

## 2019 DRI Application

### **BASIC INFORMATION**

- Mid-Hudson
- Pine Plains
- Hamlet of Pine Plains
- Dutchess County
- Darrah Cloud, Town Supervisor
- [supervisor@pineplains-ny.gov](mailto:supervisor@pineplains-ny.gov)

### **VISION FOR DOWNTOWN PINE PLAINS**

Live/Work/Play defines downtown Pine Plains already. All three things take place alongside each other here. Our vision is to bring the town back to bustling with the retention and attraction of hamlet residents as its core value by bringing our Town Hall, currently located 2 miles away, back to our downtown in a sustainable passive-energy building. From there we could build out badly needed infrastructure for economic development, all while retaining the town's historic character. At a recent focus group with under-40 residents, we learned that they moved here for "the small-town community and the people". We want to keep people here with a combination of affordable housing and a revitalized walkable downtown with easy access to Stissing Mountain, (a rare ecosystem featured in a permanent exhibit at the Natural History Museum in NYC), our recreation fields, beach, lakes, and all the essentials for growing up here, thriving, and growing old here.

### **JUSTIFICATION**

18 years ago, our Town Hall was located in a very old house downtown. That house fell apart more quickly than expected, and when an old Farm Credit building became available, the offices were relocated there, "temporarily". We are still out here, 2 miles from people and commerce; the roof leaks, it's infested with bees, and our assessors are in trailers long past their sell-by dates. People have to drive out here to vote, to get licenses, to come to court, to come to meetings. In our view, bringing citizens into Town Hall is essential to good government: those of us in office get to meet our residents, and they in turn get to know us. This is how democracy thrives at the local level. Imagine the difference in civic engagement if our Town Hall were located right downtown. If we could build a new Town Hall in an eco-sustainable way, we would also save thousands of tax dollars a year in utility costs. Except for this, Pine Plains is already totally walkable. Two feet or wheels will take you to the grocery store, the bank, a French restaurant, a coffeehouse/diner, a Mexican restaurant, a beer garden and pizza parlor, an art gallery, a barber, a feed store, a pharmacy, a dentist's office and the local veterinarian (who also handles large animals!). Still within walking distance is a fine wine store, the Veterans Services, 4 churches, and elementary/middle/high schools. And jobs! You can walk to Titan Barrel, where they make wine barrels; you can walk to Floorings.com where they make and sell custom flooring; you can walk to Schapirra's Coffee Roasters... We have worked in the past with County Planning and the PDCTC (Poughkeepsie-

Dutchess County Development Council) to draw up plans for improved sidewalks throughout town for neighborhood access to downtown, as well as an improved downtown "landscape" to make it visually more beautiful. These plans are all ready to implement. Our recently finished Trails Report resulted in a map of the 32 rail-beds crossing through town and a plan for gaining access to this land as part of a trails network we'd like to implement as well. Land has now been obtained by the town on which to build municipal parking, (or Town Hall!) which we will need when Memorial Hall, our newly renovated concert and arts venue, opens August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019. Beside Memorial Hall, there is a 21-acre parcel of open field which is owned by the NY Archdiocese. We are working to obtain an agreement with them so that we can build a central septic system underneath it, then create a vast public commons. This is also one of 3 possible locations for a new Town Hall, which could be built in a hub with our Public Library. That makes sense for infrastructure-building as well.

New this year, Dutchess Spirits is being re-opened by a new owner. This will be a tourist attraction highlighting the old hideout of famed mobster Dutch Schultz, with a tasting room for made-on-site and locally sourced liquors. Our old library building has been bought by a young entrepreneur who plans to renovate it into a store and coffeehouse. There are 4 developers who have expressed interest in developing their land in collaboration with the town: the Durst Corporation, which owns the Carvel golf course property, about 2000 acres, and plans to develop a resort there; Stissing Farms LLC, which plans to build their second phase of 45 affordable rental units, which we sorely need; a 20-acre parcel perfect for residences; and a developer who owns property at the south end of town and is contemplating an assisted living development. The town is working with these developers to help us become a sustainable community with an emphasis on accessibility, agriculture, and the arts.

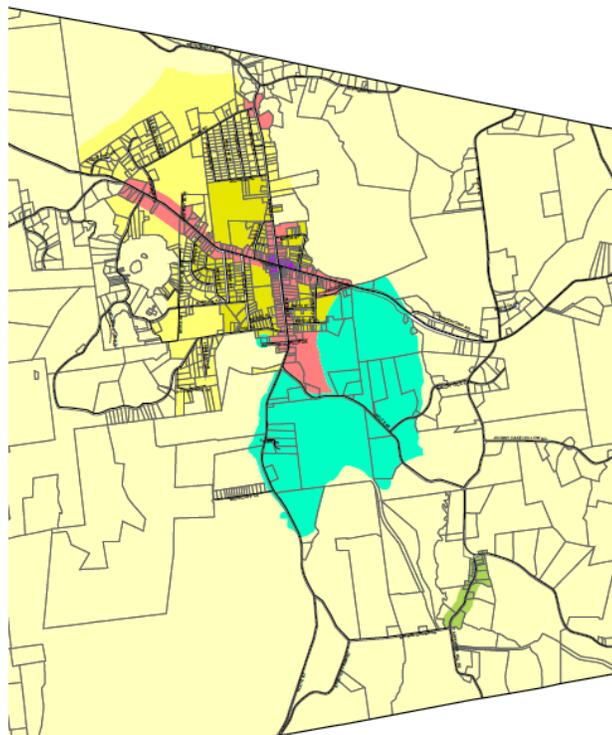


*Currently The Stissing House, Pine Plains, NY*

## **DOWNTOWN IDENTIFICATION**

### **1) Boundaries of the proposed DRI area.**

Pine Plains is the smallest town in Dutchess County, with a population of 2473. It has one of the few remaining walkable downtowns in the County. Boundaries of the essential downtown area grow out of the center of the town, at our intersection of Routes 199 and 82. (AKA, The Light). To the east, downtown stretches to Sunny Meadows Farm and the end of Factory Lane. To the west, downtown stretches to the New Holland Tractor Company, Wheels of Time, essentially Highway Boulevard just beyond Lake Road. This includes our Recreation Fields and Town Beach at Stissing Lake. To the north, downtown becomes residential immediately after the municipal parking lot and the American Legion on North Main Street. To the south, downtown extends down to the Stewart's at Route 83. This direction sports a Lighting District with historic lighting all the way down from the crossroads.



*Hamlet of Pine Plains*

### **2) Description of catchment area.**

Though only 94 miles from Manhattan, Pine Plains feels far, far away. It is totally walkable, because it contains most of our residences, excellent eateries of varying kinds and prices, our library, our bank, our grocery store, our elementary, middle and high schools, our pharmacy, our beach and recreation fields, Stissing Mountain, and Memorial Hall, our concert-and-arts venue. Light industry forms the edge of our hamlet, with a wine-barrel making enterprise, a flooring-maker, and a coffee roaster among many businesses here. Literally, one can Work, Live, and Play all in a few blocks. We have an expandable municipal parking lot, ample street parking, new town-wide LED lighting and new

sidewalks, with more planned. Two new Inns have brought new visitors and are located downtown as well.

### **3) Past investment, future investment potential.**

This year, with the help of a Greenway Grant, we launched our Comprehensive Plan Review and Revision. We used our grant to hire truly visionary planners with innovative ideas. We are a Town which has long valued innovation as a way to, frankly, save tax dollars. Our committee meets weekly to create and implement the short survey we need, and to plan for the Town-wide Public Meeting to be held in June. The strategy here is to bring the town back together after years in which we were divided on the subject of development. Attitudes are changing as the new Town Board works to create excitement and better understanding of what new projects are providing the town. In the works: Memorial Hall, a concert venue and arts center, opens August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019; the Durst Organization, in collaboration with the town, is designing a healthy lifestyle resort using our natural assets—a perfect hiking mountain with a fire tower to climb, lakes, and trails, to be delivered in January 2020; Habitat for Humanity is collaborating with the town with plans for “in-fill” affordable housing on vacant lots using passive solar systems that are also affordable to maintain; numerous new farming operations run by young farmers who are revitalizing old land, making cheese and milk products, local meat and vegetables; and 2 new businesses planning to open in the coming year in the renovated Old Library.

### **4) Recent or impending job growth.**

Job growth in the area is evolving. Titan Barrel, a company which makes wine and whiskey barrels, opened last year with plans to employ around a dozen workers. Ronnybrook Farm, a well-known dairy and Chaseholm Farm both employ farm help, young and old. Memorial Hall, a \$5,000,000 renovation project housing a concert hall, art studios and community kitchen, will start hiring this month for its opening in August. Our restaurants remain big attractions, bringing people to town, and are big employers. Floorings.com just partnered with a national company to build custom flooring and plan to expand their craftsman workforce to 35 employees in the next 2 years. A young entrepreneurial mother recently opened a Feed Store right in the center of town, which caters to dog, chicken, horse, and goat owners alike, and another young woman opened a Mexican restaurant called El Guacamole, which is enormously popular. And the whole town smells like coffee roasting when Schapirras is doing just that. The school system is our largest employer, making residential growth essential for the town’s survival.

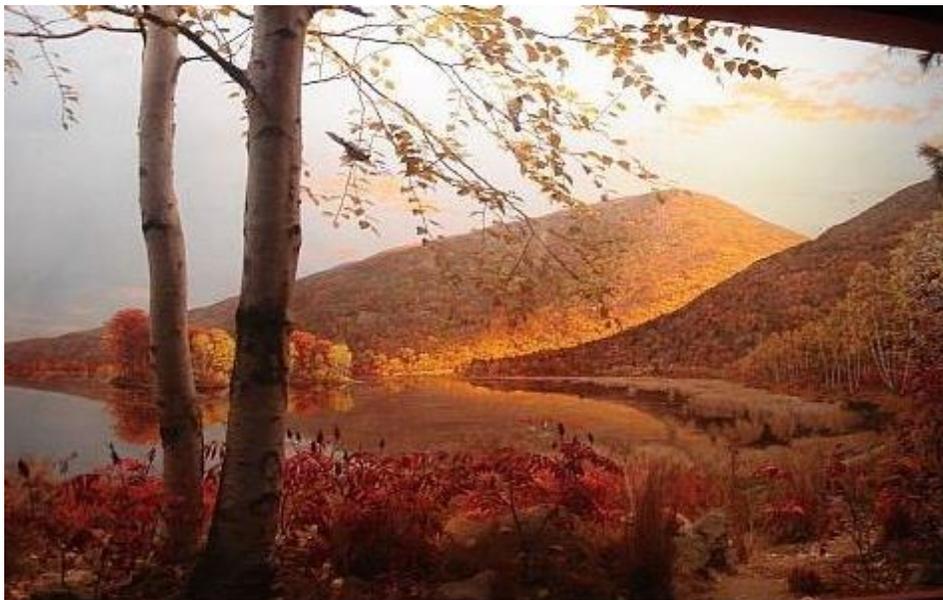
On the far edge of the town, outside the downtown district, lies the old Carvel Golf Course, bought in 2000 by the Durst Corporation. The town is collaborating with them on a development project for a healthy lifestyle resort which would use the assets of the area to attract visitors. Hiking and biking, swimming, and a small family golf course are all a part of their passive solar building and landscape design, which will also provide walking and biking trails right into town.

Paula Redmond Realty recently analyzed our housing market, finding that 24 properties had sold in the past year: 18 under 316,000, 2 under 900,000 and 4 over 1,000,000. Our recent Under-40 Focus

Group found 12 new families who moved into town in the last four (4) years. We see a movement towards healthy lifestyles, towards eating good, fresh, organic foods grown by people we know who have a stake in the matter, and towards community and volunteerism. Dutchess County has an excellent bond rating, and though the bulk of the jobs remain in the cities here, we are also seeing new young families coming to make this small town home.

#### 5) Attractiveness of physical environment.

Although Pine Plains is only 94 miles from Manhattan, it feels worlds away. The landscape into which the town nestles is what initially draws people here. Stissing Mountain is walkable from the town center, and is a landmark you can see all the way from Kingston as you cross the bridge. There you can climb the fire tower-preserved by townspeople long ago, and below the mountain, the Land Conservancy maintains Thompson Pond and its trails. We hold the headwaters of the Wappingers Creek Watershed. The landscape is compellingly pastoral, dotted with farms and farm animals, and the roads are always filled with cyclists and dog-walkers and the occasional ancient turtle. Our annual Triathlon passes through all this.



*Stissing Mountain Diorama, Museum of Natural History, NYC*

The downtown area has maintained its historic character for almost 200 years. Some buildings date to the 1920s and some to the 1950s, but all maintain the rural personality of the town. Sidewalks run through the downtown and more are desired, so that people might safely walk around at night, and kids can better travel to school. People here love being outside. Technically, we really are one of the few remaining walkable towns in Dutchess County. This is how we meet new people and get used to new faces around town. You don't need a car to get to the bank, the grocery store, the pharmacy, the dentist, schools, the library, our beach and our recreation fields, or any of our restaurants. Our new Trails Zoning Plan allows for trails to be connected on the 32 old rail-beds with owner permission. But

you can see the rail beds as you walk around town: they're everywhere. There is a large field of 21 acres right downtown currently owned by the NY Archdiocese which is ideal for a hub which could extend from the library to include a new Town Hall and an easily/economically built central septic system which could greatly enhance downtown revitalization. We could build a commons there, with a playground near the library as well. We are in the process of renovating our tiny town park at the corner of our crossroads with volunteers and a small inheritance left to the town. Our recreation fields to the west are easily accessible by walking or biking, and we have a beach next to these with a new bathhouse and concessions at Stissing Lake. A boat launch is next to that with kayak rentals. Stissing Lake itself is a true gem. People walk and bike around it, and the road has a healing effect, passing as it does through the wetlands of Thompson pond, the base and fine view of Stissing Mountain, two lakes (Twin Island and Stissing) and much bird life. Foxes cross it like regular citizens. They are.

## 6) Quality of Life policies

Life in Pine Plains has been preserved by an innovative Comprehensive Plan that demands care and protection of the environment as well as the agricultural, rural character of the town. The Plan is undergoing formal updating with the help of new planners right now. Our zoning is the strictest in Dutchess County in an effort to preserve that character. We are a Climate Smart Community, completing our total conversion to LED street lighting in 2019, with an EV Charging Station, and the recent passing of a Unified Solar Permit Law to enhance air quality, promote renewable energy, and lead by example. We have accomplished all the steps necessary to become a Clean Energy Community and are on the verge of that final designation.

Our Comprehensive Plan has also resulted in a strong, award-winning Future Farmers of America association in the school, and liaisons there with Bard College and Dutchess Community College to encourage accelerated study to reduce college costs to families and enhance opportunities. The town is dedicated to its fine Public Library, which is the center of activity here. We are working on a strong Solar Law to preserve landscape while promoting solar power.

We are a town of firsts historically: first Public Library in the County, first centralized school district, first Seed Library in the State, launched in 2013, and the place where FDR delivered his first public speech as a candidate for political office. We recently re-started Town Clean-up Day and passed a Trails Zoning to map and maintain the rail-beds which abound in town and allow people to use them for walking and biking. We fund a vibrant program for our Seniors which is free to them and a vibrant recreation program with sports both children and adults can play year-round. This local government commitment to people has created a compassionate way of dealing with the problems that come up. Our police department has a policy, and has always been committed to, helping those with drug and alcohol problems, for instance, because helping people actually works better than sending them away. In this regard, we invited a Recovery Coach to the town, who comes once a week and holds a group at the library.

The quality of life in Pine Plains is preserved not always by policies, but by traditions which have been upheld by its diverse citizenry, many of whom arrived here from another country to find something worth preserving. It is diverse, because diverse people moved here and made it their home. Immigrants fleeing the pogroms in Russia made their way to Pine Plains and started businesses. African-American families here can trace their heritage back to the post-Revolution era. Many Italian families found their ways here after WWII. And now 20% of our school is Latin American. It is well-known that it's safe to be gay here. (And why is that? Because many of our most active citizens are gay and grew up here, beloved and valued by the town.) The roots of this run deep. The atmosphere is accepting and open.

People have easy access to getting to know each other. They meet each other in line at the pharmacy or the grocery store. They get on committees and participate in government. They join the Garden Club, coach for the Recreation Department, come to free Senior events which are a hallmark of the town. They attend Memorial Day and the Ag Fair we hold every year, and Dutchess County's first Parade of Lights on Decoration Day, events for which the town rigorously maintains an emphasis on bringing people together, not on making money or selling things. These aspects of life in Pine Plains are not always things that can be upheld by policy but remain by strong traditions.

#### **7) Public support.**

We were one of the first towns ever to record our Town Board meetings, and our film archive is important and enviable. This has allowed home-bound people, seniors and single parents to stay in touch with what's going on, in addition to attending meetings. Our meetings are almost always packed. The Downtown Revitalization Plan, created by the Town Board with help from Dutchess County Planning, the Comprehensive Plan Review, and the Durst Project have brought people constantly together at the Community Center over the last few years, in frequent town-wide discussions about the future. There is enormous support for revitalization here. Businesspeople reformed the Pine Plains Business Association to help spearhead this effort, and it is an active presence in town once again. They have launched a driven social media effort since meeting with Dutchess Tourism in February. Stakeholders have also been added in the past year, as projects near completion: specifically, Memorial Hall, our concert, arts and community kitchen venue, is a huge stakeholder, with a lot to gain from improving our downtown. Our restaurant owners have been hanging on by threads for years and are vital participants in change here in town. Our school system a huge stakeholder, as enrollment is down from all-time highs in the 90s of 1600 to 900 overall. All of these are vital to a strategic investment plan, and willing participants; but so too are the members of the Comprehensive Plan review Committee, comprised of both businesspeople and residents.

The best leader for the DRI would be the Town Supervisor, and this is for a few reasons: it is best to have someone who is seen as representing landowners, farmers, parents, seniors, children and businesspeople alike; who can speak to all the different stakeholders and knows them, while holding the Comprehensive Plan close to her heart. She has a brilliant team of advisors and the Town Board is vibrant and participatory.

## 8) Transformative opportunities.

Ten (10) million dollars would go further in Pine Plains than in a larger municipality. It would completely transform our downtown. We envision six (6) projects which could be totally finished thereby strengthening our ability here to live, work and play. At the heart of these projects would be a new Town Hall, to replace the aging one which is located 2 miles outside of town, and was only meant to be a temporary location—18 years ago... This would form the heart of activity here. The infrastructure of a septic system required for this building could be centralized, extending to include businesses downtown which could then expand and become sustainable. Residences would be able to tie in as well. The lack of a system holds us back economically.

Historically, this small town has always kept taxes low in order to keep people here. In place of huge coffers, we relied on ingenuity and volunteerism to build the things we needed. But it is also the curse of small towns that we can manage to win grants to create studies, but never manage to find the money to implement them. In that regard, we have four (4) shovel-ready completed plans: a Downtown Revitalization Plan, Pine Plains Town Center Pedestrian and Biking Plan, Recreational Fields Plan, and the Trails Plan, which involves making gravel walkable/bikeable trails out of the 32 old rail beds which crisscross through town. (At the turn of the 20th Century, Pine Plains was the crossroads for cargo trains to get from the South to the Northeast to the Midwest.) The Town Hall and concurrent central septic system are in draft stage. We have 3 possible locations for these.



*Barnum and Bailey Circus, Circa 1900, Pine Plains, NY*

At least 4 people have been unable to open small businesses here in the past year due to antiquated/inadequate septic systems in our downtown buildings. Hence, we have applied for a Sewer Feasibility Study, engaging with RCAP for help in this project. Initial studies show that we are blessed with such porous land that all we need is a septic field, which the Town Hall and existing businesses could tie into via a piping and pumping system. Department of Health rules are strict and the lots most of our businesses sit on are not large enough to accommodate adequate waste systems

for what they need. This would really spur economic development in Pine Plains. What is important to note here is that wealthy developers can afford to do many things that local entrepreneurs might not be able to do. Town-wide septic would level the playing field quite a lot to include local people who want to start a business in their hometown.

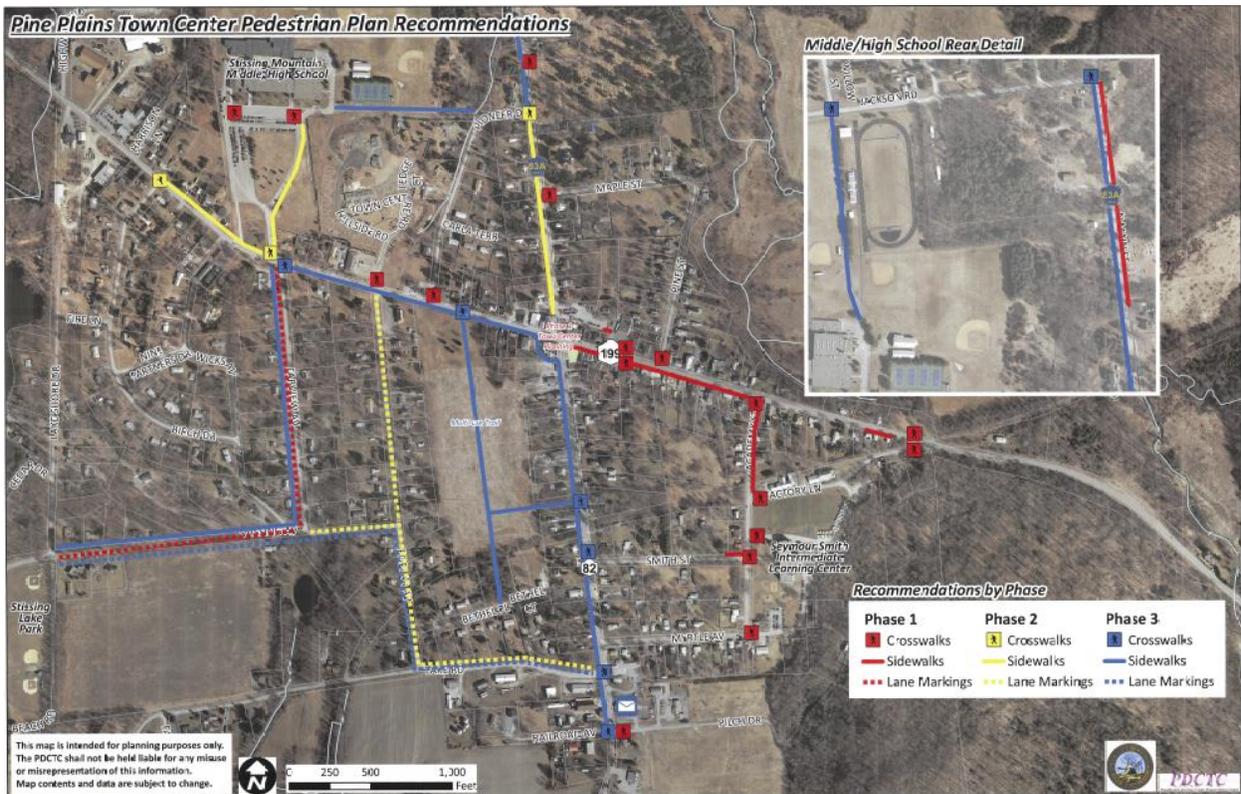
Our collaboration with Habitat for Humanity on passive solar affordable home ownership is just beginning and we are very excited about it. The design is innovative and transformative. These will be in-fill houses to be built on vacant lots, designed in a farmhouse style, and owned by residents with help from Habitat throughout the life of their occupancy. The price for maintenance and mortgage is extremely low. We are currently looking for potential owners and seeking donations of lots for this. In addition, they have an initiative to help owners of empty buildings renovate. We currently have six (6) buildings with this potential.



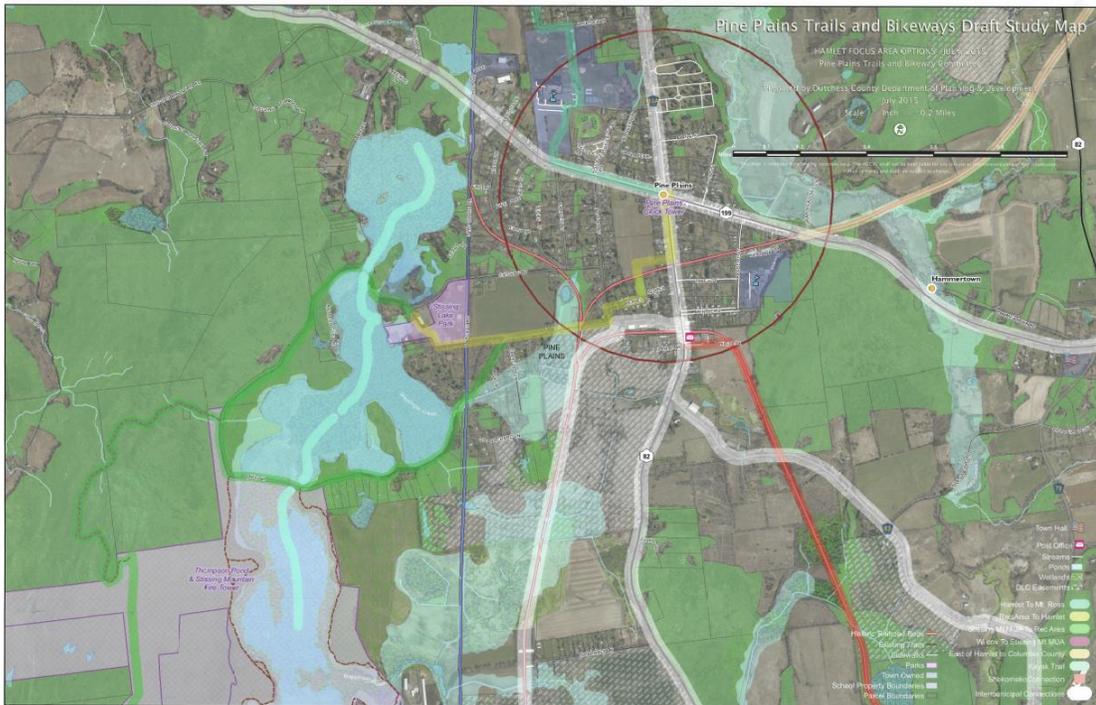
Pine Plains Recreation Plan



Downtown Revitalization Plan



Pedestrian and Biking Plan



*Trails and Bikeway Study Map*

## 9) Administrative Capacity.

The Pine Plains Town Board consists of 5 energetic and generous people with a wide range of skills from law practice to civil engineering, landscaping, farming, and creative writing. Each is prepared to welcome the future and take on added responsibilities in light of new opportunities.

The Secretary to the Supervisor manages grants as well.

The Planning Board is strong and committed, comprised of new people with energy and skills interested in dealing with new projects.

Town Assessors are also well-positioned and experienced in managing projects, as is our Building Inspector. We have strong committees in Pine Plains with capable members willing to take on extra work.

**10) Other.**

Pine Plains is 94 miles from Manhattan but feels a world away. People come here to shed the stress of city life, and to live a more community-based life. Live/Work/Play defines downtown Pine Plains as it already is. It is a place where one can afford to live with access to services, necessities, jobs, community life, and life-long learning. But this is threatened. Our Town Hall needs to come back into town to once again serve as the hub of community activity here, right beside our public library. That is essential for people to have easy access to government services, to voting, to participating in democracy. We intentionally keep things low-tech and personal so that people are forced to come to Town Hall and get to know us. We need a central septic system to help small businesses expand so they can endure. We need sidewalks and bikeways that are safe for people to use so that our walkability is enhanced and our air stays clean. We need more affordable housing as prices rise and home ownership becomes more of a dream than a reality. But we want to intersperse that housing in neighborhoods so that these new homeowners are not separated out but automatically by location a part of town life. We have all the plans to make those things happen. Pine Plains is ready.