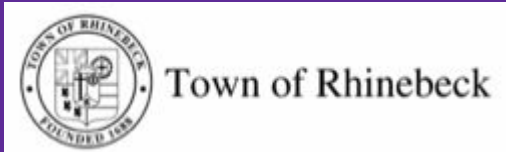


Comprehensive Plan Review: Final Report

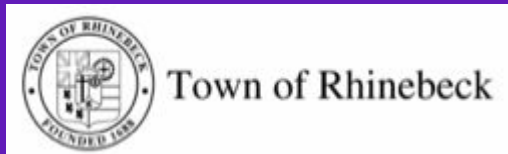
David Chernack, Bard CEP 2021 | Joint Environmental Committee Intern

December 17, 2020



Project Background: Reviewing the Town of Rhinebeck's 2009 Master Plan

- ❖ This project was undertaken to understand what the Town of Rhinebeck's 2009 Master Plan and the Village's 1993 Master Plan say about the environment, transportation, energy, and other climate-related aspects of the plan
- ❖ In addition to reviewing the Town's Comprehensive Plan, climate and environmental policy in the Town and Village in the 2010s was examined



What is a comprehensive plan and why is it important?

- ❖ A Comprehensive Plan is a complex document designed to guide the actions a community takes towards its future, including its environmental, economic, and cultural goals and aspirations
- ❖ A Comprehensive Plan presents a set of visions for the short- and long-term, including goals and objectives for all aspects local community governance



Town of Rhinebeck

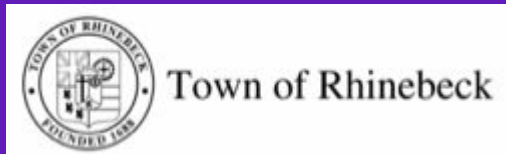
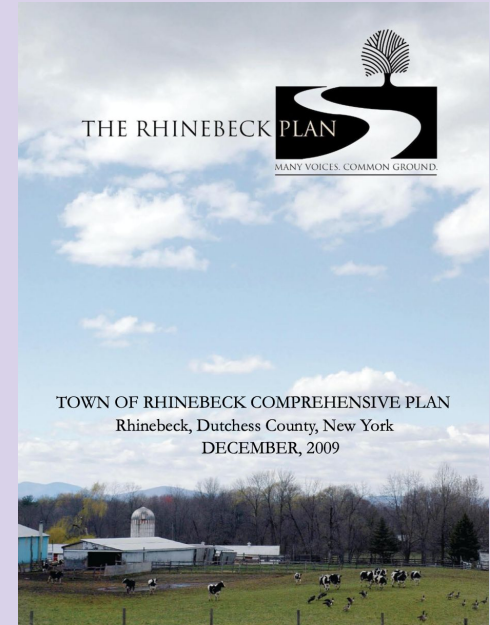


Bard  **CEP**
CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY



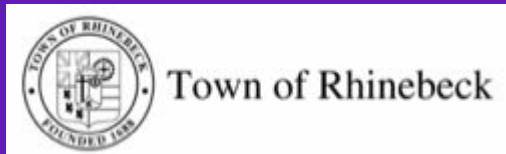
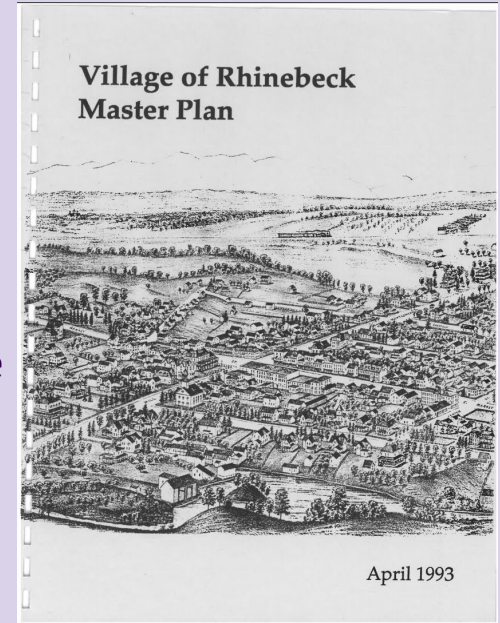
Background on Rhinebeck Town's Comprehensive Plan (2009)

- ❖ The Town of Rhinebeck published its most recent Comp. Plan in 2009 after thousands of hours of work and much capital investment
- ❖ Reflective of the issues of its time
- ❖ Primary issue areas:
 - Economic development, housing equity
 - Maintaining the Town's rural character
 - Understanding Rhinebeck's natural environment
 - Ensuring commercial and housing development is consistent with the Town's values



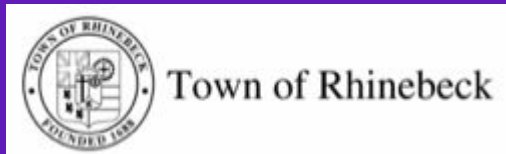
Background on Rhinebeck Village's Master Plan (1993)

- ❖ Similar to the Town's far more modern plan, the Village's Master Plan sets forth the community values and goals of the community
- ❖ Focus on development, preserving character
 - “The overall picture that emerges from the questionnaire is of residents who enjoy the community in which they live and, for the most part, would like it to remain the same. They do not oppose changes in the Village, yet feel that any changes must benefit the Village and its residents, while sustaining its existing character.”



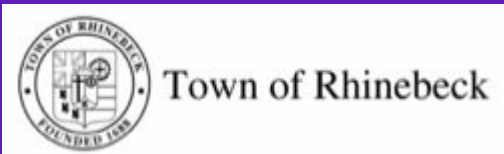
Comprehensive Planning has shifted in recognition of the challenges municipalities face from a changing climate

- ❖ Federal action on climate in the 2010s has been inadequate
 - States, cities, counties, towns, and villages have been picking up the slack
- ❖ Reducing emissions and planning for the effects of climate change are now more commonplace characteristics of local master planning
- ❖ Opt-in, state-level climate programs—like Climate-Smart Communities, of which Rhinebeck is a member—are another way local municipalities have been able to act on climate



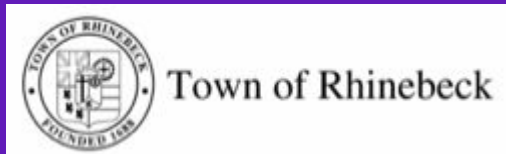
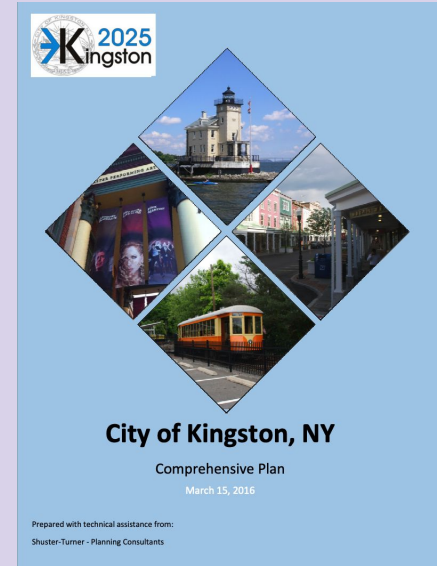
Modern Comprehensive Planning with Climate in Mind: Examples from Elsewhere

- ❖ Miami Beach, Florida (2019)
 - “10 Guiding Principles” for acting on climate change, including “protecting social equity” and “taking a long-term and regional perspective” to addressing local climate challenges
- ❖ Portland, Maine (2016)
 - “One Climate Future” sets forth the City’s plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions levels by 80% by 2025

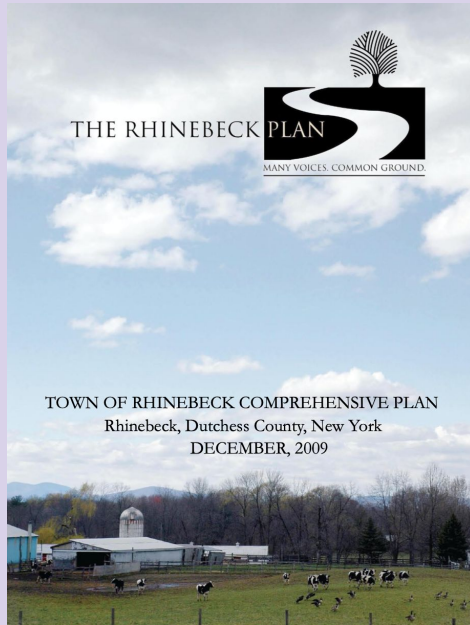


Modern Comprehensive Planning with Climate in Mind: Examples from Rhinebeck's Neighbors

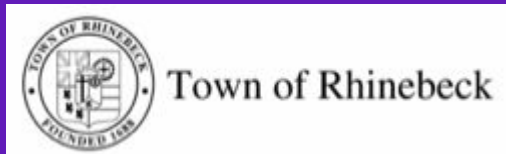
- ❖ Focusing on the specific effects of climate change in the Hudson Valley: rising Hudson River, community resilience, extreme weather events
- ❖ Kingston, Ulster County
 - Setting goals for 2025 with a focus on climate justice impacts, rising high tide mark on the Hudson River
- ❖ Philipstown/Cold Spring, Putnam County
 - Consumptive Greenhouse Gas Inventory



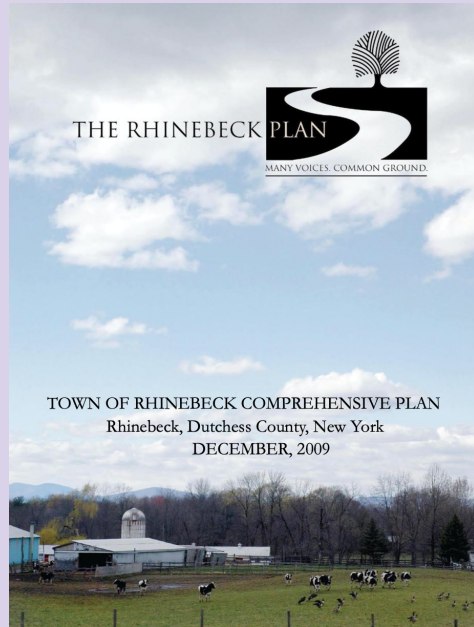
Content of the Town's Comprehensive Plan



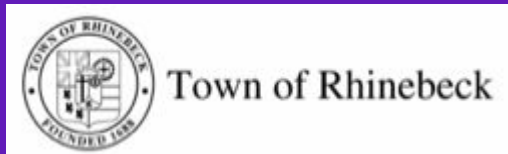
- ❖ **Visioning:** setting forth a medium-term vision for the Town of Rhinebeck's environment, economy, and society
- ❖ **Resources:** the scenic, natural, historical, and cultural resources of the Town were described in great detail
- ❖ **Tasks:** hundreds of specific tasks to be undertaken in the following decade to fulfill the mission of the Plan's crafters



Comprehensive Plan Restraints and Outcomes

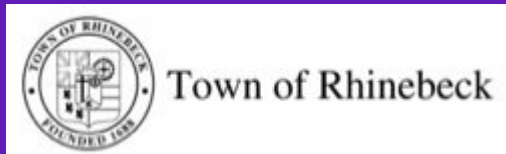


- ❖ **Challenges:** the Comp. Plan was published in 2009—right into the Great Recession—so many of the cost-intensive projects recommended by the Comp. Plan Committee were not undertaken
 - **Additionally,** many of the volunteer committees that were recommended to be formed to undertake specific tasks never coalesced
- ❖ **Outcomes:** the Comp. Plan itself is a thorough and highly prudent document; however, tight budgetary and time constraints hindered many possible longer-term success stories



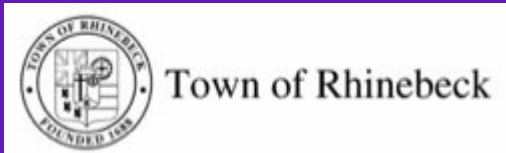
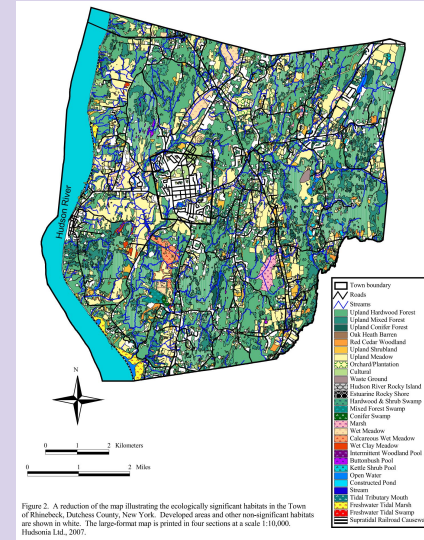
Report #1: Natural Resource Inventory

- ❖ A Natural Resource Inventory (NRI) is a study that collects and produces information regarding the status, condition, and trends of land, soil, water, and related resources in an area in support of efforts to protect, restore, and enhance those resources
- ❖ An NRI chapter was included in the 2009 Comp. Plan, but no fully fledged NRI was ever crafted based on the research done for the Plan in the late 2000s



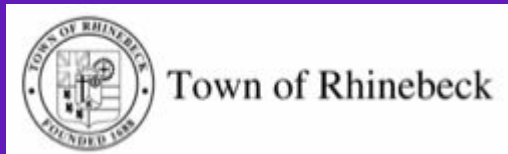
Natural Resource Inventory Report: Key Findings

- ❖ The Village and Town are in good shape to deploy an NRI considering the state of previous work dating back to 2007
- ❖ The NRI process presents an opportunity for Town and Village cooperation as well as participation by Rhinebeck's youth and students
- ❖ The completion of the project would take ~4 months



Report #2: Ecological/Agricultural Aspects of the 2009 Comp. Plan

- ❖ Review of the land use, biodiversity, agriculture, and scenic resources chapters of the Comprehensive Plan
- ❖ Extensive work was done by Hudsonia, Ltd., to catalogue and identify the significant habitats and biodiversity in Rhinebeck
- ❖ Set forth goals to preserve prime agricultural soils and lands in Rhinebeck, do everything the Town could to support its farmers
- ❖ Called for strengthening ties with local land trusts and land owners to preserve more private land within the Tow's borders



Ecological/Agricultural Aspects of the 2009 Comp. Plan: Key Findings

- ❖ A lot of unique research was done to define and document the critical habitats, unique species, and critical ecological areas of Rhinebeck
- ❖ The Plan says essentially nothing about how climate might affect agriculture, natural resources, etc.
- ❖ Regarding agriculture and land use protections, many projects were not completed because of budgetary constraints in the early 2010s



Small-scale farming in Rhinebeck



Town of Rhinebeck

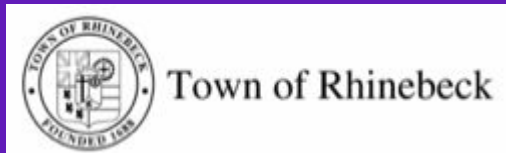
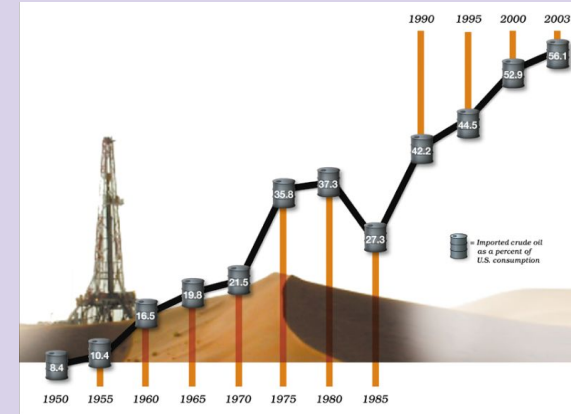


Bard  **CEP**
CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

NWF

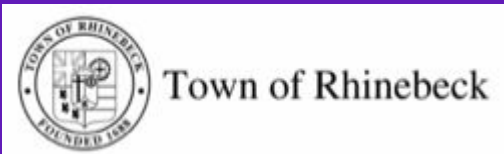
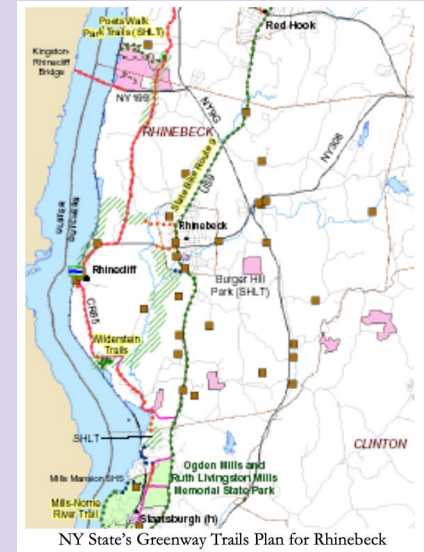
Report #3: Transportation Aspects of the 2009 Comp. Plan

- ❖ Review of the transportation and traffic goals of the Comprehensive Plan
- ❖ Much of the focus of these sections concerned easing traffic, enhancing pedestrian safety, and maintaining Rhinebeck's historical and rural character
- ❖ The Plan also focused on maintaining the public transportation *status quo* at Rhinecliff station



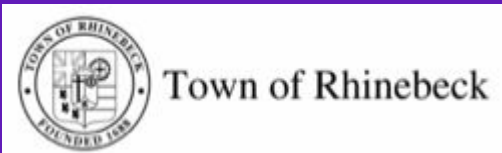
Transportation Aspects of the 2009 Comp. Plan: Key Findings

- ❖ The transportation projects suggested by the plan were very expensive, and very few were implemented
- ❖ Public transportation service in and to Rhinebeck has been reduced since 2009
- ❖ Rhinebeck should invest heavily in electric vehicle charging stations (esp. Level 3 fast-charging [DCFC]) and encourage major businesses in the Town and Village to do the same



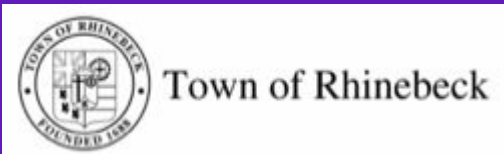
Report #4: Energy/Climate Aspects of the 2009 Comp. Plan

- ❖ Energy and climate did not receive dedicated chapters; rather, energy efficiency and other goals were included in discussions of housing, community facilities and infrastructure, etc.
- ❖ Focuses were typical of the late 2000s: concerns about rising fuel and oil prices, decreasing energy use and increasing energy efficiency to reduce costs



Energy/Climate Aspects of the 2009 Comp. Plan: Key Findings

- ❖ Climate change, global warming, greenhouse gas emissions, etc. are not mentioned in the 2009 Comprehensive Plan.
 - This is not a failure of Rhinebeck's Plan
- ❖ Many of the energy initiatives that the Plan recommended Rhinebeck pursue have become outdated
- ❖ The energy focus of Rhinebeck should be on increasing residential access to solar and other renewables, as well as building more EV infrastructure



Survey Results: Resident Input about Rhinebeck's Future

- ❖ Is Rhinebeck moving in the right direction?
76% say yes
- ❖ While 87% say Rhinebeck is doing slightly better or significantly better *economically* than its neighbors, only 47% say Rhinebeck is doing better than its neighbors in *tackling climate issues*
- ❖ Updating comp. plans: 94% support updating the Village's 1993 Plan, 91% support updating the Town's 2009 Plan

Rhinebeck's Environmental Work Questionnaire

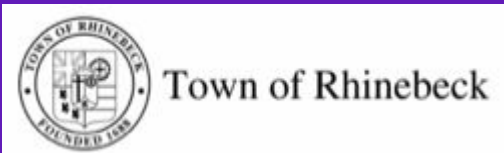
Hello!

Rhinebeck is at a crossroads in its climate actions. The Town and Village of Rhinebeck -- like every city in America and around the world -- are facing the worst aspects of climate change while grappling with how to reduce their contributions to it.

In the past year, Rhinebeck has commissioned many environmental projects. A report detailing possible projects to increase the resilience and usability of Thompson-Mazzarella Park was delivered by the Conway School of Sustainable Landscape Design. The Cornell Cooperative Extension of Dutchess County delivered a resiliency report for the Village. And, a review of the Town's Comprehensive Plan has been undertaken by a graduate student intern from Bard Center for Environmental Policy.

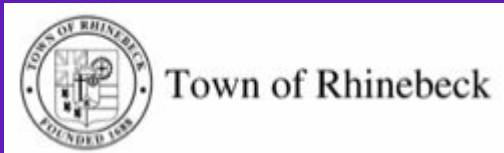
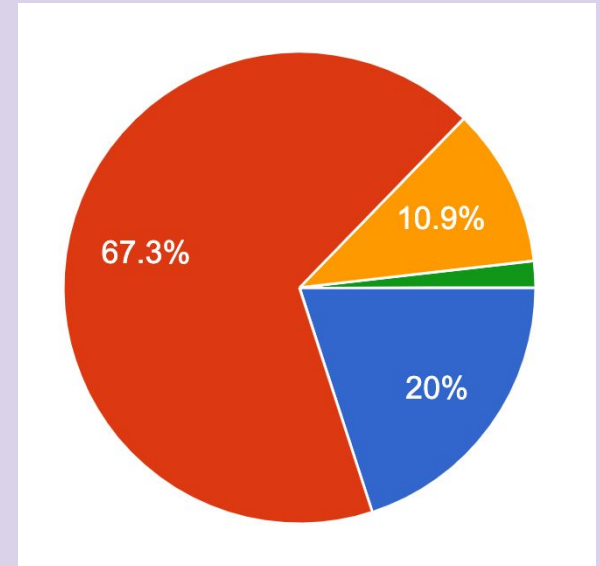
Now it's time to hear from you, Rhinebeck's citizens, about what should be prioritized next. This questionnaire is intended to increase Rhinebeck's knowledge about which environmental projects are most crucial to its community members. It is anonymous, meaning we won't know your identity if you take the survey.

Hit "next" below to take the survey, which should take no longer than ten minutes to complete. We are looking forward to hearing from you!



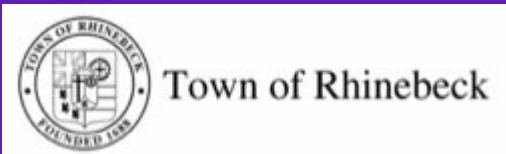
Survey Results: Top Issue Areas for Residents

- ❖ Town issues:
 - Protecting Rhinebeck's farmers and
 - Increasing the acreage of protected land in Rhinebeck
 - Protecting air and water quality
- ❖ Village issues:
 - Reducing waste and increasing opportunities for composting
 - Supporting a green economy and green investment
 - Protecting air and water quality



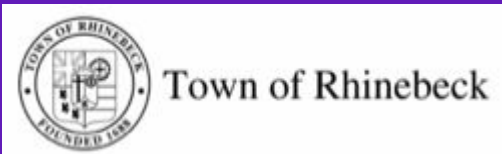
Recommendations for Future Action: Projects and Proposals

- ❖ Based on the research done by this project into the Comp. Plan's goals—and trends in other municipalities—three dozen potential projects were selected and run through a project prioritization matrix
- ❖ It is recommended that a Comp. Plan update with sustainability elements be crafted in conjunction with the Village, as an addendum to the 2009 Plan



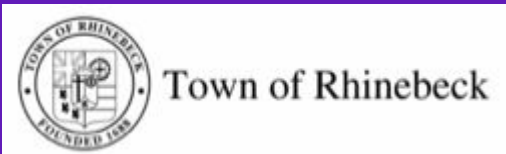
Recommendation #1: Complete a Village-Town NRI, *integrating Rhinebeck's youth as much as possible*

- ❖ An NRI should be developed as a free-standing document that fully integrates past research within a framework of resiliency and our knowledge of how climate change will affect Rhinebeck
- ❖ Sub-projects, including invasive species identification and visioning, should include work with Rhinebeck's schools and youth



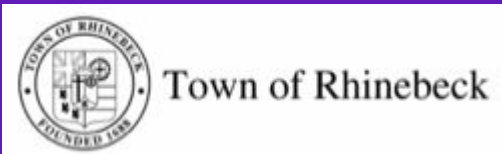
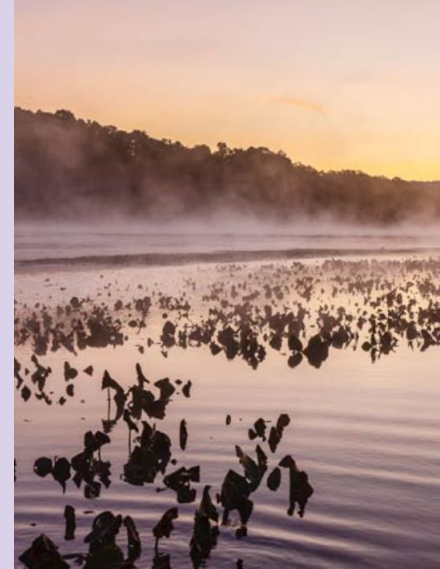
Recommendation #7: Construct a pedestrian pathway from the Village of Rhinebeck to the Hamlet of Rhinecliff

- ❖ Directly called for in the Town's 2009 Comp. Plan
- ❖ **Benefits:** easier pedestrian access to Rhinecliff
 - More foot traffic for its businesses, the Amtrak rail station, and the Hudson Riverfront
 - Offers a far safer pedestrian and bicyclist route from the Village to the Hamlet
- ❖ **Challenges:** very high cost, land access issues restrict potential routes



Recommendation #5: Designate Vanderburgh Cove as a Critical Environment Area (CEA)

- ❖ The 2009 Comp. Plan called for designating several areas, including Vanderburgh Cove, as a CEA
 - NYSDEC: “A CEA designation serves to alert project sponsors to the agency’s concern for the resources ... within the CEA.”
- ❖ Southern Vanderburgh Cove (within the Town of Hyde Park’s borders) is already designated as a CEA



Key Takeaways

- ❖ Rhinebeck's Comprehensive Plan is a solid document, but as a product of its time, it does not adequately address climate concerns
- ❖ An update to Rhinebeck's Comp. Plan with sustainability elements that explicitly integrates the Village and Town, if possible, is a prudent way forward.
- ❖ Projects outlined by the Plan should be undertaken with renewed energy now, especially those with tangible community benefits and climate benefits

