

**Priority Action 9.5** *Continue to coordinate with Sullivan County to construct the planned O&W rail trail.* Part of the trail would run from Rotary Park in Livingston Manor and continue southeast to connect with the Parksville Rail Trail.

**Action 9.6** *Explore adding a shared pedestrian/bicycle lane on Pleasant Street running from the Livingston Manor business center to Rotary Park.* This would enable cyclists and walkers using the proposed O&W rail trail to safely access the Downtown business district. Bicycle lock stations could be located at the park and at locations in the Downtown district.

**Action 9.7** *Promote connectivity between residential developments.* Residential developments, especially cul-de-sacs, can become dead ends with one way in and out. Multiple ways should be explored to connect subdivisions to local destinations and to other subdivisions. For example, the Hemlock Ridge residential development has two points of vehicle ingress and egress, one of which connects the development's sidewalks with Livingston Manor's Downtown sidewalk network.

**Action 9.8** *Promote interconnection opportunities between trails, parks and pedestrian walkways with the rest of Town's transit network.*

**Action 9.9** *Coordinate with adjacent municipalities on bicycle and pedestrian transit opportunities that may cross mutual borders.*

**Strategy 10** **Monitor advances in vehicle technology against infrastructure needs they may require.**

**Action 10.1** *Encourage additional EV charging stations in the Town as needed.* Currently there are EV charging stations located at the Roscoe Diner and Roscoe Beer Co. in Roscoe and at the Catskill Brewery in Livingston Manor. If electric vehicles become more common place, there may be a need for additional charging stations at these and other locations to accommodate the people that drive them.

## **SECTION 10 – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

### **10.1 Goals**

- > To maintain a land use pattern that accommodates orderly business growth while preserving the Town's natural beauty and rural character.
- > To promote year-round tourism to enhance the economy.
- > To promote a diversified economy.
- > To invest in public improvements necessary to attract and retain businesses.

### **10.2 Summary of Existing Conditions**

In 2018, the business atmosphere in Sullivan County is generally upbeat with the opening of the \$1.3 billion Resorts World Catskills Casino and the Kartrite Resort & Indoor Water Park along with a surge in recreational tourism. Unemployment in Sullivan County is 3.8% – a ten year low, and housing sales are up.<sup>1</sup> Rockland's business community, which consists mainly of small owner-operated enterprises, shares this enthusiasm as they have seen an increasing number of tourists visiting the Town and spending money. It is interesting to note that a number of businesses are owned by individuals who hail from other regions of the nation – having once been visiting tourists themselves. Interest in opening a business in Rockland has also increased as reflected in its relatively new breweries, distillery, lodging, wine & spirits shop and others. With this increase in economic activity, now is an opportune time for the Town to take stock of its economic development strengths and challenges and plan for its economic future.

### **10.3 Strengths and challenges**

Rockland has many strengths for economic development including location, transportation, a trained labor force, infrastructure, business incentive programs and quality of life resources. However, in 2018, the



Roscoe Lumber Yards



Prohibition Distillery

<sup>1</sup> Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. Unemployment Rate in Sullivan County, NY, October 2018.

Axelrod, Daniel. "Residential real-estate market booming throughout the region." Times Herald-Record, July 28, 2018.

Town is facing challenges from stiff regional competition for business attraction, online shopping and the high cost of living and doing business in New York State. Within this context the Town must continue to take a focused and proactive approach to economic development.

### **10.3.1 Strengths**

*Strengths are the resources that strengthen the economic base and positively contribute to business operations. These resources may include the local labor force, location, incentive programs that make doing business desirable, and quality of life resources. Strengths foster economic development and retain and expand business.*

*Location.* Approximately 60 million people live within a five-hours drive from Rockland and 20 million of them are within a 2 hours drive in the New York metropolitan area. The Town is the western gateway to the state's Catskill Park and is traversed by world-class trout streams. Rural beauty and proximity to urban areas make the Town an attractive place in which to live, start a business and telework.

*Transportation Network.* Rockland's excellent roadway system, with Route 17 (future I-86) at its core, provides fast and convenient access to major metropolitan centers, interstate highways and airports. The roadways facilitate the efficient movement of people and goods both regionally and nation-wide. In particular, NY metropolitan area markets, which generated an estimated GDP of \$1.72 trillion in 2017, are within a two hours drive of the Town.<sup>2</sup> Regional motor freight services offer LTL (less-than-truck-load) and truck load freight service. NY Stewart International Airport is 1.5 hours away and offers air cargo service and international flights.

#### Travel times:

- New York City – 2 hours drive
- Boston, MA – 4.5 hours drive
- Hartford, CT – 3 hours drive
- City of Binghamton – 1 hour drive
- City of Middletown – 1 hour drive
- Route 17 intersect with I-84 in Orange County – 1 hour drive
- Sullivan County International Airport – 30 minutes drive
- Greater Binghamton Airport – 1.5 hours drive
- NY Stewart International Airport – 1.5 hours drive
- Newark Liberty International Airport in New Jersey – 2 hours drive

*Skilled workforce.* Town residents comprise an experienced and educated labor force. A large portion of the labor force is employed by professional industries, with education, healthcare and social services being the largest segment in that group (see Appendix A, Table 13). Some 90% of the Town's labor force is employed at job locations within Sullivan County, while a lesser number of workers commute to job locations outside the County (Appendix A, Figure 5). A skilled labor force is as important to business attraction as are incentive programs.

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<sup>2</sup> "GDP of the New York metro area from 2001 to 2017." Statista.com.

*Water and sewer service.* Municipal water and sewer service is available in the commercial zones of Roscoe and Livingston Manor (see Figure 3-4, Zoning Map, and figures 6-3, Livingston Manor Sewer & Water Districts and 6-4, Roscoe Sewer & Water Districts). The availability of municipal water and sewer service is a valuable asset to business attraction.

*Business incentive programs.* Numerous federal, state and county incentive programs are available to the business community. While it is not the purpose of this Plan to list each program, two county examples of note are (a) the Sullivan County Industrial Development Agency (IDA) which offers financial assistance to qualifying businesses in the form of tax incentives and tax abatement opportunities, and (b) The Sullivan County Revolving Loan Fund which provides low-interest loans to help businesses, including agribusinesses, get started and expand in the county.

*Quality of Life.* Rockland's high quality of life is grounded in a strong sense of community, attractive rural character, excellent school districts, vibrant hamlets, cultural events, and exceptional recreational opportunities. All of these attributes make Rockland an attractive place to live, work and locate a business.

### **10.3.2 Challenges**

*Challenges are negative factors that provide obstacles or stumbling blocks to economic development, and detract from business retention and expansion.*

*Cyclical economy.* The effects of the economic recessionary period of 2008-2012 have largely disappeared in the Hudson Valley and this is reflected in increased economic activity. Corporate spending within the U.S. is up as is consumer spending. Bank lending has increased and unemployment rates are at low levels, though many new jobs often pay less than pre-recession jobs. All of this has been good news for Rockland's tourist-based economy which is very much tied to the economy's cyclical highs and lows. However, lurking underneath this robust economy are rising debt levels that could put the brakes on it. In particular, US household debt at over \$13 trillion exceeds the 2008 pre-recession peak by some \$837 billion and total global debt is estimated at \$247 trillion – 2.5 times the size of the global economy.<sup>3</sup> While too-easy credit brought on the last recession, high debt levels could bring on the next one.

*Stiff Competition.* Competition for business attraction and retention primarily comes from the New York City area, northern New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut, as well as the Hudson Valley region up to and including the Albany area. All of these competing regions offer attractive business incentive programs and some have less burdensome tax and/or regulatory structures compared to New York State.

*High cost of doing business in New York State.* For over 200 years, New York State was the nation's center of capitalism, prosperity, ingenuity and opportunity. However, over the past forty years the state's role as an economic engine has faltered. The cause is largely rooted in New York State's tax structure,

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<sup>3</sup> Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Center for Microeconomic Data. [Household Debt Registers Faster in Q3 2018](#).  
Institute of International Finance. [Global Debt Monitor – July 2018](#).  
International Monetary Fund. [World Economic Outlook \(April 2018\)](#).



and multiple layers of government and regulatory requirements all of which can be impediments to economic development. The State has one of the highest overall tax rates in the nation according to the Tax Foundation; the State's municipal "home rule" structure gives local municipalities authority over various land use approvals which can cause delays, and projects may require review from county and state agencies which can add further delays. If a project is determined to be a Type 1 action under the State Environmental Quality Review Act, the project sponsor may need to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement which can add considerable time and cost to a project's pre-development costs.

*High cost of living in New York State.* New York's high cost of living is causing many of its working age residents to flee the state to less expensive areas of the country.<sup>4</sup> Between 2017 and 2018, the state had the highest out-migration rate of any state in the nation for the third year in a row.<sup>5</sup> Where the workers go businesses will follow.

*Lack of shovel-ready building sites.* While this issue primarily affects projects involving more than five acres, it can affect smaller ones as well. Currently there is a shortage of shovel-ready building sites in Sullivan County and there are none in Rockland, yet shovel ready sites can play an important role in attracting economic growth.<sup>6</sup> This poses a challenge to attracting new corporate businesses, many of which want to be operational within one year. However, navigating the regulatory approval process can take a year or longer, especially if an Environmental Impact Statement is required. Fully engineered sites with municipal approval are important to attracting companies interested in doing business in Sullivan County. The Town and County are currently at a disadvantage with competitor regions that have a varied selection of shovel-ready sites.

*High Infrastructure costs.* The high cost of infrastructure improvements can be an impediment to economic growth. The Town currently benefits from a well maintained infrastructure base which includes municipal water and sewer service in most of its commercial zones. In particular, wastewater facilities serving the Roscoe and Livingston Manor downtown business zones are currently in the midst of significant upgrades which will allow them to operate well into the future. However, the cost to expand water and sewer service to unserved areas of the Town's commercial zones could be a disincentive to attracting new businesses, especially those projects with high volume water and sewer requirements.

*Broadband service gaps.* Currently broadband service gaps exist in certain rural parts of the Town which is a major deterrent to economic growth in those areas. Tourists, including second home owners, home-based businesses, teleworkers, farmers and year-round residents all require internet service.

*National and Global competition.* Even rural communities such as Rockland are competing in the global economy. On the one hand, the Town successfully competes as a world-wide recreational tourist

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<sup>4</sup> Quinnipiac University / Poll. 35% of New Yorkers expect to move for a better life, March 20, 2019.

Campanile, Carl and Max Jaeger. "41% in city can't afford life in state: poll," *New York Post*, March 21, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Westchester County Business Journal. *New York ranks first in population loss (again)*, January 4, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Walsh, James. "Real estate summit explores county's strengths, challenges." *Times Herald-Record*, May 22, 2015.

attraction. In particular, its world-class fly-fishing streams attract fishing enthusiasts from all over the world. On the other hand, the Town would seem to be a logical location for manufacturers of fishing equipment. At a minimum, one might expect to find a small, boutique manufacturer of fishing flies. Unfortunately cheap overseas labor coupled with the high cost of doing business in the state causes companies to manufacture this equipment elsewhere. Many fishing flies are imported from Africa.

*Online shopping.* In addition to competing with large-scale malls, many small-business owners are also competing with online shopping. Many people today – working long hours and sometimes two jobs – have less time to do things like shop at small stores or even at large malls and supermarkets. Still other folks prefer use their free time for other activities rather than shopping at a box store. The convenience and time saving advantage of shopping at online sites – which often offer lower prices than box stores – represents a challenge to a number of Rockland’s small businesses.

#### **10.4 Planning for future economic development**

While it is recognized that some elements which attract business investment, like market forces and capital availability, are out of the Town’s control, it is also recognized that there are many things the Town *can* do to promote a positive business environment.

##### **10.4.1 *Maintain a land use plan that accommodates growth while preserving the Town’s natural beauty, rural character and historic heritage.***

The pristine natural beauty of Rockland’s forests, streams and lakes; its exceptional recreational opportunities; its open space and attractive hamlets are critical assets to its success as a tourist and second home destination. As discussed below, tourism represents a large component of the Town’s economy, so protecting these natural assets is vital to a successful economic future. The Town should periodically review its zoning districts and Zoning Law with an eye toward guiding growth in ways that protect and enhance these assets from which future generations can enjoy and prosper.

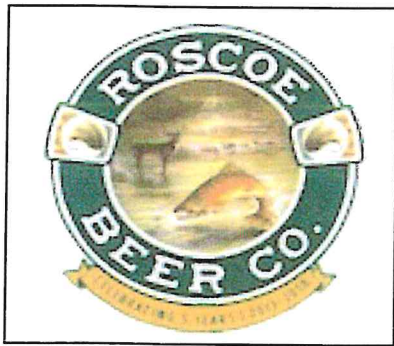
##### **10.4.2 *Enhance year-round tourism.***

Rockland’s economy is largely driven by tourism including second-home owners which fall into the tourism category. The Town’s rural natural beauty, attractive hamlets and exceptional recreational opportunities, including world-class fishing streams, attract tourists from around the nation and the world. In 2016, the total state-wide economic impact of tourism was 104.8 billion which generated 914,000 tourism jobs and 8.2 billion in state and local taxes.<sup>7</sup> In 2016, tourism was up some 8% over the previous year in Sullivan County and it realized \$419 million from tourism spending of which \$140 million was generated by second homes.<sup>8</sup> The annual economic impact from sport fishing alone in Sullivan County is

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<sup>7</sup> New York State Office of the Governor. Governor Cuomo Announces Economic Impact of Tourism Achieves Historic \$104.8 billion, May 11, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Tourism Economics. “The Economic Impact of Tourism in New York: 2016 Calendar Year Catskill Focus.” Oxford Economics Ltd. Abraham, Joseph. “Tourism sparks the economy to the tune of \$419 million in 2016.” Sullivan County Democrat, March 2018.



Small business shops, Livingston Manor

estimated at \$12 million.<sup>9</sup> Some 15.5% of all labor income in the County comes from tourism.<sup>10</sup>

Currently most tourism activity, including second homeowners, occurs during the warm months of spring, summer and early fall and then declines during the winter. That leaves many tourist dependent businesses with several lean months to contend with. The drop in economic activity seems to coincide with a drop in media and marketing exposure despite the fact that the area offers exceptional winter recreation opportunities in the form of snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, snow biking, ice fishing, snowboarding, etc. For example, NYC millennials looking for a break from the digital world are discovering the peaceful attractions of ice fishing just as they have with warm weather fly fishing. When the O&W rail trail is operational it will present some excellent cross-country skiing, snow biking and snowshoeing opportunities. The Town could work with the Sullivan County Visitors Association and the local chambers of commerce to promote the area as a year-round tourist destination, and not just for outdoor recreation but for quaint lodging, cultural arts, and eco-tourism. Development of a social media based presence that touts year-round tourist attractions could benefit the Town.

#### 10.4.3 *Diversify the economy to make it more resilient.*

With Rockland's economy largely built around tourism, this reliance on one industry comes with risks such as the cyclical ups and downs of the economy and the ever evolving nature of the tourism industry. Tourism is a discretionary expenditure and, as such, it tends to be something people cut back on when economic times are tough. And while tourists are once again flocking to the area, what happens if Sullivan County's many tourist attractions fall out of favor as they did once before in the 1970s? When the resort industry died in the 1970s, the County was mired for several decades in a recession with high unemployment. Broadening the Town's economic base would help make it more resilient to economic downturns and/or to the loss of any one industry. For example, agribusiness, which includes agricultural production, support services and value-added processing (i.e., breweries that turn hops into beer), is an economic sector that is well positioned to expand in the Town (see Section 11, Agriculture). The trend

<sup>9</sup> Beam, Andrew. "A cold start to trout fishing season." *Times Herald-Record*, April 2, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Tourism Economics (see footnote 8).

towards remote office (RO) work (i.e., telework) is another area that could benefit the Town. Made possible by high speed broadband, more companies and workers are embracing the flexible work style offered by RO. In 2015, roughly 23% of employees reported some work done remotely and by 2020 RO workers may account for up to 50% of the workforce with educated millennial and Gen Z workers leading the way.<sup>11</sup> RO workers in the NY metropolitan area would find Rockland's far lower cost of living, high quality of life and proximity to NYC an ideal place to relocate. Attracting RO workers to live in the Town would provide a year-round boost to the local economy and help to stem recent declines in population. The Town should assess its stock of rental housing as many RO workers prefer to rent (see also Section 4, Residential Areas).

#### **10.4.4 *Invest in public improvements necessary to attract and retain businesses.***

Maintaining and improving infrastructure is critical to attracting and retaining businesses, and Rockland has infrastructure assets that businesses look for. Most Town lands zoned for intensive commercial use have available municipal water and sewer service. The Town has been diligent in maintaining its water and wastewater systems and is currently upgrading its two wastewater treatment facilities. Most businesses do not want the expense of developing and maintaining potable water and septic systems. For businesses with large water and wastewater demands, there is often little choice but to locate in a municipality where these services are available. The Town's roadway system is well maintained and its centers of commercial activity in Roscoe and Livingston Manor have quick access to Route 17 (future I-86). The Town should continue to invest in road maintenance and make sure that it keeps its three access interchanges to Route 17 as it transitions to I-86.

The quaint, historic beauty of downtown Roscoe and Livingston Manor are qualities that attract businesses and people to these hamlets. As discussed in Section 5, Commercial Areas, the Town should develop town-wide design guidelines for commercial structures and expand the sidewalk networks in the two hamlets. These steps would improve the attractiveness of both hamlets to businesses and visitors.

Broadband internet plays an integral role in 21st century economies and in the daily lives of most people young and old alike. Commercial lands in and round Roscoe and Livingston Manor have access to broadband service which is vital to attracting and retaining businesses. Fiber optic service may also be available in the near future in the Downtown areas of both hamlets. However, there are some rural gaps in town-wide broadband service which deters new residents, second home owners, commercial development, home-based businesses, and teleworkers from locating to these areas. The Comprehensive Plan Committee placed special emphasis on eliminating broadband service gaps in the Town and making broadband coverage available to every person and business regardless of location. Toward this end, the Town is working with state and local elected officials to achieve this goal and some locations without broadband service are now set to receive it. The Town is also exploring alternative means to provide internet service such as the NYC-Mesh system which operates independently from major carriers such as Spectrum and Verizon.

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<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. *American Time Use Survey—2017 Results*. June 28, 2018.  
"By 2020, 50% of Workforce Will be Remote. Here's How." Sector Watch, MarketWatch. April 19, 2017.



## **10.5 Recommendations**

### **Strategy 1      Develop a list of strategic locations for development.**

- Action 1.1      *Develop an inventory of commercial sites available for development or redevelopment as a tool to facilitate business attraction and expansion. Each identified property should include detailed information such as parcel size, utility availability, building and/or land description, and distance to transportation modes.*
- Action 1.2      *Coordinate with property owners, realtors and the Sullivan County Partnership to maintain the above said inventory so it remains up-to-date. Real estate is a constantly changing resource so to be successful the inventory must be current.*
- Action 1.3      *Coordinate with the Sullivan County Partnership to showcase commercial and industrial properties available for development on the Partnership's website.*
- Action 1.4      *Establish a web portal for economic development on the Town's website and post the property inventory on the portal (see also Action 5.1 below). Also include other information relevant to business attraction and retention such as financial incentive programs.*
- Action 1.5      *Explore expanding the GB and NB zones to increase the inventory of commercial properties.*

### **Strategy 2      Develop a target list of business sectors that would enhance and diversify Rockland's economy.**

- Action 2.1      *Identify types of businesses that would complement the Town's existing businesses and tourism infrastructure (including 2<sup>nd</sup> homeowners). These may include additional lodging, restaurants, garden center, bicycle sales and repair, refrigerated trucking for agricultural products and food processing and distribution.*
- Action 2.2      *Consult with Sullivan County and the Sullivan County Partnership to develop a list of target industries that would add diversity to the Town's economy. These could include software development, light manufacturing, corporate offices and agribusiness value-added processing.*
- Action 2.3      *Develop a target list of jobs that can be done by telecommuting. Rockland's high quality of life attractions, low cost of living and its proximity to New York City*

make it an ideal location for telecommuting jobs such as law, graphics, design, animation, ROBO (remote office/branch office), software development, distance research and learning, artists and interactive media. These types of jobs would add new full-time residents to the community and boost the Town's year-round economy.

- Action 2.4     *Support Sullivan County's initiatives to enhance and diversify the county's economy. Rockland residents could benefit from well-paying jobs located in other parts of the county as well as in the Town.*

**Strategy 3     Seek to develop shovel-ready sites.**

- Action 3.1     *Encourage property owners to ready their lands for business development by conducting a site analysis and environmental reviews leading to generic environmental approval.*
- Action 3.2     *Encourage property owners to apply for governmental funding initiatives targeted to develop shovel ready sites.*
- Action 3.3     *Encourage Sullivan County to develop shovel ready incentive programs.*

**Strategy 4     Support efforts to streamline Permits and SEQRA**

- Action 4.1     *Periodically review the Town's Zoning Law for ways to streamline the permit approval process without compromising essential reviews. Opportunities may exist to create more business-friendly regulations for small businesses, including home-based businesses and agribusinesses.*
- Action 4.2     *Encourage governmental efforts to develop meaningful procedures to streamline the effectiveness and predictability of actions subject to the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA). For example, the Environmental Assessment Short-Form under SEQR was revised by the state to help streamline the review process for some projects.*
- Action 4.3     *Review the Town's Zoning Law with a focus on identifying ways (if any) to simplify and expedite the commercial land use review process.*

**Strategy 5     Promote the Town as a desirable place to locate a business.**

- Action 5.1     *Utilize the Town's website to create a business portal by which to tout the Town's economic development strengths including quality of life assets. Include the property inventory discussed in strategy 1 above and showcase new*

businesses and successful, well established businesses in the Town. Include a link to the Sullivan County Partnership and Roscoe and Livingston Manor Chambers of Commerce

- Action 5.2      *Utilize relevant social media platforms to promote business attraction.* Social media has integrated into daily communications and the Town should use these platforms to promote its attributes as a desirable place to locate a business or from which to telework (see action 2.3 above). Target businesses identified in Strategy 2 above.

**Strategy 6      Maintain and enhance the Town's transportation advantages.**

- Action 6.1      *Monitor new development projects that could increase traffic flow on the Town's roadways.* Seek to implement appropriate measures to mitigate potential traffic congestion on these roads.
- Priority Action 6.2      *Support governmental initiatives to mitigate traffic congestion on Route 17 between Liberty and its intersect with NY I-87 (Thruway).* Developers seeking to site a commercial operation such as a food processing hub or distribution center are concerned about the potential for traffic congestion that can impede business flow. Tourists and 2<sup>nd</sup> homeowners share the same concern.
- Action 6.3      *Maintain Town roads to facilitate traffic flow to and from business centers.* Local market-based businesses require well maintained roads for customer access while larger manufacturing businesses require ease of access to interstates.
- Action 6.4      *Identify any existing traffic bottlenecks and other traffic problems and seek to develop solutions for the same.*
- Action 6.5      *Encourage regional initiatives to improve transportation and distribution infrastructure which could benefit Sullivan County.* The state's proposed cargo distribution hub at NY Stewart International Airport and locating a transrail distribution hub in Orange County are two such projects that could benefit businesses in Sullivan County.
- Action 6.6      Support Sullivan County efforts to expand public transit services both in the private and governmental sectors.

**Strategy 7      Explore expanding water and sewer service in commercial zones.**

- Action 7.1      *Explore opportunities to expand municipal water and sewer service in the GB and NB commercial zones in Roscoe and Livingston Manor.* Some properties in these zones do not have access to water and sewer service, while others have access to one of these services but not both.



- Action 7.2      *Identify governmental funding programs and private sector opportunities to finance any future expansion of municipal water and sewer service in the GB and NB commercial zones. It is not unusual for developers to contribute to costs associated with bringing water and sewer service to their properties.*

**Strategy 8      Work to close broadband service gaps in the Town.**

**Priority Action 8.1**      *Continue to work with elected officials and governmental agencies to expand broadband service to all areas of the Town.*

**Priority Action 8.2**      *Work to identify areas in the Town where mobile phone and/or broadband internet service are not available.* This would enable the Town to become a more effective advocate in working to provide mobile phone and broadband service to these areas.

Action 8.3      *Continue to monitor alternative ways to provide broadband service to close service gaps. New or existing technologies may offer viable ways to close service gaps and/or offer better and less expensive internet service to all areas of the Town.*

Action 8.4      *Explore federal, state and private sector programs designed to assist rural communities in closing local gaps in broadband internet service.*

**Strategy 9      Partner with Sullivan County, the Sullivan County Partnership and the Roscoe and Livingston Manor chambers of commerce on initiatives to attract and retain businesses.**

Action 9.1      *Coordinate with Sullivan County as it implements recommended actions in its Economic Development: Sullivan 2020 Toolbox. The plan contains strategies which could benefit Rockland's business attraction and retention efforts.*

Action 9.2      *Work with the Sullivan County Partnership on business attraction opportunities and marketing strategies. Focus on industries where there is an identified local need and/or locational advantage such as food processing, food distribution and on industries utilizing teleworkers.*

Action 9.3      *Work with the Sullivan County Partnership on opportunities to target a small but growing number of companies seeking to 'reshore' foreign operations to the United States. One example is the high-end apparel industry which has made a significant move back to the U.S.*



**Strategy 10 Promote small business attraction and retention.**

Small businesses generate tax revenues and often account for a large portion of jobs in a given community. Small businesses are significant generators of jobs in Rockland.

- Action 10.1 *Support county-wide entrepreneurial programs that assist new and existing businesses with marketing, business plans, local regulations and funding opportunities.*
- Action 10.2 *Continue to support small-scale home occupations in the Town's residential zones.*
- Action 10.3 *Support shared office space for business start-ups and short-term and long-term businesses.* Opportunities for shared space can lower operating costs and provide an additional source of income for businesses that own their buildings. For example, Willow & Brown, a retail store in Livingston Manor, shares space with the Sugar Blossoms floral shop.
- Action 10.4 *Encourage new agribusiness ventures in the Town.*
- Action 10.5 *Explore creating a Town Local Development Corporation (LDC).* LDC's can be used to support economic development efforts and other public purposes. LDC's have a wide variety of activities in their toolbox to foster the attraction or expansion of new and existing businesses, enhance employment opportunities, provide job training, acquire and sell real property, and other activities.
- Action 10.6 *Explore the implementation of local incentives that would benefit new and existing businesses.* For example, some communities offer property tax reductions for a period of time to commercial property owners who improve their buildings in specific ways such as façade improvements.

**Strategy 11 Promote agribusiness industries, including agricultural production, support services, and value-added processing.**

Rockland recognizes the importance of agribusiness operations to the Town's economy. See also Section 11, Agriculture.

- Action 11.1 *Encourage and support Sullivan County as it implements recommended actions in its 2014 Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan.* The plan contains recommendations that could enhance agribusiness retention and development in the Town.

- Action 11.2     *Encourage governmental and private sector financial initiatives that support young farmers.* For example, New York State offers the New Farmers Grant Fund and the Young Farmers Loan Forgiveness Program to help young farmers get in the business and remain there. Many farm credit cooperatives have programs to help start-up farms secure working capital.

**Strategy 12     Promote labor force education.**

- Action 12.1     *Work to identify skills gaps in the local labor force and encourage development of training and education programs to fill them.* Promote this action with the Sullivan County Partnership and local and higher education institutions. For example Orange-Ulster BOCES has offered a commercial sewing class in response to the reshoring of the high-end clothing manufacturing industry (see Action 9.3 above).
- Action 12.2     *Encourage governmental and private sector initiatives to promote apprenticeship programs.* There are currently shortages of trained workers in areas such as construction trades, manufacturing trades, technology and healthcare. Many of these are well-paying trade jobs which do not require a college degree.

**Strategy 13     Encourage the expansion of childcare providers in the Town.**

- Action 13.1     *Work with Sullivan County on ways to increase the number of childcare providers in the county.* This service is critical to many working families. Currently, there is a shortage of childcare providers in the county and there are none in Rockland.

**Strategy 14     Plan for the development of alternative energy systems that minimally impact adjacent land uses, properties, and the environment in each of the Town's zoning districts.**

- Action 14.1     *Periodically review and revise (if necessary) existing Town regulations for solar photovoltaic energy systems.* For example, recent advances in solar energy storage will now allow on-site energy storage to be included with solar photovoltaic systems. The Town should review its existing solar energy regulations and revise them (if necessary) to factor in this advance.
- Action 14.2     *Periodically review and revise (if necessary) existing regulations for wind energy systems.*
- Action 14.3     *Monitor advances in energy technology and develop regulations for any such advances where appropriate.*

## **SECTION 11 – AGRICULTURE**

### **11.1 Goals**

- > To promote and expand agribusiness entrepreneurship as an important component of Rockland's economy.<sup>1</sup>
- > To encourage policies and programs that enhance the economic viability of agricultural production.
- > To preserve prime farmland and facilitate access to farmland for new and next-generation farmers.

### **11.2 Summary of existing conditions**

Rockland's roots lie partly in agriculture and this heritage continues to be a presence in the Town today despite the escalating challenges of operating farms and preserving farmland. The Town is located within Agricultural District #4, which district was created by the New York State Legislature in 1975 under the State's 1971 Agricultural Districts Law. District #4 covers approximately 46,747 acres across Sullivan County including lands in Rockland and several nearby townships. As shown in Figure 11-1, Agricultural Districts, the portions of District #4 in Rockland primarily consist of scattered parcels of land. Figure 11-2, Farmland Soils, shows that a considerable amount of Town lands are suitable for agricultural production.

Rockland has many strengths for agricultural production including a growing regional market for local farm products, proximity to the NY metropolitan area food market and an excellent transportation network. The Town also has available lands that are zoned to accommodate agricultural support services and food processing operations. However, in 2018 the Town's farmers are facing increased national and global competition, high costs of production, high costs of land, the State's high tax rates, and, in the case of dairy farms, volatile milk prices that are currently too low to support most farms.

Historically, agriculture has been a vital economic engine to the economy of New York State while at the



Hay field (view from Route 152)

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<sup>1</sup> **Agribusiness** is an all-inclusive term coined in the 1950s that covers the complex value-added chain that begins with the farmer's purchase of seed and livestock and ends with a product for the consumer's table. Agribusiness is the business of agricultural production, agricultural support services and agricultural manufacturing.

Figure 11-1  
Agricultural Districts  
Town of Rockland  
Sullivan County, NY

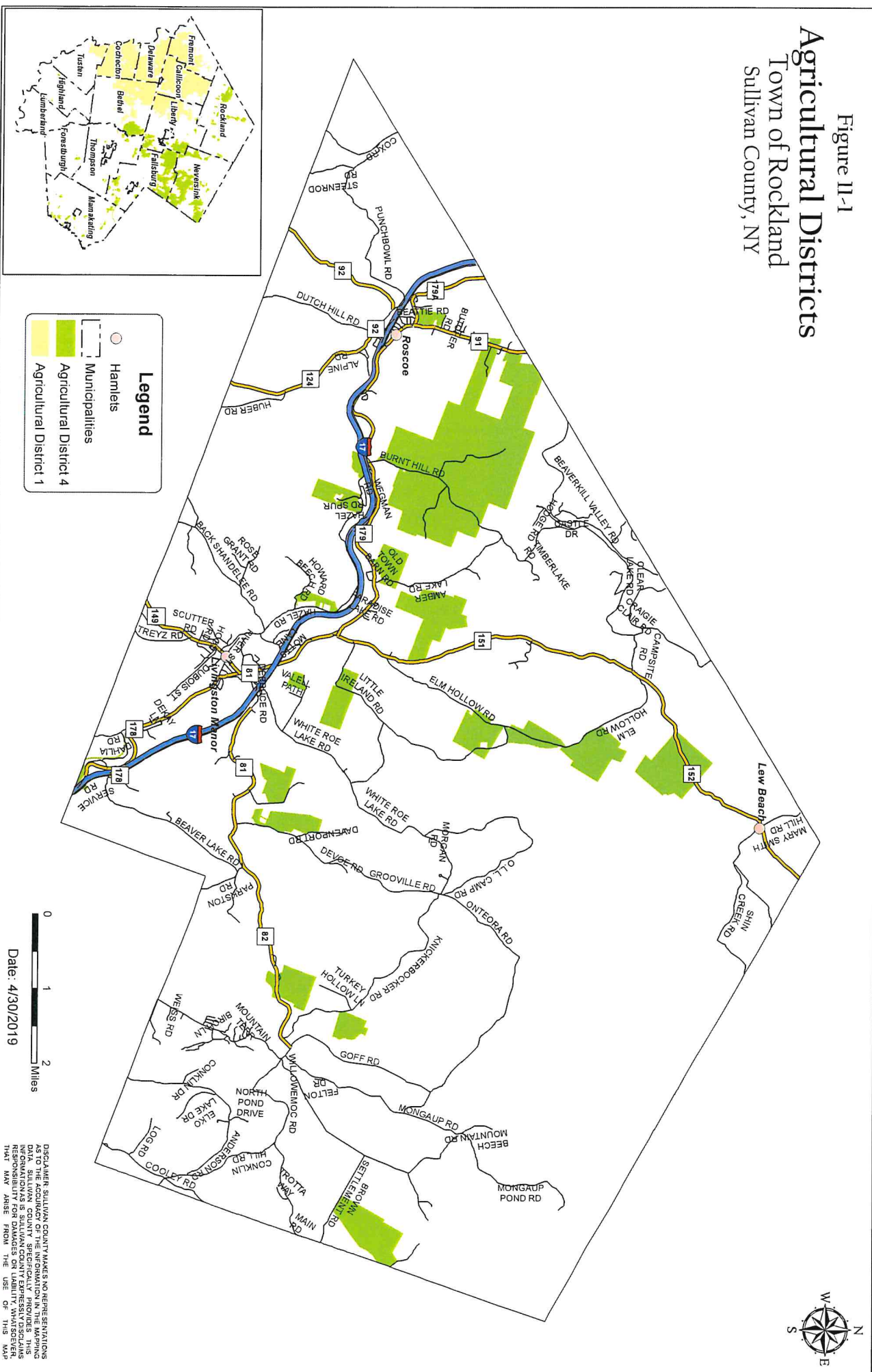
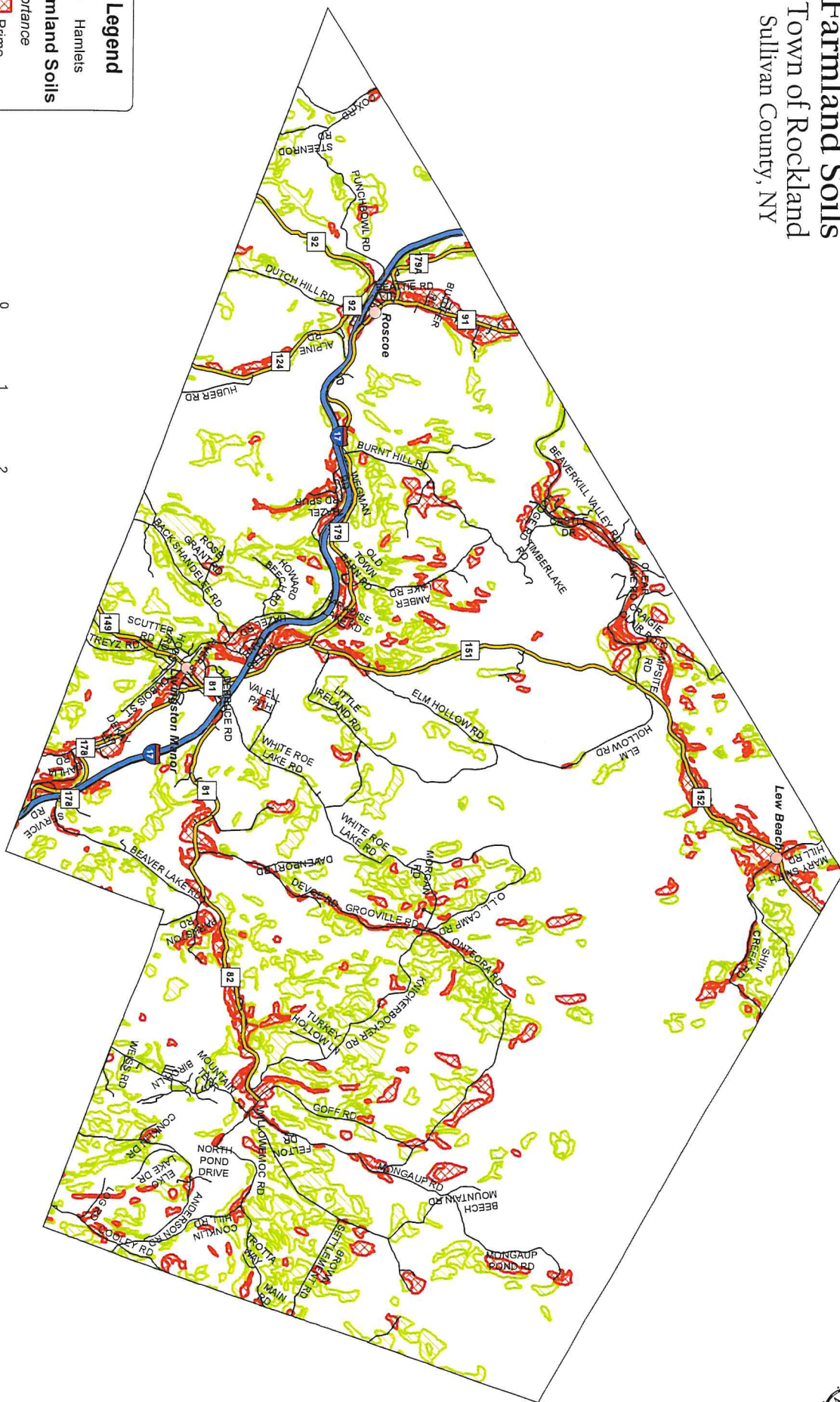
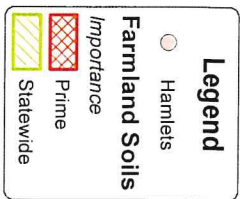




Figure 11-2  
**Farmland Soils**  
 Town of Rockland  
 Sullivan County, NY



DISCLAIMER: SULLIVAN COUNTY MAKES NO REPRESENTATIONS AS TO THE ACCURACY OF THE INFORMATION IN THE MAPPING. SULLIVAN COUNTY EXPRESSLY DISCLAIMS ANY AND ALL LIABILITY FOR DAMAGES OR LIABILITY, WHATSOEVER, THAT MAY ARISE FROM THE USE OF THIS MAP.

same time enhancing the social and environmental quality of life of all New Yorkers. Agriculture contributes billions of dollars to the state's economy while also providing open space and scenic beauty that is cherished by millions of New Yorkers, as well as by the millions of tourists that visit the state each year.

It is important to stress that agriculture *is* economic development. All too often agriculture's economic contribution to the overall economy is overlooked by local governments which tend to focus on other sectors like technology, distribution and manufacturing. In fact, the agribusiness industry is a significant economic engine in New York State that produces jobs and revenue, while placing little demand on public services such as fire, police, and education. Studies have shown that farms generally contribute more in taxes than they require in public services making them net revenue generators for both municipal and school budgets (In 2008, for every dollar Rockland's farms paid in taxes they required only 50¢ in services.<sup>2</sup>).<sup>3</sup> In 2014, on-farm agricultural production returned over \$6.7 billion to the state's economy and employed over 54,000 workers.<sup>4</sup> While agriculture production only accounts for a small portion of the state's economy, output from this sector generates a strong downstream multiplier effect on the economy in terms of jobs and added economic output.<sup>5</sup> This is because agricultural production requires support services such as feed, seeds, financial services, fuel, equipment and equipment repair, veterinary services, as well as food processing facilities. It also creates spin-off businesses such as wineries, breweries, distilleries, ice cream parlors and many others. The agricultural services and value-added agricultural manufacturing sectors contributed over \$38 billion in sales to the state's economy in 2014 and accounted for close to 91,000 jobs.<sup>6</sup> This statistic suggests that agricultural production, support services and manufacturing sectors have a combined impact of some 44.7 billion annually to the state's economy and generate some 145,000 jobs. Farms also contribute scenic working landscapes, rural heritage and quality of life, all of which support the state's multi-billion dollar tourism industry. Simply put, agricultural land use is an economic driver that creates jobs and helps to balance both municipal and school budgets in the same way as commercial and industrial land use. Agriculture *is* economic development.

The number of farms in Sullivan County has been in decline for decades. In the 1960s there were some 500 operating farms in the County while in 2003 only 235 farms remained.<sup>7</sup> However, it is encouraging to note that by 2017 the number of farms had increased to 366 with a combined 59,942 acres.<sup>8</sup> This trend shows an increase in the number of farms producing vegetables, while the number of dairy farms continues to decrease from 53 in 2002 to just 18 by the end of 2018.<sup>9</sup> To put this figure into perspective, in 1950 there were 631 dairy farms in the County.<sup>10</sup> In 2012, the market value of agricultural production

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<sup>2</sup> Sullivan County Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan, December 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Glynwood Center. The State of Agriculture in the Hudson Valley, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Schmit, Todd. The Economic Contributions of Agriculture in New York State (2014). Cornell University, Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management, August 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., Abstract.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> "Ground UP, Cultivating Sustainable Agriculture in the Catskill Region." Columbia University, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> 2017 Census of Agriculture, Sullivan County, New York. US Department of Agriculture.

<sup>9</sup> Rife, Judy. "Growing number of local dairy farms shutting down," Times Herald-Record, December 25, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Sullivan County Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan, December 2014.





Bee hives, Cripple Creek Farm



Elm Garden & Flora Design – commercial flower farm

in Sullivan County was \$28.4 million with livestock and poultry accounting for \$22.8 million and \$5.6 million for crops.<sup>11</sup> When this figure is combined with agricultural support services and value-added manufacturing the total impact to the County's economy is over \$741 million.<sup>12</sup> In addition, agritourism is a small but growing component of the agricultural economy, which plays nicely into the County's \$449.7 million tourism industry.<sup>13</sup>

In Rockland, the importance of agribusiness to the Town's economy and the pressures impacting farming are recognized. Historically, agricultural production was a profitable business despite unpredictable weather and other challenges. However, the introduction of supermarkets and national and global competition in the 1960s and 1970s began to alter the agricultural landscape. Increased competition and high operating costs resulted in decreased profit margins throughout the production and distribution chain, with profits often not making it to the farmer. In this climate, the Town has seen the number of full-time farms steadily decline as farmers frequently have little choice but to shut down rather than operate at marginal profit rates or at a loss. That said, in the past year a new vegetable farm began production in the Town, so the county's recent uptick in new farms may spread to the Town.

While there are no remaining dairy farms in Rockland, there are full-time and part-time agricultural operations which produce forage, vegetables, microgreens, berries, livestock, poultry, horses, honey and flowers. The Town has recently seen growth in the agribusiness processing sector with the opening of two breweries and one distillery with an additional brewery under construction. It should also be noted that some farmers have seen an increase in prices for produce, beef and lamb as a result of direct sales to high end restaurants and New York City green markets where these commodities command a higher price than local markets offer. The twist is that many locally raised farm products are not available to local residents because they can be sold at higher prices elsewhere.

A community such as Rockland, which has seen the steady growth of its 2<sup>nd</sup> home market, has a higher risk of losing valuable agricultural land along with part of its rural character. The low profitability of farming has impacted a farmers ability to stay on the land to say nothing of saving for retirement. This

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<sup>11</sup> 2017 Census of Agriculture, Sullivan County, New York. US Department of Agriculture.

<sup>12</sup> Sullivan County Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan, December 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Axelrod, Daniel. "Hudson Valley tourists spending more every year," *Times Herald-Record*, August 26, 2018.



Main Street Farm (an eatery featuring local farm products)



Livingston Manor farmers market

essentially causes the value of a farmer's land to become his/her retirement nest egg. While farmers can choose to sell their land to developers, many farmers, and sons and daughters of farmers, might prefer to stay on the land if farming was more profitable. Promoting profitable farms is the best way to keep farmers on the land.

### 11.3 Strengths and challenges

#### 11.3.1 Strengths

*Strengths are the resources that strengthen the economic base and positively contribute to business operations. These resources may include the local labor force, location, incentive programs that make doing business desirable, and quality of life resources. Strengths foster economic development and retain and expand business.*

Regional food movement. Increasing concerns over food safety and public health have contributed to a strong food movement in New York City and the greater Hudson Valley and an increased demand for safe, fresh, local food. This has resulted in a surge in the number of farmers markets as well as an increase in mainstream grocery stores, food distributors, restaurants, breweries and other food service companies that carry and/or process locally produced food.

New York City food market. Rockland's proximity to the New York City food market, which is larger, more ethnically diverse and wealthier than most other consumer markets in the nation, is a key asset for



Catskill Brewery



Strawberries, Mountain Sweet Berry Farm





Beaver Lake Farm



Snowdance Farm

local farms. The NYC food market consists of some eight million residents, \$30 billion in food spending and a budget for institutional meals second only to the U.S. military.<sup>14</sup> However, this is a market whose demand for regionally produced food is not fully met. It is estimated that the City's unmet annual demand for regionally produced food exceeds \$600 million.<sup>15</sup> This represents an opportunity for local farmers and food processors to expand operations to meet this demand and thereby increase profits. The Mountain Sweet Berry Farm has tapped into the NYC market and sells produce directly to consumers through the GrowNYC farmers market program. The Catskill Brewery markets its craft beer to the NYC market.

Transportation network. As discussed in Section 9, Transportation, the Town has access to an excellent regional network of local roadways, interstate highways and an international airport. Regional motor freight services offer LTL (less than truck load) and truck load freight services. These transportation modes provide quick access to the New York metropolitan markets and to other regional markets via interlinking highways. There is a need, however, for more “small box” trucking as well as refrigerated trucking services to transport perishable farm products.

Direct sales. A number of Sullivan County farms are able to sell a large part of their production directly to end users at farmers markets, restaurants and grocery stores. Direct sales can increase profits by cutting out the middleman. The Snowdance Farm in Rockland distributes livestock and poultry meats, including beef, chicken, turkey, lamb, pork and pheasant, directly to high-end restaurants both local and in NYC.

Availability of land. Rockland currently has lands suitable for agricultural production which are not being used. Farmland in Rockland is generally less expensive than lands in the rest of the mid-Hudson region. In addition, the Town's zoning law allows land uses for a variety of agricultural support businesses.

Increasing number of new farmers. Over the past twenty years, the Mid-Hudson region has seen a marked increase in the number of new farmers which is largely driven by the demand for locally produced food and by the region's proximity to the NYC food market. Most of them work small to midsized farms that often incorporate multiple crops and a variety of livestock into their business models.

<sup>14</sup> The New York City Council, “Foodworks: A Vision to Improve NYC's Food System,” 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Soils and climate. The Town's soils are not entirely suited to growing vegetable crops, though some lands are productive in this regard. However, most soils are well suited for raising forage such as hay along with grazing livestock. The climate supports a wide variety of agricultural products.

Diversity of products. Local farms can produce a variety of agricultural products which allow them to fill a growing demand from regional populations and high-value markets. In addition, markets for niche ethnic foods in NYC can offer favorable prices and reduced competition.

### **11.3.2 Challenges**

*Challenges are negative factors that provide obstacles or stumbling blocks to economic development, and detract from business retention and expansion.*

Competition. The competitiveness of agriculture in New York State relative to national and global competitors is a concern. The high cost of food production in the State makes competing with lower cost national and global food producers a challenging proposition.

Difficulty accessing the New York City food market. Weaknesses in the food distribution system can make it difficult for small regional farmers to connect with the NYC food market. At the same time, City restaurants and food retailers often encounter difficulty sourcing regional agricultural products from wholesalers.<sup>16</sup>

High operating costs. The high costs of equipment, feed, energy, fertilizer, capital, labor and other factors contribute to high production costs. In addition, New York State has one of the highest overall tax rates in the country including property taxes and income taxes. The State's minimum wage rates are higher than many other states.

Low profitability. Prices received for the sale of farm produce outside of the NYC market are often low in comparison to production costs and this causes thin profit margins. Average expenses per farm in Sullivan County were \$111,068 in 2017, while average net income (after expenses) was -\$23,866.<sup>17</sup>



Upward Brewing Company



Harvest time, Mountain Sweet Berry Farm

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<sup>16</sup> The New York City Council, Foodworks: A Vision to Improve NYC's Food System, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> 2017 Census of Agriculture, Sullivan County, New York. US Department of Agriculture.





Collins Farm



Beaver Lake Farm



Foxwillow Farm

Dairy farms in particular are subject to volatile milk prices which frequently do not cover production costs. Roughly one-third of county farms cleared a profit in 2012.<sup>18</sup> Bulk milk prices are currently so low that many dairy farms in New York State are operating at a loss and going out of business.

High cost and diminishing supply of farmland. Lack of affordable farmland can be an impediment for new and existing farmers in the Mid-Hudson region and this issue will continue as growth pressures drive up the developed value of prime agricultural land. Farmers need deep, well-drained soil on fairly level land which is exactly the type of land developers seek. Developers usually win in the ensuing competition for land and much of the Mid-Hudson's prime farmland has been sold to developers. While farmland in Sullivan County tends to be less expensive than in the rest of the Mid-Hudson region, it is still an expensive proposition for farmers to expand operations and new farmers can be priced out of the market. This forces some farmers to rent land, if they can afford to, which impacts already thin profit margins.

Weak distribution system. The food distribution network in the Mid-Hudson region is currently not adequate to meet the supply of local food production. In particular, this hurts medium and small sized farms that may not have the resources to distribute their own products to regional markets.

Difficulty attracting new farmers. A majority of New York State farmers are over age 50 and in Sullivan County the average age was 59.7 years in 2012.<sup>19</sup> Not surprisingly, the farming industry has struggled to attract young farmers because farming will not financially sustain them. In 2007, farmers in the Hudson Valley region had an expense to sales ratio of 94% making for very narrow profit margins<sup>20</sup> As a result, many farm families must earn off-farm income in order to survive. Approximately 55% of county farms earned less than \$10,000 in 2012 and it is assumed that off-farm income keeps most of these farms in business.<sup>21</sup> Residents have expressed concern about county farms that have no successors to eventually take over operations.<sup>22</sup> Aging farmers need to be replaced by new young farmers in order to preserve farmland and maintain agriculture's contribution to the Town's overall economy.

<sup>18</sup> Sullivan County Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan, December 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Glynwood Center. *The State of Agriculture in the Hudson Valley*, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Sullivan County Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan, December 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Rural gaps in Town-wide high speed internet service. As discussed in Section 10, Economic Development, internet service gaps currently exist in certain rural parts of the Town. At the same time, access to the internet has become increasingly important to farmers for crop management, marketing and accessing governmental assistance programs.

Other issues. Additional issues facing Sullivan County's farmers are the lack of local processing facilities, farmers unaware of the broad array of governmental assistance programs, a burdensome regulatory structure, and the high cost and limited availability of capital. The limited availability of a motivated and qualified labor force due, in part, to unsettled federal immigration policies and a cumbersome guest worker program is also problematic.

#### **11.4 Recommendations**

##### **Strategy 1      Coordinate the implementation of strategies in this section with Sullivan County's farmland protection plan.**

- Action 1.1      *Coordinate with Sullivan County as it implements recommended actions in its "2014 Agriculture & Farmland Protection Plan." The plan contains many recommendations which could benefit local farmers.*
- Action 1.2      *Encourage Sullivan County to explore coordinating with New York City's efforts to better connect local farmers with NYC markets. Connecting upstate farmers with NYC wholesalers and end users is a stated goal in the City's 2010 'Foodworks' plan.*

##### **Strategy 2      Continue to maintain the Town's farm-friendly regulations.**

- Action 2.1      *Periodically audit the Zoning Law to explore modifications that support agriculture. New technologies and changing market conditions may warrant adjustments to the zoning law. For instance, demand for local beef is increasing which could represent a market opportunity for local farmers. Allowing smaller lots to contain livestock would help to promote this activity. Small lots could also be used by 4-H groups and other organizations to help prepare next-generation farmers.*
- Action 2.2      *Review farm-friendly zoning code guidelines in Sullivan County's "2014 Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan." Incorporate appropriate recommendations into the Town's zoning law.*
- Action 2.3      *Explore expanding the allowable types of agricultural uses on small lots. The number of small farm operations is increasing in the Mid-Hudson Valley. Some*



of these farms fill ethnic niche markets where there is less competition. See also 2.1 above.

- Action 2.4 *Continue to allow alternative uses for existing agricultural buildings and farmland.* Allowing compatible uses for existing agricultural buildings and farmland would help farmers to remain on their land even while farming is not taking place. The Town could define alternative uses for existing buildings and farmland in its zoning law. Alternative or additional uses that are compatible with the surrounding area but not necessarily agriculture-related may include low-impact businesses such as packaging or warehousing.
- Action 2.5 *Explore ways to better define land-use designations for agritourism.* Agritourism activities can fall into a gray zone between hospitality and agricultural land-use regulations which makes navigating local permitting, land-use coding, and land use controls a tricky proposition for budding entrepreneurs. See also strategy 7 in this section.
- Action 2.6 *Accessory agricultural uses as allowed by the zoning law should be encouraged.* Elements such as seasonal farm stands and ice cream stands can help boost agritourism efforts and supplement income. Businesses featuring on-farm processing (milk and cheese, jams, baked goods), on-farm retail (grains, hay, fertilizer), and the sale of non-perishable items and local produce grown outside of Rockland should be encouraged.
- Action 2.7 *Seek to have a member of the agricultural community on the Town's Planning Board and/or Zoning Board of Appeals.* Individuals experienced in agricultural operations can offer valuable contributions in the administration of regulations affecting agriculture.

**Strategy 3      Work to preserve farms and agricultural lands for next generation farmers.**

- Action 3.1 *Promote Purchase of Development Rights (PDR), Transfer of Development Rights (TDR), conservation easements and term easement programs to preserve both farmlands and farming.* For example, PDR's involve the voluntary sale by a landowner of the right to develop a property to a government agency or private nonprofit land trust. The cost of doing this would vary depending on the appraised value of the specific parcel—both the current value and its appraised value as open or agricultural land without development potential. The difference between these two numbers is the value of the development rights to be purchased.

Benefits of Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)

- > PDR protects farmland permanently, while keeping it in private ownership.
- > Participation in PDR programs is voluntary
- > PDR allows farmers to capitalize on undeveloped assets – their land.
- > PDR programs can protect ecological as well as agricultural resources.
- > PDR removes the non-agricultural value of land, which keeps it affordable to farmers.
- > PDR can be implemented by state or local governments, private organizations and not-for-profit entities.
- > PDR provides farmers with a financially competitive alternative to development.

Source: Action Guide: Agricultural and Farmland Protection for New York (American Farmland Trust).

The purchase of a conservation easement is the same thing as PDR; however, whereas a PDR typically refers to a government acquisition, the purchase of an conservation easement is typically done by a private land trust.

In addition to PDR and conservation easements, term easements are sometimes employed. A term easement is a temporary covenant that may include a right of first refusal for purchase of the property in cases where the farm may transition to another agricultural use.

- Action 3.2     *Explore sources of grant funding for farmland protection.* These could involve agencies of the state or federal governments or private organizations such as Equity Trust that work with land conservation organizations in the Hudson Valley. For example, the State’s Farmland Protection Implementation Grant program helps local governments and land trusts offset the cost of conservation easements. Equity Trust is a non-profit organization that partners with local organizations to help fund the purchase of farmland for farmers.
- Action 3.3     *Explore a Leasing of Development Rights (LDR) program as a supportive tool in farmland purchase or PDR acquisition.* LDR's can temporarily protect farmland until a PDR can be employed.
- Action 3.4     *Promote the New York State Agricultural Districts Law to encourage the continued use of farmland for agricultural production.* The program is based on a combination of landowner incentives and protections, all of which are designed to forestall the conversion of farmland to non-agricultural uses. Included in these benefits are preferential real property tax treatment (agricultural assessment and

special benefit assessment), and protections against overly restrictive local laws, government funded acquisition or construction projects, and private nuisance suits involving agricultural practices.

Action 3.5     *Encourage owners of inactive farmland to rent their land to new and existing farmers.* Work to connect land owners to farmers. Land owners renting farmland may qualify for an agricultural assessment on their land. The Hudson Valley Land Trust partnered with 16 other organizations to launch the HV Farmlink network which is designed to connect farmers and landowners.

Action 3.6     *Explore allowing appropriate agricultural uses on open space that may be created in a conservation subdivision or clustering.* Take into account any property tax implications that may arise from such use.

**Strategy 4     Encourage policies that support new and next-generation farmers.**

Action 4.1     *Encourage governmental and private sector financial initiatives to support young farmers.* For example, New York State in recent years launched the New Farmers Grant Fund and the Young Farmers Loan Forgiveness Program to help young farmers get in the business and remain there. Many farm credit cooperatives have programs to help start-up farms secure working capital.

Action 4.2     *Promote education, training, and technical assistance programs for farm start-up operations.* Historically farming skills have been handed down from one generation to the next. But that is not always the case today as sons and daughters leave the farm for more profitable careers. In addition, the increasing pace of new technologies and methods can be challenging for farmers to keep up with. Access to training programs is essential for new and next-generation farmers. The Hudson Valley Farm Hub sponsors the ProFarmer Program which trains individuals with farming experience who aspire to farm management positions or to own and operate their own farms.

**Strategy 5     Seek to expand food processing and distribution networks.**

Action 5.1     *Coordinate with the Sullivan County Partnership to attract and expand value-added food processing companies to the Town.* The Town's quick access to Route 17 would be an attractive asset to food processing firms. The property inventory recommended in Section 6, Economic Development, would assist in site identification and land assemblage. One example of connecting processors to local produce is Farm-to-Table Co-Packers in Kingston, NY which processes local produce to make soups, frozen vegetables, jarred sauces and other value-added products that it then sells to regional markets. Another example is Hudson

River Fruit Distributors in Milton, NY which is the region's biggest marketer/distributor of New York apples.

Action 5.2 *Support efforts by Sullivan County to establish food hub projects for local food producers.* Food-hubs act like warehouse distributors where local food can be sourced by downstream users such as groceries and restaurants. Such hubs could serve to connect locally produced food with the NYC food market. One food hub has recently opened in Liberty. See also Action 1.2 in this section.

Action 5.3 *Encourage Sullivan County and Cornell Cooperative Extension, in conjunction with local dairy farmers, to explore the feasibility of developing a dairy processing facility.* Through such a facility, local dairy farmers could process milk and produce other dairy products and market them through an established brand or newly created brand. The Hudson Valley Fresh brand of dairy products processed in Dutchess County is a success story for using this strategy.

Action 5.4 *Support any regional efforts to establish livestock slaughtering and processing capacity.* There is an increasing demand for local beef which could provide a new source of income for local farmers. Some former dairy farms might convert to beef cattle operations if there was a nearby FDA meat processing facility. Currently, the two closest USDA slaughterhouses are each two hours drive away in Moscow, PA and Otego, NY.

**Strategy 6      Support financial incentives, access to capital, and farm-friendly policy reforms.**

Action 6.1 *Encourage New York State and Sullivan County to continue economic incentive programs specific for agriculture.* For example, the Sullivan County Industrial Development Agency offers a number of loan and lease programs to farmers and other types of agribusiness enterprises such as farm equipment dealerships.

Action 6.2 *Encourage State and federal policy and regulatory reforms that are farm friendly.*

**Strategy 7      Work to promote agritourism in the Town.**

Action 7.1 *Support Sullivan County efforts to promote agritourism.* Agritourism has become increasingly popular in the local region with activities such as wineries, distilleries, Christmas tree farms, on-farm dinners, u-pick farms, pumpkin carving, hayrides and other activities. There is also a spin-off effect with visitors patronizing local eateries, gas stations and retail stores.



Action 7.2      *Support the development of New York State and private sector programs that provide technical assistance and start-up capital for agritourism entrepreneurs.*

Action 7.3      *Utilize the proposed special events portal on the Town's website to promote agritourism. Establishing a special events portal is discussed in Section 5, Strategy 2 in this Plan.*

Action 7.4      *Explore development of a "heritage trail" to promote historic tourism and agritourism. The mobile phone wayfinding application discussed in Section 9, Transportation, Strategy 2 could include these items.*

**Strategy 8      Promote citizen education on farmland benefits.**

Action 8.1      *Educate the community about the benefits of farming to the community (economic, rural heritage, scenic working landscape, etc.).*

Action 8.2      *Coordinate with Sullivan County on marketing methods to promote local farms and buying locally produced foods.*

## **SECTION 12 – LAND USE**

### **12.1 Goals**

- > To protect Rockland’s environmental and aesthetic resources to benefit the public health and safety and for the enjoyment and prosperity of future generations.
- > To balance growth of all land uses with conservation of the Town’s scenic and rural character and environmental integrity.
- > Continue to improve land use regulations to meet the objectives of this plan.

### **12.2 Summary of Existing Conditions**

The unspoiled character of the Town is largely attributed to the nature and location of a diverse set of land uses. The growth of the Town throughout its history to the present day reflects traditional settlement patterns. Closely knit hamlets are economic hubs in the stream valleys which serve as transportation corridors; undisturbed agricultural open spaces and large, forested swaths of protected, public forest contribute to the Town’s rural and wilder feel. Residential growth has centered on the hamlets, where it complements the Town’s sense of place, and is also dispersed in rural areas.

Land uses are summarized within twelve property classifications (see Table 3-1 on page 3.8 ) while the distribution of these land uses is depicted on Figure 3-5, Land Use Map (page 3.7). Reinforcing the Town’s land-use pattern are parcel sizes, with the map showing both an abundance of larger parcels throughout the rural areas and concentrations of smaller parcels in and around hamlets and denser residential areas, such as Hunter Lake. The pattern reflects existing character and also illustrates that there is significant opportunity for future development.

The Town has five primary zoning districts that generally correspond with the land use patterns (see Figure 3-4, Zoning Districts on page 3.6). The Town has been active in reviewing and revising the zoning law. In June 2016, the town board appointed a committee who issued a series of changes that were adopted in December 2016. The changes included the improvement of existing use definitions and the development of new definitions; enhancement of stormwater protection language; the creation of a downtown overlay district to promote business through eased parking requirements, new sections on Signs and Solar Collection Systems; and several procedural improvements to bring the zoning law in better conformance with state statutes. In 2017, the Town further improved the stormwater protection standards, integrating the requirements of the NYS Stormwater Design Manual. In 2018-19, the existing sections on campgrounds and nonconforming uses were revised and limitations on dwellings and uses per lot have also been drafted, although these proposed changes have not yet been adopted.

### **12.3 Cluster development and conservation subdivision**

Although the Town has improved its zoning law, there remains opportunity for further upgrades to land