

The Saratoga Spring Greenbelt: What is it?

The Greenbelt is an area of low intensity development that surrounds the urban core of the City of Saratoga Springs.

The Greenbelt is important for many reasons. It fosters biodiversity, flood protection, water quality, climate resiliency, wildlife habitat, and the rural character of our “City in the County” that promotes tourism and economic sustainability for the community.



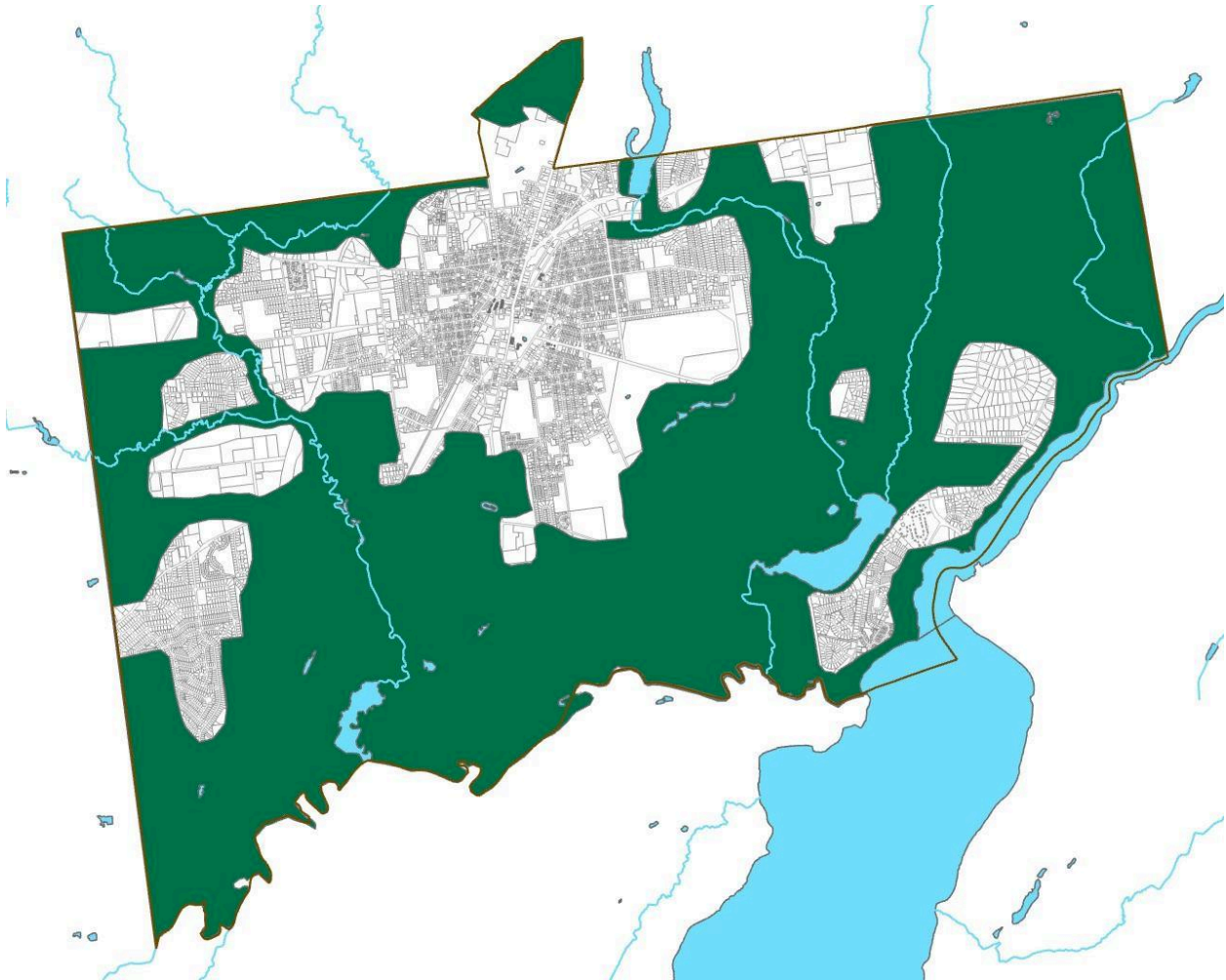
The City of Saratoga Springs first officially established a designated Greenbelt with the adoption of the 2001 Comprehensive Plan. That document declared that a map of the “Country Overlay Area” depicted a nearly contiguous Greenbelt around the urban core which defines and shapes the “Country” in the “The City in the Country” vision of the Plan.

This policy was repeated and reinforced with even stronger wording in the 2015 Comprehensive Plan.

Below is the map of the “Country Overlay Area” or Greenbelt from that 2015 Plan.



The following map produced by Sustainable Saratoga shows the same Greenbelt with a little more graphic clarity.



The Greenbelt does not have precise boundaries:

The boundaries of the Greenbelt or “Country Overlay Area” are not precise. Unlike the clear and legally defensible boundaries of the zoning district, the outline of the Greenbelt is more schematic. Its boundaries are more fluid.

However, it was intended that the Greenbelt would have recognizable boundaries. The dense urban core is to have a well-defined urban edge that differentiates it from the outlying rural area (the Greenbelt).

The Greenbelt is not all “Green”:

The “Country Overlay Area” or Greenbelt is not all green. The City’s policy is that the area should “consist of open lands, a landscape of rural character and low-density residential development”.

Some of the Greenbelt is publicly owned, but most is privately owned. Low density development exists and is permitted in the Greenbelt. However, the City’s policy calls for all development within the Greenbelt to have “rural character”. The Greenbelt currently contains these uses:

- Low density residential and limited low to moderate commercial development.
- Protected open space such as wetlands, stream corridors, wildlife habitats, passive recreation lands, floodplains, areas with conservation easements.
- Private and institutional recreational lands and open space resources such as the Saratoga National Golf Course, Yaddo, and the racetracks.
- Public recreational lands including the Saratoga Spa State Park
- Linkages that provide natural corridors for wildlife and a multi-purpose trail system.
- Rural and scenic viewsheds.
- Vegetative visual and sound buffers from the Northway
- Active agriculture areas include equine farms and horse stables, truck farms and tree farms.
- Highway corridors: I-87 (Northway), Route 9 (South Broadway), Route 50, Route 9P (Outer Union Avenue), Route 29 (Outer Lake Avenue and Outer Washington Street), Route 9N (Outer Church Street)
- Lakefronts and small water bodies.

The Greenbelt by the numbers:

The Greenbelt comprises close to 70% of the City’s total land mass, housing about 7% of the city’s population. approximately more than 13,000 acres out of a total of 18,500 acres.

Within the approximate 13,000 acres Greenbelt, there are:

- Nearly 3,900 acres of New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) regulated freshwater wetlands (30% of the Greenbelt) *(Source: 2020 Natural Resources Inventory - page 116)*

- More than 7,150 acres of unfragmented habitat blocks (55% of the Greenbelt). These natural corridors that are most likely to allow the free movement of wildlife between habitat blocks. (*Source: 2020 Natural Resources Inventory - page 211*)
- Nearly 3,250 acres flood hazard areas (25% of the Greenbelt) These are areas that are susceptible to flooding every 100 to 500 years. (*Source: 2020 Natural Resources Inventory - page 159*)
- Nearly 8 acres of NYSDEC designated rare and vulnerable ecological communities (.01% of the Greenbelt) (*Source: 2020 Natural Resources Inventory – page 201*)
- More than 2,160 acres of New York State parkland (17% of the Greenbelt) (*Source: 2020 Natural Resources Inventory - page 258*)
- More than 270 acres of dedicated open space land or easements purchase by the Saratoga Springs 2002 Bond Act (2% of the Greenbelt) (*Source: 2020 Natural Resources Inventory – page 270*)
- More than 890 acres of preserved by planning process or private non-profits (7% of the Greenbelt) (*Source: 2020 Natural Resources Inventory- page 275*)
- More than 600 acres of active agriculture (5% of the Greenbelt) (*Source: 2020 Natural Resources Inventory – page 341*)
- Nearly 1,950 people (7% of the City’s total population) (*Source: Sustainable Saratoga*)

(Note: the above percentages do not add up to 100% because land use types are often found in more than one category. Also, all acreage figures are approximate because the boundaries of the Greenbelt are not precise.)