

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### WHY ARE WE PLANNING FOR OPEN SPACE IN LAGRANGE?

The Town of LaGrange's 2005 comprehensive plan update analyzed the town's future growth and development potential and provided a forum for community members to participate in planning for the future of the town. Many town residents were concerned that the growth of the town, if not balanced with conservation, might affect the town's open space resources and rural character. The comprehensive plan recommended that the town develop an open space inventory and use it to prioritize conservation of important resources.

Following the comprehensive plan, an open space committee was formed to implement the open space recommendations of the plan. The first initiative of this committee was to conduct a survey to further evaluate the community sentiment towards open space. The results of the survey indicate that there is strong support for open space conservation, and that community members are willing to contribute financially towards conservation efforts. With this in mind, the open space committee and town officials initiated this open space plan.

### WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THE OPEN SPACE PLAN?

The goals of this plan, and the process that has shaped it, are as follows:

- Identify the town's major open space resources.
- Prioritize resources for conservation and create a vision for the town's future.
- Keep the community informed and engaged in the planning process.
- Include landowners as key partners in the process.
- Provide recommendations and a plan of action for implementing the vision.

### WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THIS PLAN?

This plan provides an inventory of LaGrange's open space resources. It creates a vision for the future of open space resources in the town and sets forth a strategic plan of action for their conservation. It includes several key components, which are summarized below.

- **Resource Inventory and Analysis** of the town's natural systems; working landscapes; cultural landscapes and recreational opportunities (Chapter 2).
- **Open Space Vision Map** and summary, which identifies important elements of the town's open space vision and discusses recommendations for preserving these features (Chapter 3).

## Town of LaGrange Open Space Plan

- **A Plan of Action** for the town to begin to implement the open space vision (Chapter 4).
- **A Summary of the Townwide Survey** conducted by the open space committee at the start of the open space planning process (Appendix A).
- **Resource Inventory Maps** (Appendix B).

### **WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS OF THE OPEN SPACE VISION?**

The open space vision map illustrates the town's resources as an interconnected system. For example, forests are important for wildlife and natural function but they also help to maintain clean drinking water. Farms produce agricultural products, but they also preserve scenic views and provide habitat for wildlife. Preserving the town's open spaces as a system provides exponential benefits to the environment and community. The components that contribute to this interconnected system are:

- **Core Farm Areas** such as in the northwest part of LaGrange and the farms along Sprout Creek.
- **Greenway Corridors** such as the lands adjacent to Wappinger Creek and Sprout Creek.
- **Natural Areas** such as the forest of the Taconic ridge and the wetland systems associated with Sprout Creek.
- **Trails** such as the one being implemented along the Wappinger Creek and the proposed trail that loops Freedom Plains.
- **Scenic Roads and Views** such as the exceptional views along Skidmore Road and Freedom Road.

The components of the open space vision are discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of this plan. Recommendations for implementing the open space vision are discussed in Chapter 4.

### **WHAT ARE THE PLAN'S MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS?**

The plan's major recommendations are detailed in Chapter 4. The central feature of the recommendations is the creation of a comprehensive resource conservation program, which would, in the long term, include the following:

## Town of LaGrange Open Space Plan

- Establishment of specific tools for conserving land such as a purchase of development rights program, a local term easement/tax abatement option, and estate planning options for landowners. A local term easement or tax abatement option is recommended as an immediate step in implementing this plan.
- Securing a significant funding source for the town to implement conservation projects to achieve the open space vision. Additional study of the town's potential build-out and appropriate balance of land uses to achieve fiscal balance is recommended to guide funding decisions.
- Adoption of design guidelines to assist landowners and developers in creating development patterns that help to preserve the town's open space vision.

### **WHAT ARE THE PLAN'S CONSERVATION GOALS?**

The plan sets forth short-term (5-year) goals for conservation of resources within each of the major components of the open space vision, as follows:

- Core Farm Areas: Conserve 500 additional acres of land in the core farm areas.
- Greenway Corridors: Conserve 250 additional acres of land along major greenways.
- Natural Areas: Conserve 500 additional acres of land in priority natural areas.
- Trails: Develop or secure easements for 5 new miles of trail (in addition to the Dutchess Rail-Trail).

### **HOW WILL THIS PLAN AFFECT ME AS A PROPERTY OWNER?**

The plan identifies priorities for conservation such as core farm areas and critical wildlife habitats. The plan is based on voluntary landowner participation, with the goal of creating financial incentives for landowners to do so. If your land is located within a priority area on the vision map, and you own a significant amount of acreage, the town or a partner in conservation may approach you to see if you would be interested in conservation. Your participation would be voluntary and would be based on the availability of appropriate tools and funding sources. Criteria will be established by the town to set priorities.

## **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING THIS PLAN?**

Planning for open space helps to ensure that, as the town welcomes new residents and businesses, it continues to maintain the resources and quality of life that existing residents have come to know. This plan provides a blueprint for preserving open space by setting forth goals and a path for the town to follow towards the community's vision. Some of the many benefits of implementing the open space plan include the following:

**Maintaining the town's agricultural lands.** LaGrange's farms help to keep lands open and provide a source of local food and agricultural products. Many landowners in LaGrange are now faced with difficult decisions as land values escalate and it becomes difficult to hold on to the land. Currently, there are few options for landowners who want to retain their lands. Implementing this plan would help to set up the tools landowners need to continue farming, and to permanently preserve their lands for agriculture, if they choose to do so.

**Sustaining the town's water resources.** LaGrange's water resources are important to residents. Aquifers provide drinking water. Surface waters are important for recreational activities, and associated floodplains protect people and property from flooding. Conserving stream buffers and aquifer recharge areas helps to maintain the quality of these waters and the benefits they provide the town's residents.

**Providing fiscal benefits to the town's taxpayers.** Preserving open space and farmlands can help to keep local property taxes down. Cost of services studies have consistently concluded that dispersed residential development costs more to service than it returns in revenues. A 2002 report by the American Farmland Trust concluded that, nationwide, for every dollar that is received, farmland and open space require \$0.36 in services (such as schools, roads, water, sewer, police and fire services), while residential development requires \$1.16 in services.

When the costs of preserving open space are compared to the costs of developing the same land, there is typically a fiscal benefit in conservation for local taxpayers. For example, when the Town of Pittsford, NY reviewed the fiscal impact of their \$9.9 million dollar open space bond, it was determined that the approximate \$64 per year cost to the average household to pay for the bond would be far less than doing nothing, as the cost service that additional development would impact the average household by about \$250 per year for schools, road maintenance, and other community services. In Webster, NY, the fiscal model prepared for the town and school district showed that for every dollar invested in open space conservation, town residents would save an equal dollar in avoided costs associated with growth. Hence, in that community, there was no net cost of investing in open space land acquisitions. Open space protection can balance and reduce the future costs of growth.