

E-17. Cultivate greater public awareness of Guilderland’s historic sites and resources, celebrating past contributions from a broad range of individuals and groups.

The Guilderland Historical Society has a collection of museum objects kept at the Mynderse-Frederick House, in addition to online collections of historic photographs. As new technology, resources, and archival materials become available, an opportunity exists to highlight forgotten or little-known people and chapters in the story of a Guilderland. It is therefore recommended that the Town promote research and sharing of Guilderland’s history, encompassing its many influences and eras.

The Town may consider development of a Veterans Memorial Park. This could include the repurposing of an existing park to establish a

dedicated space commemorating Guilderland’s military veterans. This initiative would provide a meaningful tribute to those who have served in the armed forces, while also complementing the Town’s existing Hometown Heroes Banner program.

Tawasentha Park, which incorporates the historically significant Normans Kill Battleground, could be considered as a potential location for this Veterans Park, as its setting offers both cultural relevance and an appropriate environment for reflection and tribute.

E-18. Consider rezoning Town parks, open space, and other similar types of holdings by the Albany Pine Bush Preserve, Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy, New York State, and other groups to a new zoning classification such as “Parkland.”

Most of the parcels owned by the Town and other entities that are parks and open space retain their underlying zoning, mostly residential districts. The rezoning of those parcels to “Parkland” or other conserved space use would provide a better understanding of lands protected from development.

E-19. Establish a program for acquiring key properties in Town to preserve as open space by prioritizing land that offers significant ecological, recreational, scenic, and community benefits. It will be funded through a dedicated mechanism and guided by clear, publicly vetted criteria.

In 2023, the Town Board established the Environmental Protection Reserve Fund. The purpose of this Reserve Fund is to accumulate moneys that may be used, with the Town Board’s approval, to fund actions that protect the environment, including, but not limited to, purchasing land for preservation and protecting watercourses and sensitive areas. The Town Board should create a process for accepting donations to the Reserve Fund from individuals, civic organizations and non-profit groups.

Define a partnership with non-profits.

The Town should enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or other formal agreement with qualified non-profits. This agreement would outline the roles and responsibilities of each party, including how donations are solicited and

managed. Non-profits could provide additional capacity for land acquisition by offering their scientific expertise, volunteer labor for land management, or by leveraging their own funding.

Establish a selection and evaluation process for land acquisition.

Criteria should be established to prioritize geographic areas in Town to focus on for land acquisition and utilize a data-driven scoring system to evaluate and rank parcels for acquisition. Priority should be given to properties that meet the following criteria:

- **Align with open space plan:** All acquisition decisions must align with the objectives of the Town’s land preservation goals, which prioritizes land for conservation.

- **Evaluation criteria:** A scoring system should be created to evaluate properties based on factors such as:
 - a. **Water resource protection:** Lands that contain or protect wetlands, drinking water sources, shorelines, or contribute to aquifer recharge.
 - b. **Biodiversity and habitat preservation:** Properties that contain unique ecosystems, provide critical habitat for species of concern, or connect existing natural areas.
 - c. **Recreational and scenic value:** Lands that offer opportunities for public access, trail networks, or preserve important scenic views.
 - d. **Rural and agricultural character:** Working farms or lands that help preserve the Town's rural character.
 - e. **Proximity and connectivity:** Parcels adjacent or close to existing preserved lands to create larger, more effective open space networks.
 - f. **Development pressure:** Lands in areas facing intense development pressure where acquisition is time-sensitive.
 - g. **Cost-effectiveness and leverage:** Properties that can be acquired at a lower cost, often in partnership with other organizations, or through bargain sales or donations.
- **Oversight committee:** A committee, such as the Conservation Advisory Council, or a special Open Space Committee, should be created to oversee the evaluation process.
- **Conservation Easements/Purchase of Development Rights:** Donations could fund the purchase of a conservation easement, allowing the non-profit or Town to hold the easement while the land remains in private ownership, with its development rights permanently restricted.
- **Donations of property:** The Town would establish procedures for accepting direct land donations from non-profits, ensuring the properties meet conservation criteria.

Promote leveraged funding

The open space acquisition program should specify that non-profit donations will be used strategically to unlock other funding sources.

- **Matching funds:** Donations can serve as a local match to secure competitive state and federal open space grants, multiplying the impact of the initial donation.
- **Public-private partnerships:** Non-profit funds could support joint ventures between the Town, the non-profit, and other community partners.

Codify the open space acquisition program

Codification ensures consistency, legal defensibility, and public transparency, helping the Town manage its land preservation efforts strategically. The decision to codify the program can be made in several ways, from simple resolution to a more robust local law. The benefits of codifying an open space program include:

- **Creates a strong legal foundation:** Adopting a program through local law, rather than just a policy resolution, makes it more enforceable and robust against legal challenges. It establishes a clear legal basis for the town's actions.
- **Ensures continuity and consistency:** Codification prevents the program from being undermined by changes in local government or leadership. A defined, official policy provides consistent guidance for acquisitions, ensuring that all projects are evaluated and executed according to

Allow for flexible donation structures

The open space acquisition program should recognize that non-profits can contribute in various ways, not just with cash donations.

- **Fee simple acquisition:** The Town can use non-profit donations to purchase land outright.
- **Bargain sales:** The open space acquisition fund could be used to facilitate "bargain sales," where a non-profit purchase a property from a landowner at a discount with the Town and open space acquisition fund assisting to cover the remaining costs such as closing costs, legal fees, etc.

the same standards over the long term.

- **Increases transparency and public trust:** When the acquisition process is clearly documented, the public can better understand how decisions are made and how funds are spent. This builds community trust in the program's fairness and effectiveness.
- **Enhances credibility for grant applications:** Many state and federal grant programs require municipalities to demonstrate a clear and consistent strategy for land conservation. Codified policies and plans

show that the town has a serious, long-term commitment to open space protection, which can improve its chances of receiving funding.

- **Allows for proactive, strategic planning:** Codified programs enable a town to define acquisition priorities in advance, rather than acquiring land opportunistically as it becomes available. This allows the town to focus its efforts on conserving ecologically sensitive lands, preserving connected corridors, or purchasing land for future recreational use.

Recommendation E-20: The Town of Guilderland should endeavor to support the efforts of the Village of Altamont and Historic Altamont, Inc., where practicable, in implementing the goals and recommendations of the Altamont Trails Master Plan.

The Altamont Trails Master Plan is an initiative to create a connected trail network throughout the Village of Altamont, the Town of Guilderland, and Albany County, with the primary goal of enhancing recreational opportunities, connecting communities and natural resources, and promoting outdoor activity.

The Town of Guilderland can support the Altamont Trails Master Plan through inter-municipal collaboration, integration into its own comprehensive plan and zoning laws, resource allocation (including grant applications), and community engagement. Key actions for support may include:

- **Inter-Municipal Cooperation:** The plan is a collaborative effort, and the Town can formally acknowledge and work with the Village of Altamont and organizations like Historic Altamont and the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy. This collaboration can include shared resources, joint grant applications, and a shared vision for connected green spaces that extend beyond municipal boundaries.
- **Zoning Amendments:** Reviewing and amending zoning ordinances to align with the trail plan's goals, such as preserving open spaces, viewsheds, and farmland that the trails traverse.

- **Connectivity:** Explicitly planning for the linking of the Altamont trails with existing or planned Guilderland pathways, bike routes, and sidewalks to create a seamless network connecting various parks and open spaces.
- **Grant Applications:** Actively supporting and collaborating on grant applications (state, federal, and county) that benefit the trail system. Guilderland has a track record of successfully obtaining grant money for infrastructure projects, which can be leveraged for the trails.
- **Land Acquisition/Easements:** Exploring opportunities for land acquisition or conservation easements to secure the trail corridors from future development.
- **Development Policies:** The Town can use its reviewing boards to negotiate with developers of new subdivisions to include trail linkages or set aside open space as part of the approval process.