

SPRING 2018



Village of Menands, New York

**OPPORTUNITY ANALYSIS FOR THE VILLAGE OF
MENANDS COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

MRP Studio



UNIVERSITY^{AT}ALBANY
State University of New York

University at Albany, Master in Regional and Urban Planning Program, Planning Studio

The 48-credit, two-year Master in Urban and Regional Planning (MRP) degree program at the University at Albany was established in 1982 and is fully accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board, the sole national accrediting body for planning. The MRP program is interdisciplinary, student-centered and participative, emphasizing the importance of creativity, public involvement, social justice, professional ethics, and environmental sustainability. With a strong orientation towards professional practice, an MRP provides a thorough foundation in land use planning, a range of technical skills and internship opportunities, and the opportunity to specialize in one of three alternative fields:

- Environmental and Land Use Planning
- Community Planning
- Transportation Planning

Alumni of the MRP program include university faculty, professional consultants, PhD students, and planners practicing in several regions of the United States and many foreign countries. Near the end of the degree program, students participate in the MRP Planning Studio, which provides them with an opportunity, working as a collaborative team, to apply the skills and knowledge obtained during their degree program to a real-world project.

The fall 2017 and the spring 2018 MRP Planning Studios supported the development of a comprehensive plan for the Village of Menands, NY. The fall Studio conducted initial public engagement and background research on the community. The spring 2018 Studio worked closely with Village of Menands officials and other stakeholders to complete a public engagement process and opportunity analysis, which can be used for the development of the future comprehensive plan.

The Spring 2018 MRP Planning Studio included:

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Studio Instructor: Marcia Kees

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Introduction

Nine students in the University at Albany Masters of Urban and Regional Planning Program have conducted research into the areas of opportunity based on strengths and weaknesses for the Village of Menands. The students were involved in the Planning Studio course that met weekly beginning in January of 2018 and ending in May 2018. The opportunity analysis is supported by a thorough public engagement process with residents, businesses, and other stakeholder groups and review of many historical planning documents relating to the Village. This document outlines specific areas of opportunity for the Village to consider in the future and throughout the comprehensive planning process including transportation alternatives, climate smart community, use of parks and trails, housing options, economic development, and food access.

Methodology

Spring 2018 studio members began the semester reviewing background documents on the Village of Menands (“the Village”) that had been completed by Fall studio members, specifically community profile data and stakeholder interviews. Initial steps for public engagement were established in 2017, which then helped to craft outreach strategies deployed by the Planning Studio in 2018. As data was collected through these public engagement activities, the Planning Studio identified key opportunity areas for the Village which are included in this report.

The primary methodologies for the public engagement portion of the Village’s comprehensive planning process were carried out in order to generate meaningful community discussion and compile public input about the existing issues, resident values, and community aspirations. The public engagement efforts deployed range from in-person interviews to visioning exercises. The following methods were used in the public engagement strategies:

- Involvement of Community Leaders
- Established Internet Presence
- Community Presentations
- Public Open Houses
- Survey Distribution & Collection

Additional information regarding the public engagement techniques can be found in the “Report on Public Engagement” and the “Report on Community Survey” published by the Planning Studio.

Opportunities

Housing

A common topic frequently brought up across the public engagement process is the extent to which apartments and single-family dwellings can exist compatibly in relative proximity. The recommendations should function as potential solutions to concerns of the people of the Village. It should be noted that the approach to this issue calls for an examination of the planning, economic effects, aesthetic aspects, and the amenities provided by multi-family residences and in this particular context, the role of multi-family residences located in the Village of Menands.

Many smaller towns and villages, especially those within easy commuting range of principal cities, have experienced a wave of development in recent years, particularly residential developments. In many cases such development has brought positive benefits in the form of extra housing supply and enhancement of the viability of local shops and public services.¹ Concerns have been raised, however, about the impact of rapid development and expansion on the character of small towns and villages through poor design and the impact of large housing and apartment developments that often bring a standardized design approach that can affect the character of a village such as Menands, which has developed organically over time.

- 1. Create an RFP to conduct a housing market analysis. To get the best results, be sure to address the following in the housing market analysis²**
 - a. Analysis of the economic base of the area.
 - b. Basic factors in housing demand.
 - c. The housing stock or supply.
 - d. The current housing market situation.
 - e. Effective housing market demand and consumer preferences.
- 2. Maintain and protect the existing single-family housing stock**
 - a. One of the most difficult challenges in planning and community development has been the protection of adjacent neighborhoods undergoing intense community development. Preserving the privacy and character of adjacent residences can be a hard balance to achieve.

¹ <http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Planning/FileDownload,19164,en.pdf>

² <https://www.planning.org/pas/reports/report139.htm>

- i. Maintaining livability in nearby residential areas is critically important because the success of mixed-use centers is economically and physically dependent on the support of the adjacent neighborhoods.
- ii. Ensure Village zoning codes have the necessary requirements for setbacks, height, and buffers to mitigate the impacts of larger scale development adjacent to single-family homes.
- iii. Another common strategy to address the impacts to existing neighborhoods is to rezone the properties adjacent to the high-intensity development area and to encourage their redevelopment to more compatible uses and building types. Another approach is to allow low impact, home-based businesses to be run out of single family homes. This provides for mixed-use neighborhoods without breaking the existing fabric of neighborhoods.

3. Ensure consistency with comprehensive plan and vision for the Village of Menands

Often when a municipality is undergoing major redevelopment projects after having no redevelopment projects for a long period of time, the municipality will give developers leeway in design review and concessions that it would not ordinarily give to a developer. It should be noted, this is the quickest way to lose neighborhood character and community values.

- a. The scale of new residential development schemes should be in proportion to the pattern and grain of existing development in the Village. Because of the scale of smaller towns and villages, it is important that multi-family dwellings do not break the urban fabric and form but are seamlessly integrated into neighborhoods.
- b. Maintain and secure the urban fabric of historic districts. Menands has historic districts that need special treatment in zoning and design review. The Village should re-visit its zoning code to ensure that these areas are protected appropriately.

Transportation

Bus Routes

The Village is currently served by two major Capital District Transportation Authority (“CDTA”) routes between Downtown Albany and Downtown Troy: Route 22, serving Broadway; and Route 182, serving Van Rensselaer Blvd. As displayed in Figure 1 transit map Route 22 pictured in blue, and Route 182 pictured in green. Bus ridership rates have increased across the region, including along the Broadway Corridor in recent years. The Broadway corridor is the third busiest

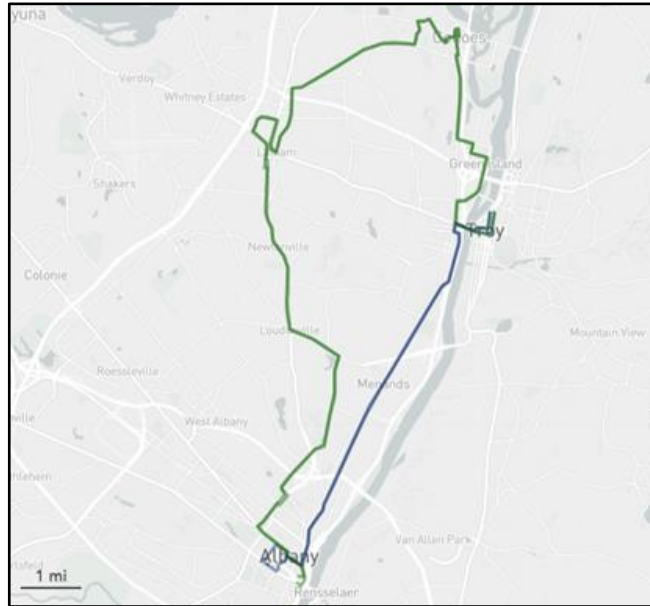


Figure 1: CDTA Transit Map of Routes 22 & 182 (Image via CDTA)

transit corridor in the Capital Region and CDTA has plans to implement a new bus-rapid transit system, with enhanced stations and improved travel times. One proposed station at Riverview Center is within the Village boundaries, and another station is just north of the Village at Schuyler Flatts Memorial Park in the Town of Colonie, New York. The proposed Blue Line displayed in Figure 3, will provide bus-rapid transit service to the Broadway corridor.

Bus Stop Analysis

Most village residents live within a quarter mile of a transit stop. The quarter mile distance radius from a bus stop is generally considered to be adequate access by the transit industry. In order to increase access to bus stops for pedestrian foot travel, there are several sections of the

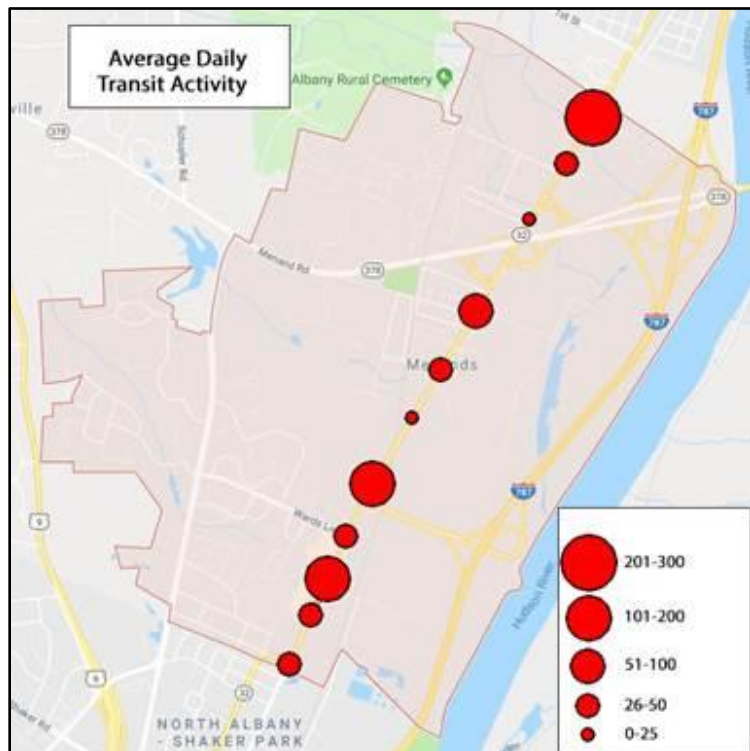


Figure 2 Bus Stops within the Village mapped by amount of transit activity

sidewalk network that can be extended or improved. There are two opportunities for new benches to be installed at busy bus stops along Broadway, because the locations meet minimum ridership rate requirements established by CDTA. Both bus stops, 00103 (Broadway & Menand Rd) and 00106 (Broadway & Brookside Ave), meet the daily ridership requirement of 15 persons onboarding the bus for CDTA to install benches at these bus stops.

The Broadway Corridor presents an opportunity for transit-oriented development. The busiest bus stop sites within the Village are mapped in Figure 2 with red dots scaled to identify the highest daily transit activity. This can be a useful tool in determining where to concentrate transit-oriented development in the future.

Bicycle Connections Infrastructure

In recent years there have been continued efforts to increase bicycle connectivity within the Village of Menands. Dedicated bicycle lanes have been installed on both Broadway and Van Rensselaer Blvd. In 2017 Capital District Transportation Authority launched a bike-sharing program called *CDPHC Cycle!*. After expansion in 2018, *CDPHC Cycle!* currently operates 350 rentable bicycles from 80 stations located in the cities of Albany, Saratoga Springs, Schenectady, and Troy. While no stations are currently located in Menands, future expansion could be a catalyst for increased bicycle connectivity. There are bike station hubs for *CDPHC Cycle!* in South Troy and North Albany, which could make the Village a great mid-way point. The Village can consider joining the neighboring City of Watervliet to advocate for more bike features on the west side of the Hudson River. All the new CDTA buses, including Bus Rapid Transit, will have bike racks on the front end for commuters to transport their bicycles.

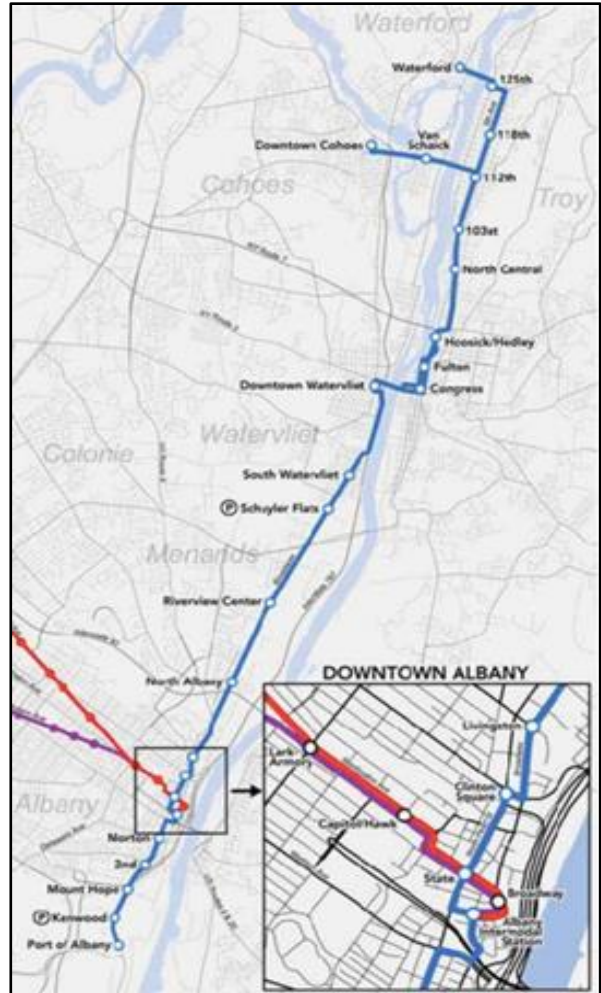


Figure 3 CDTA Transit Map of future Bus Rapid Transit along the Broadway Corridor (Image via CDTA)

Sidewalk Network Connections and Inventory

The Village can work with a consultant and volunteer community members to create a database of sidewalk network features to assess and track the condition of the village sidewalk network and to gauge compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). A Sidewalk Network Inventory and Assessment can be included with, or be separate from, the comprehensive planning process. This effort would highlight potential enhancements or expansion areas in the sidewalk network, which can include reduction of sidewalk gaps and replacement of non-compliant curb ramps. Data collection is the main component needed to carry out the inventory assessment, but the Village should also coordinate with residents to examine and record measurements for all sidewalks, curb ramps, crosswalks, and pedestrian signals. In addition to measurements, the geo-location of sidewalk features can be recorded and documented by photographs. The priority collection data could consist of all sidewalk network features adjacent to public streets in the commercial areas, as well as some off-street features in the residential areas, within the “Village Center Connectivity Zone” to connect public amenities and community spaces. To analyze the results of the inventory, the project plan must incorporate an ADA compliance index to evaluate and score each sidewalk feature variable on a scale from 0 to 100 according to the Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG).

The analysis can reveal locations or streets where ADA compliance scores are highest or lowest. This can help prioritize improvements or enhancements. While there have been some infrastructure upgrades in Menands, the pedestrian network was constructed prior to the development of modern universal accessibility standards, and the core of the community can be more connected to support pedestrian foot traffic. To evaluate and prioritize barriers to pedestrian connectivity, the assessment can review sidewalk gap and missing curb ramp analyses. The sidewalk gap analysis will reveal possible missing sidewalk links to be identified and mapped. The sidewalk gap analysis will assign connectivity scores to reveal areas in need of attention, for example Wards Lane west of Park Drive. The outskirts of the Village will typically have large gaps with lower connectivity value, and some areas in the Village lack sidewalks altogether. Neighborhoods and apartment developments further away from the core of the community typically have the lower levels of compliance, on average.

The public engagement involved with the comprehensive plan and other aspects of the assessment can establish priority areas with great potential and high demand for accessible pedestrian infrastructure. Priority areas are typically influenced by concentrations of people with disabilities and the elderly; housing density; transit activity; local commerce; and proximity to key types of destinations such as public parks. Based on overall findings of the assessment, the Village can obtain baseline recommendations related to ADA compliance, condition, connectivity, and priority areas. These recommendations provide guidelines that the Village can follow to address the key findings of the inventory and assessment process, moving the community toward a safer and more accessible sidewalk network for all pedestrians. Figure 4 shows a priority area with potential for expanding the sidewalk network along Wards Lane, which was identified by members of the public in the community survey and at open house events. Wards Lane connects several apartment complexes with the Menands School, and connects a major commerce hub, Broadway, to Van Rensselaer Boulevard. It can also connect to the future bike-pedestrian multi-use path to the riverfront across the Exit 6 ramp to I-787.

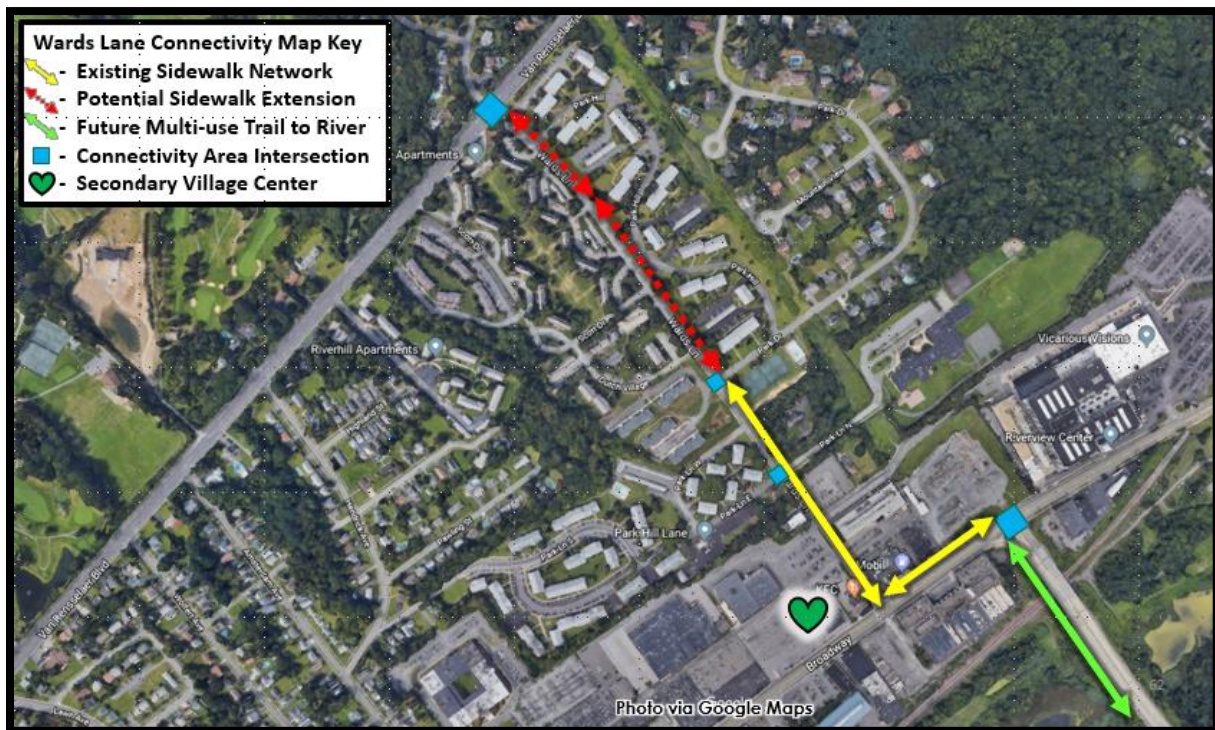


Figure 4 Sidewalk Network Expansion Potential on Ward's Lane

Climate Smart Communities

The Village of Menands will be affected by climate change impacts and, since the Village already has plans and projects underway that include climate change mitigation and adaptation, they should consider taking the pledge to become a Climate Smart Community. This program, under the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, would provide guidance to the village towards outlining and reaching climate action goals, and can be used to leverage funding to meet those goals.³ Municipalities across the country have decided to help mitigate their contribution to climate change by reducing their energy and water consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, and waste. Pledging to become a Climate Smart Community is consistent with New York State’s Renewing the Energy Vision (REV), which outlines 2030 goals for 50% electricity to be sourced from renewable energy, 23% reduction in energy consumption of buildings from 2012 levels, and a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels, with an 80% reduction by 2050.⁴

Climate Change Impacts

The Village of Menands is located along the Hudson River, an estuary that by medium projections is expected to rise 3 feet within the next 80 years.⁵ The village already experiences issues with flooding, and sea-level rise is expected to exacerbate those issues. The hottest days of the year are expected to continue to get even hotter, so consideration should be paid to vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, in the coming years.

Overview of Climate Smart Communities Program

The Climate Smart Communities Program (“CSC”) is meant to “provide local governments with guidance on how to reduce GHG emissions, save taxpayer dollars, and advance community goals for health and safety, economic vitality, energy independence, and quality of life.”⁶ The program is designed to provide guidance to local governments through five sequential phases in a cycle of action: 1) commit, 2) assess, plan, & govern, 3) build capacity, 4) implement, and 5) monitor & report.

³ NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. (2018) “A Guide to Local Action: Climate Smart Communities Certification”. <http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/50845.html>.

⁴ “Reforming the Energy Vision”. (2018) New York State. <https://rev.ny.gov/>.

⁵ NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. (2018) “Part 490, Projected Sea-level Rise - Express Terms”. NYCRR. <http://www.dec.ny.gov/regulations/103877.html>.

⁶ “Climate Smart Communities Certification Manual Version 2.0”. (2014) New York State. http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/administration_pdf/certman.pdf.

The CSC Certification outlines ten pledge elements for local governments to complete to become certified. This includes:

1. Pledge to become a Climate Smart Community
2. Set goals, inventory emissions, plan for climate action
3. Decrease community energy use
4. Increase community use of renewable energy
5. Realize benefits of recycling and other climate-smart solid waste management practices
6. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions through use of climate-smart land-use tools
7. Enhance community resilience and prepare for the effects of climate change
8. Support development of a green innovation economy
9. Inform and inspire the public
10. Commit to an evolving process of climate action

Under each of these ten elements are priority and optional actions that provide ideas for local governments to reach these goals in a flexible way that can help each municipality with their unique features and assets. There are different award levels of certification that can be reached, from initial pledging, to a Gold Certified Climate Smart Community.

This program includes a CSC Grant program that provides competitive 50/50 matching grant funding for municipalities towards implementation projects for adaptation and mitigation, and certification projects for supporting research and planning.⁷ The 2018 round is now open, offering up to 5 grants between \$2,500 and \$9,999 for municipalities with populations less than 40,000. This round's deadline is July 27th, 2018. More information on the CSC Grant Program can be found at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/109181.html>.

Current & Potential Projects

The Village has already completed or is currently active in projects that can be counted towards the actions required for certification. This includes upgrades to water infrastructure, solar energy options, energy efficiency upgrades, transportation improvements, and more.

⁷ Office of Climate Change. "Climate Smart Communities Grants". NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. <http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/109181.html>.

There is the potential for more climate change mitigation and adaptation projects that the Village could pursue, including:

- Community Choice Aggregation (for community wide solar energy)
- Wetlands Protection
- Municipal Composting (potentially in partnership with Albany County Waste Water Treatment Plant located in Menands)
- Convert streetlights to LEDs
- Adopt a Comprehensive Plan that integrates sustainability elements.

CSC & the Village Comprehensive Plan

Recently, more and more municipalities that have created a Climate Action Plan have integrated its elements throughout their updated Comprehensive Plans. This makes sense for several reasons. A Climate Action Plan, which is part of the CSC Program, includes everything the municipality plans to do with their land use regulations, zoning, infrastructure improvements, and more. This naturally ties into the several sections included in a Comprehensive Plan, and helps to leverage grant funding from New York State by showing that the municipality is working towards the NY REV goals.

The Village can begin initial steps of the CSC Program by integrating the steps of a climate action plan into the Comprehensive Plan. Suggested first steps include taking the pledge, reaching out to stakeholders, creating a community Climate Smart Task Force, and appointing a project coordinator from the Village Board.

Parks, Trails and Green Space

The Village has an abundance of green spaces within its boundaries and just outside jurisdictional limits. The Village currently has the following green spaces within its bounds:

- Ganser-Smith Memorial Park (3 Acres)
- Pocket Park
- Polk Switzer Park (7.2 Acres)
- Sage Estates Preserve (68.38 Acres)
- Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail

The following green spaces are within two miles of travel in adjacent municipalities:

- Albany Rural Cemetery and St. Agnes Cemetery, located in both Menands and Colonie
- Burden Pond Preserve, Campbell Ave, Troy, NY
- Corning Riverfront Preserve, Albany, NY
- Schuyler Flatts Memorial Park, Broadway, Colonie, NY

The aforementioned parks and open areas within or near the Village include the following community amenities: pavilion space, BBQ area, children's playground, baseball field, soccer field, basketball court, volleyball courts, horseshoe pits, picnic tables, hiking and jogging trails, and access to the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail. There are excellent parks and trails within the village, but the awareness of their existence needs to be fully maximized to help the community members realize the enjoyment of such. Basic improvements to help re-connect the public with green spaces include posting trail markers or other wayfinding signage and establishing more distinct welcoming entrances to each public amenity. The various parks and trails in the village can also be reviewed to ensure there is adequate and definitive parking areas near the entrances. The Village could consider establishing a form of organized stewardship, and/or encourage the establishment of a "friends" group to help with ongoing maintenance and improvements.

The results of the community survey conducted for the Village indicate the demand for various community amenities such as a dog park, community garden, and additional picnic areas. Based on the open house mapping sessions, members of the public indicated that the existing parks would be ideal locations for additional community amenities. Access to these kinds of amenities should

also include universally accessible routes and safe pedestrian infrastructure connecting to or near the center of the village. Other potential community amenities to be implemented can include: tennis courts, handball courts, ice skating area, fitness gym, game room, nature preserve, skatepark, bike racks, bike lanes, amphitheater, boat launch, and farmers market.

Much of the under-developed and underutilized land is located between the Broadway corridor and the riverfront. There is opportunity to continue development in those areas, with the exception of challenges created by the wetlands and I-787. Some vehicle access is available on the land between Broadway and I-787. This area has the potential to serve several different community purposes and, if developed, could attract new additional community members to the Village. Development of this area of land could yield greater wholeness of the community and an increase in revenue from local eateries and destinations.

To clearly define park and trail entrances, the Village can work with community organizations to design and construct welcoming informational signage or structures at each access point. The Village can also undergo an effort to make green space entrances universal to all users regardless of age or disability. There are funding streams that could be explored to assist with this work.



Figure 5 Sidewalk Network Expansion Potential at Polk Switzer Park

Economic Development

Economic Development Trajectory

This section of the Opportunity Analysis provides some tools and ideas to help establish short, medium, and long-term projects and programs that can promote economic investment, job creation, and community development in the village at strategic locations. The Village has great potential to leverage local and regional markets and improve quality of life through strategic spending by the private and public sector to maximize investments. To reflect input from the public engagement processes, the Village has the following challenges to consider:

- options for community events and gathering facilities
- multitude of diverse shopping and dining experiences
- physical appearance of commercial corridor
- available development sites range in size
- place identity and brand awareness

Nestled in the heart of the Capital Region, and in proximity to major employment centers, the Village of Menands offers a refreshing small-town way of life with abundant outdoor recreation assets, an excellent K-8 school, and rich cultural history. The Broadway Corridor is an eclectic hub of commercial activity, with the I-787 highway corridor running parallel to serve employment opportunities, and a diverse tax base. Working with economic development partners, the Village can make strategic investments in public facilities and infrastructure to secure the fiscal stability of the community's future. The Village could explore the possibility of an economic development committee for the comprehensive plan comprised of public officials, business leaders, and community members, to work towards future goals which could include the following:

- Economically diverse and resilient community
- Healthy commercial base with both light and heavy industrial business
- Create a destination-like atmosphere within the Village Center Connectivity Zone
- Promote recreational tourism based on natural and historical resources in the Village
- Promote new residential development in accordance with the Village's vision
- Set forth a definitive set of economic development policies for guidance

Figure 6 illustrates community assets that can be capitalized on by increasing connections and accessibility between the "Village Center Connectivity Zone," making it a destination for people

that live, work, and play in the village. There is a network of existing sidewalks and connection points that be examined for inclusion of all modes of transportation to meet the needs of everyone. The Village Center locations were established through the public engagement processes and can guide strategic investment in the future.

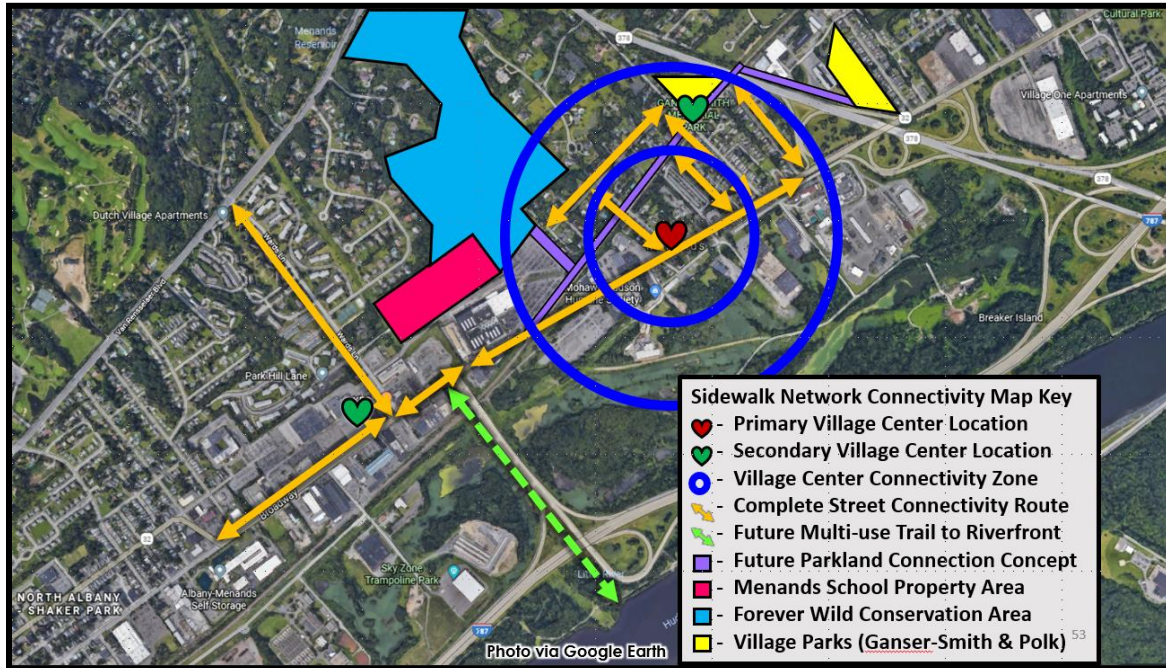


Figure 6 Village Center Connectivity Zone and Public Amenities Map

The Village offers a limited selection of land areas for growth within its boundaries, which requires strategic placement of new development projects. The Village can work with development partners to establish a set of market-driven tools and techniques for retaining, expanding, and recruiting desired businesses that can build recent commercial and residential development. A future market analysis could review site-specific factors to identify and describe promotional and implementation strategies to guide local development efforts.

The village’s key assets as a business location include diversity of existing businesses, desirability as a place to live, multiple routes of commuter traffic, recreational open spaces, and stable population growth in the region. The village’s main vulnerability as a business location stems from the lack of alternative size or placement of commercial spaces, especially when considering the prior use of a facility or parcel. Market potentials can identify housing demand based on the past trends and in consideration of the available developable land.

Along the Broadway Corridor, future development analysis may suggest that professional services such as chiropractic care, legal services, dental care, or similar uses could occupy a shared office

space in the priority re-use locations. Another ideal business is a childcare facility, especially with the NYS Childcare Council located in the Village. Childcare facilities are unique in that they require specific interior design safety features, including an outdoor and indoor space, with usually a minimum of 10,000 square feet of functional usage area. The market potential for a childcare service can be supported by the roughly 4,000 people entering the Village on average for employment purposes and the external demand of the passing commuter traffic.

Targeted potential retail business could include grocery, specialty foods, department store, gift, or jewelry shop, used-goods or thrift store, and dining options for all meals of the day. The Village could encourage more breakfast and lunch time dining options to support the local employment base and passing commuter traffic. Other personal services that could move to Broadway include hair or nail salons, photo or video services, repair work, fitness or health nutrition, and other similar services. The lack of diverse service offerings in the village creates an ideal scenario for new mixed-use development to have commercial and residential development on the same project site.

Adaptive Re-Use for Underutilized Properties

All over the world, industrial infrastructure is being creatively repurposed. Culture, leisure, sport, research, education, design, services, production, residences, and even agriculture are bringing life back to abandoned factories. This process is called adaptive reuse.

Long-term revitalization of the village commercial corridor will require new infill development of several underutilized properties that were identified as high priority revitalization areas during the public engagement process. The Village could create marketing information to highlight the Broadway Corridor and promote the properties available for adaptive reuse, providing with interactive map and background information. As listed below, the Village could focus on these properties to determine new strategies to attract and retain development opportunities:

- Former Broadway diner
- Former coke bottling plant
- Former Price Chopper Plaza
- Former mid-city plaza
- Former NYS Office of Workers Compensation Board

The large amount of surface parking lots within the Village, combined with high volume of traffic on I-787, Broadway, and Van Rensselaer Boulevard, could create an opportunity to attract a major auto-dealer. This would provide a new source tax revenue, especially in sales tax, and utilize the abundance of parking lot space. There are several auto-repair shops in Menands which could benefit from working with car dealerships and other businesses related to the automobile industry.

Green Infrastructure Implementation

The infrastructure techniques known collectively as green infrastructure can serve multiple purposes of beautifying streetscapes, mitigating storm water runoff, improving air quality, and helping to restore the Hudson River ecosystem. Green infrastructure is an investment that can spur economic development by employing local contractors to focus on specific areas for landscape beautification as a priority identified by the community. If the Village establishes a local stormwater management system along Broadway, this could be an incentive to help attract new property uses.

Hotel, Motel or Bed-N-Breakfast

The Village can make efforts to attract a hotel or motel to host visitors attracted to the area for business, tourism, or academic institutions. The surrounding municipalities have hotels which exceed vacancy capacity during specific times of the year and the village does not have a similar business to host overnight visitors. The Town of North Greenbush directly across the river does not have a hotel business and, with Hudson Valley Community College less than 3 miles from the Village, this presents an opportunity for new business and for new tax revenue. The State of New York allows municipalities to tax hotel/motel businesses for additional revenue on top of the charge collected for each room, which is commonly known as a “bed tax.” The bed tax is a separate charge on a customer’s bill.

Potential Business/Technology Park

To help attract commercial and light industrial businesses of different size and scale, a pre-planned business park could be a suitable option. One example for reference, “Ross Valve Technology Park” in North Troy is a cluster of different buildings that offer shared space and parking for small to mid-size industrial entities. This is a modern approach and promotes sustainable adaptive reuse of the former, and now vacant, large industrial and commercial buildings. The former “Two Guys” building is a good example of this type of adaptive re-use.

Dining Experiences

Residents in the community have consistently identified the need for more casual dining alternatives, especially with the closure of the Broadway Diner. The of the former Broadway Diner was identified as a top priority for adaptive reuse, and therefore should be a primary focal point of attracting a new business. Based on the high influx of daily workers, as well as the amount of active families and professionals living in the village or traveling through, it seems there is opportunity for a quality dining experience to locate near the Exit 6 ramp to I-787.

To help stimulate the local economy, the Village can consider establishing a set of “economic development incentives” to encourage expansion, relocation, or attract new businesses.

Economic development incentives should be applied selectively and only in the best interest of taxpayers of the Village. Tax abatement or concession should only be offered in the “but for” test; that is the business would not be able to expand or move to the village without a specific incentive. Incentives should be provided for operations that create additional revenue streams where the Village is made whole in the investment. One exception to this would be if a longstanding institution in the Village has a greater opportunity to re-locate outside of the Village and the incentive would encourage the business to remain. The Village has location as a great strength, which must always be remembered negotiating new incentives for new business. Incentive opportunities should be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Village Board (or by the Town of Colonie or Albany County, as applicable) to include the following options: sales tax abatement, property tax abatement, mortgage tax abatement, creation of business improvement district or tax assessment district, façade improvement grants, or direct municipal infrastructure investment trade-off. The Village would have to carry out a feasibility study and review cost-benefit analysis of the economic development incentive strategies to assist with such decisions.

All business in consideration to receive any kind of economic development incentive should align with the following criterion to meet specific goals and objectives:

- Expand village tax base and build a more resilient community
- Create new jobs with well-paying wages available to people living in or near the Village
- Promote new commercial business activity that adheres to the Village character and vision
- Diversify the economy to offer new additional products or services

- Enhance the Village appearance along the commercial corridor
- Increase property values while balancing residential growth and development

Food Access

Food Deserts and Food Insecurity

Food Security is used to describe a situation where people have convenient and safe access to adequate, fresh, and nutritious food.⁸ Food insecurity refers to situations where this access is limited or inadequate. According to the USDA, there are different ranges of Food Security as well as Food Insecurity.

Food Security:

- High food security: no reported indications of food-access problems or limitations.
- Marginal food security: one or two reported indications—anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of household food. Little or no indication of changes in diets or food intake.

Food Insecurity:

- Low food insecurity: Reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet. Little to no indication of a reduced food intake.
- Very low food insecurity: Reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and a reduced food intake.

According to studies conducted by the Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT), households with food security worried less than those who were food insecure when it came to the longevity of their food, the affordability of a balanced meal, skipping or cutting short the size of meals, being hungry, losing weight, and going long periods of time without eating.

Food insecurity is often associated with Food Deserts.⁹ The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a Food Desert as an area that is “vapid” of or otherwise offering a dull variety of fresh fruit, vegetables, healthful whole foods, lack of grocery store, farmers market and healthy food providers. This catalyzes the growth of “quickie marts” which are retail centers providing processed foods that are high in sugar and fat, ultimately contributing to our country’s obesity issue. Due to the categorization of the Village of Menands as a food desert, there is a portion of the community that deals with low to very low food security, experiencing

⁸ What is Food Security - <https://www.wfp.org/node/359289>

⁹ The Committee on National Statistics

some of the same characteristics from the CNSTAT household study. While many food deserts are in isolated, low income communities, Menands, NY is not qualified as a low-income community. To qualify as a low-income community, the poverty rate must be 20% or higher and the Village’s current poverty rate is 6.39%.

Low Access

The Village of Menands qualifies as a low-access community. In low-access communities, at least 500 people, or 33% of the population must reside one-mile away from a grocery store. An additional qualification of a low-access area is the absence of a surrounding grocery store/fresh food location and a lack of a vehicle. However, car owners may also feel the burden of a low-access area due to the distance of the commute. Other scenarios that may be labeled as an area with low-access, include when at least 100 households are more than a half-mile away from the nearest grocery store/fresh food location, or when 500 people live more than twenty miles from the nearest grocery store, regardless of vehicle ownership.

The following data was documented to indicate how Village residents commuted to their place of employment. The percentage of those who found modes of transportation other than their personal vehicle to commute to their places of employment, may serve as an indication of the percentage of Village residents who feel the burden of residing in a low-access community.¹⁰

Table 1: How Menands Residents Commute to Work

Commute Category	Percentage of People
Walk	1.3%
Work from home	5.2%
Public Transportation	7.6%
Other Transportation Options	0.8%
Drive Alone	79%
Carpool	6%

¹⁰ Livability in Menands <https://livability.com/ny/menands>

Previous food access in the Village of Menands

444 Broadway in Menands, NY most recently served as the Price Chopper grocery store, which closed January 28, 2017. The site was constructed in 1960. The location can be accessed from Route 278 and I-787 at exit 7. It was one of the chain’s oldest and smallest stores.

The building at 100 Broadway, located at the Mid-City Shopping Center, previously served as a fresh food location called the “Ideal Food Basket.” This full-service grocery store provided Latin American/Caribbean foods, fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as meat, deli, seafood and bakery items. The store is based out of Long Island, promoting itself as a chain that serves underserved neighborhoods. The lease for this location was signed in May of 2012, opened in March of 2014 and announced its closing on November 3, 2015.¹¹ The closings of these locations forced residents to turn to alternative areas to purchase fresh food. The diets and overall health of communities with an absence of alternatives for fresh, healthy food will be directly impacted.

Grocery Access

While are no grocery stores or fresh fruit/whole food locations in the immediate Village of Menands, there are options for the residents outside of the Village in areas such as Watervliet, Loudonville and Troy NY. The table below illustrates the traveling distances, recorded by car, with Village Hall, located at 200 Broadway Menands, NY serving as the starting point. Although public transportation is available to connect Menands residents to these surrounding grocery stores, the duration of the commute increases due to the additional stops that are made along the way, and fees for public transportation apply. The table below illustrates the previously mentioned grocery store locations, and their commute time by way of bus.

Table 2: Grocery Store Commute by Automobile

Store	Distance/Duration of Commute	Address	Direction
Price Chopper	4.1 Miles 6-minute commute	1804 2nd Ave, Watervliet, NY 12189	North
Price Chopper	4.1 Miles 10-minute commute	475 Albany Shaker Rd, Loudonville, NY 12211	West
Price Chopper	7.2 Miles	865 2nd Ave	North

¹¹ All over Albany <http://alloveralbany.com/archive/2013/11/07/the-notable-thing-about-this-new-supermarket-isnt>

	17-minute commute	Troy, NY 12182	
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In addition to the lack of retail grocery options in the Village, residents that do not own vehicles, are differently-abled and/or are older, may have difficulty getting to and from these other locations. In a Tufts University study that examined food access and food insecurity in Massachusetts, researchers identified concerns in relation to geographic proximity to supermarkets, convenience stores, and fast food areas and their correlation to certain demographics, income, and transportation.¹² Residents with the inability to make these commutes to fresh foods may succumb to eating foods that promote obesity and other chronic diseases. This group of residents may also run out of food sooner and go without food until they are given a means to travel. This makes them more vulnerable to impoverishment, malnutrition, cycles of food deprivation, overeating when food is available, and high levels of stress and poor mental health.¹³

Table 3: Location of Local Grocery Stores

Store	Distance/Duration of Commute	Address	Rate (one-way)
Price Chopper	16-minute commute Bus: 22	1804 2nd Ave Watervliet NY, 12189	\$1.50
Price Chopper	1 Hr. 23-minute commute Buses: 22 & 125	475 Albany Shaker Rd. Loudonville, NY 12211	\$3.00
Price Chopper	47-minute commute Buses: 121 & 82	865 2nd Ave Troy, NY 12182	\$3.00

Capital Region Health Factors

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 60% of New York State Adults are overweight. Obesity in youths ranging from 6-11 years old has doubled from 6.5%-17%. In youths and young adults ranging from 12-19 years old, obesity has tripled from 5-18%. According to the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) and the United States Census Bureau County Population numbers, 54% of adults in the Capital Region, or 123,168 residents are overweight or obese. The rate for adults with diabetes in Albany County (Capital Region) adult

¹² Planning, T. U. (2016). Massachusetts Food Access Index A Pilot for Accessing Food Access in the Commonwealth.

<http://as.tufts.edu/uep/sites/all/themes/asbase/assets/documents/fieldProjectReports/2016/MAfoodAccessIndex.pdf>

¹³ Food Research and Access Center <http://frac.org/obesity-health/low-income-food-insecure-people-vulnerable-poor-nutrition-obesity>

diabetes rate is 8.8% which is higher than the remainder of New York State which (8.2%.) Hypertension is the leading cause of death in Albany County (31.8%) with a rate of diagnoses being higher than the rate of remaining Upstate NY communities, which are made up of Western NY, the Southern Tier, Hudson Valley, the Catskills, the Adirondacks, North Country, Central NY, and the Finger Lakes. (28.3%.)¹⁴

Food Access Recommendations

The results from the community survey conducted for the Village indicate that convenient access to a grocery store is a high priority for Village residents. The following are recommendations to leverage existing resources to assess the food access conditions in Menands and secure funding to increase access to healthy, whole foods.

Capital Roots' Healthy Stores Program.

Capital Roots is a non-profit organization headquartered in Troy, NY, that “works to reduce the impact of poor nutrition on public health”.¹⁵ They achieve this goal by establishing community gardens, improving access to healthy food and offering education on nutrition and gardening to people across the Capital Region. Their Healthy Stores program focuses on providing access to healthy food in areas with limited access to fresh food. Through this program, Capital Roots partners with local businesses such as convenience stores to install refrigeration units for fresh produce. Capital Roots and local business-owners work together to keep the prices of these fresh alternatives to typical convenience store food low so that fresh food is available and affordable for people living in neighborhoods with limited food access. The refrigeration units are stocked twice a week by Capital Roots and this program allows residents in these neighborhoods to have convenient and affordable access to fresh food.

There are currently 21 businesses participating in Capital Roots' Healthy Stores program in the cities of Albany, Schenectady, Troy, Rensselaer and Cohoes.¹⁶ This Studio recommends that the

¹⁴ Albany County 2012-2018 Community Health Improvement Plan, 2016

¹⁵ Capital Roots, Mission and History. <https://www.capitalroots.org/about-us/mission-and-history/>

¹⁶ Capital Roots, Healthy Stores Locations <https://www.capitalroots.org/programs/healthy-stores/locations/>

Village work with the Healthy Stores program coordinator to find businesses in Menands that may be interested in this program and negotiate the establishment of a Healthy Store in Menands. The convenience stores and larger gas stations that many Village residents already shop at may be a good starting point.

Establish a coalition of public officials and residents to work on attracting a grocery store.

The survey conducted for the Village included questions about the importance of a grocery store in the Village and the results were overwhelmingly supportive of a grocery store locating in Menands. During their public engagement efforts, Studio members were also able to receive comments from residents with more details about their wishes for a grocery store. It was noted that many residents might not be aware of the difficulties faced by the Village in attracting a grocery store and the complexities of the traditional data used by the food retail industry to identify potential markets.

To address these issues, the Studio members suggest that the Village organize efforts to educate the residents on past efforts that have been made to attract a grocery store and invite residents to participate in voicing their wishes and support for a grocery store in their Village. This can be done through the distribution of an official statement from the Village informing residents of their past efforts and organizing a forum where residents can stay updated on the grocery store attraction process. To involve residents in this process, the Village can organize a coalition to connect Village residents that are concerned with food security in Menands with other advocates and create a coalition of community members to work in partnership with the Menands government. This coalition would work towards advertising the support of Menands residents for a grocery store and highlighting the Village as a profitable market. They would also serve a resource for Menands residents in finding sources of fresh food. While there is no traditional storefront grocery retail available in Menands, there is fresh food available through other sources such as the CSA drop site at Riverview Center and the Capital Roots Virtual Farmers' Market.

Organize a Community Food Assessment to gauge access in the Village.

Community food assessments are used to gather information about resident food access, shopping behaviors and their beliefs about the local food environment.¹⁷ These assessments help communities identify their needs, while examining the existing patterns that act as a barrier to accessing healthy food. Capital Roots is currently conducting a region-wide food assessment of the Capital Region and while the Village is included in this assessment as part of Albany County, there is no data specific to Menands available yet. Conducting a food assessment, whether in conjunction with the existing efforts of Capital Roots or independently, would assist the Village in understanding the residents' food access needs and identifying information that may help it encourage grocery stores to locate in the Village. The coalition suggested in the previous section may be a valuable resource to the Village in conducting this assessment. The Community Food Security Assessment toolkit published by the USDA Economic Research Service can serve as a guide to conducting a community food assessment.¹⁸

Conduct a market analysis for grocery shopping within the Village

The Studio members suggest emphasizing the concentrated consumer buying power of residents in the Village as part of the community food assessment. Data from the traditional market analyses done by the food retail industry may not accurately represent the travel limitations faced by a significant portion of residents, particularly older residents. The results from the Studio Open Houses have shown that although there are several grocery stores within driving distance of the Village, many residents are unable to drive to these locations and would like to see a grocery store located within walking distance. Gathering data on grocery store access information to highlight the travel limitations of some residents could be beneficial as part of a market analysis. Another data point that could be focused on in a market analysis of the Village is the significant number of recently built, under-construction and planned housing developments. Conducting a market analysis would correctly represent the potential in this underserved community and demonstrate to the food retail industry that the Village is a profitable location for their business.

¹⁷ Community Food Assessment <https://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-a-livable-future/projects/CFA/index.html>

¹⁸ USDA Economic Research Service, Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit. (2002). https://assets.jhsph.edu/clf/mod_clfResource/doc/efan02013_1_.pdf

Incentivize a grocery store to locate in Menands through Empire State Development

Empire State Development (ESD) is the primary New York State organization for economic development. ESD is a public benefit corporation that coordinates between the private and public sector to promote economic development in the State by offering loans, grants and tax credits to encourage investment and job creation. ESD's NY Healthy Food & Healthy Communities (HFHC) Fund offers \$30 million in loans and grants to operators in the grocery retail industry to encourage them to locate in neighborhoods with low access to fresh, healthy food. This program enables communities to offer tax-incentives through the State to attract grocery stores to their municipalities while simultaneously promoting economic development and job creation.¹⁹

To be eligible for this financing option from ESD, communities must qualify as “underserved”:

- A low- or moderate-income census tract
- A census tract with below average food market density
- A food market site with customer base of 50% or more living in a low-income census tract

Menands may qualify as a census tract with below average food market density. Studio members would recommend that the Village apply for this funding opportunity, if eligible, and work with potential grocery retailers to invite them to relocate to an existing space in Menands or assist with the construction of a new building. Financing from this ESD program has enabled small grocery stores to renovate and expand existing grocery stores or build new ones in underserved areas like the Village.²⁰ The Food Trust and New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets were involved in providing different forms of assistance and funding to communities through the HFHC and are potential partners for Menands in this effort.

Take advantage of the Capital Roots Veggie Rx program

To address the health issues faced by some residents of Menands and the surrounding region, the Village could work with regional health providers and Capital Roots staff to promote the Veggie Rx program. This program is a collaboration between nutritionists from Whitney M. Young Health and Capital Roots that offers Capital Roots coupon books to patients with nutrition-related illnesses. In addition to taking advantage of this program if possible, Menands residents with

¹⁹ Healthy Food, Healthy Communities Fund
<https://esd.ny.gov/businessprograms/healthyfoodhealthycommunities.html>

²⁰ <http://www.liifund.org/projects/healthy-food-markets/>

nutrition-related illnesses could work with health professionals to develop a plan to benefit from the active transportation modes and outdoor recreational opportunities within the Village.

Conclusion

To reflect on community sentiment, there are many great reasons why residents and businesses choose the Village as their home. The Village has many positive aspects to capitalize on, but is in need of enhancements to public amenities to help ensure long-term stability and sustainable economic growth to encourage more investment. People primarily come to the Village for the combination of small-town community culture and the proximity to regional access and employment opportunities. People will stay in the Village for a more inclusive and robust multi-modal transportation network, and a more diverse selection of restaurant and retail establishments. With recent closings of several small businesses in the Village, there is opportunity for entrepreneurship to thrive in niche areas of services needed to meet basic needs of the people. The lack of service-oriented and convenience businesses within the Village forces people to travel outside the Village, which usually requires some form of motorized vehicle instead of bicycle or pedestrian modes of travel. With the current arrangement of the Village infrastructure and amenities, most people have adequate access to transit but there are ways to improve equitability in access to different modes of transportation. As the Village moves to focus around connectivity within the “village center connectivity zone,” residents and businesses can form community partnerships with volunteer-led efforts to beautify public spaces and gateways to make streetscapes more inviting and welcoming. The areas explored in this report should help guide the focus of the Village for the near future as they work with the public and stakeholders to develop the Comprehensive Plan.