

## 2. REGIONAL CONTEXT AND HISTORY

### 2.1 VILLAGE HISTORY

Though Nyack is a small place, with just 7,000 residents, the Village plays a significant role in the region. Its location at the western terminus of the Tappan Zee Bridge and direct access to Interstate 87/287 (New York State Thruway), as well as U.S. Route 9W and New York State Route 59, provide important links to Westchester County and New York City, northern New Jersey and the Hudson River Valley (see Figure 1). Two major regional job centers are located in Nyack – Nyack Hospital and Rockland BOCES – that together employ more than 2,000 people. The Village boasts a compact, walkable and vibrant downtown that attracts people from well beyond its borders, giving it a well-deserved reputation as a cultural destination for the region. And Nyack’s location on the Hudson River and near several state parks, creating recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike.

Nyack was incorporated as a village in 1883, soon after the incorporation of the adjacent areas of Upper Nyack and South Nyack. The majority of the Village is in the Town of Orangetown, with a small western portion located in the Town of Clarkstown. Totalling 1.6 square miles in area, Nyack is situated on the western shore of the Hudson River, approximately 20 miles north of New York City. It is bordered to the north by the Village of Upper Nyack, to

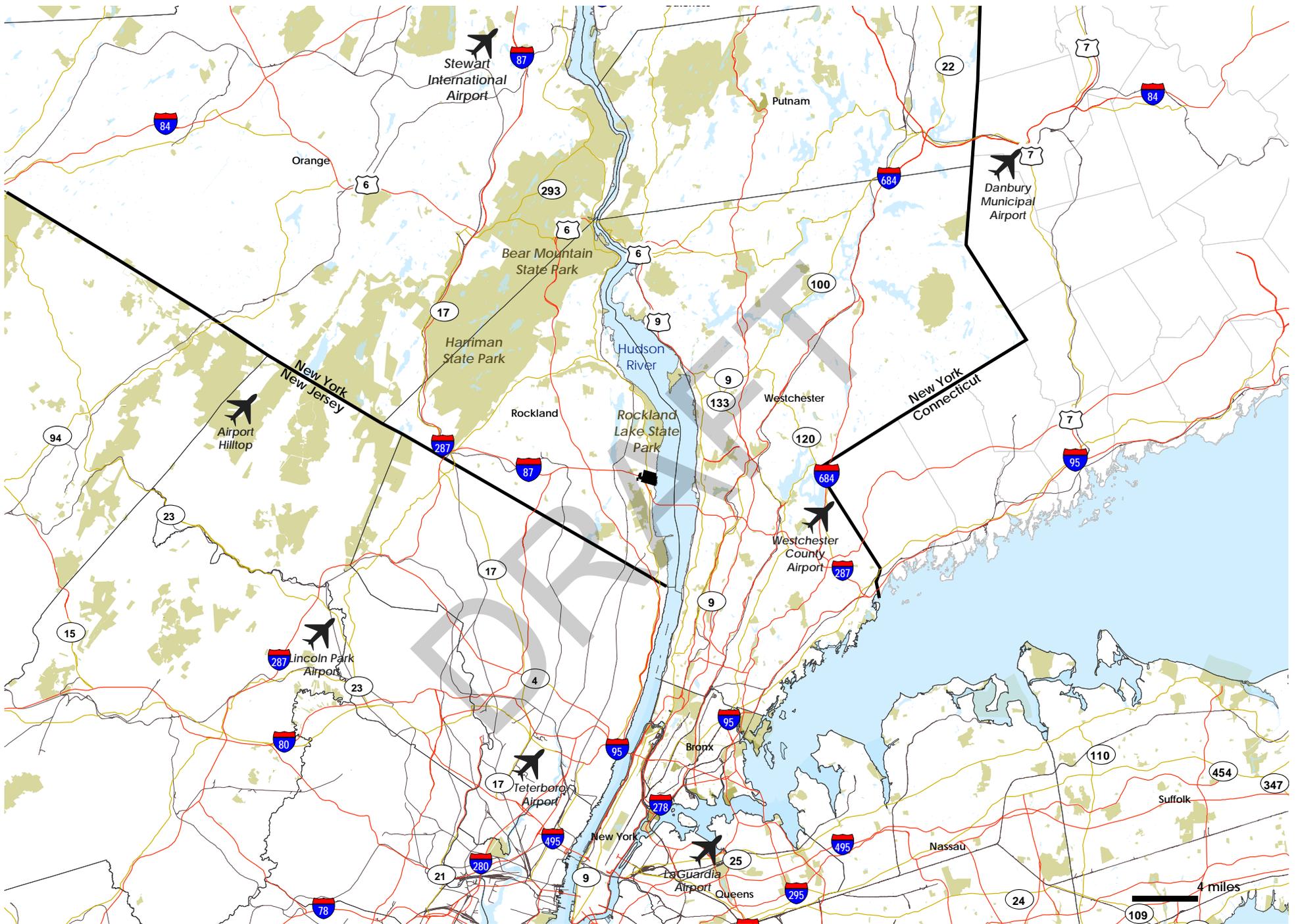
the south by the Village of South Nyack and to the west by the Town of Clarkstown (see Figure 2).

The land that is today Nyack was originally inhabited by the Tappan group of the Lenape Native American tribe that migrated seasonally throughout the Hudson Palisades and New York-New Jersey Highlands region. The first European arrival in Nyack was in 1675, when a Dutch trader, Harman Dowsen Tallman, settled in the area. Other Dutch families followed, and Tallman later erected a mill along Nyack Brook. The land that forms most of present-day Nyack remained in ownership of the Tallman family until 1799, when it was sold to Abraham Lydecker, who in turn sold the land to Tunis and Peter Smith in 1813. Between 1814 and 1828, the Smiths laid out Nyack’s first streets and sold building lots, initiating the development of the modern Village.

Nyack’s history – and that of Rockland County overall – is closely tied to transportation infrastructure. The Nyack Turnpike (roughly NY Route 59) was completed in 1825, linking Nyack to Suffern. In 1827, steamboat travel began from Nyack to New York City. Commercial ferry service to Tarrytown launched in 1834 and operated through the 1940s. A railroad connection to Piermont was launched in 1870, providing rail access south to New Jersey and north to Lake Erie. By 1893, the County Legislature established a county road system to link its major business areas.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nyack Historical Marker (The Nyack Library Local History Collection); Rockland County Comprehensive Plan.



**Nyack Comprehensive Plan**

**Figure 1: Regional Setting**





# Nyack Comprehensive Plan

## Figure 2: Local Context

1,000 ft

Source: Rockland County, BfJ Planning



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Industry has played a major role in Nyack's land-use development. The Village's first industry was quarrying, beginning after the Revolutionary War in the Palisades from Hook Mountain to Piermont. Sandstone quarried in Nyack was used locally in structures like the Old Stone Church in Upper Nyack and the John Green House in Nyack, and in building construction up and down the Hudson River, including at Manhattan's City Hall and the old Capitol building in Albany. Quarrying reached its peak in Nyack in the 1830s, but waned after 1845 with the discovery of higher-quality stone in Connecticut and New Jersey. Although the industry lasted through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its impact on the Palisades spurred the regional conservation movement that led to the formation of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission in 1900, which began buying up quarries to preserve the remaining Palisades.

Shipbuilding has also been an important industry in Nyack, beginning at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century largely to serve the quarries. In 1813, Tunis and Peter Smith launched a longstanding shipbuilding business at the foot of Main Street, and about the same time, Henry Gesner opened a yard nearby at the foot of Clinton Avenue in today's South Nyack. From 1800 through the 1850s, Nyack built more Hudson River sloops than any other community along the river. However, by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only one boatyard remained.<sup>2</sup>

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw more infrastructure improvements with the 1924 opening of the Bear Mountain Bridge, providing the first vehicular crossing between New York City and Albany. With the opening of the George Washington Bridge in 1931, bridges largely replaced cross-river ferry service. The construction of the Palisades Interstate Parkway and the New York State Thruway in the 1950s further improved connectivity.

However, no modern infrastructure development has had a greater impact on Nyack than the opening of the Tappan Zee Bridge in 1955. Linking South Nyack and Tarrytown, the bridge forever changed the way Rockland County's residents interacted with the communities east of the Hudson River. Prior to its opening, most residents working outside Rockland commuted to New York City via New Jersey. After construction of the Tappan Zee Bridge, that commuting pattern shifted from Rockland to Westchester County, a trend that continues today. The bridge also facilitated the growth of travel in Rockland County and more intensive development along the I-87/287 corridor. In 2013, construction began on new Tappan Zee Bridge north of the current span; when fully complete in 2018, the bridge will carry eight traffic lanes, four breakdown lanes, a dedicated commuter bus lane and a bike/pedestrian path. The new bridge, like its predecessor, will have major ramifications for Nyack.

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<sup>2</sup> "Fish & Ships: The Hudson River in the History of the Nyacks." Newsletter of the Historical Society of the Nyacks, Spring 2009.

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### 2.2 REGIONAL PLANNING CONTEXT

A community's growth and development patterns are shaped most directly by the 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 provided by vision and comprehensive plans issued by county and other municipal governments, and sometimes inter-municipal agreements. For Nyack, several plans developed at a regional and municipal level are relevant, including the following:

#### ***Rockland County Comprehensive Plan (2011)***

This plan set a vision for the future development and preservation of the County, as a guide to municipal land-use decisions. While planning and zoning authority rests with the County's five towns and 19 villages, *Rockland County Tomorrow* gives an understanding of how regional land-use patterns and policies work together and to help local officials identify and avoid potential land-use conflicts along borders and encourage intermunicipal cooperation. The plan is also meant to guide capital budget decisions for County facilities and programs.

*Rockland County Tomorrow* supports conservation of the 90% to 95% of the County's land area that lies outside its commercial centers and corridors, including residential neighborhoods, parks and farmland and scenic and

environmental resources. The plan encourages focusing growth and redevelopment efforts on existing centers, along commercial corridors and in office and industrial clusters, that all provide local services and jobs.

#### ***Orangetown Comprehensive Plan (2003 and 2011)***

The Town's 2003 plan outlines recommendations for open space and environmental protection, community facilities and transportation and infrastructure. The plan also included detailed analysis and recommendations for the six hamlet areas of Pearl River, Orangeburg, Blauvelt, Tappan, Sparkill and Palisades, as well as key corridors such as Route 303 and underutilized areas like the Rockland Psychiatric Center site.

In 2011, Orangetown began the process of updating the 2003 plan. The Town determined that most of the suggestions from the 2003 plan remained valid. The initial planning effort would focus on several detailed areas of analysis, with the results of that study to determine whether a full update of the comprehensive plan was needed. The 2011 study offered recommendations for the Pearl River hamlet, Route 303 and the Rockland Psychiatric Center site, and determined that a full update of the comprehensive plan was not necessary.

#### ***Clarkstown Comprehensive Plan (2009)***

This plan focused on improving residents' connections to jobs, schools, businesses, parks and the environment. It outlined a series of goals and objectives for economic development; environmental resources; health, safety and welfare; historic and cultural resources; housing; recreation, parks and open space; and transportation.

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The key areas of focus for Clarkstown’s plan were ensuring efficient travel among the Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 corridor, the Route 59 corridor and other parts of the town; and promoting revitalization of the Valley Cottage, Congers and New City hamlet centers. Areas of the town that adjoin Nyack are primarily residential neighborhoods and open space, and are not suggested to change.

### ***South Nyack Comprehensive Plan (ongoing)***

Nyack and South Nyack are closely linked, sharing both a school district and a downtown. The border between the villages is relatively indistinguishable, running through residential neighborhoods and the Broadway commercial corridor at the eastern end and along the Nyack College and Nyack Middle School campuses at the western end. The two villages – together with Upper Nyack, Grandview and Piermont – jointly applied in 2011 for a State grant to study how combining or sharing services could save costs without reducing services.

In 2009, South Nyack began the process of updating its 1969 Comprehensive Plan by forming a volunteer board to formulate a vision for the village’s future. The board proposed two overarching goals for South Nyack: to improve economic sustainability through enhancing the tax base and to support cultural sustainability by establishing a unique identity for the village.

A key recommendation of the planning effort is a proposal to redesign Exit 10 of I-287 as part of the Tappan Zee Bridge replacement, and to incorporate a “lid park” over a portion of the interchange to better connect portions of the community. In 2014, the Village of South Nyack issued

a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a consultant to conduct a feasibility study of alternatives to meet the economic and cultural sustainability goals of its planning initiatives. The outcome of the study will include preliminary project renderings and cost and revenue estimates.

### ***Upper Nyack Comprehensive Plan***

To be completed pending coordination with Upper Nyack.

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### 2.3 REGIONAL PLANNING ISSUES

In considering Nyack's place within the greater region, there are several key issues that – while in part beyond the Village's direct control – require careful consideration in this Plan, to ensure that its quality-of-life, sustainable environment and economic vitality are preserved.

#### *The Tappan Zee Bridge and the I-287 Corridor*

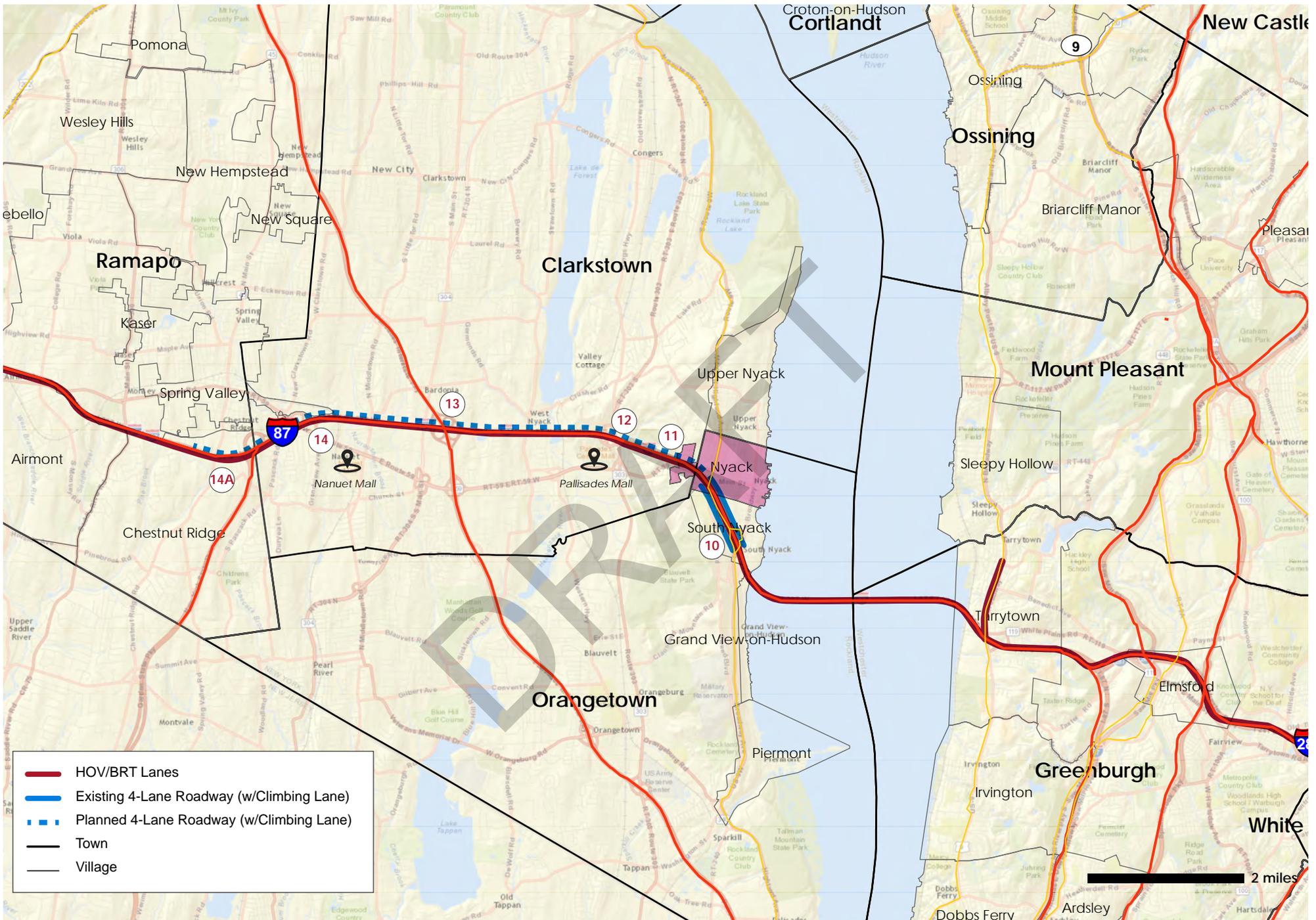
As discussed, the Tappan Zee Bridge replacement and associated I-287 corridor improvements in Westchester and Rockland Counties will have a tremendous impact on Nyack and other adjacent municipalities. As part of that project, the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) has proposed to address major congestion issues along the corridor through a bus rapid transit (BRT) service connecting Suffern to downtown White Plains, with stops in Nyack at Artopee Way and on Franklin Street in South Nyack. This main bus route, which received \$10 million in federal funding in October 2015, could be expanded to six additional routes in the future.

The current Tappan Zee Bridge reconstruction rebuilds only the bridge itself, and not the approaches to the bridge. This decision was made so that a decades-long planning process could be brought to a conclusion and an affordable bridge project could move forward. The bridge will be four lanes of traffic in each direction. Those four lanes connect to corresponding lanes on the Westchester County side until Exit 8, where traffic can go

south on I-87 to New York or east to White Plains on I-287. However, original plans to extend the four lanes in Rockland County to the Garden State Parkway at Exit 14A have not been included in the bridge reconstruction. Those plans, incorporated in the original environmental impact statement for the bridge, are shown in Figure 3.

Currently, the four lanes westbound end just west of Exit 10 at the top of a hill within Nyack. They need to be extended to the Garden State Parkway to reduce this congestion point and to give traffic the opportunity to exit at either the Palisades Interstate Parkway or the Garden State Parkway. Conversely, coming eastbound, the fourth lane would ideally also start at the Garden State Parkway, but it is absolutely necessary to extend from the Palisades Center Mall to the bridge, as shown in Figure 3. These lanes were originally seen as “climbing lanes,” necessary to relieve congestion. They will be even more important with increased traffic projected for the new bridge.

Unless these lanes are created, the resulting congestion will have significant negative impacts, including increased air pollution, decreased response time for emergency services, higher crash rates and a greater cost of doing business due to greatly expanded travel times. Two impacts have a particular relevance to Nyack. The first is air quality. Stop-and-go traffic has been shown to create significant increases in carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide and volatile organic compounds. Secondly, more congestion will give drivers an incentive to get off I-287 at Exit 10 and use local roads to bypass traffic, thus affecting Nyack's local streets and residential neighborhoods.



**Nyack Comprehensive Plan**

**Figure 3: Originally Planned I-287 Corridor Improvements**



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### ***Watershed Planning and the Nyack Brook***

Nyack is part of the Saw Mill River-Hudson River watershed, which covers the riverfront area of Orangetown and most of Clarkstown. The Village's location at the water's edge, and the surrounding topography, mean that it faces impacts from land-use activities that occur upstream, well outside of its municipal borders. Recognizing this reality, planning for communities like Nyack is increasingly taking a watershed approach, which 1) is defined hydrologically instead of politically; 2) acknowledges that everyone's actions in a watershed have an effect on others; 3) realizes that upstream conditions affect downstream water quality; and 4) creates more effective solutions because whole watersheds and many stakeholders are included.<sup>3</sup> This type of planning requires coordination with adjoining municipalities and regional planning groups, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) provides tools to assist local communities in undertaking watershed-based planning.

Within the Village itself, the Nyack Brook has a major impact on planning and land-use decisions that may be under the Village's direct or indirect control. Historically, the brook originated from a pond located at present-day Exit 11 on the New York State Thruway, flowing east along Main Street before turning south and then eastward again to exit into the Hudson River south of Hudson Avenue.

Today, the Nyack Brook is a degraded, urbanized stream that travels through pipes or armored channels for most of

its way through the Village. This channelization has reduced the brook's capacity during stormwater overflow events, and is a major contributing factor to flooding throughout downtown Nyack. Previous planning efforts such as the *Nyack Green Infrastructure Report* have identified ways to improve stormwater management and aesthetic conditions along the brook, including the potential to bring portions of it above ground. For example, the Village has a long-planned project known as the "Big Dig" that would divert the overflow portion of Nyack Brook via additional conduits, which would help to relieve the stormwater capacity issues. In addition, the recently approved redevelopment of the Pavion property on Cedar Hill Avenue at Nyack's southern border will "daylight" part of the Nyack Brook. Similar opportunities can be explored for both Village property and future redevelopment of private land along the brook.

### ***Growth and Accommodation of Bicycle Transportation***

Bicycling – both recreational and as a means of commutation – has exploded in popularity in the New York metropolitan region. Nyack has seen a significant increase in the number of cyclists, with estimates numbering in the hundreds of cyclists traveling to or through the Village on a typical summer day.

The Tappan Zee Bridge replacement project will incorporate a 3-mile shared-use pedestrian and bike path

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<sup>3</sup> New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Division of Water. <http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/25563.html>.

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from Tarrytown to a yet-to-be-determined site in South Nyack. Although the number of users that the path will attract is not known, the NYSDOT's parking demand study has estimated that 151 parking spaces – 54 in Rockland and 97 in Westchester – will be needed to accommodate visitors to the path when it opens in 2018.<sup>4</sup>

The potential for the shared-use path to generate substantial growth in cyclist traffic to and through Nyack has raised concerns about the impact of that traffic on local quality-of-life. Careful planning will be necessary to ensure that the appropriate infrastructure is in place within the Village to mitigate negative impacts of bicycle transportation while capitalizing on the potential positive economic impacts. A 2012 report on the economic impact of the Walkway Over the Hudson bridge connecting Poughkeepsie and Highland, New York, found that the 500,000 annual visitors to that bridge generated more than \$15 million in direct spending by non-local users in Dutchess and Ulster Counties, nearly \$8.5 million in indirect "spillover effects," 383 new jobs and \$9.4 million in new wages. In addition, the two counties receive nearly \$800,000 in annual sales and hotel tax revenue.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, there is great potential for Nyack to benefit from the growth in cyclists; the key task will be to ensure that these benefits do not create adverse effects on the Village's residents and businesses.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.newnybridge.com/news/2015/2015-05-12-relocation-nnyb-bike-ped-path.html>.

<sup>5</sup> *Walkway Over the Hudson Economic Impact Update: Final Report*. Camoin Associates, February 2012. <https://walkway.org/impact>.

### ***Impact of Major Retail Destinations on Local Commerce***

Nyack is located near two regional malls, the Palisades Center Mall in West Nyack, off Exit 13 of the New York State Thruway, and the Shops at Nanuet at the intersection of Route 59 and Middletown Road. The Palisades Center Mall, opened in 1998, comprises approximately 2.2 million square feet and is the second-largest shopping mall in the New York Metropolitan region (behind Roosevelt Field in Garden City on Long Island). The Shops at Nanuet, formerly the Nanuet Mall, opened in 2013, has about 750,000 square feet of retail, restaurant and commercial space in an outdoor mall setting. Economic development analysis for the Rockland County Comprehensive Plan found that retail space in the village centers and hamlets tends to suffer at the expense of these two regional malls and other major shopping centers in other areas of the county, and recommended branding village centers as "magnets for uniquely different patterns of spending" based on demographic trends and consumer preferences. At the time of the County's plan, retail vacancies were found to be twice as concentrated in village locations as they were in unincorporated areas.<sup>6</sup>

These data likely reflect, at least in part, the nationwide economic recession that began in 2008, and Nyack's retail picture has clearly improved. But the trend highlights the importance for the Village's downtown to capture its optimal niche market. Nyack contains among the largest

<sup>6</sup> *Rockland Tomorrow: Rockland County Comprehensive Plan*, March 2011. [http://rocklandgov.com/files/4513/5067/1656/Rockland\\_Tomorrow.pdf](http://rocklandgov.com/files/4513/5067/1656/Rockland_Tomorrow.pdf).

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stock of retail space of villages in Rockland County, and it serves as the downtown not only for its own residents, but for those in surrounding municipalities that do not contain their own commercial areas. There is strong potential for the Village to leverage retail dollars for a larger area. The challenge is to ensure that the types and scales of businesses are well-positioned to capture it.

### ***Capitalizing on Proximity to an Exceptional Park System***

As a small, built-out village, Nyack does not have a large amount of dedicated open space. However, it is part of a larger network of parks and recreational facilities that is one of the Hudson Valley's strongest assets. State parks near Nyack include Rockland Lake, Hook Mountain and Blauvelt, and it is a short ride from Harriman State Park and Bear Mountain State Park, which are major draws for the region. The Hudson River itself is a significant recreational resource, providing opportunities for fishing, boating, swimming, hiking and wildlife-related recreation.

Nyack's waterfront already boasts important public access resources, including Memorial Park, the municipal marina and two private boat clubs. The Village's 1992 Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) identified a range of projects and policies to preserve and enhance the riverfront. Still, there are opportunities for Nyack to improve the condition of its waterfront and increase the public's access and enjoyment of this important amenity, through public investment, future redevelopment of land and appropriate planning and programming initiatives.