

City of Rensselaer Comprehensive Plan



January 2006

Introduction

Introduction and History

The City of Rensselaer, Rensselaer County is located in the heart of New York State's Capital District on the east side of the Hudson River directly across from Albany. As the smallest city in the region, Rensselaer is a quaint working class community with charming heritage areas and hilltop residential neighborhoods that are in close proximity to all primary employment centers. The development pattern is defined by the city's early dependence on the Hudson River. However, the city is also home to the ninth busiest train station in the nation as it is the confluence of the primary east-west and north-south arterials of the northeast's rail system.

One of the earliest Dutch settlements is located in the City of Rensselaer, NY. In 1629, Kilean Van Rensselaer established the feudal manor of Rensselaerwyck. The portion in Rensselaer County was 24 miles long and ran along the Hudson River to include what is now known as Schodack, Nassau, North and East Greenbush, Sand Lake, Grafton, Brunswick, Petersburg, Berlin, Stephentown, Pittstown, Troy and Rensselaer. Fort Crailo, located in the City of Rensselaer, was the early Manor house, and is the site where "Yankee Doodle" was composed in 1758.

This early Dutch history is present throughout the city today in the form of family names, architectural details and neighborhood designations.

In the 19th Century, the area now known as the City of Rensselaer entered an era of industrial growth that shaped the Capital District as well as the entire Northeast. The upper Hudson Valley became a primary economic engine for the State and the Nation. A myriad of products were invented and produced in the area, ranging from textiles to heavy machinery. The region became a center of distribution activity with the confluence of the Erie and Champlain Canals and the Hudson River. The City of Rensselaer grew as an industrial city with companies such as Huyck Mills and the Hudson River Aniline Color Works. Bayer Pharmaceuticals located in Rensselaer in 1903. BASF Corporation purchased the Bayer site in 1978 and became one of the region's largest employers until 2000.

Over the past thirty years, Rensselaer's industrial base has eroded as the region and the State have moved from manufacturing to informational and serviced-based sectors. While the city retains its important role as a shipping and distribution center managed by the Albany Port Authority, there are only a few employers still located within the city limits. Rensselaer has become a bedroom community for the Capital District, although great potential for redevelopment still exists. With significant stretches of land along the Hudson River that are currently vacant or underutilized, Rensselaer could become the Capital District's premiere waterfront destination. In addition, the availability of well

established industrial areas can be re-marketed as affordable locations for supportive office, research and development, distribution and warehouse spaces for the growing high technology industry of the Capital District.

Past Planning Efforts

The City of Rensselaer's last Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1969. Two additional plans were produced between 1975 and 1990 including the Recreation Master Plan for the Hollow Natural Area and the 1981 Riverfront Development Plan. In the late 1990's, SUNY Albany Department of Geography and Planning completed two studio project documents focusing on redevelopment efforts within the city. More recently, the City was awarded a grant by the New York State Department of State Division of Coastal Resources to complete a multi-phased planning study that reviews options to re-connect the city's Central Business District and new Train Station to the waterfront. A waterfront trail plan, design and construction program was included as part of this grant. Additionally, a Downtown Redevelopment Plan was developed and adopted by the City. It is included as Appendix B. In 2002, the City was awarded a grant by the Capital District Transportation Committee to develop recommendations to improve the State Route 9&20 corridor. Finally, the City was awarded a Technical Assistance Grant by the NYS Small Cities program to strategically plan for the revitalization of the North Broadway Corridor in 2003. The resulting North Broadway Revitalization Plan is included in Appendix C.

The Comprehensive Plan builds upon recommendations provided in the aforementioned documents and defines an overall vision for the community as it moves forward over the next fifteen years. The policies, land use recommendations and implementation strategies outlined in this document will help to guide decision makers in a thoughtful and consistent process for enhancement and revitalization, ensuring the needs and desires of the community are met.

Introduction

The Planning Process

The City of Rensselaer established a Steering Committee of 12 residents, business owners and city officials. Participants were charged with the task of overseeing the planning process, providing guidance and information and review of all products and recommendations.

The Committee was encouraged to review the information generated in past planning projects, especially the Downtown Redevelopment Plan. This document provided significant insight into market conditions, demographics, housing trends and land use recommendations for three key areas of the community, including the Central Business District, the Bath Neighborhood and the Train Station Area. The recommendations in the Downtown Redevelopment Plan served as a foundation for this Comprehensive Plan in many instances, especially related to land use and development.

A citywide inventory and analysis was completed as part of the Downtown Redevelopment Plan, as seen in Appendix A, and was updated for the Comprehensive Plan. The Steering Committee was provided with this information for review and comment.

The Committee was asked to identify key areas of interest and concern as part of the planning process. The group generated policies and objectives that focus on these areas of interest and are expected to guide future decisions. Measures were developed to track implementation success and identify potential improvements for each policy.

Land use and development was considered in great detail. The Committee was asked to review the existing zoning and land use maps of the city and determine revisions required to encourage development patterns desired by the community. These patterns were identified during the Downtown Redevelopment Plan Charrette.

A subsequent public meeting was conducted to review policy and land use recommendations for inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan. The public was encouraged to provide input on the recommendations provided and suggest any improvements that could be made to better implement their desired vision. Revisions to the future land use plan and policies were made according to public comment.

Implementation strategies were developed after the public meeting. These strategies are based upon each policy area and the land use plan. A second public hearing was held for the adoption of the Plan and comply with State Environmental Quality Review Act requirements.

STRUCTURE AND APPROACH OF THE PLAN

As the foundation for future decision-making and community investment, Rensselaer's Comprehensive Plan must address the short- and long-term needs of the City. Like any sound public policy, comprehensive plans are developed and implemented on multiple levels. The plan must address a continuum of issues and ideas, from the broad, all encompassing vision to detail-oriented implementation items and everything in between.

The plan is divided into chapters that focus on the unique features and challenges within the City of Rensselaer. Chapters are further structured around a system of objectives and strategies. Each chapter includes several objectives, or goals, that the City would like to achieve through the provisions of the plan. Beneath these objectives are a series of strategies that could be utilized to meet the stated objectives.

Introduction

OVERVIEW OF PLANNING TERMINOLOGY

The Comprehensive Plan includes references to, and discussion about, several community planning and design principles. The following terms are defined to ensure that readers fully understand the direction and intent of the Plan's goals, objectives and implementation items.

Key Terms:

Façade—the face or front of a building; usually the side facing the primary street or parking area.

Infrastructure—the basic facilities, services, and installations needed for the functioning of city. Infrastructure usually refers to roadways, communications systems, water, sewer and power lines.

Mixed-Use—refers to the combining of retail, commercial, industrial and/or service uses with multiple uses located in the same building, the same site or the same district. Mixed-use can occur horizontally (adjacent parcels take on different but complementary uses) or vertically (different floors with varying uses).

Open Space—An area set aside or reserved for public or private use with very few improvements. Uses can include: parks, golf courses, trails and farms

Pedestrian-scaled—most often refers to development that is built to accommodate and encourage pedestrian activity and movement.

Public Spaces—the parts of the community (whether or publicly or privately owned) that are available, without charge, for everyone to use or see, including streets, squares and parks. Also called public realm or public domain.

SEQRA—State Environmental Quality Review Act, the law governing environmental review of proposed planning, zoning and development activities within New York State.

Shovel-ready—a site that is prepared for construction to begin.

VISION STATEMENT

***R**esidents, workers and visitors will enjoy the high quality of life offered by the Rensselaer's unique combination of small-city charm and regional access to large-city amenities. The City will build upon its unique heritage and exceptional location within the Capital District, renewing residents' sense of pride in their community.*

The city's waterfront along the Hudson River will be reinvented as a place to live, work and recreate. Public access to the Hudson River from neighborhoods, the train station and the central business district will be of paramount importance. A waterfront pathway/trail will provide continuous public access, connecting to activity centers such as downtown, the train station and adjacent neighborhoods. New businesses will be attracted to Rensselaer's quality-of-life assets, excellent transportation infrastructure, and proximity to major educational institutions.

The City will include a variety of housing options that meet the needs of its diverse population. Residents will be encouraged to participate in the city's continuous planning and development process, especially at the neighborhood level. Their involvement will form the foundation of the city's future.

**CITY OF RENSSELAER
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
VISION AND IMPLEMENTATION**

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Rensselaer's waterfront is underutilized and is one of the city's most important assets.

Waterfront Development

It is the policy of the City of Rensselaer to utilize the Hudson River waterfront for its highest and best use. This effort, which will balance economic development with environmental and floodplain protection, will require that the residents of Rensselaer play an integral role in the waterfront planning process. Public access to the shoreline is paramount as the city moves forward in redefining its image. Rensselaer will work to continuously provide and enhance the public's access to the Hudson River waterfront within city limits and will support regional waterfront initiatives that improve connectivity to surrounding municipalities.

Objectives and Strategies

A. Create a regulatory framework that supports the appropriate redevelopment of the Hudson River waterfront as a vibrant mixed-use district.

1. Review, and revise as necessary, the city's zoning code to ensure waterfront related uses are permitted in appropriate locations along the shoreline. Uses that should be permitted include public recreation, water-dependant development (e.g. marina), residential, retail, office, accommodations and professional services. Active industrial uses should be permitted to continue, and new light industrial uses should be permitted in the southern portion of the waterfront with appropriate safeguards.
2. Consider a Waterfront Overlay District to control setbacks, building heights, public access and design of new development along the waterfront, regardless of the underlying zoning.
3. Revisit and update the Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (LWRP). The current LWRP was adopted in 1985 and is out of date in many respects; a new LWRP should incorporate other waterfront plans and activities that have occurred in the intervening 22 years. An up-to-date LWRP assures State support of local goals for the waterfront and puts the city in good standing to obtain funding to enact these goals.

Why Form a Local Development Corporation?

The waterfront is a key resource and opportunity for the City of Rensselaer. While the city has certain powers to ensure appropriate development, such as regulatory control and the ability to make certain public improvements, a Local Development Corporation (LDC) has additional powers and freedoms that would hasten the full implementation of a the city's vision for waterfront development.

An LDC is an independent not-for-profit entity which has extensive powers in providing and receiving economic assistance to promote economic development. Examples of activities that an LDC can undertake include:

- Buying, holding, developing, leasing and selling real estate;
- Applying for public and private funding;
- Providing loans to assist businesses to locate, expand, and improve within the city.



Design guidelines for new development and a substantial public access requirement could result in a waterfront similar to that of Tonawanda, NY as illustrated in these photographs.

4. Develop design guidelines for the waterfront area that can serve as a guide for future development to ensure consistent landscaping design and materials are used throughout the shoreline area. Special attention must be given to buffering requirements between adjacent uses.
5. Require a 50 to 100 foot minimum public access easement for all new waterfront development to permit adequate space for public waterfront trails and other recreational opportunities.

B. Establish a local development corporation to support and direct the orderly development of the Hudson River waterfront. The mission of the LDC would be to promote high quality mixed use development on the City's waterfront; enhancing the City's tax base; and provide opportunities for employment for city residents. Specific responsibilities of the LDC would include the following:

1. Acquire and hold title to key properties to control waterfront development;
2. Issue Requests for Proposals (RFP) to attract prospective developers to implement elements of the comprehensive plan in an orderly fashion on the waterfront and throughout the city;
3. Hold ground lease for waterfront property rather than selling outright to developers if deemed desirable by the City;
4. Issue bonds or notes as necessary to construct needed infrastructure improvements to render waterfront property "shovel-ready" and desirable for commercial and residential purposes. Pursue funding for the identification and clean-up of key brownfield sites on the waterfront.

C. Increase public access to the waterfront.

1. Develop destinations along the river that complement the existing destinations, including the outdoor classroom and the boat launch. Consider amenities such as interpretive kiosks, boat lockers, public restrooms, play areas, picnic areas, etc.
2. Look for opportunities to develop public event/gathering areas along the River. Identify potential sites for large public gathering areas along the waterfront to accommodate concerts, festivals and other community events. Ideally, the selected site(s) would also function as attractive public space when not in use for special events.
3. Explore opportunities to incorporate scenic overlooks and direct water access, including a boathouse.
4. Involve citizens' groups, volunteer organizations and school groups in the clean up and protection of future public waterfront areas. Consider hosting regular clean-up days to remove debris and litter from the shoreline.
5. Create a continuous, high-quality sidewalk along Tracy Street that connects neighborhoods with the waterfront trail.



The Forbes Avenue Boat Launch provides public access to the Hudson River. The city would benefit from the development of more such opportunities.

6. Provide pedestrian and bicycle linkages between the future waterfront trail and neighborhoods, downtown and waterfront trails in neighboring communities.
7. Work with CDTA to establish bus service to the waterfront as the waterfront becomes developed.

D. Encourage active and frequent use of the waterfront by all sectors of the residential, worker and visitor populations.

1. Host events, activities and festivals that celebrate the Hudson River and its significance as a cultural, historical and natural resource for the city.
2. Work with the Hudson River Clearwater to hold a festival once a year when the Clearwater docks in Rensselaer.
3. Ensure that pedestrian amenities, such as benches, trash receptacles and pedestrian-scaled lighting are included in all future development proposals on or adjacent to the waterfront area.
4. Require the provision of open space and pedestrian accommodations (e.g. sidewalks, boardwalks, etc.) along the waterfront in all new development.
5. Ensure that all future development along the Hudson River includes the provision of a right-of-way for the proposed Waterfront Trail.



The Clearwater regularly docks in Rensselaer, providing an opportunity for public events and celebrations.



A waterfront trail, such as the one pictured here, would make the Hudson River accessible to the city's residents, visitors and workers.



Economic Development

Rensselaer desires a vibrant economy that is diverse, that includes locally-owned businesses, that offers a range of employment opportunities for City residents, and that is attractive to city and regional consumers. In response to changes in local and national economy, the city is moving away from dependency on manufacturing-based industries and toward a healthy mix of commercial, service, and clean industry. Further diversification will ensure a stronger and more resilient local economy that limits the severity of downturns in a single market sector. Rensselaer will work with local and regional economic development agencies to promote the city as an excellent location to do business. Elected officials and city administrators will work to ensure potential businesses will benefit the city in the long term and serve to advance the vision of this Comprehensive Plan.

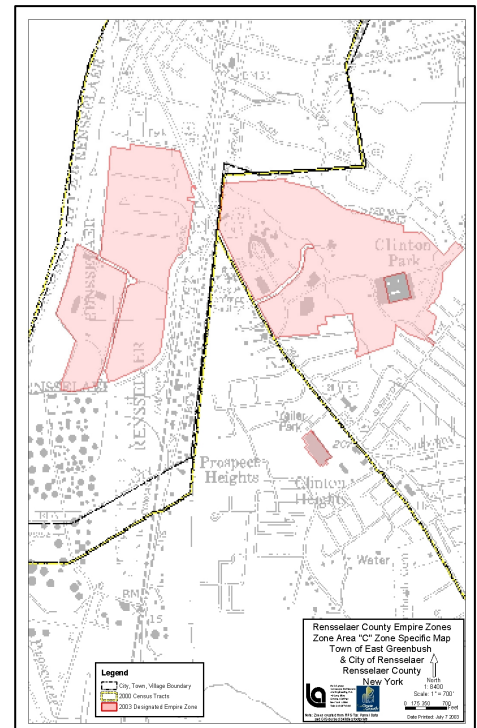
Objectives and Strategies

1. Create an atmosphere conducive to small and locally-owned businesses

- a. Evaluate business services available in the city, and encourage the development of new services to meet the needs of both existing and new businesses.
- b. Develop a manual to assist small businesses to navigate the permitting and regulatory process in Rensselaer.
- c. Support and encourage home occupations that do not have a negative impact on residential neighborhoods through zoning.
- d. Upgrade the library and encourage the development of business services within the library, including computer terminals, subscriptions to online databases and business magazines, carrels with hook-ups for portable computers, fax services, meeting rooms with projection capabilities, etc.

2. Actively market Rensselaer to new and expanding businesses

- a. Inventory potential economic development sites in the city, listing their attributes and site preparation needed to enable shovel-ready status. Work with the County, State and other government officials to fund preparation of key sites.
- b. Update and maintain the database of available retail space, vacant parcels and build-ready sites suitable for commercial and industrial



Rensselaer's Empire Zones



The library, in a former bank building, offers an opportunity to provide services for small businesses and people with home offices.

development and available for sale or rent. Tie the database into the city's GIS system, publish it on the city's website and make it available to real estate agents and economic development agencies.

- c. Work with regional economic development agencies to develop a program to market the city and region to site selectors and prospective businesses.
- d. Develop high quality marketing materials for the city to include in local and regional marketing efforts and ensure that Rensselaer is among the featured areas that regional economic development agencies promote to site selectors and prospective businesses.
- e. Promote the benefits of the Empire Zone designation and consider working to expand the boundaries.
- f. Market the city as an excellent location for new business due to location proximate to two major highways, the rail lines, the Hudson River, and Albany Airport.

3. Foster a responsive city government that is cognizant of the concerns and needs of businesses.

- a. Assign a liaison within City Hall to assist businesses to work with the city and be fully aware of all the requirements. This person would be responsible for ensuring consistent contact and communication with local business groups and individual businesses within the city to ensure that the needs of the business community are being met.
- b. Streamline the permitting process for new and expanding businesses.
- c. Explore ways the tie in with Rensselaer County One-Stop to provide "one-stop shopping" for businesses currently located in Rensselaer or considering a Rensselaer location.

4. Provide amenities and services within the city that respond to the requirements of site locators.

- a. Strengthen the available employee pool by working with Rensselaer County One-Stop and other local and regional agencies, institutions and non-profits as appropriate to promote existing job training programs and develop new ones if needed to provide necessary skills to city residents.
- b. Pursue projects that improve the quality of the in the city, including high-quality waterfront development with a strong public access component. An excellent quality of life for employees is a good incentive to attract new businesses to the city.

5. Strengthen the city's tax and employment base by encouraging appropriate industrial development in the city's traditionally industrial areas while minimizing the negative impacts traditionally associated with industrial land development.





Rensselaer's barge terminals provide economic opportunity for the city and should be maintained.

What is a Brownfield?

Brownfields are properties that are abandoned, idled, or underused and where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by actual or suspected environmental contamination. Left untouched, brownfields pose environmental, legal and financial burdens on a community and its taxpayers. However, after cleanup, brownfield sites can accommodate the highest and best use, thus become powerful engines for economic vitality, job creation and community pride.

The City of Rensselaer, as an older industrial city, contains numerous brownfield sites, including riverfront sites that are key to future development within the city. By investigating and cleaning up these brownfield sites, redevelopment can take place without fear of potential environmental liabilities. A coordinated process that begins with a comprehensive inventory and cataloging of all suspected brownfield sites and includes an economic analysis to identify the highest and best use for these properties, prioritization of key sites, and a strategy for remediation.

- a. Develop design guidelines and performance guidelines that buffer the city's residential development from both new and existing industrial development.
- b. Promote redevelopment of brownfield sites for light industrial and other appropriate uses.
- c. Prioritize the remediation of brownfield sites with the highest economic development potential and aggressively pursue funding.
- d. Maintain existing barge terminals and encourage the use of water-based transport for industrial uses.

6. Focus on attracting high-tech industries to the city that complement the region's educational institutions.

- a. Identify areas where electronic infrastructure is or could be located to support the development of high-tech businesses and industry. Pursue funding opportunities, such as those available through NYSERDA and National Grid, to study the availability of technology infrastructure (such as fiber optics and cable) and the feasibility of expanding as needed.
- b. Meet regularly with officials from the University of Albany, including the SUNY East Campus, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and other regional institutions of higher education to plan economic development projects that could foster new industries in the city.
- c. In collaboration with the county IDA and the Chamber of Commerce, actively work to attract high-tech industries and related support businesses that would make the city more attractive to these industries.
- d. Identify potential sites for a high-tech incubator and conduct a feasibility study to determine its financial viability as well as the type of businesses that may become successful if nurtured in the incubator space. Priority should be given to redeveloping existing buildings in the downtown area.
- e. Look into city-wide free or low-cost Wi-Fi capabilities. As one of the first cities to offer this amenity, Rensselaer would be well-positioned as a potential location for high-tech businesses.

7. Expand and strengthen the city's retail and service centers to add to the economic diversity of the city while also creating conveniences for residents, visitors and workers alike and thus improving the quality of life within the city.



Retail outlets in the train station, like this flower stand in Paddington Station in England, provide local businesses the opportunity to expand their market and offer convenience to travelers.

- a. Prepare a market analysis of the area to identify retail and service gaps. Use the results to actively pursue new businesses to fill these gaps. Look to local and regional chains that might want to open a second or third location before going to national chains.
- b. Review the zoning districts to ensure that the city has enough area zoned for commercial development and use to meet the current and projected demand.
- c. Work with the Chamber of Commerce and local businesses to undertake organized advertising campaigns that market the city's businesses to local and regional consumers.
- d. Consider working with CDTA to develop

kiosks that permit local businesses to market goods and services in the train station and receive exposure to the massive pass-through market.

- e. Work with service and retail businesses to promote the city as a whole through city-wide events such as a holiday shopping event, a city-wide sidewalk sale, etc.



Sidewalk sales, like these in Northfield, MN and Holland, MI, promote individual businesses as well as the city as a whole.



Neighborhoods

Rensselaer desires to be a community that provides a wide range of housing options and a first-rate quality of life for all income levels. City leaders and residents understand that great neighborhoods are created when diversity is celebrated and not segregated. Rensselaer provides an abundance of affordable housing to the Capital District area; however, there is a shortage of upper income housing. The Comprehensive Plan promotes the development of a range of housing options to provide an appropriate mix of lower, middle and upper income housing. Neighborhood resources such as parks, green spaces, local shopping opportunities and civic institutions will be recognized as essential to the community's well being. Residential areas will be well-connected to such community assets, as well as other parts of the city, including downtown and the waterfront. The City will work with residents to improve property values by planning for improvements at the ward level, encouraging home ownership, preserving and enhancing the unique historic and architectural character of the city, and enforcing property maintenance standards. Residents will come to celebrate their city as a place that provides a high quality standard of living.

Objective and Strategies

A. Promote housing rehabilitation and reverse disinvestment and deterioration throughout the city's neighborhoods. The city's high proportion of older housing stock elevates the need for programs that provide funding and technical assistance toward maintaining structurally sound, aesthetically pleasing and functionally up-to-date homes.

1. Consider establishing a tax incentive to encourage property owners to improve their properties. This incentive, which is also recommended in for historic properties, could offer a freeze on increases in assessment for five years after major improvements. After the initial five years, the increased assessment (and thus taxes) would be phased in over the next five years.
2. Develop a property maintenance brochure that describes the City's property maintenance program and regulations. This brochure should be mailed regularly to property owners with their tax bills and made available in locations such as City Hall and the public library.
3. Encourage the City's Code Enforcement department to meet with block clubs, neighborhood and business organization to discuss property maintenance requirements within the City and respond to questions and concerns of the residents, businesses and property owners.
4. Continue to promote various home maintenance and rehabilitation programs that are available through local, state and federal agencies and non-profit organizations.
5. Continue strict and systematic code enforcement.



Deteriorated houses, such as the brown building on the right, have a negative impact on the surrounding neighborhood

6. Take an active role in ensuring that city-owned properties are redeveloped in a timely manner and in keeping with the intent of this comprehensive plan by establishing a process to quickly turn over *in rem* properties. (See box)
7. Clean up and maintain city-owned property. Vacant lots should be kept free of debris and overgrowth. Vacant buildings should be nearly boarded up, lawns should be mown, and litter removed promptly. Consider a fresh coat of paint if needed.

B. Provide residents with a choice of housing costs and unit types in order to ensure the availability of safe, decent, adequate and suitable housing for all City residents.

1. Consider allowing accessory housing/in-law units in appropriate residential areas. This type of zoning allows for convenient and affordable housing arrangements for elderly parents, young-adult children and other family members. Accessory units could be permitted by special permit in owner occupied buildings so long as the unit does not exceed 700 sf or 30% of the principal structure, whichever is less, and adequate parking is available.
2. Conduct a city-wide survey of vacant and underutilized land in order to identify appropriate locations for new residential development, including appropriate infill development. Consider creating a streamlined permitting process for developing these locations.
3. Amend the City's zoning code to permit residential units on upper floors in neighborhood business districts.
4. Promote the private development of market-rate housing on the waterfront.

C. Encourage home ownership. The 2000 Census reported that 51% of the households in the City of Rensselaer were renters. This particularly high rate of renters and absentee landlords discourages personal investment in the city. Policies that encourage home ownership will increase personal investment in the city, foster neighborhood pride and cultivate property maintenance.

1. Encourage or require owner occupancy in buildings with approved accessory units.

Strategies for dealing with *in rem* properties

Consider a two-pronged approach to dispensing *in rem* and other city-owned property that is appropriate for residential development or rehabilitation. Small vacant parcels should be offered to sale first to adjacent property owners. Smaller parcels - single and two family houses –may be offered for sale either through a bidding process or through local realtors. The city should require that the successful bidder meet several criteria that may include an agreement to live in the property for a period not less than five years, and the demonstration of financial wherewithal to restore and maintain substandard housing. The reversion clause that requires successful bidders to fully rehabilitate all structures within a given timeframe should be included in all sales and vigorously enforced. Consideration should be given to expanding this clause to require that certain types of non-conformances be removed by the purchaser. Successful bidders who purchase vacant developable land should be required to make taxable improvements to the land using a similar reversion clause.

When the city comes into possession properties that do not conform to the use table in the zoning ordinance, the properties should be returned to a conforming use before transferring ownership. For example, a three-family house in an R-1 zone should be sold as a single family house.

Larger parcels, including developable tracts of land and building targeted for redevelopment for multi-family housing or mixed use, should be offered to developers through an RFP process in order to ensure that the properties are developed as the city would like them. Proposals from prospective buyers should include details of plans for renovation or construction, estimated costs, financing plan and timetable for completion.

2. Work with Rensselaer County, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), banks and other lending institutions to develop new and promote and enhance existing home ownership programs that make it more feasible to purchase homes in Rensselaer.

D. Increase resident and property owner involvement in their neighborhoods. Residents who are involved in their community are invested in the community.

1. Promote the establishment of block clubs and other neighborhood organizations. Conduct or sponsor seminars and workshops throughout the city to guide citizens in their grassroots organizing efforts.
2. Identify and solicit the assistance of neighborhood groups that can help implement this plan and provide guidance and feedback on future public planning efforts.
3. Encourage neighborhood associations, special events, block parties, neighborhood watch programs and other volunteer activities to increase residents' community spirit and sense of neighborhood unity.

E. Build on existing neighborhoods to create vibrant connected urban villages that provide for the daily needs of residents and create a strong sense of community pride for its residents. Residents should have the opportunity to live, shop and socialize in a high quality, visually inviting pedestrian friendly environment.

1. Work with block groups and community leaders to better define particular city neighborhoods. Neighborhood definition techniques could include, but not be limited to, the installation of historic plaques, neighborhood signage, or specially designed streetscape elements.
2. In appropriate zoning districts, allow for mixed use buildings that would include commercial activities on the ground floors and residential uses on upper floors. Permitting such mixed uses would help fill currently underutilized buildings and would provide an active market for ground-floor commercial uses. In addition, mixed-use neighborhoods often bring a constant flow of activity throughout the day and often into the night. This kind of vitality creates excitement and promotes the urban economy.



Small stores such as the Broadway Grocery offer convenient access to basic goods and services to the city's residents.



The vacant building next door to the library offers a unique opportunity to expand the library's offerings.

3. Permit limited, small-scale commercial development by special use permit in designated areas within residentially zoned neighborhoods (such as properties at major intersections, along busy roads, and in traditionally commercial pockets) in order to provide needed services proximate to residences.

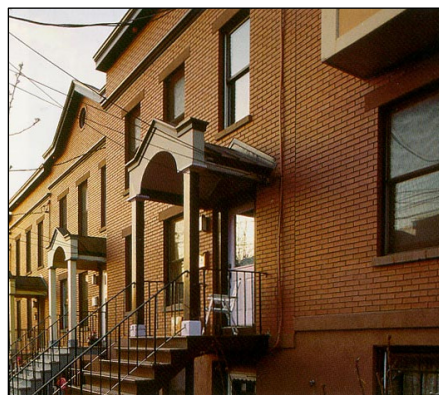
4. Develop and maintain a continuous network of sidewalks linking residential and commercial areas.
5. Provide pedestrian amenities that make walking more interesting and enjoyable. Benches, pedestrian scaled lights, street trees, clocks, planters, trash receptacles.
6. Develop and maintain an inventory of street trees. Consider soliciting local high school or college students to assist in the data collection in order to reduce costs.
7. Develop a street tree program that will preserve the city's existing street tree population and add appropriate tree species along streets throughout the city.
8. Expand and enhance the public library to provide activities and programs to residents of all ages.

F. Conserve, protect and enhance the quality of existing residential neighborhoods and encourage private sector development that is compatible with the existing development pattern.

1. Review the zoning ordinance in light of the established urban fabric. Adjust setbacks and other zoning regulations as necessary to bring existing older homes into compliance with the standards of the zoning code and to allow new infill construction to fit into the urban fabric.
2. Encourage new housing development in strategic locations proximate to activity centers, such as the Central Business District, Bath Neighborhood and Train Station Area. These locations would provide convenient access to goods and services and generate additional demand for retail and other services.
3. All new development should be reviewed to ensure visual compatibility with the surrounding architectural character and scale. Consider the development of architectural guidelines for new residential development to ensure future residential development complements and enhances the area's character and aesthetic appeal. Work with developers to ensure new residential



Well-maintained, attractive sidewalks with a grass strip and trees, such as the ones on Third Avenue, are a community asset.



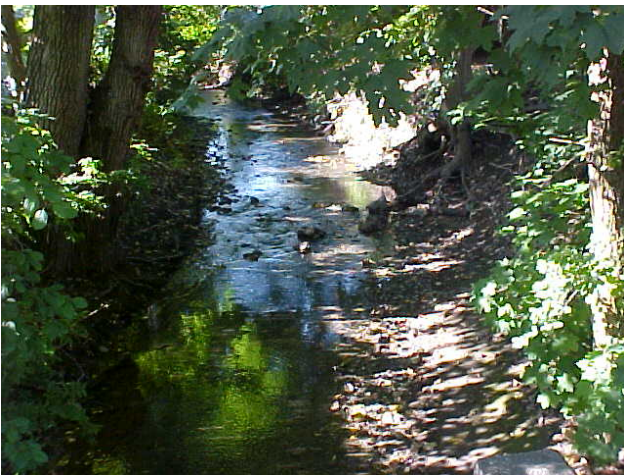
Three examples of well-done infill development, in Seattle, Albany, and Saratoga. Each of these developments introduced new buildings that are compatible in character and scale with the existing buildings in the surrounding area.

development is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood(s) and supports the overall goal of increasing home ownership opportunities in the city.

4. Use performance bonds to ensure future development is consistent with plans approved by the Planning Commission.
5. Due to the age and condition of infrastructure, and the new Statewide Stormwater Management regulations, ensure a review of system impacts are provided by residential developers.
6. Ensure all future development within neighborhoods considers environmental justice issues and does not explicitly impact any one population, income or racial group.
7. Provide parkland, playgrounds and other recreational outlets in walking distance to all residential areas and neighborhoods.
8. Explore the feasibility of workforce labor to clean vacant lots and other city-owned property.



Neighborhood parks, such as the Tracy Street Playground, are a valuable amenity for Rensselaer's residents



Natural Environment and Open Space

It is the policy of the City of Rensselaer to preserve and enhance the city's many natural resources, open space areas, and parks, allowing future generations to enjoy a similar or improved quality of life. The City supports State and Federal environmental protection regulations and will ensure a careful review of all actions that may have an impact on important natural features. Special attention will be given to the waterfront, due to its environmental, aesthetic and recreational value. In addition, Rensselaer will strive to revitalize brownfields, infill sites and identified redevelopment areas before allowing development on open spaces.

Objectives and Strategies:

A. Increase regulatory protection of natural resources, including steep slopes, wetlands, the Hudson River and its tributaries, and other natural areas.

1. Improve accuracy and consistency of State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) documentation in order to identify and address potential environmental impacts from development activities.
2. Balance waterfront development with the need to be sensitive to environmentally sensitive areas in order to protect natural resources including the Hudson River, other streams, flood plain areas, wetlands, steep slopes, etc.
3. Ensure strict review of Environmental Impact Statements and Environmental Assessment Forms associated with all new development and redevelopment projects.
4. Support key officials and staff members in obtaining training in SEQRA and other environmental regulations.
5. In order to protect the city's significant watershed and flood zones, establish overlay zones and other regulatory measures that limit development and harmful activities in critical areas. Particular attention should be given to buffers along the city's waterbodies, including the Hudson River, Mill Creek, Quackenderry Creek and other streams that run through the northern section of the city.

Design Guidelines for Waterfront Development

In order to ensure that the highest quality development occurs in the waterfront area, design guidelines will be needed to specify the architectural styles, materials and site development considerations deemed appropriate. Creating a waterfront destination for residents and visitors will require a change in the way development is currently handled. For example, development standards could be developed for this area to specify:

- Required use of natural materials;
- Restrictions to building height or site configuration in order to preserve views and access to the river;
- Specific architectural details to be included on structures;
- Site development standards for ingress/egress, parking (located to rear) and overall attractiveness.

B. Maximize publicly accessible open space, parkland and greenspace

1. Encourage and, where appropriate, require the dedication of parkland and/or open space in new developments.
2. Inventory existing and potential natural and recreational resources within the city. These should be included in an integrated plan for open space protection and improvements for the

city that will guide this vital aspect of urban development. The open space plan should identify existing and new opportunities to plan for conservation and to provide recreational and educational opportunities to all city residents. The plan should also include an environmental inventory that identifies and prioritizes natural lands, regardless of ownership, for protection and stewardship. The plan should include both the Hollow and the waterfront as priority areas and should identify greenbelt corridors, which support plant and wildlife, throughout the city.

3. Develop a Master Plan for the Hollow that integrates environmental education and stewardship efforts with habitat restoration programs. The plan should include a set of achievable action items to fully realize the benefits of the Hollow.
4. Continue to pursue funding to further develop the Hollow area. Consider private funding options particularly focused on recreation, open space preservation and trail development.
5. Implement a community garden program in vacant lots in residential areas throughout the city. This will serve the dual purpose of greening the city and stimulating community involvement and investment.
6. Develop and implement a comprehensive, systematic street tree planting program.
7. Adopt a tree ordinance that would require property owners to obtain a permit before removing trees over a certain caliper.
8. Encourage developers to participate in public space development on the waterfront through incentive zoning. This approach would provide the city with flexibility to allow a developer to exceed the limitations of the established bulk requirements of the zoning code if certain public facilities, services or amenities are provided for in the project. Communities utilize incentive zoning to achieve a myriad of community development objectives. In the mixed-use waterfront area, it is likely that several objectives could be identified for incentive zoning, such as the provision of parks or open space (to be used for passive recreational facilities).



The Hollow offers a range of natural landscapes, from long views to wooded trails to the Quackenderry Creek.

C. Increase community awareness of the importance of environmental protection and appreciation of the City's natural resources.

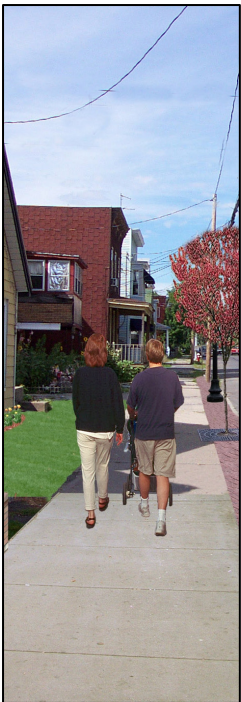
1. Design and implement a multi-faceted program to educate residents about the importance of preserving environmental features, including their positive impact on the area's quality-of-life and about methods to protect the environment for the enjoyment of future generations. This program should include public forums, brochures, interpretive signage, workshops, school programs and other measures.
2. Organize seminars, possibly in conjunction with the MS4, on environmental preservation issues that emphasize the benefits of a healthy environment such as improved quality of life, educational and recreational opportunities and aesthetic enhancement.
3. Place waste receptacles throughout the city, particularly in areas with heavy pedestrian traffic. Ensure that the receptacles are emptied frequently and post "please do not litter" signage.
4. Develop educational kiosks and interpretive signage near key natural resources in the city.
5. Educate residents and businesses on recycling, its importance and how the city would benefit fiscally from a strong recycling program. This can be done through newsletters, website postings, flyers, local access cable and other local modes of communication.



Trash receptacles, such as this one on Third Ave., discourage littering.

D. Eliminate hazardous contamination from past land uses

1. Work with local, state, and federal agencies and organizations to remediate and reuse brownfield sites for future development.
2. Identify potential funding sources available to conduct site assessment and develop concept and master plans for future development.
3. Develop a plan for remediation and redevelopment of brownfield sites. The plan should inventory contaminated site and prioritize critical sites. Priority should be given to the cleanup of brownfield sites with the highest potential economic development value.
4. Pursue funding to remediate contaminated sites throughout the city.



Transportation

It is the policy of Rensselaer to ensure a safe, efficient and well-designed transportation system. The city's form is impacted by its multi-modal transportation infrastructure consisting of a traditional street grid conducive to pedestrian activity, the Rensselaer/Albany Train Station that serves the entire Capital District, the Hudson River and its potential for barge traffic, and high capacity roads including Route 9&20 and Interstate 90.

The City recognizes the benefit of a multi-modal transportation network and will continue to work with State and Federal agencies to better integrate roadways, rail lines, and water traffic into its urban form and to reduce negative impacts to safety and appearance. The city also realizes the importance of having a pedestrian network that adequately links neighborhoods to the business districts and waterfront areas. This network will combine sidewalk systems, off-road trails and on-road bike lanes to improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety and access.

Objective and Strategies:

A. Maintain the integrity of the city's grid street pattern. The grid street pattern provides excellent access and connectivity for vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists and is a trademark of older cities such as Rensselaer.

1. Require that new streets, whether deeded to the city or privately maintained, continue the established street grid. Cul-de-sac and dead-end streets should be discouraged.
2. Prohibit projects that would alter or interrupt the existing street connectivity by closing streets for the purpose of private development.

B. Enhance the city's pedestrian scale and pedestrian infrastructure, including its sidewalks, crosswalks, and trail system.

1. Evaluate the condition of all streets and sidewalks and develop a priority plan for rehabilitation and a maintenance schedule to maintain high-quality streets and sidewalks.



Buildings with no front set-back and retail uses on the ground floor create a vibrant and welcoming pedestrian atmosphere, as can be seen above.

2. Preserve and enhance the pedestrian scale of the Central Business District (CBD) by requiring all new development is built up to the front lot line in order to create a continuous street wall. Zoning should minimize the required front setback to encourage new buildings to continue this street wall. Where building to the front lot line is not practical, or in the case of existing buildings, other elements should be incorporated to create a vibrant and interesting pedestrian environment such as attractive low fences, landscaping, outdoor cafes, and other elements.

3. Encouraging active and attractive retail and service uses on the ground floor throughout the

Central Business District.

4. Provide amenities for pedestrians, including benches, street trees and trash cans, throughout the city.
5. Improve crosswalks. Consider patterned crosswalks to slow traffic and add character to the city's streetscape.

C. Ensure the availability of adequate and appropriate parking throughout the city, particularly in neighborhoods and in the downtown area.

1. Conduct a comprehensive parking analysis to determine where parking shortages exist and what groups lack adequate parking (i.e., residents, retail customers, office workers, industry workers, etc.). The study should develop a prioritized list of areas that need additional parking and the type of parking (e.g. surface lot, parking structure, on-street, etc.) that would best suit each area's need.
2. Encourage shared parking lots, especially where the timing of parking lot usage varies.
3. Prohibit off-street parking in front of buildings through the city, with the exception of limited street front parking, mitigated by appropriate landscaping, on Route 9&20.
4. Consider traffic calming measures such as textured crosswalks and bump-outs where advisable to promote pedestrian safety.
5. Recognizing that Rensselaer is a developed city, adjust zoning regulations to provide flexibility while meeting parking demand. Consider creative solutions such as fee in lieu of parking, shared parking and permitting off-site parking.
6. Conduct a comprehensive parking survey to determine where parking shortages exist. In these areas, identify potential locations for off-street parking.
7. Consider using vacant lots owned by the City to provide off-street parking in neighborhoods that have parking shortages. In order to maintain and enhance the residential area's appearance and character, off-street parking areas must be well landscaped, especially along the streets and sidewalks.
8. Review parking requirements to ensure that they reflect actual parking generation.



Textured crosswalks and sidewalk bump-outs at intersections calm traffic and create a safe pedestrian environment.



An example of a parking lot with a planted buffer to screen it from the street. If parking lots are needed in Rensselaer, similar buffering techniques should be used.

D. Promote bicycle use as an alternative mode of transportation and for recreational activity.

1. Distribute bicycle facilities, especially parking racks, at key activity centers such as downtown and the waterfront.



Bike racks on buses, such as the one above in Baltimore, encourage bicycle use.

2. Encourage the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) to expand their fleet of buses that can accommodate bicycles.
3. Require new development to accommodate bicycles, providing amenities such as bicycle racks and bicycle lanes.
4. Continue to pursue the creation of an inter-municipal bicycle trail along the Hudson River.

E. Utilize access management techniques to maximize existing infrastructure and land use potential.

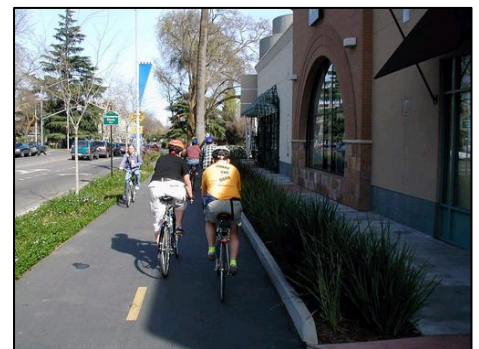
1. Develop a long range road improvement plan that reflects current and future demands based on existing and

potential development.

2. Use zoning and other regulations to encourage or require shared access to minimize curb cuts and traffic conflicts, particularly on Route 20, Broadway, and other major streets.
3. Undertake a level of service study to determine the current status of all major routes in the City. Use this study to inform future development.

F. Minimize the impact of heavy truck traffic associated the city's industrial development.

1. Assess truck traffic patterns through the city based on current and projected development. Consider the capacity of roadways to accommodate trucks, the impact of traffic on residents, pedestrians and other traffic, the time as well as volume of truck traffic generation.
2. Conspicuously post truck routes and streets where trucks are prohibited.
3. Continue to enforce existing limitations on truck traffic.
4. Strengthen regulatory limits on the volume and timing of truck traffic generated by proposed businesses.



Bicycle lanes and racks, such as those pictured here, should be encouraged throughout the city.

5. Consider development of alternative access roads in order to improve truck access to industrial areas, minimize potential conflicts with other traffic, and promote pedestrian safety. If such access roads are deemed necessary to provide access to key economic development sites, work with county, state and regional economic development agencies to fund these projects.
 6. Promote barge transportation as a desirable alternative to truck traffic and make certain that barge terminals are maintained.
- G. Investigate and encourage the development and full utilization of alternative forms of transportation to alleviate congestion within the city and as an economic development tool.**
1. With rail companies, pursue the upgrade of tracks to accommodate light rail as the demand grows for this type of transportation.
 2. Consider implementing light rail service to provide improved access to the waterfront and to link adjoining communities.
 3. Encourage the use of the Hudson River as a viable alternative to other forms of freight transport.
 4. Promote the development of a water taxi along the Hudson River.



A water taxi service like the one pictured above in New York City could provide both transportation and recreation for people who live, work and visit Rensselaer.



2006 Comprehensive Plan

Community Character and Streetscape

The physical appearance of public and private buildings and places convey a visual message about the city. Rensselaer recognizes that improving and enhancing its aesthetic appeal will be beneficial to the city’s economy as well as quality of life. From window displays to parks, physical improvements to the city will send a positive message to residents, visitors and businesses alike that Rensselaer is on the upswing – a good place to live, work, and shop.

Objectives and Strategies

A. Enhance the aesthetic appeal of city’s retail districts and neighborhood centers.

1. Adopt and consistently enforce design guidelines in commercial areas throughout the city. Design guidelines can be customized for specific areas of the city (e.g. Waterfront, Downtown, etc.) or can be developed for citywide use.
2. Develop a façade improvement program to assist property owners with needed maintenance and upgrading of their buildings. Elements of the program could include a small grants or revolving low-interest loans, and should target highly visible areas, especially properties located in the downtown, train station and waterfront areas.
3. Consider defining and developing distinct images or identities for each of the city’s commercial centers. Use these images to develop promotional programs that create a vibrant and attractive atmosphere, such as unique seasonal banners, distinctive street signage, and distinguishing streetscape elements.
4. Maintain existing and identify new locations for planters and landscaping in public spaces throughout the city. Consider offering businesses planters in the spring if they will agree to care for the planters. Small signs could be placed in the planters thanking the business for its commitment to the city.
5. Create and publicize an award program to recognize beautification efforts. Awards could be granted, for example, to “Most Festive Storefront” or “most improved building façade” or “most beautiful gardens.”
6. Require that vacant buildings be neatly boarded up, and that vacant lots be kept mowed and free of debris.
7. All city-owned property should be well maintained.



Features such as the banners and planters, above, improve the city’s image.



B. Promote volunteer opportunities that invite residents and merchants to participate in revitalization efforts. Utilize volunteers innovatively and capitalize on often underutilized segments of the community, including the elderly and youth.

1. Support the development of volunteer gardening and clean-up clubs to augment the City's beautification efforts.
2. Implement an adoption program in which community groups such as boy scouts, garden clubs, and others pledge to clean and maintain parks, street islands, medians, blocks of street trees, etc. The group would sign an annual contract, and in return, the city would erect a sign acknowledging the group's efforts. In addition, the city should consider an annual thank-you dinner or some other event recognizing and celebrating the commitment of these groups.
3. Develop a community service recognition program that would include a "Distinguished Community Service" award. The awards should be symbolic of the City of Rensselaer and connote community pride.
4. Consider creating a part-time Volunteer Coordinator position in City Hall to coordinate volunteer efforts.



Landscaping like this area at the Dunn Memorial Bridge ramp create a positive first impression of the City of Rensselaer.

C. Beautify key gateways to the city. Attractive coordinated signage and landscape elements at the gateways to the city and along the major corridors through the city will create an environment that encourages residents, visitors and passers-by to think of Rensselaer as a city to spend time in, not just to go through.

1. Add landscaping and seasonal decorations where appropriate along the major corridors of the City, including Route 9&20 and Broadway.

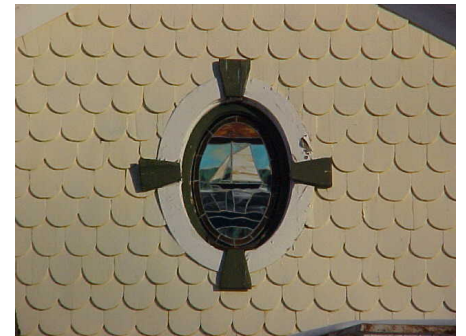


This photo simulation of the approach to Broadway from the off-ramp of the Dunn Memorial Bridge demonstrates the positive impact of a gateway enhanced by textured crosswalks, coordinated signage and landscaping.



This sign welcomes visitors to Rensselaer

2. Erect distinctive signage welcoming visitors to the City of Rensselaer. These signs should be placed at train station as well as at the major gateways to the city.
3. Develop a signage program to direct visitors to attractions throughout the city, including the Central Business District, the Clearwater dock, Fort Crailo, and City Hall.
4. Recognize the railroad tracks leading to the station as a gateway and clean the areas alongside the tracks both entering and leaving the city.



Historic Preservation

The City of Rensselaer is fortunate to have abundant and noteworthy historic resources. The City's history is reflected throughout the City in its urban fabric, historic structures and local lore and particularly in its two historic districts – the Bath neighborhood and the Fort Crailo neighborhood. The City recognizes that historic preservation can be an important component of community revitalization, economic development and community pride and to these ends the City will promote, preserve and enhance its history.



The Fort Crailo Historic Site should be a centerpiece of the city.

Objectives and Strategies

A. Utilize regulatory measures to preserve and protect the City's rich historic resources.

1. Pursue State and National Historic District designation for the two historic neighborhoods. Official designation not only confirms the City's commitment to preserving these neighborhoods, but it provides funding opportunities and other benefits.
2. Develop and adopt design guidelines for new construction and renovations within the historic districts.
3. Consider replacing the HR and HC zoning districts with a Historic Preservation Overlay District. The underlying zoning could be changed to R2 and LB respectively. This would allow the city to adopt a single set of design guidelines for both districts, streamline the process by which historic areas are protected and permit the historic zoning to be expanded to other areas as appropriate without altering the underlying zoning.
4. Consider establishing a Historic Preservation Commission. The Commission would be charged with reviewing proposed exterior changes within the historic districts and of historic structures outside the districts, whether or not these changes require a building permit, and issuing certificates of compliance. In addition, the Commission would oversee the historic preservation regulations and design guidelines and recommend changes as necessary. Alternately, legislation could assign the duties of a Historic Preservation Commission to the Planning Commission, either temporarily until such time as a separate Historic Preservation Commission is established.



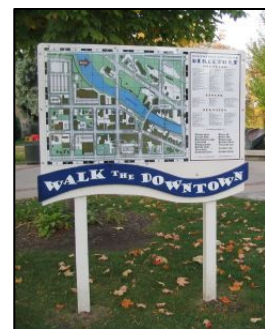
8 Riverside Ave. has been carefully restored, down to the smallest detail. This should be encouraged throughout the historic districts.

B. Encourage the restoration and preservation of privately owned historic properties

1. Promote programs that assist owners of historic buildings, such as the federal income tax credits for investment in historic properties, by sending out information in tax bills, posting information on the City website, and other avenues as appropriate.
2. Implement a revolving loan or small grant program for façade restoration of buildings in the city's historic neighborhoods.
3. To encourage preservation and restoration of registered historic buildings and buildings in the historic districts, consider implementing a Real Property Tax Exemption. This program would offer a five-year freeze on increases in assessment that commonly result after an owner of a property located in one of the historic districts has rehabilitated a property. After five years, the increased taxes would be phased in over the next five years, resulting in a ten-year delay before the full impact of the new assessment is felt.
4. Develop a recognition program for historic preservation of privately owned buildings, both residential and commercial. Award plaques to be displayed on participating buildings.

C. Pursue public improvement projects that complement and enhance the historic appeal of the City's historic districts.

1. Implement infrastructure improvements and upgrades within the historic district that enhance the historic value of the areas, including but not limited to historic lighting standards, well-designed traditional street furniture, brick or stamped concrete streets and sidewalks.
2. Enhance the quality of life for Fort Crailo neighborhoods by providing visual separation from the industrial park to the south.
3. Consider developing a small park along the waterfront to enhance the experience of both residents and visitors to the Fort Crailo district.
4. Develop a distinctive signage program to distinguish and enhance the Bath and Fort Crailo neighborhoods. This program should include street signs, district maps and interpretational signage as necessary.



Examples of street and identification used to distinguish historic districts

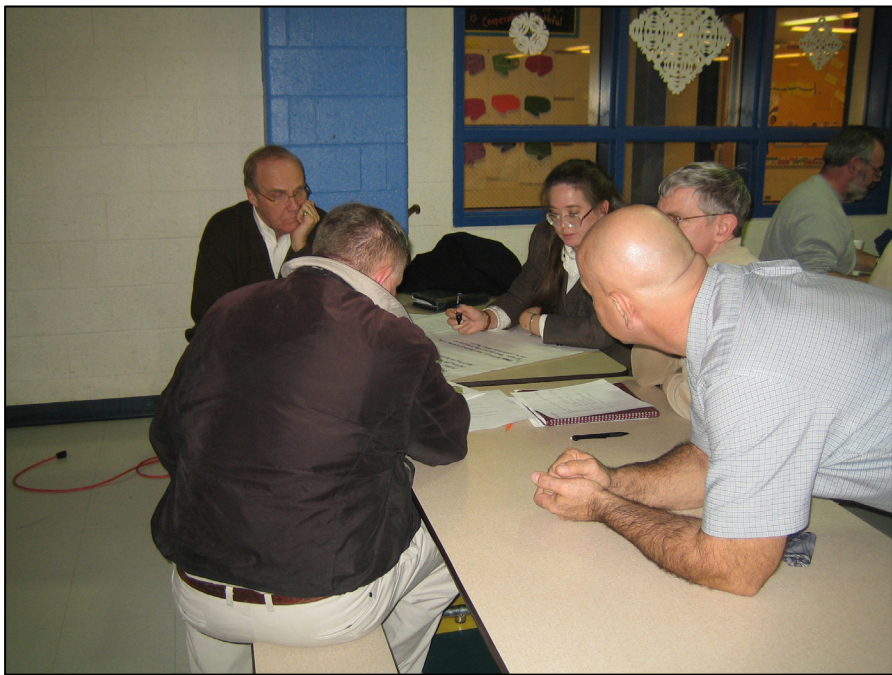
D. Promote and celebrate Rensselaer's historic story

1. Pursue Certified Local Government status in order to further formalize the City's commitment to historic preservation and to poise the City to be eligible for funding.
2. Erect information plaques at locations of historic significance.

3. To increase the interest in and attention to the historic structures throughout the city, consider developing a comprehensive inventory of all structures constructed before 1920. This could be accomplished in partnership with local college students studying architectural history.
4. Work with the National Parks Department to refresh and enhance the programming at the Fort Crailo Historic Site.
5. Develop brochures that identify and describe the historic structures throughout the city and recommend self-directed walking tours of the City.
6. Establish a Patroon Path to lead people to places of historic significance throughout the city. In addition to creating a brochure, consider footprints painted on the sidewalks and streets and distinctive informational signage.
7. Promote Rensselaer as the Home of Yankee Doodle in all promotional materials.



Find creative ways, such as those illustrated above, to celebrate the city's heritage.



Public Participation and Cooperation

Rensselaer is working to redefine its image in the Capital District as a premier small city and key to this effort is substantial involvement and grassroots effort on the part of the city's residents and businesses as well as increased cooperation with other municipal and regional governments. The City will continue to encourage opportunities for open dialogue and cooperation among all stakeholders, including residents, business owners, workers, community leaders, neighboring municipalities, and regional governments. By creating a positive atmosphere that supports communication, leadership and collective action, Rensselaer will offer an improved quality of life.

Objectives

A. Develop a formal method for residents to participate in the planning process, communicate with government officials and obtain information

1. Consider recruiting interested community volunteers from each of the city's wards to represent their area in planning-related matters. The Planning Department could engage in regular meetings with participating community members to provide updates on citywide issues as well as those relating to the specific wards. In addition to conveying information, such meetings would also allow the officials to hear concerns from citizens from particular areas of the city on a regular basis. It is recommended that each ward include between three and five volunteer representatives for this program.
2. Consider the development of a youth advisory committee to provide input and feedback on youth-related activities, policies and programs. Cultivating youth involvement will help ensure active citizenry and leadership in the future.
3. Provide a variety of methods for submitting public comments and questions to city officials such as a form on the city's website and comment boxes at locations including city hall and the public library. Adopt an official policy that all public comments submitted in writing will be addressed within a realistic timeframe.
4. Utilize the City's website to provide elected officials, city staff, residents and businesses with information about important issues, events, meetings and activities.
5. Develop a citizen's handbook that contains contact information and general information about city government and local community organizations. The handbook could be posted on the City's website as well as be made available free of charge at City Hall and the library.



Public meetings are just one of the many ways in which the City's citizens can be involved in the governing of the city.

B. Promote volunteer opportunities that invite residents and merchants to participate in revitalization efforts. Utilize volunteers innovatively and capitalize on often underutilized segments of the community, including the elderly and youth.

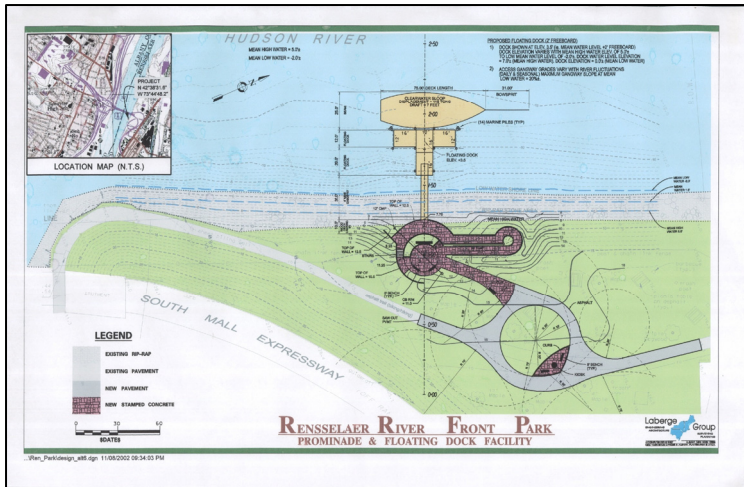
1. Consider creating a part-time Volunteer Coordinator position to organize volunteer efforts

throughout the city.

2. Implement a program to allow individuals, businesses and organizations to “adopt” planters, street, medians, parks, and other public amenities or areas in need of maintenance.
3. Support the development of volunteer gardening and clean-up clubs to augment the City’s beautification efforts.
4. Develop a community service recognition program that would include a “Distinguished Community Service” award. The awards should be symbolic of the City of Rensselaer and connote community pride.
5. Continue to add new opportunities for active involvement in the city. Some examples include painting murals, a public clean-up day, and community-built playgrounds.

C. Promote regional partnerships that reduce the costs of government and increase cooperation.

1. Join regional, state and national organizations that provide resources and information sharing opportunities related to image enhancement and beautification.
2. Work with other municipalities in the region to pursue private and public funding opportunities. This approach not only improves cooperation among neighboring municipalities, it increases the chances of receiving funding. For example, the NYS Department of State’s Quality Communities grant program is one funding source that focuses on multi-jurisdictional submissions. Other funding sources reward joint projects with additional review points, a critical consideration when funding decisions come down to the difference of a few points.
3. Maintain open communication with representatives from neighboring municipalities to share information, ideas and issues and to look for opportunities to develop inter-municipal agreements to pursue funding and work on joint projects with mutual benefit.



Parks and Recreation

Rensselaer strives to provide a broad array of recreation opportunities for all its residents. The City recognizes the contribution that its system of parks and playgrounds makes to the quality of life of its residents, and the benefit of preserving and expanding the park system. The city has made updating its parks and playgrounds a priority in recent years, but acknowledges that a long-term plan is necessary to fully identify and address the demands that city's population makes and will make on the park system in coming years.

The parks system consists of seven small parks and playgrounds, each with its own identity, and two waterfront parks: Riverfront Park and the Forbes Avenue Boat Launch. Together, these provide a good foundation for a parks and recreation system. However, there are areas that need to be addressed in order to maximize the opportunities available to city residents. These include adding a large park that provides a location for large crowds to congregate, the development of three city-owned properties into active parks, the continued emphasis on public waterfront access and additional programming throughout the city.

Rensselaer City Parks System:

Coyne Field, located in the Historic District off of Route's 9 and 20, is our most used park. There is a large ball field that is used by the Rensselaer Girls Softball League, and 2 different Men's Softball leagues. This ball field gets daily use during the summer and fall. In addition, there is a large playground area as well as a basketball and a tennis court.

Riverfront Park is our largest park, beautifully situated on the banks of the Hudson River. Two tennis courts, two basketball courts, walking trails, a ball field and a playground are just some of the features of this park. During the summer evenings, Music in the Park is held in the beautiful gazebo. Large groups of people can gather on the open green, with their blankets and lawn chairs to listen to music from all kinds of artists.

East Street Baby Pool – the city's only 'pool' – is actually a very large spray pool. Through the city's Summer Program, kids of all ages as well as their parents are offered a place to cool down in the hot days of July and August. This park is also used for picnics and birthday parties and offers swings, a slide and an open green space for kids to play waffle ball.

Plum Street Park – located off of 3rd Avenue, this park is tucked behind a row of houses and, although it is within walking distance of many residents, it is often the forgotten park. The park contains a small ball field, a playground with picnic table and a basketball court.

Tracy Street playground – located on upper Broadway, this neighborhood park has a basketball court, swing set and slides.

First Street Tot Lot is located a few blocks away from the Tracy Street playground in a residential area of Rensselaer. This playground is fenced in and contains swings, slide, and merry go round. This park is scheduled to be updated in the near future.

Eighth Street Playground is another park situated in an old neighborhood. This park has many shade trees, a basketball court, playground equipment and picnic tables.

Lakeview Avenue Park has two tennis courts, a basketball court, a large playground area as well as a mid-size ball field. This park also hosts neighborhood music and picnics throughout the summer months.

Objectives and Strategies:

A. Develop a long-term strategic plan for park improvement to ensure that the city continues to meet the needs of its current and future population.

1. Undertake a level of service analysis to identify current and future gaps in the current supply of parks and recreational opportunities, taking into account expected residential development.
2. Develop a multi-year capital improvement plan to ensure that these gaps are addressed in a systematic way.

B. Creatively address existing and projected service gaps.

1. Look for an opportunity to provide a larger, centralized park to accommodate crowds and larger events. A potential location for such a park is along the waterfront, north of the Forbes Avenue Board Launch.
2. Look into innovative methods for providing additional programming for city residents in existing parks. Consider cooperating with the Boys and Girls Club, for example, to bring children to the parks after school.
3. Complete the planning and implementation process for a skate park in Riverfront Park.
4. Continue to pursue recreational opportunities along the waterfront. (See Waterfront for more detailed recommendations)

C. Develop publicly-owned land into active recreation.

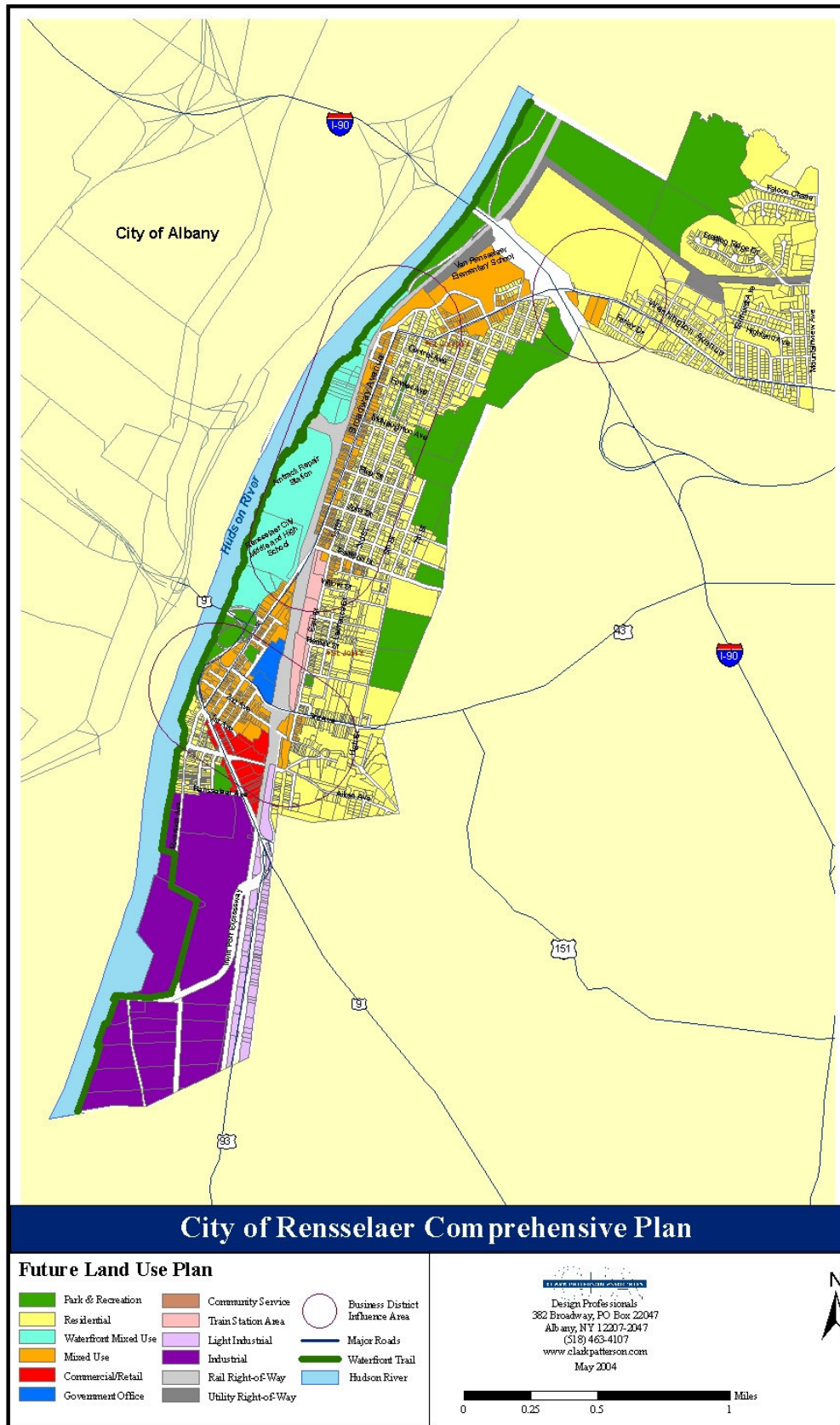
1. Continue to pursue development and programming of the Hollow for public access. (See Natural Resources and Open Space for more detailed recommendations.)
2. Consider creating a park in the area between Riverside Ave. and the Hudson River in the Fort Crailo Historic District to complement the Fort Crailo Historic Site.
3. Develop a public boathouse on the Hudson River.
4. Pursue funding to develop Central Park.

D. Increase programming throughout the city's park system.

1. Explore the possibility of a city rowing program, possibly in cooperation with RPI.
2. Consider community gardening programs, including offering individual garden plots to city residents.
3. Expand recreational programming for youth.



A public boathouse, like this one in Alexandria, VA, would create opportunities for increased access to the water and perhaps a school or municipal rowing program.



Introduction

Many of the recommendations outlined in the previous section of this Comprehensive Plan are place-based, and implementation will require zoning updates and the institution of other place-based regulations. The future land use plan lays out a pattern for new development of the city – a vision of what the city should look like in the future. This plan, illustrated on the Future Land Use map, is based upon the input provided by the Steering Committee, detailed field analysis and information provided in the Downtown Redevelopment Plan. The land use recommendations provided herein offer a framework for these zoning revisions and other land use regulations. The Future Land Use Map and accompanying descriptions of the various land use categories depict a generalized future pattern of land use in the city.

Residential:

The City of Rensselaer has several well established residential neighborhoods that provide a range of housing options for local residents. These areas are generally located to the east of Broadway, East Street, Washington Avenue, the Avenues, and in the Fort Crailo neighborhood. Future planning and development should focus on maintaining and enhancing these areas as primary residential neighborhoods with a mix of single family, two-family and limited non-owner occupied apartments.

The current residential zoning includes R-1, R-2 and R3 zones. This land use plan recommends that most of the areas zoned residential remains as such, but the densities permitted in these zones should be revisited, as should the range of permitted complementary uses. Permitted uses should be limited to single family residential, two-family residential and limited multi-family housing in structures originally designed for two or more families in established neighborhoods. Accessory units may be permitted by special use permit and under stringent controls. Limited commercial development should be allowed by special use permit in order to provide convenience to residents, and allow home businesses to thrive. Performance of permitted non-residential uses should be carefully controlled to ensure they will have limited or no impact on the quality of life. This may include noise, light, parking, hours of operation, signage, exterior color and entrances.

Design guidelines should be developed for all residential neighborhoods, with a priority given to the two historic districts, in order to assure that new residential construction and significant reconstruction respect the scale, massing and character of surrounding structures.



New residential development can be sensitive to the design and scale of an older city, as is demonstrated by the new construction in these photos, from Saratoga Springs, NY; Portland, OR; and Kentlands, MD.

Waterfront Mixed Use:

The City of Rensselaer's waterfront is currently underutilized and represents a significant opportunity for economic revitalization due to the large developable tracts of land proximate to the City of Albany, convenience to transportation, direct water access and exceptional views.

The waterfront mixed use area indicated on the Future Land Use Map should become a destination that provides a diverse mix of uses including residential, retail, office, service, accommodations, water-dependant uses and public spaces. Relatively high development density and scale should be permitted where feasible and creative solutions for parking, traffic management and access should be required. In general, waterfront development should accommodate pedestrian amenities and infrastructure. Utilizing access management and traffic calming techniques, roadways should be designed to minimize speed while encouraging safe and efficient traffic flow through the area.

Structures should be designed to celebrate the Hudson River and the city's heritage and to enhance the appearance of the site. New development should be urban in scale and design, and parking should be integrated into all development plans and should be located to the side or rear of every structure so as not to be obtrusive; large suburban-style parking lot should be avoided. Shared parking should be encouraged. Parking structures may be required to meet parking demand generated by dense development patterns and should be designed to integrate with the building design and materials of surrounding structures. Ideally, parking structures in the waterfront area should be located to the rear or underneath commercial uses.

Public access to the waterfront will be essential to the revitalization of Rensselaer's waterfront. Future development should provide a 50 to 100 foot minimum public access easement to allow public access to the waterfront.

Permitted uses should include residential (large-scale, multi-family), small-scale retail and office space, professional services, lodging, accommodations, boat rentals, tours and taxis, and marina-related uses.



Examples of development that would be appropriate on the waterfront, from Saratoga, the Erie Canal, and Pittsburg

Mixed Use:

The areas labeled as Mixed Use on the Future Land Use Plan are intended represent the traditional urban land use pattern, including a variety of uses such as commercial, commercial, civic and open space, that result in traditional neighborhoods where living, working and shopping occur in close proximity to one another. Currently, this type of mixed-use development is predominantly found in

Rensselaer’s Central Business District. To a lesser extent, this type of development pattern is also present on Partition Street and scattered along Washington Avenue. The Future Land Use Plan envisions mixed land use expanding and encompassing the areas along the North Broadway corridor.

Zoning for mixed land use should be carefully crafted to encourage appropriate levels of activity in different areas. For example, in the Central Business District, residential uses should be introduced on upper floors only and commercial uses with an active street front should be encouraged on the first floor. This area should become a centerpiece of the city - providing needed services to residents and attracting visitors to enjoy the retail and dining opportunities offered by the city.



Two examples of mixed use buildings with commercial and retail on the first floor and residential and office upstairs.

Train Station Area:

Mixed use development similar to that described above should also be encouraged in the area surrounding the train station, which is one of the busiest urban train stations in the nation. The Future Land Use Plan singles this area out from the other areas targeted for mixed use development to emphasize the importance of the train station neighborhood as a key gateway to the city and a driving force for the economic development of the city as a whole. Special attention should be given to physical infrastructure in the train station area, and regulations should be carefully crafted to maintain an attractive and welcoming atmosphere.

Similar to the Mixed Use and Waterfront areas of the city, the Train Station Area will encourage a wide range of uses, including, but not limited to, housing, retail, services (e.g. hotels), and public spaces. However, this area will require special attention to development that encourages transit-based uses. Therefore, car rental, business hotels, dry cleaners, office space and other uses will be encouraged. In addition, this area should be linked to the Central Business District and Waterfront areas to encourage people to explore all the city has to offer. This will require careful attention to detail in terms of wayfinding



Mixed uses should be encouraged around the train station.

signage, common design specifications and safe pedestrian facilities.

Office and Retail:

The US Routes 9 & 20 corridor is currently, and expected to remain, a commercial development area. Due to high traffic volumes, this area is an attractive location for major retail uses and professional offices. However, the corridor is also a primary gateway to the city. Consequently, attention to building design, façade materials and structure orientation on the site should be carefully weighed.

Future development on the 9&20 Corridor should be controlled by strengthened regulations that promote good design, require pedestrian accommodations including a continuous sidewalk, provide for landscaping and encourage parking behind buildings. Better signage controls should also be enacted to ensure that signs are attractive, well-placed, and reflect positively on the city as a whole. Traditional franchise signage should be modified to fit in with the scale, context and materials as seen fit by the City.



These photographs demonstrate that highway commercial does not have to be unattractive

Government Office:

The New York State Division of Youth currently uses a significant portion of the City of Rensselaer located to the east of Broadway in the Central Business District. These government offices provide stability and a consistent daytime worker population in the City and are thus a desirable use within the city. This area, which is identified on the Future Land Use Map as Government Office, is expected and desired to remain as it is for the foreseeable future. Small scale retail should be encouraged on the streets surrounding the government offices to provide needed services to the State employees. Examples of uses that should be promoted include restaurants, dry cleaners, small groceries and gift shops.



The State offices are a desirable land use

Community Services:

There are several uses in the city that fall into the Community Services category. In general, community services include any public, private or not-for-profit agencies that provide a community benefit. The location of many of these services is in transition – City Hall, the Police Department, the Boys and Girls Club, the city's schools are all either moving or expected to move within the next five years, thus opening up valuable economic development opportunities. As these uses shift from their current locations, which are indicated as such on the Future Land Use Map, these areas will need to

be revisited to determine the highest and best use.



The City Hall, Community Center and Elementary School are just three of the institutional uses that are in flux.

Light Industrial:

The City of Rensselaer has several small light industrial uses scattered throughout the city. The primary location is in the southeast area of the city on South Street. Future light industrial development is encouraged in this location. Permitted uses should include machine shops, warehouses, manufacturing and assembly and other non-intensive industrial use. Careful attention should be given to the impact of future development in this area on the non-industrial parts of the city, and safeguards such as buffers, design guidelines and noise and emissions restrictions may be put into place to mitigate any potential negative impacts of industrial development in the Light Industrial area.

Industrial:

The City of Rensselaer has a significant industrial area located to the south of Fort Crailo currently occupied by Organichem, Inc., the former BASF site and other uses related to the Albany Rensselaer Port. This area has historically been used for industrial purposes and is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. This is due primarily to the investments made by the Port to attract shipping, freight and warehousing of goods. The site is currently limited by poor access to critical state and interstate highways. It is recommended that all industrial trips use the Irvin Stewart Port Expressway rather than Riverside Drive. However, the intersection of SR 9 and the Irvin Stewart Port Expressway will require significant improvements to more efficiently accommodate the increased traffic.



Industrial land uses such as Organichem are valuable economic assets, and should be encourage to continue to operate in Rensselaer.

Permitted uses in this area should include any industry that will require 24-hour production of noise and light, generate significant truck traffic for delivery, or manufacture goods that require safe distances from the general public. A 40,000 SF minimum lot size should be required with buffering distances and landscaping for all non-industrial adjacent uses.

The heavy industrial zone is minimized to encompass only those areas that are currently developed

or severely encumbered by contamination. Industrial uses in transitional areas should be limited and controlled to minimize the impact on the neighboring non-industrial waterfront so as not to negatively impact the development potential of non-industrial waterfront land, and much of the transition area is, in fact, identified as Light Industrial on the Future Land Use Map.



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