

TOWN OF CORTLANDT MASTER PLAN

CHAPTER 7: LOCAL MUNICIPAL SERVICES

A. INTRODUCTION

GOAL: Develop and maintain adequate services to serve the Town's population and businesses

Local municipal services such as schools, libraries, fire departments and ambulance corps, health care services, senior citizen programs and child care are vital pillars of community life. Other local services include sanitation, highway, planning, zoning, engineering, code enforcement, water & sewer, etc. Residential and commercial growth in recent years has burdened local services. The Town's school districts, in particular, have experienced significant growth in enrollment, which has, in turn resulted in costly building programs in all school districts. Volunteer fire departments and EMS/ambulance corps serve more homes and businesses every year.



State Police & Cortlandt Regional Paramedic Headquarters

Meeting the challenge of providing essential services is one that requires constant attention and support by the Town. Other services, such as outreach to seniors and teens, support of the Croton-Cortlandt Center for the Arts, are needed more than ever.

Strategies for providing these services to Town residents and dealing with the impact of new development are key to making services available on a continuing basis. New development should address potential problems and impacts on existing services.

B. BASE STUDIES SUMMARY

The Master Plan Base Studies contains general information on local services such as schools, fire protection, ambulance service, health care, postal and retail services, child care and senior citizen programs. In response to new development, local fire districts are looking for ways to maintain the current high level of emergency services while not overburdening the taxpayer. Due to increased school enrollments in the last ten years local schools have added classrooms and teaching staff while increasing school budgets and taxes.

While the Town of Cortlandt is served by seven postal districts, post offices such as Verplanck and Crompond do not provide home delivery and Cortlandt Manor does not have its own post office. In recent years the Hudson Valley Hospital Center has completed a major expansion program of its building and health services and medical and dental office space in the town is in demand. In response to growing senior citizen and teenager populations the Town of Cortlandt continues to fund and expand programs and other assistance for these age groups.

C. OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

The following objectives and policies are intended to implement the goal for the development and maintenance of adequate local services to serve the Town's residents and businesses and to ensure that allowable growth does not exceed the capacity of such services.

OBJECTIVE: Improve services for the public by assisting the local school districts, libraries, fire districts, police services, ambulance, health care, homeland security and postal services and provide more town information and access via the internet and on the local cable channel.

Policy 115: Explore methods of reducing impacts from new developments on the School districts and on Town Services.

Explore methods of reducing impacts from new developments through efforts to attract new rateables to school districts that are particularly overburdened. Likewise, school districts should be encouraged to respond to proposals for new development with regard to potential negative fiscal impacts and increased enrollments.

In order to better address the fiscal status of local services and school districts, the Town should consider collecting fees from developers to fund comprehensive regional studies with neighboring municipalities which would assist in better evaluating the actual fiscal impact from proposed new development.

Policy 116: Respond to the service and equipment needs of the various fire departments.

In response to the cumulative effect of many new housing and commercial development projects throughout the Town, the fire districts are looking for ways to maintain the current high level of emergency services while not overburdening the taxpayers of the districts.

One such way as proposed by the Lake Mohegan Fire District is for developers to donate money to the Apparatus Replacement Fund; the Montrose Fire Department has also suggested that the Town request funds from developers to purchase a new 100' ladder truck.

Over the years various fire departments have indicated, in response to new development, that certain areas within their districts require capital improvements in order to foster optimum fire and ambulance protection to the Town.

One example of such capital improvements is the building of new fire stations like the one recently constructed by the Lake Mohegan Fire District on Oregon Road near Westbrook Drive.

The Plan supports the concept of requesting and/or requiring developers to contribute to any necessary capital improvements in the fire districts to better serve said future development.



Lake Mohegan Fire Station

Policy 117: Continue to provide incentives for Fire Department and Emergency Medical Service volunteers such as property tax reductions for volunteer service.

Cortlandt is fortunate to have much of their fire and ambulance services provided for by professional volunteers. The Town is encouraged to continue to support any and all efforts of these various departments to maintain a large volunteer base.

Throughout northern Westchester, as the population continues to grow, housing prices increase, and the demographics of where people work changes, many volunteer fire departments and EMS units face a problem in attracting volunteers.

Although the Town of Cortlandt is one of the most affordable Towns to live within northern Westchester County, it should continue to investigate ways to provide incentives to local volunteers (such as property tax abatements and the like) to continue to provide encouragement to residents to volunteer for in fire departments and EMS agencies.



Hudson Valley Hospital Center - Cortlandt Manor

Policy 118: Encourage the establishment of a new post office facility for Cortlandt Manor, NY 10567.

A new Cortlandt-based post office would be a strong focal point for Town's identity and would nicely accompany the recent Cortlandt Manor 10567 designation. In addition, a major public building such as a post office adds considerably to the identity of a hamlet as a center for community activity. Locations that could be considered for this new post office include areas such as in the vicinity of the Cortlandt Manor Train Station or in the Van Cortlandtville Hamlet.

The Town should seek assistance from the U.S. Postal Service to help it achieve the goal of a Cortlandt Manor, NY 10567 Post Office facility. It should be noted that a new post office was one of the most often cited concerns regarding community identity and character. The Town should also lobby for postal delivery for the hamlets of Verplanck, Crompond and Mohegan Lake.

Policy 119: Continue to provide financial support to the libraries that provide library services to the Town's residents

As indicated in the Base Studies, there are three libraries that serve the Town of Cortlandt population and they are the Hendrick Hudson Free Library in Montrose, the Croton Free Library in Croton-on-Hudson, the Field Library in Peekskill, and the John C. Hart Memorial Library in the Shrub Oak hamlet in Yorktown. These libraries belong to the Westchester Library System and continue to see an increase, from year to year, in the demand for their services. Cortlandt has provided financial support to all local libraries and should continue to do so in the future.

Policy 120: Continue to improve the Town's web site, online services and Cable TV coverage.

In addition to the Town's Cable TV station, the Town has been actively involved in developing and maintaining a web site to constantly provide information to its resident population over the internet.

The Town's web site is a major source of information about the various Town Departments and services, including a calendar of activities and meeting dates for the various Town Boards, Councils and Committees. The Town should continue to make future enhancements to its website that make it possible for the public to pay taxes, download building permits and other forms, water bills and other fees online and that the Town's Master Plan, the Zoning Ordinance and the Wetlands, Steep Slope and Tree Ordinances be available on the web site. Recommend the Town periodically notify residents of the existence of the Town website.

It is also recommended that all public hearings be advertised on the local cable channel and on the website and that more town meetings be televised and shown at various times to better inform the public.

Policy 121: Encourage the installation of high quality telecommunication infrastructure to support the needs of existing and future businesses in the Town.

As indicated in the Economic Development Strategy Report, the Town should work with telecommunication companies to ensure that its infrastructure is capable of supporting the growing needs of existing and future businesses and school systems, including installation and provision of access to fiber optic cables.

Policy 122: Continue to provide for the local coordination of homeland security with all levels of government.

In January, 2003 Cortlandt established the position of “Coordinator of Homeland Safety” within the Department of Environmental Services. Cortlandt was one of the first local communities to establish a homeland security position on a “local level”.

The purpose of the Coordinator of Homeland Safety is to be responsible for the overall administration of a wide range of emergency planning preparedness and the integration of various policies involving Federal, State and County procedures with respect to emergency planning.

The Coordinator of Homeland Safety closely coordinates security matters with other department heads including the Director of Technical Services and the Director of the Department of Environmental Services. Currently the Town is completing a program to provide emergency generator services to all critical facilities including the Town Hall and security lighting and other safety measure at sensitive locations.

The Master Plan encourages the Town to continue to provide for these needed interactions with respect to emergency planning, response, recovery, mitigation and preparedness with all levels of government.

OBJECTIVE: Continue to provide programs and support that benefit senior citizens, veterans, teens and individuals with disabilities.

Policy 123: Continue to provide specialized services for our senior citizens such as shopping vans, nutrition programs, support of senior citizen clubs, support of the Operation Snowflake program and pharmacy pick-up programs.

Cortlandt has a long history of providing a variety of services to its senior population including those listed above. The Plan strongly encourages the Town to continue to support and fund these necessary programs and to remain open to ideas for new programs and services to meet the needs of our senior citizens.

Policy 124: Continue to assist our veterans by maintaining our Veterans Council and supporting property tax exemptions for Veterans.

The Town should continue its support of the Veterans Council and to support veteran’s events and continue to designate select sites for memorials in recognition of their contribution.

In addition, the Town should continue its support of veteran’s property tax exemptions. In 1984, NYS passed an “Alternate Veterans Exemption” which grants an exemption to

Veterans for all service back to 1916. The exemption consists of 3 areas:

1. War time active service – 15% max.
2. Combat zone – Additional 10% max.
3. Disabled – 50%.

Policy 125: Continue support of the NOR-WEST program

Nor-West Regional Special Services is a social service agency which was established in 1973 and serves residents living in Cortlandt Manor, Peekskill, Ossining and Yorktown, amongst others. Nor-West's mission statement reads:

“Nor-West provides recreation programs for persons with differing abilities, and as such, plays an important role in the habitation and normalization of the disabled. Our goal is not only to provide recreation, but also to develop emotional security, social skills, physical coordination and personal confidence in each individual.”

Nor-West program offerings are diverse and are designed for individuals ages five through adult who have a developmental disability, and who have recreation needs not met by the traditional municipal recreation departments and organizations in their community. Cortlandt has a long history of supporting NOR-WEST and should continue to do so.

Policy 126: Continue to support and encourage cultural and art based organizations throughout the Town.

Paramount Center for the Arts

For over the past 15 years, Cortlandt has provided annual financial support to the Peekskill based “Paramount Center for the Arts”. The Master Plan committee encourages the Town to continue this commitment to this vital regional arts center.

Croton-Cortlandt Center for the Arts

For over the past 10 years, the Croton-Cortlandt Center for the Arts has been located at the Cortlandt owned and operated Charles J. Cook Park. Cortlandt has been providing financial support to the CCA throughout this time including through in kind services such as the use of the building, insurance coverage and advertisement through the Town of Cortlandt Recreation Brochure.

The Croton Cortlandt Center for the Arts describes their program as follows:

“The Croton Cortlandt Center for the Arts has been serving the communities of Northern Westchester for 12 years bringing education, art, and cultural services to the region's diverse populations. We have successfully provided art and education for children and adults. One of our goals in the coming year is to increase programming for middle school and high school age children”.



Statues at Cortlandt Train Station

Policy 127: Continue to evaluate appropriate geographic locations for Youth Activity Center and Teen Center.

Currently the Town has a Youth Activity Center on Albany Post Road in Montrose and is considering constructing a larger facility on Memorial Drive near the Cortlandt Train Station. In addition, the Town is evaluating the feasibility of providing Teen facilities at the Cortlandt Community Room located at the Cortlandt Town Center on Route 6.

**OBJECTIVE: Maintain the planning and development process
at its highest efficiency and effectiveness.**

Policy 128: Strengthen enforcement of building and zoning codes, environmental and other regulatory compliance. Make the development process more efficient, informative, and fair to the Town, the applicant and the general public.

Many of the policies outlined in all areas of the Master Plan work toward better defining the criteria to be used in planning for new development in the community. This better definition should aid in making the approvals process more predictable and informative for the applicant, the Town and the general public. In addition, certain procedural elements that could specifically further this goal are identified below.

- A.** Create checklists for applicants to follow for providing information required by the Town Codes to the planning, zoning, and architectural review boards.
- B.** The Town Board, in coordination with the Planning Board, should establish maximum limits on the number of time extensions on subdivisions and site development approvals.
- C.** Increase the public hearing notification of nearby properties to be a radius of 500 feet from the applicant's property line.
- D.** Require in the subdivision and zoning regulations that applications to the Planning Board that remain inactive (no required written information or plans submitted) for more than twelve (12) months are deemed withdrawn.
- E.** Provide the public with a brochure that contains information from the Town's various environmental, zoning and planning regulations and include the maximum penalties under each item.
- F.** Require in the subdivision and zoning codes that there be on-site notices posted for public hearings.
- G.** Strengthen the enforcement of the Town's Environmental Protection Regulations. (see policy under Natural Resources).
- H.** Coordinate and organize local environmental protection and preservation ordinances and regulations under one umbrella title (see policy under Natural Resources).
- I.** All Town Departments and Boards that receive applications and issue permits should be required to place this information on a computer data base by tax lot number which can be utilized in the Town's GIS system and readily available to Town staff, applicants and the general public.
- J.** Require administrative penalties, in addition to permit fees, to be paid by property owners who allow work on their property to take place without first obtaining required permits such as: a building permit, a wetland permit; a steep slope permit; a sign permit; and a tree permit.

- K. Enhance the role of the economic/business facilitator recently established by the Town to promote and assist business owners with property improvements, use changes and relocations.

Policy 129: The Town should continue to encourage the use of Concept Committees with independent facilitators to foster consensus in the development process.

Concept committees are a vehicle to foster consensus among the various interested parties that own property or live in the vicinity of a proposed project, including independent facilitators, the applicant, businesses, Town staff and Board members, and representatives from relevant Town committees such as the CAC and PRC.

For large or controversial projects, a well-organized process of utilizing Concept Committees may offer significant improvements in the overall development process whereby initial interaction and negotiation can lead to improved efficiency of the formal review process. The Concept Committee can take an active role in determining the development program and, where appropriate, in determining the EIS Scope of Work to be followed for the SEQRA review of the project.

The Zoning Code should include Concept Committees with independent facilitators as a part of all procedures for large projects requiring special permits and a change of zoning district.

Policy 130: Encourage the creation of the function of “Planning Advocate” within the Town government.

The Master Plan encourages the Town Board to create the function of “Planning Advocate” to assist in long-range proactive planning in Town. Some topics include enhancing the physical appearance of roads, watershed protection, development trends, economic development, and participation in regional planning with other municipalities. The Planning Advocate role can be a local committee consistent of Town staff which will provide professional planning, citizens, Town and Planning Board members and led by the Supervisor.

