Town of Poughkeepsie
Climate Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Plan

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Acknowledgments

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The Hudson Valley Regional Council's (HVRC) Climate Action Planning Institute (CAPI) Adapt Program provided the Town of Poughkeepsie with technical assistance in completing this Climate Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Plan (CVAAP). This CVAAP was prepared using a template developed by HVRC, drawing on the work of New York State Local Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience Plan Template, and Community Vulnerability Assessments from other municipalities. Additionally, the details of this product are largely supported by the Town's participation in the 2019 Lower Wappinger Creek Community Resilience Building Workshop.

CAPI Adapt is a program of HVRC. This document was prepared for the Hudson River Estuary Program, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, with support from the New York State Environmental Protection Fund, in cooperation with NEIWPCC. The viewpoints expressed here do not necessarily represent those of NEIWPCC or NYS DEC, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or causes constitute endorsement or recommendation for use.

Executive Summary

There are numerous hazards resulting from climate change. Based on scientific data collected over many decades, the largest threats to Dutchess County stem from increasing temperatures, shifting precipitation patterns, and sea-level-rise. For the Town of Poughkeepsie ("the Town"), this means: the potential for increased frequency of extreme heat waves and cold weather; increased risk for severe weather that causes high winds and power outages; increased risk of wildfire threats; increased frequency of inland flooding; and taxed storm sewer systems leading to poor drainage. These hazards result in widescale community impacts often exacerbating the risks for vulnerable populations. Examples include the elderly struggling to keep medications refrigerated in the event of a power outage or low-income populations where emergency preparedness contingency planning for multifamily developments may not be included. Both the natural and built parts within the community are increasingly at risk without a proper assessment of the Town's vulnerabilities and a means to plan for adaptation.

These hazards cause social, environmental, and infrastructure damage and losses outlined in this CVAAP. To avoid such damage today and in the future, the Town of Poughkeepsie ("the Town") will need to work with partners, such as community-based organizations, regional planning organizations, state and federal agencies, to increase their resilience and adapt to these conditions. Devastating storms, such as Tropical Storm Irene and Superstorm Sandy, have reinforced this need and led communities in Dutchess County, including the Town of Poughkeepsie, to climate action-based resiliency planning to protect residents and mitigate risk. Ultimately, leadership on climate resilience will reduce the exposure and vulnerability of citizens, infrastructure, and ecosystems, and will serve as a model for communities across New York State and the country.

The Climate Smart Communities (CSC) Program provides a framework for implementing climate-smart resiliency actions. This CVAAP is one of the CSC program's fundamental actions, identified as Pledge Element (PE) 7. The CSC Program ensures that recommendations to promote community resiliency are based on climate science and relevant data and address the top hazards in a community. The framework mandates an inclusive process, with public outreach and engagement each step of the way. Members of the Town of Poughkeepsie CAPI Adapt Team met with municipal officials and committees, tabled at local events, leveraged the municipal web site and social media platforms to solicit feedback, and attended CAPI Adapt cohort trainings and meetings, including a Community Resilience Building Workshop where the cohort was presented with top local climate hazards, prepared by the Hudson River Estuary Program.

Introduction

Background

The Town of Poughkeepsie is a regional center in Dutchess County, containing a mix of residential, institutional, commercial, industrial, and natural places covering approximately 31.2 square miles. The current population is approximately 45,000. The Town is a Hudson River Valley Greenway Community bordered by the Hudson River to the west and the Wappinger Creek to the east. Major arterial roadways include Route 9 which runs north to south along the western edge of Town, and Routes 44 and 55 which cross the Town from east to west. Along these corridors and connector roads are concentrated industrial, commercial, business, and shopping districts. The City of Poughkeepsie literally forms an "urban center" in the middle of the Town. Long- established residential neighborhoods radiate out from the City, as well as from historic, established hamlets within the Town.

Climate in the Hudson Valley region is temperate and variable, from warm summers bringing occasional heat waves and droughts to cold, snowy winters. Climate change has already affected the normal variability in weather patterns and is projected to continue to significantly alter climate conditions in the future. It is important for municipalities to understand the risks posed by changing climate conditions, and how the climate relates to local natural resources and human health, as well as to the built environment. Increasing temperature, sea level rise, and variability in precipitation are the primary climate change related hazards in the Northeast region. These hazards may pose significant risks to natural resources and human communities, namely through heat waves, drought, flooding, and poor air quality.

According to the Town's 2022 Natural Resources Inventory (NRI), approximately 47% of the Town is developed. Forested and shrubland habitat types including hardwood, conifer, mixed and cedar woodlands, account for over 5,000 acres or 25% of the Town. Other key habitats include the Hudson River, open water/ponds, and wetland habitats which together account for 14% of the Town. Additionally, it is worth noting that all the land in the Town ultimately drains into the Hudson River Estuary via tributary streams.

Understanding the Town's existing flood prone areas is also important for planning for future conditions. The Town contains approximately 3,030 acres of land located in the 100-year flood zone. This is about 15% of the property in the Town. The Town also contains approximately 728 acres of land located in the 500-year flood zone. This is about 4% of the property in the Town. Public drinking water for the Town is provided by surface water from the Hudson River. Approximately five (5) million gallons of water are pumped through the Town's water treatment system on a daily basis, serving about 10,000 customers within the Town's municipal boundaries. Said treatment facilities also serve portions of the City of Poughkeepsie, the Village of Wappingers Falls, and the Town of Hyde Park.

Town Climate Planning Achievements

The following outlines the many climate-conscious strides the Town has taken since 2018:

- 2018: Took the Climate Smart Community Pledge to become a climate smart community
- 2019: Participated in the Lower Wappinger Creek Community Resilience Building Workshop
- 2019: Participated in a Climate Smart Resilience Planning initiative with Cornell Cooperative Extension Dutchess County – developed a resilience toolkit
- 2019: Formed Town Climate Smart Task Force
- 2019: Reinstatement of the Town Conservation Advisory Commission
- 2021: Achieved Bronze-Level Certification through CSC program
- 2021: Developed then adopted a Comprehensive Update with Sustainability Elements
- 2023: Developed then adopted a Natural Resources Inventory
- 2023: Developed then adopted an Open Space Plan
- 2023-2024: Participated in the Climate Action Planning Institute
    - Developed a Government Operations Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory
    - Developed a Government Operations Climate Action Plan
- 2024: Participated in the Climate Action Planning Institute – Adaptation Plan
    - Developed a Climate Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Plan (this document)
- 2024-2025: New Hamburg Flood Study
- 2025-2027: Project site for SUNY ESF "Climate Ready Hudson" grant from HRF focusing on resilience in environmental justice communities

Climate Vulnerability Assessment (CVA)

A CVA identifies community assets, systems, and populations that are susceptible to climate change. A vulnerability assessment is a necessary step in developing a climate adaptation strategy because it identifies and characterizes the environmental, infrastructural, and social elements of a community that need adaptive measures. The Town is fortunate to have the ability to build off many prior climate-related achievements that support the development of a CVA.

Completing a CVA includes the following steps:

- Identify climatic hazards occurring and likely to occur within the geographic boundary of interest.
- Identify community assets, systems, and populations currently and likely to be exposed to the identified climatic hazards.
- Assess the sensitivity and adaptive capacity of each exposed asset, system, and population to each applicable hazard.
- Use a scoring or prioritization methodology to rank each identified community facet to inform an adaptation strategy.
- A CVA increases local awareness and literacy of climate vulnerability and resilience and encourages a community to take ownership and support implementation of actions.

Vulnerability Assessment Background and Considerations

Findings

The Town, so as not to duplicate work, reviewed planning documents and findings that included extensive public engagement in order to develop a CVA suitable for the CAPI program. The following findings were identified:

2019: Participated in the Lower Wappinger Creek Community Resilience Building Workshop

The following hazards have a growing impact on residents and businesses in Village of Wappingers Falls, Town of Wappinger, Town of Poughkeepsie, Town of LaGrange, and Town of Pleasant Valley, all located in Dutchess County and within the Wappinger Creek watershed.

1. *Sea Level Rise and Storm Surge:* Projected rises in future mean sea levels, combined with severe coastal storms, such as Superstorm Sandy, capable of producing storm surge and coastal flooding.
2. *Inland Flooding:* Inland flooding caused by intense precipitation, storms and subsequent runoff from rain or snow, especially in the Wappinger Creek and other waterways.
3. *Drought and Wildfires:* Higher peak temperatures in summer with sporadic precipitation events which may stress municipal and private resources, especially public water supplies and private wells. In addition, the threat of wildfires was brought up repeatedly at the Community Resilience Building workshop as an additional hazard, related to drought and dry conditions.
4. *Wind:* Storms with high winds capable of damaging infrastructure.

Participants in the Community Resilience Building Workshop were asked to identify environmental, infrastructure, and social assets in their communities; determine whether those assets are strengths, vulnerabilities or both; and identify and prioritize actions. The following sections summarize the results of this workshop, which were identified by participants from all five municipalities.

There were **three** major areas of concern related to **environmental assets**:

1. Watersheds, waterbodies and shorelines including floodplains and wetlands associated with the Hudson River, Wappinger Creek, and other tributaries.

2. Public and private parklands and open spaces which recognize the various local, county, state and non-profit protected areas acquired through easements or fee acquisition, throughout the five municipalities.

3. Other environmental features such as the groundwater aquifers that supply drinking water to most communities, along with the rail trail systems that support healthy lifestyles and access to green space.

There were **four** major areas of concern related to **infrastructure assets**:

1. Wastewater infrastructure assets were identified as the highest priority concern by workshop participants, including more than seven wastewater treatment plants and private septic systems.

2. The municipal drinking water supply for all communities, whether the source is community wells or the Hudson River.

3. Transportation infrastructure: These represent a multitude of bridges, rail lines and commuter stations, roads, dams and culverts. Examples of specific systems identified were Route 9, Route 44 and Route 55.

4. Communication, utility, and power systems, representing cell towers, telephone lines, and power generation and distribution.

There were **four** major areas of concern related to **social assets**:

1. Emergency services and communication, including various cooling shelters and emergency shelters, municipal and county emergency management committees, the ambulance corps and volunteer fire departments, municipal and county emergency communication such as 911 and reverse 911, and a regional food pantry.

2. Emergency Management Plans are not consistent across municipalities.

3. Vulnerable populations and neighborhoods: These include transient populations, various group homes, assisted living facilities, mobile home communities, Fallkill Creek neighborhoods, and the community of New Hamburg.

4. Other key facilities identified as vulnerable include assets belonging to Central Hudson Gas and Electric and Metro North Railroad as well as municipal assets located in floodplains such as town halls, fire stations, and police stations.

Summary of Findings: Hazards

The Hudson River Estuary Program prepared the following summary of climate planning as a part of CAPI. It identifies historic climate trends and introduces future projections and strategies to address the climate hazards most likely to affect Dutchess County. This summary provides a starting point for recognizing important climate hazards and risks in the county, but it is important to note that it is limited to information available to NYSDEC and its partners at the time of this document production and is not a substitute for on-site survey and assessment. Using the Governor's 2100 Commission report and the NYS Climate Impacts assessments, this document presents the Dutchess County primary climate hazards and the risks and opportunities they present.

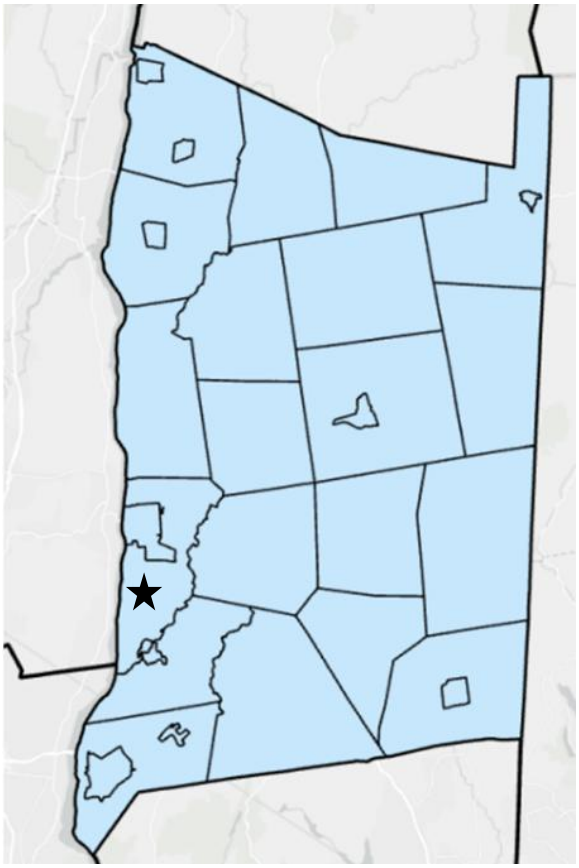

Figure 1: Map of Dutchess County with star label to Identify Town of Poughkeepsie.

Increasing Temperatures

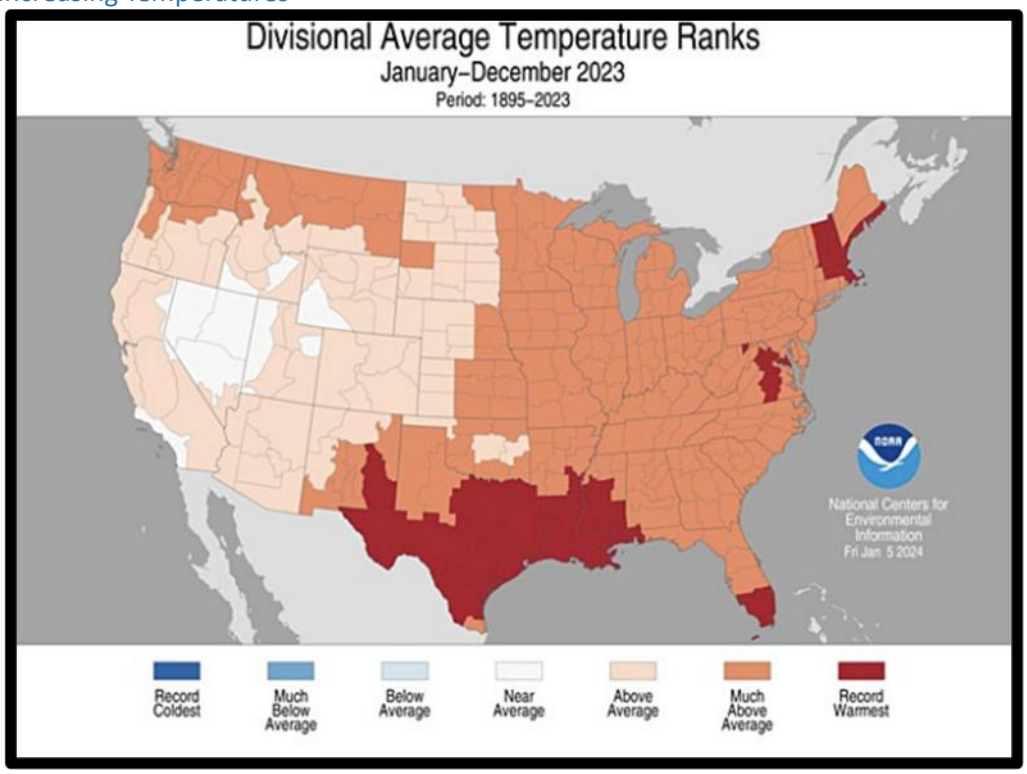

Figure 2: *Divisional Average Temperature Ranks. Source: National Centers for Environmental Information*

Annual average temperatures have been steadily increasing in New York State, posing new challenges to human health, electricity demand, and many of our industries, including tourism, recreation, and agriculture. Since 1970, temperature increases in New York have surpassed national and global averages:

- 2023 Global annual average temperature up 2.12°F above 20th century average.
- 2023 U.S. annual average temperature up 2.4°F above 20th century average.
- 2023 NY annual average temperature up 2.2°F above the average from 1991-2020.

The average annual temperature around Dutchess County is expected to increase approximately four to six degrees by mid-century and as much as 11 degrees by 2100. As a reference point, by the 2080s, New York City's average temperature is projected to be on par with the 20th century average for Birmingham, Alabama.

Air Temperature Projections for the Southern Hudson River Valley

	Baseline 1981 -2010	2030s	2050s	2080s	2100
Annual average air temperature	50.8°F	52.8°F – 55.7°F	54°F – 58°F	55.6°F – 62.7°F	56°F – 64.7°F
Increase in annual average		2.0°F – 4.9°F	3.2°F – 7.2°F	4.8°F – 11.9°F	5.2°F – 13.9°F

Table 1. *Like all projections, these climate projections have uncertainty embedded within them. Sources of uncertainty include data and modeling constraints, the random nature of some parts of the climate system, and limited understanding of some physical processes. Levels of uncertainty are characterized by using state-of-the-art climate models, multiple scenarios of future greenhouse gas concentrations, and recent peer-reviewed literature. Even so, the projections are not true probabilities, so the specific numbers should not be emphasized, and the potential for error should be acknowledged. Source: Climate Impacts Assessment.*

An analysis of historical trends in annual average temperature and precipitation was conducted for 27 weather stations across New York State. Below are the results from the Southern Hudson River Valley's Dobbs Ferry weather station in New York State taken from the latest New York State Climate Change Projections.

Trend in Annual Average Temperature from 1901-2020 from observed weather stations
❖Temperature increase for Southern Hudson River Valley – Poughkeepsie: 0.42 °F/decade
Trend in Average Annual Precipitation from 1901–2020 for Observed Weather Stations in NYS
❖Precipitation increase for Southern Hudson River Valley – Poughkeepsie: 0.32 inches/decade

Table 2. *Trend is significant at the 99% significance level. Source: Weather Station Data: Dobbs Ferry, NY*

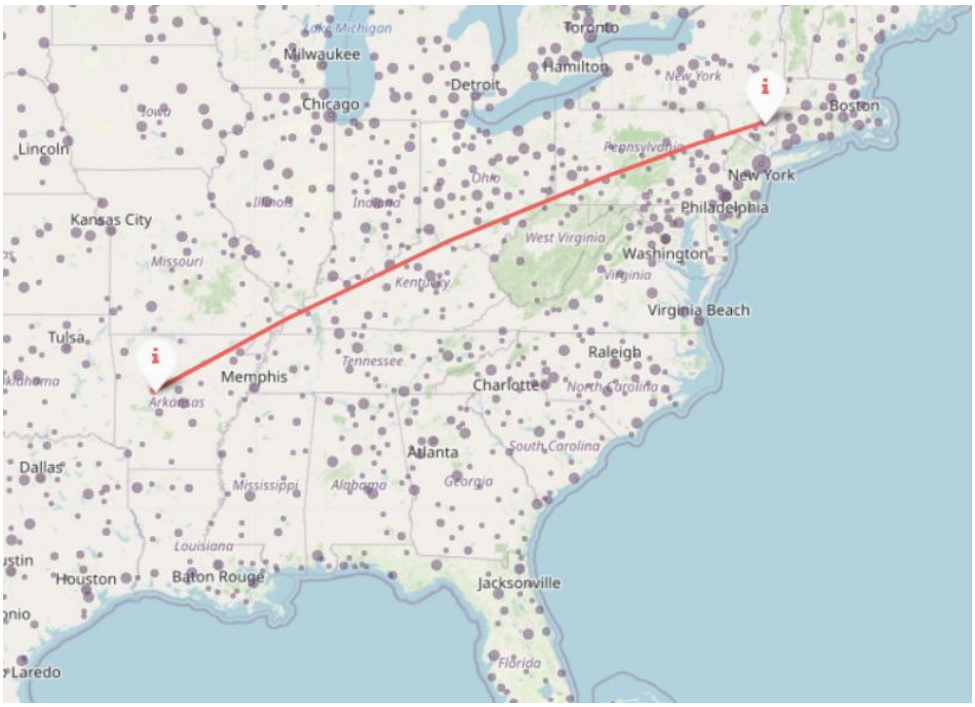

Figure 3: *The Town of Poughkeepsie's Predicted Climate in 60 Years (comparable to today's Ola, Arkansas)*

Heat Wave Projections for Region 5

	Baseline 1971-2000	**2020s**	**2050s**	**2080s**	**2100**
Total annual precipitation	51"	52" - 54.5"	53" - 57"	53.5" - 58.5"	53.5" - 61.5"
% Increase in precipitation	-	2 – 7%	4 – 12%	5 – 15%	5 – 21%
# Days with precipitation > 1"	10	14 – 15	14 – 16	15 – 17	16+
# Days with precipitation > 2"	1	3 – 4	4	4 – 5	5+

Table 3: *Precipitation projections for region 5*

Sea Level Rise

Global sea level is rising due to various factors, including thermal expansion from warmer water temperatures, and melting of land-based ice. The Hudson River is connected to and influenced by the sea; therefore, it experiences tides and contains saltwater in its lower reaches. This is why the Hudson River south of the federal dam at Troy is considered an estuary. It is also the reason why the Hudson River's water level is rising with global sea level.

Since 1900, sea level in the lower Hudson has risen over 13 inches. Below are Albany sea level rise projections taken from the 2023 Climate Impacts Assessment for New York State which are based on the results from the IPCC 6th Assessment report and show the range from the low-estimate (10th percentiles) to the high-estimate (90th percentile). The table showing the projections of the sea-level rise with rapid ice melt were taken from NYS 2100 Commission Report. The rapid-ice melt scenario is based on acceleration of recent rates of ice melt in the Greenland and West Antarctic Ice sheets and paleoclimate studies. These projections are consistent with the most recent projections released by New York State in the Governor's 2100 Commission report.

	Baseline 1981 -2014	**2030s**	**2050s**	**2080s**	**2100**
Albany Sea Level Rise - Inches		5” – 12”	11” – 21”	18” – 41”	21” – 60”

***Table 4**. Like all projections, these climate projections have uncertainty embedded within them. Sources of uncertainty include data and modeling constraints, the random nature of some parts of the climate system, and limited understanding of some physical processes. Levels of uncertainty are characterized by using state-of-the-art climate models, multiple scenarios of future greenhouse gas concentrations, and recent peer-reviewed literature. Even so, the projections are not true probabilities, so the specific numbers should not be emphasized, and the potential for error should be acknowledged. Source: NYS Climate Impacts Assessments.*

		2020s	**2050s**	**2080s**	**2100**
Sea- Level Rise with Rapid Ice Melt	No baseline	4”-9”	17”- 26”	37”- 50”	52” – 68”

***Table 5**. Values are the central range (middle 67%) of model-based probabilities rounded to the nearest inch. The rapid-ice melt scenario is based on acceleration of recent rates of ice melt in the Greenland and West Antarctic Ice sheets and paleoclimate studies. These projections are consistent with the most recent projections released by New York State in the Governor's 2100 Commission report. Source: NYS 2100 Commission Report.[5]*

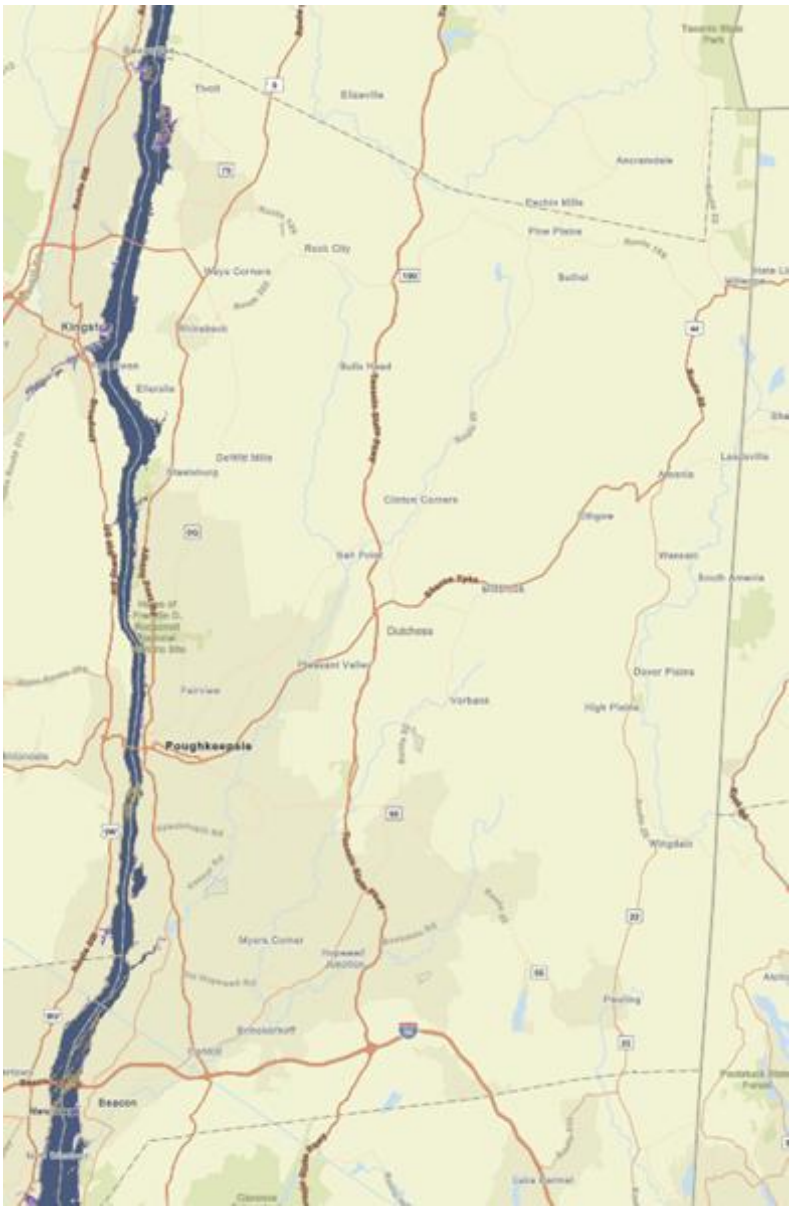

Figure 4: Figure 3: Map of Sea level rise projections for Dutchess County 6

Changing Precipitation Patterns

Precipitation has become more variable and extreme, whereas total rainfall has changed only marginally. The total annual precipitation in New York State from 1901 – 2022 has increased by 10% to 20%. Overall, while New York is projected to remain a "water-rich" state, water quality can be affected by the increase in total precipitation.

The table below depicts the projections for average precipitation (mean precipitation) for the South Hudson River Valley, in which Dutchess County is located. These projections were taken from the NYS Climate Impacts Assessment and are based on the global climate model (GCM) simulations from the latest version of the world climate research program's Coupled Model Intercomparison Project.

Precipitation Projections for the South Hudson River Valley

	Baseline 1981-2010	**2030s**	**2050s**	**2080s**	**2100**
Mean Precipitation	45.8 in.	45.8" – 50.4"	46.3" – 51.8"	46.7" – 55.9"	44.9" – 58.6"
% Increase in precipitation		0 – 10%	1-13%	2 – 22%	2 – 28%

Table 6: *Precipitation projections for region 5*

Summary of Findings: Recommendations for Adaptation

Environment

The most resounding environmental priorities were associated with the protection of existing natural water assets including streams and rivers, shorelines, wetlands, riparian areas, and drinking water sources.

Short-Term

1. Be proactive in protecting existing natural resources and assets. Restoration can be more costly and is reactive. This could be accomplished through stream corridor overlay districts or protection ordinances. Building relationships with surrounding municipalities and continuing to work with County and State agencies and organizations can support this work. Additionally, the Town may continue to work with and improve relationships with local and regional non-profit organizations, including land trusts, to share resources.

2. Restoration and management were identified as important next steps for specific assets identified as vulnerabilities. These areas include, but are not limited to, the Fallkill Creek watershed and the Casperkill Creek watershed. Implementation activities should be monitored for viability and, ultimately, success. This could also be accomplished through stream corridor overlay districts or protection ordinances. Updating existing watershed management plans for the Fallkill Creek and Casperkill Creek could be a helpful process to identify specific actions to improve these assets.

3. Continue engagement in the Wappinger Creek Intermunicipal Council in order to continue to engage in implementation of the goals from the Wappinger Creek Management Plan. Additionally, the Town's engagement affords the ability to learn new information and hear insights related to the Wappinger Creek.

4. Drinking water sources in the Town include surface water (Hudson River) and groundwater sources. Both are vulnerable to changes in upstream consumption and environmental conditions. Attention should be given to the security of existing primary and backup sources.

5. Maintaining public space assets into the future will require active monitoring for changes in conditions as well as implementation of an adaptive management approach to keep pace with changing environmental conditions.

Medium-Term

1. The recreational assets in the Town include hiking and rail trails. These resources will require monitoring and implementation of adaptive management techniques as conditions warrant.

2. Aging septic systems are becoming an increasing concern for water quality and human health concerns throughout the region, particularly systems located in floodplains. There is an opportunity to consider assessing the current condition and vulnerability of these systems and develop resilience strategies to reduce the risk of current or future failure and/or contamination.
3. Initiatives to further protect and/or restore wetlands and watercourses within the study area should be encouraged, with an eye toward likely future conditions. Watershed planning is one path toward capturing this information and developing solutions.

4. Work on wildfire prevention and planning. This is an opportunity to engage County and State natural resource managers as well as emergency responders.

Infrastructure

Infrastructural assets included transportation, drinking water distribution, wastewater treatment, vulnerable housing and townhalls located in the floodplain.

Short-Term

1. The Town Police and Town Court building is located in a floodplain and a relocation plan should be developed and implemented.

2. Address any ponding/overwash, culverts and flooding/debris passage for the various roads in the Town, including Route 9, Routes 44 and 55, Overlook Road, DeGarmo Road, and River Road.

3. Prepare a vulnerability study for rails, commuter station, roads and infrastructure located in New Hamburg.

4. Prepare vulnerability studies for culvert and bridge, and road. These assessments should evaluate the ability to pass water/debris torrents, implications of failure to neighborhood traffic patterns and surrounding infrastructure, as well as impacts to vulnerable residents.

5. There are many drinking water distribution and wastewater treatment systems in the Town that are both strengths and vulnerabilities. Individually, many of these systems were prioritized as “medium” priority, however the total number of systems present elevates the management of this collection of systems to a “high” priority. Though the condition of the infrastructure is variable across systems, so too is the risk/vulnerability. A prioritized comprehensive asset management plan could be developed, guiding implementation efforts to ensure functionality into the future. This process should consider a coordinated approach, as many systems cross municipal boundaries and new solutions may emerge that allow for greater collaboration.

6. Installing emergency power supplies to significant community resources such as Town Hall, the Senior Center, municipal fuel storage facilities, water department facilities, sewer department facilities, and highway department facilities. Emergency shelters and other support facilities should be explored and strategically located throughout the community.

Medium-Term

1. The Town of Poughkeepsie, Town of Wappinger, and Hamlet of New Hamburg with shorelines along the mainstem of the Hudson and tidal Wappinger Creek (below the Wappinger Creek dam) should develop detailed vulnerability assessments and implement proactive resilience measures to reduce the likely impacts of sea level rise and increasing storm surge characteristics.

2. River Road in New Hamburg represents a significant flooding challenge. The Town is encouraged to continue to pursue funding to in support of the mitigation strategies identified in the New Hamburg Flood Study.

3. Engage local colleges in the community to establish clear evacuation and emergency response protocols. Higher learning establishments might have their own plans, but it is important to understand how they fit into the broader community network. Facilities at these institutions may even provide a community strength by also serving as shelters during emergency situations.

4. Managing stormwater runoff into retention basins, as well as management of the basins themselves, is a challenge that will only get worse as precipitation events intensify. Improving and modifying design and management standards for these systems and implementing adaptive management plans should be an increasing priority.

Social

Actions related to social assets were associated with support institutions, emergency communication and management facilities, and municipal programming.

Short-Term

1. Create or update emergency plans to include shelters with water and power and energy providers. Actions should ensure the adequacy and feasibility of emergency and energy plans.

2. The several emergency response facilities should undergo a facility vulnerability assessment to ensure access and overall resilience during flood events.

3. Learning more about how to protect and serve vulnerable and marginalized populations with the Town when it comes to climate change response and emergency response.
    a. Vulnerable populations may include those in flood prone areas, senior housing communities, mobile home communities and more.

4. There are diverse and numerous social service and non-profit agencies serving the community including The Red Cross, Meals on Wheels, Office on the Aging, land trusts, and Dutchess County Soil and Water Conservation District. These agencies require continued public and private support and the ability to access resources.

5. Regional and facility-specific emergency communications are critical to reduce impacts during events. Focused attention to multi-lingual communication platforms that provide advanced warning through emergency response are essential and may be in need of an update or review.

Medium-Term

1. Several marinas, boathouses, and clubs are located within the Town. Their viability hinges on sound and active management of sediment deposition and resilience to flooding events. Facilities should go through a vulnerability assessment and implement resilience upgrades such as relocating utilities to top floors and permanently anchoring fuel tanks. Local emergency management plans and hazard mitigation plans should be reviewed and updated based on new environmental conditions and projected future conditions on a regular interval.

Conclusion

This plan integrates scientific data and the perspectives of residents and key groups regarding climate hazards in our community, county, and region. It outlines, analyzes, and prioritizes the impacts of priority climate hazards on key assets in the Town. The assessment reflects the dedication of the Town to safeguarding the identified unique and irreplaceable assets.

Next steps include the continuation of implementing adaptation strategies identified in this plan. The Town has already completed a Natural Resources Inventory and an Open Space Plan. It has also completed a Flood Study for the hamlet of New Hamburg and as of December 2025 has secured funding to explore the feasibility to implement engineering solutions proposed in the original study. These are just a few ways the Town is already working on climate adaptation. Acknowledging that perceptions and priorities evolve, the Town is dedicated to continuing the dialogue, as well as climate vulnerability, adaptation, and resilience planning.