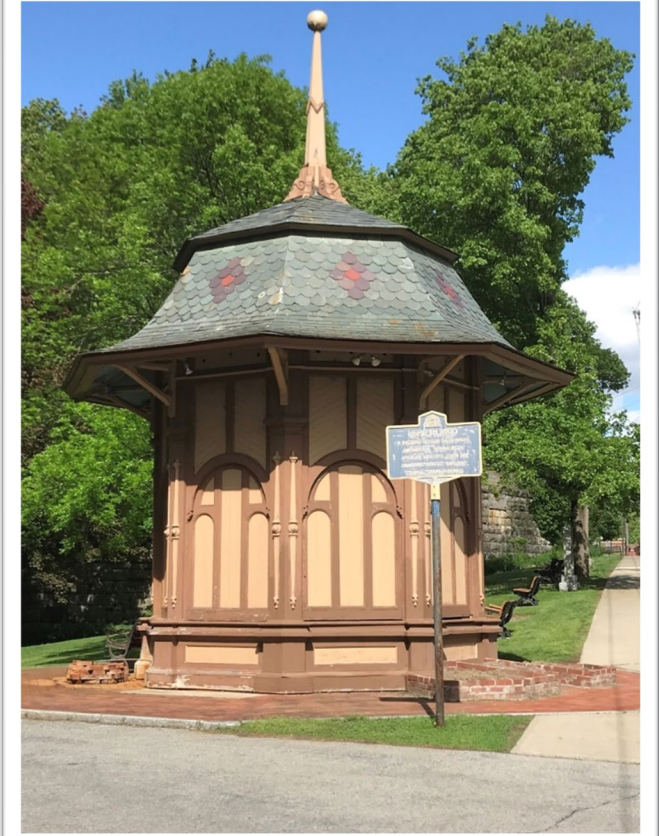


# VILLAGE OF BALLSTON SPA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



DECEMBER 2022

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Executive Summary

The Comprehensive Plan process was led by a dedicated effort by a cadre of village volunteers, supported by the Village Board, with assistance in preparing the plan documents from a team of professional planners. The Plan provides a vision and set of goals to guide the village in the next 10 years of its development.

An abbreviated version of the village Vision statement:

*Ballston Spa will continue to enhance and preserve the charm, historic character, and natural resources of the community for future generations, while encouraging opportunities for the economic growth of small businesses and improving the quality of life for residents.*

The Comprehensive Plan takes into consideration the village's unique history, identity, character, and values while addressing each aspect of the village by utilizing previous reports, undertaking substantial community outreach, and balancing the needs of residents and businesses to foster the community's vision.

Village leadership, with support from the advisory committee and all participants, seem to agree that the major community effort dedicated to the making of the plan will be best complemented by an equal and greater commitment toward putting the Plan into action. The goals of this plan will be reviewed yearly by the Village Board to assess what has, and has not, been accomplished. A set of goals and an implementation framework are included in the plan to shape the actions of the village in the years to come.

In looking ahead toward organizing the village to implement the many projects recommended in the plan, it may be helpful for the village to establish a more formal planning and community development function within the village administration. This could be staffed on an interim, part-time basis through a consulting arrangement. That function may initially be focused on technical services to support grant-writing tasks.

Some of the key projects noted in the plan include:

- Create and adopt a fully updated zoning ordinance for the village including a set of illustrated development design guidelines to help shape investment in all major districts in the village.
- Prepare a Brownfield Opportunity Area nomination study as currently funded with a NYS grant and focus redevelopment opportunities in that area. (This may become a long-term project recognizing the opportunity in this area is significant for village growth and development.)
- Continue to develop a unified capital improvement program for all village infrastructure (utilities, streets and sidewalks, streetscape amenities, etc.) and secure grants and local funding for implementation.
- Support planning and development of a village-wide trail system including volunteer efforts along with appropriate professional planning and design support as required.
- Address the diverse housing needs and opportunities including housing rehabilitation grant programs and accessory housing provisions in village code.

Getting projects completed will be the measure of the success, and by doing so, the Comprehensive Plan will serve to guide the future of the Village of Ballston Spa for the benefit of current and future generations.



### *Comprehensive Plan Objective*

The Comprehensive Plan guides decisions affecting the physical development and redevelopment within the Village. The process for the development of the plan has critical to its success and the final document reflects the desired vision for the community in consideration of input by residents, landowners, business leaders, appointed and elected officials, and other stakeholders through community participation. The plan is a guiding document and presents a vision and goals reflective of Ballston Spa’s unique history and natural character. It provides a process, together with specified objectives, policies, and strategies to guide the village to build upon its strengths while becoming a community able to meet future challenges head-on.

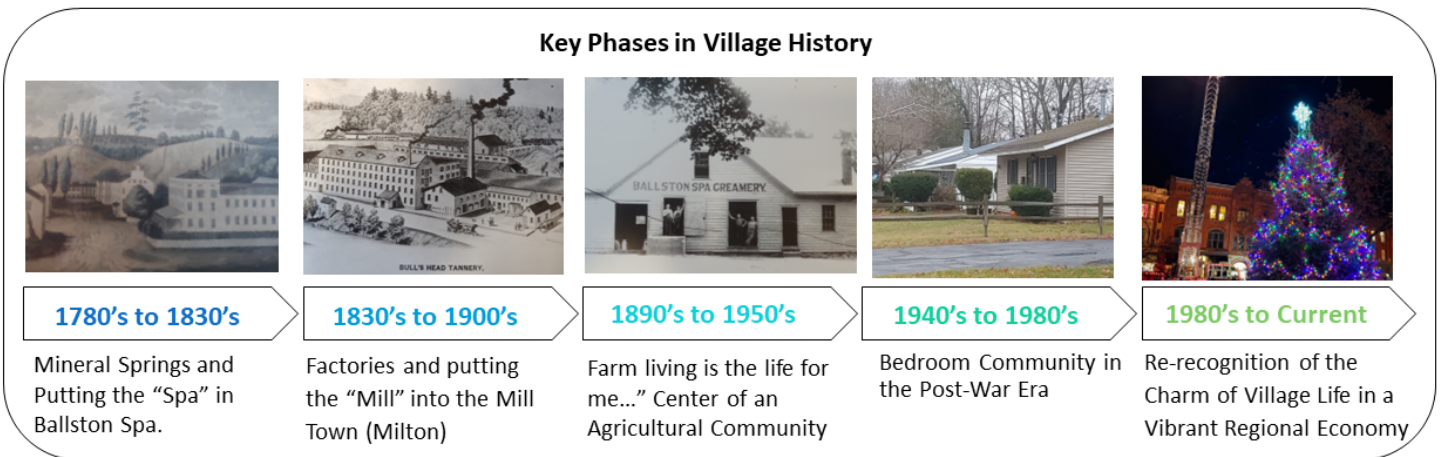
Overall, the Comprehensive Plan articulates a shared community vision and desired future, define various long, medium, and short-term goals and objectives, and provide guidelines for decision making within each of the below-listed focus items, as they relate to those goals and objectives. The plan includes an implementation and action framework outlining the recommended course of action including key steps and projected time frame to accomplish the identified strategies. The Comprehensive Plan is responsive to the following themes:

- Response to effects of climate change and the information revolution.
- Government responsibility for its buildings, parks, utilities, and storm water management.
- Relationship of built environment to village character and uses by residents, businesses, and visitors.
- Actual residential uses vs. permitted uses and guidance for preparing future regulations.
- Recognition of Village’s position in the Capital Region’s economy and what it means for future investment by residents and businesses.
- Social and community cohesion and quality of life issues.



### Historic Overview of the Village of Ballston Spa

In planning for the future, it is helpful to understand community history—what forces led to the creation of the village, what were the subsequent reasons for the continued growth and change in the village and what is the current role of the village in the regional economy looking forward? Of particular importance is recognition of the phases through which the village has transitioned. Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee Member, John Cromie, a local history expert, prepared the overview of village history that follows.



Ballston Spa grew in a most unlikely location. The early settlement was located by a hemlock swamp at the southern end of an ancient fault's floor. Two streams, one much larger than the other, had sliced their way through the fault's hanging wall. The smaller Gordon Creek flowed onto the swampy floor without a definite channel.

The larger Kayaderosseras had found its miles-long course between fertile, clay-loam to the south and sandy, gravelly soils to the north until it reached the flat of the fault's floor. There the low-banked creek wound, turned, and was joined by the Gordon in a configuration that caused ice jams and flooding. Beyond the confluence, the stream flowed through a wide flood plain on its way to Saratoga Lake.

Two factors introduced this early settlement, which became Ballston Spa, into this less-than-ideal environment. A mineral spring and a "chance" drawing of a lot by a young boy in Manhattan in 1774. It was the luck of that draw (and being on the winning side of the Revolution) that resulted in Nicholas Low owning the land which included the spring.

Low (rhymes with "cow") was a New York City merchant, financier, and land speculator. In 1792, Low built a rooming house facing his spring for summer visitors. His ownership was bounded by the center line of Ballston Ave. on the west; West High on the south; Milton Ave. on the east, and North Line Road to the north. By 1792, Low had sold all his land down to south of the Kayaderosseras near where Prospect Street now runs. He kept his land encompassing the springs.

Mineral springs were assumed to aid one's health and were good for what ailed or could ail a person. Most all these natural outflows in this young nation offered only rudimentary lodging. Low opted to begin a business venture and built a complex that could entertain as well as house. He built a spa.



The Sans Souci Hotel, opened in 1804, offering 150 rooms, a large ballroom, dining room, and gracious public areas. The hotel's parties, dances, food, social life, and excursions to nearby places attracted people of money from along the eastern seaboard, especially the South and New York City. In 1807, Low, with support of other hoteliers and boarding house owners, used his influence to have the state legislature establish Ballston Spa as a village to eliminate the influence of Milton's town government, which he could not control. He owned property in the Town of Ballston to secure a freshwater spring. His lands and the neighboring Alcott farm determined the village's reach into that town. It was Low's influence that resulted in Ballston Spa becoming the seat of county government in 1819.

Not understanding that a successful operation must make money for all its participants, Low sucked the money out of his enterprise. He rented land for home/businesses; he sold water; he took rent from proprietors of the hotel, bathhouses, and billiard hall, and most of the staff at the Sans Souci Hotel came from New York City. It was difficult for residents to build capital. During periods of recession and distress, the people suffered. Within 20 years, Saratoga Springs, whose local people copied Low's development of a spa, had taken over the role of America's watering place, and never looked back. Thus ended Ballston Spa's first reason to exist.

Ten years before the 1823 sale of his Ballston Spa interests, Low sensed the spa was not working and invested \$80,000 in a woolen factory. Having sold all his water rights, he opted for steam to energize his operation. After 30 days of operation, the large walking beam which transferred power to machinery broke under its own weight. By that time, Britain was flooding its former colonies with goods, and Low abandoned the project. The building lay vacant, but for squatters, and machinery was stolen. In later years the three-story stone building became a plaster mill, oil cloth factory, box manufactory, and produced grinding wheels. Finally, it housed Haight's tannery, which grew into the present factory complex on Bath Street. The original mill having been razed a century ago.

In 1832, New York's second railroad wound its way through Ballston Spa, as it ran from Schenectady to Saratoga Springs. It appears a portion of that road's original embankment exists on Front Street's south side.

The gorge formed by the Kayaderosseras provided Ballston Spa with its second reason for existence, waterpower. Its high walls allowed as much water to be held back as high as dams could safely be constructed. In addition, the configuration of the creek's fall and its banks provided for a series of mills back to Milton Center. Water held back by one mill became a water source for the next. By the time water reached the fault's wall, west of Milton Avenue, the duration of usable water rivaled that of river mills.

While small mills needed relatively little capital, larger enterprises needed larger pools of cash. The closest banks were in Albany, Schenectady, and Waterford. To answer that need, in 1838, thirteen men pooled \$100,000 and formed the Ballston Spa Bank, the precursor to Ballston Spa National Bank, in the building that now houses its downtown branch.

With power, transportation, and capital, Ballston Spa was off and running. Over the next twenty years, cotton became king. Ballston Spa could compete with Cohoes and the mills in Massachusetts. The McMaster and Smith families made fortunes in New Orleans cotton brokerages and banking and built mansions on West High Street. Sylvester and son Isaiah Blood moved their scythe business from the Mouringkill in Ballston to the Kayaderosseras, just above the village. Other lesser mills were strung along the creek to the area near present day Kelly Park, where the flood plain widens.



As factory owners built homes near their factories, so did the workers. The factory-town concept where the mills provided housing and provisions to workers (for a cost) did not take hold in Ballston Spa.

Isaiah Blood's philosophy was a worker was more productive who strived for self-betterment. He subdivided a large tract that became the north end of the village and sold lots to his workers, who built homes for their families. Blood's sharp-edged tool factories grew during the great Irish immigration, giving the north end an Irish persona for the next century.

At the same time, mill workers built homes along Saratoga Avenue and the area of Mechanic Street, called "The Island." Shop keepers and merchants often had their enterprises in our current downtown on Milton Avenue and Front Street and residences along lower Milton Ave and West High Street.

The Civil War propelled Blood's production as it did the Rock City Falls paper mills of George West. It put a crimp in cotton manufacturing. With his new wealth, West bought the lower cotton mill by Milton Avenue. In 1878 a millworker spilled a kerosene lamp on the factory's oil-soaked floor, consuming the factory in flames. Out of the ashes arose the brick factory complex now a multiuse facility at Milton and Prospect. Built for making manilla paper for bags, the factory became a major employer for the next generation.

The third major industry arrived in 1881. The Bull's Head Tannery owned by brothers-in-law Matthew Vassar and Samuel Haight moved from Milton Center. Expanding during its first 20 years, it attracted the current wave of immigration, resulting in an Italian community in the flats around the tannery and their church, the Irish established St. Mary's.

Nationally, industry became consolidated, primarily through the establishment of trusts, designed to corner markets and control pricing. Ballston Spa was not to be left out, and its major factory owners were early activists in organizing the sharp-edged tool trust, paper trust, and leather trust.

The Kayaderosseras became a wastewater system for the paper and tanning industries, polluting Saratoga Lake, a playground for wealthy Saratoga Springs visitors. Governor Theodore Roosevelt earned his chops as a conservationist by going after Ballston Spa's paper mills and in the process created the bedrock case of our nation's environmental laws.

The main building at the axe factory burned in 1901, and tools made with the Blood label were manufactured elsewhere. Unable to compete with more modern factories, the paper mill closed in 1914. Ballston Spa's second reason for existence was over. Its third had already begun.

Unlike waterpower, electricity and steam are unrestricted by geography. Industries gravitated to cities with extensive transportation opportunities, dense population, and greater availability of capital. Normally a death knell for most small communities dependent on waterpower for production of wealth, Ballston Spa prospered. The fertile loamy-clay soils around the village came to its rescue. It didn't hurt that Thomas Edison decided to site an electrical company at Schenectady creating a nearby demand for farm products.

James L. Scott and Louie Schwarz understood the situation, purchased the old opera house, and, in 1898, created a cold storage facility to store fruit and produce until the market offered favorable prices. The building was across the tracks from the railroad station in the middle of the village. The structure later housed the post WWII plastics factory, Tufflite, and now retails antiques.





Many of the small farms of Malta, northern Ballston, Charlton, Galway, and Milton changed from subsistence to cash crops, such as potatoes and apples. The abundance of milk cows attracted a chocolate maker from Brooklyn. Frederick Bischoff took over West's old mills and residence.

For the next 50 years, Ballston Spa became the center of a prosperous farming community, as families from the surrounding towns came to Ballston Spa to trade, shop, and socialize. Stories were rampant of the loss of tenant farms at card tables in the Medberry Hotel. Youth of farm families boarded in the village to attend high school.

Factories did not disappear. In addition to the tannery, knitting mills making socks and utilitarian cloths were established. Several other industries prospered. For its population, millworkers continued to find work in Ballston Spa.



*Front Street looking east, 1912*

Shopkeepers did well. By the 1920s, the block left empty after the Sans Souci Hotel was torn down in 1887, was filled with store fronts, as it is today. A housing surge east and west of the downtown that began in the 1890s continued until stopped by the great depression. Mostly middle and upper middle-class housing, it was occupied by merchants, managers, and professionals.

While the 1930s took a toll on most communities, Ballston Spa came through the depression relatively well. Everyone had to eat, couldn't live without chocolate, wear shoes, and work socks were favored. The village would have been considered a self-contained community, except the sense of community had spread well beyond its boundaries. Even as late as 1962, when the local historical society was formed, it was titled, Ballston Spa Area Historical Society and embraced members from Galway, Charlton, Malta, Ballston, and Milton.

Within its bounds, the village was not terribly unified. The Kayaderosseras was the dividing line. Those north of the stream had their stores, school, fire company. It was their territory. Those south of the Kayaderosseras had theirs. At night it wasn't safe for kids of one side to go to the other. The families to the south and east of downtown were sort of above it all, although grouped as southenders by those in the north. This rivalry crumbled in 1957 when the village came together to celebrate its sesquicentennial.

Technology was slow to affect farming, until restrictions caused by the depression and WWII ended. Then it came with a rush. Within ten years, small farms that had brought wealth to Ballston Spa were obsolete. By 1955, Ballston Spa's fourth reason for existence was well underway.

Schenectady's General Electric and American Locomotive Company were well positioned to prosper during WWII and the cold war. The Watervliet Arsenal was producing weaponry. They needed thousands of workers. The tannery was slowing down and closed in the early 1960s. Knitting mills and the new plastics forming company, Tufflite, paid modest wages. Former mill workers found well-paid employment in Schenectady and to a lesser extent, Watervliet. General Electric scientists and engineers found a village in which to raise their families. The village's first suburban style development opened in 1956, as 91 homes were sold in "Forest Park" across from the fairgrounds. Ballston Spa became a bedroom community. Its wealth, for the first time, came from outside itself.

Community identity was shifting. School centralization was completed in the 1950s. Family activities and social interaction revolved around the children's schools. Slowly, areas gravitated away from Ballston Spa to Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake, Galway, Saratoga Springs, and Shen.



Ballston Spa's position as a bedroom community for Schenectady was short lived. By 1965, General Electric was pulling one division after another out of Schenectady. Alco was failing. Worse, the construction of the Northway made Colonie Center Mall and other large shopping centers minutes away. Ballston Spa's downtown businesses couldn't compete. First national chains like Newberry's and Endicott Johnson closed. Then clothing stores like the Style Shop and Buchdahl's shuttered, followed by the department stores of Pearl's, Betor's, and Steiner's (which was the last to turn the key).

Unlike Saratoga Springs, which was skirted by the Northway, Ballston Spa was four miles away, too far to feel its beneficial effects. The once prominent north/south corridor of NYS Route 50, which runs through the village, had shriveled. For the first time in its 170-year history, Ballston Spa had no reason for its existence, and nobody seemed to realize it. However, everyone was aware store fronts were vacant. Retail spaces were looked at as possible residential units.

In the mid-1980s something strange happened. Two young fellows took over an empty store on Front Street and began to sell high-end clothing with labels torn off. CJ Outfitters attracted students from Union, Siena, Skidmore, and SUNY Albany to Ballston Spa. Merchants of Ballston Spa took notice. About the same time, a second effort was made to set up a business association, with the help of Saratoga Springs Chamber. It succeeded, and the Ballston Spa Business and Professional Association was born. Efforts to promote the village began with earnest. The need for capital investment was answered by Amsterdam Savings (now Key Bank), which opened a branch in the village, as well as other regional and national lending institutions. After twenty years, things began to look up for the village.

During the 1990s a definite population shift had occurred, and the Northway corridor had widened, and more industries and businesses had located within it. Four miles from a Northway exit and 30 miles from Albany was no longer that far. Small business retailers adjusted to big-box competition, specializing in unique items and specialty services. Many were looking for a proper venue to sell their wares. Its fifth reason for existence had found Ballston Spa.

Once vacant or underused store fronts took on new life as proprietors of specialized, unique shops opened their businesses. At first, a few specialty restaurants opened. Soon, the village became known for its variety of eateries, from diners to formal fare. A decades-long trend of non-owner rental properties among modest older housing began to reverse, turning neighborhoods back to family-oriented streets. Throughout this later period, non-profit organizations did not falter, but worked to encourage the community's growth and social cohesion.

Each period of prosperity for the village brought its own buildings and architectural styles. Each succeeding generation has had sufficient funds to keep up the housing stock. A varied geography creates pockets of interest throughout the community. Neighborhoods are small and often anything but homogeneous. Services expected within a village are within easy reach. But for the three suburban style neighborhoods, every lawn differs from one neighbor to the next and greenery is abundant.

Among Capital Region villages, Ballston Spa is in a class by itself because of the way it was shaped in its 230-year history. As the area's population increases, so will Ballston Spa's uniqueness, which forms its prosperity, if it can stay the course.



## Vision

Ballston Spa will continue to enhance and preserve the charm, historic character, and natural resources of the community for future generations, while encouraging opportunities for the economic growth of small businesses and improving the quality of life for residents.

Self-described as “a village of friends” Ballston Spa residents recognize its unique sense of community, safety, and quaint and cozy character. A more interconnected village can be achieved by linking nearby regional trails to neighborhoods and downtown destinations, supporting a community greenway-historic corridor along the Kayaderosseras and Gordon Creeks, and enhancing sidewalk and streetscape infrastructure to serve both local economic development and community interaction.

The village’s proximity to larger cities such as Saratoga Springs, nearby I-87, and the greater Capital District help continue to make Ballston Spa an accessible and desirable place to live, work, and visit. By improving its infrastructure, enhancing its diverse and affordable housing stock and preserving its many historic community assets, Ballston Spa will continue to set itself apart as a unique and valuable destination— ***“We’ve really got a gem here!”***



Festival in Wiswall Park



## Community Profile

### Introduction

Beginning in late 2021, the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee held twice monthly, open to the public, topic-based meetings. The topics were identified as important elements to be addressed in the comprehensive plan by the committee. This Community Profile reflects the topics of the committee meetings and includes selected findings from reports recently completed for the village including an Existing Conditions Report, Economic Development Plan and Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan.

The Community Profile includes a brief historical overview of the village and an overview of the goals from the 1993 comprehensive plan. The profile also includes some of the initial collective thoughts and observations of the committee relating to the respective topics. The topics include:

- Governmental-built infrastructure
- Information technology and climate change
- Built environment
- Housing
- Utility infrastructure
- Stormwater management
- Economic considerations
- Social considerations

Each subsection of this community profile includes the Steering Committee’s summary of each month’s topic. As these are considered major topics the village will face over the next 10 to 15 years, it is recognized that the comprehensive plan can play an important role in guiding how these issues can be addressed by both village government as well as other partners who are living and investing in the village—from neighborhood residents, to the business and development community and the other government entities and nonprofits. (Steering Committee meeting summaries and links to meeting minutes and videos are provided in the appendix for the reader’s convenience.)

Among the many assets of Ballston Spa, perhaps its greatest asset (besides its people), is its rich history. This history is preserved by its architectural heritage and will continue to provide economic dividends.



Previous Comprehensive Plan and Current Plan Initiative

Looking at the previous Village of Ballston Spa Comprehensive Plan, it is striking that the goals listed are very similar to the goals expressed by the Steering Committee in the creation of this Comprehensive Plan, see inset 1993 list. While an amount of continuity in vision is a good indicator, the overall feeling currently is that the goals set forth in the 1993 plan did not come to fruition to the extent the community had hoped. The goals and implementation strategies for this new comprehensive plan are focused on ways to really make a difference in the village, so that the same set of needs is not identified again in twenty years.

**Village of Ballston Spa Comprehensive Plan (1993) Primary Goals**

1. Preservation and Revitalization of the Local Economy.
2. Preservation and Enhancement of Historic Resources and Aesthetic Character.
3. Evaluation and Rehabilitation of Village Infrastructure and Police/Fire Services.
4. Evaluation and Enhancement of Community Services.
5. Evaluation and Enhancement of Recreational Services.

**Specific land use goals for the Village:**

1. The development of a more attractive and successful central business district.
2. The preservation of our small village identity and unique Victorian culture.
3. The development and enforcement of a comprehensive signage program.
4. Recommendations to amend the current zoning ordinance in order to clarify areas of confusion and accommodate the growth and expansion of the Village that has occurred over the past 25 years and the accompanying changes in land use.
5. The identification of Village-owned vacant property and the determination of the most appropriate uses.

Village Properties and Infrastructure

Recognizing the age and extent of existing village buildings, parks and other properties, utility infrastructure, and the magnitude of costs for upkeep and improvement of these assets, the village needs to be increasingly proactive in planning for its maintenance and prioritize the projects needing improvements. In order to be prepared to apply for competitive grants and dedicate taxpayer funding for infrastructure investment, the village must define what needs to be done.

The village recently put together a list of important capital improvements with assistance from the Chazen Companies (now LaBella Associates) that outlines important water, wastewater (sewer) and stormwater infrastructure projects. That capital improvement project list is an excellent outline of initial needs across these systems. The list provides an initial foundation for a broader, system wide inventory and assessment of the current state of all village-owned infrastructure for that should be developed in the future. A link to the capital improvement list is included in the appendix.

For financial planning it will be important for the village to create an annual budget set aside to address the maintenance/capital replacement needs of the public buildings like the Village Hall, Department of Public Works, Police/Court buildings and Swimming Pool. A broad range of grant and subsidized loan programs exist from state and federal agencies that can be tapped to address village infrastructure needs.

The overall management of infrastructure in the village will benefit by expanding and formalizing a Department of Public Works capital plan and updating it and resetting priorities periodically. Public Works can prepare property owners for the shift in state and federal government energy policies, by encouraging green practices and promoting mindfulness of the current and new restrictions in village infrastructure.



Climate Change

Uncontrolled forces include situations and events that are beyond the control of the village such as climate change and ever-changing technological advances that will continue to impact life in the village in many ways. It is important for the village to take steps to address issues of climate change and protect itself from severe weather damage or dangers, such as flooding during intense storms. As various climate change impacts manifest themselves, village leaders should devise a process identifying actions to prevent or minimize adverse effects and exploit the positives. The map entitled Topography & 100 Year Flood Zone (Map 7 of the Existing Conditions Report) shows that part of the downtown is in the 100-year flood plain (roughly from Prospect Street to Hamilton Street and from Bath Street to Malta Avenue), making it more vulnerable and a priority area for protection measures.

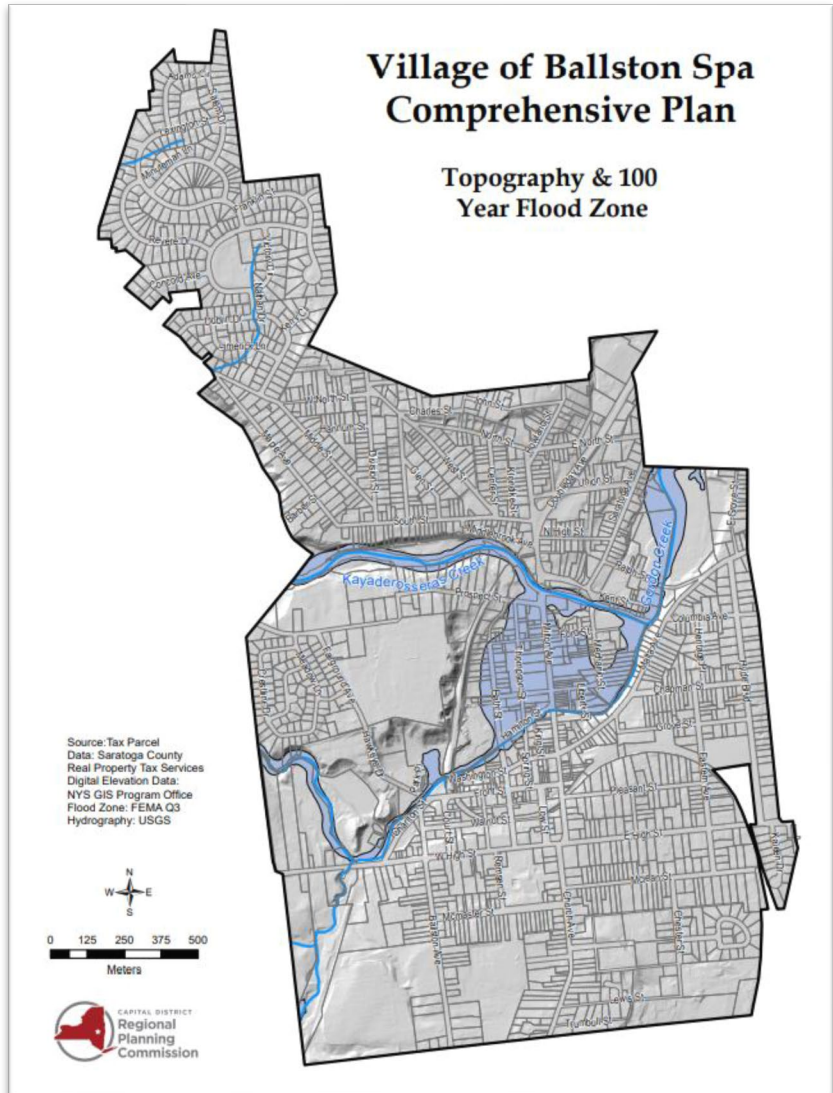
Despite these constraints, overall, the village’s natural assets and geography

place it in a desirable location in terms of serving as a potential host to people seeking refuge for several reasons. In particular those seeking relief from severe weather—climate refugees. Wildfires, tornadoes, hurricanes, sea level rise, damaged ecosystems—these events are unfortunately not uncommon in other parts of the country and world. Regions like upstate New York and established communities like Ballston Spa offer a locational advantage that can be attractive to those seeking refuge from environmental forces.

Due to the increasing number of electric cars on the road, the village can make itself more inviting by providing and encouraging deployment of charging stations, which is another amenity for both visitors and residents. These facilities can be in the public and private parking areas, so no on-street parking is lost. The state and federal government is subsidizing the installation of the charging stations, and they could create a cash flow for the village.

Information Technology

As the steady march of technologic change continues, so too are the challenges and opportunities presented to the Village of Ballston Spa. From a governmental administration perspective, continual investment in



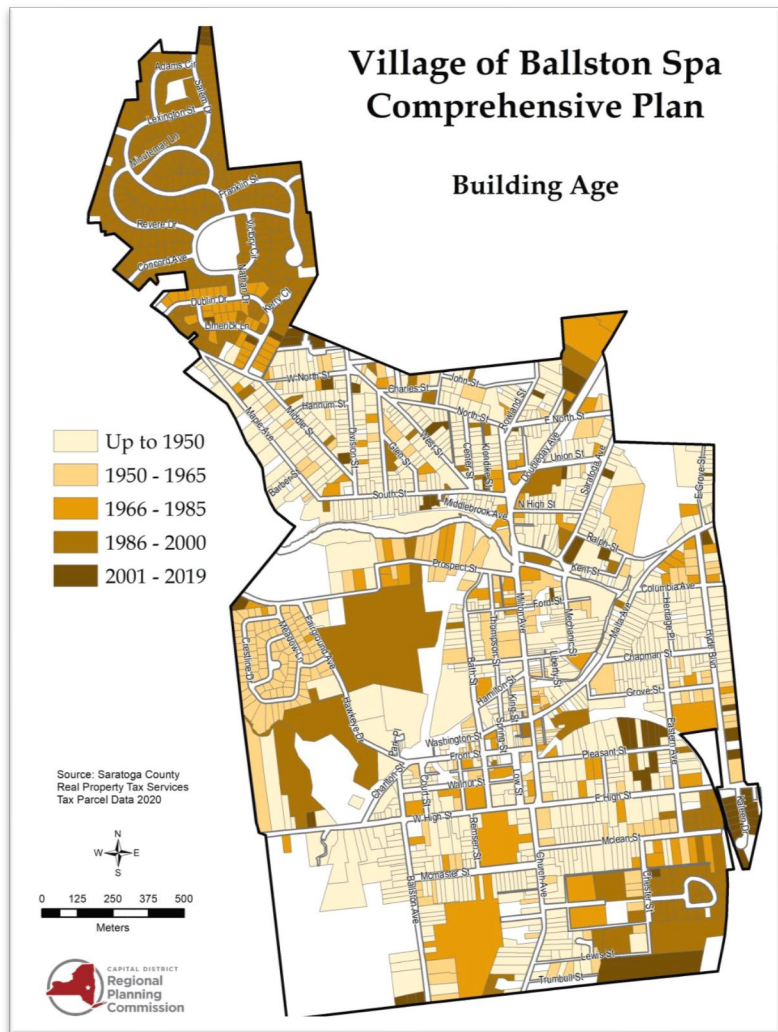
information technology (IT) by the village will be imperative—including hardware, software, support and training. Ideally, such investment will be based on an assessment of IT needs and deployment of a reasonable plan that is aligned with village capacity and available resources. Recognizing the increasing importance of information technology (IT) on management and maintenance of village systems and operations, the village should consider a plan which centers around personnel responsible for operating, updating, and securing all the uses of IT by the village and for on-going training of village employees. Village IT should facilitate accessible, easy-to-find information; trusted delivery of services and communication between residents and government; and to enhance village operations.

Approximately 4 percent of all workers in the village worked from home, according to the 5-year estimates, ending in 2019. These estimates are from before the pandemic, however, and remote work has become much more prevalent over the past two years. Even as things begin to return to normal, remote work continues in popularity and shares of workers who stay home may increase across all the age groups. It will be important for the village to factor this into its future and to ensure that the village has high speed internet access for residents and businesses to be attracted to the village.

Considering advances in information and communication technology from a social and economic perspective, one can see a range of issues and opportunities. Continued advancement of work-from-home opportunities renders village residential life increasingly attractive for current and future residents. Hence, supporting expansion of broadband service including fiber optic networks will be important for the village in many ways. On the other hand, as technology continues to advance rapidly, the “digital divide” between those who are comfortable keeping up with tech and those who are not so inclined will likely grow, potentially leaving an increasing number of people who will not be able to fully participate in the technology-based society. (Which may be an ideal state for some people and no so ideal for others.)

**Built Environment of The Village**

The variety of architectural styles present in the village helps create the image of the community and attracts people to visit, live in, and invest in the village. Popular architectural styles change over time and the village includes an example of just about every major American architectural style of the past two centuries. The Building Age map (Map 16 of the Existing Conditions Report) shows the approximate ages of the buildings in the village. It shows



that at least 70 percent of the village was built before 1950. The ages and styles of the downtown buildings and in the residential neighborhoods are a significant part of the charm of the village. They are valued assets that will benefit from reasonable and appropriate guidelines and regulations for their upkeep.

An effort to inform property owners of the valuable aspects of their properties and to present guidelines for them to follow to preserve this value would be helpful. The village’s historic appearance can also be protected through enforcement of zoning codes. While there is a need for reasonable regulations to protect properties and investments downtown and in the historic district, regulations should not be so restrictive as to discourage those who would like to move to or invest in the village.

As an incentive to invest in the preservation of historic properties, there are state and federal historic preservation tax credits, however, these programs include restrictions and requirements which may make eligibility not feasible for many potential applicants. (See [www.preservenyny.org](http://www.preservenyny.org) for more information.)

Often-overlooked areas of the village are the major gateways on New York State Route 50 (Milton Avenue/Church Avenue). These areas are important in forming a visitor’s first impression of the village. To effectively manage the primary entrances, the village government should seek expanded partnerships with the surrounding towns of Milton and Ballston to advance shared economic development goals.

The village’s significant green canopy of its “urban forest” should also be recognized for its importance and value. Trees are noted by the US forestry service to increase residential values, make downtowns more inviting to shoppers who spend more, and, if strategically placed, can mitigate heating and cooling costs. The Steering Committee noted that a conflict exists along Milton Ave between mature trees and sidewalk maintenance. Tree roots have caused sidewalk heaves, but all attempts should be made to save the trees while also fixing the problem and advancing accessibility in the village. (Note: advances in urban forestry have included development of structural soils that can support sidewalk construction while accommodating healthy habitat for appropriately planted street trees.)

Vacant and underutilized property in the village detracts from the overall charm and it is recognized that this issue warrants additional attention. The chart below (from the Existing Conditions Report) lists some of the vacant commercial properties in the village. There is an opportunity to adaptively reuse or infill these properties in order to increase the vibrancy of the village and to capture additional tax revenue.

Address	Notes	Tax ID	Property Class	Acres	SqFt	Year Built
92-96 Front St		216.32-1-89	481 - Att Row Bldg	0.04	6,610	1950
24 Washington St		216.32-1-6	541 - Bowling Alley	0.69	12,167	1920
2017-2019 Doubleday	condemned	203.72-2-1	485 ->1use Sm Bld	1.38	25,274	1955
125 Bath St		216.32-1-96.2	710 - Manufacture	6.35	77,699	1930
149 Ballston Ave		216.-3-9	642 - Health Bldg	15.83	129,609	

Housing

There are approximately 2,480 housing units in the in the village with about 57 percent owner occupied and 37 percent rented. The number of housing units in the village has increased only slightly since 2000. Since 2000, approximately 82 total housing units were reported as added to the housing stock, about a 3 percent increase.





The rate of housing unit increase has been far below Saratoga County, which has seen a 23 percent increase from 2010 - 2019.

The map entitled Land Use (Map 8 of the Existing Conditions Report) shows that over 75 percent of the village land use area was classified as residential/mixed use with residential in 2020, shown in the yellow, orange and fuchsia colors. The preponderance of housing is single family, with some two and three family and mixed use. The Steering Committee has expressed interest in the village considering the potential benefits of adding housing units on single family lots through accessory dwelling units. The addition of new units through these measures may help keep living in the village more affordable.

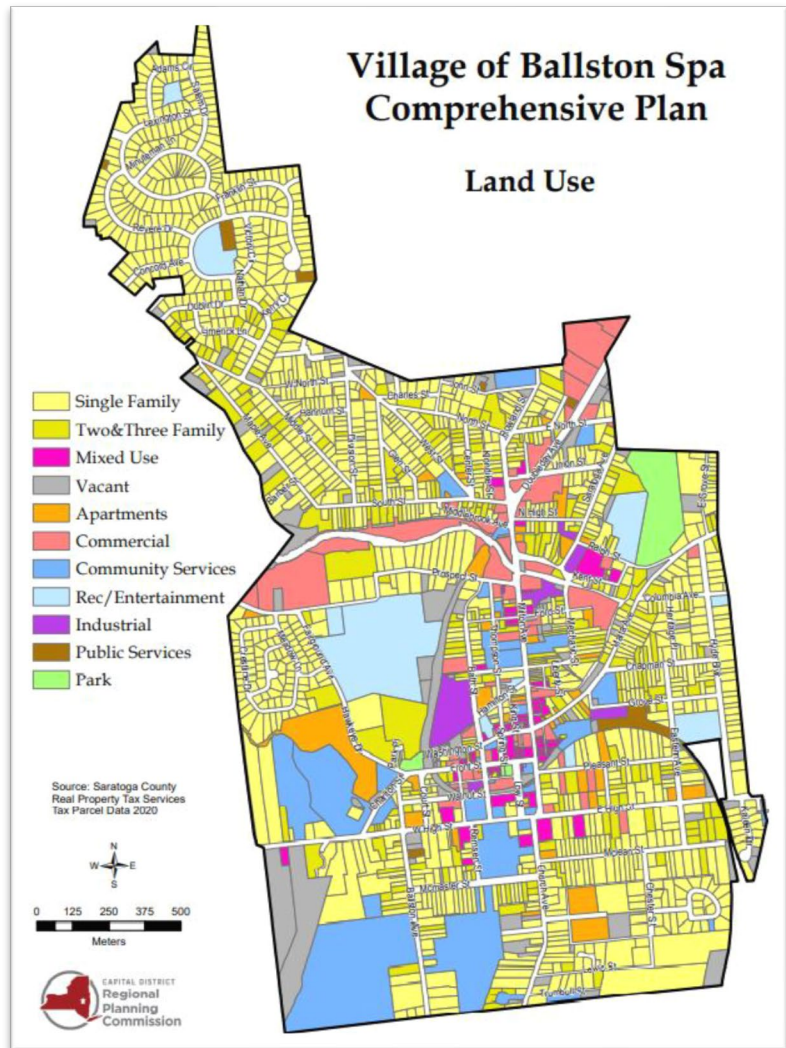
Major rental projects have been built in the last few years within a few miles of the village providing a contrast to village life. Recognizing these growth patterns, it will be increasingly important for the village to differentiate itself in order to maintain its unique character, provide a positive environment for home ownership, and discourage the use of single family homes as multiple or short-term rentals. Local property

maintenance codes, when properly prepared and enforced, can help prevent the housing stock from being exploited by residents, absentee landlords, and large corporate entities. To be successful in a village, enforcement should begin with incentives and rapid response to small infractions like trash-strewn lawns, unshoveled sidewalks and excessive noise, and should involve the homeowner, landlord, and/or tenant.

Stormwater Management

Ballston Spa’s history and form are in large part due to the confluence of geology and hydrology—land and water. While groundwater springs were the first reason the village developed, the sloping, narrow valleys of the Kayaderoseras and Gordon Creeks focused surface water so it could be readily harnessed for its industrial phase of development that benefited from the renewable resource of hydropower. Today, stormwater management is often forgotten by many—until the system breaks down or is overloaded and flooding or other damage occurs.

In general, Ballston Spa has weathered some very significant storms and has avoided serious flooding. It is fortunate because east of the village is a very large flood plain that can absorb large amounts of stormwater



flow and helps prevent the Kayaderosseras from backing up. Much of the village's flooding is localized and a product of surface runoff and the drainage system. When more than 100-year storms have occurred, there may have been some flooding at the confluence of the Gordon with the Kayaderosseras, but no significant damage.

As stormwater runs across urban areas like the village, the surface water can become polluted as it runs over pavement and parking lots, picking up oil and other pollutants before flowing into a nearby river or stream. High volumes and velocities of stormwater runoff—during larger storm events—can cause not only flooding and property damage, but also excessive erosion which can contribute sediments and excessive levels of nutrients that are not healthy for lakes and ponds.

Further, almost all older communities in our nation that have sanitary sewer systems like Ballston Spa, sections of the storm and sanitary sewer systems had been combined into a shared system. While those older engineering design standards were once considered sufficient for routine rainfall events, when overloaded during large storms, the combined sewer overflows and discharges into streams, rivers and other surface waters, bringing damaging pathogens and pollutants into natural water bodies.

In 2003, smaller communities like Ballston Spa were brought under the Clean Water Act and required to have a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System or MS4. Ballston Spa's MS4 is regulated by the Clean Water Act with the goal of limiting adverse impacts to area surface waters including Gordon Creek and Kayaderosseras Creek and ultimately Saratoga Lake and the Hudson River. The village participates in the Saratoga County Inter-Municipal Stormwater Management Program administered with the assistance of Cornell Cooperative Extension. As part of the village's responsibilities as an MS4 community, it is required to develop and implement a stormwater management program plan (SWMP).

It is no surprise, considering the age and extent of the village's street system, that the village's stormwater management system is in serious need of a full assessment. After addressing immediate concerns of sanitary sewer cross-connections and failing catch basins, a full-system audit of the storm sewer system is in order, followed by a capital plan to support the measures identified in the audit. As time, money, and talent permit, modern evaporation, storage, and absorption techniques can be constructed as demonstration projects in the village.

Particular attention can be given to capturing stormwater before it enters the system. Immediate, short-term, and long-term goals include making basic repairs to the system and enhancing maintenance protocols; conducting an engineering assessment for cross connections, dead-ends, and inappropriate connections and identifying alternative designs to reduce stormwater from entering the sewer system, including the use of naturalized "green infrastructure" solutions. Fortunately, these solutions have several potential funding sources of which the village could take advantage, as shown in the implementation framework section below.

#### Economic Considerations

Ballston Spa is well-positioned among the region's economic activity centers. Saratoga County is prosperous and growing. Ballston Spa distinguishes itself as a residential oasis in which people can still afford to buy a home and residents value the village, the school, and the community. The region's population has moved up the Northway from Albany to the point where Exit 12 is an acceptable drive to and from the Albany area. These factors support our downtown and determine demand for housing. The continued economic health of the village requires we build on these strengths.



The Economic Development Plan showed that over a quarter of village families make between \$100,000 and \$149,999, as do over a third of married-couple households. Almost half of non-family households live on \$35,000 or less. This includes people living on social security, social services, and subsidized housing (e.g., Doubleday Woods). These statistics underscore the wide range of economic levels in the village.

The largest employment group among village residents is the service industry (education, health, etc.). This indicates Ballston Spa is not a “company town” driven by one employer, rather its families are supported by a diverse set of employers including those in health, education, and government. These are generally stable employment sectors and with the rest of the employment divided among a wide range of other occupations, Ballston Spa is relatively protected from economic downturns.

Most employed residents of Ballston Spa travel within a 30 or so mile radius from the village for work. That is approximately the same radius from which downtown businesses draw most of their customers. It is fair to say that Ballston Spa’s economic health is tied directly into that of the Capital Region. The economic drivers that bring money to Ballston Spa are coming from Saratoga Springs, Clifton Park, and Albany, and throughout the Capital Region. Anecdotal evidence for business owners shows that their clientele regularly travels from communities 25 or 35 miles away. Business owners have repeat customers from Lake George, Troy, Glens Falls, Schenectady, Niskayuna, etc.

The Steering Committee identified that when visitors arrive downtown, it is important to incentivize visitors to spend more time there. For example, creating opportunities for longer term parking in the Central Business District. The public parking lots should be pointed out through obvious directional signage at major intersections and through updates to online mapping services. Easily accessible public bathrooms would also help people spend more time downtown. Bathrooms in the library, Welcome Center (Bottle Museum), and police station could be opened to serve the public.

The Economic Development Plan also envisioned expanding the business district down Washington Street and west on Front Street to Iron Spring Park. The portion of Washington Street that dead ends west of Bath Street also holds potential for commercial/retail development. The expansion of uses in some residential areas to allow home businesses is also of interest to the Steering Committee.

The greater the diversity of businesses and of people experiencing the village, the more its attractiveness increases, which in turn draws more people to Ballston Spa. Responsibility for creating a diversity of businesses falls largely on Ballston Spa Business and Professional Association (BSBPA) and building owners. The government’s fundamental role is to provide reliable infrastructure for businesses, ensuring their investments in the community, and secondarily to have an articulated promotional plan that describes its activities to support a positive image of the village. A necessary element in promotion and marketing is to articulate a simple message that encapsulates a desired image. The promotional plan should support current businesses and encourage the development of new ones.

A village position could be considered which would focus on public affairs and communicate with residents as well as businesses. The ideal would be an apolitical person who understands the ins and outs of the village and is not only able to help people navigate policies but advocate for changes when needed.

More cooperative efforts should also be focused on bringing those who spend a good part of their day in or near Ballston Spa to the downtown to shop and use services in the village. For example, the Ballston Spa Central School District schools in or adjacent to the village house 4,100 students and over 800 staff and this large



number of people (including parents) is an audience that could be engaged to add to the prosperity of the downtown. County workers commute to the village as well as the hundreds of people each week who use the county services. More work is needed to market village businesses to those who may work within a 5-to-15-minute drive from it.

Social Considerations

There are some future opportunities - and serious challenges - potentially impacting the social fabric of the village, including increasing population pressure due to the development of the electronics industry and the generally favorable living conditions in the Capital Region. One good way for the village to prepare to meet future challenges, whatever they may be, is by encouraging residents to become involved in social organizations that will help the community meet the challenges. This will allow decision making in the village to become more inclusive, consistently bringing new members onto boards and committees.

As the older population ages out of participating in public service, younger residents will have to take over. About a third of the village is between 18 and 49. The village should encourage the next generation to be involved in decision making and implement a process to appropriately bring new faces and voices onto village volunteer boards and village staff. Many in this age group are busy with kids and jobs and have little time, so outreach must be in places where it can be effective.

Service groups like the Lions Club and Rotary, along with its exchange program, provide opportunities for community service. Rotary is currently exploring its Interact club program for young people ages 12-18 to introduce students to community projects. As the volunteer base increases, so will the known talent pool for governmental positions, allowing them to turn over regularly.

Collaboration, not just between government and organizations but among organizations, is important to foster communication among residents and supporters of the village. This serves to improve village amenities and the delivery of services. Ballston Spa, overall, is a middle-class community with a large lower income segment. Whether accomplished through a paid liaison or otherwise, a robust, inter-related network of non-profits is essential. The non-profits present and active in the village include Life Works, Rebuilding Together, Community Emergency Corps, Ballston Area Churches Association, Veterans’ Housing Coalition and Job Link.



*Rotary volunteers working for Rebuilding Together constructing a gazebo for the veteran’s home on Church Ave.*

Ballston Spa Central School District as well as the village library bring families from adjoining towns into the village, providing a major resource for community organizations. The village benefits from its two museums which bring people into the village and promote the history of the area. Attention to the arts, culture, and history is important to the quality of life in the village and is instilled in children by the school district. These institutions are assets to the community and should be recognized as such.

Open Space

The village should work to improve aesthetic character of existing parks and open spaces and consider further development of existing parks such as Victory Circle in the Colonial Hills area. Anecdotal evidence from the Steering Committee informs that smaller parks (downtown “pocket parks” like Iron Spring and Wiswall) and



public spaces in the village are used more than the larger areas, due to their location. The larger parks (like Kelley Park and the Victory Circle) have little of their potential realized as gathering and recreation space, as they are more out of the way. These parks should be developed so they become destinations and their use can be tied to where they are situated. Kelley Park’s adjacency to the Kayaderosseras Creek invites the development of a creek trail system to engage with the natural surroundings. Victory Circle is in the middle of the Colonial Hills neighborhood and would lend itself to family centered activities like a playground/play space, dog park and gathering spaces. The Village Cemetery may not be village owned but is a huge space suitable for passive recreation like an interpretive walking trail, jogging and walking dogs, to which the Cemetery Association agrees.



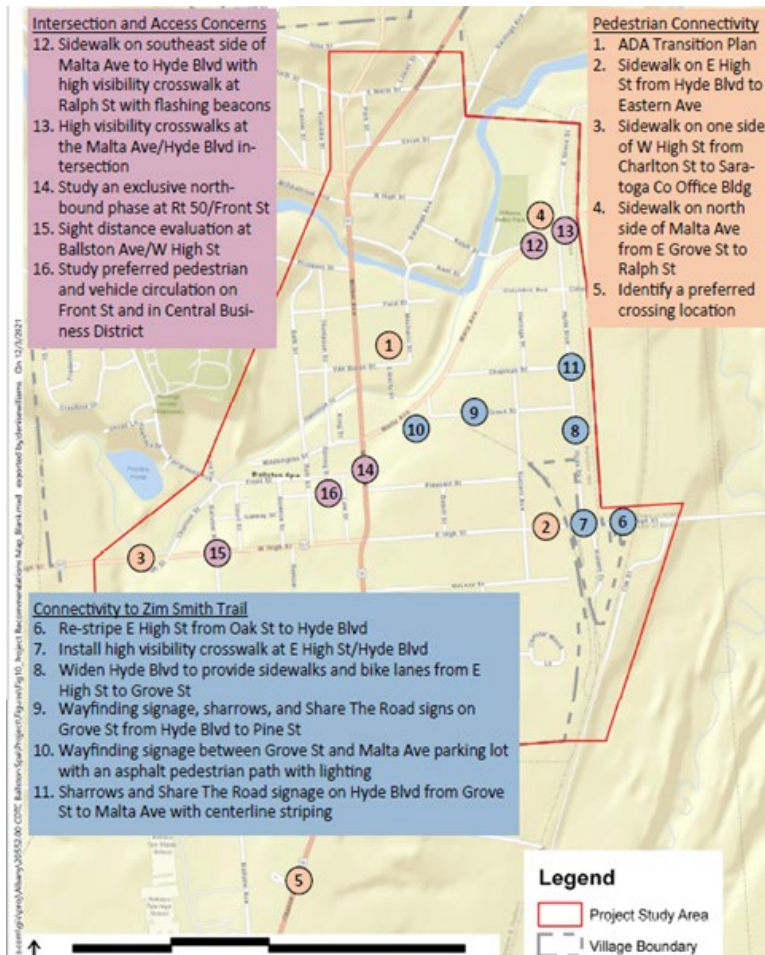
Playground at Kelley Park

As a community with plentiful green spaces, gardens, trees and natural habitats, it is important to recognize and celebrate these features as a wonderful part of life in Ballston Spa.

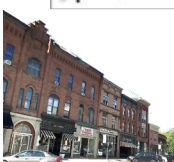
Transportation

The Village of Ballston Spa has a diverse transportation system that is supportive of vehicle travel, cyclists,

pedestrians, and transit riders. Most roads within the village are low-volume local roads, but high volume roads like NY Route 50 and 67 run through the village. The unique character of the village offers a pedestrian oriented layout, however, gaps in sidewalks and bicycle infrastructure can make it difficult for many to safely traverse the village by foot or bicycle. Additionally, there is the potential for improved connections to nearby regional trails presenting the opportunity for economic development within the village, and in general, a more integrated multi-modal transportation network. Key recommendations in the Village Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan are shown on the adjacent map.



Street signage has gone missing over the years and is needed for people to navigate side streets. In the past emergency vehicles had been known to get lost. (Today, fire trucks and ambulances are tied into the county-wide emergency services mapping.) The village has identified 91 missing street



signs and is enlisting the aid of the county to replace them.

NY Route 50 carries about 15,000 cars a day and causes traffic congestion during commuting (rush) hours. The traffic congestion is most likely related to the growth of Saratoga County in the last few years—and the growth in general of vehicle registrations/vehicles on the road. Much of the traffic comes from or goes to the Northway from the rapidly growing areas north and south of the village. Traffic congestion’s silver lining is that it gives the community a sense of vitality and prosperity. It is preferred to the use of a by-pass, which has damaged other small downtowns.

Luckily, motorists are not just driving through the village. Many are stopping and parking, bringing commerce to the community, but also making it difficult to find places to park near the popular areas downtown. The Parking Advisory Committee found there is not a lack of parking spots, but rather insufficient enforcement, people’s expectation that they should not have to walk a block or two to their destination, the lack of signage and maps (including online maps) of public lots, and a need for an overall parking plan. During off hours, the county lot is available, but it is not well posted. Not-for-profit lots could be made available when not normally used, in return for village snow clearing.

The January 2022 Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan and the Existing Conditions Report of 2021 find sidewalks generally exist in the village but could be in better condition and intersections could be made safer and easier to use. A priority has been established to address sidewalks needed along Malta Ave and to improve sidewalks leading to downtown. As properties are developed or re-developed, sidewalks made part of projects can be financed with little impact on the ultimate owner. The current reimbursement program has failed, and something further must be inaugurated to promote repair and replacement of faulty sidewalks.



## Priority Issues

In addition to meeting the broader goals of the comprehensive plan described above, the Steering Committee established a list of priority issues to address:

1. Definition of the existing “community character.”
2. Historic Preservation – the Ballston Spa Historic District was established in 1999. Further exploration of a local historic district or historic standards for future development within the district should be explored.
3. Downtown Ballston Spa - advance the goal of a vibrant, walkable downtown area.
4. Smart Growth – establish/expand opportunities for economic and smart growth and:
  - preserve the village’s historical, natural, and architectural character
  - preserve and enhance the quality of life for all classes of residents
  - anticipate changes to the economic, social, and environmental conditions over the next 10 to 15 years.

### Community Character

The first priority issue is the definition of the existing community character. This step is crucial to guide infill development that occurs in or adjacent to established neighborhoods. It also informs future preservation methods of community character during the land use review process and will assist in minimizing potential impacts of new development.

To help inform this definition, input from the community survey and the visioning session were used. Also, a visual preference survey was distributed to the Steering Committee with images shown from other similar communities to serve as points of reference. The visual preference survey included images related to existing areas of the village and images related to potential changes to the village which were discussed in prior Steering Committee meetings. These included residential, transition zones, additions to the central business district, creek-side greenway trails, highway commercial, industrial conversion and gateways to the village.

#### Residential

The highest rating on the visual preference survey was given to a tree lined and well-maintained residential street, as seen in the image at the right. The committee recognized that the absence of design review for residential zones may put this desired character at risk in the future and revising this policy is recommended as the village looks to update its zoning ordinance.



Residential

#### Transition Zones

These areas were described as chances to allow residential uses to have home businesses and create a transition between commercial and residential areas. Properties in transition zones are suitable for low-level commercial/business uses and will have to be treated on an individual basis. For instance, one can do much more on a wide well-traveled street like Bath than on Ford Street. It is important that activities related to these home businesses should be properly managed to ensure there is very little impact on neighboring residences.



The intensity of the businesses would have to be gauged to specific properties and their location, so that too intensive uses are not allowed. Those areas designated transitional should be in a separate zone, or as suggested, in an overlay area in a residential zone. Design review should be included in the zone to ensure appropriate consideration to the existing neighborhood context is followed. The highest ranked image of a transitional zone is the one shown at right.



Transition Zone

Two possible transition zones between the Central Business District (CBD) and purely residential areas could be the Bath Street area and lower Malta Ave., which could offer home-oriented businesses.

The least favorable image on the visual preference survey was one of a converted single family residential to commercial building with most of its design features removed, surrounded by asphalt and business signage that is too large. The photo was included to show what can happen without design guidelines.

There are a couple vacant and underutilized properties in the currently defined CBD and the concept of a transition zone would offer other options that may be sufficient to address foreseeable demand. Nonetheless, it is recognized that new investment and appropriately planned and well-designed new development will be a welcome complement to renovation of the older building stock.

*Creek-side Greenway Trail*

The committee identified the creeks in the village as an underutilized asset and a feature that helped differentiate it from surrounding communities. Where the terrain and adjacent land uses are compatible, the creek corridors can provide an opportunity to add trail systems, especially on the old rail bed that runs along the Kayaderosseras. A route along the creek could provide residents of Kelley Square and Colonial Hills a pleasant



Creek-side Greenway Trails—On the left a more naturalized nature trail. On the right a pathway with additional amenities





way of walking downtown as well. Ultimately this could connect further up along the Kayaderosseras to neighborhoods outside of the village. Currently, the walking route is on streets where there are no sidewalks. A pedestrian bridge over the creek is a desirable as an alternate to the vehicle bridge on Milton Avenue. Small, designed areas like the pictures above were well reviewed in the visual preference survey. The left picture includes some informational signage and a pedestrian bridge, and the right picture shows a more built out meeting spot with pavilions, pavers, stone benches, covered bridges, and other architectural elements. Re-opening the underpass at Iron Spring Park could be a chance for a more built out trail option.

*Highway Commercial*

The committee’s response to commercial buildings in the visual preference survey was not positive, indicating large commercial buildings lacking quality architectural character and large open areas of pavement are not favored. However, large commercial buildings already exist along the northern entry along Route 50. This area can be made more attractive through improved approaches to site planning design standards. These would include architectural design guidelines so buildings fit into the desired Ballston Spa setting, signage that is well-designed, and landscape amenities including street trees, other plantings, attractive lighting and appropriate accommodations for pedestrians and the pedestrian environment. The image at right was the highest rated due to its contextual design and is an example of a chain store blending into the architectural style of a community.



*Highway Commercial*

*Industrial Conversion*

A highly ranked image of a former factory a conversion which maintained many original elements while allowing some new features is shown on the right. A similar reuse of space is desired at the industrial space located at 125 Bath Street (Angelica). The factory conversion on 20 Prospect Street (The Factory) is another good example of adaptive reuse of industrial space.



*Industrial Conversion*



*Gateways to the Village*

The concept of a gateway is to have a welcoming visual cue that one is entering a community. For example, historically, many upstate villages had gateway features constructed either at the village boundary or at a main entry to their downtown district. The NYS Route 50 corridor presents an opportunity to create gateway treatments to welcome visitors traveling to/through the village. The committee is interested in considering more of an architectural and landscaped gateway—a visual reference example is provided in the historic image to the right.



*Gateway— historic example*

Along the northern entry to the village at NYS Route 50, there is no sense of arrival as the character of the corridor is a typical commercial highway strip that could exist anywhere. The landscape here is mostly a horizontal plane of pavement with overhead

utilities, free-standing signs and occasional landscaped areas. Adding some landscape architectural enhancements along the corridor would do a lot to make this gateway to the village more unique and inviting. For example, adding street trees and other greenery, low level lighting, red brick structures, etc. that would signal to travelers they have entered the Village of Ballston Spa.

In contrast, as one approaches the entrance to the village along NYS Route 50 on Church Avenue from the south, the highway commercial uses rapidly transition near the village line to a greener and more residential landscape character, which creates a unique and peaceful image of the village.

*Conclusion*

The Steering Committee reiterated what was also heard from the visioning workshop participants, which is that most residents want to keep things relatively the way they are, and guidelines in the code will help with that goal. There is a consensus that Ballston Spa should not try to be like other communities, but hold on to, nurture and enhance its own unique community character. Toward the goal of continuing the existing community character, and what kind of growth and change is desirable—and what kind is not; the committee recommends neighborhood workshops for robust discussion during the process of developing the zoning ordinance update. This way, future zoning changes are built upon community consensus.

**Historic Preservation**

The Ballston Spa Historic District was established in 1984, extending much of the width of the village along Route 67 from West High Street to Eastern Avenue. Although existing local village laws provide for basic review procedures and some design guidance for this district, it is recommended that additional guidance and standards should be developed to clarify the expectations and procedures for review boards and applicants alike. To help support this, code enforcement officials should ideally be knowledgeable and comfortable with historic architecture and best-practice preservation guidelines. In addition to support for training of local



officials, the development of a village-specific set of historic preservation design guidelines would be of great value not only to local officials but to owners as stewards of these historic treasures.

### Downtown Ballston Spa

The downtown Central Business District of the Village of Ballston Spa represents the core engine of the community, and as such, should be nurtured and preserved to enhance this vibrant, active and walkable neighborhood that serves residents and visitors alike. While there are many parallel efforts which must be worked on to help achieve this, a core component is supporting and expanding the local business community.

An update of the zoning codes is necessary to modernize and expand the list of allowable uses in the downtown area to ensure they reflect the economy in which we live today. In a mixed-use neighborhood commingled with residents and businesses, this includes the reality that many people can and do choose to work from home these days. It is appropriate to revisit the home occupation provisions in the zoning code to ensure that sufficient latitude is provided for current and expected future home occupations. Understanding that there are different types of home occupations, it is recommended that the revised code should recognize two or three “levels” for this use – one which is a simple home office which requires no, or perhaps one, additional employee with no additional demand for parking, material storage or traffic impacts; and other levels which may have more activity and potential impact to the neighborhood. Recognizing these different levels would allow the code to treat them accordingly, identify where they are each appropriate, and set some basic performance standards for their lawful operation. Other uses may include shared incubator office space, electric vehicle charging stations,

breweries/distilleries, marijuana dispensaries and similar emerging trends. Taken overall, a wider variety of different commercial activities and residential housing types should be promoted in a mixed-use environment.

An update of the zoning code is also recommended to more effectively manage the physical built environment of the urban landscape which shapes the village. While this topic is covered in more detail in the Land Use Vision section below, it is recommended that the primary one

or two zoning districts which comprise the core of the downtown move toward a more “form-based” code approach over traditional zoning. This approach would emphasize desired building form, massing, fenestration and architectural scale while providing more allowance and flexibility for what uses would be permitted inside them. It is expected that this system would promote new construction which reinforces the “historic downtown” form of the village while providing more flexibility and incentive for prospective businesses.



Busy day on Front Street.



Another important component of the downtown is improving how it connects to the residential neighborhoods and places of interest which surround it. There was no disagreement among the participants in the planning process that the Village of Ballston Spa should continue to work on enhancing the sidewalks and pedestrian amenities which create an inviting walkable environment (along with addressing other important infrastructure needs). These streetscape improvements include areas of new sidewalk, walkway repairs, street trees, landscaping, lighting, crosswalks as well as improved signage.

A coordinated public wayfinding signage program should be pursued which identifies places of interest, public parking, trails, shopping loops, historic locations and businesses throughout the downtown. Locations for public bathrooms should also be established and identified within the wayfinding program. The overall connectivity of the downtown should eventually be expanded to include a system of walking paths and trails—preliminarily identified on the Future Land Use Vision Map (shown on page 33)—which connect to the Kayaderosseras Creek and surrounding environs such as the Zim Smith Trail.

The condition of buildings within the downtown, as well as the larger village overall, is an important consideration in boosting community pride and attracting visitors and tourism activity. In order to address this, the village should work on enhancing code enforcement efforts throughout the village to ensure that properties are well maintained and managed, establishing and following through with reasonable fines and protocols for enforcement. To further this effort, it is recommended that the village consider establishing a registry of rental properties to enable periodic inspection which ensures the premises are safe and well kept. Likewise, local business and property owners should be encouraged to make facade and property improvements to enhance their business and improve the overall quality of the village. The Ballston Spa Business and Professional Association (BSBPA) has solicited and presented Beautification Awards recognizing renovation, restoration, interior and exterior improvements and landscaping for both commercial and residential properties for many years. This effort could be continued as part of an annual community-wide beautification event, organized as a friendly competition by the village and the business community, with awards and public celebration. This could be coordinated with the village-wide curbside trash pickup day and expanded to include residential neighborhoods as well as part of a wider village “beautification day.” The village should look to pursue grant funding for facade improvements to support this annual initiative, celebrating and showcasing the most improved properties. The village could lead by example by starting with their own properties, such as Village Hall. Such an effort could be contagious, inspiring others to make improvements as well. Enhancing the overall cleanliness and visual aesthetic of the village will improve community spirit and help to better capture some of the pass-thru tourism traffic which winds its way through the village each year.



Lastly, many residents of Ballston Spa reflect positively on the overall sense of community which the village offers. Much of this can be attributed to the different community events which bring people together at various times of the year such as Arts in the Park, Movie Night, concerts and sledding downtown, which are presented by the BSBPA (organized by volunteers) with sponsorships. The village should take on an active role and work to enhance and expand these different community events to occur with a variety of family-friendly activities throughout the year. This effort would strengthen the sense of community, improve community pride and support local businesses.



## Smart Growth & Sustainability

Looking forward, it is important that the changes we plan for today put the Village of Ballston Spa in a more secure and sustainable position to thrive in this changing world. Severe weather events, energy dependence and a changing economy are all considerations of importance in this plan. In the big picture, the village should seek to make itself more resilient, independent, and adaptable to navigate the uncertainties ahead. Inherent in the implementation recommendations are several strategies related to sustainability and smart growth. A few focused elements are expanded upon below.

The village should seek to minimize any restrictions or obstacles to the adoption of solar energy systems, however, provide some reasonable guidelines for solar panel installations which help to protect the character of the community and avoid conflicts with neighbors. Solar energy system adoption in commercial and civic properties should also be promoted and encouraged, as well as public access points for electric vehicle charging facilities.

As the village zoning is updated, new provisions for enhanced stormwater mitigation should be integrated into the standards which encourage contemporary best-practices such as permeable pavements, bioswales, rain gardens and similar “green” methods to reduce runoff. Design standards for site planning should emphasize the use of more native landscaping and generous green spaces while minimizing unnecessary parking and paved surfacing where possible. Recreational improvements and trail connections along the creek should be completed in conjunction with stormwater and flood mitigation efforts wherever possible to help leverage grant funding and improve flood resilience. The state building code requires stringent requirements for energy conservation in terms of insulation of new construction. Renovations for older properties are often more difficult as retrofitting existing conditions can be challenging. There are subsidies and grant programs available for a range of eligible applicants. These kinds of services would be highly advantageous to many village property owners and property managers.

Overall, maintaining a relatively compact, mixed-use commercial center with an attractive walking and biking network will create a more sustainable community and one which will remain very attractive to new generations of residents and business owners for years to come.



## Community Engagement

### Steering Committee Meetings

The Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee (committee) starting meeting in December of 2021 and held twice monthly, topic-based meetings that were open to the public from January – October 2022. Each topic was based on identified needs of the community and areas of improvement. The village website and social media pages were used in disseminating information related to the plan committee meetings and plans.

### Village Board Informational Meetings

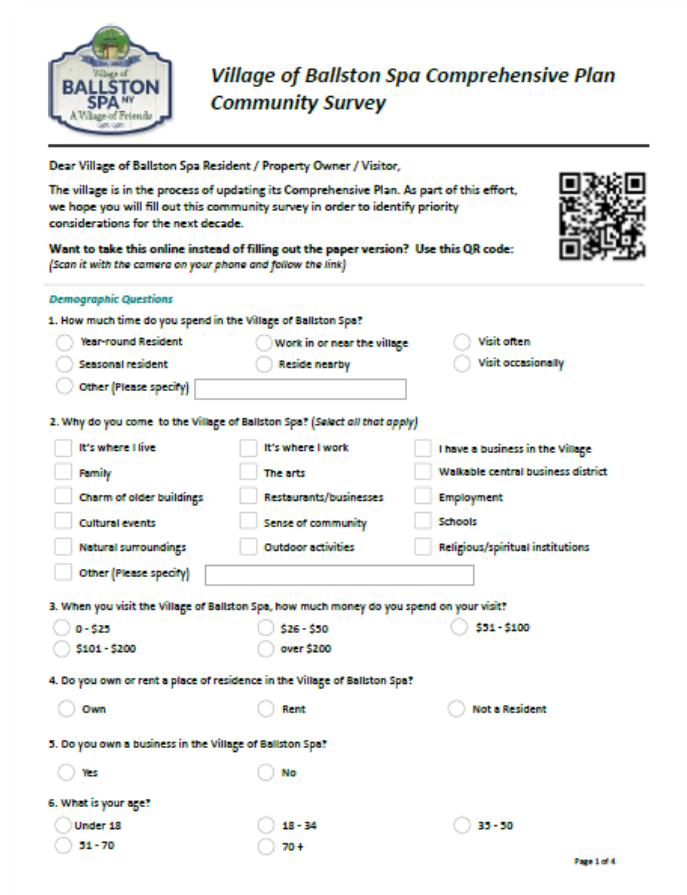
Behan Planning and Design provided a brief presentation on the planning process to the Village Board in July 2022. An overview of the committee meetings and community survey outreach was covered. Behan Planning and Design presented an overview of the plan including proposed policies, recommendations for future land uses and potential revitalization projects in January 2023.

### Community Survey

A public survey was created by Behan Planning and Design with input from the committee and was active between early July of 2022 through the end of September 2022. Both a paper version and online version were made available. Paper surveys were sent out to residents along with the village water bill and a link to the online survey could be accessed directly from the village website. Posters were also placed in many shop windows in the village as well as the public parks. The posters, like the one at right, had a QR (quick response) code that linked to the online survey. Social media posts were also made for the village Facebook page and a link was added to the village website in the news blog and on the Steering Committee page. A table was set up for public outreach about the survey at a July 14 public concert at Iron Spring Park.



Poster for Community Survey



Front page of Community Survey



The committee made a push at the beginning of the school year to get the Ballston Spa Central School District’s high school students to take the survey. Eighteen percentage of all survey respondents were in the under 18 age category.

At the close of the survey, the total number of paper and online responses was 808. Along with gathering general demographic information, the purpose of the survey was to gain the public’s input regarding what improvements and enhancements could be made within the community regarding village infrastructure, housing, economic considerations, natural resources, accessibility, walkability, etc. The questions developed stemmed from the topics discussed at the Steering Committee meetings.

Most people that took the survey were village residents or resided close by (74 and 13 percent, respectively). Nearly three-quarters of those that took the survey own a home in the village and 72 percent work outside of the village.

A selection of the most highly rated responses is included below:

Respondents listed that the biggest draws to Ballston Spa are its restaurants and businesses, walkable business district and neighborhoods, schools, sense of community, and charm of older buildings.

Approximately 89 percent of respondents strongly agree or agree that it is important for the village to create an annual budget set aside to address deferred maintenance on public buildings (like the Village Hall, DPW, Police/Court, buildings, Swimming Pool).

Chart 1 -Housing type response chart

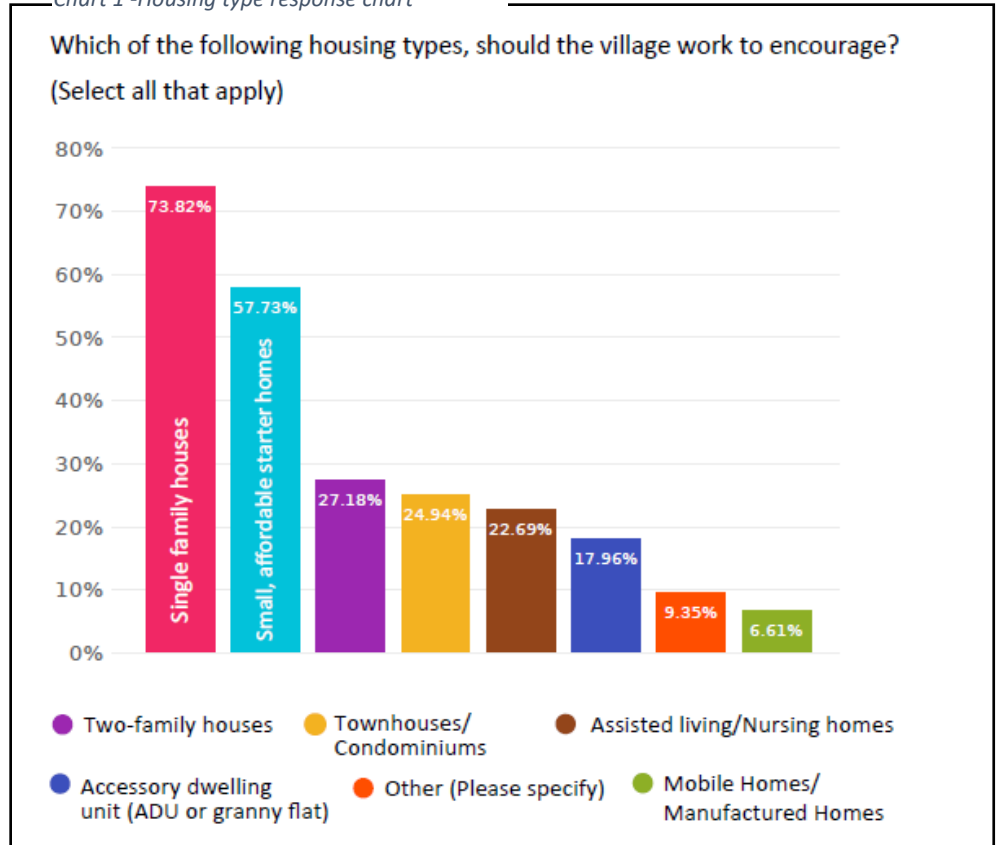
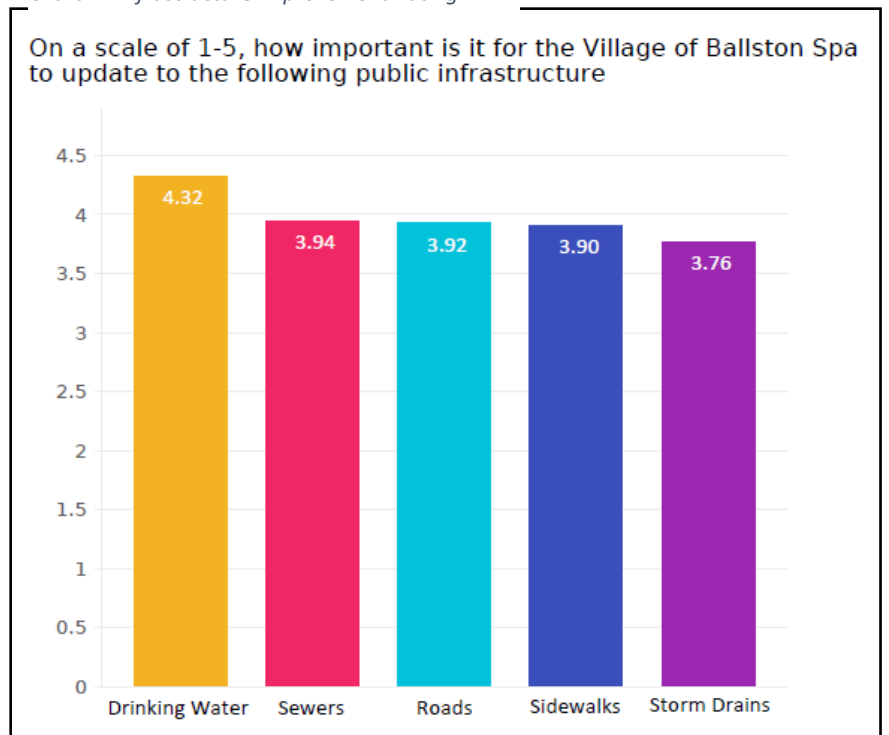


Chart 2 - Infrastructure Improvement Rating



About 82 percent of respondents said it is very important or moderately important for the village to take steps to address issues of climate change and protect itself from severe weather damage or dangers (flooding during intense storms, etc.).

Approximately 77 percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the community’s buildings are such an important part of Ballston Spa’s image that design standards are needed for new development in order to maximize compatibility with existing structures.

Roughly 80 percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that there is a need for improvement in the walkability (repair/add sidewalks, crosswalks, lighting, etc.) of the entire village.

When asked which types of housing the village should encourage, most respondents were interested in single family homes (73 percent) or small, affordable starter homes (57 percent). It is striking that any type of multi-family housing received 27 percent or less of supportive responses, as seen in chart 1.

About 60 percent of respondents strongly agree or agree that allowing home-based businesses would be good for the village's economic development.

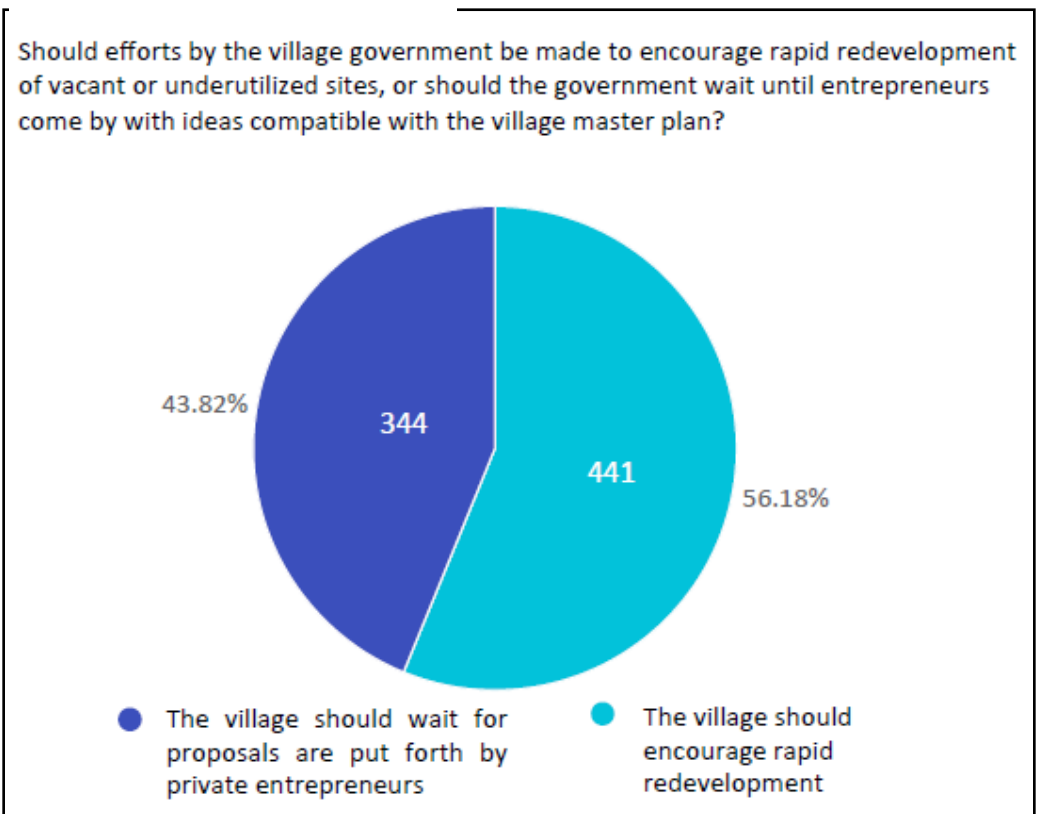
When rating needed public infrastructure improvements, all 5 categories were rated highly as chart 2 shows.

Roughly 78 percent of participants said it was very important or moderately important for the Village of Ballston Spa to take steps to actively promote or encourage the use of alternative energy sources for its municipal and community use.

Almost 83 percent of the survey respondents thought it is very or moderately important to enhance broadband internet access/options in the village.

There was one question where the survey respondents were split in their response, see chart 3. The question was about the pace of redevelopment of underutilized sites in the village. Many people wrote in that there should have been a third option for this question which was more of a balance between the two - that it is not a binary issue.

Chart 3 - Development survey response





## Feedback

*Selected write-ins from the “any others” box at the end of the survey:*

“A sidewalk on the south side of Prospect Street from The Factory to the fairgrounds with adequate lighting and trash receptacles is needed to provide a safe walking path to events at the fairgrounds. It is a major safety issue and an accident waiting to happen!”

“On another note, when I first moved here in 2002 the Christmas lights were all strung across the street and look very nice. They stopped doing that a few years later. You should really bring them back and make our town look very festive for the holiday season. That will attract others to come here and visit and shop.”

“The village should work on accessibility and ease of getting around town by bicycle and foot. As well as focus on outdoor recreational opportunities for the villagers and visitors.”

“I think updates to Kelley Park would be greatly appreciated by the residents. Basketball court, roller hockey rink, tennis court. Maybe utilize that empty fenced in area of the park between the pavilion and playground.”

“Change the zoning to allow for common sense development. The zoning in the village does not make any sense and is outdated. The sooner the zoning changes the faster new/improved development will occur.”

“Water lines in the village need massive repair NOW. Walk down Van Buren and you can see every house has dug up their line because it froze in the middle of the road. This should not be the homeowner’s responsibility that the village lines are so low they’re above the frost line. Unbelievable this hasn’t been addressed. Cost me \$15K last year!”

“Diverse businesses would be nice vs what is there. Encouraging different businesses. Encouraging upkeep of homes and businesses in the village. Better parking vs on street which fills.”

The full set of survey responses are in the appendix.



### Visioning Workshop

On August 30, 2022, consultants and the village Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee held an in-person Visioning Workshop at the Saratoga County Office Building. Additionally, participants were also able to access the event on Zoom with two consultants from Behan online to facilitate the virtual meeting. Over 50 participants were in attendance for the in-person meeting and approximately 30 for the on-line session.

The consultants presented information on the meeting purpose, agenda, project schedule and similar information to orient any members of the public who were not part of the committee. Behan facilitated the presentation with an overview of the project to the community as well as an update on the progress of the committee to date and selected survey results from the recently closed Community Survey.

Attendants were broken up into several discussion groups in a round-table setting, each one having at least one Committee member. Virtual attendants followed the same procedure but worked together as one group.

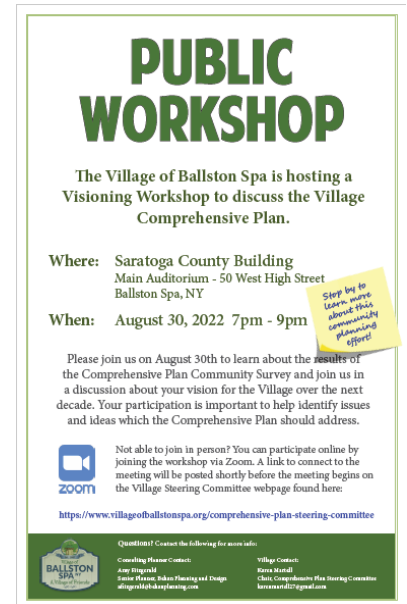
Participants were given a 2-page worksheet when they signed into the meeting. This worksheet was created to facilitate the activity at each table group and asked participants to share thoughts based on the following questions/prompts, including:

1. What attributes do you think make the village an attractive place to visit, live, invest money or start a new business?
2. How would we like to enhance each of those attributes?
3. What 3 words might you use to describe your ideal future “vision” for Ballston Spa?

A consultant team member or Steering Committee member served as the “lead volunteer” at each group table and took notes on behalf of the group. The role was to support the discussion of each group, help keep the conversation going, ask questions, and take additional notes.

After the completion of the table discussions, the participants were asked to come together again to share the responses and ideas that each group came up with. The “lead volunteer” from each discussion group recapped them for the audience.

After the workshop was concluded, Behan Planning and Design collected and organized the notes and public comments into a complete summary, which is provided in the Appendix. The ideas collected were used to create the vision and inform the development of the plan.



Poster for Public Workshop



Presentation at Visioning Workshop



Group participation at Visioning workshop



## *Land Use Vision*

In order to plan for and promote the orderly growth and development of the village in keeping with the wishes of the community, a general plan for future land uses should ideally be established. This plan has been graphically depicted in the Future Land Use Vision Map, shown on the page following. The Future Land Use Vision Map is not intended to act as a replacement for the zoning map, but it is instead designed to help inform the agenda of more detailed land use decisions which are made when the Village Zoning Map is updated. The vision map is intended to be used as a general guide to the broader goals of the community in making land use decisions, and as such, future zoning updates should be in general conformity with it.

The Future Land Use Vision Map is roughly broken down into nine different “character areas” which roughly represent the long-term goals of the community with respect to how different neighborhoods should develop. These character areas are described in more detail below.

### *Downtown Central Business District*

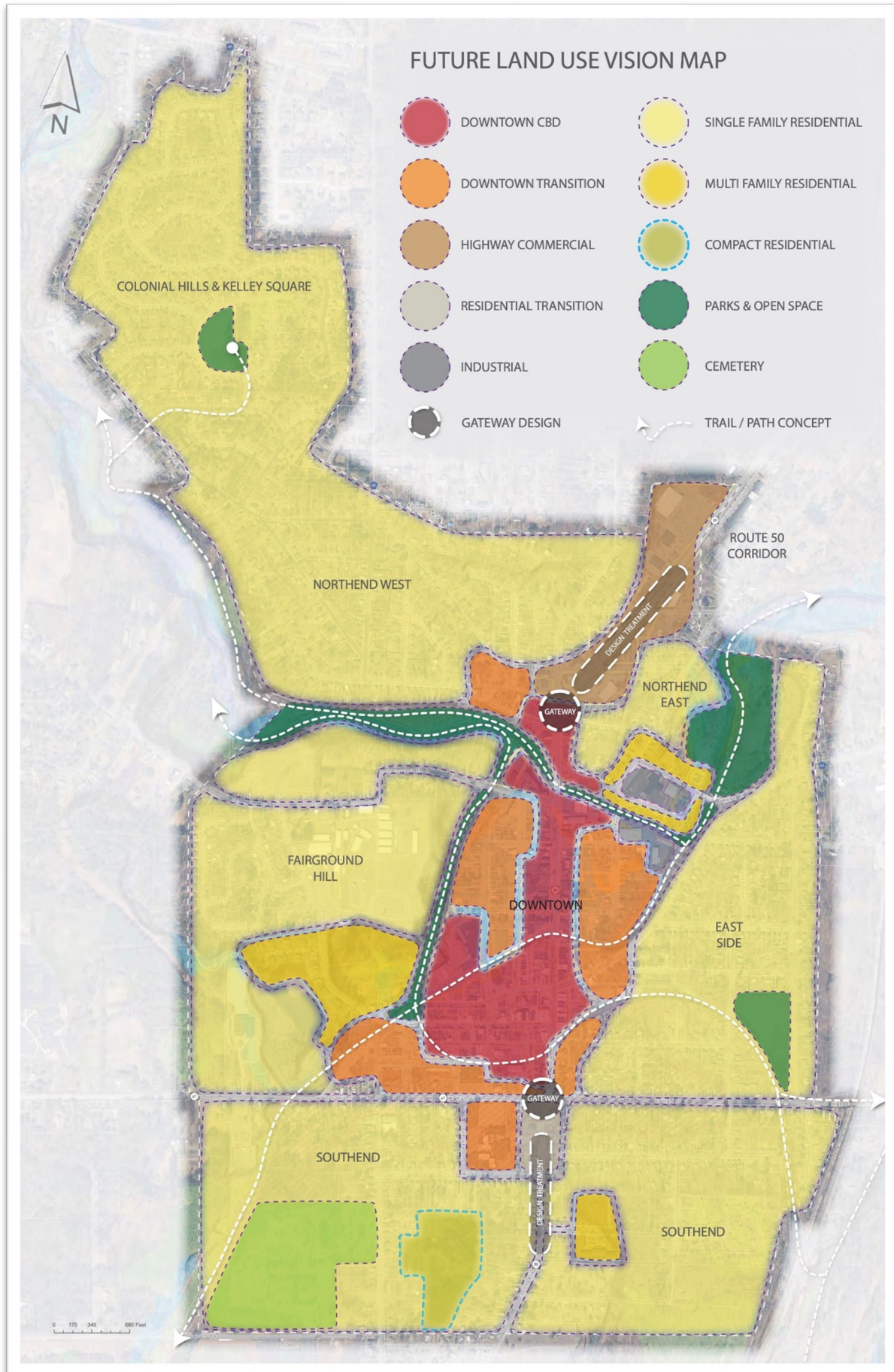
The Downtown Central Business District represents the commercial core of the village, and as such, is envisioned to have the densest commercial development, focused on pedestrian-oriented retail and mixed-use commercial uses with inviting, walkable sidewalks and engaging streetscapes, facades and public spaces. Buildings in this neighborhood are encouraged to maximize their use of the site, utilizing up to 100% of their parcel for building footprint and extending up to four stories in height, as compatible with neighboring development. The groupings of downtown buildings form the urban fabric of the center of the community, with multiple adjacent buildings working in concert to create a continuous urban street-wall of welcoming retail windows. Not only does this form reinforce the historic building patterns of the village, but it also shapes the outdoor spaces of our public realm where we gather as a community. For these reasons, the form, massing and relationship of buildings within the Downtown CBD is very important.

The first-floor ground level of buildings within the Downtown area should be commercial uses, ideally suited toward retail and/or service uses which primarily cater to locals but also are attractive to visitors and tourists. Some dwellings that are transitioning into commercial may offer the front rooms on the first floor of the building for commercial use and the rear portion for family use, due to their layout.

The ground floor facade should provide the highest level of transparency and fenestration to provide an open, inviting and well-lit commercial space along pedestrian sidewalks. Upper floors may contain any combination of commercial retail, service, office or residential uses.

As noted for the downtown vision above, the Schedule of Uses by Zoning District (Schedule A in the Zoning) should be expanded and modernized to increase the types of different uses allowed and provide more fine-grained control over where and how they are permitted. Understanding that the allowed uses in the CBD are not as important as the form and relationship of the buildings, the village should consider the adoption of a form-based code for this neighborhood in particular.





### *Downtown Transition*

The Downtown Transition neighborhood is intended to serve as a “transition” between the downtown core of the Central Business District and the surrounding residential neighborhoods while also allowing the commercial activity of the downtown room to grow. This neighborhood generally mirrors the extents of the existing R-2 zoning district, allowing a combination of residential, commercial and mixed-uses at a smaller scale and intensity than found in the CBD. Buildings here would be limited to not more than three stories, with building setbacks, massing and scale designed to be sensitive to the existing built environment of the neighborhood. Site design here would also include attention to highlighting and celebrating greenspace and urban landscape design, while limiting visibility of expansive areas for off-street parking and similar functions. The existing residential uses here would be augmented by smaller scale retail, offices, services, restaurants, home occupations and other commercial operations as properties redevelop. Due to its commercial nature and strong relationship with the CBD, the village may wish to consider a form-based code approach for the Downtown Transition district in conjunction with the CBD. However, teardowns of existing buildings should be discouraged. Every building that is torn down or neglected so it becomes obsolete subtracts from the village image.

As part of the process for the zoning code update, it is recommended that zoning development workshops be conducted with property owners in the areas considered for Downtown Transition uses. This way, consensus can be developed toward the details of the zoning changes. Topics to be explored would include documentation of desired (and discouraged) elements of design character, building height, massing, permitted uses, special permit/provisional uses and prohibited uses.

### *Highway Commercial*

The Highway Commercial neighborhood encompasses the Route 50 corridor coming into the northern outskirts of the village. This area is predominated by (and most suitable for) automobile-oriented commercial uses which would otherwise be inappropriate within the historic older blocks of the village. It is recommended that this neighborhood continue to serve this necessary purpose. This travel corridor represents one of the busiest gateways into the village, however the auto-centric uses with large front-yard parking areas and lack of lawn or landscaping do not typically present an attractive backdrop to create a welcoming gateway into the village. With this in mind, it is recommended that design guidelines or standards be developed specifically for this area to improve future redevelopment, and that corridor design treatments be developed which would visually tie the roadway together into a more consistent theme. These elements could include a consistent pattern of street trees, lighting, landscaped medians or similar design elements. These corridor design treatments and design guidelines would help to set a backdrop for the more “official” gateway into the village (described in more detail below). A similar corridor design treatment is recommended along the Route 50 corridor at the southern end of the village as you approach the southern gateway.

### *Residential Transition*

The Residential Transition neighborhood reflects areas where older residential neighborhoods, which were once quieter streets, are slowly transitioning into small scale commercial offices as the roadways become more heavily traveled and the existing residential buildings are attractive for office and related uses. This transition can often be seen happening very slowly, where occasional existing single-family houses are converted into office space for a law office, dentist, realtor or similar use. The southern approach into the village along Route 50 approaching High Street is one example of this evolution. Allowing these conversions to occur, while maintaining the distinct look and feel of the original residential use, is very important to capture new economic



growth while protecting neighborhood character. If done correctly, the only visible change to the property is often a new commercial sign in front. The residential transition neighborhood is intended to capture and sensibly manage this gentle growth. Commercial uses allowed in this area would be mostly limited to professional offices with little impact to the surrounding neighborhood. Specific design standards for this area would be necessary to strictly limit and screen any off-street parking, provide attractive signage, accommodate ADA retrofits and maintain the residential character of any converted property. Like the downtown transition area, this neighborhood is intended to provide a buffer between heavier downtown commercial uses and residential districts, however, is largely limited to working within conversions of former single or multi-family houses.

### *Industrial*

The Industrial neighborhood represents areas where more specialized manufacturing, technology or light industry would be conducted. Appropriate buffers and performance standards would be established to help ensure compatibility with neighboring uses in this tight-knit setting. The industrial district is small, but flexibility in uses could be added to the zoning code (perhaps by special permit) so that buildings could be converted instead of sitting vacant.

### *Single Family Residential*

The Single Family Residential character area represents the largest area of the village and defines the sections where single family residences are generally most suitable. These areas are most commonly attributable to the existing R-1 zoning district. Despite the reality that one generalized character area represents a majority of the village, there are many different types and scales of residential neighborhoods found in Ballston Spa—primarily based upon the history and economic setting when these sections were developed.

Older historic residential neighborhoods, with very small narrow lots, are visibly quite different from newer suburban developments with wider lots and larger building setbacks with many variations in between, like historic neighborhoods with broad lots and larger building setbacks. Despite this variation, the current zoning code does not reflect the actual built environment of many residential parts of the village and treats these different neighborhoods all the same in terms of dimensional setbacks, lot widths and heights.

In order to protect the existing character of these varied neighborhoods, a more fine-grained zoning approach is appropriate. It is recommended that the single family residential land use area adopt a more “context-based” approach to managing future neighborhood changes. A context-based approach would not only rely on a set of standard dimensional requirements but would additionally consider the surrounding context of existing houses to determine what is most appropriate for that portion of the village. Such an approach would alleviate the need to create many slightly different zoning districts and would potentially provide a much more customized and sensitive regulatory tool to maintaining neighborhood character. This system should also allow for more flexible integration of future accessory dwelling units.

### *Multi-Family Residential*

The Multi-Family Residential land use areas represent areas which are generally more suitable for multi-family living, including duplexes and senior living. Priority goals in these areas should be working toward development of smaller-scale individual multi-unit construction, much like cottage courts, in lieu of larger apartment “boxes” which do not fit into the fabric of the historic village. Design standards and limitations should be considered for these areas to ensure that new development is in keeping with the desired scale and character of the village,



while still providing more efficient use of land and housing type diversity which meets the needs of younger residents, local workforce and seniors.

*Compact Residential*

The Compact Residential land use area is primarily intended to replace and support redevelopment of the unique former nursing home use at the Maplewood Manor property. This character area would be re-imagined as a denser single-family neighborhood with options for small lot detached homes, townhomes, cottage homes and similar compact, efficient layouts organized around useable open space such as a central “village green.” This redevelopment would aim for a residential density which equals or exceeds the older historic village residential neighborhood patterns. It is recommended that design standards for this neighborhood layout be established for site planning, buffering and architectural character.

It is recommended that this site be considered as part of a special conceptual design study during the zoning update. The study would more closely consider the level of density and housing form that would make both economic and community compatibility sense. It will be important that a sufficient lot count/unit count be achieved so that issues of real property tax, housing affordability, reasonable return, quality neighborhood design and open space amenities can all be appropriately addressed and balanced.

*Parks And Open Space*

The Parks and Open Space character area represents active and passive public parks or otherwise open natural areas which have been identified as important areas for conservation as well as potential linkages as part of an intra-village trail system. Trails along the creeks and connecting thru the village were noted as highly desirable by the committee.

*Gateways*

Two prominent “gateway” areas into the village are identified on the Future Land Use Map, at the northern and southern ends of the downtown commercial core. These two areas were selected to receive distinct landscaping, beautification and “Welcome to



Rendering of smaller, cottage-style homes in a compact residential setting.



**Trail Building Teamwork.** The Village of Pittsford has taken a collaborative approach for trail building, working closely with the Town of Pittsford and other partners to create an improved system that connects the village together, with the larger town and the region. Above the Erie Canalway Trail and below, screenshot of interactive trail map hosted by the town.



For trail related maintenance issues, please contact the Parks Department at (585) 248-6495. Any other concerns can be directed to the Department of Public Works at (585) 248-6250.



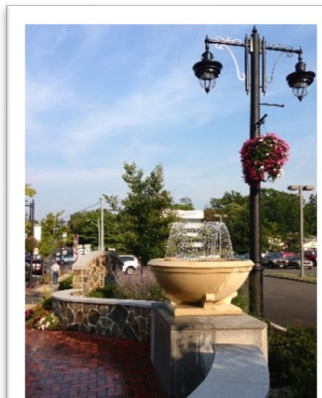
Ballston Spa Village” historic signage to celebrate the entry into the community and reinforce the village identity.

**Gateway Concepts for Ballston Spa**

Creating a visual cue as a “Welcome to Ballston Spa” can take several forms. For example, a simple, unified entry sign with landscaping would offer a low-cost option. Example below at the entrances to Central Nyack, an unincorporated hamlet in the Town of Clarkstown.



Images to the left illustrate how streetscape improvements can serve as a gateway treatment and add to community identity.



Water features and other architectural treatments can all be used to help create a gateway feature. Public art, like sculptural elements, could be an interesting way to celebrate Ballston Spa’s identity.





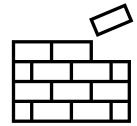
## Community Goals and Implementation Framework

The intent of the Steering Committee is to set achievable goals that are ambitious in nature to propel the prosperity and livability for all socio-economic classes of the community in a positive direction. The committee ran through various action statements that were created to incorporate most of the issues discussed during past year of committee meetings. The committee discarded concepts deemed not viable and rated others based on their immediacy. The committee also assigned the goals as short, medium, long term or ongoing. In general, a short term goal should be accomplished within 3 years’ time, a medium within 5 years and a long term goal in 10 years’ time. The resulting framework that follows has goal statements with implementation steps listed beneath and selected potential funding sources identified.

Two priority projects are identified to get the ball rolling toward implementation. The first is a zoning code update and design guidelines that will have village-wide effects (goal #1 and #2). The second priority project is continuing the Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) process as it is a phased process that can potentially have farther reaching effects than the discreet contaminated land parcels identified (see goal #20).

(Note—there are literally dozens of state and federal grant programs that may be applicable to these categories of activities-- a more detailed evaluation of grant program eligibility will be an important task for advancing each goal of the comprehensive plan in the coming months and years.)

### Built Environment & Land Use



#### SHORT TERM

##### 1. Include flexibility in zoning

##### PRIORITY PROJECT #1

The process and product for the updated zoning law should be advanced with community buy-in. Allowing flexibility in uses and area requirements, while also requiring the character and charm of existing buildings and uses to be retained, will make zoning more generally accepted and allow for enforcement.

For instance, it would be helpful to explore creative ways to address existing non-conforming uses. Uses that can provide proof of continuous active existence and documentation of no adverse effect on neighboring properties of the village, or on the village as a whole, could be provisionally allowed to continue by special permit or similar mechanism. The burden of proof should fall on the applicant and not the village.

Steps to move forward with the zoning initiative include:

- Create a small ad-hoc committee to oversee zoning update process.
- Hire a consultant to help manage the project and draft recommended zoning changes.
- Conduct public outreach for community input, especially in neighborhoods where significant changes are discussed.
- Revise zoning law.
- Adopt revised zoning law.



Potential Funding: Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) Community Planning/Linkages Program. Several New York State agencies (NYSDEC, NYSDOS, etc. have programs that can often support zoning activities related to each agency’s respective program goals (e.g., climate resiliency, energy conservation, etc.). (As well, the village may wish to update the zoning code independently without the time and scope constraints imposed by state/federal grant program requirements.)

## 2. Develop design guidelines

Basic zoning codes often fall short in guiding growth and change in a community. Zoning codes typically do not make clear what a successful, compatible design looks like, and similarly, often fail to prohibit projects that detract from the community assets. Develop design standards and guidelines to help inform reviewing boards, officials and property owners design and build projects that maintain and enhance village character and community assets. The inclusion of design guidelines for the Historic District would be of particular importance as well as for other important districts in the village including, but not limited to, the Central Business District. (Ideally, the design guidelines element would be integrated into the zoning scope of work if time and funding permits.)

- Create a committee to oversee the process of creating design guidelines.
- Hire a consultant to research existing conditions, conduct outreach for input and create recommended design guidelines for each zone.
- Revise and add to the zoning law.
- Publish guidelines for widespread use.

Potential Funding: Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) Community Planning/Linkages Program. New York State Council on the Arts, Preservation League of New York State.

## 3. Strengthen property maintenance code/enforcement

To promote pride in maintaining property and discourage exploitation, property maintenance should be more strongly codified in village law including enhanced enforcement provisions to address neglect, failed maintenance and safety concerns of properties.

- Clarify responsibility for property maintenance and occupant conduct by property owners and, to the extent practicable, tenants.
- Establish periodic inspections of rental units to ensure safety, maintenance, elimination of overcrowding, and other conditions that will devalue a building beyond its usefulness.

## ONGOING

## 4. Encourage compatibility with local character

Ensure building and site development is designed to be compatible with the scale and desired character of the community. Of particular importance is along entrance routes, the downtown and historic districts to maintain the image of a friendly, approachable community. Promote the village’s older architecture and spruce up the traveled gateways.

- Integrate a human scale factor into zoning and design guidelines (i.e., appropriate heights and setbacks) when addressing goals #1 and 2 above.
- Strengthen guidelines for adaptive reuse of older buildings.
- Plan and design gateways into village areas along Route 50.



Potential Funding: Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) Community Planning/Linkages Program.

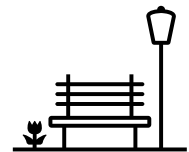
### 5. Enhance delivery of building/code enforcement services

Strengthen code enforcement services so that the evolving needs of the community can be best addressed. These services may include, but not be limited to, proactive review and enforcement for property safety and maintenance issues, conservation of historic architectural resources during, and, once a new zoning law is enacted. Proactive enforcement is key so owners and potential investors will know their investments will be protected.

- Set up training sessions with village staff for inspectors once the design guidelines and zoning law have been updated.
- Redo training whenever laws/codes are updated/changed.

## Open Space and Recreation

### SHORT TERM



### 6. Encourage street trees and landscaped areas

Street trees, greenbelts between sidewalks and the street, lawn and landscape plantings, flower gardens and other planted and naturalized areas contribute greatly to the character and ecologic diversity of the village. Maintaining, and where feasible, expanding areas for these green spaces is encouraged as it helps unify the built environment by pulling together varying architecture and uses in the village and projects a comfortable image. Include generous landscape plantings and trees in site plans and along village streets.

- Implement the recently completed Village of Ballston Spa Urban Forest Management Plan. In particular, planting of new street trees at locations identified in the plan.
- Enlist volunteers to do a green inventory of other existing village landscape/green spaces for potential enhancement (for example the Ballston Spa Garden Club has transformed the area near Iron Spring from a forlorn and neglected patch into a beautiful, landscaped feature.)
- Use inventory to assess and create guidelines of appropriate landscape treatments for civic, commercial and residential areas.

Potential Funding: NYS DEC Urban and Community Forestry Grants

### LONG TERM

### 7. Expand recreation resources for village parks.

Development of underused parks (e.g., Victory Circle, rear of the swimming pool) and expansion of opportunities for residents and visitors to engage in recreation can provide parallel benefits in increasing local business and commerce as well as provide inherent health benefits to residents. Enhance sidewalk and pathway connections to parks and recreation resources between neighborhoods and the Central Business District of the village. Revitalize springs with updated infrastructure (Iron Spring, Wiswall, Sans Souci).

- Complete a detailed parks inventory and village-wide parks and recreation master plan.
- Implement plan (or phases of plan) when funding allows.



Potential funding: Environmental Protection Fund Grant Program for Parks, Preservation and Heritage – Parks Program

**8. Creek-side Greenway Trail additions**

Work with neighborhoods and other partners to create plans for greenway trails connecting village neighborhoods along the Gordon and Kayaderosseras Creeks and along former railroad and other corridors. As feasibility is confirmed and funding is available, construct trails along these corridors. Important connections may include a pedestrian bridge over the Kayaderosseras tying the North End to the Tedesco Trail and downtown and a linkage to the Zim Smith Trail.

- Complete a detailed assessment and plan for village-wide trails system.
- Prepare feasibility studies and secure funding for design and construction of trail sections prioritized in phases.
- Implement plan (or phases of plan) when funding allows.

Potential funding: U.S. DOT Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Recreational Trails Program, Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) Community Planning/Linkages Program. (See Capital District Trails Plan for longer list of funding sources.)

Housing



**SHORT TERM**

**9. Accommodate affordable housing opportunities.**

Consider appropriate mechanism in the zoning code to permit accessory dwelling units throughout the village. Recognize opportunities to be responsive to potential population increase from outside the region due to “climate migration” from coastal areas, etc. and provide infrastructure and services to accommodate migrants from climate damaged locations. Allow housing variety in some neighborhoods from mixed use to solely single families, to accommodate accessory living units with sensible restrictions in some residential neighborhoods, especially in larger houses, as a percentage of the primary residence (in preparation for state mandates) and permit home/retail businesses on lower Milton Ave, Bath St., and other area streets.

- Zoning to enhance affordable housing goal can be integrated with goals #1 & 2 above.
- Identify priority neighborhoods for housing rehabilitation and secure grant funding to assist property owners in creating quality housing units.

Potential funding: Several programs from NYS Homes and Community Renewal including Community Development Block Grant program.

**10. Manage short-term rentals to ensure compatibility with neighborhood.**

Short term rentals (like Airbnb) can be a positive use to ensure sufficient accommodations for visitors, however, it is recognized that most of the adverse effects of these uses relate to management issues and inappropriate guest behavior. Review village code and strengthen policies and enforcement methods as appropriate including:



- Consideration of a registry system for property owners to facilitate communication with village code enforcement.
- Review requirements for off-street parking and other related needs.
- Address any necessary modifications to noise ordinance enforcement policies in collaboration with the Village of Ballston Spa Police.
- Assess fine/fee schedule to make implementation sustainable.

### MEDIUM TERM

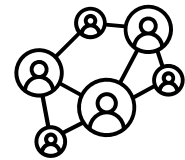
#### 11. Strengthen community connectedness

Support a sense of community through a few housing- related initiatives.

- Seek financial incentives to promote owner-residents in two family properties.
- Create a registry of individuals responsible for apartments.
- Involve developers in community affairs and measure the demand for unconventional homes.
- Support work-at-home with high-speed internet and co-working space.

Potential funding: Several programs from NYS Homes and Community Renewal including Community Development Block Grant program.

## Social Considerations



### SHORT TERM

#### 12. Modernize/enhance administration of village services

Open communication among government, businesses and residents is important for a cohesive community. It is imperative that the village continues to stay current, up to modern best practices, with systems and training for online and electronic tools used by the village government and appropriate access/communication with residents. This will facilitate responsiveness to infrastructure concerns, bill paying, emergencies, accomplishments and needs, soliciting volunteers, and the like.

#### 13. Expand youth/community interaction

Government should continue to partner and, where appropriate, expand partnerships with village non-profits to engage new residents and youth and to encourage social and cultural institutions and organizations to offer activities for all in the region.

- Create an ad-hoc committee for community and youth outreach and engage with other partners for a coordinated effort (e.g., Ballston Area Recreation Commission, village etc.)
- Committee will conduct outreach to individuals in order to increase participation in government
- Committee will connect non-profits to youth and new residents and encourage new programming.

### ONGOING

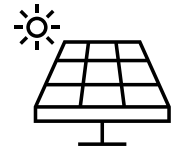
#### 14. Promote village messaging and continued strategic planning

Continue the planning process by periodically reviewing and articulating 1) a simple message that encapsulates a desired community image, 2) a strategic plan that covers village operations and assigns responsibility, including DPW priorities and citizen communication



- Create an advisory group for periodic review of the messaging and strategic planning.
- Set up a schedule to reconvene the advisory group.

## Information Technology & Climate Change



### LONG TERM

#### 15. Embrace smart technology across village

Embrace “Smart Technology” in government buildings and street lighting, assist residents to harness renewable energy and switch from fossil fuels.

- Conduct an audit of all technology needs and opportunities with village buildings/infrastructure.
- Support work-at-home villagers with co-working space and advocacy for investments in high-speed internet by communication companies/funding agencies.
- Create a plan and budget for phased change over to smart technology

Potential funding: NYSERDA Clean Energy Communities Grants, NYS EFC Green Innovation Grant, NY Power Authority Smart Street Lighting & Smart City Technology Grant Program.

### ONGOING

#### 16. Encourage alternative energy compatible with local character

Without sacrificing aesthetics, ensure local laws will not unreasonably restrict residents from producing their own electric power from renewable resources.

- Plan for alternative energy while creating updating the zoning law and creating design guidelines mentioned in goals #1 and #2.

## Economic Considerations



### SHORT TERM

#### 17. Create action plan to promote Ballston Spa locally

In addition to regional marketing, the village should work to realize the full potential of thousands of surrounding residences, a school district with almost 5,000 students and staff, and hundreds of Saratoga County employees and visitors.

- Create ad-hoc committee or work directly with the Ballston Spa Business & Professional Association (BSBPA) to create an ongoing program to reach out to village institutions and other local users.

Potential Funding: Market New York – Tourism Grant Program, Empire State Development.

#### 18. Upgrade downtown visitor infrastructure (rest rooms, public parking, wayfinding, trail connections, streetscape improvements)

Add infrastructure to downtown including maps, signage to parking lots, charging stations, sidewalk repairs and extension of the Zim Smith Trail and other attractions throughout the village. Seek State tourism dollars.



- Create committee to oversee downtown revitalization program development
- Hire a consultant to create an inventory, conduct public outreach and identify sites for infrastructure improvements.
- Design signage to direct visitors to the amenities
- Prioritize streetscape improvements for downtown area with overall infrastructure capital improvement program.

Potential Funding: NYS DOS Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI), NYS Department of Transportation TAP-CMAQ Program, NYSEDA Clean Energy Communities Grants

**MEDIUM TERM**

**19. Upgrade downtown visitor infrastructure**

Build public bathrooms downtown.

- Identify sites for public facilities.
- Hire a consultant to design the amenity and signage to direct visitors to it.
- Install when funding is available

Potential funding: NYS DOS Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI)

**LONG TERM**

**20. Utilize Brownfield Opportunity Area for redevelopment**

**PRIORITY PROJECT #2**

Village of Ballston Spa has been awarded a \$153,000 competitive grant from the New York Department of State Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) Program for a BOA Nomination Plan in December of 2021. The study will focus on what are called ‘brownfield’ sites that may or may not have contamination associated with them – such as vacant buildings or properties that have the potential for redevelopment – like the industrial space at 125 Bath Street. The BOA encompasses key sites downtown between the two creeks. The idea behind the BOA program is to identify key properties that can revitalize the surrounding area when they are redeveloped.

- Create a committee and hire a consultant to develop the BOA Nomination Plan.
- Prioritize areas for redevelopment within the BOA to create transformative redevelopment of the central core of the village, increase access to waterfront property, and return underutilized properties to productive use.
- Prepare a Brownfield Opportunity Area Nomination Study in compliance with the NYSDOS brownfield redevelopment program.
- Request BOA designation from the Secretary of State. This official designation allows developers who are participating in the voluntary Brownfield Cleanup Program to receive a tax credit “bump-up” to redevelop the sites in a manner that is consistent with the community’s vision and Secretary-approved plan.

**ONGOING**

**21. Implement strategic marketing program for village**

Strategic planning is necessary to exploit the village’s location in the Capital Region and proximity to Saratoga Springs by emphasizing its walkable downtown, unique shops and eateries, built and natural environments.



- Create a Strategic Planning Committee.
  - Implement the marketing strategy in the recently completed village Economic Development Plan. The plan’s Action Matrix laid out strategies and stakeholders/leaders to carry them out.
- Potential Funding: NYS Department of Economic Development Strategic Planning and Feasibility Studies grant, NYS Empire State Development Grant Funds

**22. Encourage compatibility with local character**

Policies should support investors who work within the architectural and business framework of the village.

- Integrate clear policies when implementing goals #1 and #2.

**23. Encourage expansion of commerce and attractions in the Central Business District**

Develop a formal expansion plan for the Central Business District by creating interesting loops for shoppers/diners to roam. Identify sites for investment/business development: Make room for growth of the retail sector by extending the retail district the length of Front and Washington Streets (open the underpass at Iron Spring Park), down Bath Street and up Malta Avenue to Pine Street. Select areas for longer term parking. Help finance improvements, such as street lighting, in an expanded downtown, with a downtown Business Improvement District.

- Discuss expansion of the business district with a Downtown Revitalization Committee (mentioned in goal #18).
- Updated zoning to allow retail use extension (mentioned in goal #1).
- Gauge interest in a Business Improvement District (BID) among the village businesses.

Potential funding: New York Main Street Program (HCR NYMS), NYS Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI).

Transportation, Infrastructure, Village Properties, and Staffing



**MEDIUM TERM**

**24. Update water system/management program**

Increase efficiency of wells, pumps and storage systems, and root out leaks.

- Hire consultant who will create a digitized map of the water system from wells to user laterals.
- Install system to digitize water distribution, including meters that do not need to be read.

Potential funding: NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation.

**25. Update sewer system/management program**

Digitally map the sewer system to eliminate crossovers with the stormwater system and provide developers with accurate capacity estimates.

- Hire consultant who will create a digitized map of the sewer system.
- Create plan to eliminate crossover with the stormwater system.

Potential funding: New York State Department of Environmental Conservation; NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC).

**ONGOING**





## 26. Consider separate “enterprise funding” for water and for sewer

Separate water and sewer budgeting where feasible/desirable from other village finances (recognizing outside village revenues provide a flexible budget line for the village to address other important village needs.)

- Rework village budget to separate out water and sewer.
- Fund repairs and improvements in both systems, and work with the County to develop a joint sewer permit application.

Potential Funding: New York State Community Development Block Grant Program (HCR CDBG), NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation.

## 27. Create unified capital improvement program for all infrastructure

Capital funds should be established and generously funded for separate purposes: water, sewer, streets and sidewalks, stormwater management, and buildings and grounds.

- Create a committee to set aside capital funds for infrastructure
- Meet twice yearly to assess progress.
- Secure funding for development of capital improvement program.

Potential funding: New York State Department of Environmental Conservation; NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation.

## 28. Create village facilities capital improvement program

Develop a plan that will attack delayed maintenance of village buildings with a major emphasis of repairing the Police/Court Building and Department of Public Works (DPW) garage, firehouses, etc., find more room for the Justice Court, provide toilets and heat to the Village Hall’s upper floors, assess feasibility of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility improvements, and, if necessary, construct new facilities.

- Form a committee with DPW and facilities managers at each departmental building.
- Create a multi-year maintenance plan, using the 2021 Ballston Spa DPW Capital Project Plan as a starting point.
- Meet twice yearly to assess progress.

Potential funding: New York State Community Development Block Grant Program (HCR CDBG)

## 29. Add specialized staff

The village will better address challenges if dedicated responsibility can be assigned to specially trained employees relating to issues of management, the spectrum of IT issues, communications and repair of equipment and buildings, advance community development, housing and infrastructure needs.

- Create a committee to assess which departments/positions would benefit from the hiring of specialized staff.
- Create a plan to identify funding sources for any new staffing and attract and retain new staff.

## 30. Prepare village-wide stormwater management/enhancement plan

- Complete the digital mapping of the stormwater system begun by Cornell Cooperative Extension Saratoga County.
- Begin a process of repairing faulty basins and regular cleaning.
- Identify streets that need drainage and opportunities to divert stormwater away from the system.



- Educate the public about keeping debris out of collection basins.
- Ready the village for the impending DEC audit of the system.
- Map natural springs and how their waters flow to the creeks and modify the confluence of the Gordon and Kayaderosseras to minimize flooding.

Potential funding: NYS DEC Non-Agricultural Nonpoint Source Planning and MS4 Mapping Grant, NYS AGM Community Resiliency Training Programs, NYS EFC Green Innovation Grant Program.



## *Organization for Implementation*

It is appropriate that implementation of the comprehensive plan be managed by the village board with assignments of follow up tasks as necessary and appropriate. This comprehensive plan suggests some potential expanded committee development, recognizing that securing volunteer resources in the village will not be without its challenges, but will meet the stated goal of increasing participation in government.

In looking ahead, it may be helpful for the village to establish a more formal planning and community development function within the village administration. This could be staffed on an interim, part-time basis through a consulting arrangement. That function may initially be focused on technical services to support grant-writing tasks. Over the long term, a full department could be developed, with sustaining revenues for staff coming from administration and program delivery services associated with grant-funded projects.

This plan expires in 10 years. At that time a comprehensive planning process must be restarted, and a full review done.

This plan must be put into action. The goals of this plan should be reviewed yearly by the Village Board to assess what has, and has not, been accomplished. Getting projects completed will be the measure of the success of this Comprehensive Plan. Continuing to work together will be imperative to ensure that the benefits envisioned for the community set forth in this plan are secured.



## *Conclusion*

The Comprehensive Plan took into consideration the village’s unique history, identity, character, and values while addressing each aspect of the village. By utilizing previous reports, undertaking substantial community outreach, and balancing the needs of residents and businesses to foster the community’s vision, the Comprehensive Plan will serve to guide the future of the Village of Ballston Spa for the benefit of current and future generations.

