

2.0 EXISTING CONDITIONS

This chapter describes Briarcliff Manor’s planning history and physical characteristics. This is necessary background for the land use recommendations in the Village Plan.

2.1 REGIONAL AND HISTORIC CONTEXT

2.1.1 Regional Location

Briarcliff Manor is located in the west central portion of Westchester County. Incorporated in 1902, the 5.75-square-mile Village is situated largely within the Town of Ossining, with its eastern portion in the Town of Mount Pleasant. Surrounding municipalities are the Village and Town of Mt. Pleasant to the south, Mt. Pleasant and the Village of Pleasantville to the east, and the Town of Ossining to the north. The Village is well situated along regional rail and road networks, offering convenient access throughout the New York metropolitan region. Less than thirty miles north of Manhattan and fifteen minutes northwest of White Plains, Briarcliff Manor is easily accessible via Routes 9, 9A, 100 and the Taconic State Parkway. Metro-North railroad makes regular stops at the Village’s Scarborough train station, connecting the Village to New York City. The Hudson River is part of Briarcliff’s western boundary, contributing to the scenic natural character of the Village (see Figure 2-1). Briarcliff Manor’s vistas and dramatic topography, and a well-defined Village center create a charming, small-town character.

2.1.2 Early Briarcliff Manor History¹

Known as the Village Between Two Rivers, Briarcliff Manor can trace its early beginnings to the Dutch businessman Frederick Philipse. Through a series of land purchases from the 1660s to the 1680s, Philipse

extended his Manor of Philipsburg north from Manhattan to include all the “hunting lands” between Spuyten Duyvil and the Croton River. The manor was owned and governed in succession by Philipse and his heirs. In 1685, Philip Philipse, Frederick’s oldest son, purchased the last tract of land within the manor from the Sint Sinck Indians. This land was Scarborough, east of the present Scarborough railroad station, which later became the Town of Ossining. In 1779, the manor was confiscated and put up for sale by the State because Colonel Frederick Philipse had been a Loyalist during the Revolutionary War. Farmers were able to buy the land they once had worked as tenants of the manor.

In 1813, the Village of Sing Sing was incorporated. The State legislature created a new township in 1845 from the northern part of the Town of Mount Pleasant. This new town was called Ossining, a variation of Sing Sing. Local officials changed the name of the Village from Sing Sing to Ossining in 1901 to avoid possible confusion between village-made goods and products made at Sing Sing prison.



Village Gateway at Law Park, with Memorial Plaque to Walter Law



Brick Wall along former Speyer Estate

¹ Source: Cheever, Mary. *The Changing Landscape: a History of Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough, West Kennebunk Maine*: Phoenix Publishing, 1990; “Briarcliff Manor: Rich in History and Sense of Community,” *North County News*, 2004; “If You’re Thinking of Living in Briarcliff Manor, Sweeping Vistas and Subdivided Estates,” *The New York Times*, 1994.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Regional and Historic Context

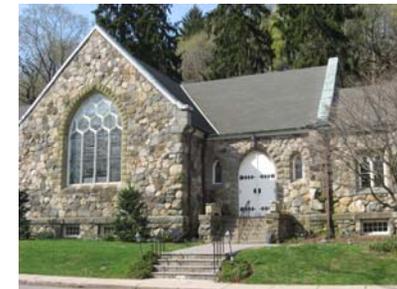
To the east of the Village of Ossining lay an area called Whitson's Corners, which was settled during the 19th century. In 1890, Walter Law, an English businessman, moved to Whitson's Corners from Yonkers. Walter Law initially purchased 236 acres of farmland and added to his holdings in rapid succession. By 1900, he owned more than 5,000 acres on which he began "Briarcliff Farms." Employing virtually everyone in the local area, Briarcliff Farms supplied much of the metropolitan region with high-quality milk, bottled water and American Beauty Roses (also known as Briarcliff Roses and which were shipped daily to New York City). With roughly 300 employees on 5,000 acres, Walter Law's estate was said to be a city within itself, including houses for his employees, roads, the Congregational Church, the Briarcliff Lodge (a vacation resort) and the Briarcliff Manor Light and Power Company. The employee population made the area eligible to be incorporated as a Village. In 1902, Law applied to the state for and got a Village charter for Briarcliff Manor – the name made popular by industrialist Andrew Carnegie, who called Walter Law the "Laird of Briarcliff Manor." A historic map of Briarcliff Manor in 1936 is shown in Figure 2-2.

2.1.3 Previous Planning Projects

Briarcliff Manor's planning has reflected the long-standing goal of preserving and enhancing the single-family residential characteristics of the Village. Planning and zoning began in the 1920s with the preparation of the Village's first land use plan and the Board of Trustees' adoption of the 1928 Building Zone Ordinance. The Building Zone Ordinance was the precursor to the Village's first Zoning Code, which was adopted in 1953. In 1958 the Village prepared its first Master Plan and made subsequent amendments to the Zoning Code to reflect the goals and policies of the plan. The 1958 Master Plan remained in effect until its first update in 1988. The 1988 Plan reaffirmed the goals and policies in the 1958 Master Plan, while suggesting additional strategies to further the stated goals. The plans focus both on accommodating growth and managing its progression,

to retain the Village's scale and character. The principal goals and recommendations of these plans are described below.

1958 Plan. The 1958 Master Plan concentrated on the maintenance and preservation of the, single-family residential character of the Village and made recommendations regarding commercial, industrial and recreational land uses, streets, and public facilities and utilities, all in an effort to improve the Village's quality of residential life and its tax base. The plan recommended a broadening of types and sizes of single-family residential lots, creating a pattern of gradually decreasing residential density. Density ranged from one-quarter and one-half acre lots (four dwellings and two dwelling per acre) in existing built-up centers near the northerly, easterly and westerly edges of the Village to the largest lots sizes (60,000 square feet or more) in the central, hilly and more inaccessible southerly portions of the Village. This pattern is termed "centers and open space" in the Plan. It remains to this day the prevailing development pattern.



Briarcliff Congregational Church



Former Law Family House



Local 137 Building

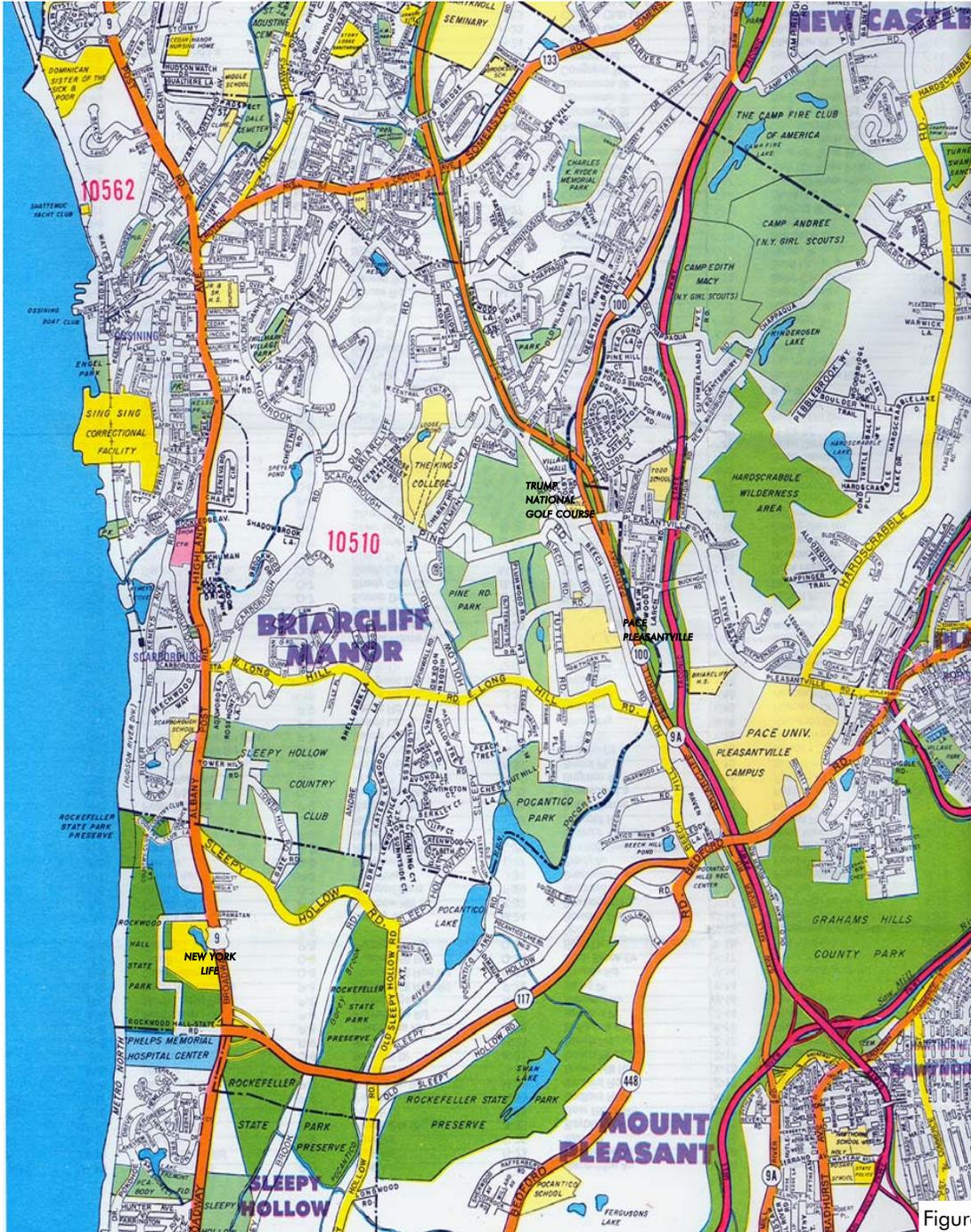


Figure 2-1: REGIONAL LOCATION

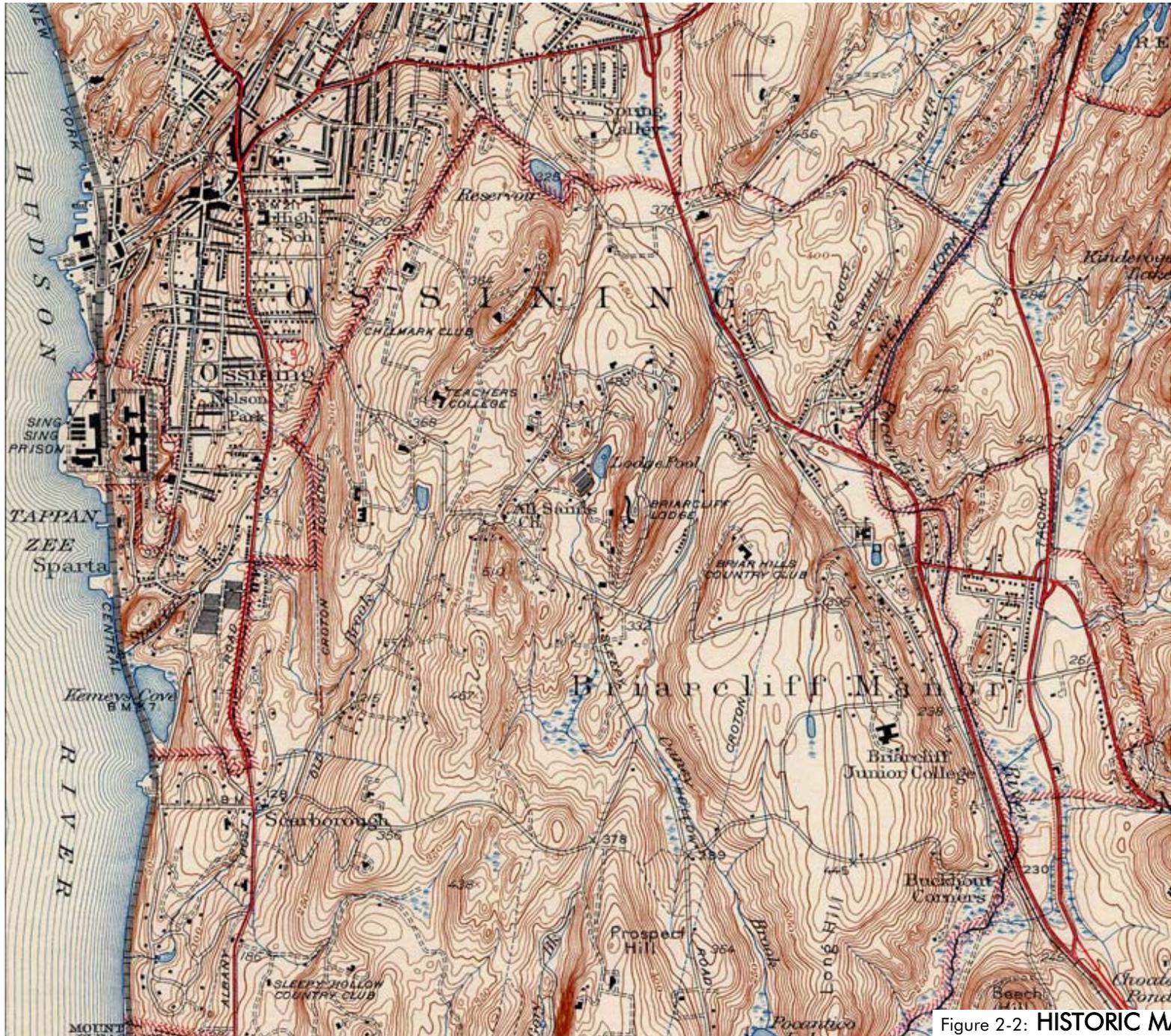


Figure 2-2: HISTORIC MAP, 1936

1988 Plan. The Village’s desire to incorporate affordable housing goals and policies into the plan spurred the preparation of the 1988 update. In all other areas, the 1988 Plan reaffirmed the goals and policies of the 1958 Plan. Specific recommendations responded to issues resulting from the significant period of growth which had occurred in the Village during the three decades following the publication of the first plan. The major policies and recommendations in the 1988 Plan are:

- Reaffirmation of Basic Goals in 1958 Master Plan.** The 1988 Plan recommended overarching policies to emphasize a strengthened, multi-functional Village center; the provision of multi-family housing in specified areas in accordance with the 1958 “centers and open space” concept; and the strengthening of open space preservation and natural resource conservation.
- Residential Development.** Echoing the basic principle of the 1958 Plan, the 1988 Plan recommended that the Village continue to encourage high-quality single-family homes in the center of the Village (the R-60 and R-40 zones) to support the “open residential” living environment. However, the plan also acknowledged that reasonable amounts of relatively higher-density, affordable or moderate cost housing should be encouraged in specified areas of the Village. The criteria for appropriate areas were access to shops, services, municipal infrastructure, public transportation, and parking. The Village acted on this recommendation by creating the RT4B residential townhouse zoning district in two locations: (1) between North State Road and Route 100 and (2) on the east side of Route 9 opposite the Arcadian Shopping Center.
- Commercial.** The 1988 Plan supported the 1958 recommendation that zoning for retail and personal service business be limited to that amount needed to support the local convenience needs of the Village. The plan recommended that a portion of commercially-designated land could be used for residential purposes as the location was appropriate for the moderately dense pattern of residential

development envisioned for the RT4B townhouse development discussed above. Although the 1988 Plan recommended a reduction in the Village’s overall commercial acreage, it did recognize that it was appropriate to encourage reasonable amounts of high-quality, low-intensity office and research campuses to support the tax base.

Timeline: Planning in Briarcliff Manor	
Date	Action
1902	Village incorporated
1920+	First Land Use Plan prepared
1928	Building Zone Ordinance adopted (precursor to Zoning Code)
1929	First Planning Board appointed
1953	First Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance enacted
1956-8	First Master Plan prepared
1958	Major Zoning Amendments adopted
1959	Village Recreation Study completed
1968	First Subdivision Regulations adopted
1970	Village Business Area Study completed
1976	Village Wetlands Protection Law enacted
1977	Village Environmental Quality Review Law enacted
1977	Environmental Mapping completed
1978	Existing Land Use Analysis prepared
1980	Large Parcels Study completed
1984	Steep Slopes Protection Law enacted
1985-7	Miscellaneous Amendments of Zoning Ordinance adopted
1985-7	Miscellaneous Environmental Protection Laws enacted
1988	Updated Village Master Plan

1996	Adoption of Area Site Plan for the West Side of Pleasantville Road
1997	Feasibility study for active recreation opportunities
1997	Adoption of Area Site Plan for the East Side of Pleasantville Road
1999	Interim zoning amendments adopted
2000	Central Business District Study completed
2001	Area-Wide Traffic Analysis completed
2001	Scarborough Road Corridor Study completed
2001	Land Trust Study completed
2002	Briarcliff Manor Central Business District Blight Study completed
2002	Large Parcel Study completed
2003	Comprehensive zoning revisions adopted
2006	Hazard Mitigation Plan completed
2006	Trail Study completed
2006	Scarborough Station Feasibility Study completed
2007	Bulk law zoning amendments adopted

- Open Space and Conservation of Natural Resources.** Whereas the 1958 Master Plan did not emphasize open space preservation or the protection of natural resources, by 1988 this had become critical. The 1988 Master Plan reaffirmed the importance of maintaining the open residential character of the Village, as more and more land in the Village continued to be developed. The plan stressed open space preservation, particularly in those locations that would benefit all residents. The 1988 Plan stated open space preservation could be achieved through adoption of the goals and policies of the 1980 Briarcliff Manor Large Parcels Study. The two broad open space goals of that study were to (1) actively preserve open space, and (2) maintain environmental quality by channeling development to suitable areas and away from sensitive and environmentally fragile areas.

These were identified as streams, wetlands, steep slopes, forests and ridgelines.

- Traffic, Public Transportation and Parking.** The 1988 Plan discussed traffic congestion on primary routes, secondary roads, and local roads in the Village. The Plan also covered public transportation: commuter train service at the Metro-North Scarborough, bus service, and vanpools. The Plan’s major recommendation was for the Village to prepare a Road and Parking Adequacy Study and Improvements Plan.
- Recreational Resources.** The 1988 Plan recommended a review of existing park lands to determine the most appropriate use of the Village’s recreational resources.
- Infrastructure.** The 1988 Plan recommended on-going review, planning, and updating of the water, sewer, storm drainage and road systems.
- Schools.** While the school districts are not under the control of the Village, the 1988 Plan recommended that the Village cooperate with the school districts in matters of mutual concern, e.g. population growth estimates, land use compatibility, and adaptive reuse of aging facilities.

2.1.4 Relevant Regional Policies

A community’s growth and development patterns are shaped most directly by land use and planning decisions made by its local government. However, many local concerns, such as air and water quality, traffic conditions, and economic growth have impacts that reach beyond municipal boundaries. These can be most effectively addressed when the regional context is taken into consideration. This broader outlook for growth and development is focused on plans issued by State and County governments and sometimes inter-municipal agreements. For Briarcliff Manor, two plans are relevant to local decisions:

- Westchester County's Patterns for Westchester
- Hudson River Valley Greenway Program

Westchester County Patterns. In 1996, Westchester County adopted Patterns for Westchester: the Land and the People ("Patterns"). Patterns serves as a policy document designed to guide sustainable development that "balances economic and environmental concerns and serves the needs of a changing population." Patterns offers a broad vision and context for local-level planning initiatives. It supports looking at both local and cross-border issues and encourages inter-municipal communication and cooperation, to strengthen individual municipalities and the County overall.



Stream Running under Scarborough Road



Hillside leading down to Hudson River

Since final land use authority rests with municipalities, Patterns serves as a guide and not a mandate for local planning efforts. However, the county does have two sources of influence: 1) when considering distributing grants or funding assistance for local planning efforts, the county can look at whether these local efforts conform to the vision set forth in Patterns and 2) under Article 239-m of the State's General Municipal Law, the county's planning department has mandatory review over certain proposed planning and zoning actions that occur within 500 feet of a municipal boundary and state and county facilities.

These actions include the adoption of a comprehensive plan, and the issuance of site plan approval, special permit, or variance for property within 500 feet of a municipal boundary, county or state park or recreation area, county or state roadway, county-owned stream or drainage channel, or county or state-owned land on which a public building or institution is situated. If the county does not approve the proposed action, it can require that the referring local board approve the action by a majority plus one vote of all board members. Westchester County has exercised its right under Article 239-m in disapproving local comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances.

Patterns categorizes the County's municipalities, transportation network and natural environment as centers, corridors and open space respectively. The Village of Briarcliff Manor is categorized in Patterns as a local center, with a well-defined downtown business district that includes small-scale offices, retail stores, a library, and public buildings. The county's other local centers have a mix of single- and multi-family residential and are proximate to regional rail and road networks. Typically local centers also have "over the store" residential uses, which Briarcliff Manor does not have at present. For Briarcliff Manor, and all Westchester municipalities, Patterns recommends facilitating access to public transit options such as bus and train routes to decrease traffic congestion.

The recommendations set forth in Patterns for Briarcliff Manor support the Village's efforts to preserve its existing patterns of development and open space (see Figure 2-3, Patterns for Westchester Recommended Density). In keeping with Briarcliff Manor's layout, in which housing density decreases towards the central and southern portion of the Village, (away from Routes 9 and 9A), patterns recommends a mix of medium density suburban development (2-7 units per acre and 3-13 units per acre) in the western part of the Village along the Hudson and Route 9, the north part of the Village, and the northeast to eastern part of the Village, near Route 9A; Patterns recommends the remainder of the Village be medium density suburban development with only 1-3 units per acre.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Regional and Historic Context

Briarcliff Manor's existing development density is less intense than that recommended in Patterns. This lower density not only contributes to the Village's open space character, but it also helps limit traffic congestion brought on by further development. As discussed in this section and in more detail later in the Plan, preserving this open space character and maintaining the existing pattern of development are important goals for Briarcliff Manor.

Hudson River Valley Greenway Program. The Hudson River Valley Greenway Act of 1991 created regional connections and cooperation within New York's 10-county, 3 million acre Hudson River Valley. The directives cover working with local governments in the establishment of a Hudson River Trail System east and west of the Hudson, developing a single tourism destination strategy, and working with the agricultural community to promote and protect the industry of agriculture in the Hudson River Valley. New York State's Hudson River Greenway Community Council enters into agreements with municipalities to encourage planning reforms according to the Governor's Quality Communities Task Force Report. The Council encourages all Westchester municipalities to sign such agreements. In exchange, the Council offers planning assistance to member municipalities.

Westchester County is developing Greenprint, the Westchester County Greenway Compact Plan. This will include a regional economic development strategy for the Historic River Towns of Westchester (HRTW) and which will promote the historic, cultural and natural resources of the region. As one of the first Greenprint Compact members, Briarcliff Manor is part of a consortium of 13 municipalities on the east side of the Hudson River that have adopted the Greenway Program. Greenprint will be directly linked to the Hudson River Valley Greenway planning compact through three objectives: to develop the Greenway trail system, participate in the regional tourism strategy, and coordinate planning among local governments. Communities that participate in the Greenway Program will receive funding advantage for state agency grants and coordination of state agency actions with Greenway plans.



Hudson River, by the Train Station

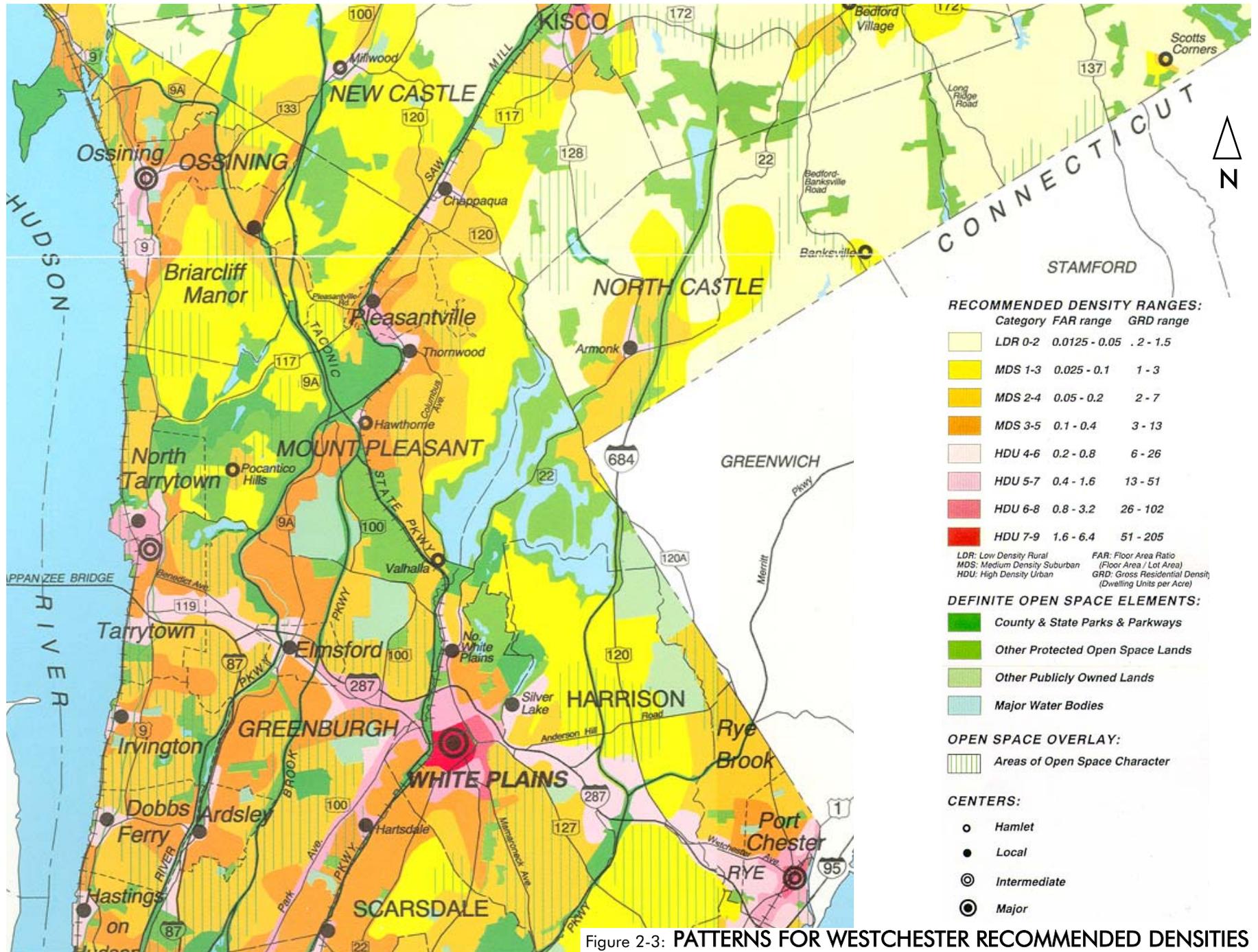


Figure 2-3: PATTERNS FOR WESTCHESTER RECOMMENDED DENSITIES