

3.21 Community Character

3.21.1 Existing Conditions

The project site is located within the Town of Amenia, a rural community appreciated for its scenic views of rolling hills, open farm fields and expansive valleys. The project site is nestled in a valley and is surrounded by forested hillside to the east and west.



26.A - Depot Hill Road, looking south toward subject property.

Just north of the project site, development is dominated by late 20th-century single-family homes along Depot Hill Road, and its cross-streets Lincoln Court, Washington Court and Powderhouse Road. Most of these homes are 1- to 2¹/₂-story single-family houses on lots ranging in size from 0.5 to 1.5 acres, with lot widths between 125 and 200 feet.



26.B - Intersection of Depot Hill Road and Washington Court, looking south-southwest down Depot Hill Road.

Depot Hill Road continues north through a neighborhood consisting mainly of late 19th and early 20th century homes, on 0.5- to 1-acre lots, with widths ranging from 50 to 100 feet. before crossing the Harlem Valley Rail Trail and changing its name to Mechanic Street at the edge of the Hamlet of Amenia.



26.C - Neighborhood on Depot Hill Road, near Midway Avenue

The hamlet has grown up at the crossroads of what is now NYS Routes 22 and 44 / 343. Most of the buildings in the center of the hamlet are 1-3 stories in height, and appear to date to the mid 19th to early 20th century, and are constructed of traditional materials such as brick, wood or a combination thereof. The businesses within the hamlet include small professional offices, restaurants, retail stores, gas stations and a few larger businesses including a hardware store with a 2-story barn and warehouse appearance.



26.D - Mechanic Street and Route 343, looking southwest.

Most of the structures in the center of the hamlet are sited with little or no setback from the road, on narrow lots with typical widths between 48 and 80 feet. Outside of the hamlet, setbacks and lot widths increase.



26.E - Intersection of Routes 22, 343 & 44, looking southeast onto Rt. 343.

Freshtown Plaza, just north of the Hamlet on Route 22, is a strip-mall shopping center with a supermarket, a video rental store, a dollar store, a bank and several other retail shops. Freshtown Marketplace is a locally owned chain of supermarkets.



26.F - Freshtown Plaza

Development on the project site consists of roadside residences and the Keane Stud Farm comprised of barns and office buildings. There are currently no street lights on Depot Hill Road, leaving only minimal external residential, and external barn lighting at night.



26.G - Western terminus of Depot Hill Road, intersection with Old Route 22, looking west.

The site is characterized by open farmland in the north and central portions, with a series of hedgerows and heavy forest cover at the highest, steepest portion of the site along the southeast boundary. The land slopes upward steeply to the southeast and drops off steeply at the western boundary. The site is surrounded by sparsely settled single family homes, farming fields and wooded areas.



26.H - Keane Stud Farm

Existing buildings include a dairy barn and two pole barns, six horse barns, and eight other miscellaneous small structures, such as houses and outbuildings.



26.1 - Syms Farm Buildings

Notwithstanding some notable Victorian residences and other individual structures in the Town, local Amenia architecture is primarily a vernacular residential and farmstead type found in buildings common in rural communities and small towns throughout the Hudson Valley and Western New England, specifically between the Hudson River and the Connecticut River.

Journey-to-work and employer information (see Tables 3-126 and 3-127, respectively) from the 2000 Census provides a glimpse at the economic life of the Town. In Amenia in 2000, 43% of workers commuted 15 minutes or less (if at all; this figure includes those who worked from home, as well) indicating that a significant number of people work locally. Only 27.5% of commuters traveled more than 30 minutes to get to work from their homes in Amenia. In Dutchess County as a whole, only 28.8% of workers had a 15-minute commute, and 40% traveled more than 30 minutes to get to work. The percentage of those making a 90-minute or greater commute was about the same for Amenia (5.2%) as it was for Dutchess County (5.5%). It should be noted that as of 2000, Metro-North lines did not reach Amenia. Since the opening of Wassaic Station, the northernmost station on the Harlem Valley Line, in May, 2000 (one month after the Census surveys were completed), ridership has reached approximately 150 each day from Wassaic Station, with an estimated 32 people making a regular rush-hour commute. These Metro-North commuters double the use of public transportation, and add an additional 30% to the number of workers traveling more than 90 minutes.

**Table 3-126
Journey to Work**

Total workers 16 and over	1935	100.0%
LENGTH OF COMMUTE		
worked at home	54	2.8%
0-14 minutes	778	40.2%
15-30 minutes	571	29.5%
30-45 minutes	245	12.7%
45-60 minutes	109	5.6%
60-90 minutes	78	4.0%
90 minutes or more	100	5.2%
MODE OF TRANSPORTATION		
car, truck or van, drove alone	1531	79.1%
car, truck or van, carpooled	255	13.2%
public transportation (bus only)	25	1.3%
walked	60	3.1%
other	10	0.5%
worked at home	54	2.8%

More than one quarter of Amenia's workers were employed by the healthcare and social assistance industry, neatly overlapping the number of workers employed by the state government - a coincidence that can be attributed to the influence of Wassauc DDSSO. In 2000, there were nearly as many employed in agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting and mining industries (7.3%) as there were in the finance, real estate, insurance, professional, scientific and technical services industries, combined (7.6%). While neither of these categories has an overwhelming number of practitioners, this is a testament to the relative importance of agriculture in the community. In Dutchess County as a whole, only 1% of workers were engaged in agriculture or mining, while 15% were engaged in professional, technical, real estate and finance professions.

**Table 3-127
Current Employment by Class and Industry**

Employed Civilian Population 16 Years and Older		
WORKERS BY CLASS	1,956	100.0%
Employee of private company	925	47.3%
Self-employed in own incorporated business	22	1.1%
Private not-for-profit wage and salary workers	210	10.7%
Local government workers	115	5.9%
State government workers	471	24.1%
Federal government workers	37	1.9%
Self-employed workers in own not incorporated business	176	9.0%
Unpaid family workers	0	0.0%
WORKERS BY INDUSTRY		
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	121	6.2%
Mining	12	0.6%
Construction	157	8.0%
Manufacturing	151	7.7%
Wholesale trade	36	1.8%
Retail trade	183	9.4%
Transportation and warehousing	90	4.6%
Utilities	13	0.7%
Information	15	0.8%
Finance and insurance	56	2.9%
Real estate and rental and leasing	21	1.1%
Professional, scientific, and technical services	71	3.6%
Management of companies and enterprises	0	0.0%
Administrative and support and waste management services	47	2.4%
Educational services	158	8.1%
Health care and social assistance	533	27.2%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	35	1.8%
Accommodation and food services	67	3.4%
Other services (except public administration)	94	4.8%
Public administration	96	4.9%

Source: U.S. Census 2000

3.21.2 Potential Impacts

The project will combine high- to moderate-density housing in four separate neighborhoods. Neighborhoods 1 and 2 are aligned on existing hedgerows, Neighborhood 3 takes the shape of an existing paddock, and Neighborhood 4 forms a tight village-like cluster on either side of Depot Hill Road, between the entrances proposed for Keane Stud farm and general site access. The land between the neighborhoods will remain agricultural, used as hay field or horse paddock and pasture.

Although lot lines are not legally defined in this condominium development, each house in Neighborhoods 1, 2 and 3 has corresponding plantings, walkways and structures. A conceptual landscape plan for a single house site is provided in Section 3.7.2; each home will be surrounded by native meadow vegetation, and hedgerows will be replaced or constructed along

the edge of the road. Within Neighborhoods 1, 2 and 3, homes will have individual detached garages located between the house and the road. The distances between homes and garages will vary from 10 feet to 112 feet. Individual homes are proposed to be approximately 2,600 square feet on two floors with a footprint of approximately 1,300 square feet, exclusive of porches. The overall density of each neighborhood is similar to that found in the Midway Avenue-Depot Hill Road neighborhood, about 2/3-mile north of the project site. Most lots in this traditional late 19th- early 20th-century neighborhood have frontages between approximately 50 and 160 feet, and lot depths between 200 and 300 feet.

Houses are staggered as they proceed up the hills in Neighborhoods 1, 2 and 3 in order to provide residents unobstructed views from their windows. This creates varied setbacks between the residences and the on-site roads, the effect of which is regularized by hedgerows and a consistent garage setback along any stretch of road. Despite the prominent placement of houses on the site's hillsides, landscape and architectural details in Neighborhoods 1, 2 and 3 have been planned that will minimize their visibility from off site. Houses will be camouflaged in matte earth-tone cladding, and plantings will further obscure the visibility of new development. Plantings will be composed of native species.

Neighborhood 4 is the most densely developed. Houses are arranged in village-like clusters near Depot Hill Road. They are spaced every 50 feet, with 30 feet between houses, in rows approximately 100' deep, creating a density similar to that found in the center of the Hamlets of Amenia and Wassaic, where lots are often as narrow as 48 to 50 feet, with depths ranging from 80 to 200 feet.

The proposed structures will be comparable in scale to traditional farmhouse and hamlet houses found in the Town of Amenia. The massing and exterior finish of proposed houses and other structures reflect the rural vernacular style that is found in regional and local small-town and farm buildings (including Shaker structures) from the 19th century. The typical footprint of a house will be 24 by 56 feet. Houses will be two stories high, with a basement and peaked roof, and their height will not exceed 28 feet. The proposed cedar-shake cladding is a common exterior treatment among 19th century homes in the Hamlet of Amenia. The houses will be designed to recall the exterior simplicity and internal functionality of Shaker architecture, but they will not be reproductions of historical homes. Instead, they will reflect present-day aesthetic sensibilities and concerns, using innovative construction methods to create appealing, flexible and efficient interiors. The intent is not to mimic historic designs, but to develop new homes that fit into their surroundings with the same grace that we attribute to these historical settlements. Please see Chapter 2, Project Description for figures and additional information regarding architectural style and details.

Development on site will be visible from points off site, but vegetated buffers are planned adjacent to Depot Hill Road, and as a screen north of Neighborhood 1. The site will be lit with low levels, as is appropriate in a rural residential setting. While individual pinpoints of light may be visible from off site, there will be no light spilling from the site. The aesthetic objective for lighting is to enhance the visual appeal of the site and to illuminate leisure activities, such as accent lighting at public buildings and equestrian facilities, and other special features. Where lighting will serve multiple purposes, such as at public buildings, the design will be coordinated to achieve the minimum average maintained levels necessary to achieve all objectives. The target light levels will be designed for the rural location and surrounding conditions, with the understanding that lower light levels are sufficient in darker areas.

Residents of Depot Hill Farm will use local businesses and services, including both equine-related businesses such as feed, tack and veterinarians, and practical, everyday businesses, such as grocery stores and gas stations. They will also patronize businesses associated with leisure and recreational activities, such as restaurants and specialty retail shops – for instance, bookstores, antique stores, gourmet food stores and gift or clothing boutiques.

3.21.3 Mitigation

The scale and location of Depot Hill Farm are such that it is appropriately viewed as a district of the Hamlet of Amenia. The *Charter of the New Urbansim* declares that “Districts generally emphasize a special single use, and should follow the principles of neighborhood design when possible.” Depot Hill Farm, with its emphasis on equestrian recreation and agriculture, cannot be accommodated in a community with an urban, or even suburban, density. It is expected that Depot Hill Farm’s residents will frequent shops and services located in the Hamlet, and an attempt to re-establish such a marketplace at Depot Hill Farm is redundant, and potentially detrimental to the existing community. Considering the historic pattern of agricultural uses and farmsteads, the street-and-block layout is an inappropriate model for the site. The proposed development uses a scale that is familiar to the Town of Amenia, but it modifies some of the traditional relationships between buildings and streets to better match the site. The proposed development takes its organizational cues from the spatial arrangement of agricultural fields, farm roads and hedgerows in an attempt to achieve a low-impact rural/agricultural aesthetic that complements the surrounding landscape. It achieves a degree of privacy and separation between buildings without removing them so far from one another that a sense of community and shared experiences with neighbors are impossible.

Upon completion of the project, approximately 418 acres of the project site will remain agricultural or will be used as recreational open space,. The extensive open space areas preserved as active agricultural land are consistent with the surrounding community and will help revitalize the area’s rural character in the long term, even as nearby property may be developed conventionally. A zone between Depot Hill Road and new residential and recreational development will be planted with trees that are native to the region and found in the site’s existing hedgerows. As part of the open space conservation plan for the site, approximately 5 miles of trails will be provided for public equestrian and pedestrian use. Bicycles and motorized vehicles will be prohibited and the trails will have signs to indicate this. The trails will benefit the Town of Amenia and complement the existing Harlem Valley Rail Trail, which allows bicycles and pedestrians, but not equestrian uses.

While the proposed development results in a visual impact, the impact is mitigated with the use of linear neighborhoods carefully placed along existing hedgerows, and homes oriented with the narrowest face of the building exposed to views. Visual impacts of the homes are further mitigated through the use of natural and non-reflective construction materials. A palette of natural stains will be used to blend homes with each other and with the deep tones of the tree lines. Dark-colored galvanized standing metal seam roofs and low glare windows will further reduce the visual impact of the homes. Because homeowners in this no-lot condominium community will not own the land beyond their building envelope, site maintenance will be consistent throughout the proposed development, giving it an aesthetic integrity similar to the

existing agricultural lands. In addition, outdoor lighting will be kept to a minimum, ensuring no light spillage beyond the immediate neighborhood areas.

Households with incomes of at least \$250,000 are expected to purchase homes at Depot Hill Farm, as is discussed in Section 3.20, Demographics. These households are expected to spend, on average, \$6,293 on restaurant meals and \$7,606 on entertainment expenses (including admissions fees, equipment for hobbies, pets and other leisure activities), which is more than 10% of their total expenditures.

The proposed project's new residents are anticipated to stimulate the Town's existing businesses, the proposed project is specifically anticipated to support growth of businesses related to agriculture and equine services, such as feed, tack, lessons, transport and veterinary medicine. It is expected that Depot Hill Farm will also create a market for restaurants and shops within the Town of Amenia, which would bring pedestrian traffic and activity to Hamlet's downtown and other commercial areas. This, in turn, would provide a venue for the Town's current residents to meet and interact with the residents of the proposed development, and it would draw people from outside Amenia into the town's business districts.