

Almost two decades later, the *Rural Guilderland* document is more relevant than ever.

The “Community Vision” presented in the 2005 Rural Guilderland: Open Space and Farmland Protection Plan (hereafter, RG) commanded an ever-increasing adherence and urgency over the ensuing years. [Our group] fully endorses the “Concepts for Conservation” and the “Concepts for Development” expressed in this document.

Connect our recreation assets in one long, arcing corridor. We urge the creation of a “Rural Greenway and Trail System” (RG 2-3), that would link the Town’s recreational assets from Albany Country Club through Nott Road Park, Western Turnpike Golf Course, Tawasentha Park, Vosburgh Road trail system and Keenholts Park to the Watervliet Reservoir. Important historic sites along this imagined corridor, such as the Nott Mansion, the Guilderland Glass House and the Battle of the Normanskill should be afforded special prominence. The means of connection would most likely be acquisition of intervening parcels and/or establishing easement agreements with landholders for trails of different sorts.

Maintain the unique character of our traditional settlements. In the same section of RG, we find this statement, which continues to resonate deeply: “The compact settlement pattern of the town’s rural historic hamlets should be maintained and a countryside greenbelt around hamlets should be preserved” (RG 2-3). To maintain the sense of place and community cohesion of the traditionally rural localities of Guilderland (Altamont, Guilderland Center, and other smaller hamlets), these areas should indeed be surrounded by a greenbelt, before they are swallowed up in residential development. This could be accomplished by creating special zoning around them; for example, by imposing R-5 zoning (where it does not already exist) for all parcels falling within a certain distance of the outer bounds of these two communities. The need for a five-acre minimum lot size for the entirety of western Guilderland was a topic that surfaced repeatedly in our discussions. The recommendation to “Provide greenbelt areas around hamlets and between developments and settlements” in RG (4-7) returns to this topic in more specific terms: “open space or greenbelts provide relief between settled areas and help each hamlet or settlement maintain its unique identity as an individual place”; this is a position [we fully support.]

Allow limited development. We likewise endorse the sections appealing to the Town to “maintain roadside rural character” and “allow *limited* new development that is *consistent with* Rural Guilderland character” (RG 2-4). Our discussion about “cluster” developments that would keep open space open and that would benefit from the infrastructure, when available, of municipal water and sewer, seems to follow the same lines of thinking found in this section of RG (2-4): “New country hamlets should be focused in areas with existing water and sewer infrastructure supply. They should be sited in locations that connect to existing development” (RG 2-4). However, despite frequent reference to “cluster” style development, no one in our group was aware of any examples of this form of residential development within Guilderland. Our group also acknowledged that extending this infrastructure beyond its current reach does little more than encourage the encroachment of suburban development in an area that wishes to remain rural.

Minimize intensity of new development. Unlike the original RG position on development intensity, we believe a radical re-zoning of the entire “valley” (the term used in RG), which

currently is zoned RA-3, should be rezoned to RA-5. In this sense, we go beyond the 2005 recommendations in urging a much less intensive development, *in addition to* maintaining a clear and strong commitment to preserving farmlands and forested areas through conservation easements, tax relief and other similar policies. “The development intensity allowed by the town’s current zoning ordinance... should be reduced to more closely match the capacity of the environment and the community’s vision for appropriate growth” was argued in RG (4-9). Either this recommendation was ignored in 2005, or implementation was ineffectual, because in the 18 years since the publication of RG, residents of western Guilderland feel the incursion of new residential developments and the pressure they place on roadways and infrastructure more severely than ever.

New proposals for development of larger tracts of land should be required to maintain mature trees wherever possible. Use of eminent domain for the benefit of private businesses should be vetted in a public forum to determine if such is considered in the best interests of the community.

Historic Sites

We recommend the comprehensive plan address the repair and maintenance of historic sites owned by the Town of Guilderland: Mynderse Frederick House, Schoolcraft House and The Ballet Barn. Resources should be dedicated to preserving these structures. If the town invests in these sites, the Mynderse Frederick and Schoolcraft houses may be suited to events similar to those at Cherry Hill in Albany. Some events are free, but others would have a fee, such as tasting events. Mynderse Frederick gardens are maintained by the Guilderland Garden Club, perhaps smaller gardens could be established at the Schoolcraft House. This could be a joint effort between the garden club and the historical society. The Town would need to provide resources to purchase plants for a garden at the Schoolcraft House. Some perennials would be available for transfer from the Mynderse Frederick house.

As the historic sites are under the purview of Parks and Recreation, information about the properties should be listed in the Town website under Parks and Recreation. As programs develop, the site would be updated with events. The Garden Club has a holiday event each year. This should be advertised on the Town Website.

Alternatively, the Town website could add a link to provide information about the town history and historic sites. This would provide a place to list the various historic markers that are found throughout Guilderland.