

PART 3 CLIFTON PARK'S SETTING

The Town of Clifton Park encompasses approximately a 50-square mile area and lies in the heart of the Capital District region of New York. Clifton Park's proximity to Albany, Schenectady and other urban areas, a well-developed network of roads, and easy highway access has contributed to its tremendous growth—making it one of the fastest growing towns in the Capital District. In addition to offering convenient commuting distances to surrounding cities, the town also provides easy access to diverse recreational and cultural centers including the Adirondack Park region, Saratoga, Lake George, and the ski areas of New England. The Mohawk River that bounds the town's southern border not only played a significant role in the town's early development but also serves as a modern-day recreational resource.

Clifton Park continues to attract more residents each year. They realize the natural and cultural assets the community enjoys. Unique ecological setting, agricultural heritage and the presence of the Mohawk River and other transportation opportunities are a few examples of the natural resources that enrich and bring value to the growing town.

Long-time residents and newcomers are noticing that some of the rapid changes may be happening without accounting for community impacts and costs. A different approach may be necessary to balance economic growth with the community's natural and cultural assets.

Maintain more open space with future developments

The vision of welcoming growth with concern for retaining the beauty and unique character of the town's landscape is the challenge. Consequently, Clifton Park's Town Board and its Open Space Committee are implementing an open space planning process.

Clifton Park is not alone in facing the challenge of allowing for continued, healthy growth while seeking ways to save the key features and assets that make the community "a great place to live, work and play" – (the town's motto). Neighboring communities in Saratoga County – Malta, Saratoga Springs, Wilton, and Milton are striving to find the best path to balance growth with open space protection. This document provides approaches and actions for Clifton Park to encourage participation in the protection of community open space resources.

A. Ongoing Development and Growth Pressures

Numerous subdivisions dominate the eastern half of the town next to retail businesses, service industries, and major highways. The western portion of town maintains a more "rural" feel with agricultural tracts and 100,000 square-foot lot requirements. Subdivision expansion has followed the installation of water and sewer infrastructure. In addition to single-family developments, the town's zoning code has provisions for Planned Unit Developments (PUD) for the construction of apartment complexes, townhouse developments, and mixed-use industrial parks.

Prior to 1995, recognizing the need to establish a set of goals and policies for future growth, the town board formed a committee to create a land use plan - a "master plan." A Comprehensive Plan 1995 was adopted by the Town of Clifton Park Town Board (amended in 1997), that is re-amended every two years. The purpose of the comprehensive plan was to encourage residential, commercial, and industrial development to provide long-term municipal financial stability, enhance the tax base, and provide for necessary services. The amended master plan identified and examined such elements as land use, public utilities, transportation, the economy, environment, housing, and community services. This plan offers consistency to decision-making by boards and officials and provides for the implementation of zoning legislation.

The basic strategies for growth have remained relatively unchanged since the 1995 Comprehensive Plan. In 1997, the town board approved substantial revisions to the zoning code. To date, it appears that the Town of Clifton Park Comprehensive Plan has provided for reasonable and controlled growth. Residential development has occurred in accordance with bulk and space requirements set forth in Section 208 of the Town Code. Light industrial growth has been encouraged along the Northway corridor at Exit 10 and retail activity has grown in B-3 areas at Exits 8 and 9. Planned Unit Developments have been approved in "transition areas" to create a smooth flow from more intensive land use to residential areas.

In addition, another tool to gauge the potential impacts of growth, Generic Environmental Impact Statements (pursuant to the State Environmental Quality Review Act) have been adopted by the Clifton Park Town Board and employed to evaluate environmental areas and provide mitigation recommendations for major development in the Vischer Ferry Road and Wood Road areas. A Generic Environmental Impact Statement was prepared for the Exit

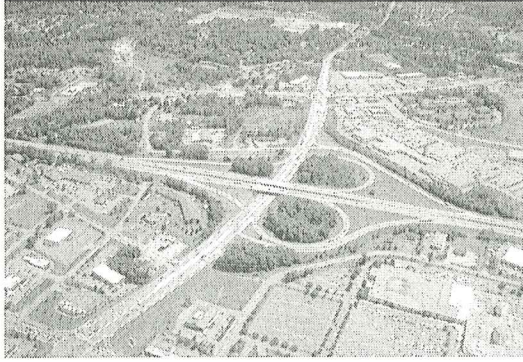
9 area that the town has considered for some aspects that outlined mitigation components. These studies have proved useful to the planning board for protecting some open space resources and for evaluating funding for infrastructure expansion.

The characteristics that make Clifton Park so appealing – its accessibility to major highways, shopping centers, award-winning schools, nationally recognized sports teams, and family-friendly neighborhoods – continue to draw new residents. As the community evolves, however, there is growing pressure to address the impact of continued growth on such community facilities as recreation areas, schools, and emergency services and to evaluate the benefits of protecting and preserving such non-renewable resources as drinking water, wetlands, historic properties, and visually aesthetic properties. To this end, the open space committee, with the endorsement of the town board, is committed to preserving open space – an acknowledged non-renewable resource that is considered essential for maintaining residents' current “quality of life”.

B. Growth Patterns

Much of Clifton Park's growth has occurred in the eastern half of the town where the presence of sewer and water lines and highway access make this area desirable for development. Between 1984 and 1989 more than 2,000 houses were built. In a one-year period alone, 1994 -1995, residential building permits increased by about 20%. As a result of this trend, 90% of Clifton Park's population resides on half of all the developable land within the town.

While most of Clifton Park's growth has occurred in the eastern half of the town, the western half, predominantly a rural area, has also begun to see increased development pressure. Development throughout the western edge of the town has been slower due to its distance from major highways and the absence of central sewer and water systems. The proposed extension of water and sewer lines into the western half of town along Route 146A will provide new development and open space resource conservation challenges.



Modern-day development patterns are largely attributable to advances in transportation technologies. The completion of the federal Interstate 87 (the Northway) linking Albany and the Capital District to Montreal and Canada spurred extensive development in Clifton Park. Housing development first started on agricultural lands nearest the exits to the Northway in such

subdivisions as Clifton Knolls; Clifton Gardens; Calico Colony; Country Knolls; Country Knolls West; and Crescent Estates.

Commercial development is concentrated at Exit 9 in and around the Route 146 corridor and its intersection with Route 9, and at smaller commercial areas at Exits 8 and 8a. The intersection of 146 and 146A is also a significant commercial area. Today, the land nearest the Northway has become built-out. The future trend in residential and commercial development is to reach into the more rural, western areas of town, thereby increasing the potential for traffic, environmental, and loss of agricultural land conflicts.

C. Demographics

The Town of Clifton Park is the third fastest-growing municipality in the Capital District Region, according to the 2000 U.S. Census. Its residents are well educated, with nearly 50% of all adults over the age of 25 holding at least a Bachelor's Degree. According to Sales & Marketing Management magazine, the 2000 estimate for Household Effective Buying Income (EBI) for Saratoga County residents was \$45,186, significantly higher than the national average.

Since its incorporation in 1828, the Town of Clifton Park has been committed to maintaining the health, safety, and welfare of all its residents. Though population remained steady during the late 19th century when agriculture was the main industry, improved transportation routes during the 20th century generated development pressures. In response to these growth pressures, elected officials responded with comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances, and policies that encourage a balance between industry, retail outlets, residential development, historic preservation, and open space.

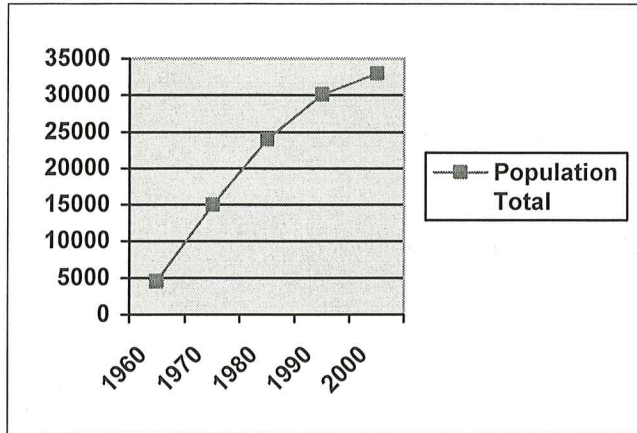


Figure 3-1. Clifton Park Population, 1960-2000.
 Town population increased significantly since 1960.

Throughout the Capital District, cities and villages no longer function as purely separate entities. Automobiles permit the region to function together; people often live in one municipality and work, shop, and spend their leisure time in another. According to the 1990 Census, 96% of the working population of Clifton Park works in the Metropolitan Statistical Area of the Capital District, but only 25% work within Clifton Park. The vast majority commute to other parts of the region (1990 US Census). As a result, the population of Clifton Park is contiguous with that of the other towns in the Capital District; they work together, play together, and make consumer choices together. Such a shift in dynamics from earlier times is important to understand the forces shaping the town; decisions cannot be made purely within the isolation of town boundaries, but must be simultaneously viewed from the context of the entire Capital District.

Consequently, Clifton Park is a fast-growing, popular residential community. Its expansive residential fabric is interrupted by the commercial strips that have developed primarily along Route 9 and Route 146; Crescent, Grooms, and Ushers Roads - the roads leading directly to exits 8-10 of the Northway.

The town's population on the whole is well-educated, with 95% of the adult (over 25 years old) population holding high school diplomas and 49% having obtained at least a bachelor's degree.

It is financially well-off, as the median household income was \$55,700 in 1989, well above that of surrounding communities.

It is also quite mobile; 47% of the population had moved house within the last 5 years, and 21% were new to the Capital District

(1990 Census), meaning that much of the population has little or no tie to the recent history of the area.

As such, the pressures on the town's land are extremely high.

Conclusion

The Town of Clifton Park is well-positioned to carry out an open space program. Its significant tax base and residential population can help provide the means to secure important open space resources. There are several tremendous opportunities, if action is taken soon, to set aside natural areas, protect working farmlands, and build a network of trails and open spaces - - a "greenprint™" for the future.

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