

## SUSTAINABLE SARATOGA'S REVIEW OF THE FINAL UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE (UDO)

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Sustainable Saratoga, a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote sustainable practices and protection of natural resources, has been closely following the Unified Development Ordinance (the UDO) process for many years. The UDO is a document of great consequence to the future of our community; it provides the regulations that shape our city, neighborhoods, and the greenbelt.

Over the past several years, we performed detailed reviews of the UDO, attended public meetings, met with City Council members and Planning Department staff, submitted public statements, as well as made specific recommendations to improve the UDO to better protect our sensitive and invaluable natural habitats and to bring the UDO into compliance with the city's 2015 Comprehensive Plan. While we have focused our advocacy on things that are lacking in the UDO in hopes that those issues would be remedied, we recognize that there are many good sustainability and environmental protection provisions in the UDO.

There are a few critical shortcomings of the final UDO document that what we feel must be remedied before the UDO is approved by the City Council. **The UDO needs to go farther to preserve the rural character of the city's Greenbelt and the sensitive environmental areas it contains.** The changes we propose are not complicated but will significantly improve the Greenbelt protections. We are eager to work with the City staff and the Council to hammer out the details of how to best address these final issues.

As currently written, the UDO allows too many inappropriate uses and fails to maintain or establish rural character in the "country" part of the "City in the Country". In our view, this violates the Comprehensive Plan by diminishing the required distinct boundary between the "city" and the "country" and allows for uses and site plans that could threaten the health of the wetland and forest resources in that surround the urban core. It also erodes the "City in the Country" character and walkable downtown that attracts tourists and sustains our economy.

We have argued since the start of this process that a critical review of all current and proposed rural uses in the Rural Residential (RR) and Gateway Commercial - Rural (GC-R) districts must be made to ensure every use is consistent with the vision of the Comprehensive Plan. It is essential that the UDO also contain clear, detailed design standards to preserve the rural character of these areas. To adequately protect our



important environmental resources such as streams, wetlands, and forests, it is imperative that both the permitted uses and how the uses are built into the landscape are adequately addressed. We must also support our land use boards by giving them detailed, mandatory standards that give them the direction they need to consistently uphold the vision for the City.

**It is vitally important that the following amendments to be included in the adopted version of the UDO:**

1. Uses in the RR and GC-R districts must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan's vision to protect our natural resources and keep urban uses in the downtown area. Some of the most intense uses proposed for the RR were addressed in the final UDO, but many other uses remain that are neither residential nor associated with agricultural or recreational activities. The UDO continues to include uses in the GC-R that should not be allowed in the rural entranceways to the urban core, including large hotels and restaurants.
2. Strengthen the rural design standards for all projects within the Rural Residential Zoning District by inserting the omitted "design standards" and illustrations that exist in the current "Rural Design and Siting Standards" into UDO Article 16.10 and making these standards mandatory. To maximize effectiveness and create uniform decision-making, these standards cannot be waived without a written explanation for why the waiver was necessary.
3. Add strong and clearly delineated design standards for all projects along city entrance roads that are within the Architectural Review District and outside the urban core by requiring that architectural review for all properties in the Rural Residential zoning district are subject to the "design standards" in Article 16.10.
4. Strengthen the rural design standards in the Rt 50/Rt9 Gateway Commercial Rural District (GC-R) by replacing the omitted "design standards" and illustrations from the current standards found in Article 3.2 of the existing zoning ordinance and making these standards mandatory. To maximize effectiveness and create uniform decision-making, these standards cannot be waived without a written explanation for why the waiver was necessary.

While we regret that the UDO draft does not contain all of the sustainability provisions we have advocated for (see Appendix), **it is critically important that the four provisions above are included in the UDO before it is adopted.**

  
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Executive Director

  
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Co-Chair, Board of Directors

  
Laura Rappaport  
Co-Chair, Board of Directors



## APPENDIX

Sustainable Saratoga remains committed to following up on the sustainability and environmental protection issues that are not adequately addressed by this final UDO. For example, while the UDO does not weaken the protections for streams and wetlands, the document does not go far enough to protect these vital resources that we will increasingly depend on to mitigate the impacts of climate change and maintain water quality. Similarly, the incentives for green building standards and building decarbonization fall far short of where we need to be in reducing our contributions to the climate crisis.

It was decided early on in the process that affordable housing would not be considered within the scope of this UDO. However, the lack of affordable housing plagues the city and has consequences for the diversity and vibrancy of our city, as well as development and environmental impacts well beyond our city's boundaries. This issue must be addressed by the next City Council.

### KEY SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED IN THE NEAR FUTURE:

- Reexamine all uses and their definitions that are included within the Greenbelt (including the RR and GC-R zoning districts).
- Increase stream corridor protections for all streams
- Protect water body shorelines from erosion
- Increase wetland buffer protection for all wetlands
- Expand incentives for building decarbonization and require new buildings to consider green building practices such as onsite solar, green roofs, geothermal, solar hot water, air source heat pumps, and system electrification as part of the site plan application
- Add realistic, achievable zoning amendments to obtain more housing diversity and affordability
- Enact greater protections for the public right-of-way for pedestrian safety and tree belt vegetation
- Expand exterior lighting controls to reduce light pollution
- Restore regulations to promote more walkable commercial areas in the urban core
- Improve stormwater management regulations
- Add greater specificity to ensure clear and uniform criteria for making land use decisions

