
THE 2003 COUNTRYSIDE EXCHANGE

A PROGRAM OF
GLYNWOOD CENTER



THE TOWN OF COLONIE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Countryside Exchange	ii
The Exchange in The Town of Colonie, New York	
Community Description	1
The Town of Colonie Exchange Team	5
Sample Itinerary	6
The Exchange Team Report	7
Issue One: Opportunities for recreational, residential, and commercial development along the Mohawk River	9
Issue Two: Highlighting and enhancing the Mohawk River waterfront as a part of Colonie’s identity	16
Issue Three: Enhancing the community’s enjoyment of the Mohawk River waterfront	21
Issue Four: Continued stewardship of Colonie’s Mohawk River waterfront	29
Glynwood Center Thanks You	35
About Glynwood Center	36



THE COUNTRYSIDE EXCHANGE

A PROGRAM OF GLYNWOOD CENTER

The Countryside Exchange brings together international teams of volunteer professionals to work with communities on their most important issues. The Exchange is a catalyst. It uses a visit by an objective team of "outsiders" to identify a wide range of potential solutions, create diverse coalitions, spur the emergence of new leaders and inspire collaborative action. The community also benefits from new ideas, networks and information that it can use to help shape its future.

Since 1987, 110 communities in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Japan have hosted a Countryside Exchange. Over 800 professionals from England, Scotland, Wales, the United States, Canada, Japan, France, Portugal, Germany, the Netherlands and Australia have participated as team members.



Glynwood Center

HOW DOES THE EXCHANGE WORK?

Communities are selected to participate in the Countryside Exchange through a competitive application process. Applications are evaluated based on such criteria as the depth of interest within the community, existing leadership and leadership skills and the strength and diversity of community members supporting the application. Applicants must also demonstrate flexibility, a willingness to

learn new skills and processes, show commitment to working as a team and to developing a community based implementation strategy after the Exchange.

Once a community is selected, a Local Organizing Committee (LOC) is formed. The LOC is crucial to the success of the Exchange and must include a representative cross section of the community – business owners, developers, elected officials, conservationists and "average citizens." The LOC identifies and refines the questions that the Exchange team will address. It also plans the Exchange week itinerary, takes care of logistics and handles publicity. After the Exchange, the LOC helps initiate implementation efforts.

THE EXCHANGE TEAM

Glynwood Center draws upon its extensive international network to form teams consisting of six to eight experienced professionals. Each team is international and interdisciplinary in its makeup. Team members are selected by matching a candidate's expertise with the issues identified by the community. In order to ensure that teams are objective, participants must have had no previous connection to the host community.

The team spends a very intense week in the community. A full itinerary of issue oriented roundtables, presentations, tours, panel discussions and community gatherings gives the team an opportunity to speak with many residents, officials and organizations. The week culminates with the team presenting its observations and ideas at a public forum. A summary report is also published to assist the community with implementation.

IMPLEMENTATION

After the Exchange week, the team report is distributed throughout the community as a first step toward developing an implementation strategy. Most Exchange reports include some forty recommendations and determining priorities is one of the most important tasks facing the community. Glynwood maintains contact with its "Family of Exchange Communities" through its web site, www.glynwood.org, Update Newsletter, database and ongoing personal contact.

THE RESULTS

Just as communities vary, so do the results of each Exchange. Some team recommendations may be broad, others very specific. Some may be small-scale projects that can be implemented quickly. Others may be larger, requiring a policy change, a significant philosophical shift – and time. In some cases, the Exchange may trigger a change that the community widely acknowledged was needed. The report may articulate an issue that leads to community discussion and an alternate solution. What most Exchange communities share in common is that the new and strengthened partnerships, expanded leadership base and collaborative action cultivated through the Exchange pay dividends long into the future.

THE TOWN OF COLONIE, NEW YORK

10 MILE EXCHANGE STUDY AREA



THE EXCHANGE IN THE TOWN OF COLONIE, NEW YORK

COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

Established by an act of the New York State Legislature on June 7, 1895, the Town of Colonie received its name from the Dutch "Colonye," meaning "the settlement outside the city." It was created from the Town of Watervliet, when farmers living in the rural part of the Town of Watervliet were dissatisfied with being governed by the Village of West



Troy. The New York State Legislature, after listening to their concerns, allowed the rural portion of the Town to secede. Subsequently, most of the former Township of Watervliet, except for the City of Watervliet, became the Town of Colonie.

The Town, including the incorporated villages of Colonie and Menands, is approximately 59 square miles and has a population of 80,000 residents. It is one of 932 towns in the State of New York. It ranks 16th in population, and is the largest of the 10 towns in Albany County.

The Town of Colonie is located in the northern part of Albany County and constitutes a significant portion of a triangle made up of the City of Albany, (New York State's capital), at the southeastern corner; the City of Schenectady at the western corner; and the City of Troy to the northeast. It sits at the crossroads of two interstate highways, I-87 and I-90, is home to the Albany International Airport, and is within a three hour drive of New York City to the south, Boston to the east, and Montreal to the north. Much of the Town is relatively flat with some rolling hills, but does drop steeply toward both the Mohawk River to the north and the Hudson River to the east. Several small creeks originate in the Town and help feed the Mohawk River. From its highest elevations, one can see all the major mountain ranges; Adirondacks to the north, Catskills to the south, the Berkshires and Taconic ranges to the east and the palisades of the Helderbergs. In the undeveloped areas, there are many mature woods, as well as pine barrens.

The Town lies at the confluence of the Hudson River and Mohawk River. Frontage and access on the Hudson are limited, but the Mohawk River frontage is approximately ten miles in length and includes a mix of commercial, residential, and public land uses as well as substantial areas of undeveloped land. The waterfront area presents a challenge to the Town to allow for appropriate residential and commercial development and to provide increased recreational opportunities, while preserving and enhancing the environmental, cultural, and historic qualities that make the waterfront an asset to the community.

The Town, once predominantly rural, experienced rapid growth during the 1950's and 1960's as suburban development pushed outward from the surrounding cities. During this twenty year period, population in the Town grew from 25,000 to 57,000, an increase of 128%. Growth during the 1970's through the 1990's slowed considerably, with only a 15.5% increase to 67,500 during this 30-year period.

Today, the Town enjoys a balance of residential and commercial development, with a good supply of quality housing and strong retail and office sectors. Light industrial is clustered around the Fuller Road area, the boundary with Menands and Watervliet, portions of the east side of Route 9 in the northern part of Town, as well as along the I-90 portion of the Town. There are several large office parks near the airport, Wolf Road and Route 9 at the junction of Route 7. Commercial and retail uses are primarily along Route 5, Wolf Road and Route 9 north of Loudonville, with smaller local areas scattered through-out the Town. Route 7, which parallels the Mohawk River, west of the Northway is a mixture of commercial, residential and office development.

The Town has a 150-acre park which includes an Olympic-size swimming pool, hiking trails, and access to boating on the Mohawk River. A second major park, The Crossings, offers 130 acres of trails, formal and informal gardens, and a small lake for non-motorized boating. Other recreational opportunities in the Town include 15 neighborhood pocket parks, tennis and basketball courts, skating rinks, a 36-hole championship golf course and a 5.5 mile long bike trail.

The history and culture of Colonie is mixed with the development of the Erie Canal and the Shaker movement. Some of this history is documented at the Pruyn House, a house museum depicting life in Colonie in the 1800's. The Pruyn House is on both the National and State Registers of Historic Places.

In 2002, the Town of Colonie applied to the New York State Department of State to participate in its Local Waterfront Revitalization Program. The Town has approximately ten miles of shoreline along the Mohawk River and would like to preserve the environmentally significant features; protect and enhance scenic viewsheds; control point source and non-point source pollution; identify opportunities for recreation; and consider appropriate residential and commercial uses along the waterfront. The Town contracted with the Glynwood Center to conduct a Countryside Exchange to assist the community in educating the public about the Town's waterfront issues and to consider, through extensive public participation, what the community considers appropriate land uses for that area.

COMMUNITY ISSUES

1. How can we use Colonie's Mohawk River waterfront in ways that are environmentally sensitive while allowing for recreational, residential, and commercial uses where appropriate?
 - a. What opportunities exist for waterfront development, consistent with the goals of promotion, protection, and enhancement of the waterfront resources and ecosystems?
 - b. What are the potential land use alternatives?
 - c. What infrastructure development would be needed to support each of the alternatives?
 - d. What regulatory framework is necessary to accomplish each of the alternatives?
2. How can we highlight and enhance Colonie's Mohawk River waterfront as an element of the Town's identity?
 - a. What existing assets can be used to develop and promote this element of the Town's identity?
 - b. How can the community be made more aware of the existing and potential assets of the waterfront area?
 - c. How can we better identify, promote, and interpret the historical, cultural, and environmental aspects of our community's waterfront area?
3. How can opportunities for community enjoyment of Colonie's Mohawk River waterfront be enhanced, in ways that are environmentally appropriate?
 - a. Where do opportunities exist for development of public recreational facilities, and what facilities should be provided?

- b. How can access to the river be improved?
- c. How can access to and utilization of the offshore islands be improved?
- d. How can access to and enjoyment of the bike path and adjacent areas be improved?
- 4. What steps can the community take to ensure the continued stewardship of Colonie's Mohawk River waterfront for generations to come?
 - a. What steps can be taken in tandem with our present efforts to enable the continued success of any programs/places/ideas which may result from these efforts?
 - b. How can preservation of significant environmental assets, such as water quality, wetlands, woodlands, and view sheds be ensured?
 - c. How can a public/private partnership be formed to further the goals we set now, and see that they continue into the future?



*The Town of Colonie Exchange Team with LOC Members:
John Grebert (LOC), Fergus Murray, Austin Brady, Kevin DeLaughter (LOC),
Corinna Woodhall, Carl Atkinson, Allen Bell, Malcom Ford (front).*

The Town of Colonie Exchange Team

Carl Atkinson is the Senior Interpretation Officer for the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) where he manages interpretation activity for this major agency that is concerned with countryside protection and recreation. Carl's work involves interpretive planning, contract management and collaboration. He also manages the education and community action functions within CCW and acts as deputy head of the communications group which undertakes all CCW's external relations, including publications and public relations.

Allen Bell is a Senior Planner with the Columbia River Gorge Commission in White Salmon, Washington, a bi-state regional planning agency that plans and administers the 300,000 acre Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. Allen played a lead role in preparing a management plan for the Scenic Area. He compiled environmental data, developed land use designations and wrote policies and guidelines to protect and enhance scenic, cultural, recreational, and natural resources. He also helped prepare a land use ordinance to implement the management plan, which has been used to review more than 2,200 land use applications in six counties.

Austin Brady is Conservator for the East Midlands of England region of the Forestry Commission, an agency that promotes forestry and public recreation in the UK. He is responsible for the delivery of the government's forestry policy through regulation, grant aid, advice and partnerships. He has worked on a variety of projects, both in the UK and Australia relating to visitor management, community engagement and interpretation. Austin was responsible for the development of the Sherwood Initiative, a ground breaking project to regenerate the landscapes, habitats and communities in this former coal mining area. The area now receives over 3 million visitors a year and is a major public recreational facility. He is also the chair of the Sherwood Forest Trust, helping to secure over nine million dollars in funds for a variety of landscape conservation, interpretation and access projects.

Malcolm Ford has just completed a five-year period with the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) Cooperative Extension Service where he managed several grants including environmental stewardship, community development, and watershed planning. He has worked extensively with Alaskan Native Tribes, more recently joining a UA College of Rural Alaska, community-based "Healthy Communities" planning team. In November Malcolm begins a new position as Outreach Director for a UAF Institute of Northern Engineering three-year graduate research, education and outreach program, targeting the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta.

Fergus Murray is Development Plans Manager for Shetland Islands Council in the far north of Scotland. He also manages all the associated research, analysis, forecasting and monitoring projects concerned with the implementation of land use policy, including population and census data and developing proposals for area regeneration in Shetland communities. More recently he has been involved in two large waterfront regeneration projects at Scalloway and Lerwick in Shetland. Previously, he worked in the inner city of Glasgow dealing with major planning applications in one of the UK's biggest urban areas. During this time he prepared a development strategy for Glasgow's merchant City Project that set guidelines for various residential and recreation development opportunities to regenerate the area.

Corinna Woodall is Policy and Research Officer for the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) where she advises on the application of public lottery monies across the UK to potential projects involving nature conservation and landscape projects. Corinna also serves as the lead advisor on sustainable development policy for her organization. Prior to joining the HLF, Corinna worked for English Nature, a major nature advisory body, where she gained considerable skills in ecology and land management. In other projects Corinna has used Geographic Information Systems to predict the best opportunities for restoring habitats and landscapes. She has contributed to conservation studies in Europe, Africa and the USA.

**A SAMPLE ITINERARY:
THREE DAYS FROM THE TOWN OF COLONIE EXCHANGE**

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18

9:45 a.m. Auto tour of the waterfront

1:30 p.m. Boat ride on the Mohawk River

6:00 p.m. Dinner hosted by Colonie's Supervisor, Mary Brizzell

MONDAY, OCTOBER 20

9:00 a.m. Shaker Meeting House -- Historical Roundtable

12:00 p.m. Business Roundtable

4:00 p.m. Tour of Pruyn House

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22

9:00 a.m. Natural Resources Roundtable

11:30 a.m. Bicycling along the Waterfront; Visit with school children

1:00 p.m. Presentation by the Canal Corporation

7:00 p.m. Town of Colonie Conservation Advisory Council and Sensitive
Environmental Areas Management Appeals Board meeting

MOHAWK RIVER WATERFRONT REVITALIZATION PROGRAM IN COLONIE, NEW YORK

COUNTRYSIDE EXCHANGE TEAM REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The stretch of the Mohawk River that runs through Colonie is a place of natural beauty, rich in heritage and natural resources. It is highly valued by residents and visitors alike.

Many layers of history are overlaid on the waterfront area: native people, early settlers, revolutionary war battles, the Shakers and canal and transportation heritage. This history underpinned the development of Colonie as a popular and thriving modern town.



People want to live in Colonie because of the area's high quality of life, but there is growing concern that the natural beauty and recreational values of the river and its surroundings are at risk because the river area has not been properly managed. To ensure that this area remains a valued asset for future generations, hard decisions must now be made with respect to limiting the spread of residential and commercial development and promoting and

adopting improved environmental practices.

The community has identified that there is a need to recognise the natural values of the river and to secure and enhance opportunities for access, public recreation and open space. This proactive approach can help to ensure that the river remains a highly valued local and regional asset.

The Exchange team has been impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment of local people and community leaders, and by the willing engagement of a wide range of local, county and state agencies.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

- The Mohawk River and its tributaries remain Colonie's greatest natural asset.
- The waterfront area includes moderate to large undeveloped parcels of land that are central to its open and rural character. The future use

The community had identified that there is a need to recognize the natural values of the river and to secure and enhance opportunities for access, public recreation and open space.

of these parcels is a key land use decision. Currently, the Town's zoning ordinance, which allows high-density residential development on these lands, could permit more than 800 new houses be built along the waterfront. This scale of development would dramatically change the area's character and conflict with the Local Organizing Committee's goals of "promotion, protection, and enhancement of the waterfront resources and ecosystems".

- The Town Board has set out to produce Colonie's first Comprehensive Plan and is working to engage the community in this process. Some parts of the community, however, appear frustrated with the current development review process and are concerned that suburban sprawl will continue to encroach on the river and its surroundings. The team believes that despite this rapid rate of development, there is still a limited window of opportunity to change course.
- Colonie has a wide range of recreational opportunities to offer its residents and visitors, including a major new facility at The Crossings. However, there are opportunities to improve some existing facilities. For example, there is poor and deteriorating boat access to the river. The current management of the river and canal system is failing to protect its natural and recreational values from impacts such as siltation and invasive weeds. The bike path is well used and highly valued, but limited vistas as well as a lack of facilities and linkages to other sites prohibit the Town from realizing the full potential of this asset.
- Colonie is a popular and growing town, but it does not have a clear community identity or sense of place. There are strong heritage features of local and national significance, which have not been fully developed. Colonie is part of the wider stories of the Mohawk River and Erie Canal system. A number of regional and river corridor programs recognize the importance of the Colonie section of the river and are willing to offer support and funding to develop local projects.
- The river ecosystem, its wetland habitats, tributaries and woodlands are a valuable natural resource, which is vulnerable and easily damaged. There are concerns among some people that not enough is being done to assess the impacts that changes to land and river management as well as land use and development are having on wildlife and habitats.
- There are many different agencies and non-profits with an interest in the river and the waterfront. Some have expertise and support to offer and others have funding. Several have already expressed interest in supporting or funding potential projects. There is an urgent need to improve communication and co-operative working between these agencies and the local community.

ISSUE 1: OPPORTUNITIES FOR RECREATIONAL, RESIDENTIAL, AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT ALONG THE WATER- FRONT THAT PROMOTE, PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE AREA'S NATURAL RESOURCES AND ECO-SYSTEMS.

OBSERVATIONS:

- Developing a Vision for the Waterfront: The community is facing important questions about future development and land use along and near the waterfront. Through the Waterfront Revitalization Program, the community must develop a long term vision for the area. What types and scale of development are consistent with this vision? The current zoning ordinance allows significant residential and commercial development that could conflict with and render meaningless the community's vision and the objectives of the Waterfront Revitalization Program.
- Existing development and land ownership patterns limit the opportunities for future development along the Mohawk River waterfront. The Town's policymakers and residents need to be familiar with these factors in order to realistically assess the opportunities and constraints for waterfront development. For example:
 - Approximately one-third of the waterfront is currently developed as, or is committed to, residential use. This includes a combination of houses, undeveloped residential lots and a 300-unit residential development at Shelter Cove that is in the final stages of planning approval. These developments offer virtually no opportunities for public recreation or commercial development.
 - There are numerous small and a few moderate size undeveloped parcels along the waterfront. The small parcels are typically interspersed with developed parcels and will be developed with single-family houses. Additionally, many existing "camps" and small houses will be replaced with larger houses. The moderate size parcels will likely be subdivided and developed with single-family houses, which could result in more than 200 new houses north of the bike path. The Town currently lacks regulations to minimize the visual impacts of development on viewsheds as seen from the bike path, the Mohawk River, and the north side of the Mohawk River.
 - The Town owns land that includes several miles of waterfront. The

Town's water and sewer treatment facilities are located on separate parcels that collectively include approximately 1 mile of waterfront. These parcels are not available for intense recreation and river access because of existing development and additional security measures that were instituted in response to September 11, 2001.

- The Town's original water treatment facility is now used only for water storage and transfer. The site is adjacent to the bike path and includes a small parking area, a short trail and benches. The existing water treatment building is vacant and in a poor state of repair.
- The Town Park offers various waterfront recreation facilities such



as a picnic area, boat ramp and dock. Use of the boat ramp and dock are now limited to kayaks, canoes and other small watercraft because of siltation and invasive aquatic plants. The Shaker Creek rowing crew intends to relocate to the park. The developer of Shelter Cove intends to donate 20 acres to expand the park, but steep topography limits the use of this land for recreation and river access facilities.

- The Town's landfill occupies a 3/4-mile segment of waterfront immediately west of Cohoes Road. The landfill has a projected life span of 15 years. The reclaimed portions of the landfill are currently planted in grass and appear out of place from the surrounding tree-covered landscape. Local business people and residents complained about the smell of the landfill. In particular, a nearby marina owner believes that the smell limits business opportunities on his property. At present, environmental engineers believe the reclaimed portion of the landfill will offer few opportunities for development because of methane and other environmental hazards.

- Many people expressed the need for additional public access to the Mohawk River, however, there are few privately owned, undeveloped parcels that could be used for waterfront development. One opportunity is two adjoining parcels located between the Town's water and sewage treatment facilities. These parcels total approximately 55 acres and are currently zoned "Undeveloped", which allows retail stores, banks, offices, theaters, mini-marts, adult entertainment uses, and other businesses. These parcels could be re-zoned for residential development, yet, they also offer a rare opportunity for a wide range of new water-related recreation uses.

- Commercial development along the waterfront consists of two private marinas (Blains Bay Marina and Albany Marine Service). The use of these marinas for launching and docking boats has been severely affected by siltation and invasive aquatic plants. If no significant action is taken these problems could make the marinas unusable within the next few years. A boat service business and boat ramp that used to operate immediately west of Crescent Bridge is now abandoned.
- Opportunities for further commercial development along the waterfront are limited. Town property is committed to public use and most homeowners would object to commercial development within existing residential areas along the waterfront. Additionally, the residential areas are poorly suited to commercial development because they have narrow access roads and lack municipal water and sewer services.
- Several miles of waterfront exist south of Crescent Bridge and Albany Marine Service. The waterfront south of Crescent Dam and parallel to Cohoes Road is narrow and steep. The swift moving water immediately below the dam poses a health and safety risk and makes the area unsuitable for boating and swimming. New York Power Authority has a small public fishing area immediately below the dam. This park has poor pedestrian and vehicle access with limited opportunities for improvements.



- The waterfront between the Town's original water treatment facility and Shaker Creek is in the floodplain and contains sensitive wetlands and natural open space. This area is publicly owned, except for one moderate size parcel.
- The Canal Corporation owns all the islands in the river and numerous strips of land adjacent to the waterfront. The islands are undeveloped, although one is

leased as a private seasonal campsite. A few people use the islands for low intensity, informal recreation. The waterfront land is generally isolated and often within the floodplain. There may be opportunities to use this land in combination with adjoining lands for public recreation.

- In the past, the Canal Corporation has leased waterfront land for residential and commercial development. Its activities could compromise the Town's efforts to implement a plan for the waterfront area.

- In 1977, the Geology Department of Union College Schenectady reviewed the historical record of flooding of the Mohawk River. The data suggest that the number of flooding events is increasing: 60 percent of the top 20 water flows occurred during the last 40 years, including three out of four of the all time high flow rates.



- The Town continues to allow houses to be constructed within the floodplain. If climatic patterns continue as predicted, these houses and potentially lives, are at risk. Floodplain development also leads to the direct loss of wetlands and riparian habitat and compromises the hydrological function of the floodplain. Besides flooding, ice flows in the winter threaten and damage buildings in the floodplain.

- The waterfront area includes more than a dozen moderate to large-size undeveloped parcels immediately south of the bike path and west of the intersection of the bike path and Loudon Road (Route 9). Some examples include a 74-acre parcel and 60-acre parcel south of River Road between the Town's original water treatment facility and Shaker Creek; a 50-acre parcel immediately south of Shaker Bay Road; and a 64-acre parcel west of and adjacent to Northway Road (I-87). Most of these parcels are wooded, while a few are still used for agriculture. The future use of these parcels is a key land use issue. The Town's current zoning ordinance allows high-density residential development on these parcels. The Town is in the final stages of approving a 300-unit residential development immediately west of Loudon Road. Based on this development and the current zoning ordinance, more than 700 new houses could be developed on these parcels. This scale of development would dramatically change the area's character from "open and rural" to "developed". Many of the moderate to large-size undeveloped parcels also have significant natural and scenic resources.
- Colonie has an extensive network of infrastructure that covers most of the waterfront area. Nevertheless, residents observed that some properties lack access to water and sewer. This was particularly the case for the area near Crescent Bridge. In terms of new infrastructure, the current zoning ordinance allows substantial residential and commercial development in the waterfront area, which will require significant improvements to local roads if built. This issue was highlighted at the North Colonie Comprehensive Plan meeting in connection to new

The community is facing important questions about future development and land use along and near the waterfront.

commercial development south of the waterfront. A number of local residents also said traffic flows through their neighborhoods are already having an increasingly detrimental effect on their quality of life.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Creating a Plan for the Waterfront Area: The Town should develop and adopt a plan for the waterfront area that emphasizes open space preservation, waterfront development and future land use.¹ Among other elements, this plan needs to include land use designations (e.g. open space, recreation, residential, commercial), minimum lot sizes and goals, policies and objectives for protecting scenic, cultural, natural and recreation resources.
 - Within the next 12 months, the Town should endorse the vision of the waterfront area, develop a work program for preparing a district plan for the waterfront area and secure the planning staff and resources for implementing the work program. The work program should include tasks, outputs, completion dates and staff resource allocations.
 - The Town is scheduled to complete the Waterfront Revitalization Strategy and Action Plan in 2004. This document will contain an inventory of existing conditions, a list of issues, a vision and other valuable information. The Town should use this information as the foundation of the district plan. For instance, the inventory should be used to identify areas suitable for open space and recreation; the vision should be translated into planning goals and policies.
 - The planning process has to meaningfully engage residents and policymakers from start to finish.
 - A public/private/not-for-profit partnership can be a crucial partner in this process. It could help generate public involvement and advocate the Town's goal of using the "waterfront in ways that are environmentally sensitive".

¹This type of plan – one that addresses a particular geographic area - is called various names, such as a sub-area plan, neighborhood plan, unit plan, or district plan. This report will use the term "district plan".

The district plan should not be confused with the Comprehensive Plan that the Town is now preparing. The Comprehensive Plan will provide broad policies for the entire Town of Colonie. The district plan would provide much more detail at a parcel-by-parcel scale and would address issues that relate specifically to the waterfront area.

Ideally, the Town should formulate and adopt its Comprehensive Plan before developing the district plan. The Comprehensive Plan would provide overarching direction and relate the waterfront area to the larger community in terms of transportation, open space, natural resources, visual form, land uses and public services and facilities. Alternatively, the Town could prepare the Comprehensive Plan and district plan at the same time. Steps would be needed to help minimize the shortcomings of this approach. For example, planners would need to periodically reconcile the two plans throughout the planning process to ensure consistency.

- The district plan will provide a key part of the regulatory framework to accomplish the vision of the waterfront area. Another vital part is an updated and expanded zoning ordinance. Once the Town adopts the district plan, it must immediately amend its zoning ordinance to put the plan into effect. It may also need to amend other existing ordinances or develop new ordinances to address particular issues. For example, the Town's watercourse area management regulations (buffer zones) may need to be strengthened. The amended zoning ordinance and any amended or new ordinances must be consistent with the plan. Landscaping and building design standards are needed to ensure that new houses blend with the landscape setting.
- The Town needs a reasonable period to prepare and adopt a district plan and amend and expand its outdated zoning ordinance. During this period, the team recommends that the Town actively consider suspending new development in the waterfront area by enacting a building moratorium. Alternatively, the Town could defer action based on environmental impact statements.
- Besides suspending development, the Town should request that the Canal Corporation postpone any new lease agreements in the area until it completes the plan and amends the current zoning ordinance. The Town should actively consider a comprehensive lease agreement to secure all Canal Corporation land on the waterfront for recreation, open space or conservation purposes.
- The district plan can serve as an important vehicle for obtaining grants and technical assistance from federal and state agencies. For instance, the Town should ask the National Park Service to include the plan in its upcoming Preservation and Management Canalway Plan for the Erie Canalway Heritage Corridor.
- Opportunities on the Waterfront: The team recommends that the Town focus on the following three areas as it considers potential waterfront development: preserving and enhancing open space; maintaining and improving existing public and private commercial recreation facilities; and identifying and developing new recreational facilities.
 - Town's water and sewer treatment facilities: There may be numerous opportunities to use portions of these parcels, and contiguous land owned by the Canal Corporation, for low intensity recreation facilities such as fishing piers and trails leading to viewpoints of the river.
 - Town's original water treatment facility: This site is well suited for a variety of low cost passive recreation developments including

trails, picnic facilities and interpretative kiosks. The treatment building may be suitable for re-use as a facility for hosting community meetings, interpretative programs, and other related uses. This action would also help the Shaker Creek rowing crew become operational.

- Town's landfill: The Town's environmental engineer should research and apply best management practices for planting trees and shrubs on reclaimed portions of the landfill. Forestry Commission Great Britain has significant information on this issue.
- Town Park: The Town should undertake measures to make the existing dock and boat ramp more usable. In the short-term, the area around these facilities needs to be dredged and cleared of invasive aquatic plants. The Town should also consider developing the site further for the high school rowing crew.
- Commercial marinas: The two existing marinas allow residents to access the Mohawk River. The Town needs to support the owners' efforts to maintain and improve these facilities. In the short-



term, steps should be taken to secure funding to dredge and clear invasive aquatic plants to at least allow access to the main navigable channel. Another important opportunity is the boat service and boat dock west of Crescent Bridge. Redeveloping this prominent abandoned site would eliminate visual blight at this major gateway to the Town and create a new opportunity for launching boats.

- New public recreation: The two undeveloped parcels located between the Town's water and sewage treatment facilities offer a unique opportunity to develop new moderate-size public recreation and river access facilities. We strongly recommend that the Town pursue public/private partnerships to acquire and develop these parcels.
- New development in residential areas: New houses will be constructed along the waterfront in areas committed to residential use. To address the impacts of these houses, the Town needs to consider developing landscaping and building design standards that will help ensure new houses blend with the landscape setting.

These standards could include measures regarding landscaping, grading, height, scale, and reflectivity.

- New development in floodplains: Further building in the floodplain should be prohibited. Even if a building is adapted to cope with a flood, it is not sustainable and increases the chances of flooding further downstream if the absorption function of the floodplain is diminished. Land within the floodplain should remain open space, and where existing good wildlife habitat exists, this should be protected through re-zoning as conservation land.
- Opportunities within the waterfront area: Efforts to protect some undeveloped parcels that are within the waterfront area, but not along the shorefront, should also begin immediately. For example, Albany International Airport is negotiating to purchase a 72-acre undeveloped parcel that exists within its noise abatement zone. This parcel is zoned for residential use, and the owner has plans for a 130-unit residential subdivision. At the same time, this parcel lends itself to being protected as open space. It is partially wooded and includes sensitive tributaries. It is near the bike path and prominent in the viewshed as seen from the Mohawk River and River Road.
- Infrastructure: The recommendations in this report will not require major infrastructure improvement, but some small-scale improvements would be necessary to allow additional recreation development to take place.

ISSUE 2: HIGHLIGHTING AND ENHANCING THE WATERFRONT AS A PART OF COLONIE'S IDENTITY.

OBSERVATIONS:

- Colonie's does not have a coherent identity. It is a sprawling suburb of Albany, developing piecemeal along the main road (Route 9). The Town has become well known for its shopping malls and being the first community to attract NYC stores such as Macys. The expansion of the airport has also attracted development and a once predominantly agricultural landscape has all but disappeared. Since Colonie developed through the growth and coalescence of many small hamlets, it has no obvious town center. However, there are still remnants of important periods from Colonie's past – particularly the mid 19th century Shaker settlement on Shaker Creek, and Pruyn House from the earlier period of Dutch settlement. There are a couple of other older buildings in private hands, but because they are scattered within the modern suburban sprawl they do not create "a sense of place" beyond their immediate environs.
- The history of the area is very rich - from its native American origins to the first European settlers, the Dutch who farmed under the medieval



Patroon system of land ownership during the 17th & 18th centuries. English immigrants also moved into the area to farm in the 17th century and with them came the Shakers, an extraordinary charismatic religious movement that played a significant part in the history of Northeast America. During the French and Indian wars and the American Revolution, great armies marched up and down the Hudson along the "pathway to empire" crossing the Mohawk River by

fords and ferries. In 1825, the Erie Canal was completed and there were various phases of expansion culminating in 1918 with the Barge Canal which utilized the course of the river and lakes, opening up the West and introducing industry to the valley. Colonie became Albany's breadbasket and retained its agricultural character until during the later 20th century development gradually displaced the previously rural landscape.

- Colonie's heritage sites, particularly the Shaker settlement and Pruyn House, do not relate to the river or each other and tend to do their own thing. They all need to work together to present a more coherent picture of Colonie's heritage and connect people with the river whenever possible.

There are wider stories here of which Colonie is a part. It will be important to build links and partnerships to organizations that reflect these stories.

- The Shaker site, Ann Lee's Pond, and the Shaker cemetery form a wonderful oasis in North Colonie. A step forward has been the appointment of a professional director here. The Meeting House is an impressive space, but interpretation is limited and dated. In addition the site is on a short lease from Albany County, renewable every 3 years, which gives no long term security.
- Pruyn House is an attractive site with several interesting buildings including the house itself. It has a collection of agricultural equipment and some of the buildings have been moved here from near the river when development threatened them. It offers facilities for social events and gets about 14,000 visitors per year. However it is not an obvious visitor attraction, signage suggesting that it is an office, and the other buildings on the site are only open erratically. It appears underused and could substantially increase its visitor numbers and create an educational program if its management was more proactive. Its use of volunteers is to be commended and they could constitute a useful resource if trained as personal guides/ interpreters for the site.
- At present, interpretation of the heritage around Colonie is very limited. While the Shaker settlement and Pruyn House are open to the public and promoted on some tourist maps of the Mohawk Corridor and Canal, they are not well promoted, signed or obviously inviting to the visitor, particularly Pruyn House. They could contribute more to a sense of history and identity to the town. There is no interpretation along the bike trail, although there is a small booklet that interprets features of interest, particularly wildlife. The only other fixed interpretation the team found was a rather worn kiosk/panel at Freddy's Park interpreting canal/bridge history and birdlife and a small interpretive sign at Ann Lee Pond. Some Canal guide material does feature the Mohawk at Colonie and mentions the Shaker settlement, however, Colonie is not really on the map for heritage tourists and there is a perception that few local people know much about the Town's history.
- There are wider stories here of which Colonie's story is a part. It will be important to build links and partnerships to organizations that reflect these stories e.g. Mohawk Valley Heritage Corridor Commission, NYS Canal Corporation, Erie Canalway National Corridor etc.
- At first sight the bike path is an obvious contender as a primary tool for access to and promotion of the waterfront. However, the river is really only visible at its western end and then intermittently to where

the Shaker Creek enters the river. There are a few more glimpses of water around the sewage treatment site and again after the Delphus Kill, but for the remainder of its length within the Town, the river is barely visible at all. The bike path does not really deliver the river, but it is a beautiful woodland trail.



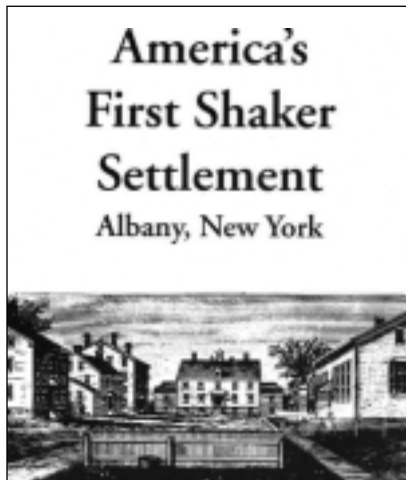
- The bike path has good use and there is significant awareness of its value, but there is a general view that the Mohawk waterfront is not well known. Sometimes this is a perception based on its polluted past - that it is not a good place to go. Sometimes the lack of recognition is because the Mohawk River takes second place to the Hudson River in people's minds.

- The Town Park is the prime riverside recreational resource for walking, day camping and other activities and provides beautiful woodland trails and views of the river. The shoreline is accessible through the woods and provides excellent views across a wide stretch of the Mohawk. The Town Park provides a range of other facilities including a pool and game pitches. The park protects a good range of habitats including mature secondary deciduous woodland, ponds and other wetland habitats, and the rocky river shore exposes the underlying geology.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Link the bike path to the river, or at least to viewpoints where possible, and to the Town. Around Delphus Kill there are some informal trails up to a viewpoint and down to the river. These could be signed and the surfaces improved (but not paved, so as to retain their natural feel). Other potential trail locations should be surveyed which might link the bike path to Ashford Glen Nature Reserve and the Shaker site. Utilize quiet roads where necessary.
- The new Crossings site could serve as Colonie's Town Center. It appears to have space which could be used as exhibition/gallery space. Temporary exhibitions could be developed here that tell "the big stories" of Colonie that don't relate to any specific site.
- The Town Park should be renamed Colonie Mohawk River Park. It would be worth reviewing the charging policy so that it is free for residents and those other visitors who arrive on foot or bike. An interpretive strategy should be developed that focuses on the area's natural history.

- Get the word out about the waterfront and its heritage:
 - Develop a publications and media strategy:-
 - plan and produce a set of quality promotional leaflets for the waterfront identifying the bike trail, Town Park, any other pocket parks or access points such as Freddy's Park and the access point at the Crescent dam; and
 - use local press, TV & radio to promote the waterfront.
 - Identify commonly visited places and use these to distribute promotional materials - for example, the town library, youth services, malls, sports facilities (especially water based sports clubs).
 - Develop an events program that includes waterborne events, bike trail events, and guided walks in Town Park and other locations.



- Form a "Colonie Heritage Partnership" as a sub-group of the successor to the LOC, with representatives from the Shaker Heritage Society, Town Historian, Conservation Officer, Parks Dept, Pruyn House, etc. This group should work to produce an interpretive strategy for the region. This strategy should include:

- Identifying all the stakeholders and involving them as appropriate including those umbrella organisations that can offer funding, support and advice;
- Creating clear management objectives for interpretation, e.g. engaging local people with the river and its history;
- Producing an inventory of sites and stories;
- Auditing the provision of infrastructure and current information;
- Identifying audiences;
- Identifying appropriate places for interpretive kiosks, wayside exhibits, and signage along the waterfront;
- Producing a marketing plan for the riverfront and local heritage; and
- Creating a thematic framework. The North American school of the thematic framework associated with Professor Sam Ham, University of Idaho, and derived from cognitive psychology is an excellent framework for identifying appropriate information for visitors and ensuring that they are not overloaded. It defines the visitor experience and links sites and stories into a coherent whole.
- A useful resource person to help with the preparation of this strategy is Rachel Bliven, Interpretation Officer with the Mohawk Valley Heritage Corridor.

- In parallel with the interpretive strategy, or as a sub-section of it, an educational strategy should be prepared that is aimed at the formal educational sector including local schools. They have different requirements from the casual visitor in terms of curricular requirements, but the overall aims will be the same – to connect local children with the river and its heritage.
- The Heritage Partnership should undertake an inventory of all historic buildings and other sites to document their importance, current status and interpretive significance. They should also conduct a risk assessment to determine what action can be taken for any identified threats. Changes of zoning and/or town ordinances are best options for their future security.
- There is a need to ensure that the Shaker site becomes more secure of its tenure. Alternative options including acquisition should be vigorously pursued. Acquiring Landmark status could be of significant assistance in accessing federal funds.



POTENTIAL INTERPRETIVE TOPICS

Sustainable Past – Sustainable Future?

Theme: From the Mohicans to the Shakers, people worked and lived on the land in a sustainable way. What can we do to emulate them in our own lives?

Transport History

Theme: The Colonie area has participated in many of the great firsts in transport in North America:

- first canal systems – lock systems etc
- the railroad
- commercial airport with first long distance flight
- first road systems – old plank road

Dutch History

Theme: Colonie's origins lie with Dutch settlers

Shaker History

Theme: The Shakers were a vivid, complex people at odds with the prevailing culture, who worked the land and created many products often adapted from native American culture

Military History

Theme: Armies have marched to war through these great river corridors

Agricultural History

Theme: The Colonie area was once Albany's breadbasket

Placenames

Theme: Local placenames are a legacy of previous inhabitants of Colonie

Immigration History

Theme: Colonie has been home to waves of people from the first native Americans through Dutch settlers, the Shakers from England, and then people from the cities who have created the Colonie we see today

Landscape History

Theme: The landscape we see today, created by ice and the power of water has influenced the history of a nation by channeling the movement of people

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

There are opportunities to develop an oral history project to capture the memories and reminiscences of long time inhabitants of Colonie e.g. the Engels family with regard to agricultural history, and people who have long experience of the river such as Tom Fanniff. Identifying these people and recording their stories would create a fascinating and unique archive of local history. These would serve as resources for interpretive projects and for future local history researchers.

ISSUE 3: ENHANCING THE COMMUNITY'S ENJOYMENT OF THE WATERFRONT

The Town's Mohawk Riverfront is a unique, green "safety valve" where people can spend time recharging their batteries.

OBSERVATIONS:

- The Town of Colonie is similar to many other towns in that it wants to maintain a stable and quality living environment for its residents. In today's high pressure society, it is increasingly important to have time and space to get away from the hurly-burly of everyday life and have some timeout to draw breath and reflect. The Town's Mohawk River waterfront is a unique, green "safety valve" where people can spend time recharging their batteries.
- It has been demonstrated that regular physical activity, even just walking or cycling several times a week, reduces the risk of heart disease and problems associated with obesity. This is a major benefit to the individual and the community in general and has significant positive impact on the local economy. This is particularly important in a highly dispersed and car dependent community like Colonie.
- The river and the bike path are both part of linear long-distance routes that support high volumes of "thru traffic". As such, many users may not start or finish their journeys in Colonie, but will place demands on local facilities and offer opportunities for interpretation and commercial engagement along the way. This demand is likely to grow as a number of County and State agencies move ahead with promotion and interpretation plans for the Canal Corridor and the Mohawk Valley.
- Within the waterfront area there is a natural division between land-based and waterborne recreation. One common feature that they share relates to access. The way that the town has grown in recent years has compounded the problems associated with suburban sprawl. Travelling around without a car is very difficult (it is increasingly difficult to travel by car too) and the volume of road traffic means that cycling is too dangerous in many areas. Even walking can be problematic due to the difficulty in crossing traffic flows and the lack of sidewalks. In terms of accessibility, this means that recreational opportunities can be split into three categories;
 1. Opportunities that run through or are adjacent to quiet neighbourhoods and are immediately accessible without a car journey.
 2. Opportunities that are nearby and are connected by a safe and pleasant cycling or walking route.
 3. Opportunities that are within a short drive.

- The many Town residents who do not live close to the bike path or the river must drive to those facilities. This situation creates a need for parking and puts pressure on the limited parking spaces available, not to mention adding further to traffic congestion. Many residents who want to access the river must drive to facilities like the Town Park where they are required to pay a fee. The new facilities at The Crossings represent a major investment for the Town and are currently accessible to all free of charge. This policy should be maintained.



- People's preferences and needs for recreation are varied and may change over time. For example, there are many people in the town who ride the bike path regularly (some everyday in summer) and also spend time in areas along the river just taking in the view, or maybe at a barbecue in the Town Park. There are also large numbers of people, residents and visitors, who take part in more organized sports and activities such as rowing and fishing.

- Colonie has a wide range of recreational opportunities to offer its residents and visitors; however, there is poor and deteriorating boat access to the river. There are many people in the community who feel that access to the waterfront is restricted by a lack of information and directional signage, a lack of recognized public open space and by a lack of trails and access paths. There is also some concern that the natural beauty and recreational benefits of the river are being threatened by rapidly encroaching development.
- Current land use along the waterfront reveals very little opportunity for any significant new development. Approximately one-third of the waterfront land is already in residential use. Much of the remaining waterfront is in public ownership and a significant proportion of that belongs to the Town. The Town Park is clearly the most important section of public land on the riverfront in terms of recreation potential. In addition, the Canal Corporation owns significant stretches of the waterfront. This land also has great potential for recreational use and could be developed to facilitate better river access and enjoyment. The Canal Corporation has indicated that they are prepared to consider commercial and non-commercial proposals to allow use of this land on permit or on lease.

- Outside of the Town Park, almost all of the Town land is primarily used for non-recreation purposes such as the water treatment and sewage treatment plants. There is also Town land at the old water treatment works as well as some redundant buildings there that could be redeveloped or remodelled for recreational use. Of particular interest is the abandoned boat marina, just to the west of Crescent Bridge, that is believed to belong to the Canal Corporation. This has potential to become a new public boat launch facility, but may have limited potential for a more commercial development such as a restaurant because of the visual impact and odors from the nearby landfill site.



- When considering the extent of private land on the waterfront there is only one significant area for development of new recreational facilities. This is the land situated between the water treatment plant and the sewage works. This site, in conjunction with the adjacent Canal Corporation land and Town land has potential for low impact development to support sensitive recreational use at the riverside and improved boat access. Any development at this site should also link to the bike path.

- There is potential to promote the natural values of the river and waterside habitats as part of the visitor and recreation experience. Opportunities to see wildlife and enjoy natural spaces are important and can help to foster a feeling of care and stewardship within the community.
- Many people in the community identify the waterfront as one of the Town's most important and valuable natural and cultural assets. It is valued for its attractive, natural and unspoiled appearance and for the recreational opportunities it provides. At the present time, many people feel that the waterfront has deteriorated significantly due to increased siltation, changes in water levels and the spread of water chestnut weed. This reduces access to the river for local people and creates barriers to other river users wishing to access boating facilities in Colonie. There appears to be a limited understanding of the natural processes that are changing the river, and of what the options might be to mitigate these where appropriate. Repeated dredging of the navigation channel does nothing to address the causes of siltation.

- At the present time there is some confusion over responsibilities for different aspects of river management. For example, the Canal Corporation only accepts responsibility for dredging in the navigation channel in the middle of the river, essentially to maintain a "thru route". Unfortunately, cumulative siltation has occurred all along the river margins and reduced the usable depth for boats. A problem compounded by the shallower water is the proliferation of Water Chestnuts that further restrict boat use. The result is something of a no man's land between the riverbanks and the navigation channel. In effect, there is a canal sitting in the center of a slowly silting river. Without intervention, the local community and river-based businesses risk being left stranded on the riverbanks without any real recreational access to the water. There are few effective public boat launching facilities and so the commercial marinas are often the most reliable way for the local public to get boat access.
- There are limited opportunities on the waterfront for specialist users of the river such as rowing clubs and fishing. At present, local rowing clubs have to drive some distance to get river access and local clubs and school teams are rowing on the Hudson River rather than the Mohawk. Fishing is a very popular recreational activity, with major events like the Bass Masters taking place on the river.
- Access to the river extends beyond the physical issues discussed above to visual access as well. Local people and visitors alike need to see the river in order to incorporate it more effectively into the Town's identity. There is a need to make this visual connection both incidental to people going about their daily business and to target the creation of viewpoints and opening of vistas along key stretches of quiet roads and carefully chosen spots along the bike path.



incidental to people going about their daily business and to target the creation of viewpoints and opening of vistas along key stretches of quiet roads and carefully chosen spots along the bike path.

- The river can be a busy place in summer, and conflicts can emerge between water users. There are issues of noise, speed and disturbance and some concern at heavy handed enforcement or duplication of enforcement efforts.
- There are several islands in the stretch

of river adjacent to the Town. A number of the islands are identified as public land. At present, the islands are accessible by small boat users but this is hampered by a build up of silt and Water Chestnuts. The

Opportunities to see wildlife and enjoy natural spaces are important and can help to foster a feeling of care and stewardship within the community.

islands are a valuable natural resource and wildlife habitat. They remain relatively undisturbed compared to some shore-side areas and provide valuable refuges away from development.

- The Colonie section of the Mohawk bike path is a well maintained, well used and appreciated community asset. Many users of the bike path treat it as their daily or regular "work out". However, the bike path is isolated from other recreation opportunities and does not offer key facilities such as information points and restrooms. The trail does not connect well with the river – failing to link users to accessible areas on the water's edge and does not offer vistas over the river due to dense areas of adjacent vegetation.
- One of the bike path's main disadvantages is its linear nature. Users have few option other than cycling out and then back over the same route. The path would be much more valuable if links to other areas could be added and loops created to take users down to the water's edge or up to viewpoints.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Enhance recreational use along the waterfront by adding a refreshment kiosk or warming shelter for bike path users – particularly in view of the year-round usage pattern - at the old water treatment works. It is located alongside the bike path and is owned by the Town. It includes redundant buildings that could be remodelled within their existing footprint or redeveloped. Additional public parking here would also help improve recreational access to the river.
- The Town should explore the possibility of securing the private land between the water treatment works and sewage works to ensure that it remains predominantly open space. This could be done by outright purchase or through a conservation easement.
- Improve river usage and access though dredging and weeding. Initial efforts should focus on improving the existing public and private recreation facilities that offer access to the river. While it is important to study and understand the natural processes leading to siltation and weed growth, and to develop sustainable and appropriate long term solutions, localized action is needed immediately. Spot dredging and weed removal should be planned as a joint program for public boat launch areas and the marinas that serve both commercial users and local people.
- Explore the recreational opportunities offered by the few areas of waterfront that remain undeveloped, particularly where Town or public land is involved. Land at these sites offer opportunities for

new public boat launches and access for fishing uses. A new and appropriate site for rowing club access should be identified. The Town Park boat launch facility is currently being set up for this, but will need to be monitored once in use to ensure that it works in practice. A deep-water section of shore just west of the sewage works should be assessed as an alternative option for rowing club use. When planning boat ramp locations care must be taken to



avoid conflict with local residents.

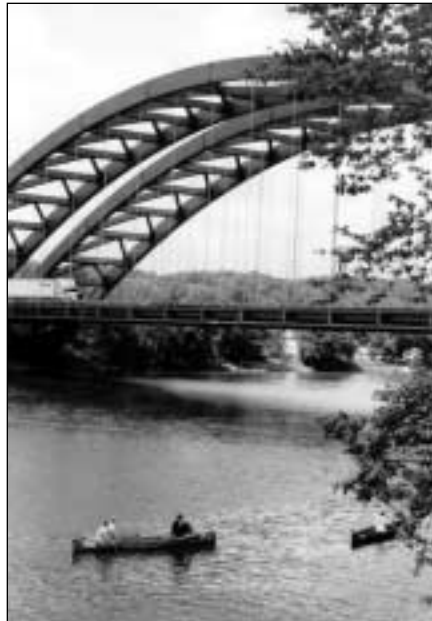
- The islands in the center of the Mohawk River should be left as refuges for wildlife and no further encouragement of public use should be made. Small craft such as kayaks and canoes may still be able to access them and some limited walk-in camping may be appropriate. The islands are known to be used by bald eagles passing through the area.

- Link the bike path to the Town and to the water's edge. Create viewpoints and vistas along the path by sensitively removing some vegetation so that people can see the river.

- Add loops to the bike trail for both walkers and cyclists. These loops should not be paved, but should be appropriate for mountain bikes or hybrids cycles. Appropriate signage will be needed to encourage use of new trails. Trail management should be appropriate to the levels of use, with paved areas only on the main thru route. A new loop should be added into the Town Park. Consider adding a loop to the river at the old water treatment plant, and a short loop via the paved access road adjacent to the new driver training site at the new water treatment plant.
- Consider linking the bike path to other assets such as Ashford Glen Nature Reserve, The Crossings, and to key heritage areas such as the Shaker museum. Some bike links could follow or connect to tributary areas such as Shaker Creek and Delphus Kill, providing new green recreation corridors and reinforcing positive management for runoff control and buffering. These links should have a water bound permeable surface and should not be paved.
- To maximise the benefits of the path, and make sure it delivers on the regional opportunities, some specific improvements are needed.
 - Convenient access to restrooms – either by developing new facilities or identifying existing facilities with better signage,

such as those in the Town Park.

- Wayside seating and shelters – the bike path is used year round. Rest points could be linked to viewpoints or other points of interest.
 - Information panels – to assist with safe use of the facility and to link in with interpretation opportunities described earlier.
 - Paving of non-paved sections so that there is a complete end-to-end quality surface.
 - Improvements to car parking should also be pursued, both at existing sites where capacity could be increased and by identifying new access points.
 - New bike path access points should be considered alongside any proposed developments at the old water treatment site or the private land east of the new water treatment plant.
- Explore the viability of establishing a bike rental shop and identifying possible locations for this business. At present, because there is no facility to either rent bicycles or get assistance with repairs, Colonie is missing an important economic opportunity.



ISSUE 4: CONTINUED STEWARDSHIP OF COLONIE'S MOHAWK RIVER WATERFRONT.

...a large proportion of Colonie resident's don't know about and have little interaction with the river.

OBSERVATIONS:

- There appears to be a thriving federal, state and non-profit commitment to public outreach programming along the Mohawk River and Erie Canal, but the team repeatedly heard that a large proportion of Colonie residents don't know about and have little interaction with the river.
- In order for future generations to enjoy the waterfront, the Town must take action with regard to the following three issues: preventing further sprawl on the waterfront and protecting the remaining open space within the study area; reducing and removing silt from the river; and improving management of invasive aquatic species.
- Preventing further sprawl on the waterfront and in the study area:
 - There is strong support for open space preservation among the residents of Colonie. Almost fifty-seven percent of respondents to Colonie Planning Department's survey identified open space preservation as a high priority. Strong support was confirmed at the October 20, 2003 North Colonie District Comprehensive Plan meeting when issues such as protecting "Undeveloped land along the Mohawk River" and "Existing Open Space" scored highly compared with other identified Town resources. The same audience also indicated that the "lack of a building moratorium until completion of a comprehensive plan" was more important than any other issue. Voting also highlighted a widely held belief that an imbalance exists between business and open space interests.
 - Development in the former summer camp area is resulting in the loss of identity to this special place. Former camps are being replaced by all-year homes and adjacent properties are being developed with "cookie cutter" models. Improvements including paved roads and links to sewer and water add to the high desirability of these locations. In the absence of guidelines, the special character of the community is being adversely impacted in a relatively short period of time.
- Reducing and removing silt from the river: Preventing silt from entering the system, as a result of poor land management practices is very important. It is likely to be more cost effective to stop silt and other material from entering the river system in the first place, than dredging the silt out once it is in the river.

- Accumulating silt and banks of weed significantly impinge on the ability of people to access and enjoy the river. The silt load is increasing from a number of point sources such as the tributaries and surface water run off during certain weather conditions. A study in February 2003, identified a number of locations that were point sources for silt and highlighted areas vulnerable to soil erosion. It is likely that significant amounts of silt and other suspended solids are being washed into the river, which is contributing to the overall silt accumulation in the system and causing localized problems for navigation and access.
- It is important to recognize that the existing tributary buffers may be inadequate to fully protect the environmental integrity of individual tributaries and ultimately the Mohawk River.



In particular, steep-sided gullies or ravines may require increased setbacks to accommodate for shallow soils and slopes. Studies have demonstrated that 150 feet of riparian setback (3 % slope) reduced sediment transport by 90%; an 82-foot setback is necessary to remove 80% of sediments; 197-foot setback is necessary to remove 80% of suspended solids (clays) and nitrogen; and a 279-foot buffer is necessary to remove 80% of phosphorus.

- Adequate environmental buffers are particularly important during site development when soils are vulnerable to rain. Computer modeling of creek buffers show that 150 feet buffers may be a minimum buffer (this does not take into account steeper slopes) sufficient to protect the integrity of waterways.
- Improving management of invasive aquatic species. The Mohawk River has problems with some non-native plant species which grow both within the river and the associated wetland habitats. The aquatic species that are of particular local concern, causing both environmental damage and adversely affecting use of the river include the Water Chestnut and the Eurasian Milfoil. These species are fierce competitors in shallow waters with soft muddy bottoms and form nearly impenetrable mats across wide areas of water. Other species such as common reed, Purple Loosestrife and Japanese Knotweed threaten biodiversity by forming large areas of monoculture where native species struggle to survive, changing soils and affecting water flow.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To prevent further sprawl on the waterfront and protect the remaining open space within the study area, the Town must work with the public to develop a vision for the study area that must be incorporated into the new Comprehensive Plan. The Plan should also include an open space planning component.
 - The future LOC should work closely with the Department of Planning and Economic Department, The Albany Land Conservancy, as well as agencies and non-profit organizations in the region to identify the data that is currently available on open space and natural resources in the community. Where there are gaps in information, studies should be completed and the information integrated into the plan.
 - The Town should develop design guidelines for summer camps that are being replaced with year round homes.
 - Consider purchase of development rights (PDR) as a tool for conservation. Under a PDR program, a landowner voluntarily sells his or her rights to develop a property to a non-profit organization or municipality. The landowner retains all other ownership rights attached to the land and a conservation easement is recorded on the title.
 - Engage the Albany Land Conservancy in the identification and pursuance of potential funding sources for the acquisition and protection of valued open spaces, habitats and key sections of viewshed. The Conservancy has a strong record of local involvement and were involved in the purchase of Ashford Glen, land directly adjacent to the western boundary of the Study Area.
- The Town Parks' Department should establish a "River Custodian" position to reach out to residents and visitors in the Mohawk River waterfront area. This would generate awareness about the importance of protecting Colonie's natural heritage along the river and tributaries. Activities and events (e.g. educational, restoration) could be designed to engage the public in good stewardship of the area. These may include school educational visits, creek cleanup day, wildlife surveys. Some communities produce a yearly "State of the Creeks" report that increases user awareness of changes that are occurring in the watershed.
- Develop a program to educate developers, homeowners and contractors about reducing storm water runoff. This may best be accomplished by the Town of Colonie, but the program should be promoted

through organizations like Conservation Advisory Council and the Significant Environmental Area Management Appeals Board. The team believes that the six minimum best management policies contained within the Town of Colonie NPDES Storm Water Phase II Permitting should be at the core of the educational program.

- There are several model programs available that demonstrate best practice regarding reducing non-point source pollution and improving environmental practices. The University of Wisconsin, Cooperative Extension Service has developed excellent materials and resources that are relevant to Colonie. Similarly, the Alaska Cooperative Extension has customized "National Home*A*Syst"



home environmental materials. The University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension Service, Nonpoint Source Pollution Education for Municipal Officers program (NEMO) offers an "educational program for local land-use officials that addresses the relationship of land use to natural resource protection".

(www.nemo.uconn.edu/index.htm). NEMO employs Geographic Information System technology (computer based mapping) capable of predicting the effects of sprawl as a function of impervious surface (e.g. paved areas). This community-based tool engages the community/planners in the production of necessary data coverages (e.g. vegetation, land use

and ownership, streams, roads, slope, aspect and elevation) and allows them to visualize various build-out scenarios.

- To reduce silt from entering the river and its tributaries, the Town of Colonie should take over the administration of the new storm water regulations and ensure that sufficient staff and training are available on this particular issue.
- Consider increasing the riparian buffer width within the study area in order to further reduce runoff and additional siltation/nutrient loading of the river.
- Further studies need to be carried out to ensure that any dredging be undertaken in the most environmentally sustainable and cost effective way. Modern techniques of removing silt such as the use of aqua coffer dams should also be investigated. As a minimum the Canal Corporation, in partnership with the necessary authorities, should sanction a hydrological study of this length of the Mohawk

River and Erie Canal to gain a greater understanding of the siltation patterns. This problem is not the sole responsibility of hard pressed marina operators within the study area, since it significantly impacts the general public's ability to launch boats from this site.

- Dredging operations may damage wetland habitats associated with the river. It is recommended that an inventory should be carried out identifying important wetland and associated riparian habitats. An impact assessment should also be undertaken when carrying out these dredging operations and disposal, in order to ensure that these vulnerable habitats are not damaged.
- Determine if there are available studies or surveys of fish and invertebrates in the Mohawk River. Just because there are significant numbers of striped bass, doesn't necessarily mean that the fishery is in a healthy state.
- Manage the non-native plant species so that they do not eradicate the native flora. The most effective treatment is likely to be harvesting. Experience at Lake Champlain has shown that mechanical harvesting and hand pulling can be successful, if infested sites are targeted repeatedly for five or more years. On Lake Champlain, funds have been obtained from the State of Vermont, New York State, US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Lake Champlain Basin Program.. It is important to note that Water Chestnut harvesting is expensive, over a 20 year period over \$4.3 million was spent on tackling this problem. Water Chestnut over-winters entirely by seeds that may remain viable for years, repeated control is critical to deplete seeds in the sediment; it may be worth investigating whether a targeted desilting operations combined with harvesting locations may be effective.
 - The weed problem affects most users of the river and there are a range of different bodies that have a stake in the Mohawk. The only way to tackle the weed is in partnership with these organizations. This could also involve community Water Chestnut pulling and harvesting events as well as collaborating to seek funds to support these efforts.
 - Understand the extent and distribution of these invasive species. In order to gain support for tackling a problem, there needs to be an awareness raising and educational campaign, aimed at both users of the river and householders. There may be opportunities to establish a public/private partnerships to address these issues.

NEXT STEPS:

The team recommends that the LOC properly constitute themselves to act as a planning and implementation body. Adopting 501(c)3 non-profit status will facilitate access to federal, state, foundation and other funding streams. This will necessitate employing an experienced professional and eventually program and administrative staff. It is advisable for the volunteer board to seek professional assistance and not to get bogged down with developing their own Articles of Incorporation and by-laws.



The reconstituted (and renamed) LOC should facilitate a series of meetings with representatives from the business and commercial community, major institutions (including the Town Board, Planning Board, landowners etc.) In particular, the newly constituted body should also take account of the views of young people through appropriate engagement. The intent is to develop further participation and commitment to the waterfront planning process.

AND FINALLY ...

The Countryside Exchange Team has been impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment of the community. We have identified significant challenges ahead, but we are confident that the community is more than equal to the task. We wish you well.



GLYNWOOD CENTER THANKS YOU

Glynwood Center and the members of the 2003 Countryside Exchange Team would like to express their sincere thanks to the Local Organizing Committee and the residents of the Town of Colonie for their remarkable hospitality and support. Many individuals, organizations and businesses gave generously of their valuable time to educate the team about the area and its issues, provide transportation and host numerous delicious and memorable meals. The preparation, hard work and generosity of the community not only made the week a pleasant one, it also helped the team work together effectively in sharing their ideas and experience and in drafting this report.



Glynwood Center