



The *Owlkill Commons* Revitalization Initiative



Capital Region REDC • NY Forward 2022
Village of Cambridge • Washington County
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1. The Vision: The Owlkill Commons Revitalization Initiative

The Village of Cambridge aspires to be a thriving, people-centered, walkable Main Street community in rural Washington County. Resilient, adaptable and dynamic, this small urbanized community will continue to be a center of economic, social and cultural activity for the region—an incubator for entrepreneurs, artists and agriculturalists. The Village will offer an excellent quality of life, celebrate its history and connections to the natural environment and serve as an active space where diverse people of all ages and abilities live, work, innovate, play and explore and connect.

The *Owlkill Commons* is in the geographic heart of the Village and is poised to advance the Village's vision through revitalization. It is a neighborhood filled with rich history and an abundance of natural, architectural and community resources. It serves as an incubator of ideas and entrepreneurship and an important place for commerce, convening and residing.

With NY Forward support the Village can leverage this neighborhood to accomplish four goals:

- Secure and advance the Village's role as an incubator for entrepreneurs and artists;
- Foster a recreational economy with connections to our Main Street Economy;
- Expand housing and commercial options to attract residents and visitors;
- Improve quality of life.

The Village has chosen the *Owlkill Commons* for NY Forward support because not only does it speak to the community's longstanding vision and goals for its future, but it builds on a confluence of synergies and assets and is ripe for public-private partnership. We have momentum but NY Forward is the catalyst needed to comprehensively transform this neighborhood into a magnet for residents and visitors alike.

Specifically with NY Forward support, the Village will take a multi-pronged strategic approach that includes:

- Rehabilitating and updating historic structures to retain jobs and attract entrepreneurs, artists and food producers;
- Creating trails, connections among natural resources, wayfinding signage and branding materials;
- Expanding the Public Library; and
- Addressing important infrastructure concerns and expanding housing options.

We are proposing eleven integrated projects in the *Owlkill Commons* totaling \$7,250,000.



2. Geographic Area and Justification

The Village of Cambridge is an economic, social, and cultural hub in rural Washington County, NY. NY Forward would focus on transforming a key component of the Village's heart: The Owlkill Commons.



The *Owkill Commons* includes parcels along Main Street mainly between Railroad Avenue and Memorial Drive encompassing about 20 acres. Over 25 percent of the Commons is underutilized open space; the Owkill, a trout stream, meanders through and wraps around its southern boundaries. Approximately a quarter of the Commons is municipally owned; a quarter was recently purchased by or is in the process of being donated to a local community development organization; and half is owned privately—with 10 of 12 parcels with Main Street frontage. Hence it's an area ripe for coordinated, multi-sectoral partnership and collaboration to advance Cambridge's vision.

Opportunities in the Commons abound to: cement and augment opportunities for commercial pursuits; capitalize on an emerging recreational economy; create more places to live; and expand access to key public resources that enhance quality of life and strengthen community; and highlight and celebrate history.

Assets of the Owkill Commons Abound:

Assets in the *Owkill Commons* abound, but they face challenges which NY Forward will help us overcome to realize the community's vision and goals.

An Incubator for a Vibrant Economy: The *Owkill Commons* is an incubator of sorts. It is home to over 85,000 square feet of commercial space, where professionals in the health, legal, financial services and insurance sectors practice alongside entrepreneurs, innovators and artists. The Commons not only provides important resources for start-ups but also outlets for local farmers and food processors to market, test and refine their products. It is a place where people create and innovate.

The Challenge: Most of this commercial incubator space is within large old, historic structures in need of upgrading and rehabilitation or expansion in a manner that celebrates their historic integrity in accordance with Secretary of the Interior's Standards of Rehabilitation and is climate smart.

Abundant Natural Resources and Open Space with unrealized potential for a Recreational Economy:

Over twenty-five percent of the Commons is underutilized park or vacant, open space, ripe with potential for recreation and community gatherings. Most of this is owned by municipalities or a community development organization. The Owkill (a trout stream) meanders through and wraps around the Commons. Over it sits a Victorian Covered Footbridge, recently rehabilitated and reinstalled on new abutments in 2021 to much fanfare.

Abutting the Commons to the south are wetlands with potential for a connector trail to the district school, Community Forest, health center, and safety services on the outskirts of the community. The *Owkill Commons* strives to be a Main Street gateway to outdoor recreation—connecting a recreational economy with our more vibrant, diverse Main Street economy.

The Challenge: Most of the open space is barren or overgrown with brush, and the Owkill has suffered from neglect. The parks that do exist are not linked and generally uninviting, and a network of trails coordinated with recreational assets has not been fully realized.

Opportunities to expand housing and commercial pursuits, and advance quality of life:

On the western edge of the *Owkill Commons* sits the Cambridge Public Library—a critical public institution in small rural communities which lack a lot of social services of larger metropolitan areas. It is bursting at the seams under strong leadership. Prominent within the Commons are a number of dilapidated structures with potential for enhanced housing and commercial pursuits—such as the firehouse (soon to be abandoned) at 11 W Main, a burned-out multi-residential unit structure (once listed as "Exceptional" on the Village's National Historic Registry) at 18 W Main; and two story barn in the center of the Lumberyard—as well as frontage on Railroad Avenue for potential development of a multi-unit residency.

The Challenge: A large crumbling 'old school/bus garage' is inhibiting the library's growth. Infrastructure issues, particularly the lack of shared parking and the need to be climate smart, and create challenges for addressing needs for affordable housing and commercial pursuits.

Has Character, Historic and Architectural Significance: The *Owlkill Commons* is historically significant. First, the Owl Kill itself is named for *Soquon, The Owl*, a chieftain known as a Great Uniter of the *Mohicans* in the 16th and 17th centuries who resided locally. Second, the seed industry which has remained a staple in Cambridge's economy up to present day, gained its footing in the Commons in the late 1800s with the construction of the J. B. Rice Seed complex—reputed to be the world's second largest seed company in the early 20th Century. Today, Bentley Seed Company, just south of the Commons, carries on the tradition as does Cambridge Pacific (near the Village's southern border) which has grown to be the largest supplier of seedpacket envelopes in the US. Finally, the *Owlkill Commons* is within the Village's Historic District. Five structures within were noted as Exceptional in the inventory nomination form.¹ Their placement, visibility and architectural features (be they Empire, Classical Revival or High Victorian Italianate) are intact and collectively character-defining for the community.

The Challenge: Narratives about the historical significance of the *Owlkill Commons* have not yet been realized leaving untapped opportunities for increased visitorship to the community.

A Confluence of Synergy within the Owlkill Commons Emerging—Poised for Action: A confluence of community energy is coalescing in the *Owlkill Commons* which will enable us to ACT. In particular,

- The community seeks to diversify its economy—to develop a recreation economy. In a highly participatory fashion it crafted and has begun to implement components of a *Recreation Economy for Rural Communities Plan* (developed with the EPA). Momentum has been unleashed.
- The Cambridge Valley Community Development and Preservation Partnership, Inc. (Community Partnership) - an NGO with a strong track record, has purchased and begun initial revitalizing of a 2.6-acre parcel in the Commons, known as the lumberyard containing four underutilized structures. Owners of VARAK are donating additional parkland and stream frontage to the NGO for public benefit re-imagining.
- The Cambridge Public Library is poised and ready to expand their programming which will serve as a magnet for residents and visitors alike and is working with an architect to develop expansion plans. The Food Co-op and Rice Mansion Inn too have a desire to expand their offerings around food production and history, respectively.
- Two historic industrial buildings' importance as a hub of entrepreneurship, artistry, and innovation have been recognized.
- Finally Village leaders, residents, local business owners and organizations engage in participatory planning processes and are dedicated to collaborating to make the community a better place to work, live and play. Complex revitalization efforts have been achieved through public-private partnership in the Village.

In Section 9, we offer a slate of integrated projects to transform and enliven the Owlkill Commons as a magnet of activity for residents and visitors alike.

3. Past Investment and Future Potential. WE Plan WE Act.

The Village's Comprehensive Planning process jump-started a lot of activities. The Village has taken a proactive approach to asset management. Significant zoning revisions were made and design guidelines were established. Hence, new commercial and public projects have followed smart growth principles through sensitive architectural and site planning. The redevelopment of the Post Office, two assisted living facilities and the redevelopment of Rite Aid (now Walgreens and one of the only chain establishments) reflect the Village's character and encourage walkability in the Village. Main Street redevelopment grants (NYMS) have been sought and received to refurbish storefronts and residential units in historic Main Street buildings. An examination of the last eight years of building permits in the Village suggests upwards of \$4.5 million in commercial-related or multi-unit residency building renovations. In response to the 2003 closure of Mary McClellan Hospital, the community invested in public services (EMS, Fire and police, Urgent Care/Health Center) which are generally strong. Following significant public engagement including a successful public referendum, the Village just completed construction of a new, state of the art, 10,000 square foot firehouse at a cost of \$3.7 million.

1. Structures listed as Exceptional in the Village's National Registry of Historic Places nomination form include: 18 W Main St (Square Italian Villa); 16W Main Street (Rice Mansion Inn—Classical Revival); 15 West Main Street (VARAK Park) (Empire with convex Mansard roof and cupola; 13 W Main Street (High Victorian Italianate); 3 W Main Street (Baptist Church)

The proposed NY Forward target, the *Owlkill Commons*, is just west of the site of the **Cambridge Freight Yard Revitalization Project**—which directly and indirectly became a magnet for activity and catalyzed the rehabilitation of 14 historic structures for expanded commercial, artistic and residential pursuits.

The Cambridge Freight Yard Revitalization Project provides a sustainable model which the Village will replicate at a larger scale through NY Forward in the *Owlkill Commons*. It was a complicated placemaking initiative much like the *Owlkill Commons* revitalization effort will be. Through the community-driven initiative, a 2+ acre historic, intact rural freight yard in the Village's commercial heart east of the railroad tracks was purchased and rehabilitated. Through a dynamic public-private partnership, initially seven previously vacant, distressed historic structures were rehabilitated for commercial, residential and civic uses, including the arts center and a farmers' market expansion. Important infrastructure was installed, including an 8,000 gallon per day decentralized wastewater treatment system now servicing eight buildings, a park and a 30-car municipal parking lot. The project was facilitated by a then newly formed local NGO, the Cambridge Valley Community Development and Preservation Partnership, Inc. Key partners were the Village, Hubbard Hall Center for Arts and Education and several private building owners. Over the course of about eight years, the project leveraged \$2.5 million+ in private donations and grants from sources including NYSERDA, NYSDOT/FHWA, NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, NYS Office of Homes and Community Renewal (NYMS), NYS Council on the Arts (NYSCA) and RESTORE NY. Building owners collectively invested additional hundreds of thousands of dollars.



The impact of the Freight Yard Revitalization project was dramatic. New jobs were created in the arts. Hubbard Hall doubled the number of full-time jobs and quadrupled part-time employees including actors, singers, directors, designers and instructors and increased the need for other service employees by increasing the number of visitors to the community. Businesses expanded and added employees including a diner and an independent bookstore; a number of businesses migrated to the block in refurbished office space; and individuals launched new enterprises. Four new apartments were added, enhancing the vibrancy of the place.

Since 2010, the Freight Yard project has catalyzed over \$2.75 million largely from private investment in the neighborhood—to expand housing options. An historic hotel to the west of the Freight Yard was adapted into an assisted living facility, enabling many local residents to remain in the community as they age; and most of the owners of the five historic buildings across Main Street have made significant investments to create or significantly upgrade housing options. Of note, in April 2022, owners of 2-4 East Main Street (c.1880), the largest freight structure (10,000 sf) in the Village, completed a total rehabilitation of the structure into five apartments and two commercial spaces with NYMS support and Historic Tax Credits.

More recently in the midst of COVID and, on a much smaller scale, the community came together through public-private partnership to rehabilitate, build new abutments for, and reinstall a unique historic Victorian Footbridge within the Owlkill Commons — to incredible fanfare. The Washington County Historical Association recognized the initiative with a 2022 WCHA Historic Preservation Award.



The Freight Yard Revitalization Project (and even the Victorian Footbridge project) was complex, involved multiple actors and funding sources and is the model for Cambridge's approach to placemaking and the revitalization of the Owlkill Commons with NY Forward support. We will leverage these experiences to advance planning and work under the Owlkill Commons Revitalization Initiative.

4. Recent and Impending Job Growth

Cambridge's location in southern Washington County makes it accessible to jobs in more urbanized areas as well as in nearby towns—but still allows people to enjoy rural village life. More than 90 percent of Cambridge residents with jobs have their primary employer outside the village. About one quarter of these individuals work elsewhere in Washington County, particularly in the town of White Creek. Half work in the nearby counties of Bennington (VT), Saratoga, Albany, or Rensselaer. The remaining quarter work in other locations, some as far away as New York City.

Light Manufacturing: Compared to workers nationally, workers in the Cambridge area are far more heavily concentrated in agricultural and manufacturing occupations, as well as in construction, the arts, and several service and retail occupations. Within the Village limits Bentley Seed Company, Eastern Castings and Ed Levin Jewelry Design employ residents in the manufacturing sector—and within a few miles of village limits, Cambridge Valley Machining, Cambridge Pacific and Morcon do the same.

Small Businesses: In addition, we've identified well over 120 public-facing small businesses in the Village or immediate surrounding area, some with a Main Street presence, many of which are one or two-person operations with self-employed individuals. These businesses include accountants, artists, boutiques, building contractors, crafts persons, hair stylists, investment advisers, lawyers, and real estate agents. In addition, the area is home to many Limited Liability Companies that do not have a storefront presence but may conduct business-to-business operations in regional or national markets. Many of the people working in these businesses do not show up in jobs numbers, but they are critical contributors to the local economy. The Cambridge Valley Chamber of Commerce is a meeting point for the sector.

Incubator for New Commercial Pursuits: The Village also serves as an incubator for new commercial pursuits—VARAK Park, an historic industrial complex named after its five originators, smack dab in the Village's center and the *Owlkill Commons* offers affordable rents to entrepreneurs and artists getting a start. Its spaces offer low-cost market entry. Artisans sell their works at the Valley Artisans Market, a cooperative within arts center Hubbard Hall and other regional venues. The Cambridge Valley Farmers Market has provided a market to well over 100 agricultural vendors since its establishment in 2004—a significant number of whom have 'graduated' to become vendors at larger regional markets in Troy, Saratoga and Glens Falls. Hence it serves as a 'feeder market' for the Capital Region. Another local marketplace product testing ground is the Cambridge Food Co-op with 30% of its products sourced from local food producers.

Job Expansion: Two assisted living facilities (both adjacent to the *Owlkill Commons*) have recently grown and are significant employers. Several impending projects are likely to create new jobs and work-from-home opportunities.

In 2018, Morcon Tissue, a paper products manufacturer with operations in New York and South Carolina, relocated its headquarters within the Town of White Creek. Its revenue tripled over the last 10 years, and it now employs 60 people in White Creek. Morcon is working on a \$14.6 million expansion to construct a 40,000-square-foot warehouse for material storage and product distribution and for a 15,000-square-foot expansion to bring third-party paper-converting work in house. Approved by the Town planning board, that project currently is under discussion with the Warren Washington IDA. If it goes forward, it will result in eight new high-skill well-paying jobs.

In late 2021, an Oregon cannabis grower purchased the *former* Morcon headquarters just outside the Village limits with the goal of converting 20,000 square-feet of it into marijuana growing and processing. The \$6 million project

could result in a reported 25-50 new jobs paying between \$37,500 and 75,000. This initiative is contingent upon obtaining needed growing and processing licenses from the state.

With NYS's help the *Owlkill Commons* seeks to (a) retain jobs in the Village by upgrading the historic building fabric supporting them; and (b) capitalize on the impending job growth in the area by creating another placemaking initiative which will bring people into the Village core to live, work, shop, play and build community.

5. Quality of Life

The Village of Cambridge is a rural community of approximately 1,800 people, in bucolic southern Washington County. Its landscape is formed by rolling hills dotted with working farms, picturesque hamlets and scenic views of the Adirondacks and Taconic mountains of New York and Green Mountains of Vermont. It is an historic settlement, founded in 1761, with two mile-long main arteries, Main Street and Park Street, sporting historic houses, shops, businesses, community gathering places, and the regional public K-12 school. The Village is compact, walkable, and contains enough key attractions to encourage people to live in the Village. Part of the Village's charm is its lack of sprawl.

Vibrant Arts Scene: In many ways Cambridge is a cultural mecca for the area—a magnet for artists and crafts people—a vibrant creative economy—enriching the lives of individuals and the community—entertaining, stimulating creativity and providing an outlet to explore complex ideas and feelings related to the past, present and future. Hubbard Hall Center for the Arts and Education, key to this vibrancy, is housed in an 1878 Victorian Opera House which has been operating continuously since 1978 as a theater and multi-disciplinary arts center. Local visual artists regularly sponsor studio tours, and regional artists sell work through the Valley Artisans Market, and through the Agricultural Stewardship Association's acclaimed annual Fall exhibit *Landscapes for Landsake*. Famed photographer George Forss made his home and had a gallery on Main Street until his death in 2021. Several venues regularly present local musicians, including the Argyle Brewing Company, the Bog and the Cambridge Valley Farmers Market. The Library's Gazebo hosts a popular summer concert series. Literary artists give talks at Battenkill Books. Crafts people abound. Tucked along Main Street is Ed Levin Jewelry and a short walk away is Thirsty Cat Fountains, run by a ceramic artist.



Commercial and Retail Main Street Businesses: Main Street and Park Street businesses include a hardware store, independent bookstore, post office, barber shop/salons, antique stores, and a few small retail thrift and craft stores. A chain drug store and two gas stations/convenience stores are at the main intersection - our one and only traffic light. Consistently in public forums, participants call for the expansion of offerings along Main Street—and especially would like a coffee house.

Food Options: Food choices abound for a community Cambridge's size. On Main Street there is a small but full-service independent grocery store and a food co-op. Sundays, there is a Farmers Market now almost year-round—an important income generator and incubator for farmers and food producers. A food pantry serves one hundred families weekly. There are about half a dozen restaurants. Several food trucks create a festive atmosphere for performances at the microbrewery in the old railroad depot and give budding entrepreneurs a chance to test their products. Just off Main Street is a vibrant community garden with plots for anyone interested in growing vegetables and fruits. Since 2009 the Community Garden has implemented a well-established program with the elementary school, giving children the opportunity to grow and learn about food. Some of the harvest is given to the Food Pantry.



Building a Recreation Economy/Connecting to Surrounding Open Space:

Cambridge is located near the Battenkill, a world-renowned trout fishing stream, as well as several lakes and a host of unconnected NYS-owned forests. The region includes a mix of privately owned open farmland and forests, and game is plentiful for hunting. To enhance public access to natural resources, the **Agricultural Stewardship Association** purchased 145 acres and created the **Cambridge Community Forest** at the edge of the Village in 2019. The school owns a nearby six-acre parcel of forest and wetlands and has begun creating a learning preserve. Despite the proximity of these resources, within the Village itself, there is a need to develop public trails, public parks and natural areas to improve the quality of life through access to walkable/bikeable recreational opportunities for Village residents, students, and visitors.

The Village seeks to develop its recreation economy to fulfill many unmet recreational needs in the community and contribute significantly to the economic vitality of the Village, healthy quality of life of its residents, and attractiveness of Cambridge as a destination for new residents and visitors — particularly to attract younger residents with families to the Village. The EPA-funded *Recreation Economy in Rural Communities* program gave shape to strategies to these ends. The Village of Cambridge and Town of White Creek comprehensive plans both identified untapped potential for recreational trail opportunities.

To advance our recreation economy, the EPA-funded plan identified the need and desire not only to develop a system of trails within the Village to connect greenspaces and natural amenities but also to better connect the Village to the new Cambridge Community Forest. Future considerations include creation of connectors to three state forests (Mount Tom, Chestnut Hill, and Notch Lane) in White Creek which are just four private parcels away from the Forest/Village limits.

The Owlkill Commons will be a launchpad and gateway to this Recreation Economy, connecting Main Street to natural resources and recreation and providing amenities like a coffee shop and eateries, and hopefully retail businesses that support outdoor exploration.

Walkability/Bikeability within Downtown

This is a weakness in the Village that our NY Forward initiative proposes to address. The Village is compact and technically walkable but the recent Recreation Economy workshops and planning initiatives pointed out significant deficiencies. The Village has had some success in garnering State support for *Complete Streets* projects to add sidewalks, crosswalks and undertake “road diet” projects to make Main Street more pedestrian and bike friendly. Since 2017 the Village’s Department of Public Works has invested \$381,360 in important sidewalk and street upgrades. However, a recent citizen-led survey of sidewalks uncovered a host of problems, including significant disrepair and problems with safety. Sidewalks are lacking altogether on some streets such as Gilbert Street (NYS Route 313) where the health center, Head Start, a pre-school and other safety services are located. Bicycling is popular due to the quiet country roads, rolling hills, and spectacular scenery. Entrepreneurs in the Village gave birth to the annual Tour of the Battenkill, a bicycle race that attracts hundreds of cyclists from all over the country.



Affordable housing is one of Cambridge’s challenges: Housing affordability has been a challenge in Cambridge, although there has been some progress. About a third of Cambridge Village households including 47 percent of renters, have housing costs that are at least 30 percent of income, the HUD threshold for “housing cost burden”. This is greater than the Washington County and rural NYS averages, although it is down from 5 years earlier. The Cambridge Village vacancy rate of 8.4 percent is far lower than Washington County and many nearby areas, perhaps indicating the desirability of living in the community given its charm and amenities.

Over the past two decades, Cambridge has endeavored to create affordable housing options for the aging population within walking distance to many amenities. Two buildings on a quiet street near the school now include 48 one-bedroom units largely for those 62 years and above. In addition, two large historic properties have been upgraded and adapted to become assisted living residences. One is Washington County's only assisted living Medicaid applicable home and the first to offer SNALP/SNALR memory care services in the county. The other is the retrofitted Cambridge Hotel—now The Cambridge, providing safety and opportunities for people for whom living at home alone is no longer viable. One is within and the other adjacent to the *Owlkill Commons*.

There is more to do. Several properties have suffered from severe neglect including two houses cut up into multiple units over the years. In the last three years two motels collectively with over 20 rooms have been turned into extended-stay properties, but face numerous code violations and are allegedly in violation of current zoning laws. Through the Freight Yard project and subsequent spin off, nine new residential units have been created in mixed-use Main Street structures and three apartments significantly upgraded. The *Owlkill Commons* seeks to create at least seven new residences in the Village's mixed-use heart.

Access to health care facilities: In 2003, the Mary McClellan Hospital, a major employer and lifeline in the Village since 1919, closed—which was a major blow to the Village economy. Soon thereafter, Glens Falls Hospital established the Cambridge Medical Center & Urgent Care on Route 313/Gilbert Street in the Village. Adjacent to it is the Cambridge Valley Rescue Squad—a leader in Washington County emergency services and across the street is the new state of the art Fire Department facility, servicing the region. Despite its proximity to the downtown, most access these life-safety services via vehicles as there are no sidewalks.

Community Spaces, Ethnic and Religious Diversity: Cambridge Central School, which educates just under 800 students, is a focal point of activity for the broad community. From a smart growth perspective, having its compact K-12 campus within the Village is a tremendous asset. The Cambridge Public Library (as described further in this proposal) is a key community space and hub of activity. In addition to traditional lending practices, it provides access to a range of social services. It is vibrant but small and accessibility is a challenge. There is a small Senior Center in the village as well. Seven churches are located in or near the Village; an interfaith group composed of ministers brings them together. ACS suggests that the Village's population may have become about 2.5% more diverse from 2015 to 2020. Community-building events such as the annual Balloon Festival, Memorial Day Parade and Christmas in Cambridge celebrations are highlights.

Broadband accessibility: According to data from the NYS Public Service Commission, broadband internet service is available throughout the village. However, availability of service does not mean that all households have service, particularly in areas outside of the village and school students have met with some challenges in this regard.

Demographic Shifts and Income Challenges: Like most rural villages, Cambridge faces challenges. It has suffered from population decline, losing about 4.4 percent of its population between 2010 and 2020, compared to a 3 percent population loss for the county. As with most of rural New York, Cambridge's older population is an increasing share of its total population: using data known as the 5-year ACS, between the 2014 and 2019 data years the age 65+ population increased from 17.2 percent of the population to 22.4 percent. Perhaps surprisingly, over that same period the under age-20 population also increased as a share, with the working-age population shrinking as a share. The combination of these changes caused Cambridge's median age to decline slightly.

Income of residents is well below the county median: using the same data, Cambridge's median income of \$51,295 was 10.4 percent below the county median. HUD data indicates that 50.8 percent of village households are living on 80 percent or less of median income for the Glens Falls area. The 2019 5-year ACS put the village poverty rate at 7.7% — below Washington County and rural NY.

Hence, the Village of Cambridge has significant assets that contribute to its charm and quality of life. However, while it has a mighty will, the Village generally has limited economic means to draw from. We need NY Forward to fully realize the transformational potential of the Owlkill Commons Initiative—which would go a long way to improving quality of life and augmenting amenities for residents and visitors alike.

6. Supportive Local Policies

The Village of Cambridge has adopted and embraced several local policies that increase NYS's decarbonization goals and advance quality of life. Following the adoption of its Comprehensive Plan in 2004, the Village made **significant zoning revisions** (2009, updated 2015) to advance its vision for the future. It created new zoning districts to encourage commercial activity beyond its Main Street Mixed Use and Industrial districts, including a Residential Transition District along Main Street (allowing for mixed-uses within while maintaining residential character) and a Gateway Commercial District. Building on the concept of the comprehensive plan's Greenbelt, a Rural Residential District was also established that allows for small scale agriculture uses in the outer areas of the community. It also created an **Environmental Resource Overlay District** to preserve and protect lands which are particularly sensitive such as steep slopes, stream corridors, wetlands and floodplain, and a Greenbelt (open space, agricultural land and rural residential).

In 2005 with support of the NYS Council on the Arts, the Village developed **Design Guidelines** for Main Street Mixed Use, Residential Transition and Gateway Commercial districts as a way of maintaining and enhancing community character, quality of life and long-term economic success—and promoting smart growth principles. The Design Guidelines focus on site organization, site design and architectural design. The Design Guidelines reflect a desire to maintain the character of the Historic District. **The Cambridge Historic District, on the National Register**, includes 240 structures.

In 2016, the Village became a **Clean Energy Community** with the aim of implementing clean energy actions, saving energy costs, creating jobs and improving the environment. To date, the Village has implemented energy benchmarking, converted streetlights to LED and, with other municipalities, has been working on putting a solar array on the old landfill.

In July 2022, the Village registered as a **Climate Smart Community** (one of only two communities in Washington County) and is establishing a committee to begin work on a plan to take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to a changing climate. In the recent CFA, the Village applied for a Complete Streets grant.

About 60 percent of the Village is in the Town of White Creek. Following a highly participatory, multi-year planning process, funded with support of the *NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets*, that Township adopted a Comprehensive Plan (2011) which included a **Farmland Protection Plan**. The *Agricultural Stewardship Association* (ASA) works with landowners to conserve working lands in the Towns of White Creek and Cambridge—including in 2021, two farms at the Village's eastern gateways.

7. Public Support

A host of public engagement initiatives over the years have shaped the Village's and *Owkill Commons'* vision, goals and project list. Community engagement is critical to shaping goals and harnessing commitment to work together to realize this transformative revitalization effort in the *Owkill Commons*.

On September 8th, the Village held an in-person public meeting and on the 15th a follow-up Zoom meeting to seek input on the Village's existing vision statement, identify needs and opportunities, and outline components of the initiative which could be addressed through NY Forward. Comments at both forums regarding vision and goals closely paralleled those articulated in the Village's Comprehensive Plan and echoed those generated at several other recent forums. **These public engagement forums included:**

A set of four+ planning workshops the **Environmental Protection Agency** (EPA) sponsored in September 2020 regarding **Recreation Economy for Rural Communities**. These were incredibly dynamic, participatory, and well-attended and created a vision for and ignited action toward development of a recreational economy. The planning process helped us understand how identifying recreational assets and supporting and growing an outdoor recreation economy can be part of our overall economic development strategy and lead to a more diverse, vibrant Main Street. **Cambridge was only one of ten communities the EPA selected in the United States to be part of this smart growth**

planning process. It helped us develop priorities for the newly established Cambridge Community Forest, identify ways to transform underutilized sites into valuable outdoor recreation assets, and begin to create a vision to connect nodes of opportunity for outdoor recreation in the Village, broader community and region (e.g., nearby state forests, lakes, Battenkill River, agricultural landscapes) to advance our economy and quality of life.

A 2017-18 **NYS Library Sustainability Initiative:** Our library was only one of four libraries chosen to participate in the pilot program which was designed to help libraries assess, identify and facilitate community change, while being a critical partner in growing the sustainability movement in New York and beyond. Through four workshops and attendance at a host of community events and meetings, staff and the board learned about community members' aspirations, and helped the library better engage/communicate with and address needs of the community. Information gathered helped guide development of the Library's Long Range Strategic Plan (which will be realized through its expansion with NY Forward support).



On a more neighborhood level, in **October 2021 the Community Partnership held a visioning session for the Cambridge Lumberyard Revitalization** initiative (now rebranded and expanded as the **Owkill Commons**). This gathering highlighted interest in expanding opportunities in the community for eating (particularly a coffee house), entertainment and shopping. A dynamic Main Street was envisioned, highlighting and creating incubators for new businesses, including artists, makers and entrepreneurs. A significant need included the expansion of affordable, innovative housing options (especially targeting youth). Importantly the provision of public access to and connections among greenspaces, the Owkill and Main Street to enhance mobility, provide opportunities for recreation and engagement with the natural world, and promote community building was a high priority.

Cambridge comes together and PLANS and Cambridge ACTS. The Freight Yard Revitalization Project is proof of that but even more recently..... Since the **Recreation Economy** planning process, the community has acted on a number of priorities identified:

(1) A Friends of the new Community Forest was established and has undertaken a number of activities to support trail creation and community engagement in workshops/events. (2) ASA constructed a bridge over White Creek and a temporary parking lot to improve access to the Community Forest. (3) Community members rallied to rehabilitate, construct new abutments and reinstall our unique Victorian Pedestrian Bridge (over the Owkill). (4) Local residents organized an audit of sidewalk conditions throughout the Village. The assessment report prompted the Village to apply for a Complete Streets grant. (5) The **Community Partnership** began to develop plans for the Owkill Trail—a connector from Main Street to natural assets and social services.

(6) **The Library** developed a strategic plan, hired an architect to develop expansion plans and is poised, with NY Forward support, to better address the needs and desires of the community, articulated through the NYS sponsored program. (7) The **Community Partnership** is rehabilitating 9 West Main Street to host a new coffee house, based on plans developed by the internationally renowned architecture firm, MOS Architects. 9W's apartment now upgraded with NYMS support is occupied by a new young teacher.



8. Transformative Project Opportunities:

Like the Freight Yard revitalization project, the Village of Cambridge is 'Place-making' through the *Owlkill Commons* Initiative. The *Owlkill Commons* Initiative capitalizes on four main interlocking project themes: (1) Securing and advancing the Village's role as an incubator for entrepreneurs and artists (2) Advancing a recreation economy; (3) Expanding housing and commercial options on Main Street within the *Owlkill Commons* and (4) Improving quality of life. **We are proposing eleven (11) integrated projects for New York State's consideration for NY Forward's support.**

I. Securing and advancing the Village's role as an incubator for entrepreneurs and artists

The *Owlkill Commons* is an incubator of sorts. It is home to over 85,000 square feet of commercial space, where professionals in the health, legal, financial services and insurance sectors practice alongside entrepreneurs, innovators and artists. The *Commons* not only provides important resources for start-ups but also outlets for local farmers and food processors to market, test and refine their products. It is a place where people create and innovate. However, most of this commercial incubator space is within large old, historic structures in need of upgrading and rehabilitation or expansion in a manner that celebrates their historic integrity and placemaking contributions in accordance with Secretary of the Interior's Standards of Rehabilitation and is climate smart.

Through the *Owlkill Commons*, we also seek to capitalize on and celebrate the Village's unique agricultural history as an important world supplier of seeds. The Rice Seed Company's headquarters, industrial buildings and trial gardens were established in the Village of Cambridge in 1879. Its warehouse and accompanying office building were completed in 1895—and once played host to hundreds of workers, often supplementing farm family incomes during winter months and providing work for artists hired to design seed packets. At the turn of the 20th century the Rice Seed Company was reputed to be the second largest seed manufacturer in the nation.

The most prominent of these buildings in the *Owlkill Commons*, the VARAK Park complex, is intact and ready to be further adapted to retain and attract additional entrepreneurs and professionals. Also intact and across the street at 16 West Main is founder Jerome Rice's home, now The Rice Mansion Inn (*See section IV*). With NY Forward support these three nearly 150 year old buildings will be preserved and adapted to (i) meet the needs of artists, entrepreneurs, and innovators in our community; and (ii) initiatives through programs, signage and possibly a museum to heighten awareness of the role of the seed industry in our history and economy.

A. VARAK Park (15 West Main Street)— Formerly the Rice Seed Company's Complex

VARAK Park, a multi-building complex, serves as an important node for entrepreneurship, artistry and innovation in Southern Washington County today. It was built in 1879 as the home of the former J.B. Rice Seed Company and then became the Asgrow Seed Company. When that seed company met its demise, Cambridge adapted; a collection of local folks bought the complex. Since 1987 VARAK has served as an industrial park, housing upwards of 45 diverse tenants from professionals in the health field to the computer field to the arts and to a machine shop and manufacturing. Amongst current tenants for example are seven artists and craftspersons and a host of specialists with expertise in metal fabrication, plumbing, antique car restoration and creation of curved wooden doors/windows. Approximately 70% of the complex is currently occupied. Rents are affordable so it functions as an incubator of sorts.

There are three main buildings now. The first is the Victorian Building (c. 1879), a three-story, brick Second Empire style building with a convex mansard roofed cupola. Over the years a three-story wood-framed building was attached to the rear. It offers 31,440 square feet of commercial space. The second known as the Professional Building is a two-story brick 3,600 square feet office building. And the third is a former storage building (2,400 square feet). The complex is listed as Exceptional in the National Register of Historic Places. The current owner has invested over \$250,000 in the structures in recent years.

Importantly, VARAK Park is an incubator of entrepreneurship, space for the provision of important professional services and a seat of artistry in the heart of



both the Village and the *Owkill Commons*. In addition it is architecturally splendid and character defining for the Village.

With support of a 2019 NYMS Technical Assistance grant, Argus Architecture & Preservation conducted an assessment of the Victorian Building and concluded *that the architectural integrity of the building was very good overall. However, exterior conditions range from good to poor. Categorically, the mansard roof and wood cornice exhibit the worst deterioration, including some areas of leakage...the dormer units are only in fair to poor condition...6/6 windows remain...collectively their condition is fair to good and some masonry has deteriorated. Key liabilities include a lack of a passenger elevator, inadequate and outdated toilet facilities, and deteriorated conditions, particularly on the exterior.*



Argus concluded that (t)he major assets of the building are its rational layout, large and flexible spaces with ample natural light, and the architectural distinction and appeal of the exterior. It recommends enhancing the building's physical contribution to the vitality and the character of Main Street through improving the green space layout in front and developing a sensitive scheme for exterior lighting (including a lantern in the cupola). It recommended addressing deteriorated conditions of the exterior of the building envelope, coupled with energy efficient improvements for the windows and the roof. Secondly improve the functionality, accessibility and marketability of the building. Work proposed under NY Forward would also focus on energy efficiency, stabilizing/preserving the exterior envelope, and improving heating/cooling, safety and accessibility. Funds would be used in part to repair roof/cornice/cupola; improve energy efficiency of windows and heating and cooling systems; renovate sprinkler piping; improve access/egress (including new passenger elevator); reconfigure space for shared offices; and improve exterior lighting and visibility from Main Street.

Estimated Costs \$1.5 million

NY Forward will help rehabilitate the buildings further to retain jobs and maintain a valuable incubator with incredible historic character well into the 21st century.

B. The Cambridge Food Co-op (1 West Main Street). A community-owned grocery store for all. Founded in 1976 by a handful of families and building a presence on Main Street in the late 1980s, the Co-op purchased One West Main (a 3,800+ square feet, two-story brick, storefront) in 2014. Since purchasing the historic building (c.1849) and with NYMS support, it has invested about \$135K renovating the store, installing heat pumps, replacing the roof, rehabbing the façade etc. Today, the Food Co-op has 263 member families; nine employees (2 FT and the rest PT) bringing healthy local food and products to the whole community. Forty working members, many of them retirees or new arrivals, contribute working shifts at the Co-op and strongly value this opportunity to actively engage with the community.



On average the Co-op sources 30% of its products from local suppliers and close to 50% from regional suppliers (defined as NY and New England) - **a total of 48 local farmers and makers.** The Co-op often acts as an incubator for local suppliers, providing real world feedback and ideas regarding product quality, packaging, compliance, etc. Its gross sales are more than \$600,000 annually. In addition, the Co-op leases upstairs office space to four commercial tenants.

The Problem/The Opportunity: The Cambridge Food Co-op finds itself at a crossroads; it's bursting at the seams—its current footprint constrains its growth and limits its potential. With NY Forward support, the Co-op proposes to build an historically sensitive addition to add additional retail space for more local, regional and bulk products; a licensed commercial “community” kitchen for value-added food production by community members, with a ready retail market steps away; and flexible space to facilitate classes on health and wellness, and community gatherings. It will also explore partnerships with other organizations to improve access through the delivery of healthy food facing mobility challenges. Architectural Resources Cambridge Inc., has created a concept for this expansion.

Estimated Cost: \$300,000 (including commercial kitchen fit up)

An expansion would result in as many as four more Co-op jobs; more opportunities for food entrepreneurs to create, test and refine their products; and more activity in the Owlkill Commons.

II. Advancing the Recreational Economy: Gateway The Owlkill Commons

Cambridge seeks to grow its outdoor recreation economy. In accordance with our EPA/USDA/NBRC-funded plan, we desire to develop a system of trails within the Village to connect greenspaces and natural amenities to Main Street (which has some of the amenities—brew pub, arts center, farmers market, various eateries—through which a recreational economy would flourish). Ultimately, the objective is to better connect the Village to the new Cambridge Community Forest and thereafter think about creating connectors to three state forests (Mount Tom, Chestnut Hill, and Notch Lane) in White Creek and improving links to waterways like the Battenkill and nearby lakes. The *Owlkill Commons* would be transformed to be the link and dynamic gateway between recreation and Main Street.

Central to placemaking of the *Owlkill Commons* initiative is enlivening underutilized greenspace and stewarding, celebrating and increasing access to the Owlkill itself—a stream which meanders within and wraps around the Commons. This project element is key to further developing Southern Washington County's Recreational Economy and enhancing mobility within the community. Through this initiative the community will seek to uncover the history and acknowledge the important role of *Mohicans* to the area and our region's development. There are two main elements of focus which will help the community realize this vision:

A. Stewarding, Celebrating and Increasing access to the Owl Kill

The Owl Kill starts north at Lake Lauderdale and runs south with Route 22 except for a jog through the Village of Cambridge to the Hoosic River in Eagle Bridge. It is a pristine stream that adds aesthetic and natural beauty and character to the area and is rich in natural resources. Sections of it are loaded with small, wild brown trout and rainbow trout. It is also rich in other habitats and wildlife such as mink, muskrat, and even otters. The natural character and beauty of the Owlkill stream is a vitally important feature in the fabric and character of the village and helps define its context. It is a highlighting feature to the center of the community and serves to draw people together at the footbridge. The stream has been mistreated in various ways in the past; we now seek to reclaim and restore it to its natural character and beauty. This initiative focuses on the .55 miles of the Owlkill within the Commons. There are three project components:

(i) Stream Restoration/Reusing fallen retaining walls adjacent to the Victorian footbridge in front of VARAK Park to renaturalize the stream channel. The Owlkill's channel, along with the stream corridor and riparian vegetation, has been historically manipulated, channelized, and constrained within the Village of Cambridge. Renaturalizing the channel, along a proposed community trail, will enhance the ecosystem by improving flood resiliency and fish habitat, and enhance recreational enjoyment of the creek. We will assess nearby sections of the Owl Kill to create reference information, and evaluate hydrology, hydraulics, and geomorphology to develop mapping and models needed to ensure the function and stability of the channel, floodplain, and riparian vegetation, and the safety of the adjoining the trail and nearby buildings. Following planning, stream restoration would take place along the .55 mile stretch in the *Owlkill Commons*.

Retaining walls adjacent to the famed footbridge have collapsed and crumbled. These stone walls, channelizing and controlling the stream section, will be removed and the stream redesigned back to its naturalized form and condition similar to its upstream and downstream state. The naturalized design will gently turn, undulate and meander as it once did before it was controlled and channelized. Its small reflective pools, rills, jetties and riparian features will harbor wildlife and aquatic biology. The gurgling stream will serve to once again enhance the area adjacent to it as a natural resource. The potential for the stream to serve educational purposes is equally important and significant and will be greatly enhanced when it is returned to its natural condition and splendor. See Conceptual plan. Estimated Cost for Stream Restoration and Naturalizing Stream Channel: \$300,000



(ii) Creating an eight foot wide ADA Accessible .55 mile walking/biking shared use pathway/trail along the Owl Kill from the corner of Pearl and Main Street to the southwest corner of the Commons. The most-traveled portion will be gravel. Plans call for eventual trail expansion south to connect to the school, Community Forest and health and emergency services, greatly enhancing walkability, connectivity and a means for supporting pedestrian transportation. Estimated Cost: \$250,000

(iii) Develop Wayfinding and interpretive signage and branding of Owlkill Commons both to connect Main Street to recreational assets within the Village and on the outskirts and heighten understanding about the stream corridors in the Cambridge Valley and the *Mohican* communities² that once relied on these resources as well as the importance of the seed industry historically. Estimated Cost: \$25,000

B. Expanding, improving and enlivening public park spaces:

The Owlkill Trail will connect two re-imagined currently underutilized park spaces. The first, currently known as **VARAK Park**, will be expanded about 1.75 acres eastward to include open space recently purchased by the Community Partnership. This new space includes additional *Owlkill* frontage, wetlands and a spring. Opportunities for community recreation, leisure, education and events for pedestrians, community members, senior citizens, students and visitors will abound. The second, **Memorial Park**, is a .5 acre parcel owned by the Village which serves as the gateway to the Public Library. The Knights of Columbus will rehabilitate the gazebo, the site of a popular summer concert series. The Community Partnership will also seek to situate the Cambridge Carousel, an historic 20 horse kiddie carousel in the park and make improvements in tandem with the library's expansion. *(Note: The carousel was brought to Cambridge by Gerry Holzman, the designer and carver of the Empire State Carousel at the Farmers' Museum in Cooperstown. Like that initiative, artisans and community members have been involved in the restoration. The effort was paused awaiting a permanent location to erect it.)* Cost: \$200,000

III. Improving Quality of Life

Expanded opportunities will enhance quality of life for residents and visitors alike. Importantly too, Cambridge's Public Library provides sustenance to the community through its lending and offers an array of services to residents and visitors alike. It, like the Food Co-op and Hubbard Hall Center for the Arts, also plays an important role enhancing quality of life by bringing people together and weaving community fabric. It is a site for ideas (new and old) creativity and connection. It sits on the *Owlkill Common's* western boundary and with NY Forward support would expand its offerings and building footprint, making for a more vibrant community.



2. Owl Kill itself is named for *Soquon, The Owl*, a chieftain known as a Great Uniter of the Mohican in the 16th and 17th centuries. He is famed for having met with Henry Hudson, for having led warriors to many battles and for having spoken on behalf of the Mohican Tribe to many European and Indigenous leaders. He is perhaps best known for his leading role in the Witenagemot Peace Council, in which England's Governor Andros, along with the Mohawk and the Mohican tribes agreed to a landmark peace treaty. The Owl delivered what is considered the keynote speech.

A. Cambridge Public Library Expansion (21 West Main Street)

First constructed in 1904 and expanded in 1987, the Cambridge Public Library invites patronage and visitors of all generations, all economic levels, all educational backgrounds and across cultural and racial makeup. In addition to the general goals of literacy, learning and research, culture and entertainment, the Library seeks to improve the lives and meet the needs of the entire community. Though chartered by the Village, ultimately it serves the needs of three towns with a total population of about 7,000; as such its budget is included in the School District vote. In 2019 there were approximately 40,000 visits to the library. It fulfills critical roles in the wider community, as a historical and cultural hub and a cross-demographic community center. The services it provides to the broad community (from storyhour for toddlers, to tax-preparation and Alzheimer/Dementia awareness workshops, a fresh foods refrigerator, to Mahjong and craft clubs for folks of all ages to name a few) are vast and the resources, particularly the Library's physical plant, are very strained.



The Problem/Opportunity: Located at 21 West Main Street, the small historic brick Colonial Revival structure is highly visible from the West and serves as the gateway to the *Owkill Commons*. The Library is small—only 5,604 square feet (1,428 sq ft of which are in an inaccessible, practically windowless basement). The historic envelope has signs of wear and disrepair and the interior space is cramped and multi-tiered with the meeting room in the basement—making accessibility problematic. The parcel it sits on limits how it can expand.

The Board of Trustees has embarked on an ambitious capital plan to cement the Library's role and make an even more meaningful difference in Southern Washington County. With a Southern Adirondack Library System Construction Challenge Grant, it hired Butler Rowland Mays Architects to work with them to develop an expansion plan.

Components of the expansion plan currently include:

- **Historic:** Restoration of the historic reading room and building envelope of the original 1904 building consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation;
- **Cultural:** By expanding its footprint and rearranging interior spaces, the Library can focus on different collections and program types. Specifically the Library will dramatically expand the Children & Families Space (adding 1,462 sq ft) and the Adult Reading Room and Collection and will establish a Young Adult Activity Center (adding 420 sq ft) and a Business Center; and
- **Community Center:** Expand access to and create more space for community meetings. The addition is being designed to include outdoor program space and connect to Memorial Park and the historic gazebo.

Through collaboration with the Village and Washington County, it is hoped that the demolition of the Old School (to its northern border) will catalyze further expansion—particularly the opportunity for the library to broaden programming spaces outside and connect library patrons to trails and recreation within the *Owkill Commons* and beyond.

Actor: Cambridge Public Library (Friends of the Library; Village of Cambridge)

Estimated Cost: \$1.75 million

IV. Expanding Housing and Commercial Main Street Options within the *Owkill Commons*

Complementing these elements above, the Village would take several steps to make sites more shovel-ready and provide incentives to private building owners to invest and broaden the transformational nature of the *Owkill Commons* Initiative, resulting in at least seven new residential units and two new upgraded commercial Main Street businesses.

A. Improvements to Existing Buildings: An incentive grant fund (modeled after NYMS) would be established to encourage building owners in the Owlkill Commons environs to revitalize structures for expanded housing and commercial pursuits. *Examples of interest expressed include:*

• **16 West Main Street:** Rice Mansion Inn, is a 12,000 square foot Classical Revival home (c. 1892) with a carriage house, it was a seat of elegance and entertainment for the community. By the mid-20th century it fell on hard times and disrepair, shifting from owner to owner but still remaining listed on the National Register of Historic Places as Exceptional. In 1984 then-current owners began to convert the property into a bed and breakfast. Starting in 2004, current owners rebranded the site to the Rice Mansion Inn and made significant investments to expand lodging opportunities in both the mansion and carriage house. There are now twelve guest rooms decorated with the elegance and grace of the early 19th Century. Interior historic details, including rococo paneled walls, fresco ceilings, original pocket doors, a birdcage elevator, and decorative fireplaces and moldings are fully intact. Because of COVID and competing demands on the owners' time, the Inn has in recent years only operated for occasional repeat visitors and sporadic large sold-out events.



With improvements afforded by NY Forward support, the current caretakers with the support of Jerome Rice's relatives, would resume offering overnight lodging full time but will explore the idea of turning a portion of the Carriage House into lodging-for-artists residencies and adapting the first floor of the Mansion into a Seed Museum sharing the story of the Rice Family and the significance the seed industry had in shaping Cambridge and Washington County. Improvements to facilitate this transformation include: reduce the carbon footprint and eliminate reliance on fossil fuels and reduce threat of fire by converting the Mansion and carriage house to a geothermal heating and cooling system; make exterior facade improvements; renovate four rooms maintaining historic elements while adapting them for museum use; create a common kitchen, living space and laundry in the carriage house for artist residencies. Actor: Current Owners/ Caretakers and Rice Family Descendants

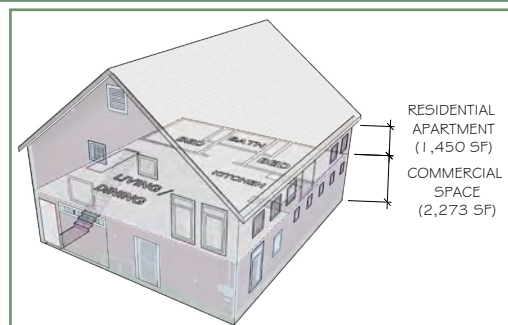
• **18 West Main Street:** Two-story square Italian villa residence with paired bracket cupola, bay window, veranda once listed as Exceptional in the National Historic Registry. In recent years this prominent 3,200+ sq ft Main Street structure served as a five-unit apartment building but suffered significant fire damage in 2020. Rehabilitate into five one-bedroom unit residences. Actor: Building Owner



• **11 West Main Street:** This fall the Village of Cambridge will move into a new state-of-the-art fire house and sell its firehouse on Main Street. Funds have been reserved to incentivize purchase and rehabilitation for commercial use on the first floor. (Note: Original building plans called for constructing a second floor for apartments). Neighboring Community Partnership would develop infrastructure to unlock the potential and interest in the structure. Actor: TBD



• **The Red Barn** in the lumber yard: Formerly a storage space adapted to be the arts center's dance studio, the first floor has served as space for retailers and craftspersons in recent years. The intent is to rehabilitate the commercial first floor and create a two-bedroom residential unit on the second floor. Actor: Owner, The Community Partnership



• **Railroad Avenue Multi-Unit Housing Development:** The Community Partnership is exploring the potential of partnering with an affordable

housing development entity to develop a modest multi-unit residency on Railroad Avenue. *(See Owlkill Commons Map for proposed location behind the Co-op)*

Collectively the Village would strive to incentivize creation of at least seven new residential units and three rehabilitated commercial units on Main Street. Estimated Cost. \$1,500,000 reserved for these projects. *(Grants program administered in an NYMS-like fashion with this funding would supplement private funding or additional leveraged monies).*

B. Unlocking the Potential: Advancing Shovel Ready Sites: There are two structures in the *Owlkill Commons* that have deteriorated significantly and are distressed and unsafe, inhibiting realization of place. Plans call for their removal to expand space for recreation, social services and infrastructure.

• **The White Building in the Lumber Yard:** A 1,200 sq. ft barn built of hollow bricks is deteriorating. Its interior is divided into four bays. The floor is a combination of dirt and cement. Given its construction, rehabilitation costs would be prohibitive and it is not character defining. The owner (Community Partnership) proposes to demolish the building to expand access to open space and the Owlkill, thereby enhancing recreational opportunities in the Village. Actor: Owner The Community Partnership. Estimated Cost: \$75,000.

• **The Old School/Bus Garage:** Located at 25 Memorial Drive is an approximately 20,000+ sq ft brick structure originally built in 1891 as the District's central school. A fire in 1947 demolished top floors so the district abandoned the building for educational purposes and the resulting charmless, unattractive structure was turned into offices and a bus garage. In January 2009, following construction of a new bus garage, Cambridge Central School District, the former owner of the building, commissioned Bernier Carr & Associates to do a feasibility report to explore options for the building. The overall condition of the structure eleven years ago was fair to poor—and observed conditions led BC&A to condemn a portion of the structure. There are underground tanks and questions about other hazardous conditions have been raised. It was purchased by a private party, went up for taxes and is now owned by Washington County. It has deteriorated further due to neglect rendering it unusable and potentially a Brownfield Site. In 2008, the costs to adapt the building to other uses were exorbitant: \$2.5 million as a cold storage warehouse; \$5.4 million for residential apartments; \$6 million for a Youth Community Center; \$5.7 million for manufacturing—not to mention clean up.



The 20,000+ sq ft building sits on 1.5 acre adjacent to the Library—a library which is bursting at the seams and wishes to expand but is constrained by the Old School. It could be a gateway to expanded park space and the Owl Kill and walking trails. To these ends, the proposal calls for the Old School to be demolished. The Village has inquired about the possibility of partnering with Washington County to demolish the building to advance community development needs. Estimated Cost for Demolition: \$1 million (Brownfield funding would be sought too.)

C. Underpinning Infrastructure:

Paths and Parking Lots: Parking is an issue for ten properties just west of the Railroad tracks—including the Food Co-op and the collection of buildings in the Lumberyard. To ease congestion on Main Street, and improve access and mobility for at least a dozen small businesses, multiple residencies and visitors to the Commons, the Community Partnership would work with the Village to construct a shared parking lot, including EV stations along with pathways and necessary lighting in the lumberyard. Estimated Cost: \$350,000

Climate Smart: The Village of Cambridge has no electric vehicle charging stations. They would be integrated in new shared parking lots within the Lumberyard, VARAK Park and the Library. Building owners look forward to meeting with energy consultants 'to identify ways of improving building performance and contributing to the State's clean energy and healthy community goals.' Whenever feasible, alternative energy heating and cooling systems, including heat pumps and geothermal, would be installed in buildings renovated under the program. We will look for opportunities to install solar panels on rooftops.

Village of Cambridge *Owkill Commons Revitalization Initiative*: Priority Projects

Public Infrastructure	Cost	REDC Priorities	State Priorities
Owl Kill Stream restoration/naturalization	\$300,000	Core	Placemaking Opportunity Agenda
Owkill Commons Park Establishment/Upgrades	\$200,000	Core	Placemaking Opportunity Agenda
Owl Kill Trail (.55 mile)	\$250,000	Core	Placemaking Opportunity Agenda
Owkill Commons Branding & Wayfinding Signage	\$25,000	Core Gateway	Placemaking Opportunity Agenda
Shared Parking Lots w/ EV charging stations	\$350,000	Core, Talent	Placemaking Opportunity Agenda
Historic Building Expansion/Revitalization	Cost	REDC Priorities	State Priorities
Public Library Expansion (21 W Main)	\$1,750,000	Core	Placemaking Opportunity Agenda
VARAK Park: (15 W Main)- entrepreneur incubator	\$1,500,000	Core Talent, Magnet	Placemaking; workforce dev; Next Tech
Commons Housing/Commercial Unit Incentive Fund, examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rice Mansion Inn (16 W Main) • 18 West Main • 11 West Main • The Red Barn (9 W Main) • RR Ave Housing Development 	\$1,500,000 (incentive fund)	Core Talent Magnet	Placemaking
Cambridge Food Co-op Expansion (1 W Main)	\$300,000	Core Talent Magnet	Placemaking; workforce dev.
Demolition of Old School (25 Memorial Dr)	\$1,000,000	Core	Placemaking
White barn demolition	\$75,000	Core	Placemaking
TOTAL	\$7,200,000		

Priority projects within the Owkill Commons Revitalization Initiative address the Capital District Region's Regional Economic Development Council Priorities regarding Core, Talent and Magnet particularly and advance New York State priorities for rural areas particularly in the areas of placemaking, opportunity agenda and workforce development.

9. Administrative Capacity

The Village of Cambridge community has a proven track record of managing transformative projects of scale by leveraging private-public partnerships and the myriad of talents within the community. In September, the Municipality completed construction of a new firehouse that services the Village and multiple townships at a cost of \$3.7 million (including architectural, surveying, testing and archaeological services)—C.T. Male Engineering helped with this.

The Cambridge Valley Community Development and Preservation Partnership (Community Partnership) in partnership with the municipality, multiple building owners and the arts center created a vision and facilitated implementation of the *Cambridge Freight Yard Revitalization Project* and simultaneously directly implemented two NYMS projects.

The *Owlkill Commons* is a larger and even more transformative initiative. As we did with former projects, we would leverage the wealth of expertise and good will in the community and as necessary hire planning, architectural and engineering firms to implement the plan. We would work closely with NY Forward's consulting team and DOS project manager to develop the Strategic Investment Plan and refine implementation strategies, enabling us to realize our vision of a vibrant community.

Finally, the Freight Yard project has been sustainable for over a decade (including through a pandemic) and yielded results (more jobs, visitorship, downtown living and catalyzed additional investment in the neighborhood) because it was home-grown, highly participatory in nature, addressed tangible challenges head on and emanated from the community's needs and desires. Despite setbacks from time to time, we were dedicated and had fun working together. It created synergies across and leveraged resources from within and outside the Village to simply help people passionate about their particular endeavor to do better what they do best.

Cambridge's *Owlkill Commons* Initiative would do the same, with NY Forward support. It would be a magnet and further transform our community to the benefit of residents, the region and visitors to New York State.



Letters of Support

Town of White Creek

Major General John Wilson Sprague Building
28 Mountain View Drive
Cambridge, New York 12816

James S. Griffith
Town Supervisor

September 20, 2022

Ms. Ruth Mahoney
Dr. Havidan Rodriguez
Co-Chairs, Capital Region,
Mr. Michael Yevoli, Director
Regional Economic
Development Council
Hedley Park Place
433 River Street, Suite 1003
Troy, NY. 12180

Dear Ms. Mahoney, Dr. Rodríguez, Members of the Regional Economic Development Council and the NY Forward Application Review Team:

I write enthusiastically in support of the Village of Cambridge's request for NY Forward support for its Owlkill Commons Revitalization Initiative, which is situated within the Town of White Creek. The Township stands ready to work with the Village and Department of State planners to advance the effort.

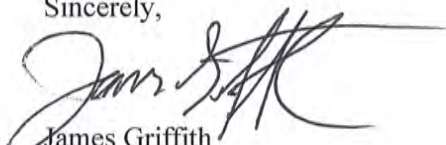
The initiative is consistent with goals of the Town of White Creek's Comprehensive Plan and Farmland Protection Plan. It focuses on growing the Village's urbanized core and bolstering a key center of homegrown entrepreneurship and commerce in our Township. It furthers efforts to establish a recreational economy—14 percent of White Creek's lands are State Forest and their recreation potential has yet to be tapped. Importantly it would offer additional housing options to residents and allow our Public Library to expand. All important for growing our tax-base in a way that is sensitive to the Town's rural character.

The timing for such a placemaking initiative could not be more welcome. The Township has a rich agricultural heritage and economy, mixed with an expanding light manufacturing industry. Morcon, a paper products manufacture is advancing on a \$14.6 million plant expansion that will result in the retention of 60 jobs and addition of eight jobs. A cannabis grower has purchased a vacant industrial building and if licenses are obtained could create an additional 25+ jobs in our rural community.

Hence, the Owlkill Commons initiative it will serve as a magnet to attract new workers and improve quality of life in the Village.

I urge New York State to support the Village of Cambridge's NY Forward Owlkill Initiative.

Sincerely,



James Griffith
Supervisor



Ms. Ruth Mahoney and Dr. Havidan Rodriguez
Co-Chairs, Capital Region
Regional Economic Development Council
Hedley Park Place
433 River Street, Suite 1003
Troy, New York 12180

Dear Ms. Mahoney, Dr. Rodriguez, and members of the Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) and the NY Forward Application Review Team:

I write to urge your support of the Village of Cambridge's NY Forward proposal. It will help retain and expand job opportunities along Main Street in a key Southern Washington County community. I am Co-Owner of 17 Mile VARAK LLC.

VARAK Park is a multi-building complex in the heart of the Village of Cambridge's *Owlkill Commons Initiative*. An array of professionals, artists, craftpersons and entrepreneurs advance their livelihoods in one of our three historic buildings—collectively offering over 37,000 square feet of commercial space.

Originally built as offices and factory space for the Rice Seed Company in the late 19th Century--these buildings are historic and character defining for the community. However, an assessment by Argus Architecture illustrated that the exterior of particularly the largest building faces deterioration; there is also a need to improve energy efficiency and upgrade HVAC systems to be more climate smart; enhance accessibility; and reconfigure space for shared offices.

Importantly too from a marketing and character-defining perspective the architects suggested enhancing visibility of the building from Main Street and improving exterior lighting to make it more of an attraction. We keep rents affordable to promote entrepreneurship in this rural community. Costs to upgrade are significant especially to ensure the Secretary of the Interiors Standards for Rehabilitation are maintained given the complex's historic fabric. These would be supplemented by NY Forward support—and serve as an incentive to make improvements.

Donation of Victorian Footbridge and 1.75 Acres of Open Space: Additionally, 17 Mile VARAK knows that private-public partnerships are realized to advance the Village of Cambridge. VARAK recently collaborated with the Village and Community Partnership on the rehabilitation of the famed Victorian Bridge.

We are in the process of donating approximately 1.75 acres of the green space in front of our buildings (which includes frontage on the Owl Kill) to the nonprofit the Community Partnership so it can be developed as a gateway to a trail system which is an essential component of this grant application—and the community's efforts to foster a recreational economy.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Benjamin Long', written over a horizontal line.

Benjamin Long, Member



69 Harry Street
Conshohocken, PA 19428



21 W. Main St.
Cambridge, NY 12816
Ph./Fax: 518-677-2443

September 21, 2022

Ms. Ruth Mahoney and Dr. Havidan Rodriguez
Co-Chairs, Capital Region
Regional Economic Development Council (REDC)
Hedley Park Place
433 River Street, Suite 1003
Troy, New York 12180

Dear Ms. Mahoney, Dr. Rodriguez, and members of the Regional Economic Development Council and the NY Forward Application Review Team:

The Cambridge Public Library is excited to be a centerpiece of the *Owkill Commons Revitalization Initiative* and urges the Capital District REDC to select the Village of Cambridge's NY Forward Proposal for support.

Our Library's mission is to stimulate the connections between people and ideas, to encourage literacy, and to promote free exchange of information and resources for cultural, educational, and economic development while fostering a sense of community in a welcoming environment. We invite patronage and visitors of all generations, all economic levels, all educational backgrounds and across cultural and racial make ups.

Our Library is bursting at the seams with activity. Its physical plant is cramped, multi-tiered and presents serious accessibility challenges—limiting our ability to serve the community and meet its needs. In 2017-18 the Library was one of four libraries chosen to participate in the *NYS Library Sustainability Initiative Community Change Agent Program*—through workshops and attendance at a host of community events/meetings we learned about the community's needs and aspirations. These findings formed the focus of our Long-Range Strategic Plan (2018-23) which calls for the expansion of collections and programs and the need to address accessibility issues the building presents.

As such the library is embarking on an ambitious capital campaign to expand and rethink our physical plant. The Library has hired and been working with Butler Rowland Mays Architects to design our expansion plan. (See attached conceptual renderings).

Despite the receipt of a significant bequest; funds to realize our vision fall short and would be offset through NY Forward support. NY Forward support would also allow the Library to broaden programming spaces outside (particularly if the Old School were removed and a trail system created).

The Library is the western gateway to the Owkill Commons. We look forward to working in public-private partnership to transform the heart of the Village of Cambridge to the benefit of residents and visitors alike. NY Forward will help us to better serve our community.

Sincerely,

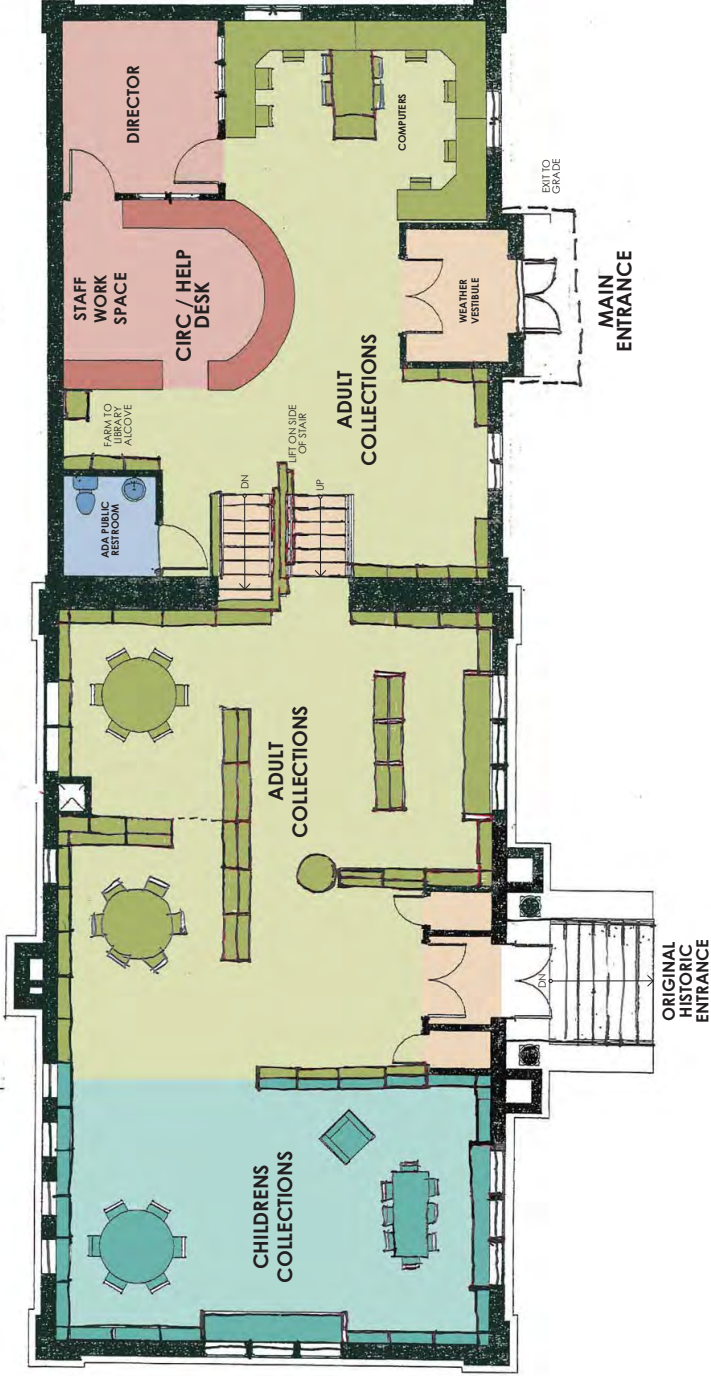
Christina Becker
Library Director

Susan Sawyer
Library Board President



COLOR KEY

Adult Collections
Children's Collections
Teen / YA Collections
Study Rooms
Lobby / Gathering / Stairs
Local History (not used)
Staff Areas
Program / Activity Rooms
Friends Spaces (not used)
Mech / Elect / Other
Rest Rooms / Kitchens



MAIN FLOOR PLAN -
EXISTING CONDITIONS

CAMBRIDGE
PUBLIC LIBRARY

05-23-2022
EM





COLOR KEY

Adult Collections
Children's Collections
Teen / YA Collections
Study Rooms
Lobby / Gathering / Stairs
Local History (not used)
Staff Areas
Program / Activity Rooms
Friends Spaces (not used)
Mech / Elect / Other
Rest Rooms / Kitchens



MAIN FLOOR & ENTRY
FLOOR PLAN

OPTION 1

CAMBRIDGE
PUBLIC LIBRARY

05-23-2022

1





COLOR KEY

Adult Collections
Children's Collections
Teen / YA Collections
Study Rooms
Lobby / Gathering / Stairs
Local History (not used)
Staff Areas
Program / Activity Rooms
Friends Spaces (not used)
Mech / Elect / Other
Rest Rooms / Kitchens



LOWER FLOOR PLAN
OPTION 1

CAMBRIDGE
PUBLIC LIBRARY
05-23-2022

1





CAMBRIDGE FOOD CO-OP, Inc.

1 West Main St - Cambridge, NY 12816
518-677-5731 - cambridgefoodcoop.com

September 20, 2022

Ms. Ruth Mahoney and Dr. Havidan Rodriguez
Co-Chairs, Capital Region
Regional Economic Development Council
Hedley Park Place
433 River Street, Suite 1003
Troy, New York 12180

Dear Ms. Mahoney, Dr. Rodriguez, and members of the Regional Economic Development Council and the NY Forward Application Review Team:

I write on behalf of the Cambridge Food Co-op Board to enthusiastically support the application of the Village of Cambridge for funding through the NY Forward initiative to advance the Owlkill Commons Revitalization Initiative.

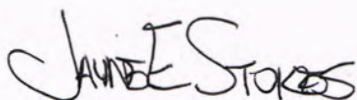
Founded in 1976, the Cambridge Food Co-op is a community-owned grocery store for all. In the last five years the Co-op has experienced sustained growth. (Current gross sales of \$620K represent a more than 20% increase from sales in 2018. We have 263 members and nine employees. On average the Co-op sources 30 % of its products from local suppliers. In real terms that means supporting 42 local farmers and makers. The Co-op often acts as an incubator for local suppliers providing real world feedback and ideas regarding product quality, packaging, compliance etc. It is also a very important gathering spot and community builder within Southern Washington County.

Today the Co-op finds itself at a crossroads. Current retail space is constrained by the size of the original structure making it very difficult to grow sales enough to access better wholesale pricing. Although we have invested about \$135K in improvements in the existing footprint through a combination of grants (NYMS), donations and financing, we have not been able to reach the economies of scale that would drive down costs and make the Co-op more accessible to all. To achieve this we are planning an historically sensitive addition that would be built to the highest energy efficiency

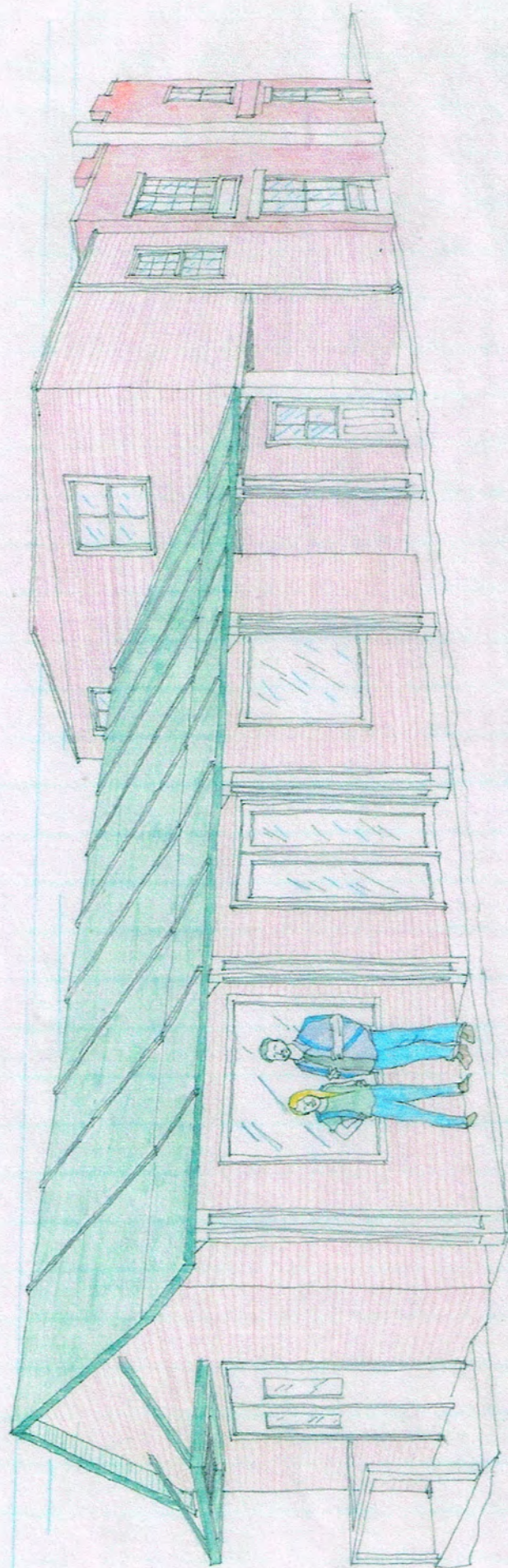
standards while providing needed retail space and allowing us to develop a licensed commercial community kitchen as well as a public meeting space to facilitate classes on health and wellness. Architect concept drawings are already generating excitement for the vision of a sustainable Co-op of the future. One that would have an integral role in the overall Owlkill Commons Revitalization Initiative and the Village of Cambridge as a whole. NY Forward support would be the ultimate catalyst to turn these ideas into reality.

Thank you for giving the highest consideration to the application from the Village of Cambridge.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jayne E. Stokes". The signature is stylized, with the first name "Jayne" written in a cursive-like script and the last name "Stokes" in a more straightforward, slightly slanted font.

Jayne E. Stokes
Chair



**The Cambridge Valley Community Development
and Preservation Partnership, Inc.
P.O. Box 72
Cambridge, NY 12816**

September 22, 2022

Ms. Ruth Mahoney
Dr. Havidan Rodriguez
Co-Chairs, Capital Region,
Mr. Michael Yevoli, Director
Regional Economic
Development Council
Hedley Park Place
433 River Street, Suite 1003
Troy, NY 12180

Dear Ms. Mahoney, Dr. Rodríguez, Members of the Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) and the NY Forward Application Review Team:

The Cambridge Valley Community Development and Preservation Partnership (Community Partnership) looks forward to working with the Village of Cambridge, building owners and community members as well as NYS to revitalize and realize the vision for the *Owkill Commons*.

Formed in 2002, the Community Partnership is a nonprofit community development organization that promotes people working together to strengthen the economic vitality of rural Southern Washington County by building on the area's character and assets. The Community Partnership encourages sustainable neighborhood planning and facilitates downtown revitalization projects—by rehabilitating and celebrating historic community assets. It has a history of bringing together and empowering a myriad of talents, leveraging resources and working collaboratively with the public, private and non-profit sectors.

Revitalize the Former Lumber Yard: In June 2020 at the height of the pandemic, the Community Partnership purchased a 2.6 acre former lumber yard with frontage on Main Street and Railroad Avenue and host to five structures in various stages of disrepair. Our goal is to revitalize the property for expanded commercial, residential and recreational use and rebrand it as part of the larger *Owkill Commons Initiative*.

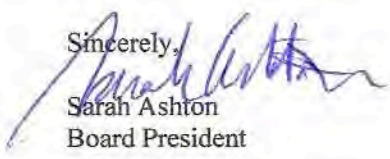
To date the Community Partnership has made significant headway on revitalizing 9 West Main Street, a 3,800 sq ft mixed-use structure—we have retained one commercial tenant and welcomed a new residential tenant as we prepare the space for a coffee house. Rehabilitation plans for 'the Red Barn,' a two-story 3,700 sq ft structure currently call for commercial space(s) on the first floor and a two-bedroom apartment on the second floor. A 1,200 sq ft barn built of hollow bricks and in deteriorating condition, is slated for demolition to expand space for recreation, infrastructure and enhance mobility.

We purchased the property knowing that the adjacent building 11 West Main—the firehouse—would soon be abandoned; and that there is potential space on Railroad Avenue to construct a modest, affordable housing unit. We want to help create the conditions through infrastructure improvements (such as a shared parking lot) that makes these properties desirable for purchase/redevelopment. Also, the property has open space, 480+ linear feet of Owkill frontage, a spring and a unique wetland, offers the opportunity to create a park for the community. The owner of VARAK Park is in the final stages of donating its 1.7 acre park both with Main Street and Owkill frontage and the site of the Victorian Footbridge to the Community Partnership—allowing for the creation of an expanded integrated park in the Owkill Commons. We aim to steward, celebrate and increase access to the Owkill in accordance with the proposal and work with the Village to construct a trail along it.

Natural Evolution from the Freight Yard. This new initiative builds on the approach the Community Partnership took with the successful placemaking *Cambridge Freight Yard Revitalization Project* (just west of the lumber yard)—which resulted in job retention and creation and catalyzed investment in housing, the arts center and farmers market. It involved the purchase and rehabilitation of seven buildings and development of infrastructure (septic/parking/park) within the two-acre intact historic rural freight yard. This effort was community-driven and involved public-private partnership to address identified needs and craft a vision to unleash the economic vibrancy of the area. We worked with and received grants from a variety of Federal and NYS agencies including NYSERDA, FHWA/NYS DOT, Office of Homes and Community Renewal, Empire State Development Corporation, and Department of Agriculture and Markets. Involvement of multiple local partners and government agencies deepened the project and made it better and more sustainable.

We stand ready with excitement to collaborate with the Village, NYS consultants and the Department of State in 2023 to realize the scope of the Owlkill Commons. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Sarah Ashton
Board President



RICE MANSION INN
The Mansion Built by Seeds

September 22, 2022

Ms. Ruth Mahoney and Dr. Havidan Rodriguez
Co-Chairs, Capital Region
Regional Economic Development Council
Hedley Park Place
433 River Street, Suite 1003
Troy, New York 12180

Dear Ms. Mahoney, Dr. Rodriguez, and members of the Regional Economic Development Council and the NY Forward Application Review Team:

My husband and I are the owners, caretakers, of the Rice Mansion Inn at 16 West Main Street in Cambridge, New York. Purchasing the 7,500 square foot Neo Classical Colonial Revival Mansion (c. 1903) and adjacent 4,500 square foot Carriage House in 2004. Over the course of the last 18 years, we have worked with local crafts people to restore the Mansion, maintaining its historical features while modernizing to today's standards. Much of the once uninhabitable second and third floors are restored. We estimate the restoration investment between 2004 and 2022 to be \$600,000.

The Mansion operated as an Inn for much of the last 30 years, but due to the changing landscape or how people travel, choosing Air BnB type accommodations, and COVID the Mansion needs to turn the page and begin a new chapter.

With the support of Jerome B. Rice's relatives, we would resume offering overnight lodging full time but will explore the idea of turning a portion of the Carriage House into lodging—for-artists residencies and adapting the first floor of the Mansion into a Seed Museum sharing the story of the Rice Family and the significance the seed industry had in shaping Cambridge and Washington County. Improvements to facilitate this transformation include reduce the carbon footprint and eliminate reliance on fossil fuels and decrease threat of fire by converting the Mansion and carriage house to a geothermal heating and cooling system; make exterior facade improvements; renovate remaining rooms maintaining historic elements while adapting them for museum use; create a common kitchen, living space and laundry in the carriage house for artist residencies and other guests.

I thank you in advance for your consideration of the Village's Owlkill Commons Revitalization grant application.

Sincerely,

Christine Hoffer
Owner, 16 West Main Street

ALLAN P. MORRISON
237 Broad Street
Schuylerville, NY 12871

September 20, 2022

Ms. Ruth Mahoney and Dr. Havidan Rodriguez
Co-Chairs, Capital Region
Regional Economic Development Council
Hedley Park Place
433 River Street, Suite 1003
Troy, New York 12180

Dear Ms. Mahoney, Dr. Rodriguez, and members of the Regional Economic Development Council and the NY Forward Application Review Team:

I am the Owner of 18 West Main Street. It is an historic two-story square Italian villa residence with a cupola, bay windows and veranda. In the 1970s it was listed as an Exceptional building in the Village's National Historic District.

Unfortunately, the 3,200+ sf building was damaged by fire. At the time of the devastating fire that rendered my building uninhabitable, I was in the process of refurbishing it and restoring its five residential rental units. Intended to provide affordable rentals, badly needed in this village, the fire has put those plans on hold, pending options that would enable the huge expense of such restoration. I have been working with an engineer; the estimated cost of rehabilitation is about \$500,000—significantly above my original rehabilitation budget. NY Forward support could help offset this additional expense. I would seek to match contributions with personal funds and bank financing.

Given the location of my building in the exact middle of the Village and prominence on Main Street, its renewal is essential to restore the core of the focus area to its pristine state.

I thank you in advance for your serious consideration of this grant application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Allan P. Morrison", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Allan P. Morrison
Owner, 18 West Main Street



September 20, 2022

Ms. Ruth Mahoney
Dr. Havidan Rodriguez
Co-Chairs, Capital Region,
Mr. Michael Yevoli, Director
Regional Economic
Development Council
Hedley Park Place
433 River Street, Suite 1003
Troy, NY. 12180

Dear Ms. Mahoney, Dr. Rodríguez, Members of the Regional Economic Development Council and the NY Forward Application Review Team:

I write to urge New York State's support of the Village of Cambridge's NY Forward grant application.

The Owlkill Commons Revitalization Initiative will be transformative and benefit the Cambridge Valley tremendously.

Formed in 1997, the Cambridge Valley Chamber of Commerce seeks to improve business opportunities and community—the Owlkill Commons initiative does just that. It will promote job creation and retention--over three dozen small businesses are located within the target area—many of them Chamber members.

The reimagined open space not only add to the community's vibrancy and but will be an asset to for events like the annual Balloon Festival, the second largest event in Washington County. The rebranding effort of the Commons will be helpful in drawing residents and visitors alike to our local businesses which the Chamber would be happy to lend its expertise and collaborate on with the Village.

Thank you for your consideration of the Village of Cambridge's request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lisa M. Pembroke".

Lisa Pembroke
President



JACOB C. ASHBY
Assemblyman 107th District

PLEASE REPLY TO
District Office:

☐ 594 Columbia Turnpike
East Greenbush, New York 12061
518-272-6149

☐ Albany Office:
Room 402 LOB
Albany, New York 12248
518-455-5777

ashbyj@nyassembly.gov

THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

VICE-CHAIRMAN
Assembly Minority Conference
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Ways & Means

Ms. Ruth Mahoney and Dr. Havidan Rodriguez
Co-Chairs, Capital Region
Regional Economic Development Council
Hedley Park Place
433 River Street, Suite 1003
Troy, New York 12180

RE: 2022 Application to NY Forward
Village of Cambridge, Washington County, New York

Dear Ms. Mahoney, Dr. Rodriguez, and members of the Regional Economic Development Council and the NY Forward Application Review Team:

I write today to express my strong support of the Village of Cambridge's application to the NY Forward grant program. The Village of Cambridge endeavors to use this funding to specifically revitalize Owlkill Commons.

The Village of Cambridge is a beautiful community nestled within the surrounding foothills of the Adirondack and Green Mountains. Like other small, rural villages, Cambridge faces distinct and prominent challenges in their work to provide needed services and to expand opportunities for all residents. It's important to note, however, that the Village of Cambridge has successfully utilized State and Federal grants in the past to rehabilitate both Hubbard Hall and the Cambridge Freightyard. Therefore, Cambridge knows the work that goes into successfully completing a project, and I have no doubt that they will not only accomplish the projects outlined but also gather additional funding as needed.

I ask you to please support Cambridge's application for the NY Forward grant, as they are excited by the prospect of some much-needed revitalization. I thank you in advance for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Assemblyman Jake Ashby

September 22, 2022

Ms. Ruth Mahoney and Dr. Havidan Rodriguez
Co-Chairs, Capital Region
Regional Economic Development Council
Hedley Park Place
433 River Street, Suite 1003
Troy, New York 12180

Dear Ms. Mahoney, Dr. Rodriguez, and members of the Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) and the NY Forward Application Review Team:

I understand that the Village of Cambridge is applying for NY Forward support for its Owlkill Commons Revitalization Initiative, which includes a focus on fostering a recreation economy.

In 2019, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service, and the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) selected 10 communities in the United States to participate in the [Recreation Economy for Rural Communities](#) (RERC) program. The Village of Cambridge was the only community chosen in New York for the inaugural round of the program designed to help communities revitalize their Main Streets through outdoor recreation and smart growth principles. I am the lead at EPA for this initiative.

The RERC planning assistance program is designed to foster environmentally friendly community development and Main Street revitalization through conservation and sustainable use of public or private forests or other natural resources. At the time of Cambridge's application to the RERC program, the Agricultural Stewardship Association had just purchased 140+ acres to establish the Cambridge Community Forest. The community hoped to leverage RERC planning assistance to determine how to advance the Forest as a site for recreation and education and also to connect it to the Village's Main Street and other natural amenities (including parks, streams, wetlands, and forests) both within the Village and throughout the broader region, thereby improving quality of life and diversifying their economy.

As part of the RERC program, our planning assistance team held seven workshop sessions with Cambridge community members in September and October 2020. We held Cambridge's workshop sessions virtually because of limitations around travel and gathering during the COVID pandemic, and even given the virtual nature of our engagement, the Cambridge RERC workshop sessions were some of the most well attended during the first round of the RERC program, with over 100 community members represented. Following the workshop sessions, our team worked with local leaders in Cambridge to develop a Community Action Plan that outlines Cambridge's vision, goals, and actionable next steps to achieve their recreation economy and main street revitalization goals. The local team created a website to document their RERC process and final action plan [here](#).

I have continued to stay in touch with the local team in Cambridge and have seen that they have made a number of strides in implementing their RERC plan. I understand that with NY Forward support they would seek to improve natural amenities (including parks and stream corridors) intersecting with the Village's Main Street and to begin to develop trails along the Owl Kill that would eventually link Main Street to other natural resources and the Community Forest. Taking this next step will strengthen the community's commitment to their recreation economy and will boost their ability to succeed in continuing to implement their RERC action plan.

I hope with your support the Village can continue to advance its recreational economy.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steph Bertaina". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Steph" and last name "Bertaina" clearly distinguishable.

Steph Bertaina
Senior Policy Analyst
US EPA Office of Community Revitalization

