

Town of Cochecton

Sullivan County, New York



Comprehensive Plan Update



This project was assisted by a grant from the
Upper Delaware Council, Narrowsburg, NY 12764
Logo is copyrighted by the Upper Delaware Council. All rights reserved.
Logo may not be copied or reproduced without written permission from the UDC.

Background

The Town of Cochection prepared a Comprehensive Plan in 1972 and updated it with a Supplement in 1998. Numerous studies of the Upper Delaware region, of which Cochection is part, have been conducted over the years and these have offered background support for many of the Town's land use regulations. There have been some changes in the Town subsequent to the last update.

It is, therefore, the intention of this 2011 Supplement to further update the Plan and bring it current in terms of both relevant data and recommendations. The following summarizes significant changes in Cochection over the last 12 years and analyzes their relevance to present-day policy making and land use planning.

Population

The 2010 Census indicated Cochection's population was 1,372, a 44-person or 3.3% increase from 1990. The population is projected to add another 47 persons by 2015. Overall, the population has been remarkably stable since 1980.

This contrasts with the County, which, up through 2010, expanded at a modest but steady pace. The table below illustrates how Cochection compares with surrounding areas in terms of population growth.

Town of Cochection and Regional Population Patterns, 1970-2015														
Municipality	1960	1970	% Chg 70-80	1980	% Chg 80-90	1990	% Chg 80-90	2000	% Chg 90-00	2010	% Chg 00-10	Proj. 2015	% Chg 10-15	Density 2010
Town of Cochection	1,070	1,181	10.4%	1,330	12.6%	1,318	-0.9%	1,328	0.8%	1,372	3.3%	1,419	3.4%	34.9
Town of Bethel	2,366	2,763	16.8%	3,335	20.7%	3,693	10.7%	4,362	18.1%	4,255	-2.5%	4,351	2.3%	46.6
Town of Delaware	2,141	2,260	5.6%	2,782	23.1%	2,633	-5.4%	2,719	3.3%	2,670	-1.8%	2,660	-0.4%	77.5
Town of Tusten	1,087	1,224	12.6%	1,424	16.3%	1,271	-10.7%	1,415	11.3%	1,515	7.1%	1,526	0.7%	28.2
Sub-Total	5,594	6,247	11.7%	7,541	20.7%	7,597	0.7%	8,496	11.8%	8,440	-0.7%	8,537	1.1%	47.5
Damascus Township	1,703	2,006	17.8%	2,536	26.4%	3,081	21.5%	3,662	18.9%	3,659	-0.1%	3,942	7.7%	45.3
Sullivan County	45,272	52,580	16.1%	65,155	23.9%	69,277	6.3%	73,966	6.8%	77,547	4.8%	73,364	-5.4%	73.2
New York State (000's)	16,782	18,241	8.7%	17,588	-3.6%	17,991	2.3%	18,976	5.5%	19,378	2.1%	19,737	1.9%	382.8

Note: Source of all data 1970-2010 is U.S. Census; and 2015 projections from ESRI.

Projecting population changes in a second-home area is difficult because the future is so dependent on individual development decisions. The aging of population and a severe economic recession have clearly kept Cochection from growing, with some serious negative consequences on school enrollment in the Sullivan West School District.

Notwithstanding this, the existence of large undeveloped tracts of land and still unbuilt lots suggests the possibility of some changes in growth patterns. The Town, therefore, needs to maintain up-to-date land use regulations to guide this growth.

Seasonal Population

Some 352 or 36.9% of Cochection's housing units were classified as being of "seasonal/recreational/occasional use" or as "other vacant" (typically second homes) in 2000 (latest data available as of this writing) and this is a very substantial block of the housing stock. The numbers are slightly down from 1990 when 40.9% of the stock consisted of second homes.

Nonetheless, it is a strong indication of the recreational and tourism economy on which Cochection is heavily dependent. It also demonstrates the importance of Cochection maintaining a unit-based system of sewer and water charges.

Second-home studies by Shepstone Management Company and others have indicated these units are occupied by households with an average size of approximately 3.3 persons and this suggests a peak seasonal population for the Town of 1,161 persons, only slightly less than the permanent population.

This has obvious connotations for land use planning in that second-home dwellers tend to demand a more "clean and green" environment, look for recreational opportunities and seek convenience type services. A strong second-home industry is also a harbinger of potential future growth because some portion of these units typically convert to permanent residences over time.

Age

The Cochection population is a relatively old one. The median age of Town of Cochection residents in 2000 was 42.1 years, up a full 4.0 years over 1990. It is estimated at 47.6 years for 2010 and is projected to reach a very high 50.1 years in 2015.

Those persons over 65 years old represented fully 231 or 17.4%% of the population in 2000. The population under 18 years of age dropped from 335 in 1990 to 299 in 2000, accounting for some of the enrollment declines in the Sullivan West School District, which losses continue.

Housing

Cochection's total housing units actually decreased from 964 in 1970 to 817 in 1980 (probably reflecting a loss of bungalow and cottage activity around Lake Huntington) but bounced back to 889 in 1990 and 955 in 2000. It is estimated there were 1,093 units in 2010 and it is projected the number will reach 1,142 in 2015, indicating housing growth is being offset by aging of the population and shrinking household sizes.

The tax structure of the County and general economic decline in nearby Monticello and Port Jervis may account for some of the early losses, with proximity to nearby Pennsylvania and that expanding housing market having influenced a change in trends during the 1980's.

Cochection's experience has, for whatever reason, been atypical of other second-home areas which generally saw rapid growth in the 1970's followed by lesser rates of expansion in the 1980's.

The population growth rates of Cochection and New York communities in general compared to Pennsylvania, as reflected in the foregoing table illustrate the very divergent patterns and probable role of taxes in influencing growth in past years. However, New York State's S.T.A.R. program resulted in substantial softening of the tax impacts on seniors in particular and has probably helped cause the shift in patterns experienced in recent years.

Education

Some 83.6% of Cochection's population over 25 years of age had high school diplomas and 17.3% had college degrees in 2000. These are high numbers compared to Sullivan County as a whole, where the proportions were only 76.2% and 16.7%, respectively.

Incomes

The ESRI estimated median household income for Cochection in 2010 was \$48,310 as compared to \$46,326 for the County. The \$1,984 difference indicates Town incomes were some 4.3% higher than the County but the opposite is true with respect to average income.

Overall, one must conclude the Town is slightly more wealthy than the County as a whole. The proportion of the population below the poverty level was only 5.0% of the total in 2000 compared to 11.6% for the County.

Town of Cochection Family and Household Incomes, 2010

<u>Income Category</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>County</u>
Median Household Income	\$48,310	\$46,326
Median Family Income	\$57,450	\$55,255
Average Household Income	\$55,991	\$58,346
Average Family Income	\$63,657	\$66,891
Per Capita Income	\$24,504	\$23,545

Employment

The table following illustrates the makeup of Cochection's employed population 16 years and older by industry and suggests the economic base is fairly diverse.

**Town of Cochection
Employment By Industry, 2000**

Category	No.	Percent
Ag/Forestry/Mining	29	4.8%
Construction	58	9.6%
Manufacturing	32	5.3%
Transportation/Utilities	19	3.2%
Wholesale Trade	17	2.8%
Retail Trade	56	9.3%
Finance/Insurance/Real Estate	29	4.8%
Information	13	2.2%
Professional/Management/Administration	57	9.5%
Educational/Health/Social Services	159	26.4%
Arts/Entertainment/Recreation/Accommodations	46	7.6%
Other Services	26	4.3%
Public Administration	62	10.3%
Totals	603	100.0%

Commuting Patterns

The 2000 Census indicated Cochection workers over 16 years of age travelled an average of 30.7 minutes to work, but businesses such as Cochection Mills, Fosterdale Farm Equipment, the beer distributor and assorted tourist-based enterprises such as ice cream stores, a motel and a general store do create local jobs. The statistics suggest Cochection must continue to provide for the development of some additional commercial/industrial enterprises and, particularly, for the retention of those it now possesses. It is important to maintain the diversity of the local economy and to build on what now exists.

Land Use

There have been very few major changes in land use in the Town since the original Comprehensive Plan was developed. The following is what that Plan stated regarding existing land use:

The existing land use analysis is useful in understanding how past activities in Cochection have influenced the pattern of development, and it is utilized as a basis for formulating an effective plan to guide future growth. In May of 1972, a field survey was conducted in the town to determine the nature of existing land development. The results of the survey, in conjunction with aerial photographic interpretation, and their implications on the existing settlement pattern are (as follows):

Undeveloped Area

The relatively undeveloped nature of the town is demonstrated by the fact that there are a total of 20,000 acres of land classified as wooded or vacant. This represents over 80 percent of the total land area of Cochection. Agricultural uses represent 2,145 acres, further characterizing the generally undeveloped nature of the town. The amount of land used for agricultural purposes in Cochection has decreased, as has the number of farms; however, the average size of farms has increased. It is anticipated that agriculture will remain a significant land use throughout the planning period.

Developed Area

In order to more adequately assess the impact of tourism on Cochection's development pattern, the developed land classifications reflect seasonal residences, mobile homes, tourist homes and mixed residential uses, in addition to the standard classifications of single-family residential, commercial, industrial, public and semi-public, and recreation uses.

The developed portions of the town represent less than 20 percent of the total land area. The majority of developed land is adjacent to major roads or surrounding Lake Huntington. The Land Use Tabulation Table provides a breakdown of land uses by acreage and percentage within the town.

Cochection Land Use Tabulation, 1972

<u>Category</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>% of Total</u>	<u>% of Total</u>
Single-family residential	290	1.2	16.2
Seasonal Residential	290	1.2	16.2
Mobile Homes	98	0.4	5.5
Tourist Homes	73	0.3	4.1
Mixed Use	24	0.1	1.3
Commercial	24	0.1	9.4
Public and Semi-Public	170	0.7	9.4
Industrial	24	0.1	1.3
Recreation	98	0.4	5.5
Roads and Railroads	708	2.9	39.2
Agricultural	2,145	8.8	n/a
Vacant	3,095	12.5	n/a
Wooded	16,905	69.4	n/a
Water Bodies	414	1.7	n/a
TOTAL		100.0	100.0

Source: Urban Planning Division, Michael Baker, Jr., Inc.

The year-round residential uses are all single family. These homes are scattered throughout the town with only a minor concentration occurring in and around the unincorporated village of Cochection. A total of 16.2 percent of the developed land is utilized for single-family homes.

A majority of the remaining residential uses can be classified as of a seasonal nature. These include single-family homes used only in the summer, mobile homes, tourist homes and mixed use structures which combine dwelling units and commercial establishments. Together the seasonal dwellings represent over 27 percent of all development, but only two percent of the total land area within the town.

Commercial uses, which are centered around Lake Huntington, are directly related to the summer tourist activity and comprise only 1.3 percent of the developed land area. Most of the commercial uses are closed during the winter months.

Public and semi-public uses are represented by the churches, cemeteries, clubs, nursing homes and public facilities that are scattered throughout the town. The two major uses are the airport and a convalescent home. Because of the rural nature of the town, the amount of land utilized for governmental facilities, such as the sewage treatment plant, fire stations, post offices, is minimal. The public and semi-public uses total 170 acres or 9.4 of the developed area.

Industrial uses are limited to three small locations: a portion of a stone quarry operation, a new sand and gravel quarry on Route 97 and industrial facilities adjacent to the railroad track in Cochection Village. These facilities represent less than 0.1 percent of the town land area.

Several camps, ballfield and golf courses constitute the recreational land uses. Together these uses represent approximately 100 acres or 5.5 percent of the developed land.

Other Key Facts

- Route 97 has now been recognized as a "Scenic Byway," a designation that serves to enhance tourist promotion efforts and complement the Upper Delaware River program on which so much of the local economy depends.
- Nearly all of Cochection is part of an official New York State Agricultural District, the town having a large block of active farmland which supports the economy in many ways including the previously mentioned jobs in the feed manufacturing and farm equipment sectors.
- Other 2010 estimates (by ESRI) follow:

- Average household size	2.28 persons
- Median value of owner-occupied units	\$148,242
- Number of households	618
- Number of families	415

Sullivan County Survey

The Sullivan County Planning and Community Development Department did a "Comprehensive Plan Survey" in 1995 and 1996 and tabulated the results by Town. This is the latest opinion survey data available as of 2011. Nevertheless, it provides some limited insights into local opinion at that time. Cochecton residents returned 31 such surveys and the following are some of the key views and facts regarding Cochecton residents who participated. They:

- Like living in Sullivan County primarily because of its natural resources and open space and clean, safe neighborhoods.
- Strongly dislike the taxes and limited availability of job opportunities in the County.
- Feel the future economic vitality of the County as a whole depends mostly on;
 - Upgrading of the general appearance of the County
 - Encouragement of private enterprise
 - Expansion of agricultural business
- Strongly feel there were adequate housing opportunities in the Town (77.4% yes) and throughout the County (56.7% yes).
- Favor the following types of housing:
 - Two-family homes
 - Accessory apartments with main dwellings
 - Rental apartment buildings
 - Mobile homes on individual lots
 - Senior citizen housing
 - Low and moderate income housing
- Oppose the following types of housing:
 - Conversions of single-dwellings into apartments
 - Mobile home parks
- Strongly favor measures to protect agricultural land, forested and open space land, groundwater resources and wildlife habitat.

- Believe the Town should be responsible for the following high priority services:
 - Fire protection
 - Emergency medical services
 - Library services
 - Zoning and building code enforcement
 - Sewer systems

- Favor the development or expansion of the following within the Town:
 - Service oriented business
 - Retail shopping
 - Light manufacturing
 - Agriculture and related business
 - Home occupations

- Generally purchase non-food items such as clothing and appliances in Sullivan County (53.3% yes).

- Strongly favor offering some type of incentive to property owners who improve and clean up their properties (60.7% yes).

- Favor stricter control and enforcement of sign regulations in the Town (60.7% yes).

- Owned their home (90.3%).

- Were employed regularly over the last 12 months (77.4% yes) and worked in Sullivan County (60.9% yes).

- Had incomes as follows:
 - \$0 - 19,999 = 30.4%
 - \$20,000 - 34,999 = 21.7%
 - \$35,000 - 49,000 = 30.4%
 - \$50,000 - 99,999 = 17.4%
 - \$100,000+ = 0%

- Were male (62.1%) and aged as follows:
 - 0-24 years = 0%
 - 25-44 years = 29.0%
 - 45-64 years = 51.6%
 - 65+ years = 19.4%

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

As part of the original Comprehensive Planning effort, the following goals and objectives, which remain valid today with some additions, were developed:

ENVIRONMENT

Conserve and use efficiently the natural resources, directing economic activities and land use development toward compatibility with the physical environment.

Objectives

1. Encourage preservation and enhancement of natural and scenic beauty, especially in developed or developing areas.
2. Protect the Delaware River, streams and watersheds from pollution to insure both the availability and the quality of water for current and future needs of the Town residents.
3. Prevent the local occurrences of air pollution and work regionally toward an effective clean air program.
4. Encourage protection of the natural ground cover, prevention of soil erosion and encourage proper methods of storm water drainage in developed areas.
5. Propose developmental densities according to the holding capacities determined by subsurface and slope characteristics.

LAND USE

Create a development pattern that will conserve natural amenities, and encourage a harmonious balance between various land uses, both seasonal and year round, to produce an overall appealing atmosphere and a distinctive community character.

Objectives

1. Encourage the proper development of vacant lands by preserving scenic beauty, encouraging proper techniques and coordinating with adjacent communities.
2. Guide development through arrangement of land uses that will encourage quick, convenient and safe access between working, shopping, living and recreation areas, and encouraging the provision of necessary community facilities.
3. Discourage inharmonious and incompatible land use combinations.

4. Coordinate development to maximize the recreational potential of the area.
5. Preserve the existing low-density single-family residential nature of the Town using open space design development as well as a specific zoning districts for the protection of already developed areas of the Town.
6. Preserve the existing rural and natural character of the Town in applying site-plan review procedures and supplementary regulations from the Town Zoning Law.

ECONOMY

Develop a diversified economic base to assure a variety of employment opportunities and a range of commercial and service activities to meet local demand.

Objectives

1. Promote the development of new activities to expand employment opportunities and improve the Town's tax base.
2. Provide commercial services in response to market demands in terms of volume and type.

HOUSING

Develop a variety of housing types to permit a range of choice for the residents regardless of their economic status or social characteristics.

Objectives

1. Encourage the relation of all housing to surrounding land uses, roadways and slope characteristics through developmental controls.
2. Promote the rehabilitation of deteriorating housing, the continued upkeep of existing sound housing units, and the removal of dilapidated structures.
3. Protect housing values through the provision of adequate utilities and community facilities.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Develop a level of community facilities adequate in amount and type to meet the existing population needs and prepare for future demand, locating such facilities for maximum accessibility and efficiency of operation.

Objectives

1. Combine the efforts of the Town with those of adjacent communities and the State in order to provide more efficient community facilities.
2. Encourage the provision of community facilities especially public utilities in growth potential areas to foster development.
3. Provide adequate police and fire protection.
4. Develop priority scheduling and fiscal planning for the development of community facilities and services.

TRANSPORTATION

To develop a circulation system that provides safe and convenient movement of people and goods, with the least possible infringement of other values.

Objectives

1. Expand the economic potential of the Town by developing fast, safe and efficient transportation ties with the surrounding region.
2. Correct existing roadway deficiencies to provide a more efficient roadway system for present needs and to prevent future deficiencies.
3. Promote the development of a street and road system that is capable of accommodating existing and future residential, commercial, industrial and recreational development.
4. Employ special use and site-plan review criteria to evaluate traffic impacts and provide for protection of scenery and other aesthetic features.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Town of Cochection established subdivision regulations and zoning several years ago and is making revisions to the latter in conjunction with this Plan update. The following are recommended changes and improvements to existing Town land use regulations:

1. Enforce the recently enacted set of comprehensive mobile home park licensing regulations to ensure that new parks as well as individual mobile homes are developed in a manner consistent with maintaining the rural character of the Town and protecting the health and safety of prospective park residents.
2. Update the Town Subdivision Law to conform to current requirements of New York State Town Law and the State Environmental Quality Review Act. Other recommended improvements to this Law include:
 - a. Incorporating procedures and requirements for multi-family subdivisions.
 - e. Encouraging the use of open space design development concepts in the form of conservation subdivisions.
3. Amend the Town Zoning Law to refine the Zoning Map based on property lines, incorporate new Special Use/SEQR procedures under Town Law and add new requirements for particular Special Uses. Specifically recommended improvements include:
 - a. Refinement of the purposes of the existing zoning districts and the combination of others in a schedule format to better distinguish between each on the basis of allowed uses and statements of interest. A revised Zoning Law incorporating the specifically recommended changes in uses and development standards has been prepared concurrently with this update and may be consulted for additional detail.
 - b. Addition and clarification of supplementary regulations regarding landscaping, traffic, signs, parking, home-based businesses, adult-oriented businesses, conservation of natural features, junkyards, conservation subdivisions, forestry uses and communications structures.
 - c. Development of a more practical procedure for handling changes in non-conforming uses as Special Uses, so as to offer more flexibility but retain control.
 - d. Development of a more accurate zoning map tied to the County G.I.S. System property line maps.

These recommendations, as well as the input received through the County Survey and the process of updating goals and objections, are reflected in the revised land use regulations prepared concurrently with this Supplement and shall be considered as Appendices thereto.