

TOWN OF GUILDERLAND

Comprehensive Plan Update

DRAFT October 18, 2024



PATHWAY TO OUR FUTURE GUILDERLAND COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



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1. INTRODUCTION

Overview

The Town of Guilderland initiated an update to its *Guilderland 2000* Comprehensive Plan to reengage with the wider community about the Town’s future direction and to capitalize on opportunities to improve overall quality of life for residents. Situated in northern Albany County, New York, between the forested Helderberg Escarpment and the urban core of the State capital, Guilderland is home to hamlets, neighborhoods and the Village of Altamont that support a broad range of lifestyles. As a Capital District community, Guilderland residents have nearby access to cultural institutions, large employers, and an international airport, while also enjoying access to local agriculture and scenic outdoor recreation. Pride in local schools, parks, and the library connects a community that has grown in both size and diversity since the last Comprehensive Plan process was undertaken more than two decades ago.

This Comprehensive Plan update aims to balance the interconnected priorities of Guilderland residents, business owners, and other stakeholders, charting a clear pathway toward a sustainable and livable community for people of all backgrounds, ages, and abilities. Toward that end, the Comprehensive Plan update process has incorporated an array of events, activities, and methodologies to engage the public and solicit various viewpoints on the current and future challenges facing Guilderland.



The Guilderland Public Library at 2228 Western Avenue is a centrally located gathering place for Town residents.

The Planning Process

In 2022, the Guilderland Town Board appointed nine (9) community members representing a variety of professional backgrounds and life experiences to the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee (CPUC). The CPUC was tasked with guiding the update process through its successive stages, reviewing past planning efforts and current conditions, setting and refining goals and recommendations, and engaging participation from the public to better inform the vision for Guilderland's future. The CPUC held meetings on alternating months throughout the update process; all CPUC meetings were open to the public and concluded with a designated period for public comment. The CPUC received administrative support for their mission from Town staff and the consultant team of M.J. Engineering and Land Surveying, Community Planning & Environmental Associates, and E.M. Pemrick & Company.

The process of updating Guilderland's Comprehensive Plan builds on the work of numerous planning efforts that have been undertaken since 2001, when the existing plan

was adopted by the Guilderland Town Board. Detailed plans were created for corridors, hamlets, and rural areas in Town, all of which inform the Town-wide update effort. Planning documents that formed the foundation of this Comprehensive Plan update process included:

- Town of Guilderland Comprehensive Plan (2001)
- McKownville Corridor Study (2003)
- Fort Hunter/Carman Road Neighborhood Transportation Plan (2003)
- Biking in Guilderland (2004)
- Rural Guilderland: Open Space and Farmland Protection Plan (2005)
- Guilderland Pathways Study (2005)
- Town of Guilderland Pathways Master Plan (2005)
- Guilderland Hamlet Neighborhood Plan (2007)
- Harriman Campus – University at Albany Transportation Linkage Study (2007)
- Normans Kill Riparian Corridor Study (2007)
- Route 20 Land Use and Transportation Study (2008)
- Neighborhood Master Plan for the Guilderland Center Hamlet (2010)
- Drainage Analysis for the McKownville Area (2010)
- Railroad Avenue Area Transportation and Revitalization Plan (2012)
- Westmere Corridor Study (2016)
- CDTC Regional Freight and Goods Movement Plan (2016)
- Albany County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Update (2018)
- Normanskill Relicensing – Water Chestnut Control Study (2018)
- Normanskill Project FERC Relicensing Study Report – Downstream Flow (2019)
- Capital District Trails Plan (2019)
- Resolution (No. 123) to Establish Albany County as a Pollinator-Friendly Municipality (2019)
- Parks, Trails and Open Space Project – UAlbany Graduate Planning Studio (2020)
- Resolution (No. 384) An Act Pertaining to the Albany County Planning Board and Consideration of Critical Viewsheds of the Helderberg Escarpment (2020)
- Guilderland Bicycle and Pedestrian Connectivity Study (2020)
- Town of Guilderland Development Growth Trends Analysis: Traffic – Technical Memorandum (2021)
- Local Law “L” A Local Law of the County of Albany Creating the Albany County Nature and Historic Preserve System (2022)
- Draft Albany County Climate Resiliency Plan (2022)
- CDTA Route Performance Report (2022)
- CDRPC Town of Guilderland Demographic and Growth Analysis 1990-2020 (2022)
- Normanskill Project FERC No. 2955 Recreation Plan (2022)
- Normanskill Project FERC No. 2955 Eel Passage Plan (2022)
- Town of Guilderland Local Law No. 2 Adopting Rules and Regulations for the Conservation Easement Agreement Exemption (2022)

- Resolution (No. 137) Establishing a Tree Preservation Policy for Development of Albany County Owned Parcels (2022)
- Report on Rare Animals, Rare Plants, and Significant Communities (2023)

Public Engagement

Throughout the development of this plan update, the Town has emphasized the importance of gathering a multitude of perspectives from across the community. Input solicited from residents, business owners, students, volunteer organizations, and other stakeholders helped inform the work of the CPUC as they shaped and synthesized the recommendations for Guilderland’s updated Comprehensive Plan.

A combination of public engagement methods and formats was employed in order to elicit ideas from a wide range of voices in the community. The following is a list of public outreach activities and initiatives that were employed throughout the plan update process:

- Project Website
- Stakeholder Focus Group Discussions
- Public Open House & Visioning Workshop
- Community Survey
- Student Engagement
- Public Workshop #2
- Topic-Based Subcommittees
- Public Open House #3
- Comprehensive Plan Update Committee Meetings

Written meeting summaries, materials, and survey highlights have been included in Appendices C-G.

Project Website

A dedicated project website – www.pathwaytoguilderlandsfuture.com – was developed by the consultant team as a repository for meeting notices and informational materials throughout the plan update process. In addition to general information about the purpose of a Comprehensive Plan, the site also offered access to planning documents, meeting summaries, and an online portal that enabled members of the public to submit written comments at any time during the planning process for consideration by the CPUC. Guilderland Town Supervisor Peter Barber recorded a short informational video, welcoming public engagement in the Comprehensive Plan Update effort; that video was embedded in the main landing page of the project website, to help orient page visitors. As part of the

effort to raise awareness of the project website as a resource, the consultant team developed, printed, and distributed wallet-sized cards listing the website URL accompanied by a printed QR-code for faster access by smartphone/tablet users.



The landing page for the Comprehensive Plan Update Project Website at www.pathwaytoguilderlandsfuture.com

Stakeholder Focus Group Discussions

In order to draw on the professional expertise and first-hand knowledge of organizational leaders working in and around Guilderland, the consultant team held a series of six theme-based stakeholder discussions, held virtually via Zoom to enable wider participation for working professionals. A list of community stakeholders on the themes listed below was developed by the CPUC, with administrative support from the consultant team and Town staff:

- Transportation & Mobility (8 representatives attended; 9 invited)
- Environment, Sustainability & Recreation (9 representatives attended; 12 invited)
- Arts, History & Education (5 representatives attended; 8 invited)
- Neighborhood & Community Organizations (6 representatives attended; 15 invited)

- Business & Economic Development (7 representative attended; 10 invited)
- Local & Regional Partners (6 representatives attended; 12 invited)

During the Stakeholder Focus Group sessions, discussion moderators solicited input from participating professionals on perceived strengths, challenges, and opportunities in Guilderland. Participants shared perspectives on salient issues such as traffic challenges, services for seniors, food insecurity, municipal collaboration, and environmental protection, among others. Notes from each of the six sessions were compiled and distributed to the CPUC for review and consideration. Those notes were also made available for public review via the Project Website.

Public Open House & Visioning Workshop

In order to seek perspectives on perceived needs and opportunities in Guilderland from members of the wider community, a Public Open House & Visioning Workshop was held at Guilderland Town Hall on March 20, 2023. The Open House format allowed participants to drop in for as much or as little of the allotted timeframe – between 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. – supplied with an informative Participant Guide upon arrival. More than one hundred (100+) community members attended the Open House and engaged with eleven interactive station boards designed to elicit written input on the desired future direction for the Town.

Initial station boards at the Public Open House event provided a foundation of demographic data and resource mapping, to help orient participants with varying levels of familiarity with Town statistics. Subsequent stations prompted participants to share ideas about Town challenges and opportunities, as well as their ideal future conditions in Guilderland. A mapping exercise at one activity station allowed participants to indicate common gathering places and preferred travel routes around Guilderland. The event featured a Kids' Station, as well, to facilitate participation of young people and their family members. The Open House also served as the launch of the Community Survey, with an activity station dedicated to promoting the survey with Quick Response (QR) code survey access and informational wallet-sized cards for those who wished to take the survey at a later time.



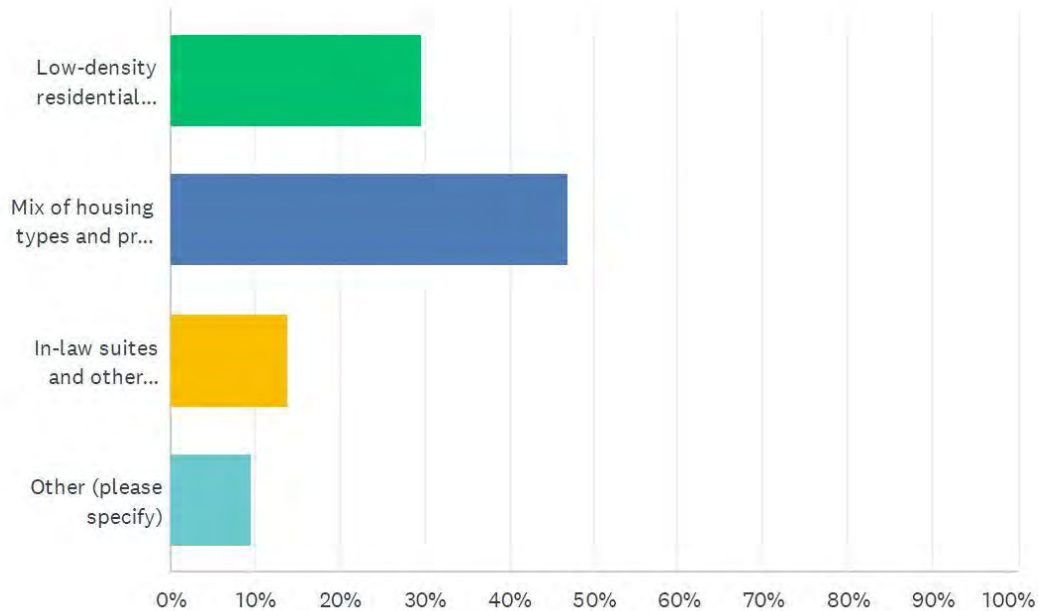
Town residents attend an Open House and Visioning Workshop event at Guilderland Town Hall as part of the public engagement activities during the Comprehensive Plan Update.

Community Survey

Building on previous public engagement efforts and themes, a 17-question Community Survey was developed and launched to coincide with the Public Open House & Visioning Workshop event in March 2023. The Community Survey was available both online and in hard copy, which community members could access and submit at Guilderland Town Hall. The submission window for the Community Survey remained open from March 13th to May 15th, 2023, garnering 635 total responses.

Q15 What type of housing would you prefer to see constructed in Guilderland in the next 20 years?

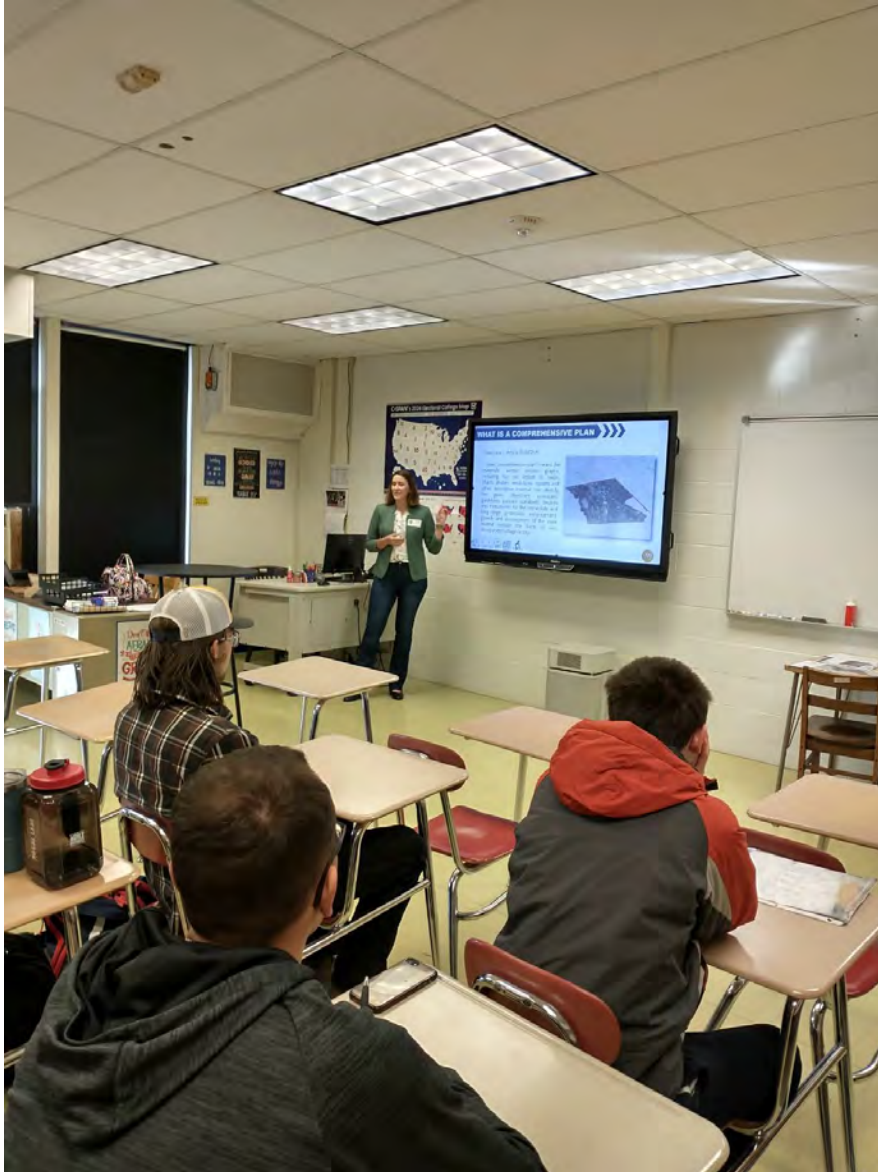
Answered: 537 Skipped: 98



A question from the Guilderland Community Survey, which gathered input from Town residents and stakeholders during the Comprehensive Plan Update.

Student Engagement

In coordination with the Guilderland Central School District Superintendent, the Guilderland High School Principal, and relevant faculty members, the consultant team visited two Public Policy classes at Guilderland High School on May 18, 2023, to present an overview of the Comprehensive Plan Update effort and to solicit input from young people on perceived community needs. Working in small groups to replicate the role of a Town Board, the Public Policy students brainstormed such question prompts as what the Town is missing, what policy issues might be important to consider when planning for Guilderland’s future, and what new technologies or ways of living might exist in the next ten to twenty years. Student groups reported on their discussions at the end of each class session. Notes with the primary takeaways of the students’ small group discussions were shared with the CPUC for their consideration, and highlights of the student feedback were shared with the public at the next scheduled CPUC meeting.



Student engagement with Guilderland High School public policy classes gave younger district residents an opportunity to share their input on the Town’s future direction.

Public Workshop #2

While the first Public Open House event at Guilderland Town Hall helped identify and elevate prominent themes for charting the Town’s future course, the second Public Workshop was designed to elicit more specific input about where and how the Town should focus its efforts on improving quality of life. With a view toward broadening participation in the Comprehensive Plan Update process, the decision was made to hold the second Public Workshop event at the Westmere Fire House community room, engaging neighborhoods on the eastern end of Guilderland’s US-20 corridor.

The format for Public Workshop #2 was a brief welcome from CPUC Chair Cody Betton and a short informational presentation, followed by a series of facilitated topic-based speed-round discussions. Workshop participants provided targeted feedback on the following themes:

- Parks, Open Space & Recreation
- Transportation & Mobility
- Economic Growth
- Neighborhoods & Housing
- Agriculture & Environment

Approximately twenty-five (25) participants rotated around the community room space to participate in discussions on all of the dedicated themes. Input generated from the discussions was recorded on large-format boards by discussion facilitators and reported back at the end of the Workshop. A transcribed list of all received input was transmitted to the CPUC for their consideration; the list was also uploaded to the Project Website for public review.



The second Public Workshop was held at the Westmere Fire Department community room.



Participants in the second Public Workshop event engaged in topic-based brainstorming sessions to identify key priorities.

Topic-Based Subcommittees

In an effort to solicit more in-depth input from local professionals and concerned residents, the Town of Guilderland oversaw the formation of theme-based subcommittees. Six subcommittees comprised of volunteers from the community were formed, and each subcommittee met for a series of discussions to review the goals and recommendations from the *Guilderland 2000* Comprehensive Plan and to propose potential priorities for consideration by the CPUC. Subcommittee meetings took place between the months of August and October 2023. The thematic categories for the six subcommittees were as follows:

- Agriculture
- Economic Growth
- Environment, Climate Change & Resiliency
- Neighborhoods & Housing
- Parks, Recreation, Open Space & Historic Resources
- Transportation & Mobility

The Town notified prospective subcommittee members of their selection, facilitated appropriate meeting space, and ensured that meetings were publicly noticed. Subcommittees submitted written records of all meetings, culminating in a draft list of proposed goals recommendations for each respective thematic category. Drafts of proposed recommendations from each subcommittee were provided to the full CPUC for consideration and were made available to the public via the project website.

Public Open House #3

To assist in further refinement of the vision, goals, and recommendations for the Comprehensive Plan Update, a Public Open House event was held at Guilderland Town Hall on February 12, 2024. The Open House format was chosen by the CPUC to allow Town residents and stakeholders to participate in the event on a drop-in basis, for any amount of time that their schedules allowed. A series of informative and interactive activity stations were arranged around the perimeter of the Town Hall first-floor meeting room, and each of the more than sixty (60+) participants received a printed program, explaining the purpose of each activity station. Open House stations included:

- Project & Process Overview
- Highlights from Previous Public Outreach
- Draft Vision
- Agriculture Goals/Recommendations
- Business, Employment & Fiscal Resources Goals/Recommendations
- Environment, Climate Change & Resiliency Goals/Recommendations
- Neighborhoods & Housing Goals/Recommendations
- Visual Preference Survey for Housing Options
- Parks, Recreation, Open Space & Historic Resources Goals/Recommendations
- Transportation & Mobility Goals/Recommendations
- Future Land Use Interactive Maps
- Kids Table
- Other Ideas and Input

Open House participants were provided with stickers to indicate which of the listed draft recommendations aligned with their personal priorities. Each station also included an area for additional qualitative feedback in the form of sticky notes. Input received during this Public Open House was relayed to the CPUC for consideration and posted to the Project Website along with an invitation to submit additional public comment electronically, for those who were unable to attend the event in person.



Participants at the third Public Open House event provide input on future land use priorities at an interactive map station.

Comprehensive Plan Update Committee (CPUC) Meetings

Meetings of the full Comprehensive Plan Update Committee (CPUC) were held at Guilderland Town Hall every other month throughout the update process. Each meeting was noticed on both the Town website and the Project Website. Each CPUC meeting concluded with a public comment period, during which attendees could provide input to the Committee directly. CPUC meetings were livestreamed via the Town’s public access channel to facilitate greater accessibility. Written summaries of CPUC meetings, including public comments received, were prepared and posted to the project website.



Members of the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee (CPUC) were appointed by the Town Board and met every other month throughout the Plan update process.

Committee Public Hearing

Per New York State Law §272-A, Town comprehensive plan, the special board (the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee) are required to hold at least one public hearing to assure full opportunity for citizen participation in the preparation of such proposed plan. As such, the CPUC held the public hearing for this Draft Comprehensive Plan Update on September 10, 2024, at 7PM at Town Hall. The public hearing included a presentation providing an overview of the draft Comprehensive Plan, led by MJ Engineering, Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Land Surveying, P.C., followed by public comment. The public comment was subsequently documented and reflected in the Comprehensive Plan. A written public comment period also opened on August 9, 2024, and extended through September 27, 2024.

Plan Organization

This update to the Comprehensive Plan establishes a framework for the future of Guilderland. The plan addresses a series of topics that impact overall quality of life in the community, at the present moment and for years to come. To support its overarching community Vision for Guilderland, the Plan includes Goals and targeted Recommendations for each topic area. The Plan devotes an individual chapter to each of the following six (6) topics:

- Agriculture
- Business, Employment, and Fiscal Resources
- Environment, Climate Change, and Resiliency
- Neighborhoods and Housing
- Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Historic Resources
- Transportation and Mobility

Each of the above-listed chapters begins with identification of the goal(s) for that thematic category, followed by an overview of community-specific data and, finally, a set of enumerated recommendations which lay out action steps that form the pathway to Guilderland’s future.

Following the six theme-based chapters are sections pertaining to the governance structures of the Town, the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan Update, and the mapping of identified Plan priorities.

Challenges and Opportunities

The various methodologies employed to solicit public input – stakeholder focus group discussions, a community survey, public open house events, among others – were invaluable in the process of identifying perceived opportunities and challenges in Guilderland. The list below represents a distillation of the most salient community issues that surfaced through public engagement:

Challenges

- Unlike communities elsewhere in New York State whose populations are contracting; Guilderland is growing, and the Town must balance growth with the preservation of those attributes that make Guilderland such an attractive place to live.
- The Town covers a large area and is varied in its development patterns, which presents a challenge for establishing a cohesive community identity.

- Potential loss of productive agricultural land to development of homes and/or energy utility infrastructure.
- Derelict properties along Western Avenue detract from charm and tax base.
- Excessive water use for landscaping during warmer months puts strain on the public water supply.
- The percentage of the Town population aged 65+ is increasing, driving the need for expanded services and accessibility infrastructure.
- Guilderland’s trees and forested areas – which contribute significantly to Town character -- are vulnerable to disease, climate change, loss of open space, and other threats.
- Western Avenue/US-20 is the Town’s de facto “Main Street,” but it falls under the jurisdiction of the New York State Department of Transportation, thus requiring significant coordination to implement changes to the corridor.
- One of the most recognizable features in Guilderland, Watervliet Reservoir, is controlled by the City of Watervliet, requiring intermunicipal coordination to address issues such as invasive species removal, expansion of recreational access, and emerging contaminant response planning.

Opportunities

- Rapid public transit service between Albany and Crossgates Mall, initiated in 2023, holds the promise of increasing residents’ options for both transportation and employment.
- Engineered roundabouts have been successful in reducing traffic congestion and high-speed collisions in recent years, and there are opportunities to implement these proven (FHWA) safety countermeasures elsewhere in and around the Town.
- Guilderland can capitalize on its proximity to the Albany Nanotech Campus to attract complementary and compatible residential, commercial, and service offerings.
- Guilderland is home to a range of productive agricultural operations. There is an opportunity to help those operations thrive and expand by encouraging connections to local and regional consumers through farmers markets, farm stands, agritourism, and targeted partnerships.
- Guilderland’s recently enacted Conservation Easement Program has been used successfully to preserve a strategically located tract of land as undeveloped open space; the Program holds the promise of facilitating additional open space preservation in the Town by partnering with landowners on a voluntary basis.
- Guilderland has a significant number of sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places. While historic properties can be expensive to maintain, expanded access to such sites represents an opportunity to create new community gathering

places, helping connect residents to Guilderland’s architectural and archeological past.

- The Town has successfully installed sidewalks in strategic locations to improve walkability in Guilderland; further expansion of the sidewalk network is an opportunity to bring greater connectivity within and between more areas of Town.

Vision

A key step in articulating the future direction of the Town, for the purposes of comprehensive planning, is the creation of a community vision. The vision represents an ideal toward which the Town can strive in both the short- and the long-term. As a collective intention, the vision also inspires the process of goal-setting and the creation of recommendations – concrete actions that the Town can take to realize its vision.

Members of the public provided input on priorities for the Town vision via the Guilderland Community Survey, as well as via an interactive activity station at the Open House and Visioning Workshop. Common themes from public input included a desire for more open space and parks, traffic management and walkability, affordable housing, and a focus on commercial redevelopment of vacant buildings on Western Avenue. Drawing upon public input, the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee (CPUC) undertook an iterative process to refine a Town vision that could encapsulate the core priorities of the community. The community was given an opportunity to review and provide feedback on the revised vision during Open House #3. Based on additional input provided, the CPUC expanded language in the vision to emphasize the importance of environmental stewardship as a common value in the community. The resulting vision reads as follows:

The Town of Guilderland is made up of distinctive, attractive neighborhoods, with abundant recreation open space, and scenic resources that serve to connect the community and support a high quality of life for all residents. Collaborative environmental stewardship of Guilderland’s land, air, and water reflects the community’s values and its commitment to forward-thinking resiliency planning. Varied, productive agricultural operations link the Town to its proud agrarian history, while the architectural legacy of Guilderland’s past is honored through preservation and educational initiatives. The Town is home to a balanced array of prosperous and well-loved businesses, whose success generates the economic base necessary to support quality public services. Well-designed transportation corridors maximize safety for all travelers while facilitating efficient movement and incorporating relevant emerging technologies. Residents of all age groups and backgrounds contribute to the vitality of the Town, each proud to call Guilderland home.

Goals

A series of thematic goals were created to address the priorities identified in the Town vision. Goals were informed by community input and developed through a collaborative process involving the CPUC, theme-based subcommittees, and the planning team, which worked to solicit and synthesize the information provided. Six (6) thematic priority areas – drawn from the Town vision – were identified. The goals associated with those priority areas are listed below:

Table 1. Comprehensive Plan Goals

Theme Category	Goal
Agriculture	Ensure the long-term viability of agriculture as a vocation and economic pursuit within the Town of Guilderland by prioritizing the preservation of suitable farmland and by promoting agriculture as an important component of the Town’s economy and character.
Business, Employment & Fiscal Resources	Establish and promote a diverse and strategic economic base that provides income, employment, and revenue to the community in a manner compatible with the future land use and unique identity of Guilderland.
Environment, Climate Change & Resiliency	Protect the natural resources that support quality of life and Town character in Guilderland through strategic hazard mitigation and resiliency measures to address the impacts of a changing climate.
Neighborhoods & Housing	Provide a balanced blend of quality housing opportunities, including a desirable range of housing types and price ranges, which are affordable and accessible to residents.
Parks, Recreation, Open Space & Historic Resources	Provide access to a diverse network of well-maintained active and passive recreational facilities for Guilderland residents of all ages and abilities.
	Prioritize the preservation of open space in the Town of Guilderland, particularly where such areas perform critical ecosystem functions and/or contribute to scenic resources that influence the character, aesthetics, economy, health and welfare of the Town.

	<p>Preserve Guilderland’s historic resources and enhance cultural opportunities in the community.</p>
<p>Transportation & Mobility</p>	<p>Provide safe, convenient, and efficient transportation options for people and goods within, through and around the Town of Guilderland, which are supportive of the Town’s future land use plan and which minimize the negative impacts of traffic on the Town’s character and quality of life.</p>

2. AGRICULTURE

Goal: Ensure the long-term viability of agriculture as a vocation and economic pursuit within the Town of Guilderland by prioritizing the preservation of suitable farmland and by promoting agriculture as an important component of the Town’s economy and character.

Overview

The Town of Guilderland’s landscape and historic settlement patterns have been influenced by its agricultural history. Lands at the base of the Helderberg Escarpment and along the Normans Kill were used for food production by indigenous peoples during the pre-colonial period and later by early European settlers to the region, prior to Guilderland’s incorporation as a Town.

Agriculture plays a multifaceted role in modern-day Guilderland. While agriculture remains an important sector in the Town’s economy, it also preserves rural viewsheds that are important to Town identity and character, and it influences ecosystems that support plant and animal life, both within the Town and beyond its borders. Farmland provides watershed protection and wildlife habitat such as meadows and pastures, which are vital to species requiring open areas for feeding and breeding. Local and regional visitors to Guilderland’s farmers’ market, farm stands, orchards, vineyards, nurseries, and other businesses benefit from access to locally grown products, knowing that support for such businesses helps bolster employment and investment in the community.

Agricultural operations and the development of infrastructure – road, water, and energy -- necessary to support such operations can frequently be in tension with each other. The inauguration of the Great Western Turnpike (now US-20) in 1799 helped to connect Guilderland farmers with distant markets for their products, but transportation infrastructure is frequently a precursor to population growth, which puts pressure on agricultural land uses over time. Similarly, as they increase in size, agricultural operations require reliable access to water and wastewater infrastructure, but expansion of municipal water/sewer networks can induce residential or commercial development, driving competition for limited space. In more recent history, advancements in solar and wind energy generation technology have led to demand for undeveloped lands for solar arrays or windmills, creating land-lease opportunities for farmers wishing to supplement the incomes they derive from agricultural land uses but causing concern about the potential loss of crucial scenic resources.



Agricultural operations near the intersection of Becker Road and Dunnsville Road in Guilderland

Agriculture is a land use activity that is tied directly to – and dependent upon – the natural resources of the area. Chief among those natural resources is high-quality soil. The Town has a high concentration of well-drained soils that are very conducive to farming (see *Figure 1: Agricultural Resources Map*). While some areas with these productive soils have been converted to suburban or low-density residential use in preceding decades and remain under development pressure, agricultural activities still take place in rural Guilderland. (Rural Guilderland is defined as those lands west of the CSX rail line and the Normans Kill.) This section presents information from several sources to detail the extent and role of agriculture in the Town.

Farmland Soils

Successful farming depends largely on suitable topography, soils, and water to support agriculture. Land that is too steep, arid, or rocky presents significant challenges to successful agricultural operations, although advancements in agricultural techniques such as greenhouses and hydroponics can compensate for soil deficiencies in certain instances. That said, soils conducive to farming can be found across a substantial portion

of Guilderland (See Figure 1). Three types of soils are considered farmland soils: Prime Farmland Soils, Prime Farmland Soils if Drained, and Farmland Soils of Statewide Importance. Agricultural practices can also highly influence soil health. Good soil management practices can mitigate climate change and can lead to more climate resiliency.

Prime Farmland Soil: Prime Farmland, as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and is available for these uses. It could be cultivated land, pastureland, forestland, or other land, but it is not urban or developed land or waterbodies. Prime Farmland Soils have the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high yields of crops when proper management, including water management, and acceptable farming methods are applied.

In general, Prime Farmland has an adequate and dependable supply of moisture from precipitation or irrigation, a favorable temperature and growing season, acceptable acidity or alkalinity, an acceptable salt and sodium content, and few or no rocks. The water supply is dependable and of adequate quality.

Prime Farmland Soils are permeable to water and air. They are not excessively erodible or saturated with water for long periods, and either are not frequently flooded during the growing season or are protected from flooding. Slopes range mainly from 0 to 6 percent.

Farmland Soil of Statewide Importance: In general, land that does not meet the criteria for Prime Farmland is considered to be "Farmland of Statewide Importance" for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops. Generally, this includes soils that nearly meet the requirements for Prime Farmland and that economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Some areas may produce yields as high as those of Prime Farmland if conditions are favorable.

Prime Farmland if Drained: Soils that are designated as Prime Farmland if Drained meet all the prime farmland criteria except for depth to seasonal high-water table and are suitable if drained. In New York, somewhat poorly drained soils are designated as Prime Farmland if Drained, if they meet all criteria for prime farmland other than depth to water table. The following table details farmland soils in Guilderland:

Table 2. Soil Type by Acreage

Soil Type	Acreage in Guilderland
Prime Farmland Soil	10,202.66
Prime Farmland Soil if Drained	6779.75
Soils of Statewide Significance	9325.36

Source: USGS

Farmed Parcels

Farmed parcels, defined by tax assessment data and aerial imagery, can be found across a broad swath of the Town in the valley area. The valley area encompasses the remaining portion of rural Guilderland, not including the Settles Hill and Helderberg Escarpment areas). The valley is a large area with gentle slopes and a mosaic of farmlands, hamlets, wood lots, and water bodies. It contains the Watervliet Reservoir and its three main tributaries: the Bozen Kill, Normans Kill and Black Creek. The valley contains the bulk of rural Guilderland’s agricultural resources. The majority of rural Guilderland’s working farmlands are located here - including many within the agricultural district as shown in Figure 1. Agricultural uses consist mainly of field crops, with a small number of livestock farms. However, the gentle slopes and access to water supply that make the valley conducive to agriculture also make the valley a prime area for development.

Real property data from 2019 shows that there were 114 actively farmed parcels in Town on just over 5,513 acres. The following table lists the various property classes of these farmed parcels and their total area.

Table 3. Number and Area of Agricultural Parcels by Property Class

Property Class	Number of Parcels	Total Acreage
Agricultural Vacant Land (productive) (105)	23	707.20
Livestock and Products	7	457.86
Dairy products: milk, butter and cheese	4	248.24
Cattle, calves, hogs	12	766.63
Sheep and wool	1	13.15
Honey and Beeswax	1	2.70
Other livestock, donkeys, goats	4	204.53
Horse farms	8	228.73
Field crops	40	2335.35
Truck crops, not mucklands	3	159.43
Orchard Crops	4	140.49
Apples, pears, peaches, cherries	2	153.90
Vineyard	2	38.75
Nursery and Greenhouse	2	61.38
Totals	114	5,513.40

Source: 2019 data from the Town of Guilderland

Agriculture Districts and Agriculture Assessments

An Agricultural District is a land area identified through New York’s Agricultural Districts Law (Article 25-AA) to help protect current and future farmland from non-agricultural

development by reducing competition for limited land resources and helping to prevent local laws that would inhibit farming and raise farm taxes. In an agricultural district, the NY Commissioner of Agriculture is authorized to review local comprehensive plans, legislation, and regulations, and approve or disapprove them according to whether they unreasonably restrict or regulate farm operations within an agricultural district. The Commissioner also reviews any purchase by a municipal or state agency of active farmland larger than one acre, or any land over 10 acres within an agricultural district, to assess the potential impacts on local agricultural resources. Agricultural Districts are developed when interested landowners, who collectively own at least 500 acres of land, request formation of such a district. Farmers and rural landowners enrolled in a state-certified Agricultural District receive important “right-to-farm” protections.

In Guilderland, 218 parcels (as of 2019) encompassing 6,720.84 acres are within the NYS Agricultural District.

Some farms receive an Agricultural Tax Assessment: These are active farmlands that participate in and receive special land assessments through the assessment program established in New York State Agricultural and Markets Law 25-aa. These special assessments are based on criteria established in State Law and applied by the Town Assessor, and are determined by crop production, soils, and acreage of farmland. This is a voluntary program designed to reduce (but not eliminate) a farmland owner’s property tax liability. Lands having an agricultural assessment are generally considered to be committed to staying in agriculture because there are penalty fees to pay when active farmland that has received an ag assessment is converted to non-farm use. The other kind of tax incentive is New York’s 480-a program, designed to promote maintenance of forested areas through best management forestry practices. 258 parcels in Guilderland on 5,749.70 acres receive an agricultural assessment or a 480-a assessment.

Agriculture Census Data

Data from the US Agricultural Census confirms that there is a relatively small level of agriculture taking place in Guilderland. Zip codes having data from the 2017 Ag Census in Guilderland are: Guilderland (12084), and Altamont (12009). There were 56 operations identified as farms at that time - most of them small (24 had less than 50 acres and 32 between 50 to 999 acres).

The Ag Census also provides an indication of the types of farm activities. At that time, 23 farms were listed as having animals, all with sales < \$50,000. Of those, nine had cattle, 12 had chickens, 15 had equine, 1 had hogs, 7 had poultry, and 3 had sheep. Eleven farms had berry operations, 13 had fruit crops, 4 had corn/grain, 8 had some type of crop operation with sales > \$250,000, 3 had crop sales (\$50,000 to \$249,000), and 20 had crop sales less than \$50,000. Crops grown in Guilderland at the time of this Census were grain, hay, nursery/greenhouse, maple syrup, oats, orchards, potatoes, and vegetables.

Albany County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan

Albany County adopted a county-wide agricultural and farmland protection plan in 2018. That plan provides a snapshot of agricultural conditions and trends in the County and offers a comprehensive suite of strategies to promote and preserve agricultural activities. As part of that Plan, the county developed a program for defining and prioritizing farmland for protection. The result of that analysis is the Albany County Priority Farmland For Protection Map (see Figure 1). As illustrated on this map, the Valley area in Guilderland where the remaining farms are located shows as priority farmland for protection.

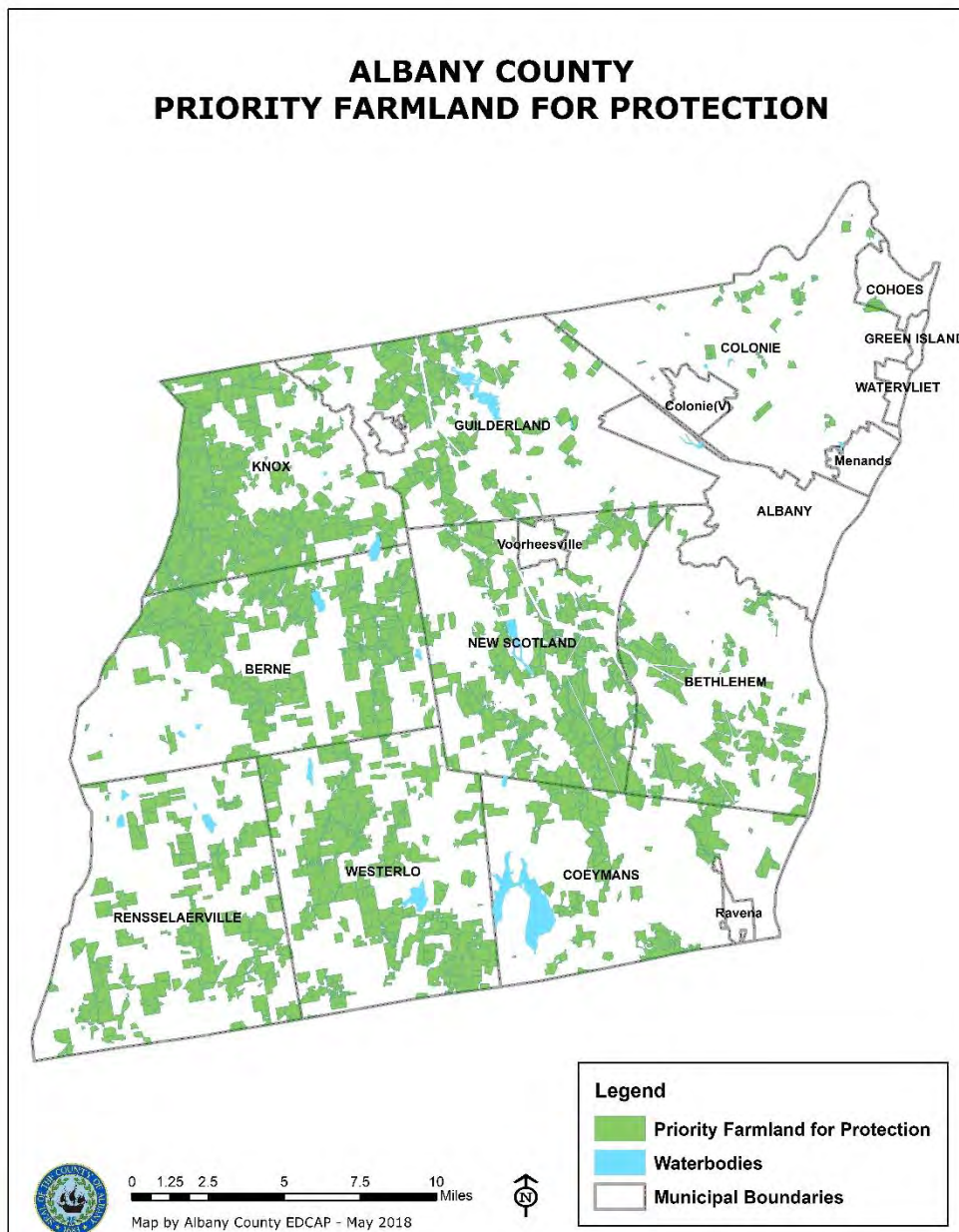


Figure 1: Albany County Priority Farmland for Protection mapping indicates concentrations of priority farmland in western Guilderland.

Role of Agriculture in Guilderland

Farms and other agricultural operations can have a local economic impact that goes beyond generating crops and produce. Agritourism – which includes seasonal opportunities such as apple picking, maple syrup tapping, and Christmas tree harvesting, among other activities – can draw visitors from throughout the region, thus increasing the market for local goods. Guilderland residents also interact with local agriculture in other ways, from visiting local nurseries for landscaping needs to visiting the Guilderland Farmers Market, which has been held on Sundays in front of the Guilderland Public Library during the summer months in recent years.

During preliminary stakeholder focus group discussion for the Guilderland Comprehensive Plan Update, agriculture was a topic that arose in both the economic development focus group and the open space/environment focus group. It also emerged as an important topic in the Public Open House & Visioning Workshop, with public input indicating great support for farms and farmland. Preservation of agricultural land, promotion of sustainable agricultural practices, and use of conservation easements were among the many comments received in support of agriculture. The community values the existing farmland in Guilderland, recognizes its role in contributing to the rural character and to the economy of the area, and sees opportunities to promote new operations and protect agricultural land. Concerns were raised about the loss of farms to development as well as the need to have sustainable agriculture. In addition to development pressure, it was recognized that taxes can present a significant burden for farm operators.



Apple picking is a seasonal activity that draws residents and visitors to Guilderland's orchards.



Vineyards contribute to the Town's agricultural sector.

Recommendations

The following recommendations constitute a coordinated, multi-faceted approach toward achieving the goal of prosperous and sustainable agriculture in Guilderland:

A-1. Promote agriculture’s place in Guilderland’s economy by supporting farmers markets, farm stands, and other opportunities for residents to connect with local agricultural businesses.

Both agricultural producers and Town residents stand to benefit from successful farms, orchards, vineyards, and nurseries, as businesses such as these contribute not only to the local economy but also to the character of the community. Given agriculture’s enduring importance to the identity of Guilderland, the Town should ensure that its zoning and regulations are aligned to facilitate opportunities for residents to purchase directly from local farmers and growers. The Guilderland Farmers Market currently operates from the parking lot of the Guilderland Public Library at 2228 Western Avenue. Should there be a need for the Market to expand or relocate, it is recommended that the Town prioritize finding a Town-owned property or a suitable private partnership to host the event. The Guilderland Farmers Market currently operates on Sundays from July through early October; expansion of offerings to include a longer season and/or a wider range of value-added agricultural products and local crafts could benefit Guilderland’s small business owners but would require a location that could adequately accommodate such an event. The high priority that residents place on access to local food sources should factor into Town decisions about properties within the Town’s control.

In addition, the Town can support agricultural operations in Guilderland by recognizing the role that bicycle and pedestrian transportation infrastructure – e.g., sidewalks, bike lanes, multi-use trails – can play in facilitating agri-tourism activities such as wine/brewery tours. Connecting more populated areas of Town to rural farms via active transportation networks helps establish farms as destinations for commercial and recreational opportunities. Further, Town regulations should be in alignment with and supportive of seasonal events such as apple picking, maple syrup tapping, and Christmas tree harvesting, since such activities give residents opportunities to gather as a community and appreciate the charm of rural Guilderland.

A-2. Promote and maintain the scenic resources of rural corridors and roads through the use of rural development design guidelines and conservation subdivision practices that prioritize maintenance of rural character.

Views of the Helderberg Escarpment, orchards, and other agricultural lands are central to the experience of living and moving about in Guilderland. Indeed, the scenic vistas of and

from the Escarpment influenced settlement patterns throughout Guilderland’s history as a Town. Strong public support for maintaining that important connection to scenic resources was expressed throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update process via public engagement activities.

The Albany County Office of Natural Resource Conservation has identified important Escarpment viewshed corridors on sections of the following roadways in western Guilderland:

- Dunnsville Road
- Gardner Road
- Hawes Road
- Frederick Road
- Meadowdale Road
- Depot Road
- Hennessey Road

Rural design guidelines are an important tool at the Town’s disposal to regulate building height/bulk, landscaping, setbacks, and other factors that can potentially detract from valued viewsheds. As identified in the *Rural Guilderland: Open Space and Farmland Protection Plan (2005)*, the conservation subdivision approach is another methodology that the Town can employ to “maintain important water resources, provide for usable open space, and generally ensure that development considers the natural environment as the key component to site layout.”

A-3. The Town should support the Village of Altamont’s efforts to implement an interconnection between the water districts to improve the Village’s water security. It remains important to focus on water and sewer capacity improvements to support traditional population centers in Town.

The Town of Guilderland provides water to residents via its own municipal treatment works as well as via connections to the public water supplies of neighboring Rotterdam and Albany. However, areas in western Guilderland are served by smaller branches of the municipal water infrastructure or rely on drilled wells and septic systems. A portion of this population is served by the Village of Altamont water district, an isolated district with limited capacity and without an alternative source for drinking water. The limitations on access to high-capacity water and sewer infrastructure in rural areas of Guilderland have served to inhibit large-scale residential, commercial, or industrial development allowing it to maintain its agricultural viewsheds and lifestyles.

To improve water security in and around Altamont, the Village will assume the primary role in overseeing and managing the establishment of the interconnection between the water systems. This interconnection will offer an alternative drinking water for the Village. The interconnection would be sized to provide water for the entire Village in case of an emergency and is not intended to induce large scale growth and development. While the Village will be responsible for the planning of the interconnection project, the Town’s involvement will enhance the project’s efficiency and provide critical support throughout the process.

The Town should explore the opportunity of providing easement rights to the Village of Altamont for the Village to install a private water line for as an emergency use and not intended to induce large scale growth and development. consider tools and land use regulations that can address potential concerns related to development along a future interconnect such as cluster and conservation subdivisions as well as the incorporation of an overlay district in this area. An overlay district could include additional requirements or standards related to development in addition to the underlying zoning. These regulations should align with Guilderland’s commitment as a registered participant in New York States Climate Smart Communities program, which aims to “Minimize the greenhouse gas impact of new development through smart-growth strategies. Adopt community plans, land-use policies, building codes, and multi-modal transportation actions to limit sprawl, reduce vehicle miles traveled, support local agriculture, and protect open lands, wetlands, and forests.” Town should understand that research shows isolated residential developments typically generate lower tax revenue per acre, leading to a situation where municipalities bear a greater burden of maintaining and supporting these areas without proportional returns. This makes the long-term sustainability of isolated growth problematic, both financially and environmentally.

In general, when prioritizing maintenance and upgrades to Guilderland’s water and sewer infrastructure, it is recommended that the Town prioritize water lines and wastewater pump stations to serve existing population centers, in order to continue delivering high quality public utilities to residents and avoid inducing development that is out of alignment with community land use goals.

A-4. Form a standing Town Agricultural Lands Committee, with oversight by the Town, to enhance and advocate for the productive use of agricultural lands and to serve in an advisory role on agricultural land uses.

Given the importance of agriculture to Guilderland’s identity, it is recommended that the Town facilitate the creation of a standing Agricultural Committee to serve as a liaison between the Town and local agricultural producers. In form, the Agricultural Committee

would mirror committees that are already in place such as the Traffic Safety Committee or the Tree Preservation Committee, which represent similarly important Town priorities.

With an established liaison between the Town and agricultural land- and businesses owners, there will be a two-way mechanism in place to help the Town share details of relevant policies on Conservation Easement Exemptions, solar energy infrastructure siting, and rural design guidelines while farmers and agricultural business owners can share expertise about relevant land use concerns.

A-5. Expand participation in the Town’s Conservation Easement Program through targeted promotion and potential funding incentives. Lands surrounding Watervliet Reservoir and lands connecting existing Town recreation and open space should be prioritized to advance the goals of watershed protection and open space connectivity.

In 2022, the Town Board adopted a Conservation Easement Agreement Exemption (Town Code Chapter 251, Article XVI §251-66), establishing a framework to provide financial incentives to those Guilderland landowners willing to forego development and maintain open space on a portion of their land for a minimum of 15 years. This step was the realization of a recommendation from the *Rural Guilderland: Open Space and Farmland Protection Plan* (2005). Pursuant to NYS Real Property Tax Law §491-b, the local legislation provides for reductions in property taxes on exempted lands that have been set aside from development. At the time of adoption, the legislation did not provide for reductions to school or county taxes. As of 2024, one Conservation Easement Agreement Exemption had been completed: a 57-acre plot of land between Wormer Road and the Normans Kill.

The use of conservation easements as a tool for engaging willing landowners in the effort of open space preservation has received a substantial amount of support via public engagement activities of the Comprehensive Plan Update process. The adoption of the legal framework in 2022 was a key steppingstone; increasing the number of participating landowners will require a multi-pronged approach that encompasses both publicizing the benefits of participation to landowners as well as exploring potential ways to augment the existing benefits, in order to tip the scales in favor of participation. To advance the Town’s stated goal of open space connectivity, it is advisable for the Town to focus its efforts in areas where undeveloped parcels sit adjacent to or nearby existing parks, trails, or designated open space.

Maintaining the flexibility that exists in the current tax exemption – i.e., the percentage reduction in property tax liability is tied to the term of conservation, from 15 years to in perpetuity – will be important to address the different needs of landowners. Providing relief from some portion of school and/or county taxes would likely motivate greater levels of

participation among landowners, but the Town must work to identify a mechanism for offsetting the lost revenues to school districts and county taxing authorities.

A-6. Regulate the development of solar and wind energy installations in agricultural areas of Town. Consider forming a Solar Overlay District based upon a solar capacity analysis of land within the Town. Consider requiring energy infrastructure designs that allow for agrivoltaics or compatible “dual use” agricultural operations.

In 2020, the Town of Guilderland amended the Supplemental Regulations (§280-40-v) in its Town Code to regulate the siting, development, and decommissioning of solar energy systems. The Town adopted NY State’s Unified Solar Permit, which provides for streamlined review of solar photovoltaic (PV) installations with a DC capacity of 25 kW or less that meet specified zoning and installation requirements. As a registered “Climate Smart Community” with the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation and as a “Clean Energy Community” recognized by the NY State Energy Research Development Agency (NYSERDA), the Town of Guilderland looks to capitalize on the environmental and economic benefits of renewable energy sources.

In addition to supporting local and State energy goals, however, the purpose of the solar energy regulations in the Town Code includes “Protecting scenic and environmental resources from the impact of major solar energy facilities on parklands, trails, wetlands, wildlife, scenery, floodplains, historical and cultural sites, and recreational activities.” Term leases of agricultural land for solar and/or wind energy generating infrastructure represent potential supplemental income for owners of large land parcels. The Town, therefore, must balance the needs of agricultural landowners with the community goal of viewshed preservation. In order to minimize the impact of energy infrastructure on the Town’s abundant scenic resources, it is recommended that Guilderland initiate a solar capacity analysis of lands within the Town, upon which a Solar Overlay District could be based. As technology and best practices in the field of agriculture continue to evolve, it is recommended that the Town consider provisions to allow “agrivoltaics” or “dual use” arrangements in which energy infrastructure and agricultural production can compatibly take place on the same land parcel.

A-7. Create opportunities for light retail/farm service businesses on US-20 near the Princetown municipal line in a manner that is consistent with rural design guidelines and the character of the surrounding area.

The great majority of business activity in the Town of Guilderland is conducted along Western Avenue between the intersection with Carman Road/NY-146 and the Albany City line to the southeast. There are far fewer commercial offerings, however, serving northern

areas of the Town. Limited Local Business (LB) zoning exists at Western Turnpike’s intersections with Dunnsville Road and State Route 158, but the need to travel toward Albany to procure most goods and services contributes to traffic congestion along stretches of Western Avenue in more densely populated areas of Town. To better serve residents of rural parts of Town and to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) for commercial trips, it is recommended that the Town evaluate opportunities to expand opportunities for additional light retail and/or farm service businesses along Western Turnpike between State Route 158 and the Princetown Town line, provided that such businesses conform to rural design guidelines that ensure compatibility with the character of the surrounding area.

A-8. Consider implementing a flexible, voluntary Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program to preserve farmland and open space.

To complement Guilderland’s Conservation Easement Exemption program, the *Rural Guilderland: Open Space and Farmland Protection Plan* (2005) included a recommendation to establish a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program to limit the loss of important open space and farmland soils to development. While a conservation easement grants property tax relief, a PDR program provides upfront funding to landowners who voluntarily agree to leave a portion of their property undeveloped. For some landowners, access to capital in the near term is a determining factor in retaining the ability to farm or otherwise retain property ownership. Municipal funding sources – often in partnership with funding from land trusts or other conservation organizations – are required to incentivize the voluntary participation of landholders.

A-9. Partner with the Albany County Soil and Water Conservation District to assist local agricultural operations in preventing adverse impacts on Guilderland watersheds from agricultural runoff.

Maintaining high water quality in Guilderland’s rivers, streams, and wetland areas has been identified as a key priority by the Town, State agencies, residents, and other stakeholders. To that end, the Town has instituted buffer zones to prevent incompatible development within 500 feet of Watervliet Reservoir and within 250 feet of its tributaries, in addition to a 100-foot buffer along the Normans Kill, Hunger Kill, Kaikout Kill, Blockhouse Creek, and Black Creek. As unpaved, permeable surface, agricultural lands have the capacity to mitigate stormwater runoff to Guilderland’s waterways, but that beneficial effect can be negated if agricultural best practices are not employed to prevent nutrient rich soil and water from entering nearby water bodies.

The Albany County Soil and Water Conservation District spearheads the voluntary Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) program, which is designed to help farmers

protect important environmental resources. In cooperation with the local AEM team, farmers can tract their environmental stewardship and contribute to an enduring positive image of agriculture in the community. The AEM program also helps direct valuable local, State, and federal resources to the farms that need them. It is recommended that the Town of Guilderland promote partnerships with the AEM program, using the aforementioned Agricultural Committee as a liaison to spur participation in AEM and to publicize its successes in maintaining environmental quality in Town.

A-10. Update zoning code to align with the vision and goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

In order to ensure that Town regulations work in concert to help support the varieties of agriculture taking place in Guilderland now and in the future, the following modifications to Town code are recommended:

- Update definition of *agriculture* in the Town zoning law to be consistent with NYS Agriculture & Markets Law.
- Update the definition of *farm* in the Town of Guilderland to allow for smaller scale agricultural operations such as cut flower farms, apiaries, organic farms, and greenhouses.
- Update the purpose statements for agricultural zoning districts in the Town to better reflect and align with the Comprehensive Plan goals.
- Update the definition of steep slopes to clarify and improve consistency for preservation and development restrictions throughout the code.
- Consider decreasing the allowable lot coverage to be consistent with the goals and purpose of zoning districts.
- Consider replacing the current minimum lot size requirement in the RA3 and RA5 areas with a density measurement – dwellings per acre instead of minimum acres per dwelling – to establish lots that fit better in the landscape.

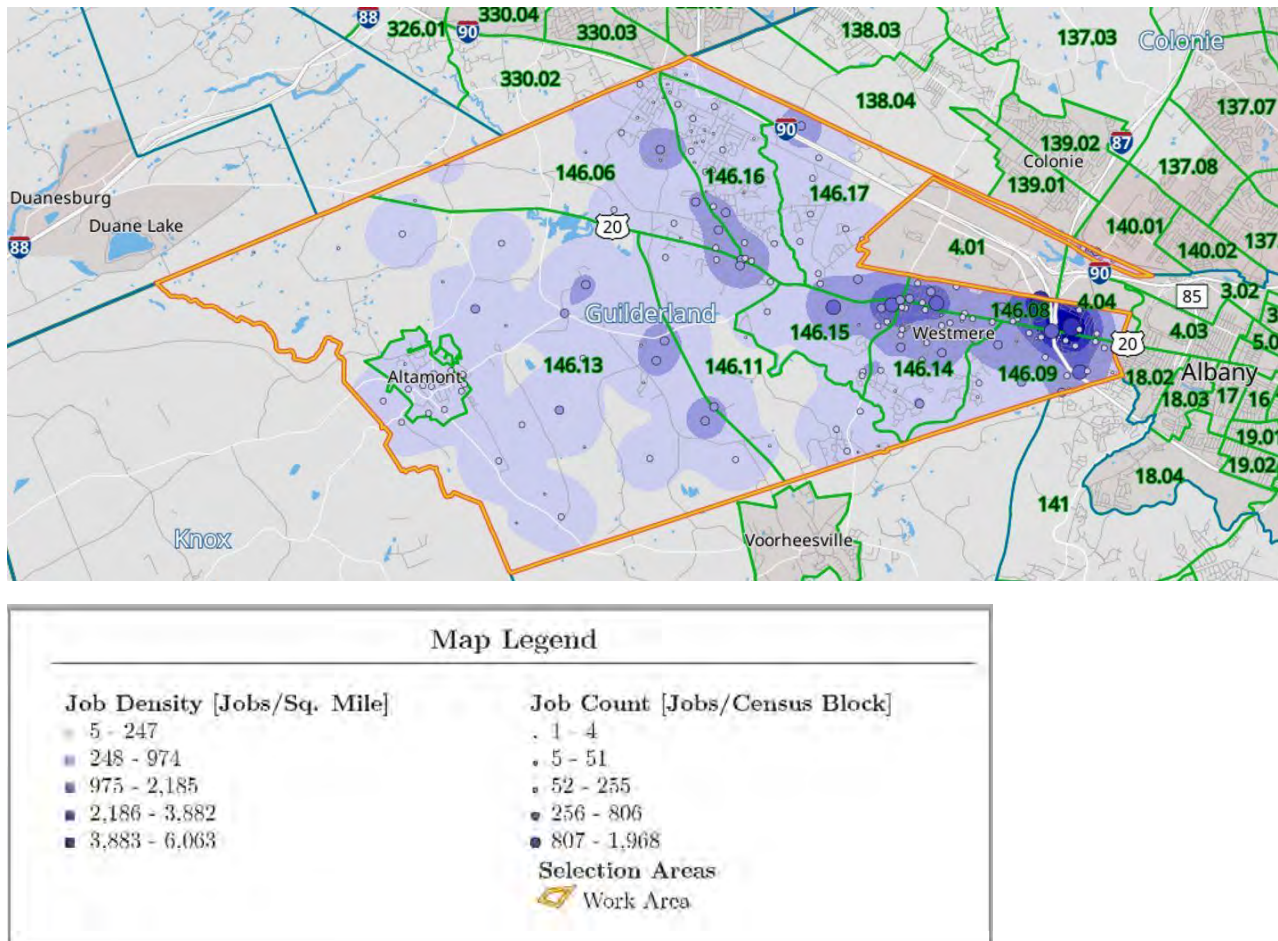
3. BUSINESS, EMPLOYMENT & FISCAL RESOURCES

Goal: *Establish and promote a diverse and strategic economic base that provides income, employment, and revenue to the community in a manner compatible with the future land use and unique identity of Guilderland.*

Overview

While the Town of Guilderland may be more widely known in the Capital District for its attractive residential neighborhoods, its commercial areas are equally important in supporting the conditions for a high quality of life. Among other things, commercial activity in Guilderland strengthens the tax base that funds essential public services, including high-quality public education, regular road maintenance, water treatment, and emergency response. Land used for commerce in Guilderland takes many forms: productive agricultural fields, large and small retail centers, warehouse complexes, office parks, tree nurseries, and much more. Western Avenue/US-20 is Guilderland’s primary commercial corridor, with the highest concentrations of private-sector employment at Western’s intersection with the Northway/I-87 and State Route 155, in the eastern half of Town (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Counts and Density of Private Employment in Guilderland



A strategic regional location makes Guilderland an attractive place to operate a business. The combination of transportation routes and modes – two interstates, active freight rail lines, high-frequency public transit to and from downtown Albany – available to Guilderland businesses mean that business owners can source materials, ship finished goods, draw customers, and attract employees from a wide regional radius. The Town of Guilderland is part of a larger economic region connected by employment, trade, and transportation networks, defined as the Albany-Schenectady-Troy Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which consists of Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, and Schoharie counties. The City of Albany is the state capital. Guilderland is also part of the broader Capital Region, a geographical area that extends outward from the Albany MSA to encompass four additional counties: Warren, Washington, Columbia, and Greene.

More than 420,000 people are employed in the Albany-Schenectady-Troy MSA, 52% of them in Albany County (Table 4). The regional economy is anchored by government, health care, and professional and business services. Government represents about 22% of the employment in the metro area, and includes jobs in local, state, and federal agencies as well as public school districts, community colleges, and state universities. The University

at Albany, a portion of which is in the Town of Guilderland, has approximately 4,000 employees. In the last two decades, the region’s economy has become more diverse with the growth of high-technology, knowledge-based industries (e.g., semiconductor chip manufacturing, nanotechnology, video game development) and research activity.

Table 4. Employment by Industry, 2021

Industry	Albany County		Albany-Schenectady-Troy MSA		County % of MSA
	Employment	%	Employment	%	
Total, Government	57,881	26.4%	91,751	21.8%	63.1%
Total, Private Sector	161,508	73.6%	329,321	78.2%	49.0%
Health Care and Social Assistance	32,022	14.6%	61,676	14.6%	51.9%
Professional and Business Services	31,274	14.3%	53,451	12.7%	58.5%
Retail Trade	20,107	9.2%	44,100	10.5%	45.6%
Financial Activities	15,466	7.0%	24,744	5.9%	62.5%
Leisure and Hospitality	12,685	5.8%	32,216	7.7%	39.4%
Educational Services (Private)	8,811	4.0%	17,086	4.1%	51.6%
Personal and Repair Services	7,806	3.6%	14,012	3.3%	55.7%
Construction	7,698	3.5%	18,370	4.4%	41.9%
Manufacturing	7,630	3.5%	25,648	6.1%	29.7%
Transportation and Warehousing	6,086	2.8%	14,086	3.3%	43.2%
Wholesale Trade	6,007	2.7%	12,051	2.9%	49.8%
Information	4,368	2.0%	7,161	1.7%	61.0%
Natural Resources and Mining	775	0.4%	2,301	0.5%	33.7%
Utilities	440	0.2%	1,561	0.4%	28.2%
Total, All Industries	219,389	100.0%	421,072	100.0%	52.1%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages.

Note: Government employment totals include public education, public colleges and universities, etc.

Table 5. Largest Private-Sector Employers in the Albany Area

Company	Total Local Staffing
Albany Med Health System	15,165
St. Peter’s Health Partners	10,989
Northeast Grocery, Inc.*	8,065
Hannaford Supermarkets	5,000
General Electric	4,000
Stewart’s Shops Corp.	3,418
Regeneron Pharmaceuticals	3,100
Ellis Medicine	2,900
GlobalFoundries U.S. Inc.	2,600
Community Care Physicians	1,805

Source: Albany Business Review, July 15, 2022

* Parent company of Price Chopper and Market 32 supermarkets

Among the fastest growing industries in Albany County and the Albany-Schenectady-Troy MSA from 2011 to 2021 were transportation and warehousing, manufacturing, and construction. Albany County also experienced significant employment growth in professional and business services and private educational services.

The ten largest private employers in the region are listed in Table 5. The full list includes hospitals and health care networks, retailers, private colleges, manufacturers, and finance and insurance companies. St. Peter’s Health Partners, Hannaford, Price Chopper/Market 32, and Stewart’s Shops are all represented in the Town of Guilderland.

Employment by Place of Work

Total employment in the Town of Guilderland was at 14,149 in 2019 but, notably, fell to 12,785 in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Most of the jobs lost were in leisure and hospitality, retail trade, and personal services. These industries were disproportionately impacted by the mandated business shutdowns and social distancing measures that followed the onset of the pandemic, as jobs in these industries often could not be performed from home. While the loss of employment was not as acute in Guilderland as in places more heavily reliant on hospitality, the economic impact of Covid-era closures serves to demonstrate the importance of having a diversified and resilient commercial sector.

As shown in Table 6, nearly 20% of the Town’s employment base is in government, including public schools, while 17.5% of the jobs are in professional and business services. Retail trade, health care and social assistance, and leisure and hospitality are also major employers.

Approximately 14% of the jobs based in Guilderland are held by Town residents. Most workers that commute to the Town live elsewhere in the Albany-Schenectady-Troy MSA, which has ramifications for congestion within the Guilderland transportation network. More than 27% of the jobs are held by individuals who reside in other Albany County communities; Schenectady County residents account for 13.9% of the employment in Guilderland, while Saratoga County residents account for 10.6%.

Table 6. Employment by Industry, Town of Guilderland

Industry	Percent
Total, Government	19.8%
Professional and Business Services	17.5%
Retail Trade	13.6%
Health Care and Social Assistance	13.6%
Leisure and Hospitality	9.1%
Financial Activities	5.9%
Wholesale Trade	5.4%
Personal and Repair Services	3.5%
Construction	3.1%
Educational Services (Private)	2.4%
Transportation and Warehousing	2.0%
Information	1.9%
Manufacturing	1.9%
All Other Industries	0.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics.
 Data is as of 2020, the latest available.

Commercial and Industrial Development

Commercial areas of the Town are concentrated along Western Avenue/Route 20, which serves as Guilderland’s main street. Commercial land uses can also be found on New Karner Road (Route 155) near the Albany city line, on Railroad Avenue off Fuller Road, on portions of Carman Road, and at Northeastern Industrial Park.¹ The inventory of commercial property has a combined total of 1,227 acres and comprises about 3% of Guilderland’s total land area. The most prevalent commercial uses are storage, warehouse, and distribution facilities (684 acres), retail services (194 acres), and office and professional buildings (117 acres). Industrial land uses are much more limited, covering less than 1% of the town’s total acreage.

¹ Commercial land uses include hotels and motels, dining establishments, motor vehicle services, retail stores and shopping centers, banks, office and professional buildings, miscellaneous services, and storage, warehouse, and distribution facilities.

Guilderland is home to the region’s biggest shopping center, Crossgates Mall, which opened in 1984. The mall has more than 180 tenants and over 1.7 million square feet of space, offering opportunities for shopping, dining, and entertainment. Adjacent parcels have also been the focus of development. A 192-room hotel built on Western Avenue in front of Crossgates Mall in 2018 was the first new hotel in Guilderland in more than 20 years, and two nearby apartment complexes have started construction. A new Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line, which began operation in November 2023, connects Crossgates with the University at Albany campus, the Harriman State Office campus, and downtown Albany.



Crossgates Mall, located in the southeast corner of Guilderland, attracts customers from throughout the Capital Region.

Another regional shopping center in the Town is Stuyvesant Plaza, which first opened in 1959. Today, the 240,000-square-foot plaza has more than 60 specialty shops, restaurants, and other businesses. Like Crossgates, Stuyvesant Plaza benefits from its proximity to I-87 and I-90 and draws shoppers from throughout the Capital Region.

Other retail centers in Guilderland include Star Plaza, Hamilton Square (the former 20 Mall), Town Center Plaza, Park Guilderland Shopping Center, Westmere Plaza. There are also numerous stores outside of these developments. Additionally, the Village of Altamont offers unique shopping opportunities with local businesses that contribute to the Town's

diverse retail landscape. According to the Economic Census, the Town’s retail sector generated \$330.3 million in sales in 2017, while food services and drinking places had revenues of \$79.8 million.²

An array of office properties can be found along the Western Avenue corridor, especially near Stuyvesant Plaza and I-87. Two of the largest office complexes in Guilderland, Executive Park and Great Oaks Office Park, are located in this area. There are eight office buildings with 320,000 square feet of space at Executive Park, while Great Oaks has 210,000 square feet in three buildings. A proposal to develop 120 market-rate apartments on an underutilized parking lot at the Great Oaks complex was approved by the Town Planning Board in 2022. The multifamily structure will also house amenities, like a fitness center, to serve both residential and office tenants; building residents will have onsite access to traditional office space as well as a coworking center that opened at the office park in 2020.

Located at the southeastern edge of Guilderland Center, Northeastern Industrial Park is one of the region’s most expansive business parks, containing over 4 million square feet of warehouse space on 620 acres. It is seven miles from I-87 and is serviced by an active CSX rail spur that runs along the eastern edge of the site. The industrial park property is part of what was once a U.S. Army maintenance, distribution, and supply depot that operated from 1941 to 1969. Buildings at Northeastern Industrial Park are occupied by about 50 different businesses, and there is room for expansion. One of the newest occupants is Airgas, which constructed a storage and distribution facility on the site with tanks for argon and nitrogen. Purina Animal Nutrition, which operates a manufacturing facility at the industrial park, received town approval in 2022 to develop an addition to its existing office building.

Railroad Avenue is a commercial and industrial corridor off Fuller Road that houses a mix of retail, wholesale, manufacturing, commercial construction, and trucking/automotive service establishments and storage, warehousing, and distribution facilities. It is split between the Towns of Guilderland and Colonie. The Railroad Avenue area has been identified as an area that is ripe for redevelopment, due to its proximity to the University at Albany, the College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering, and Harriman State Office Campus and its easy access to the interstate highway system.

In 2012, the Railroad Avenue corridor was the subject of a Transportation and Revitalization Plan that recommended transportation access and connectivity upgrades and identified strategies to improve the aesthetics and redevelopment potential of the area. The plan called for preserving the existing industrial zoning and maintaining the area’s industrial base. One of the large vacant and underutilized properties on Railroad Avenue at the time of the study was a site once occupied by Miron Lumber. The owner of the property has

² The Economic Census is conducted every five years.

proposed a 68,000 square foot warehouse with offices on the site that would be leased to tenants. Another recent development project on Railroad Avenue is a 14,000 square foot warehouse to support the expansion of an existing catalytic converter recycling business.

Commercial Real Estate Market Trends

Changes in commercial real estate market conditions since the Town of Guilderland adopted its 2001 Comprehensive Plan could impact future land uses and development patterns in the Town. Trends in the office and retail markets are discussed below.

Offices and the “New Normal.”

Historically, the demand for office space has been driven by job creation in office-using industries. While virtually all industries have some jobs based in office environments, industries with high rates of office utilization, such as information/media, financial activities, and professional and business services, are particularly important.

Flexible workspaces and virtual office arrangements that allowed employees to spend less time in the traditional office existed long before the pandemic, but these workers represented a mere fraction of the labor force. The broad shift of working from home that started during the pandemic, however, highlighted the benefits of remote work for employees, including better work-life balance, freedom from long commute times, and lower stress levels. It also resulted in higher-than-expected productivity and reduced employee turnover, a key consideration for employers facing a shrinking labor pool, although it is important to note that the prevalence of remote work varies greatly by occupation, industry, and geography.

The widespread adoption of remote work has affected office demand. Properties with persistently high vacancy rates may need to be modernized, diversified by adding alternative uses, or adapted to new uses that are more financially viable.

The Evolution of Retail

Although the online commerce share of retail sales has been climbing for two decades, the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the continued growth of e-commerce. In response to stay at home orders, many consumers shifted their shopping habits online, ordering groceries to be delivered and purchasing goods from Amazon. At its peak in 2020, e-commerce accounted for more than 16% of total retail sales.

Although there are some malls that are struggling, mall vacancy rates overall have not markedly increased.³ To remain competitive, though, malls are reinventing themselves. Many are diversifying their tenant mix, adding “experiential” retail, more dining and entertainment options, fitness and wellness centers, indoor attractions, and other businesses that offer experiences and services that are not available online.

In some malls, the anchor spaces that once housed department stores are being converted to non-retail uses, such as call centers, apartments, medical clinics, event space, even life science centers. Mall properties are also being transformed into self-contained, walkable neighborhoods that include a mix of uses (e.g., multifamily housing, office, hospitality), providing more customers for the retail centers. Successful examples of this type of redevelopment can be found in places like Virginia (Pentagon Centre), Maryland (Annapolis Town Center), and Massachusetts (Woburn Village)

These trends could provide an opportunity in Guilderland for the development of walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods with retail uses at their core, while addressing the demand for multifamily housing. In some respects, such an effort has already begun at Crossgates Mall, where a Transit Oriented Development District has been created, a hotel was developed, and underutilized property is being repurposed for apartments. As retail continues to evolve, there is also an opportunity for shopping malls to become places that are less homogenous and more interesting and engaging.

Resident Labor Force

The labor force consists of residents ages 16 and older who are currently employed or who are unemployed but actively looking for work. Local Area Unemployment Statistics from the NYS Department of Labor show that labor force levels in Guilderland have been steady for the past 20 years. In 2022, the resident labor force stood at 20,000, slightly above the average of 19,800 between 2002 and 2021. Guilderland residents are highly educated. As indicated in Table 7, 55.6% of individuals aged 25 and over hold a bachelor’s degree or higher, and 28.1% have a graduate or professional degree. These educational attainment levels, which contribute to the affluence of the town’s population, are higher than those in Albany County and the state overall. Bethlehem is the only town in Albany County with a higher share of residents who hold at least a bachelor’s degree (59%).

³ Moody’s Analytics, “The Brick and Mortar Retail Evolution,” November 18, 2022,

Table 7. Educational Attainment, Population Age 25 and Over

	Town of Guilderland	Albany County	New York State
% with High School Diploma/GED or Higher	97.5%	92.8%	87.4%
% with Bachelor's Degree or Higher	55.6%	44.3%	38.1%
% with Graduate or Professional Degree	28.1%	21.8%	16.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017-21 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Unemployment rates in Guilderland have been consistently below countywide and statewide figures. Despite the national recessions that occurred in 2008-09 and 2020, annual average unemployment in the town has been less than 5% in fifteen of the last twenty years. The most recent annual rates issued by the NYS Department of Labor (2022) show unemployment at 2.4% in Guilderland compared to 3.0% in Albany County and 4.3% in New York State.

Employment by Place of Residence

Nearly a third of employed residents of the Town of Guilderland hold jobs in the City of Albany, while 14.2% work in the Town of Colonie (Table 8). Only 11% of residents live *and* work in Guilderland. Others commute to jobs in the counties of Schenectady, Rensselaer, and Saratoga, but 84% of residents travel less than 25 miles each way to work. The flow of workday travel from the town is mainly to the east and southeast or to the north.

Table 8. Where Town of Guilderland Residents Work

Location	Count	Share
Albany County	9,921	61.5%
Guilderland town	1,815	11.3%
Albany city	5,164	32.0%
Colonie town	2,297	14.2%
All other locations	645	4.0%
Schenectady County	1,743	10.8%
Schenectady city	829	5.1%
Rotterdam town	337	2.1%
All other locations	557	3.5%
Rensselaer County	1,006	6.2%
Saratoga County	825	5.1%
All Other Counties	2,627	16.3%
Total	16,122	100.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, LED OnTheMap Origin-Destination Database, 2020 (the most recent available).

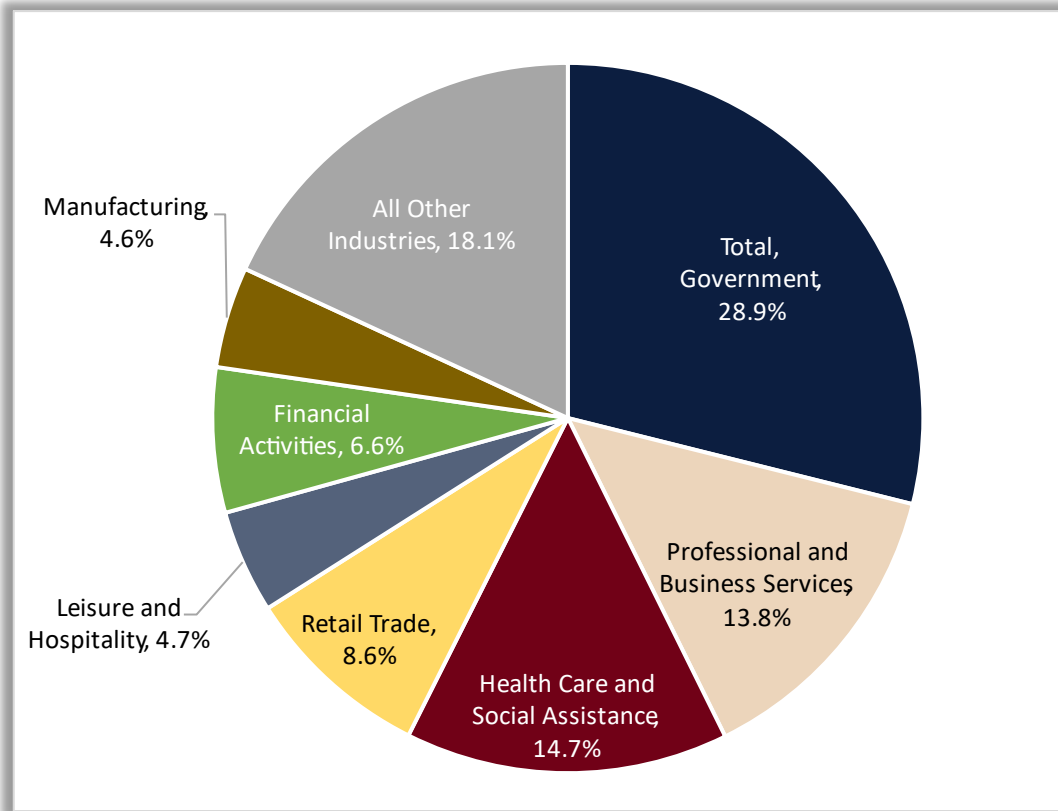


Figure 3. Resident Employment by Industry, Town of Guilderland (2020)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin -Destination Employment Statistics

According to the American Community Survey, an estimated 84% of employed Guilderland residents drive to work, most often traveling alone, and 11% work from home. Less than 1% of residents use public transportation to get to work. This could change, however, with the CDTA’s new BusPlus Purple Line, which will connect Crossgates Mall and downtown Albany, stopping at the University at Albany and the Harriman State Office Campus. The Purple Line will run along the Washington Avenue and Western Avenue corridors (among the busiest of CDTA’s routes) and will have a limited number of stops, reducing the time it takes to commute between Guilderland and Albany. It is expected to benefit not only Guilderland residents commuting to Albany, but also Albany residents and college students, who will have improved access to job opportunities at Crossgates Mall and other locations.

Guilderland residents are well-represented in the industries that dominate the region’s economy. As shown in Figure 2, 29% of the jobs held by town residents, regardless of location, are in the public sector, whether in government or education. Other industries in which Guilderland residents are employed include health care and social assistance (14.7%), professional and business services (13.8%), and retail trade (8.6%).

Recommendations

B-1. Develop commercial design guidelines, with illustrative examples, to supplement zoning regulations and articulate expectations for commercial development in the Town.

While commercial areas in Guilderland contribute needed revenue, employment opportunities, and services to Town residents, the appearance of commercial properties can have a significant influence on the Town character. Factors such as setbacks, landscaping, location of parking, and the height and bulk of buildings all combine to affect the look and feel of commercial corridors. It is recommended both that the Town align its commercial design guidelines with the vision and goals of its updated Comprehensive Plan and also that the Town develop a set of illustrative examples, clearly showing the desired characteristics for commercial development. Having exemplars of site designs that conform to Town regulations can ideally serve to promote compatible design elements early in the planning process, bolstering the efficient use of Town administrative capacity.

B-2. Encourage the redevelopment and adaptive reuse of existing sites in Guilderland to improve the attractiveness of commercial corridors, grow the local business base, and make efficient use of existing resources.



A vacant commercial structure near the intersection of Western Avenue and Foundry Road detracts from both the economic vitality and the aesthetic qualities of the corridor.

Empty and abandoned properties emerged as a prevalent and consistent public concern throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update public engagement process. Unsanitary, derelict sites were seen to detract from both the aesthetics and the commercial vibrancy of Guilderland’s commercial corridors, especially Western Avenue/US-20. In the case of brownfields, site abandonment carries with it the additional concern of detrimental impacts to the environment. Finding ways to bring previously developed brownfield and grayfield sites back into productive use holds many potential benefits for the Town: improved aesthetics, increased revenues, remediation of environmental hazards, and preservation of undeveloped land elsewhere in Guilderland, to name a few. The term “adaptive reuse” refers to retrofitting an existing building for an entirely new purpose than it was originally designed for – for example, converting a former factory into lofts or a museum space – to better serve the needs of the current population. Since such conversion involves a change of use, regulatory frameworks must be navigable, so as not to dissuade developers from advancing project proposals in line with residents’ desire for thoughtful reimagining of existing vacant sites. It is therefore recommended that the Town take the following steps to increase the efficiency and transparency of property redevelopment pathways in Guilderland:

- a. Create and maintain an inventory of vacant and underutilized structures and brownfield sites that can be rehabilitated to support commercial or industrial uses within suitable zoning districts.
- b. Analyze whether there are elements in the review process that could be made more efficient to encourage and incentivize projects that redevelop vacant properties. The objective would be that commercial and mixed-use redevelopment projects that fully meet design guidelines would be expedited and streamlined during the review process.
- c. Provide flexibility for office parks and office/professional buildings to accommodate other uses through the conversion of existing space and/or new construction.
- d. Consider increasing the ability to waive the requirement for site plan approval for a change in tenancy in the BNRP, LB, GB, I, and IP districts when it is similar to a prior allowed use, does not involve a change in the scale or intensity of the use, and does not propose a building addition. Any waiver should require that sites and structures are in accordance with the applicable code and any prior approvals.

B-3. Develop design guidelines for signage with illustrative examples.

Signs, by definition, are highly visible elements in the built environment. As such, signage can contribute to or detract from Town character – particularly along Guilderland roadways – depending on the extent to which there are effective regulatory guidelines that are publicly accessible, intelligible, and fairly applied. To that end, it is recommended that the Town develop a set of illustrative examples, to provide a clear understanding of the signage design guidelines and to ensure that these elements in the visual landscape support and conform to the character of their surroundings. Currently, all signs are reviewed and approved by the ZBA, however, the process could be streamlined if signs were considered during the Planning Board’s review, avoiding the need for duplicative public hearings. It is also recommended that the Town allow for sign permits to be administratively approved if they are not part of the site plan review process.

B-4. Develop strategies to attract well-paying, job-creating employers who will be able to provide employment opportunities for Guilderland’s community.

Guilderland is fortunate to be located in close proximity to NY State offices, university campuses, and large hospital complexes, all of which provide well-paid employment opportunities in professions that have historically been more resilient to downturns in the wider regional and national economy. Even so, economic trends are always changing, and the large employers of tomorrow may be seeking exactly the sort of well-educated workforce that Guilderland is well-positioned to provide. For that reason, it is recommended that the Town partner with the Center for Economic Growth, the Advance Albany Alliance, Empire State Development, and other relevant organizations to attract economic development which diversifies, strengthens, and expands Guilderland’s tax base. A diversified local economy does not “put all its eggs in one basket,” but rather seeks a blend that will offer superior employment to residents of all backgrounds, ages, and interests while providing for a reliably strong tax base.

B-5. Develop resources to facilitate greater participation of small business owners and entrepreneurs in the local economy.

While businesses of all sizes have roles to play in the Guilderland economy, strong public support was expressed throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update process for the contributions that small business owners and entrepreneurs make to the quality of life in Town. In recognition of the time and energy demands on small business owners, it is recommended that the Town designate resources toward assisting individuals in navigating the development review process for a small

business in Guilderland. Local entrepreneurs may need clarification on permitted uses in each zoning district, so it is recommended that the Town develop an easy-to-read use table that is accessible to the public via the Town of Guilderland Planning Department webpage, alongside other helpful guides.

B-6. Facilitate business roundtables with Town leaders and staff, adjacent local leaders, and community stakeholders to discuss specific issues of interest, such as economic development, transportation improvements, and infrastructure projects.

Regular coordination with representatives of Guilderland’s business community provides an avenue for two-way communication on pressing issues such utilities infrastructure, parking, and regional economic development. It is recommended that the Town initiates and maintains a schedule of periodic roundtable discussions with business owners, the Guilderland Industrial Development Agency, the Guilderland Chamber of Commerce, and the Town Planning Department. Such discussions hold the promise of identifying fruitful public-private partnerships, as well, which can support a broad range of identified Town goals.

Additionally, the Town should support Smart Growth principles, promoting collaboration among community members and stakeholders in development decisions. Business roundtables should not only involve Town leaders but also invite local leaders from neighboring municipalities. This broader engagement will ensure that economic development, transportation improvements, and infrastructure projects are considered within a wider regional context, fostering collaboration and shared insights.

B-7. Identify and establish the desired mix and scale of businesses in a manner that is sensitive to the neighborhood setting and cultural diversity of the Town. This includes supporting home-based businesses.

Guilderland’s mix of businesses includes decades-old shops that are familiar to residents as well as newly opened restaurants and home-based businesses. Changing trends in the business community affect the Town in myriad ways, from increasing the number of delivery vehicles on Guilderland’s roads to shifting the demand for office space. In recognition of these and other changes, it is important for the Town to consider how its policies and regulations support the needs of the business community, facilitating the efforts of entrepreneurs and business owners who contribute to Guilderland’s dynamism. Since there are a variety of ancillary benefits to home-based work – e.g., fewer commuters during peak hours, reductions to Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) and greenhouse gas emissions, among

others – it is recommended that the Town seek to refine its regulations to support home-based businesses that are compatible with the character and scale of its residential neighborhoods.

B-8. Seek partnerships with higher learning institutions including the University at Albany, the Albany Nanotech Complex, and other entities to promote economic development opportunities in Guilderland.

The State University of New York at Albany (UAlbany) is one of four institutions in the 64-campus SUNY system that confers doctorate degrees in addition to undergraduate, graduate, and professional certifications. The southwestern corner of UAlbany’s campus is within Guilderland’s municipal boundary. Just to the north sits the Albany Nanotech Complex, off of Fuller Road, home to UAlbany’s College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering and its cutting-edge research facilities. Taken together, these campuses represent invaluable economic resources to the Town of Guilderland – as employment sites for highly-skilled current residents, as places of learning for Guilderland’s future workers, and as drivers of demand for Guilderland housing and services. To maximize the positive impact of these resources on Guilderland’s economy, it is recommended that the Town strengthen existing partnerships and ensure coordination with campus leaders on a range of issues including transportation infrastructure, integration of educational opportunities to benefit Guilderland students, historic preservation initiatives, and more.



The Albany NanoTech Complex on Fuller Road is linked to Guilderland’s Transit Oriented Development district by the CDTA Purple Line BusPlus.

B-9. Consider the development of a new village-like planned community that incorporates a mix of land uses – commercial, residential, recreation/open space – that allows for walkability, environmental sustainability, and high quality of life for residents.

Public input received throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update process consistently identified a desire for walkable community nodes, with a range of services and amenities within close proximity to housing. Improvements to sidewalks and other active transportation infrastructure can increase walkability in existing population centers, but there is also an opportunity to envision a new mixed-use village-like setting that incorporates a considered spectrum of complementary land uses including residential, commercial, open space, and community services. As Guilderland looks to accommodate the current trajectory of population growth in a manner that aligns with Town character, it is recommended that the Town initiate a process to study the feasibility of building a new, mixed-use neighborhood development that incorporates design features and building techniques that are compatible with Guilderland’s focus on resiliency and environmental sustainability. Potential locations for this style of development would follow the traditional disbursement of Town hamlets and historic crossroads. This style of development should be promoted through the demonstration of successful

developments throughout the United States such as Old York Village in New Jersey and Celebration in Florida.

B-10. Pursue partnerships and incentives available through federal, state, county, and local organizations that support both the existing and future business community and strengthen Guilderland’s economic future.

With financial resources that are constrained by available tax revenues, the Town of Guilderland must closely consider the relative merits of municipal expenditures. Partnerships with public entities or private organizations, however, present opportunities to achieve a multiplier effect when spending public dollars. Over time, often coinciding with changes in leadership, government agencies and not-for profit organizations introduce new funding initiatives targeted at accomplishing specific goals or objectives. When the objectives of such initiatives align with the outlined vision, goals, and recommendations of the Guilderland Comprehensive Plan, it is recommended that the Town devote administrative resources toward the pursuit of partnerships and/or funding that can help the Town leverage municipal spending to maximum effect. On this point, close coordination with the Guilderland Industrial Development Agency and the Guilderland Chamber of Commerce is recommended.

4. ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE & RESILIENCY

Goal: Protect the natural resources that support quality of life and Town character in Guilderland through strategic hazard mitigation and resiliency measures to address the impacts of a changing climate.

Overview

Environmental resources such as clean air, water, and soil form the foundation for a livable community. Without them, a community cannot thrive. Guilderland has long attracted those seeking abundant fresh water, fertile soils, and fresh air, so safeguarding those and other vital natural resources is of paramount importance to residents, as evidenced by input submitted throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update process. Respondents to the Guilderland Community Survey rated “protecting natural resources and wildlife habitat” as a top future Town priority.

Appreciation for the role of the natural world in everyday life has grown in recent decades, as extreme weather events and even large-scale environmental disasters become more commonplace across the region, state, and nation. The Albany County Climate Resiliency Plan (2022) identifies elevated risk of flooding, extreme heat events, and drought as threats to communities throughout the county, including Guilderland. The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, in its report entitled *Climate Change Effects and Impacts*, summarizes the justification for climate resiliency planning in the following way:

New York's *Responding to Climate Change in New York State* (ClimAID) report (2011, 2014) the *National Climate Assessment* (2018) DEC *Observed and Projected Climate Change in NYS*, and other climate impact assessment reports show that a variety of climate change impacts have already been observed across the northeastern United States and in New York State. These climate change reports clearly show, based on scientific data, that significant climate change impacts are already occurring. People, plants and wildlife, and ecosystems are facing an uncertain future unless adequate actions are taken to adapt to climate change impacts already unfolding and expected to intensify over time. GHG emissions must also rapidly and significantly be reduced in the near future and eventually eliminated to prevent the increasingly harmful impacts of climate change over the next several decades.

In recognition of the critical role that natural resources and the environment plays in supporting quality of life in Guilderland, the following set recommendations have been put forward as part of a strategic approach to maintaining Town character and livability.



The Normanskill along the Vosburgh Trail system, below the Watervliet Reservoir dam

Recommendations

- C-1. Build on Guilderland’s designation as a registered Climate Smart Community (CSC) in the State of New York by completing the criteria for bronze-level CSC certification by 2030. Criteria include the formation of a CSC Task Force for Guilderland, the designation of a CSC Coordinator, as well as three (3) or more of the following priority actions:**

- a. Government Operations GHG Inventory
- b. Community GHG Inventory
- c. Government Operations Climate Action Plan
- d. Community Climate Action Plan
- e. Government Building Energy Audits
- f. Comprehensive Plan with Sustainability Elements
- g. Complete Streets Policy
- h. Alternative-fuel Infrastructure
- i. Natural Resources Inventory
- j. Climate Vulnerability Assessment
- k. Evaluate Policies for Climate Resilience
- l. Climate Adaptation Plan
- m. Climate Change Education & Engagement

The Climate Smart Communities (CSC) program is an interagency initiative of New York State, initiated in 2009, brings together coordination from the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), Department of State (DOS), Department of Transportation (DOT), Department of Health (DOH), Homes and Community Renewal (HCR), the Power Authority (NYPA), and the Department of Public Service. The CSC program supports participating local governments throughout New York State in their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to the effects of climate change, and thrive in a green economy. Participating municipalities sign a voluntary pledge to advance environmental planning using the CSC framework, which presents opportunities for free technical assistance and access to grant funding from state agencies. In the CSC framework, municipalities can move through a tiered classification system -- “Registered,” “Bronze Certified,” or “Silver Certified” – based upon completion of specified priority actions.

Guilderland became a “registered” CSC community in August 2019. In order to build on Guilderland’s positive momentum on climate resiliency, it is recommended that the Town prioritize bronze-level certification through the CSC framework by completing a series of targeted priority actions and pledge elements. In December 2021, CSC program administrators released an updated four-page “action checklist” with the names of the CSC certification actions (see Appendix H). Action categories of the CSC program include:

- PE1: Build a climate-smart community
- PE2: Inventory emissions, set goals, and plan for climate action
- PE3: Decrease energy use
- PE4: Shift to clean, renewable energy

- PE5: Use climate-smart materials management
- PE6: Implement climate smart-land use
- PE7: Enhance community resilience to climate change
- PE8: Support a green innovation economy
- PE9: Inform and inspire the public
- PE10: Engage in an evolving process of climate action
- Innovation
- Performance

In addition to becoming an officially registered Climate Smart Community, the Town of Guilderland has already begun taking steps to implement energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives. In partnership with National Grid, the Town has converted more than six hundred street luminaries to LED to conserve energy. The Town has also installed free electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure to incentivize use of vehicles with no tailpipe emissions. In terms of renewable energy generation, Guilderland is a partner in a Community Choice Aggregation program and receives credits for a solar facility located near Amsterdam, NY. Although there are current limitations in National Grid’s energy transmission infrastructure, the Town has also signed an option contract with GE Solar for a community solar facility on the Town’s former landfill site.

Throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update process, both the CPUC and the public identified climate resiliency action as a top priority for the Town. The CSC program offers a useful framework for initiating and tracking implementation on a municipal level. A target implementation timeframe of 2030 has been proposed, to align with other Town conservation goals and to act expediently on a high priority concern for the community.

C-2. Maintain and improve water quality in Watervliet Reservoir and its tributaries by partnering with the City of Watervliet and communities within the Reservoir’s watershed.

- a. Establish a watershed-wide committee to evaluate water quality in the Watervliet Reservoir and implement an action plan that includes testing protocols, agency coordination, lawn pesticides runoff mitigation and communication mechanisms to address emerging contaminants such as PFAS, if detected.
- b. Use well-head protection plans to protect potential groundwater sources from incompatible land uses that may jeopardize public drinking water sources.

- c. Minimize runoff and pollutants by continuing to comply with guidelines and regulations such as the Department of Health (DOH) surface water regulations and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) stormwater regulations. Continuing to comply with these guidelines is crucial for protecting the Town’s water resources, environment, and neighborhoods. This compliance helps reduce pollution, prevent flooding, and mitigate the negative impacts of runoff, ultimately supporting a healthier, safer, and more sustainable community.
- d. Refer to recommendations published in the Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC) Watervliet Reservoir Watershed Protection Plan.



Watervliet Reservoir, looking west from Western Turnpike

The Watervliet Reservoir occupies 420 acres in the geographic center of the Town of Guilderland, representing both a primary drinking water source for the Town and the sole drinking water source for the City of Watervliet, which owns the Reservoir.⁴ The

⁴ City of Watervliet, Normanskill Relicensing – Water Chestnut Control Study, 2018

Town of Guilderland and the City of Watervliet have a long-term agreement for use of drinking water allotments and the two municipalities utilize separate water intakes, treatment plants, pump stations, and transmission lines for treating and distributing water from the Reservoir.

The Reservoir was formed in 1915 by damming the Normanskill at Frenchs Hollow; in 1982 a one-megawatt hydroelectric facility was developed at the Reservoir to generate power from excess water flows. According to the Watervliet Reservoir Watershed Protection Study prepared by the Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC), the watershed area of the Reservoir includes an area of roughly 115 square miles which comprises parts of three counties, eight towns, and three villages. The majority of the watershed area encompasses northern Albany County and southern Schenectady County. The primary tributaries to the Reservoir are the Normanskill, the Bozenkill, and Black Creek. The path of the Normanskill continues its path to the upper Hudson River from the outflow at the southern end of the Watervliet Reservoir.

In terms of quantity, the safe yield of drinking water from the Reservoir is estimated at 12 million gallons per day.⁵ Interconnections with the City of Albany and Town of Rotterdam’s municipal water systems reduce reliance on the reservoir as a drinking source for Guilderland – and provide important redundancy – but the quantity and quality of water in the Reservoir understandably remain top of mind as concerns for the community. Both water quantity and quality in the Reservoir have been negatively impacted by an invasive species of water chestnut (*Trapa natans*), which is estimated to have infested 169 of the Reservoir’s 420 acres and which has a deleterious effect on water chemistry and the efficiency of water treatment infrastructure.

In effort to protect water quality in the Reservoir and its tributaries, the Town of Guilderland has implemented a 500-foot buffer zone area to prevent incompatible development around the entirety of the Reservoir, as well as a 250-foot buffer zone along the Reservoir’s northern tributaries: the Normanskill, Indian House Creek, and the Bozen Kill. (Elsewhere in the Town, a 100-foot buffer zone is in effect along the following waterways: Black Creek, lower Normanskill, Hunger Kill, Kaikout Kill, and Blockhouse Creek.) Buffer zones surrounding Town waterways and water bodies appear as a data layer on the Town of Guilderland Interactive Mapping site and are accessible to the public.

Western Turnpike/US-20 skirts the Reservoir to the northeast, and State Route 158 crosses the Normanskill where it enters the Reservoir’s northern end. Active freight

⁵ Watervliet Reservoir Watershed Protection Study, Capital District Regional Planning Commission

rail lines cross above the retention dam at Frenchs Hollow. The proximity of these transportation routes – together with agricultural runoff and other potential non-point sources of contamination elsewhere in the watershed area – represent potential vulnerabilities to maintaining high water quality levels in the Reservoir. In addition to ongoing collaboration to mitigate invasive species in and around the Reservoir, it is recommended that the Town of Guilderland develop and implement an action plan – including protocols for testing, coordinated agency response, and communications mechanisms – with the City of Watervliet and other municipalities in the watershed to address the threat of emerging classes of contaminants and other potential pollutants in the Reservoir ecosystem.

C-3. Encourage and incentivize climate resiliency through Town practices, procedures, rules, and regulations wherever practicable.

Given the substantial amount of land that the Town controls in the form of parks, municipal buildings, rights-of-way along Town roadways, Western Turnpike Golf Course, and other facilities, it is recommended that the Town work to ensure that its policies and practices are in alignment with the high-priority goal of environmental protection and resiliency throughout Guilderland. Resiliency measures include but are not limited to:

Stormwater Infrastructure Improvements

So-called green infrastructure employs interventions such as permeable pavement, bioswales, or rain gardens to divert stormwater from municipal water treatment infrastructure and/or Town waterways. When correctly engineered and strategically located, green infrastructure can be a lower-cost, lower-maintenance, and more environmentally friendly solution to stormwater concerns, saving municipalities on both capital and operating expenses.

Wetland Protection

Wetland areas can serve as sponges during times of high rainfall and can help mitigate flooding events. The Town of Guilderland identifies NY State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Regulated Freshwater Wetlands, DEC Wetland Checkzones, and National Wetland Inventory areas on the Town of Guilderland Interactive Mapping site. Maintaining healthy, viable wetland areas in Guilderland is a coordinated effort between the Town, its Planning Board, the DEC, and property owners.⁶

⁶ New York State’s 2022-2023 budget contained significant changes to the state’s Freshwater Wetlands Act, Article 24 of the Environmental Conservation Law. Improvements to the program were made to conserve an estimated 1 million additional acres of unprotected wetland habitat, assisting the state in adapting to

Tree planting and Preservation

Tree canopy can reduce the so-called urban heat island effect by providing shade and reducing evaporation. Tree roots also reinforce soil, preventing topsoil loss from erosion. The Town of Guilderland has formed a Tree Preservation Committee as a preliminary step in addressing the important role of trees in the community, followed by the enactment of a Native Tree Preservation Law. Active tree planting initiatives and/or implementation of best management practices for the existing tree cover are further steps that the Town can take, particularly on Town-owned properties.

increased flooding and severe storms spurred by climate change. Three important changes occurred and will be managed by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

First, effective January 1, 2025, existing maps depicting freshwater wetlands will no longer be regulatory. Second, DEC will largely use available aerial imagery and remote data to establish whether there are state-regulated freshwater wetlands on a parcel. Finally, the default threshold for regulated wetlands will decrease from 12.4 acres to 7.4 acres by 2028. Freshwater wetlands are lands and submerged areas, also known as swamps, bogs, sloughs, marshes, and flats that sustain aquatic or semi-aquatic vegetation. This new law will increase the number of wetlands regulated by DEC to further protect water quality and wildlife habitat.



Tree canopy along Hurst Road contributes to Town character

Creation of a Town alert system for extreme weather events (intramunicipal and intermunicipal) for extreme weather events, with the establishment of protocols for effective collaboration in State- and Federal-level disaster response situations

Extreme weather events and accidents caused by human error have caused disruptions to important utility, road, and essential services infrastructure in recent years in communities throughout New York State and the nation. Changing climate patterns exacerbate known hazards and increase unpredictability for emergency planning. Input from the CPUC and the public throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update process identified the establishment of both intermunicipal and intramunicipal Town alert systems as a high priority for heightening resilience. In addition to protocols for effective collaboration between agencies and departments in the event of an emergency, it is recommended that the Town alert system incorporate well-publicized channels for disseminating essential information to Town residents.

Preservation of Open Space

The Town has initiated a Conservation Easement Exemption program to provide property tax abatement to Guilderland landowners who voluntarily commit to setting aside portions of their land from development. The first open space conserved through this mechanism is located off Wormer Road, near the Normanskill. Preservation of additional open space can contribute to important ecosystem functions such as air and water filtration, soil stabilization, flood mitigation, and the preservation of habitat for plants and animals.

Improving environmental education and outreach at Town parks

Enhancing public awareness of environmental concerns and ongoing initiatives is an opportunity to build a common understanding of challenges and a pool of potential volunteers for such activities as invasive species removal, tree planting, pollinator habitat restoration, and other efforts. Through the Guilderland Department of Parks and Recreation programming and/or in partnership with educational institutions or conservation organizations, the Town has an opportunity to motivate residents to action with informational outreach.

Pledge Elements and Certification Actions of the NYS Climate Smart Communities (CSC) program, of which Guilderland is a registered member community

As indicated in Recommendation 1 in this chapter, certification actions and pledge elements are concrete, measurable steps that the Town to advance climate resiliency goals.

C-4. Reduce Guilderland’s collective contribution to climate change by decreasing community-wide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions with forward-thinking environmental, transportation, and energy planning.

As expressed in public input throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update process, the Guilderland community has a desire to mitigate the hazards of a changing climate through resiliency measures coupled with proactive steps to reduce the Town’s collective contribution to climate-warming pollution. Actions to reduce the community’s collective greenhouse gas emissions are inclusive of but not limited to the following:

- a. Wherever feasible, encourage and incentivize clean energy production, including rooftop solar/PV collection systems on new and/or existing structures, where practicable.**

As the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of photovoltaic (PV) solar energy collection systems – as well as the battery storage systems to support off-peak usage – improves over time, it is recommended that the Town evaluate the benefits of

installing collection systems on Town-owned properties. The Town has already taken the step of evaluating the former landfill site as a potential solar array location and should continue to evaluate the feasibility and potential cost savings of solar installations as transmission grid infrastructure is upgraded and new technology comes to market.

b. Encourage low- or no-GHG-producing transportation options in Guilderland by supporting infrastructure for electric vehicles, cycling, walking, and public transportation.

Since the adoption of the Guilderland 2000 Comprehensive Plan, the development of electric vehicle (EV) and plug-in hybrid technology has advanced substantially, reducing the percentage of vehicles on the road that have tailpipe emissions. Guilderland has installed free EV charging stations at Town Hall, in order to bolster the infrastructure network that facilitates EV usage. As technology continually evolves, it is recommended that the Town evaluate the feasibility of so-called “fast charging” stations, which are increasingly becoming the industry standard.

While EV and hybrid vehicles have low- or no tailpipe emissions, there are still considerable environmental impacts of the battery technologies that such vehicles employ. As part of a comprehensive approach, therefore, it is recommended that the Town continue to invest in sidewalks, multi-use pathways, public transit, and other mobility infrastructure to increase the number of daily trips that residents are able to make without the use of a personal vehicle.

c. Encourage sustainable agricultural practices that sequester carbon such as forest pastures and no-till seeding.

In addition to its contributions to the Town’s economy and character, agriculture offers opportunities to advance Guilderland’s environmental goals. Using a combination of time-tested techniques and evolving best practices, agricultural producers in Guilderland can contribute to wider efforts to enhance soil, water, and air quality. Working in partnership with the Albany County Soil and Water Conservation District, the Town can incentivize those techniques that lead to positive environmental outcomes by connecting growers with informational and funding resources to defray the costs associated with transitioning to more beneficial practices.

d. Encourage the use of energy-efficient lighting and fixtures such as LED, where such applications can reduce ambient light pollution as well as energy consumption.

The Town has already demonstrated a willingness and ability to convert luminaries to LED to realize energy and cost savings for residents. As relevant lighting and other technologies continue to evolve, it is recommended that the Town periodically evaluate opportunities for additional energy conservation in Town operations, especially when such conservation measures hold the promise of conserving Town fiscal revenues as well.

C-5. Prioritize the preservation of natural resources and animal habitat in Guilderland to promote healthy and functioning ecosystems that mitigate costly and harmful conditions such as invasive species, flooding, and soil erosion.

a. Consider limits to development on steep slopes for non-agricultural land disturbances.

The majority of Guilderland’s steep slopes are located in the Helderberg Escarpment and Settles Hill areas of Town, with additional steep areas along stream embankments. In order to prevent erosion, subsidence, and topsoil loss, it is recommended that the Town consider a more comprehensive approach to steep slope development regulation, with an acknowledgement that agricultural activities on such some slopes may be compatible with the aims of soil stabilization and viewshed protection. The definition of steep slopes should be updated to clarify development restrictions for non-agricultural land and improve consistency across the Town Code.

b. Develop an interactive environmental features map for Guilderland.

Up-to-date mapping of environmental features such as steep slopes, crucial animal habitats, Critical Environmental Areas designated by NYSDEC, and other relevant landscape elements can provide important context for future decisions on the location and scale of future development. The Town of Guilderland has already created an interactive map for parks and trails, which provides a potential model or template for environmental features mapping for the Town. Such mapping should occur in consultation and collaboration with relevant Albany County and NY State agencies to profit from information sharing and avoid duplication of effort.

c. Create a Black Creek Marsh Overlay District to set development standards in the vicinity of this critical wetland asset.

The Black Creek Marsh wetland complex in the southwestern corner of the Town is identified in the Albany County Climate Resiliency Plan (2022) as an area at “major” climate risk, owing to a combination of flood, heat, and social vulnerability scores in the County’s risk assessment. As an identified, functioning wetland, this area helps to sequester stormwater from intense precipitation events, in addition to providing vital habitat for birds, fish, and other wildlife. It is recommended that the Town incorporate an Overlay District for Black Creek Marsh when future zoning amendments are made, to prevent loss of this invaluable asset to Guilderland.

d. Update zoning to limit forest cover removal in the riparian area of the Normanskill and its tributaries.

Trees provide a variety of functions that support the health of waterways. Root systems mitigate streambank erosion, which prevents soil loss and maintains water quality, and tree canopy provides shade, lowering stream temperatures to maintain viable aquatic habitat for fish and amphibians. It is recommended that future updates to Town land use regulations consider the contributions that trees make to riparian ecosystems along the Normanskill and its tributaries to ensure that these important natural corridors remain functional and healthy, in keeping with the recommendations of the Rural Guilderland Plan (2005) and the Normanskill Riparian Corridor Study (2007).

e. Continue to partner with land conservancies, trusts, and other organizations whose missions include natural resource preservation.

The Town of Guilderland has begun to partner with landowners who wish to conserve open space through the Conservation Easement Exemption program. The Town has also had success partnering with organizations such as the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy to protect wild areas along the Bozen Kill and elsewhere. It is recommended that the Town maintain these and other productive partnerships, leveraging existing funding to attract support from the private and not-for-profit sector organizations with missions that are aligned with environmental conservation.

5. NEIGHBORHOODS & HOUSING

Goal: Provide a balanced blend of quality housing opportunities, including a desirable range of housing types and price ranges, which are affordable and accessible to residents.

Overview

Proximity to large public- and private-sector employers, a well-regarded school system, and access to plentiful outdoor recreation opportunities all contribute to Guilderland’s desirability as a place to call home. Unlike former mill towns and industrial towns elsewhere in upstate New York, Guilderland’s population has continued to show growth with each successive Decennial Census count since 1930. Large percentage increases in population during the latter half of the 20th century – particularly in the 1950s, when the number of residents more than doubled in a ten-year span -- influenced both the design and the distribution of housing in the Town. On average, housing stock in Guilderland is newer than the stock found in more industrial or agricultural areas of the state, and settlement patterns in Town are primarily suburban, owing to the prevailing transportation and development practices of the late 20th century.

Guilderland’s population in 2020 (36,848) was virtually identical to its land area in square acres (36,986), but that population is not distributed uniformly across the landscape. The character of Guilderland’s neighborhoods and hamlets runs the gamut from red wooden barns on green farmland to leafy cul-de-sacs to denser, more urban construction near the Town’s border with the City of Albany. The substantial majority of housing in Guilderland (67.6%), however, is presently devoted to single-family dwellings.

When asked what type of housing they would prefer to see constructed in Guilderland in the next 20 years, nearly half of respondents (47%) to the Guilderland Community Survey indicated a desire for a “mix of housing types and price points to attract and accommodate individuals and families with a variety of income levels.” Slightly less than one-third (30%) of respondents registered a desire for “Low-density residential development of single-family housing,” and fourteen percent (14%) indicated a desire for “in-law suites and other shared housing options to accommodate young professionals and senior citizens.” Other views expressed via public engagement activities of the Comprehensive Plan Update process included a desire to “build on already developed land” through redevelopment or adaptive reuse efforts. In a separate question that asked survey participants what type of future growth they would like to see in Guilderland in the next twenty years, the leading responses were “Focus on sustainability,” “Preservation of farmland,” “New mixed-use

development [commercial with residential],” and “New affordable housing residential development.”⁷

Housing in Guilderland

A sufficient supply of housing is necessary to meet the diverse needs of residents, ensure the vitality and character of residential neighborhoods, and sustain a high quality of life in our communities. It is also essential to economic development. The availability of housing affordable to households at different income levels helps businesses to attract and retain workers. When employees cannot find a decent place to live that they can afford within a reasonable commute distance, businesses may be unable to find workers to hire. The Town of Guilderland believes that the lack of housing for New York residents for all ages and income levels negatively impacts the future of State, regional, and local economic growth and community well-being; that every community must do its part to contribute to housing growth and benefit from the positive impacts a healthy housing market brings; that infill development that reduces sprawl and supports walkable communities has significant environmental and public health benefits; and that affirmatively furthering fair housing and reducing segregation is not only required by law, but is essential for keeping the community strong and vibrant.

The Town Board further supports that housing production of all kinds in this community will bring multiple benefits, including increasing housing access and choices for current and future residents, providing integrated accessible housing options that meet the needs of people with sensory and mobility disabilities, bringing economic opportunities and vitality to this community, and allowing workers at all levels to improve their quality of life through living closer to their employment opportunities.

Therefore, on March 5, 2024 the Town Board passed Resolution No. 1 of 2024 Authorizing the Pro-Housing Communities Pledge and as of July 1, 2024 the Town was confirmed as a Pro-Housing Community by the NYS Office of Homes and Community Renewal. As a Pro-Housing Community Guilderland solidifies its commitment to alleviating the housing crisis through the following steps:

1. Streamlining permitting for multifamily housing, affordable housing, accessible housing, accessory dwelling units, and supportive housing.
2. Adopting policies that affirmatively further fair housing.
3. Incorporating regional housing needs into planning decisions.
4. Increasing development capacity for residential uses.
5. Enacting policies that encourage a broad range of housing development, including multifamily housing, affordable housing, accessible housing, accessory dwelling units, and supportive housing.

⁷ See Appendix X: *Guilderland Community Survey Summary*

Table 8 shows the total number of housing units and the distribution of units by tenure in Guilderland over a 20-year period. Between 2000 and 2010, the supply of housing in the Town grew by 7.9%, with a net gain of 1,101 units. Growth continued into the subsequent decade, but at a slower pace (6.6%). From 2010 to 2020, fewer than 1,000 housing units were added to the housing supply, the smallest increase in decades. By contrast, the Town gained 2,301 housing units during the 1980s and 1,814 during the 1990s.

Table 8. Total Housing Units, Town of Guilderland

	2000		2010		2020	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total Housing Units	13,928	100.0%	15,029	100.0%	16,018	100.0%
Occupied Units	13,422	96.4%	14,205	94.5%	15,006	93.7%
Owner-Occupied Units	8,945	66.6%	9,653	68.0%	10,028	67%
Renter-Occupied Units	4,477	33.4%	4,552	32.0%	4,978	33%
Vacant Units	506	3.6%	824	5.5%	1,012	6.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census.

Housing Characteristics

According to Decennial Census data, the proportion of Guilderland residents who own their homes has held relatively steady at two-thirds during the past twenty years. According to the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) five-year estimates from 2017-2021, single family homes, either detached or attached, are the predominant housing type in Guilderland, accounting for 67.6% of all units (Figure 4). They also make up 97.2% of the owner-occupied units. Approximately 12% of all housing units are in buildings with 5 to 9 units, while 11.6% are in multifamily structures that contain 10 or more units; virtually all of the units in the latter category are rentals, as opposed to owner-occupied condominiums.

Duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes account for less than 8% of Guilderland’s housing stock. These structures tend to be prevalent in older towns and cities, where they were often placed on lots suitable for single-family homes. Historically, they provided housing affordable to moderate income households. Two- to four-unit buildings represent 14% of

the housing in the Town of Bethlehem, and one of every four housing units in Albany County overall.

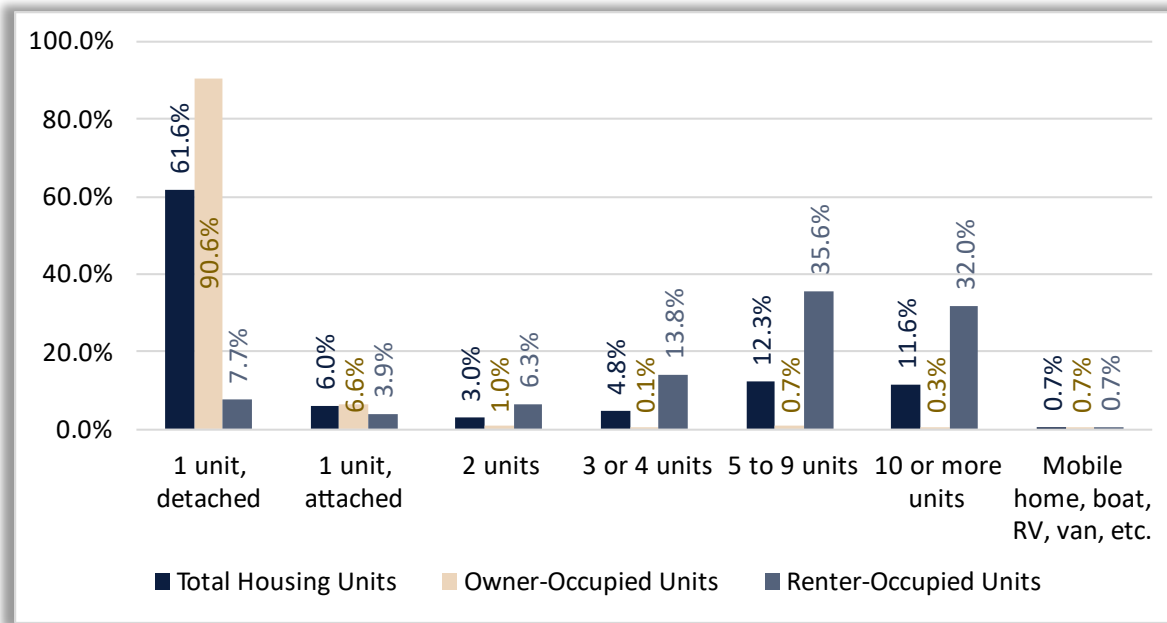


Figure 4. Housing by Units in Structure, Town of Guilderland

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2017-21 Five-Year Estimates

Figure 5 shows the age of housing units in Guilderland. Unlike many communities in upstate New York, only 8.0% of the housing inventory was built prior to 1940. Nearly one-

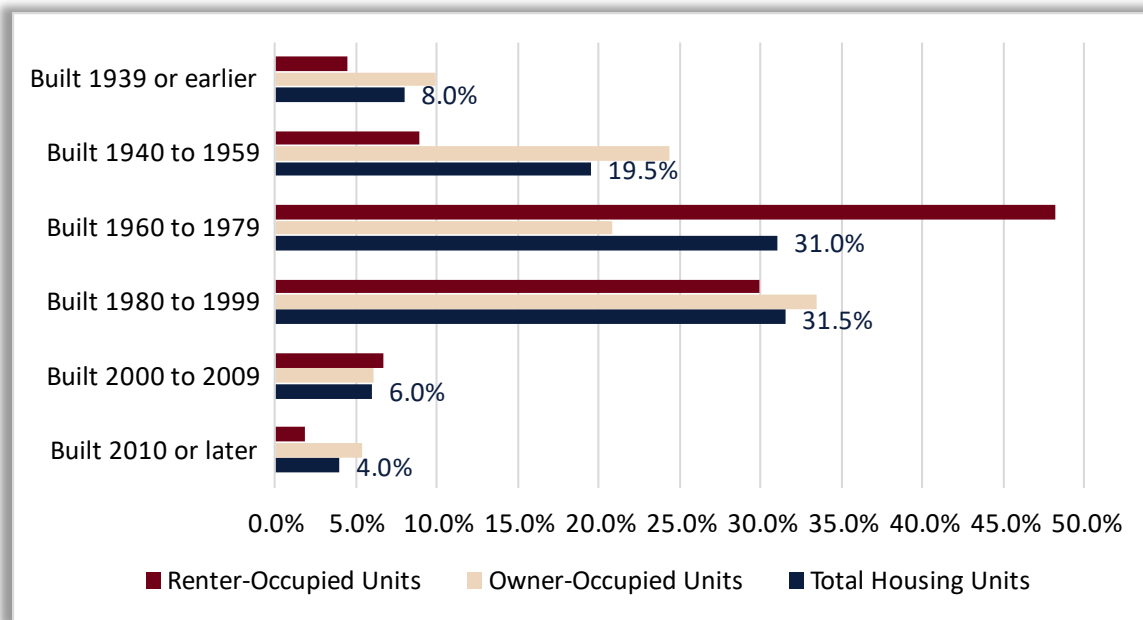


Figure 5. Housing by Year Structure Built, Town of Guilderland

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2017-21 Five-Year Estimates

third (32%) of the units were constructed between 1980 and 1999, consistent with the data on housing growth, while 31.0% were built between 1960 and 1979. As the chart illustrates, however, the town’s rental housing stock is generally newer than its owner-occupied housing: 34.3% of the owner-occupied units, but only 13.4% of the rental units, were built before 1960.

Home Values

Housing values tend to reflect both the age and condition of housing. The median value⁸ of owner-occupied housing in the Town is \$276,100, up from \$135,700 in 2000 – a 103% increase, or a 25% increase in inflation-adjusted dollars. Guilderland has a higher median home value than Albany County (\$235,200) and the Town of Colonie (\$259,500), but a lower median value than the Town of Bethlehem (\$294,600).

As shown in Figure 6, approximately 35% of homes in Guilderland are valued at \$200,000 to \$299,999, while 34.4% have a value between \$300,000 and \$499,999. Only 3% of owner-occupied housing in the town is valued at less than \$100,000, compared to 7.2% countywide.

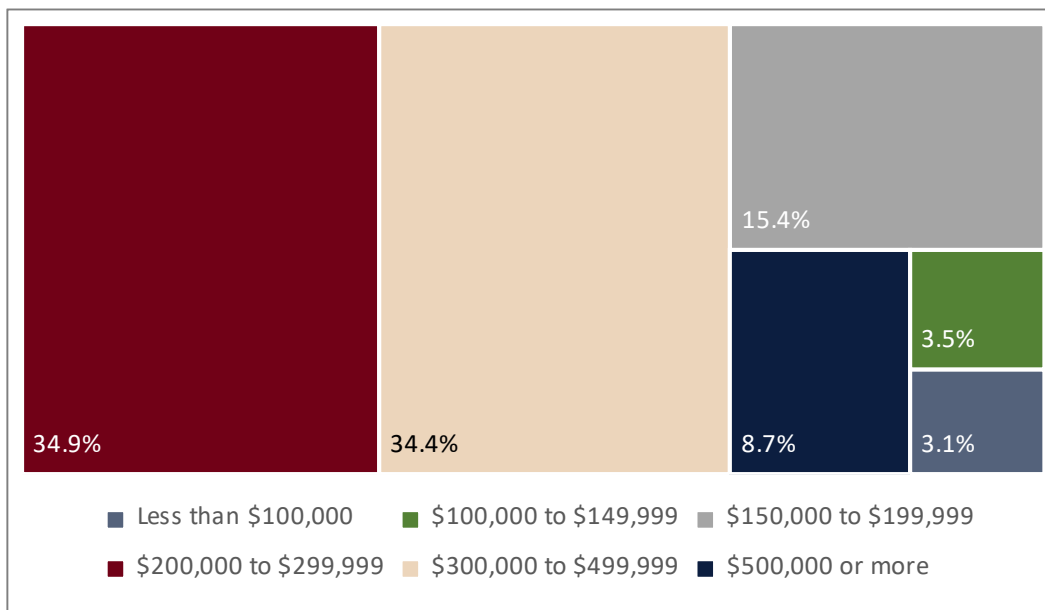


Figure 6. Owner-Occupied Housing Units by Value, Town of Guilderland

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2017-21 Five-Year Estimates

⁸ The housing value is the respondent’s estimate of what the home would sell for if it were for sale. Residential sale prices, a more accurate measure of market value, are discussed later in this section.

Housing Costs

The median gross rent is defined as the contract rent plus the average monthly cost of utilities, including heat. The median gross rent in Guilderland is \$1,310, well above the Albany County median (\$1,113) and slightly below the median rent in the Town of Bethlehem (\$1,372). The current median rent reflects an increase of nearly 71% above what it was in 2000, or a 5% increase in inflation-adjusted dollars. More than 78% of renter households in Guilderland have a gross rent between \$1,000 and \$1,999 per month.

Housing costs paid by homeowners include mortgage payments, if applicable, plus utilities, property taxes, and insurance. According to the ACS, about 65% of those who own a home in Guilderland have a mortgage. The median monthly housing cost among homeowners with a mortgage is \$1,975; among those without a mortgage, the median is \$703 per month. More than 62% of homeowners with a mortgage have monthly housing costs between \$1,500 and \$2,999.

Housing Affordability

A standard measure of affordability looks at how much households spend on housing relative to their income. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines a household that spends more than 30% of its gross income on monthly housing expenses as *cost burdened*; a household that spends more than *half* of its income on housing is considered *severely cost burdened*. The greater the proportion of income spent on housing costs, the less households have available for other necessities like food, childcare, and transportation.

Table 9. Housing Cost Burden, Town of Guilderland

	Number	Percent
Gross rent as a percentage of household income	Renters	
Less than 30.0% - not cost burdened	2,850	58.0%
30.0% to 39.9%	825	16.8%
40.0% to 49.9%	418	8.5%
50.0% or more	656	13.4%
<i>Total cost burdened</i>	<i>1,899</i>	<i>38.7%</i>

Table 9. Housing Cost Burden, Town of Guilderland

	Number	Percent
Monthly housing costs as a percentage of household income	Homeowners*	
Less than 30.0% (not cost burdened)	4,978	78.0%
30.0% to 39.9%	505	7.9%
40.0% to 49.9%	391	6.1%
50.0% or more	507	7.9%
<i>Total cost burdened</i>	1,403	22.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2017-21 Five-Year Estimates

* Homeowners with a mortgage only

As shown in Table 9, 38.7% of renter households in Guilderland are cost burdened, up from 35.8% in 2010. More than 13% of households are severely cost burdened, as they spend more than 50% of their income on rent. The majority of the severely cost burdened renter households are at the lower end of the income scale (though not necessarily low income): 79% of them earn less than \$50,000 per year. Nationally, 46% of all renter households are cost burdened.

Homeowners experience affordability challenges far less than renters. This is because lenders generally will not issue a mortgage that consumes more than 30% of the borrower’s income; however, a change in circumstances, such as the loss of a job, retirement, or a divorce, can impact an owner’s income and their ability to cover housing costs. In Guilderland, 22.0% of homeowners with a mortgage (and 9.0% of those who own their homes free and clear) are cost burdened. Two-thirds of the cost burdened owner households have annual incomes of less than \$75,000.

Out of Reach: The High Cost of Housing, a report produced by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, highlights the mismatch between the wages people earn and the cost of rental housing in the U.S. According to analysis completed by the organization, a full-time worker in the Albany-Schenectady-Troy Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) must earn an

average hourly wage of \$23.21 – or \$48,280 annually – to afford a modest, two-bedroom rental home without spending more than 30% of their income on housing costs.⁹

Table 10 lists the affordable housing in Guilderland, properties that currently offer rental units to income-qualified households. These properties, all of which are privately owned, are funded by state and federal programs like Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) and Section 8 Project-Based Rental Assistance. Carman Senior Living is the only affordable housing complex restricted to tenants age 55 and over. Rents in these developments are typically based on income and/or capped to ensure that tenants do not spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs. No new subsidized affordable housing has been constructed in Guilderland in at least ten years.

Name	Location	Units	Year Built
Carman Senior Living Community	3485 and 3489 Carman Road	96	2002
Brandle Woods	6 Van Evera Drive	32	1991
Altamont Oaks	950 Altamont Boulevard	40	1987
Brandywine Apartments	800 Brandywine Parkway	180	1975

Source: Affordable Housing Online, <https://affordablehousingonline.com>

Not all cost burdened households have low household incomes. Middle income households can also be cost burdened, or unable to find suitable housing, if prices are too high or there is a scarcity of housing units within their financial means. These households may earn too much to be eligible for subsidized housing or other forms of assistance, but not enough to comfortably afford quality market-rate housing.

Housing affordability has become a major concern in recent years, as the COVID-19 pandemic, supply chain disruptions, record-high inflation, and other issues led to a dramatic rise in the cost of housing. Renters, who tend to have lower incomes than homeowners, have been hit especially hard. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor

⁹ For more information, see <https://nlihc.org/oor>. The hourly wages necessary to afford a two-bedroom apartment are also available by zip code. In Guilderland, they range from a low of \$21.35 in the 12303 zip code to a high of \$28.08 in the 12084 zip code.

Statistics, the average rent in the U.S. increased 18% between 2017 and 2022, exceeding the rate of inflation.

Building Permits

The U.S. Census Bureau’s Building Permits Survey reports that between 2011 and 2021, the Town of Guilderland issued a total of 1,228 permits for residential construction, of which 564 (or about 46%) were for single-family homes. These homes were valued at an estimated \$150.8 million, or an average of about \$267,000 per unit. It is important to note that while the number of approved building permits is an indicator of future construction, not all permits result in new development.

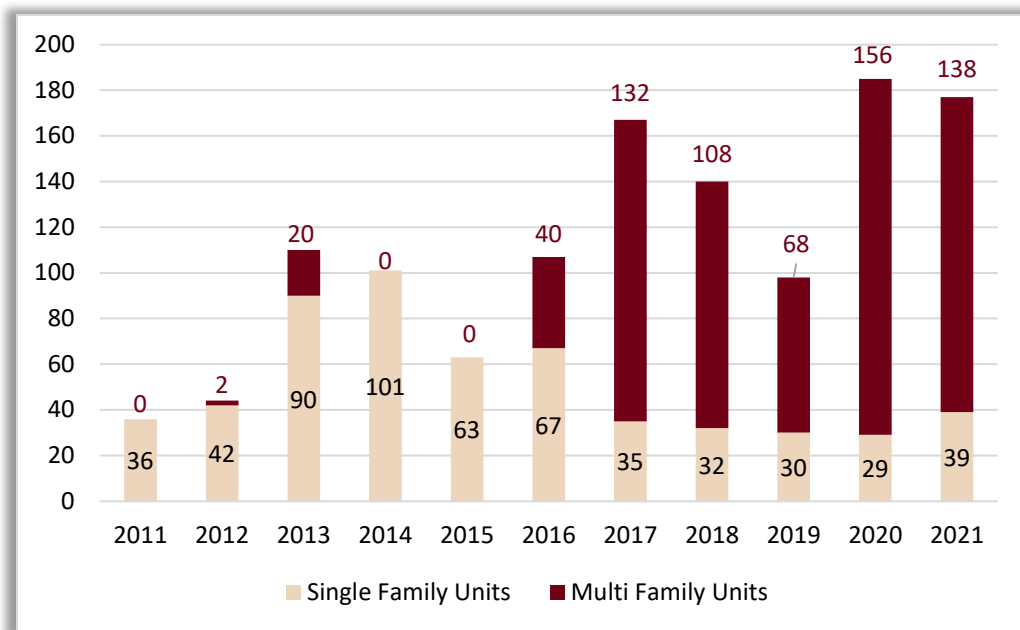


Figure 7. Residential Building Permits Issued, Town of Guilderland

Source: HUD User SOCDC Building Permits Database

Units in multifamily structures accounted for 664 building permits issued, with a substantial increase occurring from 2016 through 2021. In fact, Guilderland issued more permits for multifamily housing than for single family homes during this time. Prior to 2017, the largest number of building permits issued by the town for multifamily housing was 112 in 1999.

No new senior housing was built in Guilderland between 2000 and 2015. With nearly one-third of the population in the Albany-Schenectady-Troy MSA age 55 and over, however,

developers in the region are tapping into the growing market for independent senior housing. Hamilton Parc, the Summit at Mill Hill, and Westmere Village are among the Town’s newest senior living communities.

Housing Sales

Figure 8 presents data on arm’s length single-family home sales in Guilderland from 2016 through 2022.¹⁰ “Arm’s length” refers to real estate transactions in which buyers and sellers act independently and in their own interest, without undue pressure on either party.

As the chart demonstrates, the median selling price of a single-family residence in the town rose from \$265,000 in 2016 to \$310,000 in 2022, a 17% increase. A growing percentage of homes had selling prices of at least \$500,000. These higher priced homes accounted for less than 5% of the residences sold each year between 2016 and 2019, but they made up about 10% in 2020 and 2021, and nearly 20% in 2022. In contrast, the proportion of homes that sold for less than \$200,000 declined from 27% in 2016 to 12% in 2022.

The selling prices of newly constructed homes, which make up a small subset of residential sales transactions, are higher than existing homes. The median selling price of a new single-family home in Guilderland was \$398,700 over the 2016-19 period, and \$431,500 from 2020 through 2022.¹¹

The number of homes sold per year increased somewhat in 2020 and 2021 over each of the previous three years. This may be due to what the National Association of Realtors refers to as the “COVID real estate boom” that occurred from roughly mid-2020 through late 2021. During this time, U.S. housing demand – and home prices – skyrocketed, aided by historically low interest rates. On average, 3-4% of single-family homes in Guilderland change hands each year.

¹⁰ This analysis looks only at properties that are classified as 210 – One Family Year-Round Residence, which may be single-family homes or condos. Other types of residential property, such as two-family homes and rural residences with acreage, are excluded.

¹¹ This figure was not calculated by year due to the limited number of newly constructed homes sold in some years.



Figure 8. Arm's Length Sales of Single-Family Homes, Town of Guilderland

Source: NYS Office of Real Property Tax Services.

Quantitative information on local homebuyers is not available, but the National Association of Realtors (NAR) produces an annual profile that provides insights about recent buyers and sellers. From 2014 to 2021, Millennials – defined as individuals born between 1980 and 1998 – made up the largest share of homebuyers in the U.S. That changed in 2022 due to a rapid increase in mortgage interest rates and higher home prices, when Baby Boomers (born 1946 to 1964) represented 39% of homebuyers. First-time buyers accounted for 26% of those who purchased a home, down from 34% in 2021. Fourteen percent of home buyers purchased a multi-generational home to care for aging parents or accommodate adult children moving back into the house, while 31% of buyers had children under 18 living at home.

Leading factors influencing buyers’ neighborhood choices included the quality of the neighborhood, convenience to friends and family, housing affordability, and convenience to a job. Detached single-family houses represented 79% of the homes purchased.¹²

¹² National Association of Realtors Research Group, 2023 Home Buyers and Sellers Generational Trends Report, March 2023. Accessed at <https://www.nar.realtor/research-and-statistics/research-reports/home-buyer-and-seller-generational-trends>. The recent homebuyers had purchased a primary residence between July 2021 and June 2022.

Who Owns? Who Rents?

Decisions about whether to own or to rent are based not only on income but also on life stage and household type. Homeownership rates tend to rise as people enter young adulthood and begin to settle down. Among Guilderland householders (heads of household) under age 25, 71% are renters (see Table 11). In contrast, 82% of householders ages 45 to 54 – peak earning years – own a home. After age 65, rates of homeownership decline as wages and salaries from employment are replaced by incomes from savings, pensions, retirement accounts, and Social Security. Some seniors transition to rental units or downsize to smaller homes that are easier to maintain. Nevertheless, four out of every five households headed by someone between the ages of 65 and 74 in Guilderland, and 76% of households ages 75 to 85, own their homes. The rate of homeownership among householders age 85 and above is 56%; however, this figure excludes seniors who reside in group quarters (like a nursing home or assisted living facility) and are not in a household.

Table 11. Guilderland: Tenure by Income, Householder Age, and Household Type

	Own	Rent
By Income		
Less than \$25,000	45%	55%
\$25,000 to \$49,999	41%	59%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	47%	53%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	62%	38%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	82%	18%
\$150,000 or more	90%	10%
By Age of Householder		
15 to 24 years	29%	71%
25 to 34 years	36%	64%
35 to 44 years	63%	37%
45 to 54 years	82%	18%



Table 11. Guilderland: Tenure by Income, Householder Age, and Household Type

55 to 64 years	75%	25%
65 to 74 years	80%	20%
75 to 84 years	76%	24%
85 years and over	56%	44%
By Household Type		
Married-couple family	84%	16%
Single parent, male or female householder	62%	38%
Nonfamily household, 1 person living alone, under age 65	40%	60%
Nonfamily household, 1 person living alone, 65 years and over	57%	43%
Nonfamily, householder not living alone	34%	66%
By Household Size		
1-person household	47%	53%
2-person household	73%	27%
3-person household	70%	30%
4-person household	85%	15%
ALL HOUSEHOLDS	67%	33%
<i>Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2017-21 Five-Year Estimates</i>		

Housing Market Demographics

Key factors that shape the demand for housing include population growth, household formation, income levels, and demographic characteristics like age and household type that influence housing preferences. National economic conditions and mortgage rates also affect housing markets. Rising interest rates mean higher monthly mortgage payments and reduced spending power for prospective homebuyers. Some buyers may be priced out of the market and forced to delay their home purchasing plans. Conversely,

lower interest rates make homebuying more affordable, increasing the demand for housing.

Population Change

Guilderland’s population has been growing steadily since the 1950s. In 2020, The town had 36,848 residents, an increase of 4.4% from 35,303 in 2010 (Table 12). While the rate of growth was relatively moderate in comparison to previous decades, the Town’s population grew faster than Albany County (3.6%), New York State (4.2%), or the Town of Bethlehem (4.1%).

Population levels are expected to be stable over the next twenty years. Based on projections from the Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC), the number of residents in the Town of Guilderland is expected to reach 37,594 by 2030 and 38,151 by 2040.

Table 12. Population and Household Trends, Town of Guilderland				
	Town of Guilderland		Albany County	
	Number	% Change	Number	% Change
Population				
2000 Census	34,045	--	294,565	--
2010 Census	35,303	3.7%	304,032	3.2%
2020 Census	36,848	4.4%	314,848	3.6%
2030 CDRPC projection	37,594	1.5%	316,018	1.0%
2040 CDRPC projection	38,151	1.5%	317,709	0.5%
Households				
2000 Census	13,422	--	120,512	--

Table 12. Population and Household Trends, Town of Guilderland

	Town of Guilderland		Albany County	
	Number	% Change	Number	% Change
2010 Census	14,205	5.8%	126,251	4.8%
2020 Census	15,006	5.6%	132,812	5.2%
2030 CDRPC projection	15,600	2.9%	132,935	0.0%
2040 CDRPC projection	15,968	2.4%	134,410	1.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census and Capital District Regional Planning Commission (2030 and 2040 projections).

The 2020 Census reports that 77.4% of residents in the Town of Guilderland are white. About 11% are Asian or Pacific Islander, 5.8% identify themselves as multi-racial, and 4.1% are Black or African American. Individuals of Hispanic origin, who may be of any race, account for 4.6% of the town’s population. Three-quarters of residents of Hispanic origin, however, reside within the two block groups that include the University at Albany campus and parts of McKownville.¹³ Notably, Guilderland is more racially diverse than it was in 2010, when 86.2% of residents were identified as white.

Households

Approximately 15,000 households reside in the Town of Guilderland. According to CDRPC, the number of households is projected to reach 15,600 by 2030 and 15,968 a decade later, with growth rates averaging less than 0.3% per year.

Nationally, average household sizes have decreased over the last few decades due to an increase in single-parent households, smaller family sizes, and more people living alone. The average household in Guilderland is 2.33 persons, compared to 2.40 in 2000. Individuals who live alone make up about 29% of all households in the town. Approximately 28% of Guilderland households include at least one child under 18 years of age, while 31.1% include at least one person aged 65 and over.

¹³ Block Group (BG) 004.041 covers the University at Albany campus, and BG 146.081 covers parts of McKownville.

Age Distribution

The U.S. Census Bureau expects that by 2030, one in five Americans will be age 65 and over as the youngest members of the Baby Boom generation, born between 1946 through 1964, reach retirement age. Both the number of older Americans and their share of the total population has been increasing. Between 2010 and 2020, the 65-and-over population in the U.S. grew by over a third. Meanwhile, lower fertility rates have contributed to a decrease in the number of Americans under age 18. In the next 15 to 20 years, there will be more people in the U.S. age 65 and older than under the age of 18.

These demographic shifts have wide-ranging implications, from a reduction in the working-age population, lost productivity, and slower economic growth to an increased demand for health services, home-based care, assisted living, and nursing home care as well as transportation. Changes in the age distribution of the population are also expected to affect the demand for single-family and multi-family housing.

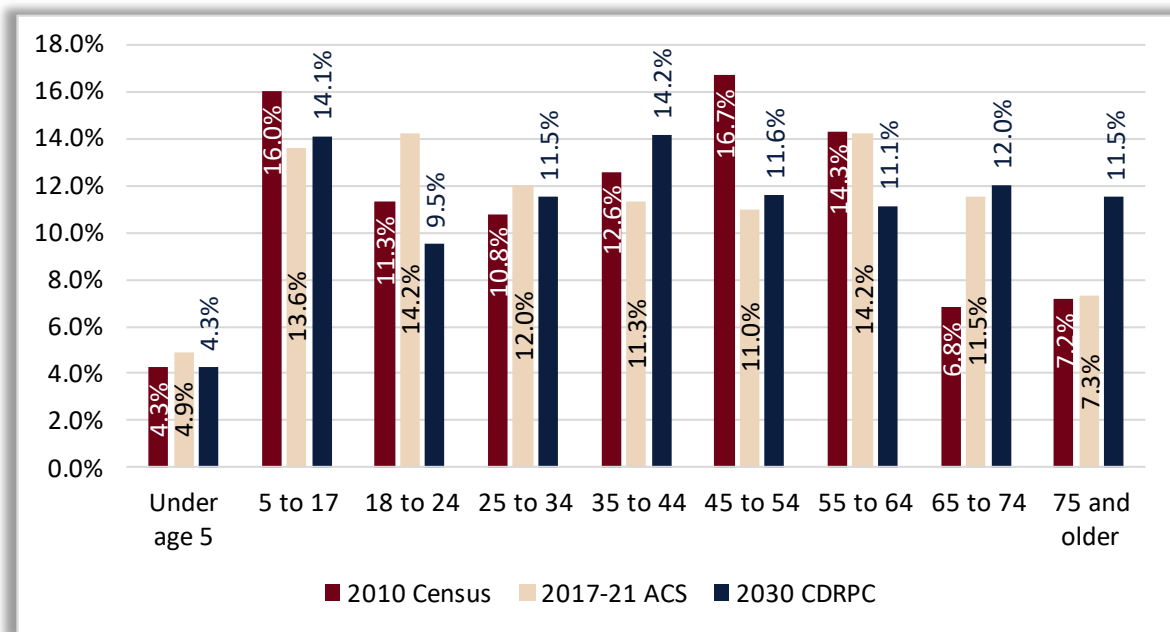


Figure 9. Population by Age Group, Town of Guilderland

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Decennial Census and American Community Survey 2017-21 Five-Year Estimates; CDRPC (2030 projection).

Consistent with national trends, the population age 65 and over is among the fastest growing age cohorts in Guilderland: the number of residents 65+ increased from 4,942 in 2010 to 6,930 in 2021, or 40.2%. CDRPC projections indicate that by 2030, the number will increase to 8,865, and seniors will make up 24% of Guilderland’s population.

Income

Household income levels impact the ability of residents to pay for housing, contribute to the tax base, and support the local economy as consumers of goods and services.

According to the ACS, the median income of households in the Town of Guilderland is \$94,606, well above the median in Albany County (\$73,810) and New York State (\$75,157). More than 47% of households in the town have annual incomes of \$100,000 or more; at the same time, 22.9% have incomes below \$50,000 per year.

Income levels vary by tenure. Owner households in Guilderland have a median household income of \$117,527. Most owner households (61.2%) have annual incomes of at least \$100,000, while 12.7% earn \$75,000 to \$99,999 per year. The median household income among renters is \$58,219. More than 26% of the town’s renter households have annual incomes of \$25,000 to \$49,999, while 25.3% earn \$50,000 to \$74,999 per year (Figure 10).

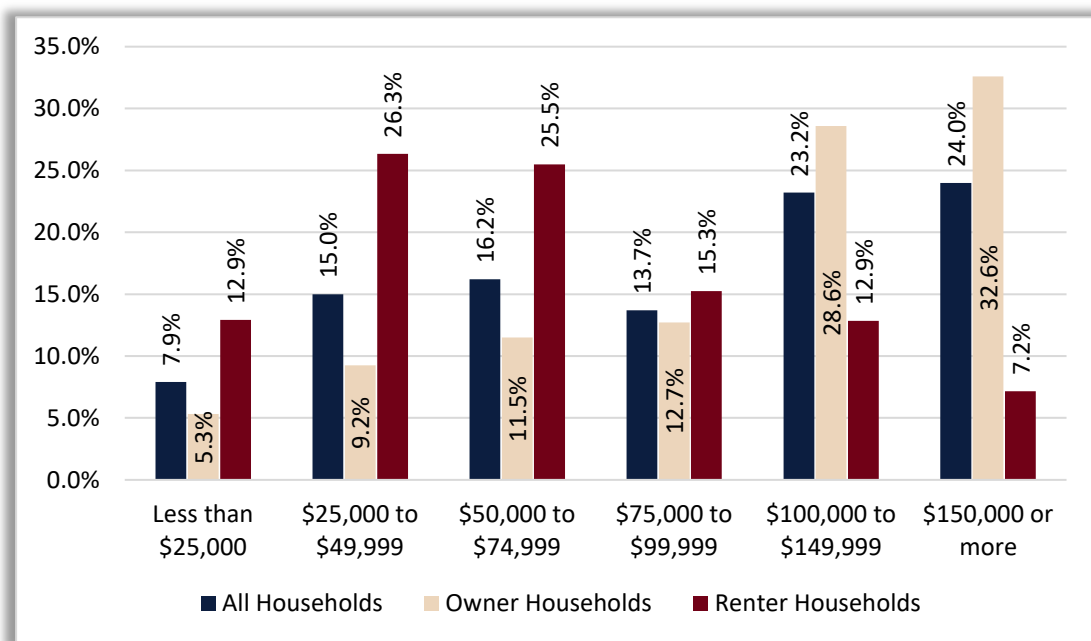


Figure 10. Households by Income and Tenure, Town of Guilderland

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2017-21 Five-Year Estimates

The ACS reveals that 5.2% of all Guilderland residents have annual incomes below the federal poverty level, with a slightly higher rate, 6.0%, among those under 18. These rates were 4.1% and 4.5%, respectively, in the 2000 Census.

The high median household income and low poverty rate in Guilderland obscure the presence of many households that earn more than the federal poverty level, but less than they need to afford the basic cost of living, including housing. The United Way refers to them as ALICE households; ALICE stands for **A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed. Members of these households are often in jobs that pay by the hour, are unemployed, or have unpredictable work schedules, making it difficult for them to save for emergencies. According to UnitedForAlice.org, 29% of all households in Guilderland are under the ALICE threshold, the minimum income level necessary for financial stability.¹⁴

Most affordable housing programs target low-income households, those whose incomes are at or below 80% of the area median income (AMI), although housing developed with funding from the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program is restricted to households earning 60% or less of the AMI. Table 13 below lists the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) FY 2022 Income Limits for the Albany MSA.

Table 13. FY 2022 Income Limits, Albany-Schenectady-Troy MSA

Persons in Family	Extremely Low Income (Up to 30% of AMI)	Very Low Income (Up to 50% of AMI)	Low Income (Up to 80% of AMI)
1	\$22,300	\$37,100	\$59,400
2	\$25,450	\$42,400	\$67,850
3	\$28,650	\$47,700	\$76,350
4	\$31,800	\$53,000	\$84,800
5	\$34,350	\$57,250	\$91,600
6	\$37,190	\$61,500	\$98,400

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Due to the pandemic, the release of the FY 2023 Income Limits has been delayed.

¹⁴ The latest ALICE data available is 2018. See www.unitedforalice.org.

Recommendations

In light of prevailing demographic trends and desired amenities, as identified through the Comprehensive Plan Update process, the following set of recommendations are proposed, to support the Town goal of providing a broad range of accessible, high-quality housing options for current and future residents.

D-1. Explore tools and approaches to support the Town’s Pro-Housing Designation.

The Town of Guilderland has been designated a Pro-Housing Community by the NYS Office of Homes and Community Renewal and strategies should be investigated to support the steps of the program. When considering potential streamlining of approvals and land use permitting the focus should be affordable housing, accessible housing, accessory dwelling units, and supportive housing. To shepherd the program, the Town should act as a resource for developers to understand and access applicable public funding sources.

The Town should be proactive in seeking affordable housing opportunities as this approach can increase neighborhood diversity while meeting the housing needs of low- and moderate-income citizens. Pursuing such projects can assist in alleviating housing shortages and attract a wide range of residents. Furthermore, this may lead to increased collaboration with developers, allowing the Town to secure funding and incentives for inclusive development.

D-2. Update building design guidelines to promote sustainable green building practices that advance the goals of energy efficiency, water conservation, and the use of building materials which reduce harmful environmental impacts.

Given advancements in building technologies and environmental science research in recent decades, an opportunity exists for Guilderland to align its building design guidelines to its allied goals for natural resource conservation and sustainability. The Town has identified a strain on municipal water supplies during warmer months, noting that much of the elevated water consumption is connected to landscaping. Recognized sustainability practices include but are not limited to:

- Street tree planting with non-invasive tree varieties to reduce “heat island effect”
- Rooftop solar panels
- Xeriscaping or other landscaping that requires minimal watering
- Recognized green building construction practices

D-3. To maximize the Town’s investments in public water and sewer, transportation, and pedestrian connections, expand opportunities for housing

types other than single-family in appropriate districts, provided there are design standards to ensure new housing is compatible with existing neighborhoods.



An example of a side-by-side 2-family dwelling with dimensional standards comparable to a single-family dwelling.
Photo courtesy of: www.newwestern.com/blog/cost-to-build-a-duplex/



An example of townhomes, which can provide more dwelling units per acre while adhering to design standards that maintain residential character. *Photo courtesy of: missingmiddlehousing.com*



An example of a “cottage court” style development. In this development model, smaller individual homes are arranged around a central common outdoor area, eliminating the need for strenuous all-season yard maintenance for older or disabled residents. *Photo courtesy of: missingmiddlehousing.com*

Multi-family housing types can allow for efficient use of water, electrical utility, and transportation infrastructure, since a greater number of people are connected by fewer miles of pipe, cable, and road. Multi-family housing can also support the maintenance or expansion of public transportation service in a given area by providing sufficient population densities to satisfy transportation system demand models. Like other types of development, multi-family residential development should be situated appropriately, where infrastructure investments can support such construction, and should conform to design guidelines that are in accord with the envisioned neighborhood character. The Town should consider the following steps in its approach to encouraging appropriate multi-family housing:

- a. **Create separate definitions in the zoning code for different types of multi-unit structures, such as duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes, rather than using the term “apartment building.”**
 - b. **Create design guidelines for duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes to ensure that they resemble single-family dwellings and fit seamlessly into residential neighborhoods.**
 - c. **Determine which zoning districts are appropriate for triplexes and fourplexes.**
 - d. **Allow two-family dwellings (duplexes) in single-family districts as long as dimensional standards can be met.**
 - e. **Consider establishing a modified site plan review process to incentivize the development of duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes in appropriate zoning districts.**
- D-4. Consider updating zoning regulations to require major subdivisions and large developments to incorporate affordable housing options such as smaller lots, smaller houses, and dwelling units for households earning 80% to 120% of area median income.**

The affordability of housing has been a prevalent concern expressed via public engagement channels during the Comprehensive Plan Update process. Median home prices and median rent have both increased at a rate outpacing inflation in recent years, adding to a sense of financial precarity for many Guilderland residents. In order to promote feasible housing options for current and future Town residents, it is recommended that the Town institute a minimum percentage of dwelling units in large-scale developments or major subdivisions that must meet affordability guidelines. Public input has signaled a demand for smaller lots and/or smaller square-footage homes, to serve the needs of downsizing seniors, younger first-time homebuyers, and others.

D-5. Offer a density bonus of additional dwelling units if certain amenities or features, such as affordable housing, senior housing, open space, recreation, and/or public access are included in a housing development.

The Comprehensive Plan Update process, through public input and visioning, has identified a variety of resources that hold great value to the community: housing for seniors, recreation areas, open space, and housing that is within reach for households of different income levels. In order to increase the supply of these desirable resources in Guilderland, it is recommended that the Town offer a “density bonus” – i.e., a conditional allowance to include a greater number of housing units per acre in a project – in exchange for the inclusion of one or more public amenity. Residential or mixed-use developments that agree to provide a pocket park for recreation or a set-aside number of senior housing units, for instance, would be permitted to increase the total project square footage, benefiting both the developer and Town residents.

D-6. Proactively develop policies for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) in the Town – either attached or detached – as an opportunity for alternative housing options in single-family residential neighborhoods while preserving the character of these neighborhoods.



An example of an Accessory Dwelling Unit or “mother-in-law” apartment above a garage. *Photo courtesy of: www.guthmannconstruction.com*

New York State Homes and Community Renewal’s Plus One ADU Program offers useful policy frameworks and grant-funding assistance for municipalities that wish to create feasible pathways to ADU construction. The intent of permitting well-regulated ADU construction in the Town is to provide low-cost housing options, slow suburban sprawl, and to allow for more efficient use of existing infrastructure. Specific steps for consideration include:

- a. **Replace the term “family apartment” with Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) in §280.5 – Definitions.**
- b. **Eliminate the requirement in §280.40 – Supplemental Regulations, Subsection G(1) that family apartments or ADUs must be “occupied by a person or persons related to the owner by blood, adoption or marriage.”**
- c. **Evaluate whether owner-occupancy, specified in §280.40 – Supplemental Regulations, Subsection G(1) is an important requirement or a barrier to the use of ADUs.**

- d. Consider allowing ADUs in all single-family districts as long as dimensional standards of the principal structure can be met.
- e. Evaluate the need for short-term rental regulations as they relate to ADUs.

D-7. Update the definition of manufactured housing units to better reflect state laws and the current state of the manufactured housing industry.

Given the growing cost of housing as a percentage of the average household budget, modular/manufactured homes have been gaining increased attention as relatively affordable and often more environmentally sustainable housing option for consideration. Regulatory barriers to manufactured housing placement inhibit opportunities for housing that is more affordable. Modular homes benefit from the increased efficiency that comes from centralized manufacturing processes combined with lower materials costs – due to volume purchasing – and climate-controlled work environments that allow for year-round housing production. New manufactured homes meet high standards for heat insulation and energy efficiency, outperforming many older homes in a variety of sustainability categories.

D-8. Amend zoning regulations to address if/where the development of tiny homes should be permissible within the Town of Guilderland.

Smaller modular homes – sometimes called “tiny homes” – have grown in popularity in recent years, offering a chance at personal homeownership even for those with relatively limited financial resources. Given that other communities in the region are addressing interest in so-called tiny homes, a forward-thinking approach should be taken in Guilderland to consider whether such development should have a place in the Town’s range of housing options. Tiny homes can function as standalone Accessory Dwelling Units, where such uses are permitted, or they can be incorporated in cluster developments – so-called “tiny home villages.”

D-9. Partner with an appropriate housing agency, such as the Albany County Rural Housing Alliance, to facilitate the rehabilitation of older homes and rental units occupied by low- and moderate-income households.

An important component of the Guilderland housing ecosystem is the maintenance of older homes, particularly for those with fixed-incomes or limited financial means. The Albany County Rural Housing Alliance, Inc. (ACRHA) offers a wide variety of grant and loan programs to assist low- to low-moderate income households in rural

Albany County with home repairs or the purchase of a first home.¹⁵ ACRHA administers or facilitates initiatives including an Emergency Home Repair Program, Revolving Loan Fund, Home Program, and NYS Affordable Housing Corporation’s grant program for home repairs. With a mission that aligns with Town goals to ensure a multitude of housing options, ACRHA represents a valuable partner in Guilderland. It is therefore recommended that the Town liaise with ACHRA representatives regularly, to identify and promote home repair/funding options that could benefit Guilderland residents.

D-10. Partner with existing non-profit organizations (e.g., Albany County Land Bank) and/or establish a Town housing trust fund to address critical housing needs and support a variety of affordable housing activities.

The Town of Guilderland can look to regional not-for-profit organizations such as the Albany County Land Bank Corporation for critical support in the Town’s efforts to address the identified need for housing that is affordable to low- and moderate-income members of the Guilderland community. The Land Bank’s mission includes facilitating the acquisition, improvement, and redistribution of vacant properties in all of the County’s 18 municipalities, with the goal of returning such properties to productive use.¹⁶ By partnering with the Land Bank, the Town can more easily identify properties with the potential for redevelopment as affordable housing units. Given increases in the cost of housing in recent years, the Town should also evaluate the feasibility of creating a housing trust fund to facilitate projects that expand the range of affordable housing options in Guilderland.

D-11. Add an inclusionary zoning requirement for affordable residential units in Planned Unit Developments (PUD).

Planned Unit Developments can include a variety of residential and nonresidential uses, but they are defined by the fact that their various components are planned and constructed as a defined unit, over the same period of time. Existing regulations in the Guilderland Town Code stipulate the following requirements for Planned Unit Developments:

- Access to municipal wastewater and water infrastructure
- Direct vehicular access to a county or state highway
- Setbacks
- Open Space
- Off-street parking and loading

¹⁵ www.acrha.org/what-do-we-do.html

¹⁶ www.albanycountylandbank.org

Inclusionary zoning refers to planning ordinances that require or incentivize the creation of housing units that are affordable to low- to moderate-income households. By adding inclusionary zoning as a *required* component of future PUDs in Guilderland, the Town can enlist private developers as allies in a coordinated approach to providing more affordable housing options to Town residents.

D-12. Consider using density restrictions rather than minimum lot sizes in the RA3 and RA5 District along with the provision for density bonuses that incentivize affordable housing types, open space protection, and other desired amenities.

Existing District Regulations (Town Code §280-24) set forth dimensional requirements for the Rural Agricultural Districts (RA3 and RA5) in Guilderland. Both districts permit a maximum lot coverage of 30% at present, however, the two districts differ in the minimum lot area required for each: three (3) acres for RA3 and five (5) acres for RA5. Permitted uses for both include agriculture/farming, passive recreation area, single-family dwelling, two-family dwelling, family apartment, and wildlife/historic preserve, among others. Using a density measurement (i.e., dwellings per acre instead of minimum acres per dwelling), the Town has the opportunity to establish lots that fit with the landscape better while simultaneously creating opportunities for additional housing that conforms to rural design standards.

D-13. Promote the creation of more modestly sized and affordable housing types by revising minimum lot size regulations that prevent construction on smaller lots.

Not all prospective homeowners wish to live on large lots, which can require significant physical work or additional cost to maintain. Public input received during the Comprehensive Plan Update process identified a desire for smaller homes, particularly for seniors and for first-time homebuyers. Setback requirements, minimum lot sizes, and minimum lot widths represent potential regulatory obstacles to the development of more affordable housing types. These requirements make it difficult to build smaller homes or on smaller lots and can contribute to a lack of affordability. Updating these building requirements is a tool at the Town’s disposal to create pathways to the development of smaller homes for those that desire them.

D-14. Explore the feasibility of a mixed-use Town Center near the intersection of State Route 155 and Western Avenue, to create a compact community node with residential, commercial, and other amenities.

Guilderland experienced periods of elevated population growth during past decades when car-centric development patterns prevailed. The result, as members of the CPUC and the public have noted, is the lack of a distinct center in Guilderland – a place for Town residents to meet and gather. Exploring the feasibility of a Town Center development – comprising a mix of retail, residential, entertainment, and other services – was identified as a key future priority, to begin to focus the civic energies of the community. In keeping with the goal of using existing infrastructure efficiently, the intersection of Western Avenue/US-20 and State Route 155 was identified as a potentially suitable location for a Town Center, with available water, sewer, and transportation infrastructure to support the mix of envisioned uses.

D-15. Promote an enhanced sense of place and community with new, attractive gateway signage at the Town’s northern and southern boundaries on Western Avenue/US-20.

As a Town made up of numerous hamlets and neighborhoods, it may not always be clear to residents and visitors when they are within Guilderland’s boundaries. Gateway signage offers an opportunity to build place awareness and offer welcome – or welcome home – to travelers on Guilderland’s roads. Signage installed in a traffic roundabout on Carman Road and Lydius Street in 2023 provides just such a welcome to those arriving from Schenectady/Rotterdam. Given how important Western Avenue/US-20 is to Guilderland – identified by many stakeholders as the Town’s de facto Main Street – there is an opportunity to enhance signage at both the southern boundary with the City of Albany and the northern boundary with the Town of Princetown. Rather than simply being informative, gateway signage holds the potential to build a sense of belonging and community togetherness. Positioning gateway signage in such a way as to allow photographs was recommended via public input.



Gateway signage in a traffic roundabout at the intersection of Carman Road and Lydius Street

D-16. Explore the feasibility of a new, sustainably built mixed-use neighborhood node in northern Guilderland.

Throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update process, several priorities emerged as repeated themes: the desire for a wide array of housing options, an interest in sustainable/green building, and a perceived need to distribute commercial activity more widely throughout the Town, to address underserved areas. The CPUC supported investigating the feasibility of creating a new mixed-use neighborhood, sustainably constructed in a manner that is compatible with its surroundings. Given existing commercial offerings in the eastern parts of Town (Westmere and Guilderland Hamlet) and in the Village of Altamont in the west, the CPUC identified the northern area of Guilderland – near the Princetown boundary – as an area lacking in commercial offerings.

6. PARKS, RECREATION, OPEN SPACE & HISTORIC RESOURCES

Goal: Provide access to a diverse network of well-maintained active and passive recreational facilities for Guilderland residents of all ages and abilities.

Overview

Few features contribute as much to Guilderland's town character as its park system. Parks provide places for residents to gather, get exercise, connect with nature, and relax. From walking trails to sports fields to picnic pavilions and playgrounds, Guilderland's parks are absolutely central to the Town's identity. Together with conserved open space in Town, the park system represents a constellation of green oases, providing not only varied recreation opportunities but also a host of ecosystem services such as air and water filtration, stormwater mitigation, and habitat for plants and animals.

Parks do not provide recreation alone. As green spaces with tree cover, parks mitigate the so-called urban heat island effect while filtering air, absorbing rainwater, and contributing to important plant and animal habitat. When viewed from above -- via satellite images -- much of Guilderland appears green and heavily treed. Changes in climate and development, however, mean that Guilderland's trees face significant threats, including from invasive species. The Town has taken the steps of forming a Tree Preservation Committee to begin to address the issue and has enacted a new Native Tree Preservation Law. Given the important role that trees play in both Guilderland's environment and its community character, the Town has recently hired a Town Arborist. The role of the Town arborist is envisioned to encompass tree maintenance and planting on public lands, as well as contributing to community efforts to plant appropriate, non-invasive tree species in all suitable areas of Town.

The Guilderland Parks and Recreation Department manages the design, maintenance, beautification, and promotion of the Town's parks, facilities, and seasonal programming. In addition to youth sports, seasonal offerings include summer concerts at the newly upgraded Guilderland Performing Arts Center (GPAC), swim lessons at the outdoor public pool in Tawasentha Park, and snowshoeing/cross-country skiing at the Town's winter recreation area. Throughout the year, residents also benefit from access to a range of facilities from dog parks to hiking trails to wildlife viewing areas. The Parks and Recreation Department maintains a website (GuilderlandRec.com) to promote available programming to Town residents and to provide information about upcoming events.

In response to input from residents, the Town has continued to add new facilities and amenities to its already impressive park system. Pickleball courts, for instance, have been added at both Tawasentha Park and Volunteer Firefighters Memorial Park to accommodate growing interest in the sport. Along with other upgrades, a new public restroom was installed at Fred Abele Park to increase park accessibility for all patrons. The Town is also poised to accept dedication of a new 28-acre park facility -- Kaikout Kill Park -- which will feature a pond with wildlife viewing, picnicking areas, and hiking trails on a portion of the former Hiawatha Trails golf course site on State Route 155.

As treasured assets to the Town, the following list of parks and recreation sites comprise a substantial portion of what makes Guilderland *Guilderland*:

Tawasentha Park (188 Route 146)

Tawasentha Park is home to the Town swimming pool and the Guilderland Performing Arts Center (GPAC), in addition to a picnic pavilion, baseball diamond, children’s playground, and approximately five miles of walking trails. The park comprises 192.5 acres, centrally located within the Town on State Route 146. Situated along the Normans kill, the park offers fishing, kayaking, and canoeing access in warmer months, as well as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and sledding areas in the adjacent winter recreation area. In 2023, upgrades were made to GPAC’s lighting, audio, seating, and patio areas, and Tawasentha Park’s list of amenities grew to include a children’s splash pad and a fitness court, in addition to the previously mentioned pickleball facilities.



A landscaped road sign greets visitors to Tawasentha Park at its entrance on NY-146.



A sign announces some of the public amenities on offer at Tawasentha Park

Albany Pine Bush Preserve

The 3,350-acre Albany Pine Bush Preserve straddles the municipal boundary between the Towns of Guilderland and Colonie and the City of Albany. The Preserve features a Discovery Center, miles of walking trails, and habitat for rare plants and animals, including the Karner Blue butterfly. The Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission, an important partner to the Town of Guilderland, is a New York State public benefit corporation that oversees the protection and management of the Preserve. The Preserve provides a host of recreational and educational offerings, as well as ecosystem services that benefit the surrounding Town and region.



A blaze marker for the Albany Pine Bush Preserve trail system, accessed from Willow Road in Guilderland

DiCaprio Park (3420 E. Lydius Street)

The Town of Guilderland purchased 109 acres of land off East Lydius Street from the DiCaprio family in 2001. The land was used for vegetable farming for over 100 years and is situated within the Pine Bush. In order to preserve the unique ecosystem, the Town designated 33 acres for DiCaprio Park and left the remaining 70 plus acres undeveloped.

Park construction was completed in 2003 and consists of twelve (12) fields, which are used primarily for soccer and lacrosse. In 2008, permanent restroom facilities and a pavilion were added to the park. In addition to organized athletic competitions, the park is a popular destination for walkers, hikers, and bird watchers. Plans for a new playground at DiCaprio Park were announced in 2024.

Keenholts Park (6355 French's Mill Road)

Roger Keenholts Park was added to the Town's park system in 1993 and is the home of Guilderland Baseball and the Guilderland Girls Softball League. The park has eight minor

baseball fields, five girls' softball fields, and a state-of-the-art Babe Ruth-level field known as Dutchmen Field. The park features public restrooms and lighting for night competitions.



One of several adjoining baseball diamonds at Roger Keenholts Park

Nott Road Park (6073 Nott Road)

Athletic fields at Nott Road Park were constructed by the Town in the early 1980's and continue to host local softball, soccer, and Pop Warner football teams. A Dog Park was added in 2006, and a pavilion was constructed in 2007. Upgrades to the park including four pickleball courts, ballfield grading, improved irrigation, and a playground were announced in 2024.

Fred Abele Park (Schoolhouse Road)

Fred Abele Park is in the McKownville neighborhood off Schoolhouse Road. In slightly more than four (4) acres, the park features amenities such as a basketball court, softball field, a walking path to McKownville Road, and a new playground that was installed in 2022. In

2024, plans were announced to install a public restroom at the park and to resurface the basketball courts.

McKownville Reservoir Park (Stuyvesant Plaza, Western Avenue)

McKownville Reservoir Park was created in 2007, when the Town received a grant from the New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation to convert the McKownville Reservoir – a small pond next to the Stuyvesant Plaza shopping area – into a small municipal park with walking trails. To complement this park area, Stuyvesant Plaza management announced plans in 2024 to create additional green space at the western edge of the Plaza’s parking lot.

Fort Hunter Park (25 Anne Drive)

Fort Hunter Park comprises approximately four (4) acres in a quiet residential area off Carman Road. Park amenities include a basketball court, playground, softball field, and a small sledding hill. A series of planned park improvements were announced in 2024, including refurbishing the playfield, parking lot paving, and the creation of a playground and small pavilion.

Volunteer Firefighters Memorial Park (1028 DiBella Drive)

Built in the mid-1980’s, Volunteer Firefighters Memorial Park comprises approximately 20 acres of land, featuring amenities such as walking paths, a children’s playground, softball field, and open space. In 2024, plans were announced to add a dog park, pickleball courts, and a small pavilion.

Fusco Park (East Lydius Street, across from DiCaprio Park)

Fusco Park, located across East Lydius Road from DiCaprio Park, consists of approximately 30 acres of unimproved open space bordered by the New York Thruway.

Community Gardens (Route 146 across from Tawasentha Park)

The Community Gardens are situated on 97 acres of property across State Route 146 from Tawasentha Park. The property was once the site of the Houck Farm; it was purchased by the Town in 1989. Across State Route 146 from the community gardens is a winter recreation area, with cross-country ski trails and a small hill for skiing and sledding.

Vosburgh Open Space (6455 Vosburgh Road)

Vosburgh Open Space comprises 124 Town-owned acres on the northern bank of the Normanskill. A trail system traverses the open space, offering a variety of scenic pathways between the Vosburgh Road trailhead and French’s Mill Road. A new (Orange) trail loop was announced in 2024.



A map kiosk located at the Vosburgh Road trailhead.

John Boyd Thatcher State Park

John Boyd Thatcher State Park is located along the Helderberg Escarpment, which forms the western boundary of the Town of Guilderland. A portion of the park and its 12-mile trail system are located within the southwest corner of the Town, and the park’s a broad range of outdoor recreational amenities to Town residents. In addition to trails, the park features campsites and cabins, pavilions and shelters, playgrounds, a nature center, a disc golf course, and playing fields. The park is home to the Indian Ladder Trail, which is a regional attraction.

Thatcher State Park also represents the northern terminus of The Long Path (LP), a trail stretching nearly 360 miles, designed with the intention of connecting New York City to the Adirondack region of the state. The LP corridor stitches together various trails, paths, and rural roadways along the route, which is marked by distinctive aqua-colored trail blazes. In

2022, a Long Path Protection Plan was developed with funding from the New York State Conservation Partnership Program (NYSCPP) and New York’s Environmental Protection Fund.

Black Creek Marsh Wildlife Management Area

The Black Creek Marsh Wildlife Management Area consists of 450 acres of wetland and upland habitat in Albany County, straddling the Town boundary between Guilderland and New Scotland. The Area is managed by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and, in addition to providing ecosystem services and wildlife habitat, provides opportunities for hiking, hunting, fishing, and birdwatching.



A marked parking area for the Black Creek Marsh Wildlife Management Area accessible from Depot Road.

Bozen Kill Preserve

In the northwestern corner of the Town of Guilderland, the Bozen Kill Preserve is a 214-acre nature area whose preservation was facilitated by the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy (MHLC). The Preserve features three (3) miles of wooded trails beside a stream, located at the base of Bozen Kill Ravine, where MHLC protects an additional 400 acres of land.

Western Turnpike Golf Course

The Town of Guilderland purchased the Western Turnpike Golf Course – a 200-acre, 27-hole course with a championship layout – in 2002. The course is located on Route 20/Western Turnpike and features an outdoor picnic pavilion as well as winter cross-country ski trails, which provide recreation opportunities during months when the golf course is inactive.

Other privately-owned golf facilities located in Guilderland include Albany Country Club, Pinehaven Country Club, and Orchard Creek Golf Club.



View from the Albany Country Club, looking out over Guilderland.

Recommendations

E-1. Maintain and upgrade the Town’s existing recreational facilities and programs.

Given the substantial investment the Town has made in establishing and constructing its parks and recreation system, residents and stakeholders have expressed strong support for maintaining and sustaining existing facilities and

programs. This will require sufficient staffing levels of the Town's Parks and Recreation Department -- including seasonal hiring to allow for trail maintenance, programming needs, and upkeep of the Town pool -- as well as forward-thinking assessments of likely replacement timetables for physical infrastructure located within the parks.

E-2. Initiate formalized opportunities for residents to provide input on the Town's changing recreational needs, in light of a changing demographic profile in Guilderland and prevailing national trends.

Over the lifespan of a Comprehensive Plan, changes in community demographics -- an aging population, for example -- can cause priorities to shift with regard to desired recreation amenities. New sport and fitness trends -- the recent popularity of pickleball is a prime example -- can also drive residents' interest in changing how available recreation space is allocated. As part of an effort to keep Guilderland residents' recreational needs and the Town's offerings in close alignment, it is recommended that the Town of Guilderland -- via its Parks and Recreation Department -- facilitate periodic, publicized opportunities for Town residents to submit input on desired upgrades or additions to the existing parks and recreation system.

E-3. Formalize regular coordination between the Town of Guilderland Parks & Recreation Department and representatives of the University at Albany, Guilderland Public Library, the Guilderland YMCA, school districts, and other local organizations, in order to provide a well-publicized range of year-round recreational opportunities, especially for youth and older Town residents.

Independently, the Guilderland Parks and Recreation Department, the Town library, YMCA, the Village of Altamont, the Village library and other organizations work to provide engaging programming to Guilderland residents. By coordinating those efforts, however, there is an opportunity to increase promotion of events, to ensure that the diverse interests of community groups are represented, and to potentially collaborate on funding such programming. For that reason, it is recommended that the Town Parks and Recreation Department initiate a recurring coordination mechanism -- e.g., scheduled videoconference discussions -- with representatives of other relevant organizations or groups that provide recreation offerings to Guilderland residents. Enhanced promotion can be achieved through co-sponsorship of events and/or by incorporating event notifications on calendars viewable via the Guilderland Town website.

E-4. Identify potentially underutilized Town-owned resources and explore the creation of new recreational opportunities for Town residents, particularly in the Westmere area of Guilderland.

While Guilderland has more than five hundred acres of parkland, that land is not evenly distributed, due to historic patterns of settlement and other factors. Throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update process, members of the public voiced strong support for the addition of recreation facilities in the Westmere area. Additional recreation space serving other community groups has been identified as a priority. Pocket parks -- smaller public spaces often established on previously developed sites -- offer one potential avenue for addressing the uneven spatial distribution of park facilities around the Town. As the Town inventories the properties that comprise its collection of publicly owned land and facilities, it is recommended that the Town explore opportunities to add park amenities, particularly in areas of the Town that may be underserved. The community rooms located in fire stations represent a potentially underutilized all-season gathering space for compatible youth and senior recreation programming, so it is recommended that fire districts be included as relevant stakeholders.

E-5. Develop a network of multi-use trails in Guilderland to link neighborhoods, public transportation nodes, Town park/open space areas, commercial and entertainment centers, and regional trail systems.

The *Town of Guilderland Parks and Trails Master Plan* (2005) identifies two types of off-road path:

- A footpath is an unpaved five-foot wide path suitable for walking or mountain biking.
- A multi-use path is a paved eight-foot-wide path suitable for street bicycles and rollerblades as well as pedestrians.

Public input submitted through the Comprehensive Plan Update process has indicated a desire to make the Town's recreational resources accessible to the widest range of residents possible. Of the two path varieties identified in the Parks and Trails Master Plan, multi-use pathways offer superior accessibility, inclusive of a variety of user groups, as well as through seasonal weather fluctuations. The Town of Guilderland has announced plans to initiate construction of a multi-use trail along State Route 146, from Western Avenue to Tawasentha Park, with the intention of extending that trail toward the Village of Altamont in future years. Additionally, the Town should support efforts to formalize the northern expansion of the Long Path, a long-distance hiking trail that stretches from New York City to the Village of Altamont.

Drawing on recommendations from the planning documents listed below, it is recommended that the Town apply the best practices learned through the construction of the trail on State Route 146 in locations elsewhere around Guilderland, where opportunities exist to provide vehicle-free access to key points throughout Town:

- *Biking in Guilderland* (2004)
- *Walkable Destinations in Guilderland* (2004)
- *Guilderland Pathways Study* (2005)
- *Pathways Master Plan* (2005)
- *Guilderland Bicycle and Pedestrian Connectivity Study* (2020)

Goal: Prioritize the preservation of open space in the Town of Guilderland, particularly where such areas perform critical ecosystem functions and/or contribute to scenic resources that influence the character, aesthetics, economy, health and welfare of the Town.

Respondents to the Guilderland Community Survey cited “protecting natural resources and wildlife habitat” among the very highest priority concerns. Open space areas in Town represent repositories of vital natural resources and are home to a variety of plant and animal species. The recommendations below are aimed at recognizing and prioritizing the preservation of open space among Guilderland’s land uses.

E-6. Update and harmonize the definitions of *open space* in Town zoning, subdivision regulations, and the Conservation Easement Agreement Exemption so that the definitions are consistent and accurately reflect the varieties and purposes of open space.

The term "open space" appears in a variety of existing Town regulations, but discrepancies in the way that the term is described and understood may serve as a barrier to coordinated action across offices, departments, and organizations. Establishing uniform terminology is an important step toward the goal of open space conservation, as consistent language allows for more targeted and precise identification of which parcels in Town meet specified criteria.

E-7. Update and harmonize the residential cluster/conservation development and open space/parkland section of the Town code.

Ideally, Town zoning regulations on residential cluster/conservation development (§280-35) and open space/parkland should be consistent with and complementary

to the cluster section of the subdivision law. Enhanced, consistent definitions and added detail on site analysis, primary and secondary conservation areas, open space criteria, and other related concerns would strengthen the Town's approach to promoting the conservation of open space.

E-8. Consider forming a Ridgeline Protection Overlay District to protect steep slopes along the Helderberg Escarpment and the Settles Hill areas of Town from non-farm development.

Development on steep slopes can potentially lead to problems with soil erosion and stormwater management. Because of topography, large developments on steep slopes are also more visible from lower-lying parts of Town, with the potential to negatively impact scenic viewsheds of the surrounding hills. The areas in the Town of Guilderland with the steepest slopes include the lands along the Helderberg Escarpment and the Settles Hill area north of Altamont. While compatible agricultural activities in these areas of Town can continue to enable soil stabilization and stormwater mitigation, non-farm development is likely incompatible with established ecosystems and viewsheds. For this reason, it is recommended that the Town consider forming a Ridgeline Protection Overlay District when it updates its zoning code.



Looking west toward the Helderberg Escarpment ridgeline

E-9. Incorporate the preservation of Helderberg Escarpment viewsheds into subdivision, site plan, and special use permit reviews.

Views of and from the Helderberg Escarpment have drawn people to Guilderland for centuries, and such views remain a cherished aspect of Guilderland life. One of the many benefits of open space conservation is that open space maintains and contributes to invaluable scenic resources. In developed areas of Town, it is important that the designs of such development place appropriate emphasis on preserving the natural Escarpment viewsheds that are such a valued part of Guilderland life for many residents. It is therefore recommended that subdivision,

site plan, and special use permitting integrate Helderberg Escarpment viewshed preservation components, to ensure that development designs do not adversely affect this key scenic resource.

E-10. Create an action plan for the identification, voluntary acquisition, and management of properties that comprise a comprehensive open space and natural resource preservation system.

Working in collaboration with partners such as the Albany Pine Bush Preservation Commission, the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy, the Open Space Institute, Albany County legislators, and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, the Town of Guilderland has found success in maintaining or restoring the beauty of natural areas within the Town's borders. As the Town works toward its stated goal of preserving thirty percent (30%) of Guilderland's land mass as open space and parkland, it will be important to channel the efforts of multiple groups and Town departments. Developing an action plan of implementable steps toward the Town's ambitious goal of creating and sustaining a comprehensive open space and natural resource preservation system will be an important step to ensure that interdepartmental and interagency collaboration is as fruitful as possible.

Goal: Preserve Guilderland's historic resources and enhance cultural opportunities in the community.

The Normans Kill, which flows in a southeasterly direction through the middle of Guilderland, is one of the four major tributaries that empty into the northern part of the Hudson River estuary. The Normans Kill had early historical importance for the Mohican and Mohawk peoples who lived in this region of what is now New York State. Long before Guilderland was a Town, bands of Mohawk Indians camped and lived along the Normans Kill and its tributaries. The Mohican and Mohawk people fished Normans Kill and traded at the Dutch trading post close to Fort Orange, which is now Albany. However, illnesses like smallpox that were introduced through contact with European colonists caused indigenous populations to decline drastically.

Although European farmers and traders began settling in the Guilderland region in the 1700s, the Town of Guilderland was not incorporated until 1801. By that time, Guilderland was home to industry as well as agriculture, boasting a grist mill, a knitting mill, a textile factory, and a button factory. Guilderland held its first Town meeting at Appel Inn in Guilderland Center. Agriculture replaced Guilderland's forests and the Town flourished

with the completion of the Great Western Turnpike. Railroads ran through the countryside, ushering in the growth of small hamlets with post offices, churches, schools, and stores.

In the mid-1900s, the eastern end of Town began to develop into a residential and commercial suburb of the Albany-Schenectady-Troy Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). In contrast, the western end remained mostly rural. The Town continued to develop in the latter half of the 20th century, with the creation of a State University campus, business and shopping centers, new residential areas, and an expanded road network.

Owing to its history of agriculture, trade, and small-scale industry, there are more than three dozen sites within the Town of Guilderland that are listed on the U.S. National Park Service’s National Register of Historic Places:

1. Chapel House
2. Strassburg Residence
3. Norman Vale (Nott House)
4. Prospect Hill Cemetery Building* (listed on data.ny.gov)
5. Guilderland Cemetery Vault*
6. Rose Hill
7. Hamilton Union Church Rectory
8. John Schoolcraft House
9. Albany Glassworks Site
10. Houck Farmhouse
11. Gillespie House
12. Mynderse-Frederick House
13. Helderberg Reformed Dutch Church
14. Freeman House
15. Schoolhouse #6
16. St. Mark’s Lutheran Church
17. Apple Tavern
18. McNiven Farm Complex
19. Fuller’s Tavern
20. Van Patten Barn Complex
21. Stephen Pangburn House
22. Charles Parker House
23. Sharp Farmhouse
24. Sharp Brothers House
25. Gifford Grange Hall
26. Veeder Farmhouse #1
27. Veeder Farmhouse #2
28. Vanderpool Farm Complex
29. Lainhart Farm and Dutch Barn
30. Knower House
31. Jacob Crouse Inn

32. Adam Hilton House
33. Coppola House
34. Aumic House
35. Frederick Crouse House
36. John and Henry Crouse Farm Complex
37. Gardner House

The Schoolcraft House and the Mynderse-Fredrick House were identified in the Town’s 2001 Comprehensive Plan as being historically important properties owned by the Town. Both properties were set to undergo a series of grant-funded site improvements in 2024, including roof, façade, and parking upgrades. The Town plans to construct a multi-use path connection between the historic School No. 6 and Keenholts Park and is poised to assume ownership of the schoolhouse property. The Town maintains information on registered historic sites as a data layer on its Town of Guilderland Interactive Mapping site (togny.maps.arcgis.com).



The Schoolcraft House (circa 1840), located on Western Avenue near the Guilderland Fire Department Station, is slated for renovations to improve its appearance and accessibility.



The Mynderse-Frederick House, located in Guilderland Center near the intersection of School Road and State Route 146.

When asked to identify their highest priority concerns for the Town, respondents to the Guilderland Community Survey cited “identifying and preserving historic buildings/sites” among their top five most pressing issues. The following actions are recommended to both preserve this important historic legacy and to expand access and awareness, so that future generations of Guilderland residents will be able to connect with these markers of the past.

E-11. Evaluate the adequacy of existing historic sites in Guilderland to support access and programming for residents – e.g., recitals, small-scale performances, and other cultural/educational events – factoring in the needs of youth, older residents, and those with disabilities.

Historic sites in Guilderland connect residents to the community’s past, but they can also serve to help community members connect with one another. The Mynderse-Frederick House in Guilderland Center, for example, hosts gatherings of the Guilderland Historical Society and the Guilderland Garden Club. Further activating suitable historic sites to host educational and cultural events would

complement the role that the Guilderland Public Library plays as an all-weather gathering place, bolstering community spirit by drawing neighbors together. Public input submitted throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update process has consistently identified a desire for increased accessibility of public space in the community, ensuring that all are welcome regardless of age or ability. To this end, it is recommended that the Town inventory historic properties with a view toward identifying suitable sites for expanded cultural programming such as literature readings/book clubs, craft demonstrations, and artist talks. Further, it is recommended that the Town take such steps as necessary to bolster accessibility features of those sites to the extent possible, working within historical preservation constraints.

E-12. Promote the use of suitable historic sites and the Guilderland Public Library as community gathering places for festivals, special observances, and educational opportunities.

In addition to the official Town website (www.townofguilderland.org), which features a calendar and a regular letter from the Supervisor, Guilderland also maintains a separate page to promote its many Parks and Recreation offerings (guilderlandny.myrec.com). After working to strengthen accessibility to Town historic sites, it is recommended that the Town use available communication channels to promote cultural programming at historic sites. Promoting the use of historic sites may include Town-sponsored events, permitting the use of sites by groups and organizations, or a combination of the two.

The Town library was also cited as an important tool to enhance cultural opportunities and historic events by offering programs and events that highlight the Town’s heritage. By hosting exhibits, lectures, and other community activities, the library plays a key role in promoting both cultural engagement and awareness of Guilderland’s historical significance.

E-13. Pursue available funding sources and develop strategies for the sustained financial support of the Town’s historical cultural sites and programs.

Maintenance of historic sites, almost by definition, is a costly endeavor. Balancing the public’s interest in well-maintained historic sites with the imperative to work within available revenue constraints will be a challenge for the Town to navigate. Just as the Town has partnered with organizations such as land conservancies to advance community goals on open space protection, it is recommended that the

Town pursue partnerships, grant funds, and other resources to support sustainable programming at designated historic sites in Guilderland.

E-14. Partner with higher education institutions in the region to foster engagement with historic and/or archaeological sites in Guilderland.

Institutions of higher education represent an invaluable potential resource for preserving and promoting sites in Guilderland. In 2020, the Town partnered with State University of New York at Albany’s (UAlbany) Department of Geography and Planning to carry out the Parks, Trails & Open Space Project. Similar opportunities to join forces may be available for research, preservation, and/or programming for registered historic sites in Guilderland. In addition to UAlbany – a portion of whose campus is located within the Guilderland municipal boundary -- the following colleges and universities also hold the promise of being regional partners in the identification, maintenance, and promotion of Guilderland’s historic assets:

- Union College (Schenectady)
- SUNY Schenectady
- Skidmore College (Saratoga Springs)
- Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (Troy)
- Russell Sage College (Troy)
- Hudson Valley Community College (Troy)
- Sage College (Albany)
- Maria College (Albany)

E-15. Ensure that land use regulations and incentives serve to support and protect historic/archaeologically sensitive areas in the Town.

The Town has already incorporated the locations of properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a data layer on the Town of Guilderland Interactive Mapping website. This is an important first step in recognizing the historic legacy that has been left for subsequent generations. A further step will entail incorporating protections for historical sites in future updates to Town zoning, as well as considering a property’s historic value as an important factor in conservation incentives that the Town allocates.

E-16. Cultivate greater public awareness of Guilderland’s historic sites and resources, celebrating past contributions from a broad range of individuals and groups.

The Guilderland Historical Society has a collection of museum objects kept at the Mynderse-Frederick House, in addition to online collections of historic photographs. As new technology, resources, and archival materials become available, an opportunity exists to highlight forgotten or little-known people and chapters in the story of a Guilderland. It is therefore recommended that the Town promote research and sharing of Guilderland’s history, encompassing its many influences and eras.

The Town may consider development of a Veterans memorial park. This could include the repurposing of an existing park to establish a dedicated space commemorating Guilderland’s military veterans. This initiative would provide a meaningful tribute to those who have served in the armed forces, while also complementing the Town’s existing Hometown Heroes Banner program.

Tawasentha Park, which incorporates the historically significant Normanskill Battleground, could be considered as a potential location for this Veterans Park, as its setting offers both cultural relevance and an appropriate environment for reflection and tribute.

7. TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY

Overview

Goal: Provide safe, convenient, and efficient transportation options for people and goods within, through and around the Town of Guilderland, which are supportive of the Town’s future land use plan and which minimize the negative impacts of traffic on the Town’s character and quality of life.

Transportation corridors in Guilderland have been instrumental in the development of the Town, from the construction of the Great Western Turnpike/US-20 to subsequent state and federal transportation projects such as the NY Thruway and I-87 Northway. Roadways and freight rail lines are important connectors for people and goods, but they can paradoxically serve as physical barriers at times for those traveling about Town on foot, by bicycle, or by other means. Balancing the needs of residents and businesses across travel modes is a perennial concern, which is influenced by factors such as emerging technologies, shifting population patterns, and the changing preferences and lifestyles of Guilderland residents.

During public engagement outreach with residents and stakeholders, a number of prevalent themes surfaced. Nearly half (46%) of respondents to the Guilderland Community Survey identified “neighborhood connectivity and walkability” as one of the greatest challenges facing Guilderland now or in the future. Converting “congested intersections to traffic circles” and establishing “pedestrian trails that connect parks and neighborhoods” also emerged as priorities with consistent public support. Representatives of the Guilderland School District and members of the public both noted that traffic congestion – in part due to access road limitations – represented a challenge for safe and efficient transportation to and from public schools, particularly Farnsworth Middle School.

Vehicular Mobility

The Town of Guilderland is primarily auto-dependent, on account of prevailing development patterns during the decades when the Town experienced the greatest growth. The use of a private vehicle is needed for most activities and the availability of mass transit is limited. Major roadways traversing the Town of Guilderland include the following:

New York Thruway

The New York Thruway spans approximately 570 miles across New York State, with connections to interstate roadways in New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania, as well as the Canadian province of Ontario. The New York Thruway Authority collects tolls on vehicular traffic via a toll collection system that was fully automated in 2020. The Guilderland Travel Plaza, located along the eastbound lanes of the Thruway, is located within the Guilderland Town boundary, and is connected to the Town’s surface street system via Brookview Drive. After a temporary closure for wholesale renovations, the Travel Plaza re-opened to motorists in 2024. The Travel Plaza generates revenue and employment opportunities for Guilderland.

Adirondack Northway (I-87)

The Adirondack Northway (I-87), classified as a principal arterial interstate, connects New York City to communities in the Hudson Valley, Albany, and other Upstate communities en route to the Canadian border. The Northway passes through the southeastern corner of the Town of Guilderland, near Crossgates Mall, where construction of a new traffic roundabout coincided with the launch of the Capital District Transit Authority’s new Purple Line BusPlus service to Crossgates from the downtown Albany in late 2023. Northway connections to New York City and Montreal – both within a half day’s drive – bolster multi-modal connections for warehousing operations at the Northeastern Industrial Park located in Guilderland Center.

US-20/Western Avenue

The spine of the Town road network is US 20/Western Avenue, which runs west-northwest from the City of Albany to the Schenectady County line and beyond. Western Avenue connects the Guilderland neighborhoods of McKownville, Westmere, Guilderland Hamlet, Fullers, Dunnsville and adjacent rural areas between Watervliet Reservoir and Duanesburg. Having Western Avenue as the Town’s de facto “Main Street” is a double-edged sword, presenting both opportunities and challenges. Given its designation as federal roadway, Western Avenue falls under the jurisdictional authority of the New York State Department of Transportation, which requires active collaboration on any alterations to the corridor’s right-of-way.

NY State Route 146

One section of State Route 146 connects US Route 20/Western Turnpike with the City of Schenectady – this section is known as Carman Road. Another section of State Route 146

connects Western Turnpike with the Village of Altamont, passing Tawasentha Park and the Guilderland Center hamlet along the way.

Public Transit Routes

The Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) provides public bus service to residents of the Town. CDTA Route 763 provides service between Crossgates Mall and Rivers Casino in Schenectady, traveling along the US-20/Western Avenue and NY-146/Carman Road corridors through Guilderland. In November 2023, CDTA completed construction of the Purple Line BusPlus route, which provides frequent service between downtown Albany and Crossgates Mall, connecting the campuses of the University at Albany, the Albany Nanotech Complex, and the Harriman State Office complex. CDTA maintains so-called Universal Access Contracts with large area employers, granting free or reduced cost transit passes to employees of participating institutions including the University at Albany, Albany Medical Center, Stewarts Shops, the State Employee Transit Program and others.

In the past, CDTA operated Route 719 in Guilderland, which connected Guilderland to the Villages of Altamont and Voorheesville along State Routes 146 and 156. As of 2023, CDTA Route 719 had been discontinued and was no longer in service. However, in 2020, CDTA initiated Flex on-demand microtransit, serving areas in Guilderland, including retail areas at Star Plaza/Hamilton Square and Crossgates Mall, as well as portions of Westmere (see Figure 11). FLEX provides curb-to-curb transportation; riders use a smartphone app to choose a time and location for pickup and to request a ride. According to CDTA service information, Flex operates Monday – Saturday from 6:00 a.m. to 10:45 p.m. and on Sunday from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Riders can pay cash or use CDTA’s rechargeable Navigator card to pay the fare.



Figure 11: CDTA Micro Transit Service Map

The Town of Guilderland Senior Services Department operates shuttle service to medical appointments and grocery shopping for Town residents aged 60 and older. The Senior Services Department also provides monthly day trips, special event transportation, and outreach to homebound seniors throughout the community.¹⁷

¹⁷ <https://www.townofguilderland.org/senior-services>



Purple Line BusPlus began operating between Crossgates Mall and Downtown Albany in November 2023

Bicycle and Pedestrian Mobility

While personal transportation in the Town of Guilderland is primarily oriented toward private car use, the Town has upgraded and expanded its network of sidewalks in recent

years. Sidewalk extensions and improvement efforts in the Town have gradually increased pedestrian access in strategic locations along Carman Road, Old State Road, and elsewhere.

One notable recent sidewalk expansion project links the Guilderland Public Library to the Hamilton Square shopping plaza along the south side of Western Avenue. Recreational walking and hiking trails in Tawasentha Park, the Albany Pine Bush Preserve, the Black Creek Marsh Wildlife Management Area, and the Vosburgh Trails area are promoted via the Town’s official website under the heading Hike Guilderland!



An extended sidewalk on the south side of Western Avenue now connects the Guilderland Library with the Hamilton Square shopping plaza and points in between.

Freight Rail Service

Class I freight rail lines operated by CSX serve Northeastern Industrial Park in Guilderland Center. Between 2,500 and 3,000 freight rail cars per year pass through the Industrial Park. CSX operates the Selkirk Rail Yard in the nearby Town of Bethlehem, New York, providing regional freight connections.



The Northeastern Industrial Park, served by Van Buren Road, benefits from Class 1 freight rail connections and nearby access to east-west and north-south interstate highways.

Traffic Volumes

According to data from the US Decennial Census, nearly a third of employed residents of the Town of Guilderland hold jobs in the City of Albany, while 14.2% work in the Town of Colonie (Table 12). Only 11% of residents live *and* work in Guilderland. Others commute to jobs in the counties of Schenectady, Rensselaer, and Saratoga, but 84% of residents travel less than 25 miles each way to work. The flow of workday travel from the Town is mainly to the east and southeast or to the north.

Location	Count	Share
Albany County	9,921	61.5%
Guilderland town	1,815	11.3%
Albany city	5,164	32.0%
Colonie town	2,297	14.2%



Location	Count	Share
All other locations	645	4.0%
Schenectady County	1,743	10.8%
Schenectady city	829	5.1%
Rotterdam town	337	2.1%
All other locations	557	3.5%
Rensselaer County	1,006	6.2%
Saratoga County	825	5.1%
All Other Counties	2,627	16.3%
Total	16,122	100.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, LED OnTheMap Origin-Destination Database, 2020.

According to the American Community Survey, an estimated 84% of employed Guilderland residents drive to work, most often traveling alone, and 11% work from home. Less than 1% of residents use public transportation to get to work.

Given the high percentage of Guilderland residents who commute to neighboring municipalities for employment, traffic congestion – particularly along stretches of US 20/Western Avenue – is a prevalent concern expressed through various forms of public engagement. According to Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) count data published by the Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) in 2021, traffic volumes have actually declined in much of the Town in recent decades, including along stretches of Western Avenue. As shown in Table 13, the roadway sections that have seen the highest increases in traffic include the section of Western Avenue between Carman Road and NY 158 (2.4%), Fuller Road between Western Avenue and Washington Avenue (2.2%), and the section of US 20 between the Schenectady County line and NY 397 (1.9%). Meanwhile, according to the same data, traffic has decreased on Western Avenue between Crossgates Mall and NY 155 (-3.4%), as well as on the section of Western between NY 155 and NY 146 (-1.7%), and on Johnston Road between Veeder Road and the Town line (-1.5%).



Table 15. Guilderland Peak Hour Traffic Volume Trends				
Roadway	Segment		Years	Annual Growth Rate
	From	To		
US 20/Western Ave	Schenectady Co. Line	NY 397 /Dunnsville Rd	2002-2019	1.9%
US 20/Western Ave	NY 397 /Dunnsville Rd	NY 158	2000-2016	1.6%
US 20/Western Ave	NY 158	NY 146/Carman Rd	2006-2018	2.4%
US 20/NY 146/Western Ave	NY 146/Carman Rd	NY 146	2001-2017	-0.8%
US 20/Western Ave	NY 146	NY 155/New Karner Rd	2005-2017	-1.7%
US 20/Western Ave	NY 155	Crossgates Mall Ent.	2001-2017	-3.4%
US 20/Western Ave	Crossgates Mall Ent.	NY 910F/ Northway Ent.	2000-2017	0.8%
US 20/Western Ave	NY 910F/ Northway Ent.	CR 156/Fuller Rd	2002-2017	-0.4%
NY 146	Main St (Altamont)	NY 158	2005-2019	1.1%
NY 146	NY 158	CR 201/Depot Rd	2000-2019	-0.1%
NY 155/State Farm Rd	NY 85A	US 20/Western Ave	2000-2018	1.2%
CR 203/Johnston Rd	Town Line	Veeder Rd	2001-2019	-1.5%
CR 156/Fuller Rd	US 20/Western Ave	Washington Ave	2010-2019	2.2%
Old State Rd (East)	NY 146/Carman Rd	Lydius St	2009-2019	-0.3%
Old State Rd (East)	Lydius St	Kings Rd	2009-2019	-1.0%

Source: CDTC, Town of Guilderland Development Growth Trends Analysis: Traffic, November 2021

Future Trends

Future vehicular trends include a more significant presence of electric vehicles (EV). As EVs become more prevalent, expansion of charging infrastructure – with an emphasis on fast-charging stations – will become necessary. As of June 2023, there were 3,264 EVs registered on the road in Albany County and the number has been climbing since 2013 when then-Governor Andrew M. Cuomo launched Charge NY, a program administered by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority to encourage the use of more electric cars and trucks by providing rebates, incentives, tax credits and assistance with infrastructure installation.¹⁸ In addition, the deployment of connected and automated vehicles (CAV) and infrastructure are important emerging trends and provide safety, mobility, land use, and operational challenges and opportunities.



¹⁸ <https://www.nysed.gov/All-Programs/ChargeNY/Support-Electric/Map-of-EV-Registrations>

An electric vehicle (EV) charger in front of the Guilderland Public Library on Western Avenue

Recommendations

In order to address community transportation priorities, the following actions are recommended. The recommendations have been grouped by travel mode and represent a coordinated approach to enhancing the Town’s transportation network for all users.

Pedestrian & Bicycle

- F-1. Enhance pedestrian mobility safety and connections by working to link Town community centers, recreation facilities, neighborhoods, shopping, schools, public parks and employment areas with sidewalk networks and multi-use trails. Explore opportunities to connect Guilderland bike/pedestrian infrastructure to the Albany County Rail Trail and other regional trail networks.**

Public desire for greater walkability in Guilderland was a consistent and prevalent theme in input received throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update process. Although materials costs have risen substantially in recent years, the Town has successfully installed sidewalks along portions of Western Avenue, Carman Road, and Old State Road, leveraging Town resources to unlock opportunities for grant funds.

- a. Explore feasibility of extending sidewalks along Western Ave and adjacent properties. Expanding the sidewalk network can create even safer walking routes for residents and encourage more connections between residential neighborhoods, local businesses, schools, parks and other recreational areas.

- F-2. Develop a Complete Streets Policy for Guilderland in recognition of the community’s desire for a broad range of transportation options.**

Complete Streets policies are tools that municipalities can utilize to “encourage a safe, comfortable, integrated transportation network for all users, regardless of age, ability, income, ethnicity, or mode of transportation.”¹⁹ Other Capital District communities have adopted Complete Streets policies in recent years, signaling a paradigm shift in how the available space within designated rights-of-way is allocated to various travel modes. There has also been a growing desire to coordinate with NYSDOT to implement Complete Streets policies for State roads within the Town, which would ensure a safer

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Transportation

and more accessible transportation network across key corridors. The addition of suitably engineered sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, and safety infrastructure in strategic locations can assist in enhancing public health and wellness and can facilitate greater mobility for those without access to a personal vehicle.

F-3. Install benches, bicycle racks/parking, bike share nodes, bus shelters, and other appropriate street furniture in strategic locations to incentivize and support transportation options in Guilderland.



Walking, cycling, or taking public transit is a far less feasible transportation option without the infrastructure to support those activities. Bicycle racks or storage facilities make it possible for cyclists to lock up bikes while shopping or performing other errands. Bus shelters and benches provide foul weather refuge or a moment's rest to transit riders and walkers. Such so-called street furniture is a vital component in a welcoming, well-functioning transportation system, so it is recommended that the Town partner with the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) and other county/regional organizations to install and maintain these amenities, to increase the attractiveness of walking, cycling, or taking public transit in service to the Town's interest in public health and welfare.

Street furniture such as benches, bicycle racks, and waste receptacles in a new pocket park at Caman Road and Lydius Street facilitate active transportation options by giving pedestrians and cyclists a place to park and rest

F-4. Upgrade road and pathway signage as appropriate to promote safe driving behavior and awareness of pedestrians/cyclists.

As Guilderland continues to add to its networks of sidewalks and trails, a complementary step involves ensuring that adequate signage exists at network intersection points to prevent inadvertent collisions or other transportation conflicts across modes. Planners who focus on non-motorized/active transportation modes identify six (6) critical elements involved in successful implementation:

- Engineering
- Education
- Encouragement
- Enforcement
- Evaluation
- Equity

While sound *engineering* of transportation routes is paramount, incorporating appropriate signage has the ability to *educate* the public and, potentially, to *encourage* a greater number of people who might be otherwise reluctant to walk or bike with confidence due to safety concerns.

F-5. Extend and enhance pedestrian walkways and safe crossings westward from Stuyvesant Plaza, facilitating greater foot traffic for businesses along Western Avenue.

Western Avenue is Guilderland’s primary commercial corridor, but some sections of the corridor suffer from a lack of pedestrian infrastructure, creating an inhospitable atmosphere for foot traffic that could benefit local business owners. Due to its width and status as a DOT-controlled highway, Western Avenue/US-20 offers a limited number of protected pedestrian crossings, but improving pedestrian facilities parallel to the flow of traffic can facilitate improved safety and mobility along the corridor. An additional benefit of improved pedestrian infrastructure is that it allows for shared use of parking facilities, so that travelers do not have to return to their personal vehicles in order to visit multiple storefronts in close proximity.

F-6. Encourage and incentivize the integration of shared bike/pedestrian paths in housing developments, linking residential areas to one another as well as to parks, community services, and retail.

To complement the Town’s efforts to install sidewalks and trails linking existing destinations, it is recommended that the Town incentivize new residential developments in

Guilderland to incorporate pedestrian and/or multi-use paths in their design. The Town of Guilderland experienced its greatest periods of population growth during decades when the personal automobile was the preeminent mode of transportation. The value that the public now places on walkability and bikeability should be reflected in the degree to which new development projects incorporate these travel modes in their planning and layout.

F-7. Consider the capabilities and characteristics of electric-powered bicycles as a factor in the design of bicycle infrastructure in Guilderland.

All-electric and so-called “pedal assist” bicycles have been growing in popularity in recent years, propelled by improvements in technology, increased affordability, and the wider effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, which incentivized outdoor recreation options over indoor activities. Electric bicycles, as a relatively new and increasingly prevalent element in the transportation ecosystem, warrant consideration in the planning of future infrastructure. On one hand, electric bicycles expand access to those who may be physically unable to use traditional bicycles, but their greater mass and acceleration capabilities have ramifications for safety on shared multi-use paths.

Public Transit

F-8. Partner with regional employers and CDTA to increase the use and the reach of public transportation for daily commuting, including potential expansion of the Universal Access bus pass system in Guilderland.

Estimates from the American Community Survey (ACS) indicate that only approximately 1% of Guilderland residents use public transit for their daily commute to work. The inception of the CDTA Purple Line BusPlus service in 2023 between Crossgates Mall and downtown Albany holds the promise of incentivizing higher levels of transit ridership, since BusPlus routes feature higher frequency service and reduced wait times. The Purple Line connects large employment areas such as the Albany NanoTech Complex, UAlbany, the Harriman State Office complex, the State Capitol, and SUNY Plaza. Explore options to expand rapid transit further into Guilderland along Western Avenue and along the Thruway to better connect the community to surrounding municipalities and to provide improved access to Town from elsewhere.

Other proactive steps, however, can be taken to ensure that CDTA service to Guilderland is maintained and well-utilized. As part of its own efforts to increase ridership across its network, CDTA facilitates so-called “Universal Access” partnerships and agreements with regional businesses and institutions, to allow the employees and/or students of participating entities to use company/college/hospital ID badges as Universal Access passes on CDTA buses and shuttles. Once the arrangement between CDTA and the

employer or school is finalized, the fare-box system is programmed to recognize and read the ID cards, the data is compiled in monthly ridership reports, and those reports serve as the basis of annual cost calculations for the participating employers. Some employers pass a portion of the cost on to employees to help pay for access.²⁰ Benefits of the program include reduced demand for parking and reduction in emissions from private vehicles on the road. It is recommended that the Town and the Guilderland Chamber of Commerce partner with the CDTA Business Development Department to identify potential business/institutional candidates for Universal Access expansion in Guilderland, as a potential mechanism for reducing traffic on Guilderland roadways and ensuring that bus ridership levels remain robust enough to maintain or expand CDTA’s presence in the Town.

F-9. Promote the use and expansion of public transit of mobility services such as CDTA Flex on demand, CDPHP Cycle bike share, ride-hailing services and electric car share.

- a. The menu of mobility options in the Capital District has grown in recent years to include bike share, car share, and transit shuttle service. CDTA Flex is an on-demand, curb-to-curb shuttle service that can be booked via the mobile Navigator app. As of 2023, the Flex coverage area in Guilderland included the Hamilton Square/Star Plaza shopping area at the intersection of Western Avenue and State Route 155, as well as Crossgates Mall, Stuyvesant Plaza, and a number of residential areas south of Western Avenue in the Westmere and McKownville sections of Guilderland. The Capital District Physicians Health Plan sponsors the CDPHP Cycle! bike share program, which comprises a network of bicycle rental stations located throughout the service area, which includes the UAlbany campus, the NanoTech campus on Fuller Road, Stuyvesant Plaza, and Crossgates Mall. In late 2023, the Capital Region’s first “mobility hub” was unveiled in nearby Schenectady, a result of collaborative efforts of regional transportation agencies and state legislators. Such a hub could be a useful model for Guilderland, combining complementary transportation modes in a single nodal location.
- b. The Town should conduct a study exploring the expansion of the existing Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) district boundary along Western Avenue. The Town has established a TOD District, which leverages the proximity of public transportation infrastructure to encourage mixed-use, higher density development. TODs are recognized as an effective urban planning strategy that promotes sustainable growth and supports the use of public transportation. This expansion would align with current CDTA

²⁰ cdta.org/universal-access

services, such as the Purple Line BusPlus route, and support future enhancements to the transit network. Extending the TOD district would not only facilitate higher utilization of existing public transit options but also create opportunities for the revival of previously discontinued lines.

Roadways & Automobiles

F-10. Pursue funding from the Capital Region Transportation Council (Transportation Council), NYSDOT, and the NY Thruway Authority to address the following transportation-related issues in Guilderland:

- a. **Reduce the traffic burden on Western Avenue by initiating a plan – in coordination with Albany County, other Capital District municipalities, and the State -- to remove tolls and add access points on the NY Thruway between Exit 22 and Exit 25A, transforming the Thruway from an inter-regional limited access facility into a one serving regional traffic, as has been implemented elsewhere in the State of New York.**

In an effort to alleviate congestion on Western Avenue and other local roads, some metropolitan areas have coordinated with the NYS Thruway Authority to increase the number of exits within the immediate region and provide toll-free access between local exits. In this case, the Town of Guilderland, Town of Colonie, Town of Bethlehem, City of Albany, and Albany County would need to coordinate efforts with the Capital Region Transportation Council to present a cost-benefit analysis to New York State.

- b. **Continue to partner and coordinate with CDTA, Transportation Council, and other regional partners for public transportation improvements and expansion.**

Guilderland’s public transportation needs continue to evolve over time. The Town currently is included as a municipal partner in all regional transportation boards, committees, and correspondences. However, services need to be expanded to better serve the Village of Altamont, the Village of Voorheesville, and the western part of Town, which refers to areas beyond the Crossgates Mall. These areas currently experience limited access to public transportation which creates challenges for residents and employees. This service expansion has garnered public support from Town residents, who have expressed a clear desire for increased transportation options in these areas. Addressing these gaps is essential to ensure equitable service across all parts of the Town. To achieve an optimal balance of service, the Town should continue to strengthen its participation and communication with these regional transportation agencies while also identifying ways to collaborate with businesses to support public transit.

- c. **Traffic signal optimization on key Town roadways.**

Effective coordination and synchronization of traffic control devices – i.e., stoplights – along road corridors can lead to a number of benefits: improved traffic flow, reduction in vehicle idling/emissions, and lower levels of frustration felt by Guilderland drivers. The timing of traffic lights must adjust as traffic levels change – within the course of a day and also over the course of time. In order to strive for paramount efficiency within the existing road network, it is recommended that the Town Highway Department liaise with the NYSDOT, Albany County, and other relevant stakeholders to ensure that traffic signals have been optimized to meet the needs of present traffic levels/patterns.

d. Repair or replacement of bridges and/or culverts through NYSDOT and CRTC’s BridgeNY program.

The New York State Department of Transportation (NYS DOT) and Capital Region Transportation Council manage an annual Bridge NY funding program. This program provides funding assistance to local governments for projects that rehabilitate and replace bridges, particularly projects that address poor structural conditions, mitigate weight restrictions or detours, facilitate economic development, increase economic competitiveness, improve resiliency and/or reduce the risk of flooding. This program is open to all public bridge owners.²¹ As a community that is bisected by the Normanskill and criss-crossed with other waterways, it is essential for bridges and culverts to be engineered to withstand likely future conditions and to be in peak working order. Bridge replacement may also be necessary to facilitate increased road widths to accommodate bike lanes or multi-use trails, in keeping with the Town’s identified multimodal transportation goals. Further, rehabilitation and/or reactivation of a bridge over the CSX rail line between Old State Road and Miller Road in the northern part of Guilderland and a bridge connecting Hurst Road and Frenchs Mill Road by the Town landfill site, may facilitate regional trail connections for walking and cycling. It is therefore recommended that the Town seek funding to study, engineer, and implement efforts to keep Guilderland bridges working to connect the community.

²¹ Capital Region Transportation Council, accessed from www.capitalmpo.org/what-we-do/roads-bridges



A bridge over the Normanskill on State Route 146 near Tawasentha Park. Bridges like this one may need to be re-engineered to properly accommodate cycling/pedestrian users as well as vehicles.

F-11. In partnership with NYS DOT and the Guilderland School District, explore options to improve vehicular traffic flow to Guilderland public schools, including options for a secondary access route to Farnsworth Middle School for buses and/or emergency vehicles.

Prevalent among the public input received during the Comprehensive Plan Update process was concern about the efficiency and safety of public-school access road infrastructure. Of particular concern was the lone access road – Peter Alland Way – to Farnsworth Middle School, off of State Farm Road/NY-155. It is recommended that the Town initiate coordination with the NYS DOT to investigate potential for an alternate access road/point, as a resiliency measure in case of road closure or an emergency event. Guilderland School

District officials have also identified traffic flow inefficiencies at Guilderland High School, off of School Road in Guilderland Center, which has impacted bus scheduling and on-time attendance.



Guilderland High School on School Road in Guilderland Center experiences traffic congestion issues that impact on-time attendance, according to District representatives.

F-12. Review and Update Town’s Standards and Regulations for Guilderland Roadways.

- a. Evaluate parking standards and regulations during future zoning updates to align with and advance Comprehensive Plan Goals.**

While maintaining adequate available customer parking remains a consistent priority for Guilderland businesses, efficient use of existing parking areas can reduce the need to add unnecessary impervious surfaces, which then require stormwater mitigation measures. Therefore, it is recommended that the Town take a considered approach to the multi-faceted issue of parking regulations in future updates to Town zoning, ensuring that such

regulations support Town goals for resiliency, walkability, and neighborhood aesthetics while continuing to support business owners who rely on customers who arrive by car.

b. Review the need to reduce street size standards in rural zoning districts of Guilderland.

The importance of rural areas and their viewsheds to Town character was a frequent theme in public input submitted throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update process. Existing standards for road widths in RA zoning districts stipulate 30-foot paved road width with a 60-foot right-of-way, which may not align with the intent of maintaining rural character. Therefore, it is recommended that the Town consider reducing required paved road widths and rights-of-way in rural zoning districts in future updates to Town code, provided that emergency vehicle access can be maintained.

c. Update cul-de-sac rules to promote grid street patterns in rural areas.

While cul-de-sac street patterns may be appropriate in more suburban areas of Guilderland, gridded streets are more consistent with rural development patterns. Promoting gridded street patterns in rural districts when updates are made to Town zoning can help ensure that Town regulations are aligned with the goal of maintaining rural character.

d. The potential for installing additional traffic roundabouts at appropriate Town intersections to reduce crash rates and ease traffic congestion.

In recent years, traffic roundabouts have been installed in strategic locations in Guilderland – the intersection of Carman Road/NY-146 and Lydius Street, as well as on Crossgates Mall Road at the Northway exit – to increase the efficiency of traffic flow and to decrease the incidence of high-speed vehicle collisions. Future plans have been announced to install a traffic roundabout at the intersection of New Karner Road/NY-155 and Washington Avenue Extension, which – although its location falls outside Town boundaries – will have an influence on traffic congestion in Guilderland. The engineering of traffic roundabouts requires significant planning and, potentially, the acquisition of land adjoining existing intersections. Therefore, it is recommended that the Town proactively pursue funding sources to identify additional feasible locations for traffic roundabouts, conduct requisite engineering studies, and eventually carry out the construction and implementation.



A traffic roundabout at the intersection of Carman Road and Lydius Drive in the Fort Hunter area of Guilderland, featuring gateway and traffic signage.

8. GOVERNANCE

Overview

Towns are local government units responsible for addressing and for the practical needs of their residents. Those needs include a range of key functions, such as road maintenance, police services, recreational offerings, land use development permitting, property assessment, and provision of sewer, water, and storm drainage infrastructure to protect public health. The Town of Guilderland works to provide these services efficiently and in a fiscally responsible manner to meet the community's needs.

Local government functions in Guilderland are carried out and directed from Guilderland Town Hall, located at 5209 Western Turnpike. The Town Hall, which also houses the Justice Court and Guilderland Police Department, is open to the public for assistance with a variety of needs and functions. Other functions such as emergency medical services, fire response, parks and recreation, highway, water and wastewater, animal control, and senior services are handled from a network of distributed locations located throughout the Town.



Guilderland Town Hall

Emergency Medical Services

The Town of Guilderland is served by the Guilderland Department of Emergency Medical Services (EMS), which provides prehospital medical care to sick and injured patients and ambulance transportation to area hospitals within an approximately 100-square-mile coverage area. EMS also provides Advanced Life Support First Response to the neighboring Town of Knox. In 2023, Guilderland EMS received 6,717 calls and performed 3,807 transports; both figures represent increases of between 5% and 10% over the previous year. In spring of 2024, the first new EMS substation in 40 years was established at the entrance to Western Turnpike Golf Course, on Town-owned property, which eliminated land acquisition expenses for the site. Two existing EMS substations in Guilderland continue to operate at the following locations:

- EMS Station 1 – Western Avenue and Centre Drive in Westmere
- EMS Station 2 – Carman Road in Fort Hunter



Town of Guilderland Emergency Services Station 1 building in Westmere

Senior Services

Senior Services is responsible for planning, advocating, coordinating, and monitoring services and programs that benefit Town residents aged 60 and older. With its fleet of four shuttle buses, the department offers senior transportation for older residents for medical appointments and grocery shopping. In 2023, Senior Services accommodated more than 3,000 transportation requests and served more than 800 Town seniors. Other services offered include daily educational, social, and recreational programs, monthly day trips, special events, and outreach to homebound elders. The department also serves as a liaison between the Town and relevant area agencies. Senior Services is a community focal point where older people or groups can participate in a variety of programs that promote independence and community involvement.

Parks & Recreation

The Town Parks & Recreation Department oversees the design, maintenance, beautification and promotion of the Town's numerous recreational facilities, seasonal programs, and parks. The department offers a wide range of programs and services throughout the year. During the summer there are Thursday night concerts series are held at the Guilderland Performing Arts Center in Tawasentha Park. Tawasentha Park is also the home of the large outdoor adult exercise facility and a new pool house, with a new sprinkler pad. The Department also manages the Western Turnpike Golf Course (WTGC).

Winter activities include snow-shoeing the Town's park system, including WTGC, and cross-country skiing on the groomed trails at WTGC and the ungroomed trails in its parks. Tubing and snow-sledding is available at the Winter Recreation Area. Skis and snowshoe rentals are available at the Parks and Recreation Office.

As part of its youth services, the Parks & Recreation Department manages a six-week, half-day enrichment camp at Tawasentha Park each summer for children entering kindergarten through eighth grade. In addition to Day Camp programs, residents can choose over 40 sports camps and 45 enrichment camps. Sports camps include cheer, archery, bowling, football, basketball, lacrosse, field hockey, and strength and conditioning. Swimming lessons are offered as part of Day Camp. Enrichment programs vary across topics of history, cooking, arts-and-craft, music, and science. Parks and Recreation also offers programs during school break weeks and at other times.

The Town recognizes the importance of providing recreational opportunities for youth as part of its commitment to community well-being and development. Youth sports offered include baseball, softball, basketball, soccer, lacrosse, football, cheerleading, and skiing.



A baseball diamond at Keenholts Park is used to host youth sports in Guilderland.

Police

Law enforcement in the Town is provided by the Police Department, which was established in 1972. The Department’s main station is located at Town Hall at 5209 Western Turnpike. The Police Department also maintains a substation located on the first floor of Crossgates Mall. As of 2023, Police Department staffing includes 43 sworn officers – including a dedicated Traffic Safety Officer – 10 telecommunicators, 3 administrative office staff members, 2 animal services members, and a volunteer Chaplain. The Department was most recently reaccredited by the New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services in 2019 and received new accreditation in 2024. The Police Department maintains a dispatch system and has access to microwave communications in the event of Town-wide emergencies that maintains access to a microwave radio network linking the Town system to the Albany County radio core, for seamless communications between the Town and emergency services agencies in neighboring counties.

Code Enforcement

Code enforcement in the Town of Guilderland is carried out by the Town’s Building/Zoning Department, whose staff includes fire code enforcement officers and building/zoning inspectors, working under the direction of the Chief Building and Zoning Inspector. The Department also employs three additional administrative staff members. The Department’s responsibilities include but are not limited to:

- Building permit applications
- Chicken permit applications
- Site plan review applications
- Special use permit applications
- Swimming pool applications
- Unified solar permit applications
- Vacant property registration
- Fire code inspections

Fire

Fire response in the Town of Guilderland is handled by nine separate fire districts, each with responsibility for a given area within the Town. Those fire districts include: McKownville Fire District, Westmere Fire District, Guilderland Fire Protection District, Guilderland Center Fire District, Guilderland Fire District, Fort Hunter Fire District, Elmwood Park Fire District, Altamont Fire District, and the Rotterdam-Princetown Fire District.²²

²² <https://www.townofguilderland.org/town-clerks-office/pages/fire-districts-information>



Guilderland Fire District building at 2303 Western Avenue

Schools

Public education in the Town is provided primarily by Guilderland Central School District. Residents in the northwestern, northeastern, and southwestern corners of Town, however, are served by the Schalmont, Mohonasen, and Voorheesville School Districts, respectively.

The Guilderland Central School District currently serves approximately 4,900 students from pre-Kindergarten through grade 12. The district includes five elementary schools: Altamont, Guilderland, Lynnwood, Pine Bush, and Westmere Elementary. The district serves students at higher grade levels at Farnsworth Middle School and Guilderland High School. Figures from the New York State Department of Education show that, during the 2019-2020 school year, the Guilderland Central School District had a total K-12 student enrollment of 4,831. The number of students in the Guilderland CSD has declined somewhat over the preceding decades; total enrollment stood at 5,046 during the 2011-2012 school year, down from 5,694 a decade earlier (2001-2002).

Library

The Guilderland Public Library is located at 2228 Western Avenue, a central location that facilitates the library’s role as “Guilderland’s Gathering Place.” In addition to its print and digital collections, the library provides an array of programming for patrons of all ages, including financial literacy, craft classes, children’s storytime, computer literacy, and a notable authors speaker series. The library building was originally constructed in 1992; substantial renovation in 2020-2021 added 20,000 square feet of available space to the building. The library is currently served by a public bus route – CDTA Route 763 – which connects Crossgates Mall to Schenectady, traveling along Western Avenue and Carman Road in Guilderland. Funding for the Guilderland Public Library is allocated from school tax revenues in Guilderland Central and through the fundraising efforts of the Guilderland Library Foundation. As of 2023, the Guilderland Public Library parking lot also hosts the Guilderland Farmers Market on weekends during the summer months.

Boards & Committees

Town Board

The Town Board acts as the legislative, governing, and policy-making body of the Town. The Town Board approves the budget, votes on appropriations throughout the year, adopts “Local Laws,” and appoints officials to various other boards and committees within the Town.

Planning Board

The Planning Board consists of seven (7) Town Board-appointed members. The Planning Board’s primary responsibility is reviewing development applications for subdivisions and site plans in accordance with the Town of Guilderland Town Code and NYS Town Law. The Planning Board also ensures that each application complies with the regulations implementing the NYS Environmental Quality Review Act.

Zoning Board of Appeals

The Zoning Board of Appeals consists of five (5) members appointed by the Town Board. The primary function of the Zoning Board of Appeals is to interpret the Town Zoning Code, and hear applications for special use permits, area variances, and use variances with respect to the Town Zoning Code.

Conservation Advisory Council

Consisting of nine (9) Town appointed members, the Conservation Advisory Council guides the local governing boards, planning boards, and zoning board of appeals on issues and concerns relating to the environment.

Ethics Board

Ethics Board oversees the Town’s adherence to ethical standards as outlined in the Town’s Code of Ethics, ensuring its functions are conducted with integrity. Additionally, the Ethics Board offers guidance to Town officers and employees on matters concerning the Code of Ethics.

Conservation Easement Review Board

The primary function of the Conservation Easement Review Board is to operate the Conservation Easement Exemption (CEE) program for the Town of Guilderland, which consists of the review of conservation easement agreement applications. Its purpose is to conserve open space lands, maintain the character of the Town, and provide assistance to landowners.

Traffic Safety Committee

The Traffic Safety Committee collects and reviews concerns and issues and makes recommendations to the Town Board, traffic engineers, or highway department. It is the goal of the Traffic Safety Committee to seek input and address public concern for neighborhood traffic issues. The Traffic Safety Committee also applies for federal grant money to conduct necessary traffic studies or to implement safety measures to address traffic issues.

Industrial Development Agency

The Industrial Development Agency (IDA) utilizes the statutory powers set forth under the provisions of the laws of New York State to assist in the enhancement and diversity of the economy of the Town. The Industrial Development Agency acts to facilitate projects within the Town that create, retain, and promote private sector investment.

Development Planning Committee

The Development Planning Committee (DPC) consists of representatives of the various Town departments that are involved in facilitating or servicing development projects in the Town. The Development Planning Committee facilitates early communication between the Town and developers during the project concept phase with regard to a variety of issues.

Tree Preservation Committee

The Tree Preservation Committee provides guidelines on appropriate plants for the Town’s parks and rights-of-ways, and the preparation of a Forestry Plan. The Tree Preservation Committee plays a crucial role in safeguarding the ecological, aesthetic, and cultural value of trees within the Town.

Comprehensive Plan Update Committee

In 2022, the Guilderland Town Board appointed a 9-member Comprehensive Plan Update Committee to assist the Town in reviewing and updating the 2001 Comprehensive Plan to reflect the needs of today and identify a vision for the future.

Infrastructure and Public Utilities

The ability of the Town’s infrastructure to support the current needs and to accommodate future development is a crucial consideration when planning for the future. Improvements to Guilderland’s existing infrastructure occur on an ongoing basis and typically require significant financial resources. The addition of new infrastructure – or expansion of existing infrastructure – can have a dramatic impact on the character and function of the Town. Such expansion requires careful attention to the potential for growth-inducing impacts.

Water

The Town of Guilderland draws water from different sources: the Watervliet Reservoir and via municipal interconnections with the City of Albany and the Town of Rotterdam’s water systems. The Town is actively exploring options to revive use of the three Town-owned wells. In addition to the Town of Guilderland Water Treatment Plant, the Town maintains four storage tanks: Relyea (2.0 million gallons), Westmere (1.0 million gallons), Fort Hunter (1.0 million gallons), and Clearwell (1.0 million gallons). The Town is permitted to use five (5) million gallons of water a day from the Watervliet Reservoir, which is located within the borders of Guilderland but owned by the City of Watervliet. The Watervliet Reservoir has an impounded area of 620 acres and captures water from a 113-square-mile basin drained by the Normans Kill, Bozen Kill, and Black Creek.

The Town’s contract with the City of Albany allows for the transfer of up to 2 MGD of water daily. During 2021, Guilderland’s water district also drew approximately 73 million gallons of water from the adjacent Town of Rotterdam, which was slightly higher than the 71,698,000 million gallons transferred to Guilderland from the City of Albany’s water system.²³ From May 1 to September 15, the Town Water Department maintains sprinkling regulations, in order to conserve water supply capacity and pressure during the warmest months.

Sewer

The Town has two sewer plants: Nott Road Sewer Plant (SPPDES Permit NY0022225) and NE Industrial Park Sewer Plant (SPDES Permit NY0022217). Additional DEC-permitted

²³ <https://www.townofguilderland.org/department-water-wastewater/pages/annual-quality-water-reports>

wastewater facilities located within the Guilderland Town boundary include a facility at Crossgates Mall (SPDES Permit NY0107930), Camp Wildwood (SPDES Permit NY0282472), and Altamont (SPDES Permit NY0031534).²⁴ Guilderland Town Law Chapter 225, Article II §225-4 requires connection to the public sanitary sewer provided that the public sewer line is within 100 feet of the property line. Where public sanitary sewer service is not available, Section 225-4 of the same Town Code chapter identifies the requirement to connect to a private sewage disposal system that complies with provisions stipulated in the code.

Stormwater

Stormwater runoff is generated from rain and snow melt that falls on impervious surfaces such as parking lots, paved streets, rooftops, and compacted bare soil. When water flows over impervious surfaces it may collect and transport pollutants that are harmful to the environment and drinking water supplies. The increase in runoff generated during such precipitation events is directly related to the increase in impervious surfaces and, therefore, to land development activities that increase impervious surfaces.

The Stormwater Coalition of Albany County includes the Town of Guilderland as a member. The group is made up of ten municipalities, Albany County, and the University of Albany. Each member pays yearly dues and benefits from coalition services. Members work together to carry out Clean Water Act requirements. Residents of Guilderland are urged to respect one another and the law. For inquiries regarding the discharge of water from swimming pools and other water issues needing permits, residents are advised to contact the storm water officer.²⁵

Small streams that empty into the Hudson or Mohawk Rivers are protected from pollution by the Coalition. Members must report their progress with reference to past objectives, present objectives, and Best Management Practices (BMPs).

Other Utilities

The National Grid utility provider supplies electric and gas service to Guilderland homes. Electrical transmission infrastructure limitations in the Town and wider region have influenced Town decision-making on the cost-effectiveness of installing solar energy infrastructure at Town-owned sites such as the former landfill. A utility transmission corridor runs essentially north-south through Guilderland to the west of the Watervliet Reservoir.

Internet service is available to Guilderland residents from a variety of private providers including Spectrum, Verizon, T-Mobile 5G Home Internet, Earthlink, ViaSat, HughesNet, Starlink, and others. High speed internet access has increased in importance with

²⁴ <https://gisservices.dec.ny.gov/gis/dil/>

²⁵ www.townofguilderland.org/stormwater-management

developments in remote/hybrid work arrangements, remote schooling during pandemic closures, e-commerce, and the shift to online public information delivery. High speed internet service refers to internet service of at least 100 megabytes per second (Mbps) download and 10 Mbps upload. The most recent available data indicates that the percentage of Guilderland residents with access to high-speed internet access (99.3%) was higher for the Albany County figure (97.8%) but slightly lower than for the City of Albany (99.7%).²⁶

Development

Development in the community is directed by the Town of Guilderland Code, Part II, General Legislation, Chapter 280 Zoning (§280-1 - §280-59) and Chapter 247 Subdivision of Land (§247-1 - §247-33). The Zoning Code was amended in its entirety in 2016. The law addresses the use of property in residential, commercial, industrial, and other areas within the Town. The legislation covers but is not limited to, buildings, signs, lighting, parking, major landscaping, and dimensional requirements. The Zoning Code is administered daily and enforced by the Building/Zoning Department. All interpretation questions, and petitions for relief, such as area and use variances, are addressed by the Zoning Board of Appeals. The Zoning Code breaks down the land area of Guilderland into the following districts:

- OS: Open Space
- A: Agricultural
- RA3: Rural Agricultural
- RA5: Rural Agricultural
- R10: Single-Family Residential
- R15: Single-Family Residential
- R20: Single-Family Residential
- R30: Single-Family Residential
- R40: Single-Family Residential
- RO: Residential Overlay District
- CH: Country Hamlet
- MR: Multiple Residence
- TH: Townhouse Dwelling
- PUD: Planned Unit Development
- MH: Manufactured Housing
- TOD: Transit-Oriented Development
- BNRP: Business Non-Retail Professional
- LB: Local Business

²⁶ www.mapmybroadband.dps.ny.gov

- GB: General Business
- I: Industrial
- IP: Industrial Park

The Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals apply the Town Code and other regulations to land development proposals. The Planning Board is responsible for reviewing various types of land use applications to ensure the orderly development of the Town and performs functions that include subdivision review, site plan review, and advisory roles for special use permits and planned unit development. The Planning Board is guided by the Town’s Comprehensive Plan and local ordinances like the Town Zoning Code and subdivision regulations.

Recommendations

G-1. Update the Town Zoning to be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan Update.

Per New York State Town Law §272-A, “all Town land use regulations must be in accordance with a comprehensive plan”. Thus, ensuring the Town Zoning Code is consistent with the contents of this Comprehensive Plan update is required by the State. The Town Zoning Code should reflect the recommendations outlined in this plan including, but not limited to, promoting a range of accessible housing options, encouraging redevelopment of vacant properties, preserving open space, and ensuring development that is compatible with Town character, particularly in rural Guilderland. This recommendation is supported by recommendations in **Section 6: Parks, Recreation, Open Space & Historic Resources** (E6, E7, E8, & E15), **Section 7: Transportation & Mobility** (F12), and **Section 9: Implementation** (H1).

G-2. Continue to provide all areas of the community with a high level of fire, police, and emergency medical response services, while also adapting to the challenges of climate change.

Providing a high level of fire, police, and emergency medical response services is crucial for ensuring the safety and well-being of Guilderland residents. These services safeguard lives and property by promptly addressing incidents such as fires, criminal activity, and medical emergencies. An effective emergency response system contributes to community resilience, fostering a sense of security and trust. Therefore, the Town should continue to evaluate coverage areas, response times, and staffing levels of these departments so that the necessary fiscal allocations can be made to ensure reliable service while addressing the challenge of climate change. This includes enhancing training for emergency personnel

to prepare for extreme weather events, such as floods and heatwaves, which can strain resources and impact response times.

G-3. Coordinate with the Town of Rotterdam and the City of Albany to ensure sustainable agreements for the delivery of high-quality drinking water.

Interconnections with the municipal water infrastructure in Rotterdam and Albany support Guilderland’s water treatment capacity and boost Guilderland’s resilience in the event of service disruptions elsewhere in the system. Ongoing coordination with interconnected municipalities will be vital to ensure that both fiscal and water resources are used in an efficient manner and that all applicable water quality standards continue to be met.

G-4. Coordinate with the City of Watervliet for the effective management of the Watervliet Reservoir’s water supply, water quality, and recreational assets.

The Watervliet Reservoir is a vital resource for both the City of Watervliet and the Town of Guilderland. To address current concerns – such as removal of invasive water chestnut and climate change that impacts reservoir water capacity and water chemistry – and to safeguard the Reservoir against future contamination, the Town of Guilderland should continue to coordinate closely with City of Watervliet officials and departments. It is recommended that the two municipalities collaborate with relevant Albany County and New York State agencies to develop an action plan to address mitigation and communication efforts for the threat of emerging contaminants. Further, it is recommended that the two municipalities coordinate closely on issues related to permissible recreation activities on or near the Reservoir. Compatible passive recreation activities near the Reservoir -- such as bird watching blinds, picnicking areas, and walking trails – emerged as frequently cited desired amenities in public engagement during the Comprehensive Plan Update process. This recommendation is supported by a recommendation in **Section 4: Environment, Climate Change & Resiliency (C2)**.

G-5. Coordinate with the NY State Department of Transportation and other stakeholders to address persistent flooding events on Western Avenue in the McKownville area of Guilderland.

Western Avenue/US-20 is Guilderland’s “Main Street,” and it provides transportation connections to the City of Albany and beyond that are essential to Guilderland residents. Extreme precipitation events have increased in frequency in recent years, resulting in flooded roadway conditions. Given the NYSDOT’s jurisdiction over Western Avenue, it is recommended that the Town coordinate closely and expeditiously with DOT, McKownville residents and business owners, and other stakeholders to develop stormwater mitigation solutions for this area of Town that align with the Town’s environmental and resiliency

goals. This recommendation is supported by a recommendation in **Section 4:** Environment, Climate Change & Resiliency (C3).

G-6. Ensure that Guilderland households and businesses have access to high-speed internet connection.

The value of high-speed internet connectivity was highlighted by business and school closures in 2020 and 2021, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The internet became an essential link to education, news, and commerce; ensuring universal access is an important step not only for equity in education, but also to stimulate home-based business opportunities and to keep residents informed of important Town initiatives. NY State’s ConnectALL initiative, established in 2022, represents the largest-ever investment in New York’s digital infrastructure. ConnectALL includes a municipal infrastructure program which provides substantial funding to municipalities and other applicants to construct last mile, open access, public broadband infrastructure. Working with community stakeholders such as school districts and the Chamber of Commerce, the Town should pursue available State funds to ensure equitable, reliable access to high-speed internet service in all areas of Guilderland, regardless of population density. The NYS Department of Public Service initiated a series of public outreach activities to determine the degree to which broadband was available in the State; public input from these efforts may be useful in determining service gaps in Guilderland.

G-7. Coordinate Town functions to advance Guilderland’s participation in the Climate Smart Communities program.

The Town of Guilderland is a registered Climate Smart Community in the State of New York, as of 2019. Through public engagement activities associated with the Comprehensive Plan Update effort, Guilderland residents expressed strong support for additional Town actions to advance environmental sustainability and resiliency. Within the Climate Smart Community framework, local governments can complete a combination of specified actions to earn bronze- or silver-level certification status through the program. These certification pathways offered by the State through the Climate Smart Communities program offer a useful guide as the Town evaluates ways to increase energy efficiency and support a healthy environment, so it is recommended that the Town coordinate its activities to align with specified Climate Smart Communities priority actions. This recommendation is supported by recommendations in **Section 2:** Agriculture (A6) and **Section 4:** Environment, Climate Change & Resiliency (C1 & C3).

G-8. Coordinate with the Conservation Easement Review Board, the Conservation Advisory Committee, the Town Assessor, and other stakeholders to expand participation in Guilderland’s Conservation Easement Exemption Program.

Conservation easements are an important tool – complementing parkland stewardship and environmental preservation efforts of not-for-profit organizations – to help the Town of Guilderland achieve its goal of conserving 30% of its land mass. In order to increase participation in the Conservation Easement Exemption program, coordination will be necessary with a host of stakeholders, potentially including school district officials, Albany County taxing authorities, local boards and committees, and interested private landowners. This recommendation is supported by recommendations in **Section 2: Agriculture (A4, A5, & A8)**, **Section 4: Environment, Climate Change & Resiliency (C3 & C5)**, and **Section 6: Parks, Recreation, Open Space & Historic Resources (E6)**.

G-9. Coordinate with the Village of Altamont on maintenance and management of shared resources.

The Village of Altamont is located entirely within the Town of Guilderland. Although it is a separate municipal entity with its own elected leadership, the Village provides commercial offerings to Guilderland residents and shares many common concerns such as viewshed preservation and the maintenance of rural character. The Altamont Fairgrounds straddle the Village’s boundary with the Town of Guilderland, representing an important shared resource whose utilization to host fairs, festivals, concerts, and other events benefits both municipalities. Ongoing coordination between Town and Village leadership will be important to advance goals such as multi-use trail connectivity, preservation of open space, and other concerns.

G-10. Continue enforcing existing land use regulations.

G-11. Continue coordination and collaboration with the Village of Altamont.

The Village of Altamont, located within the geographical boundaries of the Town of Guilderland, is a distinct municipality with its own local government. While the sharing services, the Village retains independent authority over local matters like zoning and specific services, preserving its historic character and small-town governance.

Given the Village's location within the Town, there are ample opportunities for continued collaboration among the Village Board of Trustees, the Rural Guilderland Referral Committee, and the Town on topics such as infrastructure development, pedestrian pathways and trail connections. This partnership can enhance the quality of life for

residents by aligning transportation and infrastructure projects with the needs of both municipalities.

By adopting a cohesive approach to land use and development, the Town and Village can optimize resource allocation and reduce duplication of efforts. Continued collaboration will ensure that both the Town of Guilderland and the Village of Altamont thrive together, fostering vibrant and interconnected communities.

9. IMPLEMENTATION

Overview

This Comprehensive Plan Update is the outcome of considerable effort on the part of the Town of Guilderland, the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee members, Town staff, stakeholders, and engaged residents. An active, ongoing implementation process will be necessary for the plan to have a durable, positive impact on the community. Working with a range of public, private, and not-for-profit implementation partners, the Town can accomplish the recommended actions and continue striving toward its ultimate vision, as outlined through the plan update process. Following the adoption of this Comprehensive Plan Update by the Town Board, the first step in the implementation process is to evaluate the Town’s zoning code for consistency with the plan and update the zoning to be consistent with the comprehensive plan, if necessary.

Implementation Recommendations

The following recommendations are priority actions to be completed immediately following the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan Update.

H-1. Establish a body and/or mechanism to guide the plan implementation.

For a Comprehensive Plan to be effective in achieving the Town vision and goals, it must be implemented. Implementation will be incremental and will be dependent on a number of factors, some which may be out of the Town’s control. To guide the implementation effort while recognizing some recommendations may take longer to implement than others, it is recommended that a Five-Year Action Plan be prepared with annual updates and an annual progress report to the Town Board. The Five-Year Action Plan should include the specific steps and actions needed to implement each recommendation as well as target timeframe for initiation and completion.

It is anticipated that the Town Planning Department will have a significant role in the preparation of the Five-Year Action Plan. The Town Board should specifically designate responsibility for overseeing implementation of the plan. The responsible Department will prepare the initial Action Plan, then annually report on progress and make updates as events require.

New York State Town Law Chapter 62, Article 16 §272-A stipulates the need for periodic review of the Comprehensive Plan, to gauge progress toward the completion of the Plan’s

enumerated goals and recommendations. The Five-Year Action Plan could serve as the mechanism for the Town to address the periodic review of the Plan.

The Five-Year Action Plan, while designed to guide the Town’s progress over a five-year period, involves more frequent meetings and reviews to ensure ongoing progress and adaptability. Rather than only being revisited at the end of the five-year cycle, the plan is regularly monitored and assessed, with meetings often taking place annually or semi-annually. These regular check-ins allow Town officials, departments, and stakeholders to evaluate progress, make necessary adjustments, and address any emerging challenges or opportunities in real time. Thus, the action plan serves a flexible, adaptive tool that ensures that the Town stays aligned with its Comprehensive Plan’s recommendations.

H-2. Review, evaluate, and amend the Town’s zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations to ensure consistency with this Comprehensive Plan.

A Comprehensive Plan provides the foundation for local zoning laws. A zoning diagnostic (also called a regulatory analysis) should be performed to identify inconsistencies between the local zoning code and the newly adopted Comprehensive Plan. The zoning diagnostic should also identify potential solutions to resolve any such inconsistencies. New York State’s zoning enabling statutes require that zoning laws be adopted in accordance with a comprehensive plan. Specifically, §272-A states “All town land use regulations must be in accordance with a comprehensive plan adopted pursuant to this section”.

H-3. Continue to provide support or training opportunities for Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals members to keep up to date on current planning and zoning practices and laws and meet the minimum training requirements, pursuant to NY State Town Law.

The New York Department of State’s Division of Local Government Services provides training and technical assistance to local governments and boards. Training on land use planning, regulation and procedure, and community development is offered both through on-site and regional workshop opportunities.

Prioritization of Recommended Actions

The Action Plan Table that follows is a tool to be utilized by the Town to guide the creation of the recommended Five-Year Action Plan and identification of the necessary steps to achieve each recommendation. The purpose is to assist Town leadership and Town staff in prioritizing the use of the Town’s human and fiscal resources.

The table is organized by recommendation with a column for timeframe to implement (short-, medium- or long-term) as well as an identification of the recommendation lead and potential partners to assist in implementation. Potential funding sources are also listed to support implementation. A ‘needed action and status’ column has been included to facilitate tracking and review of implementation progress related to each recommendation. The information within the Action Plan can be translated into an annual report to the Town Board on the actions and strategic steps that have been taken toward accomplishing the Comprehensive Plan’s goals.



Town of Guilderland

Action Plan Table

The Action Plan Table that follows is a tool to be utilized by the Town to guide the creation of the recommended Five-Year Action Plan and identification of the necessary steps to achieve each recommendation. The purpose is to assist Town leadership and Town staff in prioritizing the use of the Town’s human and fiscal resources. The table is organized by recommendation with a column for timeframe to implement (short-, medium- or long-term) as well as an identification of the recommendation lead and potential partners to assist in implementation. Potential funding sources are also listed to support implementation. A ‘needed action and status’ column has been included to facilitate tracking and review of implementation progress related to each recommendation. The information within the Action Plan can be translated into an annual report to the Town Board on the actions and strategic steps that have been taken toward accomplishing the Comprehensive Plan’s goals.

Agriculture													
Recommended Action		Timeframe to Initiate (Years)			Potential Lead and Partners	Potential Funding/ Technical Resources	Needed Action and Status						
		0-2	2-5	5-10			Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7
A1.	Promote agriculture’s place in Guilderland’s economy by supporting farmers markets, farm stands, and other opportunities for residents to connect with local agricultural businesses.				Guilderland Farmers Market, Albany County Farm Bureau	Empire State Development (ESD) Market New York Program							
A2.	Promote and maintain the				Guilderland Planning								



	scenic resources of rural corridors and roads through the use of rural development design guidelines and conservation subdivision practices that prioritize maintenance of rural character.				Department, Guiderland Development Planning Committee								
A3.	Partner with the Village of Altamont to initiate a feasibility study on the costs and benefits for an interconnection between the water districts to improve the Village’s water security. Focus water and sewer capacity improvements to support traditional				Guiderland Water/ Wastewater Department, City of Watervliet, City of Albany, Town of Rotterdam, Village of Altamont								



	population centers in Town.												
A4.	Form a standing Town Agricultural Lands Committee, with oversight by the Town, to enhance and advocate for the productive use of agricultural lands and to serve in an advisory role on agricultural land uses.				Albany County Farm Bureau, Guilderland Planning Department								
A5.	Expand participation in the Town’s Conservation Easement Program through targeted promotion and potential funding incentives.				Conservation Advisory Council, Conservation Easement Review Board								
A6.	Regulate the development of solar and wind				Guilderland Planning Department,								



	energy installations in agricultural areas of Town.				National Grid, NYPA, NYSERDA								
A7.	Create opportunities for light retail/farm service businesses on US-20 near the Princetown municipal line in a manner that is consistent with rural design guidelines and the character of the surrounding area.				Guilderland Planning Department, Guilderland Chamber of Commerce								
A8.	Consider implementing a flexible, voluntary Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program to preserve farmland and open space.				Conservation Advisory Council, Conservation Easement Review Board, Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy								
A9.	Partner with the Albany				Albany County Soil and Water								



	County Soil and Water Conservation District to assist local agricultural operations in preventing adverse impacts on Guilderland watersheds from agricultural runoff.				Conservation District								
A10.	Update zoning code to align with the vision and goals of the Comprehensive Plan				Guilderland Town Board								



Business, Employment & Fiscal Resources													
Recommended Action		Timeframe to Initiate (Years)			Potential Lead and Partners	Potential Funding/ Technical Resources	Needed Action and Status						
		0-2	2-5	5-10			Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7
B1.	Develop commercial design guidelines, with illustrative examples, to supplement zoning regulations and articulate expectations for commercial development in the Town.				Guilderland Planning Department								
B2.	Encourage the redevelopment and adaptive reuse of existing sites in Guilderland to improve the attractiveness of commercial corridors, grow the local business base, and make efficient use of existing resources.				Guilderland Industrial Development Agency (IDA), Guilderland Planning Department	EPA Brownfields Grants,							
B3.	Develop design guidelines for signage with illustrative examples.				Guilderland Planning Department								
B4.	Develop strategies to attract well-paying, job-creating employers who will be able to				Guilderland Industrial Development Agency (IDA)								



	provide employment opportunities for Guilderland’s community.												
B5.	Develop resources to facilitate greater participation of small business owners and entrepreneurs in the local economy.				Guilderland Chamber of Commerce								
B6.	Facilitate business roundtables with Town leaders and staff to discuss specific issues of interest, such as economic development, transportation improvements, and infrastructure projects.				Guilderland Chamber of Commerce, Guilderland IDA								
B7.	Identify and establish the desired mix and scale of businesses in a manner that is sensitive to the neighborhood setting and cultural diversity of the Town. This includes supporting home-based businesses.				Guilderland Planning Department								
B8.	Seek partnerships with higher learning institutions including the University at				UAlbany, Albany NanoTech Complex,								



	Albany, the Albany Nanotech Complex, and other entities to promote economic development opportunities in Guilderland.				Guilderland IDA, Chamber of Commerce								
B9.	Consider the development of a new village-like planned community that incorporates a mix of land uses – commercial, residential, recreation/open space – that allows for walkability, environmental sustainability, and high quality of life for residents.				Guilderland Planning Department, Guilderland Water/Waste water Department								
B10.	Pursue partnerships and incentives available through federal, state, county, and local organizations that support both the existing and future business community and strengthen Guilderland’s economic future.				Guilderland IDA; Albany County Department of Economic Development , Conservation and Planning								



Environment, Climate Change & Resiliency													
Recommended Action		Timeframe to Initiate (Years)			Potential Lead and Partners	Potential Funding/ Technical Resources	Needed Action and Status						
		0-2	2-5	5-10			Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7
C1.	Build on Guilderland’s designation as a registered Climate Smart Community (CSC) in the State of New York by completing the criteria for bronze-level CSC certification by 2030.				NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (CSC program administrator)	NYS DEC Climate Smart Communities Grant Program							
C2.	Maintain and improve water quality in Watervliet Reservoir and its tributaries by partnering with the City of Watervliet and communities within the Reservoir’s watershed.				City of Watervliet, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, municipalities within the Watervliet Reservoir watershed	NYS DEC Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP) Program, NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation Water Infrastructure Improvement (WIIA) Program							
C3.	Encourage and incentivize climate resiliency through				Conservation Advisory Council, Tree	NYS Environmental Facilities							



	Town practices, procedures, rules, and regulations wherever practicable.				Preservation Committee	Corporation Asset Management program.							
C4.	Reduce Guilderland's collective contribution to climate change by decreasing community-wide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions with forward-thinking environmental, transportation, and energy planning.					Municipal Zero-Emission Vehicle (ZEV) Program, Climate Pollution Reduction Grants Program (CPRG) through EPA,							
C5.	Prioritize the preservation of natural resources and animal habitat in Guilderland to promote healthy and functioning ecosystems that mitigate costly and harmful conditions such as invasive species, flooding, and soil erosion.				Conservation Advisory Council, Tree Preservation Committee	NYS DEC Hudson River Estuary Program and Community Forest Conservation Grant Program,							



Neighborhoods & Housing														
Recommended Action		Timeframe to Initiate (Years)			Potential Lead and Partners	Potential Funding/ Technical Resources	Needed Action and Status							
		0-2	2-5	5-10			Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	
D1.	Explore tools and approaches to support the Town's Pro-Housing Designation.				Guilderland Town Board, Guilderland Planning Department, NYS Homes and Community Renewal	NYS HCR Pro-Housing Program, NY Forward, DRI, Regional Council Capital Fund, Market NY, NY Main Street								
D2.	Update building design guidelines to promote sustainable green building practices that advance the goals of energy efficiency, water conservation, and the use of building materials which reduce harmful environmental impacts.				Guilderland Water/Wastewater Department, Guilderland Planning Department	NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation Green Innovation Grant Program, NYSERDA Home Energy Efficiency Program								
D3.	To maximize the Town's investments in public water and sewer,				Guilderland Planning Department									



	<p>transportation, and pedestrian connections, expand opportunities for housing types other than single-family in appropriate districts, provided there are design standards to ensure new housing is compatible with existing neighborhoods.</p>												
<p>D4.</p>	<p>Consider updating zoning regulations to require major subdivisions and large developments to incorporate affordable housing options such as smaller lots, smaller houses, and dwelling units for households earning 80% to</p>				<p>Guilderland Planning Department</p>								



	120% of area median income.												
D5.	Offer a density bonus of additional dwelling units if certain amenities or features, such as affordable housing, senior housing, open space, recreation, and/or public access are included in a housing development.				Guilderland Planning Department								
D6.	Proactively develop policies for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) in the Town – either attached or detached – as an opportunity for alternative housing options in single-family residential neighborhoods while preserving the character of				Guilderland Planning Department, NYS Homes and Community Renewal	NYS HCR Plus One ADU Program grants							



	these neighborhoods.												
D7.	Update the definition of manufactured housing units to better reflect state laws and the current state of the manufactured housing industry.				Guilderland Planning Department								
D8.	Amend zoning regulations to address if/where the development of tiny homes should be permissible within the Town of Guilderland.				Guilderland Planning Department								
D9.	Partner with an appropriate housing agency, such as the Albany County Rural Housing Alliance, to facilitate the rehabilitation of older homes and rental units occupied by low- and moderate-				Albany County Rural Housing Alliance								



	income households.												
D10.	Partner with existing non-profit organizations (e.g., Albany County Land Bank) and/or establish a Town housing trust fund to address critical housing needs and support a variety of affordable housing activities.				Albany County Land Trust								
D11.	Add an inclusionary zoning requirement for affordable residential units in Planned Unit Developments (PUD).				Guilderland Planning Department								
D12.	Consider using density restrictions rather than minimum lot sizes in the RA3 and RA5 District along with the provision for density bonuses				Guilderland Planning Department								



	that incentivize affordable housing types, open space protection, and other desired amenities.												
D13.	Promote the creation of more modestly sized and affordable housing types by revising minimum lot size regulations that prevent construction on smaller lots.				Guilderland Planning Department								
D14.	Explore the feasibility of a mixed-use Town Center near the intersection of State Route 155 and Western Avenue, to create a compact community node with residential, commercial, and other amenities.				Guilderland Planning Department								
D15.	Promote an enhanced sense of place and				Guilderland Planning Department								



	community with new, attractive gateway signage at the Town's northern and southern boundaries on Western Avenue/US-20.												
D16.	Explore the feasibility of a new, sustainably built mixed-use neighborhood node in northern Guilderland.				Guilderland Planning Department								



Parks, Recreation, Open Space & Historic Resources													
Recommended Action		Timeframe to Initiate (Years)			Potential Lead and Partners	Potential Funding/ Technical Resources	Needed Action and Status						
		0-2	2-5	5-10			Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7
E1.	Maintain and upgrade the Town's existing recreational facilities and programs.				Guilderland Parks & Recreation Department	Environmental Protection Fund Grant Program for Parks, Preservation and Heritage (EPF)							
E2.	Initiate formalized opportunities for residents to provide input on the Town's changing recreational needs, in light of a changing demographic profile in Guilderland and prevailing national trends.				Guilderland Parks & Recreation Department								
E3.	Formalize regular coordination between the Town of Guilderland Parks & Recreation Department and representatives of the University at Albany,				Guilderland Parks & Recreation Department, UAlbany, Guilderland YMCA, Guilderland Public Library, school districts								



	<p>Guilderland Public Library, the Guilderland YMCA, school districts, and other local organizations, in order to provide a well-publicized range of year-round recreational opportunities, especially for youth and older Town residents.</p>												
E4.	<p>Identify potentially underutilized Town-owned resources and explore the creation of new recreational opportunities for Town residents, particularly in the Westmere area of Guilderland.</p>				<p>Guilderland Parks & Recreation Department, Guilderland Planning Department</p>								
E5.	<p>Develop a network of multi-use trails in Guilderland to link neighborhoods, public</p>				<p>Guilderland Traffic Safety Committee, Guilderland Planning Department,</p>	<p>Recreational Trails Program through the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic</p>							



	transportation nodes, Town park/open space areas, commercial and entertainment centers, and regional trail systems.				Guilderland Parks & Recreation Department, NYS Department of Transportation (DOT)	Preservation (OPRHP)							
E6.	Update and harmonize the definitions of open space in Town zoning, subdivision regulations, and the Conservation Easement Agreement Exemption so that the definitions are consistent and accurately reflect the varieties and purposes of open space.				Guilderland Planning Department								
E7.	Update and harmonize the residential cluster/conservation development and open space/parkland				Guilderland Planning Department								



	section of the Town code.												
E8.	Consider forming a Ridgeline Protection Overlay District to protect steep slopes along the Helderberg Escarpment and the Settles Hill areas of Town from non-farm development.				Guilderland Planning Department								
E9.	Incorporate the preservation of Helderberg Escarpment viewsheds into subdivision, site plan, and special use permit reviews.				Guilderland Planning Department								
E10.	Create an action plan for the identification, voluntary acquisition, and management of properties that comprise a comprehensive open space and natural resource				Conservation Advisory Council, Guilderland Planning Department								



	preservation system.												
E11.	Evaluate the adequacy of existing historic sites in Guilderland to support access and programming for residents – e.g., recitals, small-scale performances, and other cultural/educational events – factoring in the needs of youth, older residents, and those with disabilities.				Guilderland Historical Society/Historian	Technical Assistance Grants from The New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) and the Preservation League; NYSCA Preserve New York Program							
E12.	Promote the use of suitable historic sites as community gathering places for festivals, special observances, and educational opportunities.				Guilderland Historical Society/Historian								
E13.	Pursue available funding sources and develop				Guilderland Historical Society/Historian	Environmental Protection Fund Grants Program for							



	strategies for the sustained financial support of the Town’s historical cultural sites and programs.					Parks, Preservation and Heritage (EPF)							
E14.	Partner with higher education institutions in the region to foster engagement with historic and/or archaeological sites in Guilderland.					Guilderland Historical Society/Historian, UAlbany, SUNY Schenectady, Union College							
E15.	Ensure that land use regulations and incentives serve to support and protect historic/archaeologically sensitive areas in the Town.					Guilderland Planning Department							
E16.	Cultivate greater public awareness of Guilderland’s historic sites and resources, celebrating past contributions from a broad range of					Guilderland Historical Society/Historian							



	individuals and groups.												
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Transportation & Mobility													
Recommended Action		Timeframe to Initiate (Years)			Potential Lead and Partners	Potential Funding/ Technical Resources	Needed Action and Status						
		0-2	2-5	5-10			Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7
F1.	Enhance pedestrian mobility by working to link Town community centers, recreation facilities, neighborhoods, shopping, and employment areas with sidewalk networks and multi-use trails. Explore opportunities to connect Guilderland bike/pedestrian infrastructure to the Albany County Rail Trail and other regional trail networks.				Traffic Safety Committee, Guilderland Planning Department	Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG)							
F2.	Develop a Complete Streets Policy for Guilderland in recognition of the community's desire for a broad range of transportation options.				Traffic Safety Committee, Guilderland Highway Department, Guilderland Planning Department	Safe Streets for All (SS4A)							



F3.	Install benches, bicycle racks/parking, bike share nodes, bus shelters, and other appropriate street furniture in strategic locations to incentivize and support transportation options in Guilderland.				Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA)								
F4.	Upgrade road and pathway signage as appropriate to promote safe driving behavior and awareness of pedestrians/cyclists.				Guilderland Highway Department	Safe Streets for All							
F5.	Extend and enhance pedestrian walkways and safe crossings westward from Stuyvesant Plaza, facilitating greater foot traffic for businesses along Western Avenue.				Traffic Safety Committee, NYS DOT, Guilderland Highway Department								
F6.	Encourage and incentivize the integration of shared bike/pedestrian paths in housing developments, linking residential areas to one another as well as to parks, community services, and retail.				Guilderland Planning Department								



F7.	Consider the capabilities and characteristics of electric-powered bicycles as a factor in the design of bicycle infrastructure in Guilderland.				Traffic Safety Committee, Guilderland Planning Department, Guilderland Highway Department								
F8.	Partner with regional employers and CDTA to increase the use and the reach of public transportation for daily commuting, including potential expansion of the Universal Access bus pass system in Guilderland.				CDTA, Chamber of Commerce, Guilderland IDA								
F9.	Promote the use of mobility services such as CDTA Flex on demand, CDPHP Cycle bike share, ride-hailing services and electric car share.				CDTA								
F10.	Pursue funding from the Capital Region Transportation Council (CRTC), NYS DOT, and the NY Thruway Authority to address identified transportation-related issues in Guilderland.				CRTC, NYS DOT, NY Thruway, Capital District Thruway communities	BridgeNY Program, Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) Program							



F11.	In partnership with NYS DOT and the Guilderland School District, explore options to improve vehicular traffic flow to Guilderland public schools, including options for a secondary access route to Farnsworth Middle School for buses and/or emergency vehicles.				Guilderland School District, NYS DOT								
F12.	Review and update Town's standards and regulations for Guilderland roadways.				Guilderland Planning Department, Guilderland Highway Department, Guilderland Emergency Medical Services								



Governance													
Recommended Action		Timeframe to Initiate (Years)			Potential Lead and Partners	Potential Funding/ Technical Resources	Needed Action and Status						
		0-2	2-5	5-10			Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7
G1.	Update the Town Zoning to be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan Update.				Town Planning Department, Zoning Board of Appeals								
G2.	Continue to provide all areas of the community with a high level of fire, police, and emergency medical response services, while also adapting to the challenges of climate change				Guilderland Emergency Medical Services, Guilderland Police Department, fire districts								
G3.	Coordinate with the Town of Rotterdam and the City of Albany to ensure sustainable agreements for the delivery of high-quality drinking water.				Town of Rotterdam Department of Public Works, City of Albany Water Department								



G4.	Coordinate with the City of Watervliet for the effective management of the Watervliet Reservoir’s water supply, water quality, and recreational assets.				City of Watervliet Water and Sewer Department, Guilderland Water/Wastewater Department								
G5.	Coordinate with the NY State Department of Transportation and other stakeholders to address persistent flooding events on Western Avenue in the McKownville area of Guilderland.				NYS DOT, Guilderland Highway Department, NYS DEC, McKownville Improvement Association								
G6.	Ensure that Guilderland households and businesses have access to high-speed internet connection.				NYS Department of Public Service								
G7.	Coordinate Town functions to advance Guilderland’s participation in the Climate Smart Communities program.				Guilderland Planning Department, NYS DEC								



G8.	Coordinate with the Conservation Easement Review Board, the Conservation Advisory Council, the Town Assessor, and other stakeholders to expand participation in Guilderland’s Conservation Easement Exemption Program.				Conservation Advisory Council, Conservation Easement Review Board								
G9.	Coordinate with the Village of Altamont on maintenance and management of shared resources.				Village of Altamont								
G10.	Continue enforcing existing land use regulations.				Guilderland Planning Department, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Code Enforcement								



G11.	Continue coordination and collaboration with the Village of Altamont.			Guilderland Planning Department, Village of Altamont Board of Trustees, Rural Guilderland Referral Committee								
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Implementation													
Recommended Action		Timeframe to Initiate (Years)			Potential Lead and Partners	Potential Funding/ Technical Resources	Needed Action and Status						
		0-2	2-5	5-10			Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7
H1.	Review, evaluate, and amend the Town's zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations to ensure consistency with this Comprehensive Plan.				Guilderland Planning Department								
H2.	Establish a body and/or mechanism to guide the plan.				Guilderland Planning Department								
H3.	Continue to provide support or training opportunities for Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals members to keep up to date on current planning and zoning practices and laws and meet the minimum training requirements, pursuant to NY State Town Law.				NYS Department of State Division of Local Government Services								

10. Priorities Map

Overview

During the Comprehensive Plan Update process, input from the public and the CPUC emphasized preservation of open space and redevelopment of vacant or abandoned commercial areas as key Town priorities. Existing land uses such as agricultural activity, limited industrial zones, and commercial corridors were confirmed as largely appropriate for Guilderland’s future direction. However, a number of key priorities related to multimodal transportation, environmental conservation, viewshed preservation, and more were identified through iterative public engagement and CPUC deliberations.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS DISCUSSION

Town Character Factors

- Light commercial/retail in areas other than Western Ave
- Desire for more recreation and community gathering spaces
- Redevelopment/adaptive reuse of properties
- Increase walkability with sidewalks and multi-use trails
- Develop building, landscaping, and signage guidelines
- Preservation of viewsheds – Escarpment & rural corridors
- Preserve agricultural land and open space
- Improve traffic conditions, esp. Western Ave + schools
- Promote street tree planting; town arborist

A presentation slide from CPUC Meeting #9 depicts a number of recommendations related to Town character.

The Guilderland Priorities Map on the preceding page provides a graphic representation of those recommended actions that emerged from CPUC deliberations and public engagement, distributed across the landscape of the Town.

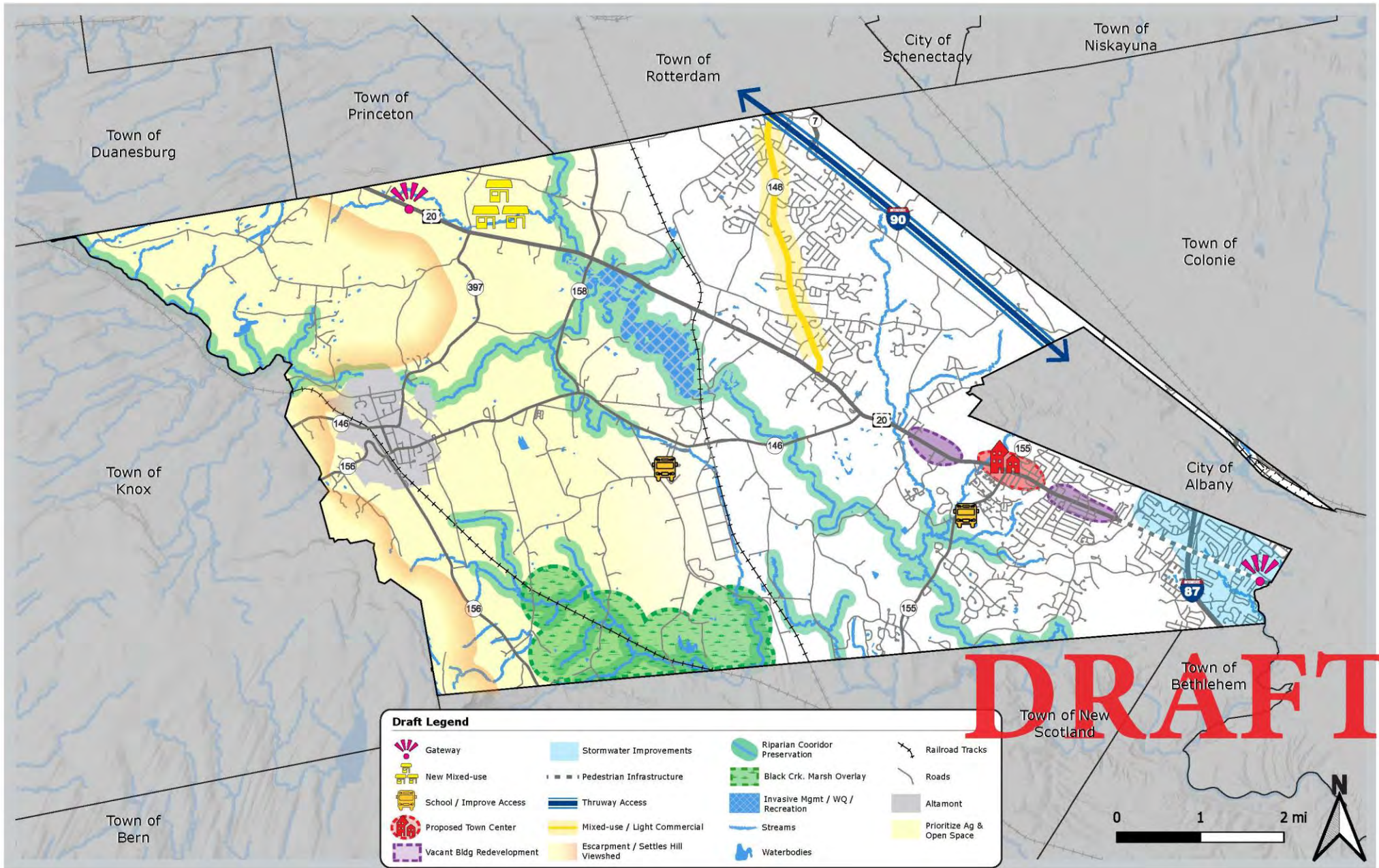


Figure 12: Guilderland Priorities Map

Gateways

As a Town made up of numerous hamlets and neighborhoods, it may not always be clear to residents and visitors when they are within Guilderland’s boundaries. Gateway signage offers an opportunity to build place awareness and offer welcome – or welcome home – to travelers on Guilderland’s roads. Signage installed in a traffic roundabout on Carman Road and Lydius Street in 2023 provides just such a welcome to those arriving from Schenectady/Rotterdam. Given how important Western Avenue/US-20 is to Guilderland – identified by many stakeholders as the Town’s de facto Main Street – there is an opportunity to enhance signage at both the southern boundary with the City of Albany and the northern boundary with the Town of Princetown. Rather than simply being informative, gateway signage holds the potential to build a sense of belonging and community togetherness. Positioning gateway signage in such a way as to allow photographs was recommended via public input.

Mixed-Use Neighborhood

Throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update process, several priorities emerged as repeated themes: the desire for a wide array of housing options, an interest in sustainable/green building, and a perceived need to distribute commercial activity more widely throughout the Town, to address underserved areas. The CPUC supported investigating the feasibility of creating a new mixed-use neighborhood, sustainably constructed in a manner that is compatible with its surroundings. Given existing commercial offerings in the eastern parts of Town (Westmere and Guilderland Hamlet) and in the Village of Altamont in the west, the CPUC identified the northern area of Guilderland – near the Princetown boundary – as an area lacking in commercial offerings.

Improved School Access

In response to public input about vehicle access at both Farnsworth Middle School and Guilderland High School, the CPUC recommended seeking appropriate agency partnerships and funding to improve access at these two public school complexes.

Proposed Town Center

Guilderland experienced periods of elevated population growth during past decades when car-centric development patterns prevailed. The result, as members of the CPUC and the public have noted, is the lack of a distinct center in Guilderland – a place for Town residents to meet and gather. Exploring the feasibility of a Town Center development – comprising a mix of retail, residential, entertainment, and other services – was identified as a key future priority, to begin to focus the civic energies of the community. In keeping with the goal of using existing infrastructure efficiently, the intersection of Western Avenue/US-20 and State Route 155 was identified as a potentially suitable location for a Town Center,

with available water, sewer, and transportation infrastructure to support the mix of envisioned uses.

Redevelopment of Vacant/Underutilized Sites

Since Western Avenue carries much of the vehicular traffic in Guilderland, vacant or dilapidated sites along that corridor have a negative influence on the Town character and economy. Finding creative, productive solutions to redevelopment and/or brownfield remediation at Western Avenue sites between Foundry Road and Rapp Road is, therefore, a priority with aesthetic, economic, and environmental benefits.

Stormwater Improvements

Through the Comprehensive Plan Update process, public input identified frequent flooding as both a transportation and livability concern in the McKownville area of Guilderland. With the climate changes discussed elsewhere in this Plan, the importance of resilient transportation and water infrastructure is of paramount importance, particularly as the Transit-Oriented Development district anchored by Crossgates Mall attracts an increasing number of visitors to the Town for shopping, services, and residential opportunities.

Pedestrian Infrastructure

Both Crossgates Mall and Stuyvesant Plaza generate substantial amounts of vehicular traffic along Western Avenue in eastern Guilderland. Public input during the Comprehensive Plan Update process indicated a need for improved pedestrian amenities – safe crossing areas, signage, street furniture, attractive plantings – along this corridor to facilitate greater walkability. Providing these pedestrian amenities can also serve to activate the Transit Oriented Development district around Crossgates Mall, allowing those who arrive in Guilderland via public transit to more easily visit businesses along Western Avenue and allowing those who park at Crossgates or Stuyvesant Plaza to patronize other Western Avenue shops and services without the need to drive to a nearby parking lot.

Thruway Access

Elsewhere in New York State – in Buffalo, for instance – the New York Thruway accommodates regional traffic, ameliorating pressure on surface roads. At present, tolls and limited access points on the Thruway in the Capital District contribute to high traffic demand on Western Avenue/US-20, especially at peak traffic times. Lower Level of Service (LOS) on Western Avenue negatively impacts daily life and commuting for Guilderland residents, per input submitted by both Guilderland residents and members of the CPUC. Working with neighboring Capital District municipalities and relevant regional/State transportation agencies, it is recommended that Guilderland initiate a process to expand the use of the Thruway for intra-regional travel, thus lessening the burden on Western Avenue.

Mixed-Use/Light Commercial

Public input on Guilderland land use identified a desire for creating additional light commercial/retail offerings along Carman Road/NY-146 between Western Avenue and the NY Thruway. Mixed land uses were recommended in order to incorporate housing and expand the range of residential offerings in Town.

Escarpment/Settles Hill Viewshed

The Helderberg Escarpment is a defining feature of Guilderland’s geography. Together with the Settles Hill area in the northwestern corner of the Town, these hillside areas contribute to important viewsheds and comprise important environmental resources such as tree cover. Creating an overlay district to preserve important environmental and scenic resources from non-agricultural development emerged as a point of emphasis in public input through the Comprehensive Plan Update process.

Riparian Corridor Preservation

Riparian corridors comprise important vegetation and tree cover along and beside waterways. Such vegetation serves to stabilize stream banks, filter potential pollutants, and maintain important habitat for animals. Protecting the riparian corridors along the Normanskill and its tributaries emerged as a high priority in both public and Committee input throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update process.

Black Creek Marsh Overlay

The wetland complex in Guilderland’s southeastern corner, fed by Black Creek, provides critical ecosystem services such as stormwater management and habitat for aquatic and avian species. Creating an overlay zone in future land use regulations is intended to safeguard this vital Town resource from incompatible development.

Water Quality at Watervliet Reservoir

Watervliet Reservoir, as a collaboratively managed environmental resource, is a vital Town asset that provides drinking water, scenic viewsheds, and passive recreation opportunities to the people of Guilderland. The Reservoir also provides important animal habitat, although this and other Reservoir functions are negatively impacted by invasive species, such as water chestnut. Input throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update process placed a strong emphasis on ensuring the enduring viability of the Reservoir as a source of clean drinking water, working with relevant partners to create contingency plans for potential contaminants or other threats.

Prioritize Open Space & Agriculture

The low-density rural development patterns in western Guilderland lend that part of Town with features – e.g., open space, attractive viewsheds, agriculture – that emerged as some of the most valued assets through public engagement activities. Prioritizing the

preservation of these characteristics through appropriate land use regulations and working to codify the protection of open space through the use of conservation easements and other tools will remain a key focus for the Town in the future.