Resource Strategies

1. Protected Open Space
Identify, permanently protect, and manage critical open space resources and systems

2. Water Resources
Protect and manage water resources

3. Working Landscapes
Enhance the viability and protection of working landscapes

4. Landforms and Natural Features
Protect the County's valuable landforms and natural features

5. Ecological Communities
Develop priority biodiversity areas and ensure that land use decisions incorporate habitat protection and species diversity

6. Historic and Cultural Resources
Promote stewardship of historic and cultural resources

7. Recreation Resources
Create, preserve, enhance and provide managed access to parks, hiking trails, active and passive recreation facilities, and historic resources

The Ulster County Open Space Plan (2007) was developed collaboratively by the Ulster County Environmental Management Council and the Ulster County Planning Board. For more information about the Plan, contact (845)340-3340 or planning@co.ulster.ny.us or visit the Plan website at: www.co.ulster.ny.us/planning/ospace.shtml

Ulster County Open Space Plan
Executive Summary

Ulster County has a long history of open space protection.

The environmental conservation movement has its roots here. With our "forever wild" Catskill Forest Preserve and Minnewaska State Park we have two of the most significant open spaces in the region.

Each community in the county has valuable open space resources. Abundant and critical water resources, rich biodiversity, renowned recreational and historic sites, and valuable, productive agricultural lands are all part of Ulster County's open space landscape. These contribute to the well-being of the region's environment, economy and quality of life.

Spring Clove, G. Steve Jordan

However, these resources are still at risk.

Much is already protected, but current development activity and existing regulatory controls foster a pattern of intrusion into our open spaces. Limited availability of water and sewer infrastructure is also a barrier in preventing a more compact land use pattern. These issues have become increasingly important as development proposals continue to accelerate in Ulster County.

We need to face the future with **a pro-active regional approach** — one that embraces scientific, legal, financial, and participatory tools to determine where and how we grow. Overwhelming evidence points to the benefits of preserving open space and growing "smart." Communities that plan ahead to protect open spaces, preserve their natural resources while creating a vision for accommodating sustainable and compact development are likeliest to succeed economically.

The postwar development pattern of sprawl has negative impacts the protection of open space (above).
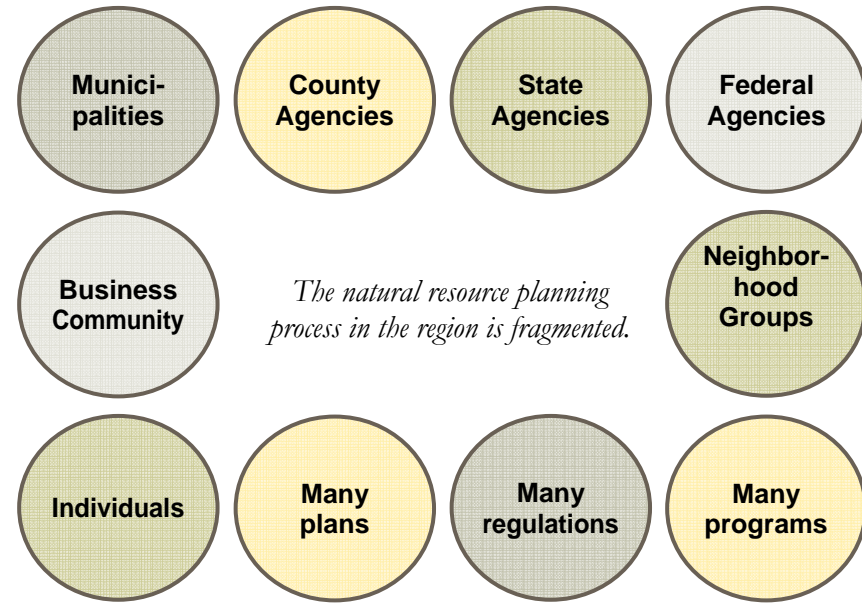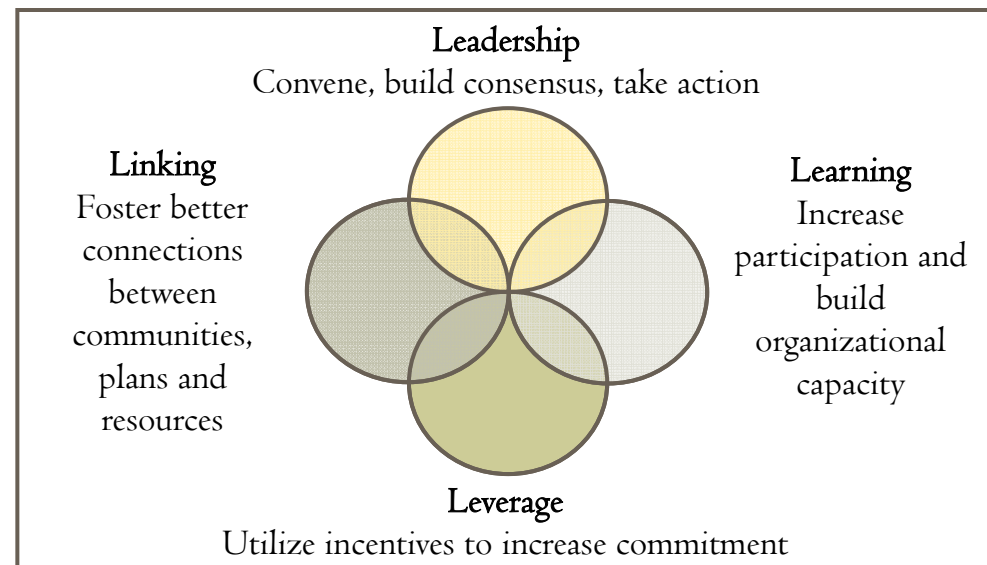

Alternative patterns exist, even for rural development, such as the example provided by Dutchess County's Greenway Connections (right).

The current planning environment

Ulster County is nearly the size of Rhode Island. Within it are 20 towns, 3 villages, and one city. "Home Rule" in New York State, makes each municipality responsible for its own land use future. There are numerous non-profit organizations with missions to protect natural, cultural, and historic resources. Finally, dozens of State and Federal programs and regulations exist to protect particular segments of the environment. These entities and the public, all compete for access, funding, and consideration of their issues in land use decisions. This backdrop presents an extremely **fragmented planning process,** as well as one that is often contentious.

Munici-palities · County Agencies · State Agencies · Federal Agencies · Business Community · *The natural resource planning process in the region is fragmented.* · Neighbor-hood Groups · Individuals · Many plans · Many regulations · Many programs

How can the County help?

The focus of this Plan is a framework for coordinated management and protection of natural resources. By putting the power of existing organizations together, we can focus our financial and human resources to protect our open spaces as we grow. The Plan recommends that the County use this management framework to coordinate and supporting the many efforts to protect open space resources in Ulster County. The key recommendations of the Plan are presented in the pages that follow.

Leadership — Convene, build consensus, take action

Linking — Foster better connections between communities, plans and resources

Learning — Increase participation and build organizational capacity

Leverage — Utilize incentives to increase commitment

This plan recommends a strategic approach to open space resource management

Leadership:

Convene, build consensus, and take action

We have already begun this process, which involves bringing together stakeholders—including government, agriculture/forestry groups, environmental groups, land trusts, economic development organizations, community organizations, and educational organization—to identify open space issues and areas of concern in Ulster County.

The Plan establishes an ongoing partnership with these stakeholders. In this leadership role, we will work together to recommend policies and actions to protect open space in the County, educate the public regarding open space protection, report regularly to County leaders, coordinate open space protection activities at the municipal, County and State levels, and establish cooperative relationships with all interest groups.

Linking:

Foster better connections between communities, organizations, plans and resources

To improve coordination of the many initiatives and open space resources in the county, the plan recommends creating linkages by:

- Continuing to convene stakeholders throughout the county to identify county-wide priorities for open space protection and work with communities to coordinate plans, provide technical assistance for capacity building and planning.
- Developing an open space database and clearinghouse with information and maps about the county's natural resources inventory, grants, regulations, and planning tools and concepts.
- Supporting "inter-municipal agreements" between communities to plan and implement shared open space goals

Learning:

Increase participation and build organizational capacity

To implement the goals of this plan, we will:

- Build capacity of our own staff and decision-makers to manage an open space protection program.
- Foster stewardship of the County's own sites, such as a County parks plan.
- Create an educational program to help municipalities strengthen their own planning and stewardship efforts.
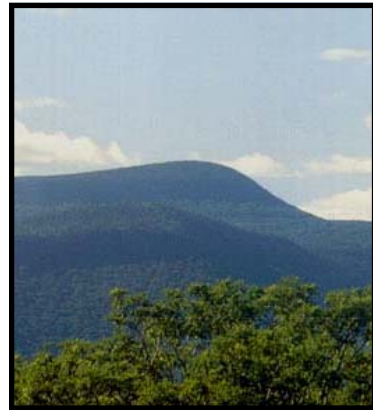
Leverage:

Utilize incentives to increase commitment to open space goals and policies

This strategy asks recipients to match the County support to show their commitment to the plan by:

- Working with the Hudson Valley Greenway program and Ulster County municipalities to become a "Greenway Compact" county. This offers incentives to communities in the form of funds and technical assistance for planning in accordance with Greenway Principles, which this plan supports.
- Creating a dedicated Open Space Fund which requires commitments from its beneficiaries in order to leverage those funds.
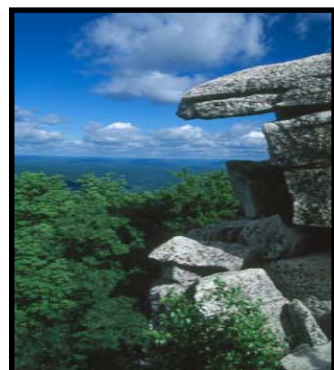
Ulster County Open Space Resources

1. Protected Open Space: areas already legally protected (e.g., Catskill Forest Preserve)
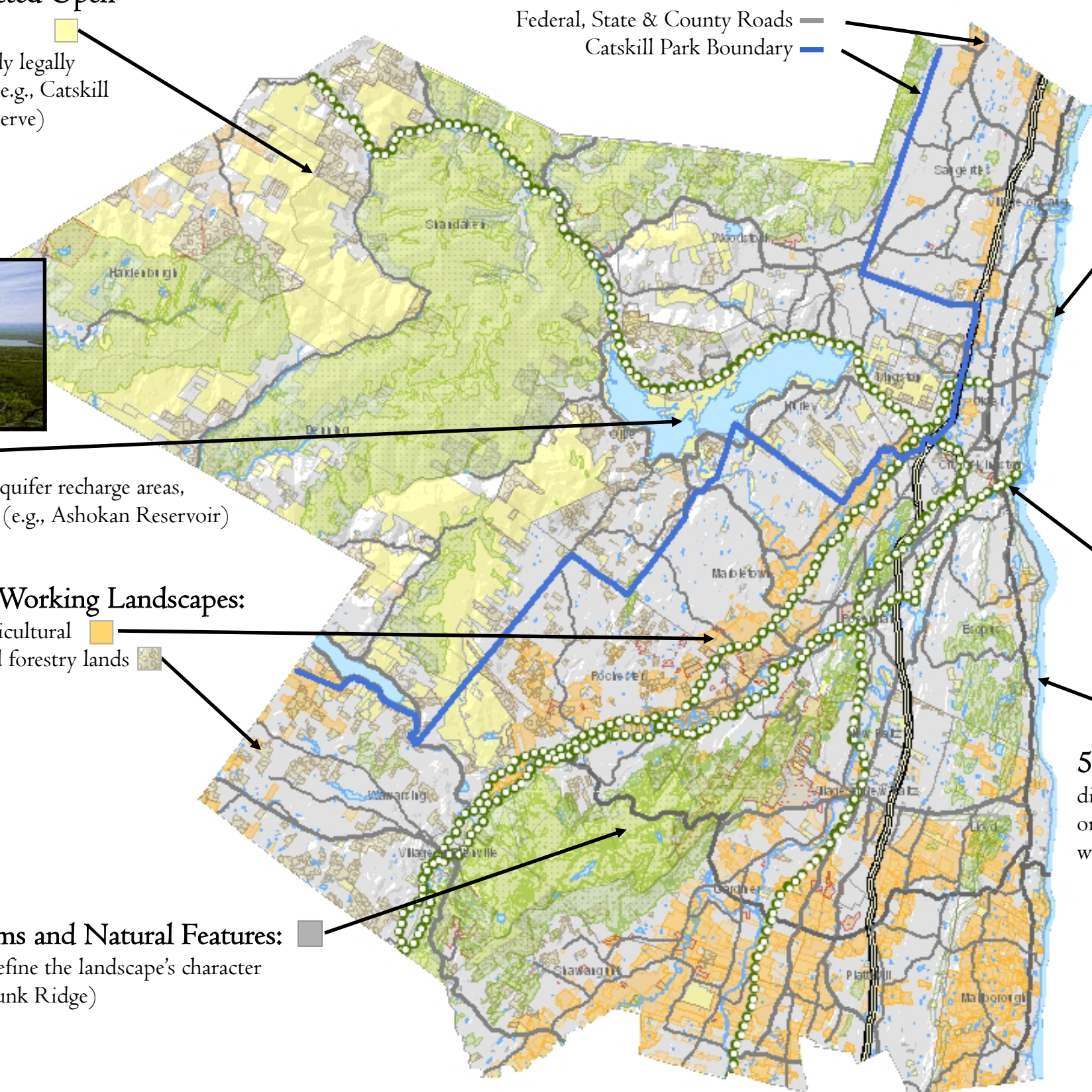

2. Water Resources: surface, ground, watersheds, aquifers, aquifer recharge areas, floodplains, wetlands and vernal pools (e.g., Ashokan Reservoir)

3. Working Landscapes: agricultural and forestry lands

4. Landforms and Natural Features: features that define the landscape's character (e.g., Shawangunk Ridge)

Federal, State & County Roads
Catskill Park Boundary

7. Recreation Resources: rural and urban parks, shorelines, fishing and hunting, trails, and tourism sites (e.g., Ulster Landing Park)
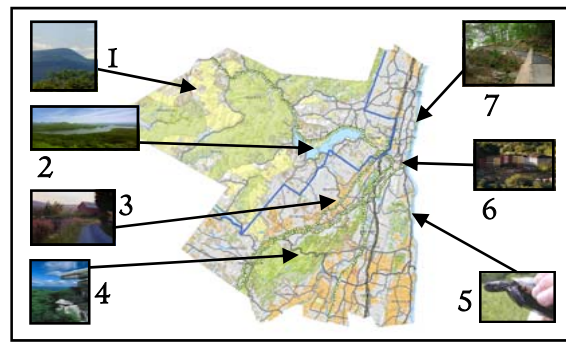

6. Cultural and Historic Resources Federal, State and locally designated structures, sites and districts (e.g., Kingston Rondout Waterfront District)

5. Ecological Communities: diversity of species and ecosystems, exceptional forest or plant community, unique and wildlife habitats, wetlands, shorelines (e.g., Black Creek)
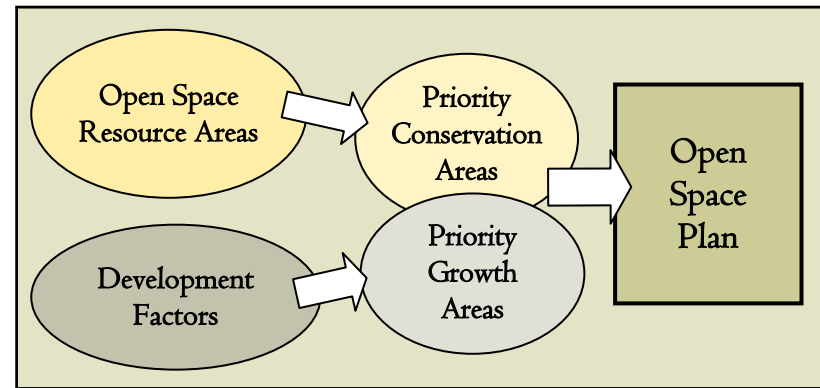
See previous page for details on the seven resource areas of the Plan.

See next page for integrated planning strategies.

Principles of the Open Space Plan

The recommendations of the plan are based upon the following principles:

1: *Identify critical natural resource "systems."*

2: *Preserve and protect* open space, unique natural areas and heritage areas and sites, wetlands, water and woodland resources, scenic views, areas of natural beauty, and the rural character of Ulster County.

3: *Integrate and link planning, development and environmental goals* and efforts by creating a coordinated policy and management framework.

4: *Integrate considerations of community well-being*, economic prosperity, and ecological integrity.

5: *Protect water resources* and the critical watershed areas of the county.

6: *Enhance the viability of existing farming* operations and agricultural businesses, and encourage new ones to be formed.

7: *Protect and enhance the County's most valuable open space* landforms and natural features with coordinated planning and safeguard policies.

8: *Safeguard priority biological diversity areas* by promoting biologically-sensitive land use and increasing research and understanding.

9: Create, preserve, *enhance and provide managed access* to parks, hiking trails, active and passive recreation facilities, and historic resources.

10: Balance consideration of *present and future generations* through sustainable development (i.e., development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.)
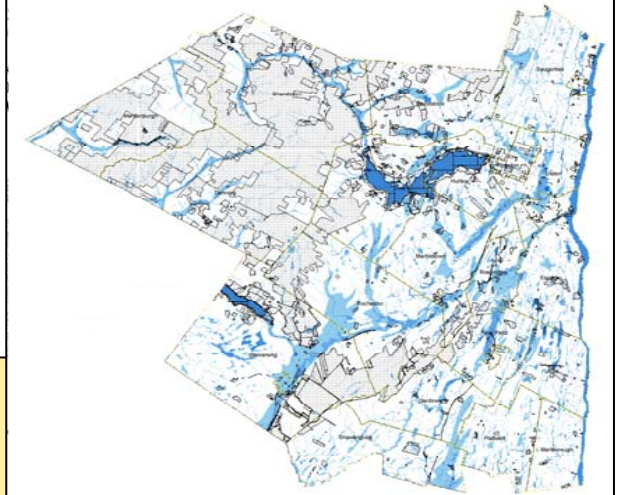
Natural Resources Inventory (NRI)

The EMC and Planning are compiling an extensive NRI for Ulster County that contains the locations and extent of natural resources including protected open space, water resources such as wetlands and aquifers, agricultural land, landforms and natural features, historic and cultural resources, and recreation areas. An NRI allows us to utilize sound scientific data, tools, and techniques in the decision making process.

Identify "Priority Conservation Areas"

Priority Conservation Areas contain high concentrations of natural resources and/or indicate development limitations for public safety reasons (flood plains, potential water resource contamination, steep slopes with unstable soils, etc). Priority Conservation Areas are identified by comparing where critical natural resources are mapped.
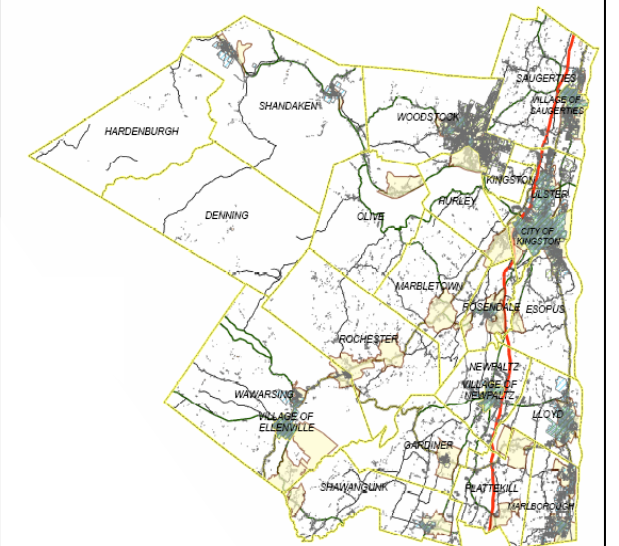

This map showing water resources and protected open space demonstrates how examining different resources together helps identify areas that may be a priority for conservation and protection.

Open Space Database and Clearinghouse

The Planning Board has compiled extensive information on planning tools, concepts, financial and legal resources, and "Best Management Practices" for open space protection. By linking this set of tools to a capacity building and educational program for individuals, communities, and decision-makers, the County will provide access to more consistent, standardized methods for a coordinated approach for development and conservation among our communities. This "toolbox" will provide guidance to local leaders and others for decisions regarding development that supports "Priority Growth Areas" while protecting open space.

Identify "Priority Growth Areas"

"Priority Growth Areas" are places where the community identifies potential for focused development in and around existing centers, rather than encouraging new construction on outlying open space or farmland. Priority Growth Areas also help us take best advantage of existing infrastructure. They are identified by mapping where development potential is most feasible based on infrastructure, zoning, population densities, and vacant parcels.

This map identifies development in and around existing centers to help make decisions about achieving a more compact land-use pattern.