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City of Rensselaer  
2006 Comprehensive Plan

## Summary of Existing Conditions



# Inventory and Analysis

## Table of Contents

Location	A-2
Natural Features	
Topography and Steep Slopes	A-4
Watersheds, Lakes and Streams	A-6
Floodplains	A-8
Wetlands	A-8
Soils	A-10
Community Services	
Fire, Police and Ambulance Facilities	A-12
Educational Facilities	A-12
Parks and Recreation	A-12
Transportation Network	A-14
Development	
Trends	A-16
Existing Land Use	A-17
Population Characteristics	
Population	A-20
Age	A-21
Education	A-21
Employment	A-22
Income	A-23
Housing	A-24

**Location (Figure 1)**

The City of Rensselaer is located on the eastern side of the Hudson River in Rensselaer County, New York (Figure 1). The City of Albany lies directly west and the Towns of North and East Greenbush lie east of the City. The City of Rensselaer is accessible from the east and west via Interstate 90 and US 9 & 20 which run through the northern and southern portions of the City, respectively. Interstates 87 and 787, located in Albany County, link Rensselaer to western and northern New York.

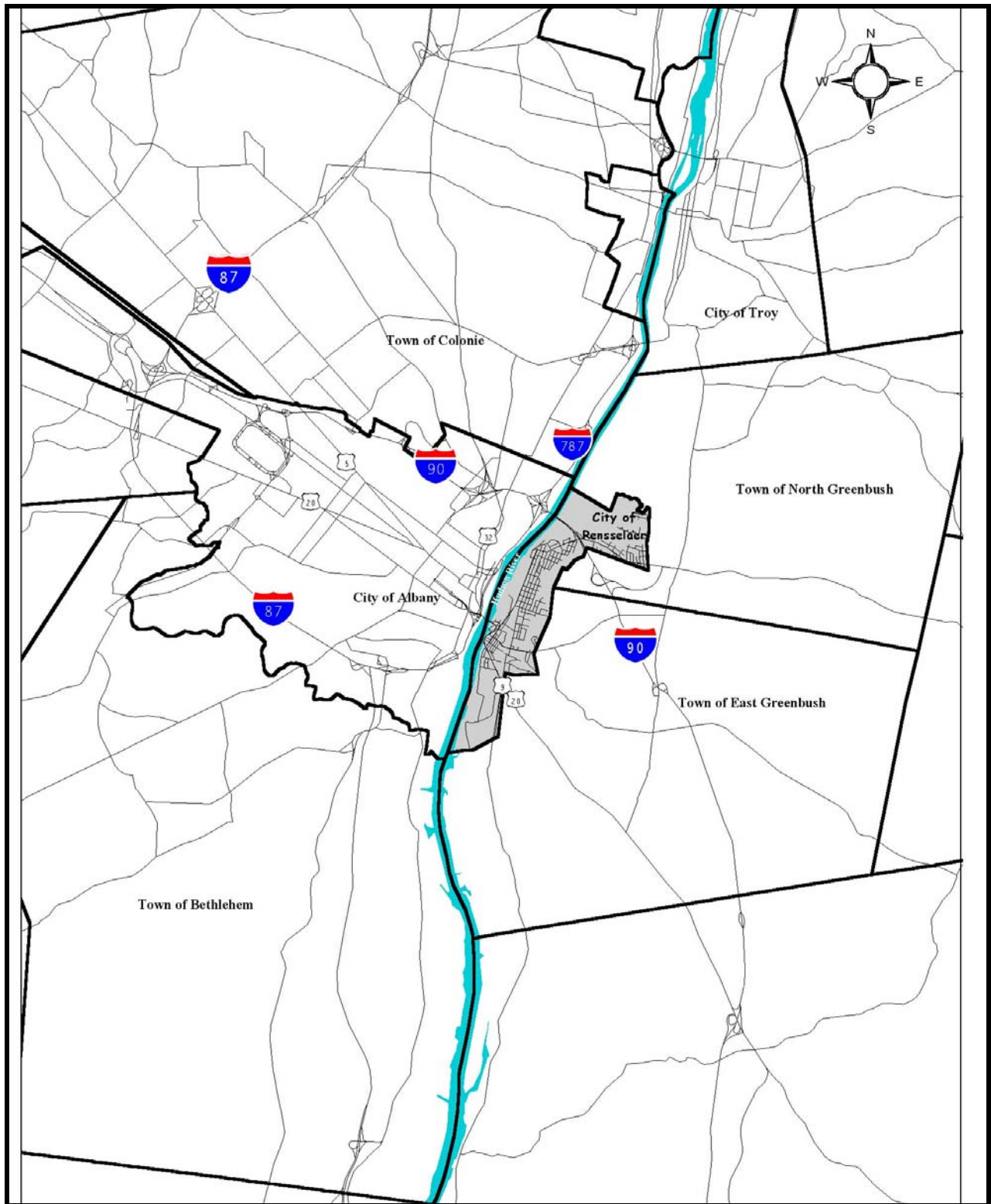


Figure 1

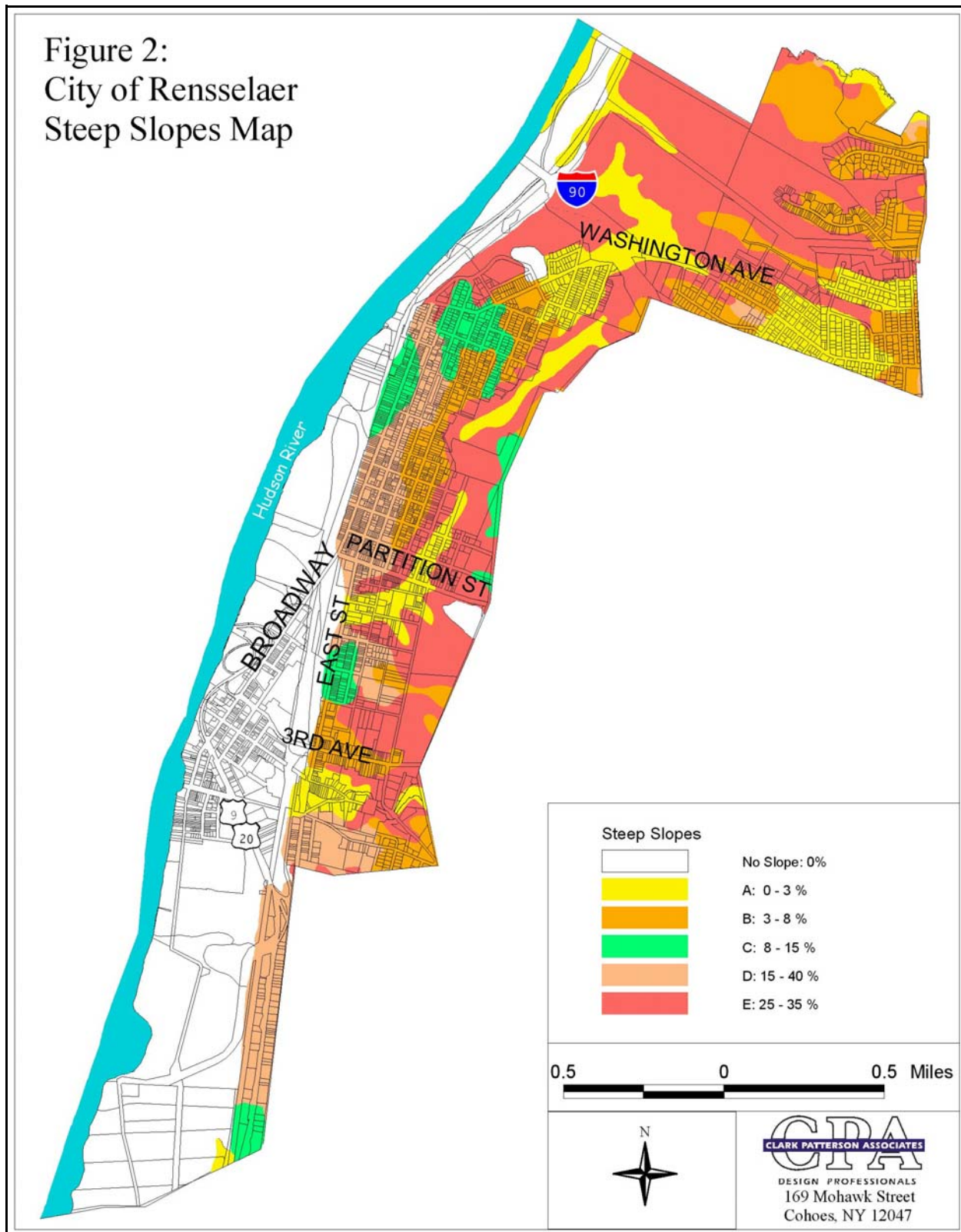
## ***Natural Features***

### **Topography and Steep Slopes (Figure 2)**

The Hudson River Valley was subject to numerous glacial movements during the time glacial Lake Albany was occupying the region. Over time, the ice margins receded northward depositing lacustrine clays and silt, which formed the terraces and hills that define region today. Figure 2, derived from the USDA's Soil Survey for Rensselaer County, provides the locations of steep slopes in the City of Rensselaer.

Steep slopes generally indicate areas where development should be avoided due to unstable soils. In Rensselaer, areas of steep slope (greater than 15 percent) can be found in the eastern and northeastern portions of the City and in the area between Broadway and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. The majority of the City has slopes ranging from zero to 15 percent. The area directly adjacent to the Hudson River generally has no slope, which makes these areas conducive to any type of development.

Figure 2:  
City of Rensselaer  
Steep Slopes Map



### **Watersheds, Lakes and Streams (Figure 3)**

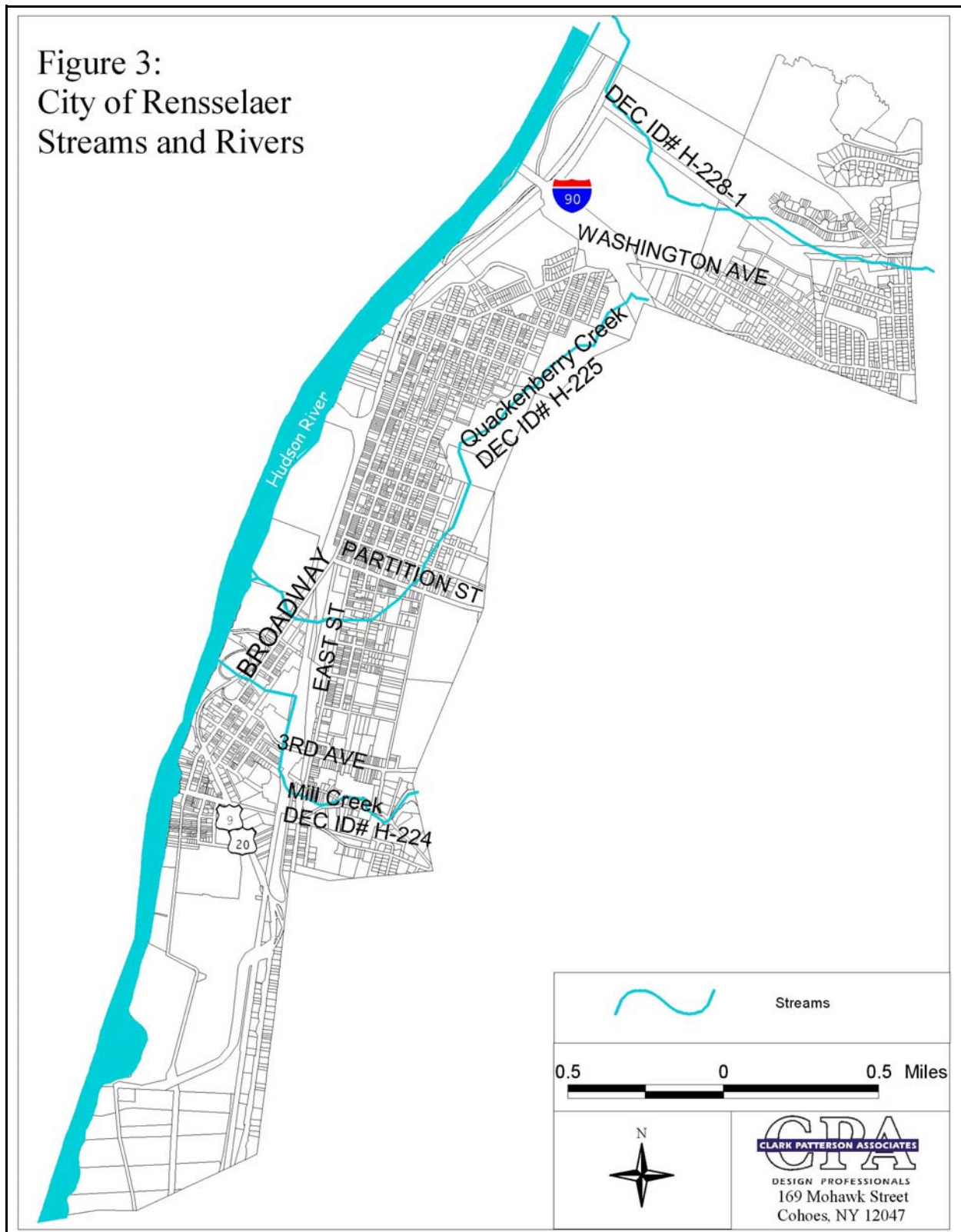
A watershed is defined as the area of land that drains into a particular water body. The City of Rensselaer drains west into the Middle Hudson River basin. The Hudson River, which serves as the City's western boundary, is the main surface water body in Rensselaer. The Hudson River begins at Lake Tear of the Clouds in the Adirondacks and terminates at the Atlantic Ocean in New York City.

The major streams in the City of Rensselaer include:

- *Mill Creek* (DEC Water Index #H-224): Located in the center of the City, Mill Creek drains into the Hudson River. Mill Creek is designated as a Class C water body, and therefore, is suitable for recreational use. A study of the creek conducted by the Department of Environmental Conservation's Region 4 Fisheries Office in 1934 concluded that the water body was heavily polluted and contaminated with raw sewage. A more recent study of the creek has not been conducted since then to determine if conditions have changed.
- *Quackenberry Creek* (DEC Water Index -225): Located in the northeastern section of the City, Quackenberry Creek also drains into the Hudson River. Quackenberry Creek is designated as a Class C water body, and therefore, is suitable for recreational use. A study conducted in July 1991 by the Department of Environmental Conservation's Region 4 Fisheries Office noted the presence of American Eel, Brown Trout, Common Shinner, Black Nose Dace, Creek Chub, White Sucker, Rock Bass, Pumpkin Seed, Blue Gill, and Blue Black Herring.
- *Unnamed Creek* (DEC Water Index H-228-1): Located in the north of the city, this unnamed creek also drains into the Hudson River. It is designated as a Class C water body and is suitable for recreational use, with fish propagation being the principle use. Studies of the creek conducted in 1934 and 1955 indicated the presence of warm water fish, including minnows, suckers and American eel.



Figure 3:  
City of Rensselaer  
Streams and Rivers





### **Floodplains** (Figure 4)

The City of Rensselaer has 100-year floodplains generally located along the bank of Hudson River, Quackenberry Creek, and Mill Creek. In the southern section of the City the 100-year floodplain for the Hudson River extends east to East Street, and in the northern section of the City it extends to the railroad embankment.

### **Wetlands**

The New York State Department of Conservation (NYSDEC) regulates wetlands that are 12.4 acres or greater. There are no NYSDEC wetlands located in the City of Rensselaer. However, federally regulated wetlands not categorized by the NYSDEC may exist in the City. In order to avoid costly fines and penalties, developers should contact the NYSDEC Regional Office 4 for permitting information if any wetlands exist on a proposed site.

Figure 4:  
City of Rensselaer  
Floodplains Map

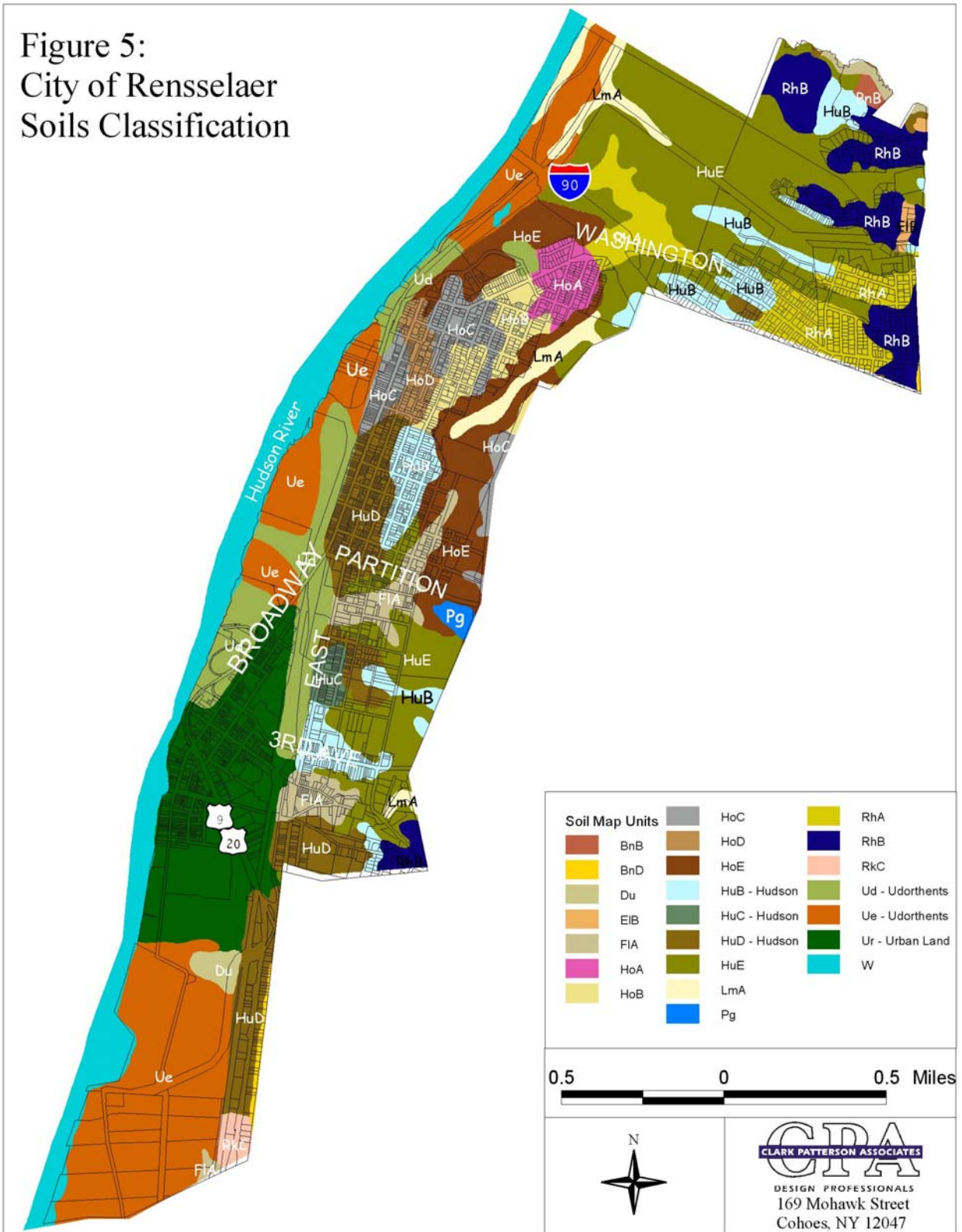




### **Soils (Figure 5)**

According to the General Soils Map created by the United States Department of Agriculture for Rensselaer County, Rensselaer's soils are mainly categorized as Udorthents, Urban, Hoosic and Hudson (see map). The eastern portion of the City, located between the Hudson River and Broadway is classified as Udorthents. This soil classification is generally deep, sandy, and moderately well drained. The soil in Rensselaer's Central Business District, located between Broadway, East Street, Partition Street and US Route 9 & 20, is classified as Urban. This soil classification consists of heavily built-up residential and commercial areas, 90 percent of which is covered with streets, buildings, and parking lots. The soils in northern section of the City, Partition Street to the northern and eastern City line, are classified as Hudson and Hoosic. The Hudson and Hoosic soil classifications are also, generally deep and well drained.

Figure 5:  
City of Rensselaer  
Soils Classification





## ***Community Services***

### **Fire, Police and Ambulance Facilities**

The City of Rensselaer's police department, located at 505 Broadway, provides local police service to 7,761 residents. Rensselaer's police department is comprised of 21 full-time police officers.

The City of Rensselaer Fire Department includes both paid and volunteer staff. Although other communities in the Capital District have begun instituting a similar approach, Rensselaer's use of paid and volunteer staff has been a longstanding policy in the Fire Department. Currently there are 12 full-time and three part-time paid personnel and approximately 20 active volunteers. The Fire Department currently operates out of three firehouses:

- Mink's Firehouse at 959 Broadway;
- J. and Ring Hose Company at 31 Second Avenue;
- James Hill Hook and Ladder at 42 Partition Street.

The Fire Department has four engines (pumper trucks) in active use. In addition to responding to fire emergencies, the Fire Department is also the first response team for medical emergencies in the City.

Ambulance service is provided to the City via Rensselaer Volunteer Ambulance as well as Empire Ambulance, which is a private service provider. Rensselaer Volunteer Ambulance contracts with Empire to provide emergency medical service from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday.

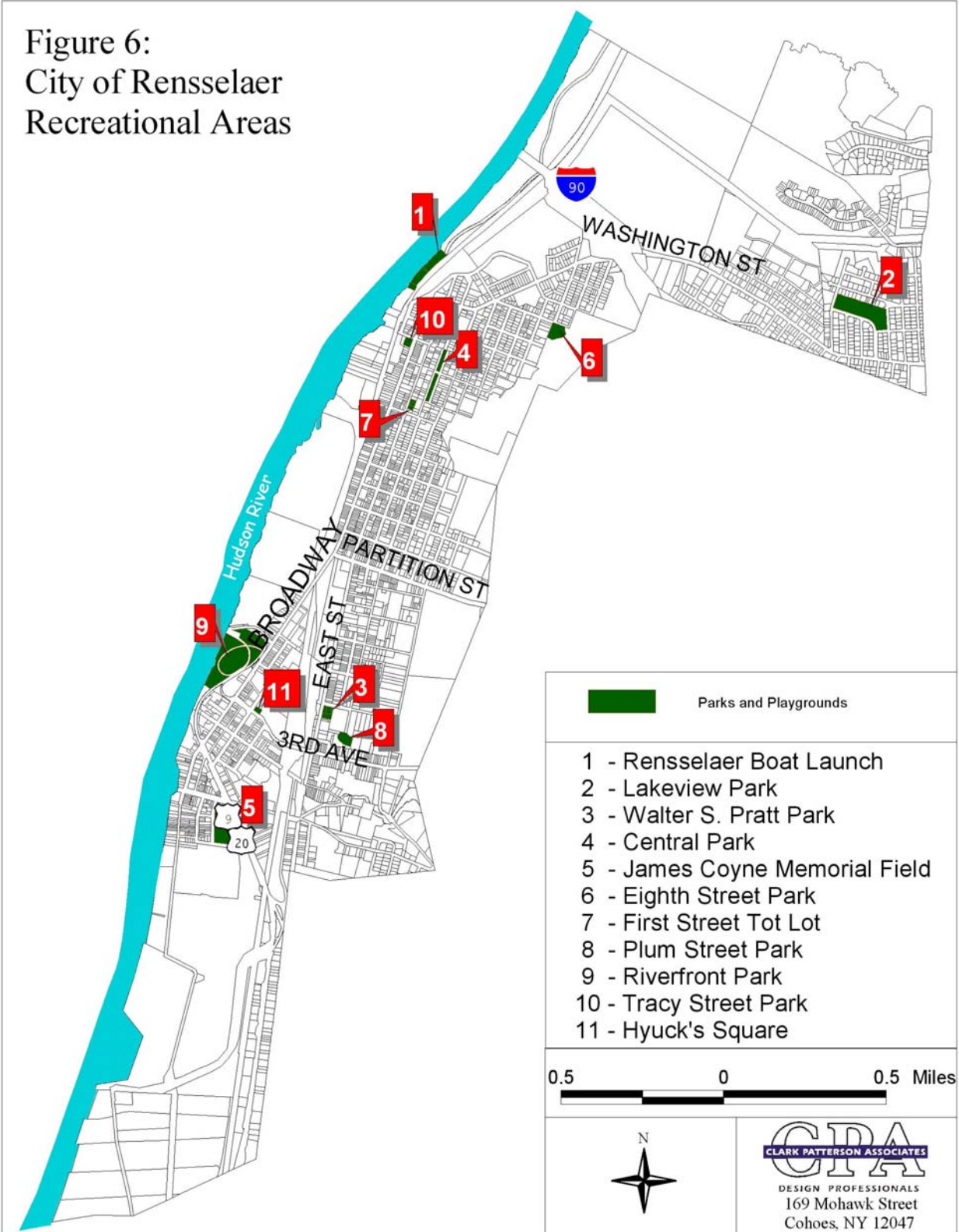
### **Educational Facilities**

The Rensselaer City School District maintains two City schools. Currently, the City's school district has 1,055 students enrolled in grades K – 12. The Van Rensselaer Elementary School, located at 199 Washington Ave, enrolls 495 students in grades K – 5. The Rensselaer Middle High School, located at 555 Broadway, enrolls 560 students in grades 6 – 12.

### **Parks and Recreation (Figure 6)**

The City of Rensselaer manages 11 parks, 7 playgrounds, 12 basketball courts, and 6 tennis courts. The City's Department of Public Works maintains the parks and facilities and the Youth Bureau sponsors and provides programs and activities. Other community recreational facilities are located in the City, including the Boys and Girls Club of Southern Rensselaer County and the Rensselaer Community Center. Both provide a wide variety of recreational and educational services to the community.

Figure 6:  
City of Rensselaer  
Recreational Areas



## **Transportation Network (Figure 7)**

Since the primary mode of transportation in Rensselaer is the automobile, Rensselaer maintains a well-organized road network. The City's grid patterned street system is compatible with its urban character. A linear street grid provides pedestrians and motorists with many possible paths to reach their destination.

Streets, regardless of design and pattern, are generally classified according to administrative authority and function; that is who owns and maintains them and what type of uses they are designed to handle. It is important to understand both classifications in order to evaluate and plan for future improvements associated with development.

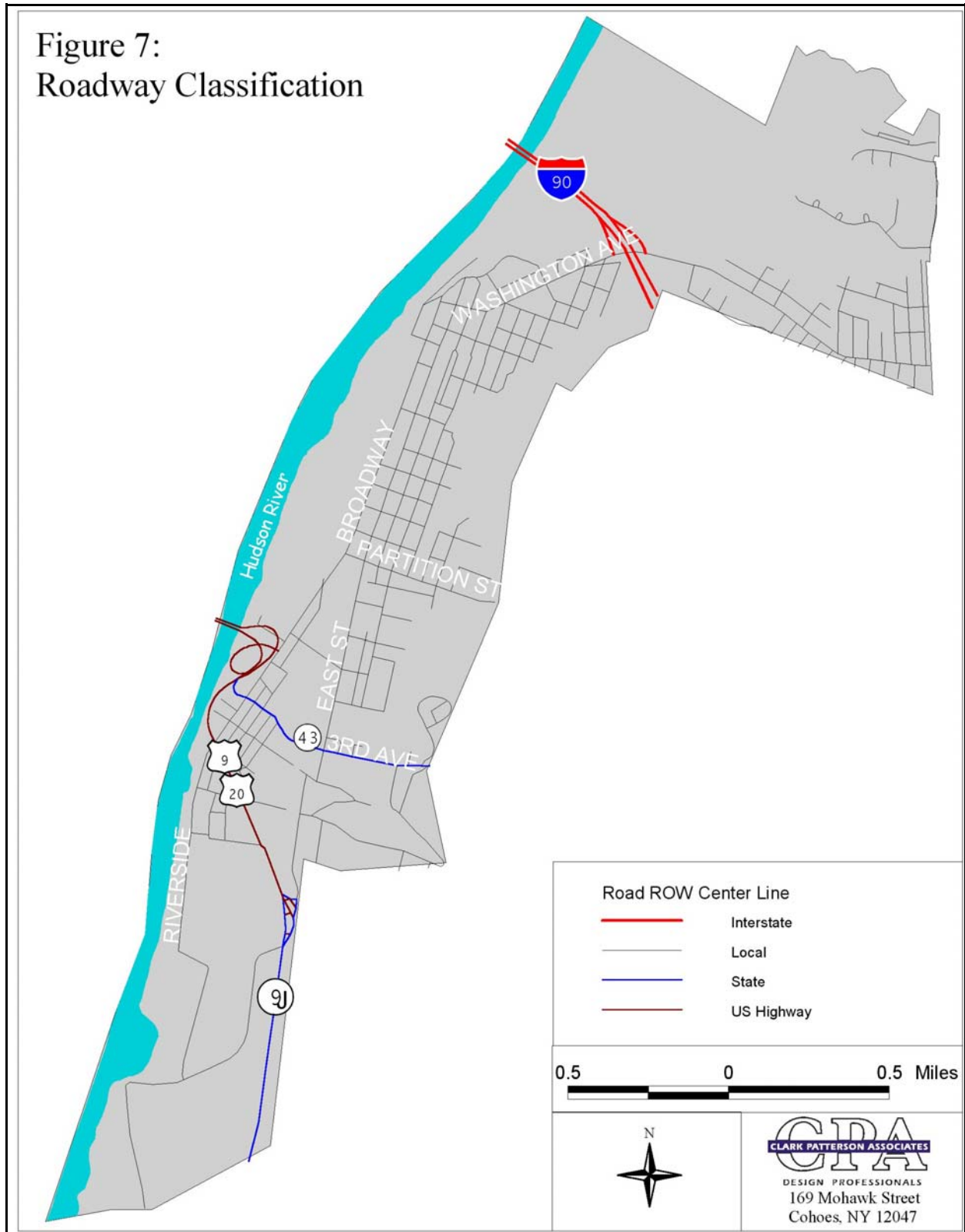
Rensselaer's road network is owned and maintained at three municipal levels: City; State and Federal. Examples of City roads include Broadway, which is a major north-south arterial in Rensselaer, as well as Washington and Partition Streets. The State is responsible for Routes 9J and 43. Federal roads in the area include Interstate 90, which runs east-west across the northern section of the City, and US 9 & 20, which is the City's main route into the City of Albany.

There are also three functional categories of roads in Rensselaer, including:

- **Highways:** These roadways provide fast access into and out of a municipality, typically characterized by limited access. Interstate 90, which provides accessibility to points east and west of the City, is an example of a highway in this area. Exit #7 on Interstate 90 is located in the northern section of the City.
- **Arterials:** These roadways are designed to accommodate both through traffic and access to residential and commercial uses located on and adjacent to the corridor. Routes 43 and 9 & 20 are examples of this classification.
- **Major Access:** These roadways generally accommodate traffic from residential and commercial areas and direct it to the arterials. Roads in this category include Broadway, 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, Partition Street and Washington Street.



Figure 7:  
Roadway Classification



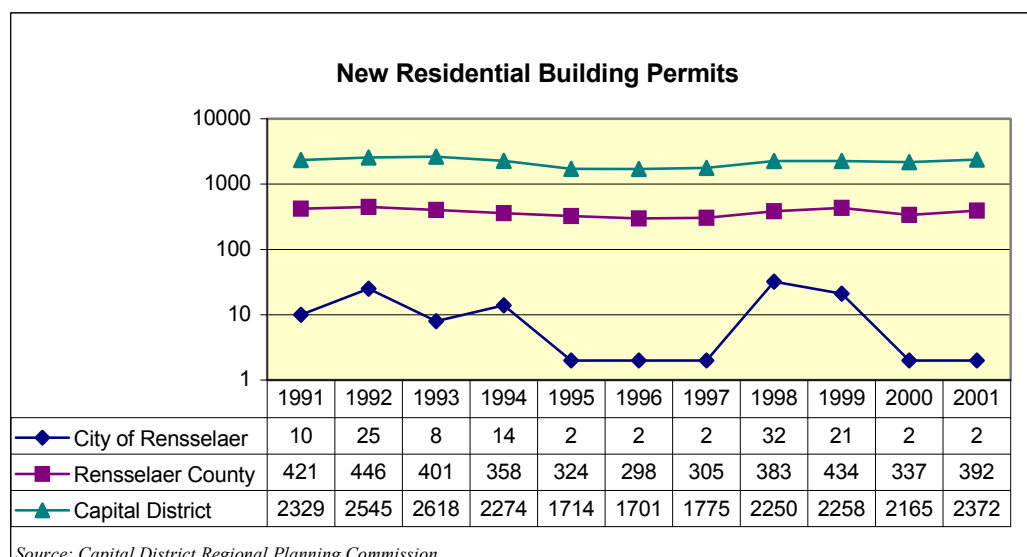
## Development

### Trends

Examining new residential building permits is a good indicator of development in a given area. The chart below graphically depicts the number of new residential building permits issued per year over the past decade in the City of Rensselaer, Rensselaer County and the Capital District, which includes Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, and Schenectady counties. It is important to note that data for new residential permits was interpolated in 1996, 1997 and 2001. Consequently the chart below does not fully depict building activity over the last decade in the City of Rensselaer. Significant development has occurred in the northeastern part of the City, which was annexed from North Greenbush over the last two decades. Partridge Run, a 59 single-family home development, was built in 1997. Between 2001 and 2002 over 430 new dwelling units, including condominiums and single-family detached homes, were built in Mansions at Tech Parks I and II, Evergreen and Patroon Pointe. Additional development in Patroon Pointe is expected to continue through 2003. The City estimates that no more than six permits for new residential construction were issued annually in the older city neighborhoods over the last five years.

Although housing demand is difficult to predict, Rensselaer should consider where future development should be located as well as what form it should take to respond to any new residential development demand. The City should strive to ensure that the goals and objectives of this plan are achieved. Planning locations for future development can be beneficial to the City for several reasons including:

- Reduced costs for service extensions and improvements;
- Efficient use of existing sewer and water capacity;
- Re-use of existing abandoned or dilapidated structures;
- Increased opportunity for future commercial development in areas accessible to residents;
- Framework for future community services including park locations and infrastructure expansion.



### **Existing Land-Use (Figure 8)**

Figure 8 provides the City of Rensselaer's Existing Land Use Map based on the County Assessor's property classification. The table below provides the breakdown of land uses currently present in Rensselaer. This information is based on data maintained by the Rensselaer County Office of Real Property.

In all, there are 3,195 parcels representing approximately 2,933 acres in the City of Rensselaer. Rensselaer's assessed land value is \$27,819,468, while the total assessed value (including structures and improvements) is \$178,840,302.

Rensselaer Property Classification		Number of		Assessed	Assessed
Property Code	Property Class	Parcels	Acreage	Land Value	Total Value
100	AGRICULTURAL	0	0	0	0
200	RESIDENTIAL	2175	375	\$9,868,350	\$56,017,781
300	VACANT	657	961	\$3,307,800	\$3,497,400
400	COMMERCIAL	250	391	\$7,087,550	\$41,429,113
500	RECREATION AND ENTERTAINMENT	11	44	\$372,000	\$482,800
600	COMMUNITY SERVICE	41	169	\$1,812,000	\$19,516,900
700	INDUSTRIAL	16	284	\$2,277,596	\$15,329,805
800	PUBLIC SERVICE	25	629	\$2,962,672	\$42,424,703
900	WILD, CONSERVATION, FOREST	20	80	\$131,500	\$141,800
TOTAL		3195	2933	\$27,819,468	\$178,840,302

*Source: Rensselaer County Office of Real Property, 2001*

### ***Residential***

Approximately 12 percent of Rensselaer's total acreage is assessed residential (375 acres). In general, residential development is located in the northern and central sections of the City. Residential development in these sections of the City tend to maintain high-density patterns. Parcel sizes are approximately 4,000 square feet and typically contain two-story structures. According to the 2000 US Census, the City of Rensselaer has an aging housing stock. The bulk of the City's residences were constructed prior to 1939 (56 percent). Residential development in the northeastern section of City has followed a more suburban pattern with respect to design and scale. Homes in this area are located on larger lots with a street pattern made up of collectors and arterials.

### ***Commercial***

In the City of Rensselaer 250 parcels are classified as commercial. Commercial development makes up approximately eight percent of the City's land uses and approximately 23 percent of the City's total assessed property value. Since commercial uses tend to demand less in public services than residential uses, maintaining an appropriate balance between residential and commercial land is critical to minimizing the tax burden placed on City residents. Rensselaer should

continue to attract commercial development in the City in order to maintain a balanced tax base.

### ***Industrial (Figure 9)***

Sixteen parcels, encompassing 284 acres, are classified as industrial uses in Rensselaer. The majority of industrial property is located in the southern section of the City. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation has identified five, inactive hazardous waste disposal sites located on industrial property within the City of Rensselaer. They include the former City of Rensselaer Landfill, Sterling Drug site, and three locations on the BASF site. Figure 9 provides the locations of the City's Inactive Hazardous Waste Disposal Sites.

### ***Vacant***

Vacant land represents 20 percent of the property in the City of Rensselaer. The 657 parcels classified as vacant encompass 961 acres of land. Vacant parcels in the northern edge of the City and along the northern banks of the Hudson River may represent development opportunities for the City to explore.

### ***Parks and Open Space***

Parks and recreation areas are important components of a community's public facilities. As with any City, parks in Rensselaer provide an opportunity for people to interact with their neighbors, gather in large groups for events, and participate in a variety of recreational activities. Additionally, parks provide green and open space areas that provide scenic and environmental benefits to the community. The City of Rensselaer maintains both recreational parks and fields as well as urban pocket parks. Pocket parks are a great way to provide open space in areas of the City that have limited green spaces.

Currently, Rensselaer maintains 11 parks. They include, James Coyne Memorial Field, Riverfront Park, Central Park, Eighth Street Park, Lakeview Park, Fort Crailo Park, the Rensselaer Boat Launch, East Street Park that features a baby pool the First Street Tot Lot, and parks located at Plum and Tracy Streets.

Figure 8:  
City of Rensselaer  
Existing Land Use Map

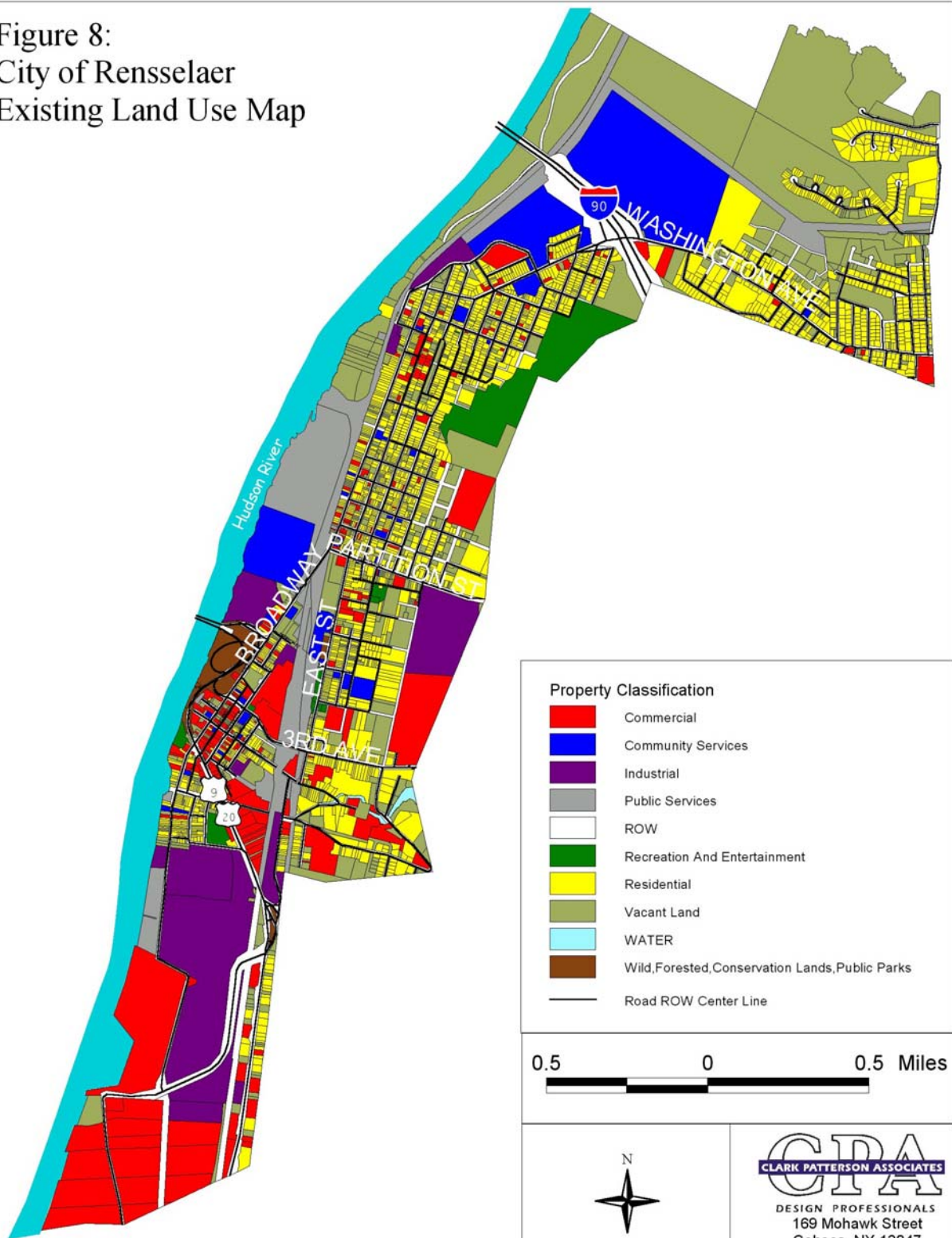


Figure 9:  
City of Rensselaer  
Inactive Hazardous Waste Sites

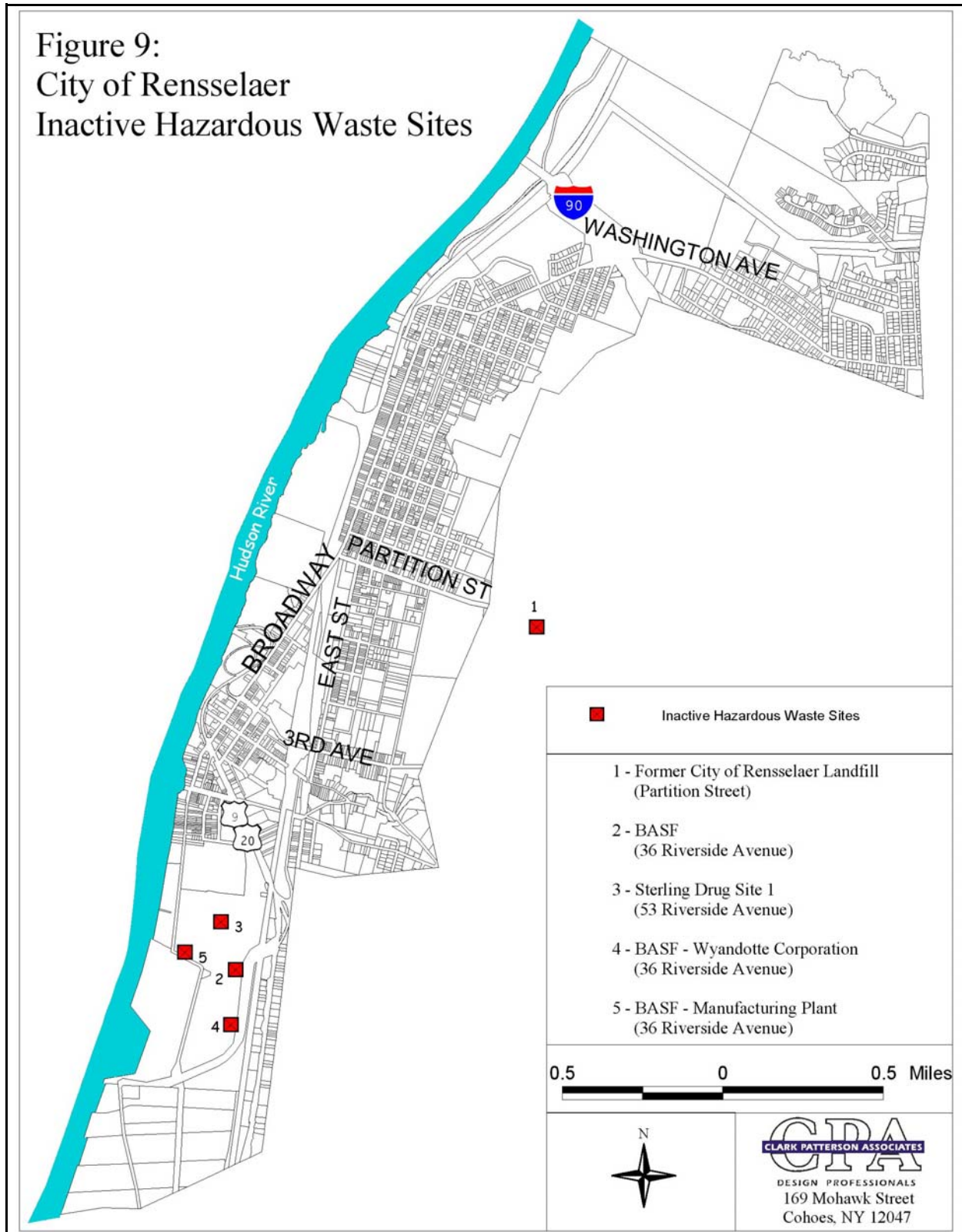
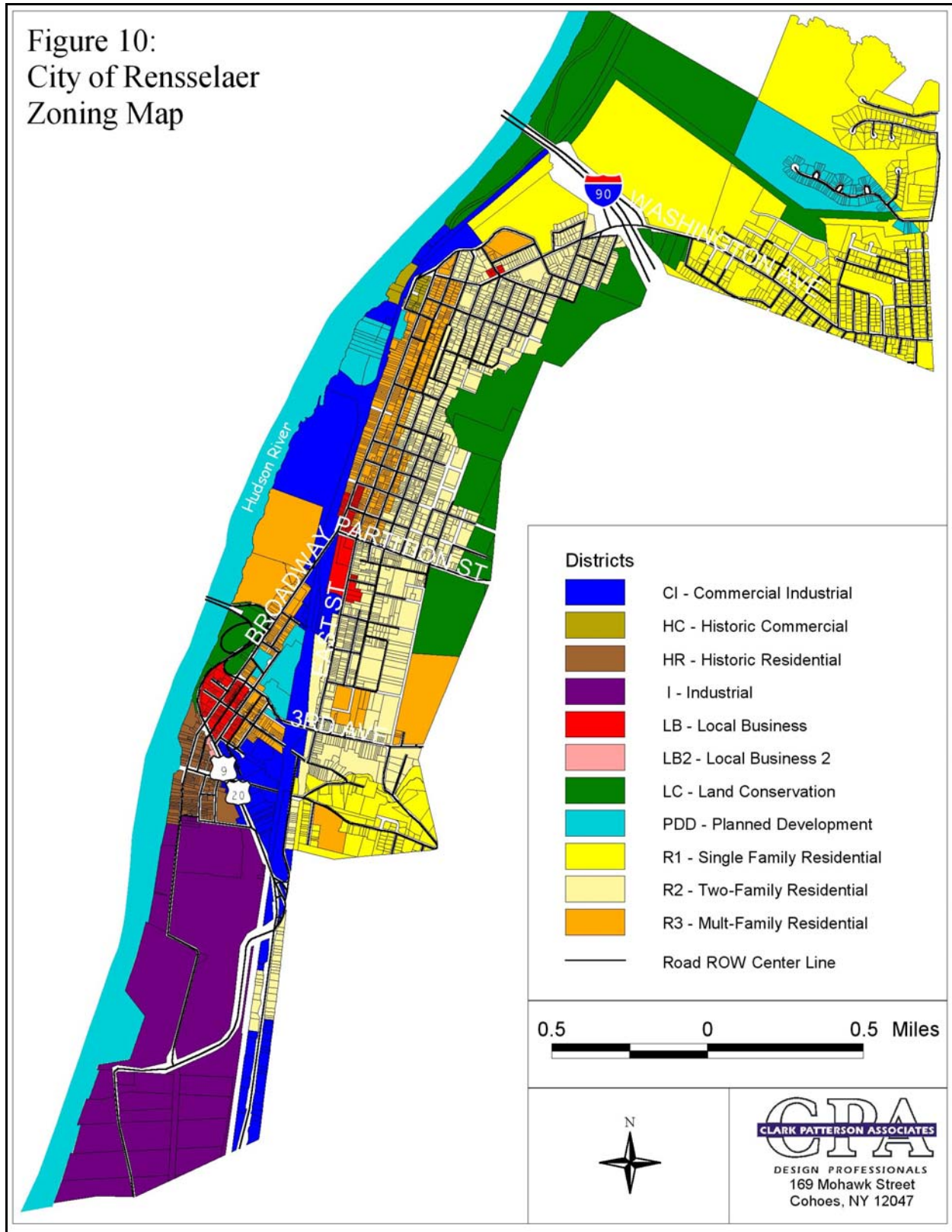


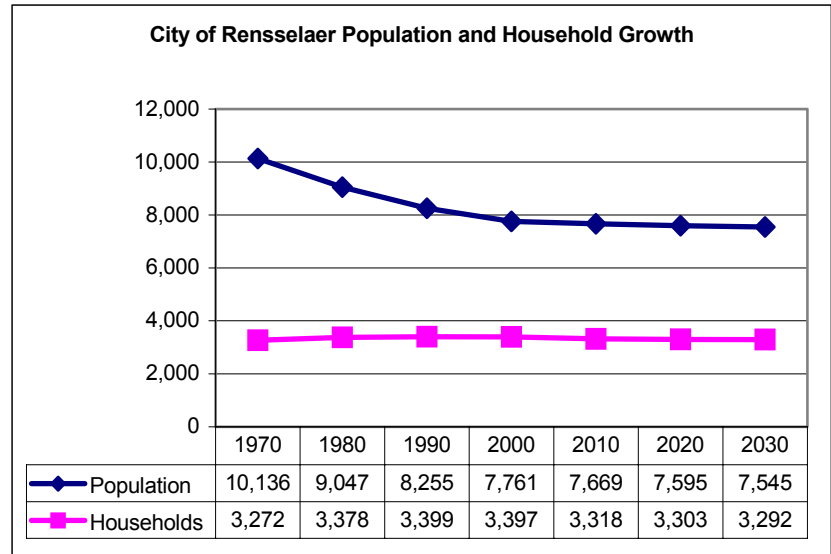


Figure 10:  
City of Rensselaer  
Zoning Map



## Population Characteristics

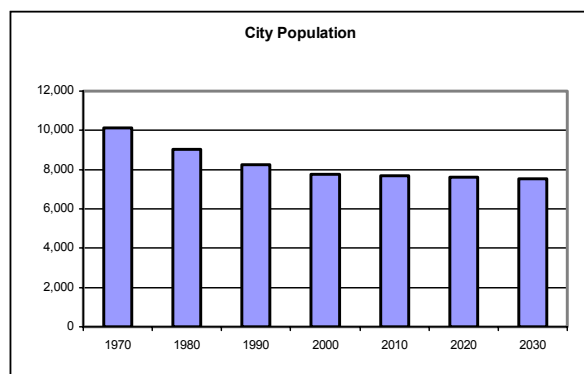
Demographic composition is a collection of population characteristics that defines a community. Future policies, land use, and development practices often depend largely on a community's population growth or decline, age distribution, educational attainment, transportation commuting trends, places of work and occupation, changes in income, and household characteristics. The information provided in this section was gathered from the US Census Bureau and the Capital District Regional Planning Commission.



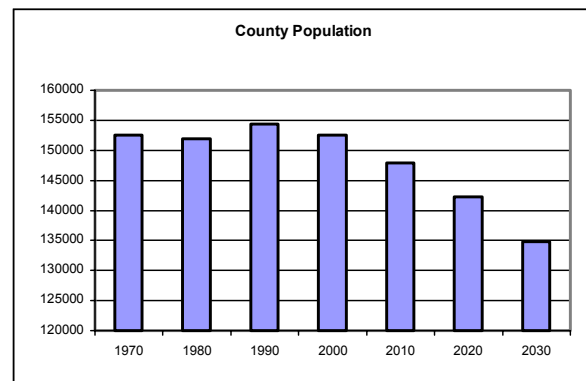
*Source: 2000 US Census.*

## Population

Population data for the City of Rensselaer from 1970 to 2030 reveals that the number of City residents has steadily declined since 1970. Rensselaer's greatest population reduction occurred between 1970 and 1980 when it decreased by 11 percent. Population-forecasting figures estimate the City will lose approximately 1 percent per year through 2030. Household size has dropped from 2.42 persons per household in 1990 to 2.28 in 2000, which is consistent with national trends. Over the last three decades, the number of households in the City of Rensselaer has remained relatively steady from 1970 to 2000. However, household projections anticipate that the number of households will slowly decline over the next 30 years.



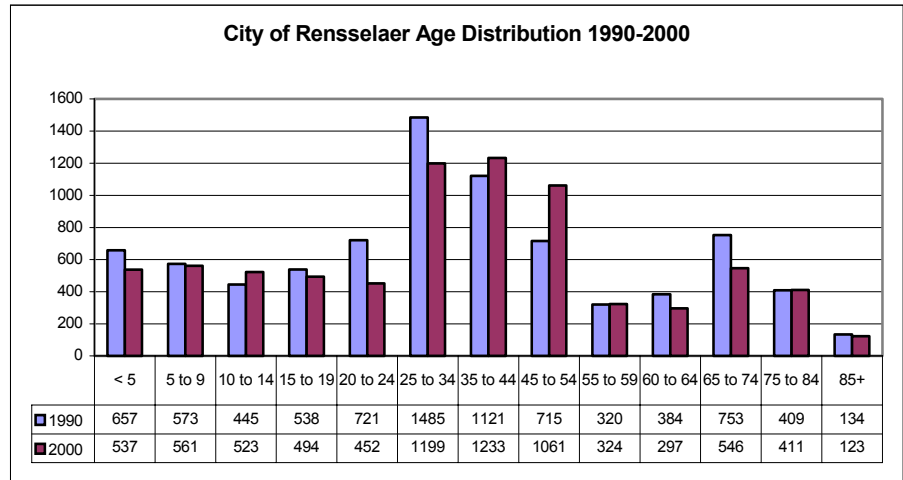
*Source: 2000 US Census.*





## Age

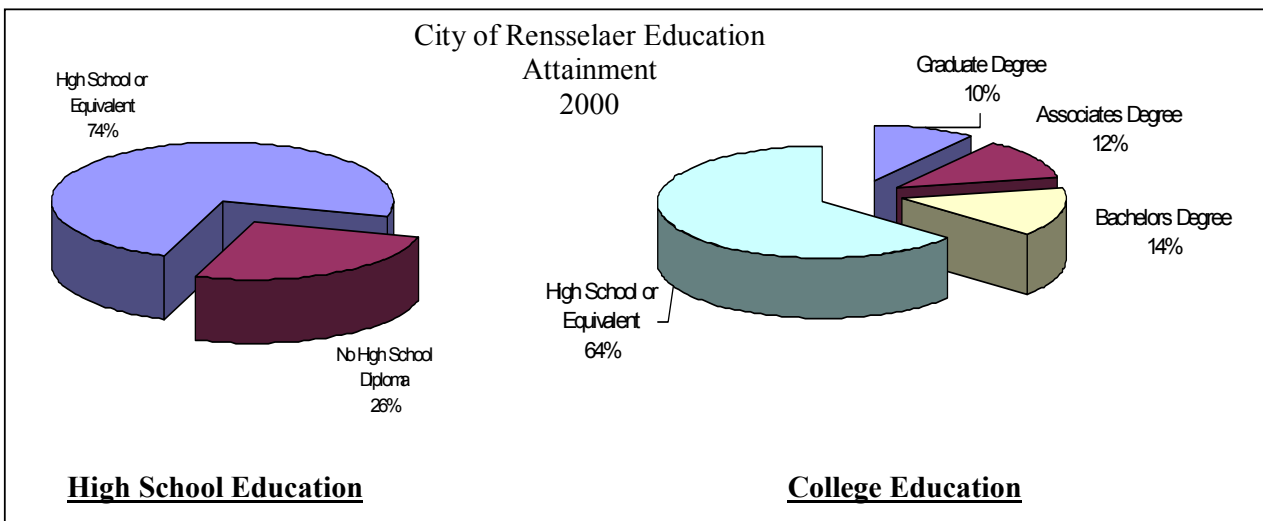
Analyzing age distribution provides important information that will help a community adequately accommodate its residents with sufficient public services. The City of Rensselaer's median age in 2000 was 35



years. The figure below indicates that the City's greatest population change occurred in the 45 to 54 age cohort, a 48 percent increase over the past ten years. The student portion of the population, the 5 to 9, 10 to 14, and 15 to 19 age cohort, remained steady over the 10-year period. On the other hand, the elderly population (>65), and pre-school aged children (<5), experienced a slight decrease between 1990 and 2000. For example, the 65 to 74 age cohort decreased by 27 percent, and the <5 age cohort decreased by 18 percent. While some of these decreases in age cohorts have occurred due to the overall decrease in City population, Rensselaer should examine the impacts of lost population in these key age groups and determine why the reductions are occurring.

## Education

The graphs below, derived from the 2000 US Census, reveal that 74 percent of Rensselaer's population earned a high school diploma or attained a general education diploma (GED). Of those who completed high school, 12 percent earned



Source: 2000 US Census.

an associates degree, 14 percent achieved a bachelor's diploma, and 10 percent earned a graduate degree.

### **Employment Characteristics**

In 2000, the unemployment rate in Rensselaer County was unchanged from its 1990 rate of 4 percent, well below the national rate of 5.3 percent. Thirty three percent of County's residents worked within Rensselaer County while 66 percent worked outside the County. The personal automobile was the chosen means of transportation to work, 73 percent, with approximately 15 percent of Rensselaer's residents carpooling. The majority of the City's residents experienced an average travel time to work of 19 minutes.

### **Major Employers**

One of the major employers for Rensselaer County is New York State, employing 1,868 County residents. The City of Albany, located west of the City of Rensselaer, is the major employer of the Capital District, and subsequently acts as the primary indicator of economic health in the County and Region. The table to the right indicates that government, education, and health service employers are the main industry sectors in the County. Employers, such as Northeast Health, Seton Health System, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Rensselaer County, and New York State, rely on residents of the County as their labor pool source.

### **Employment by Industry**

The City of Rensselaer's employment

Place of Work		
Work in County of Residence		33.7%
Work Outside County of Residence		66.3%
Means of Transportation to Work		
Personal Automobile	2701	73.0%
Carpooled	552	14.9%
Public Transportation	209	5.6%
Bicycle		
Walked	162	4.4%
Other Means	13	0.4%
Worked at Home	64	1.7%
Average Time to Work (Minutes)	19.3	
Time to Work (Minutes)		
<5	108	3.0%
5-9	457	13.0%
10-14	830	23.0%
15-19	862	24.0%
20-24	547	15.0%
25-29	221	6.0%
30-34	338	9.0%
35-39	17	0.5%
40-44	39	1.0%
45-59	85	2.0%
60-89	77	2.0%
90+	56	1.5%

*Source: 2000 US Census.*

Rensselaer County Percent of Employed Persons by Sector	
Industry Sector	% of Employed Persons
Service - Health	17.6%
Government	16.1%
Service - Education	7.9%
Government - Education	20.4%
Service - Business	4.8%
Retail	6.5%
Retail & Distribution	3.0%
Service - Human	2.3%
Insurance	3.6%
Construction	4.9%
Manufacturing	9.8%
Finance	2.3%
Transportation	0.3%
Greenhouses	0.2%
Retail Service	0.2%
TOTAL	100.0%

*Source: Rensselaer County Chamber of Commerce*

by industry for the year 2000 is outlined in the table on the next page. Public administration (17.6 percent), education/health service (17.3 percent), and retail trade (11.8 percent) were the City's top employment sectors. This information reflects the industries in which Rensselaer residents are employed. This is not a breakdown of the industries present in the City, however.

Today, many Upstate New York communities have experienced a decline in the number of manufacturing and agricultural jobs.

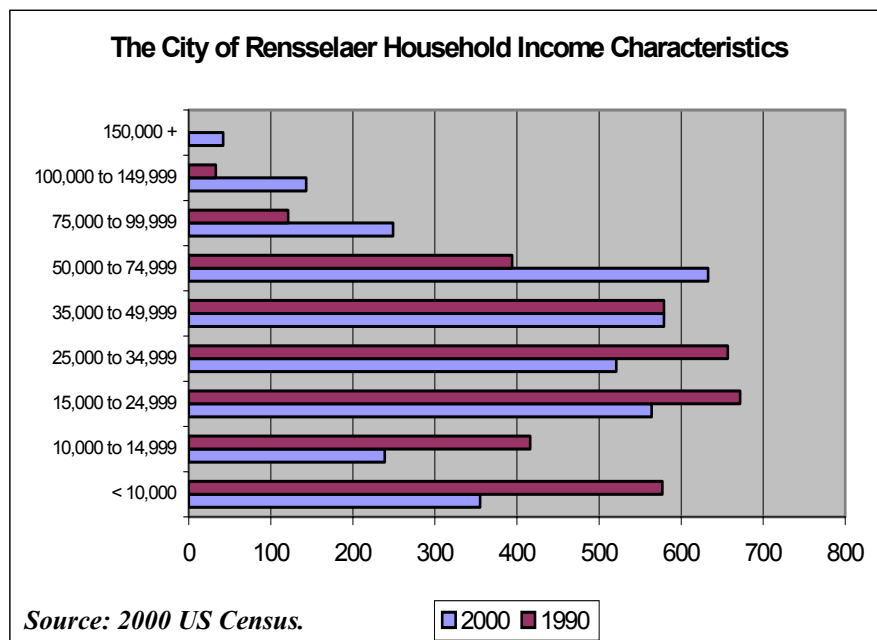
Rensselaer is no exception. US Census figures show that the number of City residents employed in manufacturing jobs declined between 1990 and 2000, dropping from 11 percent to 8.4 percent. The agricultural sector has seen similar decreases, dropping from 35 residents in 1990 to 4 in 2000. This decrease indicates that the agricultural industry in this region is shrinking. The trend of declining agricultural workers in New York State is also due, in part, to the consolidation of farming operations. The sector that has seen an increase in workers is the education and health industry. In 1990, Rensselaer residents employed in that sector increased from 14 percent in 1990 to 17 percent in 2000.

City or Rensselaer Employment By Industry	Number Employed	Percent of Employed Persons
Agriculture and Mining	4	0.1%
Construction	251	6.7%
Manufacturing	315	8.4%
Wholesale Trade	61	1.6%
Retail Trade	445	11.8%
Transportation	257	6.8%
Information	90	2.4%
F/I/R/E	248	6.6%
Sevices	269	7.2%
Education/Health Service	650	17.3%
Recreation/Entertainment	281	7.5%
Other Services	226	6.0%
Public Administration	661	17.6%
TOTAL		100.0%

Source: 2000 US Census

### **Household Income Characteristics**

Household income is a measure of reported wages earned by an entire household. Household incomes, which should be confused with family income, incorporate the earnings of related and unrelated individuals in a dwelling. A household can consist of a single person, a family, a non-traditional family, or non-related persons.



The City of Rensselaer's median household income was \$25,729 in 1990 and \$34,730 in 2000. Although the City's household income appears to have increased significantly over the last decade, an adjustment for inflation reveals a much more modest increase. When adjusted to 2000 dollars, the median household income in 1990 is equal to \$34,459, indicating near stagnant household income increases for City residents. The latest US Census shows that the City of Rensselaer experienced a 60 percent increase in number of households earning \$50,000 to \$74,999. However, this comparison does not factor in the effects of inflation and may not reflect a real increase in income levels within the City. It should be noted that in 2000, the highest percentage of residents were in the \$50,000 to \$74,999 income range, whereas the largest percentage of residents fell into the \$15,000 to \$24,999 income category in 1990.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), three-person households in the Albany-Schenectady-Troy MSA that earn less than or equal to \$39,950 per year are considered low-income. Households earning less than or equal to \$25,000 per year are considered very low-income. Extremely low-income households earn less than or equal to \$15,000 per year. Based on 2000 U.S. Census figures, approximately 901 households (47 percent) in Rensselaer earn less than or equal to \$39,950, and therefore, are classified as low-income residences. Twenty-seven percent of the City's households (512) are considered very low income, while 30 percent are considered extremely low income (188 households).

### **Housing Characteristics**

Generally, residential development is the primary land use in municipalities across the U.S. After all, part of the "American Dream" is owning a home. The City of Rensselaer is no exception. According to Rensselaer County's Real Property Tax Service, 2,175 of the City's total 3,195 lots are considered residential land uses (68 percent).

<b>Housing Units</b>		
Occupied	3397	91.5%
Vacant	316	8.5%
<b>Year Structure Built</b>		
1999 to March 2000	26	0.7%
1995 to 1998	65	1.7%
1990 to 1994	99	2.7%
1980 to 1989	285	7.6%
1970 to 1979	230	6.2%
1960 to 1969	289	7.8%
1940 to 1959	637	17.1%
1939 or Older	2095	56.2%
<b>Median Year Structure Built</b>		
<b>Tenure</b>		
Owner Occupied	1690	49.7%
Renter Occupied	1707	50.3%
<b>Units in Structure</b>		
1, Detached	1459	39.2%
1, Attached	131	3.5%
2	1195	32.1%
3-4	373	10.0%
5-9	224	6.0%
10-19	33	0.9%
20 +	302	8.1%
Mobile Home or Trailer	9	0.2%
Boat, RV, van, etc.	0	0.0%

*Source: 2000 US Census.*

Rensselaer's housing stock is largely comprised of single-family detached houses (39.2 percent) and two-family houses (32.1 percent). A majority of the City's housing units were constructed earlier than 1939. Older housing stock presents the City

with opportunities and challenges. While older homes often have architectural details and integrity that are very appealing and worth preserving, they can detract from the area if the homes have not been maintained well or kept up to code.

Approximately 92 percent of Rensselaer's housing units were occupied, according to the 2000 US Census. Approximately 50 percent of all units are renter-occupied and 50 percent are owner-occupied. The breakdown of owner-occupied versus renter-occupied properties can offer insight into the condition of the housing stock and provide insight into the types of programs that will be needed to address any housing issues currently facing the City. The large number of rental units may indicate that there is a wide variety of housing options available in the City. Affordable housing is an important asset to attracting businesses and prospective employees. Given the close proximity to the State Capital, a major employer in the region, the City can offer prospective residents a wide variety of housing choices.

However, the relatively high percentage of renter-occupied housing units may indicate an issue with absentee landlords and the negative impacts that can arise as a result. Generally, absentee landlords are a concern for communities because they lack a strong connection to the tenants that occupy their rental units or the community in which the properties are located. Consequently, buildings may become run down and lack sufficient maintenance, which can negatively impact the surrounding neighborhood's appearance and housing values. The City must assess whether its concerns about its housing stock's quality and maintenance are linked to the type of occupancy (renter versus owner) and determine strategies to address those concerns.

