

TOWN OF AUSTERLITZ COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REPORT SUPPLEMENTS: PART 3 Profile and Inventory **March 2024**

PART 3 - HISTORY AND CURRENT PROFILE AND INVENTORY OF RESOURCES

LOCAL HISTORY

The following description of Town History is from Tom Moreland.

Native Americans were present in what is now Columbia County for thousands of years before contact with Europeans. At the time of contact the Mohican homeland ranged from roughly the Hudson to the Housatonic Rivers. However, no Mohican settlements are known ever to have been within what is now Austerlitz. The Mohicans surely hunted in this area. Indeed, some 30 years ago pottery shards were found under a rock ledge, about two miles from Reed Road and Route 203, which were identified by the NYS Museum as Mohican, 600 to 800 years old. For a history of the Mohicans, from their beginnings to their current location in Wisconsin, as the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians, see their website: <https://mohican.com/brief-history>.

European settlement of the Austerlitz area may have started soon after the end of King George's War in 1748. But settlement in numbers began after some 75 heads of family purchased, for 230 pounds in New York currency, from two Mohican representatives in 1756 some 20,725.5 acres, including most of today's Austerlitz. This deed was authorized by the Massachusetts Bay colony, which claimed the territory.

Twelve of the 75 deed grantees were Spencers, and thus the name Spencers Town. The actual settlers – some deed grantees but many purchasers from them – formed the Spencers Town Proprietorship, a common form of New England government. But by about 1772 it was agreed that the area was in New York, not Massachusetts. Thus ended the proprietorship and also any title derived from the Massachusetts Mohican deed. Instead, the settlers found themselves condemned and sometimes harassed as illegal squatters by the Van Rensselaers, who had received from the Dutch and then the English crown, a patent to a vast area in Albany County. The settlers and their descendants did not obtain clear title to the land they occupied until i) 1793 for the northern part of today's Austerlitz, pursuant to State legislation, and ii) 1803-04 for the rest of the area, pursuant to a settlement negotiated by founding Father Alexander Hamilton, a Van Rensselaar attorney (and also in-law). In 1772, Albany County was divided into districts, which became towns in 1788. This area initially was within the Claverack district, save for a northern strip in the King's District (later renamed Canaan). In 1782 most of this area became part of Hillsdale, formed from the eastern part of Claverack. In 1795 the Town of Chatham was created, and it included the northwestern part of today's Austerlitz, centered around the intersection later called Morehouse Corners (Routes 9 and 203).

In 1818 Austerlitz was formed from parts of Hillsdale, Canaan and Chatham. Lore has it that Martin Van Buren, then in the State Legislature, sought to commemorate the Napoleonic victory he admired at Austerlitz. .

Economy of Early Austerlitz

As in the settlement of most 18th-century towns, the proprietors originally came here because the Green River and the Punsit afforded good sites for mills. The first mills established were the basic grist and sawmills. By 1820, when Austerlitz reached its all-time population high of 2,355 people, there were three gristmills, four sawmills, four fulling mills, three carding machines and one distillery. Added

in the 19th century were a plaster mill, shingle mills, a plane-making mill, and from 1826 to about 1858, an iron forge, the “Spencertown Furnace” turning out plows and stoves. In the mid-to-late 19th century, colliers produced charcoal for the furnaces at Richmond and Van Deusenville in Massachusetts and Chatham.

Because of the geology and topography, much of the mid-to late 19th-century technology bypassed Austerlitz. It was too hilly for a railroad and steam power in any quantity. Conditions were not advantageous for the installation of turbines on the streams, a few of the old-fashioned waterwheels were converted to steam power and persisted into the early 20th century, particularly as grist- and sawmills.

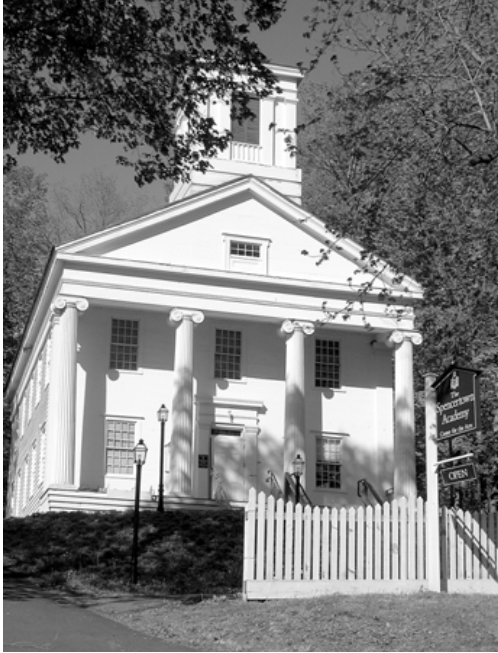
By the late 19th century, railroads started the milk trains to New York City. Farmers brought their butter and milk on a daily basis to Harlemville and Hillsdale. Hay was pressed and taken to the Hudson River to the hay barges bound for New York City. Dairy farming grew so large that a cheese factory was constructed in Harlemville and a creamery in Spencertown in the 20th century. Another cash crop was honey, and, of course, eggs. In the 20th century, there was a large poultry farm on Harvey Mountain Road, destroyed by fire in 1950. Today the farms are gone, but a few modest horticulture businesses remain, primarily producing vegetables, and raising cattle.

By the last quarter of the 19th century, second-home ownership that had sprung up in western Massachusetts Served mostly by the Chatham Railroad station, where four lines converged, several houses became summer boardinghouses in the 20th century. People, most famously, poet Edna St. Vincent Millay. and her husband, Eugen Boissevain, moved here permanently. A number of visual and print artists, artisans and writers now live here.

Beginning as early as the 1890s and, perhaps, even earlier, people started commuting from Chatham to Albany on the railroad. Frequently, state government employees would spend the workweek in Albany returning to Austerlitz on the weekends. Later the automobile enabled Austerlitz residents to travel to Massachusetts, including the Ghent General Electric plant in Pittsfield. Today some commute to the Albany area while others commute two-three times a week to New York City.

Education in Early Austerlitz

In 1818, 17 school districts existed in the new town. Each school provided a basic education from the 1st to the 8th grade, governed by a board of trustees usually composed of parents of the pupils. Their responsibilities for the physical plant involved building the school and maintaining it and paying the teacher and buying supplies. As the town’s population declined after the Civil War, districts were consolidated. Only five were left by 1900, and they were all gone by 1955, consolidated with the Chatham or Hillsdale central districts. The Spencertown school in the academy building carried on, as an elementary school in Chatham Central, until closing in 1970.



Beyond 8th grade, there were two academies. Rev. Timothy Woodbridge, pastor of the Congregational church in Green River (now Austerlitz hamlet) since 1816, started the earlier one next to the church, in 1817. In 1842, he moved to St. Peter's and founded the Spencertown Academy in 1847. Both of these academies were private charging modest tuition but functioned much like public high schools (which did not exist as such at this time). Spencertown Academy attracted a somewhat international reputation, with a few students attending from abroad. Free public schools were introduced around 1867, and the Academy became the Spencertown public school in 1871.

Churches and Public Buildings

At various times, there have been at least five churches in the Town. In 1771, the meeting house in Spencertown was erected. It later became the Congregational Church, and in 1827 a Presbyterian Church as St. Peter's in 1827. In 1792, the Congregational Church of Green River was formed at the corner of what became East Hill and SR 22. It lasted until the early 20th century.



Early on, a Baptist church was built on Macedonia Road near the junction of Stonewall Road. A cemetery is located adjacent. In 1836, the Methodist Episcopal Church was built in Spencertown. In 1853, the Christian Church was built in Green River, by then "Austerlitz". Since 1896, at different times, the Austerlitz Grange used both of the hotels in Spencertown as its headquarters before purchasing the Methodist Church in 1953. In the 1970s, with a declining membership, the Grange dissolved. The building has been converted into the new Town Hall through funding provided by the Ellsworth Kelly Foundation.



The only church in Town which has survived as such is St. Peter's. At first, and for many years, it played the meetinghouse role hosting town board meetings and a variety of quasi-public functions until the Spencertown Academy was built in 1847 and took over the role for the private groups. By mid-19th century, various theater productions, singing and dancing lessons, lectures and benefits occurred at the Spencertown Academy in the evening after school hours. After the Academy closed as a

school in 1970, ownership was transferred to the Town. In 1972, local residents interested in preserving the building formed the Spencertown Academy Society, Inc., as a not for profit organization to serve as an arts center for the community. The Spencertown Academy Society operates the Academy

facility under a long-term lease from the Town, attracting audiences for its programs from around the region.

In the 1990s, the Austerlitz Historical Society, founded in 1988, began developing on Route 22 its “Old Austerlitz” campus, with reassembled vintage buildings from the area and the former Christian Church and one-room schoolhouse. With “Old Austerlitz,” the Millay Colony for the Arts, “Steepletop” (the Millay) home and grounds), the Spencertown Academy and St. Peter’s Church, the Town of Austerlitz has a solid core of buildings and events that are attractive for residents and visitors to the area.

Historical Buildings and House Sites

Many historical buildings in Town date from the 18th and 19th centuries, some 15 graced with historic markers. . The oldest on the National Register of Historic Places, is the O'Connell house at 866 Route 203 in Spencertown, which demonstrates unique, possibly 1760s, construction. The Spencertown Academy and St. Peter's Church, and the Baldwin House on Dugway, are on the State and National Registers. “Steepletop” is a registered National Historic Landmark. The Taconic State Parkway, a National Register Eligible site, is a historic roadway. Several 18th century and early 19th-century, Federal houses grace the road frontage. The 20th century also saw the construction of many bungalows and houses in the ranch, Cape Cod, Colonial Revival and postmodern styles. Some 168 buildings pre-dating 1888 are profiled in the book *The Old Houses of Austerlitz, The history and early architecture of a Rural New York Town* (Aust. Hist. Society, 2018). The book has an analysis of local architectural styles, individual histories of each of the surviving pre-1888 buildings, and numerous sidebars on various aspects of the Town history.



St. Peter's

Spencertown and Austerlitz Fire Companies

The Spencertown Fire Company was organized and chartered in 1917 and the Austerlitz Volunteer Fire Company followed in the mid '50s after a false start before WWII. The Green River Fire Company covered portions of Austerlitz prior to 1952, and Spencertown had various forms of volunteer coverage before becoming chartered. Coverage was limited to fires and automobile accidents up to the mid-eighties when Spencertown established a Certified First Responder unit and began to assist rescue squads throughout the town on emergency medical calls. In 1986 the Town Board adopted and began to enforce the New York State Fire Prevention and Building Code. The enactment of this Code has resulted in substantially fewer fires in the town. The Austerlitz Board of Fire Commissioners is the governing entity that regulates volunteer fire and first responder services in the town and provides operating funds that are raised via fire district taxes assessed upon property owners. The Board is made up of five members elected by the Town's registered voters. The elections have traditionally been characterized by a low turnout, and the Board members have generally been active volunteer firefighters."

AUSTERLITZ IN 2023 - PROFILE AND INVENTORY OF RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive plan's foundation is based on information. This part of the updated Plan assembles information about the Town and contains the most up-to-date information available from local, county, state and federal sources. Much of this information was collected by the local Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee members and augmented by the Town's consultant.

This profile provides an introduction to the many resources in the Town of Austerlitz and summarizes the physical, economic and social character and trends that have occurred in the community. This section also includes comprehensive mapping and description of the natural resources in Austerlitz.

CULTURAL, RECREATIONAL, AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

PARKS, PLAYGROUNDS, AND TRAILS

- Spencertown Park / (Harry Beuchert) Playground located near the Spencertown Academy in the hamlet of Spencertown on Route 203 includes swings, climbing structures, an updated tennis court, and an updated pavilion where meetings or picnics are held. The Town intends to update the ball field in the near future. Spencertown Park includes limited parking for the park as well as the Spencertown Academy. (Harry Beuchert was a respected neighbor who provided funds for the purchase of the Town park.)
- The Green in Spencertown. A green space between the Town Hall and St. Peter's Church.
- Austerlitz Park – On West Hill Road near Route 22 in the Hamlet of Austerlitz, rough walking paths exist but more work needs to be done to be a functional park, e.g., better walking paths, signage, better parking, perhaps a gazebo or play equipment for children.

The Town owns and maintains the land occupied by both hamlet parks, as well as the equipment at Spencertown Park. There is no equipment yet at located at the Austerlitz Park. Improvement noted for the future of these parks include:

- Possible need for an updated war memorial on The Green
- More planning regarding safety, adequacy and governing of the parking by The Green, which is available for use including by the Spencertown Academy, St Peter's Church, the Town Hall, The Austerlitz History Center and events held on The Green.

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

- Austerlitz History Center housed in the former Town Hall. This was designed and maintained by the current Town Historian, Tom Moreland. The Town owns the site and is responsible for it. Long-term, the plan is for the center to be refreshed periodically with new exhibits, and to coincide with events within the Town.

- Old Austerlitz. This is an aggregation of historic buildings on Route 22, and the site for many events since its founding. The Austerlitz Historical Society oversees the buildings and grounds and plans events that occur there. See more information below.
- There is a small, informal lending library (part of the Little Free Library movement across the United States) located at the base of Beale Road. This is available for residents to take or leave books there free.

YOUTH PROGRAMS

The Summer Youth Program is offered every year for a six week period in July and August, Monday through Friday, for children aged from Kindergarten to age 13. This Town-sponsored program is available for Town of Austerlitz residents as well as nonresidents (for a higher fee). The program includes arts and crafts programs at Spencertown Park, lunch, and then swimming/swim lessons at Fox Hill. In 2022, this program served 35 children although the program has had up to 100 participants in the past. The program has a paid coordinator, and several counselors and lifeguards are hired for the seasonal program.

HISTORIC SITES AND DISTRICTS

- St. Peter's Presbyterian Church, on The Green in Spencertown – a 250+ year old clapboard structure (Friends of St. Peter's have a nice short history of the church that Tom Moreland wrote, can be summarized). <https://saintpeterspc.org>

There are a few cemeteries in Town, notably one adjacent to St Peter's Church in Spencertown and which dates from 1761.

- Old Austerlitz (including a historic former church and schoolhouse directly across the main grounds on Rt 22). From their website: "Old Austerlitz is a museum of historic homes and buildings from the 18th and 19th centuries in the beautiful Green River Valley of Columbia County, NY." <https://oldausterlitz.org>
- Steepletop: Home of Pulitzer Prize winning poet Edna St. Vincent Millay, and a National Historic Landmark. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steepletop> <https://millay.org>
- Spencertown Academy, erected in 1847. <https://Spencertownacademy.org> From the academy website: "Entrusted with the care and preservation of a cherished historic landmark, the Spencertown Academy Arts Center is dedicated to building community through the arts, supporting education for all ages, and providing a welcoming space for presentations in the arts and humanities for Columbia County and its neighbors." The building is owned by the Town, which has leased it to the Spencertown Academy Society, a not-for-profit organization.
- Spencertown Historic District. This area, listed on the State and National Register of Historic Places, was established in 2018. The Spencertown Historic District encompasses the entire

historic hamlet of that name in the Town of Austerlitz, which is located on the eastern side of Columbia County at the border of New York State and Massachusetts.

The historic district contains 67 properties, of which 40 can be documented from an 1888 map of the hamlet and are pivotal to its significance. The majority of the historic properties are domestic in function, although the district includes churches, a school, stores and a cemetery. The earliest dwellings are associated with the Town's first settlers and were designed in the traditional New England manner with center-chimney plans. Limited 20th-century construction has occurred within the district area.

- Austerlitz Historic District. The Austerlitz Historic District is located in a hamlet and a Town of the same name along the eastern boundary of Columbia County, which is also the border between New York State and Massachusetts. It is situated between the Taconic and Berkshire mountain ranges on the west and east, respectively, and contains the Green River, which is part of the Housatonic River watershed.

The historic district contains 37 properties, of which 23 can be documented in an 1888 map of the hamlet and are pivotal to its significance. The majority of historic properties are domestic in function, although the district also includes a church, hotel, schoolhouse, blacksmith shop and two cemeteries. Construction dates of the cited contributing buildings range from the late 18th-century to 1870 and generally reflect the architecture of southwestern New England from whence Austerlitz families came. The earliest dwellings are associated with the Town's settlers and were designed in the traditional New England manner with center-chimneys, hall-parlor plans with kitchens behind the chimney or in wings. Nearly all are story and-a-half, gable roofed forms consistent with the Town's modest, rural economy.

- Various homes and other sites are registered on state/national Register of Historic Places.⁵ This includes:
 - The Danial and Clarissa Baldwin House in Spencertown.
 - St Peter's Presbyterian Church and Spencertown Cemetery
 - Steepletop: Home of Edna St. Vincent Millay
 - Taconic State Parkway

DESIGNATED SCENIC AREAS, VISTAS, OR BYWAYS

- The Taconic State Parkway runs through Austerlitz and is a New York State designated Scenic Highway (1992). It is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

⁵ https://data.ny.gov/Recreation/National-Register-of-Historic-Places/iisn-hnyv/explore/query/SELECT%0A%20%20%60resource_name%60%2C%0A%20%20%60county%60%2C%0A%20%20%60national_register_date%60%2C%0A%20%20%60sphinx_number%60%2C%0A%20%20%60x%60%2C%0A%20%20%60y%60%2C%0A%20%20%60georeference%60%2C%0A%20%20%60%3A%40computed_region_yamh_8v7k%60%2C%0A%20%20%60%3A%40computed_region_wbg7_3whc%60%2C%0A%20%20%60%3A%40computed_region_kjdx_g34t%60%0A%20%60county%60%20IN%20%28%27Columbia%27%29/page/filter_and_https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Register_of_Historic_Places_listings_in_Columbia_County,_New_York

- The Town has many scenic aspects. Among them is Harvey Mountain on the eastern edge of town. The peak (open to the public since it became part of a State Forest in 1999) offers a dramatic vista west across the Hudson Valley to the Catskill escarpment, north as far as Albany, and south as far as the Catamount ski area. There are numerous smaller scenic views in Austerlitz, including the Punsit Creek and Green River valleys, which are bordered much of the way by steep wooded ridges. The valleys of the Ten Broeck and Indian Creeks feature rolling hills and old farms interspersed with new housing.

VOLUNTEER AND NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

- Land Trusts – Harris Conservation Area is protected by the Columbia Land Conservancy
 - <https://clctrust.org/public-conservation-areas/harris/> and
 - <https://www.google.com/maps/place/harris+conservation+area/@42.335818,-73.509237,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x0:0x35f49c3c6b36dff4!8m2!3d42.335818!4d-73.509237>
- State Forests – Beebe Hill and Harvey Mountain State Forests.
<https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/66460.html>, including the NYS Beebe Hill old Fire Tower complex & trail.
- Historic preservation organizations- Austerlitz Historical Society (<https://oldausterlitz.org>) and Friends Of Historic St. Peter’s Church, Inc. (<https://www.friendsofsaintpeters.org>)
- Watershed protection organizations – Austerlitz is part of the Agawamuck Watershed. <https://pb-inc.squarespace.com/watershed-management-plan-lw/>
- Sportsmen’s clubs – Austerlitz Club (hunting & peasant farm)
- Town of Austerlitz has a Climate Smart Committee <https://austerlitzclimateaction.org>
- Town of Austerlitz Comprehensive Plan Oversight Committee, charged with making recommendations to the Town Board regarding goals and objectives contained in the original Comprehensive Plan.
- Arts:
 - Spencertown Academy Arts Center – <https://spencertownacademy.org>
 - Millay Colony for the Arts (an artist in residence facility) – <https://www.millayarts.org>
 - Steepletop which was the home of Edna St Vincent Millay - <https://millay.org>
 - Ellsworth Kelley Foundation <https://ellsworthkelly.org/foundation/>

- Emergency Services Groups
 - Spencertown and Austerlitz Fire Companies (volunteer firefighting)
 - Spencertown Fire Company Auxiliary (volunteer non firefighting)
- Friends of Historic St Peter’s Church <https://www.friendsofsaintpeters.org>
- Animal Support:
 - Emily Eckstrom Equine Foundation, which offers equine educational scholarships [http://emilyeckstrom.org, located Angell Hill Rd.]
 - Lucky Wildlife Rehabilitation Center – <https://www.facebook.com/luckyrehab/> From their Face Book page: “Lucky Rehabilitation Center (LRC) is a small, privately funded organization in Spencertown, NY dedicated to the care and rehabilitation of injured, orphaned or sick wildlife, with the express intent to release the wildlife back into the wild.”

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

TOWN

- Town building locations include:
 - Town Hall 816 State Route 203,
 - Austerlitz History Center 812 State Route 203,
 - Austerlitz Town Garage 714 State Route 203 Spencertown NY 12165
- Town employees, seasonal employees: There are 6 full time employees – all with the Highway Department, four part time employees – the Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk, The Code Enforcement Office/Building Inspector, and the Assessor. Most of all other paid “employees” belong to the Town Board, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Board of Assessment Review, Animal Control and the Town Court. Other positions that are not paid include the Comprehensive Plan Oversight Committee, the Town’s Climate Smart Committee (except its Coordinator), and the Town representative to the Columbia County Environmental Management Council.
- Town storage facilities. The Town Highway Garage is the main storage facility for Highway Department equipment. The Town Salt Shed stores salt and sand for the winter months. The Town Hall has storage related to operations of the Town Board, Town operations and the Town court.
- General description of Highway Department: NOTE: the Town Highway Dept maintains only Town roads. The County Highway Dept & NYS DOT maintain county roads and state roads within the Town.

Town of Austerlitz Comprehensive Plan – Draft March 18 2024

- Miles of Town Roads: Approximately 60 miles of roads owned and maintained by the town. There are approximately 50 miles of dirt/gravel roads and 10 miles of paved roads.
- Annual Town Budget - about \$1.8 million for FY 2023; Approximately 37.5% of the Town budget is funded by property taxes. Other major sources of Town revenue include sales tax, mortgage tax, fines and forfeitures, fees from building permits, and state aid for our roads (CHIPS funding). Sales and mortgage taxes are paid to the county and then redistributed to the Towns throughout the County.
- The Town has no formal Capital Improvement Plan.
- Major Town projects that have recently been completed, are underway, or planned in the near future include:
 - New/Renovated Town Hall
 - Renovated Town History Center (old Town Hall)
 - New Salt Shed
 - Climate-related infrastructure: Electric Vehicle Charging Station, Solar Panels on Highway Garage Roof, LED Street Lights
 - Upgraded Spencertown Park facilities (e.g., new Pavilion, Tennis Court)
 - Austerlitz Town Park upgrades (in progress)
 - Significant investment has been made in motorized highway equipment (e.g., new trucks, road grader, excavator, bucket loader, skid steer)
 - Major Town culverts (a.k.a bridges) have been renovated .
- Areas of concern identified by the Highway Department identified as needing to be addressed include:
 - Formal road plans: Road condition and paving vs dirt has been a bone of contention for many years. Many residents want more roads paved and have questions about whether there is a process in place to choose which dirt road (entire or section) is to be paved. What is the plan(s) for paving roads in the future? Concerns have been raised about how dangerous ditches are to be addressed.
 - Austerlitz Park completed
 - Spencertown Park ball field upgraded
 - Parking in Spencertown
- FEMA has provided funding to fix infrastructure around some major streams. Otherwise, there are no other flooding issues at this time.
- There are several formal agreements with other municipalities, County, or State: Austerlitz Fire District has a Mutual Aid agreement with adjacent Towns, Chatham Rescue for ambulance services, Columbia County Sheriff's Office for police services, an agreement with Colombia County for IT shared services if needed, and the Red Rock Fire Company for fire services to a northern part of the Town.
- Informal shared services with other municipalities, County, or State includes cooperation between highway departments of adjacent Towns. The Austerlitz Fire District is an independent organization providing fire protection for the Town.

COUNTY

- There are many culverts/bridges owned by the county and state. Mainly, the County is responsible for Routes 5, 7 and 9, while the state is responsible for Rt 203, Rt 22 and the Taconic State Parkway. A major bridge on Rt 7 is planned to be repaired or replaced by the County.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES

WATER/SEWER

- There are no public water or sewer facilities in Town.
- There is a Source Water Protection Plan for Austerlitz prepared by the New York Rural Water Association in 2011. No issues were identified related to water quality. However, limited water availability may affect the density that is sustainable in the hamlet of Spencertown. Additionally, there are possible sulfur conditions in the hamlet of Spencertown. There is a water resource inventory that can be found on Columbia County NRI (<https://sites.google.com/columbiacountyny.com/emc/natural-resource-inventory-nri?authuser=0>).
- The Hamlet of Spencertown is commonly believed to have poor water pressure.
- Water and sewer facilities may be unrealistic for the hamlets of Spencertown & Austerlitz as the cost may outweigh the benefit unless significant building happens in these areas. The Town's natural environment may benefit from individual/engineered water and/or sewer systems for future large private developments (if any) on a parcel by parcel basis.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

911

- County Sheriff
- State Police

FIRE PROTECTION AND RESCUE SQUAD

- The County 911 Dept provides 911 service for both hard line and cell phones when calling from within the Town/county.
- Both the Sheriff & NY State Police provide routine police patrols for all areas of Columbia Co. NYS law allows the Sheriff to contract with municipalities for police services above and beyond what is routinely provided. The Sheriff's Enhanced Enforcement Patrol (the Town has participated) allows for a municipality to pay for a Sheriff's patrol to be assigned for specific periods and duties (traffic enforcement, police patrols of specific areas of concern,

etc.) and pay only a set fee. Some municipalities use this program for traffic enforcement on the Taconic State Parkway and other Town and county roads where there are traffic problems (speed, distracted driving, disobeying traffic control devices, etc.). Ticketing NYS traffic law violators during these patrol periods may provide additional revenue for the Town. For a municipality, the Enhanced Enforcement Patrol is similar to having its own “police dept” without the overhead costs (insurance, benefits, training, vehicle maintenance, liability, etc.).

- Court Security – The Town court contracts with the Sheriff for court security.
- Chatham Rescue Squad is contracted by the Town to provide Emergency Medical Services. There are a statewide recruiting and retention challenges associated with hiring paid paramedics and EMTs. The same is so for medical care facilities (e.g., Columbia Memorial Health) re; nurses & technicians. Active firefighters with the fire district are CPR/AED trained and equipped and usually dispatched to “Echo Level” emergency calls, ex - cardiac arrest/unresponsive & not breathing).
- The Austerlitz Fire District is an independent government entity that provides fire protection for the Town. Pursuant to NYS Town Law, each year the fire district sets a fire protection budget, collects fire protection taxes and appoints a fire chief and two assistant fire chiefs. The fire district pays for all firefighting equipment and training and contracts with the (private, non-profit) Spencertown & Austerlitz Fire Companies who provide active firefighters, building space and limited maintenance for fire district firefighting apparatus & equipment.

There is currently a statewide, County and local problem associated with recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. One problem specific to Spencertown/Austerlitz is the declining number of young(er) people living in the Town who may consider volunteering. Older volunteer firefighters are needed and certainly valued for many functions however, the training and physical agility required for interior firefighting operations using SCBA (Self Contained Breathing Apparatus) is determined by a stringent physical examination. Most volunteer firefighters older than 50 or 60 years old are not able to conduct interior firefighting duties, and more young volunteers are needed.

- The Austerlitz Fire District contracts with the Red Rock Fire District to provide fire services in a small portion of northern Austerlitz.
- Emergency Preparation & Management – The Town has an emergency plan that must be updated at least annually to allow for continual Town operations/services and important interaction with county, state and federal resources in the event of a man made or natural disaster. The Town participates in the county Hazard Mitigation Grant Program provided by the NYS Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Services and FEMA.
- The Fire Chief/Fire District has fire protection input in the planning approval process for developments related to infrastructure such as dry hydrants, turnaround locations, and others. During the planning and approval process, concerns arise as to emergency access and water supplies to homes having very long driveways.

SOLID WASTE

- There are three Solid Waste Facilities within approximately 10 miles of most locations in Town. These are:
 - The Chatham Transfer Station (owned/operated by Columbia Co) – NYS Rte. 295 Chatham, NY
 - The Canaan Transfer Station (privately owned/operated) - NYS Rte. 22 Canaan, NY
 - The Hillsdale Transfer Station (owned/operated by Columbia Co) - NYS Rte. 22 Hillsdale, NY.
- There are at least three known (private) residential waste pick up companies who provide services to the Town. Several private (& Columbia Co Solid Waste Dept) provide waste container (dumpster) services. Columbia County now charges an annual fee for bringing recyclable items to their Transfer Stations.

UTILITIES

- Cell Phone - Due to its topography, cell service is limited in some areas of the Town no matter what service provider is used.
- Land line phone service is provided by Consolidated Communications.
- Electricity is provided by NYSEG. Although service has improved, there are occurrences of power outages due to weather and traffic accidents that can be significant in some areas of the Town, especially the RT 22 corridor.
- Cable/Satellite TV service: There are areas of the Town that have no cable availability by copper and/or fiber wire. Charter/Spectrum provides wire/fiber cable service for some areas in the Town.
- Broadband Service – As of 2022, there is a project within the town to bring broadband to every residence. Before then, there were many areas of the Town that had no or very limited/slow broadband service. As of 2020, the FCC describes Broadband as reliable high-speed internet. The current definition set by the FCC is speeds of 25 megabits per second for downloads and 3 megabits per second for uploads. Many areas of the Town were limited to DSL phone service from Consolidated Communications and were unreliable with speeds so slow it does not support streaming or home business needs. Although broadband is not yet available throughout the Town, a project is underway to bring broadband to the entire Town.
- There is no natural gas availability in the Town and no plans for future availability. Propane and fuel oil is provided by truck delivery from several providers.
- FCC Registered Broadcast Land Mobile Towers include a 43 m used by the New York State Police and one on West Hill Road to River Valley Radio, Inc.
- There are 5 FCC Registered Microwave Towers, all on West Hill Road.

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- There are also 20 FCC Registered Antennas, and 5 FCC registered amateur radio licenses in Town.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS

- Chatham Central School District (public school)
- Taconic Hills Central School District (public school)
- Hawthorne Valley & Darrow schools (private) within Columbia County. Various other out of county private schools within 35 miles – a total list is on the Town website (www.Austerlitzny.com).
- Some children are home schooled.
- Some children in Town received schooling at Berkshire Country Day School

EVENTS/COMMUNITY FUNCTIONS

- Spencertown Academy Arts Center in addition to the art gallery there are various fundraisers throughout the year; including revels -a cocktail party at the academy followed by a moveable feast, a garden tour including a market on the green and topical speaker; the festival of books, a 3-day event focused on books and reading over labor day weekend, including book sales, children’s programming and author talks.
- Austerlitz Historical Society – Blueberry Festival on last weekend in July – including pancake breakfast and historic crafts, vendors and music; Holiday Open House – grounds decorated for the season, tours
- Spencertown Fire Company – annual BBQ in August / fundraiser
- Austerlitz Fire Company – antique car show / fundraiser
- Friends of St. Peter’s – usually various fundraisers, including community dinners or craft sales at the Church <https://www.friendsofsaintpeters.org>
- Town of Austerlitz Christmas Tree Lighting
- Annual Memorial Day service by the VFW/American Legion at the Medal of Honor (Town resident) recipient & military war service memorials at the Town Green.
- Annual election day dinner by St Peters Church.

OTHER TOWN AND REGIONAL STUDIES COMPLETED

Several other evaluations, plans or studies have been done in and around Austerlitz that add to the information about the community and its resources. These include:

- 2020 Austerlitz Culvert Inventory
- 2020 Columbia County Housing Brief
- 2019-2020 Road Stream Crossing Management Plan
- 2018 Natural Resources Inventory – Columbia County
- 2013 Columbia County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan
- 2011 Austerlitz Source Water Protection Plan
- Columbia County Broadband Map

SUMMARY OF KEY DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS AND CHANGES IN THE TOWN

There have been changes in the make-up of the community. These trends will influence housing, needed services, local schools, and services needed in Town. In summary, significant changes in the Town include:

- An increase in population
- An aging population
- A decreasing household size
- An increase in the number of households (25%)
- An increase in the number of housing units (the number of housing units increased at a higher percentage than the population)
- An increase in the number of occupied houses
- An increase in the number of owner-occupied housing
- A decrease in the number of rental houses (for long-term rentals)
- A decrease in the number of vacant houses
- An increase in those residents on public assistance and with income below the poverty line
- An increase in households with retirement income
- An increase in rental prices
- An increase in median value of home (This is higher than surrounding towns and Columbia County)
- Few 2+ homes – almost all single family homes
- Housing costs are high, and all measurements of this indicate unaffordable housing for those with average incomes

TOWN OF AUSTERLITZ POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS

Between 2000 and 2021, the following demographic changes have occurred in Austerlitz:

- There has been an increase in population of 11.8% between 2000 to 2021 (1453 people to 1625 people)
- The number of households increased 26% between 2000 and 2021 (620 households to 781 households).
- The population is aging, with 703 people (42%) over the age of 65.
- The number of housing units increased from 906 in 2000 to 1064 in 2021.
- There are fewer owner-occupied housing units and more renter occupied units.
- The racial makeup of the town is 97% White, less than 1% African American, 0.0% Native American, 3.0% from other races, and 2.6% from two or more races. 2.1% of the population is Hispanic ethnicity.
- In 2020 there were 778 households, out of which 98 have children under the age of 18 living with them, 85.7% were married couples living together, 23 had a female householder with no husband present, and 330 were non-families (individuals living together not related by blood or marriage). 142 of all households were made up of individuals while 71.3% had someone living alone who was 60 years of age or older. The average household size in 2020 was 2.10 and the average family size was 2.68. There were 448 families.
- The Town's population is aging. The largest change in the age-makeup of Town residents was in the category of those under five years old. Austerlitz had the largest decrease in those very youngest residents compared to all of Columbia County: the numbers in that age category went from 5.3% of the total population in 2010 to 2.5% in 2020. This represents a drop of 2.8% of children under the age of five (5) over 10 years.
- Only 14.8% of people in Austerlitz were aged 0 – 19. The rest of the town age structure was 4.8% aged 20 – 24; 5.7 % aged from 25 to 34; 7.2% aged 35 to 44; 10.5.% aged 45 to 54; 4.3% aged 55 to 59; 8.8% aged 60 to 64, 44.0% are 65 years of age or older, and 4.1 aged 80 years and older. There has been a large increase in the number of residents aged 65+ in recent years (see Chart 1). The median age in 2020 was 61.9 years.
- The median income for a household in the Town was estimated to be \$ \$65,577 in 2020, and the median income for a family was \$94,583. (A household refers to all the people who occupy a housing unit while a family is a group of two or more people related by birth, marriage or adoption living in the same housing unit.) Males living alone had a median income of \$39,583 versus \$24,234 for females living alone. Median earnings for full-time, year-round workers with earnings was \$54,583. Per capita income for the Town was \$44,645. 6.6% of the population in Town and 4.2% of families were living below the federally identified poverty line. Out of the total population, 18.4% of those under the age of 18 and 0.4% of those 65 and older are living below the poverty line in 2020.

POPULATION CHANGES IN AUSTERLITZ

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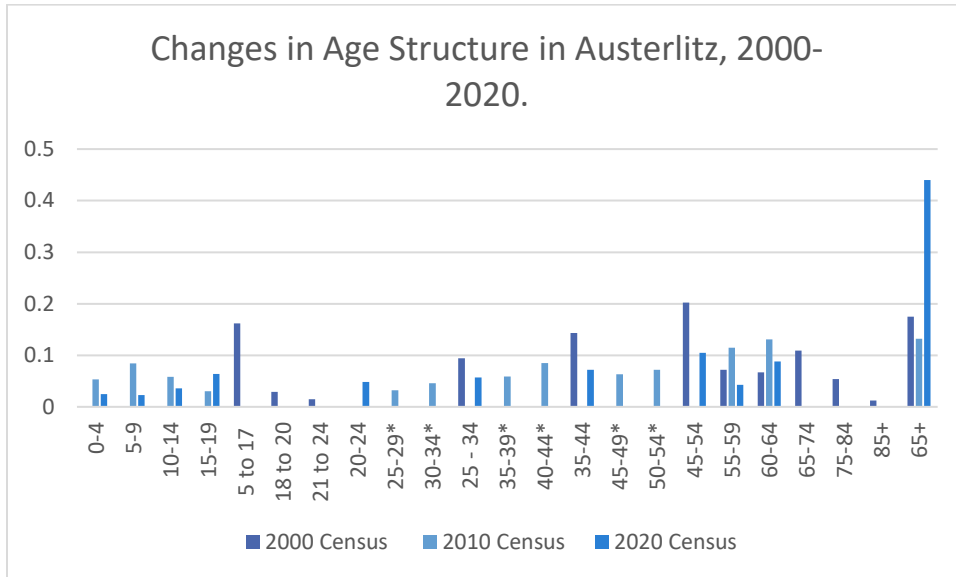
There have been population shifts in Austerlitz. The tables and charts below show that the Town of Austerlitz has a growing middle-aged and elderly population and a declining youth population.

In 2000, Austerlitz had a median age of 46.1. 20.4% of the population was under age 18; 4.4% were 18-24; 23.7% were aged from 25 to 44; 34.1% from 45 to 64, and 17.5 were 65+ years or older. By 2010, the median age was slightly higher at 46.4 years; and 25.6% of the population were children under 18 years. A decrease in young adults is seen with 3.2% of the population aged between 25 and 29. 4.6% were aged 30 to 34; 5.9% were aged 35 – 39; and 8.5% were aged 40 to 44. Approximately 6.3% of the town population were aged 45 – 49 and 7.2% were aged 50 to 54. The 2010 population was 6.3% ages 55-60, and 7.2% 60 to 65, and 13.2% were over the age of 65.

In 2020 the town population was 1625 people (a 1.8% decrease from 2010) and 14.8% of the population aged 19 and under; 4.8% were aged 20-24; 5.7% were 25 to 34; 7.2% were 35 to 44 years; 10.5% were ages 45 to 54; 13.1% were aged 55-64 years. In addition, the population is quite elderly with 44% who are 65 years of age or older.

The large “bubble” of people currently in this last category will form an even larger increase in senior citizens in the next decade. The Town’s population aged over 65 years is significantly higher than that of Columbia County, in fact it is more than double, and almost triple!

Chart 1: Age and Percent of Population - Town of Austerlitz (Where left blank, no data found)



* US Census Bureau. Census 2000 age categories: Under 5; 5 to 17; 18 to 20; 21 to 24; 25 to 34; 35 to 44

* 2010: American Community Survey

*US Census 2020 combines the age categories 25-29 and 30-34 to 25 to 34 years

* US Census 2020 combines the age categories 35-39 and 40-44 to 35 to 44 years

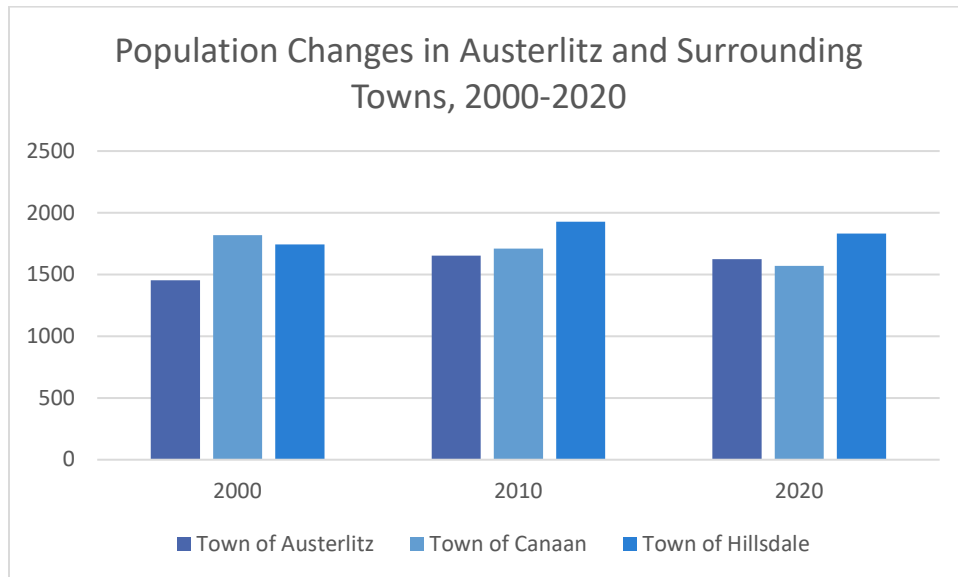
* US Census 2020 combines the age categories 45-49 and 50-54 to 45 to 54 years

COMPARISON OF POPULATION CHANGES IN AUSTERLITZ WITH COLUMBIA COUNTY AND ADJACENT MUNICIPALITIES

Columbia County had a median age of 48.5 in 2020. The County had 3.9% of people under the age of five years; 16.3% of persons under 18 years and 16.3% of persons over the age of 65.

In comparison, at the same time, only 2.5% of people in Austerlitz were under age 5; 14.8% of people were aged 0 to 19 and 44.0% were 65 years of age or older. Austerlitz has gained a significant population over the last 20 years, while Columbia County, and the towns of Canaan and Hillsdale have lost population. Canaan lost about as much population as Austerlitz gained (about 13-14%).

Chart 2: Comparison of Population Changes of Columbia County and Municipalities.



*U.S. Census Bureau. Census 2000

*2010: American Community Survey

* US Census Bureau. Census 2020

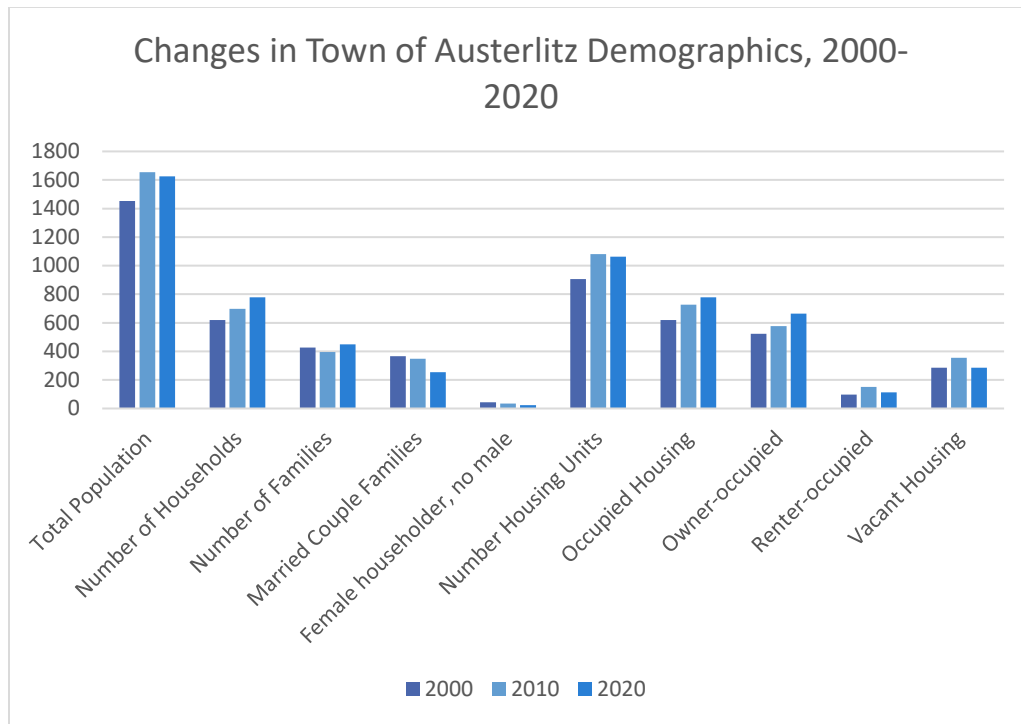
More recently, Columbia County lost 3, 225 persons (5.1%) between 2010 and 2020.

HOUSEHOLDS

In 2000, the average household size in Austerlitz was 2.34, and average family size was 2.81. There were 620 households in Austerlitz. The average household size increased a bit by 2010 to 2.43, and the average family size was slightly smaller at 2.78. The number of households has increased over the past three decades. At the same time, the household size is decreasing. By 2020, the average household size decreased to 2.34 people per household, and the average family size was 2.81 people. There were 778 households in Austerlitz in the year 2020. The 2022 ACS estimate was 769 households in Town, with 2.2 persons per household.

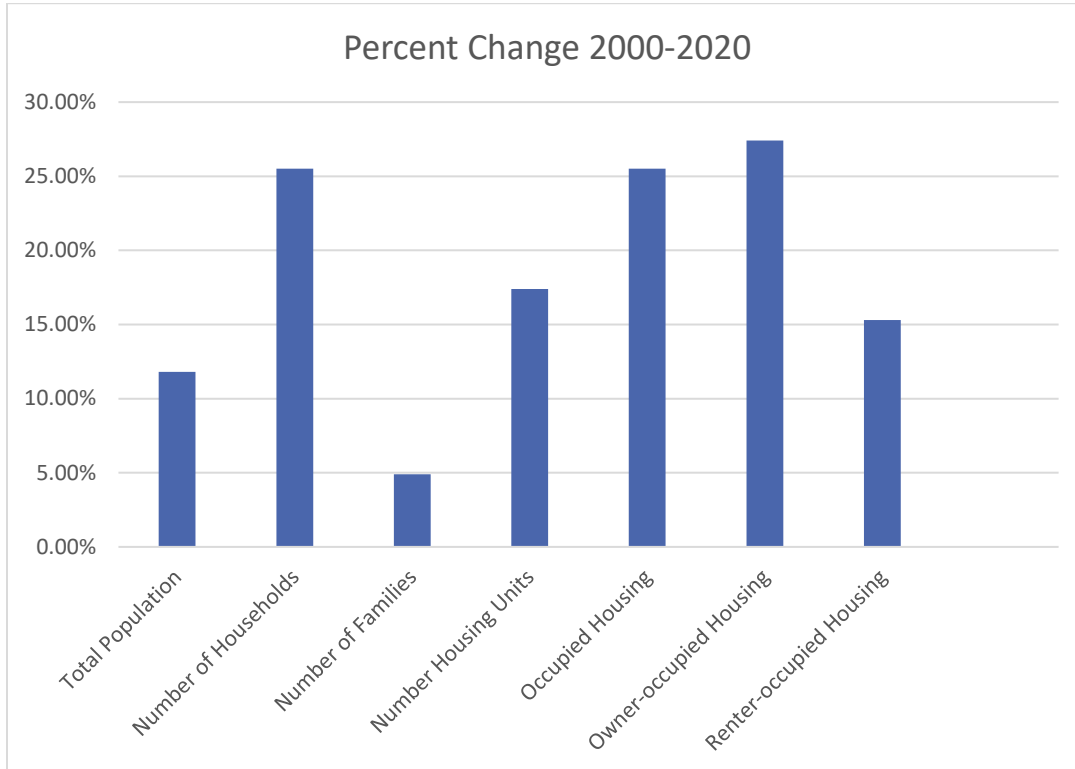
The number of households in the Town of Austerlitz increased about 25.5% from 2000 to 2020. In 2020 29% of adult residents of Austerlitz were not married. This is a trend that is occurring elsewhere as well. From 2000 to 2020, the numbers of families increased by 4.9 %, while households headed by a female with no male showed a steady decrease from 43 in 2000, to 35 in 2010, and then to 23 in 2020.

Chart 3: Town Demographic Characteristics (2000 – 2020)



Source: United States Census Bureau, Census from 2000, 2010 and 2020.
Source: New York: 2000 Summary Population and Housing Characteristics

Chart 4. Percent Change in Certain Town of Austerlitz Demographics, 2000-2020



Source: United States Census Bureau, Census from 2000, 2010 and 2020.
Source: New York: 2000 Summary Population and Housing Characteristics

Other Selected Town Demographic Characteristics (2000-2020)

Table 1 illustrates several selected Town demographic characteristics comparing 2000 to 2020. Note there was a significant difference in the data collected in the two decennial censuses. Table 2 compares the Town of Austerlitz to Canaan, Hillsdale, and Columbia County.

Table 1: Selected Town of Austerlitz Demographic Characteristics (2000-2020)

Subject	2010	2020 Pop 1625	Percent Change 2010-2020
Lived in different house, same county	17	74	335.3%
Lived in different house, out of county, same state	27	48	77.8%

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Subject	2010	2020 Pop 1625	Percent Change 2010-2020
Lived in different house, different state	8	19	137.5%
Worked in County	66.2%	75.6%	9.4%
Worked out of County	14.7%	15.7%	1.0%
Worked at home	14.7%	5.3%	-8.5%
Median Household Income	\$69,413	\$86,250	-5.5%
# With Public Assistance Income	8	36	350%
# With Retirement Income	119	285	139%
Per Capita Income	\$39,321	\$44,645	13.5%
People with Income below poverty level	3.6%	4%	3.0%
Single Family Units	88.9%	92.9%	4.0%
2 or more units in structure	7.9%	2.4%	-5.5%
Mobile Home or Trailer	3.2%	4.7%	1.5%
Median Gross Rent	\$760	\$1,057	39.1%
Median Value of owner-occupied housing unit	\$353,900	\$371,120 ***ACS	

Source: United States Census Bureau, Census from 2000, 2010 and 2020

*2000 Census category changes: Business & Repair & Personal eliminated. Professional services expanded to: Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services. Entertainment & Recreation expanded to: Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services. Health & Educational services expanded to: Educational, health and social services.

**US Census.gov 2020 – Data for In/out of labor force is only available through 2019.

*** American Community Survey 2020, estimate.

Table 2: Comparison of Demographic Characteristics

Comparison of Demographic Characteristics	Town of Austerlitz	Town of Canaan	Town of Hillsdale	Columbia County
Population Increase	-1.8%	-8.2%	-5.0%	2.4%
Population aged over 65 years	44.0%	35.8%	23.6%	25.4%
Housing units	1,064	1,086	1,239	33,226
Percent of housing stock vacant	32.9%	34.2%	45.0%	24.7%
Median household income	\$86,250	\$89,417	\$81,528	\$68,750
Percent of population below poverty line	4%	8.1%	11.7%	10.2%
Median gross rent (monthly)	\$1,057	\$1,011	\$888	\$944
Median value of owner-occupied home	\$371,200	\$254,300	\$247,600	\$236,500
Percent of housing stock in single family units	92.9%	92.0%	87.9%	74.4%
Percent of housing stock in 2+units	1.6%	2.4%	0.0%	6.7%
3 or 4 units	0.7%	1.7%	1.9%	4.7%
5 to 9 units	0.0%	1.3%	1.4%	2.1%
10 to 19 units	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%
20 or more units	0.0%	1.3%	2.1%	2.7%
Percent of housing stock in mobile homes	3.4%	1.0%	2.2%	8.7%

Source: United States Census Bureau, Census from 2020

Note that Headwaters Economics Profile System (EPS) from September 2022 for Austerlitz offers the following additional demographic indicators from 2020:

- 19 families living in poverty (4.2%) representing a 2.2% increase in the number of families in poverty between 2010 and 2020.
- 778 total occupied housing units, of which 113 were rentals which was a 5% increase in the number of rental units.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Rental Index

Method: There are several ways to determine if housing is generally affordable in a community. One method is to determine the “rental index.” This index shows the maximum gross rent a given household can afford. Affordable rental housing is generally considered to be no more than 30% of a household’s monthly income.

Results: The average monthly rental rate using 2020 data in the Town of Austerlitz is \$1,057. The median household income is \$86,250. This yields \$7,188 of income per month. Thirty percent of this is \$2,156, which means that the average household could afford this rent.

However, the Covid-19 Pandemic has had dramatic impacts on housing throughout the State and Country. As shown in the Columbia County Housing Brief by the Hudson Valley Patterns for Progress, “The full effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have yet to be realized as there may be long-term impacts, and variants of the virus are still with us. That being said, the immediate impact on housing and housing related issues was very apparent in the region and Columbia County was not held harmless with increased housing insecurity, disruption of key housing related services, and increased housing prices.” There are unknown ramifications that could yet be at work in Austerlitz.

Affordability Ratio

Method: Another method to determine affordability is to look at the ratio between the median value of a single-family house and median household income. Nationally, a ratio of 2 or less is considered to be affordable.

Results: The affordability ratio for Austerlitz is calculated at \$371,200 (median value of homes from 2020 data) divided by \$86,250 (median household income), or 4.3.

Conclusion: The affordability ratio for Austerlitz is high above the desired ratio of 2. This indicates that conditions are unaffordable for at least those families earning a median income or lower. These families would spend more than twice their annual income on a home in Austerlitz. This figure from 2020 indicates that home-owning affordability is an issue in Austerlitz. The Covid-19 Pandemic likely added to these housing affordability issues.

Building Permit Information

Evaluation of building permit information offers other valuable insight into growth and housing in the Town of Austerlitz. The charts below illustrate the number of building permits issued between 1997 and 2019 for new houses and the average costs of those structures. 1997 through 2007 had the highest rate of new house building permit issued, with the most (26 in one year) issued in 2005 (Chart 5). After that, new house starts dropped significantly. While the average cost of new homes has fluctuated through the years, Chart 6 shows the upward cost trends. Average costs could reflect both increased costs for building a new home as well as increased house sizes/styles that would contribute to increased costs.

Chart 5. Number of Building Permits Issued for New Homes in the Town of Austerlitz, 1997 – 2019

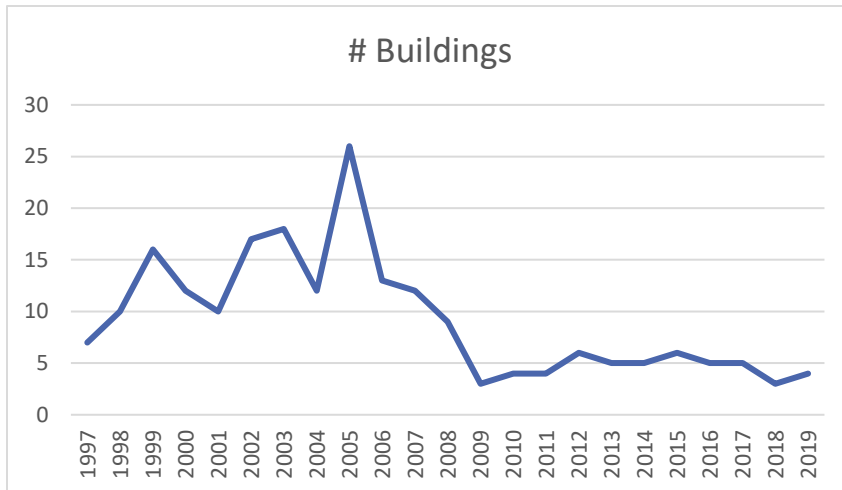


Chart 6. Average cost of New Houses Built in Austerlitz, 1997-2019

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