

# TOWN OF AUSTERLITZ COMPREHENSIVE PLAN PART I

**March 2024**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



# TOWN OF *Austerlitz*

### **Town Board**

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Cara Humphrey, Town Board Member  
Ken Kaplan, Town Board Member  
Christopher Schober, Town Board Member

(Former Town Board Members that participated in the earlier stages of the planning process include Maureen Wilson and Jere Wrightsman)

### **Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee**

Greg Vogler, Chair  
David Harrison, Member  
Barbara Smith, Member  
Tim Stalker, Member  
Nick Van Alstine, Member

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2022, the Austerlitz Town Board initiated a process to update the Town's 2004 Comprehensive Plan. The planning process to update the 2004 Plan included formation of a Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee, data collection, mapping, and significant public input from a town-wide survey, interviews, public meetings and focus groups.

### Key Findings

Austerlitz has many positive characteristics that make it a quality place, including:

- Beautiful, rural character of the area
- Safe and natural environment
- The friendly people and neighbors
- Quiet, peaceful small town with low density of residential development, open spaces, a clean environment, and cultural and historical resources
- Sense of community
- Small and home business orientation

At the same time, several concerns were identified, including:

- Lack of affordable housing
- Services for Seniors
- Excessive Short Term Rentals
- Inadequate communication between the Town and residents/landowners
- Unavailable or inadequate internet and broadband services in some areas of the Town
- Vehicular speeding throughout the Town
- Lack of community space/gathering space

Many opportunities have been identified in this Plan that Austerlitz could take advantage of to maintain community strengths and improve weaknesses. Some highlights include:

- Update zoning to promote development that is sensitive to Austerlitz's natural environment and consistent with our rural character
- Update the zoning and subdivision laws to promote protection of the environment and positive features of the community while continuing low density development patterns and more affordable housing and senior opportunities
- Maintain roads
- Promote more communication and outreach
- Enhance action to address climate change and its effects on the Town
- Continue to improve public parks in Austerlitz

Threats are factors that could hinder the Town from reaching its community goals. Several threats face Austerlitz including an aging population; climate change; lack of affordable housing; development and sprawl; increased traffic; high taxes; and loss of sense of community.

## Focus Areas

The Plan focuses on the following key areas:

- Preserving rural community character
- Protecting the environment and addressing climate change
- Providing quality services and infrastructure, including road quality
- Increasing affordable housing especially for workforce, younger people and seniors
- Attracting young families
- Allowing for compatible small and home-based businesses that are consistent with the Town's character and environment
- Protecting historic resources
- Providing transparent, efficient and effective local government
- Fostering a sense of community
- Promoting diversity in the community

## Highlights of Key Strategies

- Maintain open space and rural atmosphere through updates to land use regulations and laws
- Maintain our rural character and natural environment
- Enhance the Town's focus on the environment and climate change
- Address aging in place, affordable housing and attracting young families
- Promote businesses that are consistent with the community character
- Enhance Town and public services and safe, modern infrastructure
- Maintain the historic character of the Town
- Enhance the sense of community within the Town
- Continue to be a welcoming community for people of all backgrounds

## Austerlitz's Action Plan

What follows are an updated Vision Statement and Goals, specific Recommendations for achieving these goals and an associated Implementation Plan.

## INTRODUCTION

### WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

A comprehensive plan is a locally developed document that serves to guide decision-making in the Town for the next 5-10 years. It is a community-generated plan that generally answers three important questions about the community:

1. What are the current characteristics and features in the town?
2. What does the community want its future to be like?
3. What actions and steps can the community take to reach that future state?

A comprehensive plan is adopted according to New York State Town Law 272-a and is a means to promote the health, safety and general welfare of the people of Austerlitz. This Plan is ‘comprehensive’ in that it explores the diversity of resources and conditions that exist within the Town. The process taken to develop this plan engaged participation of citizens in an open, responsible and flexible way and fostered cooperation among different boards and groups within Austerlitz. It provides the planning data and policy for future economic, housing, recreation, land use, environmental and other decision-making. This Plan is intended to be a vital document on which local decision making is based. To ensure this, the Plan includes an action strategy designed to help implement priority recommended actions over time.

In addition to providing the basis for future decision-making, this Comprehensive Plan provides a framework for local land use laws, such as subdivision, site plan review and zoning. Those local laws are mechanisms to implement various municipal policies and those policies are articulated in the Plan. It is important to note however, that this Plan is not a regulatory document; any change to existing, or development of new land use laws would need to be adopted according to procedures authorized under state law and through a separate process under the direction of the Town Board. That future process would include public hearing(s), environmental impact assessment, and Columbia County Planning Board review.

### IMPLICATIONS OF HAVING A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

New York State law (Town Law 272-a) grants municipalities the authority to prepare and adopt comprehensive plans. Once a comprehensive plan is adopted, there are several important implications. First, all governmental agencies conducting capital projects on land in the Town are required to consider this Plan. That means the Town has a much larger stake in what other governmental agencies want to do when they are proposing a capital project here.

Second, it is the policy of New York State to encourage comprehensive planning for the sake of protecting the health, welfare and safety of its citizens. Therefore, most State agencies recognize, if not require, a comprehensive plan as a condition for grants and other funding assistance. This ensures that public funds are spent in pursuit of a well-defined public goal.

Finally, New York’s Town Law 272-a requires that land use regulations must be in accordance with a comprehensive plan. Thus, local land use related laws may need to be updated to be consistent. This Plan does include recommendations related to improving our existing local land use-related laws. It is important to note, however, that any change to, or development of, new land use laws would need to be adopted according to NYS Town Law procedures through a separate process. This process would include public hearing(s), environmental impact assessment, and Columbia County Planning Board review.

## THE PLANNING PROCESS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The strength of a comprehensive plan comes from the fact that it is essentially a grass-roots document. This Comprehensive Plan is based on significant community input and an analysis of resources, programs, and other local information to ensure that community needs and ideas are reflected.

A variety of tools were used to gather public opinion throughout the planning process. The Plan also incorporates the knowledge and skills of the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee, elected officials, the general public, business owners, and organizations serving the Austerlitz area.

The process focused on answering three basic questions:

1. **What are the current conditions in the Town of Austerlitz?** The Plan is built upon the Town’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the quality of life desired by Austerlitz residents.
2. **What is the desired future?** The Plan describes this by establishing a community vision and a set of long-range goals.
3. **What can the community do to attain its vision?** The Plan offers a comprehensive set of recommendations that address the issues of concern here. These recommendations can be implemented through policy changes, new program creation or expansions, organizational changes, grant funding, regulatory and local law updates, and other actions that will guide the Town toward the future it desires.

The issues, goals and recommended strategies detailed in this Comprehensive Plan are also based on new information gathered about the community, new public input, and relevant information from the old plan. Specific sources of information used to prepare this Plan included:

- The 2004 Town of Austerlitz Comprehensive Plan
- Audit of the 2004 Comprehensive Plan and Recommendations for Update, prepared for the Town Board by Nan Stolzenburg, FAICP, Jun 2022
- Updated population and demographic information from US Census and other available data
- Update of profile of community facilities and services, reviewed by the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee
- NYS Department of Transportation data on State Highways
- Columbia County GIS data
- NYS DEC and Hudson River Estuary Program data on environmental conditions of the Town
- Town of Austerlitz Source Water Protection Plan (2011)
- Town of Austerlitz Road-Stream Crossing Inventory and Management Plan (2020)
- Columbia County documents and other studies including:

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- Columbia County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan
- Columbia Count Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan
- Other resources and plans in the County

### Planning Events and Milestones

The planning process was initiated in the Spring of 2022 when the Town Board initiated a review of the adopted 2004 Town of Austerlitz Comprehensive Plan. This included an evaluation of the Plan by a planning consultant along with a tour of the Town, and a meeting with the Town Board to gain an understanding of the issues and trends facing the Town since 2004. This resulted in an Audit and a series of recommendations on how the 2004 Plan could be updated.

This led to the formation of the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee appointed by the Town Board and continuation of work with the planning consultant to assist in all phases of the Plan's development.

The following activities took place to develop this Plan:

1. Monthly Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee Meetings, starting in August 2022.
2. Series of interviews with specific stakeholders identified by the Advisory Committee.
3. Identified and conducted focus groups with the Climate Committee; Planning Board and ZBA; small businesses/home businesses and agricultural businesses; non-profits involved in Austerlitz including Spencertown Academy, Friends of St. Peters, Austerlitz Historical Society); Seniors; and the Austerlitz Fire District.
4. Town-wide community survey with 340 participants, out of 850 households that were mailed a notice (March/April 2023).
5. Development of an updated town-wide inventory and profile of resources and characteristics. (Part 3).
6. Developed new GIS-based maps of environmental and geographical information about the Town.
7. Worked with the Climate Smart Committee to integrate climate-related efforts into Plan.
7. Evaluated public input and all other information to determine the "Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats" facing the community (SWOT Analysis).
9. Developed updated vision and goal statements.
10. Developed updated recommended policies and actions, including an action plan for implementation.
11. Developed full draft of plan.
12. Presented draft Plan to the community and for comment.
13. Advisory Committee hosted public hearing as required by NYS Town Law 272-a (Scheduled May 18, 2024)
14. Submitted Draft Plan to Town Board (DATE).
13. Town Board review and hosted Public Hearing as required by NYS Town Law 272-a (DATE).
14. Draft Plan sent to County Planning Department for required by NYS GML 239-m review (DATE).



15. Environmental review as required by the NYS State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA – 6NYCRR Part 617)) (DATE).
16. Adoption of Plan by Town Board via a resolution (DATE).

Development of this plan was coordinated by a Town Board-appointed Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC). This group, made up of citizens and elected officials coordinated the planning effort that included collection of data about the Town of Austerlitz and its resources, creation of a detailed set of maps to understand the Town’s environment and land use patterns, and attained public input through focus groups, interviews, public meetings and a town-wide survey.

The public input received is the key foundation and strength of this plan. That input, together with data and maps, was used to identify Austerlitz’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities the Town can take advantage of, and threats facing the Town. The recommendations made in this Plan can be directly tied to those strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

The Planning process helped the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee answer three primary questions that are the focus of this Plan:

- What are the **current conditions** in the Town of Austerlitz? The Plan is built upon the Town’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the quality of life desired by Austerlitz residents.
- What is the **future direction of the Town** desired by the community? The Plan accomplishes this by establishing a community vision and a set of long-range goals.
- What **actions** can the community take to attain its vision? The Plan offers a comprehensive set of recommended actions that address the issues and topics of concern in Austerlitz. These recommendations can be implemented through policy changes, new program creation or expansion, organizational changes, grant acquisition, regulatory updates, and other alternatives and actions that will guide the Town toward a successful future.

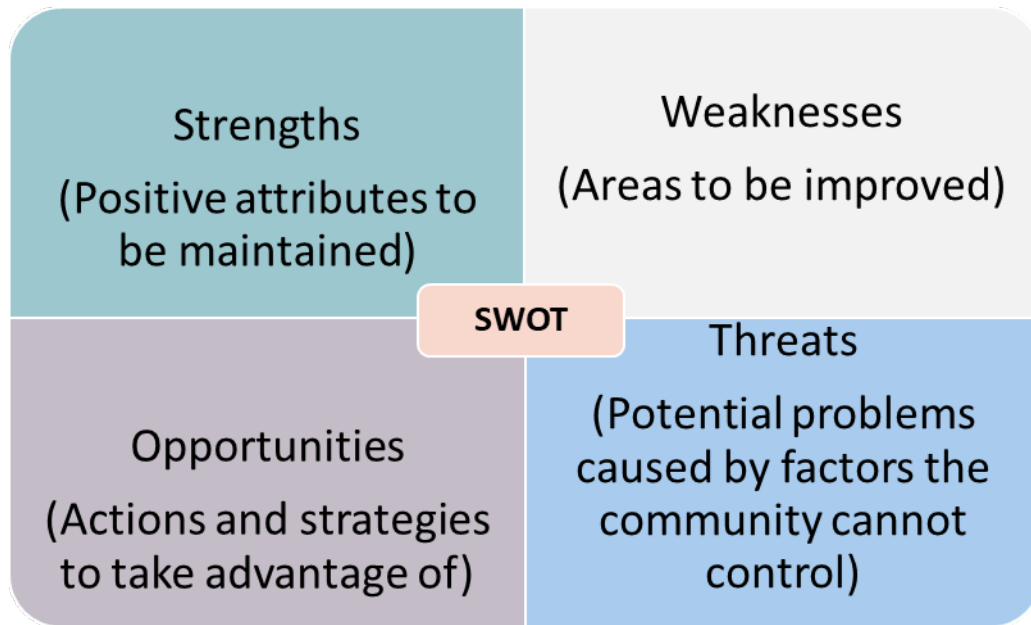
## STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS FACING AUSTERLITZ

An evaluation of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (“SWOT”) facing the Town of Austerlitz form an important part of this Plan. The features included in the SWOT were identified from public input as well as analysis of current conditions. The SWOT helps identify those important topics to be addressed in this Plan. Organizing information by this SWOT also helps the Town focus on ways to maintain its strengths, fix its weaknesses, take advantage of opportunities, and prevent threats from adversely impacting the community. A full accounting of all information gathered from the public was organized and categorized and can be found in Part 4 along with other public input information received from the survey and interviews/focus groups.

**Table 1: Important Elements Included In the SWOT (See also Figure below):**

<b>Strengths Identified in the Town</b>	<b>Weaknesses Identified in the Town</b>
Beauty/natural beauty/Attractive	Lack of affordability/affordable houses
People/friendly/neighbors	Airbnb, short-term rentals
Quiet and peaceful	Town Communication
Rural, rural character	Dirt roads/road conditions/potholes/lack of road maintenance (2:1 over good roads)
Good roads in general	Few services
Low density of housing/not too many people	High taxes
History, historical society, historic character	Lack of internet and high speed broadband
Sense of community	Lack of store/food/country store/restaurant
Good location and proximity to places and events	Speeding, especially on State and County Roads
Open spaces	Lack of community space/gathering space
Safe	Lack of diversity
Spencertown Academy	Lack of community cohesion
Clean air and climate	
Cultural activities available	
Low taxes	
<b>Opportunities Identified</b>	<b>Threats Facing Town</b>
More affordable housing	An aging population
Better roads/better gravel roads/better road maintenance	Airbnb, short-term rentals
More communication and outreach	Climate change
Store/restaurant	Lack of housing that is affordable
High speed internet	Creeping commercialization
Inform/educate about property taxes, specifically what is within town's control, how much of owner's property taxes are for the town, how much town property taxes funds town operations	Development/overdevelopment/increased population/sprawl
More or better information/notices by town of community or recreational events	Increased traffic
Action on climate change	High taxes
Formal Long Term Road Plans	Growth of urban population moving in
More activities for senior citizens	Lack of diversity
Support for Climate Committee	Lack of sense of community
Communication and improvement of parks, including improving awareness of Austerlitz Park	

**Figure 1: Explanation of SWOT**



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## PLAN FOCUS AREAS

Based on community input and evaluation of information about the current conditions in the Town of Austerlitz, the Plan focuses on the following key areas:

- Preserving Rural Community Character
- Protecting the Environment and Addressing Climate Change
- Providing Quality Services and Infrastructure, Including Road Quality to Meet the Needs of Residents
- Increasing Affordable Housing Opportunities especially for workforce, younger people and seniors
- Attracting Young Families
- Allowing for Compatible Small and Home-Based Businesses That Are Consistent with the Town's Character and Environment
- Protecting Historic Resources
- Providing transparent, efficient and effective local government
- Fostering a Sense of Community
- Promoting Diversity in the Community

## IMPLEMENTING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan details many strategies that the Town hopes to implement over the next 5-10 years. Some of these are easier to implement than others. Some can be accomplished in a short amount of time, while others will need long-term or sustained implementation. To help the Town Board focus on implementation activities, the Plan recommends a series of implementation activities. The Town Board should review this Comprehensive Plan and the Action Plan at a dedicated yearly meeting with the Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee to determine which actions have been accomplished and identify which actions from the plan should be added to the implementation list.

## VISION AND GOALS

A vision statement describes our community's values and aspirations and offers a shared image of what people want Austerlitz to become over the next 5-10 years. The statement is based on extensive community input and addresses all aspects that contribute to the social, cultural, environmental, and economic fabric of the Town. The 2004 Plan also included a vision statement: "Austerlitz is a small, rural town along the Taconic Mountain Range. Residents enjoy rural character, scenic vistas, abundant wildlife, low housing density, slow growth, historic structures and a spirit of basic freedom and independence that has been present for generations. It is the vision of Austerlitz citizens to maintain these characteristics of the community."

To paint a more complete picture and address issues important to Austerlitz now and for the future, the vision statement from 2004 was expanded to include topics such as climate change, environmental protection, housing, support services, diversity, and small, local businesses.

The following statement represents the long-held and shared consensus on Austerlitz' vision for the future:

## VISION STATEMENT

Austerlitz is a small, rural town along the Taconic Mountain Range. Residents seek to protect the Town's essential character which includes its rural nature, scenic vistas, abundant wildlife, open spaces, historic structures, and historic character. Our spirit of basic freedom, independence and sense of community that has been present for generations continues to be our foundation. We seek to enhance the health, safety and prosperity of residents by addressing climate change and responsibly caring for our environment upon which we depend. We aspire to nurture a community that encourages thoughtful housing solutions and support services so that all residents can thrive. Austerlitz is a sustainable and resilient place that balances growth with our environment and welcomes people having a diversity of backgrounds, ages, and financial status. Austerlitz supports small, local businesses that serve our community.

## GOAL STATEMENTS

Goals provide an observable result that is directly connected to the overall vision of the Town. Goals are established to help the Town reach its long-term vision and address identified needs. The goals are organized to address the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified during the planning process. The Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee reviewed the goals that were established in the 2004 Plan, and used new data, public input, and knowledge about current needs to

update those goals. It is useful to note, however, that the fundamental direction of the goal statements remains unchanged from 2004.

To address the vision presented above, the following goals are established in this Plan:

- (a) To protect open space and our rural atmosphere.
- (b) To ensure growth and expansion happens in an orderly manner that supports our community character and environment.
- (c) To protect environmentally sensitive areas of our community, such as wetlands, floodplains, ridgelines, steep slopes, watersheds and sources of drinking water.
- (d) To identify, prepare for and mitigate climate change through government operations and to facilitate this on behalf of the residents.
- (e) To better meet the needs of an aging population including such service needs as transportation and measures to support successful aging in place.
- (f) To develop policies and local laws that support the availability of affordable housing particularly to meet the needs of the town's workforce, young individuals and families, and our older residents.
- (g) To attract young individuals and families by developing policies and local laws to encourage locating or remaining here.
- (h) To ensure new allowed commercial enterprises and short-term home rentals that are consistent with the character of the community and are appropriate for the neighborhood where they may exist or wish to locate.
- (i) To welcome small scale home occupations throughout the town that operate with minimal traffic, noise, odors, or visual impact on neighbors and are consistent with neighborhood, rural character, and the environment of the town.
- (j) To provide for town services and safe and modern infrastructure, including long term planning for roads and their maintenance and protecting and enhancing publicly owned open spaces such as town parks.
- (k) To protect historic resources and the historic character of the town.
- (l) To provide for better enforcement of existing town laws.
- (m) To provide continued quality fire and emergency services within the town.
- (n) To foster a sense of community among all residents and enhance communication between the town government and town residents including information for the public on topics of community interest and government operations.
- (o) To welcome people having a diversity of identity, backgrounds, age, and financial status.
- (p) To protect the tax base to minimize future tax increases.
- (q) To actively seek funding opportunities that promote the goals and recommendations of the comprehensive plan.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are organized by Goal and outline specific strategies and actions that, when implemented, can address the needs of the Town of Austerlitz.



Recommendations below identified with this logo and in **green text** indicate that the action addresses one of the Required New York State Climate Smart Community Elements.

### (A) TO PROTECT OPEN SPACE AND OUR RURAL ATMOSPHERE.

1. Overall, review and update the Zoning and related laws (See Part 5, Appendix 3: Zoning Audit for more information). In particular, focus on:
  - a. Review Allowable Uses, including: the allowable uses as defined in the Use Table, which uses apply to each zoning district, permissions by use by district (e.g., permitted, if a special use permit and/or a site plan review is required), definitions for each use, the requirements established within special use permits and site plan reviews, and review the size, borders and purpose of each district.
  - b. Encourage commercial development in existing, built locations, where safely applicable.
2. Address the following:
  - a. Ridgeline Protection. Establish a Ridgeline and Steep Slope Overlay District and specific standards or requirements for development within the district. Adopt a ridgeline map so that landowners, the Planning Board, ZBA and CEO are informed as to where those standards/requirements apply. The maps can show both important ridgelines and the steep slopes that contribute to the town's scenic and ecological importance. Consider other development standards such as limiting tree clearing on ridgelines to further protect these areas and with regards to lighting, including but not be limited to, these development requirements:
    - i. To prevent the obstruction of sight lines viewed from public roads throughout the town
    - ii. To establish Lighting requirements such as down lighting to limit the amount of lighting and the number of lights that may be seen from around the town
    - iii. To maintain as many trees and natural screening as possible
    - iv. To ensure proper runoff and protection of surrounding land
  - b. Private Roads and Driveways. Review existing road and driveway laws to ensure consistency, appropriate sizing, adequate emergency services access, compliance with State laws, and update road standards to ensure that new roads and driveways are built to be consistent with low volume residential and rural roads and encourage road maintenance agreements. Ensure

that current driveway standards address long driveways and steep driveways, to ensure adequate stormwater management and to minimize adverse environmental impacts. Use professional services such as Engineers when needed.

- c. Signs. Signs have a lot of influence on streetscapes and community character. Include updating zoning and other applicable laws to ensure appropriate size limits are defined, electric signage is prohibited, political signs are exempt 90 days prior to an election, event signs can only be placed 90 days before the event, town property may not be used for any signs other than those authorized by the Town Board, and all signs must be removed within 15 days after an election or event.
- d. Agriculture. The following recommendations will promote the development of (or the conservation of) farms in Austerlitz:
  - i. Expand agricultural definitions of farms to add in, for example, agritourism, niche farm, and others needed to reflect the growing types of agriculture and agricultural businesses feasible for Austerlitz.
  - ii. Address development related to farm businesses on farms, such as for retail purposes.
  - iii. Provide Town Board support of farmland and open space protection applications from those landowners who wish to use conservation easements to permanently protect their land. Work with and support the Columbia Land Conservancy and other land trusts to continue efforts to preserve farmland and open space in Austerlitz. The Town should be proactive at evaluating potential important farmland areas for protection.



**(B) TO ENSURE GROWTH AND EXPANSION HAPPENS IN AN ORDERLY MANNER THAT SUPPORTS OUR COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND ENVIRONMENT.**

1. The Town Board should perform an annual review of the "State of the Town." The first review should identify key statistics including the number of homes in place and the number, type, and location of businesses operating or other non-commercial structures. In the second and subsequent years, the review shall compile the number of new building permits issued, the number of new homes built, the number repurposed, the number, type and location of new businesses or buildings used for non-residential purposes and compare that to the preceding year's information. In particular, The Town Board should analyze whether the changes occurring are consistent with the vision and goals of the Comprehensive Plan. This Report should be subject of a regularly scheduled public meeting, with information available on the Town's website (<https://www.austerlitzny.com/>) and include a summary that reiterates, or notes changes to, priorities, progress on implementation, and obstacles.
2. The Town, as assisted by the Planning Board, Assessor or Code Enforcement Officer as directed, should identify and maintain the necessary data for the State of the Town annual reviews.

3. **Promote smart growth principles in land-use policies.** The following actions can be implemented to assist the town address this:



- a. Review or establish a mandatory (or voluntary) use of conservation subdivision design for major subdivisions. A conservation subdivision results in at least 50% of the parcel being preserved as open space. If this is to be established, preserved open spaces should include core forest areas (see map), agricultural lands, lands resilient to climate change, steep slopes and ridgelines and other land with environmental sensitivities. **Use of this method will help Austerlitz conserve natural areas (including strategies to designate open space and protect it from development).**
- b. Although the local solar regulations prohibit all large scale solar facilities, State regulations supersede local zoning laws for facilities producing more than 20-25+ megawatts. To ensure that important considerations are made by the State in permitting those facilities, consider amending the current section on solar facilities to add specific development and performance criteria that Austerlitz deems important for NY State to consider. These should include protecting core forests, preventing forest fragmentation, protecting wetlands, streams and floodplains, steep slopes, ridgelines, and important habitats, as well as requiring rigorous screening and landscaping to maintain visual appeal. Solar facility regulations include those that regulate removal of forest areas. Minimize cutting of forests identified in wildlife corridors.
- c. Expand existing density incentives to other parcels slated for development, not just large lots as currently exists. Include more detail on how density incentives are to be offered, evaluated, and approved. More detail is needed to effectively apply density incentives and use of open space lots.
- d. Make the sketch plan phase mandatory for those projects requiring site plan review.
- e. Establish rural siting guidelines for all development to encourage avoidance of forest fragmentation, maintenance of meadows, and protection of active or potential agricultural lands.

A density incentive is where the Town offers additional housing units or commercial footprint in exchange for a desired amenity such as preserved open space, provision of affordable housing units, or other features.

4. **Foster a green innovation economy.** The Climate Smart Community Program seeks to have participants foster a green economy. In Austerlitz, this could include actions such as promoting rooftop solar, promoting shifting public buildings to clean, renewable energy, developing smart growth policies which focus more growth in already built areas such as the hamlets, promoting the NYS Stretch Energy Code, creating more bike and walking opportunities, and promoting the adoption of the many recommendations in this plan that promote protection of natural areas. Using the Natural Resource Inventory and maps included in this plan also contributes to those actions.





**(C) TO PRESERVE ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREAS OF OUR COMMUNITY, SUCH AS WETLANDS, FLOODPLAINS, RIDGELINES, STEEP SLOPES, WATERSHEDS AND SOURCES OF DRINKING WATER.**

1. The town's Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) included in this Plan, along with the companion online application will serve an important role in helping landowners and the Planning Board evaluate proposed development. The NRI and its online application should be used in the earliest stages of project review to help the Planning Board identify important natural resources to be evaluated in applications and SEQRA. The NRI could also be used by the Planning Board and those applicants appearing before the Planning Board so that they provide up-to-date and comprehensive information on their submittals. This will help ensure that all natural features located on a parcel are mapped and identified. *This process should foster more efficient use and protection of natural resources (e.g., water conservation), and protect drinking water sources from pollution.*
2. Review the Town's existing Floodplain Damage Prevention Law Chapter 101 with the NYS DEC and update as needed to ensure the law meets current standards for flood damage prevention.
3. Update the subdivision law to ensure that all natural features such as (but not limited to) wetlands, streams, floodplains, steep slopes, and significant habitats on a parcel are identified in a subdivision application and ensure subdivision design standards conserves these features to the maximum extent reasonably possible. The Town NRI maps included in this plan along with mapping resources from Columbia County and NYS DEC could be used to help landowners and applicants identify what features are on their properties.
4. Establish one or more Environmental Resource Overlay Districts.
  - a. Stream Corridor Overlay District. Create a stream corridor overlay district in the zoning law. This could encompass the streams, their associated banks, wetlands and floodplains along at least the Class B, B(ts), C(t) and C(ts) streams. (The subcategories of 't' and 'ts' refer to streams identified by the NYS DEC as suitable as trout habitat or trout spawning.) Use NYS DEC information on cold water stream habitats in Austerlitz to ensure those important streams are included in the overlay. This overlay could set development standards to protect these important environmental features by limiting density, prohibiting certain activities, or establishing setbacks. This corridor should be kept in its natural state to the maximum extent possible. This recommendation is consistent with Zoning purpose statements (195-2) that minimize negative environmental impacts of development related to stream corridors (as well as wetlands, aquifers, and floodplains).
  - b. Core Forest Overlay. Using NYS DEC information as to location of core forests, establish a Core Forest Overlay to minimize forest fragmentation in these locations. This could include building guidelines to site new structures on existing forest edges and in ways that do not fragment large areas of forest. This could also take into consideration those forested areas considered above average and far above average resiliency for climate change. Encourage eligible land owners to participate in the New York State 480-A Forest Tax Law that incentivizes forest management through property tax benefits.



5. Reduce aquatic and streamside invasive species. Conduct an inventory of locations having invasive species and seek funding to control them via the DEC Invasive Species Grant Program.
6. Implement recommendations from the Austerlitz Road Stream Crossing Management Plan. This identifies culvert prioritization replacement and additional programs to improve stream crossings and connectivity. Use the detailed culvert and stream crossing designs included in the Management Plan and incorporate them as part of the Streets and Sidewalks Law (Chapter 160). Seek funding to address the highest priority stream crossings in need (See Table 8 of the Management Plan). Use the Columbia County Road Stream Crossing Viewer for online data. Ensure new roads and bridges are built to withstand higher rainfall predicted in climate change models. Use NYS DOT guidelines and tools such as their "StreamStats" online calculator to help amend highway specifications for the design of culverts and bridge openings on roads. Use best practices to ensure safe migration of reptiles, amphibians, fish and other indigenous species.
7. Continue involvement with the Agawamuck Creek Watershed Management Plan development and when it is completed, work to implement that Plan's recommendations to improve water quality in the Agawamuck Creek. The Agawamuck Creek Watershed Plan will include management recommendations for improving water quality and restoring critical natural resources throughout the watershed, identify measures to address invasive species, and incorporate information identified in the watershed analysis (e.g. waterways, stormwater runoff, invasive species, onsite wastewater treatment systems, road weather management best practices, watershed data compilation and baseline monitoring)" (<https://pb-inc.squarespace.com/watershed-management-plan-lw/>). Recommendations made for the Agawamuck may be equally useful for water resources across the whole town.
8. Consider reducing stormwater runoff and erosion impacts when new building occurs by including low impact development best management practices (as per the NYS Stormwater Management Design Manual) in subdivision and zoning laws to promote green infrastructure options. These include developments that use bioretention, bioswales, infiltration trenches, permeable pavement, constructed wetlands, and tree planting. Consider developing a water quality checklist to be used in the review approval process to aid project applicants and the Planning Board in understanding what information and methods can be used to improve stormwater plans. Maintenance of water quality should be identified as a goal of site plan and special use permit processes. Ensure that zoning references the NYS DEC stormwater pollution prevention requirements. It is recommended that all disturbances over 1 acre should include review of stormwater plans to limit adverse runoff and erosion. Overall, the Town should promote stormwater best management practices both pre and post construction and work and coordinate with the DEC.

Low impact development refers to practices that result in the infiltration or use of stormwater in order to protect water quality. It is an approach to stormwater management that works with nature to manage stormwater as close to its source as possible without significant pipe, grading and other engineering.

**(D) TO IDENTIFY, PREPARE FOR AND MITIGATE CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND TO FACILITATE THIS ON BEHALF OF THE RESIDENTS.**

Through this comprehensive planning process, this Plan addresses many of the required and optional Sustainability Elements included in the Climate Smart Community program. The table below represents the required and optional sustainability elements contained in the Climate Smart program that are addressed in this Plan:

<b>Required Climate Smart Community Element</b>	<b>How is this Element Addressed in the Recommendations?</b>
Support alternative modes of transportation (including strategies for bicycles, pedestrians, public transit, and electric vehicles)	E5
Promote smart growth principles in land-use policies	B3, D1b3, Part5, Appendix 1
Conserve natural areas (including strategies to designate open space and protect it from development)	Strategies in Goals A, B, C, D
Promote a healthy and safe community	D 1, D7, E5, J10
Foster equity (including strategies for housing, schools, transportation, recreation, food, and environmental exposures)	J11
<b>Optional Climate Smart Community Elements</b>	
Foster green economic development	B4
Foster the efficient use of natural resources (e.g., water conservation)	C1, C7
Promote the development of (or the conservation of) local food systems	A2d
Protect drinking water sources from pollution	C1
Promote adaptation to climate change (including strategies related to land use and public education and engagement)	D1 - 8
Minimize solid waste and promote recycling	D1 b 6

**1. All of the Following Actions Address Climate Change:**



- a. Update the Town’s flood damage prevention law (Local Law 1 of 1987; Chapter 101 of the Town of Austerlitz Code) and/or zoning to include a stream corridor overlay. The Town should recognize that in the face of more severe storm events associated with climate change, which allowing of building in floodplain areas is problematic for both safety and environmental resiliency, and that the boundaries of streams, associated wetlands, and their floodplains may change over time. The Town should thus regularly review any boundaries established for a stream corridor overlay.
- b. Continue Austerlitz’s efforts to obtain status as a Silver Certified Climate Smart Community designated by DEC. The Town should:

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1. Finalize the Vulnerability Risk Assessment and Adaptation Plan, Community Greenhouse Gas Inventory, and Community Climate Action Plan as per the NYS DEC Climate Smart program being developed by the Austerlitz Climate Committee.
  2. Implement the Government Operations Climate Action Plan (Included in this Plan) to further greenhouse gas reductions.
  3. Update regulations and programs in Town using this Plan and the natural resource maps as a foundation for smart growth and protection of the Town's green infrastructure.
  4. Continue to evaluate the Town's fleet inventory and operations of the Highway Garage. Additionally, every three to five years, the Town of Austerlitz should update its Greenhouse Gas Inventory to assess progress in meeting the goals outlined in the Government Operations Climate Action Plan.
  5. Update the Climate Action Plan periodically to adjust greenhouse gas reduction targets and strategy.
  6. Minimize solid waste (including strategies to promote recycling and composting or anaerobic digestion of organic materials and reduce construction and demolition waste in landfills and other facilities) to conserve resources for future generations.
2. Update subdivision, flood damage prevention, and zoning local laws to enhance stormwater management (See also (C) (8), above) and coordinate as necessary with the NYS DEC.
  3. Work to implement the Columbia County 2018 Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (see also recommendation J8), which was formally adopted in 2018. Increasingly more destructive storm events related to climate change makes it imperative that the Town address hazard mitigation. Critical infrastructure to be maintained in Austerlitz includes the Austerlitz Historical Society buildings, Spencertown and Austerlitz Fire Houses, the Spencertown Academy (owned by the Town), St Peter's Church, the Town's two Post Offices, the Town Hall and the Highway Garage and Salt Shed. The Hazard Mitigation Plan further states that:
    - a. The Town should establish a line item in its municipal budget to fund pre-disaster mitigation projects to reduce its vulnerability.
    - b. The Town will utilize the mitigation plan's risk assessment to guide emergency response planning including development of evacuation plans and use of emergency shelters.
  4. Site plan review landscape plans should require as much use of native trees and plants that can thrive in a changing climate as possible or reasonable.
  5. Develop incentives or requirements for providing renewable energy when development occurs, use of energy conservation methods (such as LEED certified commercial buildings), installation of EV charging stations in commercial parking lots, and similar resiliency strategies. All bonuses included in the zoning must follow NYS Town Law 261-b (Incentive Zoning).

6. Promote new development lighting standards that promote energy efficiency and reduce light pollution while providing adequate lighting for safety.
7. Promote adaptation to climate change (including strategies related to land use and public education and engagement). Ensure that the Town maintains an active Climate Smart Committee which stays current with changing trends and strategies, and which routinely reports to, and makes recommendations to, the Town Board. The Town should work to attain as many of the DEC Climate Smart Community Certification Actions as are relevant to Austerlitz.
8. Implement a Conservation Advisory Committee (CAC). CACs provide a formal structure within local governments to advise on the development, management, and protection of local natural resources. CACs serve as important advisory bodies to local governing boards, planning boards, and zoning boards of appeals. By providing an environmental perspective on land use proposals, comprehensive plans, stewardship of natural areas, and other issues, CACs contribute to local land use decision-making, conservation, and quality of life for residents in the community. CACs are established by the Town Board under Article 12-F Section 239-x of NYS General Municipal Law. Members of CACs may conduct policy research, deliver education programs, implement stewardship projects, and gather and distribute information to other town agencies, land-use applicants, and the general public. In particular, CACs can be directed by the Town Board to keep an inventory and map of local open space (e.g., forests, fields, wetlands), which provides an essential foundation for community planning. CACs can also provide an invaluable service to the Planning Board by contributing to environmental reviews. They can conduct site visits, analyze resources, document potential environmental impacts, and consider how natural areas on a site relate to surrounding resources and offer this information in an advisory capacity.



**(E) TO BETTER MEET THE NEEDS OF AN AGING POPULATION INCLUDING SUCH SERVICE NEEDS AS TRANSPORTATION AND MEASURES TO SUPPORT SUCCESSFUL AGING IN PLACE.**

1. The Town should promote and encourage resources that allow persons to stay in Austerlitz as they age. This could include providing a center for socialization and activities; expanded transportation services; allowance for home businesses that support seniors such as home maintenance, delivery services and shopping services; promotion of health care services in or near the Town; and allowance in zoning for alternative and affordable housing types including senior living facilities, adult day care centers, and fitness opportunities in Town.
2. Senior housing will fit best in the hamlet districts where there is more likelihood of walkability and closer to amenities and infrastructure. Hamlet zones should allow for this type of housing. Alternatively, the Town could consider a floating senior housing district (this is a district that establishes development standards, but that are not mapped until an application for a specific project is received) or a Senior Overlay District.
3. Continue to allow accessory dwelling units as a permitted use in all districts. Consider, however, limiting or prohibiting use of accessory dwelling units to be used as short-term rentals because these take away opportunities for affordable, senior housing.

4. Ensure that zoning definitions for ‘family’ are not limited to people who are related by blood or marriage as this may preclude people who are willing to provide care in their homes for older members of the community.
5. Promote walkability in the hamlets, and trails and paths outside hamlets. **Support alternative modes of transportation (including strategies for bicycles, pedestrians, public transit, and electric vehicles.** Hamlets and major developments should be designed as a “complete street.” This is designed for people of all ages and abilities, pedestrians, drivers, public transportation riders, and bicyclists designed to balance safety and convenience for everyone using the road.
6. Join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities (<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/>)
7. Expand and promote the Town’s webpage to serve as a centralized source of all community information, events, activities, and services useful to seniors.



**(F) TO DEVELOP POLICIES AND LOCAL LAWS THAT SUPPORT THE AVAILABILITY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING PARTICULARLY TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE TOWN’S WORKFORCE, YOUNG INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES, AND OUR OLDER RESIDENTS.**

1. Current zoning establishes a minimum lot size for most residential development. It also allows for calculating the number of allowable new homes by ‘density,’ which is the number of dwelling units per acre. Controlling the number of new homes by density in a rural area instead of using a minimum lot size can be beneficial by allowing for smaller, more affordable lots, while at the same time setting the desired density of homes. Establishing density for development other than Large Lot develop as currently exists would allow for use of average lot sizes. To allow for a variety of lot sizes while also controlling the amount of residential growth, review options to use Density as the measurement of the number of new houses allowed in the RR district and not just for large lots.
2. Review and update zoning provisions related to mobile homes (Section 131) as this doesn’t take into consideration new rules for manufactured housing. Allow “tiny homes” as an accessory dwelling.
3. Establish development standards for multi-family (including senior housing) to ensure they are of the scale and intensity of use consistent with the goals of this plan. Consider limiting the number of units per structure to focus on smaller scale units.

Controlling the number of new houses by establishing a minimum lot size is very different than by setting a density. A minimum lot size requires every new lot to have at least that minimum size, which may create large lots unaffordable to many. Using ‘Density’ allows more flexibility in creation of lot and provided water and septic can be provided for, can create smaller lots. For example, a 20 acre lot with a 2 acre minimum lot size would allow for 10 houses and the parcel would have 10 equal-sized lots. A density of 1 dwelling per 2 acres would allow for a variety of lot sizes (meeting County water and septic rules) and could result in 9 one-acre lots, and 1 eleven-acre lot.

4. Consider creating a sub-set of multi-family dwellings designed for the ‘missing middle’ incomes that allow for 3 and 4 plex residential structures provided they are designed in a single-family dwelling style and allow them in all locations. The idea is that these really look and function like a large single family home and would fit into most places in the Town. They shouldn’t be allowed to look like a boxy, typical apartment building.
5. Identify locations suitable for multi-family dwellings. Most appropriate are areas where there is access to or potential for water and sewer or septic infrastructure in the future. This could be set as a multi-family overlay district, a new zoning district, or focused on areas such as the hamlets or other locations. Require site plan review and special use permit (if it is an overlay district, just require site plan review).
6. To address housing needs, regulate Short Term Rentals. For example, limit or prohibit use of accessory dwelling units to be used as short-term rentals and do not allow short term rentals in any multi-family dwelling type. See also Recommendation H1.
7. Promote affordable housing opportunities; for example, incentives that offer additional units that are allowed in exchange for dedication of affordable units in the development.
8. Allow for a wide variety of housing types in Austerlitz. Consider including senior apartments, single-family cottages, duplexes, multi-family apartments, cottage courts, elder cottages, and similar smaller-scale residential options designed for more affordable living.
9. Consider establishing “inclusionary zoning” requirement for major subdivisions or multi-family developments. This type of zoning requires that a set percentage (often 20%) of new units built must be dedicated, affordable units, and is usually applied only to major subdivisions or other larger developments.
10. Coordinate with Columbia County on affordable housing programs.

**(G) TO ATTRACT YOUNG INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES BY DEVELOPING POLICIES AND LOCAL LAWS TO ENCOURAGE LOCATING OR REMAINING HERE.**

1. Implement regulatory changes such as use of density instead of minimum lot size and average lot sizes to provide opportunities for smaller, more affordable lots, use of accessory dwelling units, and small scale multifamily units that could aid in attracting and keeping young individuals and families here. Ensure these changes maintain the Town as a rural community, but that promote a wider variety of more affordable housing opportunities.
2. Continue to support the summer youth program so that it can be maintained or expanded to accommodate more children at low, or no cost to children who are town residents.
3. Continue working to expand broadband services to all areas of the Town.
4. Develop more family-friendly community events with an emphasis on activities for young children.



**(H) TO ENSURE NEW ALLOWED COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISES AND SHORT-TERM HOME RENTALS THAT ARE CONSISTENT WITH THE CHARACTER OF THE COMMUNITY AND ARE APPROPRIATE FOR THE NEIGHBORHOOD WHERE THEY MAY EXIST OR WISH TO LOCATE.**

1. Consider regulating Short Term Rentals to address such things as noise, traffic, safety, and environmental issues and to reduce adverse impacts of these rentals on long-term rental opportunities. Consider short term rentals to be registered with the town or impose an annual fee on short term rentals to fund code enforcement. Limit or prohibit use of accessory dwelling units to be used as short-term rentals. Furthermore, no multi-family dwelling unit should be allowed to be a short-term rental either. See also Recommendation F7.
2. Re-evaluate which and where commercial uses are appropriate. Establish standards for uses that may be appropriate but that have a large size and amount of use that are incompatible with rural character and the environment. For those commercial uses requiring a Special Use Permit, consider expanding development criteria in the zoning law to ensure compatibility of those uses with the district. Define square footage that is appropriate in all districts.
3. Review zoning to distinguish different uses, mixed uses, smaller sizes, and different dimension requirements for setbacks with the goal of helping new development emulate current lot sizes, setbacks and other development patterns in the hamlet areas and so that these remain discernable from those rural areas in the RR districts. The overall goal of this recommendation is to make sure new development in the hamlets emulates current lot sizes and development patterns, and development in RR remains consistent with environmental and rural character goals.
4. Consider establishing design standards for certain commercial businesses as an important tool to help business development fit into rural and hamlet districts and should be considered.
5. Expand hamlet districts to allow for some additional hamlet style residential and small business growth. Expand into lands where there are no or little environmental sensitivities.
6. Establish a business district to allow for more expanded business growth and to remove pressure for business growth in low residential, open space areas.
7. Work with large landowners and promote public/private partnerships to obtain information and opportunities on how the town can be more proactive in meeting its goals.

**(I) TO WELCOME SMALL SCALE HOME OCCUPATIONS THROUGHOUT THE TOWN THAT OPERATE WITH MINIMAL TRAFFIC, NOISE, ODORS, OR VISUAL IMPACT ON NEIGHBORS AND ARE CONSISTENT WITH NEIGHBORHOOD, RURAL CHARACTER, AND THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE TOWN.**

1. Continue to welcome small scale home occupations (HO1) as an allowable use. To ensure that larger or more intensive home occupations (HO2) are consistent with the rural character of the Town, update zoning regulations to provide for additional development standards for Home Occupation



Level 2 uses to ensure careful review of the size, intensity, scale, noise, environmental and other aspects. Zoning should establish development criteria to ensure Home Occupation 2 uses are compatible with the environment, neighborhood, and location and that have appropriately sized signage and parking areas all of which should not change the character of the town or neighborhood in which they exist.

**(J) TO PROVIDE FOR TOWN SERVICES AND SAFE AND MODERN INFRASTRUCTURE, INCLUDING LONG TERM PLANNING FOR ROADS AND THEIR MAINTENANCE AND PROTECTING AND ENHANCING PUBLICLY OWNED OPEN SPACES SUCH AS TOWN PARKS.**

1. Create formal road plans describing the town's roads, financing, maintenance and upgrading requirements and how these will be accomplished.
2. Create new park signage, and a new page on the Town's website (<https://www.austerlitzny.com/>) showing parks and park amenities – add map of trails and bike paths, state lands, etc.
3. Develop a 5-year rolling Capital Improvement Plan for the highway department, town buildings, town land and town recreational facilities.
4. Consider updating the zoning and subdivision laws to reflect the need to provide for adequate emergency access for all new structures in Town. Ensure (and continue) planning practices that provide for the Fire District Chiefs to be involved and have input in project review as fire protection response and tactics change, especially related to new roadway and driveways and maintenance, identification of dry hydrant locations and water sources, and emergency gate access. This will ensure access for fire trucks during a structure fire.
5. Consider use of traffic calming techniques along high traffic areas within the hamlets. These could include planting of street trees, construction of sidewalks with crosswalks, or narrowing the road to slow traffic (a road diet). Coordinate with NYS Department of Transportation as needed.
6. Continue to coordinate with and promote the County and State to improve public transportation options. Build awareness and expansion of local organizations (e.g., the Neighbors of Northern Columbia County program) and promotion of the Columbia County Health Care Consortium's Children and Adults Rural Transportation Service to help provide more diverse transportation options for local seniors.
7. Ensure that the creation of water and sewer systems should support specific development opportunities that have been identified through this plan, or when necessary to protect the public health, safety, and welfare.
8. Implement the Austerlitz chapter of the Columbia County hazard mitigation plan. Make this plan available on the Town website (<https://www.austerlitzny.com/>). (See also Recommendation D4)

9. Enhance information regarding trail opportunities in the town. Work with New York State to provide additional signage. Enhance information about trails on the Town’s website.
10. Promote a healthy and safe community. In addition to the strategies specifically recommended in this Plan, additional strategies to be considered include implementing a climate-resilient hazard mitigation plan, evaluating the need for a cooling center or other health-related needs, conservation of natural areas and promotion of green infrastructure when development occurs, and promoting water conservation and water protection.
11. Foster equity (including strategies for housing opportunities, schools, transportation, recreation, food, and environmental exposures).



**(K) TO PROTECT HISTORIC RESOURCES AND THE HISTORIC CHARACTER OF THE TOWN.**

1. Rescind the current language forming the Historic Preservation Commission unless deemed necessary.
2. Display a map and inventory of local historical sites for use by Town boards and officials in Town Hall.
3. Consider adoption of techniques to avoid unnecessary demolition and to foster adaptive reuse of historical buildings (particularly agricultural structures) and compatible new uses on nearby sites while avoiding strict regulation of design.
4. Implement a local historic overlay district in the zoning law in Spencertown and Austerlitz, for information purposes only.
5. Establish commercial design standards so that new commercial uses have architectural design and site layout that will be consistent with the traditional and historic buildings in Town.
6. Inform the public about residential and commercial historic tax credits that are available for renovation of structures in the two historic districts.
7. Work with other area towns and seek funds such as grants to digitize newspaper articles and other written historical artifacts and records to preserve and promote history in coordination with the Austerlitz Historical Society and others.
8. Identify cemeteries in need of repair and develop a work plan to fund and conduct this work and coordinate with the Town Historian as appropriate.

Adaptive Reuse is the process of taking an existing structure and updating or adapting it for a new use or purpose and can be an effective way to maintain historic buildings. A good example of an adaptive reuse is the conversion of a former church into the Town of Austerlitz Town Hall.

**(L) TO PROVIDE FOR BETTER ENFORCEMENT OF EXISTING TOWN LAWS.**

1. In coordination with the Code Enforcement Officer, tighten procedures to strengthen compliance with the laws. Include requirements for active CEO monitoring and oversight, as well as fines and legal mechanisms that must be applied in applicable circumstances. Ensure requirements and application procedures are clear.
2. In coordination with the Planning Board, identify procedures and provide more direction to the Board.
3. Town Law 272-a authorizes the Town to develop a comprehensive plan.
  - a. Establish a Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee with at least one Town Board member to ensure the Comprehensive Plan is regularly updated and kept current, and to implement the Plan's recommendations via approval by the Town Board. The Oversight Committee should prepare an annual summary report that indicates priorities, progress on implementation, obstacles and future steps.
  - b. State law also establishes that when a town has a comprehensive plan, any capital project proposed by any other municipal, County or State governmental agency must also take town recommendations into consideration. Thus, the Town should ensure that the NYS Department of Transportation and NYS Department of Environmental Conservation in particular review and consider this Plan when those agencies undertake a project in Town.
4. Continue to fund annual training for all committee members including Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals members and the Code Enforcement Officer. Especially provide for training on new ideas and concepts proposed in this Plan.
5. Conduct an orientation as new people are elected or appointed and support this by creating a handbook for these officials containing town procedures and policies, organization chart, governance structure, laws, budgets, website, town history and an inventory of plans, maps, and other documents that may be useful.

**(M) TO PROVIDE CONTINUED QUALITY FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES WITHIN THE TOWN.**

1. Consider special incentives such as tax exemptions to support volunteer service. Institute a fire department member volunteer tax incentive as per New York State rules. When allowed by law, consider offering a bonus as an additional incentive for those who are around during the daytime to respond to emergency calls.
2. Establish a committee including representatives from the fire companies, Town officials and interested constituents to meet with service providers to develop methods to improve the attractiveness of volunteer service, notably for fire and emergency services and to facilitate long range emergency services planning. Update the Town's Emergency Plan annually.

3. Update or adopt local laws to provide criteria for proper excavation for fire ponds; installation of hydrants; driveway construction and length, access needs for fire and emergency vehicles; and proper signs for new roads.
4. Encourage 911 address postings for all residences and coordinate, as necessary, with the Austerlitz Fire District.

**(N) TO FOSTER A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AMONG ALL RESIDENTS AND ENHANCE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE TOWN GOVERNMENT AND TOWN RESIDENTS INCLUDING INFORMATION FOR THE PUBLIC ON TOPICS OF COMMUNITY INTEREST AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS.**

1. The Town Board should hold an annual Town Meeting to deliver its “State of the Town” report and to update residents on what has been accomplished, what is planned to be accomplished that year, and to have a discussion on issues of concern to the community.
2. Continue efforts to expand collection of resident email addresses for ongoing email communication to residents and landowners.
3. Consider a periodic Town Board report to the citizens as a newsletter (online or emailed).
4. Expand information on the website (<https://www.austerlitzny.com/>) for all residents. Include information about property taxes in Town and how assessments are made. Of special interest is to inform residents and landowners about their tax bill and the Town’s portion of that bill.
5. Make greater use of local media, for example with press releases and post them on the town’s website.
6. Ensure that new online application for maps (the natural resource inventory maps) is posted and kept up to date. Some maps will need to be changed regularly, such as tax parcels, agricultural districts, and flood maps. Consider funding a GIS mapping specialist to keep maps updated as new data is made available.
7. Ensure that the Planning Board and ZBA have easy access to the online application to effectively use the maps during their project reviews.
8. Post all local laws online in an easily accessible location on the Town website.
9. Build on e-government initiatives such as updating the Town website and use of social media.
10. Consider establishing a community center.

**(O) TO WELCOME PEOPLE HAVING A DIVERSITY OF IDENTITY, BACKGROUNDS, AGE, AND FINANCIAL STATUS.**

1. Maintain non-discriminatory policies for people of diverse identity, backgrounds, age, financial status and other protected groups.

**(P) TO PROTECT THE TAX BASE TO MINIMIZE FUTURE TAX INCREASES.**

1. To address taxes:
  - a. Maintain assessment equity to insure tax equity.
  - b. Maintain a strong Fund balance and Reserves to mitigate against sudden, large tax increases due to unplannable events such as a recession, or from future large scale projects such as building, culvert/bridge replacements, expensive motorized equipment and other large scale capital outlays.

**(Q) TO ACTIVELY SEEK FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES THAT PROMOTE THE GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.**

1. Ensure the Town is registered for the NYS grants.gov page.
2. Appoint a grant committee or seek grant writing consultant assistance to prepare NYS grant applications using the priority projects identified in this plan.
3. Consider applying for a NY Forward grants.
4. Seek grants for stream crossing/road culvert replacements to enhance flood capability and stream crossings for biodiversity improvement.

## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan details many strategies that the Town hopes to implement over the next 5-10 years. Some of these are easier to implement than others. Some can be accomplished in a short amount of time, while others will need long-term or sustained implementation.

To assist the Town Board in focusing on implementation activities, the Plan recommends formation of a Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee (CPIC). This Overall Committee will have sub-committees including ones for zoning updates, aging, housing, and map updates. A Conservation Advisory Committee, and the Climate Smart Communities Task Force, along with the Planning Board and Town Board will also work with the CPIC to facilitate implementation.

The Town should review the list of priority actions identified in this Plan and that are being implemented on an annual basis to determine the status and success of efforts and identify other actions that should be implemented next. Throughout the year, the Town Board should review the status of implementation of the various components of the Plan; and ask for reports from the various groups and committees working on implementation. The Plan should be reviewed and updated as needed every seven years.

The Town Board should appoint a Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee (CPIC) with representation from the Town Board as a first step to coordinate all implementation efforts on behalf of the Town. The Town Board should establish the short and long term priorities for this committee to work on. The CPIC should be further organized with sub-committees by topic outlined below. The CPIC should be established and have a work plan for each of the sub-committees within the first six months after Plan adoption.

The CPIC should further:

- Set expectations for and manage the implementation sub-committees
- Be familiar with how the Town works so that implementation steps are realistic
- Report regularly to the Town Board
- Have a Town Board member as liaison to ensure continuity, coordination, communication and ongoing implementation

The following sub-committees are recommended to facilitate implementation:

1. Create a Zoning Updates Sub-Committee with a scope of Recommendations A1, A2, B3, C2-4, C8, D1a, D2, D4, D5-6, E2-4, F, G1, H1-6, I, J4, K4-5.
2. Create a Conservation Advisory Committee with a scope of Recommendations C2-C8, D1 (except D1a, D8).
3. Continue with the Climate Smart Communities Task Force with a scope of Recommendations in B3, B4, D1b, D7, J10, J11.
4. Create an Aging Sub-Committee with a scope of Recommendation E except E2.

5. Create a Housing Sub-Committee with a scope of Recommendation E2, F.
6. Create an Ad Hoc Committee with a scope of Recommendation G, K, M, N and O.
7. Assist the Planning Board with training and necessary hardware to effectively use the Town NRI maps as needed in project review related to Recommendation C1.
8. The Town Board should be responsible for Recommendations B1, B2, C5-7, D3, E1, E5-7, G2-4, H7, J3, J5-9, K1-3, K6-8, L, M1-4, N, O, P, and Q.
9. Create a Map Committee and/or contract with a GIS specialist to keep maps current.
10. The Highway Superintendent should be responsible for Recommendation J1

#### KEEPING THE PLAN CURRENT

**The Town Board should update this Plan every seven years.** New York State Town Law 272-a, which authorizes the Town to adopt a comprehensive plan, also states that the “Town Board shall provide, as a component of such proposed comprehensive plan, the maximum intervals at which the adopted plan shall be reviewed.” It is recommended that the Town conducts this review and updates the plan as needed to ensure that it remains a useful document to continue to guide decision making in Austerlitz.

Further, the Town should review the list of priority actions identified in this Plan and that are being implemented on an annual basis to determine the status of efforts, as well as to identify other actions that should be implemented next. The Town should regularly evaluate and report to the community on implementation progress and adjust the plan as necessary based on the current events in Austerlitz.

At its annual reorganization meeting, or shortly after, the Town Board should review the status of implementation of the various components of the Plan; and ask for reports from the various groups and committees working on implementation so that Board members continue to understand concerns and issues that have arisen during the past year that may need to be addressed in updates to the Plan, local laws or regulatory action, or other programs. The Town Board review should be focused on reviewing the action plan, identifying goals reached, retiring completed ones from the action list, and adding new ones.

## COORDINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS

It is critical that the local government works closely with others to solve problems. This includes organizations, agencies, and individuals within the Town, but also with those in the broader region. It will be critical to forge strong partnerships to implement each step of this Plan.

These partners include the following:

- Area businesses and employers
- Area cultural venues, artists, and museums
- Columbia County Departments and Columbia County Board of Supervisors
- Civic Association(s)
- Historic societies
- New York State DEC and other State agencies
- Town boards and committees (Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee, Planning Board, ZBA, Climate Smart Committee, Building Department, Highway, New Committees as may be formed)
- Town historian
- Community-based non-profit organizations that serve the Town
- Regional entities such as the Columbia Land Conservancy, American Farmland Trust, Hudson Housing Authority (and similar)