

# Guiderland Stakeholder Discussion Notes

## Stakeholder Group: Local & Regional Partners

**Date/Time:** Tuesday, March 7, 2023 at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom

### Participants:

- *Capital District Regional Planning Commission*
- *Town of Bethlehem Planning*
- *Grant Hill Firing Range*
- *City of Watervliet*
- *Albany County Planning*

### Notes on Strengths/Assets/Opportunities:

- Guiderland is a “mature” bedroom community, with proximity to Albany jobs
- Guiderland has community pride in its character; the sense of character and the stability in the community/municipality is a regional strength
- Excellent trails
- Strong school district
- Beautiful natural surroundings
- Firing range has good rapport with Guiderland Chief McNally
- CDRPC is conducting a reservoir study
- Commercial uses in Guiderland are an attraction for Bethlehem residents and are a regional benefit
- North Bethlehem residents are within Guiderland School District, so areas are linked in that way
- Commercial density is both an opportunity and a threat – the market for brick-and-mortar retail is changing. Retail has shrunk, Town has to pay attention to the shift and be proactive.
- Natural resources are noted as a strength for the whole Capital District region, so safeguarding water resources is important. Plan should focus on natural resources and look for opportunities and threats related to this. Focus on water resources, safety, and safeguarding local ecosystems.
- Opportunity to expand Conservation Easement Program to protect areas in important watersheds – currently, a limitation of the program is that County and school taxes are not waived in Guiderland for participation in Conservation Easement Program. Bethlehem’s program has been in existence for longer.
- Very rare for kayak/canoe to come through Grant Hill Range property on the Normanskill – currently posted signs; boaters “holler up” to announce themselves
- There was agreement that more collaboration among the municipalities means “we all win” and participants promoted a regional outlook.

### Notes on Challenges/Needs/Concerns:

- As a regional shopping destination, managing traffic can be a challenge
- Diversity of housing options and affordability are future challenges to address
- Amenities needed for aging population – walking infrastructure and aging-in-place support

- Grant Hill range is a busy place – visitors drive through a neighborhood to get there and it does cause more traffic on roads at times. There have been no issues with conflict or complaints except occasionally noise-related complaints in the evenings. They feel they are good neighbors. They noted a useful idea to include information about planned events at the range in the weekly Town newsletter
- Watervliet working on relicensure of hydro plant with Guilderland; wants to play a part in recreation and open space planning, but concerned about development in the watershed
- Concern about invasive species (water chestnuts) in Watervliet Reservoir
- Negative impacts on Reservoir water quality a concern for Watervliet
- Question of how Guilderland keeps its sense of place in the face of development. An increase in multifamily development could be a strength regarding affordability, but aging population is a consideration and the Town needs to think about what needs seniors have and where families are located
- Guilderland is a regional destination – that has to be managed.
- There is a lot of development and types of development in Town – What is Guilderland’s vision?

### **Stakeholder Group: Environment, Sustainability & Recreation**

**Date/Time:** Tuesday, March 7, 2023 at 11:30 a.m. via Zoom

#### **Participants:**

- *Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission*
- *Altamont Fairgrounds*
- *Albany County Natural Resource Conservation and Agricultural & Farmland Protection*
- *Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy*
- *Guilderland Coalition for Responsible Growth*
- *John Boyd Thatcher State Park*
- *Albany County Executive’s Office*
- *Guilderland Tree Preservation Committee*

#### **Notes on Strengths/Assets/Opportunities:**

- Good advertising for programming at Tawasentha Park
- Some friction between Town of Guilderland and Village of Altamont; this affects Altamont Fair, since their property is in both municipalities – feels there are ways to improve communication.
- Guilderland has valuable farmland soils, successful ag operations. There are great opportunities for conservation of land for agriculture and to protect other resources at the same time (reservoir, watersheds, habitats).
- Great opportunity that the Town has GIS to use for planning
- Guilderland has substantial preserved open space and an opportunity to link that space to an even greater extent
- There is an opportunity for Guilderland to partner with the County on agriculture and natural resource protection/sustainability programs
- N.Y. Parks Rec. & Historic Preservation Law §3.09 is a relevant resource

- Great playground in Tawasentha Park – an attraction for families – an opportunity for more trails and connections, but it needs more advertisement and branding featuring the recreational areas.
- Conservation Easement Program is a plus
- Pine Bush is a huge benefit to the Town but is under-recognized and underutilized
- Town and its Parks Department excellent partners to work with
- Opportunity for more preservation and recreation along the Bozenkill
- There are more opportunities for conservation near the reservoir
- Focus on not only more connectivity for humans but also for wildlife
- Opportunities to promote large and small-scale agricultural sustainability & sustainable ag practices
- Guilderland’s reputation for development could be perceived as weakness or opportunity
- Preservation along Western Ave/Rt. 20 could help maintain Town character – there have been increases in traffic and loss of trees/park space along Route 20
- Opportunity for more bike/pedestrian paths for transportation/connectivity (not just recreation)
- Opportunity to have larger developments dedicate community greenspace
- Opportunity to use Bethlehem as a model for more formalized approach to forest and open space preservation
- Recommendation for Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) to help Town prioritize conservation
- Helderberg Escarpment Planning Guide a relevant resource
- Recommendation to prioritize conservation around Watervliet Reservoir
- Recommend not using known invasive species in landscaping around Pine Bush
- In 1970’s, Town had plan for protected corridor along the Normanskill; more conservation needed along this creek. Climate change has impacted lands here. See Normanskill Corridor Plan.
- Opportunity for future connections to Rail Trail
- Guilderland library has great programming and is a great resource for the community
- Opportunities for more passive recreation (walking/biking) areas with trail/path buildout
- Underutilized alleys in McKownville could be used for greater bike/ped connections
- The distinct hamlets and neighborhoods in Guilderland are important. They include suburban, urban, and rural character areas. Focus seems to be on the urban areas, with new apartments, but there is a need for more family-friendly amenities within these developments (neighborhood playgrounds). Add more focus on green space and amenities in new developments to create a sense of community.
- Preserve open space with farms and forest program flexible to initiate as opportunities to do so arise.
- Protect community character.
- The County Agriculture Plan maps out valuable agricultural lands. Use this as a tool to identify primary areas for protection.
- County would like to see a countywide network of youth groups focused on sustainability and climate change and would like to collaborate with the Towns to do this
- When asked what a “sustainable Guilderland” is, participants answered: walkability, with transportation alternatives, passive outdoor recreation opportunities, maintain pockets of nature to let people experience “awe”. Have complete streets with road diets, low lighting, and can’t be commerce-centric.

### Notes on Challenges/Needs/Concerns:

- There is a threat of sprawl in Guilderland, especially western part of Town, as it is rapidly being developed and with these changes there is a risk of losing identity (esp. from Altamont to Guilderland Center)
- Residents have to drive to enjoy most Guilderland parks; more neighborhood park space needed
- Walkability important – currently everything requires driving and there is little walkability
- More infrastructure for children (e.g., parks, playgrounds) needed in Westmere
- More “complete streets” a priority – esp. in McKownville and Westmere
- Climate resiliency should be a consideration – open space and wetlands important to climate resiliency
- Fairgrounds used as a park (e.g., dog walking), but upkeep is a struggle – would like to see Town and County assist with maintenance plan. Need money and staffing.
- Drainage issues at Altamont Fair
- Native plantings should be a priority, as well as invasive species removal, especially in and around the Pine Bush
- Floodplain mapping is inadequate – not reflective of current climate patterns/conditions
- What will happen to State-owned property on State Farm Rd/155?
- Limited public transportation options in most of Town
- Bright road lighting can be disruptive to nature/wildlife
- People forget about some of the resources, and there needs to be more advertising and marketing of the open space and recreation resources in Town

### Stakeholder Group: Business & Economic Development

**Date/Time:** Tuesday, March 7, 2023 at 2:30 p.m. via Zoom

#### Participants:

- *Albany Guardian Society*
- *Albany County Farm Bureau*
- *Guilderland Chamber of Commerce*
- *Guilderland Industrial Development Agency*
- *New York Department of Agriculture & Markets*
- *Crossgates (Pyramid Mgmt.)*

#### Notes on Strengths/Assets/Opportunities:

- Agricultural operations (winery, brewery, farmers) an asset to Town
- CDTA connection to Crossgates is a strength
- Only two areas zoned industrial: Northeastern Industrial Park area and Railroad Ave area
- Plenty of capacity at Northeastern Industrial Park for warehouse and distribution facilities; no other large amounts of land that would be suitable
- Property tax burden could be reduced by Town to promote farming
- People grow hay in western Guilderland to supplement income
- Next generation is not going into agriculture, so land is being sold for other uses

- There are a lot of small shopping plazas along Route 20 – could be grants to improve parking and aesthetics from road
- Increased walkability is an opportunity in the Town
- Proximity to State capital a plus, in terms of jobs and also lobbying for funding
- Opportunity for collaboration between public and private sectors
- Opportunity to leverage infrastructure funding
- The “old dry cleaners” on Western Ave is a property near YMCA & fire station – good location for walkability if it were redeveloped
- Anecdotally, single-story ranch houses would appeal to older Guilderland residents who are downsizing
- Consider housing developments that target multiple markets, with a percentage of units that are income-based affordable housing or housing for seniors; creates multigenerational opportunities
- Landscaping needs of new housing supports Guilderland tree/plant nurseries
- Solar projects help some ag property owners pay the bills
- Perspective: solar is better than residential subdivision because it is not seen as permanent change
- Important trend for planning: people are living longer, meaning more services needed for older residents

#### **Notes on Challenges/Needs/Concerns:**

- Need to balance growth with neighborhood stability
- Need housing that supports older adults
- Tight commercial real-estate market; small businesses could use cheaper space
- Route 20 is Guilderland’s “Main Street”
- Guilderland does not have a town center, but we have Western Ave – opportunity to improve aesthetics
- Businesses facing challenge presently attracting workforce
- Highly educated workforce in Guilderland good for some businesses; leaves out others
- Bus service is limited in Town; need service west of Route 155
- There is an issue with affordable and workforce housing – average new home price approx. \$450K
- Same issues facing Guilderland (economically) as facing rest of region and state
- Affordable housing for people on fixed incomes needed
- Carman Road the only other commercial corridor other than Western Ave
- No sudden transformations are possible – long-term process
- Need sidewalks, crosswalks to enhance pedestrian safety along Western Ave, especially around Route 155 intersection where there are many apartment complexes
- Taxes are a significant burden for agricultural operations – there have been discussions of taxing income vs. taxing amount of property
- Rural Guilderland taxpayers get fewer services for every tax dollar paid than residents of other areas in Town
- Certain types of retail (e.g., bakeries) not in Guilderland
- Intersection of 155 & Western Ave identified as dangerous
- Transportation is #1 issue for older adults – need services for seniors so they can age in place

## **Stakeholder Group: Arts, History & Education**

**Date/Time:** Wednesday, March 8, 2023 at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom

### **Participants:**

- *Guilderland Town Parks Department*
- *Guilderland Public Library*
- *Guilderland Central School District*
- *UAlbany Community Relations*
- *UAlbany Facilities Mgmt.*

### **Notes on Strengths/Assets/Opportunities:**

- School district highly regarded by professionals relocating to Capital District
- School district employs close to 1,000 people
- 9 parks, trails, and performing arts stage in Tawasentha are assets to Town
- Opportunity to add interpretive/historical signage in park areas
- Fabulous parks in Guilderland
- Opportunity to promote more local history
- Altamont Enterprise is a true asset to Town for local news/events reporting
- Opportunity for greater connection between Guilderland residents and UAlbany
- The Library is the “physical center” of Guilderland
- Benefits of Guilderland shared by word-of-mouth during UAlbany onboarding: schools, quality of housing, perceived safety, convenient commute
- 16+ different languages spoken at homes of district students – demand for English as a New Language (ENL) instructors
- Workforce ENL at UAlbany an opportunity
- Anecdote: Many UAlbany faculty and staff live at Landmark on Fuller Road
- Opportunity: Continue to add sidewalks in Town in strategic areas – safe routes to school
- Sidewalk from Price Chopper/SEFCU to library is well-used
- Trail extension is an opportunity for added recreation space
- “Main Street” in Guilderland is a federal highway (Route 20), for better or worse
- Greater collaboration to promote available programming (Parks, schools, library, etc.) is an opportunity

### **Notes on Challenges/Needs/Concerns:**

- Traffic (esp. on Route 20) made shifting school start time impossible
- Congestion/bottlenecks on Western at 146 and 155
- Mix of businesses in community a potential concern – lower tax assessments for businesses reduce funding for schools and library
- Concern for future of Crossgates Mall, given important location and changing retail environment
- Overall, student enrollment in district is “pretty flat” at just under 5,000 students
- EV charging stations needed
- Walkability/bikeability are priorities
- Better bus shelter needed near library – more frequent CDTA service also

- Layout of Town – e.g., Normanskill, Route 20, Reservoir – makes connectivity challenging, but Town is working hard to improve it

### **Stakeholder Group: Neighborhood & Community Organizations**

**Date/Time:** Wednesday, March 8, 2023 at 11:30 a.m. via Zoom

#### **Participants:**

- *McKownville Improvement Association*
- *Albany County Dept. of Social Services*
- *Guilderland Food Pantry*
- *Guilderland Coalition for Responsible Growth*
- *Guilderland Tree Preservation/Planning Board*
- *Save Our Pine Bush*

#### **Notes on Strengths/Assets/Opportunities:**

- Guilderland is a very giving and caring community
- Town government is supportive and responsive
- Physical location of Guilderland makes it convenient to jobs/attractions
- Beauty of western Guilderland, with its semi-rural character, is a strength; need to preserve the open space there
- Guilderland “blends from urban to rural”
- Pine Bush is “world class ecosystem”
- Great library, good schools, Tawasentha Park is a gem
- Abele Park off of Schoolhouse Road is a little-known resource
- Glass factory (Foundry Rd.) and Schoolcraft House are historic resources in the Town
- There is a signage ordinance against movable digital signs
- More reuse of grayfields an opportunity
- Reuse of existing buildings and sites should be prioritized over greenfield construction
- Federal funds potentially available for transportation, infrastructure, environmental conservation
- Safer crossing areas along Route 20 needed for pedestrians
- In other locations, Route 20 is a scenic byway; here, it’s too much like a freeway – get DOT to make improvements and replant trees
- Opportunity to potentially acquire more land in the Pine Bush – approx. 400 acres within Town not currently in Preserve
- More frequent event programming at Altamont Fairgrounds is an opportunity – underutilized
- Encourage more sustainable and earth-friendly lifestyles, greater multi-modal connectivity
- Encourage local business and agriculture
- Encourage housing developers to retain open space, add recreational amenities, and put in small parks

### Notes on Challenges/Needs/Concerns:

- Challenge: signage is a “blight” on Western Ave from its eastern end to Route 155
- Traffic and pedestrian safety are challenges/concerns in Guilderland
- Guilderland “has no town center” – challenge for distribution of services such as food pantry (inefficient)
- Food Pantry is not on a bus line
- How can abandoned spaces in Guilderland be repurposed?
- Need to replace dying trees – removal happens, but not always replacement
- Benches/bus shelters needed
- Complete streets approach needed along Fuller Road, Western Ave, and Route 155 to make these areas more user-friendly for all
- If you don’t have a car in Guilderland, it’s tough
- Need aging in place support
- What will happen if Crossgates Mall fails, as other malls have?
- Suburban sprawl is a threat in Guilderland
- Snow on sidewalks in winter makes Guilderland less walkable
- Pollution (water, light, air, noise) is a concern
- Town has services for seniors, which is a huge benefit, but there is a great need for services aimed at disabled residents under the age of 60
- Affordable apartments for seniors a clear need
- Affordable housing difficult to find near public transportation connections
- 30% of those who use food pantry are seniors
- Perceived need for more Town service sites, spread out among population

### Stakeholder Group: Transportation & Mobility

**Date/Time:** Wednesday, March 8, 2023 at 2:30 p.m. via Zoom

#### Participants:

- *Guilderland Town Highway Dept.*
- *Town Emergency Services*
- *Capital District Transportation Authority*
- *Galesi Group (Northeastern Industrial Park)*
- *New York State Department of Transportation*
- *Capital District Transportation Committee*

### Notes on Strengths/Assets/Opportunities:

- Road surfaces in Guilderland are in good condition
- Highway Department is self-sufficient and capable of clearing roadways
- Bus service to Crossgates is a benefit – Purple Line BRT set to begin operation in November 2023
- “Purple Line” will connect Crossgates, UAlbany campus, Harriman State Offices, downtown Albany
- Sidewalks make bus service possible (by providing a place for passengers to wait)



- The Transit Oriented Development (TOD) overlay around Crossgates Mall is beneficial for achieving transit goals
- Strong support for public safety from Town Supervisor and Board
- Excellent access to I-90 & I-87 for transporting goods – an attraction to NE Industrial Park tenants
- Class 1 railroad service is a benefit – approx. 2500-3000 rail cars per year currently
- Town actively seeks grants for transportation upgrades
- School system very strong
- Guilderland is within a day's truck drive to Boston, Buffalo, NYC – a plus for industrial tenants
- Crossgates transit upgrades include roundabout for highway access
- New EMS substation under construction near municipal golf course
- Sidewalk maintenance falls to Town Highway Dept.
- Industrial Park dimensions: 620 acres with 3M square feet of warehouse space; additional warehousing contemplated. Focus is on rail for transporting goods
- State roads crossing Normanskill represent vulnerable infrastructure to prioritize for hazard mitigation/resilience efforts
- Roundabouts decrease frequency of serious accidents and improve traffic flow

**Notes on Challenges/Needs/Concerns:**

- Challenge is not only traffic – perception of traffic is also a concern
- Land use and access management are the best tools currently available along Route 20
- Hard to live in Guilderland without a car
- Western Ave congestion slows emergency response and transport to St. Peters, Albany Med – sometimes 5-7 minutes to take a left off of Western without sirens
- A lot of red lights on Western
- People want to see bus access to Industrial Park
- Call volumes for emergency response currently 7000+/year and going up
- Culverts (as well as bridges) are important infrastructure for resilience
- Flooding often occurs on Route 20 near Stuyvesant Plaza – problematic area