

**Rhinebeck Village**  
**KITCHEN TABLE CONVERSATIONS**  
**What 143 Residents Said about the Village and Their Hopes for Its Future**

**I. THE VILLAGE WE LOVE—SMALL BUT MIGHTY**

Over 140 participants in 20 Kitchen Table Conversations—youth and adults—shared many things they love and want to preserve about Rhinebeck Village. The **small-town and close-knit community** feel, combined with easy access to commercial, community, and natural resources make our Village exceptional. In the words of one Villager: *“It punches above its weight.”* In the face of national and local trends, participants expressed—sometimes emotionally—an urgency to **preserve our history and aesthetic appeal, and our right-sized residential community**. When asked to identify the ONE ISSUE that residents would like solved, **a cluster of fundamental pedestrian and traffic safety issues topped the list**. In the face of an influx of rising affluence, many hoped for a **more diverse and affordable** Village in the future with more focus on residents, less on tourists. As one resident asked: **Are we going in the right direction?**



*“We need to consider the way the world/our society is evolving, and how this impacts the Village and all of us.”*

—A KTC participant

**II. CONTEXT: THE FORCES OF CHANGE**

**An Evolving World of Demographic and Social Changes**

We live in a larger world of demographic, technologic, social trends (e. g., cell phones) that influence the way we live here and the concerns we may have. Rhinebeck, as one of the state’s oldest communities by median age (57 vs. 39 statewide), is well ahead of some national trends, among them shrinking household size, more pronounced population aging, and a loss in youth population. The Village population declined 12% between 2000 and 2020 and average household size has declined dramatically to 1.88 persons. Housing has become less affordable, with 43% of renters paying 35% of their income or more for rent, while 13% of Village residents are living in poverty.

**III. PRESERVING WHAT WE VALUE**

**Small-Scale, Close-Knit, Historic Community**

Rhinebeck residents love the small town atmosphere of the Village and its quiet, easy living, and neighborhoods friendly to families with children, seniors . . . everyone. Citing convenience and walkability, they appreciate the ability to stroll to the business district to use the local banks, post office, independent retail stores, abundance of restaurants, weekly farmers’ market, and municipal offices. Many participants appreciate the unique, independent retailers in the Village and remain opposed to chain stores. Other positives are easy access to Starr Library and a hospital, and proximity to the train station, linking residents to NYC and the Albany area. Youths and adults noted and appreciated the winter lights and holiday decorations in town, and events like Sinterklaas and Porchfest—that are **“ours”** and **“contribute to a vibrant atmosphere.”**

What two residents like:

- *“Neighbors and many residents who give back to and contribute to the community.”*
- *“It’s safe for teenagers—I can drop them off after school and let them hang out on their own.”*

**Visitors and Tourists**

**All the things we love about our small town also attract many visitors and tourists.**

While half of respondents to a mini-survey question on tourism rated it “about right,” 40% percent rated it “too much.” Some residents acknowledge the importance of tourism for business profitability and the vibrancy we love. Others described a business center and local government more focused on tourism than residents, while others worried about the future growth in tourism. In KTC conversations, tourism surfaced as a concern in conjunction with multiple topics: the business center, affordability, local government priorities, and future concerns. Some adults and youths called for “no more

**The Challenge:**  
*Maintaining a delicate balance between a tourist destination and a residential small town.*

hotels,” citing the Mirbeau Hotel as an aesthetic intrusion in the Village and visitors as disconnected from the community, potentially compromising the close-knit Village feel.

One suggested solution (from a resident): *“Look to cities and towns that have been successful at maintaining a delicate balance between a tourist destination and a small, residential town.”*

### **Historic, Aesthetic Qualities—And Keeping it Clean**

In a Village with one of the state’s largest historic districts and landmark buildings, it’s period character is revered. Maintaining the historic charm and scale of the Village concerned many residents who also looked to the expansion of the historic district and zoning tools as solutions. For many residents, behind the Village’s postcard image lay routine upkeep and maintenance issues, especially in the Village center and parks: mention was made of weed growth, crooked signs, faded curb painting, overflowing trash containers, and the lack of public restrooms. CVS was singled out as an eyesore, while Veterans Park, Crystal Lake, and the post office were identified specifically as needing restoration. Several proposals were made to finance this and sidewalk repairs (below), with tourism-related fees, such as paid parking (with resident permits) and a hotel tax.

Suggested solutions (from residents): *A shift in priorities was proposed to address maintenance issues before “adding more.” Since the Village public works staff—small, but mighty—cannot do it all, additional resources would be needed. One resident proposed to have a Village aesthetics committee.*

## **IV. FUNDAMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

Participants mentioned multiple improvement needs—and mentioned them often. Needs clustered around pedestrian/traffic safety and some parking and road repairs. Overall, they would like more attention paid to sidewalks, bike lanes, crosswalks, traffic patterns, and speeding. Several existing crosswalks were identified as hazards, along with areas lacking crosswalks, chiefly along Montgomery and Market Streets. Dangerous intersections were also cited. One in particular is where South and Parsonage Streets meet.

### **Yes, It’s the Sidewalks**

Cited in the 1993 master plan as a problem, **sidewalks in disrepair remain a significant issue in 2022**. Residents expressed multiple frustrations with sidewalk conditions—frustration with uneven code enforcement, with the code itself that makes residents responsible for repairs, and with the lack of a current sidewalk inventory. Foremost is the concern with the ever-present risks of minor and serious injury to persons of all abilities. Village residents want this done! Sidewalk repairs would be a benefit to many Town and area residents, Fairgrounds attendees, and thousands of visitors attracted by the Village’s own celebrations like Sinterklaas and Porchfest.

#### **Top 10 KTC Themes**

1. Access to Improved Resources
2. Pedestrian and Traffic Safety
3. Historic/Aesthetic/Clean
4. Small Town Close Knit
5. Affordability/Access
6. Walk/Bike Paths
7. Land Use/Zoning Codes
8. Environment/Nature
9. Local Government
10. Diversity/Demographics

Suggested solutions (from residents): *Some KTC participants would like the Village to take back responsibility for repairs, while others question if Village taxpayers should exclusively bear the cost burden.*

## **VISIONING THE FUTURE**

### **I. GATHERING SPACES, GREEN SPACES, AND NEW TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS**

#### **Gathering in the Village**

Green spaces for gathering and walking and biking are important to many residents and were mentioned in response to three questions: what people love about Rhinebeck, what needs improvement, and future visions. Within the Village, small green spaces, pocket parks, and benches were mentioned as a partial solution to the issue of much needed gathering spaces. Community gathering places were important to both adults and youth, but not necessarily a bricks-and-mortar dedicated center. Rather, commercial spaces with refreshments like Barnes & Noble, Taste Budd’s, or Kingston’s Rough Draft were cited as ideal. Today, CVS serves this function for older youth: It is the only place in the Village center where they can wander freely, warm up in winter, and cool off in summer. Asked to name ONE important improvement, parents of school-age children identified upgrading recreation and park space, including the park at Crystal Lake.

Suggested solution from residents): *This topic needs more investigation. One KTC group asked where Village parks might be located: Where does green space exist in the Village and is it owned by the Village?*

### **Natural Environment, Walk/Bike Paths, and Connecting Village and Town**

Proximity to nature and agriculture is another advantage Village and Town residents say defines life in Rhinebeck. Nature ranked among the top five themes both for the present and a future vision. Many participants would like new walking and biking paths, both for recreation and as an alternative to automobiles, especially for trips to and from the Gardens and Tops supermarket. Leaning towards a “grand vision” for the future, one KTC group discussed a network of parks, walkways, and bike lanes linking Town and Village and proposed a commission to plan for it.

### **Accessible Public Transportation**

Increasing personal mobility options, while reducing vehicle congestion, was an important topic for some KTC participants not only for our older population, persons with disabilities, and parents pushing strollers, but also for local visitors and tourists. Multiple options were considered: area-wide bus service, trolleys around town, or a system integrating various existing van services with enhanced Dutchess County public transport. While the Town owns a senior van, it has no lift, and relies on appropriately trained volunteer drivers, who are often scarce, thereby limiting use.

One suggested solution (from a resident): *Consider a public-private partnership transportation model that is not free but user paid.*

## **II. AFFORDABILITY, DIVERSITY, COMMUNITY SERVICE**

### **Affordability**

Issues of affordability surfaced in all 17 adult KTCs and drove discussions about housing costs, assessments, and taxes, and the cost of goods and dining in the business center. Residents worried about escalating home prices, pushed higher lately by affluent buyers, especially in the historic district, and the renovation of the existing affordable housing stock. Participants cited the lack of affordable housing for families with children, workers, and some retirees aging in place, including themselves. Some older residents, many living alone, would downsize to smaller homes if they had the option to do so. Rising rental costs and the dearth of rentals at any price were also noted. Zoning changes to allow greater density or to prevent conversion of duplex or multifamily houses to single-family houses were recommended, as well as an inventory of current affordable housing units in the Village.

*“I don’t know if my children will be able to live here.”*

*-A KTC parent with high school children*

Suggested solutions from one KTC group: *One KTC group emphasized the need for regional collaboration with the Town and Red Hook to make headway with affordable housing. A 2% transfer tax on home buyers was also suggested.*

### **Diversity and Accessibility**

Diversity was among a list of issues residents most wanted to solve. It emerged as a prominent theme in some future vision statements. Many hope for a more diverse community, even as Village trends point to declining diversity by age and income. Some feel that people of all economic classes should be able to live here. Others view people of all backgrounds, ages, races and ethnicities as essential to a thriving future. Other residents hope to attract more individuals in the 20–40 age group. However, none of the high school students participating in one of three youth KTCs planned to remain in Rhinebeck.

According to some participants, the Village also needs to be more assertive about inclusion of persons at all ability levels. Some believe the Village is not focused on the American with Disabilities Act (ADA)—or insufficiently. Participants also noted that there are no ADA accessible public restrooms in the Village center. Right now, in fact, there are no public restrooms for anyone.

### **What Will the Village Look Like in 2032?**

Some residents embraced a hopeful view that much will remain the same:

- *“The same way it does today but with good planning and conscientious development.”*

- *“I want Rhinebeck to be a family-friendly small town that has a senior center, only a limited number of second homes, and only locally owned businesses.”*

Others hoped for a more affordable future:

- *“People want to stay and want their kids to be able to afford to live here.”*
- *“A mix of people here from different economic ‘classes’ living here in a vibrant, regular-old Rhinebeck.”*

Still others were more fanciful in describing the future:

- *“Positive and encouraging change to ensure preservation of the village’s historic character. New canopy trees are thriving. Children are in a thriving school system. The library is in the center of town and CVS has moved down the road.”*
- *“A grand vision—how do we become the best place to live in the country—a model that leads to more fundraising?”*

### **A Giving Community**

The Village is recognized as a generous giving community. Legions of residents are civically engaged and contribute time and personal resources to provide or maintain things we love about Rhinebeck—from our home and community gardens, historic structures, and school sports to food pantries, the library, and both traditional and more recently conceived celebrations. Mentioned by participants: Organizations like the American Legion, Lions Club, and Rotary/Interact that support civic projects and individuals in need. Also, volunteer firefighters and EMTs that ensure public safety and community well-being within and beyond their official duties.

Some residents—both longtime and more recently arrived—have witnessed a decline in membership and volunteerism, especially as our population continues to gray. Several residents hoped we would continue to support veterans and value traditions like the Memorial Day Parade, while others proposed we do more to recognize and support two groups essential to the vibrancy of the Village: youth and restaurant workers.

Suggested Solutions (from residents): *It was suggested that the Village itself formally recognize workers in the Village, while youth seek more community support for school activities and school spirit.*

### **What Motivates Residents to Participate?**

We asked KTC participants what would motivate them to participate or volunteer and here are some typical responses:

- *Knowing participation will have a result or make a difference.*
- *Knowing that the Village/Town is committed to actually solving issues in a timely fashion.*
- *Having motivated people in local government.*
- *Having a committee to work on the project.*
- *Having partner organizations.*
- *Recognizing interdependencies for all aspects of a community: socioeconomic needs, financial needs, child friendliness, affordability, the arts, and climate smart efforts.*

### **III. A WELL-CONNECTED VILLAGE**

As one KTC participant observed: *“A lack of communication has separated people over the last eight years; now people have a voice”* (referring to the Comprehensive Plan outreach). The need for improved communications, especially a local newspaper, was raised as ONE ISSUE to solve, **not only to keep residents informed but also for government accountability**. A solution may be at hand with the launch of a new online newspaper, the *Hudson Valley Pilot*.

*“There are gaps left in a community that relies on word-of-mouth as its primary means of communication.”*  
—A KTC Participant

### **Word of Mouth**

Family, friends, and neighbors ranked as the primary source of information about Village news and events (26%), followed by other news and print publications (20%), and Village email and website (19%). Other sources included social media, posters, and flyers, and the Starr Library monthly newsletter. One participant noted the challenge for many: *“It is hard to know what is going on in real time.”* Frustration with timely access to Village (municipal) information was a dominant concern. There was also mention in multiple KTCs that the Village is

slow in posting minutes and video recordings of Board meetings and correspondence from the public. Information about the comprehensive planning initiative was cited as hard to find on the Village website. Some posts located there are outdated and need to be taken down.

### **Improved Village Website and Collective Knowledge**

Many participants called for a more user-friendly Village website with links leading to other useful sites. A person has to “go through layers of the website to find specific documents,” such as resolution amendments or updates on in-progress Trustee business. In completing 20 KTCs, it also became apparent that Village residents lack basic or background information on certain topics or conditions, for example: the Dutchess County Fairgrounds’ contribution to the Village; the limits of Village policy and regulatory authority, the status of public works and pending upgrades; and notable Village history– who is creating and preserving it.

One suggested solution (from a resident): “Create a resident information base (FAQs) on common questions or issues, for both current residents and newcomers. Also improve, expand, and raise the profile of Town and Village websites.”

## **IV. MODELING GOVERNMENT-CIVIC COOPERATION**

*“Are local elected officials open to listening and to change?”*

—A KTC participant

Topics related to local government were second only to pedestrian and traffic safety as ONE ISSUE participants wanted to solve. They hoped for more cooperation among village officials, committees, and taxpayers. They valued receptivity to change, transparency, and more listening to residents’ voices. Many residents valued new Comprehensive Plan opportunities, like KTCs, to share their views and trusted they would be heard. Some feared they would not. Some participants questioned if we have the right priorities.

One suggested solution (from a resident): “Urge Village leadership to celebrate and encourage those who want to benefit the community and promote an increased sense of civic optimism.”

### **CECV KTC TEAM OBSERVATIONS**

Among KTC participants, there is a fundamental appreciation of the current way of life in Rhinebeck. At the same time, there is concern about the future, driven in part by an accelerating cost of living here, and fear of disrupting the balance between residential life and tourism. Some residents are frustrated by a lack of information and engagement from the local government and would like more routine reports on projects. Notably, many residents lack basic information about Village operations and institutional memory, leading to misconceptions: Periodic community Q&A or information forums could be helpful. More active outreach is needed to engage diverse voices and promote civic participation. Within this small village, concerns and perspectives differ by neighborhood, housing type (rent, own) and specific demographic and social groups.

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: KTC Background and Methods

Appendix 2: Graphs of Responses to KTC Questions 1–5

Appendix 3: KTC Analysis Main Topics and Subcodes

# **APPENDICES**

# APPENDIX 1

## KTC Background and Methods

### BACKGROUND

#### KTC Host and Participant Profile

Members of the CECV subcommittee and individual volunteers from the community hosted 20 one-to-two-hour-long conversations with 143 residents. A total of 17 KTCs were held for adults, while three were held for high school youth from the Rotary/Interact Club. Twelve adult hosts were volunteers from diverse neighborhoods in the Village, while three were from Rhinebeck Town. An additional two KTCs were hosted by Starr Library for the general public by prior registration.

Participants in adult KTCs were invited by hosts from their neighborhood or friends circles. KTCs included homeowners and renters, families with children, working adults, older adults and retirees, veteran representatives, Spanish-speaking participants, and individuals living in Rhinebeck Village or Town from one to 50 years.

#### Standardized KTC Process

A detailed host kit was developed to standardize the KTC process and two trainings were held for hosts. Each KTC had a designated facilitator and recorder. Five questions and methods to record responses were used uniformly for adult KTCs, while questions were modified slightly for youth.

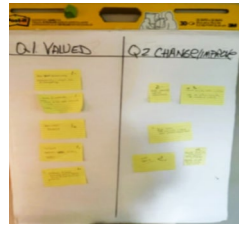
**Q1 What do you like about living in (or going into) Rhinebeck Village?**

**Q2 Are there improvements you would like to see (1 or 2)?**

**Q3 If you could solve only ONE ISSUE, what would it be and your solution? What would motivate you to participate?**

**Q4 How do you find out about events or what's going on in the Village?**

**Q5 Imagine the future (10 years from now). In the best of all possible worlds, what do you see?**



To ensure that everyone had a say, without influence from other participants, participants first responded to each question on Post-It notes. Post-It responses were read aloud and pasted on flip charts for discussion. All responses were transcribed and included in the report for each KTC.

#### Qualitative Method and Report

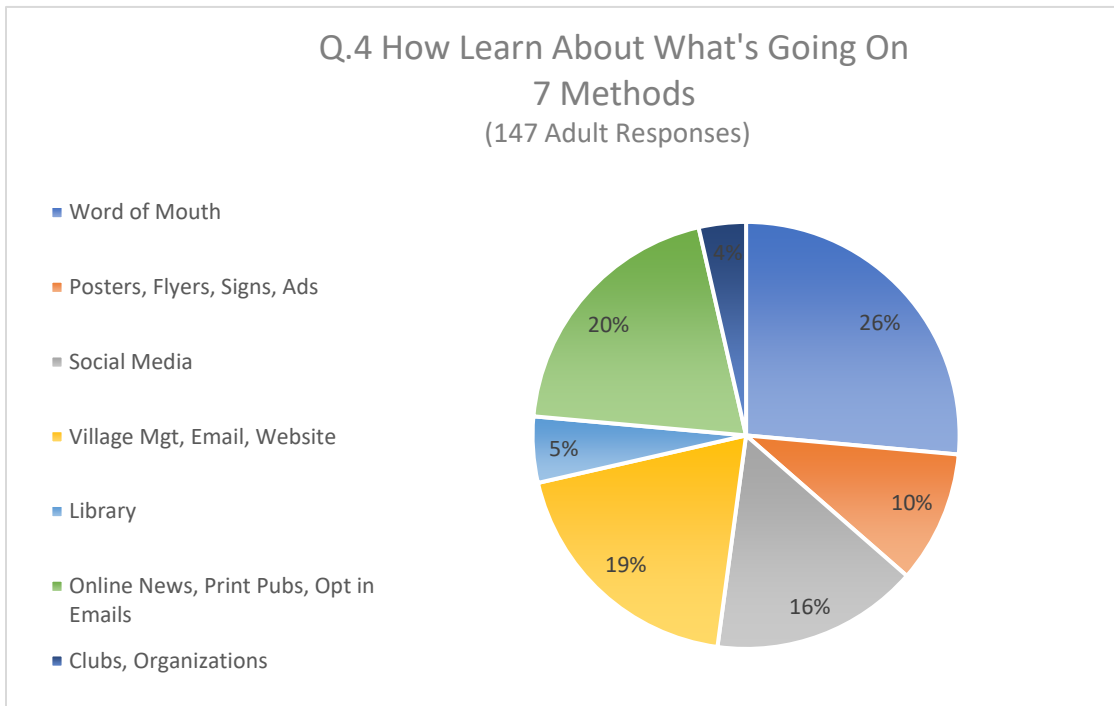
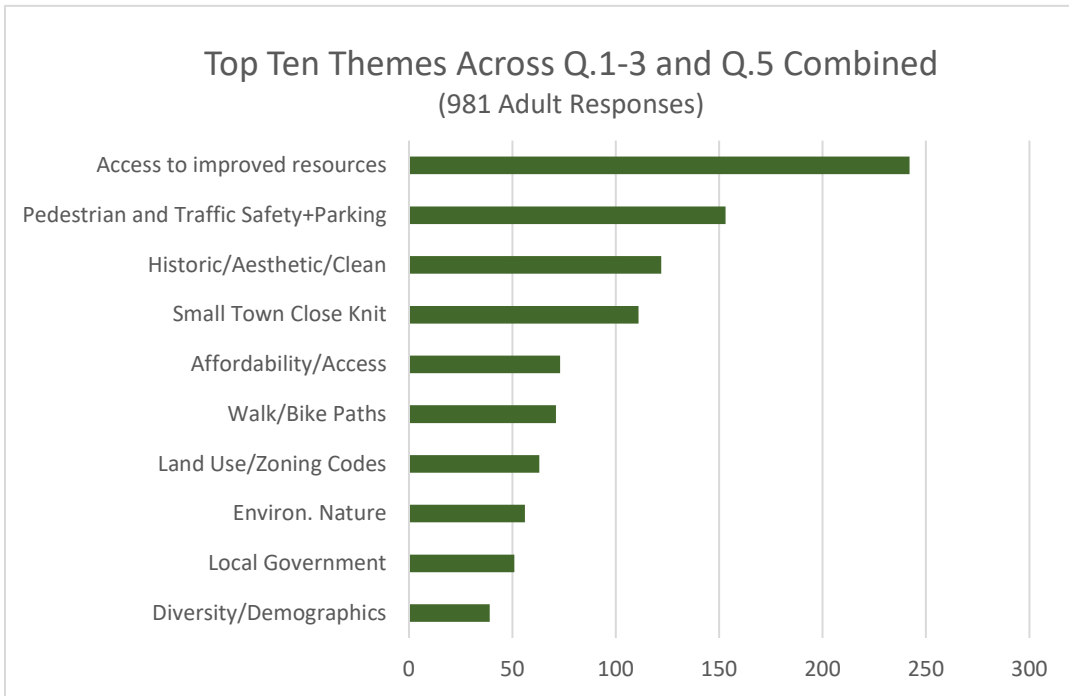
Individual comments from the 17 adult KTCs were combined into a consolidated list resulting in a 30-plus-page document containing about 1,500 comments, organized by Q1 to Q5. This list was transferred to Excel worksheets for coding and analysis. Comments from the three youth KTCs were coded and analyzed separately. To establish a set of topics or “themes” for coding, five members of the KTC team reviewed and independently coded five different KTC reports. The resulting topic lists were then combined into a single set of main and subcodes. This categorization was evaluated by coding an additional 300 items and final adjustments were made. Below are the 19 main codes used for sorting and counting all comments by the five questions.

Coding and counting comments provides a foundation for analysis. **BUT** quantitative counts mask perspectives that are often complex, multifaceted. The KTC report is intended to share participant voices and feelings and the range of views expressed. While major themes are highlighted, it is also important to bring forward topics raised by specific groups: Topics of greatest importance differed across the 20 groups and each KTC had its own “personality” and perspectives.

KTC ANALYSIS MAIN TOPICS (See Appendix 3 for all topics and subcodes)		
1. Small Town/Close Knit	8. Infrastructure	15. Contributing to Community/Connecting
2. Access to Resources	9. Pedestrian and Traffic Safety	16. Future Visions
3. Personal Safety (no crime)	10. Environment/Access to Nature	17. Diversity, Demographic Mix
4. Walkability (Code 9 for sidewalk repairs)	11. Tourism	18. ADA and Accessibility
5. Events/Celebrations	12. Village Land Use and Zoning Codes	19. Local Government (other than Communication #14)
6. Historic/Aesthetic/Cleanliness	13. Public Transportation (Vehicle)	
7. Affordability	14. Communications	

## APPENDIX 2

### Graphs of Adult Responses to KTC Question 1-5





# APPENDIX 3

## KTC TOPIC CODES AND SUBCODES

- 1. Small Town/Close Knit**
  - 1.1 Close Community/Neighbors
  - 1.2 Friendly, Family Friendly
  - 1.3 Other
- 2. Access to Resources**
  - 2.1 Shops/Restaurants/outdoor dining
  - 2.2 Health, Social, Community
  - 2.3 Children and Youth Stuff
  - 2.4 Village parks, pocket parks, gathering spaces, benches
  - 2.5 Other
- 3. Personal Safety (no crime)**
- 4. Walkability (Code 9 for sidewalk conditions)**
  - 4.1 Adult
  - 4.2 Youth
  - 4.3 Walk/Bike Paths in Village
  - 4.4 Village-Town Connecting Paths (e.g., to Top's, Rhinecliff, Village gateways)
  - 4.5 Other
- 5. Events/Celebrations**
  - 5.1 RBK's "own" celebrations
  - 5.2 Hispanic and other cultural heritage
  - 5.3 Fairgrounds events as positive. (See also #12 Land Use)
  - 5.4 Other
- 6. Historic/Aesthetic/Cleanliness**
  - 6.1 Maintain history, scale, look and feel
  - 6.2 Maintain clean and attractive Village (trash pick-up, public restrooms, visitor center)
  - 6.3 Increase arts/culture/visibility
  - 6.4 Other
- 7. Affordability**
  - 7.1 Businesses/Shopping
  - 7.2 Housing (Families, Workforce, Middle Income, All Types)
  - 7.3 Other
- 8. Infrastructure**
  - 8.1 Powerlines
  - 8.2 Central Hudson/Pruning
  - 8.3 Septic-Sewer/Water/Wastewater
  - 8.4 Cell Tower
  - 8.5 Other
- 9. Pedestrian and Traffic Safety**
  - 9.1 Sidewalks
  - 9.2 Traffic, including Traffic Noise. (See #12 for codes to limit leaf blower, barking dog noise).
  - 9.3 Crosswalks
  - 9.4 Intersections
  - 9.5 Lighting
  - 9.6 Parking (all references to needs, problems)
  - 9.7 Other
- 10. Environment/Access to Nature/Natural Resources**
  - 10.1 Access to nature nearby
  - 10.2 Emerald necklace (e.g., greenspace on Village/Town perimeter)
  - 10.3 Trees
  - 10.4 Crystal Lake
  - 10.5 Other
- 11. Tourism**
- 12. Village Land Use and Zoning Codes**
  - 12.1 Change current use (too restrictive; not restrictive enough)
  - 12.2 Enforcement (need to enforce; lack of enforcement)
  - 12.3 Fairgrounds public/RBK use
  - 12.4 Noise limits (other than traffic)
  - 12.4 Other
- 13. Public Transportation (Vehicle)**
  - 13.1 Senior Van
  - 13.2 Village/Town Trolley
  - 13.3 Town/Regional Public Transportation
  - 13.4 Other
- 14. Communications**
  - 14.1 Methods**
    - 14.1.1 Word of Mouth
    - 14.1.2 Posters, flyers, signs, advertising
    - 14.1.3 Social media
    - 14.1.4 Village meetings, email, website
    - 14.1.5 Library
    - 14.1.6 Online news, print publications, opt-in email lists
    - 14.1.7 Clubs and Organizations
  - 14.2 Communication Needs/Improve**
    - 14.2.1 Village/local government
    - 14.2.2 General news/information
    - 14.2.3 Event
- 15.0 Contributing to Community; Connecting**
  - 15.1 Losing/Sustaining Volunteerism
  - 15.2 Increase civic engagement; Does it have an impact?
  - 15.3 Connect neighborhoods (e.g., maintain a close-knit community)
    - 15.3 Solutions (e.g., develop committed partnerships; create guiding principles or vision; connect neighborhoods)
- 16. Future Visions**
- 17. Diversity, Demographic Mix**

Wish for more diversity; ref. to aging population/needs; youth, 30 to 40 year olds, families, etc.
- 18. ADA and Accessibility**

Comments about ADA compliance, improvement.
- 19. Local Gov't issues (other than Communication #14)**

Comments about taxes, transparency, planning and priorities, collaboration