

TOWN OF SHANDAKEN

DRAFT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Draft Plan for Public Input

Prepared by
Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress

For the **Town of Shandaken**

Supported by the **NYS Environmental Protection Fund**
Adirondack Park Community **Smart Growth Program**

May 2026



HUDSON VALLEY
PATTERN *for* PROGRESS



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1. What is a Comprehensive Plan, Anyway?

1.1 What is this document and why does it matter?

Comprehensive plans reflect the perspectives and lived experiences of community members in a particular moment of time. They emerge through dialogue and discussion among people who often have different values, knowledge, and priorities. A successful comprehensive plan captures the common ground shared by these different perspectives and balances long-term aspirations for the future with practical realities of daily life.

Communities revisit and renew comprehensive plans regularly for a number of reasons: they are encouraged under New York State law; they constitute a baseline for local ordinances and regulations; many grant programs rely on them as guiding documents; and the discussions they generate inform local decision-making for years—often decades—to come.

This comprehensive plan is:

1. A historical record of conversations held within the town about its future by residents in 2025–2026.
2. A foundation for municipal grant seeking and long-term planning efforts.
3. A reference for municipal leaders, residents, business owners, builders, and others invested in the community.
4. A catalog of local challenges, along with potential ideas and strategies to address them.
5. An effort to articulate a cohesive vision for the town and its residents.

It is this final purpose that often generates the most discussion and debate, which in turn helps neighbors better understand each other and deepen their connections to one another and to the place they call home. At its core, this document is a testament to the rich civic life in the Town of Shandaken, where hundreds of residents showed up to make their voices heard and shape their future as a community.

1.2 Who Wrote This Plan?

This plan was created through a collaboration between the Town Board, a Steering Committee, a team of consultants, and—most importantly—community members. Over 6,800 comments made by over 500 people shaped this document: the community’s priorities and vision, existing conditions, and strategies for a thriving future. Public input was extensive and insightful, highlighting Shandaken’s sense of identity as a close-knit rural community, living interdependently with nature amidst a forever-wild forest. This section describes the different partners involved in writing the plan and the community engagement process that informed all aspects of it.

1.2.1 Funders & Partners

This project has been funded in part by a grant from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC), Adirondack Park Community Smart Growth Program through appropriations from the New York State Environmental Protection Fund (EPF).

In 2024, the Town of Shandaken partnered with Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress (PFP) to secure the Smart Growth grant from the NYS DEC. Grant funds facilitated a collaborative and intensive community engagement process and a thorough analysis of environmental, social, and economic conditions in Shandaken. This process resulted in this very document: a new comprehensive plan for the Town, which will guide future policy decisions, rezoning efforts, and public investment based on the community’s shared priorities.

PFP collaborated closely with Town Board members and the Town Supervisor as the community’s elected officials throughout this planning process. Town Board members during this time were: Robert Drake, Ellie Kneissl, Kyle Steen, and Kevin Van Blarcum. The Town Supervisor until 2026 was Peter DiSclafani, and the Town Supervisor during adoption was Barbara “Babs” Mansfield.

Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress is a nonprofit organization that provides objective research, planning, and educational training throughout the region. Its work identifies civic challenges and promotes regional, equitable, and sustainable solutions to constantly improve the quality of life in Hudson Valley communities. Pattern develops its work upon a considerable foundation of facts and experience, without political aims or affiliations.

1.2.2 Steering Committee

At the outset of the Shandaken Comprehensive Plan process, a project steering committee was formed to help guide the project. The committee met repeatedly throughout the process, representing different perspectives on the town’s challenges, opportunities, and future. The committee informed the community and stakeholder participation plan, provided critical insights, ensured the plan would support ongoing and existing efforts in the town to increase access to affordable housing, bolster small businesses, leverage tourism for local benefit, and provide high-quality infrastructure and services. Organizations and groups represented included the Housing Smart Task Force, Conservation Advisory Committee, Town Board, Zoning and Planning Boards, Phoenicia Business Association, PH2, the arts

community, the Phoenicia Farmers’ Market, Pine Hill Community Center, both public libraries, and more. Intentional efforts were made to ensure representation from as many hamlets as possible.

Steering Committee Members:

Samantha Awand-Gortel, Phoenicia Business Association
Nicole Caputo, Conservation Advisory Committee
Roy Dignes, Community Member
Peter DiSclafani, Former Town Supervisor
Robert Drake, Town Board
Grace Grant, Assessor
Sophie Grant, Phoenicia Farmers Market and Shandaken Housing Smart Task Force
Mary Herrmann, Former Comprehensive Plan Chair
Jan Jaffe, PH2
Karen Lee, Conservation Advisory Committee
Gigi Loizzo, Local Business Owner and PH2

Mark Loete, Community Member and Former Zoning Board Member
Barbara “Babs” Mansfield, Town Supervisor
Colleen McMurray, Pine Hill Community Center
Elizabeth Potter, Phoenicia Library
MJ Reiss, Community Member
Vickie Starr, Shandaken Housing Smart Task Force
Christina Varga, Phoenicia Festival of the Arts
Kevin Van Blarcum, Town Board
Gisi Vella, Pine Hill Library
Allen Vella, Zoning Board
Beth Waterman, Conservation Advisory Committee
Vivian Welton, Planning Board

1.2.3 Community Engagement

Engagement Timeline

- December 2024-March 2025: Community Survey #1 – Building the Vision. (469 Responses)
- January 25, 2025: Public Kick-Off Day. Three back-to-back events were held to kick of the visioning process as follows:
 - 10:00 AM: Comprehensive Plan-Cake Breakfast at Parish Hall in Phoenicia (~50 attendees). Participants shared breakfast and responded in small groups to a series of prompts to identify the community’s vision, identity, and priorities.
 - 1:00 PM: Project Overview Presentation at Town Hall (~40 attendees). At this presentation, the consultant team shared technical details about the project, the timeline, and a selection of data and maps to provide an overview of existing conditions in the town.
 - 3:00 PM: Community Quilt of Resolutions Visioning at Pine Hill Community Center (~40 attendees). In the spirit of the New Year, each participant drew on an extra-large post it square as part of a collective quilt, where each square represented a community member’s “resolution” for the future of the town.
- July-September 2025: Community Survey #2 – Guiding the Future. (206 Responses)

- July 20, 2025: Community Recommendations Brainstorm. Two identical back-to-back public meetings were held, in the morning at the Pine Hill Community Center and in the afternoon at Bettina in Phoenicia, to unearth the community’s priorities and tradeoffs around development and conservation (40-50 participants in each meeting from each respective community). Attendees participated in a dot-mapping exercise to identify areas that could absorb new housing and commercial activity and areas that should be protected from development. This exercise informed the recommendations in this plan that pertain to the towns’ upcoming rezoning process.
- October-December 2025: Community Survey #3 – What Did We Miss? (0 Responses)
- April-May 2026: Community Survey #4 – Recommendations Feedback. (71 Responses)
- May 30, 2026: Community Conversations
- *Placeholder for future events and public hearings*

Description of Engagement Activities

Every aspect of this plan is rooted in community input and the experience of local leaders and practitioners working day-to-day for the sake of the town. The plan reflects local values as well as the practical realities of implementation.

The goal of the community engagement activities was to identify community needs and challenges, highlight existing community assets, and develop planning recommendations collaboratively with the broader community that will inform the town’s upcoming rezoning efforts. The aim was to understand not only what the community wants, but also what the community already has and wants to keep intact moving forward into the future.

To this end, the community engagement strategy included the following elements:

Public Surveys: The project team conducted a total of four public surveys at key points of the process.

- The first survey identified community priorities, existing assets, and challenges (469 responses).
- The second survey asked the community to define and describe what it would look like to meet those priorities in concrete terms (206 responses).
- The third survey was an open-ended feedback form to ask the community if anything was missed in the first two surveys (0 responses).
- The fourth survey was to gather input and feedback on the draft recommendations (71 responses).

Public Events: The project team conducted a series of public meetings to inform the public about the plan and to gather detailed input. Meetings were held in Phoenicia, Pine Hill, and at Town Hall to ensure broad geographic representation.

Stakeholder Interviews: As part of this process, the project team interviewed community leaders, county and town staff, representatives of community organizations, business owners, cultural facilities, fire departments and EMS staff, housing developers, and others. These interviews were conducted on an as-needed basis, and many stakeholders were often involved at more than one point in time. For this reason, specific interviews are not included in the chronological account of activities above.

1.3 Community Guide to Using the Comprehensive Plan

The primary purpose of the comprehensive plan is to guide any zoning ordinances that the town will pursue. Beyond zoning, however, the plan is also a tool for residents, community groups, government agencies beyond Shandaken, and local organizations to support efforts that improve quality of life and align with community priorities. This section provides a list of purposes that can be supported by a comprehensive plan.

How are Comprehensive Plans Used?

1. Purpose: Writing Grant Applications.

Who? Residents, community groups and organizations, Town staff and elected officials. **How?** The comprehensive plan can strengthen grant applications by demonstrating that a project is aligned with an adopted community vision. Funders often look for evidence of local support and long-term planning, and referencing the plan can provide this evidence.

2. Purpose: Making Funding and Budget Decisions.

Who? Town Board, committees, and members of the public. **How?** For the Town Board and committees, the plan can guide annual budgeting and capital planning. It helps ensure that public investments are consistent with long-term priorities identified through community input. Residents can also point to the plan to hold their representatives accountable, thereby strengthening democracy and civic engagement.

3. Purpose: Building Partnerships and Collaboration.

Who? Residents, nonprofits and local organizations, Town officials, County agencies. **How?** The plan can serve as a common reference point for collaboration around projects and initiatives. It can help to align efforts and makes it easier to build partnerships around shared goals.

4. Purpose: Supporting Advocacy and Community Initiatives.

Who? Residents and local organizations. **How?** The plan can be used to support advocacy efforts on behalf of projects, programs, or policy changes that the community wants to see. Citing the plan can help demonstrate that an idea reflects community priorities.

5. Purpose: Guiding Business and Development.

Who? Property owners, business owners, entrepreneurs, and developers. **How?** The plan can help business owners make better decisions about starting, expanding, or relocating a business based on local needs and priorities. The plan also informs decisions

about property improvements and development proposals, as it provides insight into the types of projects that are likely to be supported in the Town.

6. Purpose: Tracking Progress and Accountability.

Who? Town Board and members of the public. **How?** Over time, the plan can be used to measure progress and evaluate whether actions are moving the community toward its stated goals relative to the current conditions in the town.

1.4 Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

PLACEHOLDER: This is a list of terms and acronyms with their definitions to help readers better understand the plan. The list is currently incomplete as of May 2026. At the public meetings on May 30th and throughout the final editing phase of this project, the consultant team will be asking for input from the community about which terms need more clarification. Those terms will be included in this section.

Affordable (big A and small a) – housing for which monthly costs are 30% or less of gross household income. Subsidized affordable housing is that in which a government program reduces the cost of rent or homeownership for income qualifying households. Typically households qualify that are below certain limits based on the Area Median Income (AMI). Naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH) is that which is affordable to lower- or moderate-income households without government subsidy or restrictions. NOAH is often relatively affordable because of older age of buildings, smaller unit size, fewer amenities, long-term renters, and lower operating costs.

“As-of-right” - a property owner can build or use land without needing special discretionary approval from a zoning board or local government, as long as the project complies with the existing zoning rules. As-of-right zoning makes the development process more predictable, speeds up timelines, and reduces the chance that a project will be prohibited due to political opposition.

Overlay zoning - a zoning tool that places an additional set of regulations or incentives “on top of” an existing zoning district. Common types of overlay zones include environmental protection overlays, transit-oriented development overlays, affordable housing overlays, and flood hazard overlays.

Short term rentals – Residential properties or units that are only available for rent on a short-term such as a night, week, or less than a month.

Special use ordinance - local law that allows certain land uses only after a case-by-case review and approval process by a municipality.

1.5 Smart Growth Principles

Shandaken's comprehensive plan is funded in part by a grant from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Adirondack Park Community Smart Growth Program, through appropriations from the New York State Environmental Protection Fund (EPF).¹ **Smart Growth** is a planning approach that directs growth toward existing, built-up areas to create walkable, and sustainable communities. It aims to curb sprawl and preserve open space, ultimately strengthening local economies and protecting the environment. Created with Smart Growth principles top of mind, this comprehensive plan meets Smart Growth goals in the following ways:

1. Mix land uses (residential with retail and business).

The plan shifts away from separation of land uses and encourages buildings that combine uses (e.g. residential, ground-floor commercial, community spaces), especially in hamlet centers (Recommendations 1.1, 1.2, and 12.4). It supports conversion of existing structures into mixed-use developments (Recommendation 1.2), integrating residential and commercial uses. It also unlocks local enterprise and small businesses, allowing people to more easily make a living from home (Recommendation 2).

2. Take advantage of compact building design.

Compact development is encouraged in this plan through smaller allowable lot sizes, reduced setbacks, clustered housing, and multi-family options, minimizing land disturbance while improving efficiency and affordability (Recommendation 1, 4, and 7.2). Importantly, based on existing setback requirements in the zoning code, most current structures in the town are pre-existing nonconforming uses, meaning they could not be built or rebuilt without setback or lot size variances. Current zoning has outlawed the very architecture that community members consider to be essential to the town's unique character, even though many of these buildings were constructed over a century ago. The recommendations in this plan fix this problem.

3. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.

The plan generates a wide range of housing including ADUs (Recommendation 4.1), multifamily, (Recommendation 4.3), cluster cottages (Recommendation 1.1), tiny homes (Recommendation 4.3), and workforce housing (Recommendation 1.1.e). The plan also recommends a mandated affordable set-aside policy for larger developments (Recommendation 4.4).

¹ For more information on Smart Growth, please visit the United States Environmental Protection Agency website: <https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/about-smart-growth>

4. Create walkable neighborhoods.

Walkability is supported through compact development in hamlets (Recommendations 1.1 and 4.2), sidewalk districts (Recommendation 9.13), reduced parking requirements (Recommendation 1.2.a), and investment in pedestrian connections between public amenities (Recommendation 14.3).

5. Foster distinctive, attractive places with a strong sense of place.

The plan is rooted in Shandaken's unique identity by outlining development guidelines in line with community priorities (Recommendation 1.1), protecting scenic viewsheds (Recommendation 1.3), supporting locally owned businesses (Recommendation 8), supporting quality of life for all ages (Recommendation 12), promoting public art and historic narratives (Recommendation 13), and encouraging community cohesion and belonging (Recommendation 15).

6. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental areas.

The plan promotes conservation subdivisions (Recommendation 1.1.d) that preserve large portions of land as open space. It also relies on the Natural Resource Inventory (Recommendation 2.4) to guide development away from sensitive areas and includes tree preservation (Recommendation 4.2 and 7.2), habitat protection (Recommendation 3.6), and scenic corridor protections (Recommendation 1.3).

7. Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities.

The plan offers guidance for future rezoning efforts, to be determined with additional public feedback. Recommendations prioritize Main Street hamlet centers of Phoenicia and Pine Hill for increased density, mixed-use development, and reduced lot sizes (Recommendation 1.1). It encourages redevelopment of previously developed sites throughout the town and along Route 28 (Recommendation 1.2), allows ADUs (Recommendation 4.1) and gentle density² in existing residential areas (Recommendation 4.2 and 6.1), and adaptive reuse of existing buildings (Recommendation 1.2, 6, and 8.3), directing growth away from undeveloped areas and building on existing residential uses.

8. Provide a variety of transportation choices.

The plan promotes multimodal transit options including biking, walking, micro-transit, and ride-sharing (Recommendation 7.3), along with transportation demand management and reduced parking minimums (Recommendation 1.2.a).

² Gentle density is defined as a small increase in allowable number of residential units on a parcel of land while preserving the existing character and scale of the neighborhood.

9. Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost-effective.

The plan calls for clear, consistent, and accessible zoning, objective design standards, and streamlined permitting for development and community events (Recommendations 1.1, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 3.2, 4.2, 9.4, 13.4, and 13.5).

10. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration.

The plan was created with extensive community input and emphasizes ongoing community stewardship and implementation of recommendations (Section 16). Wherever possible the plan encourages partnerships with county and state agencies and collaboration with local organizations, youth groups, and residents (Recommendations 3.3, 3.7, 8.5, 8.6, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 14.5.)

2. Where Are We Now, and Where Are We Headed?

2.1 Shandaken: A Brief History

Contributed by Joseph Prieboy, Dir. Shandaken Historical Museum

About 420 million years ago, the Catskill region was a shallow sea that held sediments which eventually became a vast plateau. Over time, streams and rivers carved into the plateau, creating the valleys and steep-sided features that characterize the Catskills. During the Ice Age, glaciers further shaped the landscape carving out the peaks and valleys we see today.

375 million years ago, a meteor fell near Shandaken creating a 7-mile-wide crater. The crater filled with sediment and through uplift and erosion became Panther Mountain. The Esopus River, which surrounds the mountain in a circular fashion, is perhaps the most important aspect of Shandaken. To the native American Algonquin tribes originally living here, it offered a fertile home with seven sacred springs that fed smaller streams running through a magnificent landscape.

The very name “Shandaken” is believed to come from a Native American term meaning “land of rapid waters,” an allusion to the fast-flowing Esopus Creek. Long before European settlers arrived, the region was home to Native American communities who thrived on the land’s abundant natural resources. They called themselves the Munsee, a subgroup of the Lenni-Lenape people. These groups were pushed out of the area due to a combination of factors, including European settlement, disease, colonial wars, the American Revolution, encroaching settlement by non-natives, and policies like the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which promoted the removal of Native peoples to reservations. Some Shandaken residents still retain their Native American heritage, ancestry, and customs.

In the 18th century, European settlers began moving into the area. Shandaken’s fertile lands and plentiful water soon attracted those looking to establish industries based on natural resources. After the American Revolution, these settlers capitalized on the region’s vast

forests by engaging in leather tanning and barrel hoop production, industries that were vital in an era when timber and water power were key economic drivers. The town of Shandaken was officially established on April 9, 1804, when it separated from the town of Woodstock making it easier for local residents to vote in elections.

During the colonial era, the Central Catskills were purchased and sectioned as part of the Hardenbergh Patent, in which ownership was mostly in the hands of the Livingston family. Settlers in the valleys of Shandaken soon learned to use the natural resources of the mountains to supplement their farms, small sawmills and tanneries which sprouted up across the landscape.

Around the mid-nineteenth century, Aley's General Store, near the intersection of Route 28 and Oliverea Road in Big Indian, became a stop on the Underground Railroad helping enslaved people from the American South escape to freedom in the North.

By the late 19th century, Shandaken began to change significantly. The arrival of the railroad in the late 1800s was a turning point for the community. This new transportation link transformed Shandaken from a quiet, resource-based economy into a burgeoning tourist destination. Urban residents, particularly those from New York City, started venturing into the Catskill Mountains to enjoy the refreshing escape and natural beauty the area had to offer. The growth in tourism led to the development of boarding houses, hotels, and recreational facilities that catered to these new visitors. Passenger rail service was discontinued in 1954, slowing tourism at the time; though tourism continues today, its peak was during the era of passenger rail.

Shandaken is not a single, homogeneous town but rather a collection of hamlets—each with its own story. For instance, the hamlet of Mount Tremper played a strategic role during the American Revolutionary period. It was the site of Fort Shandaken, established as a defensive measure to help protect nearby Kingston. Other hamlets, such as Pine Hill, emerged as centers of both local commerce and tourism, reinforcing the town's identity as a place where industry and leisure coexisted.

The Central Catskill region spans a natural system of valleys, which traverse the mountains following the upper reaches of the Esopus Creek and the East Branch of the Delaware River. The Town of Shandaken consists of approximately 79,200 acres and 110.82 miles of highways. The town has distinctive characteristics and historical significance surrounding its unique twelve hamlets of Woodland Valley, Oliverea, Chichester, Bushnellsville, Mt. Pleasant, Mt. Tremper, Phoenicia, Shandaken, Allaben, Big Indian, Pine Hill and Highmount.

Pressure to satisfy the needs of New York City for a safe and sufficient water supply increased after the droughts in 1895 and 1896. In 1905, the New York State Legislature approved creation of the New York City Board of Water Supply with powers to establish reservoirs and regulate the watershed in the Catskill Mountains. This system now includes six reservoirs and a regulated watershed of over 1,600 square miles.

In response to new federal standards for public water supplies, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) issued new draft watershed regulations in September 1990. The 35 communities in the Catskill watershed organized the Coalition of Watershed

Towns to respond to the regulations which they believed would have major impacts on the economy of the region. After long negotiations in 1997, an agreement was reached on a Watershed Protection Plan to maintain and enhance the quality of the city's drinking water supply, while protecting the economic vitality and social character of watershed communities. These agreements, and their successor revisions, continue to inform the interactions between the watershed towns, the DEP, and NYS.

As the 20th century progressed, traditional industries gradually gave way to a new economic focus on tourism and outdoor recreation. The creation of the Catskill State Park further helped to protect the region's natural landscapes, ensuring that Shandaken's scenic beauty would be preserved for future generations. Today, visitors come not only to enjoy outdoor activities such as hiking, fishing, and skiing, but also to immerse themselves in the area's cultural heritage.

Creation of the Catskill Park was followed by acquisition of land, much of it on sensitive and remote mountaintops, to preserve it as "forever wild." The term "forever wild" is language that stems from the New York State constitution. It is a legal term as much as it is an aspirational one.

In November 1947, the people of New York voted and approved the creation of Belleayre Ski Center by amending the New York State Constitution to allow for construction of a ski center on Belleayre Mountain in Ulster County. In 1949, New York State began construction of the Belleayre Ski Center in Highmount.

Originally operated by NYSDEC and now operated by the Olympic Regional Development Authority (ORDA), the Belleayre Ski Center and the Pine Hill Lake Day Use Area now comprise one of the major tourist destinations in the region, which accommodates over 175,000 skiers annually—rising to over 230,000 in 2022-2023³—and generates patrons for many of the region's tourism-based businesses. Recent investments to improve physical facilities and marketing at Belleayre has demonstrated the state's long-term commitment to maintaining this major resource.

Shandaken's history is a tapestry of cultural influences, economic transitions, and an enduring connection to the natural environment of the Catskill Mountains. From its early days as a hub for resource-based industries to its modern reputation as a getaway destination, the town's evolution reflects resilience, adaptability and sustainability. Residents and visitors alike can experience this legacy through the preserved historical sites, community events, and museums that continue to celebrate Shandaken's storied past. This detailed history not only highlights the key events and transformations over the centuries but also underscores how the interplay between natural beauty and human endeavor has shaped Shandaken into the unique community it is today.

³ See reporting on ORDA website: <https://orda.org/2023/04/19/one-million-visits/>

2.2 Geographical Context

The Town of Shandaken sits at the northwest corner of Ulster County. Ulster is a mostly rural county situated on the west side of the Hudson River about seventy miles north of New York City. Shandaken’s population of 2,789 constitutes approximately 1.5% of the county’s population of 183,000 as of 2024. Located thirty miles east of Shandaken, the City of Kingston is the county seat and the most populous place in Ulster with close to 24,000 residents as of 2024.

The geography of Ulster County is varied and includes low-lying agricultural areas, wide valleys, rolling hills and mountain ranges such as the Shawangunk and the Catskill Mountains. Shandaken—characterized by its rural setting, mountains, forests, and historic hamlets—is entirely within both the Catskill Park and the Ashokan Watershed, which supplies drinking water to New York City. The town is home to the highest elevation in Ulster County and the entire Catskill Mountain range, Slide Mountain, at 4,180 feet.

Shandaken is entirely within both the Catskill Park and the watershed that supplies New York City’s drinking water; nearly 70% of the town is state-owned, and a total of 85% is protected from development through its “forever wild” designation. This protected land is one of the defining characteristics of the area and enhances residents’ quality of life as they benefit from living in one of the more pristine and ecologically rich and healthy wooded areas in the northeast. The protected forest is also important as wildlife habitat, for its role in a healthy regional ecosystem, and as a place of carbon sequestration.

At the same time, the extensive land protections heighten the need to carefully plan for the use of remaining developable land with future generations in mind. This challenge is further complicated by the fact that much of the area consists of steep slopes or lies within floodplains. Residents still feel the impacts of historic flood events, such as Hurricane Irene in 2011.

Indeed, the town’s geography is largely defined by the Esopus Creek river valley, which winds through the surrounding Catskill Mountains. A significant amount of the town’s existing housing and commercial assets are situated in the floodplain on the banks of the Esopus Creek. The primary state road in Shandaken, Route 28, runs alongside the creek in long stretches through the town. Smaller tributaries feed into the Esopus, carving their own winding narrow valleys known locally as “The Hollows.”

There are twelve hamlets in the town, each with its own unique history and character. The commercial centers of the town are located in Phoenicia and Pine Hill. Hamlets of Highmount, Allaben, Big Indian, Mt Pleasant, and Shandaken are also located along Route 28. The hollows include Chichester, Oliverea, and Woodland Valley. Bushnellsville and Mount Tremper are located on higher ground, along arterial routes 42 and 212 respectively.

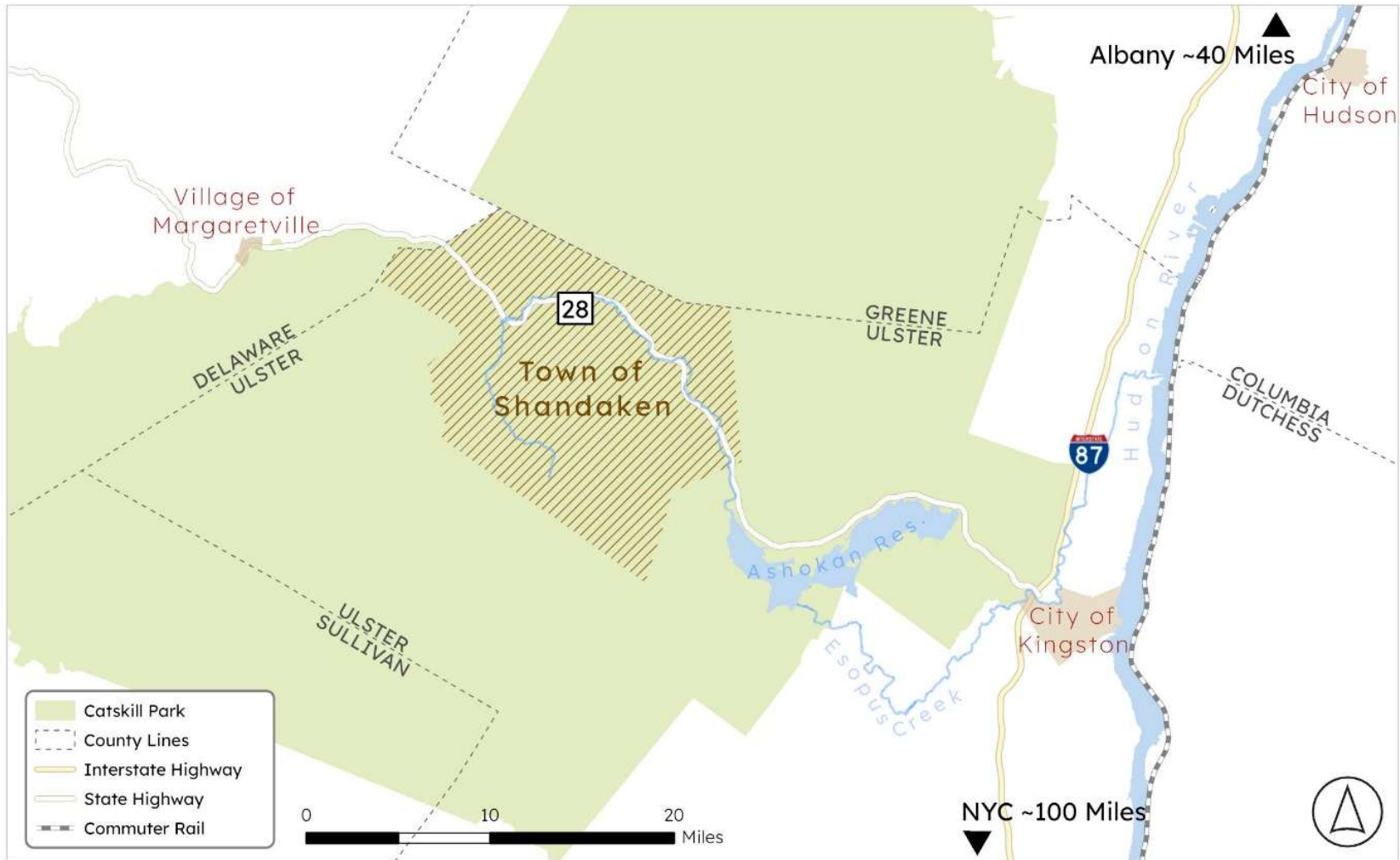
Phoenicia is located at the base of Mount Tremper and at the confluence of the Stony Clove Creek with the Esopus Creek. The hamlet's population was 268 in 2020.⁴⁵ Commercial activity is concentrated along Main Street, which retains its charm and supports several successful local businesses. However, a notable number of storefronts remain vacant or experience turnover, a fact observable firsthand and frequently raised during community engagement for this plan. These vacancies stem from a range of factors, most notably the absence of wastewater treatment infrastructure and the fact that Main Street is in the floodplain, which creates challenges for business financing and insurance. The Ashokan Watershed Stream Management Program (AWSMP) in collaboration with Ulster County and SLR Consulting have created a plan to remove Phoenicia's Main Street from the flood plain through bridge replacement and engineering of stream banks.

In 2025, the Phoenicia Elementary School shuttered its doors after an extended period of enrollment decline and a decision to consolidate the Onteora Central School District. This event was both difficult for the families that use the school and an emblematic symbol of the challenges faced by the town and the hamlet overall, described in later sections of this plan.

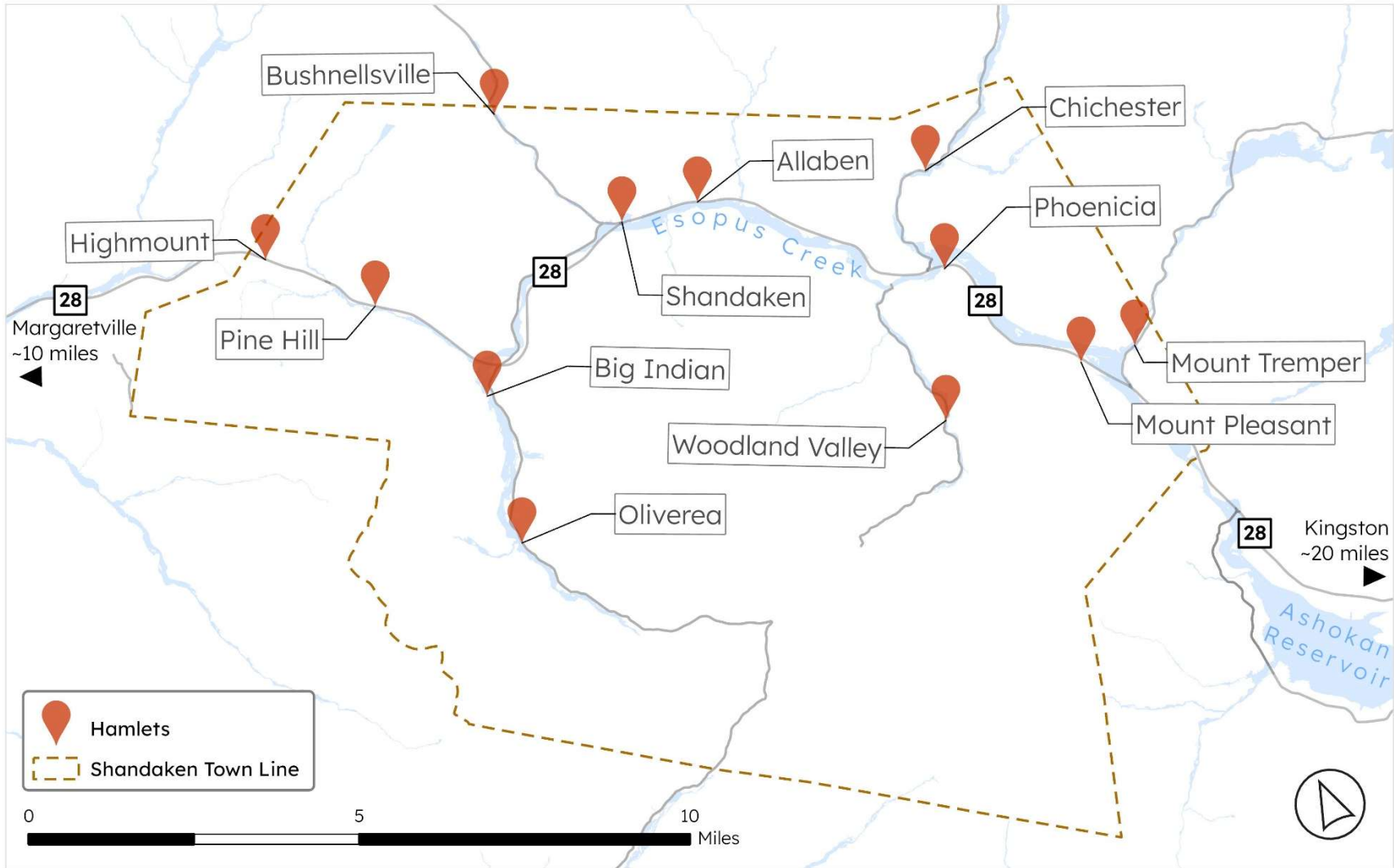
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⁴ U.S. Census, Decennial Census, 2020. Decennial Census and not American Community Survey data are used for the hamlets because the

⁵ According to the 2010 Decennial Census, Phoenicia's population was 309 that year. Between 2010 and 2020 there was a 13% decrease on the hamlet's population margin of error is typically smaller and for small communities the margin can be significant.



Map 1: Shandaken in context. Shandaken is in Ulster County, northwest of the City of Kingston along State Route 28. The town is entirely within the Catskill Park.



Map 2: The twelve hamlets of Shandaken. Allaben, Big Indian, Bushnellsville, Chichester, Highmount, Oliverea, Phoenicia, Pine Hill, Mount Pleasant, Mount Tremper, Shandaken, and Woodland Valley.

Pine Hill, with a population of 275 in 2020 (the same as it was 2010)⁶, is the most populated hamlet in the town, set on a slope at the base of Belleayre Mountain. The hamlet grew with the arrival of the railroad in 1872 and became a destination community, with hotels and inns lining Main Street. Today, it is seeing renewed investment. The recent shift to remote work has contributed to Pine Hill's draw as an attractive place to live for people from outside of the area. Unlike Phoenicia, Pine Hill is served by a public sewer system and a wastewater treatment facility, both of which have capacity to accommodate additional growth.

Shandaken is at the heart of Ulster's tourism industry, as it is rich with natural and recreational assets, two charming Main Streets, and the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center. The town relies heavily on tourism and part-time residents to support its economy. Ulster County, with its notable outdoor destinations and an expansive network of rail trails, saw tourism spending surpass one billion dollars in 2024.⁷

As is true in many parts of the Hudson Valley, including Shandaken, Ulster County's largest industry is education, health care, and social assistance (see Appendix A). While the health care industry employs a high number of people in the county, health services are concentrated in certain parts of the county while other areas, including Shandaken, have few to none. For Shandaken residents this means they must travel far to see a doctor or to access an emergency room. As shown on the map below, the closest health facilities to Shandaken are in Margaretville or Kingston.

In sum, Shandaken is both unique in its character and emblematic of the challenges facing communities across Ulster County. Its mountains, forests, streams, and hamlets give the town a one-of-a-kind landscape, yet the community grapples with familiar tensions: the privilege of living within the natural environment along with the responsibility this requires; reliance on tourism alongside the industry's pressures and fluctuations; and a housing market that is no longer affordable to long-time residents. Above all, Shandaken is a place where people live close to the natural world that is around them, hold fast to a spirit of independence, and cherish local character and connection in an increasingly homogenized world. Shandaken's community is shaped by the quiet work of preserving what has long mattered while making room for change; the old and the new exist side by side, not always with ease, but in a continual striving for balance.

2.3 Assessment of Community Wellbeing

Shandaken residents consistently describe their community as close-knit, engaged, and mutually supportive, where people actively participate in shaping their shared future. The natural environment is deeply woven into daily life and residents' sense of identity as members and protectors of their place in the Catskills. Many people identify closely with their hamlets and the unique ways of life facilitated by each place.

⁶ U.S. Census, Decennial Census, 2010 and 2020

⁷ See the Ulster County Department of Tourism Annual Report: <https://county-ulster-ny-clear.doc.cleargov.com/8484/237276/d>

At the same time, community members express concern about emerging challenges that may threaten the unique character of the town, highlighting the importance of housing affordability, opportunities for residents to earn a living locally, and the vitality of small businesses along Main Streets.

Residents also spoke about the challenge of balancing the need for a thriving local economy and vibrant year-round community with the responsibility of living within a delicate and cherished natural environment. Underlying this tension, though, is a shared aspiration: to sustain and pass on a way of life to future generations that is both environmentally resilient and socially and economically vibrant. The findings in this section will inform recommendations aimed at achieving that balance.

This section draws on data from the U.S. Census and other sources alongside community input to provide an overall assessment of community wellbeing. It considers essential building blocks of individual and collective wellbeing: economic independence, housing access and stability, food security, a healthy environment, connection to community, and education. A thorough analysis of these factors offers a comprehensive picture of both strengths and vulnerabilities within the town.

2.3.1 Demographic Profile

Over the last decade, Shandaken’s population has remained mostly stable with a slight decline. As of 2024, there were 2789 full-time residents in the town, down 3% from 2014.⁸ There are several explanations for the decrease, but the reason most frequently vocalized by town representatives and community members are the lack of local employment opportunities and affordable housing options.

The number of residents aged 65 and older is growing in Shandaken as the large Baby Boomer generation continues to move into their senior years, while the number of residents below age 14 has declined. At the same time, the town has seen an increase in residents in their late 20s and 30s. This shift aligns with remote work trends, which have made it possible for young professionals to relocate to rural areas that are far from employment centers.

Racial and ethnic diversity increased slightly between 2014 and 2024, with increased presence of Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and multiracial populations. That said, Shandaken remains majority-White (approximately 80%). The Black or African American population in Shandaken remains miniscule. Community members expressed a desire for the town to be a more welcoming and inclusive place for people of diverse demographics.

Changing demographics in Shandaken are tied to a tension that is experienced locally and was expressed throughout community engagement efforts. While this does not apply to everyone, in some cases long-term and new residents have different expectations about

⁸ U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2014 and 2024

the future of the town and how the comprehensive plan should reflect those expectations. To address this, the plan is careful to protect the longstanding unique rural character of the town while enabling positive growth and change.

2.3.2 Housing Access, Stability, and Affordability

Housing access and affordability were identified as top concerns throughout the community engagement process for this plan. Available data validate these concerns, illustrating the degree to which housing in Shandaken is increasingly expensive and hard to find.

Median rents in Shandaken increased by 50% from 2014-2024.⁹ Alongside this trend, home sale prices in Ulster County rose by over \$200,000 (82%) from 2019 to 2025.¹⁰ In addition to cost burden, housing access is also limited; according to the most recent Ulster County Rental Housing Survey (2023), only 8 online rental listings were documented over the course of 12 months.

Median Gross Rents in Shandaken

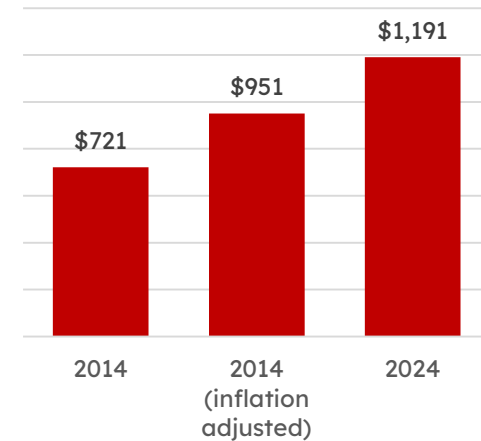
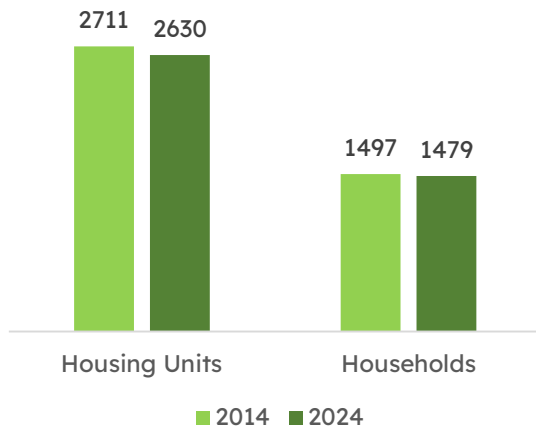


Figure 1: Shandaken median gross rents, 2014-2024. Source: U.S. Census ACS 5-year estimates.

Total Housing Units and Households in Shandaken



Alongside the slight drop in population numbers from 2014 to 2024 noted above, Shandaken also saw a small decline in both housing units and households. The total number of housing units decreased from 2,711 to 1,630, and the number of households fell from 1,497 to 1,479. The number of vacant homes also went down, from 1,273 to 1,151.

The most noticeable change in the number of vacant homes was in the “other vacant” category, which includes homes in foreclosure, under renovation, or used for storage or other nonresidential purposes. This category dropped by about 50 units (a 25% decrease), suggesting that some of these properties may have been repaired and brought back into use. However, a large share of vacant homes continue to be used seasonally. More than 900 units are classified as vacation or seasonal use, making up 34% of all housing units.

Figure 2: Housing units and households in Shandaken, 2014-2024. Source: U.S. Census ACS 5-year estimates.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ New York State Association of Realtors Market Reports, 2019-2025.

Taken together, these trends may indicate the rehabilitation and reoccupation of previously underused housing, conversion of some small-scale multifamily properties to single-family homes, and continued pressure from second-home ownership and seasonal occupancy that limits year-round housing availability.

Although data shows a decrease in vacant homes overall, vacancies and deteriorating buildings are still a concern in Shandaken. Nearly 150 units are still classified as “other vacant,” a category that includes homes that may be in poor condition, unused, or not currently livable.

Town leadership, together with partners in Ulster County, is actively working to identify vacant and underused properties that could be brought back into productive use. Community input made it clear that residents see restoring these properties and preventing further decline as a top priority. In response, this plan includes recommendations focused on reducing vacancy and expanding housing options by rehabilitating existing structures.

Among owner-occupied homes, the number of mortgage-free households increased from 589 to 651 between 2014 and 2024, while homes with a mortgage declined from 612 to 520. This likely reflects older residents’ amortizing mortgages as well as an increasing prevalence of cash purchases and mortgage-free ownership. Evidence of this trend is further supported by the rise in entire-unit Airbnb listings between 2015 and 2025 (+169), suggesting a growing presence of short-term rentals relative to full-time residency. According to analysis of Airbnb listings, the measure of Airbnb units as a share of the total housing stock in Shandaken rose from less than 1% in 2015 to over 10% in 2025.

In acknowledgement of this issue, the Town Board adopted short term rental regulations in 2022. Town staff report that there has been a decrease in the purchase of homes for this purpose. Over time, town officials anticipate that STR units will be lost to attrition, and the total number of entire homes for rent as STRs will decline.

Still, it is important to keep in mind that community input indicated a need for better balance between the town’s reliance on tourism and the availability of housing for year-round residents. There is also a desire to develop strategies that leverage the thriving tourism industry for local benefit. For this reason, the recommendations in this plan build on the efforts already put in place by the town, and explore additional strategies to support that balance between strengthening the local economy while protecting and expanding housing opportunities.

2.3.3 Economy, Employment, and Income

Shandaken experienced a notable shift in the makeup of residents’ employment between 2014 and 2024. The most significant growth occurred in the education, health care, and social assistance sectors, which are the largest segment of the workforce. Employment in this

category increased from 27% to 36% (+128 jobs), now having a total of 513 workers. Professional and management jobs also grew substantially, increasing by 80% to 216 total jobs.

During the same period, traditionally middle-income and goods-producing sectors saw sharp declines, including construction (-63%), manufacturing (-55%), finance and real estate (-77%), and public administration (-57%). The decline in arts, entertainment, and accommodation/food services (-50 jobs, or -21%) is particularly notable given the town’s tourism-based economy.¹¹

Despite this decline, the arts, entertainment, and accommodation/food service jobs still account for 13% of the workforce (187 workers). Another 13% (192 total) work in retail. Both these industries have relatively low average wages, around \$37,000 to \$41,000.¹² The lack of affordable housing can make it difficult for artists and service-industry workers to remain in the community.

Overall, available data indicate an economic shift away from construction, manufacturing, and public-sector employment toward both retail and professional sectors, which represent two ends of the income spectrum. Professional sectors typically offer higher wages while retail wages are typically lower.

Another data point to illustrate wage trends is based on income quintiles, which divide all households into five equal groups—from the lowest earners (bottom 20%) to the highest earners (top 20%)—making it easier to see how different segments of the population are faring financially over time (see Appendix A). In Shandaken, these data suggest a shift in who is living and working in the community. Middle- and upper-income quintiles

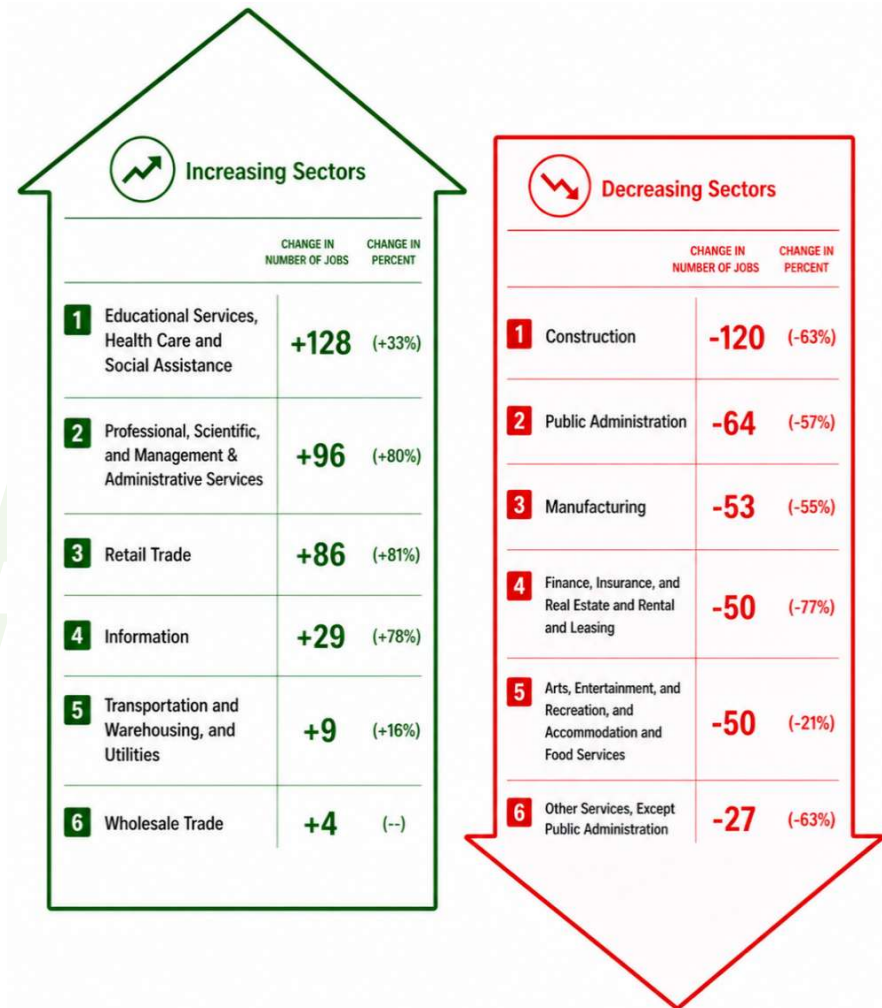


Figure 3: Growing and shrinking employment sectors in Shandaken, 2014-2024. Source: U.S. Census ACS 5-year estimates.

¹¹ U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2014 and 2024.

¹² Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2025.

appear to show rising incomes, but it is unlikely that this reflects actual income gains for existing middle-income residents. Instead, it more likely points to a decline in the number of middle-income households and an increase in the presence of higher-income households. At the same time, incomes for lower-income households have remained flat or declined.

During that same period, median income in Shandaken decreased slightly when adjusted for inflation, from nearly \$70,000 to just over \$66,000. This trend stands out when compared to Ulster County, where median income increased from approximately \$72,000 to \$82,000 in that same period. This indicates that the wages of low- and middle-income earners have decreased or stagnated to the point of bringing down the median wage, even with an influx of high-income earners. In other words, even though more high-income households are moving into Shandaken, incomes for lower- and middle-income residents have not kept pace, and in some cases have declined, pulling the overall median down. This is another data point showing very different experiences for long-term low-income residents and new high-earning residents.

The town also saw an increase in remote work over the past decade. The number of residents age 16 and older working from home increased from 164 people (about 12% of workers) in 2014 to 344 people (24%) in 2024. Taken together, the data support community input that there has been a recent influx of residents with higher education levels, higher earnings, and professional-sector jobs to the town, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic, alongside increasing financial struggles for long-time low- and middle-income residents.

Looking at these patterns holistically—growth in higher-paying professional jobs, a drop in overall median income, stagnant working-class wages, demographic changes, and industry shifts—suggests a widening gap between the highest and lowest earners in Shandaken and a loss of residents who work in trades. These findings are consistent with broader regional trends, where communities are experiencing similar changes in income distribution and workforce composition.

Community members shared that Shandaken is warm and welcoming to new residents, and that recent changes are perceived favorably. Residents have noted that new higher-earning households contribute to the tax base, support local businesses, and bring strong community-minded energy, aligned with the town's existing ethos. At the same time, pressure on the housing market from higher-income households was raised as a point of concern, and community input indicated that it is a top priority to ensure all households, regardless of income level, can access housing and other services in the face of socioeconomic changes in the town.

2.3.4 Educational Attainment

Educational attainment is often linked to economic opportunity, income, health, and overall quality of life. Across the country, disparities exist because of differences in access to early and advanced educational opportunities, differences in funding and quality of public schools, and educational opportunities that hinge on personal finances, housing stability, individual responsibilities, transportation, and a host of other factors. Educational attainment is important for community and economic development since many jobs require training and certification. Higher-paying jobs tend to be associated with higher levels of education.

In Shandaken, there were notable shifts in the educational attainment of its population between 2014 and 2024. During this time, there was an increase from 18% to 28% of residents age 25 and older who held a graduate or professional degree, and an increase from 16% to 24% with a Bachelor's degree. Meanwhile, the percent of the population for whom the highest level of educational attainment was high-school dropped from 30% to 16% of the population.¹³

These trends could reflect a variety of factors. For example, the education levels of residents may have increased overall. Alternatively, there may have been a displacement of residents with lower educational attainment in recent years. Residents with lower educational levels and associated earnings are often disadvantaged, especially when the costs of living increase, as is true in Shandaken.

As noted above, data provide evidence of a changing population, showing that there has been an outflux of middle-income earners and an influx of high-income earners in recent years. Higher educational attainment is closely associated with higher household incomes, reflecting the town's and county's overall socioeconomic changes over the decade. The increases in education and income levels in Shandaken may also be tied to the growth of remote work.



Sustaining Community in a Tourism-Based Economy

Since its emergence as a mountain getaway destination in the late 1880s, Shandaken's economy has largely been based on tourism, a trend that continues today. Over the decades, the town has experienced many highs and lows that come with fluctuations of tourism as an industry: from predictable seasonal changes to ones induced by global pandemics, access to global travel as an alternative to regional excursions, the impacts of rising fuel prices, and the impacts of online influencers and reviews. Because many residents and businesses rely heavily on outside visitors today, it is important to consider both the benefits and the challenges of a visitor-based economy and to identify strategies that can be put in place to leverage tourism for local benefit.

Tourism offers several clear benefits: first and foremost, it allows communities to leverage existing assets such as local culture, natural resources, and the qualities that make a place unique to spur economic activity. In this way, communities with tourism-economies are often motivated to preserve and protect the aspects of a place that make it special.

Tourism can also provide employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for individuals who may have limited access to other forms of work. Artists, craft makers, and local producers of goods often can sustain themselves because of visitor support and

¹³ U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2014 and 2024

purchases. Similarly, cultural institutions and destinations often generate revenue from visitors that helps them to provide programming and benefits to local residents.

While tourism clearly brings economic activity and opportunity to a community, it is also important to recognize the challenges that can come with relying on tourism as a primary economic driver. Unfortunately, tourism-related jobs—such as hospitality and retail—are often among the lower-paying occupations. Employees working in restaurants, shops, hotels, ski resorts, and entertainment venues broadly earn wages below median income. In Ulster County, average wages in tourism-related sectors are some of the lowest: retail workers earn an average annual wage of approximately \$41,000, while workers in the arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food service sectors earn about \$37,854. By comparison, the median income in Ulster County was approximately \$55,800 in 2025.¹⁴

Seasonal fluctuations also present challenges. Businesses that depend on tourists must plan around cycles of peak and slow seasons throughout the year, such that staffing needs are frequently seasonal as well. As a result, many workers in tourism-related jobs experience periods of stable employment and dependable income interspersed with periods where they must find other work or experience unemployment. For some individuals, this seasonal rhythm offers flexibility and aligns with their preferred lifestyle. For others, however, it can create recurring periods of financial hardship and stress. Seasonality also places pressure on businesses during peak season, when they must generate enough revenue to sustain operations throughout the rest of the year.

Fortunately, there are several strategies known to raise wages and increase stability for tourism industry workers. These include worker-owned businesses, establishing grant programs for local entrepreneurs, cooperative spaces to produce value-add goods, and creating clear pathways for career advancement within the industry.

Even with these strategies, economies that rely on visitor spending are also susceptible to macro-economic and social events that can change how much people travel. In recent years, global events such as the Covid pandemic, gas prices that have increased due to conflict and war overseas, and changing cultural habits have impacted the number of people who travel for leisure and where they travel to. In a small community like Shandaken, events that occur halfway around the world can be felt in significant ways through the local economy.

Another important consideration for tourism-based economies is the impact climate change may have on outdoor recreation. For example, as temperatures continue to rise, winter activities such as skiing may become increasingly difficult to sustain. Across the

¹⁴ New York Department of Labor, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2025

county, several ski mountains have already ceased operations due to declining snowfall and shortened winter seasons that no longer support reliable recreational use. Because Belleayre Mountain is one of the largest tourist destinations in Shandaken, it would be prudent for the town to consider the possibility that a changing climate could affect the mountain's long-term viability. While some ski resorts have adapted by expanding recreational opportunities to mountain biking and hiking, ski mountains are unlikely to make up lost revenue from these activities alone. It is crucial for communities that rely heavily on seasonal tourism to consider economic diversification.

The central question should not simply be how to sustain tourism, but how to sustain the local community in a way that preserves the authenticity, vitality, and charm that makes the area an attractive destination in the first place.

Residents in places like Shandaken also grapple with the impacts of tourism and high visitation on the natural environment. Tourists may not always share the same level of concern for the environment as local residents. In such cases, tourism may introduce issues of noise, litter, overcrowding, and the degradation of natural resources. Without careful management and education, tourism can create strain on the very environmental quality that attracts visitors in the first place.

Last but certainly not least, tourism-based economies require a healthy balance between serving visitors and meeting the needs of residents. In tourism-based communities, businesses may prioritize catering to tourists as they tend to spend more freely and spontaneously than residents do on goods and services. As a result, residents may find it more difficult to access everyday necessities and affordable experiences within their own community and may need to travel elsewhere for groceries, household goods, or basic services. Related to this is the question of community character and authenticity: when visitors outnumber residents and commercial activity becomes almost exclusively tourist-oriented, a place can begin to lose the qualities that make it feel special and like a "real" community. This, in turn, can reduce the appeal of the destination itself, particularly for visitors seeking an authentic local experience.

Tourism depends on the presence of a healthy and functioning local community. Visitors seek not only recreation, but also the unique character, culture, and atmosphere created by the people who live there. For this reason, the central question should not simply be how to sustain tourism, but how to sustain the local community in a way that preserves the authenticity, vitality, and charm that make the area an attractive destination in the first place.

2.3.5 Food Access and Security

Shandaken has limited access to fresh and affordable food, with no full-service grocery store currently operating in the town. Survey respondents reported regular trips to Kingston (25-30 miles away), Hunter, or Margaretville for groceries, while the IGA in nearby Boiceville provides another option but was described as more expensive and limited in selection. Residents expressed support and appreciation for the Phoenicia Farmers Market, held Sundays in Phoenicia during the summer and at the Pine Hill Community Center during the winter. Residents noted that the Phoenicia Supermarket offers some nonperishable basics, but does not provide consistent access to fresh food.

Stakeholder input identified several structural barriers to improving food access, including a small full-time population, limited infrastructure, and zoning or permitting hurdles. These challenges make it difficult for grocery stores, restaurants, and other food businesses to operate sustainably. Stakeholders identified a need for shared commercial kitchens or other value-add production spaces. The Wellington, a planned affordable housing project in Pine Hill, proposes a ground-floor grocery. Many residents continue to face inconsistent and distant access to fresh food, reinforcing concerns that parts of Shandaken function as a rural food desert. Elderly residents, those who struggle with health challenges, and residents who do not have access to a vehicle (over 8% of the population) are especially vulnerable. In addition, volunteer-driven programs are at risk of closure; for example, Meals on Wheels is considering withdrawing service from Shandaken due to low volunteerism.

2.3.6 Transportation and Mobility

New York State Route 28 (Rt 28) is the primary corridor through Shandaken. At its eastern terminus, Rt 28 connects with I-87 and local roads in the City of Kingston. The road passes through Catskill Park and continues north-west, ending just north of Utica. Throughout most of Shandaken, Rt 28 functions as a two-lane highway with a posted speed limit of 55 miles per hour. Community members expressed concerns about speeding and roadway safety, and identified a need for lower speed limits, traffic calming measures, and targeted improvements in areas with higher crash histories, such as the bridge on Route 28 near its intersection with Route 212. Local roads extending from Route 28 into the hollows can become difficult or impassable during winter storm events.

While most households in the Town of Shandaken rely on a personal vehicle for transportation, 115 households (over 8%) do not have access to a vehicle.¹⁵ In a rural community like Shandaken, lacking a vehicle can create barriers to accessing groceries, health care, employment, and other essential services, increasing the risk of isolation especially for elderly, disabled, or infirm residents as well as those who cannot afford the costs of personal vehicle ownership.

¹⁵ U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2024

Alternative transportation options are limited in the town. Public transit is provided by Ulster County Area Transit. As of 2026, Route Z connects Kingston, Woodstock, and Pine Hill on weekdays and weekends, while the Belleayre Express offers weekend express service between Belleayre Mountain and Kingston with stops in Pine Hill, Phoenicia, and other locations along the corridor (see Appendix A for map). Ulster County also provides ADA paratransit and senior transportation services, which often require advance reservations. There is also the challenge of public transportation across county lines; residents noted that access to the Margaretville Hospital, located in Delaware County, is limited due to a lack of cross-county transit. Trailways, a private bus company, offers connective service between New York City and Phoenicia, with curbside stop on Rte. 28 in Pine Hill. Catskill Neighbors, a volunteer-run organization, helps transport seniors to medical appointments among other activities. With limited taxi-type services, this free service fills a critical gap in the local transportation network.

Walking and bicycling infrastructure in the town is limited, particularly outside hamlet centers. Community members and stakeholders noted challenges with walkability and sidewalk infrastructure even within Pine Hill and Phoenicia.

At the same time, Shandaken has a strong identity as a recreational tourism destination, with opportunities for hiking, biking, skiing, fishing, and other outdoor activities that draw visitors throughout the year. Improving sidewalks, trail connections, bicycle accommodations, and safe pedestrian crossings would better connect hamlet centers to these active recreation assets while supporting residents and visitors. One such effort is Ulster County's plan for a rail trail connecting Highmount through Pine Hill to Giggle Hollow. Micro-transit may be a creative solution to these challenges, as well.

To address transportation challenges and to reduce reliance on fossil fuels throughout the town, this plan includes recommendations to increase walking, biking, and overall mobility, especially in the hamlet centers of Pine Hill and Phoenicia.

2.3.7 Cellular Coverage, Emergency Radio, and Internet

Phone and radio communications are a longstanding challenge within Shandaken noted by residents and visitors alike. There is no cell service on Route 28, the town's primary thoroughfare, from Mount Tremper through Allaben. Cell service also does not cover the entirety of the hamlets of Phoenicia, Chichester, and Woodland Valley. Big Indian, Oliveria, and the rest of the Hollows similarly have no or limited cell access. In Pine Hill, coverage is sporadic. The only cell and emergency radio towers within the town are located on the top of Belleayre Mountain and near Glenbrook Park along Route 42. Some eastern sections of the town receive cell service from towers located within the towns of Woodstock and Olive.

Because of this lack of communications infrastructure, emergency services regularly find it impossible to communicate with other departments and with Ulster County central dispatch. Emergency services often must change position or send resources away from critical locations to relay important information.

Both these issues are regularly discussed with Ulster County Planning and the Department of Emergency Management. As of 2025, proposals have been made to construct towers in the vicinity of Mount Tremper and Phoenicia to improve both cell and emergency radio services. There are similar discussions ongoing related to the Belleayre area and Big Indian. However, current zoning poses challenges to approving much needed infrastructure. Participants in the community survey for this plan identified cell service as the second most critical area of concern.

For internet access, residents in Phoenicia, along Route 28, or on some nearby roads have access to fiber-optic internet from Margaretville Telephone Company. Spectrum cable internet is available more broadly, as are satellite providers and Starlink, which is the only internet service available in the most secluded areas of certain hollows. Free Public Wi-Fi is available on Phoenicia's Main Street and extends to Parish Field. It is also available at Big Indian Park and Glenbrook Park. The Phoenicia Library, Morton Memorial Library, and Pine Hill Community Center offer Wi-Fi to the public. According to the U.S. Census, approximately 9% of households in Shandaken do not have internet subscriptions.¹⁶

Phone service is increasingly provided over internet lines, which become unavailable during power outages. Copper POTS (Plain Old Telephone Service) wiring is no longer reliably maintained and many residents complain of poor quality and frequent disruption on these older communication lines.

2.3.8 Community Communications and Connections

The shift toward online media and the decline of print have created challenges for local governments trying to communicate effectively with the public. For residents to take advantage of available services, programs, and opportunities, they first need to be aware of them. In a small community like Shandaken, information often spreads through word of mouth, online social media, municipal websites and social media pages, and local newspapers. However, as a rural community with an aging population with varying technological skills, both geographic distance and limited access to technology can create barriers to obtaining information. Additionally, as noted above, there are households in the town who do not have access to broadband or cellphone service. Continued efforts are necessary to adapt communications to the evolving media and communication landscape and to reach the public.

Shandaken.gov is the town's official website and includes both municipal meetings as well as community flyers. The town also maintains the Town of Shandaken Facebook page which includes municipal and community postings; however, it does not generally allow public conversation. The Facebook page has approximately 5,400 followers, which is greater than the town's population of just under 2,800 residents. The town also has an emergency alert service that calls and sends text messages to subscribed individuals relaying climate

¹⁶ U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2014

warnings, water district alerts, and health/safety bulletins. Town committees and related institutions, like the museum and public libraries, also maintain social media pages. The hamlet of Pine Hill recently created its own website.

There are a number of news sources that may cover the Town of Shandaken. The Kingston Freeman is Shandaken's official newspaper of record, however the newspaper rarely covers the township in its regular reporting. Shandaken is rarely covered by Hudson Valley One in its online reporting. The Overlook is an online community paper serving Shandaken and its surrounding towns that began publishing in late 2024. The Catskill Crew is an events and culture newsletter/Instagram account that covers the entire Catskill region. The lack of local reporting on both community and municipal activities is regularly noted by local residents as an ongoing challenge, and there have been frequent requests for a local newsletter.

As a tight-knit rural community spread out over a vast geographic area, conversation is paradoxically both a challenge as well as one of the town's foundational strengths. Community events are often shared with the privately-administered Phoenicia Facebook group which has 4,800 members and extends significantly beyond the hamlet itself. Flyers are often posted on the doors of the Valero gas station, on notice boards located at the Phoenicia Library and Pine Hill Community Center, at the seven post offices within town, at many of the local churches, or on notice boards located in Mount Tremper, Phoenicia, Shandaken, and Pine Hill.

The Phoenicia Business Association maintains an active website and Instagram account for their members and prints physical brochures which are available at local businesses including the Phoenicia Diner, Belleayre Ski Center, and Brio's. There are large event "billboards" located at the West Entrance to Phoenicia and the East Entrance to Pine Hill, and "sandwich board" signage is often placed at these locations, however Catskill Park and DOT rules limit signage along Route 28. The American Legion maintains a mobile billboard near the western entrance to Veteran's Way and the fire departments have notice boards occasionally used to advertise their fundraising events. Civic organizations such as Rotary often table during community festival events. Finally, there are various informal group-chats where individuals share information whenever a local fire station siren is sounded.

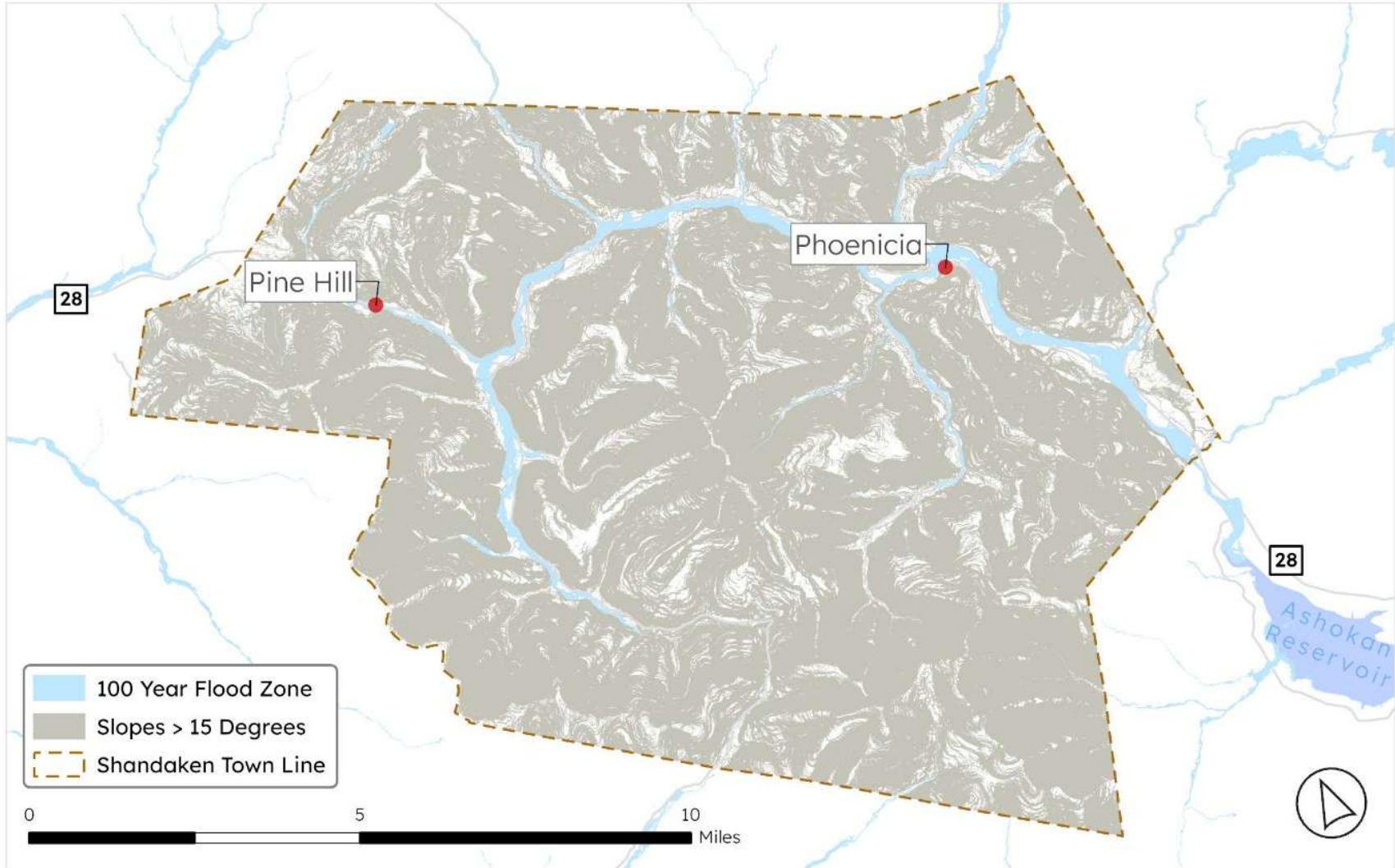
2.4 Land, Water, and the Built Environment

2.4.1 Land

The land in Shandaken is characterized by lush forest and steep slopes that surround deep valleys and hollows. Approximately 85% of the town is preserved as forever wild by New York State, New York City Department of Environmental Protection, and private land trusts. The natural landscape, infrastructure rules and regulations, and environmental protection efforts shape the way that Shandaken can grow and change. Most human settlement is located along waterways along Route 28 and in Shandaken's valleys and hollows.



Map 3: Public lands owned by NYS and NYC in Shandaken. 85% of Shandaken's land is legally designated "forever wild".



Map 4: Steep slopes in Shandaken. In accordance with Department of Health guidelines, any area with a slope beyond 15% cannot hold a septic system. Most of the land with slopes less than 15% in Shandaken are either within the 100-year floodplain or within a publicly owned forest.

2.4.2 Water

Nestled in the Esopus Creek valley, water is a defining feature of the Town of Shandaken. The creek is one of the more significant waterways of the Catskill mountains, and over millions of years, it has carved the present valley. Along its way, numerous smaller tributary streams branch off from the Esopus Creek. These streams follow the smaller valleys of the hollows. Downstream, the Esopus Creek runs into the Ashokan Reservoir, a major water source for over eight million people in New York City and beyond. The waterways are important for the town's landscape, local economy, hazards, and regional impact.

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) manages water quality for New York City and owns and regulates a significant amount of land in the Town of Shandaken with the purpose of protecting water from pollution. DEP regulates the following aspects of infrastructure and land use:

- Residential septic systems;
- Intermediate-sized wastewater treatment systems;
- Wastewater treatment plants;
- Construction of a paved driveway or other impervious surfaces adjacent to a stream;
- Crossing, diverting or piping a stream;
- Construction of a house or other structure adjacent to a stream or watercourse;
- Connection to an existing sewer system with a service lateral;
- A land clearing or land grading project, involving two or more acres, located at least in part within the limiting distance of 100 feet of a watercourse or wetland, or within the limiting distance of 300 feet of a reservoir, reservoir stem or controlled lake or on a slope exceeding 15 percent;
- Application and storage of fertilizers;
- Discharge from agricultural activities;
- Siting of junkyards or solid waste management facilities; and
- Discharge or storage of other hazardous materials, petroleum products, pesticides, highway maintenance materials, or other sewage.¹⁷

Environmental regulations enforced by the DEC for much of the town can lengthen development timelines and require a more involved permitting and approval process. However, this oversight provides a clear benefit to residents by protecting the integrity of nature,

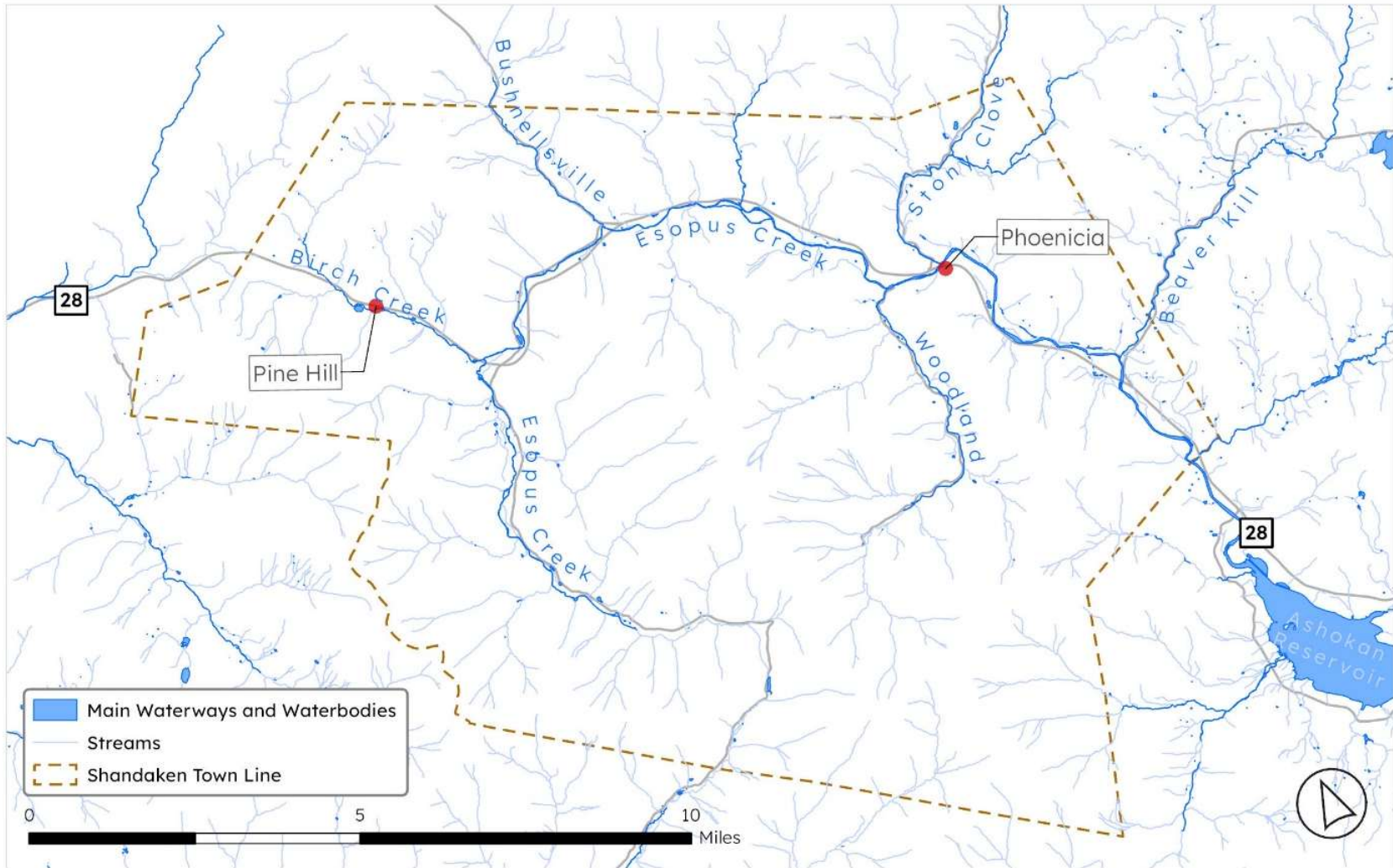
¹⁷ "Regulations" DEP's Long-Term Watershed Protection Program

maintaining environmental quality, and ensuring public safety. Overall, residents express pride in their role as stewards of clean water and healthy forests. One challenge identified by the Town Board is communicating information about DEC regulations and programs to the public. This plan therefore includes strategies to increase access to resources and programs for Shandaken residents.

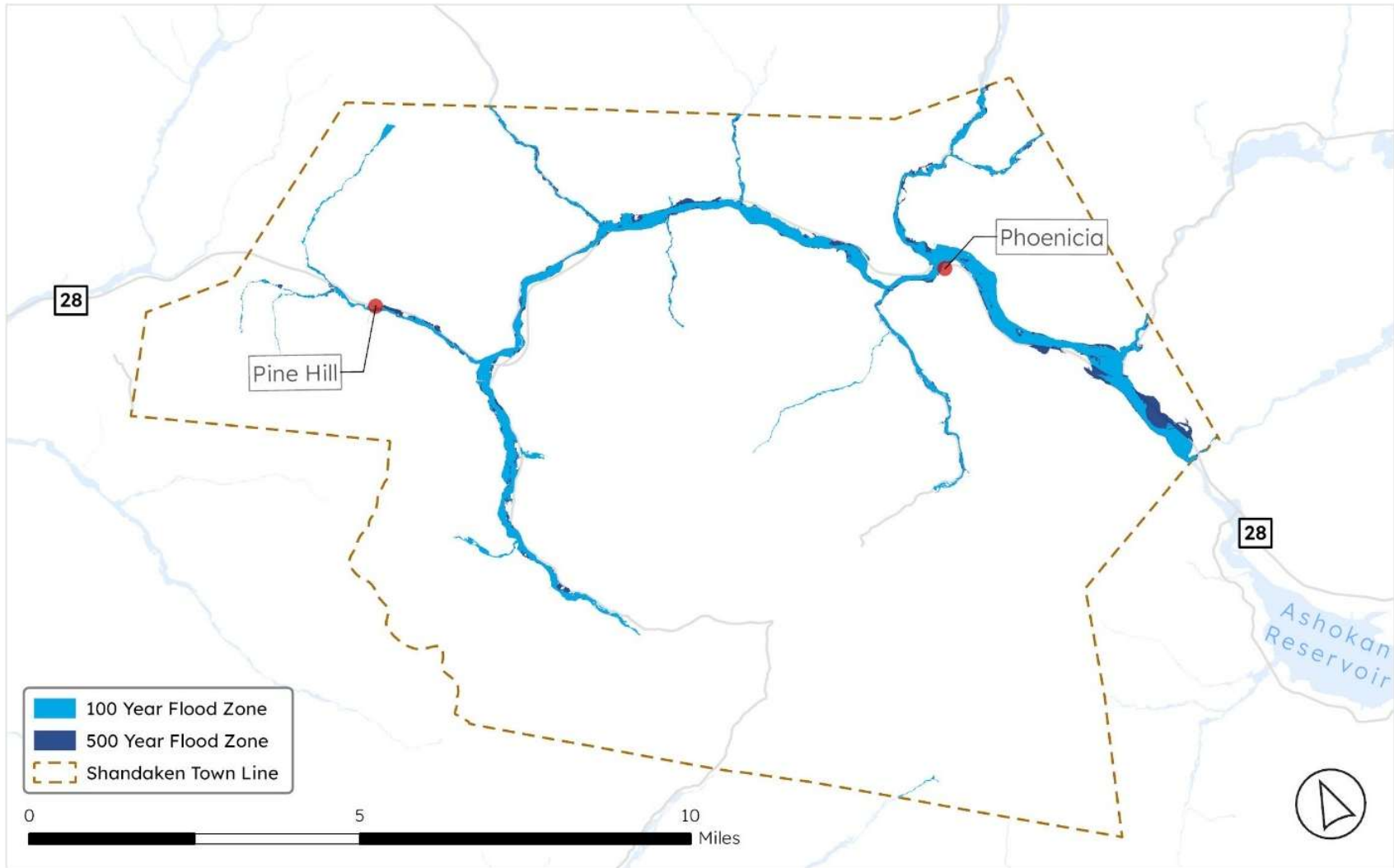
Streams and waterways are also important because of the flood risks they pose. The town's population centers were historically established near waterways for easy access to drinking water, for fishing, to support early industry, and other activities. Due to climate change and a higher frequency of major storm events, these hamlets today are increasingly vulnerable to flooding. In 2011, Hurricane Irene caused flooding in the town that damaged buildings and infrastructure, underscoring the need for climate adaptation and mitigation efforts.

A significant portion of developed areas in the town are in the flood plain. Phoenicia's Main Street is entirely in the 100-year flood zone, contributing to disinvestment in the hamlet's commercial assets, as discussed in further detail in Section 2.4.4: Main Streets below.

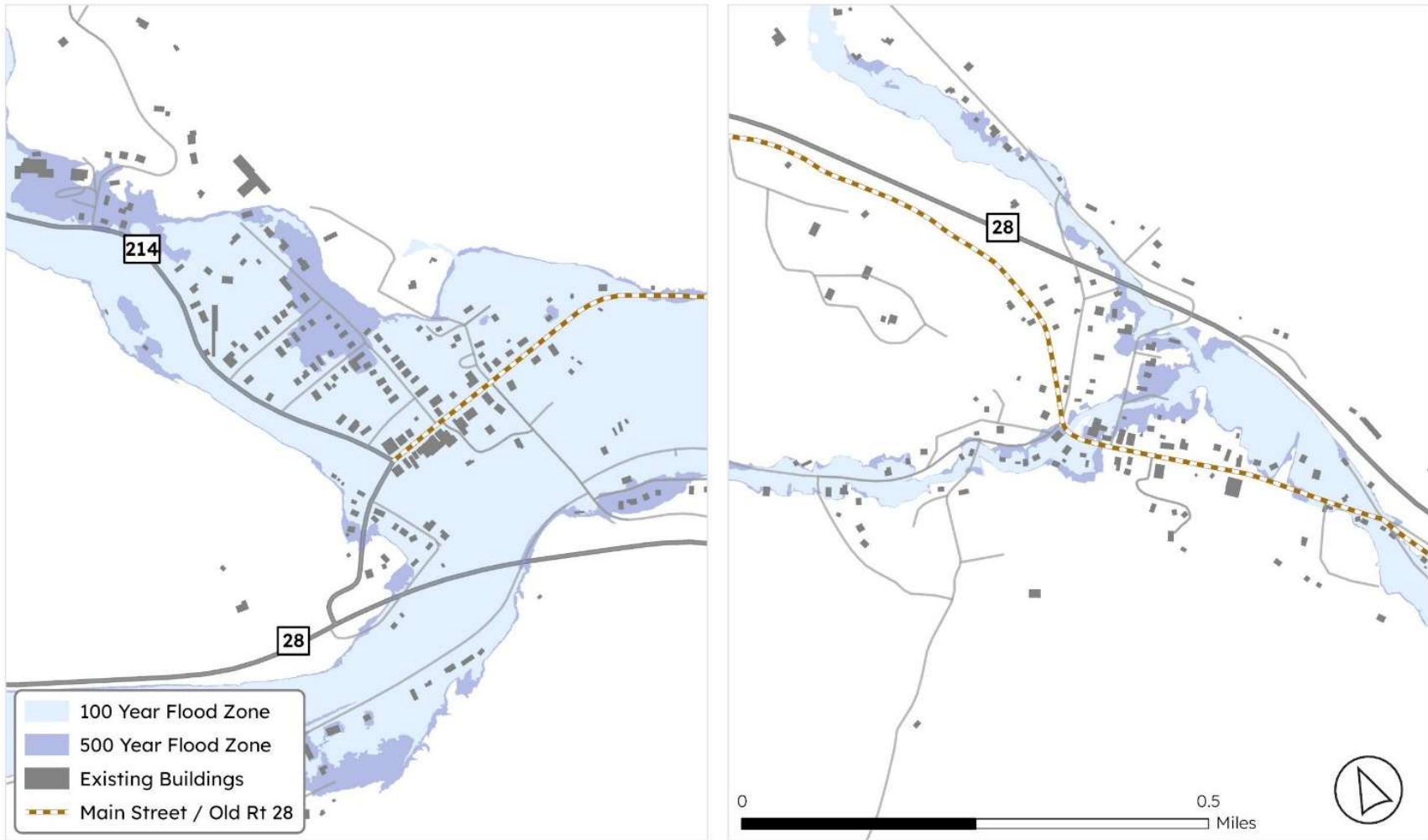
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Map 5: Waterbodies, waterways, and streams in Shandaken. All Shandaken's rivers, creeks, and tributaries carry water to the Ashokan Reservoir, which is a primary source of drinking water for New York City. The built environment is entirely shaped by this natural landscape; all twelve hamlets were founded along the creeks throughout the town.



Map 6: Flood-prone areas in Shandaken. A significant number of existing homes, including the entirety of Phoenicia's Main Street, are located in the 100-year floodplain.



Map 7: Main Streets in Phoenicia (left) and Pine Hill (right) in relation to the floodplain. Main Street in Phoenicia is located entirely within the floodplain, while some existing homes and other structures in Pine Hill are also at risk of flooding.

In the fall of 2025, the Ashokan Watershed Stream Management Program (AWSMP) along with the engineering consultant SLR developed a long-term flood reduction strategy for the hamlet of Phoenicia. The plan includes strategies to alter the course of water during flood events, and to remove critical assets from the floodplain including Phoenicia's Main Street and the former Phoenicia School. The plan presents a long-term vision for Phoenicia, which is at the confluence of two waterways. Its strategies focus on land and waterway engineering, infrastructure upgrades, and other physical interventions designed to reduce flood risk and mitigate impacts.

The consequences of not implementing the plan's strategies are serious. There is the potential that property in the floodplain will lose flood insurance eligibility, have increasing costs of insurance and repairs, and be ineligible for repair loans. There is also the continued negative economic impact on small businesses in the hamlet. Implementation of the plan is essential; strategies will require working with private property owners and investing heavily in public education to communicate the benefits of the plan as well as the risks of continuing on the current trajectory without pursuing adaptation efforts.

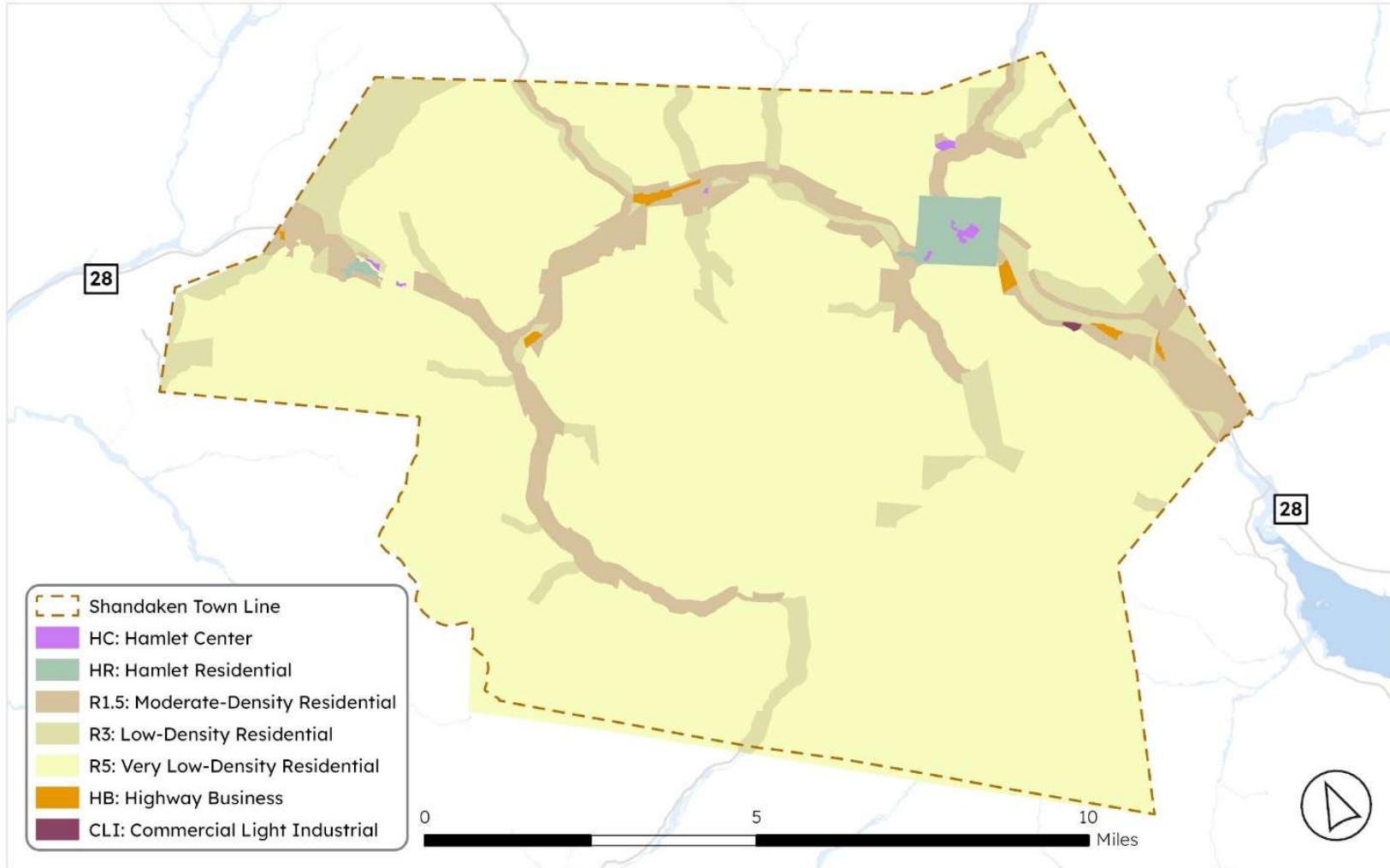
For areas outside of Phoenicia that are located in the floodplain, community input identified the need for more clarity and public education around the rules and guidelines for living and building in the floodplain. More communication and partnership between agencies and local residents is important to improve the resilience of the local community in the face of climate change and increasing frequency of flood events. Resilience means that the community is able to be proactive in mitigating potential impacts of such events, and also requires that the community is well-connected so that they can respond quickly and productively in real time.

2.4.3 Existing Zoning and Land Use Patterns

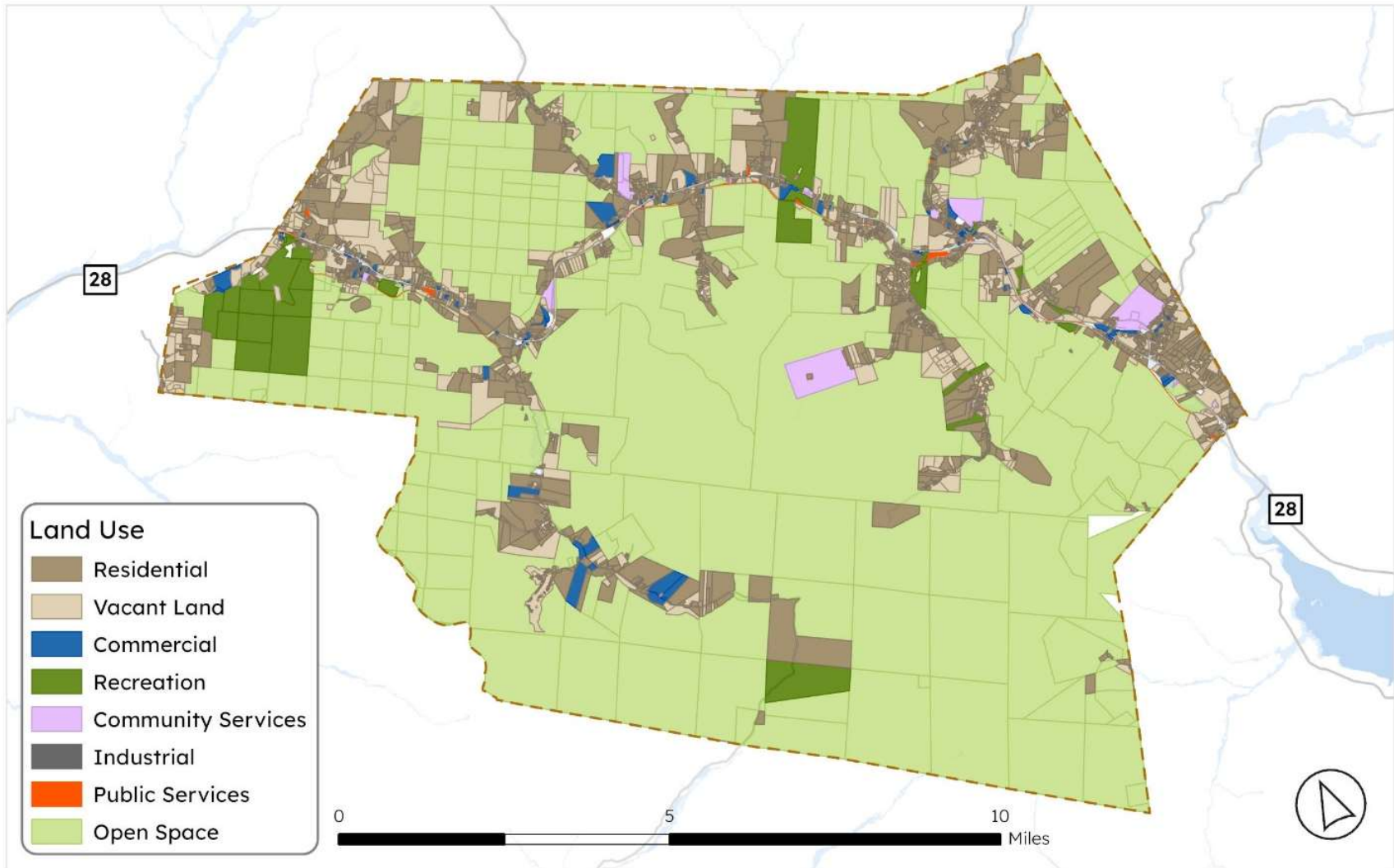
The Town of Shandaken zoning code utilizes traditional Euclidean zoning, which separates land uses into distinct districts and regulates development primarily through use restrictions, density limits, and dimensional standards. The code divides the town into the following base districts:

- R5, R3, and R1.5 (Residential)
- HR (Hamlet Residential), HC (Hamlet Commercial)
- HB (Highway Business)
- CLI (Commercial Light Industrial)
- FW (Floodway)

The code allows housing and economic activity in mostly low-density, small-scale forms. Integrated, mixed-use land uses are largely discouraged in the existing code. Shandaken's character is low-density and rural, with most development and economic activity channeled to Main Streets in the hamlet centers of Phoenicia and Pine Hill.



Map 8: Existing zoning in Shandaken. Most of the town is zoned residential with a minimum lot size of 1.5 acres.



Map 9: Current land use in Shandaken. This map is based on Ulster County property assessment data.

Residential Regulation

The existing code heavily regulates residential intensity. Single-family and two-family dwellings are permitted in most districts, generating a baseline of low-density residential development across the town. Multifamily housing (defined as three or more units) is not permitted in R5 or R3, and is allowed only by special permit in R1.5, HR, HC, and HB districts. Residential buildings with three or more units are never permitted as-of-right, even in hamlet centers. Mobile home parks are prohibited townwide.

Existing regulations preclude the creation of affordable housing. Housing is considered affordable when households are not spending more than 30% of total household income on housing costs.¹⁸ All housing is therefore on a spectrum in terms of cost and affordability. Some affordable housing is made affordable through subsidy, but affordability can also be achieved by lowering development and land costs and by creating smaller housing units.

In Shandaken, multifamily housing can only be created by conversion of existing single-family homes in certain zones on very large lots. In the R1.5 zone, the allowance for conversion is one unit per 1.5 acres; in the HR zone, the allowance is two units per acre with central water and municipal sewer; and in the HC zone, the allowance is three units per acre on lots with central water and municipal sewer. In HR and HC zones, lots tend to be much smaller than those required to qualify for conversion, creating a situation where the code technically allows conversion but conditions on the ground prohibit it. New multifamily projects are not allowed in any zone. Hotels cannot be converted to multifamily housing, and other affordable housing options such as tiny home villages are not permitted anywhere in the town.

These limitations were identified by the community as extremely prohibitive not only for affordable housing, but also for the rehabilitation of historic homes and other structures, which were built before the zoning code was created. Considering the limitations described here, there is a severe need to update the zoning code to facilitate housing that is aligned with community priorities.

Commercial Regulation

In the existing code, commercial and mixed-use activity is allowed, but segregated and limited. More intensive business uses, such as restaurants, retail, and offices are directed to the HC, HB, and CLI districts or require special use permits. The code prohibits many commercial uses in R5 and R3 zones that, if allowed, could support local entrepreneurship and meet community needs—such as health services, low-impact retail or third places, or other neighborhood commercial uses—especially as accessory uses to a primary residence.

¹⁸ This measure is the industry standard for calculating affordable monthly housing costs for any household. See Ulster County's Housing Smart Community Initiatives (HSCI) website (<https://hsci.ulstercountyny.gov/key-statistics/>) for more information.

Expanding small business allowances throughout the town, while carefully protecting the rural character and peaceful quality of life, could also increase employment opportunities.

Home occupations are permitted town-wide: as-of-right within the primary residential structure, and with special use permit if located in an accessory structure. This framework may confine economic activity to either very small, home-based enterprises or to designated commercial districts, limiting the potential for a more diverse economy. Community input indicated a need for more flexibility and opportunity for residents to be able to make a living on their own property.

Bulk Area Requirements

Regulation of minimum lot sizes, setbacks, lot coverage, and maximum heights vary by district in Shandaken's zoning code. Overall, regulations generate low-density, dispersed development. While the area requirements promote the rural character that community members value, they also limit flexibility for incremental, local-scale economic activity and affordable housing. In some cases, lot sizes are smaller than zoning permits because the lots are pre-existing nonconforming. For example, in the Hamlet Residential (HR) zone, the minimum lot size of 0.5 acres creates less dense development patterns than the current character in those zones, which is often 0.2 acres.

Importantly, most current structures in the town are pre-existing nonconforming uses, meaning they could not be built or rebuilt without variances according to the town's current zoning law. This is in part due to setback requirements—imposed after much of the town was built—that exceed existing conditions in many parts of the town. The result is that the current zoning has outlawed the very architecture that community members consider to be essential to the town's unique character, even though many of these buildings were constructed over a century ago. Accordingly, the recommendations in this plan include a thorough evaluation of setback and bulk area requirements in order to ensure zoning ordinances are aligned with local character and community priorities.

2.4.4 Main Streets

Shandaken has two Main Streets: in the hamlets of Phoenicia and Pine Hill. Originally developed to support the tanning industry and later tourism beginning around the 1870s, many of Phoenicia's main street buildings date back to the 19th century. Phoenicia served as a stop on the Ulster and Delaware Railroad, which brought visitors directly from New York City. The hamlet continues to be a significant tourist destination to the point of being referenced in movies and television.

The hamlet of Pine Hill, similarly, was a stop on the railroad and developed mostly as a tourist destination with several hotels and guest houses along the main street. Only 2 miles away from Belleayre Mountain, the hamlet is a place where skiers can spend the weekend, dine, and have a small mountain town experience, enhanced by many community-sponsored events and activities.

Tourism in the Catskills began to decline in the mid-20th century as newly accessible and affordable commercial air travel took visitors to destinations beyond those reachable by rail or car. Across the region, tourist destinations like Phoenicia and Pine Hill have since struggled. In recent years, however, there has been a renewed interest in the Hudson Valley and outdoor destinations like the Catskills. This trend accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many New York City residents left the city and discovered the area, boosting attention and visitation. Even so, places like Phoenicia and Pine Hill still have fewer visitors than they did during the peak of Catskill tourism.

Commercial activity in Shandaken fluctuates throughout the week, with peak visitation on weekends. Along Phoenicia's Main Street, several commercial properties sit vacant, even as residents express a need for more local retail options and services. Community and stakeholder input indicated that vacancies are primarily due to Main Street's location in the floodplain and the absence of proper wastewater treatment infrastructure for the hamlet.

Flooding events, such as Hurricane Irene in 2011, left an indelible impact on Main Street. In some instances, buildings are dilapidated and in need of repair but flood risk limits the property owners' ability to access financing for repairs. In other cases, a building owner may wish to sell the building and even may have a potential buyer, yet the same flood-related constraints hinder access to purchase loans. Even a couple of buildings in this situation can have impact on Main Street, signaling disinvestment to potential customers and entrepreneurs. Importantly, the Ashokan Watershed Stream Management Program (AWSMP) in collaboration with Ulster County and SLR Consulting have created a plan to remove Phoenicia's Main Street from the flood plain through bridge replacement and engineering of stream banks. This plan strongly recommends that this course of action be pursued by the town.

The lack of wastewater treatment infrastructure in Phoenicia is also a critical challenge for Main Street. Aging septic systems and small lot sizes create barriers to increasing commercial activity in the hamlet. This issue is explored in more detail below (see Section 2.6.3: Wastewater Infrastructure).

Community members also reported that businesses find it difficult to remain open given the limited full-time customer base. Even those businesses that are successful face ongoing challenges in finding and retaining employees, who themselves may not be able to afford housing in the area.

Despite these challenges, there is optimism surrounding new investment such as in the old Pine Hill Arms and the Wellington. Both Phoenicia and Pine Hill hold significant potential due to their unique small-town charm, walkability, proximity to outdoor recreation, and their close-knit and engaged communities. Community members also expressed hope that this comprehensive plan will direct resources toward those critical infrastructure improvements that will facilitate Main Street revitalization and a thriving, locally-driven, stable economy.

2.4.5 Development Constraints

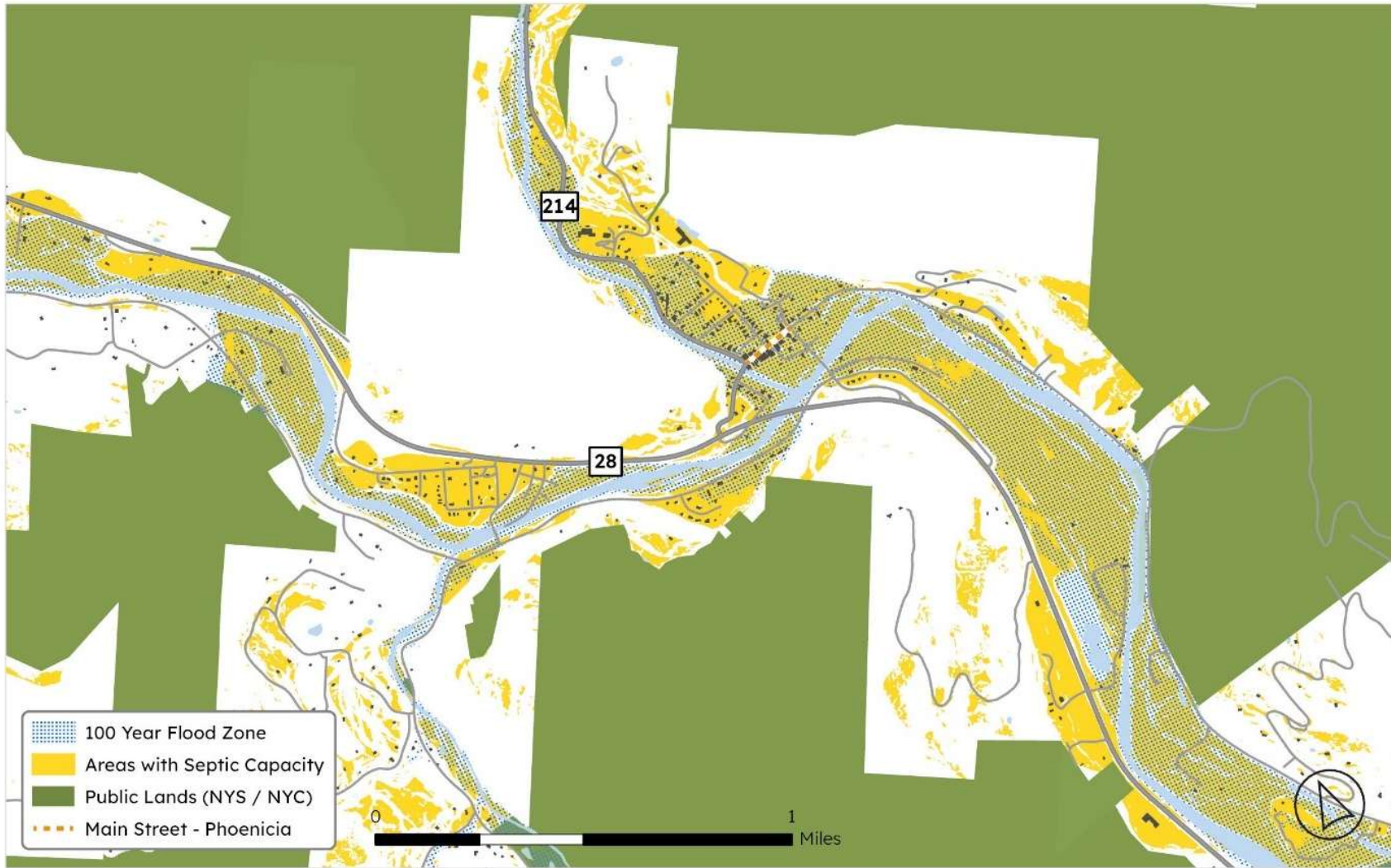
The landscape and regulatory framework described above significantly impact development in Shandaken. Housing and commercial activity are limited to areas outside of protected forests. Development is also limited to areas that do not have steep slopes, where buildings would be susceptible to erosion or landslides and where septic systems cannot be installed. There are also restrictions on development in the floodplain, which covers a significant area of the town's residential areas, especially along Rt 28.

In areas without centralized sewer systems, septic capacity becomes a key concern. The only areas served by a wastewater treatment facility are in and around the hamlet of Pine Hill, where parcels can be connected to the Pine Hill Wastewater Treatment facility (see Section 2.6.3: Wastewater Infrastructure). Soil type also plays a crucial role, influencing drainage, stability, and the suitability for foundations and septic systems. Together, these factors significantly constrain where and how development can occur.

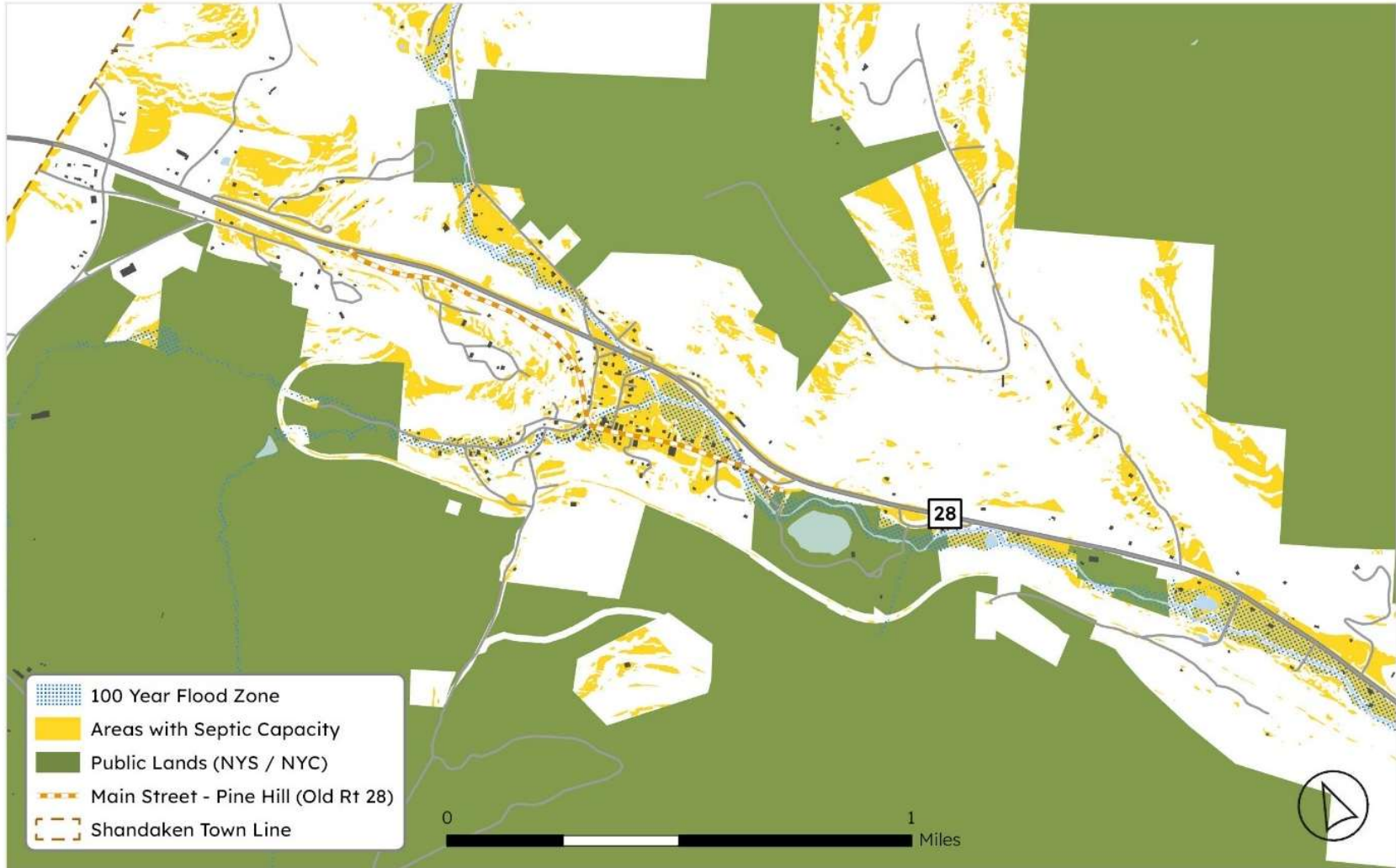
In response to the limited developable land and the need for more affordable housing, this plan includes multiple strategies to increase housing access while carefully protecting the town's unique rural character. These strategies include increased allowances for small-scale multifamily structures, cluster housing, accessory dwelling units, and rehabilitating vacant and dilapidated existing structures. This last strategy builds upon existing efforts: the town's Housing Smart Committee and Ulster County collaborated to conduct an inventory of sites that might be suitable for new housing development. The inventory includes vacant land as well as vacant and dilapidated buildings. According to the inventory, there is a concentration of abandoned structures in Pine Hill, Bushnellsville, Big Indian, and Oliveria. Most of the sites identified in the inventory are privately owned.



Map 10: Development constraints in Shandaken. Due to a combination of factors including floodplains, soil type, steep slopes, and public land, the potential to build new housing and commercial space in Shandaken is limited. For this reason, the recommendations in this plan focus on leveraging existing assets through small-scale development and gentle density.



Map 11: Development constraints in and around the hamlet of Phoenicia. Engineering solutions to bring Main Street out of the floodplain and wastewater treatment solutions could help Phoenicia overcome many of the challenges it has to building and sustaining its commercial center and broader community.



Map 12: Development constraints in the hamlets of Pine Hill and Highmount. Unlike Phoenicia, this westernmost area in Shandaken is mostly not prone to flooding. Because of the Pine Hill Wastewater Treatment Facility, Pine Hill arguably has the most potential of all hamlets to generate new housing and to revive its Main Street.

2.5 Institutions and Events: Public, Arts, Culture, and Community

Local institutions and the organizations they house are critical building blocks of a community. Libraries, community centers, schools, and other assets can help distribute resources, provide services, create a sense of stability, serve local needs for social connection, and bolster community identity and culture.

In many communities, a local school is a central public institution for families and the greater community. The Phoenicia Elementary School was such a place. Its closure in 2025 was a significant loss for the town; during community engagement for this plan, numerous people expressed their grief about the closure and fears of the loss of young families in the area. At the same time, residents spoke about their hopes for the former school building. The town is taking action to assume ownership of the building from the school district and has made a commitment to repurpose the school to meet community needs. Community input for this plan indicated broad consensus to create a community center and affordable housing at the former school site. With the closure of the school, elementary age students now attend Bennette Elementary at the main Onteora campus in Boiceville along with the middle and high school students.

Shandaken is fortunate to have two public libraries: the Morton Memorial Library in Pine Hill and the Phoenicia Library. Like many libraries today, both have evolved into vibrant community and resource centers that extend well beyond traditional book lending. Together, they provide access to media, technology, educational opportunities, and a wide range of cultural and community events. Both libraries distribute food to community members in need.

The Pine Hill Community Center is a beloved gathering place that offers afterschool programming, hosts the farmer's market in the winter, has a resale shop, and hosts a variety of events, concerts, and classes. Nearby, the Town of Shandaken Historical Museum occupies the old Pine Hill school house. The museum is open to the public and offers occasional programs on history of the area.

The Phoenicia Playhouse is one of the town's long standing cultural institutions. Home to the Shandaken Theatrical Society, the non-profit has been active for over 50 years and continues the legacy of the theater itself which was built in 1887. The Phoenicia Festival of the Arts is a multi-day event each fall bringing together the arts and performance community and attracting visitors to the town. Other arts groups such as the Phoenicia Playhouse participate in the event. Mt. Tremper Arts is another local performance space and event venue that hosts residencies, workshops and retreats.

PH2, named for the two hamlets of Phoenicia and Pine Hill, is an informally-organized active group of residents dedicated to the revitalization of the two main streets. The group is currently leading efforts on the redevelopment and reuse of the Wellington, an old hotel on Pine Hill's main street, which is planned to become 11 units of affordable housing with a much-needed ground-floor grocery.

The Phoenicia Farmer’s Market is a weekly event where regional producers sell goods and fresh food. It is hosted outdoors in Phoenicia during the warm months and at the Pine Hill Community Center during the winter. The market is also a community gathering event where neighbors can meet on a weekly basis.

2.6 Municipal Services, Infrastructure, Budget, and Communications

2.6.1 Analysis of Shandaken’s Tax Base

Shandaken’s tax base is residentially dependent, commercially weak, and constrained by public land that cannot be developed. The tax base is modest, with a total taxable value of \$175.7 million in 2025. The tax base is comprised of the following:

- 56% Residential Improved
- 4% Residential Vacant
- 7% Commercial
- 32% Forever Wild Public Land (21% New York State and 11% New York City)

Of the residential properties:

- 56% of revenue is generated by properties with mailing addresses outside of Shandaken
- 44% is generated by owner-occupied homes

This breakdown of tax revenue tells a story about land use and economic vibrancy of the town. Namely, Shandaken has a limited job base and low business activity compared to more economically diverse towns. This reality is shaped in part by infrastructure challenges—such as sewer capacity in flooding in Phoenicia—and the existing zoning code, which restricts commercial and mixed-use activity, effectively capping the potential of local enterprise. This environment creates pressure for residential taxpayers and missed opportunities for non-residential tax revenue.

The large share of government-owned forested land is at the heart of Shandaken’s identity as a town within a wild forest. At the same time, this incredible asset is a major structural constraint for developing a robust tax base. 85% of the land in Shandaken is designated forever wild and therefore generates only 32% of tax revenue.

The low rates of owner occupancy in Shandaken clearly show how the town’s tax base relies heavily on second homeownership and vacation rentals. Throughout community engagement for this plan, community members expressed different views about balancing the needs of full-time and part-time residents. Some were supportive of part-time residency and vacation rentals as critical to the local

economy, bringing wealthier patrons to local businesses. Other full-time residents expressed concern about the lack of affordable housing and exclusive business activity, which they felt are generated by external market pressures.

When examined alongside Shandaken’s existing zoning code, the tax base reveals an imbalance: the levy depends on non-local wealth to sustain the local economy while restricting housing types that would support a resilient workforce and new full-time residents.

The full-time community creates the amenities that visitors enjoy—restaurants, arts and culture, recreational resources, and more—while visitors and part-time residents in turn sustain those local businesses. The town needs solutions that nurture this reciprocal and symbiotic relationships by continuing to invite outside investment while supporting full-time residents with affordable housing, a more flexible business environment, and high-quality infrastructure.

2.6.2 Emergency Services

The Town of Shandaken is served by four local volunteer fire companies, a town-operated ambulance service, and a municipal police department. The Shandaken Police Department is the town’s primary law enforcement agency and employs both full-time and part-time personnel.

The Town Ambulance operates under formal intermunicipal agreements with the Towns of Olive, West Kill, and Lexington to provide emergency medical services through a mutual aid network. It was reported by an EMS professional that, although all EMS personnel are paid staff, recruiting and retaining workers remains challenging due to comparatively lower wages than those offered in nearby communities.

Stakeholder interviews for this plan noted that emergency responders frequently assist visitors using the area’s ski facilities and outdoor recreational resources. While ambulance services bill patients’ insurance providers, the town does not always recover the full cost of service. There is opportunity to work with Belleayre Mountain and ORDA to invest more effectively in emergency response efforts. Strategies are explored in the recommendations section of this plan.

Fire protection is provided by volunteer-run companies and departments: Big Indian-Oliveria Fire District has one company, M.F. Whitney has three companies (Shandaken-Allaben Hose Company, Phoenicia, and Mount Tremper), and the Pine Hill Fire Department, which also serves the Highmount Fire Protection District. In recent years, these departments have experienced a decline in volunteer participation. Community members and town staff have noted that rising housing costs contribute to this challenge by limiting the ability of potential volunteers to afford to live in Shandaken. As existing volunteers grow older, it is critical that the town strategize around ensuring firefighting forces are staffed.

As a mountainous and rural town with significant amounts of winter precipitation and weather, emergency planning efforts are necessary for efforts such as flood response, winter-weather events, emergency evacuation, vehicle crashes, and wilderness search and rescue.

Like many small towns in New York, Shandaken faces ongoing challenges in providing emergency services due to operational costs, limited volunteer availability, long travel distances, and inadequate cellular coverage.

The town hosts an emergency alerts webpage where residents can register for texts and calls for local and New York State alerts. The town also maintains a flood alert system.¹⁹ However, as noted in Section 2.3.7: Cellular Coverage, large areas of the town lack cell service. In some locations, even fire and police personnel are unable to contact the 911 dispatch center, creating additional challenges for emergency response and public safety operations.

2.6.3 Wastewater Infrastructure

Pine Hill Wastewater Treatment Facility

The Pine Hill Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) was built by and is operated by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). The WWTP operates under an existing State Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (SPDES) permit and is licensed to collect and treat up to 500,000 gallons per day. It currently treats an average of about 60,000 gallons per day. The plant serves the Pine Hill Sewer Service Area which includes the Hamlet of Pine Hill along with nearby properties.²⁰ The WWTP also treats waste from other septic systems in Shandaken.²¹

Sewer line extensions were completed in 2014 to connect additional nearby homes and businesses to the plant.

The plant was upgraded with an ultraviolet technology to disinfect effluent.²²

As indicated by the daily average of treated gallons versus the capacity, the plant has additional capacity beyond what is needed by the existing hamlet and the Belleayre Ski Center.

Phoenicia Sewage and Wastewater

Unlike Pine Hill, Phoenicia does not have a centralized wastewater treatment facility. Instead, homeowners and businesses rely on individual septic systems for wastewater treatment. Although the hamlet had an opportunity to develop a treatment plant through funding provided via the Catskill Watershed Corporation (CWC), the project was not actualized due to a series of events as detailed below.

The New Sewage Treatment Infrastructure Program (NIP) was created under the 1997 Watershed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to fund wastewater treatment projects in communities located within New York City's West of Hudson Watershed. Phoenicia was one of

¹⁹ For more information see the town's website: <https://www.shandaken.gov/flood-info/>

²⁰ The map of the service area is available in the Town offices. [Article II: Definitions; Abbreviations - Town of Shandaken, NY](#)

²¹ Information from the CWC's Jason Merwin, May 18, 2026

²² [DEP Announces UV Disinfection Upgrade at Mahopac Wastewater Treatment Plant](#)

seven communities identified as eligible for funding. By 2000, all participating communities had completed wastewater studies and developed preliminary treatment proposals. However, because the initial \$75 million in funding was only sufficient to advance five projects, the proposed Phoenicia wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) was placed on hold.

Additional DEP funding committed through the 2002 Filtration Avoidance Determination (FAD) allowed the Phoenicia project to move forward. In March 2005, the Town entered into a design and construction agreement with the New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC), and Delaware Engineering was retained to design the wastewater collection and treatment system. DEP approved the designs in 2006, but construction bids revealed a shortfall of more than \$6.2 million. To keep the project viable, DEP increased the project block grant from \$11 million to \$17.2 million, fully funding the project.

Despite the availability of full funding, the project stalled when a public referendum to establish the Phoenicia sewer district was defeated in early 2007. DEP preserved the project funding and granted multiple extensions while the Town explored alternative wastewater technologies, including a Vegetated Sand Bed (VSB) system and later a Membrane Bio-Reactor (MBR) treatment plant. Over time, inflation and ongoing engineering and study costs significantly reduced the scope of the project that could be completed within the remaining funds.

In 2010, the CWC assumed responsibility for managing the project and worked with Lamont Engineering to develop a smaller 130,000 gallon-per-day MBR facility focused on serving downtown commercial and residential areas. DEP approved the revised engineering report in November 2011. The Town was then required to pass a resolution moving the project into the design phase within 60 days, originally by January 21, 2012. After an extension request, the Town adopted the resolution on February 6, 2012.

A more critical deadline required the Town to establish a sewer district within six months of commencing design, setting an August 6, 2012 deadline. To meet this requirement, CWC prepared resolutions necessary to schedule a public hearing and referendum. However, following public opposition, the Town Board tabled these resolutions during meetings on May 7 and May 15, 2012, making it impossible to complete the sewer district approval process in time. As a result, the Town failed to satisfy the conditions outlined in DEP's 2010 timetable letter, the CWC-Shandaken agreement, and the EFC design and construction contract. CWC terminated its contract with the Town in June 2012.

After years of delays and multiple missed milestones, the Town was unable to meet its obligations under the MOA and related agreements. DEP has provided more than \$1.9 million that was spent studying and designing wastewater treatment options for Phoenicia. DEP also funded the purchase of land for the treatment facility; the land was later sold by the Town. The Town ultimately defaulted on its agreement with EFC, termination proceedings were initiated, and the remaining block grant funds were withdrawn.

Septic and Wastewater

Fleischmanns also has municipal wastewater treatment plants. The plant is a surface plant. The WWTP and infrastructure are managed under contracts with Cedarwood Environmental Systems.

Outside of the Pine Hill sewer district and Fleischmanns, most homes and small businesses in Shandaken rely on septic systems for wastewater. Because the town is mostly rural and doesn't have high population density, a centralized sewer system is not practical outside of the hamlet centers.

The CWC has funding to support replacement and maintenance programs for septic maintenance and upgrades for failing systems that could contaminate streams and reservoirs.

The Shandaken Septic Maintenance district covers 60 parcels in of the hamlet of Shandaken. With an endowment from the CWC, the town coordinates pumping and repair of individual septic systems for single-family homes. Under district rules in the town code,²³ the town can inspect septic systems, pump tanks, and coordinate repairs or replacements for properties in the district. The district also covers the cost of repairs and/or replacing septic systems so long as there are funds to do so. The district does not fund these activities for new users and/or expansion of existing septic systems.

2.6.4 Municipal Water

Pine Hill Water District

Pine Hill's water supply comes from a natural spring that feeds into two cistern reservoirs. The spring is located near the sewage treatment building on Bonneview Road. Approximately 170 metered properties are served within the district. Water service is funded through a combination of property tax levies, a base water district charge, metered usage fees, and existing fund balances. Because the district relies on a natural spring, water pressure may decrease during periods of drought.

The current metering system is outdated and requires replacement, and the district does not currently have real-time monitoring capabilities to assess water usage or system capacity. Plans are underway to upgrade the metering system and implement leak detection technology for the main water lines. The district also hopes to secure access to additional springs and replace outdated mains. The Pine Hill Water Committee actively meets with the Water Operator to discuss challenges and improvements. The water operator has been

²³ [Article V: Operation, Maintenance and Replacement of Septic Systems - Town of Shandaken, NY](#)

actively improving documentation around the system's maintenance schedule. The district lacks substantial capital funding and needs a long-range capital replacement plan.

Phoenicia Water District

The Phoenicia Water District draws its water supply from the surface waters of the Esopus Creek. The system includes approximately 300 service connections, serving an estimated population of 900 residents. The district is also serviced by a 300,000 gallon water tower.

According to the New York State Department of Health, the water source has a high susceptibility rating for microbial contaminants, nitrates, and industrial solvents, as well as a medium-to-high susceptibility to other industrial contaminants. To ensure water safety, chlorine is added to disinfect the water and eliminate harmful bacteria before it passes through a series of filtration systems.²⁴

As with Pine Hill's district, water service is funded through a combination of property tax levies, a base water district charge, metered usage fees, and existing district fund balances. The Phoenicia Water Committee actively meets with the Superintendent to discuss challenges and improvements. The Superintendent has been actively improving documentation around the system's maintenance schedule.

The district needs to complete the original design of the system to include a second water main over the Esopus ("the loop"), add a third redundant pump to the water plant, and install real-time leak monitoring and metering. The district lacks substantial capital funding and needs a long range capital replacement plan.

Both water districts require the updates described above. Increasing fees would place an added financial burden on ratepayers, particularly lower-income households. One way to help offset these costs is by increasing the number of users through the addition of new housing in the hamlets. Expanding the customer base would spread the cost of the necessary upgrades across a larger population.

2.6.5 Budgetary Analysis

Shandaken, like many small rural communities, faces increasing fiscal pressures as the cost of providing basic municipal services continues to rise faster than inflation. Healthcare premiums, fuel costs, road salt, equipment maintenance, and infrastructure expenses have all increased substantially in recent years. As a result, municipal governments are increasingly challenged to maintain service levels without placing greater pressure on taxpayers. Long-term fiscal sustainability will require continued financial controls work, stronger reporting practices, and more proactive long-range planning around reserves and capital needs. While the Town has made progress in modernizing budgeting and accounting practices, there remains a need to strengthen capital planning and establish more consistent funding of reserves to prepare for future infrastructure replacement and emergency expenditures.

²⁴ Annual Drinking Water Quality Report for 2025, Phoenicia Water District

The Town's 2025 budget reflects many of these broader economic pressures. General Fund expenditures increased by 6.94% over the prior year, while the overall town tax levy increased by 2.55%. Ambulance expenditures alone increased more than 10%, while fuel and diesel costs rose over 17%. Employee health insurance costs remain one of the Town's largest recurring expenditures at approximately \$450,000 in the General Fund and \$415,000 in the Highway Fund.

The budget also reflects the broader impacts of the regional housing affordability crisis on municipal operations and workforce retention. Many public employees and public servants earn salaries that do not meet the rising cost of housing and living in the Catskills region. As housing costs continue to rise faster than wages, small rural communities face growing pressure to balance fiscal constraints with the need to maintain a stable workforce in the public sector who are able to live and work locally.

Shandaken also faces the challenge of deferred capital investment. Due to relatively low property taxes and therefore low revenue, the Town historically has not contributed substantial amounts into capital reserve funds, limiting flexibility when major equipment or infrastructure needs arise. Although the 2025 budget includes modest transfers to capital reserves, these amounts remain relatively small compared to long-term replacement costs.

At the same time, the Town has benefited in recent years from unusually strong but potentially volatile funding sources: Ulster County sales tax revenue, mortgage tax receipts that increased during the strong real estate market of recent years, and short-term rental licensing fees. Mortgage tax revenues are generated when property transactions are financed and recorded, with a portion of those fees distributed back to municipalities through the County. Any slowing in the real estate market will reduce projected mortgage tax revenue. Similarly, sales tax revenues can fluctuate significantly with broader economic conditions and tourism trends, making them difficult to depend upon as a stable long-term solution to rising operating costs. Over time, the Town will likely need to balance service demands through a combination of strategic economic development, broadening the tax base, and careful evaluation of future tax levy increases necessary to sustain municipal operations and infrastructure investment while maintaining affordability for taxpayers.

In addition to these challenges, Shandaken's last revaluation was in 1976. As a result of outdated property values, NY State Department of Taxation and Finance assigns a level to assessment of 12.8%. However, the values of parcels, over time, have created inequities where some property owners pay more or less than their fair share. An updated revaluation would eliminate these disparities.

3. Where Do We Want to Go and What Do We Want to Protect?

A community-driven vision is the foundation of this plan and informs all aspects of it. This vision was shaped by what residents said they value most about living in Shandaken, as well as their hopes for the town’s future. For a full summary of community engagement, see above Section 1.2.3: Community Engagement and Appendix B.

3.1 Community Vision

Shandaken’s future is rooted in a way of life that has long defined the town: caring for land and water, living closely with the beauty and serenity of nature, and nurturing a close-knit community.

As Shandaken evolves, the community strives to guide growth in a way that honors its heritage while acknowledging the inevitability and importance of change. The old and the new exist side by side, not always without tension, but in a continual striving for balance. Residents, organizations, and town officials work together closely, tending carefully to that balance.

The community in Shandaken is grounded in strong neighborly bonds, and rich local culture. Residents value care for one another, civic participation, and a welcoming spirit. From housing affordability to emergency services, healthcare, food access, and mobility, Shandaken strives to be a place where people can live securely from childhood through elderhood.

The future of Shandaken, thriving and resilient, is one where:

- The natural environment—forests, creeks, streams, and open space—is actively protected and stewarded by residents and respected by visitors.
- The community is prepared for climate impacts, flooding, and other natural events.
- Growth is grounded in a sustainable economy that generates affordable and diverse housing options, living-wage jobs, entrepreneurship, and thriving small local businesses.
- Shandaken’s two main streets, in Phoenicia and Pine Hill, are lively, bustling, and walkable destinations that serve local residents and welcome visitors.
- Infrastructure and essential services—including cellular, broadband, transportation, emergency services, and healthcare—meet the needs of all residents.

- Arts, culture, recreation, and opportunities for youth continue to enrich daily life.
- Seniors are supported and able to remain connected and secure in the community they helped build.

The people of Shandaken make decisions with commitment to the wellbeing of people and place. Together, through collaboration and shared responsibility, residents ensure that Shandaken remains a place where nature is protected and where current and future generations can continue to live, work, and thrive in the Catskills.

3.2 Community Goals and Priorities

A shared vision is important, but what does it mean in practice? In this section, the aspirational vision is translated into clear goals, priorities, challenges, and opportunities. These will then be addressed through actionable recommendations outlined Section IV below.

3.2.1 Identifying Top Concerns

In addition to shaping the above vision, the first community survey was designed to unearth the issues that are most pressing and top-of-mind for Shandaken residents. Based on input from 469 members of the community, the five most frequently selected issues were:

1. Environmental Protection

The top priority, selected by over 58% of respondents, was to protect and steward the air, water, land, forests, and wildlife of Shandaken.

2. Internet, Cellular, Broadband

Community members want improved communications infrastructure, especially along Route 28. People expressed concern especially for seniors and others who experience medical emergencies who may not be able to contact emergency services.

3. Housing

There is broad consensus that there is a need for more housing that is affordable to young adults, families with children, members of the workforce, volunteer firefighters and first responders, and seniors. Community members expressed support for fixing up and preserving old buildings. While some people feel short term rentals are good for local tourism and businesses, many feel that they threaten housing affordability and replace full-time neighbors, which in turn harms a sense of community cohesion. People want to see an increase in stable, full-time residency to sustain critical resources like grocery stores, medical facilities, and schools.

4. Climate Change & Disaster Preparedness

People are especially concerned about flooding, especially in the Hamlet of Phoenicia. There is strong support to reduce the Town's cumulative carbon footprint through sustainable building practices, concentration of housing and business activity, and reduction of fragmentation and sprawl.

5. Infrastructure & Public Works

There was a strong focus on increasing capacity for firefighting and emergency services, and strengthening local volunteerism to sustain these and other community resources. Survey respondents also mentioned investments in physical infrastructure such as sidewalks and roads, especially in the hamlet centers.

In addition to these, community input also highlighted the need for a sustainable economic development strategy, emergency services, healthcare, and opportunities for youth and seniors.

Across many perspectives and topics, common themes emerged, indicating that residents share the following goals:

1. Protecting the environment and designing with nature in mind.
2. Preserving and enhancing the unique character of Shandaken.
3. Creating diverse and affordable housing options.
4. Nurturing an economy where everyone can thrive.
5. Leveraging investment for local benefit.
6. Rehabilitating dilapidated buildings across the town and bringing Main Streets to life.

3.2.2 Balancing Priorities

The second community survey was designed to better understand the practical and tangible meaning behind the ideas and values expressed in the first survey and during engagement activities. These topics were also explored during the mid-project public events.

While many community members shared common goals, this second phase of community engagement explored what those ideas mean in everyday terms and how residents would like to see them reflected in future policies and development decisions.

This process unearthed the following questions, revealing tensions with which the community is grappling:

- How can Shandaken preserve what makes it unique – its small-town feel and sense of wildness – while expanding the community so it can thrive for generations to come?
- How can Shandaken leverage outside investment for local benefit?
- How can Shandaken increase its presence of full-time residents within an economy that is largely driven by tourism?
- How can Shandaken fund public infrastructure and meet community needs without intensive growth?

Answers to these questions broadly fell under the following key themes:

- **Protecting the environment and designing with nature in mind** was ranked as a top priority for housing, tourism, and economic development. Residents want responsible regulations that guide growth in a way that is not at odds with environmental integrity, while offering enough flexibility so that residents can take initiative to maintain and build upon their assets. Policies that could support these priorities might include streamlined permitting for homeowners, flexibility for small projects, and clear standards to ensure new development respects public health and the natural environment without placing undue burden on local residents.
- **Scale matters.** With very few exceptions, most residents do not want megadevelopments, sprawl, large corporate businesses, or big box stores anywhere in town. Instead, they prefer gentle density²⁵ that honors the natural landscape and small-town character, with concentration and colocation of restaurants, shops, lodging, and multifamily housing in the hamlet centers, alongside appropriate spacing, clustering, and low-impact businesses in more rural areas.
- **Rehabilitation and repurpose of vacant or dilapidated buildings** is a priority across the town. Many noted that this strategy is an effective way to meet many of Shandaken’s aspirations for more housing, more services, Main Street revitalization, and environmentally responsible development.
- **People want the economy to bring direct benefit to locals.** Some residents shared concerns about outside economic interests and their influence on Shandaken’s character. Most people welcome tourism as an integral part of the economy, but they worry about it pricing out locals or driving up costs. This affects short term rental policy, as well; there is an overwhelming sentiment that lodging and hotels should be encouraged in hamlet centers, while short-term rentals in residential buildings should be limited to local homeowners who seek to leverage tourism to offset their own housing costs.

These themes are expressed differently across the many aspects of life in Shandaken. Input highlighted how residents connect these values and priorities to specific topics, concerns, and opportunities throughout the town, such as:

Housing

There is strong local support for a greater diversity of housing options and increased affordability across the spectrum of income and family constellations. Rehabilitating existing structures and mitigating dilapidation is a top priority for the community. There is strong support for multifamily residential and mixed-use buildings in Pine Hill and Phoenicia, as well as small scale, low-density opportunities (ADUs, duplexes, and triplexes), tiny homes, and clusters of homes with shared garden space in other areas. Residents generally share a strong preference against oversized development patterns such as suburbanization and sprawl, high-density, or “McMansions” in the town.

²⁵ Gentle density refers to low-impact and gradual increases to the housing stock without altering the physical scale or character of a neighborhood. This type of housing can create affordable opportunities for working and middle class residents. See: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/gentle-density-can-save-our-neighborhoods/>.

Although some expressed a desire to preserve character and design in a way that honors existing aesthetics, others are proponents of loosening design guidelines to allow for new green building materials, off-grid housing, and modern technology, also noting that uniformity of design may take away from the diversity of character that makes Shandaken unique.

Tourism

People in Shandaken are overall supportive of tourism activity as a core economic driver, with the caveat that tourism should deliver local economic benefit. Some expressed the need for opportunities for locals to invest and generate income from tourism assets, alongside concerns about catering to tourists over meeting local needs. Outdoor recreation is the form of tourism identified as most aligned with the town's character, as well as arts and cultural events.

Residents want to ensure that visitors are respectful of the local community and environment, indicating a need to mitigate adverse impacts such as pollution, noise, and rubbish. Community members also want measures enacted so that locals have access to housing that is affordable, noting that short-term rentals have become a threat to local housing options.

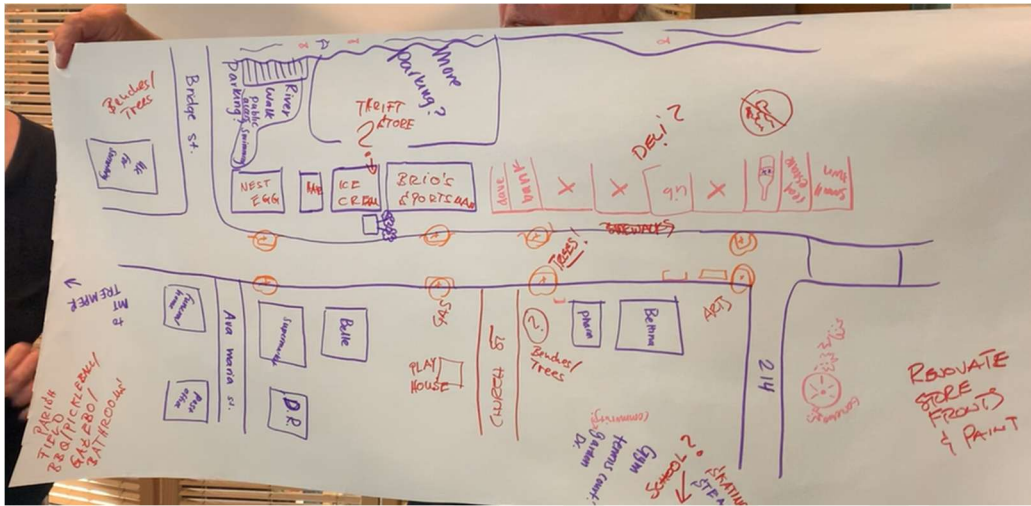
Economic Development

Community members expressed strong support for small, local businesses and opposition to chain stores and franchises. Many emphasized the importance of ensuring that new development aligns with Shandaken's small-town and rural character. Environmental protection was also a key concern, and people stressed that economic and commercial growth should not come at the expense of the natural environment. Striking a balance between meeting local needs and accommodating tourists was another common theme.

Community members emphasized the need for affordable, locally relevant options and posed questions about how to leverage tourism spending to benefit the community. Many also supported concentrating new commercial development activity in existing hamlets, reusing vacant buildings, and prioritizing infill development. Additionally, input highlighted the need for living-wage, year-round employment and recognized the arts as an important contributor to the local economy.

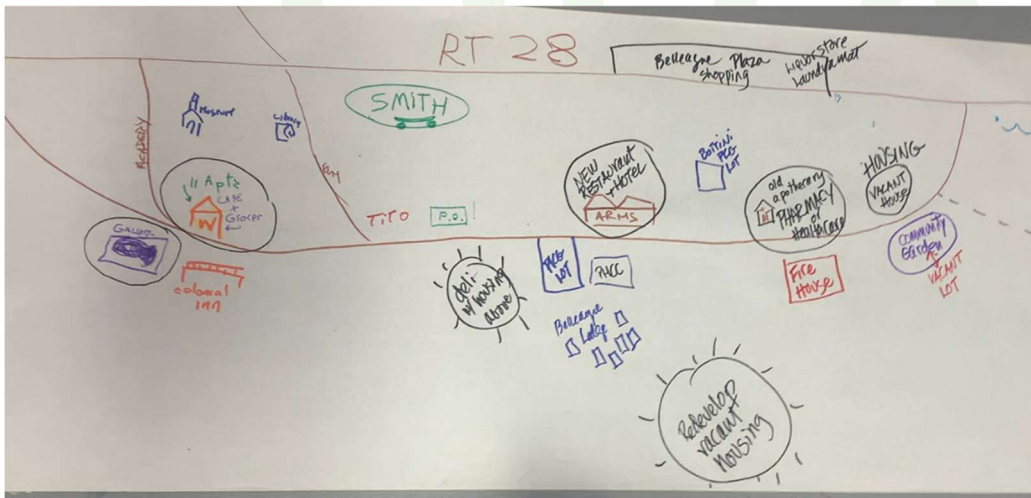
Main Streets

Residents identified the revitalization of Shandaken's Main Street hamlets as a central priority for the town's future. In both Pine Hill and Phoenicia, community members expressed a strong desire to restore vitality to historic commercial corridors through storefront activation, rehabilitation of existing buildings, and the reuse of vacant or underutilized structures. Residents broadly support creating



more affordable and diverse housing opportunities within the hamlets, including accessory dwelling units (ADUs), cluster housing, small-scale multifamily buildings, boarding houses, and mixed-use development along Main Streets.

In Pine Hill, there was support for densifying the hamlet core, especially as Pine Hill is served by a centralized wastewater treatment facility. In Phoenicia, there is broad consensus around the need to renew discussions around wastewater treatment and water quality infrastructure needed to ensure the long-term vitality of the hamlet.



In both hamlets, residents highlighted the need for improvements to streets, sidewalks, bridges, parking, building safety, and zoning allowances that would create safer, more walkable, and economically vibrant civic centers.

Image 1: Community maps of Main Street in Phoenicia (top) and Pine Hill (bottom) from public meetings in July 2025.

The Future of Route 28

Feedback about development along Route 28 leans toward cautious and limited revitalization of existing structures. Residents overall value the scenic byway designation and wish to maintain it. Many support reviving existing businesses, and some advocate for adding essential services like gas stations, grocery stores, or restaurants, especially if locally-owned and thoughtfully designed to fit the rural character.

Route 28 is generally seen as more appropriate for large-footprint businesses than quiet hamlets, but large-scale or chain developments and strip malls are widely opposed. There is a strong desire to revitalize existing vacant or rundown structures before building new ones, and there is support for multifamily housing through adaptive reuse. Residents also expressed a need to improve safety along the corridor, noting crash incidents and visitor traffic during peak tourism.

The Hollows

The Hollows are forested, sparsely populated areas outside of the hamlet centers. Community members commented that any development should preserve the Hollows as quiet and wooded. Those in favor of more housing made up the largest group of responses, but with clear specifications: small scale, low-density opportunities and clusters of homes with shared garden space. Some community members expressed caution about development where there are flood risks, while others shared the need to protect the peace, quiet, or environmental integrity of the area through enforceable noise and pollution ordinances.

4. How Do We Get There?

In this section, the ideas and priorities identified through community engagement are translated into specific strategies and actions that the Town Board, local committees and organizations, and residents can use to get things done (see above Section 1.3: Community Guide).

This part of a comprehensive plan often introduces more technical language, reflecting the tools and processes required to implement change. While the wording may be more formal, the intent remains rooted in community values. The recommendations that follow are designed to make those values actionable, with added context and explanations provided where needed to support clarity and understanding.

I. Land use and the built environment: How can local laws and ordinances support Shandaken’s vision and values?

1. Update the town’s zoning code to generate new development that aligns with community priorities.
 - 1.1 Revise land use, density, height, setback, design, and occupancy standards to better align with community priorities. These recommendations are designed to facilitate appropriately scaled development, prevent sprawl, lower construction costs, and make new housing affordable and financially viable while maintaining community character. The following actions are recommended:
 - a. The zoning code should encourage appropriately scaled development that fits with local character and supports energy efficiency. Adopt guidelines to support these goals, which may include maximum lot coverage, maximum height, or maximum square footage size²⁶ for new single-family homes. These decisions should be informed by community input, market analysis, and energy standards; smaller homes are more likely to be affordable and energy efficient.
 - b. In a similar vein, increase density allowances within Phoenicia and Pine Hill hamlet centers, in accordance with community input (see Section 3.2.2 of this plan for community preferences with regards to density allowances) to reduce

²⁶ According to the Sustainable Development Code: “The average house size in the U.S. has increased by more than seven hundred square feet since 1973. While large homes may be beneficial to or desired by individual owners, they shift costs to the public and local government. Older, smaller homes may be demolished and replaced with larger homes that disturb the character of the neighborhood. Large homes also produce more greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, which contribute to climate change. Municipalities can implement ordinances that set a limit on the size of single-family homes to mitigate these harmful effects. Typically, these ordinances seek to limit the spread of ‘McMansions.’ McMansions are large houses in suburban neighborhoods that are regarded as oversized in relation to the character of the neighborhood.” See “Establish Maximum Size of Single-Family Residences” on the SDC website: <https://sustainablecitycode.org/brief/establish-maximum-size-of-single-family-residences-7/>

fragmentation and sprawl, consistent with climate-smart development and community preferences against suburban development patterns.

- c. Evaluate and propose new dimensional and area requirements in alignment with community input, including reducing minimum lot sizes and setbacks. Cumulative impacts should first be thoroughly evaluated through a build-out analysis during rezoning efforts. Evaluation should assess the number of affected lots and potential effects on forest fragmentation and wildlife habitat alongside benefits to housing choice and affordability. Based on these findings, adopt targeted zoning amendments allowing reduced lot sizes and reduced setback and side yard requirements in hamlet centers and where environmental impacts are minimal. Amendments may include:
 - i. Reductions where such changes would support compact, mixed-use, and walkable development in designated hamlet centers while reducing environmental disturbance in outlying areas and hollows.
 - ii. Flexible standards in environmentally sensitive or constrained areas where flexibility would reduce land clearing, grading, and environmental impacts while improving siting of on-site wastewater and well systems.
 - iii. Reductions in minimum lot sizes and setbacks for residential uses across the town where such changes would support affordable housing while upholding environmental protection goals.
 - iv. Allowances for multi-family housing, mixed-use, and reduced lot sizes in areas supported by municipal water and sewer infrastructure to maximize public utilities, provide diverse housing options, and reduce pressure on natural resources.
- d. Establish conservation subdivision provisions to guide residential development in a manner that protects the natural landscape while increasing housing opportunities. Conservation subdivisions should be designed to cluster development on a defined portion of a parcel, preserving the majority of the lot as permanently protected forest or open space. Consider allowing additional units, duplexes, triplexes, and quadplexes within conservation subdivisions, provided the concentrated building footprint preserves a significantly greater percentage of contiguous open space than a conventional single-family layout. Require conservation subdivision design for major residential subdivisions outside hamlet centers. Conservation subdivisions and clustered development are a key strategy to balance growth with preservation, allowing housing while protecting open space and natural resources.
- e. Consider zoning tools, such as floating zones or overlay districts, that allow increased residential density on sites meeting defined criteria: the site should have a minimum acreage and meet environmental performance standards (i.e. limits on land clearing; clustering of development). Increased density for multi-family or attached housing types should be granted on the condition that the project provides a significant percentage of permanently affordable or workforce housing.

Linking increased density to the provision of affordable housing is a critical policy tool to ensure that development directly contributes to solving the local housing shortage.

- f. Allow cluster housing (see 4.2 below). When determining the appropriate density of cluster housing in areas not served by a sewer district, consider flood resilience and defer to septic and water requirements set forth by the Department of Health to protect public health while enabling additional housing units where feasible.
- g. Adopt clear and objective design guidelines for hamlet centers that focus on building form, scale, and relationship to the street. Guidelines should allow multi-unit development that is compatible with existing hamlet scale, development patterns, and diversity of architecture. Standards should be predictable and straightforward and should support affordable housing without altering overall rural character.
- h. Reduce setback requirements for community-serving land uses such as playgrounds and community spaces to better support quality of life and the public realm. Ensure setbacks and site planning also allow for small public gathering spaces and public art installations where appropriate, such as in Phoenicia and Pine Hill hamlet centers, fostering community interaction.
- i. Ensure zoning and building requirements are clear, consistent, and easy to interpret (e.g., clarify accessory structure requirements). Clarifying zoning and building requirements will improve efficiency, reduce confusion, and support better outcomes.

1.2 Encourage adaptive reuse of existing buildings and sites by considering the following:

- a. It is recommended to significantly reduce or remove parking minimums in hamlet centers. Consider alternative management strategies to meet parking needs. For example, evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of in-lieu-of-parking fees and allocate those fees to a transportation fund, or transportation demand management plans (TDMPs) for projects that exceed a designated threshold. A TDMP may include shared parking, assessment of on-street capacity, seasonal demand, and/or multimodal access.
- b. Encouraging reuse of existing structures is one of the most efficient and cost-effective ways to expand housing and economic opportunity. To encourage reuse of existing buildings and vacant structures, allow conversions of existing vacant structures to multifamily residential or mixed-use development provided septic approvals are met.
- c. To meet the goal of this Recommendation (1.2), there is a need to increase the financial feasibility of rehabilitating vacant and dilapidated structures. The cost of building rehabilitation often exceeds the value of allowable uses in existing zoning. To meet the community goals of preventing further dilapidation and increasing housing opportunities, the Town should

create an overlay district or special use ordinance²⁷ to allow mixed-use or higher-intensity residential uses in lower-density zones. Flexibility in zoning to make rehabilitation financially feasible is essential in a town with older building stock. For example, when considering rehabilitation of a vacant, abandoned, or at-risk structure in a low-density residential zone, consider allowances for additional housing units or low-impact commercial use (see Recommendation 2.2 below for definition) to support the financial feasibility of rehabilitation and continued/restored occupancy. Criteria for this permit could include an extended period of vacancy or demonstrated infeasibility of rehabilitating the structure within the ordinances of the base zoning. Criteria could also include structural, health, or safety concerns. Where feasible, consider requirements for applicants to demonstrate that such code compliance challenges are not the result of intentional neglect or other deliberate actions taken by the property owner to trigger a special use permit.

- d. Encourage adaptive reuse projects to incorporate energy-efficient retrofits, including insulation upgrades, renewable energy, and water-saving measures.
- e. Allow flexible, mixed-use redevelopment of previously developed sites along Route 28. If a proposed development includes significant changes to existing building footprints, the development should trigger Scenic Byway Overlay District requirements (see 1.3 below).

1.3 Establish a Scenic Byway Overlay District along Route 28 to protect and enhance the corridor's scenic viewshed while maintaining flexibility for context-sensitive development (see 1.2.c above). The overlay should regulate building placement, height, signage, lighting, vegetation clearing, and parking location. The code should continue to allow temporary enhancements in alignment with community character such as Christmas lighting and others.

1.4 Continue to protect dark skies by regulating outdoor lighting to preserve night scenery in all areas of the town, including in the Scenic Byway Overlay District and including an effort to adjust existing streetlights throughout the hamlets to meet the dark sky policy. Replacement programs for existing lighting should be explored.

1.5 In reviewing any special use permit, the planning board should encourage and look favorably upon projects that include energy efficiencies and green building design including but not limited to Certified Passivhaus Design, LEED Zero Energy Certification, geothermal (ground source heat pump) or passive solar heating, and natural habitat preservation.

²⁷ See Glossary of Terms (Part 1, Section 1.4)

2. Allow and encourage a range of commercial enterprises throughout the town while protecting quality of life and environmental assets.

- 2.1 In Phoenicia and Pine Hill, allow ground floor commercial uses, such as retail and food services, along Main Street. Streamline permitting and review.
- 2.2 Rather than determine suitable uses, regulate activity (e.g. commercial, manufacturing, industrial) based on measurable impacts, such as noise, lighting, and environmental pollution. Include specific restrictions or requirements in any permit granted for commercial uses.
- 2.3 It is recommended that the Town adopt a local noise ordinance establishing clear and objectively enforceable standards for residential areas. The goal of the ordinance should be to balance residents' quality of life and quiet enjoyment of their property with the understanding that some level of temporary and informal neighborhood activity is a normal part of community life. Accordingly, the ordinance should include reasonable quiet hours and should address persistent or excessive disturbances to while still allowing for ordinary activities such as occasional family gatherings, celebrations, and other customary residential uses. Consider an escalating response strategy for persistent disturbances, for example beginning with a warning followed by escalating fees upon repeat offenses. Consider community mediation in partnership with Ulster County for situations that are creating conflict between neighbors.
- 2.4 Clarify the procedure for commercial venues hosting events as part of their business operations, including when an event is considered an accessory use or whether additional permitting is required. Guidelines will protect the quality of life, peace, and quiet for residents; make it more feasible for event venues to conduct business as expectations will be clearly stated; and reduce confusion and permitting timelines. Adopt clear guidelines about the allowable sizes, times of day, and frequencies of events that a commercial enterprise can host based on measurable impacts such as noise and pollution. Distinguish between venues located along Main Street in hamlet centers of Phoenicia and Pine Hill and venues located in the hollows in a way that is aligned with the unique characteristics of each. For example, consider solutions like setbacks or noise barriers in the hollows. In addition, ensure guidelines do not have adverse impacts on the vibrancy of Main Streets while still protecting quality of life for residents in Pine Hill and Phoenicia.
- 2.5 Use the town's Natural Resource Inventory to identify critical resource areas and low-impact areas. In low-impact areas where there are minimal or no critical natural resources (to be defined upon completion of the NRI), such as previously developed lands or areas with minimum ecological sensitivity, develop clear permitting for development. It is recommended to determine these areas during the rezoning process with additional community input.
- 2.6 Adopt a formula business ordinance under which a formula business, restaurant, or retail store (i.e. large national chain or franchise) is prohibited.

- 2.7 Through land use, policy, and funding pursuits, support commercial spaces for local, cooperative, small business incubators, and shared facilities such as commercial kitchens to support value-added locally produced goods. Consider zoning flexibility and building density bonuses as a way to incentivize and encourage space for such small, locally owned businesses in new developments.
- 2.8 Work with the county government to match the needs of small local businesses with county services.
- 2.9 Continue to regulate the visual impacts of parking through ordinances. It is recommended to include requirements for tree ratios, as shade can significantly reduce heat production and improve aesthetic value of parking.
- 2.10 Allow hotels and guesthouses in Phoenicia and Pine Hill, specifically along Main Street. Determine specific boundaries for where these uses can be located with input from the community that will be impacted by them.
- 2.11 Allow lodging and bed and breakfast uses as an accessory use to a primary dwelling as a Type II home occupation throughout the town. Require a special use permit.
- 2.12 Allow hotels to have food establishments that serve non-guests.

3. Promote sustainability and climate preparedness through development standards, incentives, and intergovernmental coordination.

- 3.1 Adopt ordinances, informed by applicable international and state codes, to support low-impact and off-grid development, including but not limited to composting toilets, solar energy systems, and greywater reuse.
- 3.2 Adopt guidelines for buildings located in the floodplain that follow flood resilient construction standards in accordance with New York State regulations. Invest in public education with regards to flood and disaster preparedness and mitigation strategies. The town floodplain administrator will continue to offer public assistance around flood related construction.
- 3.3 Collaborate with Ulster County and relevant organizations to support projects that deconstruct and recycle building materials.
- 3.4 Adopt the NYSERDA Unified Solar Permit.
- 3.5 Pursue Climate Smart silver certification and any future certification set forth by New York State.
- 3.6 Prioritize tree preservation and natural buffers during site planning and development review. Prioritize native species and long-term ecological health and consider adopting a native plant requirement or minimum on any new development site. The town and the Conservation Advisory Committee (CAC) should develop educational materials and opportunities for the public to learn about the benefits of native plantings.
- 3.7 Collaborate with neighboring Catskill towns, the Catskill Watershed Corporation (CWC), AWSMP, and the New York State Department of Health to identify and support lower-cost wastewater treatment alternatives, including composting toilets,

graywater filtration, and compact or decentralized systems, in areas without access to municipal water and sewer, in order to improve housing feasibility while protecting public health and environmental resources. This may include advocating for pilot programs or regulatory flexibility where appropriate.

- 3.8 To support community goals of reducing carbon emissions, minimizing ecological impact, and maintaining a peaceful and quiet environment, consider adopting local regulations to limit or phase out the use of gas-powered leaf blowers and snow blowers in favor of quieter, low-emission alternatives. Consider safety, accessibility, and emergency conditions when proposing regulation. Several communities across the state and country have adopted such regulations; best practices are available and should be followed

II. Housing: What approaches to housing support Shandaken’s vision and values?

4. Promote the creation of new and diverse housing opportunities throughout the town that are affordable, consistent with community character, and responsive to local needs.

- 4.1 Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) are one of the most effective and immediate ways to increase housing options by utilizing existing infrastructure, having minimal impact on neighborhood character. Accordingly, allow ADUs on all lots with an existing or proposed principal structure. Exempt ADUs from residential density calculations in all zoning districts, provided the ADU remains accessory and subordinate to the primary use of the property. Reduce barriers to building ADUs by addressing setbacks, parking requirements, number of entrances, and others. Facilitating the creation of ADUs in this way will enable homeowners to create housing quickly, support local wealth-building for residents, unlock opportunities for multigenerational living, and provide workforce housing with minimal neighborhood disruption.
- 4.2 Permit residential cluster cottages or cottage courts of 3-4 units in all single-family zones, while prioritizing already cleared parcels and maintaining regulations for maximum tree coverage. Cluster cottages provide appropriately scaled, lower-impact housing that fits well within the Town’s character. Create clear standards to ensure cluster cottages are centered around shared open space, maintain neighborhood scale, limit building height, and include site-appropriate access and parking.
- 4.3 Where appropriate, allow a diverse range of housing types that support affordability at different price points, including affordable multifamily ownership opportunities, manufactured homes, tiny homes and tiny home villages, and other options.
- 4.4 Regulations for multifamily housing should include strict standards aligned with community priorities of increasing access to affordable housing while minimizing environmental impact (e.g. see Recommendation 1.1.d: conservation subdivision).

Expanding the range of allowable housing types is essential to meeting the needs of residents across income levels and life stages. This flexibility will help address both affordability and demographic challenges.

- 4.5 Market-rate development alone is unlikely to meet community housing needs. Accordingly, it is good practice to consider adopting an affordable set-aside policy with permanent affordability for any development that creates a certain number of units, including tiny home or manufactured home parks, subdivisions, and multifamily ownership and rental opportunities. Consider a requirement for accessible ground-floor units for seniors and people with disabilities.
- 4.6 In order to meet community priorities of increasing housing availability while increasing opportunities for residents to economically benefit from tourism, it is recommended to continue evaluation and updates of short-term rental regulations. Continue to cap the number of STR permits allowed in the town. Clarify definitions in the zoning code differentiating between guesthouses, accessory-use short-term rentals, bed and breakfasts, hotels, and other lodging uses. See Appendix C.1 for a list of strategies rooted in best practices for communities in New York State.
- 4.7 Ensure that increases in residential zoning density and reductions in minimum lot sizes are pursued in conjunction with clear and enforceable short-term rental regulations, such that newly created housing units are used for long-term residential occupancy rather than transient lodging.
- 4.8 To increase affordability, consider developing and expanding programs to reduce household costs such as utilities and energy costs. Work with Ulster County to create and expand weatherization assistance programs, partner with state programs on energy upgrades, and support community solar. Prioritize assistance for income-qualifying households. These initiatives align with actions in the Climate Smart and Ulster County Housing Smart certification programs (See Recommendations 4.9 and 3.5).
- 4.9 Pursue Ulster County Housing Smart Silver certification by 2028 and Platinum certification by 2031.²⁸

5. Pursue tax mechanisms that support local homeowners.

- 5.1 Conduct a reassessment of property values in the Town. It is recommended to establish protections for low- and moderate-income homeowners (see Recommendation 5.2). Upon reassessment, adjust the tax rate to protect long-term residents from significant increases that make monthly housing costs unaffordable.
- 5.2 Advocate for a circuit breaker property taxation mechanism vis-à-vis New York State. Support NYS Senate Bill S3303 and others that would facilitate fair property taxation based on income.²⁹ Under a circuit breaker program, qualifying households would receive a property tax rebate or credit.

²⁸ See the Ulster County Housing Smart website: <https://hsci.ulstercountyny.gov/>

²⁹ See the proposed Bill S3303 on the NY Senate website: <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2025/S3303>

- 5.3 Consider the feasibility of establishing a dedicated housing fund or community preservation fund in Shandaken. Identify revenue sources including, where authorized by state law, real estate transfer taxes or comparable mechanisms.
- 5.4 Adopt the NYS property tax exemption of newly constructed or converted rental multiple dwellings (RPL 421-p) to reduce financial barriers to creating new rental opportunities in town, including ADUs, for the purpose of creating housing opportunities that are affordable and providing wealth-building opportunities for homeowners.
- 5.5 Consider adopting existing state-enabled real property tax law exemptions (see Appendix C.2) that support affordability for full-time residents, including but not limited to the following (detailed descriptions included in Appendix):
 - First-Time Homebuyers of Newly Constructed Homes (RP-457)
 - Capital Improvements to a One- or Two-Family Residential Property (RP-421-f)
 - If adopted by NYS, opt in to the 10% exemption for full-time residents set forth by Ulster County.

6. Rehabilitate, redevelop, and adaptively reuse existing structures and previously developed land (grayfields).

- 6.1 Allow single-family conversions to 2-4 family structures.
- 6.2 Allow multifamily housing in any zone that allows hotels.
- 6.3 Create strategies to address vacancies and dilapidation. Strategies may include:
 - a. Study the conditions that have led to vacancies to inform interventions. For example, vacancies may be due to cost of maintenance, estate disputes, bankruptcies, infrastructure, or other reasons. Efforts to address vacancies should consider underlying causes, as unique conditions require different interventions. For example, a vacancy tax will not incentivize productive use if the vacancy is due to underlying infrastructural challenges; in this instance an additional tax may add a financial barrier to addressing the vacancy.
 - b. Establish a vacant building registry to track underused, vacant, abandoned, and/or dilapidated properties.
 - c. Consider a vacant building fee to incentivize rehabilitation and generate funding to support the registry and associated code enforcement costs. A waiver should be available to property owners who can demonstrate efforts to rehabilitate and bring the structure into productive use.
 - d. Consider a program or policy to encourage or require art installations in vacant street-facing windows.

III. Local economy: What approaches to economic development will support Shandaken's vision and values?

7. Encourage sustainable economic development that produces minimal environmental impacts.
 - 7.1 Adopt the term “recreational nature tourism” as a priority economic focus for Shandaken, defined as tourism based on activities in natural ecosystems such as forests, lakes, and rivers (e.g. hiking, fishing, cross-county skiing, nature photography, etc.) This framework should guide evaluation of tourism-related proposals, grant applications, and other funding opportunities, and serve as a benchmark to decide which activities do not align with local priorities (see Section 3.2: Community Goals and Priorities under Part 3 of the plan, above). Regulation of tourism activities and projects should lead to preservation and long-term health of the natural systems in which the activities take place and the people who live there. Other actions pursued based on this Plan (e.g. lodging and short-term rentals, transportation, visitor management, etc.) should be consistent with this core principle.
 - 7.2 Work with neighboring towns and Ulster County Tourism to create strategies that leverage tourism to increase local, living wage employment opportunities through ecological stewardship. Partner with regional and state organizations and agencies such as DEC, DEP, Catskill Park, the Catskill Center, ASWMP, Catskill Mountainkeepers, and others. Employment opportunities could include forest gardens, value-added forest products, shared or community kitchens, and cooperatives. These are practical ways to align ecological health with the local economy and strengthen long-term resilience.
 - 7.3 Work with county and state agencies, private landowners, and conservation organizations to ensure that research and best practices are guiding forest management. Forests in the region face challenges such as deer overpopulation, invasive species, and the long-term effects of fire suppression and hands-off management. Because of that, conservation cannot be understood as simply leaving land alone. Long-term ecological health depends on active stewardship and a positive human presence. Employment opportunities exist in forest management and other stewardship roles.
 - 7.4 Adopt strict environmental guidelines for new lodging and tourism facilities. These may include open space provisions, minimizing tree clearing, minimizing impervious surfaces, clustering development on a minimal percentage of any parcel, strict recycling and food waste / composting requirements, and green building requirements.
 - 7.5 Encourage and invest in infrastructure that increases access to and safety of alternative modes of transportation, including walking, biking, ride sharing (e.g. ZipCar or similar), micro-transit, the increase and expansion of public bus service, and others. Improve sidewalks within hamlet centers, introduce traffic calming measures and signage between hamlet centers for safe walking and biking (see Recommendations 9.13 and 14.3 below). Support and promote existing ride share services, such as Catskill Neighbors.
 - 7.6 The Town should strive to create municipal parking in Phoenicia and Pine Hill as a long-term goal.

- 7.7 With the purpose of protecting ecological assets and human safety, work with Ulster County and New York State to develop a visitor transportation plan to identify and address seasonal and peak demand. Plan elements should include shuttle or transit options, trailhead access, pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements, and coordination with relevant New York State agencies, nonprofit organizations, and tourism entities.
- 7.8 Ban drive-through businesses throughout the town. Drive-throughs encourage idling cars and generate unnecessary emissions.
- 7.9 Support local artisans, farm-to-table businesses, and seasonal markets to strengthen the local economy.
- 7.10 Work with the Ulster County Film Office to develop a permitting process for the film industry, including fees, to generate revenue for the town.
- 7.11 It is recommended to ban water harvesting for commercial purposes throughout the town. This is because extracting surface water from streams and springs potentially endangers public drinking water supplies and aquatic habitat. Similarly, bottling operations from wells may affect others who draw their water from the same aquifer. This recommendation is in alignment with the community's commitment to sustainability and ecological health.

8. Encourage local ownership and work to retain circulation of dollars within the local economy.

- 8.1 Support cooperative or community-owned business models.
- 8.2 Adopt right-of-first-refusal policies that prioritize allocation or sale of public land to a community land trust (CLT), local organizations, and nonprofit owners or developers.
- 8.3 Incentivize redevelopment or reuse of vacant commercial and residential buildings for local businesses or affordable housing. Incentives from the town might include tax abatements or fee waivers.
- 8.4 Adopt tax mechanisms and/or fees that discourage prolonged vacancies and reward investments that benefit residents and the local economy.
- 8.5 Work with partners such as Ulster County, local banks, and the Phoenicia Business Association to identify strategies that reduce operating costs for local businesses. For example, consider programs that support cost-sharing through economies of scale, such as by connecting local businesses with wholesale suppliers (e.g. operating supplies, basic ingredients, smallware, etc.), increasing competitiveness of local businesses within the broader economy.
- 8.6 Work with partners (see 8.5) to support tourism-oriented businesses to calibrate off-season business in service of local residents in order to mitigate challenges of temporal ebbs and flows of tourism and to provide essential goods and services to full-time residents.

IV. Infrastructure and Municipal Services: How can Shandaken improve and maintain public infrastructure and services without undue tax burden on residents?

9. Develop and maintain key infrastructure through strategic projects, policies, and partnerships with relevant government agencies and organizations.
 - 9.1 Relocate the Town Hall and all associated town services out of the flood plain. Consider co-location with Ulster County Highway Department.
 - 9.2 Improve signage to signal entry points to Phoenicia and Pine Hill to drive visitors downtown from Route 28. Signage should be colorful, bright, and highly visible, designed by local artists, and should highlight specific offerings along Main Streets.
 - 9.3 Restart discussions with the Catskill Watershed Corporation (CWC) and New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) about funding a wastewater treatment plant in the hamlet of Phoenicia, given changes in community sentiments and needs.
 - 9.4 A comprehensive flood mitigation strategy for Phoenicia is essential to protect residents, businesses, and the long-term viability of the hamlet. Work with the Ashokan Watershed Stream Management Program (AWSMP) to develop a long-term flood reduction strategy for Phoenicia. Implement climate adaptation strategies to remove critical assets from the floodplain, including Phoenicia's Main Street and the former Phoenicia School. Work with private property owners to assess tradeoffs and identify fair compensation to support private contributions to public safety. Clearly communicate the consequences of inaction, including loss of flood insurance eligibility, increasing costs of insurance and repairs, economic decline of Phoenicia's Main Street small businesses, and future dilapidation of floodplain buildings. Identify buildings in the floodplain that cannot currently be financed or renovated due to flood exposure. Demonstrate the necessity of flood mitigation for the hamlet's capacity to exist long-term, as the intensity and frequency flood events are expected to increase. Emphasize public safety, community resilience, and economic health.
 - 9.5 Complete storm-water runoff engineering, planning, and implementation in Pine Hill.
 - 9.6 Create a long-range capital expenditure plan for the Pine Hill Water District to ensure drinking water remains safe for human consumption, and to ensure water fees are not cost-prohibitive for residents.
 - 9.7 Continue to participate in FEMA Community Rating System (CRS) program. Adopt flood mitigation strategies and procedures as necessary to maintain and improve CRS rating.

- 9.8 Work with Ulster County, neighboring towns, and organizational partners to support community members in understanding and accessing programs provided by the Catskill Watershed Corporation (CWC). Encourage Ulster County to designate a staff member to assist residents in navigating all watershed-related services.
- 9.9 Identify strategies to encourage resident participation in the CWC flood hazard mitigation program and other programs that offer financial assistance for flood prevention.
- 9.10 Work with relevant organizations and agencies to publicize and provide up-to-date land-use board training on any updated flood mapping.
- 9.11 Explore regional shared service agreements with neighboring towns around planning, engineering, legal, financial, and building inspection. Pursue funding from state and county sources to support efforts to increase government efficiency and effectiveness through these partnerships.
- 9.12 For safety reasons, it is imperative that the Town prioritize improving cellular coverage and emergency communications (see Recommendation 10.2 below). Work with Ulster County to expand broadband and improve cellular coverage across the town, particularly in hamlets and along Route 28.
- 9.13 There is a growing problem of improper trash management in the town, contributing to harmful outcomes for wildlife and public safety. The town should partner with DEC and neighboring towns to create a comprehensive strategy to address this issue and reduce access to waste for wildlife. Efforts may include public education, requiring appropriate containers, and improved waste storage requirements. Collaborate with local waste management companies to find manageable solutions, including affordable bear-proof trash receptacles. Consider enforceable trash management requirements, including fines for violators, which could in turn fund solutions such as the installation and maintenance of bear-proof trash receptacles along Main Streets and in public spaces.
- 9.14 Consider establishing a Sidewalk District in Pine Hill and Phoenicia to support walkability, accessibility, and safety in the hamlet centers. District policy should clarify maintenance responsibilities and public fees associated with sidewalk maintenance.
- 9.15 Consider using sustainable and environmentally friendly materials for sidewalks, parks, and other public infrastructure.

10. Improve capacity and maximize investment in emergency services.

- 10.1 Collaborate with neighboring municipalities to improve efficiency and reduce costs in emergency services, including fire, EMS, and dispatch operations. Explore shared staffing, joint equipment purchases, and coordinated training programs.

- 10.2 Coordinate with regional partners and Ulster County government to improve emergency radio, cellular coverage, and dispatch capabilities throughout the town. Update the town’s zoning code to allow the infrastructure necessary to facilitate these critical communication assets.
- 10.3 Conduct a comprehensive study of EMS capacity and demand, including the impacts of Belleayre Ski Center operations, and work collaboratively with the Olympic Regional Development Authority ORDA to ensure appropriate support and shared responsibility for emergency services.
- 10.4 Consolidate and coordinate fire services across the Town to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and enhance emergency coverage. Ensure all fire districts in the Town can access sufficient water for firefighting efforts.
- 10.5 To support emergency services and address the volunteer shortage, incentivize housing developments that include set-aside units for emergency service workers and volunteers.

11. Leverage the thriving tourism industry for local investment.

- 11.1 Review and update local assessment and taxation practice for lodging, such that properties used primarily for short-term rental or transient lodging purposes are taxed in accordance with their predominant use, consistent with New York State Real Property Tax Law.
- 11.2 Consider collaborating with Ulster County and neighboring Catskill towns to conduct a study of the fiscal impacts of tourism-related land uses on public services costs and tax revenue. The study should assess whether existing taxation mechanisms adequately offset demands of tourism assets on town services and should include recommendations and strategies for fiscally responsible taxation based on best practices, in accordance with applicable laws and regulations. Strategies could include impact fees to offset public cost and reduce the tax burden on residents.
- 11.3 Develop strategies to steer tourism activity toward local businesses, including wayfinding and maps of local shops, dining, and services.
- 11.4 To increase visitor activity at local businesses, direct Route 28 traffic into hamlet centers and prominently showcase local businesses and attractions at hamlet entrances.
- 11.5 Work with relevant organizations (e.g. CWC, AWSMP, etc.) and government agencies (e.g. Ulster County, NYC DEP, etc.) to encourage visitors to respect the environment and the wellbeing of residents. For example, support proper disposal of trash through installment of receptacles and/or educational signage.

V. Community, Arts, Parks, & Culture: What strategies can strengthen Shandaken's sense of place and quality of life?

12. Establish Shandaken as a town where people can live from childhood through senior years.

- 12.1 Periodically revise the income qualifications for the Real Property Tax Law Senior Exemption (RP-467) to best reflect the earnings (social security payments and pensions) of local senior homeowners.
- 12.2 Proactively increase health services in the Town by working with commercial property owners to attract health providers and other needed services (e.g. clinics, day care centers, third places, etc.) to the area. Work with the Ulster County Economic Development office to include health services in any economic development efforts.
- 12.3 Implement and support programs that improve quality of life for families, including zoning that enables childcare and affordable housing, partnerships with schools and healthcare providers, accessible transportation, and workforce development.
- 12.4 Promote mixed-use development with senior-friendly and youth-oriented amenities to enable residents to remain in the community through all life stages.
- 12.5 Partner with Ulster County and neighboring Catskill towns to support transportation options for seniors, youth, and workers, linking residential areas to commercial, health, and recreation centers.

13. Cultivate arts and culture as integral to Shandaken's identity and economic vibrancy.

- 13.1 Acknowledge the creative arts as a driver of tourism, economic vitality, and community life. Incorporate arts and cultural programming into town branding, wayfinding, and economic development efforts.
- 13.2 Uplift key historic narratives (i.e. Indigenous peoples, the Underground Railroad, labor and railroad history, etc.) in public spaces with signage, wayfinding, and public art.
- 13.3 Engage with tribal leaders locally and nationally who have ties to the area in creating public-facing education and discourse to honor the rich history of Big Indian, including the legend of Winnisook. This process should include dialogue with local residents to honor history, promote learning, and nurture a sense of belonging. Create respectful historic markers and art that share the Winnisook story and the Native history of the area.

- 13.4 Adopt clear, consistent policies for the use of public spaces that apply equally to all types of community groups and organizers. Support modest outdoor activation (e.g., pop-ups, temporary installations, performances) that foster third spaces and community interaction, while maintaining compatibility with surrounding uses and environmental protections.
- 13.5 Clarify criteria and streamline permitting for events. Distinguish small-scale events (e.g., art openings, exhibitions, live music, small festivals) from large commercial events based on measurable impacts such as attendance, duration, traffic, and noise. Develop a tiered event permitting and fee schedule based on expected attendance, amplification, duration, environmental impact, and demand on municipal services. Ensure that permitting processes and fees do not create barriers to participation for small businesses, artists, and grassroots organizers.
- 13.6 Support efforts to incorporate arts into vacant windows along Main Streets.
- 13.7 Create a cultural asset map based on robust community input.

14. Increase access to parks, public spaces, and community places.

- 14.1 In the case of sale of privately owned spaces used by the public, the Town should consider acquisition in order to secure public access to parks and open spaces. For example, the Town should acquire Parish Field from the Archdiocese of New York and designate it as public park space.
- 14.2 Support maintenance and updates for existing community facilities (i.e. libraries, museum, historic society, Pine Hill Community Center, and others) to improve accessibility, sustainability, and relevance to the community. Seek funding for these efforts through state, county, and other grant opportunities.
- 14.3 Invest in key infrastructure to increase pedestrian linkages and access throughout the town. For example, seek funding for pedestrian bridges linking Belleayre Beach, Smith Park, parking lot, and the hamlet of Pine Hill.
- 14.4 Facilitate safe and environmentally responsible public recreational access to the Esopus Creek by working with the Ashokan Streams Management Program and other partners to identify appropriate access points, signage, visitor requirements, and ideas for community stewardship.
- 14.5 Collaborate with local community organizations like the American Legion or Rotary Club to establish a memorial program for amenities in public spaces. The program would include the funding of improvements such as benches, plantings, and cleanups.

15. Nurture a culture of cohesion, deep listening, and belonging among residents from all walks of life.

- 15.1 Support and encourage gathering opportunities that generate social interaction and respectful dialogue among different groups. For example, leverage the arts and community dinners to bring together and build bridges between lifelong and new residents; intergenerational groups; people with different political affiliations; etc.
- 15.2 Work with relevant organizations such as the school district, Pine Hill Community Center, and the libraries to revive and update the Youth Advisory Committee enabled by town bylaws. The Committee would meet regularly, attend Town meetings, and represent youth issues in formal Town processes. The Committee should be empowered to present recommendations directly to elected officials, creating a consistent channel for youth perspectives to influence decision-making.

16. Guide and monitor the implementation of this Comprehensive Plan.

- 16.1 Establish a mechanism for regular review and reporting of progress on all Plan recommendations. Prioritize transparency, accountability, and adjustment of strategies based on ongoing community feedback. Identify responsible parties for implementation of the plan, including Town Board, land use boards, staff, steering committee, and organizational partners. Outline expected outcomes and a timeline for actions.



APPENDICES

Appendix A: Data

PLACEHOLDER

Appendix B: Community Engagement Results

PLACEHOLDER

Appendix C: Policies and Best Practices

C.1 Short-Term Rental Regulations

In addition to the town's existing cap on short-term rental permits, the following may be explored in accordance with NYS and federal Fair Housing law:

- a. establishing STR allowances and caps in different zones in alignment with community priorities outlined earlier in this Plan;
- b. prohibiting STRs except as an accessory use to a principal dwelling;
- c. requiring a managing agent to live full-time on the premises;
- d. designating STR as commercial use per zoning law and requiring a special use permit allowed only as an accessory to residential use;
- e. distinguishing different transient lodging uses in the zoning code, i.e. Bed and Breakfast; Hotel/Motel; Short-Term Rental.

C.2 Property Tax Exemptions

All of the information included in this Appendix Section is directly quoted from the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance.

First-Time Homebuyers of Newly Constructed Homes (RP-457)

Description: A tax break for first-time homebuyers that purchase a newly constructed home or a home that has been substantially rehabilitated. Details: A partial exemption from real property taxation for newly constructed or recently rehabilitated homes purchased by first-time homebuyers. The exemption can be implemented for a maximum of five years. The exemption begins at 50% of the tax the first year and steps down by every consecutive year: 40% in year 2, 30% in year 3, 20% in year 4 and 10% in the final year. Eligibility: All municipalities in Ulster County are eligible to adopt this exemption. For the purposes of this exemption, a first-time homebuyer is defined as any person who has not owned a primary residence during the previous three years, and who does not own a vacation home or investment home. A newly constructed home is defined as a 1- and 2-family owner-occupied home that has not

been previously occupied. First-time homebuyers that purchase a recently renovated home are also eligible for this exemption if the renovation costs exceed \$3,000 and were contracted for within 90 days of the purchase date. The combined income of all the owners and their spouses cannot exceed the income limits defined by the State of New York Mortgage Agency (SONYMA). Process: Municipalities must pass a local law to adopt this exemption. Upon adoption, private property owners can apply for the exemption using form [RP-457](#).

Alternative Veterans' Exemption (RP-458-a)

Description: A tax break for veterans and certain veteran family members. Details: The exemption is for 15% of the total assessed value of residential property. An additional 10% exemption of the total assessed value is available for veterans who served in a combat zone. Maximum exemption amounts differ based on whether the veteran served during a wartime period, served in a combat zone, and/or suffered a service-related disability. Eligibility: All municipalities in Ulster County are eligible to adopt this exemption. Upon adoption, eligible applicants are veterans, surviving spouses of veterans, and parents of veterans who died in the service (Gold Star Parents). Process: Municipalities must pass a local law to adopt this exemption. Upon adoption, a veteran or qualified veteran family members can apply for the exemption using form [RP-458](#).

Capital Improvements to a One- or Two-Family Residential Property (RP-421-f)

Description: A tax break for single-family or two-family properties that experience an increase in assessed value as the result of alterations or improvements. Details: A maximum 8-year exemption of the increase in the assessed value when a one- or two-family dwelling undergoes significant reconstruction, alterations or improvements. The increase in value must be attributable to the new capital improvements, not for ordinary maintenance or repairs. More than 50% of the square footage (after the reconstruction, alterations or improvements) must be at least five years old. 100% of the increase in assessed value is exempt from taxes in the first year; 87.5% in year 2; 75% in year 3; 62.5% in year 4; 50% in year 5; 37.5% in year 6; 25% in year 7; and 12.5% in year 8 – the final year. The exemption is limited to an \$80,000 increase in market value. Eligibility: All municipalities in Ulster County are eligible to adopt this exemption. Upon adoption, one- or two-family property owners in the municipality are eligible. The value of the improvement to the property must exceed \$3,000. Process: Municipalities must pass a local law to adopt this exemption. Upon adoption, eligible property owners can apply for the exemption using form [RP-421-f](#)