

# Orange County Comprehensive Plan *Strategies for Quality Communities*

Executive Summary



# ORANGE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN: STRATEGIES FOR QUALITY COMMUNITIES

ADOPTED APRIL 11 2003

**Edward A. Diana, County Executive**

A. Alan Seidman, Chair, County Legislature  
David E. Church, AICP, Planning Commissioner

## Orange County Planning Board

Susan G. Metzger, Chair	Constantine Sidamon-Eristoff, Esq.
David A. Dewilde	Seymour Gordon
Gerald N. Jacobowitz, Esq.	Drew A. Kartiganer
Henry VanLeeuwen	Irving Zuckerman
Gary Lake	Kenneth R. Magar
Elaine McClung	John Dodson, PE
Lucy T. Joyce (2000-2002)	F.A. Simpson, (2000-2002)
Patricia D. Claiborne (2000-2002)	

*The Orange County Department of Planning prepared this Plan with the assistance of:*

Office of the County Executive  
Orange County Water Authority  
Orange County Citizens Foundation  
Orange County Municipal Planning Federation  
Orange County Association of Town Supervisors and Mayors

Saccardi & Schiff, Inc.	E & Y Kenneth Leventhal
Eng-Wong, Taub & Associates	Hazen & Sawyer
Wallace Roberts & Todd	

*And advice from:*

Orange County Department of Community Development  
Orange County Partnership  
Orange County Housing Consortium  
Orange Environment

*For more information, including copies of this Plan, contact:*

**Orange County Department of Planning**  
**124 Main Street, Goshen, New York 10924**  
**(845) 291-2318 / 291-2533 (fax) / [planning@co.orange.ny.us](mailto:planning@co.orange.ny.us)**  
A downloadable copy of this Plan is available at [www.orangecountygov.com](http://www.orangecountygov.com)

## PREFACE

On April 11, 2003 The Orange County Legislature unanimously adopted this new Orange County Comprehensive Plan, *Strategies for Quality Communities*. The Plan builds on the 1987 County Comprehensive Development Plan and on the October 2001 draft County Comprehensive Plan, *Strategies for Quality Communities* prepared by the Orange County Planning Board. As a guidance document, it is intended for use by County, municipal, and other community leaders to provide a county-wide or regional context for decisions on how land might best be used, developed or preserved and how financial, technical and infrastructure resources might be effectively provided. The Plan should also be used to help define a common understanding about the primary trends, assets and challenges the County, and its partner municipalities, share in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

As written, the Orange County Comprehensive Plan meets two requirements. First, consistent with Orange County Administrative Code § 9.02(a), the Commissioner of Planning, in consultation with the County Executive and the County Planning Board, must, every five years, review and update the county comprehensive development plan and submit that plan to the County Legislature for approval. Second, consistent with New York State General Municipal Law § 239-d, this Plan meets the State requirements for a County Comprehensive Plan. As such, the plan has two effects upon adoption:

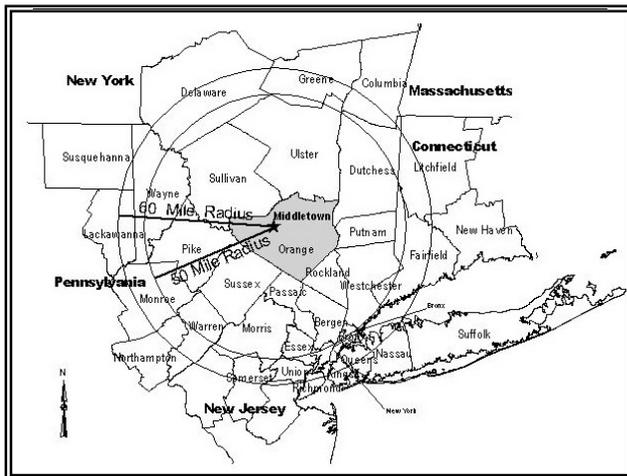
- ❖ All county land acquisitions and public improvements shall be in accordance with the County Comprehensive Plan.
- ❖ All plans for capital projects of a municipality (including the County) or state governmental agency on land included in the County Comprehensive Plan must take this Plan into consideration.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As Orange County enters the 21<sup>st</sup> Century it is in an important phase of land development and evolution of a regional identity. A combination of features -- notably varied and attractive landscapes, ready accessibility to metropolitan New York and a four State region, relatively affordable housing prices, and high quality, safe communities -- have made the County a leader in growth and development in recent decades. Recently, the pace of new home and retail center construction seems to have never been quicker. Job growth, retail sales, and real estate values are strong. Several larger regional projects -- highway and commuter rail improvements, medical facilities and distribution centers, the prospect of nearby casinos -- all symbolize opportunity and prosperity.

Yet growth may be coming with real costs. Several of our historic cities and villages still struggle for a role in this prosperity, and six of these historic centers lost modest population in the last decade. Our relative affordability has stimulated significant in-migration, but has diminished housing affordability for those of lesser means. Economic realities force more and more farm families to consider the option of selling their farms. A growing number of people complain about traffic congestion, and the rising cost of providing education and other public services.

Orange County received its charter as one of the original counties in New York State in 1687. By 1798 there were nine towns in the County: Newburgh, New Windsor, Goshen, New Cornwall, Deerpark, Wallkill, Montgomery, Minisink and Warwick. Today, the County has 20 towns, 17 villages and 3 cities as the “home rule” leaders exercising full authority in land use and development review.



As shown at left, New York City is about 50 miles from the Village of Goshen (the County seat and approximate geographic center of the county). Proximity to the largest metropolitan center on the East Coast, as well as higher wage jobs and higher housing prices in areas in the more immediate New York metropolitan area, have fostered growth in Orange County's population.

Orange County is unique. It is one of only three counties in New York State that shares its border with two other States. Three interstates I-87, I-84, and the future I-86 (formerly State Route 17) intersect here, giving the County unparalleled highway access to the Northeast, the Midwest and the South. Orange County's mountains, lakes and streams are bounded by the



Hudson River in the east, and the Delaware River in the west. The County is host to two of the top five tourism destinations (excluding New York City) in New York State... the United States Military Academy at West Point and the Woodbury Common Premium Outlet Center. Finally, in the south central part of the County, there are thousands of fertile acres of “black dirt” or “mucklands” (reclaimed glacial lake beds) that provide a strong and sustainable agricultural resource.

\*

The County faces many challenges as it enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is being challenged to offer an economically viable, attractive, safe haven for established and new residents while preserving a rural countryside that complements vital community centers. This is most apparent in the southeastern quadrant of the County, an area that has been highly attractive to the in-migration of families with at least one metro area commuter. Kiryas Joel, has been one of the fastest growing villages east of the Mississippi River and is located in this part of the County. A byproduct of the County’s interstate road access is a clustering of big box distribution and retail uses which together play an important economic role, but also remind us of the need to maintain economic diversity.

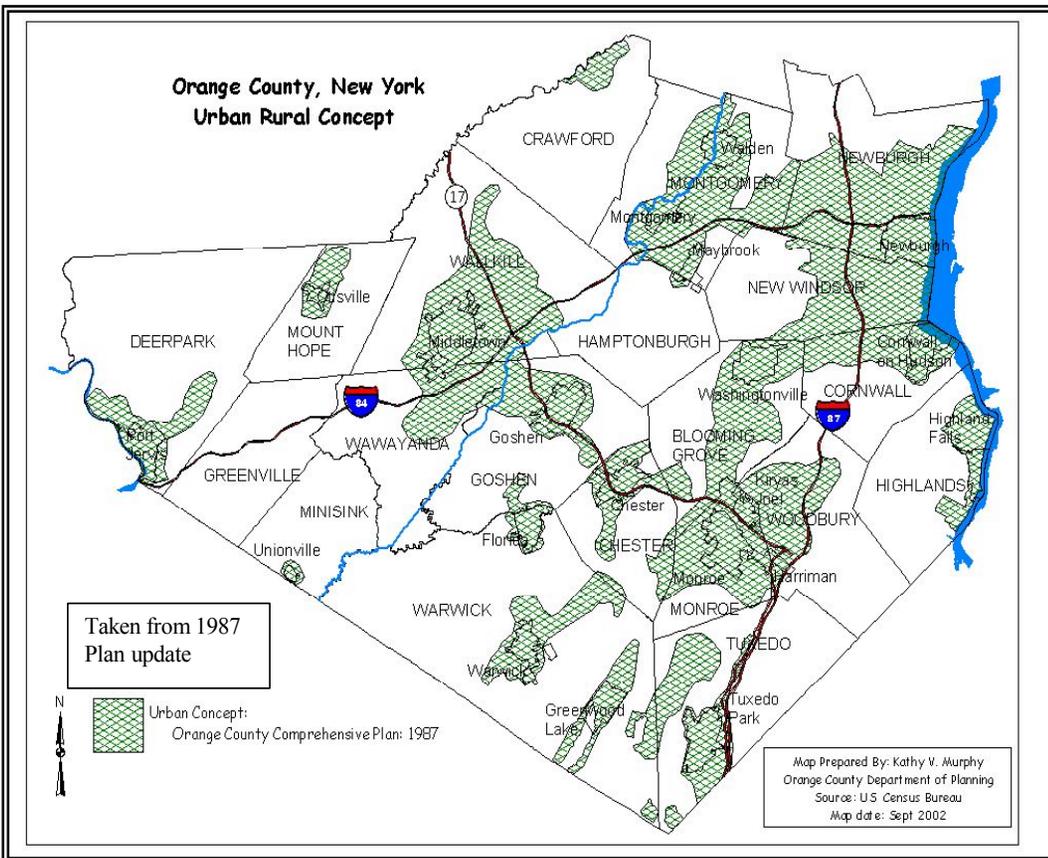
Area	1960	1980	2000	2002 estimates	% change 1960 - 2000
Orange	183,734	259,603	341,367	356,733	86
New York State	16,702,304	17,558,072	18,976,457	19,157,532	13
United States	179,323,175	226,546,000	281,421,906	291,085,865	57

*Source: US Census Bureau, 2003*

Preserving the valuable elements of the County’s historic and environmental character, defining the role of its agricultural industry, and fostering economic growth while accommodating continued population growth are among the many challenges which will need consideration as the new century proceeds.

The Orange County Comprehensive Plan, Strategies for Quality Communities provides an understanding of the factors that will shape the development of the County over the next decade and beyond. As guidance, this plan provides a strategy to move forward in a way that doesn’t simply replicate and extend

the pattern of suburban sprawl that has occurred throughout the New York metropolitan region and the United States in recent decades. The Strategies for Quality Communities Plan provides templates for the County’s municipalities to assist them with planning in a county-wide context. Under the “home rule” provisions of the New York State Constitution, local municipalities, based on local comprehensive plans, have the primary authority to regulate land use through zoning and related regulations. Yet this County Plan should be considered when local decisions about land use are being made. County leaders should also use this Plan to help define capital improvements, infrastructure, and technical assistance to support quality local decisions.



The Strategies for Quality Communities Plan discusses desirable patterns of preservation and development, using the “urban/rural” concept of previous County Plans. This concept emphasizes the concentration of development in and around “centers” -- built-up areas such as cities, villages, hamlets and certain crossroads and interchanges -- in order to maintain the County’s rural countryside. This Plan also incorporates contemporary “smart growth” techniques, and outlines specific strategies focusing on open space, housing, economic development, transportation, and utilities

### A. PLANNING EFFORTS IN THE COUNTY

The last Comprehensive Plan, updated in 1987, attempted to address the challenge of maintaining a semi-rural county bordering on the ex-urban fringe of the New York metropolitan region. Increasingly, Orange County is being integrated into the larger New York metropolitan region. The continued expansion

of regional transportation systems, coupled with the relative affordability of housing and the attractive, safe living environment, have encouraged the immigration of a population that often works in Westchester and Rockland Counties, New York City, and northern New Jersey. These same transportation

systems, notably three interstate highways, have also helped to attract businesses into the County seeking buildable, affordable sites with ready access to the largest market in the United States.

Since 1987, two regional shopping centers have been built at strategic locations along major highways: the Galleria at Crystal Run at the intersection of I-84 and NYS 17, and Woodbury Common Premium Outlet Center at the intersection of I-87 and NYS Route 17. “Big box” retailers in the Newburgh, Middletown, Monroe, Wallkill, and Woodbury areas have also altered shopping patterns, challenging efforts to reinvigorate the commercial centers of traditional downtowns and weakening older suburban shopping centers. Redevelopment efforts in the cities and older villages in Orange County are ongoing with notable success in Cornwall, Warwick, Goshen, Montgomery, and Washingtonville among others. New housing is being occupied as quickly as it can be built. Older housing is being rehabilitated. At the same time, many towns have experienced significant residential and commercial development, with development often encroaching on the surrounding country-side. Fortunately, past development patterns mostly extended historic patterns focusing on areas served by central water and sewer systems. This left significant undeveloped areas, including prime agricultural lands, undisturbed forests and other environmentally sensitive areas along with significant rolling, rural landscapes that have begun to become prime residential sites.

Orange County has a noteworthy history of comprehensive planning at the municipal and County levels. In 1976, the Orange County Department of Planning prepared a comprehensive development plan entitled “Growth Alternative: A Proposal For An Urban-Rural Concept of County Growth”. Adopted by the County Legislature in 1980, this Plan proposed an urban-rural growth strategy for the future of Orange County. The central idea was to develop a growth concept that welcomed “growth that comes as a natural course” but “stage and direct growth into areas where it can be supported efficiently and at least cost.” If growth were focused toward existing centers, the rural character of most of the County would be maintained by limiting growth in areas without pre-existing infrastructure. When the plan was updated in 1987 to reflect a quickening of development in the County during the economic boom of the early 1980s, the urban-rural concept remained the core theme of the plan.



Previous County Plans provided guidance for decision making at the local level. Other planning efforts have included studies and seminars conducted by Mid-Hudson Pattern for Progress, the Orange County Municipal Planning Federation, the Orange County Citizens Foundation and other civic and community organizations. A number of studies have addressed other critical issues, including the 1996 County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan. In the past ten years County agencies have also produced plans addressing pedestrian and bicycle needs, transit improvements, park capital needs, tourism, and community development priorities. Concepts from these efforts along with background information from the Orange County Partnership (economic development), Orange County Water Authority (water resource issues) and the Orange County Housing Consortium (affordable and special housing needs) are all incorporated in this Plan.

Central to preparing this new Plan for Orange County was the participation of public agencies, community leaders, local organizations and citizens of Orange County. Over the past two years meetings were held with county and municipal leaders along with community organizations to obtain their perspective on the issues, concerns and ideas that were ultimately addressed in the Plan. A series of community forums were structured to allow focused discussion on environmental, housing, open space, agricultural, economic development and sustainable development issues. In addition, comments were solicited from regional and State agencies to provide regional perspectives on transportation, agricultural, recreational and utility systems. Reports and studies previously published by the County, municipalities and other sources were reviewed as background material.

Out of this effort, the Planning Board developed a series of technical memoranda covering areas of land use, demographics and housing, open space, parks and recreation, farmland, transportation, historic and cultural resources, economic development and environmental infrastructure. These technical memoranda are on file at the County Planning Department. Finally, the County Executive sponsored two community “summit” meetings in 2002, the first designed to identify actions to promote “smart growth” and the second focused on economic development priorities. Over 600 individuals attended the two summits providing important input towards priority actions.



## B. Summary of Recommendations Strategies for Quality Communities

In developing a vision and guidance document for Orange County in the first decade of the 21st Century, the basic premise of previous comprehensive planning efforts will be retained as sound, fundamental policy. Growth will be encouraged in order to provide employment opportunities and enhanced living environments, but that growth should first be directed into the built-up areas of the County where it can be supported effectively and efficiently. Within existing built-up or “urban” areas, the Strategies for Quality Communities Plan emphasizes the need for a diversity of housing types, a mix of uses, transportation options, and enhanced employment and business opportunities. The Quality Communities Plan seeks to preserve the environmentally sensitive and working lands and the historic resources that give Orange County its unique, desirable character.

An analysis of demographic and economic trends and of the environmental and physical conditions of the County (more fully discussed in Chapter 2, “Building Blocks”) defines a series of core issues of concern.

- ❖ **Declining Affordability** - the need to find ways to insure greater access to livable wages, affordable housing, and available community services for all of our diverse population.
- ❖ **Retaining and Attracting Our Youth** - to insure the diversity and quality of our communities and our workforce in the future.
- ❖ **Insuring A Lead Role for Our Central Places** - Cities, Villages, and Hamlets. The vitality of these places is a prime indicator of successful planning.
- ❖ **Better Managing Development Patterns** - Traffic congestion and increasing difficulty in finding adequate water supplies are some of the lead signs that land development location, pace, and design needs improved management.
- ❖ **The Future of Agriculture** - The need for direct efforts to help reduce the costs and provide incentives to help overcome market forces that encourage the conversion of farms to residential and commercial development.



## **Quality Communities Principles**

The essence of “smart growth” is a set of guiding principles for decision-making. In implementing this County Comprehensive Plan, County leadership along with municipal, government and non-government partners should be guided by these principles:

- ❖ **BALANCE** - balancing the needs of the economy, the environment, and the community.
- ❖ **EQUITY** - insuring that all citizens share in a positive future.
- ❖ **AFFORDABILITY** - diversity and choice in housing – ideally with proximity to work, schools, transportation and commerce.
- ❖ **QUALITY OF DESIGN** - promotion of compact, efficient land development including a greater mix of land uses, density and diversity in housing, complementary land conservation, urban and village infill development, and connections among different modes of transportation.
- ❖ **CONCURRENCY** - defining a regional context for the County’s future by insuring that county, municipal, and private sector efforts communicate and share goals.
- ❖ **PARTNERSHIP** - working together among all levels of government and with all civic and community interests.
- ❖ **PREDICTABILITY** - providing support to projects and actions that are consistent with these principles.

## **The County’s Priority Growth Areas**

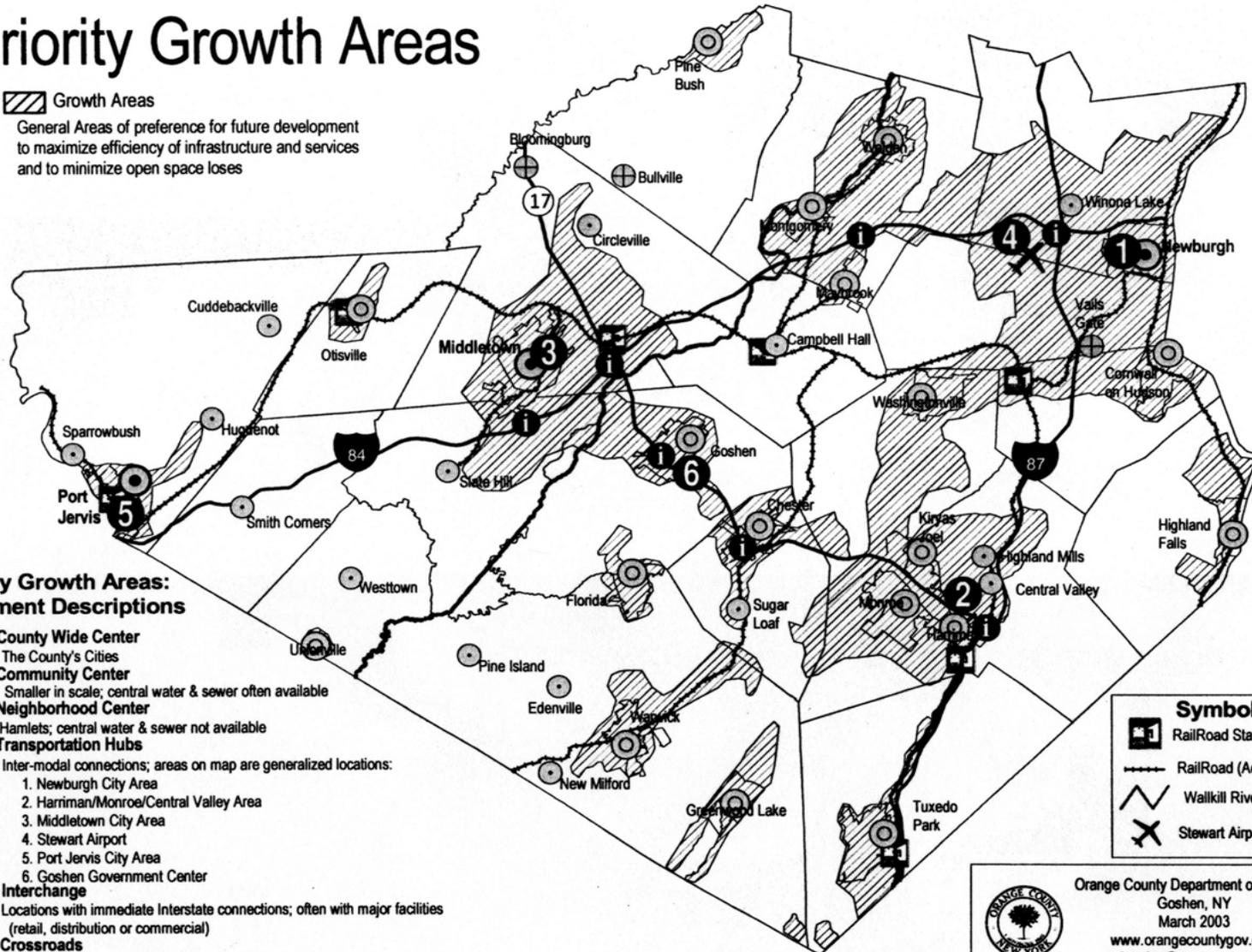
The Strategies for Quality Communities Plan recognizes the importance of developing guidance, with a County-wide, regional perspective, for Orange County leaders, local municipal officials, and citizens involved in land use decisions. Our primary, guiding strategy builds from the “Urban – Rural Concept” of the 1987 County Comprehensive Development Plan Update in anticipating future development trends and defining land use priorities. This Plan also continues the recognition of the important role of our historic community “centers”- the cities, villages, and hamlets of the County - while adding recognition of the importance of transportation hubs, interchanges, crossroads, and the corridors linking these with our historic centers. Together these land use elements are “Priority Growth Areas” (see the following two maps, Priority Growth Areas and Corridors).

# Priority Growth Areas

 **Growth Areas**  
 General Areas of preference for future development to maximize efficiency of infrastructure and services and to minimize open space losses

## Priority Growth Areas: Element Descriptions

-  **County Wide Center**  
The County's Cities
-  **Community Center**  
Smaller in scale; central water & sewer often available
-  **Neighborhood Center**  
Hamlets; central water & sewer not available
-  **Transportation Hubs**  
Inter-modal connections; areas on map are generalized locations:
  1. Newburgh City Area
  2. Harriman/Monroe/Central Valley Area
  3. Middletown City Area
  4. Stewart Airport
  5. Port Jervis City Area
  6. Goshen Government Center
-  **Interchange**  
Locations with immediate Interstate connections; often with major facilities (retail, distribution or commercial)
-  **Crossroads**  
Major road intersections which could be future community or neighborhood centers

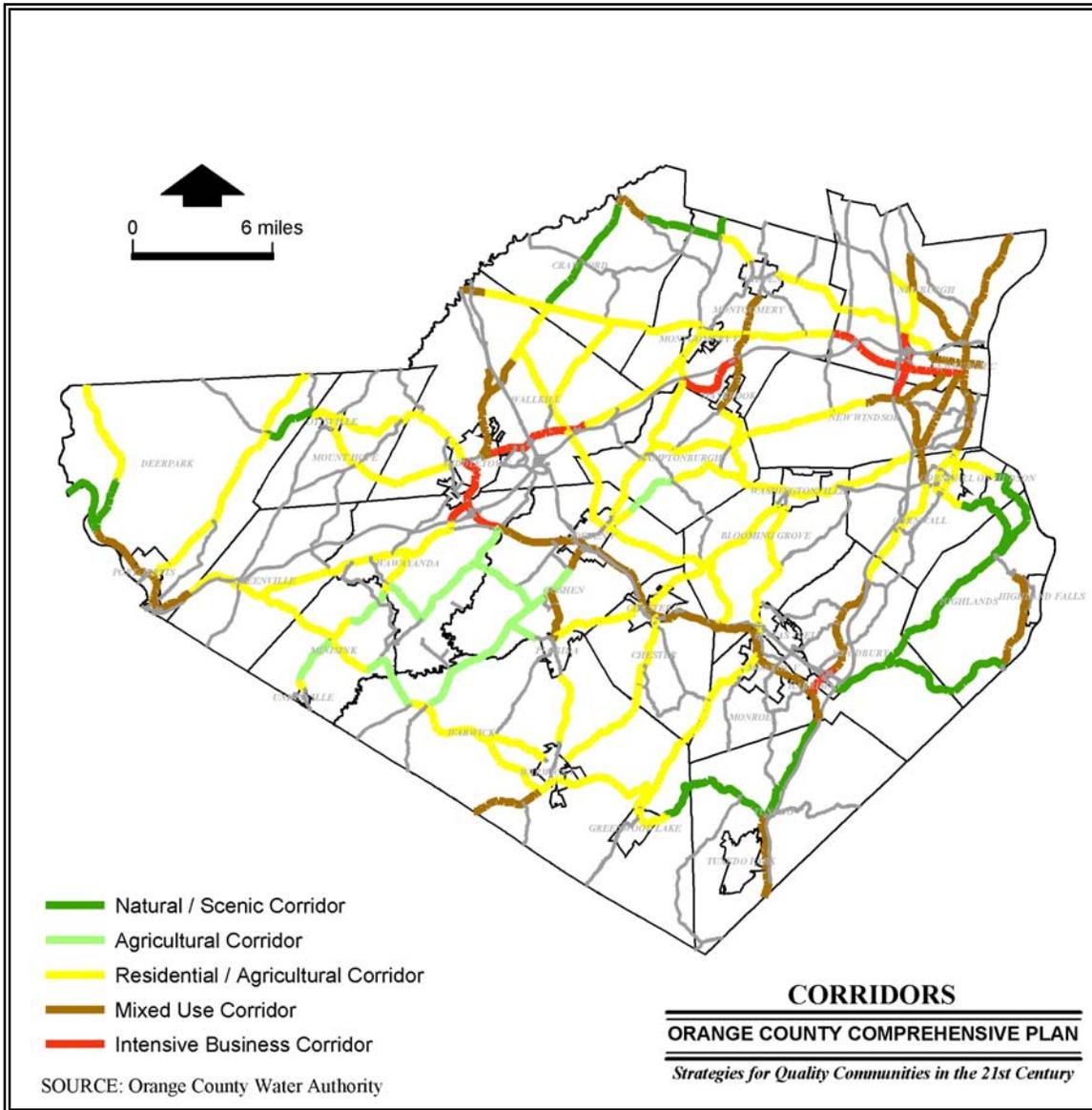


**Symbols**

-  RailRoad Stations
-  RailRoad (Active)
-  Wallkill River
-  Stewart Airport

N

 Orange County Department of Planning  
 Goshen, NY  
 March 2003  
[www.orangecountygov.com](http://www.orangecountygov.com)  
[planning@co.orange.ny.us](mailto:planning@co.orange.ny.us)  
 Map Prepared By: Kathy V. Murphy



The majority of these Priority Growth Areas include the historic cities, villages and hamlets and their immediate surroundings, where public infrastructure such as central water, sewer, and higher capacity roads exist, or could be efficiently extended to accommodate future growth. Higher density residential development and complementary civic, commercial and industrial development is preferred in the Growth Areas. The Rural Areas of the County are everywhere outside these Priority Growth Areas. In Rural Areas, the Plan’s concept supports the maintenance of a mix of agriculture, forest, and other natural areas along with lower intensity residential and commercial uses. The Rural Area concept also recognizes reliance on private wells and septic systems, and on roads with lower capacities. Public infrastructure improvements are less of a priority, except in addressing public safety or health or in meeting limited, neighborhood needs.

## Recommended Actions

Over the next five years, the following County actions are recommended towards implementation of the County Comprehensive Plan:

### DEVELOP TWO SUPPLEMENTS TO THIS PLAN...

First, THE FIRST COUNTY OPEN SPACE PLAN - A primary challenge generated by the County's dynamic real estate market is the loss of open spaces that define the uniqueness and environmental characteristics of the County. In cooperation with the Orange County Land Trust and other civic, environmental, and recreational organizations, the County Planning and Parks Departments should take the lead in inventorying current open spaces, defining future open space needs, and recommending County and municipal actions to protect key open spaces. Such a plan should also identify the financial role the County might play in open space protection. \*\*



Second, UPDATING THE COUNTY AGRICULTURAL PLAN – FARM ECONOMIC VITALITY. Orange County has been a leader in agricultural preservation efforts as shown by adoption of New York State's first Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan, and active participation in purchase of development rights programs. Yet the continued viability of farming remains a challenge. Through the leadership of the County's Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board, the County will move to update its Agriculture Plan to address ways to improve the economic vitality and diversity of agricultural pursuits in the County.



**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY** - The County has taken important steps to improve the marketing of business and tourism opportunities,. Yet there is insufficient public understanding of economic development priorities for a sustainable future. Such a strategy needs to be more than marketing and matching real estate and business interests to sites that allow commercial uses. The Orange County Partnership and other government and non-governmental organizations should collaborate to publish a consensus-based



strategy for economic development so that County, municipal, business, tourism, farming, and other interests can better appreciate their roles in strengthening the County’s economic future.

**COUNTY OFFICIAL MAP** - New York State General Municipal Law §239 allows counties to prepare an “official map” to help facilitate orderly growth and development. Orange County, through a cooperative effort of the County Departments of Planning, Public Works, and Parks, should prepare such a map, identifying future needs for public facilities such as parks and public buildings, an efficient and adequate transportation system, and stormwater management to protect the public from future damage.

**GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY DEVELOPMENT** - Municipal, business and community interests consistently seek better guidance and documentation on how to promote quality development, and how facilitate predictable approval when such development is offered. The County should take the lead in the preparation and distribution of such guidance materials, based on the concepts in this new Comprehensive Plan. Technical materials, model codes and laws, and case studies are all needed. Workshops, conferences, printed materials, and Web-based information are also needed. County agencies with land

development permit and review authority or with expertise, including the Departments of Health, Planning and Public Works as well as the County Soil & Water Conservation District, should initiate efforts to assist and to streamline the approval of development meeting the Plan’s guidelines.

**EFFORTS TO CURB TRAFFIC CONGESTION.** Traffic – the lament of many County residents. With significant influence over transportation improvements, and in partnership with NYS Department of Transportation and local municipalities, the County should take a more pro-active role to reduce congestion and to advance transportation options through the Newburgh-Orange County Transportation Council. Land use strategies should be promoted to help reduce demand for single occupancy vehicle use (SOV) and reduce demand for highway capacity increases. The County will also move to implement the 2001 County Transit Improvement Study, building intermodal transportation connections around key hubs serving the County and surrounding region.



**MAINSTREET / DOWNTOWN REDEVELOPMENT.** The County Planning Department will initiate a Main Street/downtown redevelopment program designed to provide assistance to leaders and businesses in the historically important city, village and hamlet centers of the County.



**LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY FOR FAIR HOUSING.** A quality community provides access to affordable housing for all residents. To help overcome a trend of declining affordability, the County will define what “affordable” means, and what each municipality might do to provide additional affordable

housing.<sup>1</sup> The Orange County Housing Consortium, working with the Departments of Planning and Community Development, should prepare technical materials to help overcome the myths about affordable housing. The Planning Department should advance model plans, programs and codes for municipalities to meet housing needs. Lead County agencies should inventory surplus lands and tax sale auctions, analyze options to streamline permit and filing requirements, and partner with localities or private sector interests to make a wider diversity of housing available. The County’s economic development strategy should continue to focus on creating good jobs to make the opportunity to earn livable wages available to all County residents.

DEFINING WATER AND SEWER CARRYING CAPACITIES - Land development patterns will continue to be shaped by available water supplies and sewage treatment capacity. To advance the principles of quality communities in this Plan, the County needs to foster cooperation with municipalities including inter-connections among local systems where possible. But first, the Orange County Water Authority and the County Planning and Health departments should assist municipalities in identifying the capacities and limits of their current systems with respect to future demands and potential system expansions. Watershed and wellhead protection, and best management practices, should continue to be promoted to conserve water and maximize efficiencies of sewage or septic systems. The County should also convene agency, municipal and development interests to assess new technologies, including community-based water supply and sewage treatment technologies, sometimes called “small flow” systems, which can contribute to quality development. Additionally, the Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District has important expertise and interest in water quality issues and should be an active partner in this recommendation.



MUNICIPAL PARTNERSHIPS. The essential partners to this Plan are the County’s 40 municipalities. Partnership opportunities are numerous. In particular, the County will advance:

---

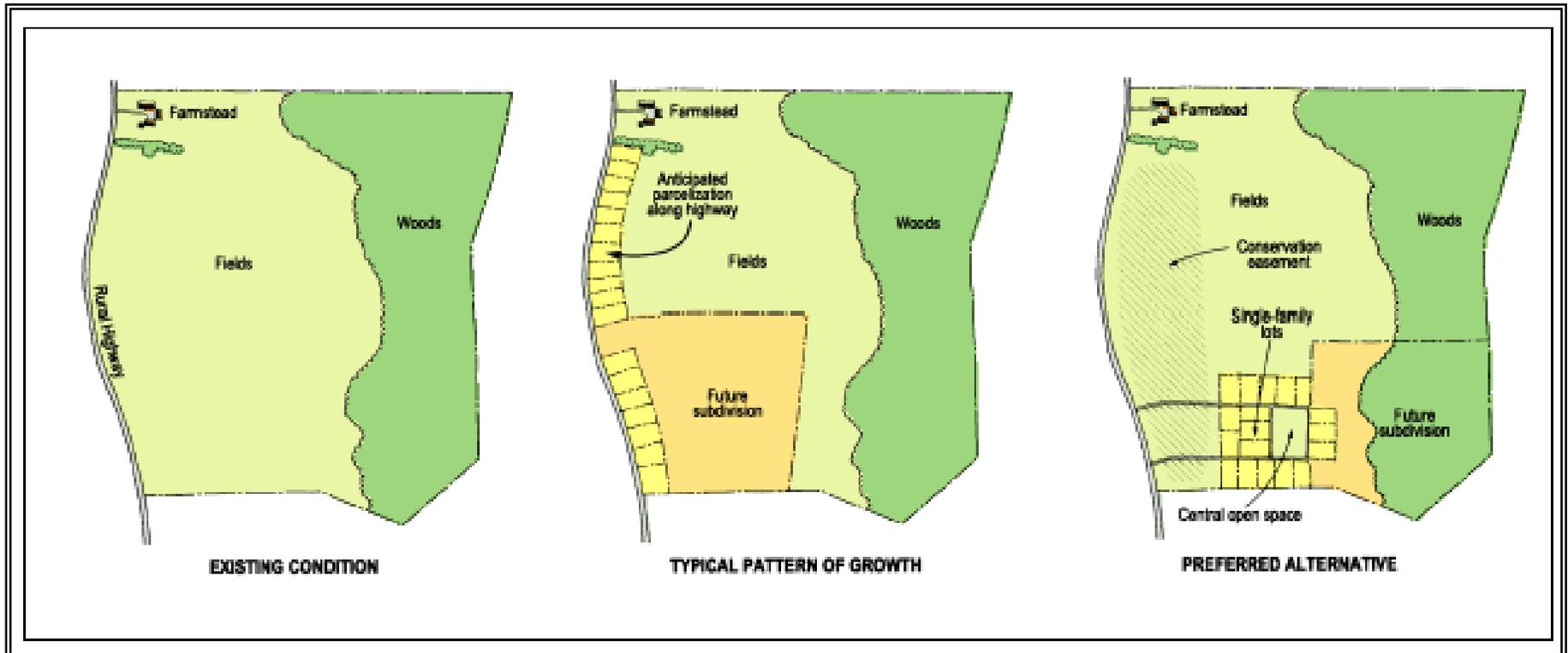
<sup>1</sup> Affordable housing is defined to encourage accessibility to housing for all residents of the County. This definition includes concepts of *fair housing*, *workforce housing*, and *low- and moderate-income housing* as well as *special needs housing*.

1. **CERTIFIED TRAINING OF PLANNING & ZONING OFFICIALS.** Working with the Orange County Municipal Planning Federation and the County Association of Supervisors and Mayors, the County Planning Department will work to advance consistent, certified training of appointed officials and staff in a variety of core subjects needed to implement quality community planning.
2. **DIRECT ASSISTANCE.** County agencies, lead by the County Executive and the Planning Department, will coordinate direct technical and financial assistance to municipalities to help in the implementation of the County Plan and municipal comprehensive plans

**DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS.** The chances of success are improved when lessons are learned by example. In 2003, the County will offer community planning and water resource assessment grants to municipalities. The Orange County Department of Planning and the Water Authority will partner to provide demonstration projects evaluating growth and development options using Community Viz software.

**BENCHMARKS FOR QUALITY COMMUNITIES -** The County Department of Planning, in cooperation with the other partners previously mentioned, should define a series of benchmarks to measure County and municipal progress in the application and effectiveness of this Plan. Such benchmarks will include the concept of “sustainability” - measuring the extent to which all county residents and future generations are able to share in a balance of economic, environmental, and community health.





APPENDIX A: Orange County is growing considerably. This makes the importance of an up- to date comprehensive plan all the more important. Sensible growth patterns and development along with the preservation of open space will help in the future to sustain a high quality of life.

Using nontraditional strategies will result in more efficient land use. Shown here is a alternative to typical sprawl style growth patterns. This results in less land consumed for development and more open space. Not only is the development pleasing through design standards, it is attractive as well with a large expanse of open environment.

*For more information, including copies of this summary, contact:*

**Orange County Department of Planning**  
**124 Main Street, Goshen, New York 10924**  
**(845) 291-2318 / 291-2533 (fax) / [planning@co.orange.ny.us](mailto:planning@co.orange.ny.us)**

A downloadable copy of this Plan is available at [www.orangecountygov.com](http://www.orangecountygov.com)  
All photos taken by the Orange County Department of Planning except \* New York State Office of Parks and Recreation and Historic Preservation, \*\* City of Port Jervis and upper left cover photo of Erie Station also the City of Port Jervis.



made from post recycled paper