



TOWN OF CHATHAM NEW YORK 2023 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



PREPARED BY:
Chatham Comprehensive Plan
Update Review Committee

PREPARED FOR:
Town of Chatham, NY
Town Board

IN ASSOCIATION WITH:



FINAL DRAFT | VERSION 3.1
September 8, 2023

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TOWN BOARD

Donal Collins, Supervisor
Vance Pitkin, Deputy Supervisor
Abi Mesick
Rick Werwaiss
Destiny Hallenbeck
John Wapner (Former Board Member)
Kevin Weldon (Former Board Member)

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE REVIEW COMMITTEE

Abi Mesick, Committee Chair, Board Member
Jeanne Bowerman, Committee Co-Chair
Donal Collins, Supervisor
Vance Pitkin, Deputy Supervisor
Destiny Hallenbeck, Board Member
Tim Mackerer
Jeff Cox
Karen Malina
Evan Young
Angus Eaton
Donna Staron
David Everett
Bonnie Schoonmaker
Lucinda Buckley

THANK YOU

Special thanks to the Tri-Village Fire Department, The Berry Farm, Chatham Agricultural Partnership as well as the many volunteers and residents who provided their time to participate and contribute to this community effort.

Prepared by:  **REGROWTH**
PLANNING

View of sunlight through the barn board slats. Cover Photo: {credit}.





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

September 8, 2023

Town Board
Town of Chatham, New York
488 State Route 295
Chatham, NY 12037

Supervisor Collins and Town Board members,

This Comprehensive Plan represents an effort to craft a vision which reflects the long-term needs and ideals of our community. It is intended to be used as a guide for future land-use and zoning changes, as well as specific strategies to address needs identified by our residents. Prior to the adoption of this plan, the Comprehensive Plan Update Review Committee (CPURC) must hold a public hearing, after which a public hearing shall be conducted by the Town Board, to collect comments before it can be finalized. It must also comply with the review procedures of the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) of New York. Once adopted, this plan becomes official policy of the town, and future actions taken should be in conformity with its principles. We trust that it will serve as a useful guide.

We have learned from this process that Chatham, like many other communities, is facing an aging population with increasing housing costs, and limited options or affordability for seniors, younger people and families to be able to live and work here. For the long-term health of our town and local economy it is important that we maintain a balance of different age and income groups, and work to create a more diverse, equitable and inclusive community. We also wish to preserve our rural nature, including the working farms, open spaces and historic hamlets which strongly define our character.

To accomplish these and other goals, a number of short-term priorities have been identified in this plan. These include a series of zoning updates to address the following issues:

Broaden the availability and types of different housing options which can be pursued, with a focus on addressing the needs of seniors and younger families;

Adopting new local laws to clarify and control the future use of solar energy installations, short-term rentals, accessory dwelling units, and timber harvesting;

Allow for a wider variety of agricultural and ag-supporting uses and identify unnecessary restrictions on active farming operations;

Revise the Special Use Permit uses and processes to provide greater protections and increased public participation and understanding of the review process;

Protections against future development along sensitive ridgelines.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, Continued

In addition to these suggested code updates, the plan also prioritizes the adoption of a Community Preservation Fund, improved understanding and transparency of everyday government processes, enhancing the hamlets and business districts with more mixed-use and commercial development options, as well as providing incentives in the recruitment of volunteer firefighters.

The plan also recognizes many other longer-term efforts and aspirations which we must work on over time. These include adjusting to the gradual effects of climate change and taking steps to reduce our influence in worsening it where we can. Expanding our network of trails, recreational and cultural activities available in town which serve our local population and help attract visitors. Incentivizing the creation of more shops and services which cater to and serve the local population. Maintaining the cultural and historic aspect of our rural dirt and gravel roads. And last but not least, we must also work to strengthen our sense of community by bringing people together, both young and old, in regular celebration of our community and history.

These ideas and recommendations were developed in discussion with the community through a planning and public outreach process. The background and reasoning behind all of these ideas is explained in the Part II - Issues & Goals section of the plan, while these and many other recommendations are further detailed in Part III - Implementation. It is our hope that this plan has been presented in a clear, friendly and easy to read manner to make it accessible and inviting to all members of the public, so that we may all do our part to help make it happen.

This 2023 Comprehensive Plan is dedicated in loving memory to Dick Dorsey, a deeply dedicated Town Historian who worked for many years preserving the stories of our past so that we do not forget them. The role of our history in understanding who we are is very important to preparing a plan for our future.

Sincerely,

Comprehensive Plan Update Review Committee



PART I

INTRODUCTION

Every community needs a vision. Our plan seeks to describe the process and discussions we have taken to formulate our vision, and identify the steps we must take to achieve it.

One of the most important powers and duties granted by the State of New York to local governments is their authority and responsibility to undertake comprehensive planning to establish a long-range vision, protect the public health, ensure their safety and see to the general welfare of its citizens. Much like our nation's Constitution, a comprehensive plan establishes a set of important goals and policies which reflect the values of its populace. Most importantly, these values and goals are derived from the people themselves, and create a blueprint for our future.

Over time, these needs sometimes change. Communities often grow, our society evolves and new industries and technologies are born. Recognizing this, the New York State enabling

law¹ which grants these powers to local towns and villages calls for the periodic review of such local plans to make sure they still reflect the current needs and desires of the community. As such, these plans are typically updated every ten years to stay relevant.

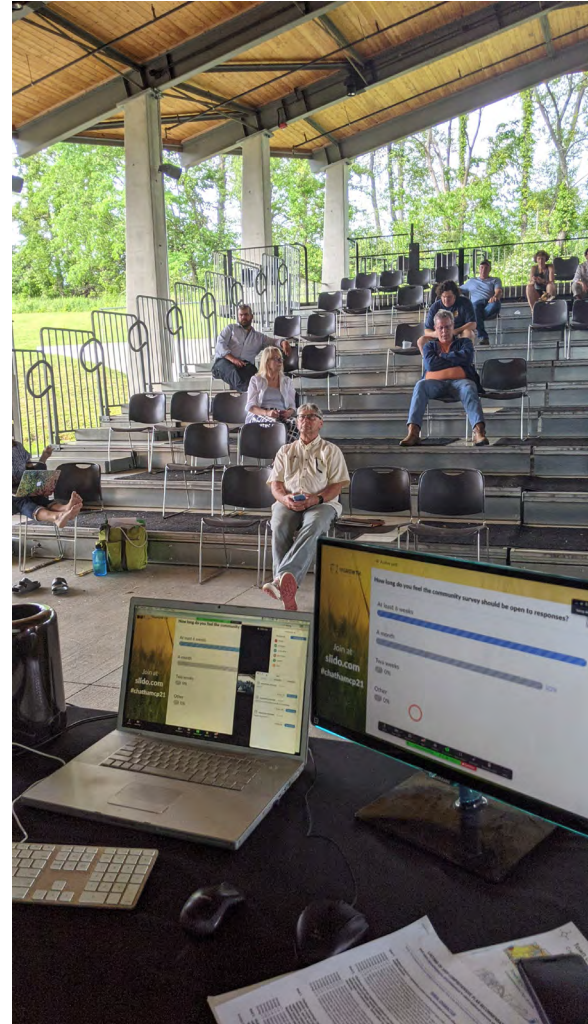
Maintaining our comprehensive plan is important, not just because it helps course-correct for gradual changes in our demographics and values over time. Many communities rely on these plans to identify new trends which should be addressed, and potential future hazards we wish to prepare for, or avoid. Our current codes do not adequately address many issues, and suffers from inadequacies in handling many types of uses. Having a recently updated plan also helps to leverage grant funding for important upgrades or projects which are desired by our citizens. The last comprehensive plan for the Town of Chatham was adopted in September of 2009, thirteen years ago. Since then, many things have changed. The authors of that time could not have predicted the rise and popularity of short-term rentals, solar power, electric vehicles or remote-working. It was time for an update.

In 2020, we embarked on the process of developing an update to our plan. A group of local citizens and officials were appointed to lead this effort, forming the Comprehensive Plan Update Review Committee (CPURC) in January of 2020. Their goal was to conduct public outreach with the Chatham community to learn what issues were important to people, what elements of the prior plan might still be relevant, and their vision for the future. This information would be used to craft a future strategy that could be worked toward over the next five years, and reviewed by current and future administrations to ensure it is still relevant in a post-COVID world.

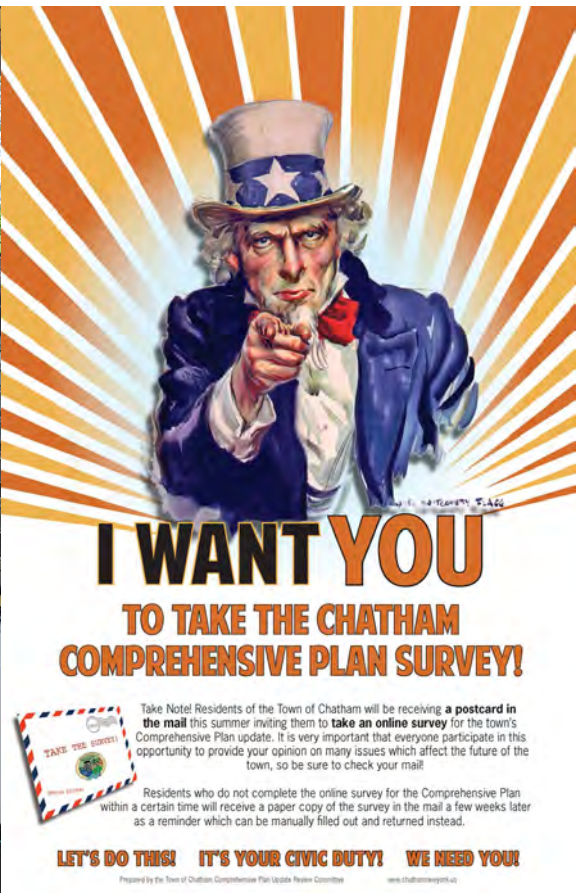
From the beginning of the effort, effective public outreach and robust citizen participation were considered of paramount importance to the success of the plan. Unfortunately, having just begun the process of various hamlet meetings to discuss the needs of the community, the COVID-19 pandemic brought society to an abrupt halt in the spring of 2020, effectively putting the process on hold for almost a year.

To assist us with getting the effort back into motion, the town sought the assistance of a land-use planning consultant who would bring an independent perspective, provide advice and help guide the process.

¹ *New York State Town Law §272-a.*



PS21 Meeting. Live polling during the June 5, 2021 public meeting at PS21 Performance Space.



▲ **Community Wide Survey.** Poster inviting people to participate in the town-wide survey mailed out residents.

Through an interview process of potential consultants, Regrowth Planning, LLC was selected for this role. Our collective work began in the Spring of 2021 with developing an approach which would allow the planning process to continue amid the pandemic restrictions. This document outlines that process, provides that background for many of the issues identified, and provides recommendations for future policies and actions to achieve our desired vision.

The Process of Planning

Public outreach is an essential component of developing a comprehensive plan which has strong community support. To that end, this planning process sought to involve multiple avenues for public input and comment.

The process began on June 5th, 2021 with the hosting of an informational meeting held at the PS21 Performance Space, an outdoor venue chosen for social distancing purposes. The goal of this meeting was to introduce the comprehensive planning effort, and to solicit comments from residents to identify the most important issues facing Chatham. The input collected from this meeting was used to develop a town-wide Community Survey intended to reach all residents, property and business owners.

The Community Survey was advertised to roughly 2,900 households and made available online, with 2,300 paper surveys directly mailed to many residents. The results of the survey were documented in a



report in January of 2022, and subsequently presented at a meeting in the Tri-Village Firehouse on March 26th. This meeting also presented some preliminary recommendations based on the feedback received from the public. *(See Appendix 'B' for survey results)*

To collect additional input on some of the more complicated topics, the town hosted a series of “focus group” public meetings in the spring of 2022. These meeting topics included Senior Living, Agriculture & Farming, Youth and Young Families, Housing, and Solar Power. Due to under-representation from younger and senior audiences in prior outreach, a second effort was made to collect more data. A separate survey was advertised and distributed with the assistance of the local schools to reach youth and younger families. The survey was also handed out by recreation director, Mike West to the families of summer camp participants, and at the Community Picnic, the Boy Scout Breakfast and made available on the Town’s website. A senior survey was made available to the Neighbors of Northern Columbia County and the Chatham/Ghent Seniors. Additionally, separate questionnaires were also distributed for hamlet-specific issues as well as Agriculture & Farming. These were distributed at various community events and made available at the town hall. Together, the input from the March presentation and these events helped to clarify ideas and recommendations for the early draft plan.

AGRICULTURAL MEETING
*@ The Greenhouse Cidery
 at The Berry Farm*

Town of Chatham
 Comprehensive Plan

Where: **The Greenhouse Cidery at
 The Chatham Berry Farm**
 2309 Route 203, Chatham NY

When: **Thursday, May 12th, 2022
 5:00pm - 8:00pm**

Rain Date!
**Friday
 May 13th**
 To verify, call:
 (518) 392-3262

The Town of Chatham Comprehensive Plan Update Review Committee (CPURC) is hosting a focus group meeting for **Local Farmers, Landowners, Equestrians, and others** interested in the future of agriculture and rural land use in the Town of Chatham. The goal is to discuss relevant issues for the Comprehensive Plan update. Please join us at **The Greenhouse Cidery at The Chatham Berry Farm** on May 12th (or in the event of rain, on May 13th!)

For more information, visit the CPURC webpage at: www.chathamnewyork.us
 Home Page | Committees | Comprehensive Plan Update Review Committee

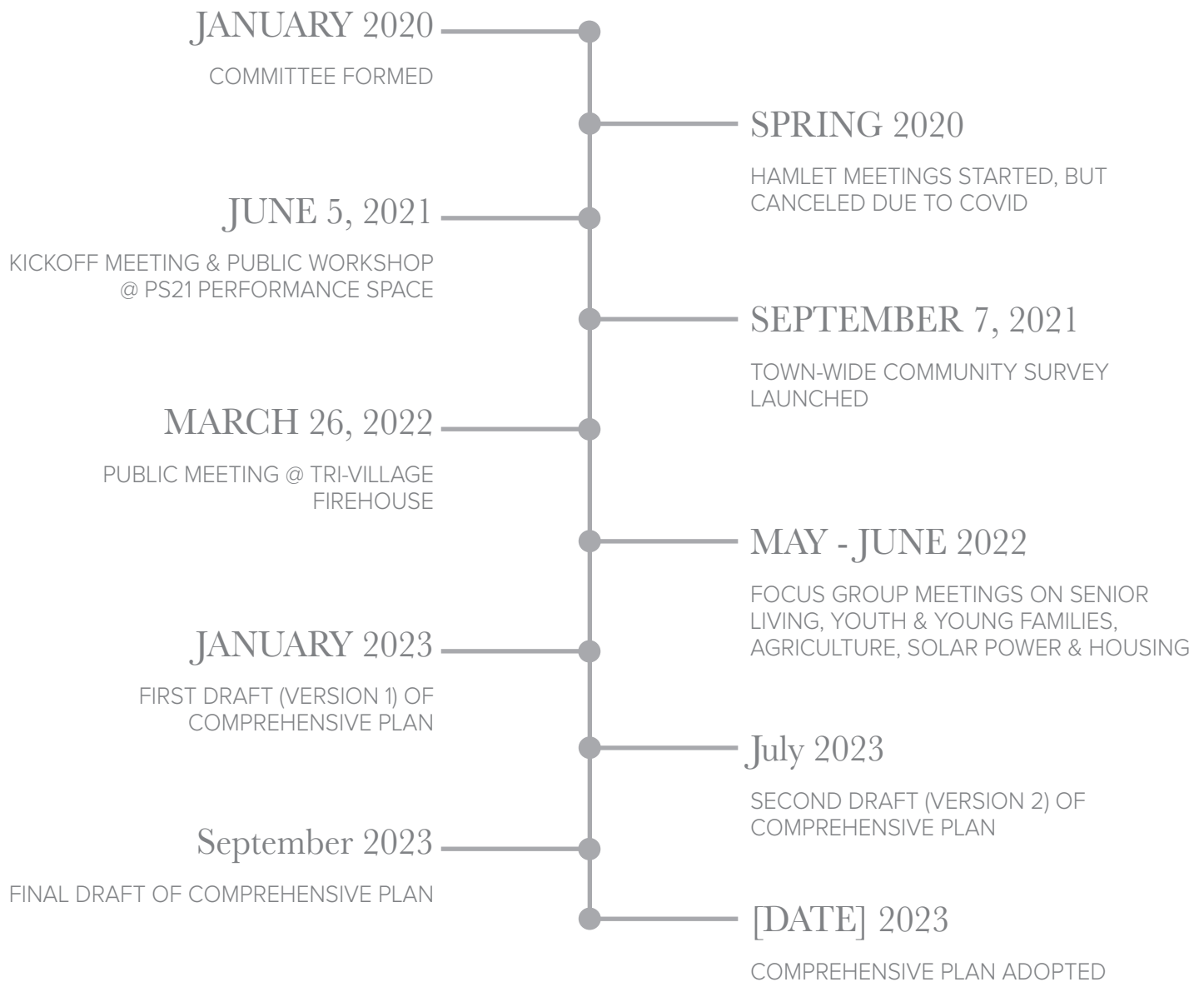
The first draft of the Comprehensive Plan was made available in December 2022 for review and comment by the public, Planning Board, ZBA and other departments. People were invited to submit comments on the draft through an in-person listening session hosted at the Tri-Village Fire Department, as well as via an online comment system. *(See Appendix 'C')* The input and comments received were considered by the



Public Meeting at Tri-Village Firehouse, March 26, 2022

CPURC and used to revise and update the plan to better reflect the needs and suggestions of our residents. A second draft was then prepared, advertised and circulated in July 2023 for additional comment, followed by a public meeting on August 6th. The final draft was then prepared and made available in September 2023 in advance of the public hearings required for State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) assessment and formal adoption by the town board.

PLANNING TIMELINE



Changing Times

Since the adoption of the last plan in 2009, our community—and the larger world around us—has experienced a number of notable changes which have had an effect on the way we live. The continued growth of the Internet is one such phenomena, expanding its presence and influence into our everyday lives more than ever before.

This growth has had many implications. **Remote work** (“work from home”) has become a necessity, enabling many people to start up small at-home businesses which have increased demand for allowable home-occupations. Fueled most recently by people fleeing the pandemic and the “great resignation” of people leaving their jobs, Chatham experienced an influx of people who no longer needed to work in metropolitan areas. Citizens could now spend more time locally without commuting, or they would greatly increase local real estate demand in their quest to relocate to the more rural areas upstate in an effort to avoid the pandemic. The combined effect had a dramatic impact on local property values. The hot real-estate market upstate caused a frenzy which fueled bidding wars, cash-only sales and sometimes inspired people to put their house on the market on a whim to see how much they might get. This increased demand and rising prices made it more difficult than ever for local families to afford any housing in the town they have lived in for generations.

The Internet has also brought us the concept of **short-term rentals**, allowing people to easily gain a new source of income by renting their homes out to visitors on vacation (or sometimes even scouting new places to live) who in turn often provide a local economic tourism benefit, particularly in places which do not have many lodging opportunities. This new rental income source is a blessing for many, helping to cover their taxes or mortgage payments



Then & Now. View looking north along NY State Route 203 toward Merwin Road. ▲▶

which might otherwise be far more difficult. However, it is not without its potential downsides. The exploding popularity of this service often takes many available rental properties off the market, further limiting an already endangered housing stock of affordable places to live, particularly for younger people and the local workforce. It has also caused concern for the long-term erosion of community cohesiveness, neighborhood relationships and a lack of common courtesy resulting in noise, trash and parking nuisances. A balance must be found to resolve these issues.

Coming on the heels of the big-box retail store phenomena, the more recent growth of **online shopping** has further undermined the ability of small local stores to compete and stay in business. This one-two punch has had a dramatic effect on Main Street America. Many retail storefronts have been shuttered, or replaced (when lucky) with service-oriented businesses which don't really cater to residents. The result of this is local shoppers are

Demographically speaking, both Chatham and the larger United States overall, is transitioning into a period of an increased **aging population**. The percentage of our senior population has been steadily increasing, and will continue to grow steadily as the Baby Boom generation continues to mature. It is estimated that the number of people aged 85 and over will more than double between 2019 and 2040.² This trend will likely require fundamental

changes to many basic elements of our society including housing, transportation and recreation. At the other end of the age spectrum, **declining school enrollment** continues to be a local and regional issue. School enrollment in New York State has been in a slow decline over the past ten years, and rapidly dropped an additional 5% in the past two years.³

Many of these gradual population changes are reflected in an **overall population decline** town-wide over the past decade or more, a condition found in many rural New York communities. While most of the growth within the state

since 2010 has been experienced in 12 downstate counties, a majority of more rural upstate counties have witnessed a decline.⁴ Throwing uncertainty into the mix, the Covid pandemic hit at roughly the same time as the 2020 Census counts were being conducted, and it is not known what effect this eventually had on actual migration.

having a harder time finding goods which were once provided locally, and historic downtowns such as Chatham Village are having to evolve to survive as important community public spaces, often at the expense of failing locals.

It is interesting to note that each of these Internet trends has brought unparalleled opportunity, advantage and convenience to individuals, yet often bring undesirable secondary effects to the larger community. Harnessing these advantages, while controlling their unwanted secondary effects, is a necessary goal of this plan.

² Administration of Community Living - 2020 Profile of Older Americans

³ New York State Education Department - District Enrollment Data

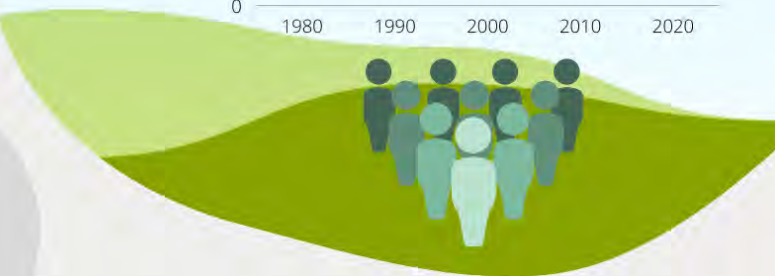
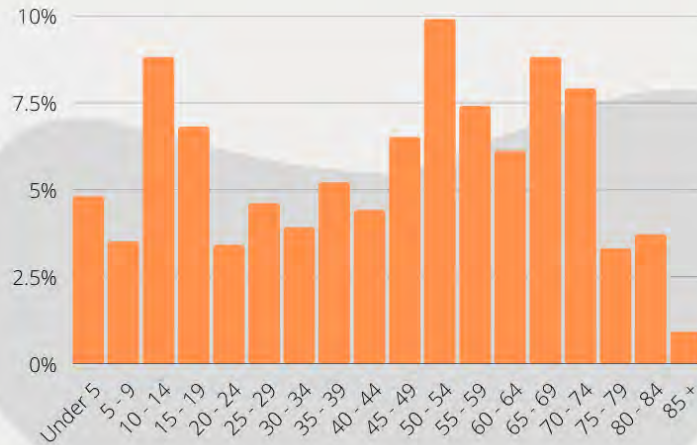
⁴ EmpireCenter.org Report on 2020 U.S. Census data

Town of Chatham Demographics

Existing conditions and demographic comparisons.

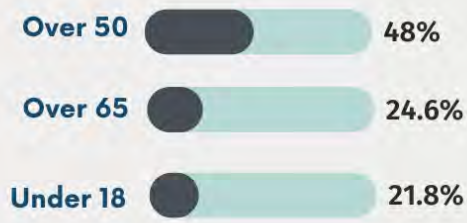
Population

The 2020 town population of 3,871 represents roughly a 6.7% decline from the levels recorded in 2009



Age Breakdown

The largest demographic age groups in Chatham are those over 50 and under 18.



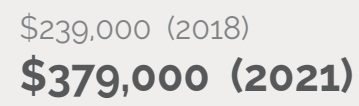
Dairy Farms

Number of active dairy farms in 2010 compared to 2023



Median Home Value

Median house value in Columbia County, 2018 to 2021



Land Use

Land Use Statistics



33,500 total acres in Chatham
55% forested
21% active or potential active farmland
58 active farms

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey 2020 data; Columbia County Housing Brief 2022, Town of Chatham;

As people move to and from our area, there continues to be new people and families who relocate here, including many second homeowners. This can often create a friction between people who have lived here for generations and those who are new to country living. It remains important that we continue to manage our expectation of each other so that this friction does not grow to become divisive of our community. We are witnessing a **drop in local volunteerism**—local fire departments and emergency responders are finding it harder to recruit new help—as well as other organizations and clubs. Lastly, since the pandemic there has also been a shortage of essential workers, as well as a reliable general workforce willing to fill many service related positions.

The continued **loss of agricultural land** and operations, particularly in the dairy sector, was a concern of the 2009 plan. Global market competition and rising prices continues to make it harder for smaller local farms to survive. Since the 2009 plan was written, Chatham has seen a significant transition in acreage used in certain farm types while losing some traditional cropland. Dairy farming then represented 2/3rds of Chatham's farmland, while today there is only one remaining operation, located on the town line.

The continued rise and popularity of **solar power** has made it increasingly accessible to private homeowners, businesses and larger operations. Residential, commercial and industrial solar installs



New solar array installation on Highland Road

have grown at a steady pace in the last ten years. This transition to more renewable sources of energy has been a great opportunity which many people support at the private level, however the influx of larger “utility-scale” solar projects has caused much concern and alarm on the potential impacts these projects will have on the rural landscape and environment. The loss of large swaths of viable agricultural land to accommodate sprawling solar arrays—at a time when farmland is already in decline—is troubling and possibly misguided. After the American Revolution, the Hudson and Mohawk Valleys were often referred to as the breadbasket of our nation. As the effects of climate change reduce the agricultural production capacity of other major food producing areas in our nation, we may once again, become a breadbasket. The effects of **climate change** are already revealing what can happen, with devastating wildfires, floods, droughts and hurricanes in increasing number and severity causing more climate refugees to seek safer places to live. Many may chose to head northeast. We must find ways to better accommodate solar energy at the individual homeowner level, utilize less productive lands and reduce our overall energy consumption if we wish to solve these problems long-term.

It is interesting to note that each of these Internet trends has brought unparalleled opportunity, advantage and convenience to individuals, yet often bring undesirable secondary effects to the larger community.

Lastly, it is also worth mentioning that there is a general trend by more and more Americans today to achieve a lifestyle which provides them **increased independence and security**. Coming on the heels of the global pandemic, there is a quiet unease stemming from uncertainty in the global economy, rising inflation and gas prices, international conflict,

political tensions, supply-chain and labor shortages, and severe weather events disrupting our world. There seems to be no shortage of things to worry about. This has contributed to more and more Americans seeking adjustments to their life which insulate and protect them from the world around us, including the desire to relocate to more rural areas away from urban centers, growing more of their own food or sourcing more food locally, and increasing their resilience to events with energy storage and backup power options. While many of these issues are outside of our control, it is prudent to weigh the merits of this philosophy as we consider long-term strategies for the Town of Chatham.

But all is not all doom and gloom. Despite these challenges, Chatham remains a very desirable place to live, surrounded by natural wonder and beauty. We have successfully avoided the commercial strip development which has plagued many of our brother and sister communities. Many other communities are facing the same, if not more, challenges. Our success will come from recognizing these changes, adapting to respond to them where we can, and taking advantage of what opportunities they present.

Chatham's Vision Statement

The Town of Chatham prides itself on its agricultural heritage and picturesque landscapes, striving to retain its rural integrity and sense of community while also adapting to a rapidly changing world. Today, more than ever, we recognize that a diverse and collaborative community is needed to sustain the many interdependent relationships which make our town special.

This Comprehensive Plan conveys the citizens' dedication to protect our farms, natural resources and habitats for generations to come. As we address climate change, housing, and business options, we will conscientiously and compassionately consider the wide range of residents' income levels to meet the current and upcoming goals. We seek to manage future growth in a sustainable fashion, ensure our citizens—from the youth to the elders—may find suitable housing, employment, education, and recreation, as well as welcome a diverse population of residents and visitors, increasing the vibrancy of our community.

Chatham also looks to collaborate more fully with the Village of Chatham and our school districts, as well as other surrounding municipalities, to help meet the challenges tomorrow brings as we look to become more self-reliant, resilient and energy independent. This is the path of localization.

Together, with thoughtful planning, we can protect and improve our way of life in the town we call home and love so dearly.



Farmer's Market at Crellin Park Pavilion.

PART II

ISSUES & GOALS

Our Community

Communities are defined in many ways by the people who live there. Having a wider spectrum of people representing different age groups, incomes, ethnicities, races and experiences is important to creating a balanced, healthy, vibrant community, and the people of Chatham seem to agree. At the June 5th public meeting, when early discussions began to identify topics that were important to people for inclusion in the 2021 Community Survey, several people requested questions on the importance of diversity and balance in the community. For some, there is concern that younger generations have few local options for employment other than service jobs, few options for housing, and that our youth will choose not to stay in the area and will instead leave for better opportunities elsewhere. Younger families cannot afford to live in the area like they used to. Local businesses are finding it harder to find a reliable and competent workforce. It has become more difficult to find locals willing to fill necessary roles such as volunteer firefighters. As our population ages, maintaining younger age groups will be important

to balance the growing number of seniors and retirees who will make up a majority of the residents in the coming decades. Gentrification is also a concern, with the influx of older, wealthier second homeowners fueling an income disparity between the locals who have lived and worked here for generations and those that are newer to the area. When young people cannot afford to live in an area, this influences the population and community character. This in turn affects the vibrancy and resiliency of a community

It should come as little surprise then, when asked about these specific issues in the 2021 Community Survey, [Chatham residents seemed to agree that the community was not quite as diverse as it could be](#). 72% of residents queried in the 2021 Community survey felt that having a diverse and balanced population of different income groups was important. Likewise, 76% felt that it was important to have a diverse and balanced population of different age groups.

However, beyond the issues of age and income, [the Town of Chatham wishes to be an inclusive and welcoming community to people of all cultures, races, ethnicities and backgrounds](#). Equity, diversity and inclusion should be cornerstones of the community, and finding ways to help keep these different considerations in balance is a necessary goal of this plan.

Our community is also one which we closely share with the Village of Chatham, as well as many surrounding towns. We are not alone in many of the challenges we face. Trying to solve some of these issues on our own will be difficult. [It is important that we sit down with the village and our neighbors to identify common problems and shared goals where we may have the opportunity to help each other out](#). These solutions may require trade-offs and compromise, but could ultimately benefit the larger area.

The town should also work to address many technical issues related to a zoning code which has become somewhat outdated and no longer meets the contemporary needs of the community. [The code should be reviewed and updated to reflect new emerging uses, home occupations, businesses which support agriculture, updated and refined definitions, a review of special permit uses, clarifications of review and approval processes, fencing and other provisions which have been troublesome](#). This update is necessary to set the stage for other zoning updates discussed further in this plan.

GOAL 01: Chatham should strive to maintain a more diverse balance of age and income groups, with housing options, jobs and amenities which attract and retain people from many generational and socio-economic backgrounds.

GOAL 02: Chatham should be a welcoming community which values equity, diversity and inclusion for people of all cultures, races, ethnicities and backgrounds.

GOAL 03: Work closely with the Village of Chatham and surrounding towns to identify common problems and goals where we can help each other.

GOAL 04: Adopt a zoning update to address new use types, refined definitions, special permit uses and other technical deficiencies.

GOAL 05: Revise and update the Special Use Permits section of the zoning to provide additional controls, public notices and procedures for the public to be aware of, and participate in, the review process. Review existing special permit uses for suitability.

The Special Permit Uses and procedures, in particular, should be reviewed to determine if each are suitable within the various zoning districts of Chatham, if they should be continued, or if they are more suited toward a simpler site plan review process. An important consideration is making sure that each of these uses are adequately and accurately defined, and ensuring that requirements for each special use be properly explained to cover the necessary concerns for review boards to weigh in their consideration.

Residents would benefit from better access to local government information in general, including how the various review and approval processes work.



GOAL 06: Ensure adequate and clear communications between the town and residents to provide information on available local services, amenities, attractions, public hearings, development review processes and similar public info.

A common issue identified by residents is that they sometimes do not feel adequately informed about these uses being proposed in their area or knowledgeable in their rights and procedures for participating in the review discussion to convey their concerns. This section of the zoning should be reviewed to identify improvements which can be made to the notification and review process to help enable area residents to better participate in the discussion.

GOAL 07: Improve awareness, clarity and transparency of important town government processes with helpful information about approval procedures, permits, flow charts, timelines, contact info and FAQs to help empower residents.

Lastly, in keeping with the above issue, it has been identified that residents would benefit from better access to local government information in general, including how the various review and approval processes work, a flowchart of the process, their timelines, opportunities to comment, town government contact info, access to copies of proposed design documents and frequently asked questions (FAQ). These tools would help to educate and empower residents to be better informed and equipped to participate in the process. This information source should also be applied to additional resources containing information on local events, activities, groups, news, as well as contact info for entities such as local schools, libraries and activity groups.

Community Character & Natural Resources

It is nearly impossible to discuss the many different issues of this comprehensive plan without touching on the topic of community character. Our population's demographics along with housing, agriculture, natural resources, economic development, solar power and many more all have an influence on the overall character of our community. For this reason, community character must be among the first topics addressed in this plan to lay the groundwork of our primary goals.

The Town of Chatham is blessed with an abundance of natural and scenic beauty. Protecting and maintaining this beauty is one of the most important topics to our residents. When asked in the 2021 Community Survey why residents chose to live in Chatham, the overwhelming majority indicated it was because of their desire to live in a rural community. Many indicated a desire for their children to grow up in a rural community. Very few people have any plans or expectations of ever leaving here, and would like it to remain much the same as it is today. In many cases, some would prefer it remained much the same as it was yesterday. Development of the rural areas of town is highly



What is Rural Character?

Rural character often describes both the natural and human landscape of a sparsely populated countryside of open views, forests, fields, as well as the people who live and work among it all. However, different rural communities can often be defined by different elements. In Chatham's case, our rural character is also defined by slow, winding roads, denser hamlet settlements, historic estates, stone walls, orchards, picturesque hillsides, dusty tractors, hedgerows, grazing livestock and old silos. All of these things combine to create a patchwork which represents our varied local economy and day-to-day activities. Farming, agriculture and the people who work our traditional landscapes are an important component of that character.

undesired, and further development within the hamlets was supported with a preference toward adaptive re-use of existing structures in lieu of new construction. Our community is also concerned about the potential impact that large solar arrays could have on our local farming operations, open space, and the natural environment. Overall, it remains clear that the protection of our rural character and resources is very important.

But what do we mean when we talk about preserving our character? Protecting the character of our town means more than just preserving the physical characteristics of the landscape, but also maintaining the societal aspects of our people and history. Our character is in part defined by the people and activities of our traditional working landscapes. It is at once both charming and utilitarian. Preserving that character means we must also preserve and retain the people who are an integral part of making farming possible, and seeing that we do not inadvertently push them out because it is no longer affordable to live here. **To do so, we must nurture and protect the diversity of our community, providing equity, inclusion and a balance to our land use decisions so that we do not inadvertently drive away the people who are an integral part of it.** This philosophy extends to the animal kingdom and their local habitats. We should all have an equal opportunity to live our lives. While this may sometimes require a balancing of different ideals, we can respect that many here are deeply invested in the town where they have lived for many generations while still welcoming and respecting those that have recently arrived and are starting a new journey.

GOAL C1: Chatham's land use regulations should protect working landscapes as well as other open spaces including forests and wildlife habitats.

In considering steps to protect this character, a majority of survey respondents supported the idea of limitations on new development along sensitive ridgelines, as well as maintaining and protecting existing hamlet character and the establishment of additional historic districts. Maintaining the character of our rural dirt/gravel roads is also important to many people, with a majority of respondents supporting the idea of leaving them unpaved, or only paving limited areas which were necessary to address troublesome maintenance issues. It was suggested by some residents that the use of better aggregates, new products or maintenance procedures should be investigated. Most of the people who filled out the community wide survey indicated they would not support the widening of our existing narrow rural roads. It is clear from these various inputs that many residents highly value the scenic, rural character of the community, and would like to take proactive steps to maintain it.

GOAL C2: Maintain and protect the existing natural, scenic and rural character of Chatham.

“Rural character [is] about people and community. Of knowing your neighbors and those you pass on the street. Of knowing your community and organizing and participating in community events to stay connected. Of being in a community where people are connected, helping, and enjoying one another. A true community spirit of belonging...

..When a community drifts into a state where people and place are no longer conjoined, the essence of rural character—the sense of community—is lost.”

~ Molly Donovan, Former NH Community Economic Development State Specialist

To these ends, we should first look for creative ways to accommodate desired future growth within the already established hamlet centers and around Chatham Village, as these areas are historically more suited to denser development. This step will help to take development pressure off of the more rural areas of town which often define much of our community character. However, it is important to recognize that very little of our housing needs can be accommodated in the hamlet areas. While our hamlets have historically developed as relatively denser settlements, they have little room for infill and currently lack

GOAL C3: First look to direct future growth and density in and around the already established settlement areas of the village and hamlets.



GOAL C4: Prioritize opportunities for adaptive re-use of existing vacant or underutilized properties and buildings.

any water or sewer infrastructure to support much growth. We must also seek out opportunities for adaptive re-use of existing vacant or underutilized properties that can be put to use in lieu of clearing land for new construction when possible. Maintaining a master list of other opportunity properties will help to direct new business interest in them, improve the character of the town and make better use of existing properties.

GOAL C5: Maintain the existing standard minimum lot sizes and residential density of our more rural lands while developing special provisions to accommodate more creative housing solutions where denser development may be permitted.

In an effort to maintain the existing character of the rural areas of town, the existing standard lot sizes and residential density of our more rural areas should be kept intact. It is recognized that a reduction in minimum lot sizes across a whole zoning district could lead to a proliferation of single-family subdivisions. Instead, the denser housing solutions most needed by the community—those serving seniors, young families and local workforce—can be incentivized through special provisions in the code which allow for more creative designs that protect open space utilizing “dwelling units per acre” calculations instead of “minimum lot size”.

Where development occurs, thoughtful consideration should be given to the benefits of conservation design in protecting farmland, open spaces, natural resources and scenic beauty. **The existing zoning requirement for the use of conservation subdivisions for all major subdivisions (or all subdivisions of more than three lots on parcels 50 acres or larger) should be continued.** This will help to preserve open space and create designs which more naturally fit into the rural landscape.

The existing conservation subdivision code should be reviewed to ensure that it is still consistent with this plan, and should be expanded to provide special options for specific housing types which provide more affordable smaller-lot solutions for seniors and young families.

To help ensure that any new Conservation Subdivision code is working to achieve the goals of this plan at a sustainable growth rate or without unwanted impacts, **provide growth management caps to allow the Town Board to review the amount of new development under this provision and suspend new applications if necessary.**

The importance of our scenic landscape, viewsheds, natural environment and resources must also be addressed and provided with reasonable protections to help maintain natural habitats, forests and

GOAL C6: Utilize Conservation Subdivision design to accommodate and incentivize specific housing types needed in the community which require denser lot arrangements. Review the existing Conservation Subdivision code to ensure it provides adequate design guidance to applicants and review boards.

GOAL C7: Include growth management caps in new Conservation Subdivision codes.



water sources. These resources need to be identified and provided adequate protections by our land use regulations. Examples of these protections would include a commercial timber harvesting law which helps maintain our forests in a sustainable manner, or riparian buffer zones along sensitive waterways to reduce erosion and contamination of the waterways. Likewise, the recommendations of the 2017 Water Source Protection Plan (*See Appendix 'E'*) should be considered as part of future zoning code and land use decision making to help ensure we are taking steps to adequately protect our local water supply.

GOAL C8: Protect community character and viewsheds with limitations and criteria for new development on sensitive ridgelines utilizing updated ridgeline mapping.

One specific aspect of natural resource protection that has been identified and discussed in the community is the slow degradation which occurs over time as visible hillsides and ridgelines are developed with new housing. This type of development will over time have a cumulative negative effect on the visible quality of Chatham’s landscape. To address this specific concern, the town should develop limitations and criteria for new development on sensitive ridgelines along with updated ridgeline mapping to identify the most critical and sensitive areas. This work can be supported utilizing the visible ridgeline mapping effort which was developed during the 2009 comprehensive planning process.

GOAL C9: Review the Special Permit Uses and their requirements to ensure they are adequately protecting community character.

The Special Permit Uses and procedures, in particular, should be reviewed to determine if each are suitable within the various zoning districts of Chatham, what considerations they should include, if they should be continued, or if they are more suited toward a simpler site plan review process. An important consideration is making sure that each of these uses are adequately and accurately defined, and ensuring that requirements for each special use be properly explained to cover the necessary concerns for review boards to weigh in their consideration. A common issue identified by residents is that they sometimes do not feel adequately informed about these uses being proposed in their area or knowledgeable in their rights and procedures for participating in the review discussion to convey their concerns. This section of the zoning should be reviewed to identify improvements which can be made to the notification and review process to help enable area residents to better participate and have a voice in the discussion.

Rural Roads. Fencing, narrow roads and vegetation along our roadsides are important features to maintain.

GOAL C10: Identify improvements to the Special Use Permit notification and review process to increase public education and participation in the review process.

GOAL C11: Maintain the rural character and scale of existing local roadways in lieu of widening to accommodate increased traffic levels or development.

The issue of rural and dirt/gravel roads has remained an important topic among Chatham residents. The narrow country roads of Chatham are considered by many to be a fundamental part of rural living, helping to define our relaxed character and sometimes even keeping vehicle speeds lower. Dirt and gravel roads as well, although

they often require more maintenance and funding to maintain, are preferred by most residents to remain unpaved. Understanding this, the town would still like to reserve the ability to pave selected areas which have historically been a recurring maintenance headache. To give area residents a voice in any paving decisions, the town board could provide public notice in advance of upcoming debate.

In our rural landscape, planted rows of struggling evergreens often signal rather than conceal business activity. In an attempt to move to a more natural look, it is recommended that the town encourages mixed plantings if screening is needed for residential business uses and required for large commercial projects. Foresight should be used before breaking ground. The maximum amount of existing vegetation should be left intact when a site is being developed or when screening a use. Naturally occurring hedgerows, possibly augmented with a mix of coniferous and deciduous trees, interspersed with pollinator friendly perennials, should achieve a less contrived look and benefit wildlife at the same time (See photo pg. 67).

The town recognizes that many residents would like to see the existing network of dirt/gravel roads remain unpaved. However, there may be areas or in extenuating circumstances, roads, that exhibit recurring or ever-increasing maintenance and/or safety issues that would be candidates for paving. In such instances, after giving appropriate public notice at a Town Board meeting, with an agenda that clearly states that there will be a dirt road discussion, and an email blast has been sent prior to the meeting informing readers that such a discussion will take place, the Town Highway Superintendent working in conjunction with the Town Board should engage in outreach with residents along the road in question. The capital expense of such an action traditionally lies outside of the capabilities of the Town Budget, prompting the usage of CHIPS funds (state funded Consolidated Highway Improvement Program). This funding and process is carried out by a statutory agreement between the Town Board and the Highway Superintendent. Such a resolution should identify if the roadways being improved are dirt or paved, the expense thereof and is voted on at a Town Board meeting advertised in the manner listed above, with an opportunity for public comment. In the rare instance where CHIPS funds are not necessary, the Town Board will still hold a meeting advertised in the manner listed above to hear public comment.

In order to help guide this decision-making process, the previous research completed by the Committee on Roads in their 2017 report should be revisited and updated to serve as a guidance document going forward. This update should be conducted collectively by the Highway Superintendent and a citizen advisory committee representing a diverse spectrum of residents, with all participants having an equal vote.

GOAL C12: Leave existing dirt/gravel roads unpaved except as necessary to address troublesome maintenance areas—or in extenuating circumstances, roads—after appropriate public notice at a Town Board meeting.

GOAL C13: Revisit and update the 2017 “Report by the Committee on Roads” ensuring that a broad spectrum of residents are involved and that the highway superintendent has an equal seat at the table.

Keeping these dirt/gravel roads in good condition is important. This care includes concerted efforts to control sedimentation from dust and erosion to minimize health and ecological impacts. The Town should support continued education for Highway Superintendents and highway staff, such as the Cornell Local Roads Program and other additional training opportunities.

GOAL C14: Consider implementing a corridor plan for major transportation routes in and out of Chatham which explores opportunities for future economic, business and housing growth.

The major thoroughfares into and through Chatham, including Route 295, 203, and 66, are important to our community character in how they develop over time, and the opportunities they present. **It is recommended that the town consider developing a long-range plan for some of these transportation corridors.**

GOAL C15: Work to promote and educate both residents and visitors about the history of Chatham.

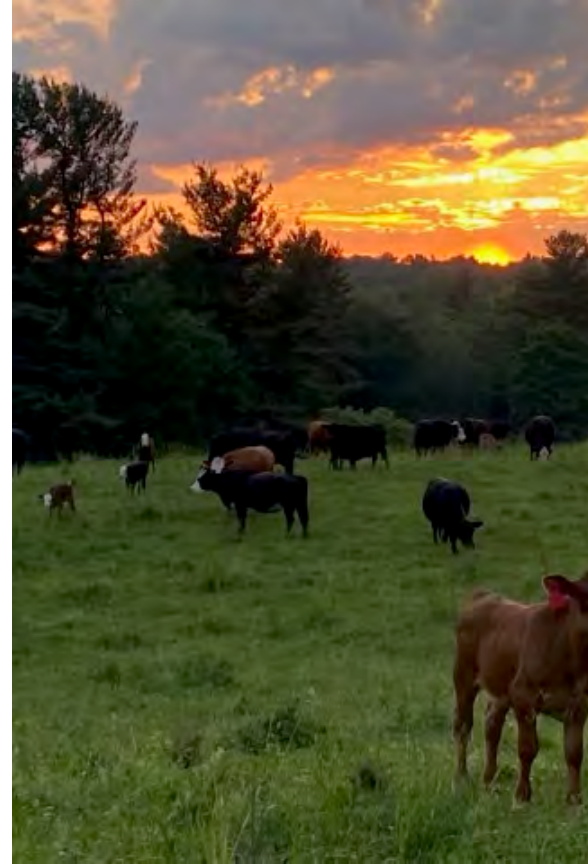
Lastly, in addition to the built environment of our many historic buildings and scenic roadways, it is important to maintain and celebrate the intangible elements of our town history. This history is part of the fabric which contributes to our sense of community, and can be easily forgotten and lost over time. New residents may not even be aware of it. **The town should make an effort to help educate and promote the history of our lands and places so that they can be properly appreciated by old and new residents or visitors alike.**



Farming & Agriculture

The face of farming is changing. Our farmers of today do not farm the way their parents and grandparents did years ago, and their children will likely not farm the way we do today. They are having to adapt the way they do things whether they want to or not. Facing rising operational costs and increased competition with larger conglomerate enterprises and commodity markets, many small local farms have buckled under the pressure and can no longer continue to operate. Those that have survived have often had to adapt the way they operate or diversify. Others remain farmers out of a sense of tradition and love of their work, although they have ceased it as a business. Sadly, it was noted that 20 of the respondents who identified themselves as farmers in the Community Survey indicated that their operations were in danger of having to shut down or reduce operations. Only fifteen years ago, dairy farming represented 75% of the agricultural use in the town. Today, there is only one dairy farm left in town—A. Ooms & Sons Dairy—which straddles Chatham and Kinderhook. Ooms as well as other farms, own/use land in Chatham for crop production and pasturage which are instrumental in supporting dairy, beef, sheep and other operations as well as providing large swaths of habitat and scenic beauty. Our farms and agricultural lands represent a majority of the rural community character of Chatham. If maintaining community character is important to the residents of Chatham, then so is protecting our agricultural heritage. Today, a full 70% of Chatham residents consider themselves supportive of farming, and protections and policies supporting working farms and agricultural lands has been identified as one of the top community priorities.

The difficulty in preserving this legacy becomes more apparent as one understands the complexities of the agricultural community. Agriculture is an interconnected and co-dependent network of many goods and services which - when working optimally - maintains a delicate balance. The agricultural community relies on each other and the cooperation of a supportive community. When one segment is disrupted or removed, it has a ripple effect which often disrupts the flow and balance of the others, making their operations more difficult. As more segments unravel or are lost, the network becomes increasingly fragmented and stressed, disrupting everyone. The loss of one farm is not the loss of just one farm.



Ag Focus Group. *Members of the community come out to discuss the status of farming in Chatham and agricultural issues which should be addressed in the comprehensive plan on May 12, 2022.*



Preserving farmland from being lost to unwanted development is not a straightforward solution either. Many farming families are looking to be able to sell off some of their property to be able to retire or pay off debt. This is especially true as it becomes harder to find new, younger generations who are willing and able to take over the reins. The option of subdividing their land, or building a new home for themselves or their children, is a future right which they rely on. Prohibiting farms from developing their own land would take this sometimes necessary option away from them. Choosing which lands should be protected over others is also a tricky issue that must balance the goals of the community with the individual needs of the farmer. The mantra of preserving areas of “high quality soils” fails to recognize that many of our smaller farms depend on a patchwork of leased lands, often utilizing poorer quality soils. The financial allure of exchanging these poorer quality working lands for a housing development or large-scale solar array can likely put another farming operation out of business. Thus, farmland protection can be a double-edge sword.

The Chatham Agricultural Partnership (CAP) was established in 2009 with the goal of working to bring the community together to strengthen and support farming. Its success can be seen with the development of



the 2009 Agricultural Protection Plan and outreach efforts such as farm tours and film festivals to raise community awareness on the importance of farming. A Focus Group meeting to discuss these issues was held on May 12th, 2022 at The Chatham Berry Farm, and a questionnaire was distributed to collect input and ideas. Much of the discussion and input centered around the difficulties facing many operations; regional hay shortages, lack of farm worker housing, conflicts between farm and non-farm communities, lack of skilled labor, loss of riding trails and the need for better awareness and education for new residents who come for the aesthetic of “the pretty postcard” but don’t understand “how the country really works.”

Given the many complexities involved, it becomes evident that there is no single, easy solution to the problems. Instead, it is believed that the solution to protecting agriculture in Chatham will need to come from a combination of three parallel efforts, discussed in more detail below.

- 1. Increasing options for profitability and diversification;**
- 2. Allow for reinforcing and patching holes in the supporting agricultural network;**
- 3. Develop multiple sources to fund farmland conservation which provide flexibility and options for farmers to participate.**

#1. Profitability & Diversification

It stands to reason that the most effective method of protecting farming and agriculture from financial decline in Chatham is to find ways to increase the profitability of their farm. While we cannot control the markets, we do have some control of the types of farming activities and support systems which are permitted. As farms continue to adapt, reducing local burdens on their operations and increasing their flexibility would help provide them room to breathe. This may include new agri-tourism options, technologies, creative partnerships or combinations of uses which are not traditionally found on farms that people may be unaccustomed to. *If the community values rural character and supporting agriculture, it is important that they understand this change may be necessary within reason. Farms will need to try new techniques, technologies and diversify to different uses which may cause some local disruption, but it is important that we work with them. As farms adapt, the overall community must adapt to support them in return.*



GOAL F1: Increase options for profitability and diversification on agricultural properties.

GOAL F2: Reinforce and fill gaps in the supporting agricultural network.

GOAL F3: Develop multiple sources to fund farmland conservation.

GOAL F4: The Chatham community should support local farming and agriculture by adapting to new uses, methods and technologies that farms may need to transition to.

GOAL F5: Continue to allow active farms to pursue alternative energy systems for on-site use without undue burden.

On-Farm Solar. A lot has been said about the pros and cons of solar installations on farms, and this topic is expanded on in more depth later in the section on Infrastructure & Energy. The reality is that the lands best suited to farming—open, level and dry fields—are also the most attractive to solar installs and housing. Many farms see a potential source of income from solar leases which may be enticing, yet the larger community has valid concerns about what impacts it would have on farming, open space and the environment. However, there is a valid opportunity for on-site solar installations to help existing farming operations with little to no impact on agriculture. Highland Farm, for example, utilizes roof-mount solar on their barn which subsidizes the entire farm utility bill. *At a minimum, farms should be allowed to invest in solar and other alternative energy systems to generate enough power to run their own on-site operations and reduce costs without undue burdens or restrictions.* The Town of Chatham currently uses the New York State Unified Solar Permit, a standardized application and review process designed to help streamline and simplify the approval process for solar installs. This makes it very practical for private homeowners and farming operations to get expedited approvals, removing many of the normal burdens.

The Unified Permit system however is designed for smaller-scale installations up to 25kW, and additional guidance on larger installation projects is currently lacking. Much of the concern comes from larger solar installations, such as community solar and utility-scale solar projects which are designed to generate power for off-site use. These typically provide income from leasing agreements, and therefore represent a tempting buyout option for many farmers. Much of the push for these larger utility-scale solar installations is coming from New York State, which aims to meet its renewable energy goals. While the residents of Chatham are very supportive of renewable energy, it is prudent that we should not rush into meeting these state-mandated goals at the expense of our long-term food supply. Utility-scale solar installations have recently been proposed in many neighboring communities, often targeting farmland areas large enough to accommodate them at an efficient scale. The reality is that farmland is being targeting now because it is typically the easiest host—providing relatively flat, dry and open land—with financially stressed farms often representing a “soft target.” We should instead be prioritizing lands not suitable for farming, encouraging more private solar adoption, and taking steps to



▲ **Staron's Farm Stand.** Local farms currently provide us with a source of important food options, and will likely play a more critical role as our population continues to increase and available farmland decreases.

reduce our energy use before we begin to use up suitable farmland. We therefore strongly feel that farmland should not be used for siting larger solar installs, which should be directed instead to less sensitive lands.

GOAL F6: Larger solar installations designed for off-site energy consumption, if permitted, should be directed away from agricultural land.

When considering other “dual use” applications—which can support farming while maintaining their land, preserving community character, viewsheds, and the environment—a more careful and creative solution may be found in housing.

On-Farm Housing Exception.

As an alternative to income from solar, creative solutions may exist which provide multi-family housing options on active farms. This approach has the major benefit of also addressing the critical housing needs of the community, but without the loss of significant acres of land required by a solar installation or the negative impact it can bring to scenic character. The growing popularity of Agri-Hoods (agricultural neighborhoods) have provided an alternative to traditional housing developments by combining housing clusters centered around working farms which help to support each other.



However, the Agri-Hood approach is often developed as a planned community dedicated more to housing and less to farms. A different approach to this idea is needed in Chatham.

Adaptive Re-use. In lieu of new construction, existing farm structures could be renovated to create apartments, further maintaining local character and reducing use of available farmland. ▲

In a different approach, one can imagine a working farm in Chatham where they qualify and are permitted to construct a small amount of multi-family housing structures on the farm property. This can be tastefully designed in architectural scale and style to reflect the country character of Chatham. The farm would gain from this special exception a steady rental income from the units, and the housing needs of new rental properties would be provided to the community. This approach is seen as an alternative to the solar income route described above. It is believed that, if properly executed, this approach could represent a win-win for the community with limited loss of open space, the supply

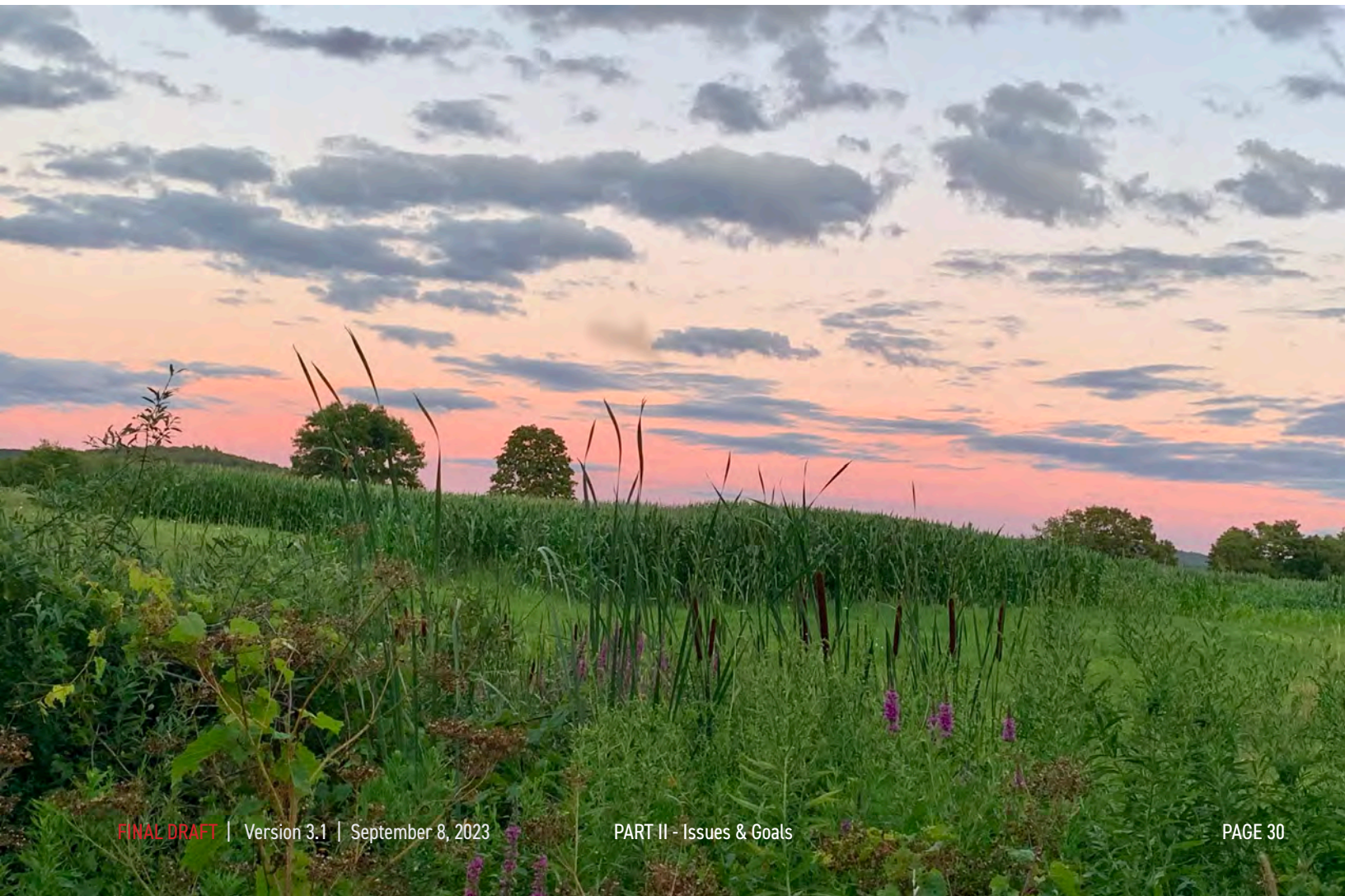
GOAL F7: Provide creative avenues for working farms to generate additional income while protecting community character and the environment.

of new housing units and a potential strengthening of community character.

This local law could have town-wide unit caps, yearly permitting limits, and a sunset date by which the town board would be required to re-authorize the provision for it to be continued beyond a trial period. The potential for how such a system could positively help local farming operations and address housing needs simultaneously merits strong consideration.

GOAL F8: Identify policy or regulatory provisions which should be changed to maximize farm productivity and flexibility as part of a farm-friendly audit.

Identify Policy and Legislative Obstacles. Almost 70% of Chatham residents support the idea of conducting a “farm-friendly” zoning audit to identify regulatory obstacles or code provisions which may inhibit their operations or limit flexibility in diversification. [Such a move should help to provide more breathing room for active agricultural operations to adapt and diversify in this changing world.](#)



#2. Reinforcing the Supporting Network

Supporting Businesses. The interconnected and co-dependent network of agriculture is enhanced when the different products and services maintain a balance in supporting each other. Filling the holes in the network of interdependencies could help to reduce the burden on the local farming community, as well as provide other economic benefits to the town.

In the 2021 Community Survey, Chatham residents overwhelmingly identified “support services for agriculture” among the most needed types of local businesses. Allowing or encouraging more of these support uses locally would strengthen the community and provide an economic boost as well.

Agriculture in Chatham today is represented by a variety of thriving industries including but not limited to dairy, beef cattle and sheep, alpacas, horses, fruits and vegetables, mushrooms, honey, syrup, corn, soybean, oats, hay and grazing pastures. These operations help to support each other and the larger economy, for example: small grains being utilized by local brewery and distillery businesses; soybean, oat and corn produced for animal feed; or forage fields made available for cattle and nearby dairy operations.

Farms often help to support each other with cooperative support measures, such as hay and crop sales between farms, equipment loans and work done on gratis. But these relationships can be improved with other related support services which are currently missing or under-represented. Chatham’s agricultural network would benefit from having

facilities such as a large animal veterinarian clinic, slaughtering facilities (including both a slaughter house and mobile slaughtering services¹), agriculture products recycling, large equipment mechanic, cold storage, preserving and canning facilities, equipment repair (mechanic, welding, upfitting) and more. Facilities the town used to have—but have since disappeared—include a bulk feed company, livestock auction barn, and crop production services. Newer ideas include the development of a “hay brokerage” to help regulate and streamline the complexities of trading that market regionally.

Each of these would not only help local farming operations, but would contribute to the larger town economy in terms of jobs and tax revenue. This effort, often referred to as “localization”, is the process of bringing the economy back to a more human scale. It is the process of building economic networks that allow more of the goods and services a community needs to be developed locally without having to rely

on outside suppliers. This leads to a stronger, more resilient and cohesive community. It can also help to support the local economy and reduce pollution.

To reinforce the supporting network we must look for ways to bring these services back to the area. As such, the town should identify and encourage these operations. A review of the currently allowed uses in the zoning should identify supporting uses which are

limited or prohibited, and these uses should be addressed in future zoning updates.

Localization is about bringing the economy back to a more human scale. It is the process of building economic networks that allow the goods and services a community needs to be developed locally.

¹ Having these services is not only about expanding local business, but are also critical for the financial feasibility of many farms and will offer the highest degree of humane treatment of livestock.



GOAL F9: Identify and encourage agricultural supporting businesses to locate within the town and in areas where they would be most appropriate.

GOAL F10: Encourage the development of programs and work with schools to increase awareness, interest, knowledge and participation in the traditional field of farming and similar trades.

On-farm Jobs. A lack of skilled labor has been holding back many farming operations. With the average age of local farmers now approaching 55, the window for having younger generations willing to learn and take over operations is slowly dwindling. *There is a need for more programs and opportunities which will increase awareness, interest, knowledge and participation in the traditional fields of farming.* Finding affordable places to live has not helped the farm labor market either. The loss of local trade schools such as BOCES has limited interest and education in many of these traditional fields. Institutions such as Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), Future Farmers of America (FFA) and the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Columbia and Greene Counties Extension Education Center can provide the skills and guidance to younger generations to help fill the generational gap in agricultural tradeskills. Partnerships with local school districts could potentially bring this training to the students without the need for new brick-and-mortar facilities, and further partnership with local

farming operations would provide hands-on training and potentially increase the labor pool. Getting younger generations interested and knowledgeable in this work again is critical to the continued operation of the farms we have today.

These efforts could include the development of a camp program, where kids spend a week working on a local farm, learning how things work, gaining some skills and (even possibly) helping out in the process. Similar options could include a program to share and trade a younger labor pool to help diversify their skillset. A shared worker pool could transition from one farm to the next as seasonal needs require more or less labor, while not requiring any full commitment to any one farm. Such programs could be organized and administered through a cooperative effort of CAP, BOCES and 4-H with participating farmers.

Equine Industry. The local and regional equine industry helps to directly and indirectly support open space preservation, tourism, recreation as well as other farms which benefit from their business. The success of this sector should continue to be supported in Chatham, but despite its relative stability, it is not without its own challenges.

Recreational horse riding is often impeded by the loss of trails interconnected by dirt/gravel roads which complete a riding network throughout the area. Increased road traffic, vehicle speeds, and pressure to pave rural roads can undermine this network and activity. Horse trails—which have been used over many generations with permission to cross private property—can become severed if new landowners decide they no longer wish to grant access. Private concerns over liability, property and crop damage, dislike of hunting, and a general lack of informed awareness have undermined efforts to keep these routes intact over the years. With more and more land parcels changing hands each year, the trail network can become more fragmented. **To increase education and awareness of this issue, a brochure or similar outreach material could be prepared by local equine groups to propose how landowners may partner with the community on trail riding and/or fox and rabbit hunting on their lands.**

#3. Funding Farmland Conservation

Purchase of Development Rights (PDR). The Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) is a voluntary incentive to protect valuable farmland from being lost to development while still allowing the farmer



Horseback riding. Horseback riding relies on a network of interconnected routes along dirt/gravel roads and trails. Photo credit: Mimi Foret.

GOAL F11: A brochure prepared by the equine community could be made available at the town hall and other venues that explains how landowners may partner with the equine community to allow trail riding and/or fox and rabbit hunting on their lands.

GOAL F12: Continue to pursue farmland conservation through easements and Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) agreements.

to retain ownership of the land and obtain a cash payout for its value. In this scenario, the farmer sells the development rights of a parcel of land to a land trust or local municipality in return for a permanent conservation easement on the land. The conservation easement allows the farm to continue operations, but prohibits it from being used for other non-farm development. This is considered an option for a landowner to keep their land farmable while making a profit—instead of selling their agricultural land to private developers—which frequently results in land conversion away from agriculture.

GOAL F13: Continue to pursue grant funding through the NYS Farmland Implementation Grants Program.

The common obstacle to PDR's is typically finding the necessary funding. Absent a donor who may simply donate a conservation easement, one potential funding source is through the Farmland Protection Implementation Grants (FPIG) Program administered by the NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets. This program offers competitive grants to fund conservation easements every two years. Statewide funding for these grants is typically divided into funding pools for different state regions, however they can sometimes allocate monies without regional limitation. This year, FPIG has awarded more than \$38 Million to 39 different projects covering over 11,000 acres in New York State. Of this, the Capital Region area (which includes Columbia County) received over \$5 million, portions of which went to projects with Columbia Land Conservancy and Scenic Hudson Land Trust. While this grant program can be very competitive, it provides a potential source of funding which the Town of Chatham should continue to pursue.

Community Preservation Fund. The Chatham Agricultural Partnership (CAP) and the CAC have been leading an effort to create a new and reliable source of revenue for farmland protection, specifically through a Community Preservation Fund (CPF). In 2007 the State of New York passed legislation giving the Town of Chatham the authority to establish such a funding program, subject to voter approval, to protect unique and important local land resources. A CPF is a dedicated, non-transferable fund that can be used to acquire conservation easements in cooperation with willing landowners. Funding would be collected through a real-estate transfer fee, paid by the property buyer, set at a percentage (no more than 2%) of the purchase price above the median county property value.

The benefit of this approach is that it does not affect existing town residents—no increase in local property taxes—it is a one-time fee



paid by the buyer, which will typically be new residents moving into Chatham. The exemption for median property value would also avoid burdening buyers of more affordable properties. The fund can also accept donated lands and cash gifts toward conservation. Creation of the CPF would also enable the town to leverage significant state and federal grant funding to protect local farms, as demonstrated by early adopters of CPF such as the towns of Warwick, Red Hook and New Paltz.

The Town of Chatham has made significant strides in the advancement of this preservation mechanism. In May, of 2023, the Town Board adopted the Community Preservation Plan (CPP), a comprehensive collaborative effort between CAP and the Conservation Advisory Council (CAC) in conjunction with guidance from the DEC Hudson River Estuary Program and Cornell University. The CPP identifies the specific priority lands eligible for protection using the Community Preservation Funds and the scoring methodology for determining which lands should be chosen for protection. For Chatham, preservation of farmland is identified as the highest priority for preserving community character. However, there are other possible areas of preservation outlined in the CPP which can be found on the Town's website. The Town Board also adopted The Community Preservation Fund and Advisory Board by local law, as well as establishing a statutory real estate transfer tax that will be brought in front of the voting public on the November 2023



GOAL F14: Continue work to establish funding for farmland preservation through an adopted Community Preservation Fund.



GOAL F15: Provide timber harvesting guidelines based on sound and established forestry management practices to ensure long-term forest sustainability.

GOAL F16: The town board and others should reference the most current Agriculture Protection Plan and Comprehensive Plan, and continue to coordinate between these two documents to keep them in sync.

ballot. If the Fund is approved, it would provide a regular funding source for the town to protect local farms through voluntary easements and Purchase of Development Rights agreements.

Agriculture Districts & Assessments. Working farms and lands leased by working farms can often qualify for an Agricultural Assessment which reduces their property tax burden. This is true of parcels both inside and outside of an Ag district. Of the responses received from the Agriculture & Farming Questionnaire, approximately half noted that they did not receive an Ag Assessment on their land. While some of this non-participation may be due to other factors and decisions, increasing awareness and maximizing participation in this exemption would help to reduce the tax burden and subsequently allow parcel owners and operators additional resources to reinvest in the land and farm operations.

Commercial Timber Harvesting Guidance. Forested areas are an essential component of Chatham’s natural ecosystem, character and economy. Responsible management of this forest resource is important to conserve it for future generations, protect our rural character, maintain wildlife habitats, avoid soil erosion, recharge ground water, reduce forest fires, and maintain its value as a renewable source of private income. Done properly, commercial timber harvesting benefits farms and rural landowners. When practices are poorly executed, it can often result in environmental damage to the land, adjacent properties, water quality and public roads. While these are important issues, it is also recognized that undue regulation would be burdensome on local residents and could have the unintended effect of discouraging timber harvesting altogether, which would undermine our larger goal. To strike the right balance, it is recommended that the town consider providing commercial timber harvesting guidelines based on the New York State Forestry Best Management Practices (BMP) field guide as part of approving new timber harvest permits. Such guidance could provide the information and flexibility to help to educate property owners and promote good stewardship of the land without presenting an undue burden on operations.

Lastly, as these and other documents evolve, it is important to coordinate between this plan and the most recent Agriculture Protection Plan as each are updated to recognize the most up-to-date information and keep the documents in sync.

Seniors

It has been said that “Demography is Destiny.” The future of a society is predetermined by the particular makeup of their population, demographic trends and age distributions. As the large generation of baby-boomers enters into retirement age, our society is finding itself needing to adapt to a large influx of many senior and elderly people who have very different societal needs. It is wise of us to make preparations for this change. Whether those preparations will be made is a burning question for many older Chatham residents.

Having the ability to “age in place” within the community—surrounded by a supporting group of friends and family in familiar surroundings—is a benefit not just to them but to all of us, because an age-diverse community is a healthy community. We do not wish to lose established residents, friends and family members because they had no option but to leave for a senior living facility in a far away place, severed from their hometown roots.

Chatham does not wish to lose our elder population because they can no longer afford to live here, or there are a lack of services and activities for their new stage in life. Instead, we would much prefer to keep our elder population living here where they belong. **To do this Chatham must become a community which welcomes and embraces our aging population.**

GOAL S1: Chatham should be a community which welcomes and embraces our aging population.

Seniors provide a unique insight to the past which is crucial to sustaining the future of our town.

A Seniors Focus Group meeting was held on May 9th at Crellin Park to discuss issues important to senior residents, and it was perhaps telling that many of the people who attended the event were not yet seniors. They were attending however because the issue of aging has been on their minds, and they want to make plans for their future. A primary concern of older Chatham residents is that the community they have lived in for many years—the community which they love— may not be suitable for them as they grow older. Having lived here for years, they have built many fond memories here, as well as a support system of local friends and family. As one resident described it, facing the prospect of having to give that all up and move somewhere else was very scary.

Older Chatham residents would very much like to see that the community is taking steps to address the issues now, recognizing that it will take time to meet these future needs. While the greater Chatham area has always served their needs well in their younger years, the suitability of this area for a senior or elderly

person comes into question when one looks at the availability of housing, high property taxes, cost of living, lack of public transportation, medical treatment, recreation and social/cultural resources in the area.

Housing Availability. Many older Chatham residents are looking to the future with an eye toward downsizing. The house they have lived in is often too large or requires too much effort to maintain and occupy. Downsizing to a small dwelling with less maintenance and easier single-story living is the perfect solution, however few such options exist in town which are affordable. The steadily rising property values in Chatham have made most if

GOAL S2: Permit and encourage a more diverse selection of housing types.

not all of the available housing stock out of financial reach for many people who have traditionally lived here. Many of these people identify themselves as not being “high-income”, but not being “low-income” enough to qualify for housing assistance either. **There is a strong need for a more diverse housing stock in the area which provides both rental and purchase options which are affordable to seniors.**

GOAL S3: Permit and encourage more accessory dwelling units.

Several housing typologies would help to fit this need, including senior citizen apartments, small cottage homes, and shared cottage arrangements where multiple seniors can share a common living space or communal center. **Accessory dwelling units (ADU’s) could also fill this need, and are becoming extremely popular.** Several states have recently adopted ADU laws which greatly reduce the obstacles to their creation in an effort to mitigate the housing affordability issue in this country. New York State currently has a similar draft bill under consideration. This issue is discussed in further detail in the *Housing* section later in this plan.

***Seniors Focus Group.** Area residents gather at the Crellin Park Pavilion on May 9th to discuss ways in which the comprehensive plan can address issues related to senior living and aging in place.*



GOAL S4: Modify the zoning to enable and encourage more senior housing, assisted living and nursing home capacity in the greater Chatham area, including coordination with neighboring towns, where it can blend into the character of the area.

In their later years, some form of assisted living and/or nursing homes would also provide an option for local seniors to remain in the area and “age in place”. While some of these facilities do exist locally (Lewis F. Payn Foundation, Camphill Ghent) it is not enough to meet the growing demand and many of them are already fully booked with waiting lists. **Additional senior housing, assisted living and nursing home capacity is needed in the Chatham area which contributes to and blends into the character of the area.** Currently, only nursing homes are permitted in the zoning.

All of these dwelling types mentioned above were identified among the most “highly needed” in the 2021 Community Survey (*See Appendix ‘A’*). Currently, the town zoning is not properly set up to really enable or encourage these types of developments locally due to use limitations, minimum lot sizes, maximum densities or a lack of available water and sewer service to make them financially feasible.

Medical Services. Chatham is roughly 35 minutes from two different hospitals (Albany and Columbia Memorial). Ambulance services can have a 20 minute response time, leaving some residents with a difficult decision—if something happens, do you wait for the ambulance, or try to drive yourself? While there is a family clinic in town, it is not open 24-hours, so may not be there when you need it. Many older Chatham residents explained that living in a more rural area is what they subscribed to—they wanted to live in the countryside, understanding that it was not going to come with many of the conveniences of a urban or suburban area. Now that they are approaching a more senior lifestyle, they are wondering if the current medical care in the area gives them confidence that they will be adequately taken care of.

There is a need for more advanced medical services at the local level. The more contemporary model of “mini hospital-clinics”, such as WellNow Urgent Care found in Hudson and the Albany area could help to fill that void. **If a facility similar to that were to be located within the community, that would provide some confidence and a sense of security to remain living locally.** It is unclear how exactly these facilities (which are smaller than a full hospital but far more intensive than a neighborhood doctor’s office) should be classified in terms of zoning, or how their corporate architecture would fit into the community. These questions would need to be addressed.

Recreation & Socialization. Socialization affects our health and wellbeing particularly as people get older and are more susceptible to social isolation when their peers move or pass away. Part of what is needed in keeping those residents here involves having a network of social activities and recreation options which are readily accessible and help tie the community together. Some of these activities already exist. Active senior trips, breakfast gatherings, hikes and summer picnics have all been a part of local living. However, some of these features are



LOCAL MEDICAL CLINICS. *Smaller local medical clinics and urgent health care facilities are becoming more popular now, filling a gap between a small doctors office and a full hospital.*

GOAL S5: Revise zoning to allow for a small urgent health clinic to provide quick-response medical services to area residents, or coordinate with adjacent communities on the nearby creation of one.

not yet available, or are not widely known or advertised enough for people to take advantage of.

In an effort to obtain more targeted data, a questionnaire was distributed at a Ghent/Chatham Senior Citizens Club meeting. The most popular responses concerned the need for more activities and social events, and particularly an improved mechanism for sharing up to date information about local events, services and programs. While some of this information is available from scattered local sources such as the Library and Facebook, there is a strong demand for a simple, centralized source for all of this information in one easily accessible location. For some, the complexity of the Internet can be daunting, and people suggested that an online system may be a deterrent to its use or would be inaccessible. Instead, they suggested a “reverse-robocall” setup where people could call a special phone number which would list upcoming events, similar to the old movie theater showtimes system.

GOAL S6: Develop or support a centralized source for all community information on upcoming events, activities and services which is readily accessible and easy to use.

When asked what activities would be most needed and desired by older adults, many responded that they did not yet know what their needs were going to be in the future. There is recognition that the needs of seniors in the community are in competition with the needs of other demographic groups. Recognizing this competition, it was suggested that finding activities which would also be desired by other age groups would stand the best chance of being realized, and would likely benefit the most residents overall. With this



in mind, the seniors were very supportive of a community center. A community center, they argued, would be highly desirable for many reasons including offering them a Chatham location to hold their monthly Club meetings that often include more than 80 participants. The multipurpose nature of a community center would provide the flexibility to tailor programming to meet their future needs. More broadly speaking, a community center could also serve a wide range of functions and would likely be supported by all age groups. In this way, multi-generational competition for resources and funding could be streamlined. When considering a project of this magnitude, it is essential to recognize the importance of looking for collaborative partners and exploring external funding sources for all phases of the project to alleviate some taxpayer burden.

Among the future activity needs which they could positively identify today, a year-round swimming pool was a top request, ideally with a communal area and pickleball courts. Local seniors very much liked the concept of a YMCA or similar facility, except more local and accessible. “The Villages” facility in Florida was suggested as a potential model, as well as the Senior Center in Orleans, MA. A community facility such as these would be a wonderful addition to the Town of Chatham.

Transportation. Getting to and from these social activities and events was another important topic. Older residents noted that it was not always easy or possible to get around the area as they have advanced in age. Others anticipated this need will only continue to grow as they get older. There is a local need for some form of alternative transportation for them. In a rural community, where populations are lower and destinations are often spread out over a large area, scheduled bus or shuttle options can be challenging to set up. These options are generally more suitable to longer distance trips to more populated destinations such as Albany or Hudson. When asked in the Community Survey how often residents would use a County Bus shuttle linking Chatham, Hudson and New Lebanon, only 15% responded once a month, while 73% responded never. Overall, it is believed these types of services at the regional or county level could use some improvement or coordination.

Getting around town locally is a different animal, and one that is likely in higher demand. The Columbia County Health Care Consortium’s Children and Adults Rural Transportation Service provides free door-to-door, non-emergency medical transportation to county residents. Neighbors of Northern Columbia County has a program which

GOAL S7: Pursue options and grant funding for the development of a local Community Recreation Center or YMCA which would provide multi-purpose space, flexible programming, and a year-round swimming pool.

GOAL S8: Continue to coordinate with county and regional agencies to improve transportation options to longer-range destinations such as Albany and Hudson.

provides a range of assistance services for older people who find it difficult or impossible to complete certain everyday tasks such as shopping, minor household repairs or transportation. This non-profit group links enrolled residents who pay a yearly membership fee to a network of volunteers who have signed up to participate. The group is experiencing an increase in membership, but surprisingly not a lot of requests for assistance. It was suggested that there may be some reluctance or embarrassment by members to request assistance when they need it. *It is believed that these programs would benefit from increased awareness and education about their offerings, which in turn would help serve more people and potentially diminish any stigma of needing to ask for help. These and other noteworthy community services, if expanded, could help meet the needs of local seniors needing transportation help, as well as other assistance.*

GOAL S9: The Town of Chatham should support and encourage alternative modes of transportation, including walking and biking paths, public transit, ride-share options and increased awareness and expansion of the Neighbors of Northern Columbia County program and promotion of the Columbia County Health Care Consortium’s Children and Adults Rural Transportation Service to help provide more diverse transportation options for local seniors.

Coordination and Partnerships. Each of these important senior topics described above represent a potentially daunting task to implement. As noted above, a rural community such as Chatham typically does not have the population density one expects to attract or support some of the types of housing, medical services, or recreational facilities described above. The power of the town to implement these ideas is largely limited to policies and supporting guidance to encourage their formation. However, coordination and partnerships with neighboring communities and agencies can greatly increase the town’s influence. By banding together with Chatham Village, adjacent municipalities and the county, a common goal could be realized where the combined population and needs of the larger area could be met by working cooperatively with our neighbors. This could take the form of a medical facility spearheaded and shared as a joint effort between multiple municipal entities, or a community center shared as a cooperative effort between the town, Village of Chatham and the Morris. *After all - these issues are not unique to Chatham. It makes sense not to compete with our neighbors but to find ways to work together. It is believed that such a joint cooperative effort would have a better chance of success than taking on any of these goals alone.*

GOAL S10: Collaborate with the Village of Chatham and adjacent municipalities to take on efforts which the Town of Chatham may not have the influence or resources to complete alone.

GOAL S11: Ensure that future improvements to address the needs of seniors are designed and located to be sensitive to the scenic rural character of the community.

Lastly, many seniors also recognize that the many reasons they love Chatham should not be sacrificed by poor development decisions to achieve these goals. *Any future development to meet their needs should be conducted sensitively, in a way which does not undermine or detract from the scenic rural character of the area which they love.*

Youth & Young Families

The future of our community lies with the children and young families of today. Much like our senior population, retaining younger generations in town is important to our community balance. However, it is challenging for the new generations growing up in Chatham to be able to afford to live here like they used to be able to. Much as we do not wish to “price-out” our local seniors from being able to remain in the area, we do not wish to do the same for the younger generations either. These two populations share many common interests, and offer a unique interdependency. The benefits of multi-generational communities often include reciprocal support between age groups.

The 2021 Community Survey unfortunately captured very little public input from residents below the age of 30. To help address this, a focus group zoom meeting for Youth and Young Families was held on June 13, 2022, followed by a separate questionnaire specifically targeted toward the needs of youth and younger families. This survey was made available online and in hard copies. Index cards were handed out by the Recreation Director at Crellin Park to families participating in summer camp. These cards were also distributed at the Community Picnic, at a Boy Scouts pancake breakfast and elsewhere, directing our target audience to the online survey. Hard copies were hand delivered to schools and index cards were also made available for those students who preferred to respond online. While the key issues and areas of improvement identified by the youth and young families participants are roughly summarized below, there was a recurring theme of affordability.

Lack of activities, recreation and socialization options. The most commonly identified issue was a general lack of fun local activities, recreational options, and places where children and families



could meet up for socializing. The socialization issue ran deeper than one might expect. Several people noted that as a young family it was very important to have opportunities to get out and meet others in the community. Sometimes this was driven by a need to make new friends, sometimes for the adults, sometimes for their children, and often for both. Sometimes—for parents who spend a lot of time at home with young children—it was just a need to get out of the house and talk to an adult for a change. But overall, the socialization helped to fuel a stronger sense of community which people felt was very important but somewhat lacking. Having more community events—picnics, pot lucks, etc.—would help to create more socialization options and strengthen community bonds. Locations such as Crellin Park served this purpose at times. However, some felt that the kids playground apparatus was too spread out and did not have sufficient shade, the pond water frequently icky or it was not an option during the winter months. Others noted that relying on commercial establishments such as restaurants were often not economical, and there is a need for more options which were affordable and family-friendly. Overall, having a wider variety of family-friendly activities, events or socializing

GOAL Y1: The town should continue to provide or promote a variety of local community events, activities and socialization opportunities which bring the community together.

GOAL Y2: Investigate the option of a community recreation center which could provide a variety of year-round activities. This may or may not include a swimming pool, which could be looked at as part of a separate feasibility analysis.

GOAL Y3: Investigate safer routes to Crellin Park.

Young Drawings. Artwork created by local youth during the Community Picnic event on July 17th, 2022.

opportunities, particularly low-cost, is in high demand.

Some of the younger participants wanted to see more active/adventure activities such as trampoline parks, indoor rock climbing, escape rooms¹ indoor pool or an interactive educational center. Older respondents suggested a need for more rec fields, youth sports, splash pad, swimming pool, dance or theater camps, and a more age-diversified playground. A community recreation center, it was suggested, could potentially host many of these activities while providing socialization options and community events to people of all ages. Many people pointed out the benefits which the Morris has provided to the community, though some felt that it had grown somewhat outdated. Transportation for kids was also an issue, since biking on local roads is not viewed as safe as it used to be. While making improvements to Crellin Park is important, there is a recognition that kids don't have an easy way to get to it, and we should look to find ways to make safer connections to get there.

Some of these desires may reflect a generational shift. After all, it wasn't that long ago that kids were quite content catching frogs, climbing trees and throwing dirt bombs at one another. However these earlier generations often enjoyed more freedom back then and would ride their bikes several miles just to see if a friend was home to play with. These needs may also reflect some families who have moved from more suburban areas where they are accustomed to having many more local amenities. Either way, if Chatham wishes to attract and retain more young families, it should consider how these needs could be addressed.

Lack of affordable housing options. The second most popular topic noted that finding housing rental or purchase options, particularly affordable ones, seemed close to impossible. Recent data from the 2022 Columbia County Housing Brief showed that the median price of single-family homes in the county has risen an astonishing 54% between 2017 and 2021. This cost increase is particularly difficult for first-time home buyers, who would need an estimated income of around \$125,000 a year in order to afford the median sale price of a home in Chatham. Young home buyers noted that it was very difficult to afford a home in the area, and they perhaps were able to get their foot in the door before prices got out of control. Some noted that they spent years trying to find a place they could afford, or that if they were buying

¹ A real-life adventure game requiring a group of people to cooperatively decipher clues and solve a series of puzzles within a time limit to accomplish a goal, typically escaping confinement.

a house today, they would not be able to afford the house they are currently living in. Currently, there are very few rentals available, and those that exist are quite expensive. **These factors can make Chatham an uphill climb for most young families, and the hill may be getting steeper.** It is therefore crucial that we begin work to address this need by supporting more income-inclusive housing options.

Severe shortage of childcare options. The third most requested topic centered around the need for child day-care, particularly ones that were affordable. Many people noted that all of the child care options in the area are already fully booked, and have a long waiting list to get into. The lack of child care options has also made it more difficult for young parents to conduct their daily business. Together these factors all contribute to making it more difficult and expensive for families to function in their jobs and socialize. **It is clear that more child care options are in high demand.**

Improved Communication. Last but not least, many young parents pointed out that there was a need for better communication about what events, activities and programs were available in the area. While much of this information may already be advertised, it is scattered across many different sources and media types and can be difficult to find. This factor may be responsible for some of the perception that there are few local activities in the community. **It was suggested that a more centralized and easily accessible source of local information would help to better educate and inform residents about things they can participate in, which may help address some of the problem.** It should also be noted that such a system would also help to improve socialization and create a stronger sense of community.

It is interesting to note that many of these issues identified by the Youth and Young Family Focus Group have a striking resemblance to many of the issues identified by the Seniors Focus Group held earlier in the year. A desire for more activities, community socialization, affordable housing options and better access to local information is shared by both young and old alike. This should tell us something. If executed correctly, we have an opportunity to address the needs of both demographics without much competing interest. This opportunity comes into better focus when we reflect on the importance of retaining these two age groups, and how we might find benefit in bringing them together as part of one community.

GOAL Y4: Enable more housing options which are accessible and affordable to younger families and the local workforce.

GOAL Y5: Enable and encourage more child care options throughout the town.

GOAL Y6: Create an easily accessible, centralized source of local information for both young and old residents.



Word Cloud. Word cloud displaying the most common topics, ideas and concerns from written comments in the Youth and Young Families Survey.

Housing

The issue of housing availability and affordability has become a critical need not just in Chatham, but within our nation as a whole. America has been facing skyrocketing housing costs, and the problem is no longer limited to the cities. Housing for both homeowners and renters is less affordable today than in three generations, and is projected to get worse.¹ Not surprisingly, this topic was a recurring theme heard when discussing many subjects including the needs of Seniors, Young Families, Agriculture, Community Character and the overall community. When asked in the Community Survey, a majority felt that housing in the town was not affordable for the typical family, and even more felt that it was not affordable for first-time home buyers, seniors and renters. This is not surprising when one looks at the changes in housing prices over the last several years. The median sales price of homes in Columbia County in just the four years between 2018 and 2021 has risen by \$140,000². While this issue is certainly not unique to Chatham, our town has been experiencing some of the more dramatic changes.

In the aftermath of the COVID pandemic, the cost of real estate in the Town of Chatham rose dramatically as people relocated here from urban areas. The popularity of short-term vacation rentals through services such as AirB&B and VRBO causes concerns that long-term rental properties are being taken off the market to be converted into short-term rentals. This has made it much harder for many to continue to afford living here. Currently, local housing stock is limited and in high demand

as well. Camphill Ghent—a popular independent elder living community of some 33 townhouses—reportedly has a long waiting list to get in. If we wish to avoid pricing out our elder/senior and younger generations from being able to live in the town, then we need to look at what options are available to help mitigate this. Overall, there is a need and desire for less expensive housing options, and current town policies and codes are not addressing this goal. While the community has clearly voiced a need for housing options which are more affordable, there is legitimate concern for how this can be accomplished.

When asked what types of housing were most needed and desired in Chatham, most people pointed to smaller, affordable single-family starter homes, senior citizen apartments, and apartments to serve a younger, local workforce. Overall, the community is very supportive of new housing and mixed-use options added into the existing fabric of the community, while there is little support for larger scale apartment buildings. Housing options should be small-scale and blended into the existing fabric of the community.

A Housing Focus Group was held on June 4th, 2022 at the Tri-Village Fire Company to discuss options for this topic in more detail, and gain insight on the character of housing residents felt was most appropriate for the area. This presentation introduced examples of other housing typologies which may meet local needs, such as cottage courts, tiny house villages, small duplexes, senior apartments, senior housing, apartments, mixed-use and accessory dwelling units (ADU's). A visual preference survey of these examples showed that the highest scoring images selected by the audience were of smaller, individual housing structures which evoked smaller scale architectural features and character typically found with single family homes. These examples were usually not larger than duplex (2-family) structures. (In contrast, the least desired

1 "Two Issues Define America's New Housing Crisis" - National Housing Conference, nhc.org

2 "2022 Columbia County Housing Brief" - Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress

housing examples were larger or longer connected structures of multiple units, typically in the form of townhouses, condos or apartment buildings.) Participants generally preferred buildings in the range of 1-2 stories, and frequently noted they did not like buildings 3 or more stories. This input gives us important information on the size and scale of housing solutions we should be focusing on.

The discussion at this focus group also attempted to frame wider expectations for the future of housing in this area. The people of Chatham do not want it to become unchecked suburban sprawl. Rising taxes, particularly school taxes, are becoming an increasing barrier to homeownership. Many seniors, teachers, emergency responders and local workforce can no longer afford to live here. Increasing density in existing neighborhoods often runs into a glass ceiling of water and septic limitations. Participants

inquired about many options, such as what can we do to encourage more sustainable, ecologic, net-zero homes? Can we incentivize people to add new dwelling units or apartments? Is there a way to salvage and re-purpose vacant barns for housing?

All of this input begins to paint a picture of what must be done to address the critical housing and demographic issues of the community while still protecting the character of rural Chatham. **It is clear that Chatham must work toward accommodating a more diverse balance of housing options in order to begin to address issues of availability and affordability for people of all ages.** The current zoning code is not well positioned to meet these goals, and must be updated to reflect a wider variety of housing types, uses, definitions and methods to give us better control in future land use decisions. Given the community's interest in protecting the rural lands, it



is recommended that we must first investigate what opportunities may be present in the already established denser neighborhoods within the hamlets as well as in and around the village. Accommodating additional growth in these established areas makes sense. At the same time, we recognize that solutions in these areas may be very limited. Finding ways to accommodate some more diverse housing solutions in the rural lands may be necessary in order to enact any meaningful shifts, but we must be careful and creative in how we approach this.

GOAL H1: Allow for more diverse housing types throughout the town with options that address availability and the affordability spectrum for all stages of life.

“Columbia County is in the throes of a serious affordable Housing crisis.”

~ Michelle Tullo, Housing Justice Director

All of this community input is coming at a time when it is becoming increasingly clear that new housing strategies are needed. At the time of this writing, Chatham—like much of the mid-Hudson Valley region—is experiencing a localized version of the housing crisis that has unfolded across the United States. Stagnant local wages and a reduction in available housing supply, exacerbated by a proliferation of out of town home buyers, have created deep imbalances in the housing market. 2021 American Community Survey data finds that since 2010, the homeowner vacancy rate in Chatham has decreased by 42%, while rental vacancies have all but disappeared. The affordability gap for homeowners—the difference between what an employee earning a median salary can afford and what is available to purchase—is above six figures. A majority of Chatham renters live in unaffordable and/or severely unaffordable units.

As housing costs have increased, the demographic character of the community has changed. Although Chatham’s total population experienced a relatively minor decrease over the past 10+ years, key age cohorts have seen higher levels of variation. The percentage of residents aged 25 to 54 years—i.e., the bulk of the workforce—decreased 12% from 2010 to 2021. During this period, the percentage of residents aged 55 and over increased by an identical rate. Homeownership trends during this period reflect an even greater disparity. The ownership share of householders aged 55+ has increased 18% from 2020 to 2021, while the share of homes owned by householders aged 25-54 has decreased by 28%. Like much of the region, Chatham is facing a severe lack of housing opportunities for residents and prospective residents who comprise the bulk of the workforce population; prices for available homes are beyond the reach of workers in key industries and fields, including but not limited to education, health care, agriculture and emergency services.

◀ **Housing Focus Group.** Participants at the housing focus group discuss desired size, scale and architectural character of potential housing to be compatible with the town.



▲ **Visual Preference Exercise.** The top four highest-scoring images used in the visual preference exercise. **Top left:** "Railroad Cottages" - cottage housing development, Falls Church, VA. (Copyright Architect Jack Wilbern, RA / bwd architects Inc.); **Top right:** Duplex home, Williston, VT; **Lower left:** "Woodstock Commons" duplex development, Woodstock, VT; **Lower right:** Single family homes on small-lot development, Williston, VT

It is believed that a combination of village / hamlet-focused housing options will be needed in conjunction with thoughtful movements into the rural lands to adequately address our needs. These two parallel efforts are described in more detail below.

Village & Hamlet-Focused Housing Strategies

Coordination with the Village. The Village of Chatham could be a potential location for new, denser housing development due to its existing residential density, walkability, mixed-use character and if available, supporting infrastructure of water and sewer. **Because of this, a preliminary step which**

should first be taken is to closely collaborate with the Village of Chatham to explore what housing options needed by the wider community could be accommodated there. This recommendation is further described by **Goals O3 and S10** in addressing the needs of the larger community. Opportunities for re-development or expansion with adaptive re-use of existing buildings, greater densities, density incentives and new mixed-use areas through rezoning should be considered. Such a coordinated effort could help to benefit both the village and the town in terms of housing, tax revenue, business development and improved sustainability.

Vicinity of the Village. Building off of the coordinated effort within the village, the town must also identify locations which may be suitable to accommodate additional housing options just

GOAL H2: Closely collaborate with the Village of Chatham to explore a shared effort toward increasing housing options.

GOAL H3: Identify areas in the immediate surrounding vicinity of the Village of Chatham for rezoning to accommodate additional housing options, working toward a coordinated effort where possible.

GOAL H4: Pursue the potential to extend existing water and sewer services from the Village into the town to help support new housing options where appropriate.

GOAL H5: Identify ways the zoning could be updated to accommodate increased residential density and more mixed-use options within the hamlets.

outside the village. In close coordination with the effort to seek common goals and opportunities for housing within the Village of Chatham, logical areas just outside the village could be considered for additional housing options as well. This coordination is recommended as it may provide opportunities for adjacent areas on either side of the village/town line to be designed as a coherent whole. This idea also builds off of the strengths of the village for these uses noted above (existing density, walkability and available infrastructure) and was generally supported in the Community Survey. Additional housing density just outside the village could potentially be supported in part by extensions of water and sewer service from the village, if it is available, to serve these identified areas where necessary. Logical candidate areas for this consideration would include some of the existing Hamlet 1 and Rural Land 3 zoning district areas found just northeast/east of the village, as well as lands further north along Route 295. The inclusion of any additional housing options in these areas outside the village would likely require some rezoning, zoning overlays, or the creation of a new zoning district so that these changes would not apply to other areas of the town where they are not intended.

These two “village-focused” housing strategies, directly within and adjacent to the Village of Chatham, represent an initial focus of allowing new housing options in the community, and therefore should provide for the widest range of options and improved densities considered.

Within the Hamlets. Similar to the village, the hamlets also represent the historical settlement areas where denser development and living has traditionally occurred. These areas represent a logical location for housing, however available space for growth within the existing hamlets is very limited. It is recommended that the town look to update and revise the zoning to identify ways that increased residential density and more mixed-use options could be accommodated while protecting the existing character and charm of each hamlet. This could include a stronger emphasis on existing conversions to accommodate more apartments, mixed-use commercial stores with apartments above, smaller lot size requirements and accessory apartments. Because space is limited and dwelling units are often constrained by septic needs, the town may also want to consider the addition of future sewer service in the long term, as discussed further in the Infrastructure section.

Overall, our larger land use strategy should be to continue the historic pattern of growth which built the Town of Chatham. This is

exemplified by higher residential densities found in the village and hamlet centers, and relatively lower density in the more open and rural lands. However, these areas, for reasons such as lack of available land and infrastructure, may not be sufficient to accommodate the young families, seniors and essential workers that the town wants and needs to maintain community character.

Town Wide Housing Strategies

Investigating housing solutions at the town-wide level involves a number of smaller, more careful moves designed to help maintain the scenic character of our town, particularly in the more rural areas. However, creative solutions are necessary to meet the town's critical housing needs.

Short-term Rentals. The increasing popularity of short-term rentals (STR's) can bring financial, tourism and lodging benefits to the community, while at the same time they can cause nuisance issues with neighboring properties and sometimes reduce the available housing stock which might otherwise go to local renters. Some people are also concerned that as STR popularity increases, it could undermine our social fabric, inviting visitors who have no investment in the community and do not contribute to it the way residents do. Working to capitalize on these benefits while mitigating or eliminating these issues is a necessary goal of this plan. However, enforcement of them can be difficult. **To accomplish this balance, the town needs to adopt a local law providing clarity and reasonable expectations for the continued use of STR's within the town.** Such a law, at a minimum, should require the registration/permitting of STR's so that properties found in repeated violation can have their permits suspended or revoked, providing basic performance standards and ground rules for any fines or offenses.

Such a system would enable the town to continue their use while addressing problem areas as they might arise. This would also benefit the town by providing important data on the number and location of short-term rental properties. The town should establish this basic regulatory function as a starting point, with the written understanding that it be revisited after a period of one or two years to determine if any additional provisions or changes are merited based on past performance. The Building Department/Code Enforcement officer, in conjunction with the town's Housing Committee, could be tasked with reviewing this performance.

While the above method would help to address potential nuisance issues, a remaining concern is the effect STR popularity can have on reducing available housing stock for longer-term renters. Being mindful that we do not wish to limit or remove existing STR properties from their lawful use, **some avenue should be provided to encourage the creation of new rental properties which do not automatically**



TINY LIVING. The recent popularity of "tiny houses" reflects a growing interest in Americans downsizing to a simpler, more economical lifestyle. ▲

Conversions. Large old family homes such as this were once home to multiple generations of a family living under one roof. Today, they are often converted into multi-family structures which blend into the community and serve many local residents. This old home now provides nine individual apartments. ►

GOAL H6: Chatham's land use regulations should continue to support the historic patterns of growth with higher densities in and around the established village and hamlet centers, and relatively lower density in the more open and rural areas while accommodating additional housing opportunities throughout the town.

GOAL H7: Adopt a local law providing basic regulatory control, clarity, reasonable expectations and procedures for the use of STR's within the town.

GOAL H8: Develop a voluntary incentive option where new apartments can be created in exchange for agreement that they cannot be used for short-term rental.

GOAL H9: Reduce barriers to the creation of Accessory Dwelling Units.

fall into short-term rental use. This could be designed as a voluntary incentive option where additional apartments could be permitted on the condition that they cannot be used for short-term rentals. If such a system were developed, it would allow property owners the option to create new housing units within the town which would more directly serve the local population.

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's). Accessory dwelling units provide homeowners with a separate, smaller residential apartment dwelling on their property, often for the use of extended family members or rental income. ADU popularity has soared in recent years in part due to a lack of affordable housing nationwide and their ability to fit into already established neighborhoods. To help support their development, several states have recently adopted laws which promote their use and set thresholds for local municipalities to better enable them. ADU's should be considered an option for Chatham. [The Town Board should review the zoning code with an eye toward facilitating the expansion of ADU availability throughout the town.](#)

Existing Residential Conversions. The conversion of existing residential homes into two or three-family residences would provide needed housing without developing new land area and with minimal impact to the visual character of the landscape. Currently, the town already allows the construction of new duplex (2-family) in almost all zoning districts, and the construction of "limited multi-family" (up to 4-family) in the hamlet areas. Unlike new construction however, sensitive



conversion of existing properties would have very minimal impact to the area. With this advantage in mind, there is merit to potentially allowing existing single-family residences the option of converting to multi-family as part of a preferred or incentivized option which is treated differently than new construction. Such a mechanism would likely require that it would be limited to homes pre-existing on the date of adoption of such a provision, meeting all septic requirements, and could be restricted from being used as a future STR property as described above in short-term rentals. **The town should create such a mechanism for incentivizing and classifying existing residential conversions differently than new construction, allowing them to be permitted in areas where construction of a new multifamily structures would otherwise not be allowed.**

On-Farm Housing Exemption. Described in more detail within the Farming and Agriculture section (Goal F7, pg. 29), the On-Farm Housing Exemption would provide a specific zoning mechanism for qualifying active farms to construct a limited number of multi-family apartments on the farm property. This would provide the farm with welcome rental income to support their agricultural operations while also providing the town with much needed additional rental properties.

Single-Lot Exemptions. Current zoning mandates that any new lots subdivided must meet minimum size requirements of 10, 5 or 3 acres, however these land requirements often contribute to the higher cost of housing. In order to maintain the existing character of the rural areas, it is not recommended that these minimum lot sizes be reduced across entire districts, however there is an alternative strategy. Single-lot exemptions would allow a property owner a “one time” option to subdivide a piece of their land to create a smaller lot which would not normally be permitted. This would allow a property owner to sell off a small amount of land that they would not normally be able to, while creating a new housing parcel which is more affordable for a family member or new family. Such an exemption can be adopted in the zoning with a sunset date by which it expires, if desired. **It is recommended that the town provide this voluntary exemption to help create new parcels for single family homes, and consider possible building size limitations for such new lots.**

Inclusionary Zoning - Addressing Local Housing Needs. The types of housing identified and most needed by the community today involves smaller, more affordable units that provide some of the

GOAL H10: Develop zoning where the conversion of existing single-family homes into multi-family is incentivized with less obstacles.



CLUSTER DESIGN. Design emphasis on new housing development should focus on clustering smaller cottage-style homes and apartments on smaller lots while protecting the remainder of the lot as open space and minimizing visibility of the residences to preserve rural views. ▲

GOAL H11: Create a method for single-lot exemptions allowing property owners a “one time” option to create a smaller and more affordable housing parcel from their land.

GOAL H12: Update the zoning to identify, define and include a wider variety of housing types which are designed for more affordable living.

“missing middle” of housing in America. These solutions often require designs or densities which are not supported by the standard minimum lot sizes or use types permitted under our current zoning. However, simply reducing the minimum lot sizes in any of our rural zones to accommodate this could result in an influx of many new—and often expensive—single-family subdivisions across an entire zoning district. Such growth would be undesirable for its impact on the rural areas as well as the fact that it would likely be unaffordable to many people who live here. That would not meet our goals.

GOAL H13: Incentivize the creation of the type of housing Chatham needs, including young workforce housing, starter homes and senior apartments.

Instead, a more creative approach is necessary. The Conservation Subdivision code in the zoning should be updated and expanded to specifically include and incentivize the types of smaller-scale housing needed in the community. This could include senior apartments, single-family cottages, duplexes, multi-family apartments, cottage courts, elder cottages, and similar smaller-scale residential options designed for more affordable living. Using this approach, reduced lot sizes and higher densities could be approved for that specific application in return for open space protection and other amenities, while the standard lot sizes and densities for the remainder of the zoning district would remain unchanged. The open space protection elements would also be utilized to help design the development in a way which would minimize environmental and visual impact to the community. Importantly, a shared community septic system in this scenario would be able to utilize the conserved open space for the on-site septic system, helping to support a residential density which might not otherwise be obtainable.



In order to help ensure that any such new residential development is working to address the goals of this plan, [this provision could include requirements that a percentage of the dwelling units provide more affordable “workforce” units, as defined relative to the county median income, or meet other specific goals.](#) Alternate methods could include a density bonus in exchange for providing workforce housing or senior apartments which meet specific affordability requirements. Along with this it is also recommended that clear definitions, design and performance standards be developed for any such conservation design to ensure that they are designed to be compatible with the surrounding environment and preserve our scenic character.

This alternative approach provides an avenue for the specific types of housing needed in the community. It also gives us much greater control over what it provides and how it would be designed. Developing the tools for this approach will take some time, and additional controls for how such a provision might work may also be considered. These might include conditions on overall size, number of units, or property size requirements. The town may also consider a threshold goal to meet before the provision expires, or a sunset date after which it must be re-enacted by the town board to remain in effect.

Mobile Home Parks. Currently, mobile home parks are permitted by special permit in the RL-2 and RL-3 zoning districts, covering a majority of the town. It is recommended that this option should remain.

Coordinate with Regional Experts. The Town of Chatham is not alone in facing the increasing housing challenges of today. [There are many non-profit groups and agencies such as RUPCO, Kearney Realty Group, Habitat for Humanity, Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress and others such as Columbia County resources who can work cooperatively with the town to help us achieve some of our housing goals.](#) The town should take advantage of these regional experts and work cooperatively with them where it makes sense to collaborate.

Prioritize Underutilized / Vacant Properties. There are potentially other options for addressing both housing (and commercial) needs in town while avoiding disruptions to the local character which people wish to protect. [The adaptive re-use of abandoned, vacant structures or otherwise underutilized properties in town would help to accommodate new growth without the need for new land development or new construction.](#) Cleanup and renovation of these sites would

GOAL H14: Provide inclusionary zoning incentives or requirements in future zoning code updates.

It will be incumbent on local residents who want to see this change occur to organize and develop a grassroots effort to solicit the types of housing we need to come to the area, and the town should be supportive of such grassroots efforts.

GOAL H15: Work collaboratively with local and regional housing agencies and not for profit groups to help realize improved housing affordability where opportunities permit, taking advantage of programs which will help to create housing types for seniors, first time homebuyers and long-term rental units.

GOAL H16: Identify and prioritize the adaptive re-use of vacant, underutilized properties for new development.

also improve the look and character of the town. Identifying potential sites which are not readily visible from public roads may also work for potential housing options.

Housing for Full Time Residents. In discussions with the community, many people voiced skepticism and concern that any new housing realized in the area would quickly be snatched up by others from out of town, while the local seniors, young families or local workforce would never have reasonable access to it. Others have made the argument that it is not possible for us to control the housing market, and as such, high demand will always prevail with higher prices. While this may be true, there are mitigating factors which would allow for success in this sector. *To help address this, it is believed that much of the focus for new housing types should be purposely geared toward smaller dwellings and settings which would address local needs, while not marketing itself to second-home buyers, to those seeking homes situated on larger parcels or investment property seekers.* Many of the additional housing types discussed in this plan would generally not appeal to those who have been recently very active in the local real estate market seeking more upscale homes. It is believed that this design factor may help to alleviate some of the housing competition. *In addition, the town may want to consider a mechanism for giving rental preference to local seniors, emergency responders, teachers and similar priority audiences.* The town or a local non-profit / agency could maintain a sign-up list which is made available to rental property owners, encouraging them to utilize the list before advertising to the general public. This mechanism could also be designed as an incentive package as part of creating new rental property.

GOAL H17: New housing options should focus on meeting the needs of the local population.

GOAL H18: Pursue a mechanism for rental housing preference being given to local seniors, emergency responders and local employees.

Taken as a whole, each of these town-wide housing recommendations would provide new housing stock to be created in a dispersed manner, blending with their surrounding environment. Given the stated goals of the community to provide new housing while preserving Chatham's scenic beauty, it is believed that this approach would strike an acceptable, if not desirable, balance to meeting both.

While the Town of Chatham can help to enable these housing changes, it cannot control private-sector decisions. It will be incumbent on local residents who want to see this change occur to organize and develop a grassroots effort to solicit the types of housing we need to come to the area, and the town should be supportive of such grassroots efforts.





The Hamlets

The hamlets of Chatham represent our community’s oldest historic settlement patterns. Collecting public input on these critical areas came from the Community Survey as well as Hamlet Questionnaires which were distributed at various local events. Overall, it was found that people were receptive to some improvements within the hamlet areas, however were mostly interested in maintaining existing hamlet character and scale without much change. The people of Chatham value our hamlets and their historic districts for the ways they capture and help preserve a snapshot of an earlier time, providing great cultural and aesthetic value to our town. There is a desire for new small-scale shops and services which serve locals—preferably as adaptive re-use of existing structures—while new construction or expansion of the hamlet area was a common point of concern.

Currently, North Chatham, Riders Mills, New Concord and Kinderhook Lake¹ have registered historic districts. The idea of protecting the historic character of the remaining hamlets through the establishment of other historic districts was generally endorsed in the Community Survey, with 40% likely to support and 15% unlikely to support the effort. It remains important that each of our historic districts provide a level of protection which allows for change while ensuring that new construction is outwardly in keeping with the surrounding context.

Within each of the individual hamlet areas, a common theme and concern often related to speeding motor vehicles and pedestrian safety—particularly along the busier state-owned roads—as well as protecting the relatively rural nature of the land outside the hamlet. These hamlets would benefit from some pedestrian amenities which would provide better connectivity and safety. Similar enhancements to the gateway areas entering each hamlet could be used to welcome travelers, identify the neighborhood, and help reduce vehicle speeds with subtle traffic calming measures as well as using digital radar devices and enhanced patrol presence.

Some of the more hamlet-specific issues are described below.

GOAL T1: Protect and maintain the existing historic character and charm of the hamlet areas.

GOAL T2: Ensure that new buildings and construction within the historic districts are conducted with a sensitivity which is outwardly in keeping with surrounding homes and buildings.

GOAL T3: Hamlet centers should be provided with pedestrian amenities which enhance and promote walkability, safety while working to decrease vehicle speeds through sensitive and subtle traffic calming measures.

GOAL T4: Provide multiple radar devices in the hamlets with enhanced patrol presence.

¹ The Kinderhook district has its own separate historic preservation commission and zoning which is separate from Chatham.

North Chatham. Residents in North Chatham expressed concern over the lack of Short-term Rental regulation, truck traffic and the high speed of vehicles on state highways, particularly along Route 203, and suggested that pole-mounted speed notifications, a lowering of the posted speed limit, or police patrols were needed to combat this problem. Others noted a desire for a small local corner store to serve their area would be a welcome addition to the neighborhood. Preserving the open agricultural lands surrounding the hamlet was important. Lastly, it was noted that the Valatie Kill is a true asset to the community, and care should be taken to ensure that the ecological condition of the waterway is not undermined.

East Chatham. Like Old Chatham, preserving the rural character of the surrounding agricultural lands and preventing sprawl suburbanizing the countryside was identified as a priority to the neighborhood. People would prefer to protect the rural feel and “sense of place” which the hamlet provided, opting for little change. There is also concern over the continued availability of water in the hamlet, noting that several people have had their wells run low or dry, and that continued residential development in this area could strain the water supply. It is possible that East Chatham may eventually need to take larger steps to develop more reliable solutions for their water and sewer, with the potential of a cooperative relationship with neighboring Caanan to provide these services. Other identified issues here included vehicle related concerns, with increased traffic as well as speeding on 295, Albany Turnpike and other local roads. The railroad bridge, traffic light and 295/Albany Turnpike intersection were noted as points of continuing concern. The town should consider ways to improve these areas.

New Concord. Residents in New Concord expressed a strong desire to maintain and protect the existing character of the historic-designated hamlet. Some residents felt that additional protections may be necessary to preserve the hamlet’s historic and pastoral charm.

Chatham Center. Similar to the concerns noted in other hamlets, local vehicle speeds are often an issue, as well as a lack of cell service. Residents noted that during power outages they can be completely cut off from the outside world and unable to make contact in the event of an emergency. The poor condition of the Spangler Bridge was also brought up, noting that this is a national historic bridge—the last remaining of seven—which has remained closed due to deteriorating conditions. It was suggested that this bridge would benefit from it being

GOAL T5: Pursue the ability for the town to legally set speed limits on town roads.

GOAL T6: Protect and restore the natural resources and habitats of Chatham and recognize how they played an important part in the early settlement of the area.

GOAL T7: Investigate the potential for water and/or sewer service in East Chatham to address deficiencies.



OLD CHATHAM. The Old Chatham Memorial, situated outside Jackson’s Restaurant. ▲

GOAL T8: The town should continue to provide or promote a variety of local community events, activities and socialization opportunities which bring the community together.

GOAL T9: Update zoning to better enable small neighborhood shops and mixed-use buildings in the hamlets which are compatible with the local scale and character.

GOAL T10: Coordinate with the Kinderhook Lake Corporation to create a Kinderhook Lake Watershed Environmental Protection Overlay District to improve water quality and reduce aquatic invasive species.

GOAL T11: Investigate the creation of a new zoning district which is more appropriately suited to the existing Kinderhook Lake development patterns.

restored for the use of hiking, biking, foot traffic and horse riding, but not opened to vehicular traffic.

Malden Bridge. Residents in Malden Bridge noted that they really enjoy local community events which bring people together, such as the Strawberry Pancake Breakfast held on the 4th of July. *They feel that these and other community events are important to community identity and bringing people together as neighbors.* It was suggested that these and other events should be further promoted.

Old Chatham. Residents of Old Chatham enjoy their quiet setting, and would like to find ways to reduce parking and noise conflicts often experienced between commercial and residential uses. They also noted that speeding vehicles are a common concern. The current Internet and broadband service availability is lacking, which restricts their ability to effectively work from home, and noted issues they have had in the past with short-term rentals in the area.

Kinderhook Lake. Residents of Kinderhook Lake felt that it was important they be more fully recognized as part of the town. The hamlet has many full-time residents and the recognized assets of the lake, rail trail, great sunsets and a strong sense of community. These residents however recognized the challenges of the rail trail traffic and parking, and noted there is a strong concern for the environment of the lake. With a dense population of housing in this small area, there are many aging septic systems potentially not meeting basic health standards. This, coupled with stormwater runoff from parking areas, aquatic invasive species contamination and other detrimental human activity, can pose not only risks to human health but to the health of the lake as well. *The Kinderhook Lake Corporation has been seeking to address these issues, and requires town support to institute protective measures such as a watershed overlay district to improve and protect the water quality here. Residents felt that more attention and funding for this area was needed to address these issues as well as preserving the heritage of Electric Park and resolving issues of the zoning codes it can no longer conform to.*

Rayville. When polled recently, the residents were nearly unanimous in what they value in Rayville. Their responses in conversations emphasized the preservation of the community's rural character. They stressed feelings of great safety and mentioned enjoying the quietude and dirt/gravel roads which make it a sanctuary.

Business & Jobs

In our modern economy today, it is ironic that many of us travel out of town to purchase basic everyday goods, while visitors come from as far as New York City to shop and stroll among the storefronts of Chatham Village. It is an unfortunate reality that many of the local-serving establishments which we grew up with—like the beloved Delson’s Department Store—have slowly given away to the big-box and online retail economy. Today, what is left in our commercial centers may be more geared toward stores lacking in everyday necessities. While these establishments serve an important purpose in our local economy, there remains a desire in Chatham for more small-scale shops and services which are tailored to meet the everyday needs of the local residents. This is particularly true of businesses which can support local agriculture, provide jobs or serve a family dinner out on the town which isn’t geared toward the tourist set.

While 62% of people in the Community Survey felt that local businesses did a reasonable job of meeting the everyday needs of residents, some 40% also felt that they were more geared toward tourists, and many felt that having more retail shops and services in town would be generally beneficial. Such businesses, whether situated in the Town of Chatham itself or the village, would also help to contribute additional tax revenue needed to provide basic services, as well as provide jobs.

When asked in the Community Survey what types of businesses were most needed locally, the two most popular responses were “businesses that support agriculture/agri-tourism” and “small main street size retail sales and services”. People have also stated the desire to prefer any new commercial development as part of “infill” or “adaptive-reuse” of existing properties instead of clearing land for

new construction. Together, this begins to show us that there is a need and desire for smaller scale shops and services which are designed to serve the local population and fit into the existing fabric of the community. However, even if we accept that this may be the answer, determining how to accomplish this becomes a very different problem.

Like any municipal government, the Town of Chatham is not in the business of commercial real-estate development. The town is not interested in (nor really capable of) speculative commercial entrepreneurship. So the amount of control it wields in promoting any new small-scale local business is mostly limited to ensuring the desired types of business are allowed in the zoning and that there are land areas available for them. Apart from this, the town has little control over what types of businesses seek to establish themselves here, or who they wish to cater to.



Starting with the levers of local government which we can control, an assessment of the current zoning could help to identify any obstacles to the types and sizes of businesses desired in town. This assessment should be conducted anyway, since there are new business types and creative hybrids which have

GOAL B1: Review allowed uses within the zoning to identify where improvements could be made that better support small local business and enhance the viability of low-impact home occupations.

emerged in recent years for consideration. (Marijuana dispensaries and consumption sites, which the Town of Chatham recently opted in (and out of) respectively, is one such example). **The town should review and assess what uses are allowed by right and by special permit in the commercial districts to identify where improvements could be made to better support and encourage small local business opportunities, including home occupations.** The approval of home occupations, for example, should not be made based on the type of local road surface. It has been noted that many uses in the current zoning require a special permit, which may not be necessary in cases where site plan review is sufficient. In cases where it is necessary, updated definitions and specific requirements for each use should be provided. Specifically, uses which can be identified as supportive of local agriculture should be coordinated with the farming community for this purpose. As farms evolve, the town needs to be able to adapt to new and creative uses and support systems that farms are relying on in order to remain financially stable—such as agritourism—goals which are outlined above in the Farming section of this plan.

GOAL B2: Prioritize the adaptive re-use of existing buildings, and discourage development of “chain” or “big box” stores which undermine the character of the town.

Given an interest in maintaining our commercial centers and hamlets, and a desire for more adaptive re-use over new construction, this zoning review should also consider ways in which renovation of existing buildings can be made more attractive, particularly in the hamlets, and adding provisions which legally prohibit or curtail unwanted development of “chain” or “big box” stores. Adapting existing structures to commercial and mixed-use purposes is advantageous, particularly in preserving local scale and character. As noted in the goals of the Hamlets section above, the town should work to update the zoning to better enable small neighborhood shops and mixed-use buildings in the hamlets, helping to strengthen the local economy.

Repair Cafe. *David Levow works on a lawnmower at the Repair Cafe, sponsored by the Climate Smart Action Task Force, a local example of a much larger movement.*

Improvements to the zoning code which seek to help encourage redevelopment of existing underutilized sites (such as vacant businesses or formerly industrial properties) could potentially be made by better tailoring site plan requirements for elements like the number of required parking spaces, setbacks and similar measures.

In keeping with the previously stated goals of working collaboratively with the Village of Chatham, (Goal O3), and attempting to first encourage future growth into and around established areas, (Goal C3), the commercial growth effort should also look to identify opportunities for infill growth. **We should also work cooperatively with the Village**

to support commercial and mixed-use growth in and around the village center, which in turn helps support the Town. Growth in the commercial footprint of Chatham should be done cautiously, tempered by the understanding that we do not wish to undermine our desired character, and recognizing that there was limited community support for new commercial growth outside of the established commercial and hamlet centers. **With that in mind, the town should investigate options for expanding existing commercial business districts as part of future zoning updates.**

GOAL B3: Work cooperatively with the village to support commercial and mixed-use growth in and around the village center.

GOAL B4: Investigate options to expand existing business districts to provide jobs and to strengthen the tax base.

The growth and success of our local businesses also relies on the availability of a local workforce. The previous sections on Housing and Youth and Young Families in this plan identified the retention of younger workers as an issue. Many local businesses and farms have found difficulty in finding available workers, particularly since the pandemic, and a lack of more affordable rental housing and starter homes is a contributing factor. **In order for local businesses and farms to succeed, we should advance these housing goals of establishing a more diverse and affordable range of living options—particularly mixed-use—to provide more local workforce.**

GOAL B5: Provide more diverse and affordable housing options to support a local workforce.

Finally, new business startups and non-for-profit groups are a potential avenue for creating a more locally-focused economy. The creation of these small startup efforts often requires testing and feasibility to determine how they will actually work. **With this in mind, the town may wish to consider the establishment of PILOT programs which would help support and launch new local not-for-profits which address the needs of the community.**

GOAL B6: Consider establishing PILOT programs to help support local not-for-profit organizations.

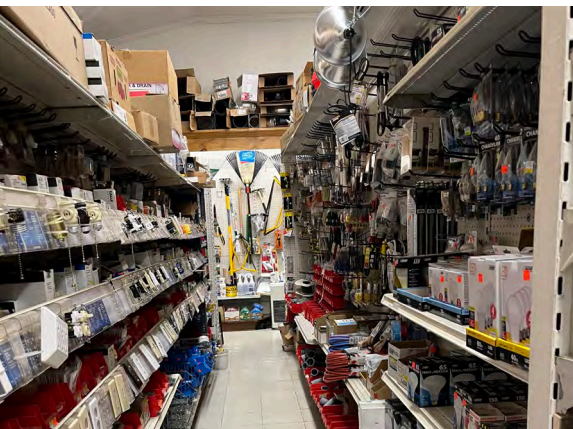
At a time when many people are trying to become more “self-sustaining and independent” from the uncertain global world around us, it becomes harder to get the things we need without having to order them online from a warehouse on the far side of our country. We are as a society quickly embracing this new online economy, while at the same time recognizing that it will hurt local businesses if we become too reliant on it, and that is a good thing. There needs to be a balance. Our desire for localization will only help to strengthen our community and economy.

So when the issue of buying local is raised, we recognize that although this would be beneficial, creating or attracting new businesses today which serve the local population can be challenging. For many years

Canaan General Store. *Caanan, NY. A local example of stores still serving the local community (bottom photo). There is a need to find ways to adapt stores such as these so they are successful and stay in the community, and not get replaced by the next Dollar General.*

GOAL B7: Reach out and work with the local business community as part of a grassroots movement to promote more businesses to serve local needs.

H.N. Williams Store. *Despite its appearance as a very tourism-driven store (top photo) when you first enter, they also serve many local needs which otherwise can't be found within a 20-minute drive, such as hardware and animal feed (middle photo).*



the mantra of “Buy Local” was a popular branding effort to get more people to fight back against the online and big-box retail trends. While it seems we may not have won this fight, there continues to be more people today starting their own businesses, and businesses adapting to changing environments. **What we need today is to reach out to the local business community and discuss ways they might be willing to adapt to also serve the local community better, with an understanding that if they did, the local population would return the favor.** Instead of trying to attract new business to serve locals, we can try to adapt some existing businesses which are already here. This begins to change the mantra from “Buy Local” to “Buy Local and Serve Local”.

While this proposition may be a heavy lift, it would only require one or two participating businesses to test how it might work. An example case study for this is the H.N. Williams Store in Dorset, Vermont, which existed as a modest dry goods and farm supply store since 1840. After a recent expansion, their success has exploded to becoming one of the most popular stores in the area. The success of Williams comes in its dual purpose of serving both locals and tourists alike, with wines, cheeses, sweatshirts and other tourist-related merchandise up front, while local supplies of hardware, work clothing and animal feed are in back.



Understanding how the local business community could best adapt to meeting more local needs may likely require that further work be done to identify specific goods and services which the people of Chatham most desire. The town could benefit from a retail survey conducted to identify what people would most like to be able to get locally, and identify what local businesses may be able to adapt to those needs. This would help local business owners to better understand and measure local demand, and give them confidence in any decision to adapt their practices. Such an effort would need to be community-driven, but one that could be mutually rewarding.

Energy & Infrastructure

The Town of Chatham seeks to find ways to serve the needs of its local population while balancing costs and available resources.

This includes finding ways to improve energy independence, maintaining local roadways, mitigating hazards, managing town-owned assets and helping to ensure residents have better access to local services such as emergency responders, broadband Internet and telecommunications.

Solar Power & Renewables

The accelerated adoption of solar power is being driven by newer technologies, lower costs and an aggressive initiative by the State of New York to reduce fossil fuel use with cleaner, more efficient technologies in the coming decades. However, this plan is not being driven by such mandates. The people of Chatham are already supportive of the many benefits which renewable energy sources can bring to the community, including energy independence and reducing the effects of climate change. However, support for solar arrays largely depends on the size, visibility and other potential impacts of the installation.

In light of recent large-scale utility solar proposals in the region, there is justifiable concern about the impact these could have to farming and agricultural land, local open space, and overall community character. When asked in the Community Survey if they supported promoting small-scale residential/agricultural solar energy systems in town, 56% indicated they were “very likely” to support, while only 12% were “not likely”. This level of support increasingly dwindled for larger and off-site systems, with 50% “not likely” to support installations 30-100 acres in size, and 62% “not likely” to support utility-scale solar installations of 100 acres or more.

To understand this issue in more detail, a focus group meeting was held on May 21st at the Tri-Village Fire Company to discuss solar power. While a majority of participants were supportive of solar power in general, their top concerns included the potential loss of farms and agricultural land, open space, as well as the visual impact on town character and scenic views. Other concerns included potential soil contamination, risk of fire, and the ability of the land to be used for farming again in the future. Audience members were also asked to score a series of photographs of different solar installations, and describe what aspects they liked or didn’t like in an effort to identify what characteristics they felt were important. Images of building and rooftop-mounted solar panels scored the highest, followed by images where the panels were set back very far from the roadway or were otherwise diminished in view. A discussion ensued about different ways to mitigate the visual impact of solar panels, as well as how much say the community has in what you do on your own property. Many agreed that there was an important distinction between having the panels for your own (on-site) electrical use versus hosting panels for off-site consumption—if they are for your own use then the community should have much less say in what you do.

Together this input begins to paint a clearer picture of how Chatham could define its vision and position in regard to solar energy moving forward. The Town of Chatham currently utilizes the New York State Unified Solar Permit system, providing a standardized and simplified application and review process. This streamlined permit allows property owners up to a maximum of 25kW of DC photovoltaic capacity on approved roof or ground mounted applications. This permitting system does not apply to larger solar installations however—which are the primary focus of concern—and policies addressing these and larger systems should be developed.

GOAL E1: Document and clarify the town's position on all solar energy systems with a local solar ordinance.

GOAL E2: Encourage the use of solar energy and other renewable systems for private, on-site use to work toward becoming a community which is energy independent.

It is highly recommended that the Town of Chatham document and clarify the community's position in the form of a local solar ordinance. This ordinance should provide guidance and regulations regarding a number of different issues such as appropriate sizes, locations, siting and mitigating design factors as more fully described below.

Recognizing the importance of energy resilience and independence, the town should encourage the use of solar energy and other renewable systems for private residential, agricultural, commercial and industrial use, with guidelines and standards that encourage sensible placement and roof-mounted installations where possible. At this basic level, support and encouragement by the town should include reasonably minimizing procedural obstacles to private renewable energy adoption while avoiding restrictions which limit their ability to pursue energy alternatives.

***Rooftop Solar.** An example of commercial rooftop solar, as seen on the Tierra Farms building on Route 203.*



GOAL E3: The town should look for grant funding and other opportunities which would assist in the town-wide transition to meet the State's renewable energy and climate change mitigation goals.

Leading by example, the town should actively seek out grant funding which would provide assistance in a transition to help meet the state's longer-term renewable energy and climate change mitigation goals.

GOAL E4: Define and establish explicit performance standards for moderately sized off-site community solar installations.

However, it should be noted that not everybody can accommodate solar on their property due to a variety of factors including financial, roof construction or space constraints. Recognizing that there may be a need for more moderately-sized community solar systems which can serve the local area, the town should provide a balanced and reasonable avenue for this option. The town should define and establish explicit performance standards and siting requirements that

will limit visual, agricultural, and ecological impacts for moderately-sized off-site community solar systems which emphasize deep setbacks, natural hedgerow-style screening and avoidance of agricultural land. This system should prioritize the use of building integrated systems (e.g. rooftop installations) formerly developed land, brownfields, former mines, landfills, hilly terrain, and similar properties for any solar installations over the use of agricultural land or open space. Such systems could be limited in size to no more than 30 acres, with the primary goal of reducing negative visual impacts to the surrounding community, rural character, and not disrupting critical habitats and forest blocks. The allowable zoning districts for such community solar installs, if not mounted on the roof of a building, could be directed to floating zones established with the intent of being reasonably unobtrusive while protecting agricultural lands, view sheds, natural resources, and historic districts. The town could also consider an overall cap on the number or acreage town-wide.

Recognizing that the residents of Chatham have expressed many concerns about larger solar installations, the town should also actively prohibit larger-scale solar energy systems from being established due to their likely negative impact on agriculture, open space, farmland, visual and community character. While the State of New York may have the authority to overrule such a measure, it would officially document the town's position on this issue for later defense, as well as provide an opportunity to outline specific requirements or conditions on any such application should it prevail. These conditions should (at a minimum) include adequate screening with the use of existing vegetation, potential integration of agricultural operations, wildlife friendly fencing, site remediation and similar provisions which were identified during the comprehensive planning process. It is strongly recommended that existing vegetation, especially hedgerows, be preserved and augmented with the installation of mixed deciduous and coniferous trees and shrubs as well as a mix of pollinator-friendly perennials. In the absence of natural screening this mixed planting theme should be implemented to establish an approximation of a natural hedgerow. If planted correctly, this type of screening coupled with the use of wildlife-friendly fencing should go a long way to help to blend in an otherwise industrial look with our rural landscape, and should help limit impacts on wildlife, birds, and pollinators.

At the smaller scale, homeowner level, it is recognized that not everyone is physically or financially able to adopt new energy technologies. With

GOAL E5: Prioritize the use of building rooftops, formerly developed land, brownfields, former mines, landfills and hilly terrain over the use of natural open space or agricultural land.

GOAL E6: Prohibit solar energy systems which exceed the 30 acre maximum size permitted for community solar.



Natural Looking Screening. An attractive mix of deciduous and coniferous plantings creates a rural hedgerow style and helps to make vegetative screening look natural. ▲

GOAL E7: Continually search for funding opportunities which would assist interested mid to lower-income residents transition to renewable energy sources.

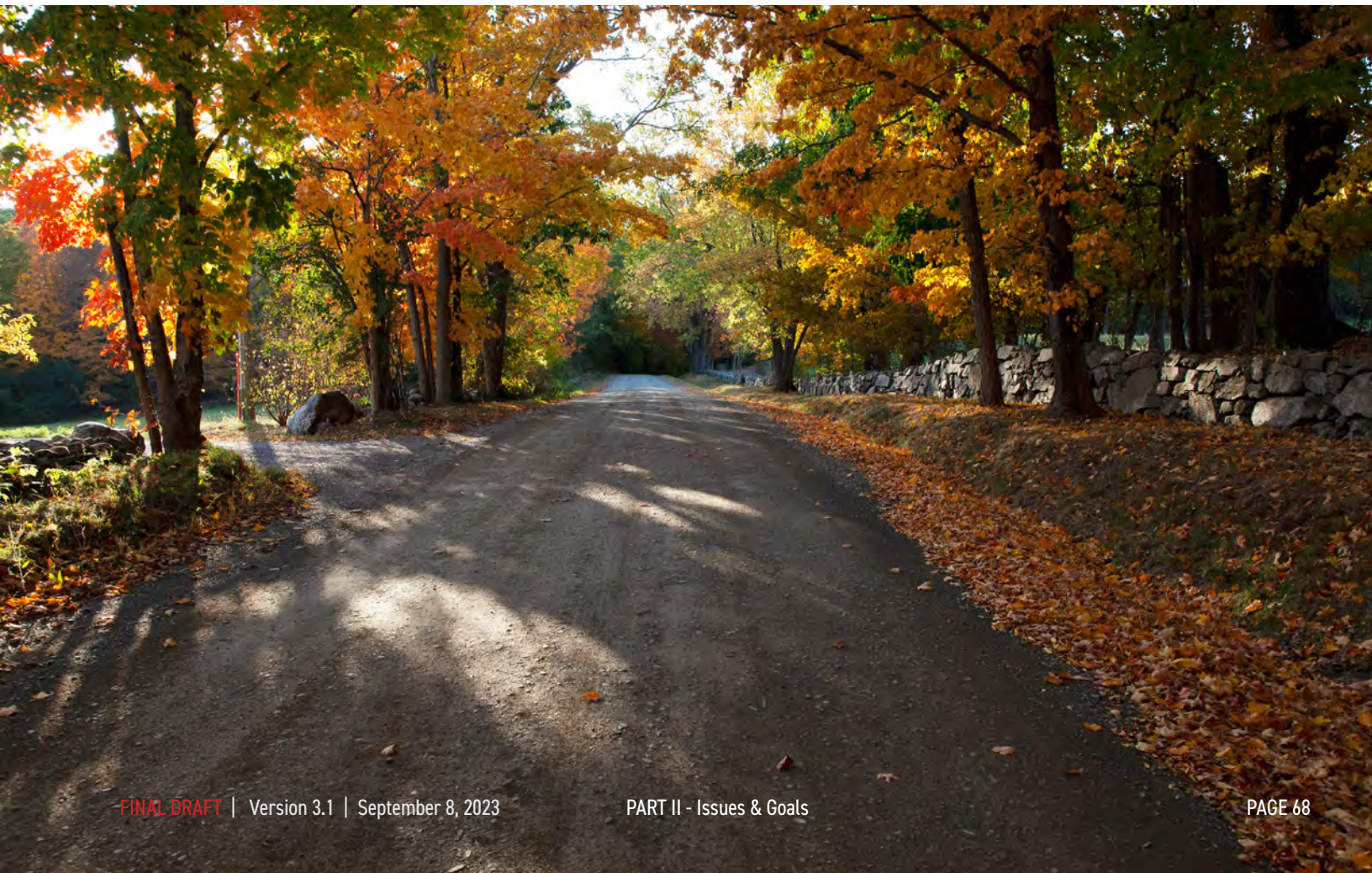
this in mind, the town should continually search for potential funding opportunities to financially assist interested mid to lower-income residents transition to renewable energy sources.

Lastly, as more fully described earlier in the Farming and Agriculture section this solar ordinance could also provide an avenue for qualifying farms to apply for an exception which would permit them to host limited ground-mount solar installations for income purposes in return for meeting specific site standards and preservation goals. This option could provide some community solar energy while generating much needed income to farm operations.

GOAL E8: Investigate the viability of additional renewable energy systems and how these could be codified in local laws, including small wind and hydroelectric energy sources.

Taken together, the different elements of this solar ordinance would provide much needed clarity for landowners and applicants, encouraging sensible use of this renewable resource while limiting many of the unwanted negative impacts.

In addition to solar power, the Town of Chatham should investigate ways in which it could incorporate other alternative energy sources such as small wind and hydroelectric sources.



Climate Smart Communities

The Climate Smart Communities Program is a New York State initiative designed to help communities reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build resilience to prepare for the impacts of climate change. The Town of Chatham is a participant in this program, and has achieved Bronze Certification level. As a climate smart community, the Town has undertaken numerous actions to help mitigate and adapt to climate change in our community. Certification in this program allows the Town of Chatham to access additional grants, rebates and technical assistance which are helpful in meeting further community goals.

Many of the goals outlined in this plan align with and work to support the efforts of the Climate Smart Communities Program, including the conservation of natural areas and resources, smart-growth principles in land use planning, and seeking equity in available housing options. *The Climate Smart Action Task Force Committee has been working diligently on establishing and certifying the town in this program, and should continue their work to advance us to higher certification levels to help address the issues of climate change.*

One of the many aspects of maximizing climate resiliency is minimizing landfill waste. *The town should continue to make efforts to reduce waste and encourage the reuse of materials and devices.* This may be achieved by encouraging recycling, repairing, and re-homing. To encourage recycling, the town should work with the county to keep abreast of any policy changes, initiatives or problems that may be

GOAL E9: Continue to advance the Town of Chatham’s participation in, and certification level of, the Climate Smart Communities Program.

GOAL E10: Develop recommendations to foster waste recycling, reuse and composting.



Maintenance Work. *Jim Klinger works to install new drainage pipes at Crellin Park to help address recent stormwater drainage issues.*

jeopardizing the viability of materials collected. Educating and helping residents repair rather than throwing out serviceable items should be encouraged by the continued support of Repair Cafes. To help re-home usable items, the town should consider a Free Store at the town hall or Crellin Park.

Various efforts such as the Annual Roadside Clean-up and the Annual Spring Clean-up Day should be supported and continued as they serve the dual purpose of keeping Chatham looking beautiful and offers residents a proper avenue for disposal of items such as tires and e-waste that require special handling.

As municipalities join in the effort to reduce the carbon footprint of the community, they have begun to engage in clean energy initiatives. In 2018, with funding from the NYSDEC, the Town installed an electric vehicle charging station with Level 2 charging ports in the municipal parking lot that is shared by the Town and Village. Currently between 15-25 users charge for about 70-90 sessions per month. **The Town should continue to investigate additional charging station infrastructure, and also consider longer-term goals to reduce fossil fuel use.** This could include both municipal reductions as well as guidance and suggestions for residents. The climate Smart committee should make recommendations to the Town Board regarding perceived need of further stations, suggested locations, and potential goals. Both the Climate Smart and Grants committees should look for funding availability. If outside funding is available, the Town should consider adding infrastructure regardless of perceived current needs.

GOAL E11: The Town should consider goals for fossil fuel reduction and continue to investigate additional EV charging station infrastructure.

GOAL E12: The Invasives Species Awareness Committee should educate residents so they can identify and are aware of the impacts of some of the most prolific and troublesome invasive species. Encourage mitigation activities for the public and practice them on town property.

GOAL E13: To help fund the control of both terrestrial and aquatic invasive species, the town should look into DEC's Invasive Species Grant Program.

Climate change brings with it the potential for the introduction and proliferation of invasive species. Invasive plants can frequently overwhelm “native” species because they are better competitors. Usually, they emerge earlier in the spring, grow quickly and are generally pest free. Chatham has a number of invasive plant species—both aquatic and terrestrial— that are problematic. **The town should take steps to check the spread of invasive species that are negatively impacting Chatham.**

Hazard Mitigation

One of the problems associated with climate change has been the increased severity and frequency of severe storm events, often causing flooding and power outages. Many communities—facing the increasing

costs of storm damage repair from events such as Hurricanes Irene and Sandy—have been seeking to identify steps which can be taken to mitigate future disruptions and reduce costs. In 2018 the Town of Chatham participated in the planning and development of the Columbia County Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) in partnership with other area municipalities. This plan identified specific steps which can be taken to directly mitigate future damages, including a reduction of flooding through increased culvert sizes on Highland Road and River Street, as well as regular debris maintenance along waterways. These and other recommendations are helpful for the community to address specific issues which can reduce community disruptions. The town also maintains an Emergency Preparedness Plan, which has been in place since 1994 to provide guidance and authority for when a disaster actually strikes. **The town should continue to work toward implementing and updating these plans and maintain an active role in future HMP updates.**

Gravel Mine & Rural Road Maintenance

One consideration with running a rural community is how best to care for and maintain the network of many dirt/gravel roads which help define our local rural character. Drainage culverts are an important component of this maintenance, requiring regular monitoring and upkeep to avoid failures which can lead to flooding, road erosion, and other problems. To reduce infrastructure costs, improve water quality and aid in the safe passage of wildlife, it is wise to identify and address failing or troublesome culverts before problems worsen. **The town should continue monitoring culverts to ensure they are working properly and adhere to the Road Stream Crossing Management Plan (See Appendix 'D'). In addition, a program to prioritize, replace, and add new culverts should be developed and maintained by the Highway Department.**

While the Community Survey showed us that the people of Chatham largely prefer keeping these roads unpaved unless absolutely necessary (Goal C5, pg. 20), the issue of where best to source the gravel necessary for this was not as clear. The existing gravel mine (which the town has relied on for many years) has indicated that they expect to close the quarry to the public in less than a decade, leading some to begin thinking ahead about where it might come from in the future.

When asked about this in the Community Survey, just over 50% of

GOAL E14: Implement the recommendations of the Columbia County Hazard Mitigation Plan and maintain an active role in future mitigation planning to become a more resilient community.

GOAL E15: The town should continue monitoring culverts to ensure they are working properly and refer to the Road Stream Crossing Management Plan.

GOAL E16: A culvert prioritization / replacement / addition program should be developed and maintained by the Highway Department.

respondents said they would support the prospect of opening another gravel mine within the town, while 11% said they were unsure. Many of the write-in comments indicated that their support for or against any new gravel mine would highly depend on where it was proposed, implying that people might be against any location they viewed as impacting their neighborhood or local road. The current gravel mine location off of Route 203 is authorized under the zoning within a floating zone “M” (mining) which could potentially exist within any Industrial, RL 1, 2 or 3 district. **Given the ongoing need for a reliable source of local gravel, the town should anticipate future discussions on this topic and be prepared to evaluate both town-owned and private options. The current mining application process should also be audited to ensure it is effective and not overly cumbersome.**

GOAL E17: Review the processes for review and approval of any gravel mine in preparation for future mine applications.

GOAL E18: The town should support continued education for the Highway Superintendent and highway staff, such as the Cornell Local Roads Program and other additional training opportunities.

Having a source of gravel is only part of the battle though. Caring for our dirt/gravel roads is an ongoing challenge. While we were once able to count on a number of months of frozen, mud-free roads, we are now often faced with almost yearlong surfacing issues. **Not only for the residents who live along dirt/gravel roads, but also for the vehicles and**



those who walk, bike, and otherwise use them, it is important to keep dust, sediment issues, potholes, and mud to a minimum.

Fire Departments & Emergency Responders

The various Fire Departments and other emergency services of town are an important part of our community, serving as protectors as well as being host to many social and civil gatherings each year.

The fire department greatly depends on fundraising events throughout the year as well as support from the town to maintain operations, yet the difficulty in doing so only seems to increase. The fire department has also experienced a dramatic loss of local volunteers, a problem which is not unique to Chatham but is a national concern. Volunteerism is down across the country. The average age of volunteer members is now over 50, with fewer young recruits in town to replace the ranks. Some of this may be attributed to needing more young residents in the area, (an issue covered in the Housing section) as well as an influx of new residents that may be unaware that local fire departments are not paid but rather volunteers. There are other mitigating factors such as many new residents are only here part-time and lastly, the training required by the state to be a firefighter in the Town of Chatham is the same as for a professional- and it is very time and cost prohibitive. The number of hours of training required are on par with that of paid firefighters who do the job for a living, rather than volunteers that do it on top of everything else they do at work and for the community.

Steps must be taken to help activate more community participation and incentivize local volunteers in the area Fire Departments.

Inspired by a new legislative action signed into law last December in New York, the Village of Round Lake recently passed a resolution providing volunteer firefighters a 10% break on their village taxes to help encourage more volunteers. The town of Chatham has since followed suit and adopted a similar measure. It is recommended that the town continue to build on this effort and investigate other ways it can help support and promote our local emergency responders.

Broadband Internet & Telecommunications

When asked to rank the importance of various topics among Chatham residents, “improved availability of broadband Internet”



GOAL E19: Continue to investigate ways the town can help support volunteer recruitment and fundraising efforts for local volunteer fire departments and emergency services.

GOAL E20: Support the efforts of the Broadband and Cell Service Committee to continue working with regional utilities to support growth and expansion of cellphone and broadband Internet coverage in the Town of Chatham.

GOAL E21: Continue work to complete the town's Capital Improvement Plan, and maintain an updated plan going forward.

GOAL E22: Investigate the feasibility of accommodating town court functions in Town Hall, either as an addition or in lieu of the current offices there.

and “improved cell phone service” topped the list. This result was reinforced by many written comments submitted by people, particularly in the hamlet questionnaires. The Chatham Broadband Committee has been working hard to help push for these upgrades, and recently succeeded in getting Consolidated Communications to provide fiber optic Internet service to the Pitt Road and Thomas Road areas. They continue to advocate for additional service extensions and seek grant funding to implement broader coverage. The town has also added the task of improved cellular service under the mission of the Broadband Committee for additional attention. **It is recommended that the town continue to lobby the utilities for improved broadband and cellular coverage,** particularly as more people are working from home.

Town Facilities

The Town of Chatham benefits from planning ahead to identify future infrastructure needs, schedule, and funding sources for expected facility improvements. **To this end, the town should continue its work to complete the Capital Improvement Plan, and maintain a current plan as necessary.**

The town has relied for many years on the continued rental of village facilities at the Tracey Memorial to serve as the local town court. Although the space is beautiful, it is not ADA compliant and it represents an ongoing expense which the town could potentially eliminate by hosting court functions itself. As times change so does the work of the town. For many years the town hall meeting room was adequate to accommodate most town meetings. However, this is no longer the case and the town must frequently use space graciously offered by our fire departments. Furthermore, the size of the town hall precludes the hosting of civic group meetings like those of the Ghent/Chatham seniors. When looking at paying rent, a lack of ADA compliance, having to rely upon the hospitality of others to hold important public meetings, and the inability to host civic meetings, it is apparent that the town hall has been outgrown. **The town should continue its work seeking to reduce operating expenses in general, and specifically in determining the feasibility and cost savings of hosting town court functions within or as an addition to Town Hall.** This effort is currently being pursued by the Grants Committee.

Recreation, Arts & Culture

Recreation, arts and cultural activities are found in abundance in Chatham and its vicinity. They can make Chatham a more attractive place to live, provide economic tourism benefits, improve our quality of life and provide important opportunities for socialization and community bonding. With an overarching goal to be a more welcoming and diverse community, it is important that we continue to work toward establishing a variety of recreational, arts and cultural options which appeal to and serve everyone.

Trail Network. A recreational trail network includes activities and other benefits which enhance our physical, emotional and social well-being to promote a healthier lifestyle. The town should

continue to maintain and improve the Crellin trail system including those connecting the park with PS21. Investigating the possibility of a new trail, connecting the park with the village, should be a priority. On a larger scale, the town should consider supporting the efforts of regional groups such as the Columbia Land Conservancy, the Hudson River Valley Greenway and the Harlem Valley Rail Trail Association to develop trails and Greenway Connections.

Park Improvements. For our parks to be successful, we should work to see that they provide the types of activities and amenities which people want. In the Community Survey, residents weighed-in on a number of proposed improvements which



GOAL R1: Chatham should be home to a variety of recreational options which encourage residents of all ages and abilities to actively participate in indoor and outdoor activities which enhance their physical, emotional and social well being and promote a healthy lifestyle.

GOAL R2: The town should continue to maintain and improve the trail system at Crellin Park and those connecting the park with PS21.

GOAL R3: Investigate the feasibility of building a new trail linking Crellin Park with the Village of Chatham as a priority to increase accessibility and safety for students as well as other park goers.

were being considered at Crellin Park. These included (in order of survey popularity): an expanded trail system, a more extensive and handicapped-accessible playground, a nature adventure playground, as well as turning the practice field into a full-sized soccer field for tournaments and the Youth Soccer Program. Other ideas (which received less support) involved refurbishment of the north pavilion, creation of new picnic areas, and lastly, the addition of a dog park.

However people were quick to suggest other needed improvements beyond those offered in the survey. The cleanup of the swimming pond and overall improved maintenance of the park was suggested by many as a priority. These folks expressed interest in ensuring that the town can adequately manage the existing facilities before taking on the added cost of new elements. Expansion of the skate park, overall accessibility improvements, and “leaving the park just the way it is” were also suggested strategies.

The public input received from the Seniors and Youth and Young Families outreach highlights the incredible role that local parks and

activities play in how we socialize and come together as a community. These two groups in particular were very supportive of creating a year-round Community Center with flexible programming space for a variety of activities. (Goal S7, pg. 41 / Y2, pg. 44). Such a proposal would find benefit for groups of many ages and would help address several of the goals identified in this plan. These groups also expressed interest in the potential for a year-round swimming pool as part of this center.

Residents were also given the opportunity to weigh-in on

how they would prefer any park improvements would be funded. Approximately 39% indicated they should be paid for with a mix of “individual user fees” and private/town budget funds, however it has not been established at this time how any user fees might be collected. 30% preferred that park improvements be paid directly out of the town



▲ **Stonykill Disc Golf.** Information stand at the Stonykill Disc Golf Course, located behind Town Hall.

budget, without any corresponding tax increase. This was followed by 28% who felt they should be paid for by individual user fees and/or private funds, with no corresponding tax increase.

Given the many different interests and projected timeframes for some of these suggestions, it is recommended that the town take a logically phased approach to addressing these needs. **In the short-term, the town should look at preparing a long-term maintenance forecast for the park and similar recreational assets to meet current management needs.** This analysis should include identifying potential alternatives such as collecting user fees for non-residents to offset budget requirements. Based on these forecasts, it should then formally commit to what the municipality is realistically willing and able to support moving forward. This will help to bring clarity to the recreation planning process and begin to address current maintenance issues. **Remaining responsibilities and programs which the town wishes to continue but is unable to cover will then need to be transferred to the private sector, not-for-profit groups, sponsorships or through a collaborative effort of the aforementioned, if they are to be continued.**

Priority park goals should be the cleanup and maintenance of the grounds. The public input collected during this planning process should serve useful in identifying short and long-term enhancements which the community supports. **It is also recommended that the projected future maintenance needs of any new improvements be factored into future budget decisions rolling forward, so that they can be managed effectively.** In this way, the town can more realistically stay on top of maintenance needs as it grows to adapt to the needs of the community.

In the near term, the town should pursue a combination of grant funding and private funds/corporate sponsorships to help construct some of the more requested improvements, such as the pond cleanup or accessibility improvements. Some of these requested improvements improve overall usability which could be addressed with proper planning and relatively little cost. For instance, parents who utilize the playground prefer seating areas that benefit from nearby shade trees in lieu of having to sit in the hot sun, an issue which could be improved with modified placements. Having shade in the actual playground area also helps to keep the metal equipment from getting too hot and reducing child sunburns. They also noted that the relative position of different activities should be considered when arranging layouts—a parent being able to keep an eye on one child in the little playground wants to be able to also

GOAL R4: Update the Parks & Recreation Plan, including a long-term maintenance and budget projection to identify what the town is committing to manage and the feasibility of potential user fee collection options.

GOAL R5: Identify additional responsibilities which the town is no longer able to maintain which can be instead managed by private sector, not-for-profit or sponsorship groups.

GOAL R6: Prioritize the cleanup and maintenance of existing park facilities before new features are added.

GOAL R7: Include the projected future maintenance time and costs associated with new recreational improvements so that they can be properly budgeted and planned for in advance.

GOAL R8: The town should seek to fund future recreational improvements through the acquisition of grants, donations or user fees in-lieu of increased taxes where possible.



see their other child who may be playing on the jungle gym, near the water or skate park, for example. It also allows for parents of different children to more easily congregate and socialize with one another. Keeping the different park elements in visual or closer proximity can be very helpful in usability and peace of mind.

The town has successfully partnered with PS21 in recent years to expand the multi-use “Pathways” trail system with the help of many volunteers, and continues to work toward a goal of three and a half miles of local trail network. Likewise, the creation of new bicycle “pump

tracks” have been realized thanks to the donation of time, money and equipment by local volunteers and businesses. Looking ahead to some of the bigger lifts and long-term recreational visions, the town will likely need to work cooperatively with the larger community to realize some of these goals.

There should be continued and improved coordination between the town, village and their respective schools and recreation committees to identify teaming opportunities and help advance common goals. This cooperation could be established by assigning a representative or liaison from both the school and village to the Chatham Parks & Recreation Committee so that there is a better understanding of what each is doing.

From a funding perspective, additional teaming opportunities may also be useful. The town should collaborate with PS21, Morris Memorial and the Village of Chatham to find funding or fundraising opportunities for larger capital improvements such as a community recreation center and/or swimming pool, which were also identified as goals for the Seniors and Youth (Goal S7, pg. 41 / Y2, pg. 44) and may bring benefit to all parties.

▲ **Natural Playground.** *The playground at the Wild Center, in Tupper Lake, NY is an example of a natural play area where kids can explore and build creatively.*

GOAL R9: Improve coordination and communication between the town, village, schools and Parks & Recreation Committee to help advance common recreation goals.

GOAL R10: Collaborate with PS21, Morris Memorial, the Village of Chatham and similar entities to help fund larger capital recreation and cultural improvements.

Arts & Culture. Chatham is very fortunate to enjoy a diverse and vibrant arts community, and we support and encourage the continued growth in this aspect of our lives. Since the last comprehensive plan was written, there have been several additions to the artistic and cultural landscape of Chatham. PS21: Performance Space opened their state-of-the-art facility in 2018, providing theater, dance, music and multi-media contemporary performances



in their open-air theater. This site continues to be enhanced with walking trails connecting to Crellin Park through an open scenic landscape of meadows and outdoor sculpture exhibits. The successful Art Omi center—featuring a contemporary art gallery, sculpture and architectural park—has more recently been expanded to include new residency programs for art, architecture, dance, music and writing to expand their offerings. Looking forward, there are plans underway to open the Shaker Museum in the Village of Chatham which would represent a major new attraction to the area. The plans call for an 18,000-item exhibit in over 30,000 s.f. of new and adaptive-reuse construction. **The Town of Chatham should continue to support this facet of our community, providing for a range different artistic pursuits and attractions which fit our landscape and enhance our way of life.**

PS21. PS21 Performance Space.



GOAL R11: The Town of Chatham should continue to be a community which embraces and supports the arts.

Tying the Community Together. Lastly a familiar theme which was found among various stages of this planning process was one of strengthening the feeling of community. The many different community events which take place within the town and village—Crellin Park Day, Community Picnic, Chatham Children’s Garden Workday, July 4th Pancake Breakfast, Farmer’s & Makers Market, Easter Egg Hunt, OctoberFeast, Repair Cafe, and Farmer’s Daughter Gravel Grinder (to name a few)—are more than the sum of their parts. These activities don’t just give us something to do. They bring us together to build our community (figuratively, and sometimes quite literally building). They allow us to get to know each other, meet new people who have just



GOAL R12: Continue to grow and expand a variety of different community events for all ages which help bring us together and strengthen our sense of community.

moved to the area and some that have lived here for a very long time. The inclusive and welcoming nature of this is very helpful and nurtures good will and cohesiveness. We should continue to grow these events and traditions each year while considering new ones which might fill the spaces between.

We should also find ways to ensure that everyone is aware and made welcome to these activities in order for them to flourish. While not all of us have the time to volunteer to help seed or organize these local traditions, there is something you can do. The next time you step outside your door for a community event, consider inviting a neighbor or local acquaintance to join you. They'll appreciate it.

▼ **Community Events.** Chatham Village OctoberFeast, October 2nd, 2021.





PART III

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The following pages outline the specific steps and strategies necessary to implement and realize the goals of plan over the next decade.

Implementation of this plan will require strong leadership from the Town Board, with cooperation and assistance from the Planning Board, Zoning Board, local municipal departments, committees, as well as some outside organizations and agencies. Although this plan identifies priorities, it will be the decision of the Town Board to determine which steps to take when.

The individual strategies and tasks are organized as follows:

- ★ **Overall Town Priority.** This is a task or strategy which represents an overarching important priority for the town to complete.
- ★ **Topic Priority.** This is a task or strategy which is a priority within its topic.
- ☐ **Checkbox.** A “one-time” task, which once completed, can be marked as done.
- » **Arrow.** An “ongoing” task, which will need to be continuously worked on.

PLAN MAINTENANCE

In order for this plan to serve as a useful living document, it is important that it be referenced on a regular basis and used as a guide to help decision-making. It must also be periodically checked to see what progress has been made in advancing town goals and strategies, what steps have been completed, and what steps should be tackled next. As progress is made, we should make note of potential improvements and keep record of these so that when it comes time to update this plan once again, we have a record of work to start from.

- » The **Town Board** should designate an annual Comprehensive Plan review session, where the implementation strategies of this plan are reviewed to identify which have been completed, the remaining progress on others, and agree on next tasks to complete. The Town Board should notify and assign other boards, departments or committees of what they need to do to advance their tasks.
- » The **Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals and Building Departments** should each maintain an ongoing list of any issues or problems encountered in the normal executions of local town laws. This list should be used to identify potential code improvements to consider at the next appropriate town or zoning code update opportunity.
- » The **Town Board** should seek to update this Comprehensive Plan once again after not more than ten years.

TOWN BOARD

The following items represent tasks primarily under the control and leadership of the Town Board, including several overall town priorities. Many of these items will require the coordination and support of other boards, town staff, committees and/or related agencies.



□ **Zoning Update Phase I - General Update.** Provide a general zoning code update which addresses a number of outstanding issues and begins to address longer-term housing goals:

- Review and update the zoning code to add and define additional uses such as new housing types, agricultural supportive uses, child day care, urgent health clinic services, intensities of home occupations and other local needs. Include other emerging uses which may or may not be permitted (glamping, marijuana sales, etc). Clarify definitions for deficient or troublesome items. Update use schedule.
- Review and revise Special Use Permit provisions to determine if each use is suitable within the various zoning districts, should be continued, or if more suited to a simpler site plan review process. Update use definitions and design/performance criteria for each as necessary. Revise section to clarify and enhance procedures for public noticing and reviews to improve public transparency. Include requirements for electronic copies of proposal design documents to be made available by the applicant which can be posted online for public review.
- Update code to require notification of all property owners within 500 feet of any major subdivision applications, special use permit applications, or building department determinations. When notification letters are issued, town should also provide notice on website.
- Define a range of different levels of home occupations which can be permitted with commensurate levels of limitations and protections.
- Update hamlet district zoning to better enable mixed-use commercial and residential options.
- Update the zoning map to identify areas for potential expansion of existing business districts and reduce or eliminate parcels split by two or more zoning districts.
- Simplify and incentivize the conversion of pre-existing single-family residential to multi-family.
- Develop incentives for the creation of new rental properties which are not to be used as short-term rentals.
- Develop code which may permit a special exemption to allow on-farm housing.

TOWN BOARD, CONTINUED

- De-emphasize the use of minimum lot sizes in zoning and replace with dwelling units per acre calculations where applicable.
- Coordinate with the Housing Committee on other short-term zoning changes which can be implemented in this update.
- Ease restrictions on active farming operations to allow more diversification and operational flexibility.
- Ensure that land use regulations allow for a variety of agricultural, agricultural-accessory and supporting uses. Expand and define allowable uses which diversify or support local large equipment repair shop, meat processing slaughterhouse and mobile service, hydroponics, agri-tourism, etc as the local market may support.
- Remove zoning provisions that act as cultural or economic barriers to maintaining a diverse community, such as required screening of essential worker's machines, tools, trailers/trucks and materials. Review restrictions, permit requirements and fees for sheds and other such outbuildings.
- Strengthen provisions for violations of town and zoning codes, including potential additional remedies, fines or penalties.
- Consider incorporating recommendations from the 2017 Water Source Protection Plan.



- **Adopt a Local Law Regarding Solar Energy.** The local law should document and clarify the town's position regarding the use of solar energy systems, including strong encouragement for the use of solar energy for private residential, commercial and agricultural purposes for on-site consumption, without unnecessary burden, to increase our overall energy independence. The law should also seek to establish strict design performance standards for any installation systems designed for off-site consumption, and limit them to no more than 30 acres in size, prioritizing the use of rooftop installations, building integrated technology, the use of formerly developed land, hilly land, brownfields, former mines and landfills in lieu of development on agricultural lands or open space. This ordinance should also specify desired design requirements for any large solar installation to incorporate features such as animal-friendly fencing, retaining existing vegetation buffers and requiring rural hedgerow style screening (See image on page 67), as well as complete decommissioning plans.



- **Adopt a Local Law Providing Basic Regulatory Control and Procedures for the Continued Use of Short-Term Rentals.** The local law should provide clarity and reasonable expectations for their continued use, including a permitting/registration process, basic performance requirements, fines established by the Town Board for penalties, procedures for suspension or revocation of permit, and a review process by which the town board can

TOWN BOARD, CONTINUED

monitor the effectiveness of the system and re-visit the need for any changes or additional requirements after a two-year trial period.



- **Facilitate Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs).** Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's) should be considered an option for Chatham and the Town Board should review the zoning code with an eye toward facilitation of expanding ADU availability in the town.



- **Establish a Community Preservation Fund.** The Town of Chatham should develop a Community Preservation Plan to enable the formation of a Community Preservation Fund for referendum vote by the town residents. Such a fund would be used to collect funding for the future protection of prioritized farmland.




- **Zoning Update Phase II - Housing.** Implement strategic zoning changes which would allow and incentivize new housing types and densities to meet the growing needs of the area, particularly geared toward local seniors and younger families.


- Coordinate with the Village of Chatham on new zoning opportunities identified immediately in and around the village boundaries which can accommodate higher-density housing options. Create new districts or overlay areas outside the village to accommodate these uses in coordination with availability of extended water or sewer service from the village.
- Develop a special Conservation Subdivision code geared toward accommodating needed housing types, utilizing clusters and small cottage lot designs geared toward more income-inclusive housing, with inclusionary zoning requirements or incentives. Emphasis on dwelling units per acre calculations in lieu of minimum lot sizes to provide design flexibility and protect open space. Allow use of on or off-site community septic systems to increase density where possible, utilizing conserved land for septic field. Allow in Rural Lands 3 district to direct this growth around existing hamlet areas and away from more rural larger-lot areas.
- Investigate inclusion of a sunset provision on new special Conservation Subdivision code.
- Develop site planning design guidelines for multi-unit developments to protect the scenic character and natural resources of the site.
- Investigate options for rental preference being given to local employees, seniors, emergency responders and others identified as priority.
- For larger developments, promote or incentivize a mix of single-family and multifamily dwellings.
- Permit residents the ability to have a temporary dwelling unit (mobile home, camper, etc.) located on their property for special considerations such as needing alternate living space


TOWN BOARD, CONTINUED

while building/renovating a home or housing an on-site caregiver. Permit renewed every 1-2 years if necessary. After the need for the structure has passed, it may get approval as an Accessory Dwelling Unit provided it meets all planning and zoning requirements, otherwise it must be removed. These provisions should be made clear by the Building Department and should also be included in writing with the application materials.

- Review current size limitations on the ratio of house to accessory dwelling unit.
- Consider incorporating additional recommendations of the Housing Committee, including other housing goals not completed during Zoning Update Phase I.

 **Volunteer Firefighter Incentives.** Investigate and consider additional steps which the town can take to further incentivize and support volunteer firefighters and emergency responders, building off the recent Local Law adopted to provide Real Property Tax Exemptions for volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers.

 **Strengthen the Hamlets.** Support strengthening the character and safety of individual hamlets. Increase hamlet safety by continuing to deal with speeding issues. As part of this effort, investigate options for reducing the speed limit, consider providing each hamlet with multiple semi-permanent speed monitoring devices. Also consider the judicious use of enhanced patrols. The town should consider employing traffic calming measures like providing painted bike lanes or similar visual cues to narrow the perceived roadway width where allowed. Hamlet committee could be formed to organize signage and plantings as visual gateways. Review the current historic district protections to ensure that they are in alignment with the goals of the community. Allow each hamlet to suggest additional local protections that may be desired to meet their needs above and beyond any existing state or federal standards after conducting multiple, well-advertised hamlet-wide meetings. If a hamlet would like to proceed, the town board should consider their suggested zoning amendments.

 **Kinderhook Zoning.** Review the existing zoning in and around Kinderhook Lake to identify improvements which can be made to allow the zoning to more closely reflect the actual historic development patterns, including consideration of a new zoning district.

Develop Timber Harvesting Guidelines. The Town of Chatham recognizes that the timber resources in the town are a renewable resource, and that responsible management should be encouraged. The Town also recognizes that if timber harvesting practices are poorly carried out, they can result in significant environmental damage to the land, adjacent lands, water quality and Town Roads. To accomplish this the Town should consider a not unduly burdensome Timber Harvest Law.

Annual or Bi-annual Teamwork Summit. Arrange a regular meeting with local leaders

TOWN BOARD, CONTINUED

from adjacent municipalities and the county to discuss common issues we are each facing, identify overlapping goals and potential solutions which might be better tackled as a cooperative team effort to solve problems instead of each municipality trying to fix them individually.

- **Examine Feasibility of New Town Court.** Determine the feasibility of relocating Town Court functions from rented space in the village to newly created space within Town Hall or as an addition to Town Hall, to reduce operating costs and provide additional community space to host events, rented to residents of the town or village.
- **Develop and Promote More Community Events.** The Town of Chatham, in cooperation with other community organizations, should continue to host and organize a variety of different existing and new community events for all ages which will strengthen the sense of community, provide socialization opportunities, fun activities, and help to welcome new families.
- **Future Gravel Sources.** Review the existing gravel mine application and review process for necessary updates and corrections in anticipation of a new private gravel mine location being proposed. Investigate the feasibility of to the town sourcing its own municipal gravel.
- ★ □ **Adopt a Local Law Protecting Sensitive Ridgelines.** Adopt a local law which provides reasonable limitations and criteria for new development along and slightly below sensitive ridgelines, as identified “visible ridgelines” in the Ridgeline Identification map, dated 7-19-2017 by Community Planning & Environmental Associates (Refer to maps in Appendix) and to this end, update map or produce new Identified Visible Ridgelines map.
- **Community Recreation Center / YMCA.** Research the feasibility of a local Community Recreation Center/YMCA or similar shared regional facility. Reach a preliminary agreement to fund, site, construct and manage a local facility which provides age-diverse activities, multi-purpose space, flexible programming and a year-round swimming pool to serve as a central focal point of the community. This feasibility study should not be considered mutually exclusive from the study to expand the Town Hall and relocate the Town Court. It may be practical and fiscally advantageous to include space for Town offices in a Community Center and use the Town Hall to house the Court.
- **Equity & Diversity in Representation.** Investigate options for raising the salary of future board members and other incentives to make participating in these government positions more appealing and feasible to residents of all economic and social demographics who are typically shut out of governmental process.
- **Corridor Plan.** Develop long-range plans for primary transportation corridors such as Route 295, 203 or 66 to plan for their long term evolution.

TOWN BOARD, CONTINUED

- » Continue to leave the majority of existing dirt/gravel roads unpaved to maintain the rural character of the town. Identify repeatedly troublesome maintenance and/or safety problems on areas and roads which may be considered for limited or complete paving. Consider providing special public notice on the town’s website and on agendas and use an email blast to notify those interested in an opportunity to participate in a discussion at a town board meeting prior to any road paving decisions.
- » The town should continue supporting continued education for Highway Superintendents and road crews such as the Cornell Local Roads Program and additional training programs.
- » Continue to work toward the ongoing maintenance and updates of the Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan, either exclusively for the town or through a cooperative effort among Columbia County municipalities.
- » Partner and coordinate with regional non-profit housing organizations and agencies to help realize successful new housing typologies which meet the local housing needs of Chatham. Support the development of lower-cost living and working space options throughout the town.
- » Work to identify and prioritize the adaptive re-use of vacant or underutilized properties within the town for redevelopment using grant funding available through the “Restore NY” Communities Initiative. This funding source provides financial assistance to municipalities for the redevelopment of commercial and residential properties.
- » Consider establishment of PILOT programs to support local not-for-profit organizations.
- » Encourage and support activities that bring residents together at our parks and other public spaces.
- » Consider discussing no-party elections.

PLANNING BOARD & ZBA

- » The review boards should utilize the latest GIS maps and data, including online maps, available to assist them in making land use and project review decisions. The identification and protection of sensitive environmental resources should be an important part of any project review.
- » New plantings requested by the board for screening and vegetative buffers should use the Natural Vegetative Screening method described in the zoning update to replicate the natural, existing landscape of the area.
- » Maintain the existing nature and character of our relatively narrow, 2-lane country roads, in lieu of widening or paving to accommodate more vehicle traffic when practicable.
- » Encourage the adaptive re-use of historic structures, particularly in the hamlets.
- » Make careful consideration on the existing limitations of water and sewer in East Chatham when reviewing potential changes in that hamlet area.
- » The boards should encourage reduced site disturbance, the preservation of existing mature trees and vegetated areas which can provide natural screening, and design incorporation of existing site features such as hedgerows, stone walls and similar elements.
- » When reviewing applications for the proposed expansion or modification of farming operations and other ag-related business, the boards should allow flexibility in determining the appropriateness of the use. Consideration should include: If the new use is accessory and subordinate to the principal agricultural function of the land; If it does not interfere with or diminish current agricultural operations; If it does not substantially change the nature of potential impacts to surrounding properties above those experienced from agricultural/farming operation.
- » During project reviews and local road projects, consider design changes to better accommodate the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists.
- » During project reviews of larger residential subdivisions, senior housing, retirement or nursing home facilities, ensure that adequate open space, parks, gardens and walking paths are included which are commensurate with the scale of the facility.
- » In a collaborative effort, the Planning Board and Climate Smart Committee should write for Town Board approval a list of elements that residents may consider that help limit environmental impacts throughout the site development process. For example, minimizing land disturbance areas, keeping existing vegetation for screening, using native plants in landscaping and reducing light pollution.

TOWN STAFF & DEPARTMENTS

- ★ **Government Processes.** Provide a centralized source of information explaining important town government processes for the public on issues such as review and approval procedures to increase awareness, education and transparency. This information should be easily accessible, covering topics such as building permits, applications for site plan review, special use permits, variances, etc. Should include process flow charts, timelines, contact info and FAQ's covering each topic. Encourage public education and participation early on in any review process.
- ★ **Dirt/Gravel Road Maintenance.** Use Best Management Practices (BMP) for road maintenance, and for dust and sediment control. The town should continue supporting continued education for Highway Superintendents and road crews through available training programs. Seek grant funding to assist with these improvements.
- Advocacy Group.** Create an advocacy program to supply knowledgeable volunteers to help walk residents through town permitting processes including help filling out applications, help finding maps and any needed professional services and to attend meetings/hearings with them if needed.
- Leave No Resident Behind.** Begin a “Leave No Resident Behind“ program, helping willing residents understand any upcoming legislation that might affect them or their area of town, attempting to partner with residents rather than “leave them behind”. Proactively reach out to potentially impacted areas of town to host an informational town board meeting and provide contact information where they can learn more about what is being considered early in the discussion process.
- Centralized Information Source.** Work to develop a centralized source of information regarding upcoming community events, activities and services which is readily accessible and easy to use for young and old alike. Consider collaborating with the village. Continue to share information about community-based local events and news. Consider including contact info for local schools, libraries.
- History.** Expand the History section of the town website to help inform and educate residents and visitors about the history of Chatham. Include an overall brief history of Chatham, including the history of each of the hamlets, eventually narrowing it down to specific historic buildings across the town and village. A link to this webpage should be included in a welcoming email to new homeowners.
- » Continue pursuing funding opportunities from local, county, state and federal programs with the assistance of a dedicated grant writer.

ARTS, RECREATION & CULTURE



- **Parks Plan & Capital Budget.** Update the Parks & Recreation Plan with a long-term maintenance and budget forecast to identify how the town plans to sufficiently maintain current facilities, prioritizing the cleanup and maintenance of existing features. This should identify what facilities and program operations the town is realistically able to maintain going forward. The analysis should include assessing potential alternatives for collecting user fees for non-residents to help offset current budget constraints, and identifying any elements which the town can no longer support or prefers to contract with an outside provider.
- **Recreation Liaison.** The Parks & Recreation Committee should add liaisons from the village and the school to improve overall communication and coordination.
 - » Pursue a combination of grant funding, private donations and sponsorships to fund any new facilities and requested enhancements at Crellin Park in lieu of utilizing the Town Budget.
 - » The Town of Chatham should consider collaborating with PS21, Morris Memorial and the Village of Chatham to identify, fund and construct larger capital recreation improvements at Crellin Park and other locations which help to meet the needs of the larger community. Potential projects include an expanded trail network that would link PS21, Crellin Park and the village, swimming pool, adventure playground or adding new active recreation activities or programs. New recreational features, if to be maintained by the town, should be provided adequate budget for time, maintenance and personnel in advance to ensure their proper care.
 - » Coordinate between the town, local school districts and activity groups to identify potential facility sharing and cross-programming which can provide a more robust offering.
 - » Work toward connecting multi-modal links between Crellin Park, the Village, and other areas such as Chatham High School and Middle School.

FARMING & AGRICULTURE

- ★ **Adopt Updated Agricultural Protection Plan.** Incorporating the findings and input from the Community Preservation Plan, adopt an update to the Agricultural Protection Plan.
 - » Coordinate with area schools and regional programs such as BOCES and 4-H to help get younger students more interested, knowledgeable and active in the roles of local agriculture.
 - » Reference the most recent Agriculture Protection Plan for relevant information.
 - » Assist with the coordination of ideas and policies between the comprehensive plan and the agriculture protection plan as each are updated periodically.

ENERGY & INFRASTRUCTURE

- ★ **Climate Smart Certification.** The Town of Chatham should work to achieve Silver certification in the New York Climate Smart Communities Program, and continue to work toward maintaining and raising participation in this process.
 - » Consider the adoption of fossil-fuel reduction goals.
 - » Continue to encourage the use of private clean-energy solutions such as solar power for on-site residential and commercial applications and energy reduction strategies.
 - » Update strategies and goals as new climate change data and information may become available.
 - » With the Broadband Committee also taking on the topic of cellular service, continue to lobby the regional utility providers to expand broadband Internet and wireless cellular coverage within the town to provide modernized services while minimizing visual impact on community character.

SENIORS & PRIVATE SECTOR GROUPS



- » Work to enhance and organize the voice and local support for the Office of the Aging to increase awareness of their services and efforts, increase the number of active supporters and more effectively lobby for community changes which better address the needs of seniors. This effort should be designed to more effectively tap into the potential provided by this growing demographic. Efforts can be focused on improving local emergency healthcare options, transportation options, as well as increased awareness and participation in the Neighbors of Northern Columbia County and similar programs.
- » Work toward the creation of a local or regional citizens group which is dedicated to lobbying and outreach efforts to attract the desired types of housing needed in Chatham. This effort would include outreach to regional housing groups, agencies, developers and advocacy groups to identify desired housing models and find ways to attract that development to the greater Chatham area, including Chatham Village and surrounding towns. This work could help inform the parallel zoning updates.
- » Work toward the development of a grassroots campaign of promoting more local businesses to provide goods and services which directly serve the local population, in lieu of residents having to travel out of town to shop for the things they need. As part of this effort, it is recommended that a survey be conducted to identify what goods and services are most desired locally, and the using this information to discuss with volunteering business owners how they might adapt to filling this need, what obstacles they face, and avenues for improvement. One or two potential “experiment” businesses could begin to act as a catalyst for a larger growing and marketing effort, in exchange for increased visibility / exposure.
- » Conduct outreach efforts at our school and with senior groups.
- » Develop a Free-Store to share clothes /food.

Town of Chatham Goals - Summary Reference

Goal	Topic / Description	Page
OUR COMMUNITY		
O1	Chatham should strive to maintain a more diverse balance of age and income groups, with housing options, jobs and amenities which attract and retain people from many generational and socio-economic backgrounds.	15
O2	Chatham should be a welcoming community which values equity, diversity and inclusion for people of all cultures, races, ethnicities and backgrounds.	15
O3	Work closely with the Village of Chatham and surrounding towns to identify common problems and goals where we can help each other.	15
O4	Adopt a zoning update to address new use types, refined definitions, special permit uses and other technical deficiencies.	15
O5	Revise and update the Special Use Permits section of the zoning to provide additional controls, public notices and procedures for the public to be aware of, and participate in, the review process. Review existing special permit uses for suitability.	16
O6	Ensure adequate and clear communications between the town and residents to provide information on available local services, amenities, attractions, public hearings, development review processes and similar public info.	16
O7	Improve awareness, clarity and transparency of important town government processes with helpful information about approval procedures, permits, flow charts, timelines, contact info and FAQs to help empower residents.	16
COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND NATURAL RESOURCES		
C1	Chatham's land use regulations should protect working landscapes as well as other open spaces including forests and wildlife habitats.	18
C2	Maintain and protect the existing natural, scenic and rural character of Chatham.	19
C3	First look to direct future growth and density in and around the already established settlement areas of the village and hamlets to limit impact on more rural areas.	19
C4	Prioritize opportunities for adaptive re-use of existing vacant or underutilized properties and buildings.	20
C5	Maintain the existing standard minimum lot sizes and residential density of our more rural lands while developing special provisions to accommodate more creative housing solutions where denser development may be permitted.	20
C6	Utilize Conservation Subdivision design to accommodate and incentivize specific housing types needed in the community which require denser lot arrangements. Review the existing Conservation Subdivision code to ensure it provides adequate design guidance to applicants and review boards.	21
C7	Include growth management caps in new Conservation Subdivision codes.	21
C8	Protect community character and viewsheds with limitations and criteria for new development on and slightly below sensitive ridgelines utilizing updated ridgeline mapping.	22
C9	Review the Special Permit Uses and their requirements to ensure they are adequately protecting community character.	22
C10	Identify improvements to the Special Use Permit notification and review process to increase public education and participation in the review process.	22
C11	Maintain the rural character and scale of existing local roadways in lieu of widening to accommodate increased traffic levels or development.	22

Town of Chatham Goals - Summary Reference

Goal	Topic / Description	Page
C12	Leave existing dirt/gravel roads unpaved except as necessary to address troublesome maintenance areas—or in extenuating circumstances, roads—after appropriate public notice at a Town Board meeting.	23
C13	Revisit and update the 2017 “Report by the Committee on Roads” ensuring that a broad spectrum of residents are involved and that the highway superintendent has an equal seat at the table.	23
C14	Consider implementing a corridor plan for major transportation routes in and out of Chatham which explores opportunities for future economic, business and housing growth.	24
C15	Work to promote and educate both residents and visitors about the history of Chatham.	24
FARMING		
F1	Increase options for profitability and diversification on agricultural properties.	27
F2	Reinforce and fill gaps in the supporting agricultural network.	27
F3	Develop multiple sources to fund farmland conservation.	27
F4	The Chatham community should support local farming and agriculture by adapting to new uses, methods and technologies that farms may need to transition to.	27
F5	Continue to allow active farms to pursue alternative energy systems for on-site use without undue burden.	28
F6	Larger solar installations designed for off-site energy consumption, if permitted, should be directed away from agricultural land.	29
F7	Provide creative avenues for working farms to generate additional income while protecting community character and the environment.	29
F8	Identify policy or regulatory provisions which should be changed to maximize farm productivity and flexibility as part of a farm-friendly audit.	30
F9	Identify and encourage agricultural supporting businesses to locate within the town and in areas where they would be most appropriate.	31
F10	Encourage the development of programs and work with schools to increase awareness, interest, knowledge and participation in the traditional field of farming and similar trades.	32
F11	A brochure prepared by the equine community could be made available at the town hall and other venues that explains how landowners may partner with the equine community to allow trail riding and/or fox and rabbit hunting on their lands.	33
F12	Continue to pursue farmland conservation through easements and Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) agreements.	34
F13	Continue to pursue grant funding through the NYS Farmland Implementation Grants Program.	34
F14	Continue to work to establish funding for farmland preservation through an adopted Community Preservation Fund.	36
F15	Provide timber harvesting guidelines based on sound and established forestry management practices to ensure long-term forest sustainability.	36
F16	The town board and others should reference the most current Agriculture Protection Plan and Comprehensive Plan, and continue to coordinate between these two documents to keep them in sync.	36

Town of Chatham Goals - Summary Reference

Goal	Topic / Description	Page
SENIORS		
S1	Chatham should be a community which welcomes and embraces our aging population.	37
S2	Permit and encourage a more diverse selection of housing types.	38
S3	Permit and encourage more accessory dwelling units.	38
S4	Modify the zoning to enable and encourage more senior housing, assisted living and nursing home capacity in the greater Chatham area, including coordination with neighboring towns, where it can blend into the character of the area.	38
S5	Allow for a small urgent health clinic to provide quick-response medical services.	39
S6	Develop or support a centralized source for all community information on upcoming events, activities and services which is readily accessible and easy to use.	40
S7	Pursue options and grant funding for the development of a local Community Recreation Center or YMCA which would provide multi-purpose space, flexible programming, and a year-round swimming pool.	41
S8	Continue to coordinate with county and regional agencies to improve transportation options to longer-range destinations such as Albany and Hudson.	41
S9	The Town of Chatham should support and encourage alternative modes of transportation, including walking and biking paths, public transit, ride-share options and increased awareness and expansion of the Neighbors of Northern Columbia County program and promotion of the Columbia County Health Care Consortium's Children and Adults Rural Transportation Service to help provide more diverse transportation options for local seniors.	42
S10	Collaborate with the Village of Chatham and adjacent municipalities to take on efforts which the Town of Chatham may not have the influence or resources to complete alone.	42
S11	Ensure that future improvements to address the needs of seniors are designed and located to be sensitive to the scenic rural character of the community.	42
YOUNG FAMILIES		
Y1	The town should continue to provide or promote a variety of local community events, activities and socialization opportunities which bring the community together.	44
Y2	Investigate the option of a community recreation center which could provide a variety of year-round activities. This may or may not include a swimming pool, which could be looked at as part of a separate feasibility analysis.	44
Y3	Investigate safer routes to Crellin Park.	44
Y4	Enable more housing options which are accessible and affordable to younger families and the local workforce.	45
Y5	Enabling and encourage more child care options throughout the town.	45
Y6	Create an easily accessible, centralized source of local information for both young and old residents.	45

Town of Chatham Goals - Summary Reference

Goal	Topic / Description	Page
HOUSING		
H1	Allow for more diverse housing types throughout the town with options that address availability and the affordability spectrum for all stages of life..	47
H2	Closely collaborate with the Village of Chatham to explore housing options.	49
H3	Identify areas in the immediate surrounding vicinity of the Village of Chatham for rezoning to accommodate additional housing options, working toward a coordinated effort where possible.	50
H4	Pursue the potential to extend existing water and sewer services from the Village into the town to help support new housing options where appropriate.	50
H5	Identify ways the zoning could be updated to accommodate increased residential density and more mixed-use options within the hamlets.	50
H6	Chatham's land use regulations should continue to support the historic patterns of growth with higher densities in and around the established village and hamlet centers, and relatively lower density in the more open and rural areas while accommodating additional housing opportunities throughout the town.	51
H7	Adopt a local law providing basic regulatory control, clarity, reasonable expectations and procedures for the use of STR's within the town.	51
H8	Develop a voluntary incentive option where new apartments can be created in exchange for agreement that they cannot be used for short-term rental.	51
H9	Reduce barriers to the creation of Accessory Dwelling Units.	52
H10	Develop zoning where the conversion of existing single-family homes into multi-family is incentivized with less obstacles.	53
H11	Create a method for single-lot exemptions allowing property owners a "one time" option to create a smaller and more affordable housing parcel from their land.	53
H12	Update the zoning to identify, define and include a wider variety of housing types which are designed for more affordable living.	53
H13	Incentivize the creation of the type of housing Chatham needs, including young workforce housing, starter homes and senior apartments.	54
H14	Provide inclusionary zoning incentives or requirements in future zoning code updates.	55
H15	Work collaboratively with local and regional housing agencies and not for profit groups to help realize improved housing affordability where opportunities permit, taking advantage of programs which will help to create housing types for seniors, first time homebuyers and long-term rental units.	55
H16	Identify and prioritize the adaptive re-use of vacant, underutilized properties for new development.	55
H17	New housing options should focus on meeting the needs of the local population.	56
H18	Pursue a mechanism for rental housing preference being given to local seniors, emergency responders and local employees.	56

Town of Chatham Goals - Summary Reference

Goal	Topic / Description	Page
THE HAMLETS		
T1	Protect and maintain the existing historic character and charm of the hamlet areas.	58
T2	Ensure that new buildings and construction within the historic districts are conducted with a sensitivity which is outwardly in keeping with surrounding homes and buildings.	58
T3	Hamlet centers should be provided with pedestrian amenities which enhance and promote walkability, safety while working to decrease vehicle speeds through sensitive and subtle traffic calming measures.	58
T4	Provide multiple radar devices in the hamlets with enhanced patrol presence.	58
T5	Pursue the ability for the town to legally set speed limits on town roads.	59
T6	Protect and restore the natural resources and habitats of Chatham and recognize how they played an important part in the early settlement of the area.	59
T7	Investigate the potential for water and/or sewer service in East Chatham to address deficiencies.	59
T8	The town should continue to provide or promote a variety of local community events, activities and socialization opportunities which bring the community together.	60
T9	Update zoning to better enable small neighborhood shops and mixed-use buildings in the hamlets which are compatible with the local scale and character.	60
T10	Coordinate with the Kinderhook Lake Corporation to create a Kinderhook Lake Watershed Environmental Protection Overlay District to improve water quality and reduce aquatic invasive species.	60
T11	Investigate the creation of a new zoning district which is more appropriately suited to the existing Kinderhook Lake development patterns.	60
BUSINESS AND JOBS		
B1	Review allowed uses within the zoning to identify where improvements could be made that better support small local business and enhance the viability of low-impact home occupations.	62
B2	Prioritize the adaptive re-use of existing buildings, and discourage development of "chain" or "big box" stores which undermine the character of the town.	62
B3	Work cooperatively with the village to support commercial and mixed-use growth in and around the village center.	63
B4	Investigate options to expand existing business districts to provide jobs and to strengthen the tax base.	63
B5	Provide more diverse and affordable housing options to support a local workforce.	63
B6	Consider establishing PILOT programs to help support local not-for-profit organizations.	63
B7	Reach out and work with the local business community as part of a grassroots movement to promote more businesses to serve local needs	64

Town of Chatham Goals - Summary Reference

Goal	Topic / Description	Page
ENERGY & INFRASTRUCTURE		
E1	Document and clarify the town's position on all solar energy systems with a local solar ordinance.	66
E2	Encourage the use of solar energy and other renewable systems for private, on-site use to work toward becoming a community which is energy independent.	66
E3	The town should look for grant funding and other opportunities which would assist in the town-wide transition to meet the State's renewable energy and climate change mitigation goals.	66
E4	Define and establish explicit performance standards for moderately sized off-site community solar installations.	66
E5	Prioritize the use of building rooftops, formerly developed land, brownfields, former mines, landfills and hilly terrain over the use of natural open space or agricultural land.	67
E6	Prohibit solar energy systems which exceed the 30 acre maximum size permitted for community solar.	67
E7	Continually search for funding opportunities which would assist interested mid to lower-income residents transition to renewable energy sources.	68
E8	Investigate the viability of additional renewable energy systems and how these could be codified in local laws, including small wind and hydroelectric energy sources.	68
E9	Continue to advance the Town of Chatham's participation in, and certification level of, the Climate Smart Communities Program.	69
E10	Develop recommendations to foster waste recycling, reuse and composting.	69
E11	The Town should consider goals for fossil fuel reduction and continue to investigate additional EV charging station infrastructure.	70
E12	The Invasives Species Awareness Committee should educate residents so they can identify and are aware of the impacts of some of the most prolific and troublesome invasive species. Encourage mitigation activities for the public and practice them on town property.	70
E13	To help fund the control of both terrestrial and aquatic invasive species, the town should look into DEC's Invasive Species Grant Program.	70
E14	Implement the recommendations of the Columbia County Hazard Mitigation Plan and maintain an active role in future mitigation planning to become a more resilient community.	71
E15	The town should continue monitoring culverts to ensure they are working properly and refer to the Road Stream Crossing Management Plan.	71
E16	A culvert prioritization / replacement / addition program should be developed and maintained by the Highway Department.	71
E17	Review the processes for review and approval of any gravel mine in preparation for future mine applications.	72
E18	The town should support continued education for the Highway Superintendent and highway staff, such as the Cornell Local Roads Program and other additional training opportunities.	72
E19	Continue to investigate ways the town can help support volunteer recruitment and fundraising efforts for local volunteer fire departments and emergency services.	73
E20	Support the efforts of the Broadband and Cell Service Committee to continue working with regional utilities to support growth and expansion of cellphone and broadband Internet coverage in the Town of Chatham.	74

Town of Chatham Goals - Summary Reference

Goal	Topic / Description	Page
E21	Continue work to complete the town's Capital Improvement Plan, and maintain an updated plan going forward.	74
E22	Investigate the feasibility of accommodating town court functions in Town Hall, either as an addition or in lieu of the current offices there.	74
RECREATION, ARTS & CULTURE		
R1	Chatham should be home to a variety of recreational options which encourage residents of all ages and abilities to actively participate in indoor and outdoor activities which enhance their physical, emotional and social well being and promote a healthy lifestyle.	75
R2	The town should continue to maintain and improve the trail system at Crellin Park and those connecting the park with PS21.	75
R3	Investigate the feasibility of building a new trail linking Crellin Park with the Village of Chatham as a priority to increase accessibility and safety for students as well as other parkgoers.	75
R4	Update the Parks & Recreation Plan, including a long-term maintenance and budget projection to identify what the town is committing to manage and the feasibility of potential user fee collection options.	77
R5	Identify additional responsibilities which the town is no longer able to maintain which can be instead managed by private sector, not-for-profit or sponsorship groups.	77
R6	Prioritize the cleanup and maintenance of existing park facilities.	77
R7	Include the projected future maintenance time and costs associated with new recreational improvements so that they can be properly budgeted and planned for in advance.	77
R8	The town should pay for future recreational improvements using a combination of funding sources including grants, donations and possibly user fees for non-residents in-lieu of increased taxes where possible.	77
R9	Improve coordination and communication between the town, village, schools and Parks & Recreation Committee to help advance common recreation goals.	78
R10	Collaborate with PS21, Morris Memorial, the Village of Chatham and similar entities to help fund larger capital recreation and cultural improvements.	78
R11	The Town of Chatham shall continue to be a community which embraces and supports the arts.	79
R12	Continue to grow and expand a variety of different community events for all ages which help bring us together and strengthen our sense of community.	80

APPENDIX

(Separate Attachment)

- A. Inventory Maps
- B. 2021 Community Survey Report
- C. Meeting Notes and Public Comments
- D. Road Stream Crossing Management Plan
- E. Water Protection Plan

Prepared by:



P.O. BOX 892
Dorset, Vermont 05251
518-496-3009
info@regrowthplanning.com

