

# ROCKLAND TOMORROW: Rockland County Comprehensive Plan

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

March 1, 2011



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*ROCKLAND COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN*

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# ROCKLAND COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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### INTRODUCTION

PLANNING is a process of formulating both a vision and the strategies to achieve that vision. Comprehensive plans formalize the planning process and provide guidance for a community's future. In 2006, Rockland County made the decision to develop a comprehensive plan to (1) guide future municipal planning and zoning actions and (2) serve as the master tool for the management of Rockland's development and preservation patterns and the provision of public services over the next decade. The active process encompassed a 19-month effort, incorporating ideas and recommendations of County and municipal officials, residents, business owners, various planning agencies, County department commissioners, interest groups, as well as collaboration with the Rockland County Comprehensive Plan Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). Extensive input from Rockland residents was obtained from four public workshops, a public scoping session and two public hearings. The Comprehensive Plan was prepared in conjunction with these public participation and outreach efforts to assure that public opinion and input were an integral part of the planning process and the final recommendations. The Plan's final vision and recommendations draw on the results of these action steps, as well as public comments received through an interactive, up-to-date project website.

The Comprehensive Plan provides municipalities and other policy makers with a regional overview in order to make sense of the larger forces shaping growth and development throughout the county. While the vision and recommendations are intended to help guide the future of Rockland, the Plan is not, in and of itself, a regulation. Under State law, the power to make land use and zoning decisions rests with Rockland's towns and villages. However, gaining an understanding of how land use patterns and policies throughout the county work in the aggregate can help local planning and zoning officials identify and avoid potential land use conflicts along borders, encourage intermunicipal cooperation, and learn about development trends within each town and village that might affect localized land use decisions. In addition, the Comprehensive Plan can guide future capital budget decisions to be made for County facilities and programs, and provide a reference for State and Federal expenditures within Rockland.

This Executive Summary provides highlights of the Comprehensive Plan; for full and explicit understanding of the Plan's goals, principles, and recommendations, it is necessary to refer to the complete version of *Rockland Tomorrow: Rockland County Comprehensive Plan*.

## **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN VISION**

The Comprehensive Plan seeks to preserve what residents love about Rockland. At the same time, it addresses the very real challenges facing the county, including the provision of affordable housing, job retention and creation, traffic congestion, preservation of the natural and scenic qualities of the Hudson River and county, provision of adequate infrastructure, and preservation of open space and other environmental resources. The Plan recognizes Rockland's historical suburban development patterns, the importance of abundant open space and scenic vistas, and the central role of the automobile in suburban living. Toward these ends, the Plan's vision can be interpreted as a three-part strategy to guide land use patterns: Conservation, Centers, and Corridors and Clusters. This strategy can be seen throughout this document in helping to preserve or otherwise improve the quality of life for the county's residents in the coming decades.

### ***Conservation***

The Plan supports conservation of the 90% to 95% of Rockland's land area that exists outside its commercial centers and corridors, including the single-family suburban landscapes, parks and farmland, physical and visual access to the Hudson River, and other natural and environmental resources. Within this conservation area, there may be single sites and properties that are optimal for redevelopment and revitalization efforts; the Plan supports efforts to enhance these sites, as consistent with local zoning and planning policies.

### ***Centers***

In order to protect against out-of-scale development elsewhere in Rockland, a key focus of the Plan is to reinforce Rockland's existing centers, defined here as an area's commercial or mixed-use focal point. As part of this strategy, the Plan encourages a mix of uses in these areas, including office, retail, residential, recreation and entertainment.

### ***Corridors and Clusters***

There are several commercial corridors and office and industrial clusters in Rockland that provide a major job base as well as retail and community services. The Plan does not encourage expanding the existing commercial corridors and clusters, but does see the preservation, redevelopment, and enhancement of these areas as essential to the economic well-being of Rockland.

## **GOALS OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

THE ROCKLAND COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN is based on the following goals, which express the County's vision for its future and underlie the Plan's approach to decision-making. Overall, the goals emphasize a balanced economy with employment opportunities, the reinforcement of centers, the conservation and enhancement of existing neighborhoods, the need for housing options, and the preservation of open space.

### ***Land Use and Sustainability:***

- Conserve open space.
- Promote conservation (cluster) subdivision design to help conserve valuable and sensitive open space.



- Reinforce existing county centers through investment in infrastructure and housing, and support of businesses.
- Foster and maintain well-designed business and industrial corridors and clusters.
- Encourage smart growth, while preserving quality-of-life and existing community and neighborhood character.
- Acknowledge the impact of climate change on planning and County operations. Develop strategies for County departments to explore sustainable development measures and “green” technology to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change.
- Foster a balance between the home rule authority of Rockland’s municipalities with the legitimate concerns of adjoining communities.

***Transportation:***

- Promote integrated vehicular, mass transit, paratransit, bicycle, and pedestrian transportation infrastructure for an efficient network of roadways, railways, and pathways.
- Enhance mobility and accessibility in order to provide greater choices of travel for all, including the growing aging population.
- Work to reduce dependence on the automobile as the major mode of ground transportation and increase the use of public transport.
- Promote and enhance safety for motorists, pedestrians and cyclists.

***Economy:***

- Foster opportunities for the growth of businesses in the county.
- Ensure a broad range of employment opportunities for residents.
- Maintain a strong tax base for the county, communities, and taxing jurisdictions.
- Protect the county’s diminishing stock of developable commercial land from rezoning in order to ensure a balanced and stable tax base and local employment opportunities.

***Neighborhoods, Housing, and Services:***

- Expand housing opportunities for Rockland County’s diverse population.
- Promote high-quality residential communities with a range of appropriate densities.
- Work with municipalities to protect historic resources and support cultural uses.
- Provide sufficient and affordable housing stock for the aging and young adult populations, caregiver work force, and emergency-service volunteers.
- Ensure that educational and community facilities and services adequately and equitably serve Rockland County’s current and projected population.

***Open Space and Environment:***

- Improve parks and expand open space in high-density areas.
- Provide recreational resources serving the diverse needs of the population.
- Preserve and protect farmland and historic, cultural, and water resources.
- Ensure physical and visual access to the Hudson River.

***Energy:***

- Encourage energy efficiency and purposeful conservation in all facets of development and redevelopment.

- Promote a whole-building approach to sustainability in the areas of site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection, indoor and outdoor environmental quality, and human and environmental health.

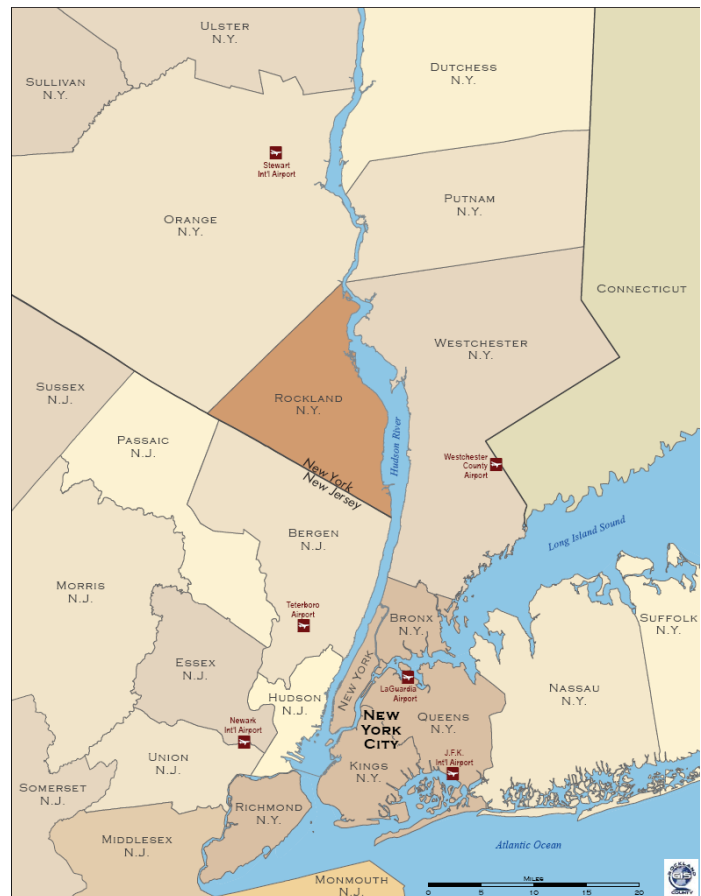
## PLANNING ELEMENTS & KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

A BROAD PLANNING DOCUMENT BY NATURE, the Rockland County Comprehensive Plan provides an overview of existing conditions and major trends. In some instances, these conditions and trends give rise to problems that should be resolved over the 10- to 20-year life of the Plan. Recommendations are established for developing programs and regulations to assist municipalities in directing their local development and conservation. In addition, the Plan addresses the major interrelated planning elements, that together comprise the form and function of the County. Specifically, the planning elements addressed in the Plan include:

### **History and Regional Setting**

Because of Rockland’s proximity to New York City, the county is subject to a number of extra-regional forces, including transportation policies and economic conditions of the metropolitan area and the Hudson Valley Region. The County, therefore, should take a leadership role not only in monitoring regional projects that could directly affect its towns and villages, but in maintaining close coordination with policymakers and stakeholders. To this end, Rockland should have a proactive role in intercounty and interstate collaboration, particularly for issues that cross political borders such as transportation and infrastructure projects, preservation of natural resources, protection and expansion of the region’s open space network, and utilization of the Hudson River. Key recommendations include:

- Coordinate with the I-287/Tappan Zee Bridge Corridor Study Team to ensure that the public transit alternative for the corridor is properly integrated with the county’s existing transit network. Also, work with the Corridor Study Team to support shared bus rapid transit/high occupancy vehicle lanes in the corridor, and that the new bridge is designed for commuter rail, should that transit option be available in the future.



Source: Rockland County Planning Department, 2010

- Coordinate with the MTA and NJ Transit to ensure that, if a rail line connecting New York City to Stewart International Airport is approved, the regional service will adequately serve the residents of Rockland, and will not adversely impact the surrounding towns and villages.
- Foster regional cooperation and coordination with NJ Transit, the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey, and Bergen County to ensure increased rail service and that the Access to the Region's Core (ARC) project, if it moves forward, is properly integrated with the Metro-North/NJT rail lines serving Rockland.
- Actively promote the Hudson River and other key environmental assets as vital regional resources, conserving their environmental and scenic quality and maintaining physical and scenic access to the greatest extent practicable.
- Support a regional strategy for preserving scenic, natural, historic, cultural, and recreational resources by establishing full participation in the Hudson River Valley Greenway Program. Continue efforts through the Greenway Land Trail Program to establish a regional system of trails that link these valuable resources.

### ***Demographics***

This chapter examines demographic trends in Rockland and their relationship to the region, the state, and the nation. The Rockland County Department of Planning, in partnership with Cornell University's Applied Demographics Program, prepared population projections that reinforced two key trends: Rockland's population is aging, and its young adults and families find it financially difficult to reside in the county. This trend, often referred to as "brain drain" or "human capital flight," has an economic cost. The creativity and energy of young adults fuel innovation and economic development, and a strong working-adult population is crucial to support a growing elderly population as baby boomers enter retirement. The needs of these populations have dramatically shifted. To remain economically and socially sustainable, the County must find ways to maintain and attract young people to live and work in Rockland, and to allow the senior population to age in place. In addition, the population under the age of 20 is projected to grow significantly in the county, with resultant implications on service needs. This trend further indicates the need to provide job, education, and housing opportunities for young adults and young families. Key recommendations include:

- Expand housing options for young singles and young families by encouraging the production of multifamily developments in or in close proximity to existing centers and public transit.
- Create and maintain job opportunities for the young adult population.

### ***Aging***

Rockland's elderly population is increasing both in actual numbers and percentage, outpacing both New York State and national averages. This trend threatens to strain Federal, State, and local government resources. The County should continue its concerted efforts to help the senior population remain vital and provide care and support to those who are struggling. Further efforts must be undertaken to meet the needs of Rockland's aging residents. Major recommendations include:

- Support affordable housing options and housing type alternatives in strategic locations such as village centers.

- Encourage zoning regulations that address senior housing needs by permitting moderate- to higher-density development in appropriate locations and require amenities that meet the needs of elderly residents.
- Create intergenerational housing opportunities through the development of new affordable living communities for all ages and by permitting greater regulatory flexibility for modifying single-family houses for “mother-daughter” or two-family living.
- Facilitate modification of existing homes to accommodate senior relatives (e.g. “mother-daughters”) and to create safer, more elder-friendly environments in seniors’ existing homes. Provide information on available grants for such modifications.
- Foster strategies to encourage aging in place so that Rockland residents can continue to live near their families and friends. Strategies could include:
  - Enhancing and expanding mobility options for seniors, including expanding transit alternatives and better informing seniors of existing transit options;
  - Creating vibrant public spaces to facilitate interaction among all residents, and providing supportive community features and services that incorporate the needs of seniors, as well as provide opportunities for intellectual pursuits and volunteerism; and
  - Ensuring safety and security through measures such as improved lighting and signage, retiming of traffic signals, and maintenance of sidewalk and bus shelters.
- Continue employment services and job skills development for seniors through coordination among the Office for the Aging, Rockland Community College, the Workforce Investment Board, and other local stakeholders, recognizing that some seniors may choose or need to remain in the work force.
- Enhance efforts to inform seniors and their families about existing services and resources, through the use of various media including mailings, organizational newsletters, newspaper advertisements, and online notices.
- Provide intellectual opportunities for the aging population, keeping seniors involved in the community and avoiding isolation. Opportunities should be provided for seniors to explore creative endeavors such as music, art, and writing, and to participate in computer training classes and similar intellectual pursuits. The County and its municipalities should coordinate marketing efforts of existing senior programs.

### ***Land Use and Zoning***

The Land Use and Zoning section seeks to provide an overall evaluation of densities and generalized land uses across Rockland. Most of the land use decisions in Rockland are made by the towns and villages, and are not under the direct purview of the County. However, the County does have a role in reviewing site plans, subdivisions, variances, zone changes, zoning code amendments, special permits, and other local land use actions under Section 239 of the New York State General Municipal Law (GML). Rockland should take the lead on regional land use issues and on activities involving County-owned property, and

encourage its municipalities to take appropriate local actions to address land use issues affecting their communities, while being cognizant of potential impacts on neighboring communities. Key recommendations include:

- Encourage investment in the county's existing centers, to help preserve the character of low-density, rural, and open space areas outside these centers. This will also promote the more efficient use of infrastructure, particularly water and sewer systems, and reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality. Centrality of development can be achieved through policy, planning, and zoning decisions made by towns and villages, as well as by developers and individual property owners.
- Promote investment in centers by supporting a mix of uses including office, retail, and residential.
- Identify brownfields, greyfields, and Superfund sites for potential redevelopment and promote adaptive reuse of older buildings, to facilitate infill development in centers.
- Upgrade the infrastructure and amenities of Rockland's existing centers, including lighting, sidewalks, street furniture, bike lanes, shade trees, and utilities.
- Preserve existing commercially and industrially zoned areas to support the county's economic base and foster job growth. Work with the Rockland Economic Development Corporation (REDC), the Industrial Development Agency (IDA), and the Rockland Business Association (RBA) to identify candidate sites for attracting major commercial and industrial users; and encourage municipalities to maintain their non-residential development potential through appropriate land use regulations.
- Protect Rockland County's existing character and quality of life through the conservation of environmentally sensitive areas, such as the Hudson River, and the continued acquisition of open space, focusing primarily on contiguous park and open space areas.
- Promote conservation (cluster) subdivision design to help preserve valuable and sensitive open space and natural areas in residential developments.
- Support zoning that encourages affordable housing for Rockland's emergency-services volunteers and caregiver work force. Encourage municipalities to craft zoning that permits affordable senior housing and multigenerational development.
- Create regular opportunities for intermunicipal communication and cooperation to ensure that land use, planning, and zoning policies among neighboring towns and villages are regionally minded and mutually beneficial.
- Coordinate and integrate transportation and land use planning on all scales by fostering collaboration among Rockland's municipalities and continued communication and cooperation with regional transit providers. Promote the wisdom of land use and transportation decisions that respond not only to existing conditions but also to future needs and demands of the county and its residents. Continue to advocate for the interests of the towns and villages and county

residents in the planning and implementation of major regional transportation projects in the pipeline.

### **Transportation**

This chapter examines all components of Rockland's transportation system – including regional and local roadways, mass transit, and pedestrian and bicycle networks – and sets strategies to improve its safety and efficiency. Rockland County should coordinate with its towns and villages, the State, and other transportation agencies to develop a balanced transportation system that uses a variety of modes operating in a complementary way to provide access to places of employment, residence, recreation, and commercial activity. The county's regional and local transportation system must be designed to reduce congestion; save energy; improve air quality and highway safety; strengthen existing commercial centers and corridors; and meet the needs of all residents, including the transit-dependent and the disabled. Major recommendations include:



*TOR buses fill an important mass transit need.*

*Source: Rockland County Planning Department*



*The West Shore Line should continue to be considered for reuse as a passenger rail line.*

*Source: BFJ Planning, 2010*

- Work with state, regional and federal officials to secure necessary financing for replacement of the Tappan Zee Bridge. The replacement bridge should be built bus rapid transit (BRT)-ready and designed for possible future commuter rail transit.
- Promote BRT and high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes on the Tappan Zee Bridge/I-87/287 corridor. Ensure that any transit component of the corridor project fully addresses impacts to Rockland's community character.
- Expand and enhance the local and regional public transit bus network through innovative transportation planning strategies such as allowing buses to use shoulder lanes along major arterials and highways; converting abandoned rail rights-of-way to busways; and studying the use of "clean air" hybrid buses on particular segments of the Palisades Interstate Parkway during peak travel times in conjunction with the future transit component of the Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 corridor project.
- Actively promote available transit/carpool options for people living and working in Rockland County, including the reverse commute options.
- Continue ongoing efforts with New Jersey Transit and Metro-North to enhance service upgrades along the Pascack Valley and Port Jervis Rail Lines, whether or not the Access to the Region's Core (ARC) project moves forward.

- Support improvements to the arterial and collector roadway systems to help alleviate congestion and enhance safety. Roadway improvements should also include prevention and repair of flooding and drainage problems as well as beautification projects, where feasible.
- Improve the pedestrian and bicycle circulation system by increasing connections between municipalities and by using “complete street” design strategies to safely accommodate all users. For example, the new bicycle and pedestrian lanes on the proposed replacement Tappan Zee Bridge should be tied into existing pedestrian and bicycle trail networks in Rockland County, where possible. Such designs should promote the safety of all users, and the County and municipalities should encourage users to follow all appropriate traffic regulations to ensure safety.
- Encourage trucks to use limited-access highways that allow for commercial traffic and State arterials to help keep truck traffic from disturbing residential areas. This could be accomplished through a truck signage program and interagency cooperation.
- Encourage reuse of the county’s abandoned railways for pedestrian and bike ways, transit corridors, or some combination of such. Ensure that the possibility for future reuse of the West Shore Line for passenger rail is left open by avoiding development in its right-of-way.
- Support enhanced west-east ferry service on the Hudson River.
- Support ongoing initiatives aimed at expanding and enhancing mobility options for seniors.

**Natural and Environmental Resources**

Ongoing development and future climate change have major implications for Rockland’s environmentally sensitive areas. This section sets strategies to protect and enhance significant environmental features, including floodplains and wetlands, water resources, steep slopes and significant ridgelines, soils, critical environmental areas, waterfront areas, and threatened and endangered species. Key recommendations include:

- Continue to protect the Hudson River as a critical regional resource, ensuring that development along its shoreline does not impair the river’s environmental and scenic quality, and that physical and visual access is maintained. Work with the Hudson River Estuary Program to develop a river stewardship ethic and identify and adopt strategies for protecting the river and all surface water resources.
- Work to establish Haverstraw Bay as an important estuary learning area, including an educational component to increase public awareness of the importance of the bay’s tidal marshlands as a unique habitat.



*The Hudson River is one of Rockland’s greatest natural resources.*

*Source: BFJ Planning, 2010*

- Identify and develop action plans for the woodland areas that are significant to the health of the headwaters of Rockland’s major rivers and streams.
- Implement a water quality notification program for the Hudson River (and potentially other surface water resources) so that the public is fully informed of all sewage discharge events. Explore providing regular water quality reports on Rockland’s rivers and streams, and distribute to municipalities for use in current and future planning and zoning decisions.
- Continue and expand volunteer community and nonprofit programs that assess the health of Rockland’s streams, such as the Volunteer Stream Monitoring Program.
- Promote water conservation through infrastructure repairs, water-efficient landscaping, education on wise water usage, reuse of greywater and recycled wastewater, and other means.
- Assist in updating uniform, shared-language municipal stormwater regulations that look at both water quality and quantity.
- Consider mapping, for planning purposes, the point sources of large, medium, and regulated small municipal separate storm sewer systems that are required to obtain National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits.
- Continue to improve road salt application techniques – as well as explore the use of alternative de-icing materials – to prevent groundwater pollution due to runoff from roadways.
- Adopt the Rockland Riverfront Communities Council’s model Ridgeline Protection Ordinance for County-owned property and encourage municipalities to adopt it, together with viewshed protection, tree preservation, steep slopes, wetlands, and impervious surfaces regulations.
- Study current wellhead protection regulations to determine if they need strengthening. Creating and enforce buffers around reservoirs and watershed lands that drain into drinking water sources. Explore forming aquifer recharge areas to prevent pollution and preserve water supply in these areas. Continue to strictly enforce the well testing law.
- Adopt and implement regulations governing development in County wellhead protection zones, and encourage municipalities to adopt groundwater protection regulations.



*Rockland’s small streams should be adequately protected.  
Source: River to Ridge, 2001*



- Research whether additional streams or water bodies should be included as regulated County streams. Encourage the municipalities to establish buffers along streams as appropriate, with the specific distance dictated by conditions on the ground and scientific study.
- Explore the creation of County Critical Environmental Areas (CEAs) to afford greater protection of key County resources, and encourage towns and villages to adopt their own CEAs.
- Continue to educate towns, villages, and the public about the risks to biodiversity from invasive species; hiking in non-designated areas; wildfires; and the use of fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides. Encourage County staff members to participate in ongoing educational opportunities on natural and environmental resources, including key regional conferences and workshops.
- Continue steps to reduce air pollution under the New York Metropolitan Air Quality Initiative. Explore establishing a “Clean Air Toolbox” with general guidelines and strategies that municipalities can use to reduce air pollution at the local level.
- Evaluate the need for a Quiet Zone study on the Pascack Valley and Port Jervis/Main/Bergen rail lines.
- Continue to work with Rockland’s Federal Congressional delegation and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to ensure that mitigation measures on regional air traffic control initiatives will eliminate adverse impacts on Rockland residents.
- Encourage the Tappan Zee Bridge study team to include additional sound barrier walls along the Thruway corridor, using appropriate sound-absorbing materials to reduce any noise reflection to uphill areas, as the right-of-way will be entirely used once the project construction is complete.
- Encourage the study of decking over highways to reduce noise and vibration pollution and to possibly capture and scrub vehicular emissions.
- Encourage municipalities to establish uniform codes to ensure consistency among noise mitigation guidelines, taking into consideration all facets of noise control.
- Develop guidelines for local lighting laws to address light pollution. Retrofit County facilities to have full cutoff lighting fixtures to reduce light pollution.
- Work with towns, villages, and private property owners to promote the reuse of abandoned quarries, brownfields, Superfund sites, or other underutilized areas for potential recreational or cultural use and for the creation of new habitats or other beneficial uses. Continue to work with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the State DEC, and property owners, as appropriate, to eliminate threats to residents or wildlife from any known site contaminations.
- Continue climate change efforts through membership with New York State’s Climate Smart Community program, a partnership program between the State and local governments that focuses on local actions that will lower operating costs, promote economic growth, improve

operational efficiency, and upgrade infrastructure, while protecting the climate. Encourage municipalities to become Climate Smart Communities as well.

- Incorporate climate protection and sustainability into County economic development plans, and encourage work-force training and public education for energy efficiency and renewable energy. Establish a set of specific climate change goals, with measurable outcomes and attainable milestones.
- Coordinate the County's climate change and energy-efficiency initiatives and develop specific short-term goals to address climate change. A structure will be established to provide centralized coordination and guidance among relevant departments as a means to implement these efforts.
- Develop model sustainability laws for use at the local level, provide technical assistance to municipalities in developing and implementing climate change goals, and create tax incentives for green building and conservation measures.
- Provide educational programs for homeowners and members of the development community to promote green building products and techniques, and consider making knowledge of sustainable development techniques a part of licensing requirements for contractors and other key members of the development community. Work with Cornell Cooperative Extension on an educational campaign for landowners and landscapers to discourage the use of pesticides and herbicides.
- Create an environmental task force including staff from County departments and other agencies as appropriate, as well as town and village appointees and volunteers from a range of sectors in the county, to act as an informational clearinghouse for regional environmental issues, to coordinate municipal environmental efforts, and to provide training programs on climate change initiatives.
- Encourage smart growth development and construction methods to enhance the existing environment.



*Permeable parking pavers can help reduce impervious coverage.  
Source: New York State DEC Stormwater Manual, 2009*

- In the course of the County's GML reviews and as allowed under the General Municipal Law, promote land use policies to reduce sprawl, minimize development in floodplains, and protect forests. This can be accomplished through such means as retaining existing mature trees, implementing appropriate new landscaping using native species, using permeable rather than impervious surfaces, and reducing the footprint of new structures if feasible.

- Use tools and techniques to reduce the

amount of impervious surfaces in all future development of County-owned land, and use retrofit technology to limit impervious surfaces in existing County developments. Encourage municipalities to incorporate design standards into their codes that will promote the reduction of impervious surfaces.

- Continue the use of “green” building techniques for all new County buildings, retrofit existing buildings as practicable, and encourage the municipalities to do the same.
- Promote the protection of existing wetlands, potentially requiring creation of new wetlands when existing wetlands are to be filled. Promote the creation of new wetland areas in future developments where existing wetlands do not meet regulatory thresholds.
- Explore launching a suburban reforestation program to address the impact of climate change, reduce hot spots, and improve aesthetics. Protect mature trees and prevent clear-cutting of large tracts through development of model tree regulation laws. Communicate and advocate with the Public Service Commission (PSC) on improving utility tree cutting and removal.
- Continue to work with the towns and villages to address the issue of “creeping” realty subdivisions, or properties that have been subdivided multiple times in a way that avoids the required approval from the County Health Department.
- Promote efficient alternative transportation networks, such as by promoting trail creation. Trail creation should ensure that sensitive environmental areas and habitats are preserved; trails should be of pervious (permeable) surface and should ideally (based on the County Official Map, Part III) have 100-foot buffers on either side of the trails, as topography and other ground conditions permit.
- Create efficient traffic routes and patterns that promote alternative forms of transportation (e.g. bus transit, walking, and biking) as part of a daily routine in order to have the greatest impact on reducing air pollution.

### ***Parks and Open Space***

An extensive variety of public and private open space forms a green network across Rockland. Since the publication of the previous County comprehensive plan (not adopted) nearly 10 years ago, Rockland has increased significantly its total acreage of open space holdings. Over the next decade, the challenge lies in acquiring additional open space holdings, improving physical and/or visual access, maintaining the properties, identifying the proper use of these green spaces, and pursuing funding for future acquisition and maintenance. Key recommendations include:



*Memorial Park in Nyack overlooks the Hudson River.*

*Source: BFJ Planning, 2010*

- Work with the municipalities on creating accurate parkland and recreation inventories for use on County Official Maps and for County planning purposes.
- Focus future open space acquisition efforts on land adjacent to existing open spaces or able to be connected to existing trails and bikeways. Possible connection opportunities include roadway and waterway corridors or linear features such as abandoned railway rights-of-way. For example, the new bicycle and pedestrian lanes on the proposed replacement Tappan Zee Bridge should, where possible, be tied into existing pedestrian and bicycle trail networks in Rockland County.



*The Hudson River Valley Greenway Trail in Haverstraw is open to bicyclists.*

*Source: BFJ Planning, 2009*

- Explore opportunities to provide public access along streams (as appropriate to preserve habitats and environmentally sensitive areas), particularly as they run through parks or by using parallel roadway rights-of-way, street ends, and space under highway and railroad bridges. In cooperation with the Palisades Interstate Park Commission and the New York State Department of Transportation, support the proposed creation of a bicycle/pedestrian path in the Parkway's right-of-way.
- Add existing trails to the County Official Map as recognition of their importance and validity. As additional trails are developed in the future, they would also be added to the map.
- Link open spaces together, whether through continuous trail systems, by acquiring adjacent lands that link two existing parks, or by providing an uninterrupted buffer along a stream or the Hudson River. Linkages can be added through several means:
  - Voluntary donation of land, often to a land trust that assumes stewardship of the property
  - Purchase of land by a municipality; the County, State, or Federal government; or private land trust
  - Granting or purchasing of easements, including scenic easements, allowing for access across land or restricting use of the land to open space.
- Protect against the loss of Rockland's remaining farmland and orchards, and support the development of small acreage community farms and farm operations.

- Explore public-private partnerships with land trusts or other nonprofit organizations to preserve private recreation facilities (e.g. golf courses, day camps) in the county.
- Collaborate with the towns and village to ensure that development along the Hudson River shoreline does not impede waterfront access or views, and facilitates access by various potential users.
- Work to ensure an appropriate balance of active and passive recreation uses, seeking to meet residents' recreational needs while ensuring preservation of environmentally sensitive areas.
- Work cooperatively with the towns and villages to preserve open space using conservation easements. The focus of these efforts should be to promote the retention and creation of native vegetation and wildlife habitat on private property with the goal of increasing biodiversity and improving the overall health of the natural environment. Conservation easements can be used to help protect a range of open space resources, including agricultural land, scenic viewsheds, and "green cemeteries."
- Continue to pursue funding for proper stewardship of Rockland's parkland and open space holdings through a variety of sources, including State funding and partnership with land trusts.
- Make use of State and Federal funding opportunities – such as the New York State Brownfield Opportunities Area program – to redevelop and reuse strategic areas for parks and open space.
- Support a regional strategy for preserving scenic, natural, historic, cultural, and recreational resources by establishing full participation in the Hudson River Valley Greenway Program. Continue efforts through the Greenway Land Trail Program to establish a regional system of trails that link these valuable resources.
- Examine the feasibility of incorporating open space components in the I-287 Tappan Zee Corridor Project. The County supports exploration of construction of a "lid park" in South Nyack, which would connect existing trails, create new open space, and help to mitigate impacts from the new bridge construction.
- Continue efforts to address deer overpopulation through participation in the State's deer management programs and advocating for Rockland's needs.

### ***Historic and Cultural Resources***

Rockland County is home to a rich variety of historic and cultural resources. Its location on the Hudson River; its Revolutionary-era history; its many performing and visual artists; and its strong arts, history, and cultural organizations can play a critical role in the economic growth of Rockland County. The task now is to coordinate and publicize these assets. The County should take the lead by encouraging the agencies charged with economic development and tourism to promote Rockland's arts, history, and educational resources as key elements in attracting economic growth. The County and its municipalities should partner with certain groups on grants and other initiatives. The County can also provide technical assistance and guidance with relevance to historic designations, scenic byways, and similar planning issues. Major recommendations include:

- Pursue a countywide marketing strategy to publicize Rockland’s arts and cultural activities, building on the strength of other nearby major arts destinations in the lower Hudson Valley, as well as elsewhere in the Hudson Valley. The County’s availability to visitors from New York City is an asset and can be described as “The Plum near the Big Apple.”
- Seek initial and ongoing funding to establish and operate visitor centers to provide stop-off facilities and information for visitors and residents.
- Provide assistance, including funding, for arts programming inter-group cooperation, and maintenance of physical facilities, to organizations seeking to integrate and coordinate the artistic and cultural activities taking place in the county.
- Pursue the nomination of additional roads to the State Scenic Byways program, helping to coordinate development of corridor management plans.
- Create a County Historic Roads program, and facilitate the creation and enhancement of trails to connect historic and cultural sites. Consider including lands abutting designated scenic byways or historic roads in the County’s open space acquisition plans.
- Support the creation of weekend ferry service to connect visitors from New York City to Rockland County and explore other ways to increase public transportation access to cultural resources.
- Conduct a countywide wayfinding and signage study to create uniform signage including distances between communities and directing visitors to major shopping; river villages; historic sites; arts and cultural attractions; and food, lodging, and traveler services.
- Continue to educate municipalities on the model Certified Local Government (CLG) local law developed by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for the historic preservation of sites, districts, and roads.
- Support towns and villages in researching and nominating structures, sites, and districts eligible for listing on the National and State Registers of Historic Places. Explore the possibility of listing additional eligible County-owned properties as well.
- Work with the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area to designate additional sites as Heritage Sites and include them on future thematic trails.
- Promote beneficial adaptive reuses of historic structures, and work with municipalities to ensure that these uses (e.g. inns and bed and breakfasts) are permitted and promoted in appropriate areas.



*The Michael Salyer House in Pearl River is home to the Orangetown Historical Museum and Archives.*

*Source: Rockland County Planning Department*

## **Housing**

Housing is a matter of regional interest to Rockland because the condition, variety of housing types, and range of affordability relate directly to the county's ability to retain and attract both jobs and people. Despite the recent recession and the resulting decrease in housing values and corresponding low level of interest rates, decent, affordable housing in Rockland is still out of reach for many. This is especially true for low- and mid-level employees, the elderly on fixed incomes, young households, emergency-service volunteers (fire and ambulance), caregiver work force (nursing, psychiatric and home health aides), and others who cannot afford the most readily available types of housing. The challenge for Rockland lies in preserving its existing predominant single-family, owner-occupied housing character while encouraging new housing opportunities for all ages and income groups. Other challenges include balancing preservation of open space and natural environments with new residential developments, protecting against the construction of out-of-scale housing, and coordinating residential land use patterns with ongoing transportation initiatives. Major recommendations include:



*New mixed-use/multifamily housing in Spring Valley, an example of infill housing in Rockland's centers.*

*Source: BFJ Planning, 2010*

- Protect Rockland's sensitive and valuable open space resources and natural environments by encouraging conservation (cluster) subdivision design in residential housing developments.



*This new townhome development in Pearl River was built for the senior population.*

*Source: BFJ Planning, 2010*

- Encourage context-sensitive townhouse and multifamily development where appropriate. Optimal locations could include siting these developments in or near existing centers and near mass transit.
- Provide a range of affordable housing for the county's emergency-service volunteers and caregiver work force by encouraging "set-asides" in multifamily developments. For example, in an 80/20 set-aside, the developer would receive tax incentives for allocating 20% of units to the caregiver work force or emergency-service volunteers.

- Encourage a range of affordable housing options for the county’s young adult and senior populations. Diverse housing options can include mixed-use developments with commercial uses on the first floor and residential units on second and upper floors. It can also include accessory apartments, in-law suites attached to existing homes, smaller lots, townhouses, and housing cooperatives for young families and seniors.
- Co-locate senior housing with local shopping centers, community facilities, and recreational areas.
- Integrate housing and social services for groups with special needs, such as the elderly, homeless persons, and people with physical or mental disabilities. Facilitate the development of appropriate housing types for these populations, such as group homes and assisted-living facilities.
- Strengthen existing and cultivate new partnerships with nonprofit organizations that are dedicated to improving housing opportunities for Rockland’s low- to moderate-income populations.
- Continue efforts to seek Federal and State grants to provide affordable housing and improve the quality of life for low- and moderate-income residents of Rockland.
- Discourage out-of-scale residential development patterns.

***Economic Development***

Rockland should strive to strengthen its economic base to preserve the county as a desirable place to live, work, and raise a family. Reflecting its inherent resources, evolving trends and competitive advantages, Rockland County’s economic development plan should reinforce its strengths; address its weaknesses; and engage residents, businesses, institutions, and local governments in efforts to attract and retain the economic activities that will enhance overall well-being. Key recommendations to achieve this goal include:

- Support the efforts of the Rockland Economic Development Corporation (REDC) and Rockland Industrial Development Agency (IDA).
- Prepare a comprehensive economic development strategy prioritizing sector and geographic goals and coordinating activities among municipalities. This strategy should



*Building on the strength of existing centers, like Piermont, should be part of a successful economic development strategy.*

*Source: BFJ Planning, 2010*



also include guidelines for making sites shovel-ready, attaining incentive and public financing, and preparing cost-benefit and market analyses, as well as a marketing strategy. The primary goal of any economic development strategy should be job retention and creation.

- Craft an economic development plan that focuses on strengthening three discrete sectors: 1) biomedical, 2) front offices and professional services, and 3) tourism, including arts and cultural opportunities. Support opportunities for data centers.
- Support on all levels the existing certified businesses in Rockland’s Empire Zones and its successor program, the Excelsior program.
- Create a process to identify vacant or potentially redevelopable sites that are deemed to be suitable for economic development from a zoning, terrain, size, and locational perspective. The focus should be on redeveloping abandoned or underutilized sites before developing vacant land. With input from the REDC on marketing potential, a number of sites should be made “shovel-ready.”
- Encourage municipalities to create local economic development offices and formulate strategic plans. Work with towns and villages to foster more cross-jurisdictional economic development initiatives.
- Expand job skill training programs based on current jobs and future potential jobs, determined by any recognized gap in skill levels.
- Provide job opportunities for high school and college graduates. Increase collaboration with high school and college curriculum planners to match educational programming with employer needs.
- Initiate a program that addresses the impact of housing and transportation costs on labor force availability. The lack of affordable work-force housing and accessible public transportation inhibits Rockland’s ability to retain and attract a broadly based work force, including its young adults.
- Attract venture capital resources to support research and development, particularly in the biomedical field.
- Collaborate with institutions of higher learning, hospitals, and other institutions to create programs aimed at nurturing the development of executive skills in existing and emerging businesses, and improve outreach efforts that support entrepreneurship.
- Reinforce existing centers by encouraging mixed-use and/or multifamily development, to help foster job creation and support public transit systems.
- Foster “green job” growth in Rockland, particularly in the construction sector, i.e. retrofitting existing structures – solar panels, geothermal heating, and other energy saving devices.

## **Infrastructure**

Infrastructure – the roads and bridges, water and sewer systems, electric and telecommunication lines, and other community systems that support Rockland’s development – is one planning area where the county’s towns and villages are closely linked and share common concerns. The County should therefore take a leadership role in maintaining and, where necessary, improving its infrastructure system to preserve the quality of life and commerce within Rockland. Major recommendations include:

- Further develop a comprehensive Rockland County water policy, including specific objectives and recommendations, and measures for outreach and education for municipalities, residents, and businesses.
- Investigate potential additional water sources within the county, as recommended by the USGS study.
- Develop a plan to address potential water supply shortfalls, including possible changes to current codes to address emergency conditions and a study of their potential impact on development and the county’s economic base.
- Promote water conservation through County regulations and public education, and adopt planning guidelines that require more water conservation. Coordinate with leading water experts on potential tools for conservation.
- Employ green development and infrastructure practices by use of “green” building techniques for all new County buildings. Retrofit existing buildings as practicable.
- Use planning techniques for green infrastructure and stormwater management, as provided by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).
- Explore adopting and implementing watershed regulations to control development along stream corridors that lead to public water supplies.
- Collaborate with towns and villages, and the owners and operators of sewer systems, to continue to identify system or capacity constraints that could impact development and impair economic development initiatives.
- Coordinate with the owners and operators of the sewer systems to continue implementing projects that can reduce inflow and infiltration into the sanitary sewer collection systems.



*Maintenance and upgrades to key infrastructure, like Lake DeForest Dam, is critical.  
Source: River to Ridge, 2001*

- Partner with the owners and operators of the sewer systems to repair and upgrade sewer systems to eliminate untreated sewer discharges to rivers and streams. Investigate implementing a testing program to monitor water quality and to notify the public if unsafe conditions occur.
- Using County or municipal GIS systems, consider developing an inventory of gas and electric transmission rights-of-way and utility easements to assist towns and villages in planning and review of development adjacent to these facilities.
- Take the lead in encouraging communication and coordination between utility and highway companies, and in developing a “master schedule” for the permitting and notification process on major projects.
- Encourage use of renewable resources, and continue to promote recycling and waste reduction policies.
- In partnership with the municipalities, develop a countywide regional plan for potential wireless telecommunication facility locations on public property.
- Encourage improvements and upgrades to existing infrastructure to facilitate economic development initiatives.

### ***Services and Information Resources***

Rockland County facilities, services, and information resources involve a broad range of functions that serve the general public or provide for their specific needs. The County’s ability to provide community services in a thorough and efficient manner is critical to the quality of life for its residents. This chapter can help determine whether or not existing public facilities and resources meet current and future capacity, and can serve as a baseline for gauging future facilities demands based on growth rates, population trends and the need for additional services. Key recommendations include:

- Promote greater cooperation between Rockland’s nonprofit agencies and governmental social service departments (Federal, State, and County).
- Expand housing opportunities for Rockland’s caregiver work force and emergency-service volunteers.
- Identify opportunities to co-locate Rockland’s health and social service centers. Space consolidation and/or reconfiguration should also take into consideration proximity to village hamlet centers, public transportation, and important institutional partners such as hospitals.
- Integrate housing and social services for groups with special needs, such as the elderly, homeless persons, and people with physical or mental disabilities.
- Work with towns and villages to ensure that all public accommodations and commercial facilities comply with ADA standards for accessible design.



*Institutions such as hospitals and colleges can be important partners in reinforcing and revitalizing centers.*

*Source: BFJ Planning, 2010*

- Promote walkability and sustainability at the Robert L. Yeager Health Center through the installation of sidewalks and improved signage. Explore retrofitting the facilities with green technology; pursue National Register listing of eligible buildings at the complex; and facilitate additional uses, such as dining, convenience retail, a farmer’s market, and a community garden.
- Provide supported housing for the mentally disabled and intellectually challenged, allowing these individuals to become better integrated into the community.
- Seek institutional and corporate partners to reinforce and revitalize centers. Work with the municipalities, especially those with existing centers, to develop housing and amenities necessary to attract the work force that Rockland’s major institutions and corporations need.
- Ensure that educational and community facilities are adequate to serve the projected population.
- Continue to support, promote, and enhance e-governance at the County and municipal level. Ensure that the technological infrastructure is present to support the advancement of e-governance.

**Implementation**

The Implementation section of the Comprehensive Plan outlines seven methods that Rockland County can undertake to ensure that this Plan, through its recommended actions, is implemented:

- *Adoption of the Comprehensive Plan* by the Rockland County Legislature.
- *Capital Programming* to ensure capital project expenditures are aligned with the Plan’s key recommendations.
- *Adoption of updated County Official Maps* to guide the planning and development of the County’s roads, streams, greenways, parks, and facilities.

- *Support for Model Codes and Guidelines* that are regionally minded and reflect the overall vision of Rockland County.
- *Continued Planning between the County* and regional agencies, authorities and municipalities to ensure that, in accordance with New York State Law, certain local planning and zoning actions are referred to the County for review.
- *Periodic Review* and update of the Comprehensive Plan to ensure that it remains a relevant and useful document.
- *Ongoing Training of County staff members* so that they can stay updated on revisions to pertinent laws, new technologies and best practices, and other relevant changes in their fields.

## **CONCLUSION**

As we begin the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is critical that Rockland County has a plan for its future. Rockland residents do not want radical change to come to their county. However, a number of challenges have arisen that threaten the very environment and standard of living that the people of Rockland wish to preserve. The Comprehensive Plan confronts these realities by providing a vision for a socially responsible, environmentally sustainable, and fiscally intelligent future. More importantly, the Plan provides the strategies by which to achieve this vision.

The state of our built and natural environment is not, by nature, a static force, nor should a comprehensive plan be either. The Rockland County Comprehensive Plan seeks to be an accessible and flexible document that can be used by policy makers and residents alike to guide growth, development, and conservation; anticipate currents of change and respond accordingly; and chart a course toward a healthy, sustainable, and prosperous environment for all.

