

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS & TOWN CHARACTER SUBCOMMITTEE

HOUSING GOALS:

- I. Provide a balanced blend of quality housing opportunities, including a desirable range of housing types and price ranges, which are affordable and accessible for residents.
- II. As a general rule, ensure that all apartment buildings in all zones are located near transportation centers and limited to a percentage of overall town housing to match the objective sources for actual demand (not based on developers' studies) to create a balanced distribution of housing in town.
- III. Create sustainability developments that truly focus on diverse housing, environmental improvements and economic growth. Develop green building standards and codes that promote energy efficiency, water conservation and the use of sustainable materials.

HOUSING OBJECTIVES:

- 1) Develop policies and programs that help maintain and strengthen the character, value and enjoyment of existing housing resources in established neighborhoods of Guilderland.

Recommended actions:

- a. AVOID OVER-DEVELOPMENT: especially in or near established neighborhoods.
 - b. CREATE PARKS: Develop a park for the Westmere area that includes areas for adults as well as playsets and facilities that kids can use.
- 2) Ensure that the town's zoning accommodates the need for housing diversity, and that supply matches need/demand.

Recommended actions:

- a. MULTI-RESIDENCE ZONES: The subcommittee on housing has determined that the current available apartment housing units are sufficient for the demand in Town. We especially recommend against any future zoning changes for any additional MR zones.¹
- b. CURRENT CODE: The town code contains a variety of diverse types of housing (country hamlet, planned unit developments, senior housing, etc.). The subcommittee recommends adding some additional categories for "affordable housing" in the next section of this report.

¹ Donald Csaposs disagreed with this recommended action.

- 3) Encourage affordable housing opportunities for seniors and those with special needs, etc., that will allow residents to remain in town in their homes despite their changing housing care requirements.

Recommended actions:

- a. **ENCOURAGE SMALLER HOMES:** Encourage one-story ranch homes for seniors and people with special needs, etc., either in existing established neighborhoods or in new 1 to 1 ½ story “cottage-type” housing developments.
- b. **PROMOTE AGE-IN-PLACE PROGRAMS:** Promote town programs like Guilderland Senior Services which allow seniors to age in place in their own homes with a range of services.

- 4) Identify appropriate sites and incentives for the creation of housing options that are needed but not adequately provided for in the marketplace. Houses that are +/- 1,000-1,500 sq. ft. are one of the most desirable types of housing, part of the missing middle housing. These are homes that are more affordable than the single-family homes currently being built. To meet this objective, the committee recommends exploring the following:

Recommended actions:

- a. **INCENTIVIZE SMALLER HOMES:** These are generally understood to be one-story ranch type homes or cottages that can be “starter homes” or “downsizing” for senior citizens, or smaller more affordable houses for low to middle income working families.
- i. **Create a new “Affordable Home Zone” category in the code.** Create a new zoning category for developers to do smaller homes (+/- 1,000 to 1,500 sq. ft.) on smaller lot sizes than currently allowed in the zoning code (for example, if a zone calls for ¼ acre lot sizes, allow for 1/8 acre lot sizes for 1200 sq. ft. homes in these developments; that way the ¼ acre lot can be divided into two 1/8 acre lots with smaller houses on them). Setbacks would be adjusted accordingly, while still providing sufficient buffers between homes. This would incentivize building smaller homes because it would allow the developer to make the same amount of profit as larger homes on larger lots.
- ii. **Identify which areas of town this type of development would be suitable in.**
- b. **GIVE TAX INCENTIVES TO RENOVATING OLDER SMALLER HOMES:** Re-invest in established older neighborhoods. If possible, create tax incentives for renovating and updating smaller homes in established neighborhoods to make them more “sellable”. Residents could make improvements to their homes (adding a bathroom, bedroom, remodeling a kitchen) and get a tax break on their town property taxes.

- i. The Town should encourage renovations, enhancements, and additions to existing homes in established neighborhoods as an alternative to the sprawl created by a continuous pattern of new construction. One way to advance this goal would be the implementation of a program under which assessment increases associated with such improvements could be waived for a period of time or, alternatively, be phased in over a period of time. A program of this nature could be put in place for both single-family and multi-family properties.

 - c. AFFORDABLE HOUSING REQUIREMENTS: While not requiring quotas, the subcommittee strongly encourages that a certain number of units in each housing development be ‘affordable’ housing units. (“Affordable” in the context of apartment units is defined as rent that is equal to or less than 30% of an average renter’s annual income). If possible, add provisions to the zoning code that require this. If not, work with developers and use the site planning process to encourage this.

 - d. ATTACHED DWELLING UNITS/APPARTMENTS: Develop policies for accessory dwelling units (ADUs), either attached or detached, as an opportunity for alternative housing options in single-family residential neighborhoods while preserving the character of these neighborhoods. The intent is to provide low-cost housing options, slow suburban sprawl and to allow more efficient use of existing infrastructure. Consider having the town join the Plus One ADU Program of New York State.²
- The Subcommittee recommends that the following conditions apply to all ADUs:
- (1) All ADUs must require a Special Use Permit. The SUP would address architectural character and guidelines so that the ADU is consistent with the surrounding neighborhood.
 - (2) The ADU may be up to 1,000 sq. ft., or 30% of the size of the principal structure, whichever is smaller.
 - (3) The maximum height of the detached structure should not be taller than the principal structure.
 - (4) One of the residences must be owner-occupied.
 - (5) The accessory dwelling would require a minimum of one additional off-street parking space. Encourage locating ADUs close to bus transit.
 - (6) The accessory dwelling unit must meet the setback requirements of the primary structure or the zoning requirements on which the parcel is located, whichever is more stringent.

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² The Plus One ADU Program provides grants to units of local government and not-for-profit organizations that are committed to crafting community-specific programs for generating safe, quality ADUs. By working with units of local government and community development partners, the program provides a full-service program to support low- and middle- income single-family homeowner occupants who wish to build a new ADU on their property or improve an existing ADU that needs to be brought into compliance with local and state code requirements (see. <https://hcr.ny.gov/plus-one-adu-program>).

- (7) Neither the ADU nor the primary residence can be used as a short-term rental (e.g., Airbnb, etc.)
- (8) The occupant of the ADU need not be a relative of the owner of the principal residence.
- (9) If the ADU is rented by the owner of the principal residence, it cannot be subleased.

TOWN CHARACTER – GOALS:

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- I. Preserve and enhance Guilderland's identity, image and quality of life; and maintain and strengthen the distinction between the town's developed and rural areas, as well as the distinction between the town's neighborhoods and commercial areas.
- II. Prevent any trends that move Guilderland towards the look of a city or large commercial town; namely, avoid putting all commercial businesses along the Western Avene Corridor. Instead, spread them out thoughtfully in appropriately zoned areas in town that are in conformance with the town's height limit and with landscaping and buffers to clearly separate them from the residential areas with native species landscaping
- III. Prioritize residents' quality of life while encouraging small businesses to grow and flourish.
- IV. Town character should recognize the abundance of ethnic groups in the town and encourage and promote diversity.
- V. Establish resilience goals/strategies that reduce the Town of Guilderland's vulnerability to potential natural hazards and events. Reduce risk to future developments through a careful planning process, and take steps to protect existing infrastructure and natural resources.

TOWN CHARACTER OBJECTIVES:

- 1) Establish guidelines to ensure that future residential and commercial development is of a scale and design that is appropriate from both a neighborhood and townwide perspective.

Recommended action:

- a. The town should proactively select one or two designated areas in town on main roads (avoiding Western Avenue) that have enough population to support small non-residential commercial uses in BNRP or LB districts in order to bring light offices, dining, professional services and employment opportunities to areas that need those services.
- 2) Identify boundaries of existing, or locations for potential, mixed-use community centers or hamlets (similar to the Village of Altamont).
 - 3) Create neighborhood “community centers” and identify necessary transportation improvements for each area that will address traffic calming and other pedestrian safety issues.
 - 4) Work with residents in Town’s traditional neighborhood corridors³ to generate strategies for enhancing their existing environment, and require town leaders to provide updates on progress achieved with the Comprehensive Plan’s general objectives to each neighborhood corridor community periodically.
 - 5) Ensure adequate, but not excessive parking.

Recommended actions:

- a. **TERMINOLOGY:** Change the language of the Zoning Code from “required” to “recommended” parking spaces.
- b. **RECOMMENDED PARKING LOT SPACES:** The number of parking spaces in the code is excessive and underutilized in many commercial and residential apartment complexes, often causing stormwater runoff. Better to recommend less parking in the code and allow the developer to argue reasons for more parking spaces.
- c. **BANKED PARKING:** Banked parking spaces should be required for all projects to allow for future growth.

³ The term ‘neighborhood corridors’ is intended to refer to areas of town with unique identities and needs that have their own specific neighborhood Comprehensive Plans, i.e., McKownville, Westmere, Guilderland Hamlet, Guilderland Center, Carman Road area, Altamont, and West (rural) Guilderland.

- d. CONNECTED PARKING LOTS: Adjust site plan code requirements to encourage connected parking lots for adjacent businesses that filter traffic away from residential areas to a single traffic signal.
- 6) Support continued use of viable agricultural lands; preserve open space, and protect and preserve natural resources.

Recommended actions:

- a. NATURAL RESOURCES: The town should compile a list of its important natural resources which deserve special protection and draft code provisions protecting these resources (i.e., the Pine Bush Preserve, the Watervliet Reservoir, the Helderberg Escarpment viewshed, etc.).
 - i. Draft Code provisions to protect the Pine Bush Preserve as a special area, similar to the Town of Colonie’s code provisions for the Pine Bush.
 - ii. In light of the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision limiting the Army Corps of Engineers’ designation of wetlands to only those that flow into U. S. navigable waters, immediately draft a new town code provision to protect our town’s wetlands, as other towns are doing (see the Town of New Paltz’s code provision, the upcoming code provision in the Town of Bethlehem, etc.). This will serve many purposes including preventing the destruction of important natural ecosystems, as well as preventing uncontrolled stormwater runoff through the town.
 - iii. Protect views of the Helderberg Escarpment.
- b. INCENTIVIZE FARMLANDS: Create a way to encourage continued use of farmlands for farming. Continue support of farmers’ markets in town.
- c. ESTABLISH CONSERVATION PROGRAMS: Continue to establish programs like the town’s Conservation Easement program, which gives tax incentives to residents for conserving their lands.
 - i. Actively reach out to land trusts and partner with them to purchase open spaces.
- d. ENCOURAGE USE OF VACANT PROPERTIES: Encourage Development of abandoned or vacant property for new housing and commercial uses, rather than breaking ground in open or green spaces in town.
 - i. Create tax incentives where possible to encourage developers to use already used property (e.g., vacant retail space in Pyramid, Westlawn Bowling Center, Jiffy Lube at Rt 155 & Western, Foundry Road/Western Ave properties, Rustic Barn, etc.) for new projects in town, rather than building new structures on undisturbed lands.

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- e. SOLAR AND WIND FARMS: Encourage green energy in appropriately sited areas that will not cause a negative impact on any town or residential natural or historic viewsheds.
 - i. Do not allow major solar or wind farms in residential areas.
 - ii. Promote use of solar panels as much as possible on (a) town properties, such as the town hall, the Nott Road garage, the school bus garage, etc. and (b) on large private commercial structures such as perhaps Crossgates Mall and the Guilderland Center Industrial Park.
 - iii. Encourage residential rooftop solar panels, perhaps with tax incentives.
- 7) Retain and strengthen the character of Guilderland’s residential neighborhoods, and develop building, landscaping and signage guidelines for commercial areas to create a cohesive and aesthetically pleasing visual environment and sense of place rather than a sprawling suburban patchwork.

Recommended actions:

- a. ZONING CODE UPDATES: To achieve this objective, improve the quality of site design, with an emphasis on harmonious signage, landscaping, lighting, planting and building façade designs to fit in with a small town look for commercial and business retail zones similar to what Altamont has done.
 - i. Make initial sign permit review part of the initial site plan process.
- 8) Ensure that new development does not result in adverse impacts such as noise, odor, and vibrations, cluttered signage, or undue burden on town infrastructure.

Recommended actions:

- a. ENFORCEMENT: Hire additional zoning personnel to actively enforce violations in the code for these items townwide. Actively seek out violators, quickly respond to residents’ complaints, and take appropriate action to enforce the code.
- b. FINES: Re-examine the code to determine if there are appropriate fines for these violations. Draft provisions to impose fines for successive, continuing or escalating violations that are strong enough to act as deterrents, and to help avoid the necessity of costly litigation.
- 9) Encourage street tree planting and other aesthetic improvements in residential neighborhoods using native/non-invasive species.

Recommended actions:

- a. TOWN ARBORIST. Hire a town arborist to evaluate trees in town, protect heritage trees from development, and enforce the code provisions regulating the amount of trees that can be cut down for any development project. Include fines

in the town code for violations of town code provisions on tree cutting. The town arborist should also review and provide comments on all site plans and submit those comments to the Planning Board and/or Zoning Board for implementation as conditions to any site plan.

b. IMPROVE THE CHARACTER OF EXISTING NEIGHBORHOODS:

- i. Provide more sidewalks in residential areas were desired by residents.
- ii. Provide attractive historic (lamppost) streetlighting that meets the zoning code requirements in denser areas (McKownville, Altamont, Guilderland Hamlet) to enhance town character.
- iii. Provide funds for the garden club and/or other volunteer organizations to plant flower beds in areas along prominent roadways and intersections (as Albany and Saratoga do).

10) Seek out potential public and private partnerships to implement needed improvements. This includes land trusts, business organizations, community leaders, etc.

Recommended actions:

- a. GRANTS: Actively seek out and apply for all appropriate grants for town improvements.
- b. TREE PLANTING PROGRAM: Set up a town program, run by the town arborist, to encourage tree planting, with a special requirement in the town code for developers to replace cut trees with a proportionate number of new, well-established trees. This will not only add to town character, but also will add to green initiatives/climate change protections.

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