

Section A: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Comprehensive Master Plan for the Town of Cortlandt, NY is a document which will help the Town guide growth and development while preserving and enhancing the environment, the Town's financial health, security, infrastructure, aesthetics and other quality of life issues. The 2003 Comprehensive Master Plan replaces the previous Master Plan which was adopted in 1991.

The current Master Plan effort began in 1998 with an intention to review and update the 1991 Master Plan. Since then the process has evolved into a more comprehensive analysis resulting in a full Master Plan. The effort began with the identification of the policies that have been implemented since 1991. This process included an evaluation of the reasons for various policy recommendations and how these policies relate to current conditions.

The planning process has revealed that Cortlandt is a evolving from a community which experienced significant residential expansion to one that is "maturing". i.e. a community with more limited development opportunities, and possible re-use of developed parcels transforming its character. It was decided that particular attention should be paid to the Town's environmental, architectural and visual character as part of the Comprehensive Master Plan .

The Comprehensive Master Plan represents an effort spanning over 5 years by the Master Plan Committee (MPC) and who were assisted by the Town of Cortlandt Department of Technical Services (DOTS) and the Towns Master Plan consultant Stuart Turner Associates. This Master Plan was prepared largely in-house by Town staff.

The Plan's recommendations include considerable input from various Town Boards, Committees, Associations and residents. Public participation in the planning effort was ensured by open meetings, several public information hearings, and a formal review process for approving the Master Plan. Please see the "Public Participation" Section for more information. A great deal of supporting information relating to existing conditions and recent changes is available in the "Base Studies" which was completed by Town staff in early 2003. The base studies are available for review in the Town of Cortlandt Town Hall – DOTS – Planning Division offices.

The 11 member volunteer MPC committee was created by the Town Board which was comprised of individuals with varying backgrounds and included liaisons from the Planning Board, the Conservation Advisory Council, The Zoning Board of Appeals, the Architectural Review Board, the Parks & Recreation Advisory Council, local historical societies, local and county officials and homeowners groups. During the 5 years of extensive information collection and analysis, the MPC met regularly on their own, and held several joint meetings with the Town Board to keep them up to date on the status and schedule of the work.

There are a total of 151 policies contained in the Comprehensive Master Plan . The word “policies” should not be interpreted to be more than what it is– which is - recommendations for policy changes or revisions. The policies contained in the Comprehensive Master Plan will help the Town direct and manage the decision-making process for years to come. The Master Plan is a legal tool in justifying major zoning changes, subdivision and site plan laws and other ordinances.

The “Summary of the Policies” listed below briefly summarizes all 151 policies contained in the Master Plan.

Summary of Policies

Residential Development

Cortlandt is largely a residential community with over 94% of its land currently zoned for Residential uses. This Master Plan recommends minor changes to the residential character of Cortlandt which includes a rich and diverse set of old and new residential neighborhoods that accommodate a variety of housing types, from multifamily dwellings to small-lot bungalows to large estate properties. This recommendation was reached after an arduous process that included evaluating up-zoning over two thirds of the land area of Cortlandt that the Master Plan committee felt would preserve the visual character of the Town and the environment by reducing development potential. However, the Town Board felt, and Town staff agreed, that these objectives could be accomplished by expanding restrictions on development by establishing stricter standards in wetland buffer areas, CEA’s and other environmentally sensitive areas. This will be reflected in a revised lot count formula which is the first step in identifying a build-out potential of a particular property.

The Town’s Residential Zoning Code will continue to permit half-acre (20,000 square foot) lots and smaller in the northern and western portions of the Town; the R-40 zone, which allows one acre lots in the central portion of the Town; and, the most southerly areas of Cortlandt will remain zoned for lots generally two acres in size.

Over the past decade, much of the residential growth in the Town has resulted in the creation of large-lot single family detached dwellings. The Plan seeks to implement measures that will ensure that a percentage of all housing that is constructed in the Town is affordable. Therefore the Master Plan calls for the adoption of an affordable housing program. The Plan calls for the elimination of the Planned Village Development (PVD) Concept and the Special Re-Use Conservation (SRC). The Master Plan also encourages cluster open space design for new residential subdivisions to further protect environmentally sensitive areas and open space.

Commercial Development

Within the context of an overwhelmingly residential land use pattern, the Master Plan specifically seeks to achieve the following three goals relating to commercial development and re-development.

- Promote a jobs/housing balance in the Town
- Balance the Town's ratable base.
- Target appropriate business niches such as research & development

Since adoption of the 1991 Master Plan, much of the nonresidential growth in the Town has occurred along the Route 6 corridor, the Town's primary commercial center. The Comprehensive Master Plan recommends that a "Regional Commercial Center District" redefining existing commercial development along Route 6.

Other recommendations include the creation of an "Office Research Area" by Special Permit which will encourage small office research parks on properties over 50 acres in size. These office research areas would be "campus like" in their settings and would be subject to the issuance of a Special Permit.

A major focus of the 2003 Plan was to create two new zones called – Waterfront Light Industrial and Waterfront Tourism – both of which are primarily located in Annsville and Verplanck. The Waterfront Light Industrial Area will target light industrial uses near waterfront - specifically in Verplanck and Annsville. The Plan suggests that heavier industrial type uses be "phased-out" in these locations. It should be noted that all uses permitted in the Waterfront Tourism districts will be permitted by Special Permit in the Light Industrial areas.

The Waterfront Tourism Area is intended to allow water-dependent and water-enhanced uses in the Annsville and Verplanck areas specifically marinas, boat yards, restaurants, gift shops, restaurants, and other tourist type uses. One objective is to link the areas with the Hudson River Greenway trail system, the Hudson Highlands Gateway Park and the Steamboat Riverfront Park and Trail.

Other suggestions in the 2003 Plan include reducing the potential for "strip" commercial development by redefining the Community Commercial Mixed Use Areas, along Oregon Road. Furthermore, the Plan recommends changing the existing HC zone to a General Commercial Area, creating a Business Mixed Use area along Route 9A as a transitional mixed use area separate from the Community Commercial area in Montrose. The purpose of the Business Mixed Use area is to allow business, services, and offices, as well as small-scale multifamily housing, retail and personal service uses.

The Plan also retains the Designed Industrial Area which currently exists on Furnace Dock Road. There are no new designed industrial areas because, in general, the Town lacks suitably large flat sites for light industrial uses that would be in close proximity to major transportation facilities that can accommodate truck traffic. A proposed Light Industrial Area will replace most of the existing M-1 districts scattered throughout the Town and would continue to operate as heavy commercial/industrial areas.

Open Space & Recreation

To preserve the attractive, rural appearance throughout Cortlandt, open space must be preserved. Cortlandt is proud of its recent successes in acquiring significant tracks of land for open space through partnerships with various government and private agencies. From 1992 – 2004, Cortlandt has increased open space by 65% from 2,729 acres to 4,502 acres.

However, there is more that must be done. The Comprehensive Master Plan discusses the land use related objectives and implementation measures that will achieve the Town's goal of preserving open space.

For planning purposes, the 2003 Master Plan defines open space as follows:

1. Dedicated open space areas that are largely vacant and are restricted from being developed.
2. Properties that are not explicitly dedicated to open space, but the use and character of the properties are essentially the same as dedicated open space such as cemeteries, golf courses and private recreation areas.
3. Undeveloped or underutilized privately-owned land. (e.g. Teatown Reservation Cliffdale Farm, Valeria, and the DeMaria Farm fall into this category.)

Since 1994, Parks, Recreation and Open Space parcels in public ownership are located within a Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) district as shown on the Town Zoning Map. Significant work on a Comprehensive Open Space Plan began in 1995 with the Conservation Advisory Council (CAC) preparing an Open Space Index of all vacant parcels over five (5) acres in size.

In 2000, the Town Board established an Open Space Committee dedicated to making recommendations to the Board regarding the acquisition of open space and conservation easements of any size. A primary objective of the Open Space Committee is the development and adoption of an "Open Space Plan". As was stated in the 1991 plan, an open space priority is to seek ways to increase public access to the Hudson River waterfront, particularly in the areas of Verplanck, the V.A. Hospital in Montrose and Annsville Circle.

Natural Resources

Cortlandt is blessed with natural resources which are diverse, accessible and contain elements of great value and significance. The 2003 Plan seeks to protect these areas of Town through a strong set of recommendations to protect the Town's natural resources. As was the case in the 1991 plan, a top priority under natural resources is to clean up polluted water bodies. The 2003 Plan addresses this primarily through compliance with the new Stormwater Phase II regulations which will help the Town identify areas of non-point source pollution. Water quality monitoring is a requirement of Stormwater Phase II and strongly supported in the Master Plan.

Conservation design is also strongly encouraged and recommended as part of the plan. Cortlandt has long had a record of success in utilizing its Wetlands, Steep Slopes and Tree Cutting Ordinances which have all served to help protect these natural resources. The 2003 Plan calls for more stringent regulations and for the Town to conduct a biennial review of all of these ordinances to ensure they remain up-to-date. Biodiversity and endangered species are also addressed in this section. Development should be planned in such a way, that to the greatest extent possible, the Town maintains high quality of its water resources and soils and continues to provide a natural habitat for its native wildlife.

The Plan supports public notification and education regarding the need to test well water, maintain septic systems and the Town's drainage system.

Traffic & Transportation

As part of the planning process, a Town wide public opinion survey was conducted. Not surprisingly, traffic/transportation issues were among the most important issues cited by our residents. Increased traffic on Town and State roadways is one of the most tangible results of continued development in Cortlandt and in the surrounding communities

Major policies addressing traffic and transportation include a recommendation to establish a proactive and continuous transportation planning function within the Town government. Some specific recommendations for this function include the development of a regional computer traffic model that would be continually updated with information provided by developers and information gathered from a continuous monitoring program which will record traffic volumes, accidents, etc. This information will help identify problem locations, help to prioritize road improvements and identify areas where traffic calming measures should be utilized.

In addition, the Plan specifically attempts to address how to improve traffic flow on older roads while preserving trees, stone walls, and other features that add to the attractive rural character of these areas.

Utilities & Local Municipal Services

As with traffic planning, the Master Plan recommends establishing a proactive and continuous water, sewer and drainage planning program within the Town Government to identify future utility improvements and capital projects.

Since 1991 the Town has successfully implemented a five-year Capital Improvement Program (CIP). The 2003 Plan strongly supports the continuation of this program. The cost of developing and maintaining public utilities is increasing and strategies for reducing and controlling such costs is critical. The recently completed GIS mapping of all storm water, sewer and water systems in the Town will permit the proper evaluation of existing facilities and foster proactive planning of all system improvements. Once again, the recently adopted Stormwater Phase II regulations are addressed in this section.

Local municipal services that are addressed in the Plan include schools, libraries, fire departments and ambulance corps, sanitation, highway, planning, zoning, engineering, code enforcement, health care services, senior citizen programs and child care programs.

Visual Quality & Community Appearance

The maintenance and enhancement of the visual nature and quality of our community was another top issue identified in the Master Plan survey. The Master Plan calls for the continuation of the Architectural Review Council as an advisory body to the Planning Board and which will review all site plan applications pending before the Planning Board. Furthermore, the Plan recommends developing a design manual and design review process which will improve the quality of design in the Town and ensure that new developments, renovations and signage are compatible with are in which they are located.

Additionally, the Comprehensive Master Plan encourages the creation of a Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (LWRP) to protect Cortlandt's unique waterfront and access to the Hudson River.

Historic Preservation

The Plan includes the identification of major historic areas in the Town as *Verplanck, Van Cortlandtville, Oregon Corners and Pleasantside* and recommends the creation of an historic design manual which would detail suggested design criteria to guide proposed activities which otherwise, might be detrimental to a historic property or an a historic neighborhood. In addition, the Plan suggests that the Town identify and list its historic roads and adopt a historic roads ordinance.

