

Sustainable Saratoga UPDATE
Proposed Amendments to the Unified Development Ordinance

At the April 4, 2023 meeting of the Saratoga Springs City Council, Mayor Kim presented 4 proposed amendments to the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), the city's revised Zoning Ordinance. As you will recall from our earlier email:

- Amendment 1 would remove a number of land uses that were added to the UDO, even though they are inconsistent with the city's Comprehensive Plan, including 2 uses in the Rural Residential (RR) District, and 9 uses in the GC-R (Gateway Rural Commercial) District along Routes 9 and 50. Both districts lie within the City's Greenbelt.
- Amendment 2 would apply to the Planning Board and Design Review Board. It would clarify when those review boards could waive rural design standards and require the boards to provide written justifications for all such decisions.
- Amendment 3 would increase the width of protective buffers along streams and emphasize the Planning Board's authority to increase both stream and wetland buffers where needed.
- Amendment 4 would strengthen protections for trees when land clearing requires a "land disturbance activity permit."

We at Sustainable Saratoga want to thank all those who responded to our call for action by writing to City Council members or coming out to speak in support of Mayor Kim's amendments. Your voices had an impact. Unfortunately, paid representatives for commercial interests were there too.

After Council deliberations, the outcome was mixed: Amendments 2 and 4 passed, while Amendment 1 was withdrawn and Amendment 3 was postponed, pending an inventory of the streams and wetlands that would be affected.

We were disappointed by the Council discussion of Amendment 1. Questions about what uses should go where were answered after the extensive public process that resulted in the unanimous City Council vote adopting our current Comprehensive Plan. The job of the UDO is to transform the Comprehensive Plan's "city-in-the-country" vision into enforceable regulations, not to re-open the process and give development interests another bite at the apple. Large restaurants and hotels miles from our urban core shouldn't be allowed to compete with downtown businesses. Dense residential development shouldn't be located far from the city, where residents will have to drive everywhere they need to go.

Some Council members also were swayed by the argument that, since the UDO was recently adopted, it should be given time to "work." On the contrary, we believe that the UDO should be allowed to work only after inconsistencies with the Comprehensive Plan have been corrected, and the inappropriate uses have been removed. We shouldn't close the door only after all the horses have left the barn!

We are continuing to work with Mayor Kim and the City Council to find common ground on amendments 1 and 3. We will keep the pressure on, and we urge you to do the same. Tell the City Council to protect the Greenbelt and stop urban sprawl!

