

TOWN OF AUSTERLITZ

Comprehensive Plan



Prepared by the Comprehensive Plan Committee, Town of Austerlitz
With assistance from David Church, planning consultant
Supported in part by a grant from the Hudson River Valley Greenway Community Council

TOWN OF AUSTERLITZ COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMMITTEE

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Town Comprehensive Plan (also known as a "master plan")

A town comprehensive plan " ... consists of the materials, written and/or graphic including but not limited to maps, charts, studies, resolutions, reports, and other descriptive material, that identify the goals, objectives, principles, guidelines, policies, standards, devices and instruments for the immediate and long-range protection, enhancement, growth and development of the municipality."

New York State Chapter 418 of the Laws of 1995 amending Town Law § 272-a.

Town of Austerlitz Planning Principles 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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	4
.1	Purposes	4
.2	The Planning Process	5
.3	Public Opinion Survey	5
2.	Town History	7
.1	Geology, Topography, Soils	7
.2	History as a Political Jurisdiction	9
.3	Economics	9
.4	Education	10
.5	Churches and “Public” Buildings	11
.6	Historical Buildings and House Styles	12
.7	Spencertown and Austerlitz Fire Companies	13
.8	Summary	13
3.	Austerlitz in 2003	14
.1	Overall Key Trends	14
.2	Assets	16
.3	Challenges	20
4.	Goals and Recommendations	23
.1	Goals and Recommendations Chart	25
5.	Appendices: Supporting Information	
.1	Survey Form and Results	
.2	Maps	
.3	Demographic information from the 2000 Census	

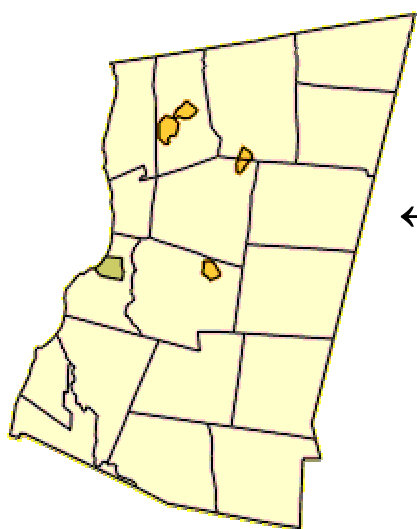
TOWN OF AUSTERLITZ COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSES

The purpose of this Comprehensive Plan is to promote the public health, safety, and the general welfare of the residents of the Town of Austerlitz. The Plan seeks to articulate a community vision for the future of the Town of Austerlitz. It is this overall Plan against which regulations, policies, and decisions regarding future growth and development shall be measured. By the development of this Plan, the Town

- creates the legal and technical foundation for its policies and procedures;
- identifies the Town's assets and challenges;
- increases the Town's eligibility for bonds, grants and other types of funding;
- sets priorities for Town officials, staff and volunteers;
- provides guidance for the future planning of activities by State, county, and town agencies; and
- provides guidance to anyone interested in the Town of Austerlitz, including current and prospective residents, property owners, businesses, and organizations.



← **Town of Austerlitz**

in Columbia County, New York

1.2 THE PLANNING PROCESS

Consistent with New York State Statutes guiding town comprehensive planning, the Town of Austerlitz Town Board recognized the need for thorough involvement of the Town officials, citizens, civic leaders, and professional advisors in preparing this Plan. In 2001, the Town Board appointed a Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee, with the goal of providing recommendations for a new Town Plan. Committee members include representatives from the Town Board and Planning Board to help insure the acceptance of the Plan by key municipal officials for implementation. Other members are citizens who bring a diversity of opinion and expertise reflected in this Plan.

To address the past controversy over land use issues in the Town, the Committee started work with some public outreach. A public information meeting was held in the Spencertown firehouse with over 100 people in attendance. In July of 2001 the Committee also prepared and, in August and September, circulated via mail and hand distribution a "Comprehensive Plan Survey" throughout the Town. 550 responses were received, which provided an idea of common interests that helped direct this planning process.

The Comprehensive Plan Committee has met at least monthly since 2001 to discuss and review elements of the Plan and to hear from community organizations and individuals. The Committee contacted the following groups to gather information: the Town Board and Planning Board, Austerlitz Fire Commissioners, St. Peter's Church Trustees, Austerlitz Historical Society's Board of Trustees, Spencerown Academy's Board of Directors, the Town Historian, Columbia County Planning Department, Columbia Land Conservancy, Hudson River Valley Greenway Community Council, New York Planning Federation, New York State Department of Conservation, New York State Department of Transportation, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and local real estate professionals. The information helped guide the recommendations that are a part of the Town of Austerlitz Comprehensive Plan.

1.3 PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

The following summary describes the results of the written public opinion survey circulated in August and September of 2001. Designed by the Town Comprehensive Plan Committee, this "comprehensive plan survey" (survey) consisted of twenty-six (26) questions covering a range of topics potentially relevant to the Town proceeding with the preparation of its first Comprehensive Plan. The survey offered ample opportunity for respondents to include narrative responses along with the yes/no or multiple choice questions.

Surveys were circulated via mail using household addresses gained from voter registration and tax rolls. Surveys were also made available at the Town Hall. 1100 copies of the survey were distributed and 550 copies were returned. A complete copy of the survey with itemized responses is available at the Town Hall. Here are the leading responses:

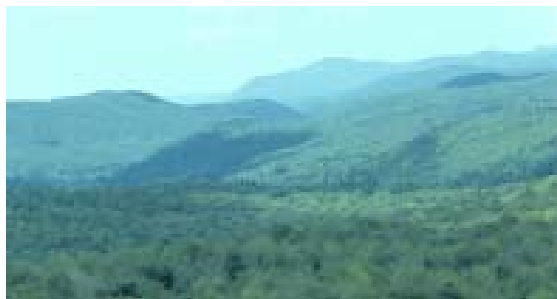
- There was strong support for the general notion of future planning; clearly the community expects the town to anticipate and plan for future opportunities and problems. 70% of the respondents agreed the town should consider implementing a plan to assist in the orderly development of the community and 75% indicated they were interested in attending meetings regarding planning and the future of the town. 61% of respondents agreed that

the town should adopt land use planning laws to control development, but narrative responses indicated a desire for cautious planning and limited restrictions.

- Most people want slow to moderate growth over the next 10 years (72%), and many agreed that the town should explore possible fees on new development (59%).
- Rural atmosphere and scenic beauty were most commonly cited as reasons influencing the decision to live in Austerlitz. There was a strong desire to maintain undeveloped open land (73%). Forests and open spaces were very important to 62% of the respondents. Scenic views were considered very important to 56% of the respondents.
- 50% of the respondents felt the town has not changed noticeably during recent years in its desirability as a place to live, and another 12% felt it has become more desirable.
- Protecting environmentally sensitive areas was a priority for most respondents (74%), particularly control of hazardous & solid waste (72%, 65%), drinking water quality (79%), stream water quality (65%), & wildlife habitat (59%).
- Most respondents wanted to discourage commercial development such as a large shopping center or mall (85%), large office buildings (79%), heavy industry (76%), corporate office parks (75%), industrial parks (75%), car washes (66%), hotel/motel (58%), and light manufacturing (53%). Respondents were supportive of small commercial enterprises, such as B&B (71%), garden center/nursery (63%), cabinet makers (60%), restaurants (58%), and antique stores (54%). 62% of respondents felt that small and unobtrusive commercial uses should be permitted near residential areas. No consensus was reached for any specific neighborhood or zone for commercial development.
- 64% of the respondents indicated a preference to continue the present trend of single family residences on several acre plots. Respondents want to discourage mobile home parks (77%), large apartment buildings (75%), condos (67%), 2-story apartment buildings (57%) and town houses (56%).
- Most respondents were satisfied with the town's parks and recreation services. There wasn't much support for additional services such as rod & gun club, squash courts, indoor rinks, pools or courts, fitness center. 57% of respondents said they would like more trail systems, but not at the cost of increased taxes.
- Most respondents were satisfied with the location (84%), parking (60%), and hours (63 %) of the Town Hall, and generally were not in favor of a tax increase to improve it (57% against).
- While many narrative responses revealed concerns about high taxes, there was some support for tax increases to expand/improve fire protection (56%) & EMT services (46%).
- When given the choice of focusing improvements on paving roads or improving gravel road beds, two-thirds of respondents favored focusing on improvements to the road beds of existing gravel roads, and when asked whether they agreed with a plan for paving "all roads" over a period of time, two thirds disagreed with that plan.

2. TOWN HISTORY

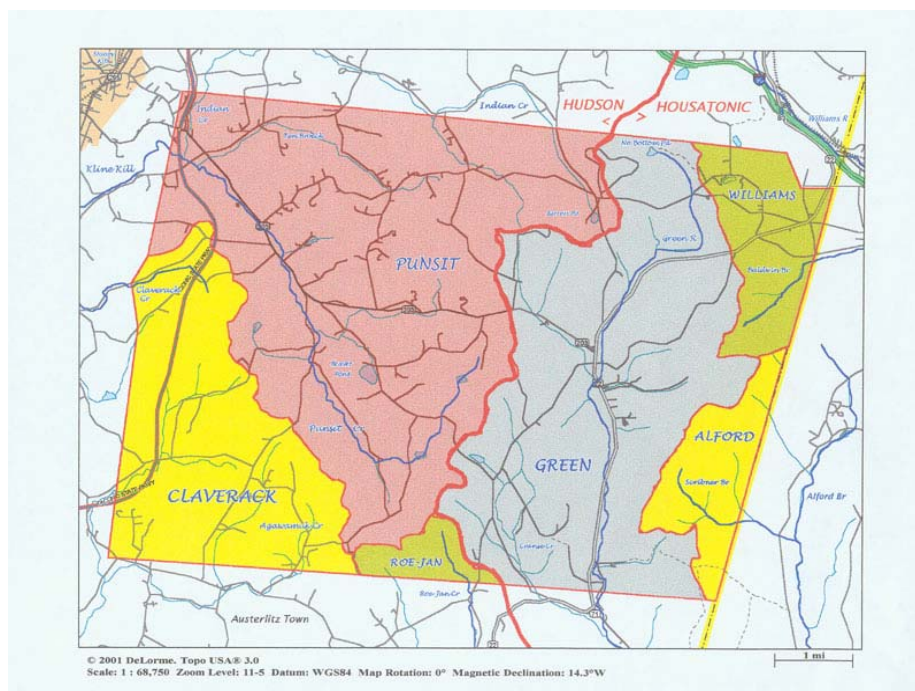
2.1 GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY, SOILS



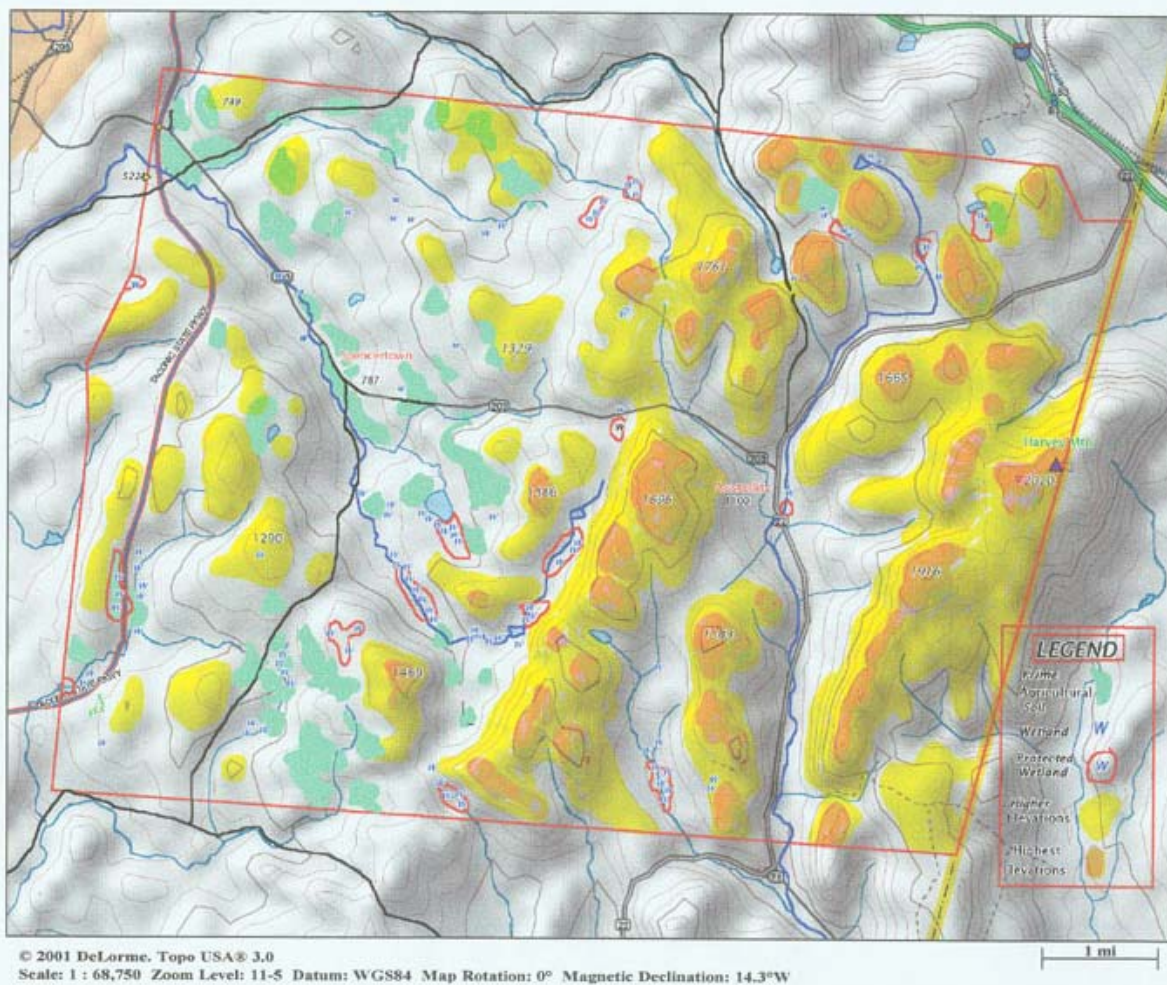
Austerlitz, a town since 1818, is located in the easternmost corridor of New York State sharing Harvey Mountain, the highest peak in Columbia County, with Massachusetts. It is one of the few towns in Columbia County that has a split watershed. Several small brooks drain south ending up in the Roe Jan or the Kline Kill eventually draining west into the Hudson River. Punsit Creek drains from Laurel Mountain Road in the middle of

the town westerly also into the Kline Kill. Green River, however, runs southeast draining the eastern one-quarter of the town. It joins the Housatonic River in Massachusetts and then drains through Connecticut into Long Island Sound. The Green River Valley provided an easy pass through the bedrock of the Taconic Mountains that allowed access west for the early settlers coming primarily from Connecticut and Massachusetts.

There also is a distinction in the geology and topography. The western half has gravelly and clay loam resting on slate and blue lime on rolling hills, while the eastern part rests on granitic and calcareous rock on higher elevations. Because of the higher altitude -hence a shorter growing season and shallow soil cover in the eastern part, farming was more limited to grasses. The western part produced grains, as well as grasses and other crops. Sulfur can occur unpredictably in well water and brooks disappear underground. Limestone formations with small caves may be found in the eastern corridor.



WATERSHEDS and TOPOGRAPHY OF THE TOWN OF AUSTERLITZ



2.2 HISTORY AS A POLITICAL JURISDICTION

The topography of Austerlitz, with its cold climate and lack of large amounts of surface water, prevented early Indian occupation for long periods of time. Traditionally, the Mohicans claimed ownership of Austerlitz, as well as all of the land from the Schoharie Creek to the Housatonic River. When the early proprietors or grantees decided to settle here, they filed the deed in Massachusetts on September 27, 1756, paying the Mohicans - who by now were established in Stockbridge - £ 230 New York currency for the land. The individuals were mostly from the East Haddam/Lyme area in south central Connecticut on the Connecticut River near Long Island Sound.

Twelve of the 75 grantees were Spencers, thus the entity became known as Spencers town. even though it did not have any political jurisdiction as such. In fact "Spencertown" has maintained its name only because it became a post office early and has kept that status.

Spencers town was part of a district. At this time under the British, there was no town designation in the colony of New York . There were districts. In reality, Spencers town was a part of Claverack District, the center of the Van Rensselaer Lower Manor. In 1772, the northeast sliver of what became the town became a part of King's District, while the rest of the town remained in Claverack. After the Revolutionary War Spencertown residents were listed in Claverack East or King's District.

In 1788, Hillsdale, formed from Claverack, became a town and included most of Spencers town from the Kinderhook line east [Chatham was a part of Kinderhook]. Also in 1788, King's District became Canaan. In 1795, the northwestern rectangular section roughly designated from Beale Road west and Angell Road north became part of Chatham.

In 1818, Austerlitz was formed from these three towns. and according to legend, was so named to commemorate the Napoleonic victory admired by Martin Van Buren. Ironically the residents had petitioned to be named New Ulm, after another Napoleonic victory.

2.3 ECONOMICS

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 the 1820s, there were three gristmills, four sawmills, four fulling mills, three carding machines and one distillery. Later in the 19th century, a plaster mill, shingle mills, a plane-making mill, and a furnace forging the Spencertown plow were added. In the mid-to-late 19th century, colliers produced charcoal for the furnaces at Richmond and Van Deusenville, both in Massachusetts.

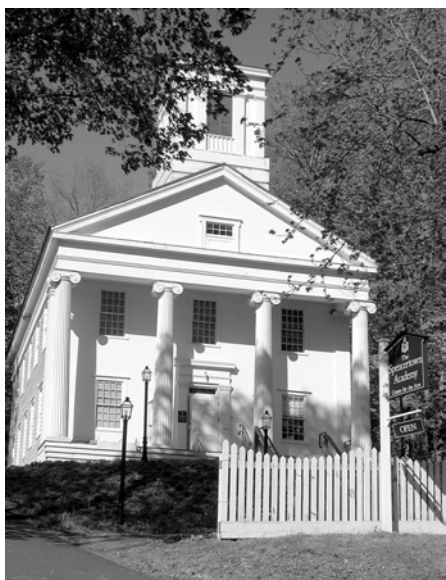
Because of the geology and topography, much of the mid-to late 19th-century technology bypassed Austerlitz. It was too hilly for a railroad and steam power in any quantity. Conditions were not advantageous for the installation of turbines on the streams, but many of the old-fashioned waterwheels persisted 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 chicken farm on Harvey Mountain Road. Currently there are only a couple of farms left in the town. In the latter part of the 20th century and currently, several horticulture businesses have flourished primarily producing vegetables, herbs and ornamentals, organic meat and poultry and pheasants.

By the last quarter of the 19th century, second-home ownership that had sprung up in western Massachusetts as part of the Berkshire Cottages spilled over into Austerlitz and other bordering Columbia County towns. With railroad stations in Hillsdale and Harlemville, as well as Chatham, several houses became summer boardinghouses in the 20th century. A few individuals, such as the famous poet, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and her husband, Eugen Boissevain, moved here permanently. Currently, a number of visual and print artists, artisans and writers live here.

Beginning as early as the 1890s and, perhaps, even earlier, people started commuting from Chatham to Albany on the railroad. Frequently, men working for the state government would spend the workweek in Albany returning to Austerlitz on the weekends. Beginning in the 1950s, Austerlitz, like Chatham and other surrounding towns, became a commuter town for many. Currently many residents commute to the Albany area and some to the Springfield area, while others commute two-three times a week to New York City.

2.4 EDUCATION



In 1818, 17 school districts were carved out of the new town. Each was to provide a basic education from the 1st to the 8th grade with each school having a board of education composed of the parents of the pupils. Their responsibilities for the physical plant involved building the school and maintaining it and paying the teacher and buying supplies. The numbers of actual districts varied depending on the numbers of school-age pupils at any given time. With the advent of the gasoline powered vehicle, all of the one-room schoolhouses were phased out by the 1950's. Most of the Austerlitz students go to Chatham Central Schools, while those in the southern segment go to Taconic Hills. [Spencertown Academy, left]

Beyond 8th grade, there were two academies. Rev. Timothy Woodbridge, pastor of the Congregational church in [Upper] Green River since 1816, started the earlier one next to the church, in 1817. In 1842, he became pastor of St. Peter's creating the Spencertown Academy in 1847. Both of these academies were private. They acted like high schools (which did not exist as such at this time as part of the public school system), but, in reality, they had academic programs roughly covering the first two years of college.

Spencertown attracted a somewhat international reputation with students from Cuba attending.

2.5 CHURCHES AND “PUBLIC” BUILDINGS



Upper Green River Church, Rte. 22

At various times, there have been at least five churches in the Town. In 1771, the Congregational church was built in Spencertown, which became a Presbyterian Church as St. Peter's in 1827. In 1792, the Congregational Church of [Upper] Green River was formed at the corner of what became East Hill and SR 22. It lasted until the early 20th century. Early on, perhaps even before St. Peter's was built in 1771, 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 [Upper] Green

River. Since 1896, at different times, the Austerlitz Grange used both of the hotels in Spencertown as its headquarters before purchasing the Methodist Church. In the 1970s, with a declining membership, the church building, then owned by St. Peter's, was sold and now houses an antiques business.

Austerlitz School House

The only one to survive as a permanent place of worship 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. By 1972, with the consolidation of school districts, the Academy closed as a school and ownership was taken over by the Town. 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.



In the 1990s, the Austerlitz Historical Society began developing at a site on Route 22 “Old Austerlitz”, an early 19th century village with reassembled buildings from the area. The Society currently maintains the Austerlitz Church and School House. With “Old Austerlitz,” the Millay Colony for the Arts, the Millay/Boissevain 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.

2.6 HISTORICAL BUILDINGS AND HOUSE STYLES

Many historical buildings in Town date from the 18th century and more from 19th, several of which could be placed on the State and National Registers with attendant benefits, for example, the O'Connell house at 866 Route 203 in Spencertown, which demonstrates unique, possibly 1760s, construction. The Spencertown Academy and St. Peter's Church are on the State and National Registers. Edna St. Vincent Millay's house ("Steepletop") and grounds on East Hill Road are a registered National Historic Landmark. The Taconic State Parkway, a National Register Eligible site, is a historic roadway. Several 18th century Connecticut River-Valley, center chimney, one-and-a-half story houses along with early 19th-century, Federal houses grace the road frontage. A few mid-19th century Victorian houses (at County Road 9 opposite Raup Road and at the corner of Stever Hill and Route 203 in Spencertown) and several early 20th century homes were built in the Edwardian style in Spencertown. The 20th century also saw the construction of many bungalows and houses in the ranch, Cape Cod, Colonial Revival and post-modern styles.



St. Peter's

2.7 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.

2.8 Summary

Since its establishment in the 1750s, the Town of Austerlitz has evolved from a community where most residents made a living through farming and related trades into one where many residents travel to work. Nevertheless, the Town's character remains generally scenic and rural and graced with many historical buildings. A major change in recent years has been the increased volume of traffic on all roads.

3. AUSTERLITZ IN 2003

3.1. OVERALL KEY TRENDS

Key trends likely to influence how land is used in the Town of Austerlitz include:

A. SECOND HOME AND COMMUTING OWNERSHIP as more and more urban residents, primarily from the greater New York City region but also from the Albany, Kingston, or Poughkeepsie regional areas, take advantage of the accessibility of Austerlitz and its beauty, safety and overall quality of life. This will continue to drive the residential real estate market. According to the 2000 Census, nearly 27% of the Town housing units are already for seasonal or occasional use. While 67% of households still live in the same house as they did in 1995, nearly 16% of total households have moved in from outside the County since 1995.

B. THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE AND THE EXPANDING FOREST LANDSCAPE. By the early nineteenth century, much of the Town was clearcut for agriculture. Today the lands continue to naturally convert to forest, with forest cover dominating again. Reliance on agriculture is changing as traditional farming shifts to better soils and towards specialized production. Newer horticultural businesses producing vegetables, herbs, ornamentals, and organic meat and poultry are starting to flourish.

C. THE GROWING ECONOMIC ROLE OF HOME BUSINESSES as residents seek necessary, convenient, and independent options to make a living. According to the 2000 US Census, about 14% of Austerlitz residents worked at home, significantly greater than the rate in adjoining Dutchess County and higher than nearly all towns in the region and the Columbia County overall rate of 5.1%

D. INCREASED TOURISM. Travelers continue to focus on shorter, more localized sites, with historic and heritage locations becoming ever more popular.

E. AGING POPULATION. Austerlitz has a relatively high median age in population for its region, nearly 10 years older than that in Dutchess County and more than 4 years older than Columbia County (see Austerlitz Demographic Trends attached). The "baby-boom" generation, now 35-54 years old and older, is a significant portion of the population, as is an older, retired sector of the population.

F. INCREASING, OVER-RELIANCE ON RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE VALUES. According to New York State Office of Real Property Services, the Town of Austerlitz is substantially reliant on the assessed value of rural residential property to provide local revenue share of public services. Nearly \$80,000,000 in total assessed value is represented in rural residences, four times the value of the highest non-residential category being vacant land.

2002 Town of Austerlitz Real Property Assessment - % of Total Value by Land Use		
Land Use	Total Assessed Value	Percent of Town Total Value
Residential	\$178,253,750	80
Vacant Land	\$24,788,650	11
Agriculture	\$5,296,100	2.4
Public Parks / Conservation Property	\$4,732,300	2.1
Commercial	\$3,346,000	1.5
Public Service	\$3,497,070	1.5
Community Service	\$2,159,600	0.9
Recreation/Entertainment	\$1,373,500	0.6

G. FIRE COMPANY TRENDS. The trends are in three: response volume, membership, and budget. The chart below gives a simple snapshot at five year intervals of response volume.

Call Volume				
Year	Total	Fire	EMS	Other
1991	94	20	52	18 – includes mutual aid calls to other districts
1996	129	22	60	34 – includes all types of fires, including structure, car and brush fires
2001	130	17	86	15 – includes false alarms and unfounded calls

1. VOLUME: The most obvious trend to be noted here is that while call volume has remained relatively constant over the last dozen years, the proportion of medical calls has increased dramatically. As the County continues to move towards greater access to paid Paramedic level care for the area's Rescue Squads, volunteer EMT participation in the Squads may continue to diminish. This will place even more importance on First Responders in the volunteer fire service.

2. BUDGET: In 2003, The Austerlitz Fire District #1 raised \$79,290.00 from taxes. The equivalent amount in 1996 was \$67,060.00 and for 1991 it was \$61,440.00. After accounting for inflation it can be seen that the budget has been very stable for a long time. While the Board of Fire Commissioners is committed to holding the line on tax increases there is a growing understanding that most Columbia County fire organizations tie the growth of their budgets to the growth of their communities. This may be necessary here also to provide adequate protection.

3. MEMBERSHIP: about 55 members currently belong to the two Town fire companies. The large majority belongs to the Spencertown Fire Company, which is very successful at recruiting new members, and the age distribution of its membership is an encouraging indicator of the future vitality of the organization. The Austerlitz Volunteer Fire Company is not so fortunate. It currently has approximately ten active members, and their average age is around 50 years old. While the company does have some younger members the rate of new enrolments is quite low and the drop-out rate for new members is fairly high.

3.2. ASSETS

Today Austerlitz is influenced by several assets unique to the Town, or as a part of a larger region and economic marketplace known as the Columbia - Taconic - Berkshire region. Generally these ASSETS define the COMMUNITY CHARACTER of the Town and can be grouped into the following categories:

A. RURAL CHARACTER

1. LOCATION. The Town of Austerlitz straddles the crest of the Taconic mountain range. Route 203 is the pass between the Hudson River watershed in the west to the Housatonic River watershed in the east. The hamlets of Spencertown and Austerlitz mark either end of this pass and were created at the places where the valleys level out and are broad enough to permit convenient development. The mountains, valleys, streams, and change of seasons make Austerlitz a beautiful place to live. We have historical hamlets, undeveloped woodlands, rural Town roads, informal paths, logging or farm roads and trails; open fields, a dispersed residential pattern, and limited commercial development. The Town is unique in Columbia County as it hosts two State Forests: Beebe, with 1383 acres, and Harvey Mountain, with 1567 acres.



Green River

2. SCENIC BEAUTY. 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. The Taconic Parkway, designated a New York State Scenic Byway in 1992, creates a north/south corridor on the western edge of town and provides numerous scenic views.



View from Harvey Mountain

3. LANDSCAPE. The irregular landscape which gives us interesting views also inhibits the development of large scale industrial development (which usually require extensive flat land to be cost effective). The winding roads, sections of forest, small hills and stream crossings creates privacy through natural buffers.

All of these features in combination lend the town a relatively serene and old fashioned flavor, much appreciated by residents and visitors.



Taconic State Parkway

B. ACCESSIBILITY. Austerlitz residents have easy access to metropolitan areas and many regional cultural attractions via main thoroughfares such as Route 22, the Taconic State Parkway and the New York State Thruway.

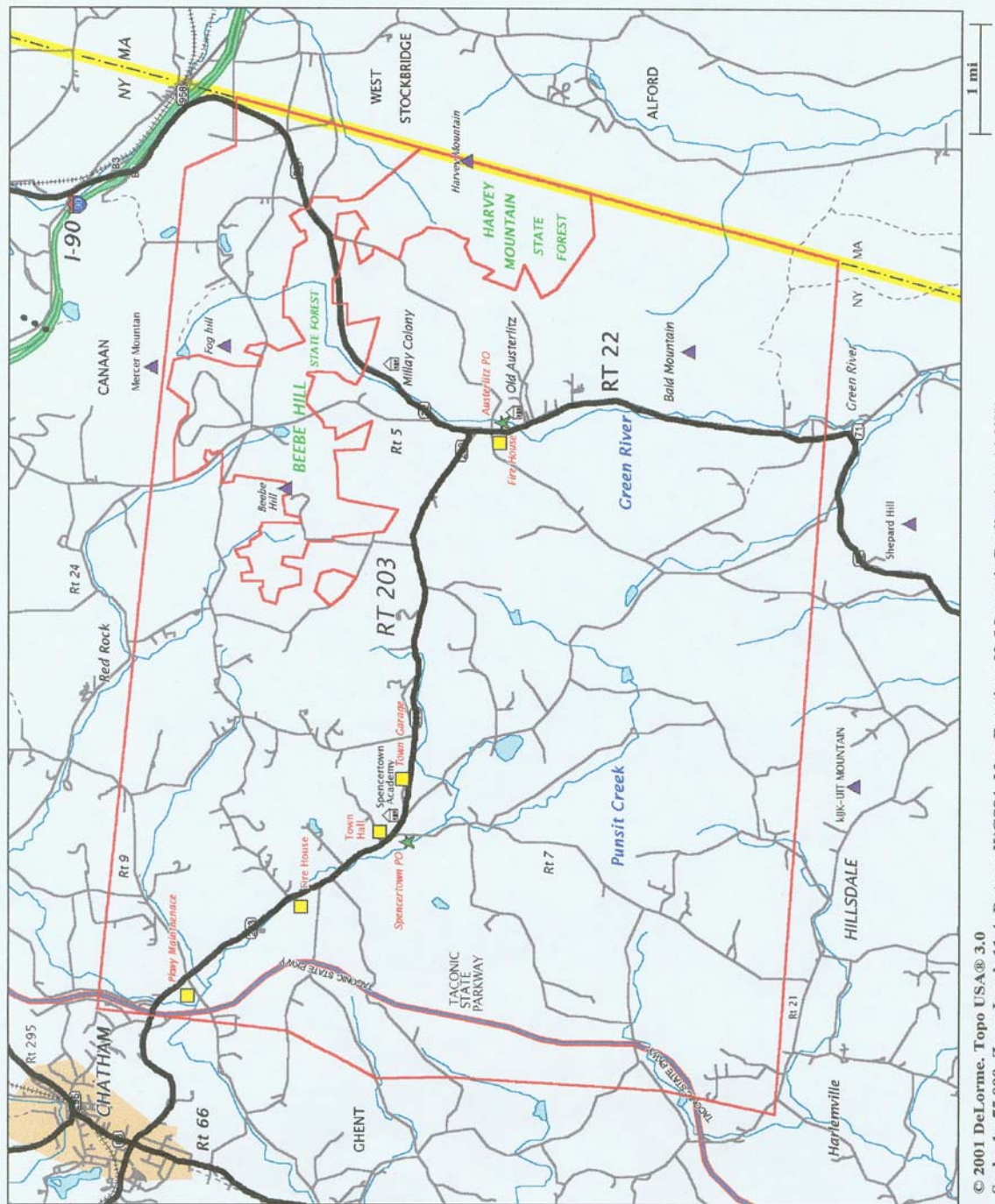
C. QUALITY OF LIFE. Residents enjoy an independence and tranquil quality of life that is associated with a small, rural town. The protection of clean air and water and abundant wildlife in our environment is a priority. Volunteerism, a sense of community, and social activity are evident in our Fire Department, Historical Society, Tower Club, Spencertown Academy, Friends of St. Peters, Friends of the Millay Society, and the Ladies Auxiliary. Rural Town roads, informal paths and trails afford pedestrian and recreational opportunities.



Pond on Dugway Road

D. HISTORY. The Town has a unique and appreciated history marked by many historic sites and features. The community supports the Austerlitz Historical Society for the preservation and enhancement of those sites and features.

E. PEOPLE. Small towns, by their nature, encourage residents to become acquainted as they join together to support organizations and causes. The Plan Survey recognized the friendly nature of many Town residents, many of whom are committed to making the Town a great place to live. Through the dedicated efforts of a core of volunteers with diverse interests, the Town's several civic and private organizations prosper.



Assets of the Town of Austerlitz

3.3 CHALLENGES

A. HAMLET OF SPENCERTOWN: The most heavily settled area in the Town of Austerlitz consists of "downtown" Spencertown where two main roads (SR 203, Co. Rte 7) and two town roads (Elm Street, Dugway Road) converge and where several businesses, civic, cultural and religious organizations are located and are open to the public. The hamlet is densely populated with houses situated close to the road. The average well depth in the hamlet is over 400 feet and the soil composition is mostly clay. The continued growth of the Spencertown hub presents the following challenges:

1. potentially limited access to water
2. difficulty in dealing with sewage waste
3. increased traffic flow, with increased speeding
4. inadequate parking areas within the hamlet
5. maintaining safety for increasing pedestrian traffic within the hamlet
6. maintaining historical character
7. the size and type of commercial activities which may locate in the hamlet
8. preservation or encouragement of pedestrian mobility within the hamlet

B. HAMLET OF AUSTERLITZ: This hamlet consists of a thinly populated area along Route 22 north and south of the intersection with 203. The gravel subsoil, which is good for sewage drainage and an excellent water supply make the hamlet of Austerlitz one of the most appealing locations within the town for residential and commercial development. The Austerlitz Historical Society Village "Old Austerlitz" is situated just south of the intersection with Route 203. This set of circumstances, and the possibility for new growth present several challenges:

1. increased traffic flow, with increased speeding, along route 22
2. inadequate parking within the Hamlet
3. maintaining safety for increased pedestrian traffic within the hamlet
4. the size and type of commercial activities which may locate in the hamlet
5. determining where residential growth will be permissible
6. maintaining historical character
7. impact on the flood plain
8. preservation of pedestrian mobility as the hamlet develops.



Old Austerlitz Village

C. Increased development places a strain on many of our town roads. Since road maintenance represents about 90% of the town budget, the issue is receiving greater attention. Survey results showed divided opinions as to the best way to keep costs down and maintain the rural atmosphere of the town, although a solid majority support unpaved roads. The road challenges include:

1. setting priorities for work to be done
2. choosing pavement or gravel depending on circumstances



Mallory Road

D. Providing recreation for a growing population at a minimum cost to the tax payer.

E. The difficulty of insuring that future growth continues throughout the town, in dispersed, primarily residential patterns.

F. Lack of organized, accessible and updated town laws and the vague job descriptions for enforcement officer(s).

G. The difficulty of achieving proactive planning and productive consensus-building in an increasingly diverse community.

H. The difficulty of keeping the community affordable. While the current trend of high value home building has added to the Town's tax base, it has also raised property values, thus making moderately priced land or homes extremely scarce. The economic base for the Town is dependent on real property taxes, derived almost entirely from single family and vacant land parcels. Twenty-first century new housing is very expensive and primarily for part-time residents. Such housing causes upward pressure of property values and taxes. This pressure is, and will be directly proportionate to real property sales as they relate to the assessment base. Increasing sales prices are tracked by the New York State Office of Real Property

Services. If increasing prices are not reflected in an increased tax base, the State will establish equalization rates that will adjust the tax base upward as a percentage of the perceived increase in values.

While there is no easy solution to the changes in value and the tax base, and lacking a legislative solution to the school and county tax burdens, **it is essential that Austerlitz maintain assessment equity to insure tax equity.**

The key to maintaining a reasonable tax level for residents is to expand the real property tax base, primarily by planning in the long term to **encourage small scale business activities.** Land use regulations, if adopted, should facilitate this development by allowing a wide range of economic activities throughout the town, while still protecting its essential rural character and scenic beauty.

I. Finding cost effective means to provide services for an aging population.

J. The difficulty of maintaining adequate fire and emergency services. Fewer people are volunteering to serve as emergency medical technicians, first responders, and firefighters. The cost of a paid emergency force would be great. Without more volunteers, the town will end up without services of its own and will have to wait for fire trucks and ambulances to arrive from larger communities. From a planning perspective this probably means that one element of providing for the future of the volunteer emergency services is to insure that new young potential volunteers can afford to live in the town and can find appropriate work in the area. The challenges are:

- (1) to sustain and encourage volunteerism;
- (2) formalize Town policies that inform the fire departments concerning new major subdivisions in the Town, that alert developers and landowners to safety requirements, and that provide for enforcement of those requirements.

4. GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This Comprehensive Plan represents the first step in proactively planning for the future of the Town and in establishing a consensus among government officials and our increasingly diverse residents. With agreement and commitment, we will work to fulfill our goals.

This Plan recognizes the special features of the Town, including the natural beauty of the area, rural atmosphere, historical structures and character of the hamlets, diversified economic base, a tradition of agriculture, dispersed residential pattern, and low population density.

When reviewing this Plan it should be understood that with time, issues and conditions can change; priorities can shift. To achieve the goals and fulfill the recommendations which follow, the Town should establish a committee to oversee implementation of the Plan, preferably appointing as members those who served on the committee to develop the Plan to maintain the vision set forth, plus such additional members from the community as are necessary and appropriate. In implementing the recommendations of the Plan, this oversight committee shall continue to elicit the comment and recommendations of the public, shall coordinate the work of the various other committees established, and shall itself research, draft and recommend policies, local laws and regulations, as appropriate. The Town Board shall consider adopting a moratorium on permitting large-scale commercial projects until the work of the committee is complete, or in any case, no later than one year after the adoption of the Plan. Likewise, the Planning Board shall consider the goals and recommendations of the Plan, and the supporting data, when considering environmental impact reviews on subdivision applications. In addition, the Town Board should periodically review and adjust the Plan, in any event, no later than five years after its adoption.

In considering and adopting any local laws, regulations, guidelines or policies, the Town government shall take care to balance the good of the whole community with the rights of the individual.



Town Hall



While many of the recommendations call for official Town action, effective implementation of this Plan will require partnership with all Town, community and regional interests. The "Town of Austerlitz" refers to the public and private sectors, not just the elected or appointed officials. While Plan adoption is the prerogative of the Town Board, Town officials will need assistance and encouragement to see that the recommendations are implemented.

All Town legislative, capital investment, and financial actions shall take these recommendations into consideration. Any capital project by any public agency must also take these recommendations into consideration. Whenever possible, the Town will identify, fund, and implement these recommendations.

It is the intent of the Town government to insure availability of information for the public on topics of community interest, particularly as those interests relate to goals and recommendations for action described here. To accomplish this, the Town will, from time to time, host public forums with Town officials; it will invite speakers with particular expertise to make presentations; and it will maintain a website with Town-related information, including, for example, local laws and policies, a calendar of events, and contacts for local organizations. The Town welcomes and encourages a dialog with its residents.

GOALS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>(A) To protect open space and our rural atmosphere from suburban-type growth.</p> <p>(B) To ensure growth and expansion happens in an orderly manner.</p>	<p>Evaluate existing Town land use regulations and maximize their use and enforcement.</p> <p>Evaluate, identify and adopt techniques to manage land use and development and adopt such techniques as may be needed to accomplish the goals and recommendations of this Plan.</p> <p>Encourage and support Town and Planning Board members and other Town officials to attend relevant training and conference events and provide and share relevant informational and educational materials to those appropriate officials.</p>
<p>(C) To preserve environmentally sensitive areas of our community, such as wetlands, floodplains, ridgelines, steep slopes, watersheds and sources of drinking water.</p>	<p><u>same as above</u></p> <p>Complete a town-wide inventory of environmentally sensitive sites and locations (with maps) to identify these assets and assist current and future Town officials and property owners to understand development restrictions and limitations.</p> <p>Incorporate this inventory into Town project and permit reviews.</p> <p>Conduct a study of water resources in the hamlet of Spencertown, to serve as the basis for the Town to pursue future planning concerning solid-waste disposal to meet the needs of residents and businesses there.</p> <p>Establish a committee in partnership with NYS DEC to assess and recommend actions for the Unit Management Plan covering state lands in and contiguous to the Town.</p>
<p>(D) To better meet the needs of an aging population, including such service needs as transportation, housing and improved accessibility.</p>	<p>Explore intermunicipal partnerships with adjoining or nearby Towns and Village to meet identified needs.</p> <p>Negotiate with applicants for new housing developments to incorporate design and pricing options for this population.</p>
<p>(E) To welcome traditional small scale commercial enterprises throughout</p>	<p>Evaluate and update current Town law to encourage businesses scaled to the rural setting of the Town. Complete the same evaluation with an eye to reducing regulatory burdens on such businesses when scale and design of the business avoids adverse neighborhood impacts.</p>

GOALS	RECOMMENDATIONS
the Town.	Consider incentives for home-based businesses as well as businesses serving local or regional needs.
(F) To encourage affordable housing for all of the Town's residents, families and workforce.	Review and update the Town subdivision regulations to address land and housing affordability.
(G) To plan for the impact of growth on town services and infrastructure, notably roads and their maintenance as well as recreation.	<p>Soliciting input from members of the community, prepare a written, long-range five year plan and budget for road maintenance and/or improvements, acquisition of rights of way and setbacks, including priorities for work to be performed and pavement choice. Make information on short and long range plans available to the public.</p> <p>Update subdivision regulations to establish, consistent with NYS Town Law, a requirement for recreation or parkland dedication or a payment in lieu of such dedication.</p>
(H) To protect historic resources of the Town, notably in and near the Town's hamlets.	<p>Encourage communication between the Town, the local historical society, and other historic preservation activists.</p> <p>Pursue grant support from the NYS Office of Parks and Historic Preservation and/or the Preservation League of New York State to complete an historical and archaeological site survey and to explore the feasibility and desirability of establishing an historic district or districts within the Town.</p> <p>Consider production of a design guide providing property owners with suggestions on architecture and layout options complementing local historical sites.</p> <p>Display in Town Hall a map and inventory of local historical sites for use by Town boards and officials.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Ensure preservation of Town historical documents, with possible funding from NYS Department of Education.</p>

GOALS	RECOMMENDATIONS
(I) To provide for better enforcement of existing Town laws.	<p>Update current town laws and regulations for consistency with NYS statutes and this Comprehensive Plan. Consolidate town laws to simplify text, eliminate redundancy, and streamline administration.</p> <p>Periodically evaluate Town laws and procedures and make such amendments as are necessary to fulfill the Comprehensive Plan; review and update the Comprehensive Plan on a regular basis, no later than every 5 years.</p> <p>Provide ready, affordable access to Town laws both in hard copy and via a website.</p> <p>Clarify the job responsibilities in building inspection and in code enforcement.</p> <p>Encourage all enforcement agencies to enhance their patrols in the Town of Austerlitz.</p> <p>Improve communications among Town government officials, both elected and appointed.</p>
(J) To provide continued quality fire and emergency services within the Town.	<p>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. Consider special incentives such as tax breaks to support volunteer service.</p> <p>Provide for notice by the Planning Board to the fire commissioners when subdivisions are approved that include the installation of a pond(s).</p> <p>Develop, publish and enforce policies with respect to new subdivisions in the Town governing: proper excavation for fire ponds; installation of hydrants; driveway construction and length, considering access needs for fire and emergency vehicles; and proper signs for new roads. Encourage 911 address postings for all residences.</p>
(K) To protect and enhance the quality of life in the hamlets of the Town, Spencertown and Austerlitz.	<p>Establish a committee in each hamlet to review ways to improve the safe flow of automobile traffic, pedestrian access and parking, traffic calming techniques and any other hamlet-specific problems. Develop a traffic, pedestrian, recreation, and parking plan for both hamlets.</p> <p>Maintain open, regular communication with regional staff of NYS Department of Transportation to coordinate work and future improvements on main routes through the hamlets.</p> <p>Review and update the Town land use regulations to ensure that new land</p>

GOALS	RECOMMENDATIONS
	<p>development protects the quality of life in each hamlet and recognizes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limited access to water; • difficulty in dealing with sewage waste; • inadequate designated parking, increased traffic with increased speeding; • pedestrian safety; • defining the type and size of potential commercial uses; and • locations for residential growth.
(L) To protect the tax base in order to minimize future tax increases.	<p>Maintain assessment equity to insure tax equity.</p> <p>Plan in the long term to encourage small scale business activities, thereby expanding the real property tax base and maintaining a reasonable tax level for residents.</p> <p>Facilitate small scale business development by permitting a wide range of economic activities throughout the town, while protecting its rural character and scenic beauty.</p> <p>Maintain a building permit policy and process so that all real property improvements are considered in reevaluation.</p> <p>Evaluate the cost to public services for new land development proposals and consider alternatives where costs out-weigh tax revenues.</p>
(M) To actively seek funding opportunities that promote the goals and recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan.	<p>Identify and pursue funding from government and private sources to implement and fulfill identified projects and services.</p>
(N) To insure availability of information for the public on topics of community interest.	<p>From time to time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • host public forums of Town officials to discuss current issues; • invite speakers with particular expertise to make presentations on topics of current interest; • maintain a website with information on Town laws, rules, policies, meetings, events, sites of interest, community organizations, etc.

On September 9th 2004 the Town Board of Austerlitz approved the proposed Comprehensive Plan.

A motion was made by P. Bernstein and seconded by A. Mesick to adopt the Comprehensive Plan with the changes made by the Town Board. The vote was as follows:

J. Braley: yes

R. Pinto: yes

E. Whiteman: yes

A. Mesick: yes

P. Bernstein: yes

Motion unanimously carried