



Jessica Montgomery &lt;montgomeryj@togny.org&gt;

---

**Comprehensive Plan Draft**

1 message

Tue, Mar 11, 2025 at 11:49 AM

[REDACTED]

To: Peter Barber <barberp@togny.org>, Amanda Beedle <beedlea@togny.org>, Jake Crawford <crawfordj@togny.org>, Christine Napierski <napierskic@togny.org>, Gustavo Santos <santosg@togny.org>, Jessica Montgomery <montgomeryj@togny.org>

Dear Supervisor Barber and Town Board Members,

I am writing to offer my comments with regard to the proposed Comprehensive Plan Update draft that is the subject of the public hearing taking place at the Town Board meeting on March 18th.

I first wish to commend the Committee members and Subcommittee members, who dedicated countless hours of effort into this process. They are indicative of the premier resource which we as a municipality are privileged to have, a community of people who care.

This has been a long and arduous process. A substantial sum of money has been spent, and it would be understandable, having the product of these labors finally delivered, to call it done. I have been an observer and participant throughout this process and find that in what has been submitted, there are concerning features that merit redress. It is my hope that the board will take these into consideration before moving forward with an approval.

Most significantly, the very basis of the Comprehensive Plan lies in the vision statement. By definition, a vision statement should, 'present a municipality's ambition for the future. It can be a short phrase or a single paragraph that clearly describes the long-term goals, dreams, and aspirations for the city and its communities. The vision statement sets the bar high in terms of how the municipality wants to be perceived by the world in the future.'

Describing what constitutes Guilderland, as the drafted vision statement does, in a manner that doesn't particularly distinguish it from any other municipality which is similarly constituted, does not present a future ambition. It does not clarify an identity from which a future perception can be established.

Our current Comprehensive Plan has a vision statement which reads as follows: 'The Town of Guilderland envisions itself as a distinctive suburban and rural community within the Capital District.' 'It is a community that looks to the future in the belief that through continued community dialogue and action it can manage, and shape change for the better.'

Please note, the previous plan utilized the terminology of suburban and rural community to identify Guilderland. Because indeed we are a municipality that is comprised of a mix of land uses. We have always had a commercial corridor as well as our historic hamlets, neighborhoods, rural and agricultural areas. The notion that a conglomeration of land uses precludes a community identity is a meritless argument.

Per Wikipedia: a suburban area is:

'An area within a metropolitan area that is predominantly residential and within commuting distance of a large city.

Located on the edge of a large town or city where people who work in the town or city often live.

Characterized by lower population density, a mix of housing types, and easy access to community amenities.

A community outside of an urban center and its outskirts, with single-family homes interspersed with shopping malls and office buildings.'

This is Guilderland. Not saying what we are is perplexing in that it undermines a perception of what we want to become. Are we seeking to become an 'urbanized suburb'? This is a construct currently in the nomenclature and reflected by design in other municipalities. As a metamorphosis for Guilderland, this was never broached in the sessions designated for public input. Perhaps this is where a Comprehensive Plan that provides no explicit town identity makes for an easier transition, by default.

If zoning code changes will be made that are reflective of the Comprehensive Plan, it is imperative that we

be very clear about how we want to see Guilderland grow and what boundaries will be in place to ensure that this is not compromised. That clarity needs first and foremost, to be unambiguously declared in our vision statement.

Replete through this document are allusions to identity and character. Not having a stated identity and by virtue of that, no criteria of character, has contributed to some very open-ended statements with regard to Goals and Recommendations, which are troublesome. Additionally, the document suggests revisions to the current zoning code and belies the efficacy of what is already in place. Examples which I found to be noteworthy are as follows.

### Section 3, Business, Employment and 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.*

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.

At present, much of the commercial corridor of Western Ave. is zoned LB, to be compatible with its surrounding residential neighborhoods. This zoning is consistent with the character of a suburban area. In her presentation to the board, Ms. Hakes spoke of a key take away of the plan being 'opportunities for redevelopment along Western Ave.'

Do we want to remain compatible with a suburban identity in our land use, where commercial development is reflective of lower density parameters or, are we promoting more urbanized parameters where closely packed, large multi-story buildings are the norm? If we are not specific about our future identity, we will have the latter.

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.*

The current town code is very specific with guidelines in regard to signage and those protocols are consistent with a more tempered suburban aesthetic. Time and time again, this is the argument put forward when variance requests are made proposing signage that is larger, flashier and more numerous than what is permitted by code. The result of variances being granted has promoted an onslaught of precedent requests which has undermined the preservation of the aesthetic that was intended to prevail. It is not uncommon to hear, with misgivings, that our commercial corridor has taken on the look of more urbanized thoroughfares. Once again, how we wish to be perceived is at play here. If we wish to maintain a more tempered aesthetic, the code does not need to change. It needs to be more uniformly enforced.

Moving on:

Section 5, Neighborhoods and 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.

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.

We need to be very clear on how this is actualized so that it is not utilized as a mechanism to fast-track projects with a minimal percentage of units applicable to Pro-Housing standards, that would otherwise be subject to greater scrutiny with normative protocols.

In my estimation, it has not been unwieldy Town regulations which have prevented the development of affordable and accessible housing opportunities. It has more been the purview of developers who chose not to embrace such projects. I am delighted that being a Pro-Housing Community, may act as a means of undercutting the familiar plaint that only producing luxury developments makes building an economic feasibility. But I am also, extremely wary of short cutting the Town's ability to maintain a standard of what we want Guilderland to look like, moving into the future.

With this, we need to ensure that we are truly aligned with Pro-Housing standards. The proliferation of high-density apartment complexes that have emerged over the past several years are luxury developments, requiring a high-income tenancy. While we have increased our ability to house larger numbers of wealthier people, we are also increasing an imbalance in what a median income level becomes. What then becomes the affordable percentage for a rental unit or market rate for a home, becomes even less accessible for the population that is already struggling to live here.

Is this a policy that 'affirmatively furthers fair housing' in accordance with the Pro Housing Communities Pledge? If we have signed on to make this commitment for the future vision of Guilderland, we don't get to pick and choose when it serves us to comply.

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.*

The Comprehensive Plan also alluded to the value of our neighborhoods in the overview to the Building, Employment and Fiscal section where it stated Guilderland to be *'more widely known in the Capital District for its attractive neighborhoods'*. I couldn't agree more. Yet nowhere in the goal

or recommendations pertaining to Neighborhoods and Housing, is there any provision for the protection and preservation of our existing neighborhoods.

It is critical that we bring our town, with an established residential history, into the future without eradicating the roots. Indeed, it is completely what has preceded and is co-existing with what is new that gives a place a tangible distinction and provides differentiation from a place comprised solely of 'attractive neighborhoods' that absent of such history, has none.

This needs to be reflected in the Comprehensive Plan.

I have limited my comments here to the sections of the Plan that were of greatest priority to me. That is a luxury that you do not have. The undertaking of the review and your efforts in this important pursuit are formidable and you have my utmost appreciation. I would like to again thank everyone involved in the process and for the opportunities throughout to be a participant.

I would also like to respectfully request that this submission be entered as my commentary for the public hearing.

Thank you,  
Iris Broyde  
Westmere