

Planning Prospects for 2008

By: Roger P. Akeley, Commissioner of Planning

Several larger forces that will help to shape our communities have been experiencing notable changes this past year, including the slowdown of the housing market, shake-ups in the mortgage industry, and increased environmental awareness marked by widespread acknowledgement of the impacts of climate change.

How our communities in Dutchess County will fare in the upcoming years depends, in part, on the work we are all doing now to properly plan for balancing economic growth while preserving our important natural surroundings. One advantage of being your Commissioner of Planning is that I can look through a county-wide lens to see how we are approaching these issues.

RECENT TRENDS

In reviewing planning initiatives throughout the County over the last few years, the following four trends emerged:

#1: Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

Local planners and environmental advocates spend considerable time with our GIS staff and Cornell Cooperative Extension's Environment Program to use detailed environmental and property data for determining viewsheds, open space corridors, and other relevant planning information considered inaccessible to the public just a few years ago.

#2: New Town Centers

The most dramatic example of this has been the LaGrange initiative to promote a Town Center in Freedom Plains. This is a mixed-use district that allows creative, village-like development with housing up to 12 units per acre. The recent rezoning will, in effect, allow LaGrange to grow the first new village-scale development in Dutchess County since the coming of the railroads in the 1850s. Beekman and East Fishkill are also considering town center approaches.



LaGrange: Original Town Center Illustrative Plan incorporated into the LaGrange Comprehensive Plan.

[Click Here](#) to view project website

#3: Priority Growth Areas

Hyde Park was the first community to begin to incorporate the priority growth area approach in its 2005 plan and zoning. This approach focuses development potential in favored, “smart” locations, while restricting it in environmentally-sensitive or agricultural areas. Red Hook, Rhinebeck, and the Town of Poughkeepsie are other localities using this approach. For example, Poughkeepsie has designated the Crown Heights and Fairview neighborhoods as priority growth centers.

#4: Biodiversity as a Planning Element

The trend is to view ourselves as being part of nature, not above it. This results from an ecological view of the world based on a sense of interdependence and reverence for all forms of life. Several localities, beginning with East Fishkill, have commissioned “biodiversity” studies to help them understand environmental interrelationships and to foster development policies that will identify and protect critical habitats. This fits in to the priority growth center concept as we seek compact “human habitats” to coexist with outlying areas that should see limited or no development.

COUNTY PLANNING INITIATIVES

These trends correspond with work we are doing here at the Department of Planning and Development. There are three County planning activities I would like to emphasize:

Local Centers and Greenspaces Maps

Working with the towns of Red Hook, Rhinebeck, and Poughkeepsie, as well as the City of Beacon, our department has created model “Centers and Greenspaces” plan maps. They identify potential development areas within walking distance of existing and emerging centers, while at the same time showing priority natural and agricultural greenspaces for long-term protection.

These maps also show major floodplain and wetlands systems, steep slopes, major greenway trails, and transit corridors. The County would like to make a baseline Centers and Greenspaces working map for each town and city and submit it for local review and modification. Some communities may then choose to incorporate the map into future planning processes.



Red Hook and Rhinebeck Centers and Greenspaces map. The Red Hook version was created by an Intermunicipal Task force for the Town and two villages. [Click Here](#) for larger view

County Centers and Greenspaces Strategy

We are simultaneously working on a first-cut draft Centers and Greenspaces map for the entire County. This draft map provides county-level GIS information and planning projections on overall landscape corridors, Greenway systems, and settlement patterns. Initial results give us a pretty good picture of the most important agricultural areas, significant habitats, and the best

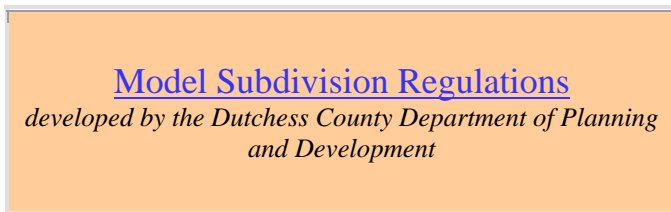
areas to concentrate new development within Dutchess County. The current draft shows approximately 75 neighborhood centers (city), villages, hamlets, and emerging centers in Dutchess County.

As communities renew their local plans, the digital version of the countywide map will be updated with current, more accurate information, including detailed illustrative site plans for certain priority growth centers.

Local Subdivision Procedures with a "Fit-It-In" Component

These model subdivision procedures will allow some basic fact-finding and dialog between the planning board and potential subdivider before any serious private money is spent on a survey or other site planning requirements. These procedures have been presented at a Dutchess County Planning Federation workshop and are available on the Department of Planning and Development's website. The towns of Hyde Park and Poughkeepsie have already adopted regulations similar to the model prepared by Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development.

Our lead planners will contact each community in 2008 to discuss how the above work can be adapted to local conditions. For interested municipalities, we will offer the support necessary to help develop new Centers and Greenspaces maps and make suggestions regarding local subdivision regulations. The proposed subdivision amendment, by itself, is a good start to protecting the natural and agricultural values of Dutchess County. It will be a positive planning achievement if most communities work to augment their existing subdivision regulations in 2008.



For More Information

[Full Article on Model Subdivision Regulations](#)
(showcased in the January 2007 DCPF eNewsletter)

[LaGrange Town Center Project Website](#)

[Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development – Homepage](#)

[CLICK HERE](#) to view past issues of the DCPF's newsletter, *Plan On It*.

This newsletter was developed by the Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development, in conjunction with the Dutchess County Planning Federation.

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