ORANGE COUNTY, NEW YORK
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ORANGE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
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The Orange County Comprehensive Plan meets two requirements. First, consistent with Orange County Administrative Code §9.02(a), the Commissioner of Planning in consultation with the County Executive and the County Planning Board, must review and update the county comprehensive development plan every five years and submit that plan to the County Legislature for approval. Second, consistent with New York State General Municipal Law §239-d, the Plan meets the State requirements for a County Comprehensive Plan. As such, the plan has two effects upon adoption:

- All county land acquisitions and public improvements shall be in accordance with the County Comprehensive Plan
- All plans for capital projects of a municipality (including the County) or state governmental agency on land included in the County Comprehensive Plan must take this Plan into consideration.

County Comprehensive Plans are developed in partnership with a County Planning Board. The Charter for Orange County created the Orange County Planning Board, and has charged the Board with the following responsibilities: “1) Consider requests from the County Executive and/or the County legislature to review and/or study planning issues of Countywide significance; 2) Advise the County Executive and/or the County Legislature on regional planning matters affecting the County; and 3) Engage in a long-term planning process that gathers information, tracks change and consults with the County Executive and the County Legislature on the identification of alternative County futures.”

Orange County’s first Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1980 and updated in 1987. A second Plan, Strategies for Quality Communities, was adopted in 2003 and then revised in 2004 and again in 2010. Each time a comprehensive plan is adopted, it supersedes the previous plan. The Plan has also been amended through the adoption of five supplemental chapters between 2004 and 2015. These are briefly described in the Introduction to this Plan.

This 2019 Plan replaces the Strategies for Quality Communities Comprehensive Plan that was last revised and adopted in 2010, while retaining the five supplemental chapters. This update focuses largely on streamlining the Comprehensive Plan and creating a new supplemental chapter exploring transportation issues and needs due to feedback from the Orange County Planning Board and overwhelming public interest in transportation matters. The Plan has retained the Priority Growth Area concept.

Additional updates to the Plan will be thematic and will likely focus on topics such as housing, non-motorized transportation, infrastructure, sustainability, and climate adaptation and resiliency. The Department will continue to work with the County Planning Board and County leadership to define the topics for future updates, while also striving to implement the recommendations laid out within this Plan and its supplemental chapters.
Welcome to the Orange County Comprehensive Plan! In order to keep the entire Plan as current and relevant as possible, we are updating it regularly by adopting new chapters. The Plan format is now as follows:

**ORANGE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

The Plan itself is now very short, approximately 20 pages; this document provides an overview of the current and future state of the County and replaces the former Orange County Comprehensive Plan Strategies for Quality Communities, adopted in 2003 and updated in 2004 and 2010. The first part of this Plan presents an overview of the previous plans we have adopted; introduces the emerging needs of the County; discusses our public outreach efforts for this update; and sets forth the mission, vision, and themes of the Plan. The second part gives an overview of the current state of the County—demographics, development trends, and brief discussions of our goals for housing and future development using the Priority Growth Area strategy.

The remainder of the plan consists of Supplemental Chapters 1 through 6, as follows:

**SUPPLEMENTAL CHAPTER 1: ORANGE COUNTY, NY OPEN SPACE PLAN**

The Open Space Plan addressed five categories of open space: water resources; agriculture; biodiversity; cultural, scenic and historic resources; and recreation. Over the years, the Open Space Plan has resulted in farmland protection through the County's Open Space Fund; the evaluation of deed sale parcels for conservation value; protection of natural resources through the Planning Department's municipal land use reviews; and public access to waterways.

**SUPPLEMENTAL CHAPTER 2: ORANGE COUNTY WATER MASTER PLAN**

The Water Master Plan was undertaken by the Planning Department and the Orange County Water Authority to evaluate the water infrastructure existing in the County's municipalities in 2009 and to identify future water supply and infrastructure needs. Water resource protection is also discussed in this document, with particular emphasis on protecting the watersheds of drinking water reservoirs and other supplies. This plan has resulted in: the preparation of watershed plans; infrastructure projects involving wells drilled on County land; and water quality monitoring through stream gages.

**SUPPLEMENTAL CHAPTER 3: ORANGE COUNTY GREENWAY COMPACT**

Orange County adopted the Greenway Compact as an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan in 2013 to promote the Hudson Valley Greenway Compact Criteria through the use of best design practices. These criteria are: 1) Natural and Cultural Resource Protection; 2) Economic Development; 3) Public Access to the Hudson River; 4) Regional Planning; and 5) Heritage and Environmental Education. Using the Orange County Design Manual as a guide, the Greenway Compact sets forth a series of strategies that would satisfy the County's goals.

**SUPPLEMENTAL CHAPTER 4: AGRICULTURE AND FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN**

Orange County, home to the State's earliest-adopted agricultural and farmland protection plan in 1996, amended the County Comprehensive Plan in 2015 to include an update to the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan that addresses current trends, challenges and opportunities. The Plan makes a myriad of recommendations, including 8 Priority Projects centered on supporting local farms and agricultural businesses, and training municipalities to protect and support agriculture through their codes and plans.
SUPPLEMENTAL CHAPTER 5: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
The Economic Development Strategy was adopted in 2015 to present a roadmap for future economic growth in the County that protects the values important to the County's residents, align the County with the Hudson Valley Economic Development Region, attract new businesses and investors, support the businesses and entrepreneurs already within the County, and allow residents, businesses and entrepreneurs to expand and experiment. In its 64 recommendations, the strategy enumerates supportive actions for: municipalities looking to attract businesses; small businesses; and economic development partner agencies.

SUPPLEMENTAL CHAPTER 6: TRANSPORTATION
The public comments received as part of the Comprehensive Plan update process beginning in 2016 showed a pressing need for a Transportation Chapter for the Comprehensive Plan. It should be noted that the planning process for the comprehensive plan was separate and apart from the products produced and administered by the Orange County MPO, per federal requirements- namely the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), the Transportation Improvement Program and the Unified Planning Work Program. However, both the MPO (Orange County Transportation Council) and the Planning Department have overlapping staff. This Transportation Chapter shows the direction that the County intends to steer transportation policy for ourselves, and as part of the larger region, and is consistent with the goals, vision and recommendations developed through the LRTP.
I. INTRODUCTION.............................................................................................................................................................................2
   A. PAST PLANS......................................................................................................................................................................................2
      i. Open Space Plan (2004)
      ii. Water Master Plan (2010)
      iii. Greenway Compact (2013)
   B. IDENTIFIED NEEDS.................................................................................................................................................................6
   C. MISSION AND VISION FOR ORANGE COUNTY IN 2018 AND BEYOND............................................................7
   CORE VALUES..................................................................................................................................................................................8

II. CHARACTERIZATION OF ORANGE COUNTY........................................................................................................10
   A. DEMOGRAPHICS........................................................................................................................................................................10
   B. HOUSING..................................................................................................................................................................................13
   C. DEVELOPMENT TRENDS .........................................................................................................................................................15
   D. PRIORITY GROWTH AREAS........................................................................................................................................16
      i. Growth Areas
      ii. Local Centers
      iii. Transit Hubs
Orange County’s Comprehensive Plan serves four specific purposes. First, the Plan provides a county-wide or regional context for decisions on how land might best be used, through development, preservation, or infrastructure investment. Second, it outlines how financial, technical and infrastructure resources might be effectively allocated. Third, the Plan recommends actions that can be taken at the County and local level in order to improve or sustain Orange County’s landscape, economy, transportation network, and use of resources. And lastly, it is a resource for those seeking to understand primary trends, assets and challenges the County and its partner municipalities share.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. PAST PLANS

This Plan replaces the 2010 Strategies for Quality Communities Plan but retains the five supplemental chapters that were adopted as amendments to that Plan. Policies declared in these documents remain those of Orange County. Below is a brief summary of the five supplemental chapters.

i. Open Space Plan (2004)

This Plan was developed through a collaboration of a broad array of conservation stakeholders. It addressed five categories of open space:

• water resources
• agriculture
• biodiversity
• cultural (scenic and historic)
• recreation
Assets within each category were inventoried and analyzed, and recommendations were developed for each. A core triumph of the Open Space Plan was the protection of farmland and subsequent establishment of the County’s Open Space Fund, which was funded for three years. Other accomplishments based on recommendations in the Plan included a policy, still in effect, that required that deed sale parcels be screened for open space value before being auctioned by the County. Other recommendations, such as natural resource protection and public access to waterways, are implemented on an ongoing basis through the Department’s municipal land use reviews.

ii. Water Master Plan (2010)
This Plan was designed to be a business plan for the Orange County Water Authority (OCWA) in order to identify municipal water infrastructure and supply needs and to identify other priorities for OCWA. The technical report (2009) included extensive analysis of municipal water supplies in terms of production and usage. Using this information and population projections, municipalities with future water deficits were identified. The report was used to inform the Water Master Plan, which addresses other topics in addition to water supply. The Plan’s recommendations range from actions the OCWA and the County could take to actions that municipalities – primarily public works departments – could take to conserve water supply and protect water resources. Actions that have been fulfilled or are underway to date include: watershed plans for Glenmere Lake, the Quassaick Creek, and Monhagen Brook; continuing conservation education; leak detection grant program; monitoring of stream gages; infrastructure projects serving water to the City of Middletown and Pine Bush from wells in County reservoir lands; and advancing a regional water system in the northeast portion of the County. The Plan also recommends developing watershed plans for additional streams, lakes, and reservoirs; the OCWA expects to release a plan for the Monhagen Brook watershed in 2019.

iii. Greenway Compact (2013)
The Greenway Compact was adapted from the Orange County Design Manual, to promote the Hudson Valley Greenway Compact Criteria through the use of best design practices. The Greenway Criteria are:

- Natural and Cultural Resource Protection
- Economic Development
- Public Access to the Hudson River
- Regional Planning
- Heritage and Environmental Education

The Greenway Compact sets forth the goals contained in the existing Comprehensive Plan, and a series of strategies that would satisfy both those goals and the Greenway Criteria through the use of the best practices contained in the Orange County Design Manual. These goals include, among others: promoting a multi-
modal transportation network; utilizing infill and redevelopment to minimize greenfield development and to enhance existing communities; conserving the County’s natural land resources in such a way as to encourage wildlife corridors; and offering an array of housing options that are affordable to a range of household incomes. Although there are no particular recommended actions or projects, the Greenway Compact provides the County with a statement of goals and ideals to which the County should aspire as we continue to develop and progress.


Orange County’s Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan, adopted in 1996, was the first to be adopted in the State. Given that agriculture is an important industry in the County, and that much had changed in the County’s landscape and the industry itself since 1996, a new Plan was developed that addresses current trends, challenges, and opportunities. The Plan was created in partnership with the County’s Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board and other key partners. It was approved by both the County Legislature and the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets.

The Plan outlines dozens of recommendations and eight Priority Projects:

1. Improve understanding of agriculture as a key economic engine in Orange County
2. Develop additional food processing and local food infrastructure
3. Develop an agricultural economics program to increase the profitability of farms
4. Develop a buy-local initiative to increase market opportunities for Orange County agricultural products
5. Provide training, tools, and support to Towns to implement farm-friendly changes to local codes and plan, and assist them with removing local barriers to farming
6. Protect farmland within core production areas
7. Concentrate on programs that recruit new and next generation farmers
8. Implement Wallkill River drainage programs

Fig. 2. The Orange County Greenway Compact, published in 2013.

Fig. 3. A scenic view along the Heritage Trail, a multi-use asphalt trail extending from the Village of Goshen to the Village of Harriman with plans to expand in the future.
Accomplishments since the Plan’s adoption that fall under these Priority Projects include: development of an agricultural resources webpage; continued funding of Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation; an increase in farmers’ market vendors accepting SNAP; progress on Wallkill River drainage project; and heightened promotion of farmers’ markets and agritourism destinations.

The Economic Development Strategy was adopted in 2015, in part to align the County with New York State’s Regional Economic Development Councils. The intent of the Strategy is to position the County to attract new businesses and investors to locate in Orange County, as well as to support the businesses and entrepreneurs already within the County and allow them to expand and experiment. The Strategy includes 64 recommendations; the following summarizes the strategy’s highest priorities:

• Supportive Actions for Municipalities:
  Develop model code and plan language and best practices; assist with cost-saving solutions such as shared municipal service agreements; and assist with intermunicipal issues like traffic bottlenecks; share best practices that encourage appropriate and desired forms of development, including streamlining approval processes and managing development teams’ expectations, among other progressive approaches.

• Supportive Actions for Small Businesses:
  Develop and maintain lists of funding opportunities and incentive programs appropriate for small businesses, such as downtown revitalization tax credits for renovating small storefronts; host the “one-stop shop” business portal; and support startup and incubator facilities such as the Orange County Business Accelerator.

• Supportive Actions for Economic Development Partner Agencies:
  Work on infrastructure improvements throughout the County, including water and sewer services, tech infrastructure, community services, and planned road and transit improvements; assist partner agencies with data, mapping, and policy development as needed; and create and share educational programs about our key industries and other businesses to help municipalities improve their support.
B. IDENTIFIED NEEDS

To help determine the focus of this new Comprehensive Plan, the Planning Department led public outreach to gauge what issues were most important to County residents. Outreach included discussions with the Orange County Planning Board, three public meetings held throughout the County, press releases, and an outreach project facilitated by coUrbanize. The last-mentioned outreach technique was especially helpful in reaching a wide audience because it was based on an interactive website where people were able to respond to questions posed on the site. The site was linked to outdoor signs the Department installed throughout the County, each of which posed a question and asked pedestrians to text their answer to a specific phone number; these questions asked “Why do you ride public transit?” and “What housing options does your community need?” among others. Those answers would also be posted on the website automatically. All answers were pinned to a map on the coUrbanize site. In total, this generated 425 comments from 64 users, and 199 responses from County Planning.

Outreach has continued for this process by way of a Facebook page specifically for this project. Although public engagement on this page has been very sparse, it offers another way for ongoing community outreach, and another way for the public to contact us with other concerns.

The following needs were identified through the public outreach process:

- Economic development, including technology support
- High paying jobs
- Regional planning and cooperation, especially related to water, sewer, and transportation
- Affordable housing
- Large employers within villages
- Mixed uses within villages
- Infill development in our urban centers
- Walkable and bike-able downtowns
- Bus and train service
- Congestion management, especially at commute times and within Villages
- Transit opportunities, especially to work sites and medical services
- Parks
- Recreational trails
- Infrastructure improvements
- Food processing facilities to support agriculture
- Farmland preservation
- Wildlife preservation
- Arts and culture opportunities
- Governmental efficiency
- Sustainable energy
- Utilization of sustainable practices in infrastructure projects
- Wildlife preservation

CoUrbanize users typically commented around a few major themes:

- Traffic issues around the Harriman/Monroe area and Newburgh area, but transportation related projects such as increased ferry service, better commuter train service, and train connections to Stewart Airport were also brought up frequently. Better/more convenient public transportation and a county-wide bus network were big topics of conversation.
- The desire for more trail connections to the Heritage Trail, particularly North-South connections, and the creation of a county-wide trail network. Nonmotorized transportation in
C. MISSION AND VISION FOR ORANGE COUNTY IN 2019 AND BEYOND

Orange County has a vision for the future in which we balance the needs of our residents for jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities in a business-friendly environment with appropriate housing across a wide range of incomes; in which open space areas and working landscapes are protected while growth and development occur in more compact areas able to support them; and in which the needs of our residents, diverse in age, race, ethnicity, and language, are met and their high quality of life is supported and maintained.

This Comprehensive Plan for Orange County states the County’s needs for the future and presents strategies to satisfy these needs. These needs and strategies were developed through research and outreach to various stakeholders, including local officials, representatives of state and local agencies, interest groups, the general public, and others. The outreach and planning process were led by a partnership between the Orange County Planning Department and Planning Board, and were conducted over the course of more than a year on a variety of platforms, to gain as much meaningful participation from as many citizens as possible.
Four “core values” define how we see ourselves and how we intend to shape the future of Orange County. These values are:

**ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY**

The natural resources and open space of Orange County are important to us, and we intend to preserve those resources so that they are available to future generations.

**ECONOMIC PROSPERITY**

Orange County should work to attract good, stable, and growing jobs, employers and industries so that our residents are able to provide well for themselves and their families both now and in the future.

**COMMUNITY QUALITY OF LIFE**

Orange County is now, and should continue to be, a great place to live, work, and raise a family for many years to come.

**SOCIAL EQUITY**

Defined as “the fair, just, and equitable management of public institutions, distribution of public services, and implementation of public policy;” Orange County strives to serve all of our residents with fairness and equity and to accommodate their needs as best we can.

These core values have informed our work in this document and the vision for Orange County that we share here, and will shape the goals and objectives of this plan.

**ORANGE COUNTY VISION**

Orange County will develop sustainably, equitably, and thoughtfully. We will continue to direct new development to our existing centers known as Priority Growth Areas to strengthen established communities; focus public investment on maintaining and improving our infrastructure; and protect our natural, cultural and historic resources to maintain and improve our residents’ high quality of life.
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A. DEMOGRAPHICS

Orange County is in an exciting phase of our history and development. Technology has rapidly changed the economic and employment landscape, which has made quality of life a defining factor in choosing where people live, work, and spend their time. Features such as open space and farmland, easy commuting distance to New York City and northern New Jersey, ready accessibility to 60 million people within a six-hour drive of the County, diverse recreational opportunities along the three rivers and in the mountains, and lower average housing prices than anywhere else in the Metro-North train system service area has made Orange County a dynamic leader in population and economic growth.
Orange County is the 7th most populous county in New York State outside of New York City, and has been the second-fastest-growing County in New York State since 2000. In the Hudson Valley region, only Westchester is larger than Orange County. Although the rate of growth has slowed in all municipalities and Countywide, Orange County is still experiencing positive growth overall, and positive growth in commuter-friendly locations. However, the County’s current rate of growth is now below both the estimated national (4.7%) and state (1.9%) rates of growth since 2010.

This slowing of growth can be attributed to a number of factors. First, the population of the United States is aging overall. Orange County is still attracting families with children under 18 to relocate here, and we experience high birth rates in some areas of the County, but outside of those pockets the County is aging at a rate similar to the rest of the United States. Second, while the housing bust of the mid-2000’s depressed housing prices for a time and caused significant long-term harm to the local construction industry, housing prices have rebounded to the point where a household making the median income in Orange County cannot afford to purchase a median-priced home in nearly all our municipalities. And third, while economic growth is strong and unemployment is very low in most of the County, the higher-paying jobs within the County are often offered to out-of-County residents, and the jobs that are available to County residents are not as well-paid or consistent.

Settlement patterns in Orange County have changed significantly over time. Our original settlers lived close together and formed villages, or lived on large working farms outside of those villages. Over time some of these villages grew into cities or larger villages and became locally important places, often due to the presence of rivers or train lines, giving these places easily accessible transportation options. Following the Second World War, the adoption of the GI Bill and the new prevalence and affordability of the automobile allowed many families to live further from their workplaces. So was born the commuter suburb,
a settlement pattern that persists in the towns of the Hudson Valley to this day, although our cities, villages and hamlets continue to be our primary pedestrian-friendly areas and contain an easily accessible mix of housing and commercial uses. The highways and train lines throughout the County provide relatively easy access for commuters heading to New York City and office complexes in northern New Jersey, as well as access to goods and services in our municipalities.

Shopping and employment centers have grown up around those highway exits, as well as some luxury apartment and condominium or townhouse complexes marketed to long-distance commuters, primarily near Middletown, Chester, Monroe, and other communities along NYS Route 17.

Housing in the County is primarily single-family detached houses intended for ownership. While rental options, and multifamily attached dwellings for both rental and ownership, are available, they are only prevalent in small pockets of the County. Rental units exceed owned units only in the cities of Newburgh and Middletown and the Village of Kiryas Joel.

The primary industries in Orange County by number of jobs are educational services, health care and social assistance; retail trade; professional, scientific, management, administrative and waste; and arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services. Retail trade and health care are also leaders for the County in terms of revenue, along with wholesale trade and manufacturing. Orange County is home to the newest hospital in New York State, and more than half the new office space in the County is used for medical offices.
with the larger businesses and employers in the County to ensure that our residents have the opportunity to be employed in the County rather than having to commute to other areas.

Other issues that should be examined for purposes of increasing employment opportunities in the County include facilities for teleworkers, including wireless infrastructure and availability in the more rural parts of the County. “Gig economy” jobs such as driving for rideshare services, delivering meals, and even more traditional freelancing should also be studied to determine their needs and how to meet them, and to examine the future of work in Orange County.

B. HOUSING

Housing in Orange County is a perpetual balancing act. The urban areas of the County—primarily our three cities and our larger villages—are served by transit and have more employment opportunities than their rural counterparts, attracting a larger share of the population and increasing the demand for housing, particularly for lower income levels. The more rural areas of the County are further from jobs and transit, requiring that people drive to work, school, shopping areas, and even parks in some cases, driving up the costs associated with living in these areas as well as serving to isolate residents of our more rural areas from the community fabric. Older residents and residents with special housing needs are increasing within our population. Young families, single-person households, and longtime residents can find themselves priced out of the housing market due to our proximity to New York City and attractiveness to commuters. Accommodating the needs of this diverse population is a difficult task, but a necessary one to maintain our vibrant communities.

The bulk of Orange County’s housing is detached single-family homes on large lots occupied by their owners. In order to purchase the median home in Orange County, a new buyer with good or excellent credit, putting down 20%, will have a down payment of approximately the amount of the County’s median household income for a year, less taxes. This is a standard that is increasingly required by financial institutions as a reaction to the 2007 housing market collapse, and is increasingly unrealistic for single people, first time homebuyers, retirees and other people living on fixed incomes, working-class families, and young families with children. In
order to afford either the median rent or the median mortgage payment, a household in Orange County needs to earn approximately 10% more than the County median household income, a gap that will only widen as housing prices continue to increase at more than double the rate of household income. This has created substantial pressure on the existing supply of affordable housing stock. Future affordable housing development is severely curtailed by escalating land prices and development costs, zoning complications, difficulty securing financing, and local opposition to projects that provide moderately priced homes. These factors decrease developer profit margins, which in turn decreases willingness for developers to construct housing that is affordable to the middle and working class.

The Housing and Neighborhood Preservation Strategy, rewritten as part of the 2010 Strategies for Quality Communities update, includes data and charts from the Regional Housing Needs Assessment undertaken in 2006 as a joint effort with Ulster and Dutchess Counties. The RHNA is based on data collected prior to the housing crash, and recommends specifically that more than 43,000 units of affordable housing should be newly constructed in Orange County by 2020, a number which constitutes more than a quarter of the County's total housing stock. The updated housing strategy also includes recommendations for: a public information campaign, both for municipal officials and the general public; creation or coordination of a housing advocacy group; technical assistance for municipalities to determine their housing needs and how their code could be hindering their efforts to provide appropriate housing options, and; technical assistance in finding and crafting incentive programs and funding for developers.

The Core Values that we have defined for this Comprehensive Plan update are relevant to housing as well, as part of how we care for our residents. For housing, we define the Core Values as follows:

- **Environmental Quality and Sustainability**—we advocate for affordable housing to be a less resource-intensive option than market-rate housing, with smaller or clustered units and lots, and more flexible housing options.
- **Economic Prosperity**—Housing affordability frees up income for savings and other costs of living, ensuring more stable and prosperous financial situations for our residents; the availability of affordable units also attracts employers and jobs.
- **Community Quality of Life**—Orange County is now and should continue to be a great place to live, work, and raise a family for many years to come. Housing affordability is an important factor in quality of life assessments.
- **Social Equity**—affordable housing options give everyone the opportunity to participate in community life in an equitable way.

Maintaining quality of life is a big concern for residents, particularly existing residents who are concerned about traffic, crime, and property values. While there will always be a need for
C. DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

Orange County has undergone significant development since the last Comprehensive Plan. Since 2006, two new villages and one new town have been created, and nearly 30,000 residential units have been issued building permits. In 2018 between January and July alone, our municipalities referred applications to the County proposing 1,886 residential units and 2.2 million square feet of commercial, industrial and office space. This is fairly typical for the County, which has seen some lean years following the Great Recession of 2007-2009, but is beginning to see a comeback in both residential and nonresidential construction.

In recent years, municipalities have focused on ways to provide alternative energy, with applications for solar installations steadily increasing. In the time between January and July of 2018, the County received 27 applications for large-scale solar installations, a number which has consistently increased over the last few years. These installations are typically being constructed on farm fields for their advantages of open and relatively flat space. A concern of the Orange County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board is that the solar installations are covering soils designated as prime agricultural soils or soils of statewide importance, which takes those soils out of production; County Planning is working to reconcile these concerns and balance our agricultural heritage and industry with the concerns and needs of cleaner energy production.

The newly created villages and town in the County are in the east-central area of the County; the Village of South Blooming Grove, located along the Town of Blooming Grove boundary with the Towns of Monroe...
and Woodbury; the Village of Woodbury, coterminous with the Town of Woodbury boundary but excluding the portion of the Village of Harriman located in the Town of Woodbury; and the Town of Palm Tree, newly formed as of January 1, 2019, which incorporated around the Village of Kiryas Joel, includes a portion of the land north of NYS Route 17 formerly in the Town of Monroe. These villages and town were all created to manage growth in the County’s largest village, the Village of Kiryas Joel. Since the 2003 Orange County Comprehensive Plan was written, the Village has increased by an estimated 10,000 people, nearly doubling in size. This has required the Village to look to annexing land and other ways to house its burgeoning population; an annexation of 164 acres from the Town of Monroe to the Village was completed several years ago. This annexation and the creation of the Town of Palm Tree will enable the Village to provide housing for its residents for at least the foreseeable future. However, the Hasidic Jewish community that constitutes the majority of Kiryas Joel’s population has unique needs that will require additional land for expansion.

Commercial and light industrial development has steadily increased as well along the County’s three interstate highway corridors, with much of the activity occurring in the Towns of Monroe, Montgomery, Newburgh, Wallkill and Woodbury. These are places with easy highway access and in some cases, easy access to freight train lines as well. The medical industry in the County is centered around the Town of Wallkill, although there are medical clusters throughout the County. The agricultural industry continues to be both culturally and economically important in more rural Towns and Villages.

D. PRIORITY GROWTH AREAS

The County Plan’s Priority Growth Area (PGA) concept is fundamentally based on a differentiation between urban and rural areas, and the specific needs of each of these two areas. The concept proposes that the land within and outside of the PGAs be managed differently, as outlined below; this management should be done through coordination by municipalities, the County, and all other stakeholders such as residents, business-owners, etc.

All growth should be sustainable, and therefore the expansion of our County’s urban and suburban development needs to be directed to areas where it can be supported efficiently and effectively. The Priority Growth Area policy was first presented in the 1980 Comprehensive Plan as the Urban-Rural Concept, and updated in 1987. That Urban-Rural Concept was then modified for the 2003 Plan and again in a 2010 update of the Plan. The concept recognizes the importance of our historic communities the cities, villages, and hamlets of the County. Such places typically have the infrastructure to serve growth, including
transportation (both motorized and non-motorized), central water and sewer services, dense housing, and other infrastructure that enables efficient and logical development.

The entirety of the City of Middletown was designated a Priority Growth Area according to the 2010 Priority Growth Area update.

The Priority Growth Areas are divided into three categories: Growth Areas, Local Centers, and Transit Centers.

i. Growth Areas
Growth Areas include the cities and villages of the County where growth has historically occurred, with some outlying areas where growth is projected and could potentially be accommodated. Most of the Areas include a prominent central business district, regional civic and employment sites, a mix of land use types and intensities, pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods, access to major transportation systems, and a diversity of housing, community and commercial activities.

Within the Growth Areas, the County encourages additional urban development within those areas of higher density such as cities, villages and hamlets. Appropriate development includes commercial, appropriate industrial, higher density residential, and community service uses. The use of infill construction and mixed-use building development as methods of revitalization are especially appropriate in these areas. While the County encourages growth within the Areas, it is critical to note that growth should be sustainable and be based on the available infrastructure and other resources of that community; water and sewer service are two of the most critical and often scarce commodities that should be considered when a new development is proposed. The Growth Areas are intended to be able to accommodate growth that is projected for the County, considering the factors discussed within this section, and typically include:

- Centralized water and sewer services
- Land use and zoning allows for a diverse mix of uses and housing types within a walkable area
- Existing municipal plans for development and conservation
- Complete Streets criteria, such as a connected road network, bicycle lanes and accessible sidewalks, along with other facilities to increase safety and ease of use
- Other services and infrastructure that allow for the efficient use of land and relatively low-impact development
- Transit opportunities, including train stations, park and rides, and other intermodal connections
- Neighborhood-scale commercial and institutional uses that are pedestrian friendly

Environmental and conservation considerations should also be carefully considered within the Growth Areas. Features and areas that should be preserved
Whenever possible include:

- land affecting a drinking water supply
- steep slopes, generally defined by the Dept. of Planning as slopes over 15%
- agricultural soils, defined in this Plan as USDA classes 1-4, which includes prime soils
- wetlands, including those not protected by State or Federal regulations, such as vernal pools
- floodplains and riparian buffers
- sand and gravel aquifers
- habitat for rare species
- scenic views
- historic and cultural resources
- land adjacent to protected areas, such as parks, nature preserves, or conservation areas

It should be noted that the Growth Areas include some portions of the watersheds and bedrock that drain to municipal drinking water supplies (i.e. reservoirs and wells), but that land uses within these watersheds, in particular, need to be managed by the municipalities in a manner that is compliant with best management practices for water supply protection. Also, while some Growth Areas include parkland, this does not indicate that the County policy is to target parkland or the area around parks for development; the County’s policy of prioritizing land adjacent to protected open space for additional conservation, as established in the Open Space Plan (2003), remains County policy. Similarly, while the County has recommended that areas adjacent to the Hudson, Delaware and Wallkill Rivers be included within Growth Areas, this recommendation does not intend to direct additional development to sensitive riverfront areas, but instead aims to prioritize investments in infrastructure and amenities in these areas.

While avoiding development on the above features is important within all parts of the County, it is especially important in the Growth Areas in order to balance green and grey infrastructure and to maintain the quality of life that makes Orange County an attractive place to live and work.

Within these Growth Areas, the County prioritizes providing technical support, incentives, and investment in physical infrastructure such as:

- central water service
- central sewer service
- sidewalks and bike lanes
- transportation infrastructure
- affordable housing

ii. Local Centers

Another component of the Priority Growth Area concept is the Local Center, which includes many of the County’s more established hamlets, some of which may provide limited services to surrounding residents. They may include some community or civic facilities and modest retail or professional services. Centralized public services are not common in these centers, but may be needed to accommodate added growth. Local centers also include some crossroads and major road intersections that could serve as future community or neighborhood centers but are not reliant on immediate arterial or interstate highway access. County investment in these locations should
be focused on addressing preexisting water and sewer infrastructure needs, improvement of transit and transportation amenities, the enhancement of amenities (such as parks, trail development and tourist attractions), and small business development.

iii. Transit Centers
Additional focus for growth within the County should be given to areas of existing and future transit service. As shown in the Priority Growth Area map, Transit Centers include both commuter rail stations and areas where bus transit (i.e. park & ride lot) exists or is needed. Priority consideration should be given to providing options for intermodal connections between transit, motor vehicle, and pedestrian or bicycle transportation for both long-distance and local travelers. The County strongly endorses the transit-oriented development concept that offers pedestrian-scaled projects and an appropriate mix of residential and commercial development at densities and scales sited to take advantage of transit connections.

iv. Areas Outside Priority Growth Areas
The County’s highest priority for rural areas is the protection of open space, which includes both working landscapes and natural resources. The many values of open space are outlined in the County’s 2004 Open Space Plan, which identifies five major resource areas: Water Resources, Agriculture, Recreation, Landforms and Landmarks, and Biological Diversity. Protection of these resources, while a priority in all regions of the County, is especially crucial in rural areas in order to avoid fragmentation of the natural landscape and disruption of the County’s critical agricultural industry.

Orange County created an open space fund soon after that Plan’s completion, in recognition of the need to help preserve precious natural resources. Since 2005, the County has helped to protect 2,995 acres of significant natural areas and working landscapes in the form of conservation easements and acquisitions, all in partnership with municipalities, New York State, and/or non-profit conservation organizations. Because maintaining active farmland is one of the most critical objectives in the Open Space Plan and because the response from farmers was so strong, 18 of the 23 projects awarded County open space funds are active farms, totaling 2,687 acres of productive agricultural land.
This open space fund has helped to preserve important open spaces and will continue to do so in the future, but other programs and policies are needed in order to maintain the County’s important rural character and natural integrity. In regions not designated as Priority Growth Areas, County programs and investments should strongly encourage the continuation of agriculture, conservation of important biological habitats, preservation of wildlife corridors, and protection of scenic vistas. The following map (Map 1) shows the County’s Priority Growth Areas, highlighting the five locations where changes are being proposed to the Growth Areas. These modifications were determined based on public feedback, input from the County Planning Department staff, and the direction of the Orange County Planning Board.
Map 1: Priority Growth Areas

Priority Growth Areas
Orange County, New York

Legend
- Priority Growth Areas
- Transit Centers
- Local Centers
- Passenger Rail Line

This map is a simple graphic representation of fuller County policy. That policy, including details on addressing environmental and other constraints within Priority Growth Areas, is found in essential text accompanying this map within the adopted County Comprehensive Plan. See the Priority Growth Area section of the Plan for more information.
Credits

COVER:
• Orange County Tourism

SECTIONS:
I. Orange County Tourism
II. Habitat For Humanity of Greater Newburgh: https://habitatnewburgh.org/

FIGURES:
2. Orange County Dept. of Planning
6. Transit Orange
7. Orange County Tourism
8. Orange County Tourism
9. Orange County Dept. of Planning; US Census Bureau
10. Orange County Dept. of Planning; US Census Bureau
11. Orange County Dept. of Planning; US Census Bureau
12. Orange County Dept. of Planning; US Census Bureau
13. Orange County Dept. of Planning; US Census Bureau
14. Orange County Dept. of Planning; US Census Bureau
15. Orange County Dept. of Planning; US Census Bureau
16. Orange County Dept. of Planning; US Census Bureau
17. Orange County Dept. of Planning; US Census Bureau
20. Orange County Tourism
21. Transit Orange
22. Orange County Dept. of Planning
23. Orange County Tourism

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