

## **Section C: BACKGROUND & PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

### **Background of the Town of Cortlandt Comprehensive Planning Process**

The Town of Cortlandt commenced a comprehensive planning process in 1998 to review and update the previously adopted 1991 Town of Cortlandt Master Plan. In 2000, this effort was upgraded to a new Comprehensive Master Plan to be completed in 2003 and adopted in 2004 by the Town Board. This effort began with the identification of the policies that have been implemented since 1991 and whether or not these policies have achieved their intended objectives; identified policies that had not been implemented and if these should still be pursued; and, identified any new needs or issues which should be addressed as part of the 2003 Master Plan.

The Master Plan Committee (MPC) worked tirelessly on this project for over 5 years. The 11 members on the front of this document reflect the current membership. They represent a cross-section of the Town including liaisons from the CAC and the Planning Board. Part of the process of the MPC was to meet with and/or correspond with various Town department heads, Board members, and local committees and councils including the Conservation Advisory Council, the Architectural Advisory Council, local historical societies, local and county officials and homeowners groups. The MPC also had several meetings with the Town Board during the master plan process to keep the Town Board up to date on the status and schedule of the work.

The Town of Cortlandt Town Board appointed a Master Plan Committee (MPC) by Resolution No. 214-98. In order to assure maximum public participation during the planning process the MPC appointees represent members of other Town boards and committees as well as citizens-at-large. Appointees included the Supervisor, a Town Board member, two members of the Planning Board, two members of the Zoning Board of Appeals, and one member each from the following committees: Conservation Advisory Council, Save Our Lakes, Traffic Safety Committee, Architectural Review Council, Pride in Cortlandt Committee. The MPC was also involved in the selection and interview process for a planning consultant to assist in the preparation of the Master Plan.

The Cortlandt planning staff and planning consultant, Stuart Turner & Associates, have assisted in the development of this plan. Maps for this document have been prepared with the assistance of and the Westchester County Geographic Information Systems.

### **Base Studies**

In order for a Master Plan to successfully guide future decision making in the Town, it must consider the past and present pattern of development, the physical and environmental setting and the Town's regional setting. The MPC conducted an extensive analysis of baseline conditions on a variety of topics important to the Town.

The Base Studies provide an informed platform from which to make reasoned Master Plan policy recommendations. The Base Studies was written to provide an inventory of current conditions and a well-balanced assessment of conditions that may affect policy decisions.

Baseline condition reports which were reviewed included the data prepared for the 1991 Plan and updated for the 2003 Plan. The policies then reflected current conditions on topics such as population (based on the 2000 Census) and housing, natural resources, community facilities, land use, transportation, utilities, economic development and historic and aesthetic resources. The MPC also conducted an extensive bus tour of the entire Town in 1998 and staff provided numerous photographs depicting the Town's visual character and existing conditions. The Base Studies benefited from the detailed land use and environmental mapping which resulted from the implementation of the Town-wide GIS in 2002.

The information contained in the existing conditions analyses, and public comment obtained through a Public Opinion Survey, as well as the significant public comment received at various public workshops and meetings, have been helpful in identifying challenges currently confronting Cortlandt and conceptualizing a vision for Cortlandt's future.

### **Draft Housing Action Plan**

During preparation of this Plan, the MPC also reviewed and commented on a draft Housing Action Plan dated May, 2000 which was prepared by Stuart Turner & Associates. This Housing Action Plan was forwarded to the Town Board for their consideration and the policies and recommendations of the Housing Action Plan have been incorporated into this Master Plan document.

The objectives of the Housing Action Plan were as follows:

1. To review the policies, goals, and objectives contained in the 1991 Master Plan related to affordable housing and determine whether the implementation measures to effectuate them have resulted in the establishment of affordable housing in Cortlandt.
2. To provide a demographic overview of the Town's population based on 1990 Bureau of the Census data on population and housing that were not available at the time the previous Master Plan Update was prepared. The demographic overview is intended to determine what portion of Cortlandt's population, if any, have unmet housing needs. It is possible to identify household types that may not have entry into the Cortlandt housing market by comparing the Town's population to Westchester County's population and determining what population segments in the County are not represented or underrepresented in the Town.

3. To review current County policies related to the provision of affordable housing. County policies influence the Town's ability to meet its housing allocation.
4. To recommend implementation measures to implement this Housing Action Plan.

### **Re-Use of the FDR VA Hospital**

The MPC was also involved in formulating a proposal for the re-use of the FDR VA Hospital by the Town of Cortlandt. This effort was conducted by Ernst & Young LLP, as consultants for the Town of Cortlandt and spanned several months. The MPC involvement in this committee's review and analysis allowed the MPC to better plan and understand this unique parcel in Town. Certain policies contained in the Master Plan address the FDR VA Hospital property.

### **Route 202/35, 6, Bear Mountain Parkway Sustainable Development Study**

In the spring of 2000, while the MPC has been deep in their process of creating the 2003 Master Plan, a major regional planning study (Sustainable Development Study) was initiated by the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) to guide land use patterns and transportation decision-making within a study area which included three major transportation corridors in Cortlandt: Routes 6, 202/35 and the Bear Mountain Parkway. The planning process for this Sustainable Development Study (SDS) has involved inter-municipal participation and cooperation among the three municipalities within which these corridors are located: the Town of Cortlandt, the Town of Yorktown, and the City of Peekskill. A draft of the Sustainable Development Study was released in September 2002.

The Town's 2003 Master Plan process was extended to consider and incorporate the SDS policies into the master plan document, where appropriate. It should be noted that the SDS is still as of January 2004, not complete or adopted. The MPC has chosen to incorporate some recommendations contained in the Draft SDS. However, similar to other major studies referenced in the Master Plan, the Town Board can choose to adopt any or all of the recommendation contained in the SDS and make it an addendum to this 2003 Master Plan.

### **The Croton Watershed Study**

Another major planning study which was taking place simultaneously to the 2003 Cortlandt Master Plan was the Croton Watershed Plan. The Croton Watershed Plan is a long-term plan which is being conducted by the Westchester County Planning Department and involves the cooperative effort of 12 communities surrounding the NYC watershed. A draft of the Croton Watershed Plan was released in March, 2003 and many of the suggested policies have been integrated into the 2003 Cortlandt Master Plan.

It is anticipated that sometime in 2004, a final “Comprehensive Croton Watershed Quality Protection Plan for Westchester County, NY” will be released. At that time, the Town Board can choose to adopt any or all of the recommendation contained in the “Croton Plan” and make it an addendum to this 2003 Master Plan.

### **Geographic Information Systems (GIS)**

The Master Plan process was also extended to make use of detailed land use and environmental mapping that became available as a result of the implementation of a Town-wide geographic information system (GIS). GIS mapping and analysis was provided by both in house staff and the Westchester County GIS.

### **Moratorium**

In October 2001, the Cortlandt Town Board adopted a local law establishing a moratorium with respect to filing new applications before the Planning Board. The purpose of the moratorium was to allow the Town time to conduct a review and update of its Master Plan and to have a citizens (MPC) committee make recommendations to the Town Board with respect to any changes to be made to that plan. During the period of the moratorium, projects that had already been filed with the Planning Board before a certain date were allowed to continue through the approval process.

### **Goals and Objectives**

Like the 1991 Master Plan, the 2003 Plan identified goals and objectives. The goals and objectives contained in the 1991 Master Plan were reviewed by the MPC to use as a foundation to build on in the 2003 Plan. *Unlike* the 1991 Plan the 2003 Plan combines the goals and objectives with the policies in each chapter of the Master Plan document instead of in a separate report. The goals and objectives addressed the issues and visions identified and studied by the MPC that supports the policies.

### **Master Plan Policies**

The MPC conducted extensive reviews of the 118 policies of the 1991 Town of Cortlandt Master Plan which served as a foundation to build on in the 2003 Plan. Although many of the 118 policies were implemented since 1991, in some cases changed conditions required a new approach to past policies to address both short and long range planning needs in the Town. The MPC also carried over or updated policies that were either on-going or not implemented since 1991.

The 2003 Master Plan contains many new policies to address existing conditions and to implement the goals and objectives.

### **Overview: Comprehensive Planning in New York State**

New York State Town Law regulates the preparation and adoption of comprehensive plans. Section 272-a of that law states that a comprehensive plan is one that will “identify the goals and objectives, principles, guidelines, policies, standards, devices and instruments for the immediate and long-range protection, enhancement, growth and development” of a town. Preparation of a Comprehensive Plan is discretionary, i.e., it is not required.

However, if a plan is prepared and adopted subsequently by the Town Board, the town’s land use regulations must be in accord with the adopted comprehensive plan. In addition, governmental agencies must take the adopted town comprehensive plan into consideration when planning capital projects that are located in the municipality.

A variety of local, county, state and other regional agencies review actions or make decisions that affect the overall land use and development pattern and character of the Town. These agencies include, but are not limited to the Town Board, Planning Board, school and fire districts, Westchester County and New York State transportation departments, and other groups. In these activities, they should be guided by a comprehensive plan that provides direction and a framework for this decision-making.

Section 272-a also guides the content of the comprehensive plan. A comprehensive plan may include the following elements:

- *General statement of goals, objectives, principles, policies for the immediate and long-range enhancement, growth and development of the town.*
- *Consideration of regional needs and plans of other government agencies.*
- *Existing and proposed location and intensity of land uses, including commercial, industrial, residential, open space, institutional and other uses.*
- *Consideration of agricultural uses, historic and cultural resources, coastal and natural resources.*
- *Consideration of demographic and socio-economic trends.*
- *The location and types of transportation facilities.*
- *Existing and proposed general location of utilities.*
- *Existing housing and future housing needs, including affordable housing.*
- *The present and general location of educational, health, emergency protection and other community facilities and services.*
- *Existing and proposed active and passive recreation facilities.*
- *Strategies for improving the local economy.*
- *Implementation measures to achieve the plan’s goals and objectives.*
- *Other items which are consistent with the orderly growth and development of the town.*

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The 2003 Master Plan process was a public process spanning some 5 years. The Cortlandt Community was invited to participate in helping to create this document that would help chart Cortlandt's future.

Public participation serves several important purposes. For one, the Master Plan is a community-based effort and reflects the cumulative values of the Town residents. Many comments made by the public helped modify and focus the work conducted by the MPC. Local residents also bring a level of expertise on Town history and conditions in their own local neighborhoods. To that end, Cortlandt chose to conduct various public forums in various neighborhoods throughout the Town so as to provide a more in-depth public participation format.

### **Public Participation in the Preparation of the 2003 Master Plan:**

There have been many public meetings during the 5 year process to prepare the 2003 Master Plan including regularly scheduled MPC meetings, overview meetings with the Town Board officials and special public forums. The regularly schedule MPC meetings were held in the Cortlandt Town Hall usually twice a month and sometimes weekly as needed in 2003 to complete the work. All MPC meetings were open to the public. Prior to the meetings, agendas were given to the media, Town officials and interested parties and posted on the Town's web site. Minutes of the meetings were prepared. Similarly, the overview meetings with the Town Board were conducted at regularly scheduled work session meetings which are open to the public.

One of the first documents prepared by the MPC was a Public Opinion Survey concerning various important issues confronting the Town. This questionnaire was distributed throughout the Town that generated approximately 380 responses. The results were then tabulated in a report to the MPC and the Town Board.

As indicated below, various public forums were held at Town Hall during the preparation period. These forums were well advertised in all the local newspapers including the Pennysaver, plus notices were posted on community bulletin boards and given to various Town officials, departments, committees and neighborhood associations.

### **Information Public Meeting – November, 1999**

A Public Information Meeting was first held in November, 1999 to explain the history and process of preparing and adopting a Master Plan and to provide an overview of the topics concerning the Town to be included in the Plan. The public also had an opportunity at this meeting to discuss important issues to be considered by the MPC concerning traffic, open space, recreation, tree cutting and sewers, among others.

**Public Informational Meeting - June, 2001**

In June 2001, the Master Plan Committee held a public forum at Town Hall to obtain citizen input on the issues, opportunities and challenges confronting the Town. This forum presented information to the public concerning the Master Plan process and provided an opportunity for the public to offer comments and suggestions on specific issues during the workshop portion of the meeting. These suggestions were taken into consideration during the development of this Plan.

**Public Informational Meeting - March, 2003**

In March of 2003 the MPC held an informational public meeting to review the progress made on its update of the Town's Master Plan that included an overview of the draft Master Plan goals, objectives and policies and a discussion of the next steps in the process. Also comments and questions from the public were discussed at this meeting. In the months following this meeting the MPC received many written comments from the public and citizen groups that were considered.

**Special Joint Meeting of TB, PB, ZBA and MPC – September, 2003**

In addition to the public informational meetings, various Special Joint Meetings of the Planning Board, the Zoning Board of Appeals, The Town Board and the MPC were held. The latest of which was held:

- **Saturday, September 6, 2003:** Presentation at the Town Board, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals Joint Board meeting of progress made to-date and the future plan for presentation and adoption by the Town Board.

**Fall 2003 Public “Workshops” in Various Geographic Locations:**

In September through November, 2003 the MPC conducted three (3) neighborhood public workshops in three different geographic areas in the Town on Saturdays that lasted each a minimum of 3 hours as follows:

- **Saturday, September 13, 2003:** Focused on areas of Crugers, Montrose, and Verplanck. Held at the Red Schoolhouse, Sixth Street, Verplanck, NY.
- **Saturday, September 20, 2003:** Focused on areas of South of Maple Avenue, East of Route 9 including Furnace Woods, Mt. Airy, Blue Mountain, Quaker Ridge and Teatown. Held at: Blue Mountain Middle School, Furnace Dock Road.
- **Saturday, October 18, 2003 & Saturday November 15, 2003:** Focused on areas North of Maple Avenue, East of Route 9, including Crompond, Mohegan Lake, the Northeast quadrant, Gull Manor, Lake Allendale, Toddville, Annsville and Van Cortlandtville. Held at: Cortlandt Town Hall, 1 Heady Street. NOTE: This workshop was adjourned to November and continued on November 15.

**Town Board Public Participation Process**

The formal adoption of the Master Plan by the Town Board also involved public participation. While the actual Master Plan carries no legislative authority, its importance to the community is emphasized by a mandatory environmental review through the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA).

Specific Town Board Public Workshops and Meetings include:

- January 26, 2004: A Monday evening Town Board Work Session dedicated solely to the discussion of the Final Draft of the Master Plan.
- January 31, 2004: A Saturday morning/afternoon Joint Meeting between the Town Board and the Master Plan Committee.
- February 10, 2004: At an official Town Board Meeting the – receive and final the 2003 Final Comprehensive Master Plan and schedule Public Hearing for April 20, 2004.
- March 9, 2004: At an official Town Board Meeting – receive and file the Scoping Document for the GEIS.
- March 29, 2004 – Special Meeting of the Town Board – Declare Lead Agency, Adopt Amended Master Plan and Scope for GEIS.
- April 20, 2004 – Official Town Board Public Hearing on the 2003 Comprehensive Master Plan.
- May 11, 2004 – Official Town Board Public Hearing on the 2003 Comprehensive Master Plan.
- June 15, 2004 - Official Town Board Public Hearing on the 2003 Comprehensive Master Plan.

**Town Board/SEQRA & The Adoption of the Master Plan**

The adoption of the 2003 Master Plan will require the preparation of a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS), which Cortlandt is completing with the assistance of Turner & Associates. The SEQRA process requires a formal public hearing on the Draft GEIS and the comments received are to be used in preparation of the Final GEIS and making modifications to the Master Plan based on public comments. As specified in NYS legislation, the EIS public hearing is combined with the locally mandated public hearing. The Town Board as the lead agency will refer the Master Plan to the Planning Board for its review and comments prior to its adoption. The Planning Board of the Town of Cortlandt held a Special meeting on March 23, 2004 to review the Plan. The Town Board is expected to adopt this Master Plan at their August 17, 2004 meeting.



