Chapter 5: Community Character

A. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This chapter analyzes the potential for the Proposed Action to result in significant adverse impacts on community character, including on the public's use and enjoyment of officially recognized or designated public resources. In so doing, this chapter includes references to and relies on the visual impact assessment performed by Applicant (see Chapter 2, "Visual Impacts"), and considers the siting, architectural scale, landscaping, and anticipated future operation of the Conceptual Future Buildout Scenario of the Proposed Action in relation to adjacent areas.

While visual effects are changes in appearance in the physical environment, community character refers to the natural and built environments of a community and how people perceive their community. Although visual effects of the Conceptual Future Buildout Scenario are modeled in Chapter 2 based on renderings of new buildings and how they would appear to the eye from various viewpoints selected by the Planning Board, any potential community character effects of the Conceptual Future Buildout Scenario can only be ascertained through a qualitative analysis that considers relevant plans and zoning as expressions of a community's desired future state or character, and not by physical and quantitative measures.

As demonstrated by the analysis below, the Conceptual Future Buildout Scenario of the Proposed Action is consistent with the existing community character of the Site, Community Study Area[1] and the Town as a whole. Specifically, the Conceptual Future Buildout Scenario is consistent with the agricultural and low-density residential character of the Community Study Area as it will result in residential-agricultural lots that are well over the minimum size required by the Town Zoning Code and preserve existing elements of the natural landscape, including agricultural fields, on-site wetlands and forested areas. The Proposed Action includes private restrictions on the locations of new residential structures can be built, permanently preserving more than 90% of the Site as agricultural land and/or open space, consistent with the existing character of the Town.

The creation of 23 lots for mixed residential and agricultural uses would ensure that the Site remains available for precisely the types of productive farming activities that are a key component of the Town's community character as discussed in the Town Comprehensive Plan. Furthermore, the Proposed Action aligns with the Town's evolving agricultural patterns and advances the important goal of protecting farmland, key to the character of the Town, while accommodating residential growth permitted by zoning.

[1] As defined in Chapter 3, "Community Plans," the Community Study Area is the area within 1,500 feet of the Site (see Figure 3-3).

B. EXISTING CONDITIONS

This section describes the existing community character of the Site, Community Study Area and the Town. The community character of Amenia is informed by, among other things, its natural landscape and bucolic setting, agricultural heritage, settlement patterns, historic areas and hamlets, and scenic viewsheds.

NYSDEC considers community character to be:

> "defined by all the man-made and natural features of the area. It includes the visual character of a town, village, or city, and its visual landscape; but also includes the buildings and structures and their uses, natural environment, activities, town services, and local policies that are in place. Development can cause changes in several community characteristics including intensity of land use, housing, public services, aesthetic quality, and the balance between residential and commercial uses."[2]

Guidance from NYSDEC further provides that "if a proposed project is going to change the character or quality of the community by impacting visual character, intensity of land use, housing, or public services, then there could be an impact to community character."

SITE

The Site is characterized by existing residential buildings, equestrian facilities, paddocks, and other agricultural uses. The northwestern area of the Site, as well as portions of the eastern and southern areas of the Site, are farmed for row crops. The southwest portion of the Site contains equestrian uses, including a large paddock and various equestrian buildings. The eastern portion of the Site, as well as the perimeter along the south, are dominated by forest land, with areas of brush interspersed. There are a few ponds on the Site, as well as a larger wetland area in the northwest corner. The Site also contains agricultural soils and areas of steep slopes. Existing land coverage is predominantly row crops (223.6 acres), paddock (167.6 acres) and forest (159.4 acres), and other natural features (51.8 acres of brush, wetland, grass and waterbodies). Existing Illumination patterns within the Site and surrounding community reflect the rural character of the area. Existing lighting in the area is generally confined to residences and farm/equestrian facilities. There is minimal ambient nighttime lighting across much of the Site, and large portions of the Site remain dark during evening hours, consistent with surrounding agricultural and forested lands.

COMMUNITY STUDY AREA

Within the Community Study Area (i.e., areas within 1,500 feet of the Site), land uses transition from existing and emerging centers to the north (Amenia Town Center) and west (Silo Ridge Field Club) to large, mostly forested parcels over 5 acres to the south and east. Silo Ridge Field Club, a members-only community set on approximately 850 acres, containing approximately 250 residences and a golf course, is situated within the western

[2] NYSDEC. *Full Environmental Assessment Form (FEAF) Workbook*. https://dec.ny.gov/regulatory/permits-licenses/seqr/eaf-workbooks/part-2-identification-of-potential-project-impacts/q18-consistency-with-community-character.

extent of the Community Study Area, west of NYS Route 22. Residences in the development include estate homes, cottages, condominiums, and lakeside residences.

On the east side of NYS Route 22, between Silo Ridge Field Club and Old Route 22/Site, is agricultural land, comprising approximately 178 acres of fields surrounding residential and agricultural structures, an approximately 68.5-acre industrial property that contains an active sand and gravel mining operation (owned by County Organic Recycling), and smaller single-family residential lots of approximately 1 to 5 acres.

Within the portion of the Community Study Area south of the Site, along the Old Route 22 corridor, uses of land transition from the sand and gravel mining operation to residential uses on large lots, working farms comprising residential and agricultural structures embedded within fields of cropland, and forested lands which comprise nearly the entire study area to the south and east of the Site. Chapter 2, "Visual Impacts," includes photographs of the existing conditions of Site and the Community Study Area from 14 publicly accessible vantage points selected by the Planning Board for the purpose of assessing the potential for impacts on visual resources and community character.

TOWN OF AMENIA

TOWN LAND USES AND SETTING

The Town Comprehensive Plan characterizes the community character and development patterns of the Town as:

> "rural…with development primarily in and around the hamlets of Wassaic and Amenia, as well as in the southern end of Town near the hamlet of Dover Plains. The smaller crossroad areas of Amenia Union, Smithfield, Leedsville, and South Amenia, also have some concentrated development—although the development in these areas is primarily comprised of older single-family homes. The areas surrounding these hamlets and crossroads are largely rural. The Town's rural character, scenic beauty, and historic hamlets are among the community's most valued resources" (Town Comprehensive Plan, page 10).

The Town is characterized by a predominantly rural landscape composed of rolling hills, forests, working farmland, open fields, and a pattern of interconnected small hamlets. According to the Town Comprehensive Plan, "the many hills and valleys of Amenia create spectacular views throughout the Town," with a landscape pattern of forests and open areas that contribute to the Town's visual distinctiveness and character (Town Comprehensive Plan, page 51). Amenia's existing built and natural environment reflects low-density settlement patterns outside of hamlet centers. Residential and agricultural uses occur across a broad countryside that is intersected by a network of rural roads. These rural roads often run through meadows, wooded areas, stone walls, and farms, which the Town Comprehensive Plan identifies as factors contributing to their scenic value.

The Town's historic hamlets—including Amenia, Wassaic, Amenia Union, South Amenia, Smithfield, and Leedsville—function as compact centers of settlement and identity within this broader rural landscape. Historically, development in Amenia largely followed patterns in which residential, commercial, institutional, and civic uses are concentrated in walkable

hamlet centers, in contrast to surrounding lands which remain open and largely undeveloped; indeed, “this development pattern has prevailed in Amenia for the better part of 200 years” (Town Comprehensive Plan, page 50). This pattern is explicitly identified in the Town Comprehensive Plan as a defining characteristic of the Town and a key factor in the Town’s desire to prevent a pattern of development more indicative of suburban settings where the expansion of facilities and infrastructure from hamlet centers to the countryside threatens to erode rural community character. The hamlets of Amenia each contribute distinct historic and visual identities, while collectively reinforcing a cohesive town-wide sense of place. The interconnected hamlets contribute to the Town’s community character.

Amenia’s community character is also closely tied to its scenic resources and viewsheds. The Town Comprehensive Plan emphasizes the importance of protecting scenic character, stating that it is “important to the other goals of the Comprehensive Plan that developments be designed in a way that does not detract from the scenic character of the community” (page 51). Scenic character in Amenia includes not only broad views of hills and valleys but also scenic corridors along rural roads, landscapes that include farms and woodlands, and extended views across open fields. The rural countryside setting, with its openness and varied topography, is described as one of the Town’s most valuable existing resources.

Amenia’s character is also defined by its natural features, including the streams, floodplains, wetlands, and forested areas. These natural systems shape the physical setting by influencing land use patterns, providing corridors of undisturbed habitat, and contributing to the sense of openness and continuity across the rural landscape.

An important component of existing community character in Amenia is undeveloped open space, including farms, natural forested tracts, wetlands, and recreational land (page 58). Privately owned farmland and forests comprising a substantial portion of the Town’s rural landscape. Public parks and trails—such as the Harlem Valley Rail Trail and Beekman Park—add to the network of open space that shapes the Town’s visual and recreational context.

Actively farmed fields, hay meadows, and pastures dominate many valley floors and lower slopes, while wooded hills and ridgelines frame these open landscapes and create a strong contrast between cultivated and natural areas. The Town Comprehensive Plan notes that these landscapes reinforce the perception of Amenia as largely undeveloped when viewed across broad areas of the Town, with built development appearing secondary to the natural and agricultural setting. Scenic views are experienced from multiple vantage points, including hilltops, valleys, and low-lying open areas, creating a continuous visual connection between hamlets and the surrounding countryside.

The Town Comprehensive Plan further emphasizes that Amenia’s scenic resources derive from the cumulative effect of its natural landforms and land uses rather than from isolated viewpoints alone. The interrelationship of rolling terrain, open farmland, forest cover, streams, wetlands, and historic agricultural patterns creates what the plan repeatedly identifies as an unbroken rural landscape. This landscape functions as a defining backdrop for daily life in Amenia and contributes significantly to community character by reinforcing a sense of openness, continuity, and visual coherence throughout the Town. Together, these land-based and scenic characteristics form a central element of Amenia’s identity as a rural community shaped by its natural setting.

The Town Comprehensive Plan provides that large-scale resort and second-home developments should be designed in a way that does not detract from the scenic character of the community. “Protection of most of the landscape as open space, either as recreational land for golf, or forest lands, or for farming and equestrian activities, will help maintain the scenic character of what is widely regarded as the Town’s most important viewshed, i.e., the views from the top of Delavergne Hill, down the Harlem Valley, and across the Valley to Depot Hill” (Town Comprehensive Plan, page 10).

TRANSPORTATION PATTERNS AND NETWORK CHARACTER

Transportation patterns and the makeup of the local transportation network also inform the character of the Town. In discussing transportation resources in the Town, the Town Comprehensive Plan (pages 84–87) provides that the “Town’s transportation resources are geared toward the road network,” and separates Town roads into functional classifications. Old Route 22 is classified as an arterial road, and such roads “carry traffic between towns and also within the community.” Depot Hill Road is classified as a collector road, and such roads function “to collect traffic from residential areas and funnel it to the arterial system.” As noted in the Town Comprehensive Plan, “new subdivisions should provide a hierarchy of streets with access to an arterial road…[and] new houses, in general, should not be encouraged to have direct access to arterial streets.”

Community character in Amenia is shaped by the strong visual relationship between its road network, surrounding farmland, and natural topography. Scenic roads, including US Route 44, Old Route 22, and numerous local roads provide long-distance vistas, framed views, and direct visual connections between hamlets and the countryside. The Town Comprehensive Plan describes these roadways as both transportation corridors and scenic resources which shape the community character, and where hills, valleys, stone walls, streams, and working farms are experienced directly by residents and visitors. These visual relationships are repeatedly emphasized in the Town Comprehensive Plan as central to understanding Amenia’s identity as a rural town of interconnected landscapes rather than isolated development areas.

TOWN PUBLIC SERVICES

The Town’s existing public services reflect its rural, low-density character and reliance on countywide services and local volunteer-based resources. Consistent with many small towns in Dutchess County, Amenia does not maintain a municipal police department. Police protection is instead provided by the Dutchess County Sheriff’s Office and the New York State Police, with local coverage supported by a Sheriff’s substation within the Town (4717 Route 22) and broader countywide patrol coverage.

Fire protection and emergency response services are delivered by the Amenia Fire District through the Amenia Fire Company and the Wassaic Fire Company, both staffed by volunteers. These organizations provide fire suppression and rescue services and operate on a demand-response basis, coordinated through the Dutchess County 911 emergency dispatch system. Emergency medical services (EMS) including basic life support (BLS), advanced life support (ALS), and paramedic services are provided by contract with North Dutchess Paramedics, Inc., with ambulance and rescue services coordinated through the same countywide dispatch system and supported by nearby hospital facilities outside the Town (including Sharon Hospital).

HISTORIC CHARACTER OF THE TOWN

The Town Comprehensive Plan identifies historic resources as another component of the Town's community character that warrants identification and protection, as historic structures and sites contribute to Amenia's visual and cultural identity (Town Comprehensive Plan, page 58). Amenia's historic resources include built elements that reflect the history of its development, such as older homes, farm structures, and community buildings located within hamlet centers and rural landscapes. These resources are referenced in the Town Comprehensive Plan as elements for potential historic overlay protections. The Town Comprehensive Plan identifies five properties in the Town listed on the State and National Registers (S/NR) of Historic Places (Town Comprehensive Plan, page 60), including:

- Beth David Synagogue, located at 3344 East Main Street, was formed in 1929 by a mix of Jewish dairy farmers. It was added to National Register of Historic Places in 2002.[3]
- Indian Rock Schoolhouse, located at 25 Mygatt Road, was constructed in 1858, and served the student population of the community until 1927, when the "common schools" of the area were centralized.[4] It was added to National Register of Historic Places in 2002.[5]
- Lewis Mumford House, located at 187 Leedsville Road, was constructed around 1820, and was the home of Lewis Mumford from 1929 until his death in 1990. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1999.[6]
- St. Thomas' Episcopal Church, located at 40 Leedsville Road, was constructed from 1859 to 1851 and designed in the Gothic Revival architectural style. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2005.[7]
- Maxon Mills Feed Elevator, located at 37 Furnace Bank Road, was constructed in 1954 as a seven-story grain elevator (which has since been transformed into a contemporary art institution). It was added to the New York State Register of Historic Places in 2006.

In addition, the Town Comprehensive Plan identifies a number of "historical sites and districts in Amenia that have local significance" (Town Comprehensive Plan, page 61).

The Town Zoning Code includes Historic Protection Overlay Districts, established to regulate construction, alteration, and demolition that affects historic areas (Zoning Code Section 121-14.2). Those overlay districts are principally found in or near the hamlets, with the closest one to the Site found approximately 0.30 miles to the north within the Amenia Hamlet.

As noted in the Town Comprehensive Plan, "history is not just about buildings and landscapes; it is also about the generations of families and the organizations and businesses that occupy those buildings and landscapes" (Town Comprehensive Plan, page 8). The Town

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[3] Congregation Beth David. https://www.congbethdavid.org/uploads/1/1/8/5/11855176/carol_ascher%E2%80%99s_history_of_beth_david_and_the_jews_updated_2017.pdf

[4] Indian Rock Schoolhouse. http://www.indianrockschool.org/about-us.html

[5] Indian Rock Schoolhouse. https://npgallery.nps.gov/AssetDetail/NRIS/02000306

[6] Lewis Mumford House. https://npgallery.nps.gov/AssetDetail/NRIS/99001209

[7] St.Thomas' Episcopal Church. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/75317481

Comprehensive Plan emphasizes that community history in Amenia is not limited to individual structures, but includes the continuity of families, agricultural practices, civic institutions, and businesses that occupy and shape these places over time. Preservation of this tangible and intangible historic fabric is identified as a priority by residents and as a key component of maintaining community character.

C. FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED ACTION

Absent the Proposed Action, the Site would not be subdivided, and the existing agricultural and equestrian uses of the Site would be anticipated to continue. Any future development on the existing lots, including residential development, would be subject to the use and dimensional requirements of the RA and RR Districts and other applicable provisions of the Town Zoning Code.

It is anticipated that existing development trends in the Town, as discussed in Chapter 3, "Land Use, Zoning, and Community Plans," would continue in the future absent the Proposed Action. There are no known changes anticipated to be made to the Community Study Area or within the Town that would be expected to change the overall community character of the Site, Community Study Area, and Town. The types of changes that might impact community character include pending capital projects in the Town[8] (e.g., updates to infrastructure, sidewalks, playgrounds, and EV charging stations), the continued incremental development at Silo Ridge Field Club, and current applications under review by the Planning Board[9] (e.g. subdivisions, lot line adjustments, amended site plans).

D. FUTURE WITH THE PROPOSED ACTION

This section analyzes the potential impacts to community character, including any potential effects on adjacent land uses and enjoyment of public and recreational resources as a result of the Conceptual Future Buildout Scenario. As set forth above, the Town's community character is generally defined by:

- A predominantly rural, agricultural, and forested landscape with scenic views;
- Historic hamlets that serve as centers of settlement and identity;
- A strong visual relationship between roads, farmland, hills, and valleys;
- A countywide and local volunteer-based public services framework;
- An array of historic structures and districts; and
- Transportation corridors that function as scenic assets and community gateways.

As discussed in Chapter 3, "Land Use, Zoning, and Community Plans," the Proposed Action includes only certain limited site work, including the creation of Rural Lanes and equestrian trails, landscaping improvements, and implementation of stormwater management practices. No other development of the Site or other improvements (residences or agricultural/equestrian facilities) are part of the Proposed Action. Any such future

[8] Town of Amenia Capital Projects. Last accessed March 9, 2026. Available at: https://www.ameniany.gov/capital-projects/.

[9] Town of Amenia Planning Department, *Current Applications Under Review*. Last accessed March 9, 2026. Available at: https://www.ameniany.gov/current-applications-under-review/.

construction by the lot owners would require site plan review and approval from the Planning Board, as well as necessary permits from other governmental agencies.

The Conceptual Future Buildout Scenario of the Proposed Action (permitted by and compliant with all applicable provisions of the Town Zoning Code) would be consistent with the rural residential and agricultural character of the Site's surroundings, which, aside from the mix of density permitted at Silo Ridge Field Club, is characterized by low-density residential development on large lots, supplemented by large and small-scale agricultural activities. Consistent with the Town Comprehensive Plan's recommendation that "developments be designed in a way that does not detract from the scenic character of the community" (Town Comprehensive Plan, page 51), the Conceptual Future Buildout Scenario of the Proposed Action would maintain the "rural countryside setting, with its openness and varied topography," which is described as one of the Town's most valuable existing resources.

As part of the Proposed Action, the proposed Declaration would restrict the placement of new homes and accessory structures to the small RDAs established by the Declaration for each of the of 23 large residential-agricultural lots, each RDA limited to no more than 10% of the total area of the lot. The delineation of the RDAs has been guided by SPO District standards and the Rural Siting Principles of the Town Zoning Code.

As demonstrated through the detailed analysis presented in Chapter 2, "Visual Impacts," the potential changes to the visual character of the Site would not be significant, in part because the proposed private restrictions would place limits on land clearing and promote edge-of-field placement of homes guided by existing hedgerows, stone walls, and historic farm road alignments. In addition to the siting of the RDAs, the proposed Declaration includes other provisions consistent with the Town Comprehensive Plan and Town Zoning Code that are designed to maintain the rural and scenic character of the Site and Community Study Area, including standards related to building height, building footprint, exterior materials and colors, roofing forms, window proportions, lighting, fencing, driveways, and landscaping. Exterior finishes would be limited to non-reflective, neutral materials.

No new lighting fixtures are proposed as part of the Proposed Action. Lighting associated with single-family residential uses on large lots is already characteristic of the surrounding community and the Proposed Action would not impact that characteristic. Future residential development will be required (as part of site plan review) to develop a detailed lighting plan for review by the Planning Board. Although not required by the Zoning Code, exterior lighting would be required by the Declaration to be Dark-Sky compliant (shielded and downward-directed). Fencing would be restricted primarily to wood materials consistent with rural and agricultural character. The Declaration would also require preservation of existing stone walls, hedgerows, and mature landscape features that contribute to scenic quality and provide natural screening. Finally, the balance of the land on each of the 23 residential-agricultural lots would be required to be preserved for agriculture and/or open space.

The Proposed Action would not change transportation patterns or character in the Town. As identified in the Scoping Document, "the Proposed Action will result in new vehicular traffic to and from the Site [but] the number of new trips that could be anticipated to occur is well below the typical threshold for potential significance" (page 11). The Proposed Action meets the Town Comprehensive Plan's suggestions for the Town's roadway network and transportation character, as it would not put volumes onto roads that do not have sufficient capacity to safely accommodate them, would not significantly change the existing level of

traffic volumes within the network, and would utilize the Site's existing farm roads as the basis for new Rural Lanes that would not impair the functionality of Depot Hill Road.

As discussed in the Applicant's narrative previously submitted to the Planning Board to support the preparation of FEAF Part 2, the Proposed Action would not result in any impacts to public services that would contribute to changes to the existing rural, low-density character of the Town and its reliance on countywide and local volunteer-based resources. The minor increase in population and corresponding demand for these services from the proposed 23 large rural residential/agricultural lots would not fundamentally or materially change the character of the Town, and any increase in costs attributable to providing public services to the Site would be offset by the additional tax revenue to the Town, County and Amenia Fire District anticipated to be generated by build-out of the Proposed Action. Based on a conservative fiscal impact study of the previously proposed 26 residential lot subdivision completed by VHB for the Applicant, the subdivision was estimated to generate an additional $793,674 in taxes annually, which would be distributed to various Town and county agencies, including the Dutchess County Sheriff's Office, the Webatuck Central School District, and the Amenia Fire Company which provides fire protection and emergency response to the Site. Additionally, the Applicant has consulted with the Amenia Fire Company and the Proposed Action includes emergency access improvements recommended by the Fire Company including 30 feet of level road clearance for all proposed Rural Lanes. The Conceptual Future Buildout Scenario also accounts for the use of ponds, pools, and other means of water storage as recommended by the Fire Company, to provide an onsite source of water. The Fire Company raised no other concerns related to the Proposed Action and the ability to provide fire protection to the Site.

The Proposed Action would not impact the historic resources in the Town, and would not change the Town's historic character as the Site is located away from the historic hamlets. There are no historic structures located on or adjacent to the Site, nor is the Site in a Town Historic Protection Overlay District. Correspondence from OPRHP, which was previously provided to the Planning Board, confirms the conclusion that there would not be impacts to historic or archaeological resources listed on, or eligible for, the S/NR. Existing Keane Stud equestrian facilities and structures on the Site would remain on proposed Lots K-1 and K-2 and proposed residential-agricultural Lots 2, 3, 8, and 23.

Numerous defining elements of the Conceptual Future Buildout Scenario of the Proposed Action would mean that it would not result in any significant adverse impacts on community character. These elements include its compliance with underlying zoning; maintenance of the existing cohesive appearance of the Site when viewed from publicly accessible vantage points including Delavergne Hill (see Chapter 2, "Visual Impacts"); the Site's overall size (605.7 acres) relative to new development permitted; its preservation of equestrian uses and facilities on proposed Lots K-1 and K-2; and conservation of forested land on proposed Lots F-1 and F-2. The development of the mix of land uses to be introduced by the Conceptual Future Buildout Scenario of the Proposed Action therefore are all permitted on the Site and encouraged in the Town and would be consistent with its community character.

E. MITIGATION

As described throughout this DEIS, various measures have been incorporated into the Proposed Action that would avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate to the maximum extent practicable all potential impacts related to community character. This includes layout of the

subdivision, prohibitions on development on certain parcels, and restrictions on siting of residential development as well as on height and bulk. The primary mitigation measure included as part of the Proposed Action that would preclude significant adverse impacts on community character is the Applicant's proposed Declaration, which would be recorded against the entire Site and would run with the land in perpetuity. The Declaration restricts future residential development on the 23 residential-agricultural lots to small, clearly delineated RDAs, each limited to no more than 10% of the area of the lot. All areas of each lot outside the RDA would be restricted to agricultural use and/or open space, thereby maintaining the visual dominance of open fields, existing (and supplemental) vegetation, and rural character of the Site.

As no significant adverse impacts to community character are anticipated as a result of the Proposed Action, additional mitigation measures are not proposed.