

Downsville Downtown Assessment

Introduction

This report summarizes the findings and recommendations of a team of downtown design professionals invited to participate in a walking tour and assessment of the downtown commercial district in Downsville -- a hamlet of the Town of Colchester in Delaware County. The services of these professionals was made possible through a technical assistance program called the *Community Empowerment Initiative* offered by the Catskill Center for Conservation & Development in February 2001.



The "downtown design team" consisted of three professionals - a planner, architect and landscape architect - with experience in downtown revitalization issues. Each member of the design team lent their particular area of expertise to help the community identify local problems and issues, as well as offer ideas and possible solutions.

The walking tour and assessment took place on Friday, January 19, 2001 and originated at the Colchester Town Hall. Local officials, business owners and concerned citizens were invited to attend a facilitated group discussion, followed by a walking tour of Downsville's commercial district. In attendance at that meeting were representatives of Town government, the Colchester Chamber of Commerce, Delaware Valley Ridge Riders, several local residents and business owners, and a representative from the local bank.



A wide variety of issues were discussed, including the need to spruce up the overall appearance of the downtown, the need to improve several key and highly visible historic buildings, concerns about the number of existing businesses and their future viability, the changing nature of the local economy, and more. These issues and others are summarized and addressed in this report.

General Planning Recommendations

Highlights of Site Visit & Recommended Next Steps

Get Organized

Building on the work of the Chamber of Commerce, the Lions Club, the Women's Club, the fire company, the Ridge Riders and others, a coordinated leadership effort needs to emerge. This leadership can better link the various yet uncoordinated activities of each group while moving on other items which may have been ignored. If there is not a natural lead, perhaps an "steering committee" or representatives from each group and from the Town could meet regularly.

Main Street Image & Appearance

The appearance of the main corridor is particularly attractive along the residential west end, but gets more mixed and run-down in the center and east. Part of this is certainly due to the winter setting, but much is to due to the mix of architectural styles and the lack of attention to appearance. Like it or not, people are impressed by the view out the car window. A quality of appearance is attractive and can influence if people stop and look around. Pick a key property or cluster of properties and do some beautification work. Consider some themes-planting, banners, etc. to dress the place up.

For an outsider, the first impression may be of Downsville as an odd cluster of buildings without any real link or attraction. Sure, you have a captive audience looking for food or gas between other places. Yet to build momentum towards economic vitality you need more. Buildings and activities seem strung out along the street without any significant grouping and links between properties. A vacant building is next to a modern residence, next to a store, next to a very historic home etc, etc. Consider working with a landscape architect or design person to establish a more cohesive streetscape.



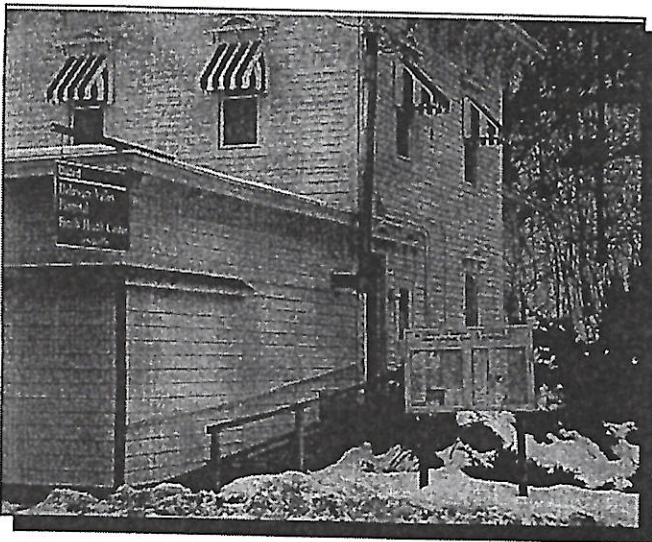
It should be noted that Downsville has many quality historic buildings, both residential and commercial. Consider inventorying these sites and developing walking tours, either guided or self-guided. Grants are readily available for such work contact the Preservation League of NYS or the NYS Council on the Arts and Council on the Humanities for ideas.

Focus on Two Core Neighborhoods as Signature or Trademark Loci

The cluster of properties including the Covered Bridge, the park, the Fireman's Field, the school, the pool and the river shoreline together could form a very important attraction if linked and improved. This could be a great area for a mix of recreation - with a trail system, interpretive signs, picnic areas, etc.

The second key area is the intersection of Routes 206 and 30. Here travelers slow down or stop and get a chance to take in the community and get a fuller first impression. This intersection should be where I am attracted to stop and turn in to look around or get out of the car. Key is to find a quality use for the vacant historic building at the corner. Key is to have quality signage directing me to other assets and opportunities. At this intersection or within sight should also be some type of information booth, kiosk or bulletin board or at least directions to one of these nearby.

Consider holding some design workshop or brainstorming session and invite people to work up ideas. Perhaps the school might hold a design contest for art students to develop ideas on these properties.



Information Bulletin Board/Kiosk

There appears to be at least one community bulletin board, but it looked to be not regularly maintained. Successful communities maintain one or more information displays at key locations and kept the materials up to date and attractive. Find at least one key location, have some group adopt the effort. The information can easily be self-service - but needs to be interesting and reliable. From here people might learn about the covered bridge and other bridges, the waterfall, antique shops, trails, events, etc.

Signage

Like many places, Downsville lacks attractive and informative signage. People hunger for information and directions - where are attractions, shops, picnic areas, information booths, historic sites. Consider a short list of key directional signs and work with the industrial arts program at the school to make up some quality signs.

Find a Use or Display for Vacant Buildings

A few buildings at key locations or which provide primary links to other sites, sit vacant. Find a way to at least get some interesting displays in the windows perhaps some school projects or materials on the NYC watershed or other themes. Keep any displays up to date and attractive.

Find a Niche

Themes have worked for many communities. At the roundtable discussion, someone mentioned "back to nature". Maybe it is water-related with the dam, the bridge, the river, the falls, etc. Brainstorm some ideas - the craziest ideas are often the best.

Build on Local Outdoor Assets

Downsville is surrounded by excellent recreational opportunities and plenty of campgrounds with some bed and breakfasts. Many may also be well linked by trails. Consider promotion around this theme. The trail system and the work of the Delaware Valley Ridge Riders is important. Snowmobiling has become very big in areas where they have reliable winters and a network of trails along with accommodations. I have seen this first hand with activities in the Old Forge and Tug Hill regions further upstate. Trails can also be multi-use in a variety of seasons. Get in contact with folks in the Old Forge/Town of Webb region to find out what might work or not.

Establish a Partnership Program to Help Businesses

Several folks during our visit mentioned that local business owners and prospective owners may need help with business planning, skills training, customer service, promotion ideas, etc. Find some regional partners who, with the Chamber of Commerce, might offer free or reduced rate help as well as periodic training sessions. Customer service can be important - again relating to travelers first impressions. If I am treated poorly I probably won't stop again. SUNY-Delhi, SUNY-Binghamton, the Catskill Watershed Corporation or others might be partners - as can be successful regional entrepreneurs.

Build on Current Successes

The Fourth of July program and the Covered Bridge Festival seem to have been successful - consider complementary efforts to make these even more successful. Coordinate programs with nearby or adjoining communities. Create links to the downtown/main street area to give visitors options and give business owners a taste of more trade.

Find One or Two Action Items - Focus on Short-Term Results

Demonstrable success will breed more success. Find a project or two which is doable, which has a high likelihood of success, and can be completed in less than six months. Get it done; celebrate completion and move on to the next project. Keep your progress and momentum; never forget that revitalization efforts come through a series of smaller steps and successes.

Landscape Design Recommendations

The area of Downsville, focusing mainly along the more developed portions of the state highway, is unto itself in good condition. Travel on the streets and sidewalks is easy due to relatively new state reconstruction efforts by the NYS Department of Transportation. Site distances and proper signage allows for safe travel in and through Downsville. From comments made during our site visit, parking seems to be sufficient in this area as well.

Existing architecture indicates the time of development similar to that of other hamlets and villages in Delaware County – a mix of mostly mid- to late 1800's to mid- 1900's development. Much of the original architectural details and styles are still apparent in the residential and commercial buildings that add charm to the district. The historically significant covered bridge is an unusual survivor of the time period and adds to the flavor of the area.



Although, the hamlet has no glaring landscape related problems, its overall appearance is one which lacks detail and a sense of place. Due to its almost too easy to pass through a travel route, non-residents/travelers have nothing to slow their pace of travel nor make them become aware of their surroundings (outside of the traffic light at the intersection of Route 30 & Route 206). It is likely that with the recent highway improvements and other street changes that old street trees have been removed from the more developed portion of Downsville. The removal of these trees leaves a wide viewing area in which most travelers do not feel as though they need to be alert for potential problems and therefore can travel quickly along the main routes.

The basic recommendations of this report shall therefore be that the community focus on bringing back more detail and place identity in the streetscape. The details and identity enhancement should focus on items which are historically relevant. An example would be to use the themes of agricultural and bluestone quarrying which were the foundation on which the community was built. Developing a theme from local residents is encouraged. A theme will assist in designing the details for the area's identity. Other benefits from adding elements to the streetscape include traffic calming that in turn will begin to invite visitors to stop and patronize local businesses.

The following are design recommendations for improvements to existing landscape conditions for Downsville along State Highway Route 30 and 206:

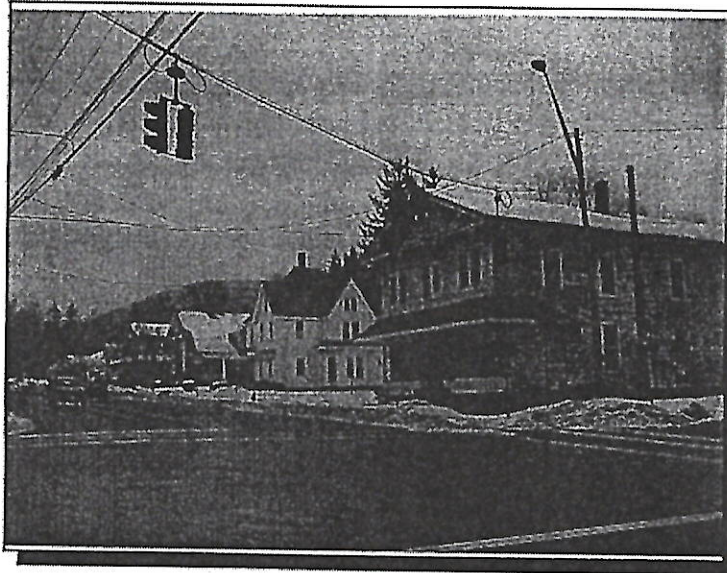
Plantings & Landscaping:

- ☐ Continue to plant the maroon leaved species of flowering crabapple trees through Downsville and on its edges along Route 30 and Route 206. These trees can be used as welcome indicators to the business and residential district to the area.
- ☐ Planting additional maroon-leaved flowering crabapples through other open areas in between the edges of the Downsville area is also recommended. Spotted group plantings as well as individual front yard tree plantings will develop a continuity and "image" to the area. These trees are not standard to most other villages in Delaware County and could become the trademark and possibly a reason to visit when the trees are in blossom (like the Cherry Tree blossoms in Washington, DC).
- ☐ Use a variety of flowering crabapple tree cultivars to minimize monoculture planting disease/insect infestations. Cultivars resistant to diseases and other pests should also be chosen for minimum maintenance and maximum strength to the health of the trees.
- ☐ Explore other similar type maroon leaved flowering trees to enhance continuity along Route 30 and 206. One type of tree would be the Purple-leaved Flowering Plum. These could provide an extended blooming period along with yet again a different variety which may not be prone to diseases and pests typical to the crabapple species.
- ☐ Downsville should explore planting standard street trees, throughout the village, along its major corridors. Presently there is no visual buffer between the street and existing buildings. The addition of street trees would provide a softening of the streetscape, buffer visually the houses from the street and vice versa, provide some dust reduction from the highways onto the adjacent properties and act as a traffic calmer, which in turn will have travelers reduce their rate of speed and take a look around at their surroundings.
- ☐ Enhance existing signage to Downsville with permanent plantings which will provide year-round interest. Existing plantings rely on annual flowers that are significant color providers between June to mid/late-September. The incorporation of low maintenance evergreen shrubs and a group of deciduous or evergreen trees can complement the image of the area while drawing attention to the signage as well.
- ☐ Add hanging baskets through the main developed area or at intersections of special interest, i.e. the road which leads to the covered bridge. The floral display could re-use plant material found in the whiskey barrels. In addition, these same locations could be the place for other holiday displays, i.e. wreaths at Christmas time.

Create of Focal Point:

□ Use the main intersection of Routes 30 and 206 to become a focal point of the community. This can be done by:

- Enhancing the appearance of the existing abandoned building on the northwest corner of the intersection - paint and possibly adaptive re- use of this commercial building as a community center/historical society office building.
- Create a park-like landscape design on the northeast corner of the intersection with the repetition of maroon leaved flowering crabapples, a bench and/or community bulletin board.
- Use clusters of whiskey barrels here on the corners, where space permits, to create an even greater visual significance than is there presently.



Community Appearance:

- Enforce Town maintenance ordinance for lawn mowing as well as sidewalk snow removal. Unkempt properties occupied or not, distract from the overall appearance of the streetscape. These same areas actually draw attention to themselves due to their different appearance as compared to the standard look of maintained properties.
- Institute a community pride initiative to promote property owners to improve their landscapes and building appearance. This recognition can appear in the local newspaper. A more active initiative could be one in which an annual competition be held for "best landscape" with various categories like residential, commercial, municipal, etc. Within these categories there can be specialized types of improvements, i.e. window boxes, seasonal decorations, best-maintained whiskey barrel planter, etc.
- Strengthen and perhaps extend the existing community clean-up day to more than one weekend and/or beyond standard garbage pick-up. This day could be one in which the community assists retired residents in spring yard clean-up projects to school pride/enhancement projects to continued park projects at the Downsville Covered Bridge park. Again, efforts can be recognized in local newspapers as well as a thank you barbeque or pizza party.

- Have the Town incorporate a street cleaning program to alleviate the soil debris on the highways and streets. This work may also be incorporated into a community clean-up type project. Local fire fighter volunteers could possibly assist with their high pressure hoses to hose down the main thoroughfares. A cleaner appearance will enhance the sense of pride in the community while creating a better image for those non-residents.

Other Suggestions:

- Development of a nature/connecting path for pedestrian use which would connect the Covered Bridge Park, Downsville Central School and the public pool facility should be explored. Although water crossings may be difficult, bridges for lighter loads such as pedestrian use can span greater distances. A path or trail such as this could also double as a walking tour of Downsville which could begin and end at the Covered Bridge Park - a logical spot with an existing parking lot.
- Local businesses should be encouraged to participate in the decision-making of the design development of the streetscape. The same people/businesses may also be a good source for wholesale priced or donated materials for the streetscape improvements.
- Enhance the information station location with the same kind of physical and visual indicators used in other areas to give this attraction importance. The addition of signage to alert travelers of the upcoming information station would also be advisable to capture a greater audience. This location, too, may want to be reconsidered for a better one which would provide a safer parking area than presently exists - but as this one, be kept in an easily visible position.

General Architectural Recommendations

- ☐ The Hamlet of Downsville is very fortunate to have several excellent examples of historic building restoration. The Schoolhouse Restaurant and several buildings in similar colors across the street, and the new plumbing supply store, serve as good examples of what a small Town's businesses can do to enhance the aesthetic beauty of its Main Street. Perhaps the local Chamber of Commerce could give an award each year, to reward such good work.
- ☐ The Downsville Historic Society has been searching for a permanent home of its own for some time now. A location in one of the prominent vacant historic structures should be considered. A museum would act as an economic development "anchor" to help to draw people to the town, and to the Main Street's businesses. The Historical Society might also consider leasing out of its space to the Colchester Chamber of Commerce for use as offices and meeting rooms, and with the Chamber create an indoor, year-round Information Counter to compliment the Information Kiosk now in operation.
- ☐ Downsville may wish to publish a pamphlet that elaborates on the Main Street's historic architecture. The pamphlet could act as a Walking Tour Guide and be distributed throughout the region to help promote downtown Downsville.
- ☐ The town may wish to encourage a small supermarket to locate on Main Street, possibly on the vacant property, where the Historic Hotel once stood. By locating a supermarket right on Main Street several goals would be achieved. The first is to have a place to shop in town. The second is to fill in a hole in the Main Street's important building fabric. By designing the new structure to compliment existing buildings and by bringing the building right up to the sidewalk (with parking behind the building) it would become a welcome addition to your historic Main Street.
- ☐ A System of walking trails might be established to connect the Town's attractions. A trail might be established to link, for residences and for visitors, the Covered Bridge Park, the Town Pool, the School, and the Fireman's Field. A footbridge would have to be constructed to accomplish this, but the effort would be well worth it. Biking, and in the winter cross country skiing could also be encouraged along the same trail. During busy festival days in Downsville, this trail could act as an alternative access route for visitors, in remote parking areas, to walk to the festival grounds, in a safe manner.
- ☐ Downsville might consider adopting a voluntary color palette list. A palette of approximately 16 historically appropriate colors, could be selected for building owners who wish to participate in this program.

Specific Facade Recommendations

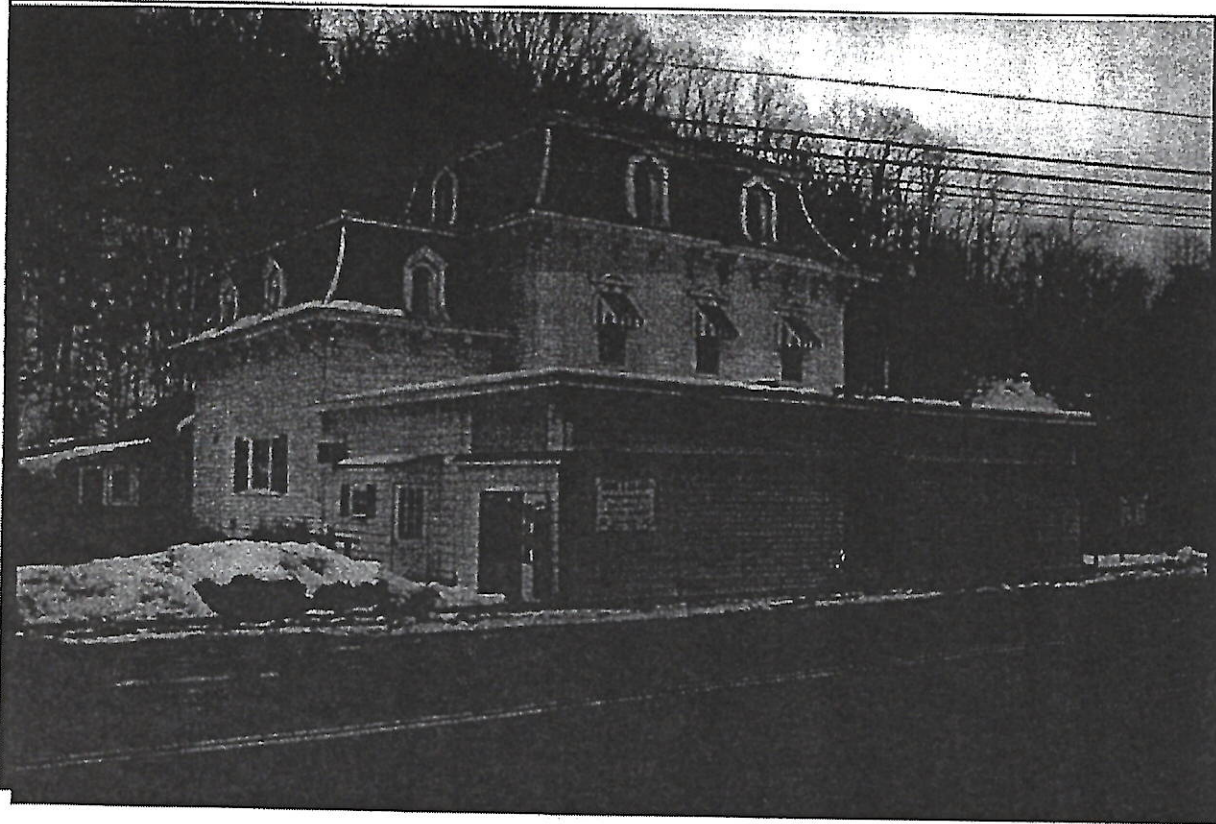


Historic Corner Building

Building Style: Italianate
Building Type: Wood frame
No. of Floors: 2
Occupancy: 1st Floor retail, 2nd Floor residential

- ♦ Pressure wash and chemically strip Paint from original Clapboard siding on building facade and to entire building.
- ♦ Prime and Paint Clapboard siding with historically appropriate colors.
- ♦ Prime and Paint windows and doors in historically appropriate colors.
- ♦ Replace deteriorated wood throughout with wood to match original.
- ♦ Remove wooden awning structure and restore original structure by use of historic photos and documentation. If an awning is desired over the storefront windows, a retractable canvas awning would be the most appropriate.
- ♦ Replace metal vent at the center of the building upper Facade with a more decorative one.

Specific Facade Recommendations



Pharmacy Building

Building Style: Victorian, 2nd Empire
Building Type: Wood frame
No. of Floors: 3
Occupancy: 1st Floor offices, 2nd and 3rd Floor residential

♦ Pressure wash and chemically strip Paint from original Clapboard siding on building facade and to entire building.

♦ Prime and Paint Clapboard siding with historically appropriate colors.

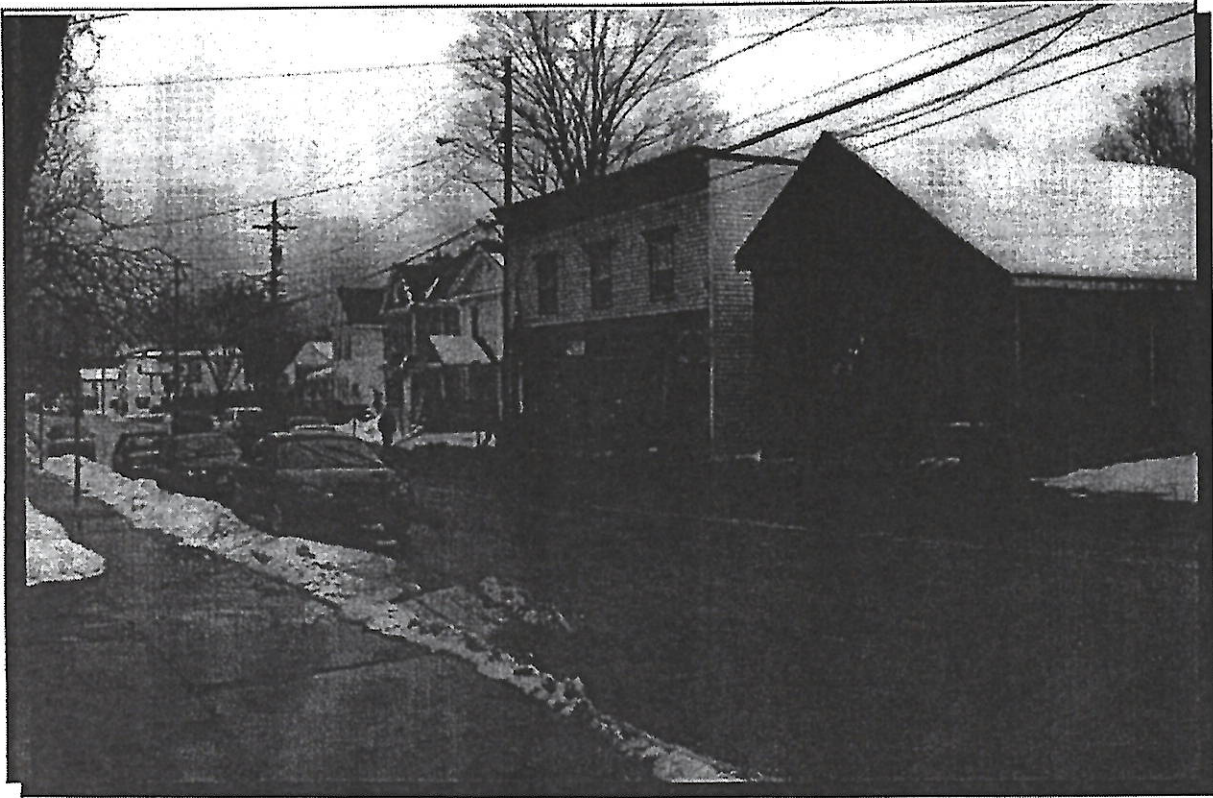
♦ Prime and Paint windows and doors in historically appropriate colors.

♦ Replace second floor metal awnings with canvas awnings, if awnings are desired.

♦ The building's slate mansard roof is rare for this region and should be preserved and restored where necessary.

♦ New historically appropriate retail signage should be installed to compliment architecture.

Specific Facade Recommendations



Post Office and Adirondack Building

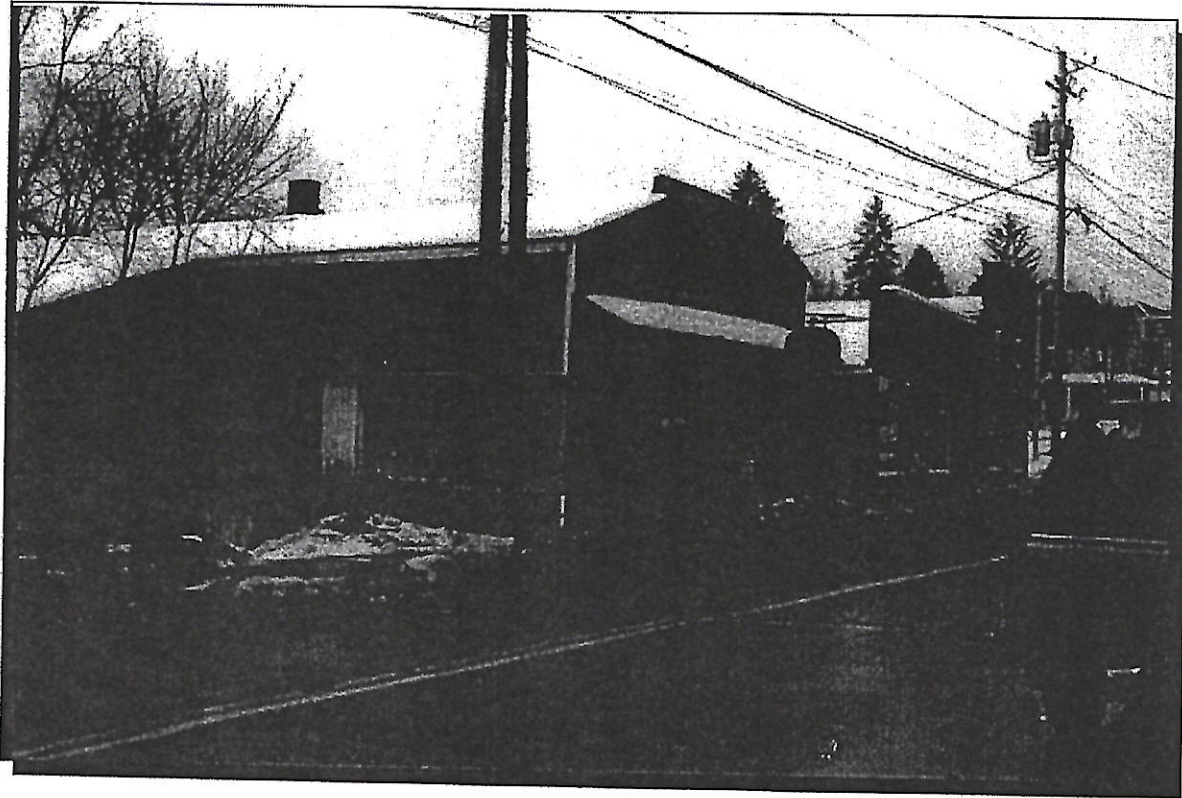
Building Style:	Italianate Victorian
Building Type:	Wood frame
No. of Floors:	2
Occupancy:	1st Floor retail, 2nd Floor residential 1st and 2nd Floor residential

♦ The Post Office building appears to be in good condition, but the owner may one day wish to restore the building's siding back to the original.

♦ New historically appropriate retail signage should be installed to compliment the building's architecture.

♦ The Adirondack building is a well constructed in-fill building. The owner may chose to compliment other Main Street buildings by painting trim boards and railings with similar historically appropriate colors.

Specific Facade Recommendations



Antiques Building

Building Style: Modern
Building Type: Wood frame
No. of Floors: 1
Occupancy: Retail with storage behind

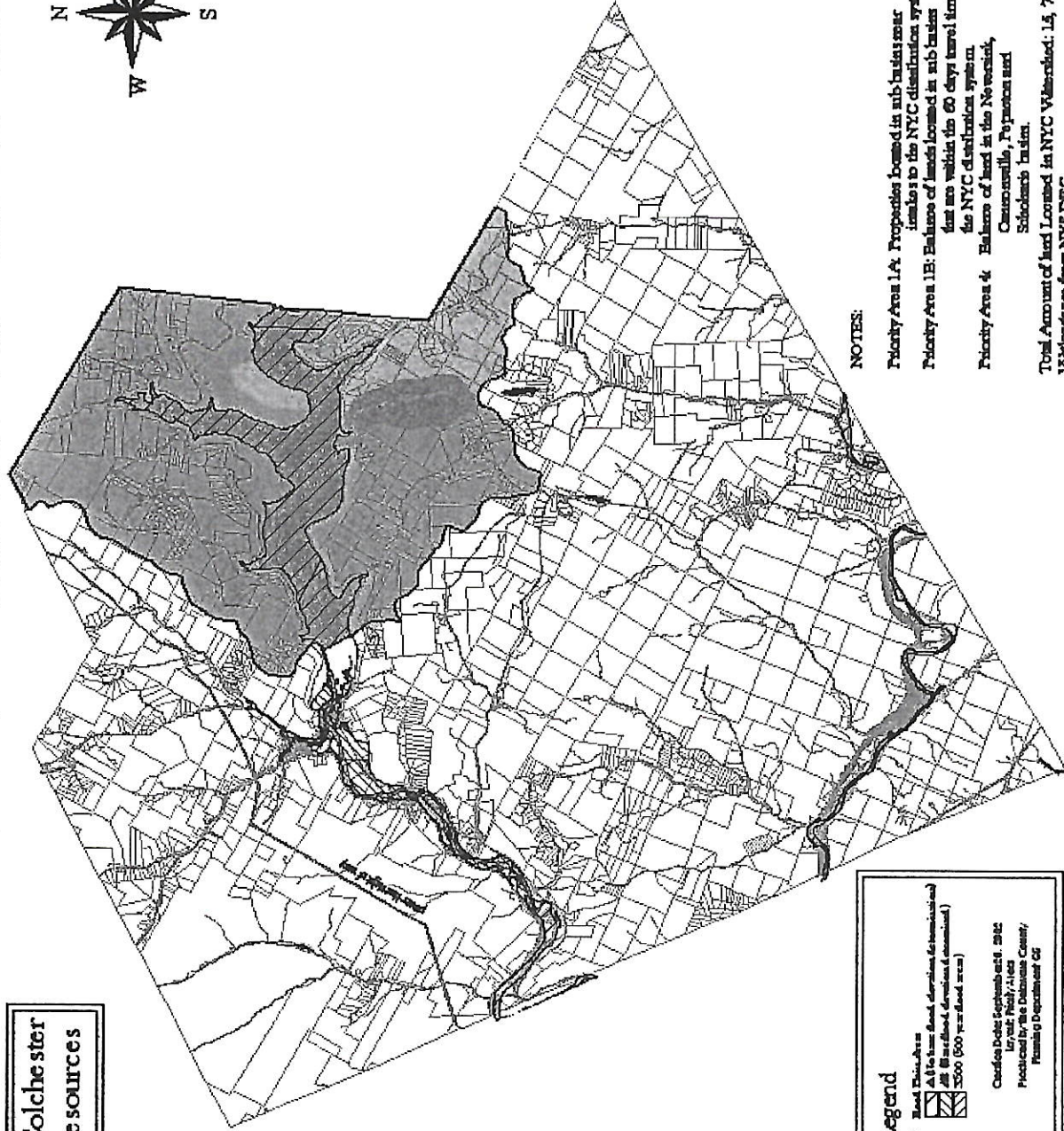
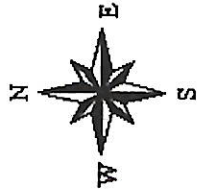
♦ Remove green corrugated fiberglass panels and replace with pine wood Clapboard siding. Trim building with 5/4 x 5" pine wood boards on corners and around existing storefront windows. Other trim board details using 5/4" pine wood may be used in various places to accent the building's features including but not limited to Fascias, Freeze Boards, and Ribbon Boards.

♦ Prime and Paint Clapboard siding with historically appropriate colors.

♦ Prime and Paint windows and doors in historically appropriate colors.

♦ New historically appropriate retail signage should be installed to compliment the building's architecture.

Town of Colchester Natural Resources



NOTES:

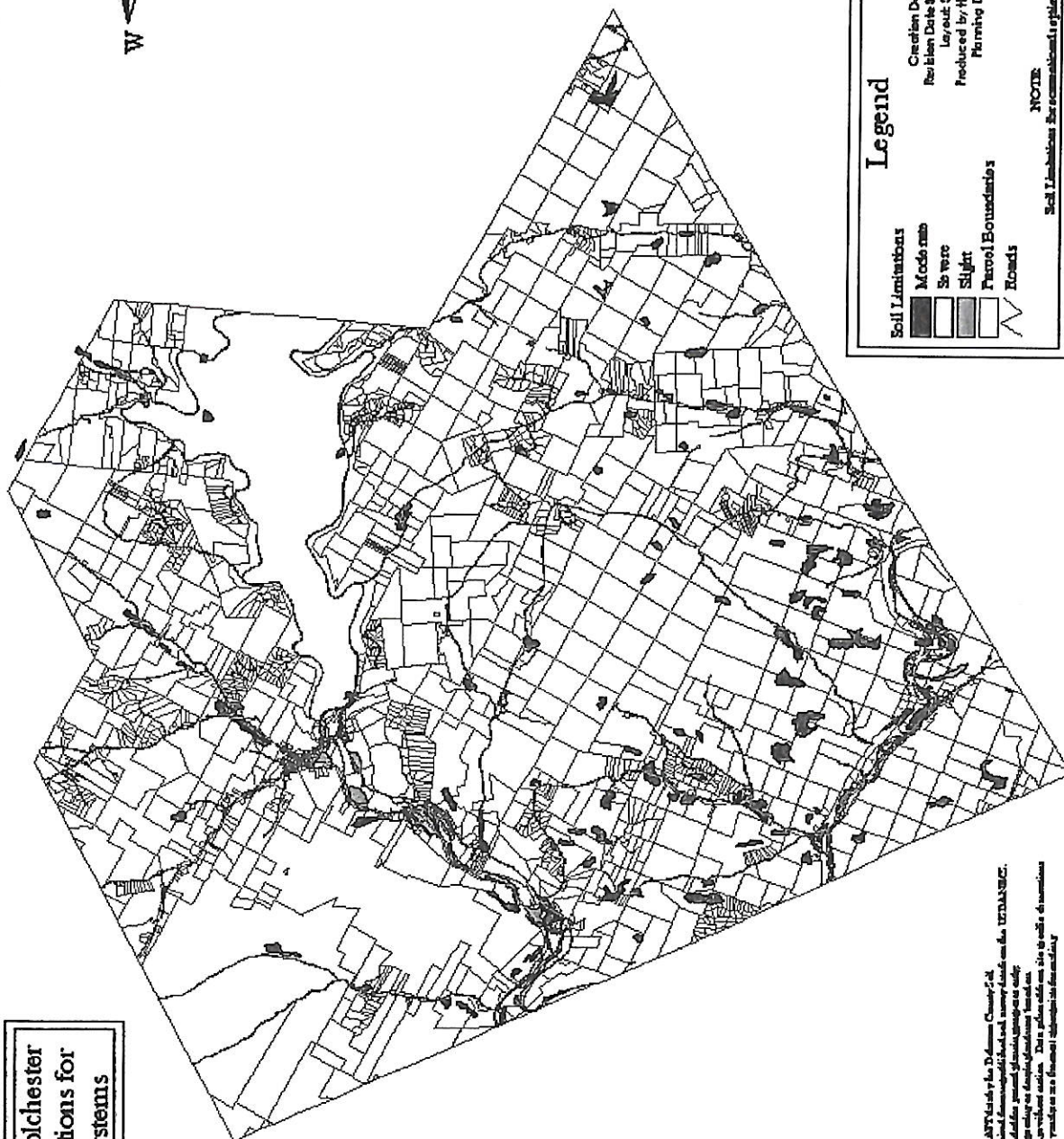
- Priority Area 1A: Properties located in subwatersheds adjacent to the NYC distribution system.
- Priority Area 1B: Balance of lands located in subwatersheds that are within the 60 days travel time to the NYC distribution system.
- Priority Area 4: Balance of land in the No service, Champlainville, Popponesset and Schoharie basins.

Total Amount of land Located in NYC Watershed: 15, 717.79 Ac, 21 %
Wetlands are from NYS DEC

Legend

- Watershed Boundary
 - Roads
 - Wetlands (DEC)
 - Drainage
 - Priority Areas
 - No service
 - 1A
 - 1B
 - 4
- Map Date: 09/20/2011
Map Date: 09/20/2011
Produced by: The Delaware Center for Planning Development, Inc.

Town of Colchester Soil Limitations for Septic Systems



Legend

Soil Limitations

Moisture

Severe

Slight

Parcel Boundaries

Roads

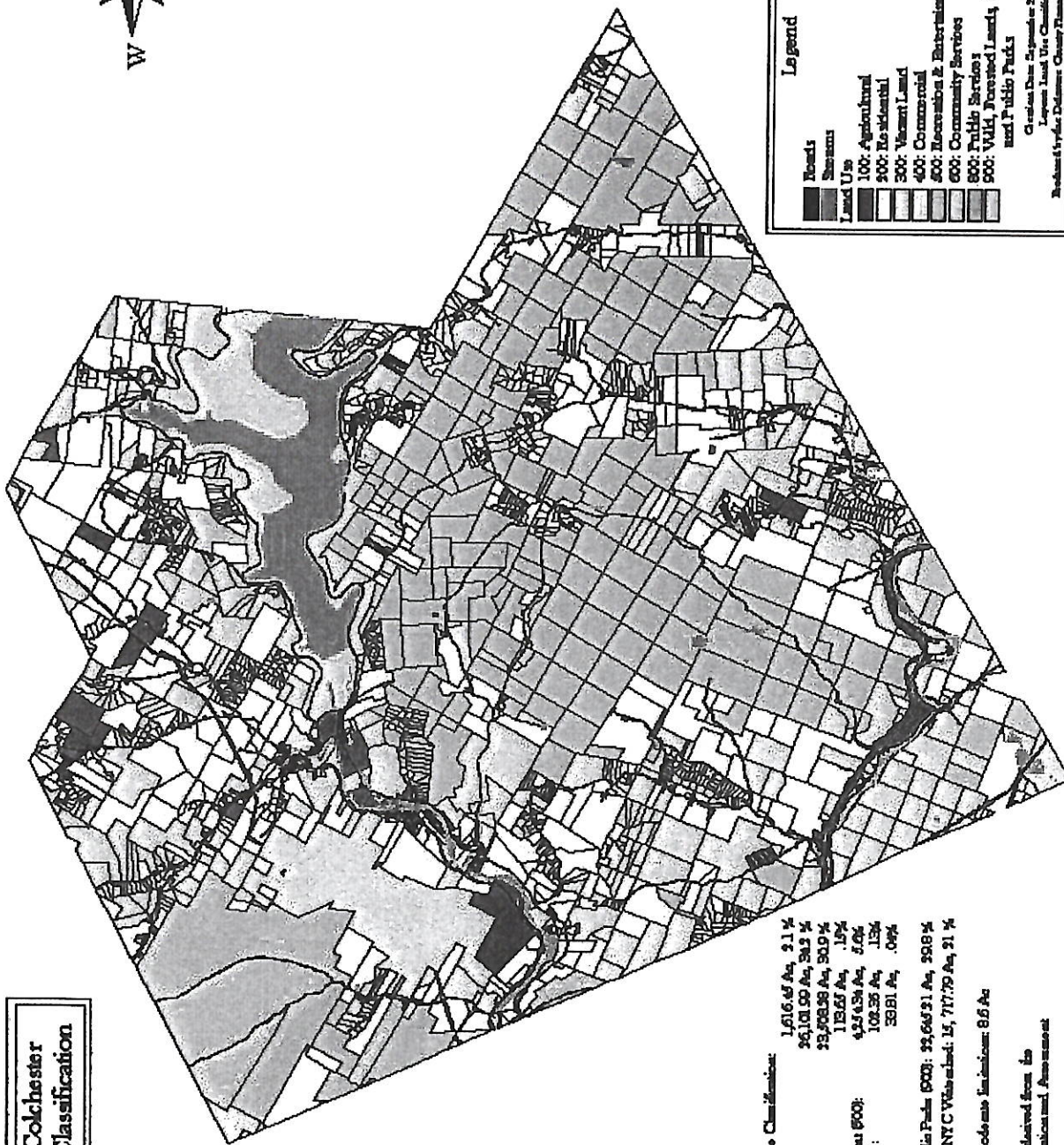
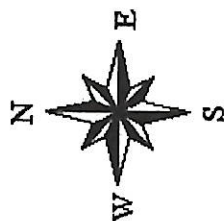
Creation Date: May 2, 2002
Revision Date: September 19, 2002
Layout: 3 of 1
Produced by: The Da Luzes County
Planning Department GIS

NOTE

Soil Limitations for residential septic systems

NOTE:
Soil map information was based on data provided by the Vermont Agency of
Natural Resources, Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, and
the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Vermont Department of Environmental
Conservation. The map is intended for informational purposes only.
It is not intended to be used for any other purpose, including but not limited to,
land use planning, zoning, or other regulatory purposes. The map is not a
guarantee of accuracy and is not intended to be used for any other purpose.
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Town of Colchester Land Use Classification



Land Use Classification:

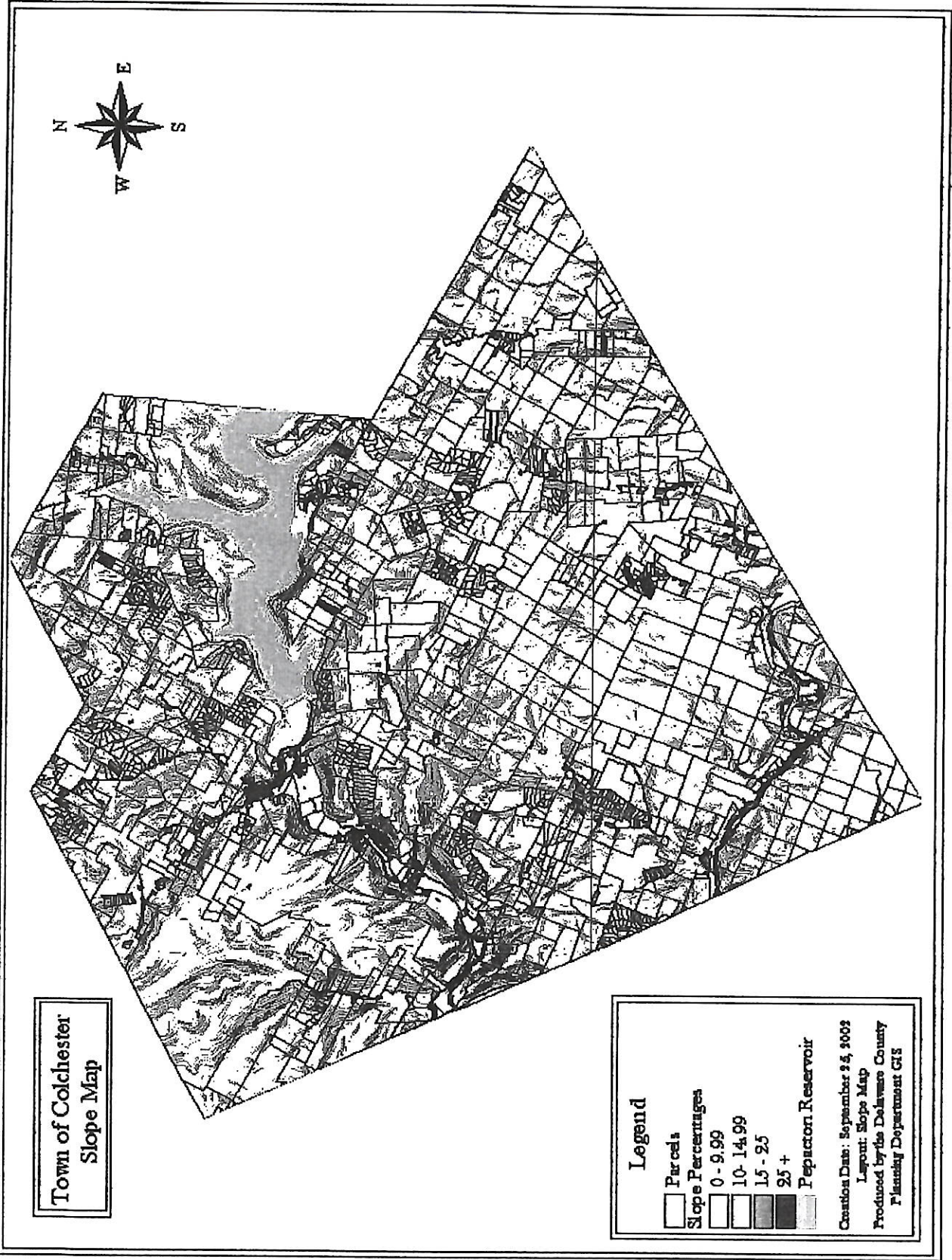
Agricultural (000):	1,616.45 Ac, 2.1%
Residential (200):	26,101.00 Ac, 34.3%
Vacant Land (600):	23,508.38 Ac, 30.9%
Commercial (400):	1,135.65 Ac, 1.5%
Recreation & Entertainment (500):	4,244.38 Ac, 5.6%
Community Services (300):	102.35 Ac, 0.1%
Public Services (800):	33.81 Ac, 0.0%
VMA, Forested Land, Conservation Land & Public Parks (000):	22,649.21 Ac, 29.8%
Total Area of Land in NYC Watershed:	15,717.79 Ac, 21%
Total Area of land of moderate to high risk:	8.6 Ac

Note:
All land use classifications derived from the
New York State of Environmental Assessment
Agency's Manual

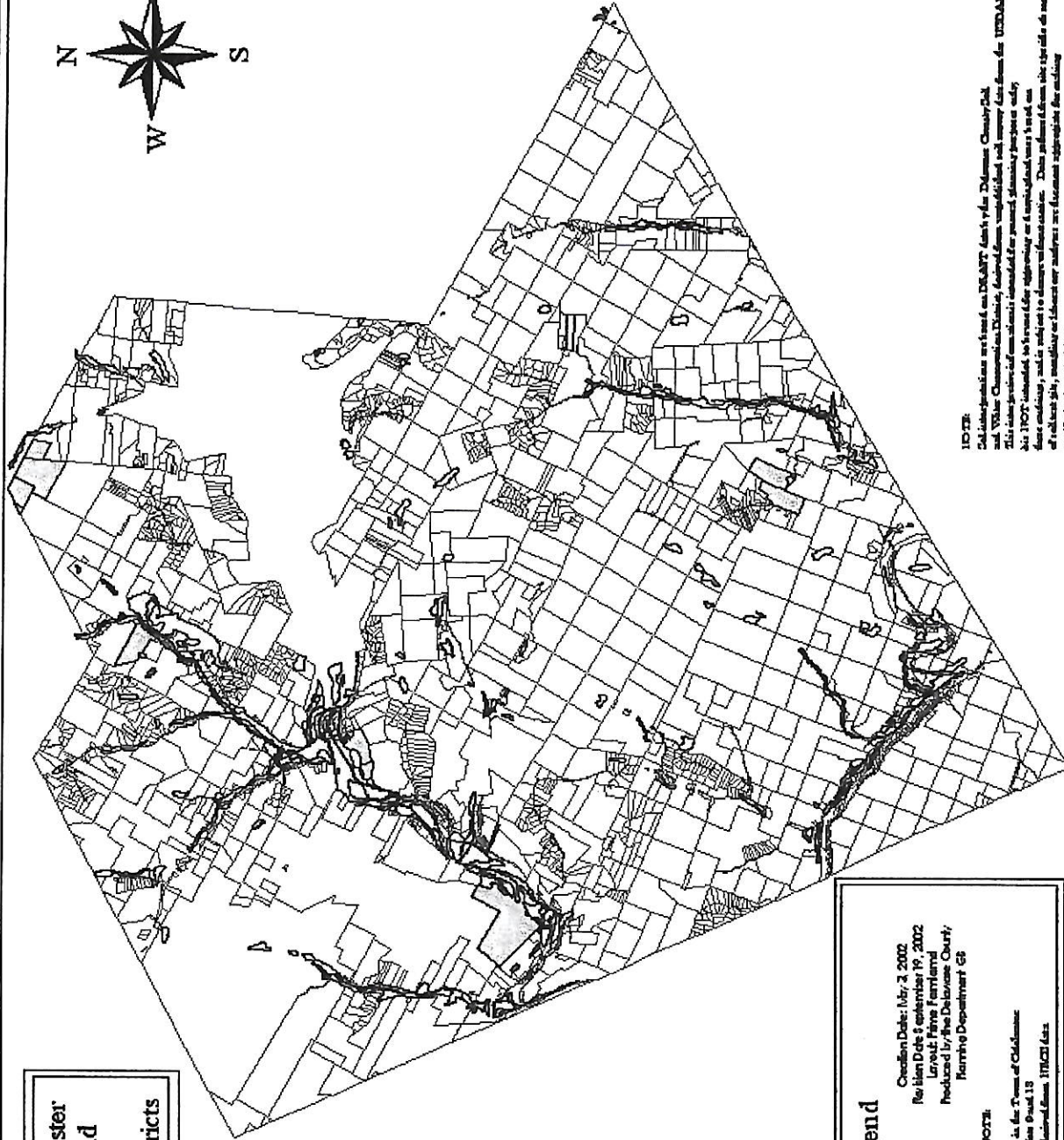
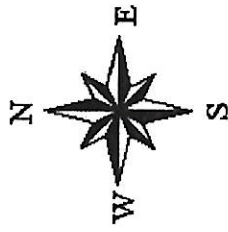
Legend

- Roads
- Streams
- Land Use
- 100: Agricultural
- 200: Residential
- 300: Vacant Land
- 400: Commercial
- 500: Recreation & Entertainment
- 600: Community Services
- 800: Public Services
- 000: VMA, Forested Land, Conservation Land and Public Parks

Classification Date: September 25, 2009
Legend Land Use Classification
Resident's Office, Colchester County Planning Department GIS



**Town of Colchester
Prime Farmland
and
Agricultural Districts**



Legend

- Prime Farmland
- Agricultural Districts
- Parcel Boundaries

Creation Date: May 2, 2002
Revision Date: September 19, 2002
Local: Prime Farmland
Produced by: the Delaware County
Mapping Department GIS

NOTE:

Agricultural Districts in the Town of Colchester
Division 9 and 10
Prime Farmland derived from USDA data

NOTE:
All interpretations are based on USDA data for the Delaware County GIS
and the Delaware County GIS. All data is derived from the USDA data. The
data is provided for informational purposes only. The data is not intended
to be used for any other purpose. The data is not intended to be used
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