

Cobleskill Small Urban Area Corridor Plan June 2002



New York State Routes 7, 10, 145

in the Towns of:

Cobleskill
Richmondville
Seward
Sharon

and Villages of:

Cobleskill
Richmondville
Sharon Springs

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Introduction

During the summer of 2000, the New York State Department of Transportation (DOT) met with the communities in the New York State Route 7, 10 and 145 region that comprised DOT's Cobleskill Small Urban Area Corridor (the Corridor). DOT requested that the communities cooperate in devising a plan that would guide transportation projects in the Corridor. The DOT recommended that some of the goals in the Village of Cobleskill Comprehensive Plan be reviewed and perhaps expanded throughout the Corridor. During initial meetings with representatives from DOT, Schoharie County Planning and Development and the five municipalities, discussions went beyond transportation issues to common issues that should be addressed on a larger scale. Under an intermunicipal agreement (Attachment 1), a Corridor Planning Team (CPT) was formed consisting of two representatives from each municipality. Participation by the municipalities in this planning effort is voluntary. The agreement instructed the CPT to do the following:

- ❖ Determine the boundaries of the Corridor.
- ❖ Draft a Corridor Plan that each individual municipality would review for possible adoption.

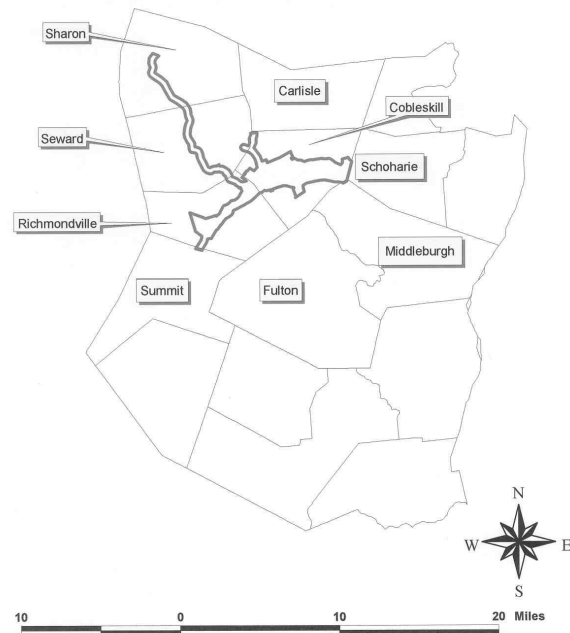
The CPT determined that the Corridor Plan would be written as brief as possible with only information that is deemed pertinent to the identified issues at hand. The Corridor Plan contains specific directions that each municipality shall work towards in order to make the Corridor more cohesive. The Corridor Plan is meant to be in addition to or incorporated in an individual municipal Comprehensive Plan. The CPT realizes that further development and implementation of this document is an ongoing process and intends to continue meeting to concentrate on possible solutions and to discuss issues in more detail.

Description of the Corridor (Geography, Natural Resources, Land Use)

The Corridor is located in northwestern Schoharie County and consists of seven municipalities. Map #1 indicates the general location of the Corridor in Schoharie County. The Corridor includes the boundary of the Village of Richmondville, the Village of Cobleskill, and a portion of the Village of Sharon Springs and the hamlets of Mineral Springs, Hyndsville, Janesville, Barnerville, Bramanville, Warnerville, and Lawyersville. The Corridor contains approximately 12,936 acres of land mainly in the low-lying areas of Cobleskill Creek and West Creek. Much of the Corridor is level or gently sloped with major transportation routes and settlements lying in the flatter valley lands. Attachments 2-12 consist of aerial maps for the entire Corridor including Corridor boundaries, Agricultural District #3, floodplain, karst and wetlands.

State mapped wetlands consist of six areas in the Corridor - a small section on Butter Creek in the Town of Seward (north of NYS Route 10 east of Hyndsville) a wetland in Warnerville on Cobleskill Creek near the Warnerville Cut-off Road, a small section on West Creek near Felske Road, a wetland northeast of Lawyersville off of NYS Route 145, and two areas around Bowmaker Pond in the Town of Sharon (see Attachment 11 and 12). State wetlands are those 12.4 acres or larger in size. The Army Corps of Engineers has permitting authority over Federal wetlands that are defined as 'navigable' or adjacent to navigable water. Although no official map exists for Federal wetlands, assistance from the Army Corps of Engineers or an expert in wetlands delineation can assist a property owner in locating such wetlands.

Cobleskill Small Urban Area Corridor Schoharie County, NY



Map #1-Corridor Location

The mapped floodplain, mainly along Cobleskill Creek and West Creek, consists of 988 acres in the Corridor (see Attachments 8 and 9). This represents 7.5% of the land in the Corridor and has historically been considered the prime development area based on the relative flatness of the floodplain and depth of soil. Cobleskill Creek encompasses a drainage area of 131 square miles. The more frequent flooding events are often a result of rapid snowmelt and ice blockages in streams and drainage ditches. Hurricanes and tropical storms can also contribute to flooding events. Flooding along Mill Creek in the Village of Cobleskill has also been a problem. The last four major flooding events on Cobleskill Creek occurred in 1938, 1964, 1980, and 1996.

Historic sites consist of both pre-historic and general historic sites. The NY State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has mapped the general locations of pre-historic sites. Major projects usually require investigation into the presence of pre-historic artifacts on any undisturbed site. Areas along waterways, especially high points near water, tend to have the greatest concentration of pre-historic artifacts. The Village of Cobleskill has a historic district and the Bramanville Mill is on the National Register of Historic Places.

A portion of Agricultural District #3 is located in the Corridor mainly along NYS Route 10 in the Town of Seward and Sharon, to the east of the Village of Cobleskill, and to the north of the Village of Cobleskill along NYS Route 145 (see Attachment 7).

Agricultural Districts Law, administered by New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, protects and promotes a farmer's opportunity to operate a successful

business. Specifically, agricultural districts promote farm activities by providing protection from unreasonably restrictive “anti-farming” local laws, protection from nuisance lawsuits and limitations on eminent domain, public projects or private citizen construction projects.

The CPT identified six dams in the area that need to be monitored since they could potentially have an impact on the Corridor.

Cavernous Limestone (Karst) topography exists predominantly in the Town of Sharon and in the Town of Cobleskill near Lawyerville, along Mineral Springs Road and along the eastern section of NYS Route 7. Limestone formations located in the Corridor are created by the wearing away of limestone by water flow and include caves, fissures, sinks, and underground streams. These features complicate the flow of ground water and create special problems regarding water supply. Due to thin soils, there is a potential for widespread ground water contamination and a limited ability to support foundations and building loads. There are few regulatory controls devoted to protecting karst areas in the Corridor. The Town of Wright has adopted their karst area as a critical environmental area subjecting most development to State environmental quality review procedures. Lamont, Van De Valk Engineers mapped karst areas, and the map of the Corridor with Karst areas identified is shown on Attachments 10 and 11.

Approximately 30 percent of the Corridor has been developed, with the remainder being woodland or farmland. Although primarily residential and agricultural, the Corridor does have a number of private businesses and a few light industrial areas. A majority of the land adjacent to NYS Route 7 is currently zoned for commercial and /or industrial uses.

Discussion of Issues/Problems and Strategies to Rectify Problems

Transportation

The Corridor area is the most populous region in the County. Increased vehicular and pedestrian use on New York State Route 7 has prompted a number of aesthetic and safety problems in the region. This includes the inability of pedestrians to cross roads safely, the increased flow of vehicular traffic, ‘bottleneck’ problems in the Village of Cobleskill and poor general appearance of the road surface and some adjacent roadside development. The accumulation of traffic problems has prompted proposed projects over the years aimed at providing relief.

According to the 1999 New York State Department of Transportation Traffic Volume Report, traffic volumes on NYS Route 7 have increased to 16,300 – 17,000 vehicles per day in the Village of Cobleskill up from 13,300 in 1992 (Attachment 16). This is a 3,000 to 4,000 increase in seven years. As a comparison, Main Street in the City of Oneonta has approximately 12,000 vehicles per day with an increase of 1,000 vehicles per day in seven years. Oneonta does have most large commercial development located on NYS

Route 23 while Cobleskill's is predominantly along NYS Route 7. However, Oneonta has an aesthetically pleasing and pedestrian friendly downtown with more commercial activity than the Village of Cobleskill while benefiting from lower average daily traffic volumes. According to the NYSDOT counts, the annual average daily traffic (AADT) in the Village of Cobleskill is comparable to the AADT in the Village of Saratoga Springs on NYS Route 9N. NYS Routes 145 and 10 have increased modestly during the same period and several of the busiest county roads that feed into the Corridor have also increased. There is no doubt that increases in traffic are expected; however, the continuing increase on NYS Route 7, especially in and east of the Village of Cobleskill will only continue to adversely affect pedestrian safety, traffic flow and other ongoing problems.

The municipalities in the Corridor agree to address these aesthetic and safety problems in the Corridor by undertaking the following:

Primary Transportation Priorities

1. Work with NYSDOT to develop a by-pass route for New York State Route 7 in the Village of Cobleskill (for example, but not inclusive: MacArthur Avenue to NYS Route 7 near the railroad overpass or Forester Road to Mineral Springs Road via South Grand Street). Any by-pass should be designed for mainly local resident use (project should include proper signage that does not indicate alternate Route 7 or Route 7 by-pass).
2. Work with NYSDOT to solve problems associated with County Road 23A (Warnerville Cut-off) to decrease some traffic pressure on the core of the Village of Cobleskill and to improve traffic safety. The new road should become NYS Route 10 and old Route 10 (Elm Street) should revert to the Village of Cobleskill/Town of Richmondville or Schoharie County (Attachment 14 and 15). Any improvements to the current road or new alignment should include or address:
 - current road flooding problems and reducing impediments in the floodplain
 - a planned recreation path that will run parallel with Cobleskill Creek
 - a new railroad bridge to eliminate the present at-grade railroad crossing and new bridges over any water crossings
 - improved safety at the connection with the current Route 10 and NYS Route 7
 - the impact of a potential increase of truck traffic into the Town of Sharon and Village of Sharon Springs
 - limited impacts to farmland in the area
 - improved safety for the movement of SUNY Cobleskill farm equipment across the road
 - the need to keep the rural appearance of NYS Route 10 by limiting the widening and/or straightening of the northern remainder of the road.

The Corridor Planning Team does not want this project to result in a 'domino' effect for major road changes north to Canajoharie. Nor is this project meant solely to accommodate increased truck traffic. The majority of NYS Route 10 is rural, agricultural

and scenic, which the Team wants to retain. The present narrow, winding Route 10 provides traffic calming and has integrity that the Team wants preserved especially since the route has the potential to become a State designated Scenic By-way and was identified as a “Rural Historic District” by the NY State Historic Preservation Office. The current DOT regional plan does not call for NYS Route 10 to become a major north-south route. Depending on the exact road alignment chosen, the Corridor Planning Team (CPT) will need to recommend land use regulation improvements to coincide with the road improvements.

3. Work with NYSDOT to improve traffic access east from the railroad overpass in the Village of Cobleskill along NYS Route 7 to Wal-Mart. Improved access from the railroad overpass to Wal-Mart should include access for pedestrians and aesthetic improvements in addition to the ‘third lane’ concept. Based on a December 3, 2001 meeting, this includes:

- A center landscaped median from Wal-Mart to the Mountainview Diner that is as long as possible.
- A sidewalk with Victorian style lighting on the north side of the highway that includes a pedestrian crossing on Barnerville Road, pedestrian area separated from the road by a guard rail under the railroad underpass, and a pedestrian crossing on the Cobleskill Creek Bridge.
- Defined curbs and curb cuts along the highway and, working with landowners, the Village and Town of Cobleskill should work to reduce and/or eliminate the number of curb cuts along the highway.

Other Transportation Priorities

- To help with the flow of truck traffic to and from the Industrial Park on Mineral Springs Road and to help decrease traffic pressures on NYS Route 7, the feasibility of on and off ramps at South Grand Street and I-88 in the Village of Cobleskill or at the Mineral Springs Road overpass should be examined.
- To help with the flow of traffic along NYS Route 7, NYS Route 10 and NYS Route 145, traffic access management plans should be adopted.
- To minimize curb cuts on all roads in the Corridor and especially along NYS Route 7, appropriate land use regulations should be adopted that encourage access between commercial lots.
- To improve the ‘bottleneck’ at the east end of NYS Route 7, the feasibility and applicability of re-construction of the railroad overpass with NYSDOT and Canadian-Pacific railroad shall be explored (i.e. increasing overpass height, widening road).

- To facilitate pedestrian and bicycle traffic along NYS Route 7 and to the new high school and SUNY Cobleskill and to increase recreational opportunities in the corridor, a recreation path from the Village of Cobleskill to the Village of Richmondville running parallel to Cobleskill Creek should be pursued wherever possible. The willingness of SUNY Cobleskill and the Faculty Student Association to cooperate in such a venture has been expressed in the past and is vital to the success of a path. (See Attachment 13)
- To facilitate safe pedestrian crossings along NYS Routes in the corridor, signal timings at lights should be evaluated and changed if needed. The feasibility of alternative options such as 'bulb outs', a pedestrian refuge island, or narrowing the road and extending the frontage of the buildings on the street should be explored within the corridor. Emergency vehicle access and snow removal need to be considered, but should not exclusively hinder change.

Land Use

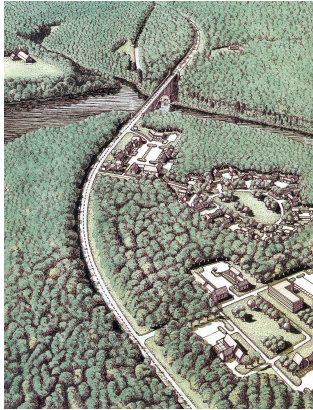
Development trends along NYS Route 7 from the Village of Richmondville to the eastern edge of the Town of Cobleskill show a growing commercial strip from one end to the other. Current zoning along Route 7 will continue to allow such growth since a majority of the land adjacent to NYS Route 7 is zoned commercial. Route 10 and Route 145 are currently zoned Rural-Residential and the land in the Corridor in this area is in Agricultural District #3 where the ability for agriculture to continue should be a primary concern. Although the municipalities want to encourage economic development in the region and take advantage of the growing consumer base in the region, uncontrolled growth for growth's sake has and will continue to diminish the aesthetics of the area, increase transportation congestion, and jeopardize portions of Agricultural District #3 if agricultural lands are converted to other uses. Continued growth in the floodplain of Cobleskill Creek and tributaries will lead to increased problems associated with property damage and safety of people during flood events.

The municipalities in the Corridor agree to have land use regulations that are similar throughout the Corridor and help advance economic development along with the general environment by undertaking the following:

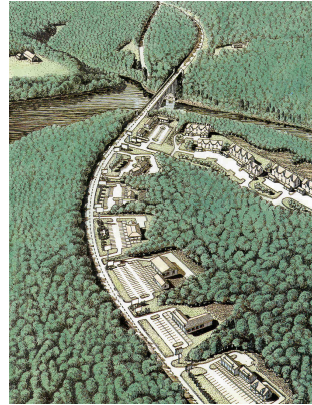
Land Use Priorities

1. Development throughout the Corridor should strive to limit curb cuts onto State Routes (especially for commercial/industrial/multi-family uses).

Example of limited curb cut development:

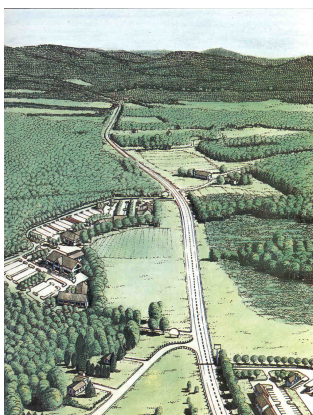


Example of multiple curb cut development:

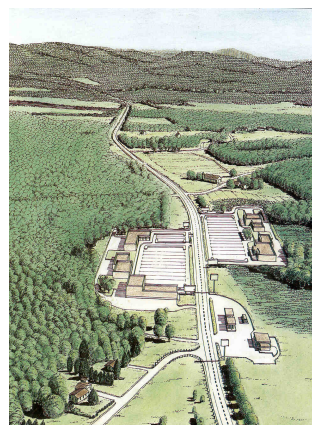


2. Development nodes along the routes could be established to concentrate commercial/industrial uses in non-floodplain areas and areas where infrastructure exists. The main trend of commercial development is to concentrate growth along state road frontage while interior ‘off-road’ portions of property remain undeveloped. Commercial/residential nodes (especially along NYS Route 7) could be established utilizing existing town and county roads and new access roads to allow interior property to become accessible. Property owners of large parcels can then realize development potential on part of their property (not necessarily all road frontage) while other portions could be protected and provide breaks between commercial/residential nodes. Such nodes should be developed around existing commercial/industrial development when possible. Nodes could be developed using the generic guidelines in the book “Visions for a New American Dream” or a similar publication.

Example of desired (node) development:



Example of undesired development:



3. Sign regulations should be uniform throughout the corridor. Therefore, the municipalities agree to adopt sign regulations that are as similar to one another as possible following the sign design guidelines included in this plan (Attachment 17). Although sign numbers and sizes may vary, sign types, placement, materials, and colors should be as similar as possible.

4. Copyrighted architecture should be discouraged throughout the Corridor and developers should be encouraged and given incentives to create unique structures and/or structures that enhance the rural nature of the Corridor.

Unique McDonald's with small-scale sign:



Copyrighted McDonald's with large-scale sign:



5. If a purchase of development right (PDR) program is developed by Schoharie County, prime agricultural land located in the Corridor could be given a higher priority due to the high quality of the soils along Cobleskill Creek, increased development pressure in the Corridor and the importance of maintaining open space and encouraging nodal development in the Corridor.

Infrastructure

The availability of water, sewer and natural gas in the Corridor can spur growth in both positive and negative ways. Unlimited extension of infrastructure can cause sprawl, but such extensions can also solve existing environmental and health problems.

Infrastructure should be provided to areas where development is planned and wanted. To reach areas targeted for growth, extension of infrastructure through areas not targeted for growth can lead to sprawl. However, individual small systems can be costly to build and maintain. The CPT desires some sort of balance to exist in the Corridor. It is agreed that extension of existing lines versus expanding or starting individual small systems (for corridor hamlets) and the associated costs need to be explored. Many of the infrastructure issues are of a complex nature and no sound solution currently exists to develop definitive strategies. Therefore, the municipalities agree to undertake the following:

Infrastructure Priorities

1. The feasibility of a comprehensive infrastructure study (roads, sewers, water) for the Corridor should be researched. The cost of such a study could be spread among the municipalities. Sources of funding to help with infrastructure costs need to be listed for the municipalities. The CPT should then help identify where development is wanted and determine if extension of existing infrastructure, small new systems, or individual wells and septic systems are more appropriate in developing the areas. The Village of Richmondville and the Village of Cobleskill may want to study the issue of land annexation procedures.
2. Unless details in a comprehensive study show otherwise and in compliance with the Schoharie County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan, the municipalities should encourage development of water and sewer infrastructure within existing hamlets rather than agricultural areas and encourage nodal development and infrastructure development rather than highway-oriented suburban sprawl.

Plan Reviews and Revisions

This Corridor Plan shall become a part of any Comprehensive Plan that a Corridor municipality currently has or adopts in the future. Revisions to the plan can only be made with the approval of all the adopting municipalities and the plan shall be reviewed a minimum of every 3 years by the CPT with recommendations for changes made to the Corridor municipalities at that time.

The completion of this document will not mean an end to the work of the CPT. The CPT knows that further development and implementation of this document is an ongoing process and intends to continue meeting to concentrate on possible solutions and to discuss issues in more detail.

References

Drawings under Land Use Priorities from:

Dealing With Change in the Connecticut River Valley: A Design Manual for Conservation and Development. Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and the Environmental Law Foundation, June 1989.

Other documents used in preparation of the plan:

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