely continue to do with improved tax incentives.

## **NATURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES**

The factor that most shapes Amenia's character is the natural environment and the scenic beauty and biodiversity that it supports. The pattern of hills and valleys, of forested and open areas, of lakes and streams all form a landscape familiar and precious to Amenia residents. In January 2007, Hudsonia completed a report on "Significant Habitats in Amenia." Maps of the entire town were produced and provide excellent information for the guidance of land use decisions. The report is available as a reference document in Town Hall. This section reviews the components of the Town's natural setting and highlights ways in which it can be protected. Appendix I contains several maps showing key features of Amenia's natural resource inventory. These maps were instrumental in understanding existing conditions and formulating policy actions for protection of natural resources and the Town's environment.

### **Geology and Topography<sup>9</sup>**

The topography of the Town of Amenia has been formed by hundreds of millions of years of geological processes of which the most recent event was the end of the last ice age approximately 18,000 years ago. The Town is underlain by four types of bedrock: the Wappinger Group, Hudson Highland gneiss, Poughquag quartzite, and Pelitic rock.

The Hudson Highlands and Poughquag formations are found mainly in the southeastern section of Amenia, on East Mountain. Water yields from wells in these formations tend to be low.

Pelitic rocks are the most extensive bedrock formation in Dutchess County. They compose many of the upland areas of the Town including the hills west of Amenia and Wassaic and Rattlesnake Mountain.

The most important formation is the Wappinger Group. In it are found the most productive agricultural soils in Town. These limestone soils run in three general belts along either side of the Webatuck Creek, north of Wassaic Hamlet to the vicinity of Sharon Station and in the Wassaic Creek Valley south of Smithfield. Internal erosion of the limestone leads to the formation of cavities and channels for groundwater. Well yields are generally good. An important consideration, however, is that because of these channels, sewage and other contaminants move easily through the bedrock having deleterious effects. Therefore it would be good practice to monitor the development of septic systems in these areas. Included in this area is the hamlet of Amenia and portions of the hamlet of Wassaic.

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<sup>9</sup> Much of the information in these sections is derived from the 1991 Master Plan and the 2005 Amenia CAC Natural Resources Inventory.

Sand and gravel deposits are found along the major streambelts in Amenia. These areas, which are the most prolific sources of groundwater in the Town, are also mined as a natural resource. They are discussed further in the section below on soils.

The topography of Amenia gives the Town its character. Gently rolling hills are interspersed with steep ravines and broad stream valleys, creating a varied and almost unique landscape.

The elevations in the community range from slightly less than 400 feet to slightly more than 1,400 feet above sea level. The lowest elevations are found along the Ten Mile River at the Dover Town line, the highest just southwest of the intersection of Flint Hill Road and Cascade Mountain Road.

East Mountain, Rattlesnake Mountain, and the ridge running to the west of Route 22 shape the Town's topography as do the Webatuck Creek Valley and the Wassaic Creek Ravine (Turkey Hollow).

One of the key development constraints is slope. In general, slopes above 25 to 30 percent are considered unbuildable. Slopes from 15 to 30 percent require special siting consideration. Slopes from 0 to 15 percent are considered to be free of constraints, with slopes from 0 to 5 percent considered level land and slopes from 5 to 15 percent are considered moderate. Table IV-15 describes the percentage of land in Amenia constrained by slopes.

**Table IV-15  
Slopes**

Percent Slopes	Acreage	Percent of Total
0-15	10,854	41%
15 and over	15,941	59%
Total	26,795	100%

**Source:** 1969 Master Plan

The 1991 Master Plan recommends restricting development in the Town to slopes below 25 percent, which is generally a good practice. Under carefully controlled circumstances, disturbances on slopes greater than 30 percent can be acceptable. A town can implement these restrictions through zoning and subdivision regulations. Best practice regulations include limiting development on the steepest slopes, and prohibiting commercial development in such areas because of the large areas required for parking. Residential development can be clustered on the least constrained sites.

### **Drainage Basins**

Almost all of Amenia is drained by the streams and rivers that empty into the Housatonic River in Connecticut. The Housatonic flows into Long Island Sound. A very small portion is drained by the Jansen Kill which eventually flows into the Hudson River. Table IV-16 shows the area drained by the five major streams in the Town: Wassaic, Webatuck, Ten Mile, Bog Hollow and Jansen Kill.

**Table IV-16  
Drainage Basins**

<b>Basin</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Ten Mile River	3,506	13.0%
Wassaic Creek	12,514	47.0%
Webatuck Creek	9,334	35.0%
Bog Hollow	1,332	4.8%
Jansen Kill	109	0.2%
Total	26,795	100%
<b>Sources:</b> 1969 Master Plan		

## **Surface Water**

The streams listed above form the major surface water resources of Amenia. The streams and the lands which border them (the streambelt) are a significant wildlife habitat and community open space resource. Their protection and incorporation into an open space network is an objective of the Comprehensive Plan.

The other major surface water features are the various lakes and ponds found throughout the Town. These range from smaller impounded livestock ponds on individual farms to much larger natural ponds. The most significant ponds in Amenia include Round Pond (49 acres) which is split by the Amenia/Northeast border, Crystal and Arrowhead Lakes, Swift Pond (61 acres), Brickyard Pond (10.8 acres), and Bog Hollow Pond. All of these lakes and ponds are on private property.

Over the long term, the Town may wish to acquire a public swimming area. A possibility would be the reconstruction of Lake Amenia which is adjacent to Beekman Park. The lake drained after its dam broke and is currently a large wet area. If the lake were reconstructed (although as a slightly smaller lake), there exists the potential to develop a significant recreation area. However, this prospect depends on various geologic and environmental features, including possible flooding impacts.

The State of New York classifies surface waters according to their quality. Quality is rated as either suitable for drinking, suitable for fishing, or suitable for secondary contact recreation such as boating. Class AA and A waters are suitable for drinking. According to the 1991 Master Plan, the Ten Mile River and its tributaries, as measured in Dover Plains, were classified as A or AA. This level of water quality should be maintained. The State Department of Environmental Conservation is charged with reviewing applications for discharges into such streams. Discharges are generally allowed if it can be proven that water quality will not deteriorate.

## **Groundwater Resources**

Almost all residents of Amenia draw their drinking water from groundwater supplies. The water system in the hamlet of Amenia also draws its supply from wells. The yield and extent of groundwater is dependent on the underground soil formation from which

the well draws. For example, thick sand and gravel deposits yield more groundwater than bedrock.

Three main types of aquifers are found in Dutchess County. These include bedrock, glacial till, and sand and gravel. Bedrock aquifers have varying well yields depending on the type of rock. Collectively, these groundwater resources in the Town are part of the Harlem Valley aquifer.

The need for protection of the aquifer may be self-evident, but it is necessary to emphasize just how critical the need for protection is. The Town completed an aquifer study (the “Harlem Valley Watershed Investigation”) that identifies aquifers and recharge areas and has worked to integrate the County’s model aquifer protection ordinance into local regulations. Model groundwater protection ordinances, which utilize zoning tools such as Aquifer Overlay Districts, can be implemented by towns to protect these valuable resources.

Depletion of aquifers can occur many ways and present communities with an array of water quality issues when not recharged adequately. The number of homes that can rely on a particular aquifer resource is limited. As the number of homes increases, the water table level may drop, causing older, shallower wells to run dry. These wells must be dug deeper and deeper in a never ending process unless the balance between recharge of the aquifer from rainwater and septic system effluent and withdrawal from wells is once again achieved. Overcrowding can also result in pollution of wells from septic system leachate.

If water withdrawn from an aquifer is released as surface water into streams, it does not recharge the aquifer as water released through underground septic systems would. In residential areas, this effect often occurs when a central sewage system is installed to solve a pollution problem and residents continue to rely on individual wells for their water supply. The water table drops and wells may run dry because household water is being discharged from the sewage treatment plant into streams and very little is being returned or recharged to the aquifer.

The effect is similar if the aquifer recharge area is significantly reduced. The most water is recharged from the least developed areas. As development occurs and parking lots, streets, and housing get built, the percentage of pervious surfaces (those areas which rainfall can penetrate) declines and the rainfall is instead concentrated in a man-made storm drainage system which most often discharges into surface water supplies.

Impervious areas can also be a source of pollution to aquifers. Oil from cars, road salts, and the like, leach into the aquifer. The ground can filter many potential contaminants before they reach the groundwater supply, but not all. Soil permeability and depth of the water table are several determining variables. In many instances, the aquifer and the water supply may become contaminated because of a spill. The 2005 Amenia CAC Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) identified some of the major sources of groundwater pollution, including the following:

- Road deicing salts
- Organic solvents
- Farms and golf courses (e.g., chemical fertilizers, manure, pesticides)
- Petroleum products
- Septic wastes

In Amenia, the issue of groundwater protection is particularly important because of the nature of the aquifers underlying much of the Town. The sand and gravel aquifers have high permeability rates, meaning that water flows through them quickly. This also means that contaminants can flow quickly through the aquifer. The same is true, although to a lesser extent, of the limestone based aquifers found in the Wappinger Group which have many underground channels and caverns capable of transmitting water quickly. The issue of groundwater protection in Amenia is also complicated by the fact that much of the community's best agricultural land lies over these aquifers, leading to concerns that they could be contaminated by pesticides and fertilizers. An aquifer protection ordinance, which recognizes these factors while providing the greatest possible protections to groundwater supply, could be designed. The ordinance could implement recommended practices by concentrating on regulating point sources of pollution through the prohibition and restriction of certain uses.

### **Wetlands and Floodplains**

Closely allied with water resources are wetlands and floodplains. Wetlands are areas that are periodically inundated. They support a wide variety of water tolerant plants and also serve as habitat for many types of wildlife. Wetlands are also extremely important in flood protection. They serve to detain water during storms and slow both the velocity and amount of storm water. Wetlands are also important in recharging aquifers.

In New York State, all wetlands over 12.4 acres (5 hectares) are regulated by the Department of Environmental Conservation. There are 28 such wetlands in Amenia. Any filling or use of land within these designated wetland areas requires a permit from the DEC. Wetlands smaller than 12.4 acres are regulated by the US Army Corps of Engineers and could be regulated and mapped at the local level as well (refer to the Amenia CAC Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) of 2005 for methods of determining wetlands). Maintaining an accurate inventory of wetlands within the Town can be useful when analyzing development proposals. According to the NRI report of 2005, there are approximately 137 wetlands altogether, equaling 1,547 acres, or 5.9 percent of the total land area, within Amenia. It is good practice for a town to require developers of residential subdivisions and builders of commercial projects to identify smaller wetlands on their sites and not disturb them. Only through actual field research can the true location and status of wetlands be determined. Important wetlands exist in the Bog Hollow area, north and east of the Amenia hamlet, and in the upper reaches of Wassaic Creek south of Smithfield.

Floodplains are the areas adjacent to streams that may be inundated during flooding. The generally accepted standard for risk is the 100-year floodplain, that area which has a one percent chance of being flooded in a given year. The Federal Emergency Management Agency has mapped these floodplains in Amenia. These 100-year floodplain areas have



been designated for the Ten Mile River and Webatuck Creek. The other floodplain areas designated are for Amenia Creek which runs north from the hamlet of Wassaic to the hamlet of Amenia, generally paralleling Route 22.

Within the 100-year floodplain, development is strictly regulated. Within a 100-year floodplain, it is good practice for a town to utilize zoning tools, such as a Floodplain Overlay District, to restrict the development of new residential structures and septic systems. Passive uses, such as parking or recreation areas, or temporary uses such as farmers' markets, could be permitted.

The previous discussion is particularly appropriate for the hamlets of Amenia and Wassaic through which the 100-year floodplain passes. In Amenia, both sides of Mechanic Street and a large area of Route 343 just east of Mechanic Street are within the preliminary 100-year flood boundaries.

## **Soils**

Knowledge of soil types is extremely important in determining what types of development are appropriate. Septic systems must be properly sited, agricultural soil protected, and buildings placed on suitable land.

### ***SOIL GROUPINGS***

Soil surveys conducted by the Natural Resources Conservation Services indicate several prominent soil types throughout Amenia: Nassau-Cardigan and Nassau-Rock, Galway-Farmington, Georgia silt loam, Copake gravelly, and Stockbridge silt loam and Stockbridge-Farmington. As stated in the NRI of 2005, Stockbridge silt loam is one of the highest rated agricultural soils in Dutchess County, according to the US Department of Agriculture's scale. Georgia silt and the Copake groups are also prime farmland. These soils, located mainly in valleys, are leftover glacial deposits from the last ice age. However, many soils in this region are not ideal for structures, especially septic systems.

### ***AGRICULTURAL SOILS***

The US Soil Conservation Service has identified those soils in Dutchess County classified as prime agricultural soils. In addition, soils of statewide importance have been mapped as well.

Unfortunately, many of the same characteristics that make soils prime for agricultural uses – their good drainage characteristics, their fertility, their levelness and the like—also make them appropriate for urban uses. Thus, there is a constant competition in urbanizing counties like Dutchess between various uses of these soils. Farmers often find it more attractive to sell their land for development than to eke out a marginal income from agriculture.

In Amenia, pressures to sell farmland for residential development are slowly increasing. Long-term farmers also face competition from new uses such as horse farms and those for whom farming is not their primary source of income. While the last two trends affect the way of life the Town has known for many years, they do not develop the agricultural

soils for urban or suburban type uses. Such uses are the greatest challenge to preserving the open space character of the community.

### **SOIL LIMITATION**

A variety of factors discussed below impose limits on various development types.

- **Depth to bedrock**

In Amenia, soils in upland areas often have very shallow depth to bedrock. Septic systems and buildings are very difficult to place in such soils. In addition, these soils are often found in steeply sloped areas and are subject to erosion. In some areas of Amenia, rock outcroppings occur as well. East and Rattlesnake Mountains and the hills west of Amenia and Wassaic feature these thin soils.

- **Permeability**

Permeability refers to the rate at which water drains through soil. Soil must be permeable enough to allow for septic systems to function so that residential development can occur. Farmlands also require decent permeability. On the other hand, soils that have a high permeability can also rapidly move pollutants. Thus, while sand and gravel areas may be the best area for siting a septic system in terms of its efficiency, they also pose the greatest danger of contamination from spills and leaks of polluting materials. Amenia's most permeable soils are generally found in creek valleys.

- **Hydric Soils**

Hydric soils are more commonly known as wetland soils. Because of their low permeability, they are not suitable for septic systems, and because of their often saturated nature, they are not suitable for building. Hydric soils can be used as a guide to highlight potential wetland areas not identified by the DEC.

- **Erosion and Sedimentation**

An ongoing concern, particularly in agricultural areas is erosion and sedimentation of soils. Good agricultural practices can reduce erosion rates. Another major concern is with construction and road projects. The erosion rate from these areas is particularly high. Sedimentation of streams can damage water quality and destroy fish and wildlife habitats. As such, erosion and sedimentation control best practices are an important element of local water quality protection efforts.

### **SOIL SUITABILITY**

The 2005 Amenia CAC Natural Resources Inventory included a rating of the types of soils in Amenia according to their development limitations. Results are summarized in Table IV-17 below.

Most of the well drained soils classified as having slight limitations are found in the major creek valleys in Town. Soils with moderate limitations, deep soils over bedrock with high erodibility, are most prevalent along Route 22 from Wassaic northward into the Amenia hamlet.

**Table IV-17**  
**Soil Groups by Development Limitations**

<b>Limitation</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Percent of total land area in Amenia</b>
Slight (0-15%)	6,305	25%
Moderate (16-25%)	1,137	4%
Severe (25%)	3,486	12%
Excessive (over 25%)	15,867	59%
Total	26,795	100%
<b>Sources:</b> Ameniam CAC Natural Resources Inventory of 2005		

Soils with severe limitations on development have poor drainage and are subject to flooding. They include the major wetland and swamp areas in the Town such as Bog Hollow, the area along Wassaic Creek south of Smithfield, and the area north of Wassaic along Ameniam Creek.

Soils with excessive development limitations are found on steep slopes and include bedrock outcroppings. These include East and Rattlesnake Mountains and the hills to the west of Route 22.

### **Mineral Resources**

Sand and gravel deposits are found underlying most of the major streambelts in Ameniam. Deposits are especially thick along the Ten Mile River and Webatuck Creek and in Ameniam Creek running south along Route 22 from the Town Center. Only a few deposits are found along Wassaic Creek. These deposits are the most prolific source of groundwater in the community. However, they are a significant resource for the construction industry. Several sand and gravel operations or soil mines operate in Ameniam. They provide material for the construction industry in Dutchess County and the northern New York Metropolitan area. Sand and gravel deposits are not unique to Ameniam, and are widespread in this area of New York and Connecticut.

Currently, sand and gravel extraction is allowed by special permit in Ameniam, although some operations continue as a nonconforming use in residentially zoned areas. Other aspects of such operations are regulated by the Department of Environmental Conservation which must also issue a permit to allow mining. The key issue for Ameniam is the amount of soil mining that is allowed, the minimization of the effects thereof on other residents and scenic resources and, more importantly, how the areas that are mined should be reclaimed. The extent to which the Town can regulate soil mining is limited because DEC exercises the ultimate regulatory authority.

Chapter II of this Plan contains a detailed examination of issues relevant to mining.

### **Forest Lands**

Uninterrupted stretches of forest contribute to the overall rural character of the community. Approximately 9,000 acres of forest cloak the ridges surrounding Ameniam in an ever changing array of color and life. Most of the forested land occurs on East

Mountain, in Bog Hollow, on Rattlesnake Mountain, and in the complex ridge and valley system that runs northward from Butts Hollow Road through Tower Hill, Deep Hollow, Turkey Hollow and Cascade Road. A great deal of this forested land is associated with steep slopes and, consequently, has not been developed.

To someone not familiar with the history of Amenias, it will come as a surprising fact that more of Amenias is forested now than in the recent past. Native Americans once burned extensive tracts of forest to make game more visible, many acres of forest were turned into charcoal for the iron industry, and agricultural land has returned to forest. Early historical accounts of Amenias explain the first two forest clearings, and stone walls in the middle of dense forest give mute testimony to the last.

The tree species vary considerably with elevation, proximity to water, and age. A wide variety of hardwoods and softwoods exist. There are a few places where groves of unusually large trees survive, probably because of their remoteness. Cataloguing and marking these trees is an important step in preserving them. Communities of wild flowers, herbaceous plants, lichens, and fungi are also found in the forested areas of the Town.

Besides scenic beauty, forests provide vital watershed protection, wildlife habitats, recreation, and an important source of wood for construction, fuel, and furniture. On a broader level, forests provide a "sink" for carbon dioxide gas which has been implicated as a possible cause of global warming.

As stated in the 1991 Master Plan, logging and development pose a threat to Amenias's forests. Since most of the forested land is in private hands, conservation of these lands depends largely on the wisdom and foresight of the property owner. Unlike some of the Town's resources, forests are a renewable resource. However, if logging is not done in a careful fashion, long-term impacts to the forest could result. A forest management plan that identifies best management practices for extraction and site stabilization is a common tool used to protect local forests from logging activities, and to preserve these valuable resources for the enjoyment and benefit of present and future generations. At the least, a management plan would include an up-to-date inventory of acreage and types of trees, significant stands of trees, wildlife habitats, and sensitive watershed and ground water recharge areas. Use of the forests should be balanced between immediate and future needs. Consideration should be given to replanting after cutting occurs, protection of forest soils from erosion during and after cutting, preservation of certain important wildlife habitats, and the complete preservation of groves of trees designated as special by virtue of their type, size, and/or location.

### **Biodiversity and Wildlife**

The forested and agricultural lands and abundant wildlife define the rural character of the town. The slow pace of development and the decrease of agriculture have created ideal conditions for the growth of wildlife. However, increasing development pressures may jeopardize their wellbeing. Undertaking a study of Amenias's biodiversity, including its wildlife populations and ecological systems, and assessing the possible effects of

development on their wellbeing, would assist in ensuring their protection. The biodiversity of a community is its ecological underpinning, and there is an increasing recognition that landscape fragmentation threatens biodiversity and the ecological health of the natural (and human) environment.

To understand Amenia's biodiversity, one must appreciate the different existing habitats, how they relate to one another, and how development may affect each. Habitats are developed by geological processes, biological interactions, differences in altitude and proximity to water, and, in the modern world, the action of mankind. A summary of the habitats in Amenia follows:

*Marble Knolls.* Knolls of Stockbridge limestone ("marble") emerge from the glacial deposit filled valleys. Many of these low hills were recently pasture and are now grown over in dense stands of red cedar, although deciduous trees may dominate some. In general, the soils are limey, sandy, and well drained. Certain rare plants may occur and could support a rare butterfly, the falcate orange-tip. Exposed rock outcrops could be habitats for various snakes. Owls may winter in the cedars and certain species may breed there. This habitat may be threatened by development and mining.

*Wetlands.* Nearly 6 percent of Amenia, approximately 1,500 acres, is wetland. In addition to their value for flood storage, groundwater recharge areas, and purifiers of surface and groundwater, wetlands form an important and diverse habitat for many species of plants and animals. Our understanding of how wetlands serve as habitat for numerous species is evolving as natural resource specialists continue to study wetland form and function. It has been determined that endangered species such as the sedge wren and the bog turtle may inhabit certain local wetlands. Many other species of birds, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals either inhabit or use wetlands to some degree. Preservation of wetlands for wildlife habitat is equally as important as protecting these resources for their value in water quality and quantity management. The movement of wildlife species between wetlands and between wetland and upland areas is also an important aspect of biodiversity and needs to be understood in order to adequately protect ecological systems.

*Streams with Floodplains.* The two principal streams in town are the Wassaic Creek and the Webatuck Creek which join in the southern part of Amenia to form the Ten Mile River. The Webatuck Creek traverses all of Amenia from north to south and has a wide flood plain along most of its length. In the Oblong Valley, Webatuck Creek forms the center of this very scenic valley. Bordered on the west by forests and on the east by farmland, it is a significant wildlife habitat. The Wassaic Creek flows through the Smithfield Valley via wetlands and floodplains, and eventually joins the Webatuck Creek near the Taconic DDSO to form the Ten Mile River. The Ten Mile is a significant stream with wide floodplains and terraces. These valleys are significant for wildlife in their own right and because they constitute corridors that connect other wildlife habitats.

*Upland Streams.* These are small streams that flow from the ridges into the valleys. They generally lack floodplains and may be intermittent or seasonal. These are important spawning streams for fish and important sources of water for wildlife in the forested

upland areas. Wassaic Creek is a fast running upland stream as it passes through the Deep Hollow/Turkey Hollow area.

*Ridges and Uplands.* The ridges that outline the Harlem Valley are significant wildlife habitats. Rattlesnake Mountain, East Mountain, Deep Hollow, Bog Hollow, Turkey Hollow, Tower Hill, Peaked Mountain, Clark Hill, Cascade Mountain, and Kniblow Hill form an interconnected series of ridges and deep valleys that are probably the most important wildlife habitats in Amenia.

## **Significant Natural Features**

The Dutchess County Environmental Management Council has identified significant natural areas in the County. These areas have been identified as possessing unique characteristics deserving preservation. In Amenia, two areas have been so designated:<sup>10</sup>

- Swift Pond and Cleaver Swamp in the southern portion of the Town are important wildlife habitats and vegetation areas which are privately owned. However, there is an identified hazardous waste site adjacent to the swamp on the Sarney Farm Superfund Site. The US Environmental Protection Agency has excavated contaminants and taken measures since 1990 to prevent spreading of hazardous wastes to groundwater drinking supplies. Monitoring wells have been installed to continually evaluate the migration of contaminants.<sup>11</sup>
- Turkey Hollow is a privately owned steep ravine through which the Wassaic Creek passes. The ravine is cool and moist, providing an important habitat for unique plant and animal species. Large evergreen trees (hemlocks) also grow in this area. Turkey Hollow is protected as forest land through its enrollment in the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Forest Tax Program, Section 480-a.

As a result of its topography, Amenia also offers a wide range of scenic views. Ridgelines form important viewsheds and scenic backdrops in most of Amenia. A Scenic Protection Overlay District is a zoning tool used by municipalities to protect ridgelines from development. Such a district could prohibit new structures or logging from breaking the continuity of any ridgeline. These types of restrictions will preserve an area's natural beauty and prevent the building of roads into areas that are too steep. Limiting logging will prevent erosion of thin mountain soils and flooding in the valleys below, as well as preserving the scenic value of the land.

Other important natural features in Amenia include the Oblong Valley along Webatuck Creek, Rattlesnake Mountain and East Mountain, and the Bog Hollow area. The Oblong Valley, a river valley between Leedsville and the Taconic DDSO, is bordered by Rattlesnake Mountain to the west and the Connecticut hills to the east. Defined by the Webatuck Creek, it is a unified geographic area designated mainly for agricultural use.

The Wassaic State Forest/Multiple Use Area across from the Taconic DDSO is another important natural area. State ownership and designation as a natural area protect it from

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<sup>10</sup> Dutchess County, Natural Resources, 1985

<sup>11</sup> US Environmental Protection Agency. Five-Year Report For the Sarney Farm Superfund Site. PDF Document. Available at [www.epa.gov/superfund/sites/fiveyear/f2006020001154.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/superfund/sites/fiveyear/f2006020001154.pdf). Accessed December 5, 2006.

development. Most of the other important natural features in Amenia have, however, no permanent protection.

Preservation of these natural areas can be achieved through a variety of mechanisms. These methods include the use of conservation easements on the most important features of a property, or the dedication or sale of land to a private land trust such as the Nature Conservancy or the Dutchess Land Conservancy. Other techniques include zoning, which limits or prohibits development on the most environmentally constrained sites, such as those areas in wetlands or with extremely steep slopes. On areas in which development is allowed, cluster techniques could be used so that significant areas of open space can be preserved.

## SCHOOLS

Amenia is served by two school districts. The Webutuck Central School District serves most of the community, including the hamlets of Amenia and Wassaic. The southwestern portion of the community (including land on either side of Route 22 to a point just below the hamlet of Wassaic), including the Taconic DDSO, and the area around Dover Plains is served by the Dover Union Free School District.

### Webutuck Central School District

The Webutuck Central School District operates four facilities: the Millerton Elementary School, the Amenia Elementary School, the Webutuck Elementary School, and Webutuck Junior and Senior High School located on Webutuck School Road, also known as Haight Road, just north of the Amenia Town line. Table IV-18 presents information on current enrollment at these buildings.

**Table IV-18**  
**Webutuck Central School District: Facilities and Enrollment, 2006**

School	Date built	Site Size (acres)	Grades	Enrollment
Millerton Elementary	1926	6.0	Pre-K, ACE*	20
Amenia Elementary	1929	6.5	K-2	167
Webutuck Elementary	1966	15.0	3-5	191
Webutuck Jr./Sr. High School	1957	35.0	6-12	507
Total			K-12	902**
<b>Notes:</b> * Alternate Center for Education (ACE) **Total enrollment includes ungraded students.				
<b>Sources:</b> Webutuck Central School District, November 2006				

Table IV-19 shows the historical enrollment trends, as well as the amount of the school district budget raised by local taxes.

The 1969 Master Plan foresaw the need for several additional classroom buildings due to projected population increases. Given the lower growth rate in the region and continued

decline in household sizes, the expected student enrollment did not materialize to the extent forecast. The 1991 Master Plan reports that the Webutuck School District had a total enrollment of 1,073 students in 1989-90. The enrollment has declined approximately 16 percent since 1990.

**Table IV-19**

**Webutuck Central School District: Enrollment and Budget Trends, 2000-2007**

Year	Total Budget from Local Taxes	# of Students	Per Pupil Expenditure
2000-01	\$6,996,918	944	\$7,411.99
2001-02	\$7,410,696	927	\$7,994.28
2002-03	\$7,775,123	876	\$8,875.71
2003-04	\$8,396,457	887	\$9,466.13
2004-05	\$8,897,808	871	\$10,215.62
2005-06	\$9,646,919	NA	NA
2006-07	\$10,488,437	902	\$11,627.98
<b>Sources:</b> <i>Budget:</i> Kevin Geoghan, School Business Manager, Webutuck Central School District, November 2006 <i>Enrollment figures:</i> New York State Education Department, New York State School Report Card, <a href="http://www.nysed.gov/">http://www.nysed.gov/</a>			

The Webutuck Central School District Long Range Facilities Plan outlines many objectives for the coming years. Consolidating core educational services on a central campus, located on district property on Haight Road, has been proposed to enhance educational opportunities for students as well as efficiency for district operations. Purchase of surrounding properties may be necessary to satisfy program demands. A restructuring of grades is also proposed to accommodate space issues of a centralized campus. Millerton Elementary School may be used for early childhood education programs, as well as the headquarters for the district's transportation services. The district's other off-site facility, the Amenia Elementary School, may also be considered for early childhood education programs. Enactment of this Plan is dependent on community comments and further evaluation.<sup>12</sup>

### **Dover Union Free School District**

The Dover Union Free School District does not operate any schools in the Town of Amenia, although parts of the Town are within its boundaries. Students from Amenia are transported by bus to Wingdale Elementary, Dover Elementary, and Dover Junior/Senior High School. Table IV-20 describes the facilities and their enrollment.

<sup>12</sup> Webutuck Central School District. Long Range Facilities Plan. Available at [http://www.webutuckschools.org/district/long\\_range.php](http://www.webutuckschools.org/district/long_range.php). Accessed December 5, 2006.



**Table IV-20**  
**Dover Union Free School District: Facilities and Enrollment, 2006**

School	Grades	Enrollment
Wingdale Elementary	K-2	351
Dover Elementary	3-5	361
Dover Jr./Sr. HS	6-12	1,043
Total	K-12	1,755
<b>Sources:</b> Dover Union Free School District website, <a href="http://www.doverschools.org/">http://www.doverschools.org/</a> , accessed 11/7/06		

The Dover School District occupies almost all of the Town of Dover, and portions of the Towns of Washington, Union Vale, and Amenia. Approximately 250 of the 3,500 property parcels within this district are located in Amenia.<sup>13</sup> While enrollment has been relatively stable over the past decade, significant growth in the 1990s increased enrollment approximately 28 percent from the 1989-90 to 2001-02 school years. However, since that peak, enrollment figures have declined approximately 4.3 percent. Recent development levels in Dover indicate a potential for increased enrollments in the years to come.<sup>14</sup>

Table IV-21 shows the historical enrollment trends, as well as the amount of the school district budget raised by local taxes.

**Table IV-21**  
**Dover Enrollment and Budget Trends, 2002-2007**

Year	Total Budget from Local Taxes	# of Students	Per Pupil Expenditure
2001-02	NA	1,833	NA
2002-03	\$11,108,279	1,821	\$6,100.10
2003-04	\$12,246,834	1,757	\$6,970.31
2004-05	\$13,243,657	1,759	\$7,529.08
2005-06	\$13,708,128	1,713	\$8,002.41
2006-07	\$14,261,885	1,755	\$8,126.43
<b>Sources:</b> Dover Union Free School District.			

The District employs over 120 teachers and almost 220 total personnel. Schools within the district are currently well below capacity with average class sizes ranging from 17 to 26 students. The District tries to maintain class sizes of no more than 26 students. Overall, the District expresses no capacity concerns, although there is limited space for program expansions, especially if enrollment increases.

In December 2005, district voters approved a \$1.5 million renovation project which includes a new outdoor track at the high school as well as miscellaneous maintenance and

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Prill, Assistant Superintendent for Business Affairs, Dover Union Free School District, personal communication 11/7/06.

<sup>14</sup> Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development. Major Projects Report June 2006. PDF Document. Available at <http://www.co.dutchess.ny.us/CountyGov/Departments/Planning/majorprojects/reportjune2006.pdf>. Accessed December 4, 2006.

repairs. No expansion projects are currently underway or predicted, but the District's Facilities Committee continually reviews the area's growth and longevity of its buildings.

## **UTILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

Without sufficient utility and infrastructure systems, towns cannot support additional growth. This section reviews the solid waste disposal system and water and wastewater issues in the Town. An ongoing issue faced by the Town of Amenia, even since the 1969 Master Plan, has been the development of a central sewer system in the hamlet of Amenia. This section supports the need for such a system as described in Chapter II, and examines the impact that utility systems have on the land use pattern of a community and the way that it evolves over time.

### **Solid Waste**

The closing of the private Harlem Valley landfill in the Town of Amenia in 1987 brought the national solid waste crisis into sharp focus for Town residents. The existence of the landfill was one of the reasons the Town decided not to join the Dutchess County Resource Recovery Agency (DCRRA) when it was established in 1982. Suddenly, the private carters which were picking up residents' garbage were forced to turn elsewhere for the disposal.

Many of the private carters are now relying on the facilities of the Dutchess County Resource Recovery Agency, established by the New York State Legislature to provide solid waste management services for residents of Dutchess County. In 1984, local legislation was enacted to create a centralized solid waste management service throughout the County. Several years later in 1990, a County law was imposed for the collection and management of recyclables whereby solid waste facilities (including municipalities) are required to separate out recyclable materials. The DCRRA operates a Waste-to-Energy Power Plant for garbage, and a Material Recovery Facility for recyclables. In addition, they sponsor an annual Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day for toxic and electronic waste. The DCRRA also provides an incineration service to those people wishing to dispose of confidential documents.<sup>15</sup>

In Amenia, the Town operates a transfer station and recycling center on Old Route 22 between Wassaic and Depot Hill Road. The transfer station collects bulk trash (e.g., appliances, furniture, etc.) for a fee, but does not accept hazardous materials.

The charter of the DCRRA outlined its responsibility for the disposal of garbage in the county. If its waste management plans are realized, the municipal and private garbage collectors in Dutchess County should be able to adequately dispose of their garbage for the foreseeable future. The Town's role will be to assist in the coordination of that effort through the encouragement of recycling activities, the scheduling of bulk waste collection days, the monitoring of private carters and the maintenance of the transfer station. Town residents will need to be educated regarding the use of the transfer station and recycling center. An ongoing concern is the sanitary and orderly appearance of the recycling center.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.dcrra.org/>. Accessed November 28, 2006.

## Water

Most residents of Amenia rely on wells for their water supply. The wells draw from groundwater stored in bedrock aquifers as well as the more prolific sand and gravel aquifers, which underlie much of the Town. However, in the Town Center of Amenia and the Taconic DDSO, water systems service a number of parcels. Both of these systems also draw their supply from the groundwater.

Amenia's water district services approximately 1,000 residents and businesses in the Town Center (the exact number of residents and businesses is currently being surveyed). The water tank in the district has a maximum storage capacity of 200,000 gallons. There are currently four wells that provide water for the district. The daily usage within the district averages 100,000 gallons, while peak flows have reached 145,000 gallons per day. Table IV-22 outlines the capacity of the different wells that exist in the water district.

**Table IV-22**  
**Town of Amenia Water District—Capacity of Wells, 2006**

<b>Well</b>	<b>Capacity (Gallons Per Minute)</b>
Well #1	15
Well #4	36
Well #5	20
Well #6	33
Well #4A (proposed)	40-64
<b>Source:</b> Gary Bonds, Water Treatment Operator, Town of Amenia Water Department, personal communication 12/18/06.	

The operating budget for the Water District is \$175,000 per year. The Town also has an ongoing capital improvements fund of \$100,000. However this money has not yet been designated for a specific project, and there are currently no large-scale capital improvement projects in the Town of Amenia. The most recent improvements were in 2001-02, when 2,000 linear feet of water main were added to the system to create a loop, and in 1999-2000, when 1,000 linear feet of water main were replaced.

As previously stated, much of Amenia is underlain by a prolific sand and gravel aquifer from which many residents draw their water supply. Because of its high porosity, the aquifer also transmits pollutants quickly. However, the quality of groundwater can be protected by aquifer protection practices or regulations.

## Sewer System

One of the most critical issues facing the Town, as emphasized in this Plan's vision and goals statements, is the need for a sewage treatment system in the hamlet of Amenia. The only existing sewer system in Amenia currently is at the Taconic DDSO. Provision of central collection and treatment is essential for public health and any opportunity for expansion of commercial or residential uses in the hamlet.

The 1969 Master Plan indicated the need for a sewer system. The 1991 Master Plan also indicated the need as a priority. The proposed area for providing treatment in the Hamlet is east of the traffic light, along Route 343 to Mechanic Street (and up Depot Hill to Prospect Street), north on Route 22/44 to the Freshtown Plaza, south on Route 22 to Lake Amenia Road, and west along Route 22/44 to the Seravan Restaurant. These are the proposed areas to be served, although without a site for locating a wastewater treatment plant, no formal Sewer District has been officially designated or voted upon by homeowners included within this proposed district.

The proposed district would include a build-out potential for approximately 160,000 gallons per day (GPD) of treatment required. The expected cost per household would have to be approximately \$500 - \$600 per year, in order to be affordable for the households that would benefit from such a system. Early feasibility studies (in 2004) without a specific location put the capital (construction) cost of a Conventional System at approximately \$6.7 million and annual Operation and Maintenance cost at approximately \$170,000.<sup>16</sup>

A Constructed Wetlands system, as a lower cost, sustainable system for treatment of 160,000 GPD has a more affordable capital cost of approximately \$5.9 million and an annual Operation and Maintenance cost of approximately \$100,000. With the Constructed Wetlands System, there may be an opportunity for NYSERDA grants for sustainable, alternative energy projects in New York State, but funding sources have diminished over the past five years, as competition for grants increases. Realistically, low-cost or no-interest loans seem to be the only funding sources available to the town.

Finding an appropriate site for either system has been elusive. Land acquisition for municipal services has not been a priority for the Town Boards for the past 10 years. The Conventional System uses less land, but would cost more to build and operate, while the Constructed Wetlands System uses more land, but costs less to build, and less to operate. The town is willing to work with potential developers to get a system in place; however, it has to be affordable to the users who will be paying for the system for the duration of its usefulness, or it could potentially be too costly for older, fixed income residents to remain in their homes.

A sewer system will allow for more business in the Hamlet, a more dense and vital downtown area, with the quality of life that comes with mixed-use occupancy. More apartments could be made in some of the older, empty buildings with stores or restaurants on the street level and living quarters on the second and third floors. This Comprehensive Plan has a vision statement that incorporates such goals.

## **Overhead Wires**

The 1991 Master Plan identified overhead wires as a major impediment to an appealing visual character in the hamlet. Unfortunately, the cost of burying utility wires can be prohibitive, particularly for a community with a limited tax base. It was suggested in the

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<sup>16</sup> All estimates are initial estimates only and are based on work performed for the Town by Morris Associates Engineering Consultants in 2004.

previous Master Plan that the Town and the state encourage the local utility companies to devise a solution which at a minimum straightens the poles. Ideally, some of the wires would be eliminated or relocated to easements which might run behind the buildings on Main Street.

## **Storm Drainage**

Most storm drainage in Amenia is accommodated in open swales and culverts. Developers are required to show drainage facilities on subdivision plats and site plans which are submitted to the Town.

The 1991 Master Plan noted the need for a comprehensive map which identified storm drainage facilities in Town.

The recommended standards in the previous Master Plan for the installation of covered storm drainage systems include those areas in the hamlets that have lots that average less than 20,000 square feet. Storm drainage systems were also recommended for areas where impervious surfaces exceed 35% of the land area and where mobile home parks exist.

Storm drainage systems may also be needed where erosion and sedimentation is a concern along many of the Town's steeper roadways. In other instances, open drainage could continue to be used. Amenia's Subdivision Regulations could be improved to provide better detail on both storm drainage and erosion and sedimentation controls.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

This section examines the transportation resources of the Town of Amenia. While the town's transportation resources are geared toward the road network, which has evolved since colonial times, some attention is also paid to mass transit and pedestrian facilities. The Route 22 Corridor Management Plan prepared by the Poughkeepsie Dutchess County Transportation Council has recommendations for road network improvements in the hamlets to improve traffic flow and enhance pedestrian and bicycle access.

### **Functional Road Network and Inventory**

Roadways are divided into functional classifications according to the purpose they serve. The categories range from expressways to rural roadways which may even be unpaved.

Limited Access Highways. These include roads known as expressways or freeways to which entrances and exits are controlled by the means of ramps. Limited access highways provide express transportation service for large volumes of traffic. The nearest limited access highways to Amenia are the Taconic State Parkway to the west and Interstate 84 and 684 in the Town of Southeast in Putnam County.

Arterial Roads. Arterial roads carry traffic between towns and also within the community. In the Town of Amenia, U.S. and New York State highways, as well as most county roads, could be considered arterials. These include the following roads:

- U.S. 44
- NY State Highway 22
- NY State Highway 343
- Dutchess County 2—Leedsville Rd. (to Amenia Union)
- Dutchess County 2—Amenia Union Rd. (Amenia Union to South Amenia)
- Dutchess County 3—Bog Hollow Road and Kent Road
- Dutchess County 4—Sinpatch Rd. and Poplar Hill Road
- Dutchess County 81—Old Route 22 (Amenia Wassaic Road)
- Dutchess County 83—(82 A) Smithfield Road
- Dutchess County 86—Bangall Amenia Road
- Dutchess County 105—Sinpatch (entry to State School to where it meets D.C. 4)
- Dutchess County 1—Sharon Station Road (Route 22 to the CT line)
- Dutchess County 5—(off Smithfield Road)

*Other Town Roads that Serve as Arterials*

- Sharon Station Road (Rt. 343 to D.C. 1)
- Perry Corners Road
- Randall Rd. (into Benton Hill)
- Yellow City Road
- Separate Road

*Roads that Should not be Arterials because of Dangerous Conditions*

- Deep Hollow
- Tower Hill

Collector Roads. The function of collector roads is to collect traffic from residential areas and funnel it to the arterial system. Since most of Amenia is rural, few roads serve this function exclusively. In the rural sections, most people live adjacent to the arterial roads. The following roads in the Amenia hamlet serve as collector roads:

- Depot Road
- Hamm's Road
- Mygatt Road
- Lake Amenia Road

Residential Streets. Residential streets serve to provide access for traffic having a destination or origin on a particular residential street.

Rural Roads. Amenia has a number of roadways that serve as important links in the transportation system but are not paved. These include sections of Tower Hill Road, Deep Hollow Road and similar roads. Some streets in new residential subdivisions, such as those in Troutbeck, have also been built to rural standards. Residents have expressed a concern about the maintenance and preservation of scenic character of town gravel roads such as Cascade, Deep Hollow, and Tower Hill roads.

The road classification system provides a way of looking at proposed development projects; and indicates how the road network should function in the future. New subdivisions should provide a hierarchy of streets with access to an arterial road. New houses, in general, should not be encouraged to have direct access to arterial streets, and adjacent subdivisions should be connected by collector roads or residential streets.

## Traffic Conditions

The highest traffic volumes are found on the State and U.S. Highways within Amenia. Table IV-23 lists the most recent traffic volumes (in vehicles per day) for major roadways in Amenia. The figures in the table are based on short term counts that were adjusted to account for vehicle mix (i.e., cars, trucks, buses, etc.), day of the week, and seasonality to produce estimated daily averages. Truck traffic is higher on Route 22 and roads serving sand and gravel operations.

Traffic congestion can be measured using Level of Service (LOS) guidelines which estimate average vehicle delay in approaches to intersections. These calculations range from LOS A, where all traffic clears the intersection with minimal delays or during each light cycle, to LOS F, where it may take several signal cycles to clear the intersection or where drivers may experience difficulty making left turns. Generally, LOS C or D is considered acceptable at the peak hour. The intersection of NY 22/US 44/NY 343, the most heavily traveled intersection in the Town, experiences some congestion during regular rush hours. But in general, all intersections within the town operate at LOS A or B.

**Table IV-23**  
**Traffic Volume Counts, Town of Amenia**

Route	Start Location	End Location	Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)	Year
NY 22	Start NY 343 Overlap (in Dover)	CR 81	5,297	2000
NY 22	CR 81	End NY 343 Overlap, Start US 44 Overlap	5,478	2003
NY 22	End NY 343 Overlap, Start US 44 Overlap	NY 199 (in North East)	5,201	2000
US 44	NY 44A (in Millbrook)	NY 343, Start US 22 Overlap	3,904	2001
NY 343	US 44, End NY 22 Overlap	Conn. State Line, End NY 343	3,595	2001
<b>Source:</b> New York State Department of Transportation, 2003 Traffic Volume Report for Dutchess County				

Generally, the NYS Department of Transportation does not consider two lane roadways congested until they reach volumes of 10,000 to 12,000 vehicles per day. When they exceed 15,000 vehicles per day, the roads are considered severely congested. None of the County roadways approach congested levels. Traffic levels on Routes 22 and 343 should continue to be monitored.

## Pedestrian, Bicyclist and Transit Issues

Founded in 1986, and incorporated in 1996, The Harlem Valley Rail Trail Association has worked in conjunction with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation &

Historic Preservation, the New York State Department of Transportation, Dutchess County, and several local communities to redevelop the abandoned Harlem Valley rail bed into a hiking and biking trail. The Harlem Valley Rail Line to Chatham in Columbia County is now being converted for pedestrian and bicycle uses. Currently, there are about 15 miles of paved trails open to the public, with another 8 miles nearing construction. When completed, the trail is intended to be 46 miles long<sup>17</sup>. Opportunities to eventually tie the trail into the Appalachian Trail could also be pursued by the County.

Several routes of the County Loop bus system serve Amenia and provide service to the Taconic DDSO from Poughkeepsie. Buses travel from Poughkeepsie via Millbrook, Dover Plains, Millerton, and other local municipalities.

## **Railroad**

In 2000, New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority extended Metro-North rail service to Wassaic on its Harlem Line. Previously, service terminated at the Dover Plains station. This rail expansion also included the Ten Mile River Station. Filled parking lots at these stations indicate the importance of this rail line in Amenia. This railroad has the potential to encourage economic growth and increase the pedestrian vibrancy of local hamlets if careful planning strategies are implemented to guide development.

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<sup>17</sup> Hudson Valley Rail Trail Association, Inc.



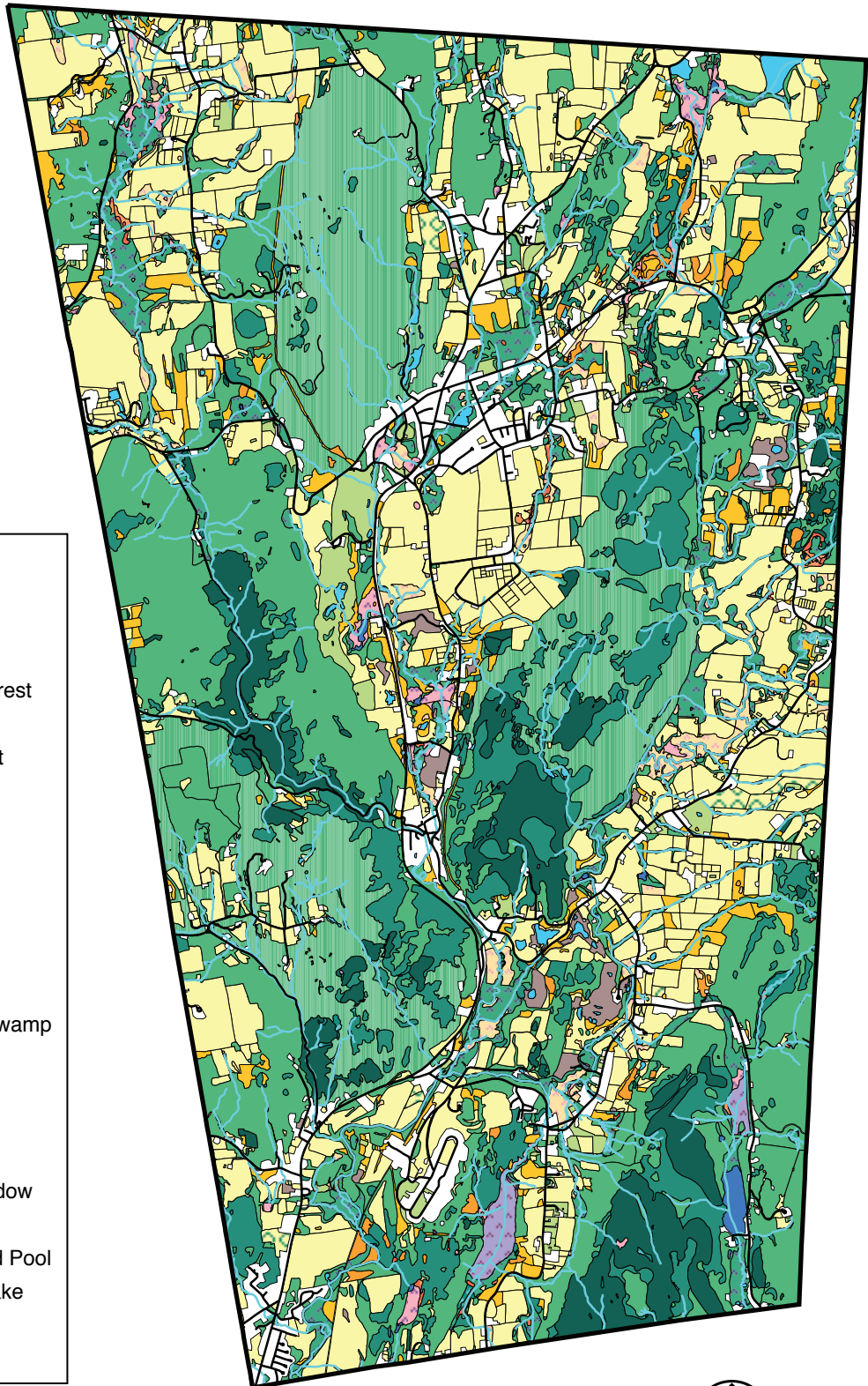
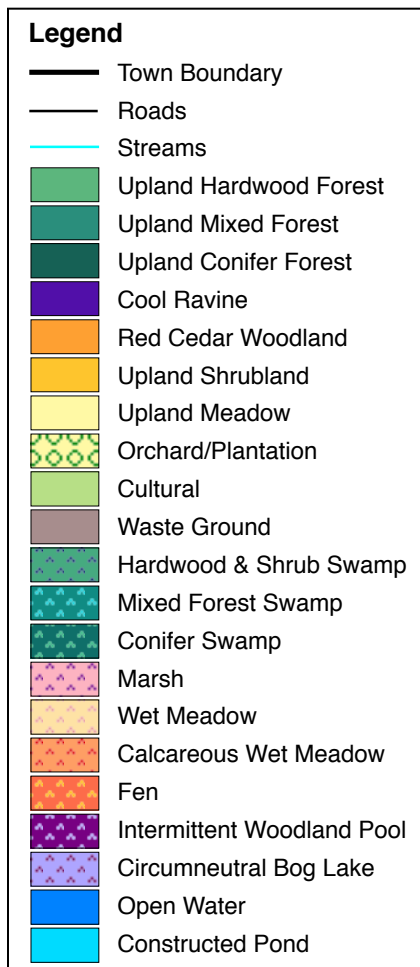
# Appendices

## I. Resource Maps

# Town of Amenia

## Natural Resources Inventory Map

### Significant Habitats

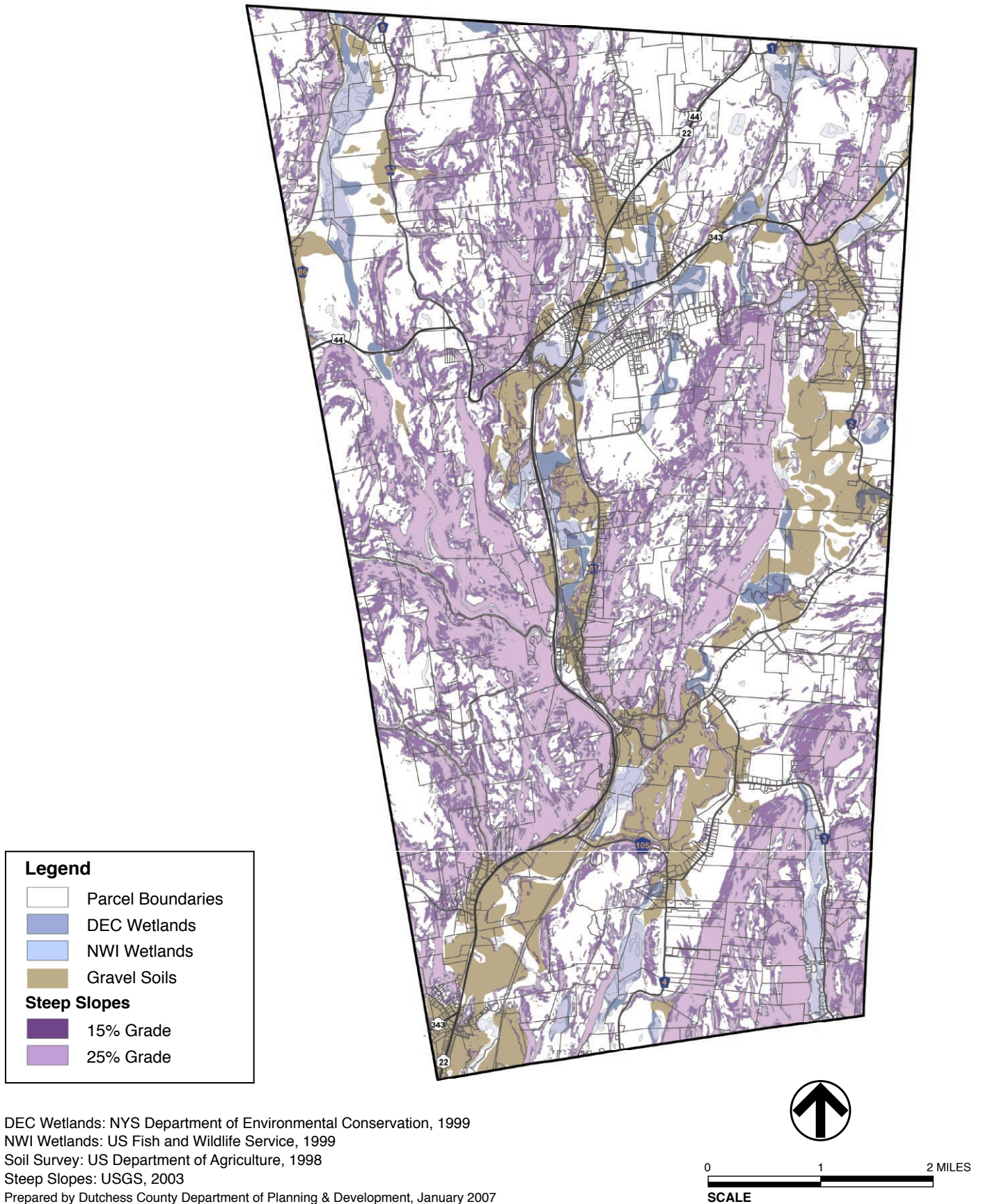


A reduction of the map illustrating the ecologically significant habitats in the Town of Amenia, Dutchess County, New York, identified and mapped by Hudsonia Ltd. in 2006. Developed areas and other non-significant habitats are shown in white. The large-formatted map is printed in three sections at a scale of 1:10,000.



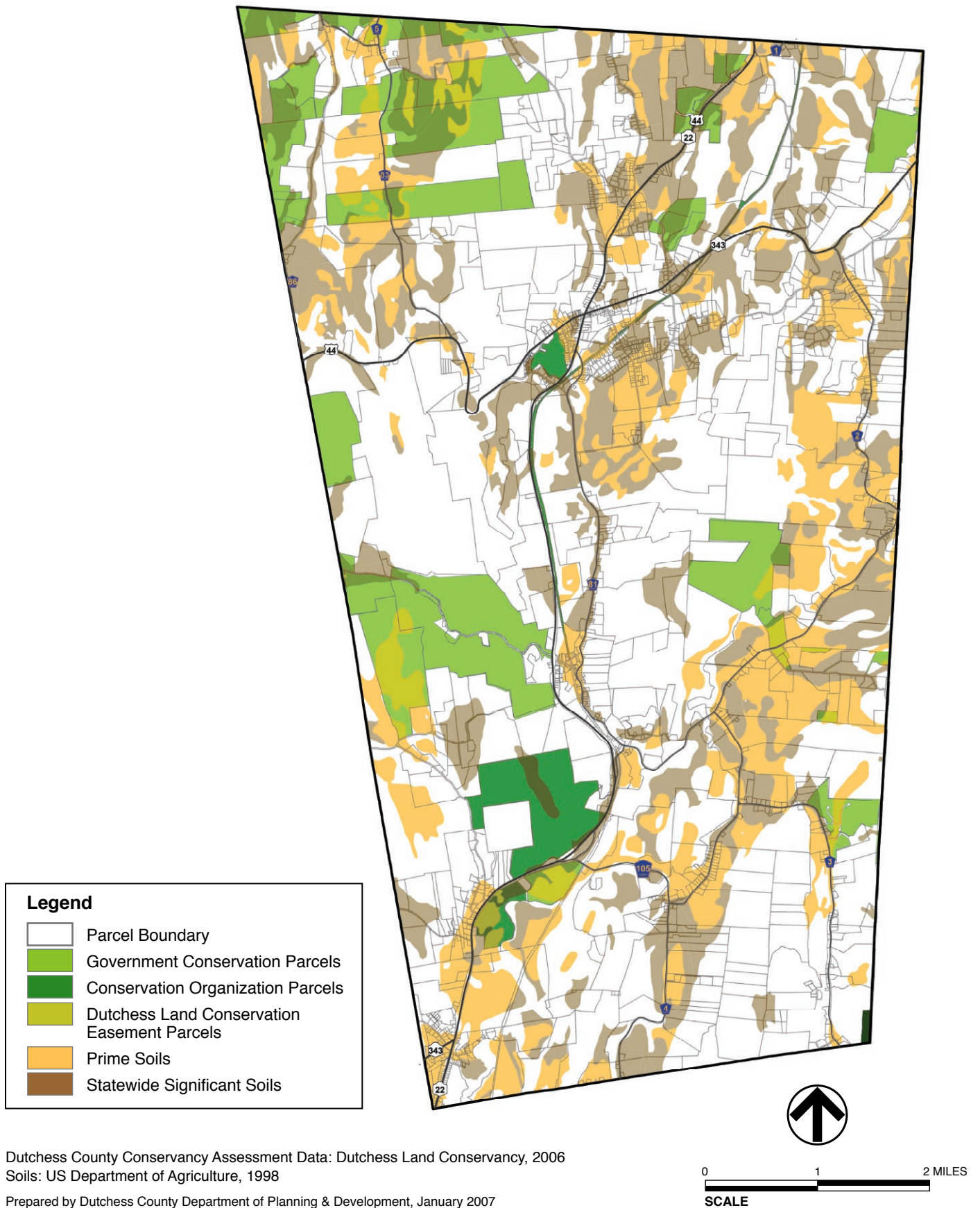
0 1 2 MILES  
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**Town of Amenia**  
Natural Resources Inventory Map  
Gravel Soils and Wetlands



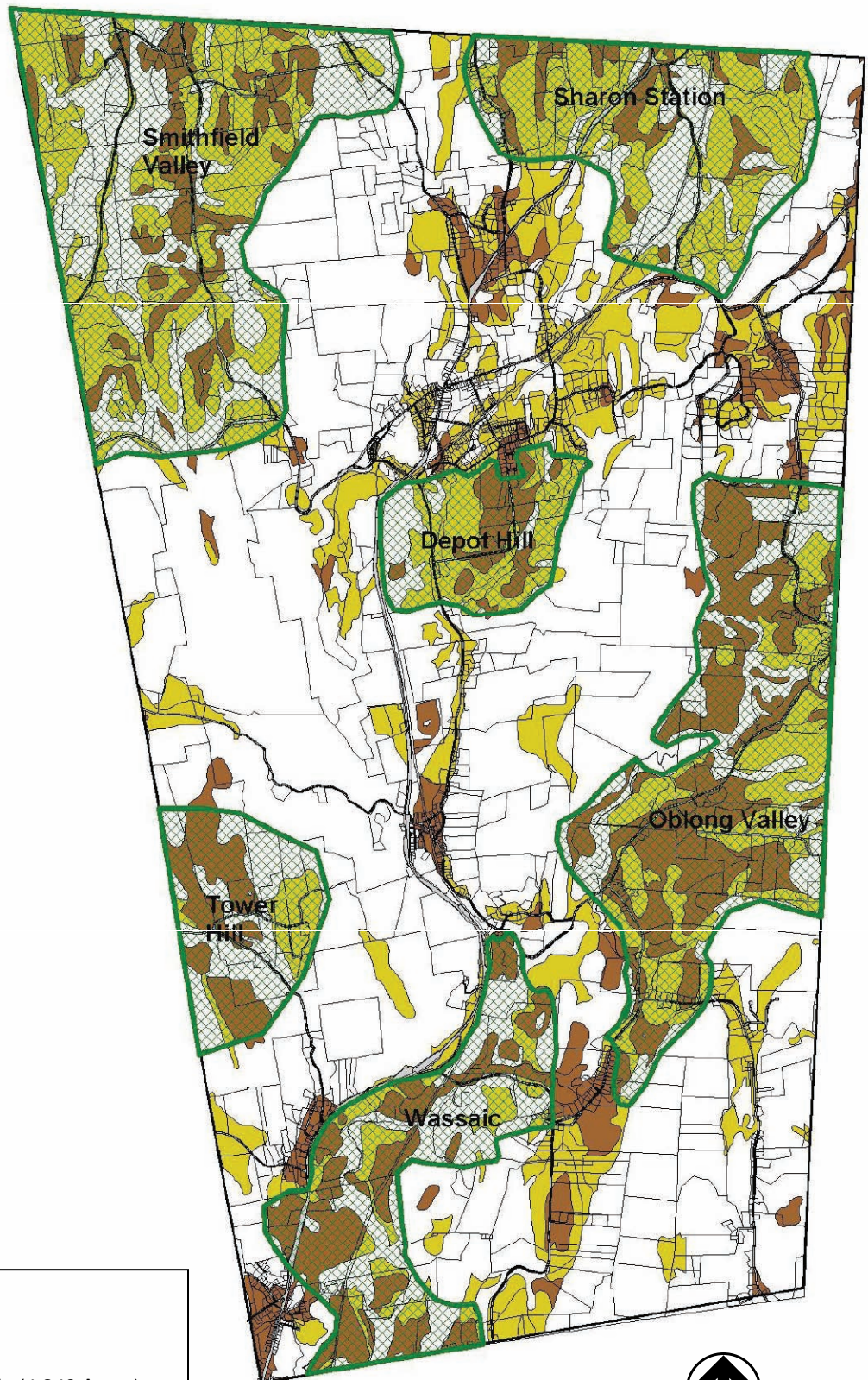


**Town of Amenia**  
Natural Resources Inventory Map  
Protected Lands and Farm Soils





**Town of Amenia**  
Natural Resources Inventory Map  
Priority Farmland Areas

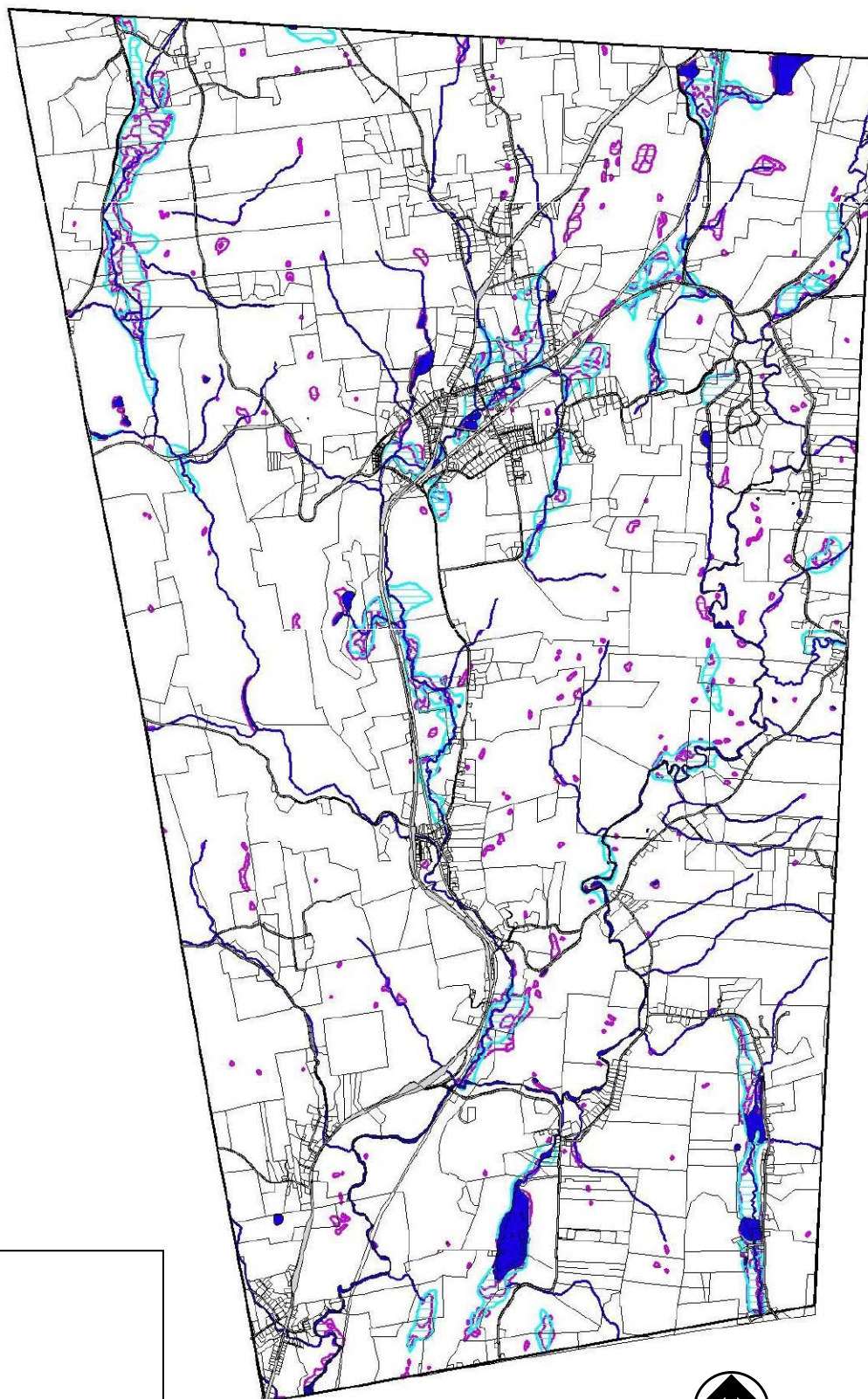


**Legend**

- Roads
- Parcel Boundary
- Prime Farmland Soils (4,349 Acres)
- Statewide Important Farmland Soils (6,984 Acres)



**Town of Amenia**  
Natural Resources Inventory Map  
Water Resources



**Legend**

- Roads
- Parcel Boundary
- Ponds
- Streams
- ▨ DEC Wetlands (1,325 Acres)
- ▨ NWI Wetlands (1,105 Acres)

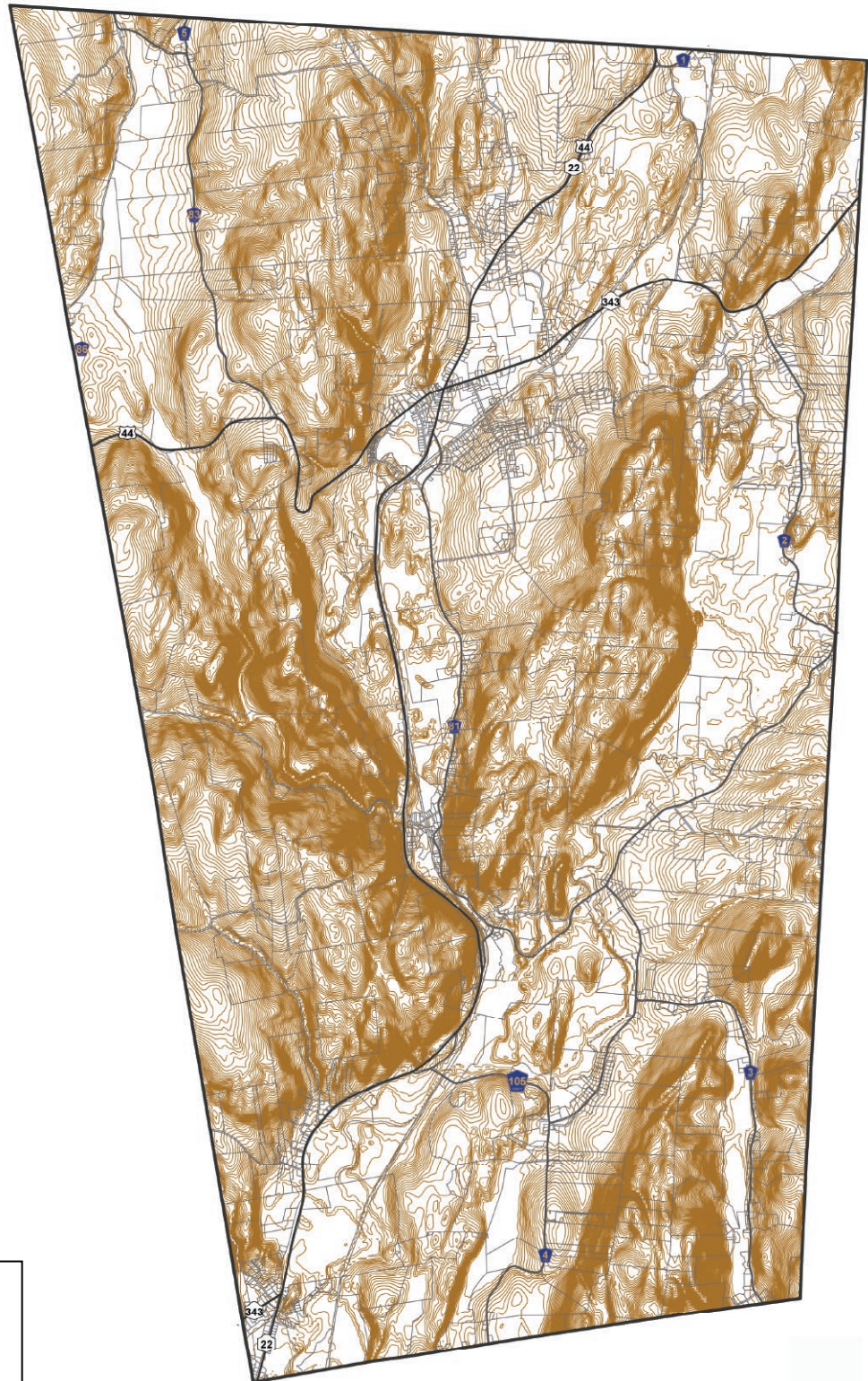


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SOURCE: Town of Amenia, Natural Resource Inventory



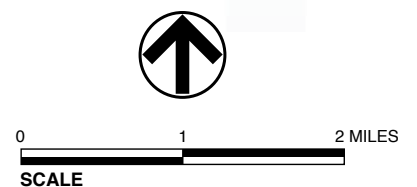
**Town of Amenia**  
Natural Resources Inventory Map  
10' Contours



**Legend**

-  Parcel Boundaries
-  10' Contours

Parcel Lines: Dutchess County Real Property Tax Service, January 2007  
Major Roads: Dutchess County Real Property Tax Service, January 2007  
10' Contours: United States Geological Survey  
Prepared by Dutchess County Department of Planning & Development, January 2007





# Town of Amenia

## Public Use Parcels

**Legend**

Town Boundary

Roads

**Public Use Parcels Use Classification**

Civic

Recreation

School

Transportation

**Type Classification**

Elementary

Firehouse

Multiple Use

Post Office

Rail Trail

Railway

Sports

Town Hall & Firehouse

Town Parkland

Train Station

SCHEMATIC NOT TO SCALE

## **II. Proposed and Existing Zoning**

# Town of Amenia

## Land Use and Development Overlay Districts Zoning Map

Prepared By Dutchess County Department of Planning & Development  
Adopted Date: July 19, 2007

### Legend

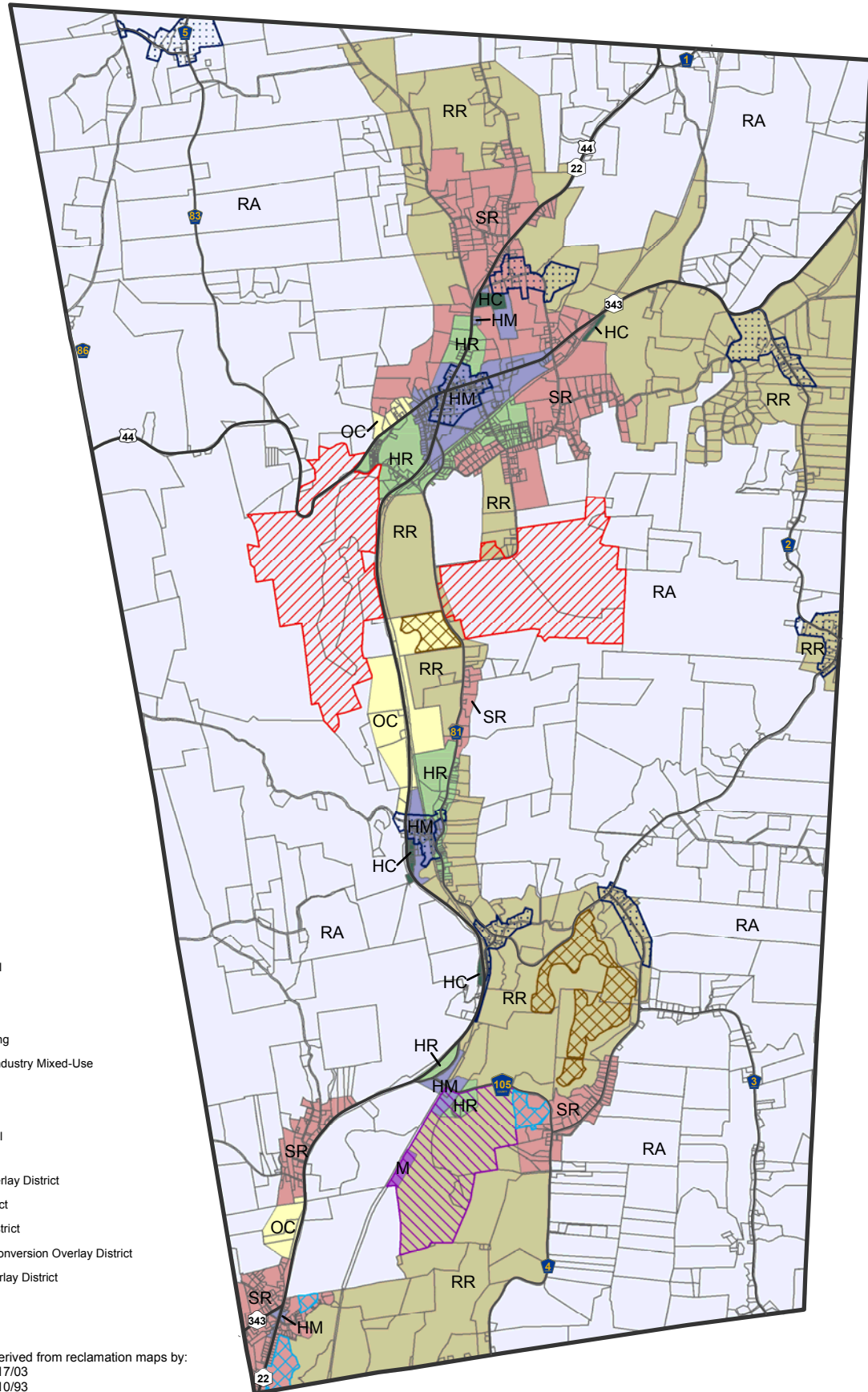
#### Zoning Districts

- HC Highway Commercial
- HM Hamlet Mixed-Use
- HR Hamlet Residential
- M Industrial/Manufacturing
- OC Office/Commercial/Industry Mixed-Use
- RA Rural Agricultural
- RR Rural Residential
- SR Suburban Residential

#### Overlay Districts

- Historic Preservation Overlay District
- Soil Mining Overlay District
- Mobile Home Overlay District
- Mixed Use Institutional Conversion Overlay District
- Resort Development Overlay District
- Parcel Boundaries

Soil Mining Overlay Districts derived from reclamation maps by:  
Roy T Budnik & Assoc. Inc, 6/17/03  
Roy T Budnik & Assoc. Inc, 8/10/93  
H2H Associates LLC



N

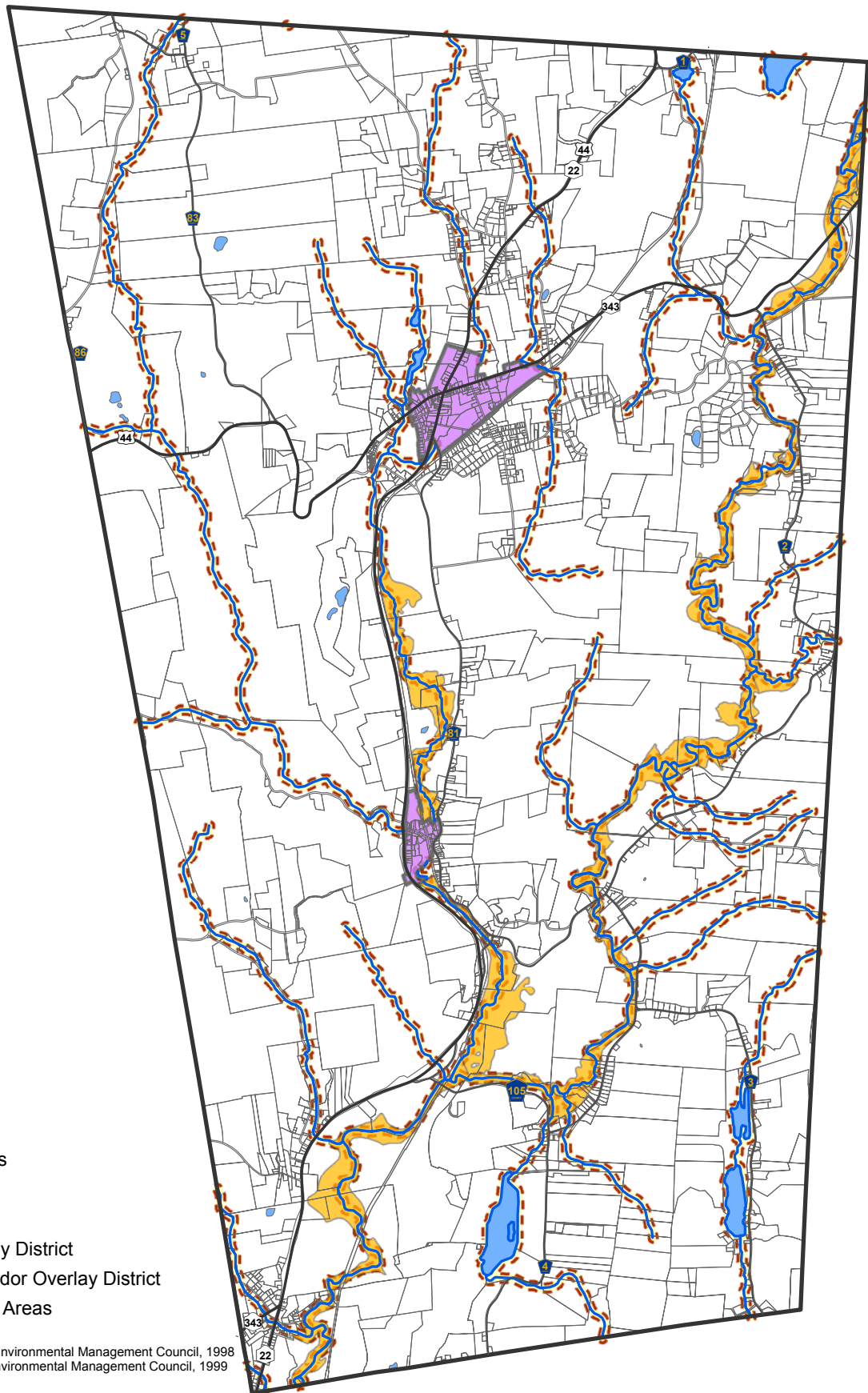


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# Town of Amenia

## Hydrological Overlay Districts

Prepared By Dutchess County Department of Planning & Development  
Adopted Date: July 19, 2007



### Legend

- Parcel Boundaries
- Streams
- Water Bodies
- Floodplain Overlay District
- 150' Stream Corridor Overlay District
- Hamlet Exclusion Areas

Minor Streams- Dutchess County Environmental Management Council, 1998  
Water Bodies- Dutchess County Environmental Management Council, 1999  
Floodplains- FEMA Q3 Data, 1996

For Discussion Purposes Only Subject to Field Verification

N



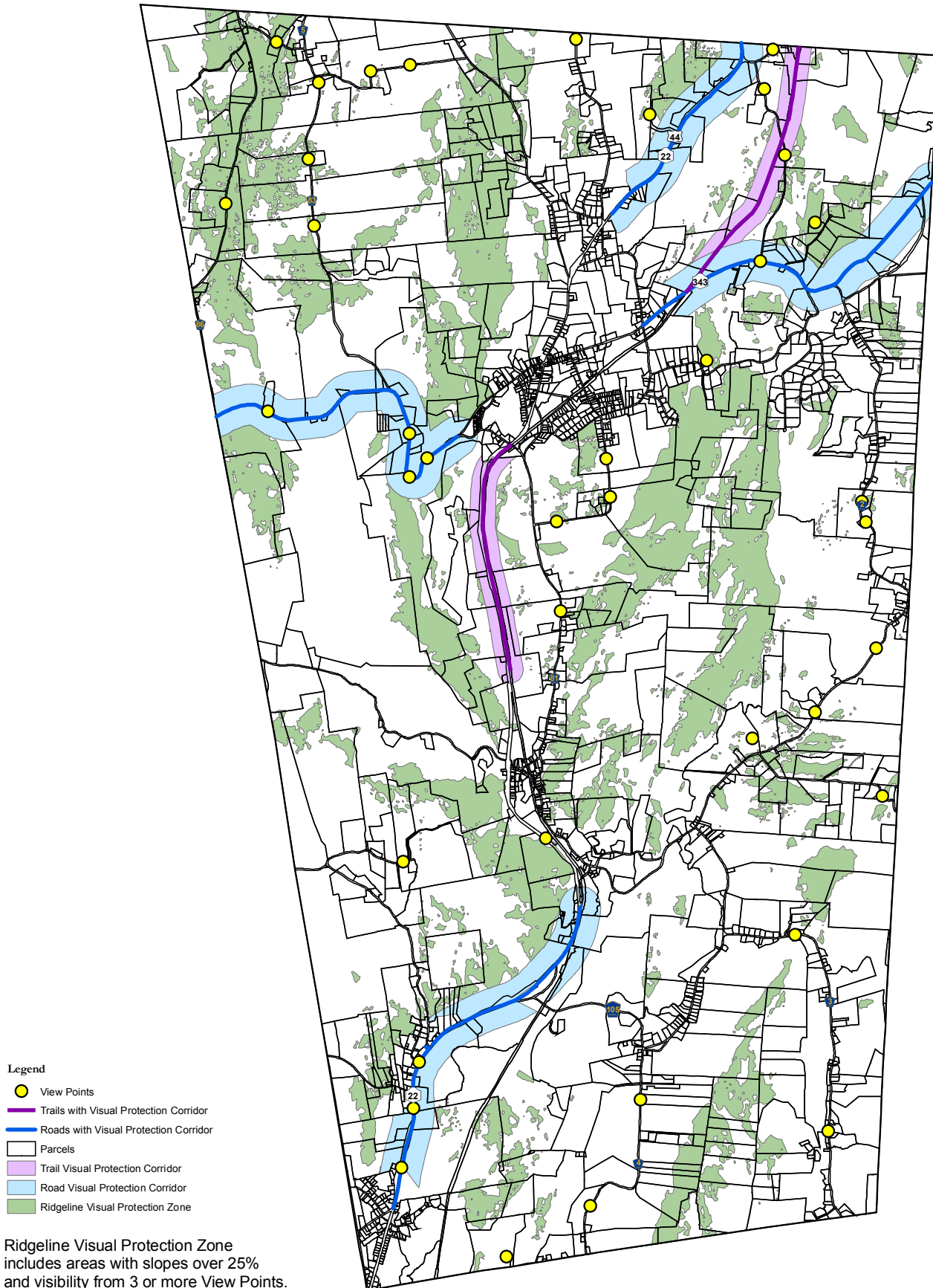
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# Town of Amenia

## Scenic Protection Overlay District

Prepared by: Dutchess County Department of Planning & Development  
Adopted Date: July 19, 2007



# Town of Amenia

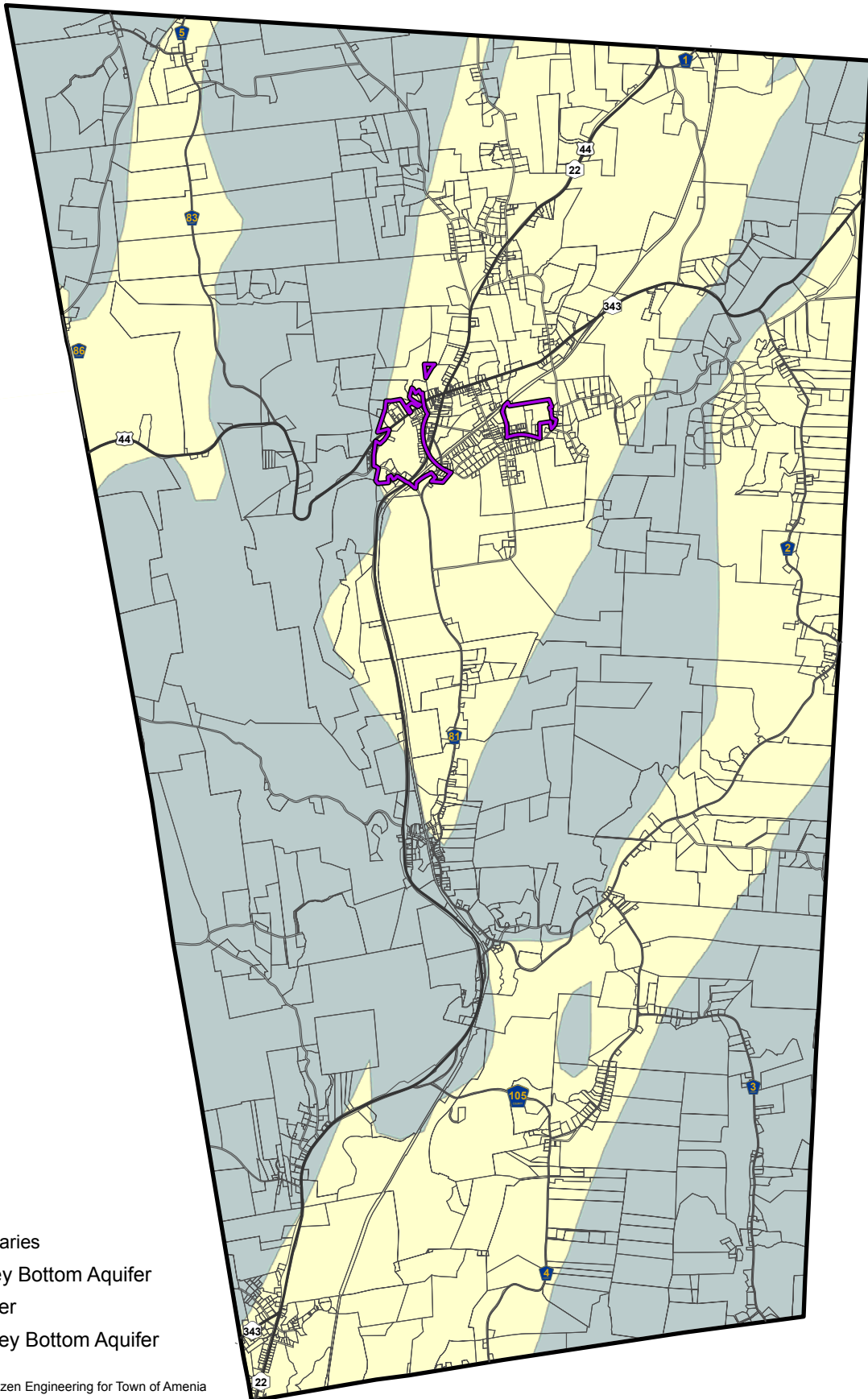
## Aquifer Overlay District

Prepared By Dutchess County Department of Planning & Development  
Adopted Date: July 19, 2007

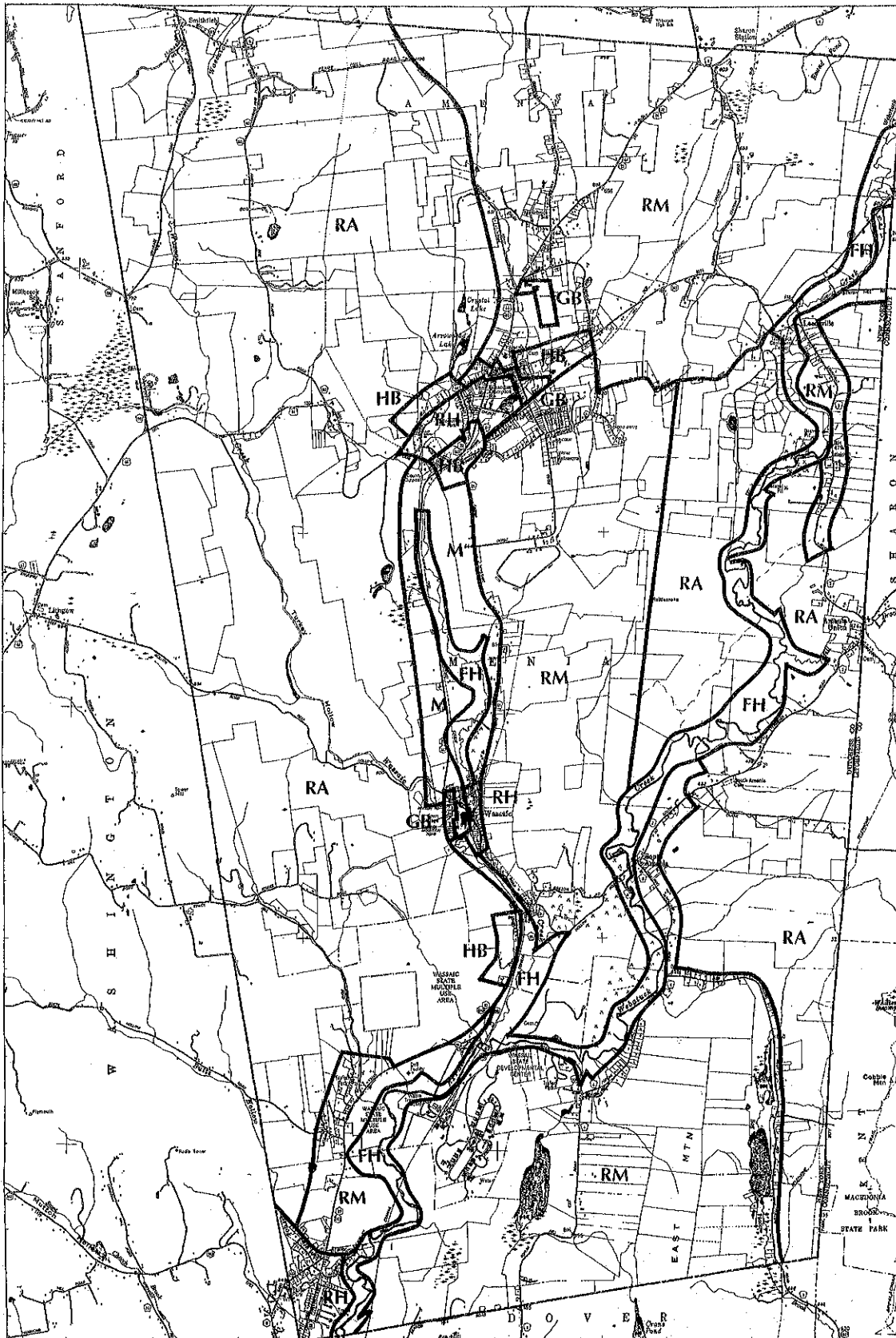
### Legend

- Parcel Boundaries
- Primary Valley Bottom Aquifer
- Upland Aquifer
- Buffered Valley Bottom Aquifer

Aquifer data developed by Chazen Engineering for Town of Amenia



Not To Scale



# Master Plan

Town of Amenia, NY

Buckhurst Fish Hutton Katz Inc.

0 1850 3700 7400 ft

Source: Town of Amenia

# Zoning, 1989

RA	Agricultural Density	FH	Flood Hazard
RM	Residential Medium Density	M	Industrial
RH	Residential High Density		
GB	General Business		
HB	Highway Business		

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# COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ADDENDUM

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the 2007 Comprehensive Plan Update, the need for workforce and affordable housing has continued to grow. This Comprehensive Plan Addendum (“Addendum”) and the accompanying zoning text amendments build on Goal #4, to “encourage more housing – low, affordable, moderate-income, high-end, and rental – to create a genuinely multigenerational community.” Specifically, this Addendum and the proposed text amendments jointly support the following objectives:

- Preserve and encourage affordable housing units within the Town;
- Promote the construction of moderate-income housing units within the Town; and
- Clarify the approvals and administrative process within the Workforce Housing Law.

## DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Demographic information can be used to portray the characteristics of residents of the Town of Amenia. This section reviews the population composition, growth and decline of the population, and the various factors involved with changes in population. In addition, a description of data on education, household income, housing, and the labor force for the town is provided<sup>1</sup>.

### Population

Since the 1991 Master Plan, the Town of Amenia experienced a net loss of population of 27.45 percent, decreasing from a 1990 population of 5,195 to its current total population of 3,769 residents, as of 2020. This substantial decrease was inconsistent with Dutchess County as a whole, whose

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<sup>1</sup> As of the date of this writing, the 2020 Census report has not been fully released, and limited datasets are available. Where current information was not available from the 2020 Census, the information was sourced from ACS 2020 5-year estimates. Sources are noted in each table.



population generally increased over the same time period. As shown in **Table 1**, the County's growth rate has exceeded that of the Town over the last 30 years.

**Table 1**  
**Population Trends of Amenia and Dutchess County 1990-2020**

Area	1990	2000	2010	2020	1990-2020 % Change
Town of Amenia	5,195	4,048	4,436	3,769	-27.4%
Dutchess County	259,462	280,150	297,488	295,911	14.1%

**Sources:** U.S. Census Bureau, 1990, 2000, 2010, 2020. "SE: T002". Social Explorer.

Much of the decline in the population of the Town of Amenia indicated in Table 1 is due to the decrease in number of Amenia residents living at the Taconic DDSO. This conclusion is indicated by the steep decline in the number of persons living in institutional or non-institutional group quarters and the decrease in population density of the census block group that includes the Taconic DDSO. As shown in **Table 2**, in 1990 a total of 1,262 persons in Amenia resided in group quarters, including the Taconic DDSO. With the decline of the number of consumers residing in that facility, the number of group quarters residents in Amenia has dropped by 92.1 percent, 99 persons in 2020.<sup>2</sup> While the group quarters residential population dramatically declined, the number of persons living in households also declined somewhat from 3,933 persons in 1990, to 3,679 persons in 2020, a net decrease of 6.5 percent.

**Table 2**  
**Population Trends Comparing Persons in Households and Persons in Group Quarters, 1990-2020**

Town of Amenia	1990 <sup>1</sup>	2000 <sup>1</sup>	2010 <sup>1</sup>	2020 <sup>2</sup>	1990-2020 % Change
Persons in Households	3,933	3,991	4,125	3,679	-6.5%
Persons in Group Quarters	1,262	57	311	99	-92.1%
Total Population	5,195	4,048	4,436	3,769	-27.4%

**Sources:** <sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 1990, 2000, 2010 "SE:T58". Social Explorer.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Census Redistricting Data. "Group Quarters by Population, P5."

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<sup>2</sup> The 2000 number represents the Town of Amenia group quarters population reported by the US Census in 2000. At the time that the 2007 Comprehensive Plan Update, employees of the Taconic DDSO indicated that this number was an under representation of the number of people living at the Taconic DDSO at that point in time.

At the time of the 2007 Update, the Town had already been seeing a considerable increase in weekend, commuter, and telecommuter populations. As many businesses continue to embrace remote and hybrid work schedules, telecommuting has increased allowing workers to live farther from urban employment hubs. Yet locally, the area has lost significant employers over the past 30 years. This loss in local jobs has led to a decrease in residents who earn their income locally. Combined, the loss of local jobs and lack of affordable housing have made it increasingly difficult for long-time local residents to afford to live in Amenia, as reflected in the Town's continuing decrease in population. While the population of Amenia dropped by 27.4 percent between 1990 and 2020 (see Table 1), this change is largely attributable to the downsizing of the Taconic DDSO and consequent decline of the group quarters population (Table 2). A more accurate measure may be a comparison of the change of "Persons in Households" in Amenia versus in Dutchess County. Between 1990 and 2020, the population living in households in the Dutchess County increased by 15.5 percent<sup>3</sup>, while in Amenia, that same population decreased by 6.5 percent.

The character of the community continues to shift. The population is older, increasing from a median age of 38.0 in 1994 to 40.5 in 2020. Between 2010 and 2020, the percent of the population under age 18 decreased by 8.1 percent, while the percent aged more than 75 increased by 37.9 percent.<sup>4</sup> This change is also reflected in the reduced household size, which decreased from 3.2 people in 1990 to 2.6 people in 2020 (see **Table 3**). The changing demographics affect the kinds of stores and services the town attracts, as well as community needs, grade school enrollment, and employment sectors.

**Table 3**  
**Regional Household Sizes, 2020**

	<b>Town of Amenia</b>	<b>Town of Dover</b>	<b>Town of North East</b>	<b>Town of Washington</b>	<b>Dutchess County</b>
Average Household Size in 2020	2.6	2.4	2.3	2.0	2.5
<b>Sources:</b> U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey (ACS) 2020 (5-Year Estimates), "Average Household Size". Social Explorer.					

The number of households and the average size of households in the Town of Amenia has decreased over the past 30 years (see **Table 4**). On the other hand, in Dutchess County, the number of households increased substantially. The Town of Amenia and Dutchess County both experienced a

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<sup>3</sup> In Dutchess County, the persons in households increased from 241,189 in 1990 to 278,565 in 2020. (US Census Bureau, 1990, Census of the Population; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Census Redistricting Data. "Group Quarters by Population, P5.")

<sup>4</sup> American Community Survey (ACS) 2010, 2020 (5-Year Estimates). "SE:A01001B Age – Cumulative (Less)." and "SE:A01001A:Age - Cumulative (Less)" U.S. Census Bureau. Prepared by Social Explorer.

decrease in average household sizes and now have similar averages of 2.6 and 2.5, respectively, as of 2020. Yet, this decrease was more substantial for Amenia, which fell from an average household size of 3.2 in 1990; whereas in Dutchess County, the average household size was 2.7 during the same period. These declines generally reflect the aging of the population, as older populations generally have fewer children living at home. In addition, the sharp decline in the average household size in Amenia reflects the decline of the institutional and non-institutional group quarters residents. Currently, the average household size in Amenia, 2.6 persons, is slightly higher than in surrounding communities, with Dover averaging 2.4, North East averaging 2.3, and Washington averaging 2.0 persons per household.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 4**

**Household Trends of Amenia and Dutchess County, 1990-2020**

Area	1990 <sup>1</sup>	2000 <sup>1</sup>	2010 <sup>1</sup>	2020 <sup>2</sup>	1990 – 2020 % Change
<b>Number of Households</b>					
Town of Amenia	1,620	1,625	1,741	1,552	-4.2%
Dutchess County	89,567	99,536	107,965	110,095	22.9%
<b>Average Household Size</b>					
Town of Amenia	3.2	2.5	2.4	2.6	-19.8%
Dutchess County	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.5	-6.0%
<b>Sources:</b> <sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau, 1990, 2000, 2010 Census of the Population, SF-1 <sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey (ACS) 2020 (5-Year Estimates), "Household by Type" and "Average Household Size". Social Explorer.					

### *Population Distribution by Age*

According to the 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates, the median age of Amenia's population is 40.5 years old, notably older than the median of 38.0 identified in the 1991 Master Plan. The rise in the median age in the Town of Amenia is consistent with the trends reported in the 1991 Master Plan. The median age in Amenia has generally increased over the past forty years from 36.2 in 1980, to 36.9 in 1989, to 38.0 in 1994, 40.2 in 2000, 38.2 in 2010, and back up to 40.5 in 2020.

Currently, the highest proportion of residents in the community falls within the 35-44 and 45-54 age categories, comprising 29.3 percent of residents. This proportion is consistent with previous years. Notably, however, the percent population over 75 years has been growing. In 2000, 7.8 percent of residents were more than 75 years old, and 2.0 percent were more than 85 years. As of 2020, 9.3 percent of the population is over 75 years, and 4.0 percent is over 85 years. Therefore, a large percentage of the town's total population falls within the retirement and elderly age category.

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<sup>5</sup> US Census Bureau, Census 2000.

The increase in median age from 1991, and the large proportion of town residents within the retirement age category, is consistent with observed trends that the Town of Amenia has attracted retirees and empty nesters from the more urban areas of New York. Combined with national trends of the aging “baby-boomer” generation, longer life expectancies, and lower birth rates, the median age of Amenia has risen higher than the County as a whole, whose median age in 2020 was 38 years.

**Table 5**  
**Population Distribution of Amenia and Dutchess County, 2000-2020**

Age Group	2000 <sup>1</sup>		2010 <sup>1</sup>		2020 <sup>2</sup>	
	Amenia	Dutchess County	Amenia	Dutchess County	Amenia	Dutchess County
Under 5 Years	5.5%	6.2%	4.6%	5.1%	4.3%	4.6%
5 to 9 Years	7.3%	7.3%	5.5%	5.9%	7.2%	4.7%
10 to 14 Years	6.8%	7.4%	6.0%	6.6%	6.5%	5.8%
15 to 17 Years	4.1%	4.1%	4.3%	4.5%	6.3%	3.8%
18 to 24 Years	6.5%	9.4%	8.6%	10.9%	8.1%	10.8%
25 to 34 Years	11.3%	12.5%	9.4%	10.6%	9.2%	11.9%
35 to 44 Years	16.3%	17.7%	12.9%	13.4%	16.3%	11.5%
45 to 54 Years	14.8%	14.2%	16.1%	16.9%	13.0%	14.3%
55 to 64 Years	10.3%	9.0%	15.0%	12.5%	12.3%	15.1%
65 to 74 Years	9.4%	6.50	9.4%	7.2%	7.5%	10.0%
75 to 84 Years	5.8%	4.0%	5.9%	4.5%	5.2%	5.1%
85 Years+	2.0%	1.5%	2.3%	1.9%	4.0%	2.5%

**Sources:** <sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. “Age, 2000, 2010”. Social Explorer.  
<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey (ACS) (5-Year Estimates).”Age”. Social Explorer.

### *Median Household Income*

As shown in Table 6, the median income in Amenia, after dipping in 2010 (after the economic crash of 2008), has remained similar since 1990.

**Table 6**  
**Median Household Income in Amenia, Dutchess County, and New York State, 1990-2020 (Adjusted for 2020 Inflation Value)**

Area	1990 <sup>1</sup>	2000 <sup>1</sup>	2010 <sup>2</sup>	2020 <sup>2</sup>
Town of Amenia	\$66,282	\$61,556	\$45,156	\$64,604
Dutchess County	\$89,941	\$83,295	\$69,838	\$81,842
New York State	\$70,223	\$68,086	\$55,603	\$71,117

**Notes:** For the years 1990 and 2000, adjusted values were calculated using the US Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator ([bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](https://bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm))

**Sources:** <sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau, Census 2000 and 1990 Census of the Population and Summary Table, SF-3  
<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey (ACS) 2020 (5-Year Estimates), 2010 (5-Year Estimates) “Median Household Income (In Inflation Adjusted Dollars)” Social Explorer.

## Employment

Approximately 50 percent of the Amenia labor force was employed by the government in 1980, which clearly indicated the importance of the Taconic DDSO as a major employer. However, since the significant downsizing of the center, the distribution of employment has changed; as of 2020, only 17.2 percent of Amenia's labor force is employed in the educational, health and social services industry (see Table 7). Tables 7, 8, and 9 show the current employment distributions of the Town of Amenia and Dutchess County. In both Amenia and Dutchess County, the highest percentage of the employed population works in management, professional, and related occupations, followed by sales and office occupations.

**Table 7**

**Town of Amenia and Dutchess County: Employment by Occupation, 2020**

Occupation	Amenia		Dutchess County	
	Employed Population	% Employed Population	Employed Population	% Employed Population
Management, professional, and related occupations	564	29.7%	60,290	41.2%
Service	357	18.8%	28,031	19.1%
Sales and Office	505	26.6%	31,600	21.6%
Farming, fishing, and forestry	47	2.5%	760	0.5%
Construction, extraction, and maintenance	151	8.0%	13,247	9.0%
Production	87	4.6%	4,645	3.2%
Transportation and Material Moving	187	9.9%	7,882	5.4%
Total	1,898	100.0	146,455	100.0%
<b>Sources:</b> U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey (ACS) 2020 (5-Year Estimates) "Occupation for Employed Civilian Population 16 Years and Over". Social Explorer.				

**Table 8**  
**Town of Amenia and Dutchess County: Employment Sector, 2020**

Sector	Amenia		Dutchess County	
	Employed Population	% Employed Population	Employed Population	% Employed Population
Private Sector	1,201	63.3%	91,104	62.2%
Public Sector	286	15.1%	23,192	15.8%
Self-Employed (Incorporated and Not Incorporated)	259	13.6%	13,678	9.3%
Private Non-Profit	152	8.0%	18,191	12.4%
Unpaid Family Workers	0	0.0%	290	0.2%
Total Employed Population	1,898	100.0%	146,455	100.0%
<b>Sources:</b> U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey (ACS) 2020 (5-Year Estimates) "Employment Sector for Employed Civilian Population 16 Years and Over". Social Explorer.				

As of 2020, the industries with the highest percent of Amenia's workers are retail trade and education, health, and social services, with 17.2 percent each. Amenia's significantly larger farming and forestry industry, as compared with Dutchess County overall, indicates the region's rural character and agricultural importance. Although agriculture is a vital industry in this area, it comprises only 4.4 percent of the labor force, a sharp decrease from 7.4 percent in 1980. As noted above, this table illustrates the notable change in the percentage of Amenia's work force employed in "educational, health and social services," which was 50.1 percent in 1980 and decreased to 17.2 percent in 2020. Industries that have seen a notable increase in percentage of workers include "retail trade," which increased from 8.7 percent in 1980 to 17.2 percent in 2020; "finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing," which increased from 2.2 percent in 1980 to 8.2 percent in 2020; and "arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services," which increased from 2.3 percent in 1980 to 8.9 percent in 2020. These changes may reflect an increase in tourism and shift to the service industry.

**Table 9**

**Town of Amenia and Dutchess County: Employment by Industry, 1980 to 2020**

Industry	Amenia				Dutchess County	
	1980 <sup>1</sup>		2020 <sup>2</sup>		2020 <sup>2</sup>	
	Employed Population	Percent of Employed Population	Employed Population	Percent of Employed Population	Employed Population	Percent of Employed Population
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	152	7.4%	83	4.4%	1,666	1.1%
Construction	100	5.0%	164	8.6%	9,061	6.2%
Manufacturing	208	10.2%	207	10.9%	8,988	6.1%
Wholesale trade	223	2.1%	0	0.0%	2,847	1.9%
Retail Trade	NA	8.7%	327	17.2%	16,373	11.2%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	59	2.8%	121	6.4%	7,499	5.1%
Information	NA	NA	28	1.5%	2,540	1.7%
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing	45	2.2%	155	8.2%	9,114	6.2%
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	1,139	5.3%	145	7.6%	16,225	11.1%
Educational, health and social services	NA	50.1%	327	17.2%	42,458	29.0%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services	48	2.3%*	169	8.9%	13,730	9.4%
Public administration	80	3.8%	131	6.9%	7,131	4.9%
Other services	NA	NA	41	2.2%	8,823	6.0%
Total	2054	100.0%	1,898	100.0%	146,455	100.0%
<b>Notes:</b> *Defined as "Personal Services" in 1991 Master Plan <b>Sources:</b> <sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. "Industry, 1980". Social Explorer. <sup>2</sup> American Community Survey (ACS) 2020 (5-Year Estimates) "Industry By Occupation Civilian Population 16 Years and Over". Social Explorer.						

## Housing

Nationally, amidst demographic shifts and economic changes accelerated by the COVID pandemic, the housing shortage has become a housing crisis, with an estimated 4.3 million apartment rentals needed by 2035.<sup>6</sup> At the time of the 2007 Comprehensive Plan Update, Dutchess County, along with the country, was experiencing a housing boom, creating thousands of jobs and new homes. Yet even

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<sup>6</sup> "U.S. Needs 4.3m More Apartments by 2035 to Address Demand, Deficit and Affordability," NMHC, July 22, 2022, <https://www.nmhc.org/news>.

at that time, Amenia, through its Comprehensive Plan, recognized the need for more housing, particularly, affordable housing. And as we know now, that housing boom was a bubble that burst in 2008, causing one of the worst recessions in American history. The need for affordable housing is acute.

While there remains a supply of existing affordable housing within Amenia (many of them mobile homes), a significant percentage of households are “cost-burdened,” meaning that they are paying more than 30 percent of their income for housing. Moreover, the percentage of Amenia residents who are cost-burdened has increased considerably since the 2007 Update. At that time, approximately 22 percent of homeowners were cost-burdened, as were 34.5 percent of renters. Current data reports that approximately 29 percent of homeowners and 45.9 percent of renters are now paying more than 30 percent of their income for housing.<sup>7, 8</sup>

Even during the time leading up to the 2007 Update, the housing boom was of little help to areas like Amenia where the new housing construction was geared toward the higher end of the market, decreasing the proportion of housing options affordable to most residents. After the economic crash of 2008, the gap between incomes and home prices expanded further in Amenia and throughout the country.

Amenia’s housing affordability problem, which was already significant at the time of the 2007 Update, has continued to swell, exacerbated both by national economics, where incomes have not kept pace with the costs of living, and regionally, where wealthier new residents continue to raise the demand for higher housing prices. As the availability of moderately priced homes decreases, this growing imbalance will continue to impact social and economic diversity of Amenia if the community does not take action. In addition, the shortage of affordable housing has historically created recruitment and retention problems with area employers. For example, in 2007 the Taconic DDSO went so far as to have the Dutchess County Loop Bus System run a special bus for each shift at the facility.

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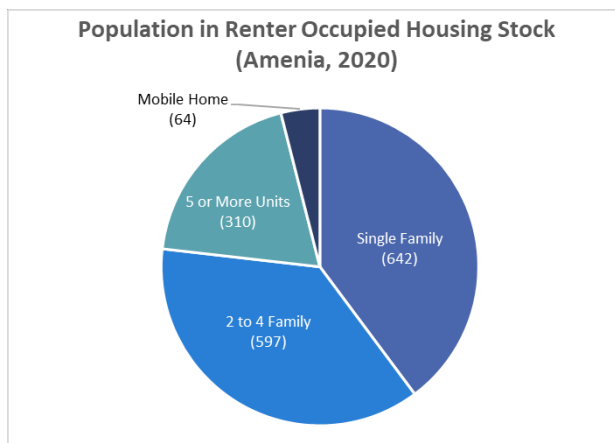
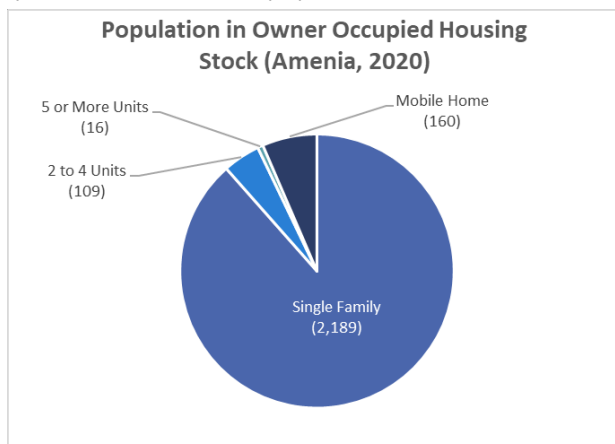
<sup>7</sup> Defining Housing Affordability." US Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2014.  
<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr-edge-featd-article-081417.html>.

<sup>8</sup> US Census Bureau; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2016-2020; Social Explorer. "SE:A10049: Selected Monthly Owner Costs as a Percentage of Household Income in the Past 12 Months (Dollars) for Housing Units with a Mortgage" and; "SE:A10051:Selected Monthly Owner Costs as a Percentage of Household Income in the Past 12 Months (Dollars) for Housing Units Without a Mortgage;" and "SE:A18002:Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income in the Past 12 Months".



## *Adequacy of Existing Housing Stock*

The statistical portrait of Amenia's housing stock is portrayed in **Tables 10, 11, and 12** below. The data shows that as of 2020, approximately 60 percent of the Town's population are homeowners and 40 percent are renters,<sup>9</sup> compared to Dutchess County, where 73 of residents are owners and 27 percent renters. As such, Amenia has a higher rate of renters than Dutchess County. Moreover, as shown in Table 11, the ownership rate in Amenia has markedly shifted over the last 20 years, decreasing from 68.8 percent in 2000 to 60.5 percent in 2022. These tables also show that, although single-family homes make up the majority of Amenia's owner-occupied homes, renters are almost evenly split between single-family and 2-4 family homes. These factors about the growing proportion of renters and their housing preferences are important for determining the types of new housing that are most needed, and should be encouraged, in Amenia.



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<sup>9</sup> Housing structures include the total of single-family houses, multi-family buildings, mobile homes, and boats, RVs, etc. in which people reside.

**Table 10**  
**Population in Occupied Housing Stock,**  
**Town of Amenia and Dutchess County, 2020**

Tenure and Number of Units in Structure	Amenia		Dutchess County	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Population in Owner Occupied Housing</b>				
1 (Detached or Attached)	2,189	53.60%	184,639	67.10%
2 To 4	109	2.70%	5,611	2.00%
5 or More	16	0.40%	3,505	1.30%
Mobile Home	160	3.90%	6,047	2.20%
Boat, RV, Van, Etc.	0	0.00%	77	0.00%
Subtotal	2,474	60.50%	199,879	72.60%
<b>Population in Renter Occupied Housing</b>				
1 (Detached or Attached)	642	15.70%	23,154	8.40%
2 To 4	597	14.60%	25,649	9.30%
5 or More	310	7.60%	24,245	8.80%
Mobile Home	64	1.60%	2,436	0.90%
Boat, RV, Van, Etc.	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Subtotal	1,613	39.50%	75,484	27.40%
Total	4,087*		275,363	
<b>Sources:</b> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2020 (5-Year Estimates) "Total Population In Occupied Housing Units By Tenure By Units In Structure". Social Explorer.				
<b>Notes:</b> * The total population figure differs slightly from that presented in Table 1 because the data presented in this table has not yet been released as part of the 2020 U.S. Census.				

**Table 11**  
**Town of Amenia Housing Tenure, 2000 and 2020**

Type	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
	2000 <sup>1</sup>		2020 <sup>2</sup>	
Population in Owner-Occupied Housing	3,991	69.50%	2,474	60.50%
Population in Renter-Occupied Housing	1,217	30.5%	1,613	39.50%
<b>Sources:</b> <sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. "Total Population In Occupied Housing Units By Tenure, 2000". Social Explorer.				
<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2020 (5-Year Estimates). "Total Population In Occupied Housing Units By Tenure By Units In Structure, 2020". Social Explorer.				

A high percentage of Amenia's housing structures were built before 1960. Of the estimated total number of 1,855 housing structures, approximately 1,188 (64 percent) were built in this period, with 789 (43 percent) being built prior to 1940. This is generally true, however, for most of the communities in the Harlem Valley with the exception of Dover, which has a higher percentage of mobile homes.

**Table 12**  
**Town of Amenia Year Housing Structures Built**

<b>Year Built</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>
2014 or Later	25	1.3%	16.97
2010 To 2013	8	0.4%	9.70
2000 To 2009	24	1.3%	13.33
1990 To 1999	149	8.0%	56.97
1980 To 1989	90	4.9%	31.52
1970 To 1979	107	5.8%	28.48
1960 To 1969	264	14.2%	64.85
1950 To 1959	307	16.5%	71.52
1940 To 1949	92	5.0%	45.45
1939 or Earlier	789	42.5%	115.76
Total:	1,855	100.0%	123.03
<b>Sources:</b> U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey (ACS) 2020 (5-Year Estimates). "B25034:Year Structure Built." Social Explorer.			

### *Housing Trends and Costs*

The housing situation in Dutchess County has changed significantly over recent decades. Lower- and middle-income people wishing to stay within, or move to, the community have had a difficult time affording homes. The rise of housing prices, which has accelerated at a much higher rate than incomes, has created an affordability crisis among a growing majority of the population. The high cost of housing is also reflected in the rise in land prices which, as noted in the 1991 Master Plan, has limited farmer-to-farmer sales of agricultural land.

A review of current real estate offerings on the Multiple Listing Services (MLS) and Zillow for the Town of Amenia in January 2023 showed a total of fourteen properties for sale, which included nine houses and five undeveloped lots. Four of the houses were in foreclosure or pre-foreclosure. The limited availability of homes and high rate of foreclosure may be largely reflective of the housing crisis, although data obtained during this time period may also reflect lingering COVID-driven trends, which may not be sustained long-term. All four of the MLS properties were in foreclosure or pre-foreclosure. Zillow listed five houses for sale (non-foreclosure) and five undeveloped lots <sup>10</sup>. Most of the undeveloped lots were about 38 acres, and two were over 300 acres. The price varied from \$629,000 to \$9,500,000, yielding an average per-acre cost of \$33,380. For the houses, the average size was four bedrooms with an average price of \$1,001,400. Interestingly, although the number of housing units has increased since the 2007 Update (see housing stock tables, above), the number and types of homes listed for sale seem to have decreased. Most notably, the 2007 Update observed multiple

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<sup>10</sup> Zillow listed one foreclosure property which was also on the MLS site.

listings for mobile homes, the most affordable housing type, whereas the current search showed no mobile homes. The only housing type available was single-family homes<sup>11</sup>.

A search of rental homes produced four listings: one single-family home for \$3,500 per month, and three luxury single-family cottages for between \$5,200 to \$7,200 per month. While these listings present only a snapshot, the results are similar to (yet more limited than) another search of rental homes conducted in August 2022, which produced two single-family homes, one within a duplex, and one within a four-unit apartment building. The rent prices for the August 2022 search ranged from \$1,275 for the apartment to \$8,500 for the larger single-family home. These two snapshots show limited selections and high prices that represent a substantial change from the 2007 Update, which stated that the rent for nearly 45 percent of Amenia's rental units was between \$500 and \$749.



**Amenia residents paying at least 30% of income towards housing:**

***29% of homeowners***

***46% of renters***

### *Affordable Housing Issues*

As discussed in Chapter 2, Amenia, like the rest of the country, has a growing housing affordability problem. A comparison of **Tables 13** and **14** shows that renters generally pay a greater percent of their income on housing than homeowners. According to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), "the generally accepted definition of affordability is for a household to pay no more than 30 percent of its annual income on housing. Families who pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing are considered cost burdened and may have difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation and medical care."<sup>12</sup>



**Amenia residents paying at least 50% of income towards housing:**

***9% of homeowners***

***23% of renters***

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<sup>11</sup> A similar search of for-sale homes conducted in August 2022 showed eight single-family houses, four undeveloped lots, one multi-family home, and no mobile homes. The home prices were similar, ranging from \$300,000 to several million dollars. The undeveloped lots were also similar, ranging from 27 to 422 acres and from \$630,000 to \$8,900,000.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/affordablehousing/>

Another term for “affordable housing” is “workforce housing” – housing that is affordable to a large majority of the workforce in any region. In Amenia, approximately 45.9 percent of renters reside in housing that is considered “unaffordable”, as compared to 28.7 percent of homeowners. Both of these percentages have increased since the 2007 Update, which reported that 34 percent of renters and 22 percent of homeowners were paying more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs. Yet, the percent of renters who are cost burdened continues to grow at a higher rate than the percent of homeowners. This dichotomy indicates a greater need for *affordable rental housing*. As reported in the 1991 Master Plan, the demand for affordable rental housing was primarily from young families and the elderly. While these sectors of the population continue to place a high demand for affordable housing, a growing portion of the greater population has become cost burdened as rising housing costs continue to outpace income levels.

As the demographic analysis shows, the median age of Amenia is increasing, indicating a growing population that will increase demand for affordable housing. Oftentimes, people prefer to “age in place” and retire in their hometown because that is where their friends, family, place of worship, community, and general support system is. To do so, they may also wish to “downsize” from their existing home to something more manageable in terms of affordability, accessibility, and maintenance. This trend increases the demand for smaller, more affordable housing in a community that is already experiencing a housing shortage.

**Table 13**  
**Cost-Burdened Homeowners, Amenia, 2020**

<b>Affordability Characteristic</b>	<b>Number of Homeowners</b>	<b>Percent of Total Homeowners</b>
Homeowners Who are Paying at Least 30% of Income for Home Ownership Costs	273	28.7%
Homeowners Who are Paying at Least 50% of Income for Home Ownership Costs	85	8.9%
<b>Notes:</b> Total Owner-Occupied Housing Units: 951 <b>Sources:</b> U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey (ACS) 2020 (5-Year Estimates) “SE: B10040: Residents Paying More Than 30% or at least 50% of Income on Home Ownership Expenses”. Social Explorer		

**Table 14**  
**Cost-Burdened Renters, Amenia, 2020**

<b>Affordability Characteristic</b>	<b>Number of Renters</b>	<b>Percent of Total Renters</b>
Renters Who are Paying at Least 30% of Income for on Rent	276	45.9%
Renters Who are Paying at Least 50% of Income on Rent	139	23.1%
<b>Notes:</b> Total Renter-Occupied Housing Units: 601 <b>Sources:</b> U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey (ACS) 2020 (5-Year Estimates) “SE: B18002: Residents Paying More Than 30% or at least 50% of Income on Rent”. Social Explorer		

The limited supply of affordable housing is a problem discussed in the 1991 Master Plan and continues to be a problem today. Among the groups most affected by this problem in the Town of Amenia are schoolteachers, town employees, emergency services volunteers, and the elderly.

Due to the Town’s attractive character and accessibility to the New York City area, Amenia continues to see an increasing number of second-homeowners, weekenders, and visitors. These part-time residents bring benefits to the Town, including that they typically generate more tax revenue than they consume in municipal services, that they spend money that stimulates the local economy, and that they can provide employment opportunities to local workers. However, it is important that the benefits provided by this demographic are balanced with the housing needs of full-time residents and local workers, such that a healthy percentage of “naturally affordable” housing (e.g., apartments, accessory dwelling units, and small homes) are available for long-term rentals and entry-level buyers. (See the discussion of “Large-Scale Resort and Second-Home Development Projects,” under the section on Specific Changes and Policy Implications.) As shown in **Table 15** below, according to the US Census, the rate of vacant housing units that are actually available for rent or purchase is zero percent. This is consistent with the 2021 Dutchess County Rental Housing Survey which reported a 0.2% vacancy rate in market rate apartment complexes in the Town of Amenia.<sup>13</sup> However, approximately 25.7 percent of units are rented but not occupied, and approximately 32.3 percent are used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use.

**Table 15**  
**Vacancy Status of Housing Units in Amenia, 2020**

<b>Unit Type</b>	<b>Number of Units</b>	<b>Percent</b>
For Rent	0	0.0%
Rented, Not Occupied	78	25.7%
For Sale Only	0	0.0%
Sold, Not Occupied	0	0.0%
For Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use	98	32.3%
For Migrant Workers	0	0.0%
Other Vacant	127	41.9%
Total	303	100%
<b>Sources:</b> U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey (ACS) 2020 (5-Year Estimates). “B25004:Vacancy Status.” Social Explorer.		

At the local level, zoning revisions can respond to the housing affordability problem by encouraging accessory apartments, higher density housing, especially multi-family housing, smaller units, and senior housing. These housing options increase the range of housing choice, and, through the

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<sup>13</sup> “2021 Dutchess County Rental Housing Survey,” Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development.

introduction of smaller dwelling units, reduce housing costs as well. Denser development also places less strain on municipal resources. The Town may also consider regulating the short-term rental market and bolstering the country inn and hotel market to balance the important economic benefits provided by the tourism economy with local housing needs.

Inclusionary housing is a zoning technique that goes further in promoting housing affordable to the local workforce by granting a developer a density bonus in exchange for the provision of a certain percentage of housing units affordable to low- and moderate-income households. Regulations that require developers to provide affordable housing are called “mandatory” inclusionary housing policies; unsurprisingly, mandatory programs are more effective than incentive programs. The affordable unit's selling prices are indexed to the median income of the residents of the area or to the average salary of municipal or school district employees.

Amenia’s inclusionary housing regulations provide a density bonus to developers who provide workforce housing, defined in the Zoning Code as, “Single-family, two-family, or multifamily housing that is owned or rented by an eligible household, as defined in § 121-42, and priced to be affordable to moderate-income households whose members live and/or work in the Town of Amenias and who cannot otherwise afford market rate housing.”

## Social and Economic Issues

As discussed in the 2007 Comprehensive Plan, largely because of the housing affordability crisis, there is growing concern that Amenias is losing the traditional economic diversity of its population. This diversity is reflected in a wide variety of incomes, occupations, and backgrounds. Amenias is the kind of place it is because of the solid corps of middle-class families who work in the local economy and staff emergency services and volunteer activities. As this segment of the population is priced out of the market, Amenias is at risk of losing its historic identity. Most new housing construction is available only to wealthy purchasers, leaving a dwindling portion that is affordable to existing local residents. History is not just about buildings and landscapes; it is also about the generations of families and the organizations and businesses that occupy those buildings and landscapes.

Amenias has managed to maintain much of its rural appearance and beauty, but the composition of its population is changing, and many long-term local families are feeling squeezed by increased property values and a shortage of local jobs. They are also finding it hard to build and operate local businesses because of the lack of suitable locations. This has exacerbated tensions between those who have come to Amenias from elsewhere to enjoy its rural tranquility and those who grew up here and seek opportunities to make a living locally.

The weekender population and tourism industry has continued to grow since 2007. Tourism and weekender residents are important to the local economy. However, it is important that the growing tourism economy and weekender population do not displace existing residents. Throughout the country, vacation communities are finding that the short-term rental market is consuming the local

housing supply and pricing out long-time residents and workers. The Town of Amenia should consider short term rental regulations to help preserve existing entry level rental and for sale homes for local residents and workers.

## SUMMARY OF ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

### Housing

As described in this Addendum, Amenia faces a worsening crisis in housing affordability. There are several concrete steps that the Town should now take to address this situation. They include the following actions.

1. **Zoning.** A number of positive zoning changes were implemented following the 2007 Update to encourage the production of housing for those who can no longer afford to live in Amenia. These changes should be maintained and adjusted as necessary to further advance the Town's affordable housing goals:
  - Allowing high density housing in hamlets that have water and sewer services, both existing (hamlet of Amenia with a new sewer) and new (transit-oriented development at Ten Mile River station using the state's existing water and sewer systems, as well as hamlet areas in which water and sewer could be incorporated as part of a new development).
  - Reduce regulatory hurdles to allow accessory apartments on single-family lots as-of-right.
  - Allowing two-family, multi-family, and other multiple housing types, such as apartments and townhouses in more locations, subject to appropriate siting and design controls. Such housing should be part of a larger community and make a positive contribution to its design, rather than standing alone in an isolated compound.
  - "Workforce housing" set-asides in new developments. This is housing that is restricted in price or rental cost, and that is maintained at a below- market rate in the future through deed restrictions; also called, affordable housing. Amenia's Zoning Code currently provides density incentives for developers to include workforce housing, and in some cases, requires a certain percentage of workforce housing. Alternatively, developers can pay a "fee in lieu" of providing such housing; these fees are kept in the Workforce Housing Trust Fund, which is used "exclusively to provide for the acquisition, purchase, planning, development, construction, improvement, rehabilitation, sale or resale, rental, subsidy, support, or other legal means of creating or supporting more workforce housing for income-qualified households within the Town and/or to provide



or make capital improvements to water and/or sewer infrastructure to the hamlets of  
Amenia or Wassaic.”<sup>14</sup>

2. **Institutional and administrative changes.** The Town should improve the administration and implementation of the workforce housing program. Administration of the program involves selecting eligible owners and tenants, and ensuring that the housing continues to be affordable and occupied by qualified owners and tenants in the future. The workforce housing program is administered by the Housing Board, which may delegate certain responsibilities to a qualified agency retained by the Town Board.

- The construction of workforce housing can be further incentivized by reducing regulatory obstacles, including: eliminating fees for municipal review and building permits; reducing the minimum required floor area per unit to the State minimum; and reducing the required amount of off-street parking, particularly in the hamlet areas.
- To ensure that the “fee in lieu” amounts are appropriate and sufficient, the required amount should be dynamic and correlated to the median income of the area.
- For orderly implementation of the workforce housing program, the procedures and responsibilities of the Housing Board should be clarified, including the Housing Board’s oversight of a qualified administrative agency.
- Unnecessary tenant restrictions, including minimum income requirements, should be removed.

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<sup>14</sup> Town of Amenia Zoning Code § 121-42