

IDEAS FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR THE CITY OF SARATOGA SPRINGS

A Position Paper
March 2013

Sustainable Saratoga is a not-for-profit organization that promotes sustainable practices and the protection of natural resources, through education, advocacy and action, for the benefit of current and future generations in the Saratoga Springs area. In furtherance of this mission, Saratoga Sustainable adopts this position paper.

OBJECTIVE

The City of Saratoga Springs is in the process of updating its 2001 Comprehensive Plan. This document is the official policy document that guides the physical development of the City. Policies set forth in the Comprehensive Plan strongly influence the quality and durability of the community.

Sustainable Saratoga's objective is to develop a list of sustainable ideas that should be considered for inclusion in the update of the Comprehensive Plan for the City of Saratoga Springs.

NEED FOR A NEW COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

In the early fall of 2012, Sustainable Saratoga sent a letter to the Mayor urging that the Comprehensive Plan be updated for the following reasons:

- Since 2008, the national, state and local economy has seen significant decline and there are limited short-term solutions. Hard choices on municipal expenditures and sourcing of revenues are needed to create a more sustainable economy for Saratoga Springs. An updated Comprehensive Plan will provide a framework for these policy choices.
- The economic impact on middle- to lower-income residents has been significant. Policies and planning must address the needs of middle- to lower-income residents within our community. Everyone must have equitable access to the City's resources.
- Since 2001 technology and our understanding of conservation science, climate change, and smart growth have greatly advanced. It has created new realities that need to be addressed. These issues affect our economy, environment and quality of life.
- New land use patterns and policies on conservation measures impact energy costs and air and water quality in both the public and private sectors.

- There is an increased awareness and interest in an improved quality of life within our community.
- The “development plan” graphic in the existing Comprehensive Plan is static. Incorporating advanced and interactive illustrations identifying integration of land use activities would better engage and inform the community.
- New planning tools allow for a fully integrated “systems” approach to comprehensive plan development, fostering the interrelationships and synergies among various components of a traditional comprehensive plan.
- New science has enhanced the understanding of the value of natural resource systems, biodiversity and green infrastructure design. Adopting practices that minimize environmental impacts and preserve the full complement of ecosystem services will avoid city expenditures on costly and unnecessary grey infrastructure.

SUMMARY OF SHORTCOMINGS WITH THE CURRENT PLAN

The following is a brief list of some of the key sustainability shortcomings with the current 2001 Comprehensive Plan of the City of Saratoga Springs:

- There are no measureable targets for achieving sustainability.
- The interrelationship among separate functional policies is not clearly defined.
- There are very few policies relating to working with other entities (adjacent communities, County, school district, non-profits, etc.) to address common issues.
- There are few policies addressing social service needs.
- Separate existing policy documents are not meaningfully incorporated into the Plan:
 - Open Space Plan (2002)
 - Historic Preservation Plan (2001)
 - Complete Streets (2012)
 - Community Development “Consolidated Plan”
 - Cleaner Greener Community Agreement (2012)
- There are few policies relating to conservation of energy, water and other natural resources.

SUSTAINABLE IDEAS FOR THE NEW COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

On May 22, 2012, Sustainable Saratoga held a community forum entitled “Sustainability and The Comprehensive Plan: What it Means for Saratoga.” More than 60 people heard presentations by David Hogenkamp (Empire State Future), Jeff Olson (Alta Planning) and Kate Maynard (City Planner) about what is in the Comprehensive Plan and what sustainable ideas could be considered in a new plan. At the end of that forum people expressed interest in talking more about sustainable ideas for the Comprehensive Plan.

Sustainable Saratoga held a second community forum on January 31, 2013 entitled “Come Share Your Sustainable Ideas for our City!” Doug Melnick, Director of the Office of Energy and Sustainability for the City of Albany, gave a presentation on how his community prepared and adopted a very sustainable Comprehensive Plan. In the second part of the forum, members of the audience offered their ideas regarding sustainable measures they believe should be included in the new Comprehensive Plan.

Adding to the comments received at the forum, Sustainable Saratoga’s Housing and Urban Planning Committee (HUP) has researched and compiled the following vision and ideas that should be considered as part of the Comprehensive Plan update.

The key premise is that through sustainable development the **City of Saratoga will be best able to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.** Sustainable development is the engine that enhances economic opportunity and community well-being while protecting the natural resources and amenities upon which our community depends. Smart Growth practices promote development that serves the economy, the community, and the environment.

A Sustainable Vision for the Comprehensive Plan

Sustainable Saratoga offers the following sustainable vision for Saratoga Springs:

A SUSTAINABLE VISION FOR SARATOGA SPRINGS: 2020

The year is 2020. Saratoga Springs is well-known as the “City in the Country.” It is a diverse, compact city surrounded by a rural greenbelt that provides contiguous natural areas and wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, productive agriculture, and low-impact residential development.

Saratoga Springs is a community where:

- *Most residents can walk, bike or take public transit to their jobs and to visit friends, stores, restaurants and recreational facilities.*
- *Schools are also neighborhood activity centers for all ages.*
- *Neighborhoods are diverse with residents of various ages, incomes, and racial and ethnic backgrounds.*
- *Buildings are well-maintained, well-insulated, energy efficient and incorporate a broad range of distributed renewable energy resources.*
- *The downtown is the civic, cultural and economic center of the community.*
- *City vehicles are powered by range of clean alternative fuels and adequate infrastructure exists to support these vehicles.*
- *Throughout the City, greenhouse gas emissions have been reduced by 25% in the past 10 years.*
- *There is an abundance of large street trees that enhance our downtown and neighborhood with beauty, energy-saving benefits and other ecosystem services. In particular, the side streets within the commercial core are well on their way to being as richly forested as Broadway.*
- *Conservation measures have reduced municipal water consumption, and our water supplies are well-protected with effective watershed regulations.*
- *There is more high-tech, small manufacturing and service-oriented employment in the City and many residents work in town or at home.*
- *There is a greater variety of affordable housing, innovative services and support systems that allow senior citizens to live independently and remain longer in their own homes or in their own neighborhood.*
- *The city is served by an effective public transportation system of inter-city trains and clean fueled buses.*
- *New residential growth has been accommodated not by sprawl but by building new highly energy efficient and appropriately sized residential units in infill locations and within*

sensitively designed structures in existing residential neighborhoods.

- *Restaurants, stores and seasonal farm stands offer many locally grown or locally produced products.*
- *Public lands and vacant lots are used as pocket parks and community gardens.*
- *The community installs solar arrays on degraded land that offers renewable energy to the City and its residents*
- *The City's rich variety of historic structures is preserved and well-maintained to attract a significant heritage tourism business.*

Sustainable Policies for the Comprehensive Plan

The following is list of policies that should be considered for inclusion in the new Comprehensive Plan for Saratoga Springs.

GENERAL POLICIES:

- 1 Create a sustainability office to coordinate sustainability efforts throughout the City and to work with neighboring communities.
- 2 Establish measurable targets for various policies. These could include a target standard for greenhouse gas emissions, reductions in local vehicle miles travelled, annual new plantings of street trees, etc.
- 3 Add items that show the interrelationships among the various polices in the different functional areas of the plan.
- 4 Incorporate by summary and reference the other major policy documents that have been adopted by the City Council:
 - Open Space Plan (2002)
 - Historic Preservation Plan (2001)
 - Complete Streets (2012)
 - Community Development “Consolidated Plan”
 - Cleaner Greener Community Agreement (2012)
 - Others including the pending new Urban Forestry Master Plan

SPECIFIC POLICIES

The following policies have been grouped in most of the same categories as used in the draft Capital District Regional Sustainability Plan. But, in fact, many policies are interrelated among categories. The policies are not presented in any particular order of importance or ranking.

Land Use and Livable Community:

1. Revise land use development maps to better illustrate smart growth principles (identify neighborhoods, economic activity centers, mixed-use corridor development, local activity nodes, open space and conservation development areas, etc.).
2. Advocate for a vibrant downtown.
3. Advocate for compact neighborhoods around the downtown.
4. Support infill development wherever possible.

5. Increase mixed-use density along public transit routes in the core area of the City.
6. Increase the number of public plazas and public meeting spaces.
7. Promote reuse of vacant and underutilized buildings and strengthen the new vacant building registry that will encourage the reoccupation and reuse of vacant/abandoned structures.
8. Encourage rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of existing historic well-constructed buildings.
9. Clean up the few remaining brownfield sites.
10. Improve GIS systems to have better information on land use activities and factors that influence it.
11. Increase form-based zoning to achieve desired community character.
12. Establish criteria that will guide future land use decisions (neighborhood services, diverse transportation options, impact on tax base, etc.).
13. Create new architectural design guidelines for neighborhood rehabilitation, increased density, and carriage house utilization.
14. Create new landscape design guidelines for neighborhoods that add safety, comfort, and beauty, while maintaining or enhancing ecosystem services.
15. Establish new regulations to protect unique trees and natural settings throughout the city.
16. Strengthen multi-modal complete streets standards and review process.
17. Encourage more small neighborhood commercial support centers with greater neighborhood involvement and support.
18. Adjust mandatory parking requirements in the core area to discourage vehicle use and provide alternatives like rim parking with shuttles.
19. Install public improvement features (traffic lights, parking signs, curb cuts, sidewalks, power lines, etc.) in neighborhoods that are more context sensitive.
20. Encourage more coordination of school facility planning and use to complement community and neighborhood needs.
21. Encourage community interrelationships with Empire State College and Skidmore College.
22. Encourage more coordination and sharing of all public and private educational and institutional facilities.
23. Promote more sustainability-based and civic curriculum with all the community educational facilities.
24. Expand City Urban Heritage Center programming in cooperation with museums and educational and other institutions.
25. Support community education outreach programs of the public library.
26. Promote more healthy activities in each of the City's passive and active recreational areas.
27. Support all public/private efforts to increase physical activities for all residents.
28. Promote more alternative transportation connections among neighborhoods and city open spaces and parks.
29. Partner with public and private schools to increase shared access to all indoor and outdoor recreational facilities.
30. Develop a green infrastructure plan to link all the existing open space areas within the City and surrounding neighborhoods.
31. Promote the development and continued operations of neighborhood community groups.

32. Support expansion of services to senior citizens to enable them to stay in their homes and neighborhoods.
33. Expand neighborhood watch programs.
34. Promote cultural diversity programs and events throughout the community.
35. Support all arts and cultural festivals.
36. Promote access for all citizens to the community's museums and cultural facilities.
37. Promote volunteer opportunities and participation in all sectors of the community.
38. Encourage co-location of human services agencies and outreach efforts.
39. Develop management plan for all city-owned properties, especially the lands purchased through the City's open space bond act.
40. Allow for and encourage community gardens and backyard agriculture and sustainable agriculture within the city limits.
41. Recognize and address the community's need for affordable and workforce housing.

Economic Development:

1. Work with County and regional economic development organizations and establish clear guidelines regarding the City's long-term sustainability objectives.
2. Work with the high-tech sector in the region to identify how the City can best promote employment and career opportunities located within the City for local residents.
3. Reduce the barriers to home-based businesses and encourage the proliferation of the same.
4. Ensure the City has access to the latest smart technical infrastructure.
5. Develop contingency plans to mitigate the impacts of any large decline from any single employment sector.
6. Promote the development of pools of capital to promote and expand local small business investments.
7. Encourage sustainable agriculture businesses.
8. Encourage existing businesses to improve their environmental performance.
9. Improve the City's procurement process to support the purchase of locally sourced and/or environmentally sensitive products.
10. Promote the creation of a youth "green corps" to provide summer job opportunities at public buildings and sites.
11. Create an award program for businesses that employs environmentally sensitive and green building improvements.
12. Encourage coordination among private realtors to develop an easily accessible directory of available business properties.
13. Ensure coordination among all downtown marketing and tourist promotions.
14. Encourage the expansion of recycling activities on the former landfill site on Weibel Avenue.
15. Promote a diversity of housing types in close proximity to employment centers, such as downtown, the hospital, Skidmore College, the racetracks, etc.
16. Promote historic tax credits and green building incentives.
17. Continue to promote heritage tourism as a way to promote historic preservation efforts.

18. Expand the geographic boundaries of the downtown special assessment district to provide improved and coordinated services for the whole downtown area.
19. Create an attractive downtown streetscape that has significant tree canopy, street furniture and other pedestrian amenities that add comfort and interest for shoppers and visitors. Develop an aggressive program to bring these standards to the streets surrounding Broadway in our expanded commercial core.
20. Develop “buy local” programs and “farm-to-table” programs.
21. Promote local zoning and marketing for local craft persons and artists.
22. Develop strategies to promote a diverse local economy.

Climate Adaptation:

1. Update and strengthen disaster preparedness plans including the potential for prolonged power outages, heat waves, droughts and other extreme weather events.
2. Formally incorporate the latest climate projections into long-term planning activities.
3. Establish a network of facilities throughout the City that can serve as shelters for local community members during storms and extended periods of utility outages (electric and natural gas supply).
4. Conduct a study that assesses the value of ecosystem services in the City of Saratoga Springs.
5. Update data on flood prone areas in response to climate change forecasts and discourage intensive land uses in those areas.
6. Create new guidelines and increase stream buffers to protect the natural watercourses.
7. Implement the new Urban Forestry Management Plan.
8. Expand urban forestry program to provide shade trees throughout the City.
9. Develop and implement programs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
10. Work with other county and regional governments/organizations on programs for climate change adaptation.
11. Develop and implement a Climate Adaption Plan to anticipate ways the City can adjust its resource management, land use planning, and infrastructure improvements in an incremental way to address and respond to future climate changes.
12. Identify wildlife corridors and enhance and protect those areas to ensure wildlife mobility.
13. Identify wildlife habitat areas and develop guidelines to protect them.
14. Develop strong local ordinances to protect state and federal threatened and endangered species that are located within the community.
15. Develop educational materials to encourage residents to plant only native species.
16. Develop a plan to identify and eliminate invasive species.
17. Develop public education programs to discourage idling of motor vehicles.
18. Develop a water plan to implement for both short-term and long-term droughts.
19. Investigate the feasibility of developing new natural stormwater management treatment facilities to recharge groundwater supplies, reduce peak flow runoff volumes, and improve the quality of urban stormwater runoff.
20. Coordinate with the Capital District to fund sustainable initiatives in Saratoga Springs using State public benefit funds under the Cleaner Greener Communities Program.

Energy:

1. Locate and correct any remaining improper connections between the municipal sewer and stormwater systems to reduce unnecessary operation of the wastewater treatment facilities.
2. Encourage the use of solar photovoltaic and thermal panels for homes and businesses.
3. Encourage broader adoption of geothermal heating and cooling systems for businesses and residents throughout the City.
4. Encourage all commercial buildings to complete a full commissioning assessment to ensure that all energy efficient equipment is properly functioning in a coordinated and optimized manner.
5. Promote building orientations/exposure, tree and other landscape planting, and streetscape design (including placement of utility wires) to create planting room to maximize solar heating and cooling.
6. Promote energy efficiency in business, residential and municipal buildings and operations while also capitalizing on federal, state and utility incentives.
7. Develop demonstration projects for fields of solar panels and other community-based renewable energy technologies.
8. Promote the use of alternative fuels in private and public sector vehicle fleets.
9. Adopt improved building codes that exceed state-level energy efficiency standards for all construction.
10. Encourage the design and construction of “net-zero” energy buildings throughout the City.
11. Develop new lighting standards for public spaces that delivers high-efficiency illumination while reducing or eliminating the amount of light pollution into the night sky.
12. Produce educational materials that provide guidance on what actions local residents can take to promote a greener environment.
13. Encourage all residents and businesses to take advantage of state-level electric utility net-metering laws that can reduce the overall cost of installing distributed renewable energy systems.
14. Promote financing programs for alternative energy activities.
15. Work with developers and builders to foster better building techniques to construct and retrofit more energy efficient homes and businesses.

Food Systems:

1. Promote “farm-to-table” programs for local products.
2. Advocate for a ban on unhealthy food packaging in restaurants, take-out establishments, etc.
3. Adopt “right-to-farm” legislation to support existing and future agricultural activity.
4. Promote and incentivize community gardens, rooftop gardens, urban gardening, year-round farmers markets, and other sustainable agricultural practices.
5. Develop a city-wide composting program for restaurants, institutions and residents.

Transportation:

1. Support implementation of City's Complete Streets policy.
2. Promote expansion of public transit and an equitable way to support and fund it.
3. Adopt and implement the City's draft Bicycle Master Plan.
4. Ensure an adequate size and width for public right-of-ways to provide accommodation for bikes, pedestrians, street trees, utilities and green infrastructure.
5. Promote the completion of the new Greenway Belt Trail Plan.
6. Develop and implement traffic calming plans for all neighborhoods.
7. Improve safe pedestrian crossings at intersections and designated points.
8. Promote full compliance for handicapped accessibility on public sidewalks and facilities.
9. Encourage linkages among neighborhoods as well as those among neighborhoods and commercial, institutional and natural areas.
10. Cooperate with all schools to implement Safe Routes to Schools improvements.
11. Work to improve transit access to all medical treatment and social service facilities.
12. Promote opportunities for bicycle and vehicle sharing.
13. Develop a parking management plan for downtown and inner city neighborhoods.
14. Advocate for a rational parking plan for downtown that will encourage higher private vehicle turnover, more pedestrian activity, fairer cost accounting and greater use of public transit.
15. Develop plans for a multi-modal transportation center in the core area of the downtown.
16. Promote ridesharing, car sharing and carpooling programs.
17. Promote educational and enforcement programs relating "share the road" concepts.

Water:

1. Implement watershed protection plans for existing City water supply areas.
2. Develop new sources of drinking water or connect to existing nearby sources.
3. Promote water conservation programs including rate structure adjustments.
4. Expand maintenance programs to detect and repair leaks to the water distribution system.
5. Create new guidelines to keep intensive land use activities away from watercourses.
6. Develop new guidelines for reducing use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides near streams, storm sewer catch basins, wetlands and water bodies.
7. Encourage use of more pervious pavements to allow more surface water to penetrate into the ground.
8. Develop guidelines for the effective utilization of vegetation to recharge, retain and delay release of storm water.
9. Promote rainwater harvesting for residential and public use, such as flower programs.
10. Develop strategically located storm water management areas to treat urban runoff from densely developed areas.
11. Promote water reclamation systems for new development.

Solid Waste:

1. Advocate for reduction or elimination of single-use plastic bags in commercial stores.

2. Advocate for the reduction in the use of plastic foam containers from all beverage or food establishments.
3. Promote recycling opportunities within the community and establish a target for the percent of municipal waste that is recycled.
4. Create urban composting programs for household organic materials.
5. Adopt legislation to reduce the volume of construction debris.
6. Adopt guidelines for encouraging the restoration and expansion of existing structures, rather than demolition.
7. Promote salvage “unconstruction” and reclamation of building materials when demolition is called for.
8. Reduce water material generated from site clearing operations by enforcing regulations that call for the preservation of mature trees at construction sites.

Sustainable Saratoga reserves the right to update or revise this position statement at any time in the future.

This position paper was endorsed by the Housing and Urban Planning Committee on February 22, 2013, and by the Board of Directors on March 25, 2013.