



# FORT ANN EMPIRE STATE TRAIL CONNECTION PLAN





## INTRODUCTION

In 2017, New York State launched the Empire State Trail (EST) to promote outdoor recreation, encourage healthy lifestyles, support community vitality, and bolster tourism-related economic development. North of Albany, the EST follows the Champlain Canalway Trail for the majority of the route and runs through the Town and Village of Fort Ann.

The section of the EST in the Village and Town of Fort Ann is the Fort Ann Towpath Trail and consists of an off-road paved trail that is located between NYS Route 4 and the Champlain Canal. The trail meets Ann Street just 400 feet east of George Street, the commercial core of Fort Ann, before heading east along Ann Street, crossing the Champlain Canal, leaving the Village, and continuing as a largely on-road trail to Comstock and points north. Heading south, the Fort Ann Trail continues as an off-road trail to Hudson Falls and points south.

According to 2022 Canalway Trail Counts, there are over 10,000 annual users of the EST in Fort Ann. The benefits of this potential tourism, however, are not being fully leveraged by the Town and Village. As discussed further in this report, there are opportunities to improve signage, physical connections and amenities to guide visitors to the services and businesses in Fort Ann. The following plan identifies recommendations to encourage better connections between the EST and Village Center and lays out a strategy for implementation.



# EXISTING CONDITIONS

The study area is depicted in the map to the right and includes portions of the EST, Ann and George Streets, and neighboring properties within the Village of Fort Ann. A description of current conditions in the study area is provided below based on a review of publicly available data and a site visit conducted on July 21, 2023.





## EMPIRE STATE TRAIL

Within the study area, the EST consists of an approximately ten-foot-wide, off-road, paved trail south of Ann Street, before turning on-road at Ann Street and heading east over the Champlain Canal.

Route assembly signs are used to identify the Empire State Trail path. At the Ann Street intersection there are four route assembly signs directing trail users to the EST, as well as a sign indicating no motor vehicles. Additionally, there are two interpretive signs on the east side of the EST south of the intersection with Ann Street. Interpretive signs provide trail users with information about the path. As shown in the photo below,

there is also a South Canal Street Sign located on the west side of the EST; however, South Canal Street, a dead-end dirt vehicular road is actually located to the east of the trail. A sign directing trail users to a local restaurant is also located on the west side of the EST.

## ROADWAYS

The study area is centered around the intersection of George and Ann Streets, a signalized intersection of the Village's two main roadways. George Street is coterminous with NYS Route 4. NYS Route 149 runs along George Street south of Ann Street before heading west along Ann Street.

George Street is the central commercial spine of the Village of Fort Ann. Within the study area, is a two-way principal arterial with a posted speed limit of 35 miles per hour (mph). The roadway has one lane of travel in each direction with parking on both sides. One exception is a left-turn only lane that is added to the northbound lane as it approaches Ann Street. South of Ann Street, George Street's curb-to-curb width is approximately 40 feet; north of Ann Street it is approximately 45 feet. Sidewalks run the length of George Street and are separated from the roadway by a planted verge.



The signs at the EST's intersection with Ann Street creates visual clutter and user confusion.



	George Street (US Route 4)		Ann Street (NYS Route 149)	
	Sout of Ann St.	North of Ann St.	West of George St.	East of George St.
<b>Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)</b>	5,754	11,978	9,131	718
<b>Truck AADT</b>	653	1,639	1,488	44
<b>Percent Trucks (%)</b>	11	14	16	6

Ann Street west of George Street is similar in design, with a 40-foot curb-to-curb width, one lane of travel in each direction, parking on both sides, and sidewalks separated from the roadway by a planted verge. Approximately 200 feet east of George Street, Ann Street narrows to approximately 20 feet in width and provides one travel lane in each direction, with no on-street parking. Sidewalks along this segment of Ann Street are limited to the south side of the roadway to just east of the EST and to the north side of the roadway from that point east. As shown in the photo on the previous page, the sidewalks are narrow and do not include a roadway buffer (e.g., a planted verge).

George Street, as well as Ann Street west of George Street, have high traffic volumes (upwards of 5,700 vehicles per day) and truck use (accounting for over 11 percent of vehicles). Currently, truck traffic through this intersection dominates the corridor due to excessive turning movements required, creating longer pedestrian crossing distances at the intersection's western and southern crosswalks.

The table above summarizes NYSDOT traffic data for George and Ann Streets.



Pedestrian amenities along Ann Street are limited.

## LAND USE

The usage, needs, and opportunities of lands near and adjacent to the EST were evaluated and are shown in the map on the following page. As previously noted, the study area generally consists of the Village's commercial core; as such, much of the land along George and Ann Streets contain commercial properties or mixed-use buildings with ground floor commercial uses. There are a mix of land uses at the intersection of Ann and George Streets: a gas station, with access from both roadways is on the southwest corner; a vacant parcel envisioned as a future park space is on the northwest corner; a multi-family building that has no off-street parking is located on the northeast corner; and a single-family home with off-street parking is on the southeast corner.

The parcels to the west of the EST along Ann Street are owned by a commercial waste removal business with trucks parked on-site. Other industrial uses line the eastern side of the EST further south. An active rail line runs north-south, approximately 125 feet east of the EST.

The study area also contains key civic uses, including the Town and Village Hall, Library, and Post Office. Along the north side of Ann Street adjacent to the Canal is the Fort Ann Trailhead, a park with a gazebo, pavilion, plantings, parking, and informational signage. The parking area for the EST at this park is an amenity that could be further highlighted to attract EST users to Fort Ann.

## LAND OWNERSHIP PATTERNS

Understanding land ownership is an important step to determine opportunities and recommendations' feasibility. Recommended improvements that occur on publicly owned properties can be easier to implement consistent with a desired vision than projects on privately held parcels. This is because private property owners cannot be required to conform to a specific community vision unless regulated through the existing zoning code or through other land use controls.

Publicly owned parcels are shown in the map on the following page. Within the study area, there are several key properties that are publicly owned, which are explored further as opportunities for future enhancement in the Concept Plan. The EST south of Ann Street is on Village-owned land. While the EST does not continue off-road on the north side of Ann Street, the parcel directly across from the EST Ann Street outlet is also Village-owned and extends north to the Village's northern border where it contains the Village's wastewater treatment plant. The Village also owns the Village Hall, also located on Ann Street, as well as two parcels on George Street. The Fort Ann Library, at 36 George Street is owned by the Town and the rear of the parcel abuts the EST. The Town Hall, at 80 George Street, is also owned by the Town. To the east of the EST and rail line, the Canal and adjacent land are owned by New York State.

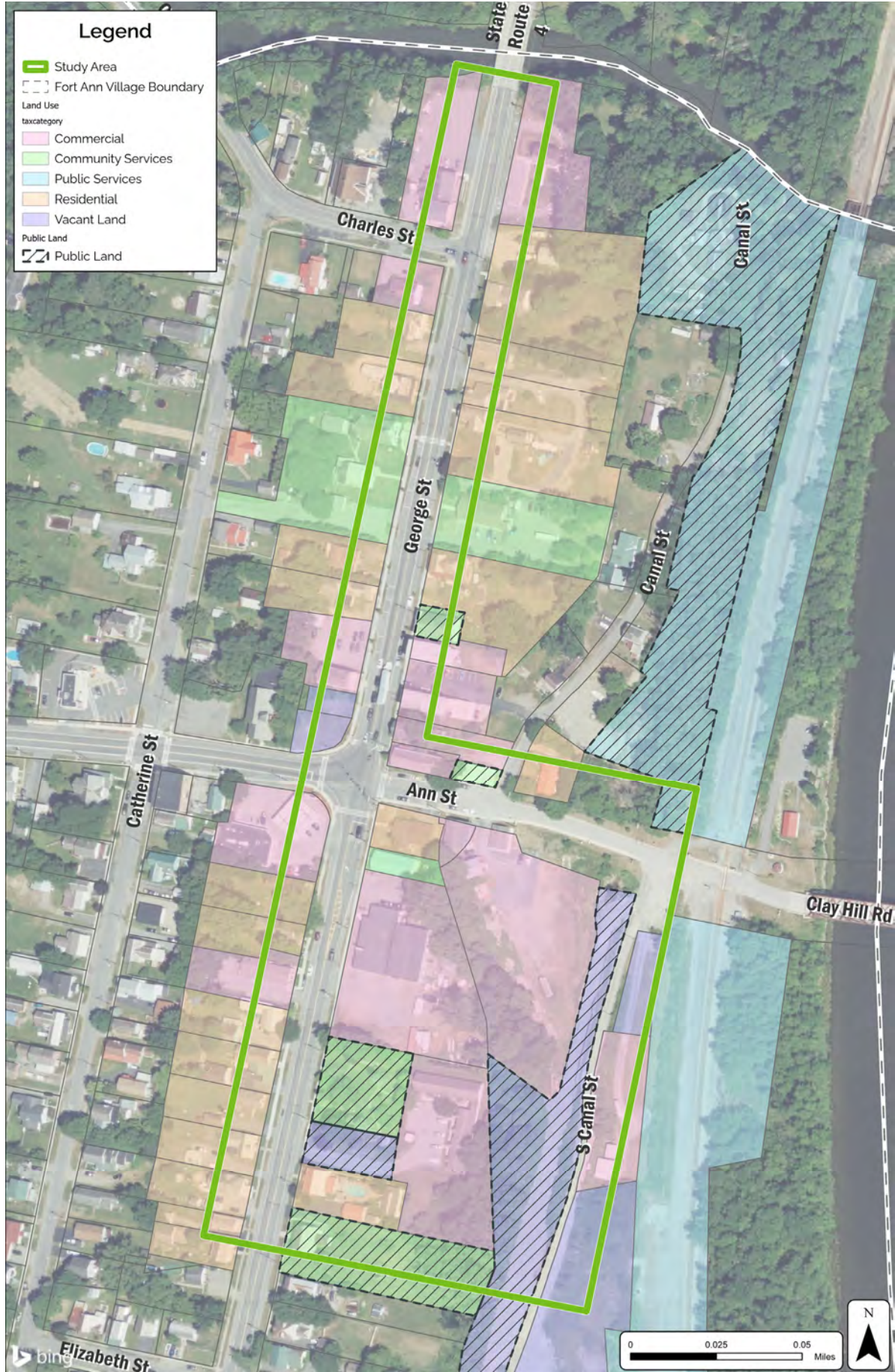
## SITE CONSTRAINTS AND ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Preliminary investigations into environmental and cultural resources were conducted as they can impact project feasibility and costs.

### *Environmental Resources*

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) Environmental Resource Mapper (ERM) was reviewed to identify any surface water features in the study area. The closest mapped surface water feature to the study area is the Champlain Canal, located approximately 250 feet east of the EST's intersection with Ann Street. The Canal is a mapped NYSDEC Class C Stream with C Standards and is also identified as a National Wetland Inventory (NWI) riverine wetland. The presence of and proximity to wetlands must be considered as part of any project design to avoid impacting these water resources.







The NYSDEC ERM also identifies the Pitch pine-oak-heath rocky summit natural community as occurring in the vicinity of the study area (at Curtis Hill). Significant natural communities are tracked by NY Natural Heritage because they serve as habitat for a wide range of plants and animals, both rare and common; and because natural communities in good condition provide ecological value and services. While not protected by New York State regulations per se, Significant Natural Communities should be addressed in environmental reviews which consider impacts on all natural resources, such as reviews conducted under New York's State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA).

#### *Historic Resources*

There are several historic resources located in the study area. A review of the New York State's Office of Historic Preservation's (SHPO) Cultural Resource Information System (CRIS) shows that the study area includes the New York State Barge Canal Historic District along the Champlain Canal running next to the Empire State Trail, as well as one National Register Building Listing: the Old Stone House Library, or the Shipman-Swift House (the current Fort Ann Library). In addition, there are several buildings along George and Ann Streets that have been determined to be eligible for listing on the State and National Register of Historic Places. The entire study area is also identified as potentially

archaeologically sensitive. The archaeologically sensitive nature of the study area must be considered as part of any ground disturbing activities.



**View of the rear of the Fort Ann Library property from the EST. Confirming property boundaries and any environmental constraints will be a key next step to implement this Phase 2 improvement.**





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# Concept Plan

This plan recommends a set of signage and bike facility improvements to safely accommodate Empire State Trail users and attract more visitors to the Village center. This concept plan is broken up into two phases: improvements to the trail that should be done in the short term, and a plan for future additions for the community. The full plan is depicted on the following pages, with key components of the plan described below.

## **PHASE 1 RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS**

The Phase 1 recommended improvements consist of roadway and signage improvements needed to direct EST users to the downtown. Installing complementary streetscape furniture that has already been secured by the Town is also included in this phase.

### *Roadway Improvements*

Road "Sharrows" are recommended along Ann Street as a reminder for vehicles to share the road. Because this portion of Ann Street has relatively little traffic, and is too narrow (narrowing to twenty feet) for a full bike lane, "Sharrows" provide a suitable alternative option to encourage cyclists to take the road into the Village Center.







It is also recommended that the Town work with the Village to explore reducing curb cuts at the Village Hall to improve safety for bicyclists on the roadway.

*Signage*

Using the information included in the Empire State Trail Design Guide, the following signs have been recommended for installation in Fort Ann to help direct Empire State Trail users to various amenities and businesses within the Town. Most of the signs suggested below do not exist anywhere yet in Fort Ann and can help bring more attention to the route through the community.

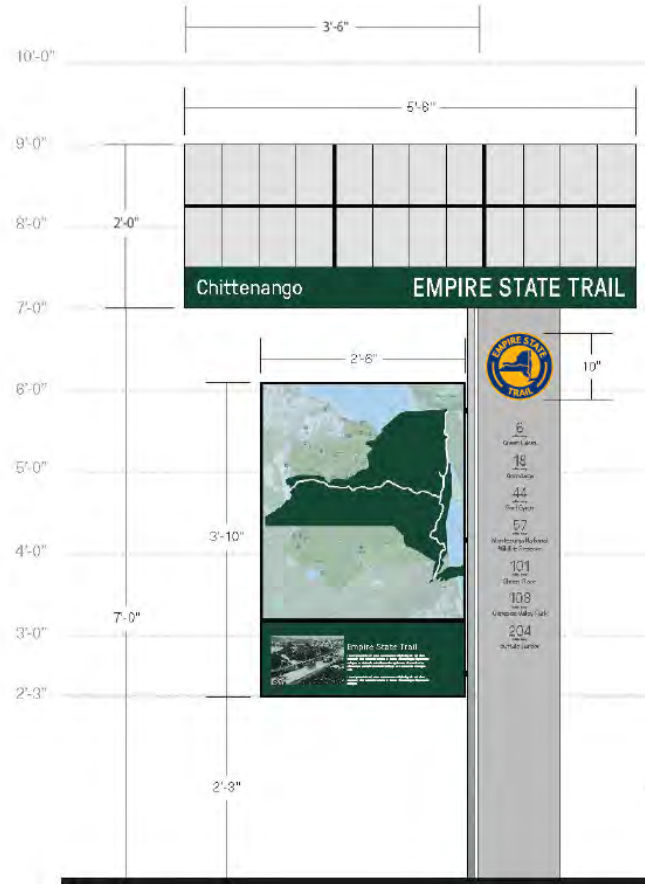
Two kiosk panels should be placed along the route to serve as educational tools for visitors. Kiosks include a map of the trail network to show a user where they are within the system and can help them plan the remainder of their trip. It is recommended that the kiosks also include a detailed, informative map of the Village which clearly identifies key destinations and businesses that may be of interest to trail users

One trail directional sign should be placed at the intersection of Ann Street and George Street to help direct visitors to the existing Empire State Trailhead. These types of signs can help visitors navigate but can also urge new people to utilize the trail by making them aware of its presence.

Three vehicular trail parking guide signs should be put in the area. These signs help direct vehicle traffic to the Empire State Trail and could help encourage people to stop in the Village along their trip.

Two "Share the Road" signs placed on Ann Street could help to indicate to cyclists that even when not on the formal EST route, they are welcome and should feel safe to cycle along roads in the community. These signs serve as a warning to vehicles to share the road, and a sign to cyclists that they are welcome on the road in the area.

**KIOSK SIGN PANEL**



**FRONT ELEVATION**

**TRAIL DIRECTIONAL SIGN**



**FRONT ELEVATION    SIDE ELEVATION    BACK ELEVATION**



VEHICULAR GUIDE SIGN



SHARE THE ROAD SIGN



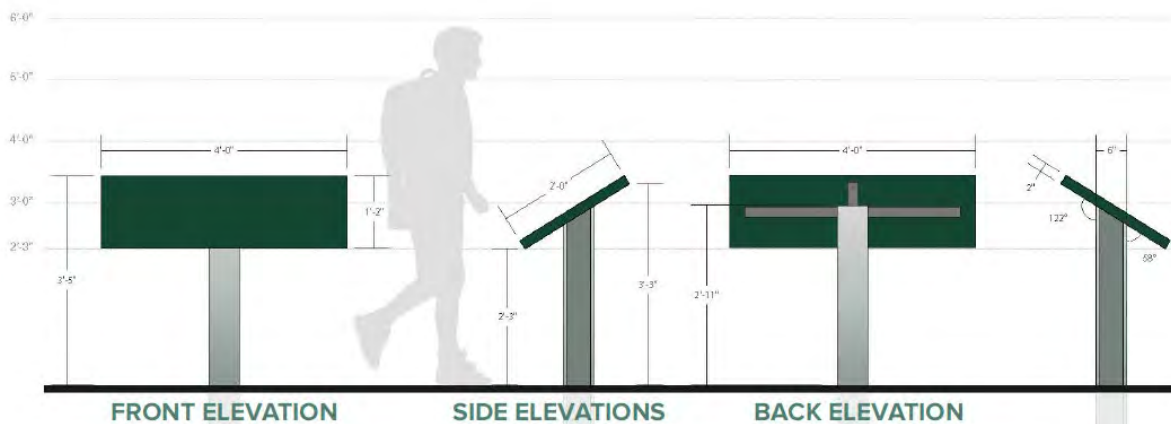
ROUTE SIGN ASSEMBLY



DESTINATION SIGN



INTERPRETIVE SIGN





Other sign recommendations for Fort Ann include relocating the existing South Canal Street Road sign to the east side of the trail to reduce confusion on location and direction of the trail, and the creation of destination signs in the Village. Destination signs can alert users to nearby attractions and amenities nearby.

*Additional Amenities*

Bike racks and benches are recommended to be installed in strategic places along George and Ann streets to encourage travelers along the trail to stop and visit the Village, with a secure place to leave their bikes while in town. As the Town has already acquired these amenity items, installation would be a low-cost next step as part of the Phase 1 improvements.

**PHASE 2 IMPROVEMENTS**

In addition to the Phase 1 recommendations, there are also potential future projects that could help bring more visitors into Fort Ann. One proposal would connect the current EST to George Street via a trail connection that runs along side the Fort Ann Town Library. This trail connection would physically connect visitors with the Village Center and encourage riders to take a break and frequent the Village's many businesses. The connection would also create a walking and cycling loop for residents to use on a regular basis. As a part of this future trail expansion, more pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements and signage could be explored to improve the experiences of the users.

Additionally, as part of future development, there is potential for a corner park at the intersection of Ann Street and George Street to benefit both residents and visitors.

Finally, along the north side of Ann Street, where the EST meets Ann Street, the Village owned property represents an opportunity to install public amenities, such as public bathrooms. In addition to generally improving trail user experience, public amenities in the Village could further encourage cyclists to pause and consider stopping for a longer period of time in the community.

**ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS RECOMMENDED FOR PHASE 1 AMENITY PLACEMENT**





# COST ESTIMATES

Preliminary cost estimates were prepared for each phase of the concept plan, which is provided here. The total Phase 1 cost is estimated at \$41,275, with the largest cost associated with the recommended signage (materials and installation). Phase 2 costs are estimated at \$421,500, with the highest costs associated with the Ann Street public amenity space and future park space at the intersection of George and Ann Streets.

PHASE 1 COST ESTIMATES	
Description	Total Cost
Removals & Site Preparation Allowance	\$1,000
Maintenance & Protection of Traffic	\$1,500
Roadway Sharrows	\$2,500
Concrete Pads & Installation of Bike Racks & Benches	\$6,000
Signage Materials & Installation	\$26,775
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$35,275</b>
<i>Contingency &amp; Escalation Allowance</i>	<i>\$3,500</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$41,275</b>

PHASE 2 COST ESTIMATES	
Description	Total Cost
Removals & Site Preparation Allowance	\$7,500
Maintenance & Protection of Traffic	\$2,500
Erosion & Sediment Control	\$1,500
Public Amenity Space	\$175,000
Pedestrian Improvement Study along Route 4/George Street	\$30,000
Library Connector Trail	\$25,000
Ann/George Street Park Space	\$150,000
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$391,500</b>
<i>Contingency &amp; Escalation Allowance</i>	<i>\$30,000</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$421,500</b>





## IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

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A tailored strategy to implement the concept plan recommendations was developed for each project phase, in consideration of funding and permitting needs. The goal of this approach is to provide an easy-to-follow, step-by-step strategy to see this project to completion. Additional information on the funding programs noted below are provided as a point of reference in the following section.

### PHASE 1 IMPROVEMENTS

The Phase 1 improvements were identified as first step, attainable solutions to improve connections between the EST and Fort Ann's commercial core. Consistent with this categorization, these improvements are comparatively low-cost and require less permitting and coordination. To minimize project delays, the Town and Village could consider seeking funding from the Glens Falls Hospital Creating Healthy Schools & Communities initiative or the Hudson River Valley Greenway, which accept applications on a rolling and quarterly basis, respectively. Installing the recommended signage would require coordination with NYSDOT, as George and Ann Streets are U.S. and State routes, respectively. Painting and installation of the signage, bike racks, and benches could be completed by the local DPW.

## PHASE 2 IMPROVEMENTS

While Phase 1 improvements are underway, the Town and Village should pursue funding for the higher-cost long-term improvements recommended in Phase 2 of the concept plan. By advancing grant applications for the next phase during Phase 1, implementation delays will be minimized. Given the scale and costs of the Phase 2 improvements, one single grant funding request could be prepared to cover the combined components. Recommended funding sources to consider include the NYS Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation Recreational Trails Program (RTP), NYSDOT Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), Canalway Grant Program, and A/GFTC Make the Connections Program.

### *Library Connector*

A boundary survey is currently underway for the Town-owned library property. This is a key first step for the project. Any wetlands on the property should also be identified and delineated, and the design approach should seek to avoid impacts to wetlands, if identified. Once site constraints are identified, design, permitting, and construction should advance.

### *Ann Street Public Amenity Space*

Similar to the library site, a boundary survey is needed for this site and should be completed before advancing design, permitting, and construction. Given the site's location along NYS Route 149, a NYSDOT highway work permit would likely be required for construction.

### *George Street Enhancements*

This Phase 2 component would include design and construction of the park space at George and Ann Streets and design of potential additional Complete Streets improvements along George Street between the Library and Ann Streets. A NYSDOT highway work permit would be required for construction.

## ALTERNATE COMBINED APPROACH

An alternative implementation plan would conduct phases 1 and 2 concurrently. In this process, the tasks outlined above as Phase 1, could act as an in-kind match for the larger projects outlined in Phase 2. This process could be useful in applying for grant program funding for the project by offering low-cost steps in the plan as the local match for larger investments. Through this process, Phase 1 projects would not be implemented immediately as in the first alternative, but could create a more cohesive and cost effective process for implementing the Phase 2 improvements.

## SEQRA/NEPA REVIEW

If federal funding is obtained for the project, a review under the National Environmental Policy Act is required. The project will likely be classified as a Categorical Exclusion. If State funding or a permit is required from a State Agency, then a review under the State Environmental Quality Review Act is required. The project will likely be categorized as an Unlisted Action and the lead agency will be able to issue a Negative Declaration as the Lead Agency.

## FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

There are several potential funding opportunities that are available for pedestrian and bicyclist improvement and trail connection projects. Additional information on the programs that are most applicable to the project, including match requirements and funding limits and timelines, is provided below.

**NYSDOT TAP** is available for projects that improve the quality of life of the community through the construction of pedestrian and bicycle facilities and pedestrian safety improvements. The program is a Set-Aside of funds from the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program. The FHWA has set aside a minimum of \$1.4 billion annually for this program through 2026.

- The current round is open with applications due January 9, 2024
- 20 percent local match
- Federal Aid Procedures Apply
- Design and Construction: Minimum=\$500,000; Maximum = \$5 million



**Canalway Grant Program** awards up to \$1 million annually for canal related capital projects. Projects must be located along one of the four canals of the NYS Canal System, trail linkages, connections to existing trail segments, or along the historic canal alignment. In addition, the program supports projects that help to enhance or tie into the EST Initiative and/or provide connectivity to the EST. This program can be applied for through the NYS Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) in 2024.

- 50 percent local match
- Grant awards range from \$25,000 to \$150,000

#### **A/GFTC Make the Connection**

**Program** is available to assist municipalities with funding to improve the region's non-motorized travel network. Project types that are considered in the program include new sidewalk and trail connections, pedestrian safety improvements, and pavement marking improvements. Make the Connection Funding is available through the FHWA, although this is not a specific FHWA program, but rather an A/GFTC program utilizing a setaside of FHWA funds and administered by the A/GFTC.

- 20 percent local match
- Design Only Projects have a minimum of \$25,000
- Design and Construction or Construction Only Projects have a minimum of \$75,000
- Federal Aid procedures apply

**NYSOPRHP RTP** provides funding for the development and maintenance of recreational trails or trail-related facilities. RTP funding is available through the FHWA and administered by the NYSOPRHP. RTP can be applied for through the NYS CFA in 2025.

- 20 percent local match
- Federal Aid procedures apply
- Design and construction: Minimum = \$25,000; Maximum = \$250,000
- \$1.9 million available during the 2023 CFA application period

#### **Hudson River Valley Greenway Community Grants Program**

provides funding to greenway communities and compact communities to develop plans or projects consistent with the five Greenway criteria: natural and cultural resource protection, economic development, public access, regional planning, and heritage and environmental education.

- 50 percent local match
- Federal aid procedures apply
- Maximum = \$10,000
- Applications accepted quarterly

#### **Hudson River Valley Greenway Conservancy Trail Grants Program**

is dedicated to funding recreational trail projects. Special consideration is given to projects that seek to implement the goals of the Greenway Trail Program. The application emphasizes connections to the Empire State Trail. Eligible projects include trail construction, planning, and design; trail rehabilitation or improvement; and trail education or interpretation.

- Funding amount varies by project type from a low of \$25,000 for maintenance projects to up to \$250,000 for construction
- 50% match requirement
- Applications accepted quarterly

#### **The Health Promotion Center of Glens Falls Hospital**

partners with members of school districts and surrounding communities to implement sustainable policy, system, and environmental changes. The Creating Healthy Schools & Communities initiative focuses on increasing access to healthy, affordable foods and opportunities for physical activity for students, staff, families, and community members.

- 100 percent funding (zero percent match)
- Funding requests accepted on a rolling basis with no formal application





