



# CLIFTON PARK TOWN CENTER PLAN

FINAL DRAFT - APRIL 2012

PREPARED BY



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PREPARED FOR

Town of Clifton Park, NY  
*and the*  
Capital District Transportation  
Committee (CDTC)



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# The Town of Clifton Park & CDTC Clifton Park Town Center Plan

2012



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This report was funded in part through a grant from the Federal Highway Administration [and Federal Transit Administration], U.S. Department of Transportation. The views and opinions of the authors [or agency] expressed herein do not necessarily state or reflect those of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

This report was prepared in cooperation with the Town of Clifton Park, the Capital District Transportation Committee, the Capital District Regional Planning Commission, the Capital District Transportation Authority, Saratoga County and the New York State Department of Transportation. The contents do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of these government agencies.

The recommendations presented in this report are intended to support the Town of Clifton Park's efforts to develop a consensus vision about the look, feel and function of a future town center in the town's existing Exit 9 commercial area. The recommendations are conceptual in nature and are presented to characterize the types of improvements that are desirable, and that may be implemented as part of future land use and transportation improvement projects. All transportation concepts will require further engineering evaluation and review.

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## Section I: Introduction

### Purpose

Through this plan, the Town of Clifton Park has developed a consensus vision about the look, feel and function of a future town center in the town's existing I-87 Exit 9 commercial area. The study brought together town officials, business owners, landowners and residents to explore land use and design alternatives that could transform this area into a more walkable, mixed-use (residential, commercial, and civic) center of activity for the Clifton Park community. It is intended that this Town Center Plan will guide future public policy, and public and private investments in the area for many years to come. It is understood that achieving the vision, as described herein, will be a gradual, evolutionary process that will require long-term commitment from the community.

### "Town Center" Defined

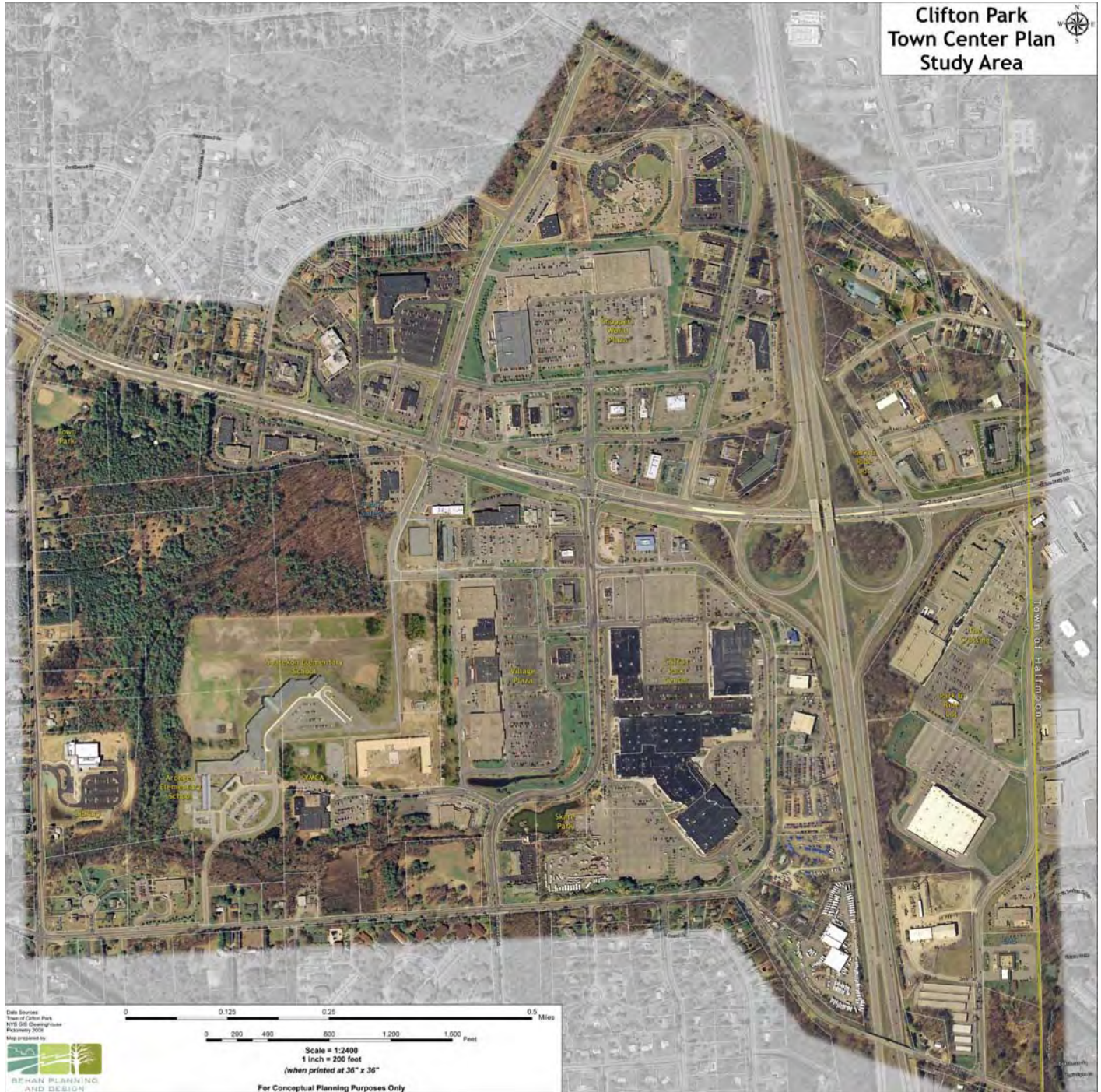
The term "Town Center", as used in this report, suggests a central place in the Town where people can live, work, shop, play, and participate in the social and civic life of the community. It is a focused area of the Town; not an individual building. This area consists of land under diverse ownership, buildings, streets, and public spaces all organized in a manner that facilitates casual interaction. Evolving from the Town's existing, primarily commercial retail district, the Town Center will bring people together for a wider variety of purposes. It will be an area that continues to accommodate the automobile; but it will be designed to make walking, bicycling, and public transportation viable, safe, and attractive alternatives to driving. Specific land use, design, and transportation characteristics of the Town Center will be further described later in this report.

### The Study Area

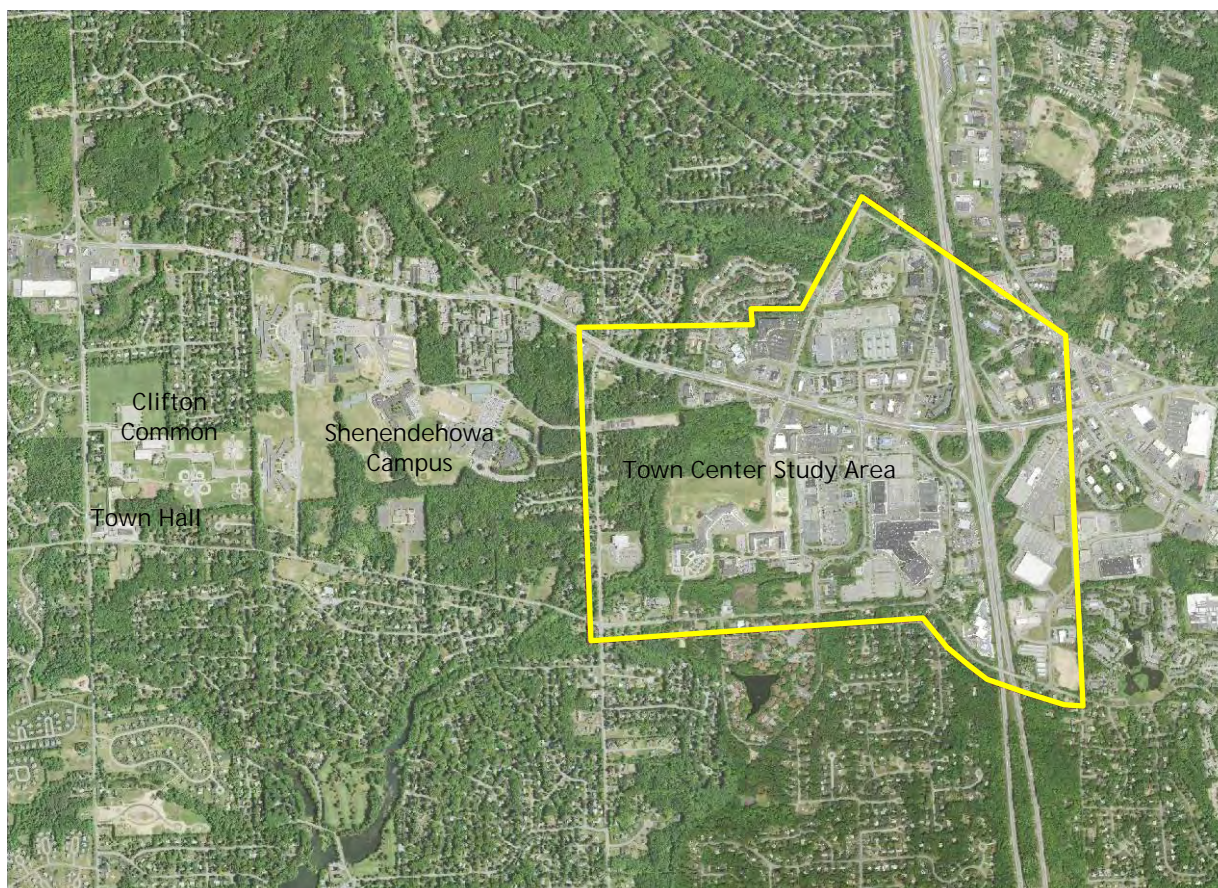
As illustrated on the following page, the study area consists of a large area stretching from Moe Road on the west to the Town of Clifton Park's border with Halfmoon on the east; and from Plank Road on the north to Clifton Park Center Road/Sitterly Road on the south. The Northway (I-87) runs north-south through the study area and NYS Route 146 runs east-west through the study area. The intersection of NYS Route 146 and Clifton Country Road is at the center of the study area.

Most of the study area consists of commercial property and it includes several large retail shopping centers such as Clifton Park Center (formerly Clifton Country Mall), The Shops at Village Plaza, Shoppers World Plaza, and The Crossing. However, there are other types of uses throughout the area including many office buildings, two public schools (Shatekon Elementary School and Arongen Elementary School), the Southern Saratoga YMCA, the Clifton Park-Halfmoon Public Library, a town park (Collins Memorial Park), a public safety building (State Police and Town Court

facility), the Clifton Park Fire Department, and some senior housing (the Bentley). There are also numerous residential neighborhoods immediately north and south of the study area.



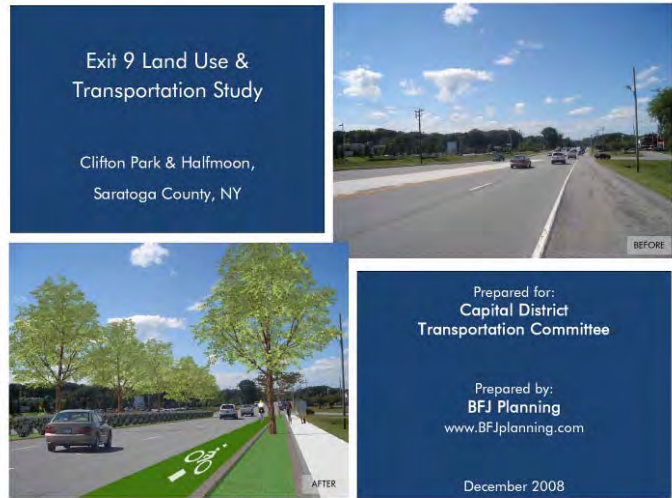
One of the unique features of the study area is its location in the Town and the region. The success of the existing commercial district owes much to its location and access to Exit 9 of the Northway (I-87) and Route 9. Proximity to Albany and surrounding communities to the south, as well as to the Luther Forest Technology Campus to the north will continue to be important to the future of this area. The study area also anchors the eastern end of a large swath of public, institutional, and commercial land at the center of Clifton Park. The Shenendehowa Central School District Campus, the Clifton Common park complex, and the Town Hall are all located immediately west of the Study Area. Residential neighborhoods surround this core of public, institutional, and commercial land; and a developing system of trails and sidewalks helps connect these neighborhoods to the various activities found in the core.



Recent Prior Planning Effort: The Clifton Park / Halfmoon Exit 9 Land Use and Transportation Study

In 2008, the Town of Clifton Park and the Town of Halfmoon worked with the Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) and a transportation consultant to develop a land use and transportation study for the area around Exit 9 of the Northway (I-87). This Town Center Plan is intended to build upon the recommendations of the 2008 study.

The study area for the Exit 9 Land Use and Transportation Study encompassed a larger area than the Clifton Park Town Center. As the image below indicates, the Exit 9 Study covered similar portions of Clifton Park and also included the commercial area along Route 9 in the Town of Halfmoon.



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The full text of the Exit 9 Land Use and Transportation Study can be found at CDTC's website (go to: <http://www.cdtcmpo.org/linkage/reports/cliftonpark.htm>)

The Exit 9 Land Use and Transportation Study included:

An *Inventory of Existing Conditions*, such as -

- Land Use and Zoning
- Demographics
- Transportation

*General Concepts and Guiding Principles* for the future, such as -

- Connect Land Use and Transportation Decisions
- Sustainable Land Use Planning
  - Density (infill and redevelopment)
  - Mixed Income, Mixed Use, Diversity
  - Accessibility and Landscape
  - Pedestrian-friendly Design
  - Schools and Workplaces
- Complete Streets (CS)
- Rethinking Parking
- Enhanced Design Standards and Design Guidelines

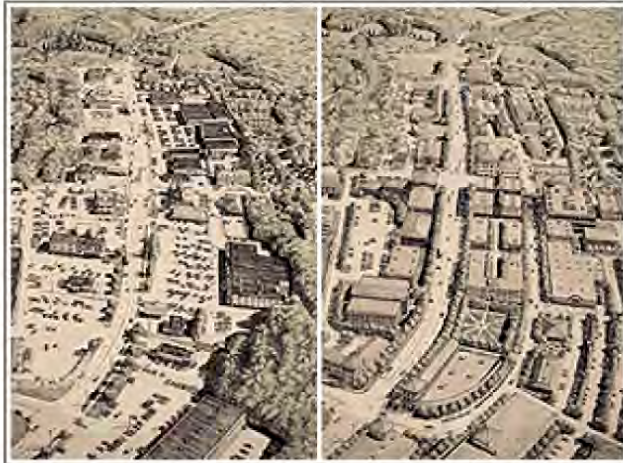
*Transportation Strategies*, such as -

- NYS Route 146 Traffic Management and Safety
  - Synchronize traffic lights on NYS Route 146
  - Create a raised and landscaped median on NYS Route 146
  - Change NYS Route 146 into a Complete Street
  - Introduce roundabouts to improve traffic flow on NYS Route 146
- Implement Traffic Flow and Safety Improvements on Sitterly Road
  - Turning Lanes
  - Shared Use Trail
  - Roundabouts
- Complement Local Road Network with new street connections
- Mitigate Barriers Created by I-87
  - Improve Existing at Grade Connections
  - Create new Pedestrian and Bicycle Overpass and/or Underpass
- Transit Improvements and Park and Ride Facilities
  - Route 9 CDTA Bus Route
  - Park and Ride Facilities
- Supplement the Existing Trail System with On-Street Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

*Land Use Strategies*, such as -

- Create Higher Densities and Greater Mix of Uses
  - Concentrate Development at Specific Nodes in the Study Area
  - Develop Design Standards and Guidelines for Concentrated Growth Nodes
- Minimize Impervious Surfaces
- Commercial Strip Redevelopment

### *Sprawl v Compact Development*



*“Concentrating development in designated areas results in increased population density, allowing for more efficient provision and use of infrastructure and services. The concentration of residential and commercial facilities gives a “town center feel” to the area and creates walkable neighborhoods.”*

*Above: Text and image from the 2008 Clifton Park / Halfmoon Exit 9 Land Use and Transportation Study (page 70)*

This Town Center Plan utilizes the 2008 Clifton Park / Halfmoon Exit 9 Land Use and Transportation Study as a starting point. Most of the background information about existing conditions in the Town Center study area is taken from the Exit 9 study. Some new or updated information is provided in Section II of this report. The transportation recommendations from the Exit 9 study are generally accepted as part of this study; however some additional transportation recommendations, or refinements of the 2008 strategies, are indicated in Section IV of this report.

It is, however, the Land Use Strategies from the Exit 9 study - specifically those that pertain to the Clifton Park Town Center area - that are the focus of this Town Center Plan. The Town Center Plan explores these ideas in greater detail. It takes these general land use ideas further by establishing a consensus vision for the Town Center and outlining approaches for achieving this vision over time in a manner that recognizes the unique opportunities that exist in Clifton Park. Section IV of this report elaborates on the plan concepts and recommendations. Section V of this report discusses next steps for implementing the vision.

## Section II: Background Information

Most of the background information about existing conditions in the Town Center study area is taken from the Exit 9 study. However, this section provides some new or updated information as appropriate.

### Historical Growth Patterns

It can sometimes be instructive to look back at historical growth patterns to understand and put into perspective the nature of change in an area. The Town of Clifton Park was for most of its history an agricultural community. The rural landscape was dotted with small settlements in the form of crossroads or canal-front hamlets such as Jonesville, Elnora, Rexford, Grooms Corners, Vischer Ferry, Forts Ferry, and Clifton Park Village.

As the series of aerial photos on the following page illustrate, construction of the Northway (I-87) had a dramatic impact on the development character of the Town. Beginning in the 1960's, once construction of the Northway was complete, the area around Exit 9 became a focal point for commercial development. In the approximately 50 years since, this part of Clifton Park has continued to grow and change. Today it is an important component of the local economy. It provides jobs, services, and tax dollars that help support the primarily residential, suburban community that now exists in Clifton Park.

There are several things about this very brief look at historical growth patterns that are instructive. One is the relationship between the transportation system (construction of the Northway) and development. The transportation-land use connection is very apparent; but it is more informative at a regional level. Another important lesson is the fact that so much change has occurred here in a relatively short period of time. In the same fashion, much can change here, for better or for worse, in the next 10, 20, or 50 years. What will the next generation of this commercial area be like? Answering that question is the purpose of this study. By defining what the community and the various stakeholders would like to see happen here, the Town can establish policies that encourage private investment and make strategic public investments that will guide this change toward the desired vision.

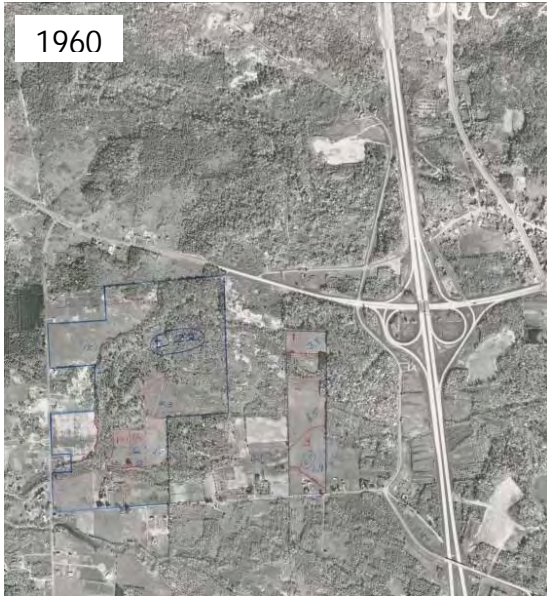
If you look closely, the private sector is already indicating a direction that change might go in the Town Center study area. The revitalization of the Clifton Park Center (former mall) in recent years has included turning portions of the old mall "inside out" - with storefronts facing out onto widened sidewalks. A new hotel and movie theater also expands the mix of uses at the Clifton Park Center and creates new attractive destinations. Elsewhere, offices have been located above stores in The Shops at Village Plaza, The Bentley now offers residential living (condominiums for purchase or rent) for older adults, and there are preliminary proposals to replace a set of older office buildings on Plank Road with mixed use (retail, office, residential)



**Historical Growth Patterns**

*Aerial photos from 1948, 1960, 1968, 1986, and 2008 - Prior to construction of the Northway (I-87) Clifton Park was a rural community. Beginning in the 1960's, once construction was complete, the area around Exit 9 started transforming. By the 1980's, the commercial district in Clifton Park was well established; and it has continued to develop and change through to the present.*

*Source of historic aerial photos: Skidmore College GIS Center for Interdisciplinary Research and the Saratoga County Soil and Water Conservation District*



buildings. Fortunately, these types of changes are generally consistent with the notion of a more walkable, mixed-use center of activity that the community envisions for the Town Center area. Through this study it has become clear that the owners and developers of most of the commercial property in the study area share with the community a very similar vision for the Town Center. Additionally, because the commercial district is economically successful the owners and developers of these properties have continued to invest in the area despite the overall slowdown in our national economy. The area's demographics remain highly attractive to retailers and real estate investors. Unlike many places, this private sector interest and ability to invest creates a real opportunity to shape gradual change in the Clifton Park Town Center in the coming years.



*Left: Outward facing retail at Clifton Park Center*

*Center: Offices above retail at The Shops at Village Plaza*

*Right: Residential living at The Bentley on Wall Street*

## Previous Studies

In addition to the 2008 Clifton Park / Halfmoon Exit 9 Land Use and Transportation Study described above, the Town of Clifton Park has completed several other reports that pertain directly or indirectly to the Town Center study area, including:

- Exit 9 Commercial Area Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) - 1998
- Town of Clifton Park Open Space Plan - 2003
- Western Clifton Park Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS), Land Conservation Plan, and Statement of Findings - 2005
- Town of Clifton Park Comprehensive Plan - 2006 Update
- Clifton Park IDA - Clifton Park Tax Base Analysis - 2010

### Current Conditions (supplemental to the Exit 9 Study)

As part of the work leading up to development of plan concepts at the Public Design Workshop (June 2011 - see Section III), information supplemental to the Existing Conditions section of the Exit 9 Land Use and Transportation Study was collected. This supplemental information is summarized below.

- Pictometry Book - Pictometry's high resolution geo-referenced aerial imagery allows users to see and measure an area from above. A complete set of images comprising the Town Center study area was created as reference material for the Public Design Workshop and is included in Appendix B.
- Non-residential Building Data - Building footprints, along with "year built" data and square footages, for all structures in the study area. This information is provided on a map included in Appendix C.
- Non-Residential Land Ownership - assessment data was utilized to identify land ownership patterns in the study area. The ten (10) largest landholdings, plus lands owned by the Town of Clifton Park, are identified on the map included in Appendix C. This map points out another unique feature of the study area - the relatively small number of property owners that control most of the land. If the Town and these landowners can continue to work cooperatively, there will be a tremendous opportunity for success in achieving the vision set out in this plan.

### Section III: Public Process

Development of this Town Center Plan included a robust mix of opportunities for public input. By bringing together town officials, business owners, landowners, and residents in this manner, the study produced a sense of shared understanding and purpose that should help the community as it moves forward with efforts to implement its vision for this important area of Clifton Park. Opportunities for community engagement included the following:

- Study Advisory Committee

A Study Advisory Committee (SAC) was created by the Town of Clifton Park and CDTC at the start of this process. The SAC included representation from both of these project sponsors, several residents from the Town of Clifton Park, and representatives from important regional agencies such as NYSDOT, the Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC), the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA), and the Saratoga County Planning Department. The SAC met several times to contribute ideas and oversee the development of this plan.

- Public Design Workshop - June 7-9, 2011

A three-day Public Design Workshop was conducted in June 2011. This intensive community event provided numerous opportunities for the SAC, Town staff, and the consulting team to meet with residents, business/landowners, school district representatives, civic organizations, and other stakeholders to explore alternatives for transforming this area into a walkable, mixed-use Town Center. Over the three-day period, activities were organized and meetings held at the Clifton Park-Halfmoon Public Library on Moe Road.

Photos from each of the activities/meetings conducted as part of the Public Design Workshop are provided below. Meeting notes are attached to this report as Appendix D.

#### *Site Walk - June 7th*



*Evening Presentation and Discussion - June 7th*



*Stakeholder Meetings and Public Drop-in / Observation Hours - June 8th*



*Hands-On Design Exercise - June 8th*



*Wrap-up / Synthesis - June 9th*



- Public Workshop - October 24, 2011

A final Public Workshop was conducted at the Shenendehowa Adult Community Center on October 24, 2011. The purpose of this meeting was to present the draft plan concepts developed by the Study Advisory Committee, Town staff, and the consulting team based on ideas generated at the Public Design Workshop; and to solicit feedback from the community about the preliminary concepts. Meeting notes are attached to this report as Appendix E.



## Section IV: Plan Concepts and Recommendations

As described in the previous section, the three-day Public Design Workshop (June 2011) led to a great deal of agreement about the nature of desired enhancements and change in the Town Center study area. Residents, property owners, town officials, and other stakeholders shared remarkably similar visions about the future. The notion of transforming this area into a more walkable, mixed-use (residential, commercial, and civic) center of activity for the Clifton Park community was widely supported.

Having a shared vision for Clifton Park's Town Center is an important first step. Going forward, the community's challenge will be to guide incremental change toward this vision without hampering the economic vitality of this important commercial area. Clear and sustained public policy and strategic public investment, in combination with continued private investment in the properties themselves, will be the mechanisms for creating this change.

During the Public Design Workshop many specific ideas for achieving the Town Center vision were identified. The Study Advisory Committee and the consulting team worked in subsequent months to synthesize these ideas into concepts and recommendations for the Town Center. Following a public presentation and discussion of these concepts and recommendations at a public workshop in October 2011, they were further refined.

It is important to emphasize again that the overall transformation of the Town Center as envisioned will happen gradually over many years. With that in mind, the big ideas are described in this section.

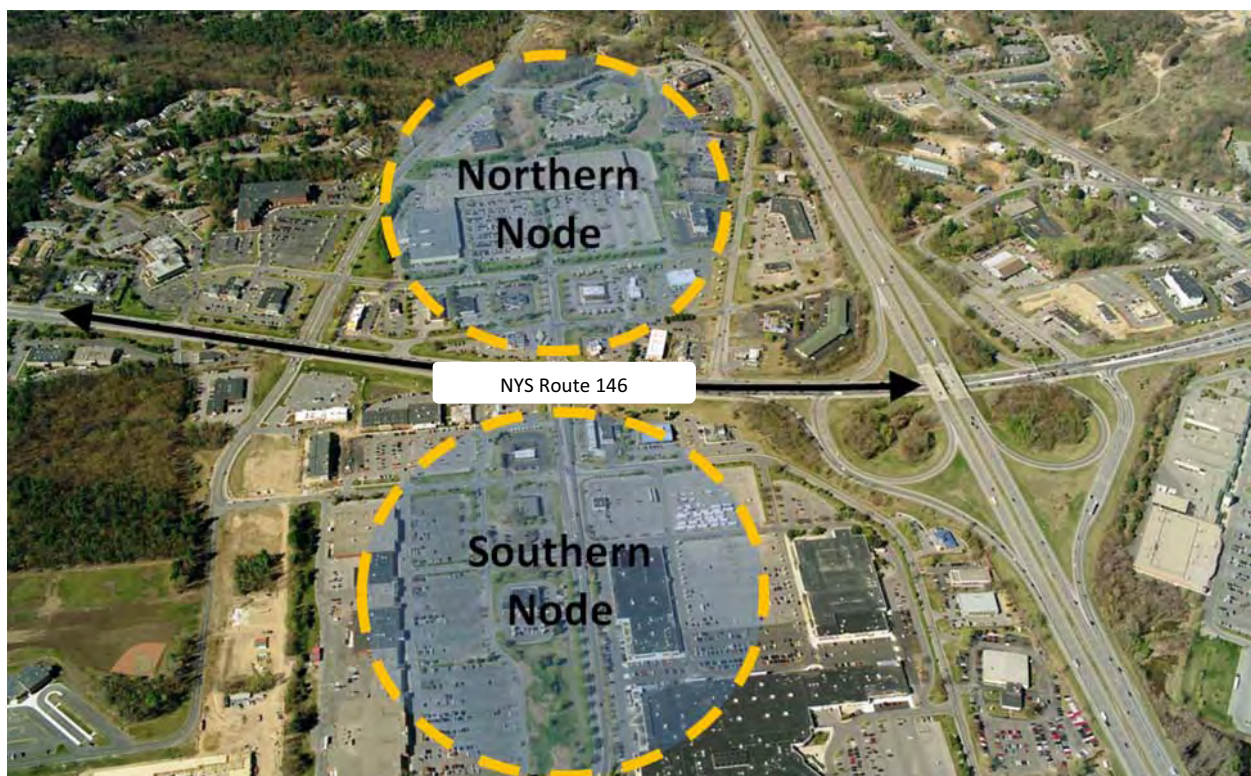
### 1. In the short-term, think about the Town Center as two, independent nodes -

Though NYS Route 146 is not the primary focus of this study, the high volume of traffic, the limited pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and the unattractive character of this important roadway are considered problems by virtually all of the study participants. The Town of Clifton Park is committed to working with the NYSDOT (owners of this road) to make improvements consistent with the recommendations contained in the Exit 9 Land Use and Transportation Study. Additional ideas for improving this road, both short-term and long-term, were generated through the process of developing this plan. These will be discussed later in this section. However, it is understood that any comprehensive solution for NYS Route 146 will take many years to achieve.

*Right: Street level and aerial views of NYS Route 146 – as currently designed this road creates an effective barrier dividing the northern and southern halves of the study area*



Rather than wait for a solution to the problem of NYS Route 146, a key theme for this Town Center Plan is to “move forward with what the Town can control”. In that spirit, the first recommendation is to think about the Town Center as two, independent nodes - at least in the short-term. Through its ability to regulate land use, make strategic public investments, and to cooperate with the small number of large landowners in the study area, the Town and the community can achieve a great deal of progress within the two nodes while continuing to cultivate more significant improvements along NYS Route 146. Of course, bridging the gap (literally or figuratively) between the two nodes remains the long-term goal. Again, ideas for doing so will be discussed later in this section.



*What are the desired characteristics of future development / redevelopment in these two nodes?*

The desired characteristics of future development/redevelopment in the two nodes include the following:

- Mixed-Use
- Walkable Streets
- Compactness/Density
- Good Design (Site and Architectural)
- Useable Open Space
- Structured Parking

*Mixed-Use (both horizontally and vertically)*

*The nodes should contain a robust mix of uses, including retail and entertainment (restaurants, cafes, theaters, etc.), offices, multi-family residential, institutional (public, educational, etc.), and well-designed public spaces/parks. These uses should be mixed horizontally - across the area - and vertically - within individual buildings. Typically, mixed-use buildings would contain more active uses (retail and entertainment) on the ground floor with offices and/or residential units above. There appears to be general agreement that buildings with two or three stories would be appropriate throughout the Town Center, with support for perhaps four or five stories in some locations.*



*Examples of new mixed-use buildings – this type of vertical mixed-use is desired in the Town Center*  
**Top:** Mashpee, Massachusetts. **Bottom left:** Gaithersburg, Maryland. **Bottom right:** Bend, Oregon.

### Walkable Streets

Elements of walkable streets include -

- street trees
- lower traffic volumes
- sidewalks
- narrow street widths
- interconnection
- on-street parking
- lower speeds
- mixed land use
- build to the street(right of way)
- small block size

The Town Center nodes should be organized around a network of interconnected, walkable streets. It is understood that for the foreseeable future, most people will come to the Town Center by automobile; however, once they arrive they should be able to move around the area without the necessity of driving. The idea is to create a pedestrian experience that invites visitors to explore. In addition to reducing the number of vehicular trips generated by new development / redevelopment, walkable streets are public spaces where activity and interaction are generated. This will enhance the Town Center's role as a place where people can come together in Clifton Park.



Walkable streets such as these will make getting around on foot a safe and attractive alternative to driving in the Town Center. **Top and bottom right:** Gaithersburg, Maryland. **Bottom left:** Seattle, Washington

### Compactness / Density

*In order for the Town Center to become a more vibrant focal point of economic, social, and civic life for the community, a more compact, higher-density pattern of development should be established. In Clifton Park there appears to be recognition that well-managed density is necessary to create the critical mass, sense of place, and urban environment that is desired within the Town Center. Examples from around New York State and the nation demonstrate how density can be achieved in a manner that improves the character and quality of the community.*



**Top left:** Old shopping mall in Boca Raton, Florida.

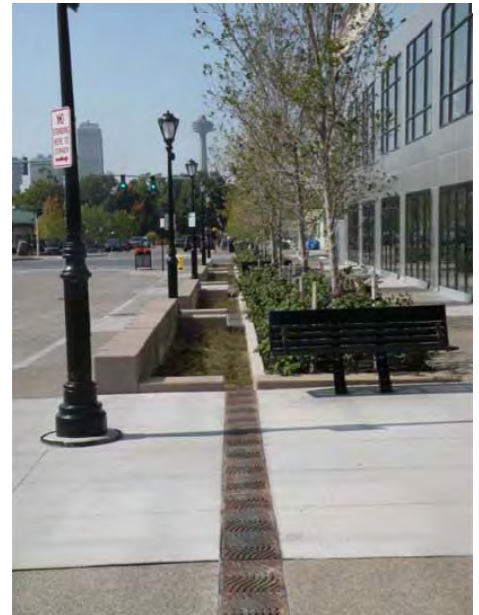
**Top right:** Mizner Park – a much higher density, mixed-use development that replaced the old shopping mall.

**Bottom:** Street level views of Mizner Park illustrate the walkable, high quality urban environment that characterizes this high density, mixed-use development



### Good Design (Site and Architectural)

*It has been said that density and mixed-use are the solution for sprawl, and that design is the solution for density and mixed-use. In other words, to make density and mixed-use a fair tradeoff for most people, attention to design is critical. Architectural style is not the primary issue, but certain traditional architectural conventions should be observed in order to ensure that the buildings address the street and sidewalk properly. Site design, or urban design, is equally important. The space between the buildings, the relationship of buildings to one another, and the design of public spaces can have a major impact on how people experience a place. Design guidelines and/or standards should be developed for the Town Center to ensure that the desired design characteristics are clear and predictable.*



Useable Open Space

*For many years the Town of Clifton Park has required that as part of any development in its commercial area, thirty-five to fifty percent of the parcel (depending on the underlying zoning) must be set aside as “green space”. While this requirement has been effective in reducing the amount of development and creating some small pockets of green amid the pavement and structures, it has not resulted in the creation of useable open space. Rather, the requirement fosters a pattern of buildings as islands on their individual lots. In the Town Center, open space should instead take the form of parks and public spaces. There can be great variety in these types of spaces, but they must be deliberate and purposeful; designed for the use and enjoyment of people who live in, work in, or visit the Town Center.*

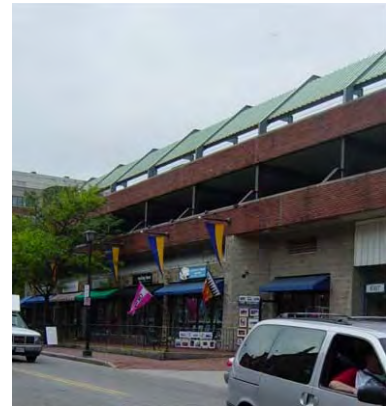


### Structured Parking

*Surface parking consumes a great deal of space and detracts from the overall character of the existing commercial district. Large parking lots create vast distances between buildings and discourage walking from one part of the commercial district to another. Reclaiming this space to allow for greater density and a walkable environment is necessary for the transition of this area into a true Town Center.*

*Since it is assumed that the automobile will remain the primary means by which people will travel to the Town Center into the foreseeable future, car storage will need to be accommodated in another manner. However, standard traffic engineering formulas for calculating parking demand in suburban retail districts should not be utilized in the Town Center because a walkable environment will make it possible for people who are already at the Town Center to move around it without getting back in their car.*

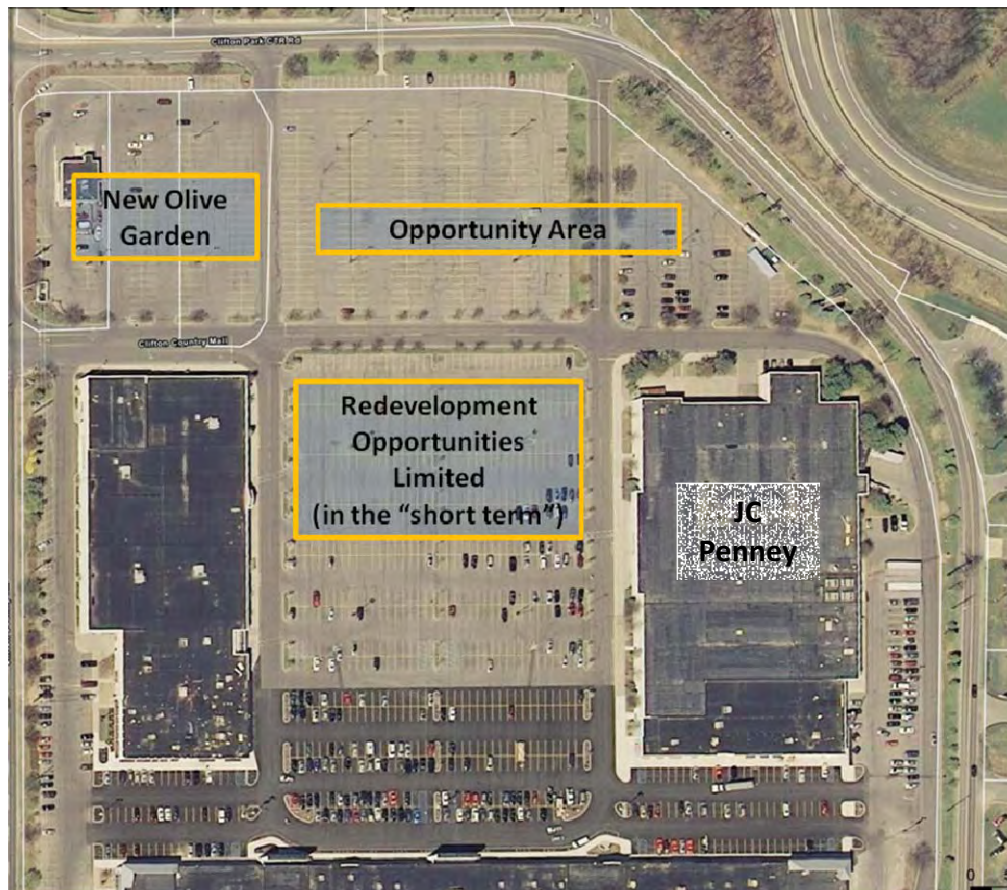
*On-street parking in appropriate locations can supply some of the parking demand while helping to calm traffic and create more walkable streets; but structured parking will be necessary to meet most of the parking need here. The design of parking structures should be recognized as an important consideration. As the images on this page demonstrate, structured parking can be designed in a fashion that does not detract from the safety and attractiveness of the pedestrian environment along the sidewalk. Retail space lining these structures at the ground floor and/or attractive architectural and landscape design can help parking structures blend in with their surroundings.*



*Within the Nodes:*

- *Identify opportunities for incremental change*
- *Try to finish one complete space at a time*

As described in Section III (Public Process), the three-day public design workshop provided an opportunity for larger public gatherings and smaller stakeholder meetings. The smaller stakeholder meetings included discussions with the primary landowners in the study area. Through these discussions, the study advisory committee and the planning team were able to identify locations within each node where change is more or less likely to occur in the short-term. Due to restrictions within the lease agreements between the various property owners and their larger tenants (JC Penney, Kmart, Hannaford, Price Chopper, etc.), it is understood that some portions of the study area will be harder to redevelop in the short-term. For example, some of these agreements limit the property owner's ability to build new structures that might reduce the parking or even block the view of the parking in front of the retailer's establishment. Furthermore, some of these lease agreements will be in effect for many years. While it is possible that economic circumstances will change or that certain lease agreements could be renegotiated, the team decided to focus on locations where near-term opportunities for incremental change are more likely to exist. These locations are referred to as "opportunity areas".



*Left: An evaluation of this location at the northern end of the Clifton Park Center identified an "opportunity area" where redevelopment could be accomplished in the short-term. Other parts of this location are less likely to change in the short-term because of very recent construction (the new Olive Garden) or because a long-term lease agreement limiting major changes is in effect.*

*Redevelopment ideas for this location are described under Opportunity Area #1 (page 25).*

Within each of the opportunity areas identified, the goal would be to “finish one complete space at a time;” that is, to redevelop the site to create a small but complete, walkable area that can stand on its own as an attractive destination. Even if other areas around it remain unchanged (remember it is expected that change in the study area will be incremental and the transition to a Town Center will take many years), the redeveloped opportunity area should have all of the desired characteristics described above - mixed-use, walkable streets, compactness/density, good urban design and architectural design, useable open space, and parking (structured, on-street, etc.) that is efficient and (unless it is on-street) hidden from view.

Beginning with the opportunity area identified in the image on the previous page, the next several pages will illustrate how incremental change could occur in several opportunity areas within the southern and northern Town Center nodes. *It is important to remember that these illustrations are merely suggestive of the type of transition that could occur in a particular area consistent with the desired characteristics for the Town Center. The illustrations should not be interpreted as Master Plans for any of the particular sites.* Actual redevelopment plans that might be prepared by the owners of these sites in the future may be similar or somewhat different in terms of layout and design than what is shown here. Still, the concepts and characteristics that these illustrations convey should guide their plans. Furthermore, the Town’s land use regulations and zoning code should be amended to ensure that these concepts and characteristics are allowed, and either strongly encouraged or required as appropriate.

## Opportunity Area #1: Northern end of the Clifton Park Center (southern node)

*Below left: Existing conditions (aerial view)*

*Below right: Initial phase of redevelopment. The arrangement of the new mixed-use buildings (brown), the small public space, walkable street, etc. create a "complete space" – a small area that can stand on its own as an attractive destination.*



*Below left: A second phase of redevelopment extends this space toward Clifton Country Road (and the new Olive Garden). Though the parking lot in front of JC Penney remains, a small portion along the new street is utilized as a narrow public space (without blocking the view of the store or its parking) and another small linear park and street are created at the south end of the large parking lot.*

*Below right: Long-term - a later phase shows redevelopment of the large store and the parking area that fronted it. In order to accommodate this level of density, structured parking (on the interior of the new blocks) is shown.*



Visualization: Redevelopment of Opportunity Area #1



*Left: Arrows indicating the location of the view used for this visualization.*

*Below: Photo used for this visualization.*



NEXT PAGE: Before and After

Renderings illustrating the view from this location now, and how it might look when the area is redeveloped



Opportunity Area #2: West side of Clifton Country Road (southern node)



The west side of Clifton Country Road (circled in image at left) is considered an opportunity area because several of the “out-parcels” in front of the Village Plaza shopping center are ready for development/ redevelopment. Recommendations for turning Clifton Country Road into a “Main Street” for the Town Center (see page 36) should also increase interest in these parcels. The set of images below illustrate how incremental change could occur on this side of Clifton Country Road.

*Below left:* A new mixed-use building (brown) on the undeveloped parcel at the southern end of this area could be the template for the redevelopment of this whole side of the street.

*Below right:* Additional construction on the south end allows for the future development of an east/west street aligned with what is now an access road into the Clifton Park Center (circled). As some of the older buildings further north are ready for redevelopment, these too are replaced by mixed-use buildings.

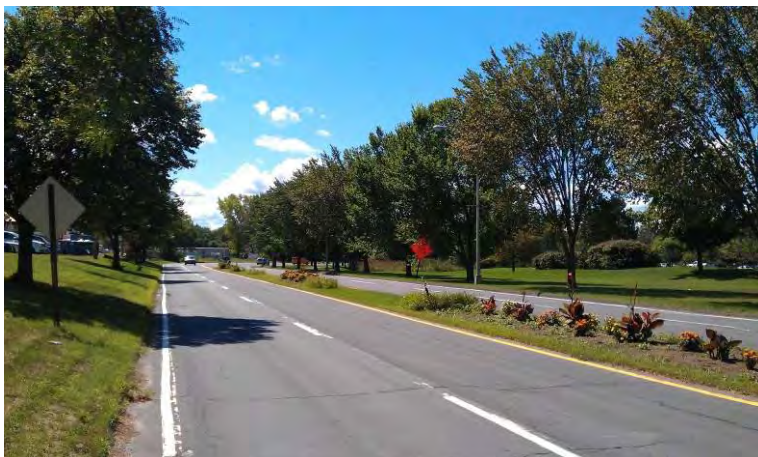


**Below left:** *Redevelopment continues along the frontage of the new “Main Street”, with small public spaces interspersed with the new mixed-use buildings.*

**Below right:** *Long-term – former access lanes in the Village Plaza parking lot are converted into new streets and blocks. New mixed-use buildings extend the walkable neighborhood character west from the new “Main Street”. In order to accommodate this level of density, structured parking (on the interior of the new blocks) is shown.*



Visualization: Redevelopment of Opportunity Area #2



*Left: Photo used for this visualization (looking south down Clifton Country Road).*

NEXT PAGE: Before and After

Renderings illustrating the view from this location now, and how it might look when the area is redeveloped



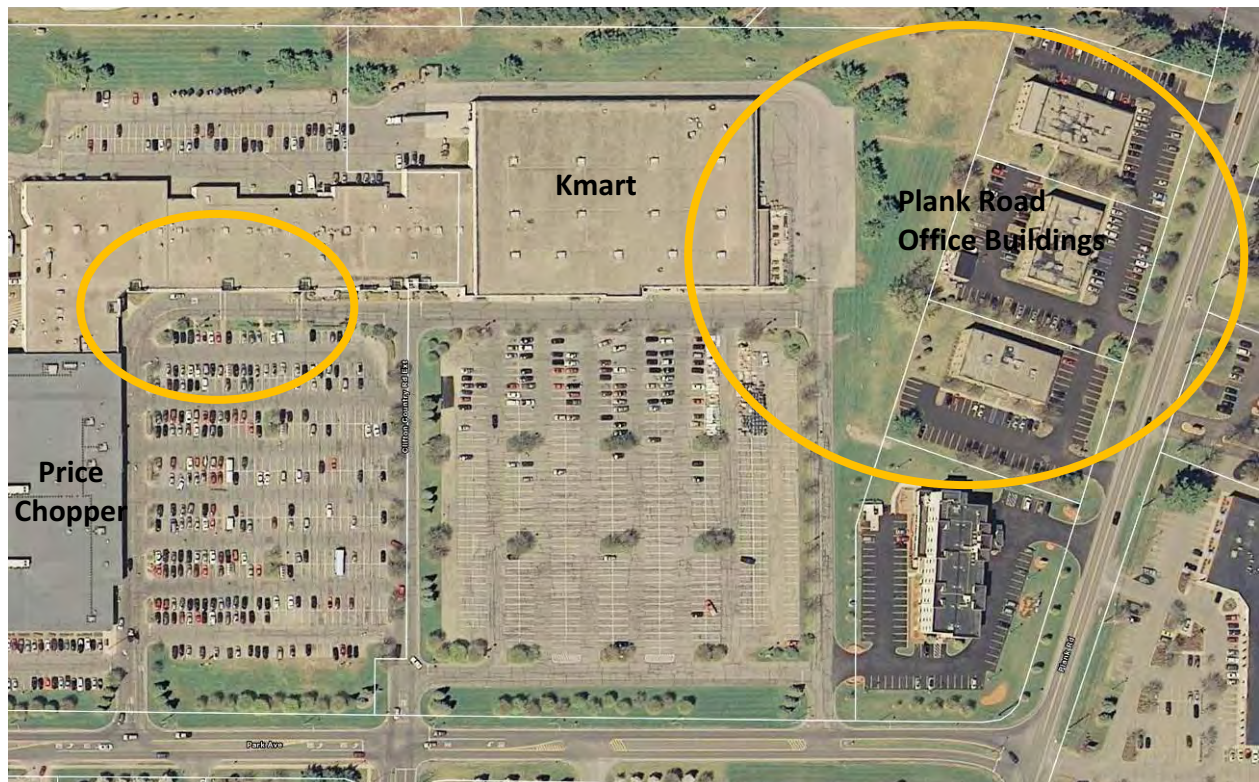
### Opportunity Area #3: Shoppers World Plaza (northern node)

There are at least a couple of short-term opportunities in the vicinity of the Shoppers World Plaza. These initial steps could set the stage for future redevelopment throughout the northern node.

The first, short-term opportunity area is located at the eastern end of the plaza. Kmart, like most of the large scale retailers in the study area, will likely be reluctant to reduce its parking or to limit visibility of the parking lot and building from NYS Route 146. As with the other large retailers, their lease agreement (which stipulates these restrictions) will be in effect for many years. Still, there may be an opportunity to do something at the extreme eastern edge of the parking lot that would connect the plaza to the proposed redevelopment of a set of office buildings on Plank Road. This location is circled on the right side of the aerial photo below.

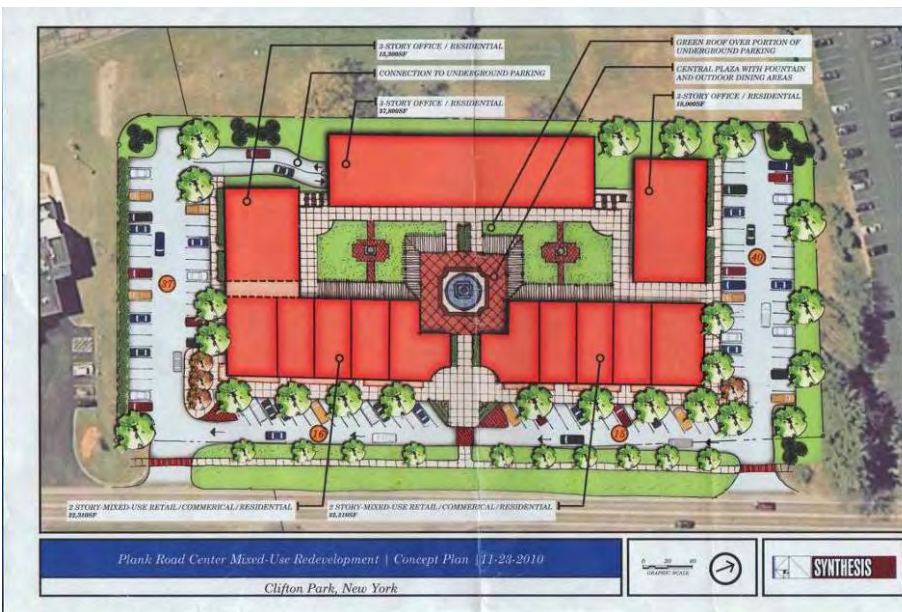
A second, possible short-term opportunity area is located at the bend in the plaza. These types of corner locations are sometimes difficult to lease out because they are somewhat tucked away and because of their size and configuration. However, there may be an opportunity to redevelop a small area at the northern end of the Price Chopper parking lot that could create more of a destination in the corner without reducing the visibility of the Price Chopper building or its parking. This location is also circled on the left side of the aerial photo below.

The potential opportunities at both of these locations will be further illustrated on the following pages.





The office buildings off of Plank Road (circled at left) are proposed to be redeveloped as a set of two and three story, mixed-use (retail, office, and residential) buildings organized around a central plaza with underground parking. Though this project must still be reviewed by the Town of Clifton Park, the concept (as illustrated in the graphic at left) does generally conform to the ideas that have been generated through this planning process for the Clifton Park Town Center.



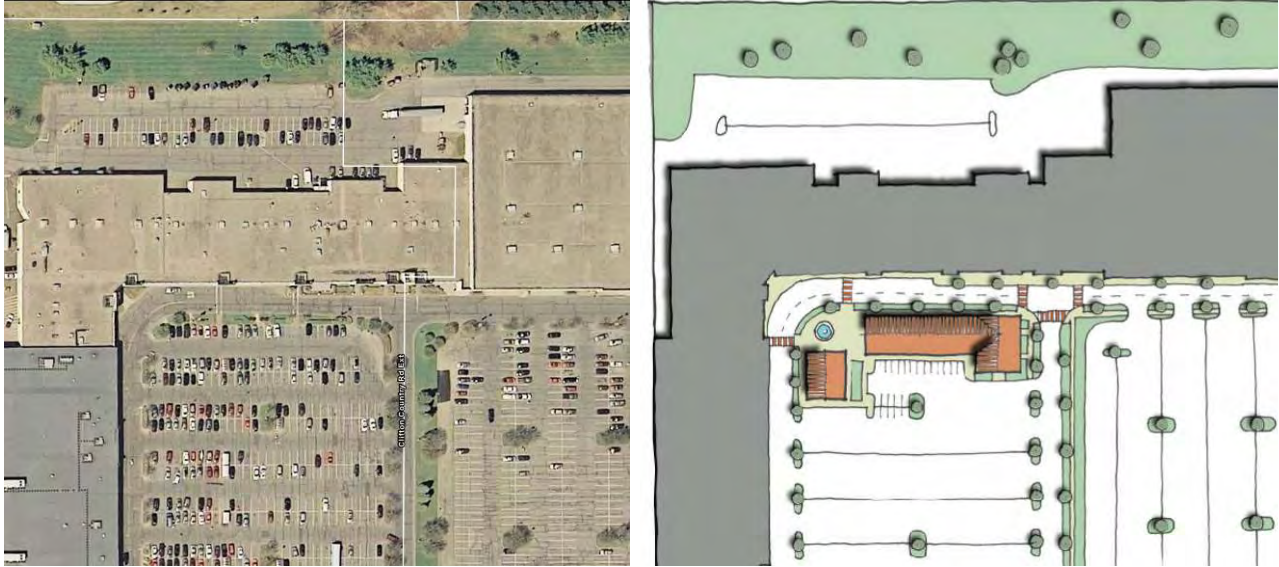
Connecting this set of proposed, new mixed-use buildings to the Shoppers World Plaza is the objective of the first short-term opportunity illustrated below.



*Far left: aerial photo of this site.*

*Left: New mixed-use buildings (brown) replace the existing office buildings on Plank Road (as proposed). Additional new mixed-use buildings, a small public space, and walkable street connect this area to the plaza.*

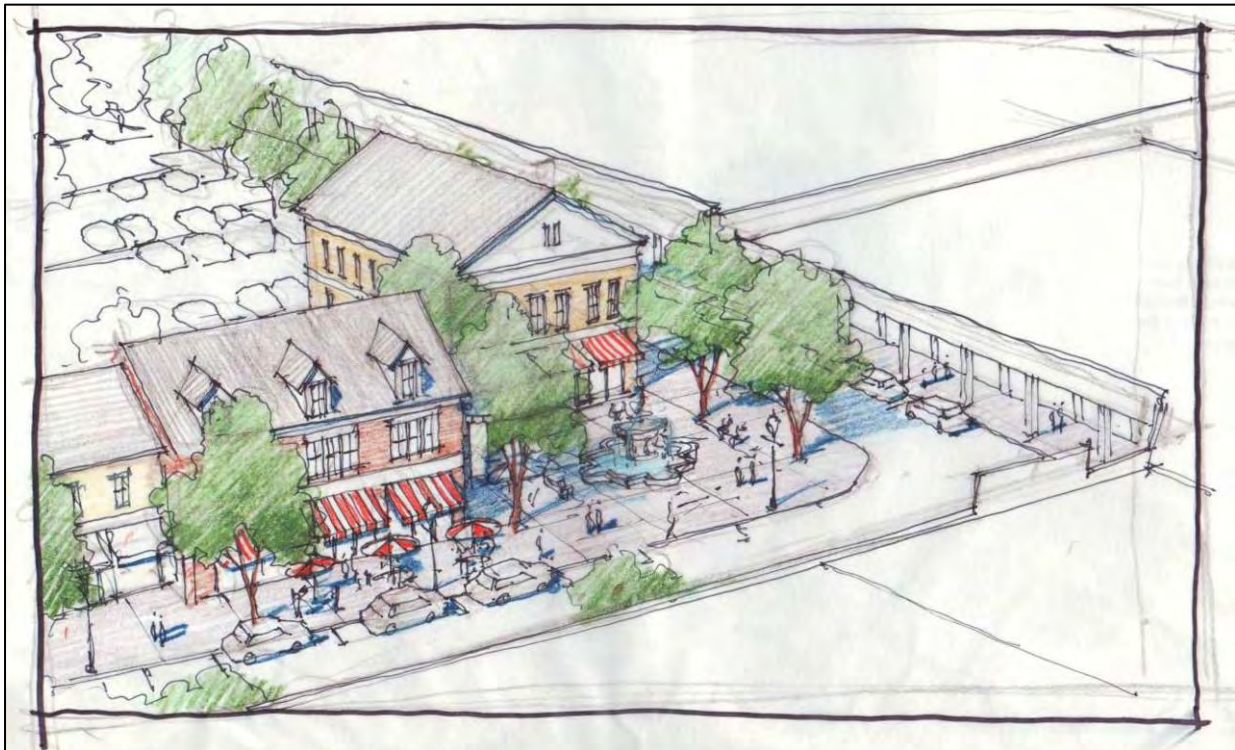
The second opportunity area related to the Shoppers World Plaza involves the area near the bend. As described above, redevelopment of a small area at the northern end of the Price Chopper parking lot could create more of a destination in the corner without reducing the visibility of the Price Chopper building or its parking.



*Top left: aerial photo of this site*

*Top right: new mixed-use buildings (brown) and public space create a destination in the corner of the plaza*

*Below: Rendering illustrating how these new buildings might look (looking down from above the existing plaza building)*



As with the opportunity areas described in the southern node, the short-term possibilities here in the northern node would hopefully lead to further redevelopment throughout the node over time. The series of images below imagines how this might unfold.



**Top left:** Aerial photo of Shoppers World Plaza and adjacent parcels along Plank Road  
**Top right:** In an initial phase of redevelopment, new mixed use buildings (brown) fill in the two opportunity areas described above

**Bottom left:** Redevelopment continues over time – new mixed-use buildings and public spaces create a safe and pleasant walking environment. Access lanes become blocks with parking in the interior. Park Avenue becomes an important cross street to the northern portion of the new “Main Street” (Clifton Country Road)  
**Bottom right:** Long-term build out of the area



In addition to bigger changes, such as the possible redevelopment scenarios for the three opportunity areas described on the previous pages, smaller incremental change could occur at any time at one or more of the “pad sites” (freestanding parcels of commercial real estate in front of a shopping center) located throughout the study area. Even a minor change, such as a change in tenant or a small addition, could create an opportunity to begin the transition of these separate sites into more walkable and attractive groupings of buildings over time.



*Above: “Pad sites” such as these (circled in orange) should also be viewed as opportunities for incremental change. Simple landscape and architectural enhancements could create better connections between these sites, improving the overall walkability and attractiveness of these portions of the study area.*

The incorporation of simple landscape and architectural enhancements - including but not limited to such elements as outdoor patio/dining areas, sidewalks, fencing/low walls, plantings, awnings, porticos, pergolas, etc. - would help to connect these separate buildings and sites. The Town could work directly with these property owners to create transition plans under an interim transition design initiative executed in conjunction with, or separate but in parallel to, the necessary rezoning work that must follow this plan (see Short-term Action in Section V: Implementation). A coordinated design initiative would ensure that incremental changes to the pad sites are beautiful and unifying; and not random or mismatched in terms of style, scale, and pattern.

## 2. Convert Clifton Country Road into a “Main Street” for the Town Center

The second important idea is to convert Clifton Country Road into a “Main Street” for the Town Center. Consistent with the theme of “moving forward with what the Town can control” (discussed at the start of Idea #1 on page 16), this idea recognizes that Clifton Country Road is a Town Road and is, therefore, something that the Town can change in the short-term. It is recommended that the Town focus on the section of Clifton Country Road in the southern node first since redevelopment along this corridor is more likely in the short-term.

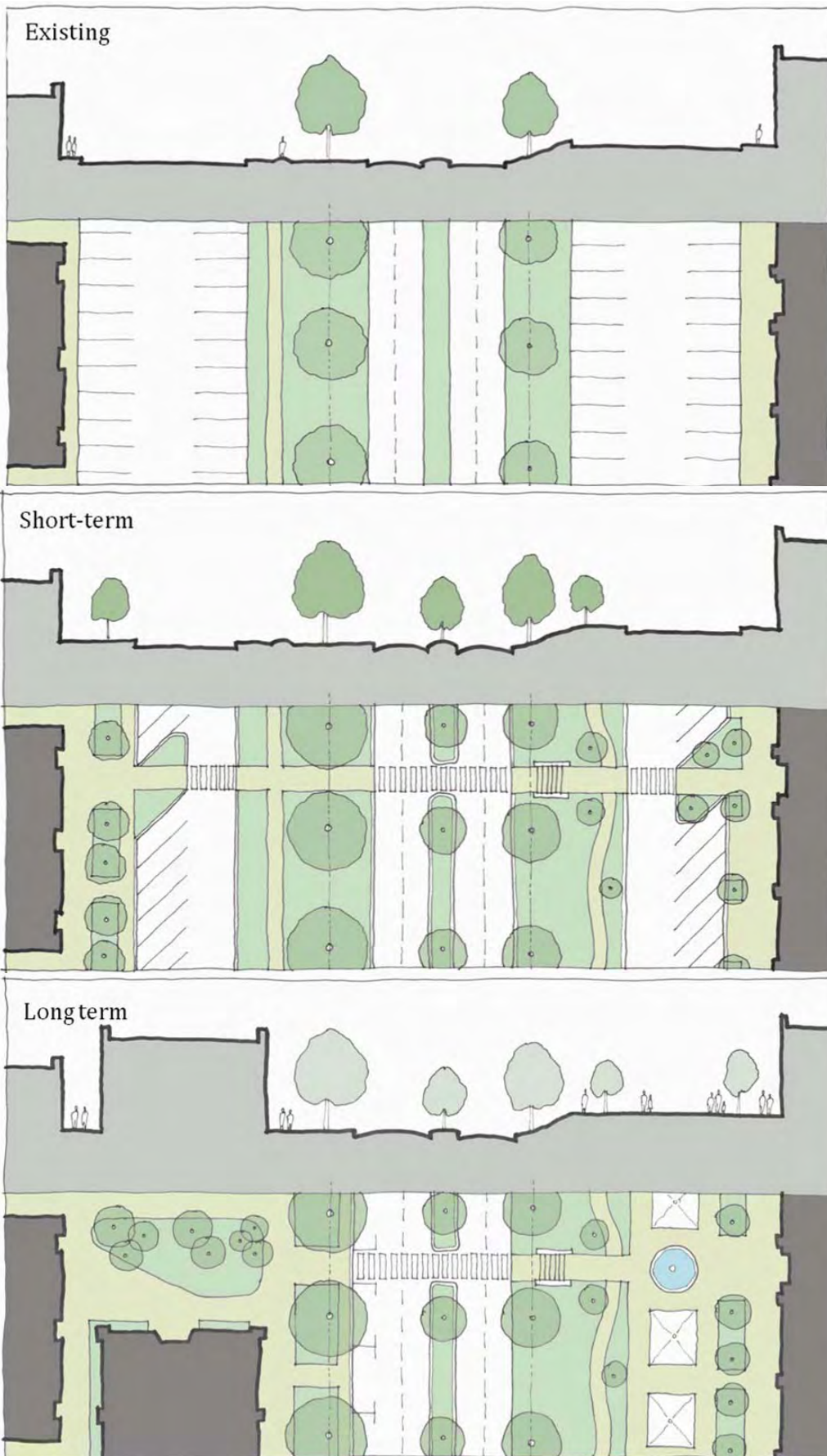
The transformation of Clifton Country Road into a “Main Street” would probably not require a major reconfiguration of the roadway. Necessary enhancements in the short-term might include the installation of high visibility crosswalks at intersections and mid-block crossings, the addition of a bike lane or shared lane in each direction, more robust median landscaping, pedestrian-scaled lighting, and the construction of a multi-use pathway on the east side of the corridor to complement the existing pathway on the west side of the corridor. In fact, the existing pathway and the row of mature trees on the west side of the corridor should be preserved - at least in the short-term - because they are a valuable part of the Town Center’s existing green infrastructure and they reflect the unique character of Clifton Park.



*Above: the existing pathway and row of mature trees on the western side of Clifton Country Road reflect the unique character of Clifton Park and should be preserved - at least in the short-term.*

### *The Evolution of a “Main Street”*

The series of images on the next two pages illustrate how modifications to Clifton Country Road could evolve over time. The first set of three images show the configuration of the street as it currently exists, as it might be reconfigured in the short-term, and how it could continue to evolve should the area become more “urbanized” in the long-term. The second set of images, a pair of renderings, illustrate how the short and long-term reconfigurations of the street might look with redevelopment of the parcels in front of the Village Plaza (looking south along Clifton Country Road).



Existing Conditions - this section of the road consists of two travel lanes in each direction with a grass median in the center. The west side of the road contains a wide linear green strip with mature trees and a multi-use pathway. The east side of the road contains a wide, sloping green strip with a few mature trees.

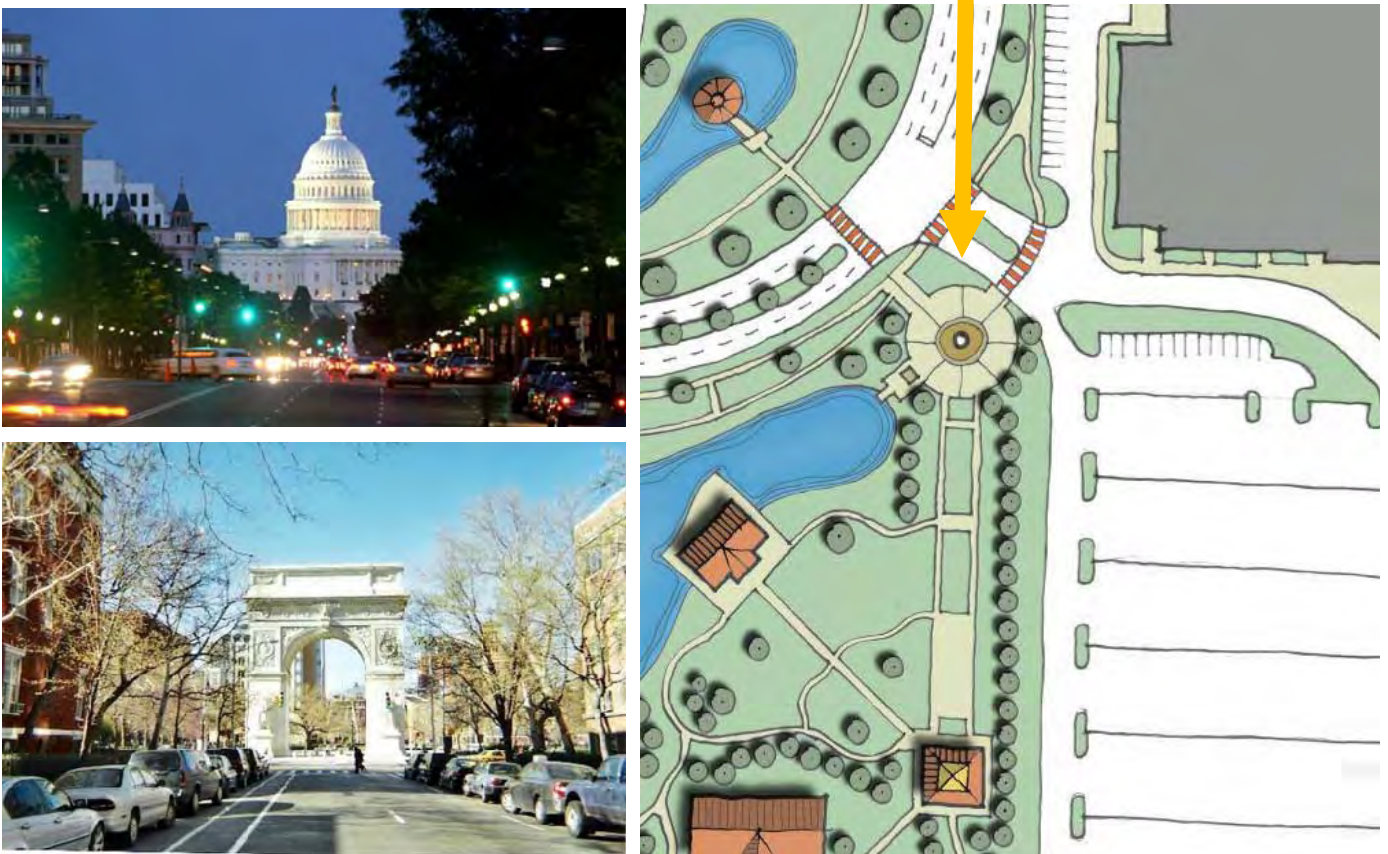
Short-term - changes include the elimination of one row of parking in front of the buildings on both sides of the road (to create a consistent access lane and safer crossing), the addition of a mid-block crossing (with crosswalk and steps up the slope on the east side of the street), and the creation of a multi-use pathway on the east side of the road to complement the existing pathway on the west side.

Long term - if the area becomes more urbanized in the future, parking in front of the buildings could be eliminated entirely. New buildings might be constructed closer to the street (as shown on the west side) or an active public space could be created where the parking was (as shown on the east side). On-street parallel parking might also be appropriate.



The ideas presented above are conceptual in nature and intended to illustrate the types of characteristics that a “Main Street”, unique to Clifton Park, might include. Before the Town of Clifton Park modifies the configuration of Clifton Country Road, a more detailed urban design and traffic/civil engineering analysis will be required.

As a final thought about the redesign of Clifton Country Road and its surroundings, it was noted that the road curves to the west as it heads further south toward Wall Street. This bend in the road presents an opportunity to create a dramatic design element by terminating the view with a significant building (a new Town Hall, church, or other significant institutional or even a private building, etc.) or a large piece of public art (a fountain, statue, monument, or similar structure). The view on the north end of Clifton Country Road (in the northern node) could be terminated in a similar fashion; bookending the new “Main Street” with memorable vistas.



**Above left:** The idea of terminating a view is illustrated by these pictures of famous vistas in Washington D.C. and New York City. A similar idea (probably at a less grand scale) could be employed on the new “Main Street” in Clifton Park.

**Above right:** The orange arrow indicates the location at the south end of Clifton Country Road where a significant building or large piece of public art could be placed to terminate the view down “Main Street”.

### 3. Allow additional residential uses in the Town Center

Encouraging a more robust mix of uses throughout this area is a key component of the long term vision for the Town Center. Residential uses, in particular, are almost completely absent from the study area today. The recent completion of The Bentley, a five-story, high-end apartment (for rent or purchase) building for older (55+) adults located on Wall Street, is the primary exception.

The addition of more, higher density residential units in the Town Center would add vibrancy and economic activity to the area. It would also help to fill a gap in the local housing market which tends to be dominated by large single family homes. Participants in this study noted the relative scarcity of affordable housing options for young professionals and for empty nesters who might want to stay in the community without maintaining a large house and property. The type of “small downtown” living that the Town Center could offer would be attractive to both of these important and expanding demographic groups. Locations where walking and bicycling are possible, and where access to public transportation is available, are likely to become even more desirable as the cost of driving continues to climb in the coming years.

Residential uses could continue to be incorporated into the Town Center in a couple of ways. The first would be to allow residential units above commercial in the “heart” of the two nodes. Upper floor residential units (apartments or condominiums) - above retail or office uses - are a highly space-efficient means of creating living opportunities in this type of setting.



*Above: Illustration of mixed-use buildings with residential units above first floor commercial.*

Another way of incorporating more residential into the study area would be to allow a mix of housing types - apartments, townhomes, and perhaps small-lot single-family homes in peripheral locations at the edges of the Town Center. For example, the southern edge of the study area along Clifton Park Center Road would be an appropriate location for this type of housing. As illustrated on the next page, it would create a nice transition from the residential neighborhoods to the south, and could actually help to create connections from these neighborhoods to the "heart" of the Town Center.

As more residential units are added to this area, the Town should be careful to ensure that public park spaces are included nearby to make these new residential neighborhoods livable. More discussion of public spaces and parks occurs in the next subsection.



*Examples of new, higher density residential neighborhoods - small lot single family, apartments, and townhomes - from around Upstate New York.*

**Right:** Existing conditions (aerial view) – the southern end of the study area, along the north side of Clifton Park Center Road, would be an appropriate location for new, higher density residential neighborhoods.



**Right:** New, two and three story residential buildings (brown) could create a nice transition from the single family residential neighborhoods to the south of Clifton Park Center Road and help connect these neighborhoods to the core of the Town Center. Small greens and pocket parks ensure that residents of these new residential units enjoy a high quality, livable environment.



#### 4. Introduce additional civic uses to the Town Center

In order to become an even stronger center of activity for the Clifton Park community, the Town Center should be the future home of public buildings and other civic uses. When it becomes time to replace existing public facilities such as Town Hall or the Post Office, the Town Center should be given priority consideration as a potential location for the new buildings.

Within the Town Center, it would be ideal if one or two key sites were identified and set aside as locations for important civic uses. As previously discussed (in Subsection 2 - the conversion of Clifton Country Road into a "Main Street"), the notion of terminating the view at the south end of Clifton Country Road with an important public building suggests one potential site. Another potential site involves the eastern portion of a large undeveloped parcel of land owned by the Shenendehowa Central School District.

As shown in the aerial photo below, the Shenendehowa Central School District owns the largest piece of undeveloped land in the Town Center Study Area. Located between Moe Road and Maxwell Road Extension, this land was part of a larger parcel that the district acquired many years ago. To the south, Arongen Elementary School, and later Shatekon Elementary School were constructed in recent years. This area offers a tremendous opportunity for the future of the Town Center.



*Above: Undeveloped land owned by the Shenendehowa Central School District (circled) offers tremendous opportunity for the future of the Town Center.*

As part of the Public Design Workshop, almost every group of residents identified this location for its potential as a future Town Park. The Crossings of Colonie, a relatively new town park (opened in 2003) off Albany Shaker Road just east of Wolf Road in the Town of Colonie was often cited as an example of the kind of facility envisioned. Though the two properties are quite different, it is the diversity of park environments and facilities at The Crossings that appears to have inspired these comments. The school district parcel is certainly large enough to accommodate a variety of different recreational experiences - nature trails, multi-use paths, playgrounds, picnic pavilions, ball fields, community buildings, etc.



*Above: The Crossings of Colonie*

If the school district parcel is eventually developed as a large public space, the precise mix of recreational activities and civic uses that might ultimately be incorporated on this site should be determined through a detailed master plan process. This process should take into consideration the unique environmental and landscape features found on the parcel and the Town's *Recreation Plan* (adopted in 2010). The process should also include significant public input. The cost of developing the park might necessitate consideration of some type of public-private partnership.

*Below: Examples from The Crossings of Colonie and other parks. The school district property is large enough to accommodate a wide variety of recreational and civic experiences.*



Additional suggestions for the school district property included:

- Create an east-west road connecting Moe Road to Maxwell Road Extension - This new street would provide additional connectivity to the Town Center, but it should be designed in a fashion that discourages its use as a cut through to other locations beyond the Town Center. Furthermore, speed on this new street should be controlled through traffic calming design elements. Full bicycle and pedestrian facilities (sidewalks and/or pathway) must also be incorporated into the design of this street.
- Create pathway connections north to Collins Park and south to the Clifton Park-Halfmoon Public Library.
- Consider use of a portion of the cleared land immediately north of Shatekon Elementary School for additional ball fields if the need for such space is demonstrated. Since this land is already cleared and part of it is not really needed for operation of the elementary school, it would appear to be an opportunity to satisfy the desire for additional playing fields for town residents.
- Consider using a portion of the land at the east end of the school district property (along Maxwell Road Extension) as one of the reserved sites in the Town Center for a future civic use. It might be possible, for example, to cluster a group of prominent public or quasi-public buildings around a more formal public space (such as a Village Green) at this end of the property without compromising the use of the remainder of the parcel as a Town Park.
- Private development, at the periphery or clustered on a portion of the site, could be appropriate and might help to provide financing for the desired public park improvements and the proposed east-west road.



*Above: The town green in Branford, CT. In classic New England style, the town green is a civic focal point for the community and is home to the Town Hall, a church, and other public and quasi-public uses. The eastern edge of the school district property could be designed to serve a similar purpose for Clifton Park. The remainder of the land could still be used as a large park as discussed previously.*

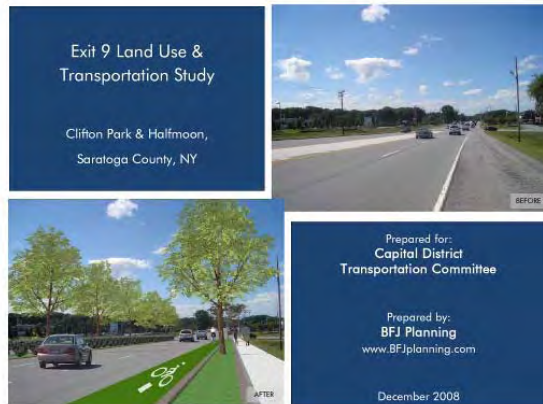
In addition to the park setting envisioned for at least a portion of the school district property, it is imperative that the Town Center be generously supplied with smaller parks and public spaces. All of the illustrations prepared as part of this plan (see discussion of short-term opportunity areas in Subsection 1) show pocket parks or public plazas as central to the redevelopment schemes. These small public spaces, purposefully located throughout the area, will be critical to the quality of life and livability of the Town Center. They will be places where people gather formally and informally and, along with streets and sidewalks, will constitute the public realm.



*Above:* A pocket park can be very informal, such as this one in Warwick, NY

*Below:* A pocket park can also be designed with more formal elements such as special monuments, fountains, etc. such as this one in Clarkstown, NY.





*The next three subsections address transportation issues, affirming and in some cases expanding upon recommendations from the 2008 Clifton Park / Halfmoon Exit 9 Land Use and Transportation Study. Though this Town Center Plan has focused primarily on land use and design it is impossible to separate these elements from the transportation issues that are so critical to the future of this area.*

## 5. Enhance connectivity throughout the north and south nodes

The Exit 9 Land Use and Transportation Study included a series of recommendations for enhancing connectivity throughout this area as a means of distributing traffic and creating a more walkable and bikeable environment. The transportation benefits of an interconnected network of streets for motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians were also discussed as part of the public workshops conducted for this study.

In general, participants in this study embraced the specific recommendations for new street connections identified in the Exit 9 study. If anything, the land use and design concepts identified for the Town Center through this study would argue for a finer-grained network of streets and blocks than what was discussed in the previous report. While ideas for macro connections (such as the possible new street linking Moe Road to Maxwell Road Extension) are common to both studies, the long-term redevelopment scenarios created through this process envision the future street network at more micro scale; including the eventual conversion of parking lot access roads to short blocks of local streets and a proposed east-west connection across Clifton Country Road.

To guide creation of the interconnected network of streets envisioned for the Town Center, the Town - in collaboration with the owners of some of the large commercial properties - should consider some preliminary steps. For example, a more detailed study could map these future connections as paper streets or as part of an Official Map to ensure that they are incorporated into future redevelopment proposals. Some of the proposed connections could be established on an interim basis by replacing a row of parking (in some of the larger parking lots) with tree-lined walkways linking one part of the Town Center to another. Finally, the Town and the property owners could give names to, and create temporary street signs for, some of the parking lot access lanes that may be considered as future roads.

Some other specific suggestions for improved connections identified over the course of this study, included:

- In addition to the proposed east-west street through the large school district parcel that would connect Moe Road to Maxwell Road Extension, consider a north/south connection to this new street - north to NYS Route 146, in line with the intersection of NYS Route 146 and Tallow Wood Drive; and south to the Library or to the access road for Arongen Elementary School.
- Complete Maxwell Road Extension to Wall Street - perhaps around both sides of the Bentley (this would also keep cut-thru traffic out of the loading area in the rear of the Village Plaza).
- Consider complete, full street connections over I-87 such as:
  - The Crossings to Clifton Park Center,
  - Old Route 146 to Fire Road, and
  - Plank Road to Old Plank Road.

Some of these possibilities were described as potential bike/ped connections in the Exit 9 Study, but they should also be considered for their potential benefit as full street connections. These should be considered in the context of any future studies by NYSDOT of the Exit 9 interchange and NYS Route 146.

- Ideas about adding an Exit 8B (at Sitterly Road) or a 9A (at Kinns Road) could also be considered in the context of future study by NYSDOT of the Exit 9 interchange and NYS Route 146.

## 6. Consider short-term and long-term solutions for NYS Route 146

As discussed previously, NYS Route 146 as currently designed creates a barrier between the northern and southern portions of the study area. Unless or until this corridor is redesigned, Town Center efforts should focus on improvements in the separate northern and southern nodes.

Still, it is impossible to ignore the NYS Route 146 corridor in our planning for the future of the Town Center. There have been some small steps of progress along portions of NYS Route 146. For example, at the western end of the study area, NYSDOT improved the crosswalk across NYS Route 146 at Moe Road and installed pedestrian activated signals in 2011. In the short-term, the Town and NYSDOT should continue to look for opportunities to make these types of small improvements, making it easier for bicyclists and pedestrians to get across this wide corridor.

In the long-term, it would be desirable to see the highway redesigned in a fashion that would allow for the expansion of the Town Center right up to the roadway on both the north and south sides of NYS Route 146. Multi-story, mixed use buildings located close to and facing the street, with wide sidewalks and an attractive, pedestrian-friendly streetscape would highlight the land use component of this transformation of the corridor.

The Exit 9 Land Use and Transportation Study contained numerous recommendations for NYS Route 146. A bold, long-term vision of NYS Route 146 as a “complete street” (a street that meets the needs of all users...including pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation riders, motorists and citizens of all ages and abilities, including children, the elderly and the disabled) was presented in that study. Before and after images of this concept are presented below. It is certainly possible to envision Town Center style redevelopment directly along the corridor as pictured in the “after” image.



Unavoidably, some additional thoughts about the NYS Route 146 corridor were generated through the process of creating this Town Center Plan. These ideas are not meant to replace any specific recommendations from the Exit 9 study; but instead should be added to the mix of options to be considered by the Town and the NYSDOT as they study this road in the future.

The treatment of this state highway could be viewed as an evolutionary process consisting of some short-term, simple enhancements as well as some medium-term projects and long-term comprehensive solutions. Ideas for each are described below.

*Short-term:*

- Continue to work on improving the ability of pedestrians to safely cross NYS Route 146 at key intersections (with Clifton Country Road, Maxwell Road, and Moe Road) - better crosswalks, traffic signals, etc.
- Make it possible for bicyclists/pedestrians to travel along NYS Route 146 via new sidewalks, bike lanes or pathways on both sides of the corridor.
- Continue the open dialogue with NYSDOT to ensure that complete street design considerations are evaluated with any proposed improvements to state-owned roadways.

*Medium-term:*

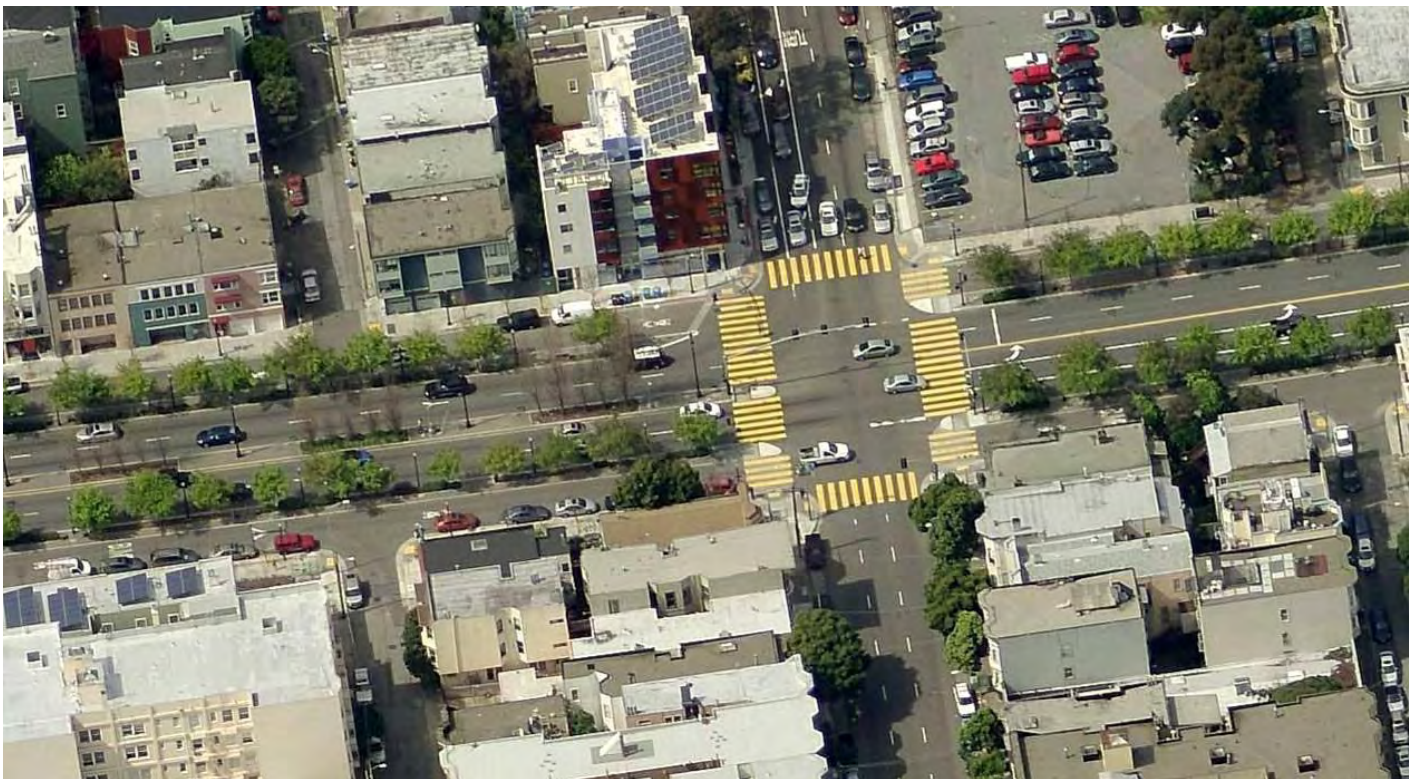
- Improve aesthetics and create gateways to the Town Center by replacing paved flush medians on NYS Route 146 with planted raised medians or other similar treatments (the section of NYS Route 146 from Maxwell Road to Clifton Country Road might be less complicated than the section from Clifton Country Road to the Northway ramps)
- Consider creating a grade-separated bicycle/pedestrian crossing of NYS Route 146 at Clifton Country Road. With existing slopes the highway is somewhat elevated above the surrounding parcels - perhaps an attractively designed tunnel could be constructed here.



*Above:* Examples of bicycle/pedestrian tunnels. Something like this could be an eventual solution for getting people across NYS Route 146 safely.

*Long-term:*

- Consider the possibility of a “road diet” (narrowing travel lanes or shoulders or eliminating some of them to provide more space for pedestrians and bicyclists) for NYS Route 146. It is understood that this corridor carries a high volume of traffic today; but with the consideration of possible east-west street connections throughout the study area (including perhaps over I-87) and alternative scenarios for the reconstruction of Exit 9 (to be studied in the future), it might be possible to reduce the number of lanes through the corridor.
- In addition to the design concepts for NYS Route 146 considered during the Exit 9 Study, the concept of a *multiway boulevard* should be explored as a possible alternative for this corridor. A multiway boulevard carries thru traffic on its center, arterial lanes and local traffic on local streets located on the outside of the boulevard. The center arterial portion of the boulevard is separated from the outer local streets by wide planted medians. This type of configuration might allow the corridor to continue carrying a high volume of traffic while also creating an attractive, walkable environment - suitable for Town Center style development - along the boulevard’s outer edges. The viability of this alternative for NYS Route 146 should be considered as part of any future study of the corridor and the Exit 9 interchange.



*Above: Octavia Boulevard – a new multiway boulevard in San Francisco, California. This type of street configuration should be considered as one of the long-term alternatives for NYS Route 146 in Clifton Park.*

## 7. Complete sidewalk and pathway system within the study area and to/from the study area to other parts of Town

The Town's pathway system (bicycle and pedestrian paths adjacent to, but separate from the road) is considered to be a great asset for the community. The pathway system penetrates into the Town Center area in several places, creating connections to other parts of Clifton Park. In addition to being a simple and efficient way to make it easier for residents to get around Town, the system of pathways contributes to the unique character of Clifton Park. This system should continue to be maintained and expanded as resources allow.



*Above: The Town's pathway system is considered an asset and should be expanded.*

Sidewalks should be considered an integral component of the Town Center's infrastructure. Though sidewalks do exist in the Town Center area today, the sidewalk system contains many gaps. This must be corrected as redevelopment of the Town Center occurs. Ultimately, all streets in the Town Center should have sidewalks on both sides.

*Below: There are gaps in the Town Center's sidewalk system today.*

The Exit 9 Land Use and Transportation Study contained numerous recommendations for improving bicycle and pedestrian connections throughout the area. A few additional opportunities were identified as part of this study. They included:



- Sitterly Road - needs better pedestrian accommodations - especially in consideration of a new urgent care facility now under construction
- The pathway system along Moe Road should be expanded south to the Exit 8 area - many neighborhoods to the south would like to be better connected to the library and the Town Center area in general
- Bicycle and pedestrian connections should also be expanded to the other major activity centers to the west of the Study Area - the school district campus, and Clifton Commons.
- All new streets within the nodes should have sidewalks. Outside of the nodes, either sidewalks or pathways could be appropriate depending on the setting.

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## 8. Additional Ideas / Recommendations

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Several additional ideas / recommendations for the study area were identified over the course of developing this plan. Though none is recognized here as a big idea on its own, that should not be interpreted as meaning that these ideas are not important. Given limited time and resources, these ideas were simply not explored at length in discussions with the committee or the public. Any of them could certainly be the subject of further study going forward.

Additional Ideas / Recommendations include:

- Diversify the types of activities in the Town Center

In conversations about the future of the Town Center, many people had suggestions about specific activities that should be located in the area. For example, adding more activities for young people to do after school (perhaps an indoor/outdoor venue, a teen center, a club or juice bar, etc.) was a common suggestion. Others included a permanent Farmer's Market, a museum or an arts and sciences center, and a wider diversity of retail options (different types of merchandise and a greater mix of local, regional, and national retailers).

- Create an "Arts District" in the northeast quadrant of the study area

Though the study area for this Town Center Plan extended east of the Northway (I-87) to the Town's boundary with Halfmoon, the focus of attention remained on the west side of the Northway. There are at least a couple of reasons for this. First, as has already been discussed, the Northway is a significant barrier to east-west movement in the study area. With the exception of the congested NYS Route 146 underpass at Exit 9 and Sitterly Road at the southern edge of the study area, connections from one side to the other do not currently exist. The second reason is because the area on the east side of the Northway is oriented to Route 9. The Route 9 Corridor has a character of its own and any changes there would be dependent on long-term coordination and cooperation with the Town of Halfmoon; whereas changes on the west side of the Northway can be led by the Town of Clifton Park on its own. Transportation issues for the Route 9 Corridor are being explored as part of the ongoing I-87/US Rt. 9 Integrated Corridor Management Plan.

Still, there were some ideas suggested for the east side of the Northway. One was the notion of creating an "Arts District" in the northeast quadrant of the study area. This older neighborhood, once known as the hamlet of Stevens Corners and later Clifton Park Village, includes the historic Clifton Park Hotel on the corner of Old Route 146 and Route 9. The Beekman Street Arts District in Saratoga Springs was cited as an example.

- Enhance Stormwater Management

With all of the buildings and pavement in the study area stormwater management is an existing issue. In particular, there are locations in the southern portion of the study area that are prone to flooding during larger rain events. In order for the Town Center to grow as envisioned in this plan, an integrated stormwater management program for the area may be warranted. Rather than dealing with stormwater on a site by site basis, a coordinated strategy could result in better environmental and urban design outcomes.



*Above: Existing stormwater management facilities in the study area.*

- Develop incentives and educational materials to encourage green building techniques and green infrastructure in the Town Center

As redevelopment occurs in the study area, green building techniques and green infrastructure should be strongly encouraged or required as appropriate. Building and adding density in the Town Center, where development has already occurred over many years and infrastructure such as roads, water, and sewer already exist, is an environmentally friendly alternative to spreading more development elsewhere in the Town and the region. Redevelopment of these areas also creates an opportunity to utilize the newest energy and resource efficient building techniques. Elements such as solar panels, geothermal heating and cooling, green roofs, shade trees, porous paving, rain gardens, and similar features should be considered for use throughout the Town Center.

Though these techniques are increasingly being utilized by the local development community on their own, the Town could encourage their use through the establishment of development incentives or by providing educational materials to builders/developers. This type of proactive approach

with the development community for the Town Center could also provide an opportunity to market the Town Center area as a green district. The Town could even consider some form of official recognition for this, such as the LEED-ND designation from the U.S. Green Building Council (LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design; the ND - Neighborhood Development certification is one of the rating systems developed by the USGBC to provide “independent, third-party verification that a development’s location and design meet accepted high levels of environmentally responsible, sustainable development”).



*Above: Green infrastructure in Niagara Falls, NY – an example of stormwater management that is environmentally friendly and aesthetically appealing.*

- Establish a local shuttle bus, trolley, or jitney service loop for the Town Center

As Town Center redevelopment progresses in the coming years and at least portions of the study area become more dense and walkable, a local shuttle bus, trolley, or jitney service loop could be established to link the northern and southern nodes. This could be a public/private partnership between the Town and the owners/developers of the new mixed-use areas within each node. It might also be possible to contract with the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) to operate the service.

- Consider the use of roundabouts at certain intersections

Though not really part of the scope of this study, residents were understandably interested in discussing specific transportation issues. For example, the topic of roundabouts was one that inspired many opinions. There was a fair amount of skepticism expressed about large, multi-lane roundabouts on high volume roads such as the one proposed in the Exit 9 study for the intersection of NYS Route 146 and Clifton Country Road. However, small one-

lane roundabouts for local roads were viewed much more favorably and suggested as a possible alternative at several current and future intersections during the design workshop.

- Integrate the Town Center into long-term/regional transportation planning efforts

Outside of a pair of park-and-ride locations (east side of the Northway) for commuter bus service to Albany, the existing Exit 9 commercial district has not been able to support a significant investment in public transportation. A recent trial service by the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) did not generate enough ridership to warrant continuation according to CDTA. This is not surprising given the low density, automobile oriented environment that currently exists in the study area. However, if the Town Center vision is implemented as described in this report, the future possibilities for public transportation here will be greatly improved.

There were several suggestions in the public design workshop and the final public meeting that appeared to recognize this opportunity for the future. For example, the notion of integrating a future transit station (bus, rail) somewhere in the study area was discussed. One idea, illustrated below, was to locate a transportation hub adjacent to the Northway Corridor where some future enhanced bus or rail service might perhaps be developed in the future.



*Above:* Sketch concept of a future transit hub adjacent to the Northway.

This location could be integrated with a new east-west street over (or under) the Northway linking the redeveloped Clifton Park Center to The Crossing shopping center. This location would allow residents of the new Town Center to walk to the transit station and take the bus or train to other parts of the region. This type of scenario imagines the Town Center as a Transit Oriented Development (TOD). There are many definitions of TOD; one describes it as “moderate-to-higher density development, located within an easy walk of a major transit stop, generally with a mix of residential, employment, and shopping opportunities designed for pedestrians without excluding the automobile (Bay Area Rapid Transit Authority).”

At this time it is not known what, if any, significant transit investment the region will ultimately make in terms of transportation to/from Saratoga County. The Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) has explored and continues to study several alternatives through its *New Visions 2035* Regional Transportation Plan. The Town of Clifton Park should continue to participate in the regional planning process and look for opportunities to integrate the proposed Town Center into these discussions.

- Consider whether there should be a common architectural style for the Town Center

Though zoning changes and some form of design guidelines or standards will be necessary to guide development / redevelopment in the Town Center, it is unclear whether a common architectural style should be identified for new buildings. While site design (or urban design) is a critical factor in creating the type of walkable, mixed-use center of activity that is envisioned here, and broad architectural rules (dealing with how the building façade addresses the street) should be followed, the question of “style” is something more discretionary.



*Above: a common architectural style does not currently exist in the Study Area.*

A common style does not exist here today, but the Town of Clifton Park does contain some historic buildings and districts that could be used to inform the selection of an architectural style if one is desired. A consistent style across the district could be considered unifying, or monotonous, depending on one's perspective.

- Seek opportunities to improve the appearance of the Town Center area from the Northway (I-87)

Currently, the area along the west side of I-87 does not take full advantage of the visual opportunity to portray the Town Center as a creative and attractive destination to be explored. Though the new urgent care facility under construction at the southern end of this strip (off Sitterly Road) will be an improvement, more should be done to enhance the appearance of this "visual gateway" to the



*Above: the appearance of this area immediately west of the Northway (circled in orange) should be improved to create a better image*

Town Center. Landscaped buffers to screen large parking and storage areas in the short-term and perhaps different types of uses and/or new buildings in the long-term should be considered for this location. The long-term notion of a transportation hub in this area could also create a more compelling visual entrance to the Town Center for those arriving via the Northway.

## Section V: Implementation

As intended, this Town Center Plan has established a consensus vision about the look, feel and function of a future town center in the town's existing Exit 9 commercial area. The process brought together town officials, business owners and landowners, and residents to explore land use and design alternatives that could transform this area into a more walkable, mixed-use (residential, commercial, and civic) center of activity for the Clifton Park community. It is hoped that this plan, once adopted, will guide future public policy, and public and private investments in the area for many years to come.

Achieving the vision, as described herein, will be a gradual, evolutionary process that will require long-term commitment from the community. The hard work of implementation cannot be left to chance, so this section of the plan describes some of the next steps for the Town of Clifton Park and its partners.

Ultimately, responsibility for the implementation of the plan rests with the Town Board as the elected representatives of the people. The actual work of implementation should be led by the Town's Planning Department. To help organize this effort, next steps have been prioritized as either short-term or medium-term below.

### *Short-term Actions*

Four (4) projects have been identified as the key preliminary steps that should be undertaken to start the process of implementation.

- Focus proactively on the opportunity sites

The opportunity sites within the southern and northern nodes (discussed in Section IV) were selected because there are few limitations to redevelopment and because there is known interest, on the part of the owners of these sites, in doing something at these locations. As noted at the start, the commercial area in Clifton Park is not stagnant. It continues to see investment even during these difficult economic times; and therefore the Town should be prepared to see proposals at any time.

Since a working relationship with the owners of these sites already exists, the Town should continue to engage them proactively to help shape their plans. A cooperative planning approach, with the Town at the table with the developers in the earliest phases of design, would ensure the ideas envisioned in this Town Center Plan are incorporated into potential projects from the beginning; before the developers invest heavily in the more detailed design and engineering associated with a formal proposal to the Planning Board.

- Develop Zoning and Design Guidelines/Standards for the Town Center Area

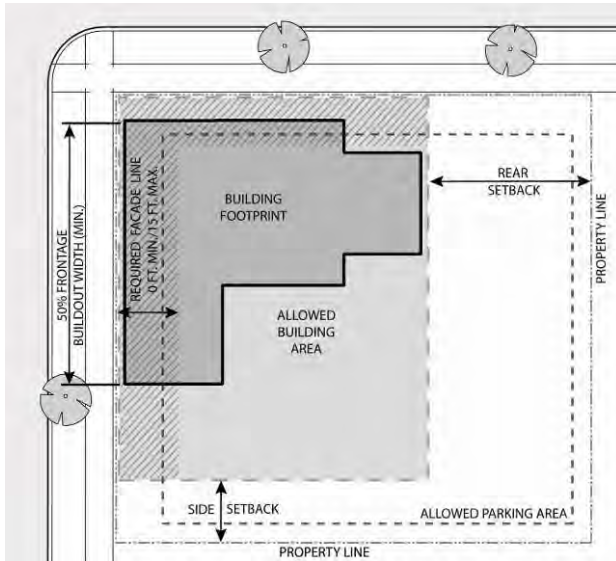
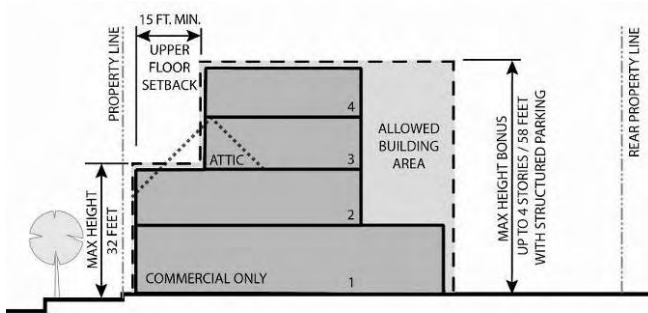
The Town's current zoning regulations would not permit the type of mixed-use, walkable Town Center envisioned in this plan. Though the Planned Development District (PDD) process does allow for some flexibility and creativity if applicants choose this path, it is a cumbersome process and it does not require outcomes that are consistent with the ideas described in this report.

"Zoning codes, frequently drafted by lawyers rather than designers, tend to be too free and flexible where more guidance is needed and too limiting where flexibility is appropriate. Typically, the most constraining inflexibility concerns zone boundaries and use limitations, especially prohibitions against mixed-use development. The most problematic over-flexibility is the lack of clear criteria to guide site planning, streetscape design, building massing and architectural form."

Roger K. Lewis, *Traditional Zoning Can't Meet the Challenge of Modern Development*, The Washington Post, July, 24, 2004

The existing commercial zoning district in this area should be replaced with one or more Town Center zoning districts. This district (or districts) should allow for a wide mix of uses across the area and within individual buildings; and it should direct future development and redevelopment proposals toward the types of urban design and architectural characteristics envisioned in this plan. Whether one district or several are warranted really depends on whether there are variations in what is desired for certain areas as compared to others. For example, the Town might wish to allow for a higher density of development (3 to 5 story buildings) and a more robust mix of uses at the center of each of the two nodes (northern and southern) with relatively lower densities (perhaps 2 to 3 stories) at the peripheries.

The new zoning should be richly illustrated or accompanied by and tied to design guidelines and/or standards that are richly illustrated. A highly visual code establishes a clear picture regarding what is desired and, therefore, greater predictability for applicants, review boards, and the general public. Newer types of regulations - such as Form-Based Codes - should also be considered here. Form-based codes, a fairly recent alternative to conventional zoning, are more flexible in terms of land use and more directive about the physical form of development (How do buildings relate to the street? What kind of outdoor spaces do they create?) These codes tend to make heavy use of graphics and illustrations and are more proactive and "results" oriented in terms of defining desired outcomes. The Smart Code ([www.smartcodecentral.org](http://www.smartcodecentral.org)) is a model or template for this type of zoning, but it must be calibrated and customized to fit local needs.



- A FRONT YARD PARKING BUFFER
- B FRONT YARD PERIMETER ISLAND
- C PERIMETER END OF ROW
- D SIDE YARD PARKING BUFFER
- E INTERNAL LANDSCAPED ISLAND
- F INTERMEDIATE LANDSCAPED ISLAND
- G BUILDING PERIMETER
- H RESIDENTIAL BUFFER < 30 FEET
- I RESIDENTIAL BUFFER > 30 FEET

Whether the Town of Clifton Park decides to adapt its current zoning code to create a new Town Center zoning district (or districts) with associated design guidelines and standards, adopt a completely different approach such as a Form-Based Code for the Town Center, or develop a hybrid approach is largely a matter of comfort. Any of these approaches could yield good results if they are carefully crafted to fit the unique circumstances present in Clifton Park. It will be important to remember that the Clifton Park Town Center is not a blank slate; and that redevelopment here will take place in incremental steps over many years. The new regulations that are created must respect the gradual nature of change that is expected here, and must balance the desire to see the area transformed with the realities of a step by step transition. The rules should be viewed as encouraging investment. If they are overly cumbersome, or if they do not consider how incremental change can be reviewed and approved, they will not succeed. Ultimately under the new zoning, good development - moving the community toward the desired vision for the Town Center - should be easy to identify and should receive approval quickly. Development proposals that do not respect the vision for the Town Center should also be easy to identify and should not move forward.

Revising the Town's zoning for this area should receive high priority. In fairness to the land owners and residents who participated in this study, ensuring that the rules reflect the vision is a most basic step forward and will signal the community's seriousness about this initiative.

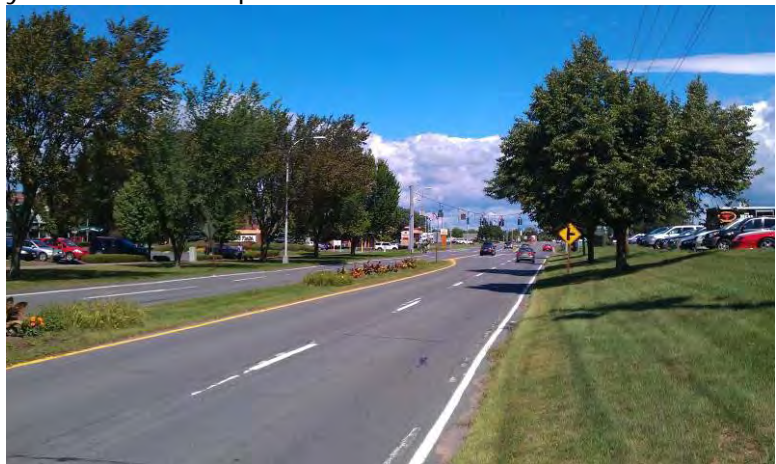
*Left: A highly visual code establishes a clear picture regarding what is desired*

Development of zoning is a fairly technical process. Therefore it is suggested that this work be led by the Town Planning Department and overseen by a small (3 to 5 person) advisory committee with representation from the Town Planning Board, the ZBA, and the Town Attorney's office. A consulting planning firm that understands the Town Center vision, with strong design skills and experience preparing these types of codes should be retained to assist the Town's staff and advisory committee with this work. Implementation funds through CDTC, or other sources of grant funding, could offset some of the cost of this effort. The primary landowners, other stakeholders, and the general public should be invited to participate in the process at key points so that the new rules are widely understood and embraced by most of the community before the Town Board must decide whether to adopt them.

- Redesign Clifton Country Road as "Main Street"

The portion of Clifton Country Road from NYS Route 146 south to Clifton Park Center Road should be considered for a redesign, and ultimately, reconstructed as a new "Main Street" for Clifton Park. Any redesign and reconstruction should incorporate complete streets concepts and green infrastructure techniques. Because this is a Town road, the Town of Clifton Park could initiate this project as soon as it is ready to proceed. The Town could fund this work on its own, with the assistance of grant funding (from CDTC or others), and/or in partnership with the key landowners along this corridor who would stand to benefit from the improvements. Because a major reconfiguration of the roadway cross-section is not envisioned (the addition of new lanes, for example, is probably not warranted), this project might be relatively inexpensive; yet it could be a catalyst for significant redevelopment that would jump start the transition of the entire area.

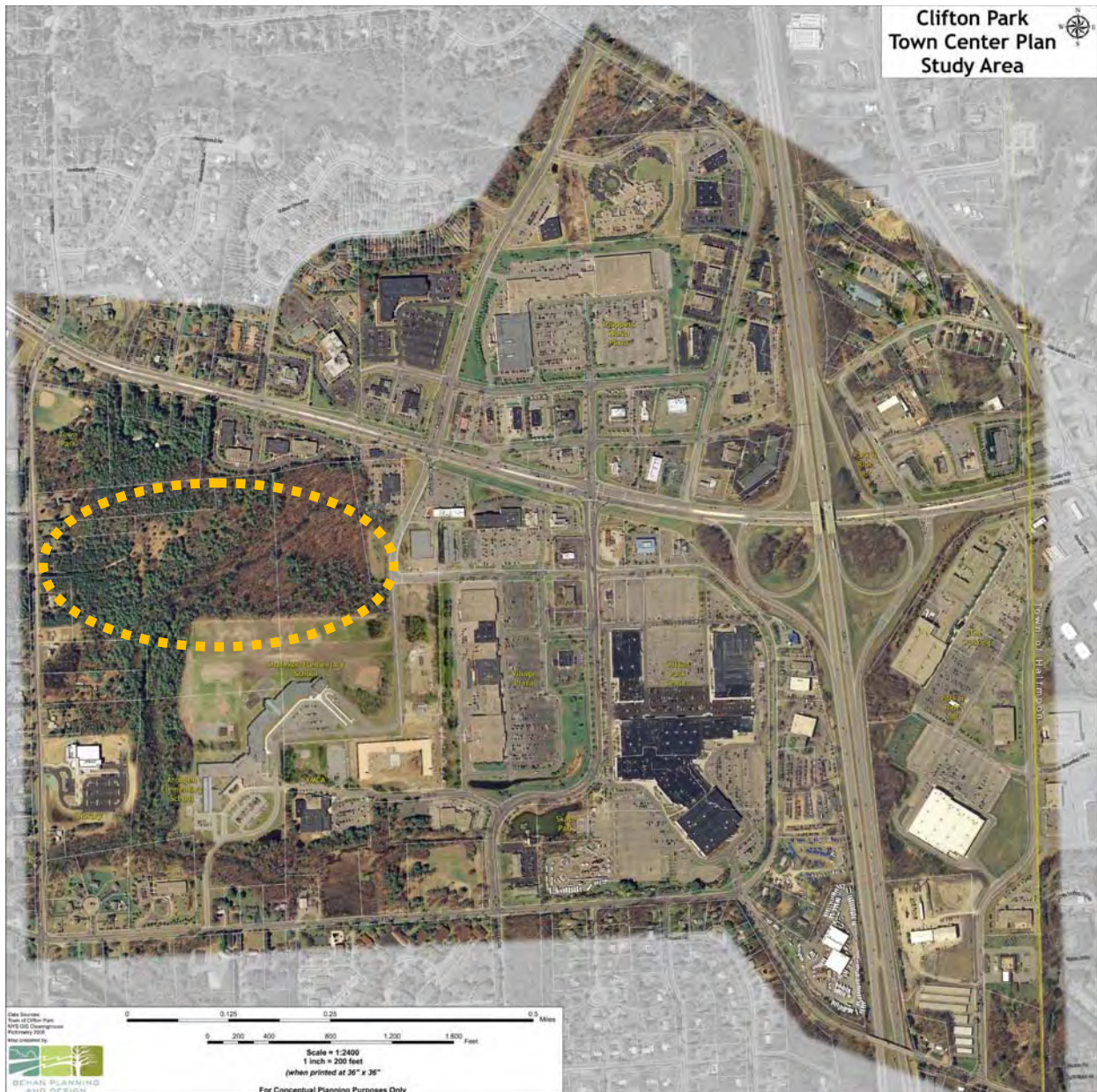
As a starting point, the Town should work with a design and engineering team to investigate the feasibility of this concept in more detail. Based on the outcome of that work, the Town would have a better understanding of the possible alternatives and the approximate cost of each so that an informed decision about whether to proceed could be reached. The key landowners along the corridor, other stakeholders, and the general public should again be invited to participate in this process.



*Above:* The redesign of Clifton Country Road into a "Main Street" for Clifton Park would probably not require a major reconfiguration of the roadway.

- Explore options for the school district property

Through the process of developing this plan, the parcel of undeveloped land owned by the Shenendehowa Central School District (between Moe Road and Maxwell Road Extension) has been identified as a major opportunity site for the Town of Clifton Park. The idea of using all or part of this property as some type of public space has been called a “once in a lifetime opportunity” and a “game changer” by residents who have participated in the public workshops.



*Above: The large, undeveloped parcel of land owned by the school district (circled in orange) is a major opportunity site.*

The Town of Clifton Park should continue the dialogue with the school district initiated through this process. Though it may be somewhat limited for development purposes due to site constraints, this property could play a critical role in supplying space for recreational and civic uses in the Town Center.

As a first step, it is recommended that the town create, in cooperation with the school district, a future use plan for the property. This plan would clarify what, if any, future use the school district might have for portions of the property and what portions are truly “non-essential” to the district’s core educational functions. The remainder of the property could then be creatively planned and designed for other public (recreational and civic) uses that would bring the vision for the Town Center more fully into focus. A closer examination of the land and its potential for different types of recreational and/or civic amenities would help to illustrate to the greater community the exciting possibilities that could be realized here.

If indeed the town and school district find that other recreational and civic uses can be accommodated on part of the property, the Town Board could decide whether the benefits to the community for those uses warrant purchase of that portion of the land. Any acquisition plan should include a financial element that would address ways to minimize the impact to taxpayers. For example, grant funding could be sought to help offset some of the cost. The Town could also look to the development community to help fund the acquisition and development of this site as a park/public space. One alternative would be for the Town to replace its current practice of requiring a percentage-based “green space” set aside for each development project in favor of developer contributions toward meaningful public space/parks throughout the Town Center. There are a number of formal mechanisms that could be utilized to achieve this – such as incentive zoning or mitigation fees through a GEIS. When a formal public space cannot or should not be created as part of an individual project, the Town could collect payments in lieu that would then be deposited in a dedicated Town Center Enhancements Fund. Another alternative would be for the Town to sell a small portion of the land (perhaps along Maxwell Road Extension or along the northern age closest to NYS Route 146) for limited private development consistent with the overall plan for the site, utilizing the revenue to offset some of the cost of acquisition and development of this park/public space.

### *Medium-term Actions*

Additional actions that should be undertaken over the next few years (2 to 4 years) include the following:

- Promote the Redesign and Eventual Reconstruction of NYS Route 146

An important future action for advancement of the Town Center will be for the Town to work within the regional framework to advance a more detailed study/redesign and ultimately reconstruction of the NYS Route 146 Corridor. Though it is understood that the NYSDOT has a growing number of projects that need attention and shrinking resources with which to do so, the Town of Clifton Park should continue to work with CDTC and the NYSDOT to move the NYS Route 146 (and perhaps Exit 9 at the same time) planning forward. That said it is understood that the phrase “medium term” is highly optimistic. The Town will do what it can to promote this project but it recognizes that it may take many years for a design and engineering effort to be initiated, and longer for actual reconstruction to take place. The Town should consider how to elevate this project higher on the list of regional priorities. Private sector (developer) contributions, for example, could become increasingly important in the region’s selection of priority transportation projects in coming years.

It is important to stress that any future redesign and reconstruction of NYS Route 146 should include a full evaluation of complete streets opportunities. The planning and design process must also consist of meaningful engagement with the Town and dialogue with the community.

In the meantime, nothing prevents the Town from exploring some of the smaller, incremental safety and aesthetic improvements to the NYS Route 146 corridor described in this report. The Town could seek developer contributions and/or grant funding through the CDTC Spot Improvement (for Bicycle and Pedestrian Access) Program to help fund these incremental improvements to specific intersections or stretches of the corridor.

- Establish a management entity for the Town Center

The Town Center (“Downtown Clifton Park”) would eventually benefit from the establishment of a management entity that could coordinate maintenance of the area (watering plants and flowers, clearing snow from sidewalks, emptying trash receptacles, and other similar activities for the benefit of the entire area), as well as marketing and other common needs. Eventually it may be necessary to institute a formal mechanism for accomplishing and funding these activities such as a Special Assessment District or Business Improvement District (BID). The Southern Saratoga Chamber of Commerce might be able to assist the Town in the organization of this entity.

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