GRADUATE PLANNING STUDIO
LAND USE & ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS

CITY OF COHOES
FALL 2016
As per request from the City of Cohoes, NY, the students of the University at Albany, State University of New York Fall 2016 Graduate Planning Studio provided a supportive analysis to be included in the City of Cohoes Comprehensive Plan. The role of the Graduate Planning Studio was to complete two tasks: (1) Plan, manage and conduct a Public Open House in the City of Cohoes, and (2) Develop a set of Land Use Recommendations combining the results from the Open House and additional research. In order to effectively tackle the assignment, the students divided themselves into the following teams:

**FALL 2016 GRADUATE PLANNING STUDIO**

**DOWNTOWN**
Jeremy Monte
jamonte@albany.edu
Laura Travison
ltravison@albany.edu
Joshua Westfall
jwestfall@albany.edu

**WATERFRONT**
Will Sikula
wsikula@albany.edu
David Wang
dwang7@albany.edu

**BUSPLUS**
Sharareh Biglari
sbiglari@albany.edu
Zach Powell
zpowell@albany.edu

**CITY-WIDE**
Andrew Gillcrist
agillcrist@albany.edu
Yogeswar Potluri
ypotluri@albany.edu
Garreton Smith
gssmith@albany.edu

Marcia O. Kees
Department of Geography and Planning
University at Albany, State University of New York
mkees@albany.edu

*Cover photo by Yogeswar Potluri*
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Fall 2016 Planning Studio class would like to thank the City of Cohoes, local stakeholders, and community members who provided invaluable information during the public outreach process and throughout the development of these recommendations.

Special thanks to the Laberge Group, who provided support, guidance and valuable feedback during the process of developing our land-use and zoning recommendations.

Finally, thank you Professor Marcia Kees, whose leadership has guided us though the semester.

Many Thanks,
The Fall 2016 Planning Studio
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section I: Land Use Recommendations</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section II: Zoning Recommendations</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section III: Presentation Slides</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section I

Land Use Recommendations
VIEW DOWN REMSEN STREET FROM CORNER OF NEWCOMB STREET
Photo by Laura Travison
Open House

The remarks made by participants at the Open House can be summarized by the following list:

1. Focus on saving existing properties, not new construction.
2. Taverns, bars, restaurants, neighborhood stores, as well as arts and culture are the most attractive uses Downtown. Change parking requirements to encourage these desirable uses Downtown.
3. Density is not the issue, it is vacancy.
4. Access to the river is an asset.

Public services are concentrated to Downtown landmarks such as City Hall, the Post Office and the Public Library. Participants at the public event expressed how important these landmarks were to attracting people Downtown. Public spaces such as Horace Silliman Park and Canal Square Park were also identified as neighborhood attractors, but not of sufficient quality due to poor maintenance and/or an outdated design. Clearly there is an interest in outdoor green space whether it offers civic art, recreational space, a place to sit and relax, or all three.

Recognizing existing uses is the first step in revitalization. An understanding of what uses the Downtown currently supplies, what use demands are not filled, and potential community partners reduces the chance of overlapping uses and builds trust between the community, public officials and potential investors and developers.
Recommendations

Blight, vacancy, and poor street and sidewalk conditions are constraints to progress in Downtown Cohoes. Lowered standards for the built environment are exacerbated by the lack of consistency with plantings and working street lamps, too many surface parking lots, lack of aesthetically pleasing signage for wayfinding, and little to no connection with nearby recreational and natural assets. An understanding of what uses the Downtown currently supplies, what use demands are not filled, and potential community partners reduces the chance of overlapping uses. In its current state, Downtown Cohoes does not offer enough quality and diverse residential and commercial uses to put feet-on-the-street. The Downtown should be envisioned to accommodate the highest intensity and diversity in retail, professional business and residential uses. The focus should be on the highest quality of design and materials to develop a Downtown consistent with the historic Cohoes form. This area should promote all manners of useful and typical circulation especially promoting walkability to create an active pedestrian oriented public realm.

It is in the opinion of the Downtown team that the following land use recommendations be implemented by the City of Cohoes.

**Small Business/Start-up Incubator** should work with residents interested in starting a business, to help gain technical knowledge, business prowess, or capital to start. Also, target recent college graduates and those interested in computer science and the tech fields, especially out of RPI and Albany Nanoscience. Space should be designated Downtown for the incubator. Any Local Development Corporation (LDC), Industrial Development Agency (IDA), or other community organization business promotion (events, online presence, publications, sponsorships, etc.) should be tied in with a plan to bring a business incubator to the town.

**Thrift & Second-Hand Stores** should be restricted from displaying goods and wares on the sidewalk after business hours and these regulations should be adopted and enforced by the City. Work with landowners and developers to focus on attracting new uses in order to balance the present high percentage of thrift and second-hand stores with the percentage of different uses.
**Arts & Culture** should be fostered by a partnership with The Foundry to attract artists interested in opening studios and doing community art projects be they murals, sculptures, or temporary installations. The Venue at St. Joseph’s Church is also a great potential partner in this effort. Allow murals and public art displays on and around vacant lots, vacant buildings and blighted properties to fill space and give a sense of place while improving the attractiveness and viability of Downtown, drawing crowds and increasing demand. Plans should include window paintings where applicable. This also includes allowing artwork on the sides of buildings beside vacant lots to be viewed from the street, even within the historic district, at the discretion of the Planning Board and Historic Preservation & Architecture Review Board. Local film festivals, live art shows, kids programming, and outdoor galleries are also popular options. Consider a partnership with the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor for assistance with funding and promoting community art.

**Mixed-Use** properties struggle to sell retail space, attract potential renters, and rent out offices. The City of Cohoes cannot shy away from promoting new development around the historic district and along the waterfront to leverage the Downtown in the hope of attracting investors to fund renovations, allow there to be more tax money to put toward renovation programs, bring in new residents and businesses, and add a contemporary flair that still fits into the appeal of the Downtown. These new developments would be economic catalysts for the Downtown. A business attraction program should be designed and implemented either through the city or a delegated community organization or authority representing the interests of current landowners or business owners. Hard incentives could include land or buildings, attractive lease terms, low-interest loans, TIF or bond financing, and/or tax rebates. Soft incentives such as training, cross-marketing training or promotional services, assistance from the Albany County Land Bank (ACLB) and Albany Community Land Trust (ACLT), and expedited approval processes should be available as well (Land Use USA, 2015).
The following are recommendations specific to either commercial/retail, office, or residential uses as part of potential mixed-use projects.

**Commercial/Retail** – The City of Cohoes should not shy away from chain stores which conform to design/architectural guidelines and other code requirements. These big-names can be an attractor just in name alone. Regional chains are preferred to national or international chains, but not required. Multiple vendors should not be permitted on one permanent site. This provision shall not include farmers’ markets, a community garage or rummage sales, and more generally outdoor vending sites. Outdoor seating (plaza, park, and/or in front of establishments) should be encouraged within reason. Designate the Planning Board to assess sidewalk width and location to assess seating allotments. With the addition of outdoor seating and meeting space, the City should restrict amplified sound after 12am outdoors regardless of the day of the week.

Examples of potential new commercial/retail uses Downtown are: a hardware and home improvement store, kid-focused stores such as a comic book and card store, a toy store, a video game store, an event space, child-care & daycare services, a wine bar, an apparel and accessory store, an electronics store, a home appliance store, a sports/recreational equipment store, a museum, a billiards hall, a gardening store, a culinary/kitchen appliances store, more high-quality dinner restaurants, a healthy lifestyle store, an art studio, more lunch spots, a bakery, a café, and a brewery.
Office – Sufficient stock of a professional quality is in demand, but unavailable Downtown. Any potential investment and renovation schemes should include the cleaning up, renovating and updating of existing office space. With attention to the form of Downtown, new mixed-use development should be encouraged to include contemporary professional office space with plans to attract regional employers and start-ups both public and private. Home occupation businesses should also be encouraged and may include professional offices, medical practices, and personal services consistent with the zoning code. This is intended for low intensity use, with not more than one client utilizing services at one time as well as no outside employees. If the intensity changes, this should be considered accessory use and held to those provisions.

Residential - Mixed income (subsidized and market-rate or fixed income) is preferred. If demand for the Downtown increases, then allow more above market-rate housing Downtown. Invest heavily in renovating/updating residential spaces in existing mixed-use buildings with first floor retail spaces already in operation. Provide support through the Historic Society and community organizations for grant applications. Combine public dollars with private investment where possible to help update these residential spaces to make them more attractive to potential buyers/renters and bring more people downtown. Consider using a community organization to collect funds from all businesses in the area, combine funds with grant money and taxpayer dollars, and put it toward a collective effort to renovate these residential spaces. Once more renters (and higher paying renters) come in, there will be enough capital available to leverage retail properties.
Infrastructure, Beautification & Connectivity investments lead to safer, cleaner, and more aesthetically pleasing streets which increase property values and attract new developers, businesses and residents to the Downtown. An easy first step would be the formalization of the Spindle City Historic District by displaying signs, logos/banners on businesses, and banners throughout Downtown. Every street in the Historic District and signs directing people toward the Historic District should be labeled as such.

Improving connectivity and pedestrian access to the waterfront with appropriate wayfinding and signage to direct pedestrian and automobile traffic where necessary must be included in any future waterfront plans. There are two potential strategies for funding the implementation and maintenance of streetscape improvements. When site plan approval is required for a downtown use, including change of use, the applicant should be required to provide streetscape improvements. These improvements should include, but are not be limited to, benches, trash receptacles, and navigational signage to be consistent with current materials and should be approved per the Planning Board. A second option would be to grant the authority to collect taxes and/or fees from landowners or business owners in a designated Downtown district to a Business Improvement District (BID), Economic Development Corporation (EDC), Local Development Corporation (LDC), or another nongovernmental organization for the management, promotion and improvement of building facades and streetscapes for Downtown businesses. The first option may be preferred to reduce the public burden. The second option may be preferred for guaranteeing streetscape maintenance and improvements while reducing the burden on developers and historic renovators.
When considering new development, no one-story buildings should be permitted in the downtown study area. Buildings should be required to be at least 18’ and include second story usable or faux-windows consistent with the existing façade. A strategy for adapting existing properties to conform to code should be implemented. Regulations would apply to buildings apart from those with historic designation.

**Abandoned & Vacant Properties** should be targeted for temporary and pilot infill programs. Strategies may include, but are not limited to community gardens, rain gardens, public spaces, art installations, simple fences and plantings (next to RJs on Remsen Street is an example), and farmer’s/flea markets or community events. Partner with community organizations, artists, the historic society, business owners, and community leaders to generate ideas. Provide incentives for great ideas like awarding ownership, grant money, prizes, and the like. Get the community involved, especially entrepreneurs and families. Use this method primarily for lots that are undervalued and/or difficult to market for new development. If applicable, promote the use of current incentive zoning to award density or height increases (at the discretion of the Planning Board) for conservation of one or more target spaces as a means to an end. This could be a great replacement for one or some of the parking lots on Main, Remsen and/or Mohawk Street. For more permanent solutions, work with the Albany County Land Bank (ACLB) and any other vacant lot owners to give preference to adjacent land owners to speed up development either through extensions, accessory uses, or outdoor seating areas for the private establishments.

**Parking** on Remsen Street should transition to primarily on-street parking and walkability. Shared parking is a viable way to limit multiple impervious surfaces. When two or more sites are to share parking in one single private lot, a 30% reduction should be granted for the total requirement. It should be left to the Planning Board’s interpretation whether or not to increase the allowable reduction considering the hours of operation, uses, and other factors pertaining to the business. This provision should also apply to developers who create lots in which the general public is permitted to park. New development is also a great opportunity to move parking off of Remsen Street and into shared private/public parking facilities which meet multifamily, single and two family attached, retail, and public assembly parking requirements.

When constructing large scale private parking facilities or lots the developer of said site should provide 1 bicycle parking or storage for every 15 automobile parking spots. The same should be done in regard to electric vehicle charging stations. Adequate space and machinery for electric vehicle charging should be provided without a hard restriction to only electrical vehicles. However, these spaces should be earmarked in the event the demand for charging stations increases. When constructing parking facilities or lots the majority of available spaces should
be unseen from the front. It is advisable that no more than 20% of parking be allowed in front of a business and the remaining percentage be behind or screened on the side. When a developer proposes to construct a private parking lot or private parking facility no more than 20% over the required minimum should be permitted to be constructed. Other parking specific to a use (if necessary) must be integrated seamlessly into design. Resist primary use surface parking lots, at the very least on Remsen Street. Integrate parking into other uses such as park space, commercial development, mixed-use development, civic space, and public buildings.

Consider only municipal parking lots with allotted private spaces for employees and/or residential units where applicable. Municipal parking or designated on-street parking within 800 feet of a use can apply the parking spaces to the off-street parking requirement. This can be a tool for getting parking out of the core Downtown. Money for a Transportation Demand Management Fund to relocate, build and/or maintain parking lots could be collected from those parties for which the parking would apply.

Eliminate the giant parking lot at Main Street, Newcomb Street, and Ogden Mills Plaza. The site is a great opportunity for something new because of its size and location. Consider consolidating the parking by Ogden Mills, KeyBank, and the Music Hall. If necessary, a consolidated shared parking lot or garage could remain in the historic overlay to make room for new parking outside the overlay yet in proximity to establishments. This will require an understanding of customer schedules and employee schedules as well as adjustments to current parking requirements per use. If the Cohoes Family Health Center and/or the KeyBank site is tied in to the City’s plan, their proximity to New Courtland and Cohoes Boulevard is ideal for controlling downtown traffic to the main thoroughfares.
WATERFRONT

City of Cohoes

COHOES FALLS FROM FALLS VIEW PARK
Photo by Yogeswar Pothuri
Open House

Feedback received from participants at the Open House was instrumental in directing the land use recommendations for the two target waterfront areas, Van Schaick Island and the Hudson Inlet/Cohoes Boulevard. The following is a summary of the comments and suggestions gathered during the public event.

Van Schaick Island

1. Residents expressed interest in paddle boat tours during the warmer months.
2. Residents wanted to see more restaurants, recreation, and retail along the river.
3. Residents who own boats and kayaks wanted boat launches and dock areas. Only one launch currently exists and it is private.

Almost every resident mentioned a need for public access and three people were interested in the City building a huge park along the river. Most residents had positive feelings toward installing a walkway directly alongside the Hudson to help revitalize the waterfront between Ontario Street and Van Schaick Avenue. Multiple residents wanted a main street-like street scape along the riverfront, possibly form based code. Residents think connecting a walkway along the Hudson River to the current bike trails would attract residents to the waterfront. Residents believe that the City should have a waterfront design or plan on the waterfront, especially landscape design. Some mentioned that streets along the waterfronts were too dark and they felt unsafe walking and jogging in the evening. Others thought the city could come up with a plan to reduce the slopes to create better walkability.

There has been discussion of constructing a music venue within Van Schaick Park. If adopted, there will need to be a connection between the waterfront, the downtown, and Van Schaick Avenue up to the park as well as connections between the historic aspects of the waterfront and the historic Van Schaick Mansion. Improved connectivity and wayfinding would ensure that attractions are not isolated and draw more visitors.
Cohoes Boulevard (Inlet)

1. Brownfields identified by Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) need to be cleaned up.
2. A potential strategy to attract interest to areas around the inlet east of Cohoes Boulevard is to start a community garden or to create a public art project with local artists and members of the community.
3. Promote mixed use
4. Focus on preserving old building stock and focusing only on infill development and reusing existing building stock.

All of the participants were able to identify the strategic brownfield areas east of Cohoes Boulevard, but not a single participant could describe the City’s vision or plan for the Hudson inlet waterfront. Many people argued that brownfields cleanup would alleviate issues as a result of light industrial uses so close to residential development in the area south of area.

The water is too shallow for normal boating and kayaking activities, therefore most people recommend mixed-use development on undeveloped waterfront area. Several participants stated that there is enough residential development along the waterfront and want to see more mixed uses. If new housing is proposed along the waterfront, a few participants argued in favor of prioritizing low income and elderly-friendly housing.
Recommendations

After a review of the existing conditions, the feedback from the public event, and the materials provided by the Laberge Group, it is in the opinion of the Waterfront team that the following land use recommendations be implemented by the City of Cohoes:

Current Uses are not compatible. Industrial and light industrial uses are in close proximity to senior and low-income housing near the inlet waterfront. There is a good amount of historic building stock along the Hudson River that should be preserved, but is unattractive to potential developers and investors due to neighboring brownfields and industrial uses. A plan should be implemented in order to require developers to respect the historical and architectural design of Van Schaick Island and offer strategic incentives for adaptive reuse of industrial uses conforming to the Cohoes Boulevard Brownfield Opportunity Area Nomination Study, the City of Cohoes Comprehensive Plan, and City Code.
New Uses may include affordable housing, age-friendly housing, basic private services, and family-friendly entertainment. New affordable housing should be age-friendly, close to services, and include a washer and dryer on the same floor as residents. Age-friendly housing should not be near traditional industrial and light industrial uses. An option for an entertainment use is an outdoor performing arts venue in/near Van Schaick Park. The venue would attract visitors to Van Schaick Island and waterfront amenities such as Van Schaick Mansion and future waterfront projects.

New development should be restricted to three-story, street side multi-use buildings. Make sure the list of allowed amenities is clear for incentive zoning if developers want to build up to four or five floors.
Open Space, Public Access & Connectivity

should be improved by increasing the required zoning easement and creating a walkway along the Hudson River, public boat docks, and recreation such as paddleboats or other activities. It should be maintained by either the City of Cohoes or the Albany County Land Trust (ACLT). Improve wayfinding along the waterfront to major attractions such as Van Schaick Mansion, Van Schaick Park, and future waterfront activities. Improve street lighting around the waterfront in order to make joggers and bicyclists feel safe at night. Focus infrastructure and connectivity improvements on providing better access to essential services and the Downtown for residents living east of Cohoes Boulevard between 787 and the bridges to Van Schaick Island.

Parks and open space along the waterfront will attract residents to the waterfront in locations where the water is not deep enough for boats or kayaks. The golf course should remain open space in order to preserve the great view of the waterfront. A community garden and/or public art project would attract residents to the neglected inlet waterfront.

Parking strategies such as shared side lot parking and parking lot/boat launch combinations should be incentivized and in some cases required. With creative parking strategies, the City of Cohoes could increase visitors while reducing the number of impervious surfaces, increasing the amount of conserved waterfront land, and making the waterfront an appealing place to visit.
BUSPLUS

City of Cohoes

FUTURE BUSPLUS STOP ON VAN SCHACK ISLAND
Photo by CDTA
Open House

Stakeholders were excited for more people to come to Cohoes. Many grew up in Cohoes and remembered the mixed-use that existed and created a vibrant community. The following summarizes the feedback provided by participants in the Public Open House:

1. There is a need for service oriented businesses that help keep business and money inside of Cohoes.
2. Mixed-use development is crucial to the viability of communities in the City of Cohoes
3. Future increases in residents and housing is reducing the availability of parking.

With a number of businesses moving away or closing, a large majority of remaining businesses do not provide essential services or contribute to the fabric of Cohoes. A majority of stakeholders believed that promoting mixed-use would start to improve the visual and economic landscape in Cohoes. Creating more pedestrian friendly access would increase the likelihood that people would shop in Cohoes. The regional transit provider, Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA), is planning to create a new bus line called the BusPlus Blue Line. The Blue Line will provide frequent bus service, with stops in Downtown Cohoes and on Van Schaick Island. Some of the people who participated in the Public Open House worried that the Blue Line could negatively affect pedestrian and driver safety since the Blue Line will run along Route 470, a major two-lane commuter road.
Recommendations

Results from the Open House were accompanied by a preliminary analysis of existing conditions, information provided by the Laberge Group, and a review of best practices. It is the opinion of the BusPlus team that the following land use recommendations be implemented by the City of Cohoes.

**Mixed-Use Zones** should be created along Van Schaick Island. Properties immediately along Ontario Street are currently designated as mixed-use zones. Expanding this zone from Heartt Avenue to Breslin Avenue utilizes a compact portion of the island while allowing transit oriented development to expand along the Blue Line route. This will help attract current residents in Riverwalk and Water View apartments, along with future residents, to take advantage of a walkable neighborhood and Blue Line all within a ten-minute walk from home.

**Incentive Zoning** along the Blue Line route could promote transit oriented development by encouraging the renovation of multi-story buildings with first floor retail to have code-compliant residential units above. The addition of the Blue Line in Cohoes will present new issues in attracting businesses that support the future of Cohoes. Incentive zoning can provide opportunities for Cohoes to encourage improvements that cater to residents and commuters along the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail and the Blue Line. Residents identified the number of historic buildings that provide the opportunity for first floor storefronts and residential units above as an asset. Aging building stock and an increase in new development have been seen as a threat to this character of Cohoes. Incentive zoning could assist developers and homeowners to make multi-story buildings usable for retail and residential. This could help retain the historic character of Cohoes by utilizing existing building stock and reduce the need for cars along Ontario and Remsen Street.
Floating Zones should be placed in key areas for affordable housing to improve walkability for low-wage earning residents. A number of residents stressed the difficulty of finding housing near alternative transportation routes. A large portion of affordable housing exists in the northwestern section of Cohoes. Residents in this area have to walk 2 miles to get to the closest continually running bus, the 182. Floating zones are a tool for cities to identify future needs and requirements for spaces. Identifying potential locations for affordable housing with floating zones could increase the potential for low-wage earning residents to live in Cohoes without relying on a car and promotes walkability along the Route 470 corridor.

Streetscape & BusPlus Station Locations should encourage more pedestrian and cyclist friendly neighborhoods. Currently, Route 470 functions as a commuter route, provides a large amount of on-street parking, and is a major entry point into Cohoes. Frequent BusPlus service and the potential for new development would increase traffic along Route 470, which could negatively impact the quality of life for existing and potential residents. Improving the streetscape to provide larger sidewalks, bike lanes, more street furniture (benches, signage, etc.), and new trees/plants creates a welcoming introduction into Cohoes. Continuing these improvements onto Remsen Street would create a natural flow into downtown, promoting more forms of transportation along Route 470.
**Encourage Discussion** with CDTA on station locations to capitalize on connections with the Mohawk Hudson Bike-Hike Trail, new residential developments, and potential transit oriented development. Residents presented concerns about the proposed locations of the new BusPlus stations due to lack of space, traffic safety, and the distance to access the Blue Line. Some residents have expressed their desire for easier access to the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail and development that caters to people who use the Trail. Beginning discussions between the City of Cohoes and CDTA could lead to improved utilization of connection points and help identify future partnerships that promote growth along the Blue Line and throughout Cohoes.
Proposed BusPlus Blue Line
Map Courtesy of CDTA
Open House

The City-Wide station at the Open House focused on areas of the City of Cohoes not covered by the other three stations. After comparing notes with the other stations, it was apparent that there were many common themes that came up throughout the evening, including:

1. Access to waterfront
2. Infrastructure improvements
3. Parking concerns
4. Aesthetics of the streetscape
5. Vacant spaces throughout the city
6. Access to private services (laundromats, dry-cleaners, etc.)
7. Access to public transportation

In addition to targeting specific areas within the City of Cohoes where improvements were needed, participants expressed their opinion on the direction of the entire city.
Recommendations

The recommendations of the City-Wide team focus on feedback that was given regarding vacant spaces in the City and the need for more mixed-use zones. It is in the opinion of the City-Wide team that the following land use recommendations be implemented by the City of Cohoes.

The first recommendation is to encourage the infill of vacant residential areas with affordable and mixed-income housing. While the quantity of affordable housing may not be an immediate concern, once development picks up in the City, it will become more of a necessity to provide incentives to developers to incorporate mixed-income housing into infill design. This will reduce the likelihood of driving out current community members with high-priced housing, while also encouraging development.

The next recommendation from the City-Wide group is to incorporate more mixed-use zones into areas of the city that are currently zoned residential or commercial. This was of particular interest to residents living on Van Schaick Island who noted that many neighborhoods in the City developed as mixed-use and later had single use zoning imposed on them. This has had the effect of removing the sense of community that once existed.

The following provides further detail on how to incorporate the recommendations of the City-Wide team into the planning process.

Mixed-Use development can be incorporated in many ways. Some communities use it as a way to bring mixed housing types while others use it primarily for revitalizing areas that have been disinvested in and are on an economic spur. Mixed-use development is most commonly used to create or maintain a city’s downtown center. Mixed-use development can be beneficial to a community in the following ways:

1. Provides a mix of retail, restaurants, offices and civic uses.
2. Encourages economic investment.
3. Promotes high-quality design by providing both greater flexibility and more control.
4. Creates more housing opportunities.
5. Enhances a city’s unique identity and development potential.
6. Promotes pedestrian and bicycle travel.
7. Promotes efficient use of land and infrastructure.
Vacant Properties could be infilled with affordable housing. One of the common themes that came up several times during the workshop is the issue of vacant lots and buildings and how to infill that space. The Citywide group is proposing that the focus of infill development should be on increasing the affordable housing stock in the city. There are a number of methods to encourage this form of development, including inclusionary zoning, housing trust fund fees, “by-right” development, enacting high density and multi-family zones, and finally, allowing the use of accessory dwelling units in more areas of the City.

Accessory Dwelling Units are extra residential structures that are found on the same lot as the principal dwelling and can increase the housing stock of a municipality without having to develop larger housing developments. These units often provide affordable options to younger single occupants, or older retired occupants looking to move back to cities to enjoy the amenities of urban living.1

“By-Right” Development is a process that planning and zoning boards can adopt to help streamline the review process for development projects. Using this technique, projects are approved administratively when proposals meet local zoning requirements. This helps to streamline the review process which creates more certainty for developers and efficiency for zoning and planning boards1

Inclusionary Zoning is a form of zoning that makes affordable housing a necessity for development projects, thereby creating more opportunities for lower to middle income individuals and families to afford housing in the City. This can include such techniques as inclusionary set-asides. These “set-asides” are mandates in the zoning that require developers to set aside a certain percentage of dwelling units as affordable for new housing developments. This may include a mandate that 10-20% of the units must be sold or rented below market rate. If this is the route the City of Cohoes would like to take, it is important that covenants in the deeds include resale controls to ensure that affordability is maintained long term2. A way to create an incentive for developers is to provide density bonuses that would allow them to incorporate more dwelling units into a project than zoning would otherwise allow. The great thing about inclusionary zoning is that it creates an upfront commitment that developers will include long term affordable housing into development projects.

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1 (White House, 2016)  
2 (Brenner and Roberts, 2013)
Overlay Zoning is a regulatory tool that enables a special zoning district to be placed over a current base zone. The overlay district can share similar boundaries with the base zone regulations and incentives can be attached to any overlay district to protect a specific resource or a special area. It can encourage mixed-use zoning by promoting multiple uses.³

Housing Trust Fund Fees is another alternative that can increase the city’s affordable housing stock, also known as linkage fees. This requires that developers pay a fee for new developments that go into a fund. This fund can then be used to build more affordable housing in the City. This method in and of itself may not create enough funding for entire building projects, but incorporated with some of the other techniques provided here, may help to subsidize the cost of infill projects⁴

³ (Commercial Mixed Use Code, 2016)
⁴ (The White House, 2016)
Section II

Zoning Recommendations
Students of the Planning Studio conducted eight interviews with key stakeholders from the City of Cohoes and the surrounding region. Stakeholders included city officials and local professionals whose knowledge guided and supported the outlined zoning recommendations.

The table below lists each stakeholder along with the interviewer:

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Date Interviewed</th>
<th>Interviewer(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael Williams</td>
<td>Senior Planner</td>
<td>CDTA</td>
<td>October 21st, 2016</td>
<td>Sharareh Biglari,</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Zach Powell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred Laughlin</td>
<td>Code Enforcement Officer</td>
<td>City of Cohoes</td>
<td>November 1st, 2016</td>
<td>David Wang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniele Cherniak</td>
<td>Chair; Architectural Review Board</td>
<td>City of Cohoes</td>
<td>October 13th, 2016</td>
<td>Will Sikula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa Thibodeau</td>
<td>Chair; Zoning Board of Appeals</td>
<td>City of Cohoes</td>
<td>October 30th, 2016</td>
<td>Andrew Gillcrist,</td>
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<td>Laura Travison</td>
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<tr>
<td>Katherine Oliver</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Cohoes Housing Authority</td>
<td>November 4th, 2016</td>
<td>Laura Travison</td>
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<tr>
<td>Melissa Cherubino</td>
<td>Director, Building and Planning Department</td>
<td>City of Cohoes</td>
<td>October 28th, 2016</td>
<td>Garreton Smith</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael Jacobson</td>
<td>Director, Community and Economic Development</td>
<td>City of Cohoes</td>
<td>October 28th, 2016</td>
<td>Jeremy Monte</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ralph Signoracci</td>
<td>Chairman</td>
<td>Cohoes IDA</td>
<td>November 3rd, 2016</td>
<td>Yogi Potluri</td>
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The following summarizes the main points of each interview:

**Michael Williams**, Senior Planner, CDTA

- BusPlus will be running every 20 minutes in Cohoes during peak hours from 7-9 AM and from 3-7 PM, with frequencies of either 40 or 60 minutes during non-peak hours.
- None of the bus routes that currently serve Cohoes are being reduced in service as a result of the Blue Line.
- CDTA is piloting a bikeshare program in Albany, Saratoga Springs, Schenectady, and Troy. If the program is successful, CDTA views Cohoes as a likely community to expand the program to.
- If the Blue Line is successful in Cohoes, the Blue Line would likely expand to Harmony Mills, providing closer bus service to residents in Northern Cohoes and easier access to Cohoes Falls for visitors.

**Fred Laughlin**, Code Enforcement Officer, City of Cohoes

- The only area on our zoning map where a change might be beneficial is the Saratoga St. commercial zone; could be changed to mixed-use.
- The downtown is another area needing revitalization, but would need to conform to the historical aspects of the city code.
- I believe that the waterfront development should be done to include restaurant/mixed use and recreational areas for river access.
- If zoning allows taller and bigger units, off street parking should be a requirement such as parking below the building or a separate lot. We have new apartment complexes that have parking garages below.
Daniele Cherniak, Chair, Architecture Review Board, City of Cohoes

- A historic properties survey should be done to clarify how far out the historic district should be extended if extended. Some properties that are currently being worried about are the armory, row houses on White, Congress, and Saratoga streets.
- Demolition through neglect could be changed downtown with form-based code.
- Setbacks outside the city core is becoming a problem because it does not conform to the historic character. An example is Rite Aid across the road from Ogden Mills.
- New developments need to have proper scale and similar setbacks and rooflines. Requiring some visual requirement would also be good.

Theresa Thibodeau, Chair, Zoning Board of Appeals, City of Cohoes

- Most variances are area variances for things like sheds and fence posts. Perhaps setback requirements should be looked at for residential zones.
- Mixed-Use zones are good for commercial corridors and the edges of neighborhoods, not in residential neighborhoods. This was made particularly clear by a variance granted on Van Schaick to allow a church building to change the use to a restaurant. There was strong pushback from local residents.
- Over the last 20 years or so the socioeconomic make-up of Downtown Cohoes has lowered. More public assistance and Section 8 housing than there used to be.
- Form Based Code is a good option for the Downtown Core, 470 and Waterfront.
- PILOT programs are a good way to bring in business. Most of these have been granted for residential use. They should be implemented to encourage commercial growth.
- New developments need to have proper scale and similar setbacks and rooflines.
Katherine Oliver, Executive, Cohoes Housing Authority

- Future Inclusionary housing hasn’t been addressed because of more immediate day to day concerns getting people into housing
- Average wait times for public housing is 18 months
- No funding or large enough space to build another dedicated low-income housing project. This means that mixed income developments through inclusionary zoning is the best strategy moving forward

Melissa Cherubino, Director, Building and Planning Department, City of Cohoes

- A lot of Cohoes variances are for minor setbacks for residents to use on personal properties like pools, decks etc. She recommends the city taking a look into changing setbacks for single and two family dwelling units.
- Ms. Cherubino spoke highly on the city implementing new green infrastructure and storm water management. She stated that the City of Cohoes could lower their carbon footprint and incorporate more green practices.
- The city had a high volume of variances for signage, the previous code didn’t allow for businesses to have their signage a certain size. The City changed the code to “Freestanding Sign” which allows for more flexibility with size and color.

Michael Jacobson, Director, Community and Economic Development, City of Cohoes

- The Department of Community and Economic Development wants to sell all available property Downtown. Recently the Masonic Temple building was sold. The vacant lot at Remsen Street and White Street (18 Remsen Street), the vacant lot beside the Cohoes Hotel, and the vacant site around the KeyBank are targets for potential new projects. The Department is planning a marketing campaign for the City to attract potential developers and investors to sites Downtown as well as along the Mohawk River.
- The City of Cohoes is undergoing a review of streets Downtown. The Complete Streets Prototype Plan will determine the cost to the City for the improvement of road infrastructure Downtown. Construction is already underway around the Cohoes Music Hall and City Hall from Cayuga Street to Ontario Street. Phase 2 of the Prototype Plan will include areas currently zoned R-1 and R-2.
- Commercial uses Downtown must fit in with the neighborhood. Based on the existing businesses, the dimensions of available retail spaces, and current zoning a few options
for the Downtown are neighborhood food services and retail serving the needs of those living and visiting Downtown. By reopening the Cohoes Music Hall, the City looks to attract new visitors Downtown to reinvigorate businesses particularly along Remsen Street.

- Any zoning changes Downtown must be compatible with current projects. The current projects underway in Downtown Cohoes are mixed-use 3-4 story buildings with retail space on the first floor and two or three stories of 1-, 2-, and 3-bedroom rental market rate rental apartments. One project is a residential development with an office space for child-care services on the first floor and residential units throughout. Reuse project proposals put forth to the town have been focused on community assets (the Cohoes Hotel and churches), underused parking lots, and vacant lots and buildings. There are plans for pocket parks and public courtyards underway at some of these sites as well.

Ralph Signoracci, Chairman, Cohoes IDA

- Zoning is not an issue in the city of Cohoes. Lack of vision is a problem.
- PILOT program is currently active by many owners in City on a 30 year payment term. For upcoming developments, 10 year payment terms might be considered.
- Waterfront currently has residential and auto services in commercial zones. No requirement for more residential zones and more mixed use can be allocated. Services like eateries, shopping, etc., should be promoted to bring more people to waterfront.
- Businesses in downtown not open past 5PM.
- Site with potential development opportunities: Waterfront, Ontario St- 787 Corridor, Remsen – Saratoga St in Downtown, Park Avenue on Van Schaick.
- City of Cohoes is starting a pavement program in phases. Phase 1 covering Downtown and other phases to be determined.
This report includes recommendations and comments pursuant to Cohoes City Code §285 “The Zoning Law of the City of Cohoes, New York,” hereinafter referred to as zoning code. This report references the current zoning code and recommends future actions for zoning changes and clarifications.

Chapter 285 General Comments

1) An organized and final table of contents should be constructed at the end of this process to facilitate reading the zoning code.

2) Correction of any and all spelling and syntax errors are recommended throughout this chapter.

3) Consider altering the zoning district boundaries to reflect the land use recommendations identified in the Comprehensive Plan. Explore the possibility of incorporating Form Based Code into specific areas within zoning district, to include areas downtown, Van Schaick Island and along the waterfront.

4) Discuss reorganizational needs to the Zoning law (e.g. Role of city officials, addition or deletion of sections, changes in enforcement).

5) It is recommended that bulk and use tables be represented in a graphical format to provide a visual representation of zoning district site regulations. This visual representation has been used in Albany’s new Unified Sustainable Development Law.

285-2 Intent; Word Usage

6) Within section B, include the phrase “sustainable development.”

7) Within section C indicate that zoning regulations are in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan and Comprehensive Plan update as approved by the Cohoes Common Council.

§285-5 Definitions.

8) The definitions sections should be updated to include all terms within the zoning law. This section will also be reviewed and updated to reflect current standards and practices.
9) Specific items to be defined are as follows, but are not limited to:

- Affordable Housing – housing units where occupant is paying no more than 30 percent of the gross total monthly household income for housing costs, including taxes and utilities.\(^5\)
- Code Enforcement Officer – A person appointed by the Cohoes Common Council to administer and enforce this law.\(^6\)
- Cornice – Any horizontal member, structural or nonstructural, of any building, projecting outward from the exterior walls at the roof line, including eaves and other roof overhang.\(^7\)
- Floating Zone – An unmapped zoning district where all the zone requirements are contained in the law and the zone is fixed on the map only when the application for development meeting the zone requirements is approved.\(^8\)
- Green Infrastructure – The use of vegetation, soils, and other elements and practices to manage stormwater.
- Incentive Zoning – The awarding of a bonus to a development in the form of a more intensive use of land in exchange for a public benefit as identified by the Cohoes Common Council.
- Mural – A hand-produced work of visual art which is tiled or painted by hand directly upon or affixed directly to an exterior wall of a building.\(^5\)
- Street Furniture – Those features associated with a street that are intended to enhance that street’s physical character and use by pedestrians, such as benches, trash receptacles, kiosks, lights, newspaper racks, etc.\(^9\)
- Streetscape – The visual image of a street, including combination of buildings, parking, signs, and other hardscape and street furniture.\(^10\)
- Zoning Officer – The appointed officer designated by the City of Cohoes as the officer responsible for enforcing and administering the requirements of the zoning law.\(^11\)
- Microbrewery – An establishment that produces malt beverages and alcoholic ciders for sale on premises and in packages for later consumption off premises via retail carry-outs, or through distribution. Production not to exceed 15,000 barrels per year. May allow food sales.
- Distillery – A Facility in which intoxicating liquors are produced. Does not include items produced within a microbrewery as defined. May allow food sales.

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\(^6\) (Davidson and Dolnick, edited 2004, pg 114)

\(^7\) (Davidson and Dolnick, edited 2004, pg 128)

\(^8\) (Davidson and Dolnick, edited 2004, pg 184)

\(^9\) (Davidson and Dolnick, edited 2004, pg 392)

\(^10\) (Davidson and Dolnick, edited 2004, pg 397)

\(^11\) (Davidson and Dolnick, edited 2004, pg 460)
• Planned Development District (PDD) – A floating zoning district, established by the Cohoes Common Council, applicable throughout the City pursuant to the review and approval procedures set forth in the Zoning Law. A PDD allows for flexible, well-planned developments that are intended to incorporate a mixture of compatible uses that are beneficial to community needs and goals.

• Hydroponics – A method of growing plants without soil in mineral nutrient solutions, water, or a solid medium such as gravel.

§285-6 Enforcement.

10) Should not specify City Planner title as Zoning Officer. The role of “City Planner” is not typically “Zoning Officer”

§285-7 §285-10 (Multiple.) Within Article 2 - Enforcement.

11) As indicated above title of Administrators/Officers within chapter are inconsistent. Section should be changed.

§285-14 Revocation.

12) While a revocation process is outlined, the Zoning Law should indicate the process for granting extensions for Site Plan and Special Use Permits. In addition, the City should consider expanding the provisions outlining the process for Special Use Permits in the Zoning Law.

§285-31 Types of Districts and District Designations.

13) Shall be updated if zoning districts are added, deleted or titles modified.

§285-32 Official Zoning District Map

14) Shall be updated if zoning districts are added, deleted or titles modified.
15) The District Intent should be updated to reflect the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan, which envisions the District to be the highest and most intensely utilized zone within the city. Consider the following revision: “To accommodate the highest intensity and diversity of retail, business and upper-floor residential uses, this district shall focus upon high-quality design and materials consistent with historic downtown, accommodating historic district form and promote an active, pedestrian-oriented public realm with connections to transit opportunities.”

16) The provision within City Code §285 Article XIV regarding no site plan review requirement for single-family or two-family dwelling and related accessory uses, shall not apply within the downtown area of this district as these uses are discouraged.

17) Add light industrial uses for light manufacturing, breweries, hydroponic etc. and allow as a Special Use. As part of these special use permits for micro-breweries and micro-distilleries, for live-music, and for performance stages (commercial amusement) such as performances and comedy shows within this zone.

18) State that parking as secondary use shall require a special use permit if spaces constructed are above required minimum.

19) Bulk and Use Table:
   a. As the intention is Mixed-Use, it is advisable that the emphasis for the Bulk and Use table within this zone be not based on individual uses but upon building form. The consistency of building heights, setbacks and other requirements that maintain the historic cohesiveness of downtown Cohoes are encouraged.

   b. All lot widths should be re-examined for all uses. e.g. Restaurant lot width is excessive in an urban setting, etc.

   c. Minimums should be established where maximums only are indicated to further guide form as compared to maximums. Conversely, maximums shall be established where only maximums are indicated.
      i. Setback, Green space- Maximums
      ii. Lot Coverage, Height- Minimums

   d. It is advisable that height be increased within this district. A minimum of 1.5 stories or 18’ shall be established to be consistent with downtown and current mixed use
form within a MU1 Zone. The maximum shall be increased above 35’-45’ to 55’
(Approximately 5 stories)

20) Allow bars/taverns with appropriate lot space to manufacture alcoholic beverages as an
accessory use, requiring a special use permit.

§285-39 Waterfront Mixed Use (MU2)

21) Provisions and developer requirements for water access should be clarified.

22) Consider allowing docks as an accessory use as of right dependent upon size and if the
primary property is single-family residential, other parcels wishing to add docks shall
require Special Use Permit.

23) Parks and Recreational uses should be added as an allowable use.

24) Remove Parking Garage from special use permit.

25) Allow special use permits for “light industrial” such as micro-breweries and micro-
distilleries, for live-music, and for performance stages (commercial amusement) such as
performances and comedy shows within this zone.

26) Allow current bars/taverns with appropriate lot space to manufacture alcoholic
beverages as an accessory use. All design specifications should go through the regular
review process performed by the Planning Board, Zoning Board, and Historic and
Architectural Review Board within this zone.

§285-40 Office/Retail Commercial District (C-1)

27) Consider removing Dwelling, multi-family and Dwelling, attached or row from
permitted uses. The only permitted residential uses should be restricted to mixed-use
buildings.

28) Include removal of special use permit requirement for a private club in a C-1 district.
§285-41 Industrial District

29) Add hydroponics and microbreweries as allowable uses.

30) Remove first floor in reference to Places of Worship as non-secular uses should be treated the same.

§285-42 – Land Conservation District (LC)

31) Do not allow single family dwelling units in land conservation districts

§285-43 Planned Development District

32) In Section B, Part 3, remove reference to “Low-Key”.

33) Include “and/or transit” in Section B, Part 3.

34) Section H should include improved access to public transportation or improvements to public transit facilities as an objective.

§285-45 Floodplain Overlay District

35) Definitions should be moved to §285-5 and placed alphabetically.

§285-70 Incentive Zoning

36) Language should be strengthened to clearly outline incentives.

37) Within Section C, the following changes should be considered:

- Remove public access to the waterfront since this should be required, not incentivized
- Add affordable housing/units
- Add public access to boat launch/water
- Add streetscape improvements that promote and benefit multiple forms of transportation

38) Extend allowance for incentives to all zoning districts except LC.
In regard to Cash Payment Section G, the following should be added: “If the Common Council finds that community benefit is not suitable on-site or cannot be reasonably provided, professional staff could provide alternate amenities that align with the goals of the Comprehensive Plan.”

§285-73 Parking

40) Parking as scheduled throughout code should be consolidated and placed within this section.

§285-74 Storage Containers

41) Definitions should be moved to 285-5 Definitions.

§285-77 Intent (Landscaping)

42) Strengthen regulation language to imply stricter enforcement of Parts A and E.

43) Consider a Part F, to require sidewalks and multi-use paths be included with parking areas.

§285-79 General Requirements

44) Establish stricter regulations and enforcement actions to be taken for non-compliance with landscaping plan.

45) Include language to indicate streetscape improvements and general beautification may be required in areas less suited for traditional landscaping.

§285-80.1 Parking Lots

46) Lower number of minimum parking spaces in surface lots for which green infrastructure is required to three. It stands at 20 spaces now, but it is recommended that three spaces be considered to offset environmental effects, e.g., storm water.

47) Change “mature tree” to “tree once it has matured.”
§285-82 Applicability

48) Adequacy of parking should be considered by the Planning Board based on building size and use.


49) Within Schedule A, parking requirements should be zone specific. This should require shared parking in target areas throughout the city

50) Add parking maximums instead of parking minimums for requirements.

§ 285-88.3. Land-banked parking.

51) Allow for temporary uses e.g. Farmer's Market Saturday, Church Parking on Sunday

52) Allow for greater flexibility and Planning Board discretion and remove "of up to 30% of the maximum allowed parking spaces,"

§ 285-126. Preliminary site plan application.

53) Add requirement to provide information on public parking and bicycle parking within 800 feet of site.


54) Add consideration of Complete Streets ideals into General Considerations.

55) Add consideration of solar access, e.g., Saratoga Springs.

56) Insert cyclist into language regarding pedestrians.


57) Move definitions to 285-5
Should zoning be modified the following recommendations are given to be included into City Code where is deemed appropriate.

It is recommended the City rezone the downtown area as well as portions of Van Schaick Island where appropriate. This should include the following zoning districts and provisions therein:

1. **Mixed-Use Downtown Core (MU-DC)** – between Ontario and Columbia along Mohawk, Remsen and Main Street
   a. No single-use dwellings, residential only in mixed-use buildings
   b. Do not allow special use permits for parking lots and garages as principal uses. Only accessory or secondary as part of a development in which the parking lot/garage is incorporated into the design
   c. No funeral homes
   d. No machine shops and related manufacturing uses
   e. No boarding or rooming house for up to three roomers
   f. The traditional Downtown Cohoes

2. **Mixed-Use Local Connection/Corridor (MU-LC)** – White Street and Bridge Avenue
   a. No funeral homes
   b. Do not allow special use permits for parking lots and garages as principal uses. Only accessory or secondary as part of a development in which the parking lot/garage is incorporated into the design
   c. No machine shops and related manufacturing uses
   d. Pedestrian throughway in Downtown with corner mixed-use, commercial and office to be seen as an extension of MU-DC but with the other parcels having the option for single-use residential, especially given existing residential stock.

3. **Mixed-Use Neighborhood Connection/Corridor (MU-NC)** – Ontario, Bedford and Columbia Street. This option may be advisable for areas along Bridge Avenue on Van Schaick Island.
   a. TOD and intercity automobile connections
   b. Primarily commercial, office and mixed-use with allowable larger lot sizes and buildable areas compared to the rest of Downtown and offers slightly higher height maximums (5-story) along Bedford and Ontario and especially at the major intersections of Bedford and Columbia as well as Ontario and Columbia with Cohoes Boulevard and Saratoga Street.
4. **Mixed-Use Regional Attraction (MU-RA)** – Remsen and Mohawk Street between Cayuga and Ontario Street.
   a. No single-use dwellings, rental and for-sale residential only in mixed-use buildings
   b. Special use permit should be required for boarding houses, hotels, and bed & breakfasts
   c. No funeral homes
   d. No machine shops and related manufacturing uses
   e. Make all parking for Cohoes Music Hall open municipal parking when events are not taking place
   f. All development proposals and changes of use should be considered in relation to the Cohoes Music Hall (use, architecture, building lot, parking, height, and district form including streetscape, setbacks and frontage)
5. The rest will stay with the same Mixed-Use zoning with general changes listed above.
6. It is advisable the mixed-use neighborhood be extended to Van Schaick Island as well
7. Van Schaick should be a new recreational zone that is slightly more intensive than land conservation but protects it from most uses that would lessen the character of the waterfront. It should be called Land Conservation – Waterfront Recreation (LC-WR) and shall extend between the waterfront side of the golf course to just north to Van Schaick Park and west to the end of Bridge Street.

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**In regard to incentive zoning, which should have clear and concise aims, objectives and requirements, the following is recommended:**

Utilize incentive zoning, contracts to businesses and business owners, and developer agreements to target vacant lots in a provision for passive/active open space and plazas – this should include partnerships between nearby property owners, business owners, and developers. These spaces should be accessible to the public.

Include streetscape and local beautification improvements in allowable amenities for incentive zoning. Require the owner of the property to maintain these amenities.

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**As some city officials and residents alike have expressed concerns regarding parking the following recommendations are provided for consideration:**

Put limit on parking requirement (size limit) with exception for transfer development rights/shared parking through legal agreement between the parties in question and the city.

Municipal parking or designated on-street parking within 800 feet of a use can apply the parking spaces to the off-street parking requirement. This can be a tool for getting parking out of the core Downtown. Money for a Transportation Demand Management Fund to relocate, build and/or maintain parking lots could be collected from those parties for which the parking
would apply. Also, reiterate §285-88 J exceptions in Mixed-Use district for off-street parking when use within 500 feet of a municipal lot with excess capacity (can build “excess capacity” into lot to match requirements)

Off-street parking which does not contain municipal parking is not required to be located within the district, but should be within at least 300 feet of use. Consider 800 feet to match municipal and designated on-street parking.

For MU-1 zoning (at least in Downtown), 1 space per dwelling unit (not 2).

Remove requirement for attached housing to have off-street parking in Downtown.

Include parking space requirement reductions in allowable incentives for incentive zoning

Consider rounding down when parking requirement measurements are not a whole number.

Potential changes to the minimum number of off-street parking spaces in MU-1 District:

1. Bar or Tavern = 1 per 150 SF
   a. Outdoor,( temporary or seasonal) areas utilized for patrons, which amount to less than 50% of the indoor floor areas, shall not be included into the parking calculations. Outdoor areas in excess of this 50% threshold shall be required to provide, 1 space per 150 SF.
   b. No additional parking if accessory use for the manufacture of alcoholic beverages

2. Places of public assembly = 1 per 4 seats

3. Restaurant = Could remain the same, with potential reduction by 0.5 spaces
   a. No additional parking if accessory use for the manufacture of alcoholic beverages

4. All residential uses should have a maximum of 1 parking space per unit

5. All retail and office, including mixed-use structures, should have maximum 1.5 unit per 1000 SF

6. Consider a uniform cap on the number of parking spaces in MU-1 districts or a zone-specific cap for each of the recommended mixed-use districts

7. Count on-street parking spaces directly in front of business toward off-street parking requirement
As indicated the asset of history and architecture in Cohoes should be considered and hold a more elevated codified role.

**HISTORIC DISTRICT AND TECHNICAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION GUIDELINES**

For murals, art pieces, sculptures, and other detached elements of significant historic value in which public funds were used or public ownership of the property in which the historic elements are located existed before sale to a private owner:

In the case where the owner of a property with historic designation intends to redesign the interior of said property and there are known interior elements of significant historic value, the Historic and Architecture Review Board will provide technical assistance for the preservation of said element whether this is done by keeping the element in place and performing the appropriate conservation and restoration procedures or by removing the element and performing the appropriate conservation and restoration procedures off-site before displaying the element at the property either at the same location or at another prominent location inside or offsite in a museum, gallery or another location for public display. Financial and technical assistance from the Board will only be provided if the restoration will be accessible to the public. It should also be possible for said element to be sold to another party as long as the element in question is displayed prominently in an area with public access and undergoes the appropriate conservation and restoration procedures as it would if the element remained at its original location.

Payment for the conservation and restoration of the element should be provided by the owner if the owner intends to sell to a private buyer. The Board should be actively finding ways of supplementing the cost and providing public information on conservation and restoration procedures. In cases where these elements are not desirable to be refurbished and preserved by the property owner, the burden of proof falls to the Board.

**VACANT BUILDINGS, VACANT LOTS, AND INFILL PROJECTS**

Murals and public art displays on and around vacant lots and buildings and blighted properties should be allowed in order to fill space and give a sense of place while improving the attractiveness of Downtown, drawing crowds and increasing demand. All murals and public art displays painted or mounted to existing structures that are not owned or operated by the City of Cohoes, should undergo review by the Planning Board, and where an Historic Overlay District is concerned, the Historic and Architectural Review Board.

Artwork on the sides of historic buildings and/or within a Historic Overlay District should follow these requirements:
1. Murals and art displays cannot directly involve the “removing, covering, or radical changing of visible features of the structural systems which are important in defining the overall historic character of the building so that, as a result, the character is diminished.”

2. “Paint or mount all murals or other similar forms of visual art on the side or rear walls of the building, and not on its primary façade, above its roof line, or on any of its decorative elements.”

3. “A mural may be any size, but it should be in scale with the district’s character and appropriate for its location.”

4. “Subject matter should reflect an aspect of the district’s or the city’s history so that it contributes to or reinforces the historic fabric of the buildings or district.”

5. “Use paints and materials that will not chemically corrode nor compromise the integrity of the building’s exterior and structure.”

Artwork on the sides of all buildings across all districts should follow these requirements:

1. No picture, symbol or device of any kind that includes the logo, brand, tagline, and/or title to a commercial business, product or service.

2. If a proposed mural project includes the refurbishment of a historic mural with this content, the project will be considered as a historic renovation project subject to guidelines specific to historic buildings followed by the regular review process for historic renovations in the City of Cohoes.

3. If a mural contains commercial content as defined, it is subject to City signage regulations as an advertisement.

All mural proposals are subject to a review of the following elements:

1. Appropriate content (no vulgar language or material and no violent or adult content with other considerations as defined by the signage regulations).

2. “Use paints and materials that will not chemically corrode nor compromise the integrity of the building’s exterior and structure.”

3. Appropriate scale and design based on the district’s character and the mural’s location.

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12 (Weeks & Grimmer, 1995)
13 (City of Newark, 2015)
14 (City of Newark, 2015)
INCLUSIONARY ZONING

It is recommended that Inclusionary zoning be included as part of the zoning update. Inclusionary zoning requires new housing projects to include a prescribed proportion of units that are affordable for people with lower to middle incomes. The developer may be rewarded with a density bonus or other incentive as determined by the Planning Board. Integrating inclusionary zoning into a community’s zoning code promotes socioeconomic diversity as well as a diversity of housing types.

BUS PLUS CORRIDOR

It is recommended that the existing mixed-use zone on Ontario Street on Van Schaick Island be expanded from around River Street to Railroad Drive and from around Breslin Avenue to Heartt Avenue. Expanding the zone would incorporate existing local businesses and provide the opportunity for more pedestrian- and cyclist-friendly businesses and housing to residents and visitors.

Similarly, commuters and residents utilize Bridge Avenue as an alternative to NY-470, creating increased traffic and opportunity in southern Van Schaick Island. Creating a mixed-use zone that extends from around Hudson Ave to Van Schaick Avenue and from around 1st Street to Park Avenue, could provide more service-oriented businesses for residents, a business-driven impetus to implement traffic calming, and improve the viability for residents and visitors to access the waterfront.

The introduction of these mixed-use zones also comes with the recognition that most residents on Van Schaick Island live in single-family housing. New housing development along the waterfront has created warranted concern about future development on the island. Therefore, we recommend an overlay on buildings and structures that do not abut Ontario Street or Bridge Street that are within the proposed expanded mixed-use zones on Van Schaick Island. This overlay can incorporate elements of form based code to reduce changes to the streetscape and allow for low-impact, low-intensity mixed-use development that can meet the service-oriented needs of residents. Utilizing an overlay can retain usable housing stock, contain negative noise and traffic effects within compact zones, provide more service-oriented businesses on Van Schaick Island, promote multi-modal connectivity, and create opportunities for projects and developments that cater to the waterfront, the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail, and the BusPlus Blue-Line.
WATERFRONT MIXED-USE

If new downtown mixed use zones are created, MU-2 (mixed use waterfront) should be changed to MU-WF (waterfront).

It is advisable to change Bridge St. to a mixed-use zone to fit in the character of the neighborhood.

Commercially zoned land on Linden St. should be changed to MU-2, to be consistent with the rest of the city.

Change golf course parcel from waterfront mixed use to land conservation. The land conservation should be a unique land conservation zone that does not allow single family dwellings.

CERTIFIED LOCAL GOVERNMENT

It is also advisable that the City of Cohoes enroll in the Certified Local Government Program. The CLG supports and strengthens local government initiatives by providing preservation provisions, improved funding opportunities and insurance of good local policy.

In New York State, this program is run through the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. To be eligible to become a CLG, Cohoes should work with NYS OPRHP to review and revise the city zoning code to include provisions that meet state and federal requirements for designation of historic resources, composition of the historic preservation commission, and local review processes. All CLGs are eligible to receive:

- Ongoing, focused support from the NYS Historic Preservation Office.
- Technical preservation assistance and legal advice.
- Direct involvement in SHPO programs, such as identifying properties that may be eligible for listing in the State and National Registers of Historic Places.
- Training opportunities that increase the ability of communities to protect their historic resources and integrate them into short- and long-term planning initiatives.
- Grants designated exclusively for CLG projects.
VARIANCE ANALYSIS

City of Cohoes

HIGHEST FREQUENCY OF AREA VARIANCES BY LOCATION
Photo by Haotian Wang
The following tables and figures outline general trends in area and use variances between 2012 and 2015. There are two types of variances, an **Area Variance** and a **Use Variance**. In Euclidian zoning, use variances, and therefore changing the use of a building on a property, is much more difficult to be permitted.

**Area Variances** involve modification for height and building size or placement.

**Use Variances** allows for a use inconsistent with uses permitted of right. 15

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15 Juergensmeyer & Roberts, 2013
VARIANCE FREQUENCIES

**FIGURE 1: CITY OF COHOES VARIANCES, 2012-2015**

- **Use Variance**: 16%
- **Area Variance**: 84%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variance Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use Variance</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area Variance</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontage</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fence</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height, number of units, greenspace</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Data Courtesy of City of Cohoes Building and Planning Department

**FIGURE 2: CITY OF COHOES AREA VARIANCES, 2012-2015**

- **Setbacks**: 28
- **Lot Size**: 7
- **Frontage**: 1
- **Sign**: 3
- **Parking**: 8
- **Fence**: 1
- **Height, number of units, greenspace**: 4

**FIGURE 3: CITY OF COHOES USE VARIANCES, 2012-2015**

- **Multi-family at edge of MU-1**: 1
- **Multi-family in a residential zone**: 3
- **Incidental restaurant**: 2
- **Former garage use as garage**: 2
- **Commercial**: 1
- **Apartment in SFH**: 1
### VARIANCE TABLE

**TABLE 1: CITY OF COHOES VARIANCES, 2012-2015**  
Source Data Courtesy of the City of Cohoes Building and Planning Department

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADDRESS</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>VARIANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>175 Park Ave</td>
<td>Use</td>
<td>Incidental Restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69 Broadway</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Shed Setbacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Setbacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44 Broadway</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Setbacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Dudley Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Setbacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony Mills – N Mohawk St</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td># Of Units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>480 Columbia St</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Signs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>480 Columbia St</td>
<td>Use</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Zeimke Farm Ln</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Setbacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113 Maple Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Setbacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>293 Central Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Setbacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74 Edward St</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Setbacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>143 Van Schaick Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Shed Setbacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William St</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td># Of Units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William St</td>
<td>Use</td>
<td>Multi-Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 Congress St</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td># Of Units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Garner St</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Lot Width</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 Peach St</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Lot Width, Parking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>154 Mohawk St</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Parking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Elaine Ct</td>
<td>Use</td>
<td>Apartment In Single-Family House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104 Western Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Lot Size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>222 Vliet Blvd</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Lot Depth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95 Rensselaer Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Side Setback/Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>625 Saratoga St</td>
<td>Use</td>
<td>Garage Storage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 Simmons Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Parking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADDRESS</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>VARIANCE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45 N Erie St</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Setbacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Watervliet Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Lot Depth For Subdivision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83 Younglove Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Setbacks For Porch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Devlin St</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Setbacks For Pool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>161 Masten Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Setbacks And Lot Size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Fox Hollow Sq</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Setbacks For Shed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98 Johnston Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Setbacks For Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>257 Columbia St Ext</td>
<td>Use</td>
<td>Multi-Family At Edge Of MU-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Deerfield Dr</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Setbacks For Shed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 Manor Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Frontage Of Lot Size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>480 Columbia St Ext</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Sign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 Congress St</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Parking For Dorms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**TABLE 1: CITY OF COHOES VARIANCES, 2012-2015**
Source Data Courtesy of the City of Cohoes Building and Planning Department

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADDRESS</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>VARIANCE</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2014</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware Ave</td>
<td>Use</td>
<td>Multi-Family In Residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Parking, Building Height, Setbacks, Greenspace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Simmons Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Sign At Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79 Lancaster St</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Parking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 Congress St</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Parking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>580 Saratoga St</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Setbacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>259 Vliet Blvd</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Side Setbacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 River St</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Setbacks For Pool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>220 Berkley Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Fence Height Next To City Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>282 Central Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Side Setback For Addition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109 Rensselaer Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Side Setbacks For A Deck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>289 Ontario St</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Number Of Parking Spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90 First St</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Side Setback For Single-Family House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2015</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>175 Park Ave</td>
<td>Use</td>
<td>Incidental Restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>248 Columbia St Ext</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Garage Setback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Meadowlark Dr</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Addition Setback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>165 Masten Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Shed Setbacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Witbeck Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Shed Setback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>217 Delaware Ave</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Height, Number Of Units, Greenspace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144 Congress St</td>
<td>Use</td>
<td>Former Garage Use As Garage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>164 Vliet Blvd</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Pool Setback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Willowbrook Ln</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Shed Setback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Amity St</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Number Of Units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Amity St</td>
<td>Use</td>
<td>Multi-Family In A Residential Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>137 Mohawk St</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Number Of Parking Spaces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ZONING MAPS

Area & Use Variance Map 2012-2015
Area Variance Map 2012-2015
Use Variance Map 2012-2015
Section III
Presentation
Cohoes: A Community For All

December 6, 2016
University at Albany Fall 2016 Graduate Planning Studio

Acknowledgements

Cohoes Common Council
City of Cohoes Officials and Staff
City of Cohoes Residents
Laberge Group
University at Albany
Overview

- Studio Roles
- Open House
- Land Use & Zoning Recommendations

Studio Roles

- Comprehensive Plan & Zoning Code updates funded by the NYSERDA Cleaner Greener Program
- Studio working with the Laberge Group to provide land use recommendations for the Comprehensive Plan Update & further recommendations for the Zoning Code Update
Cohoes Open House & Stakeholders

Open House Takeaways
Neighborhood Retail
Open House Takeaways
Retaining Historic Aspects of Cohoes

Open House Takeaways
Waterfront
Open House Takeaways
Traffic Safety & Walkability

Open House Takeaways
Streetscape
Recommendations

Overview

• Mixed-Use Consistent with Desired Form
• Housing for All
• Creative Parking Strategies
• Streetscape & Traffic Calming
Form-Based Code

Before: typical existing conditions produced by the conventional zoning system.

Form-Based Code

Form-based code: new standards for the public realm & private development.
Form-Based Code

After: potential private development allowing new form-based standards.

Form-Based Code
What it Can Accomplish in Cohoes

- Consistent Building Form
- Appropriate Reuse of Vacant Properties
- Strong Branding Opportunity
- Encourages Walkable Neighborhoods
- Privately Financed Public Benefits
  - Beautification
  - Streetscape Improvements
  - Historic Preservation and Presentation
Recommendations
Housing for All

- Tools that can help achieve housing for various income earners
- Reduces rent burden (rent above 30% of household income)
- Some of the tools of inclusionary zoning include:
  - Cash In-Lieu of Amenity
  - Housing Trust Funds
  - Accessory Dwelling Units

Inclusionary Zoning
Planning Ahead
Recommendations
Creative Parking Strategies

- Institute parking maximums
- Add on-street parking to number of parking spaces
- Shared parking and land-banked parking will reduce number of parking spaces
- Site Plan Review should include pre-existing bicycle parking
- Cash in-lieu of amenity
Recommendations
Complete Streets & Streetscape

• Complete Streets:
  Street design that helps provide safer access for all travelers, regardless of the mode of transportation
BusPlus Blue Line

- New bus service will provide frequent service to Troy and Albany
- Two stops will be located in Cohoes: One Downtown & one on Van Schaick Island

Recommendations
Complete Streets & Streetscape

- Complete Streets
- Mixed-Use & Transit-Oriented Development around the BusPlus line
- Form-Based Code & Historic Preservation
Focus Areas

Next Steps
Downtown Mixed-Use Zones

- Local Connector
- Downtown Core
- Neighborhood Connector
- Regional Attraction
Next Steps
Downtown

Mixed-Use Local Corridor (MU-LC)
White Street

Next Steps
Downtown

Mixed-Use Downtown Core (MU-DC)
Between Ontario and Columbia along Mohawk, Remsen and Main Street
Next Steps
Downtown

Mixed-Use Neighborhood Corridor (MU-NC)
Ontario, Bedford and Columbia Street

Next Steps
Downtown

Mixed-Use Regional Attraction (MU-RA)
Remsen and Mohawk Street between Cayuga and Ontario Street
Next Steps
Waterfront & Van Schaick Island

• Mixed-Use Zones
• Form-Based Code
• Parking
• Streetscape/Complete Streets
• Land Conservation

Next Steps
Waterfront & Van Schaick Island

• New zones will be form-based and mixed-use
• Traffic will be a consideration as development increases
• Van Schaick Park will be a buffer between form based development and new out-of-scale developments along the waterfront
Next Steps  
Waterfront & Van Schaick Island

- Unknown future for prime waterfront parcel.
- There is limited access to the waterfront on Van Schaick Island.
- Potential uses for the site include public parks, boat access, and outdoor event space.

Next Steps  
Waterfront & Van Schaick Island

“Buildings on the waterfront side of any roadway shall permit pedestrian access from both the waterfront side and the road side of the building.”  
- §285-39 H(3)

- Incentive Zoning (boat launches, access improvement)
- Control of required easement
### Future Citywide Collaboration

- NY-Sun
- Safe Routes to School
- Certified Local Government (CLG)
- All-America City

### NY-Sun

- NY-Sun is a program through NYSERDA that provides solar energy tax incentives and trainings for residents and municipalities
- Some of the available programs include:
  - Community Distributed Generation (CDG, or Shared Solar)
  - Real Property Tax Law § 487
  - Affordable Solar
  - Solarize Your Community
Safe Routes to School

- Safe Routes to School National Partnership provides in-person & online trainings, resources, and network of organizations
- Tailored resources for policymakers, educators, parents, and community organizations

Certified Local Government (CLG)

- Federal program through the National Park Service, which is managed by NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (Office located on Peebles Island)
- To become a CLG, Cohoes City Code will need to be amended to include certain elements as required by the National Park Service
Certified Local Government (CLG)

To become a CLG, municipalities may apply for grant funding to assist with:

– Commission and staff training
– Historic resource surveys and designation
– Public Education to raise public knowledge of local historic preservation programs
– Capacity building to improve the municipality’s ability to work with property owners throughout the review process, including support for the development of new administrative tools or documents

All-America City

• Three Multiple-Time Winners for All-America City:
• All multiple-time winners are Certified Local Governments
• Past Themes include:
  – Grade-Level Reading (2012 & 2016)
  – Collaborative Community Problem Solving (2011)
  – Solutions to Economic Stress (2010)
  – Healthy Communities (2014)
  – Vulnerable Youth (2015)
All-America City
Potential Future Focus Areas

• Green Infrastructure & Sustainability
• Walkability & Connectivity
• Historic Preservation
• The Waterfront and Waterfront-related recreation
• Community engagement with high schoolers, people with disabilities, and senior citizens

Thank You!
This document was prepared with funds provided under the Cleaner, Greener Communities (CGC) Program.

Legend

ALBANY COUNTY, NEW YORK

Municipal Boundaries

Parks and Trails

Water Bodies

Streets

Historic Overlay District

LC      Land Conservation

I-1       Industrial

C-1     Office/Retail Commercial

MU-2  Waterfront Mixed-Use

MU-1  Mixed-Use

MFR   Residential - Multi-Family

R-2     Residential

R-1     Residential

Legend

± 0.175
0.35
22
3/5/17
BIBLIOGRAPHY


