

Smarter growth



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The village of Wappingers Falls is already among the fastest growing municipalities in Dutchess County. Now it wants to be one of the smartest growing municipalities anywhere.

The old mill town, once almost lost in the rush to malls along Route 9, is preparing a waterfront revitalization plan as it prepares to build housing for young workers that Mayor Matthew Alexander believes will come to love the place.

“We are a good market for starter homes and for young families to come to,” Alexander said. “We are a livable, walkable community.”

The mayor said that a waterfront revitalization plan being prepared for public comment later this summer is designed to take advantage of the strengths of village living, having access to urban infrastructure and goods, but in a surprisingly historic and attractive setting.

“We were an old mill town built on water power,” said Alexander, citing a hydroelectric plant – which still operates – and an array of factories that operated in the 19th and 20th centuries. The village also boasts Grinnell Library, one of the oldest in the state, and a village hall that is on the National Register of Historic Places.

“There’s a lot of great stuff here,” said Alexander, of the 1.2-square-mile municipality with about 5,000 residents. “The local waterfront revitalization is going to be about 150 pages long and talk about different opportunities throughout the village.”

He cited key sections that make up the village, such as the industrial park, the creek that is a Hudson River estuary, the Route 9 corridor, the historic downtown and Wappinger Lake. The revitalization plan will focus

on those key areas, including ways of transforming former industrial land into housing and returning former shopping plazas into active use again.

“We are looking at possible mixed-use residential and businesses in the area where there are now shopping plazas; increasing the number of residential units for starter housing and working families,” Alexander said.

“We are affordable housing for Dutchess County.”

The plan, in effect, is to make the village a great place to live so that residents and visitors would support a central village business district. “We know we’re not a Rhinebeck, we know we’re not a Cold Spring, but we might be the workday destination of someone on their lunch hour,” the mayor said.

He said the village would take a broad perspective in developing their central business sector. It is located a quarter-mile west of Route 9, where about 60,000 cars per day pass by. Main Street, which is also Route 9D, attracts about 13,000 vehicle trips daily, so the mayor said, businesses such as banks and pharmacies will not locate there. But, he said, the village recently attracted a large law firm and a several interior designers who welcome the convenient location and charm the village already has in abundance.

It also has two waterfronts, Wappinger Lake, a water body that has silted in from decades of development in the 37-mile watershed that drains into the lake. With stimulus money, the village is taking a first step to examine the problem and perhaps begin restoring it. The Wappinger Creek also flows through en route, an estuary to the nearby Hudson River.

These water bodies lead to the chance to create waterfront parks, amenities that would complement efforts to attract residents and businesses to serve them.

Elan Planning, Design & Landscape Architecture in Saratoga Springs, has been working on the project since a Feb. 18 public planning session attended by dozens of residents. The village’s comprehensive plan from 2001 is also being used as a source. A draft will be released in coming weeks.



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