

## N. VISUAL RESOURCES

The purpose of this visual impact assessment is to evaluate the effect that projected development within the Study Area will have upon the visual resources of the community. This includes both areas within the Town and Village of Colonie. The process used to identify key viewsheds consisted of identifying the visual environment to be affected, characterizing the existing visual resources of the project area, and establishing the groups of viewers likely to be exposed to the views. Scenic and Historic Areas as delineated in the 1977 Town of Colonie Environmental Inventory were also included in this evaluation.

The methodology employed was adapted from a guide prepared by the United States Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects, March, 1981; evaluation techniques were based upon those found in Jones and Jones, Aesthetics and Visual Resource Management for Highways, October, 1977.

The surface areas visible from an observer's viewpoint, or viewsheds, are quite diverse in the Study Area. Based on aesthetics classifications, the Study Area can be considered a mixture of open fields and wooded areas with both residential and commercial development along the major highway corridors. Although the area has several similar characteristics throughout, a series of unique viewsheds have been identified as follows (Exhibit II-N-1):

1. Lands east of Wolf Road & south of Albany Shaker Road (Photograph 1).
2. Ann Lee Pond (Photographs 2,3).
3. Route 155 corridor and Sand Creek Road corridor (Photographs 4,5,6).
4. River Road corridor (Photographs 7 & 8).
5. Mill Road Public Golf Course (Photograph 9).
6. Albany Shaker Road corridor (Photographs 10).

1. View east of Wolf Road and south of Albany Shaker Road:

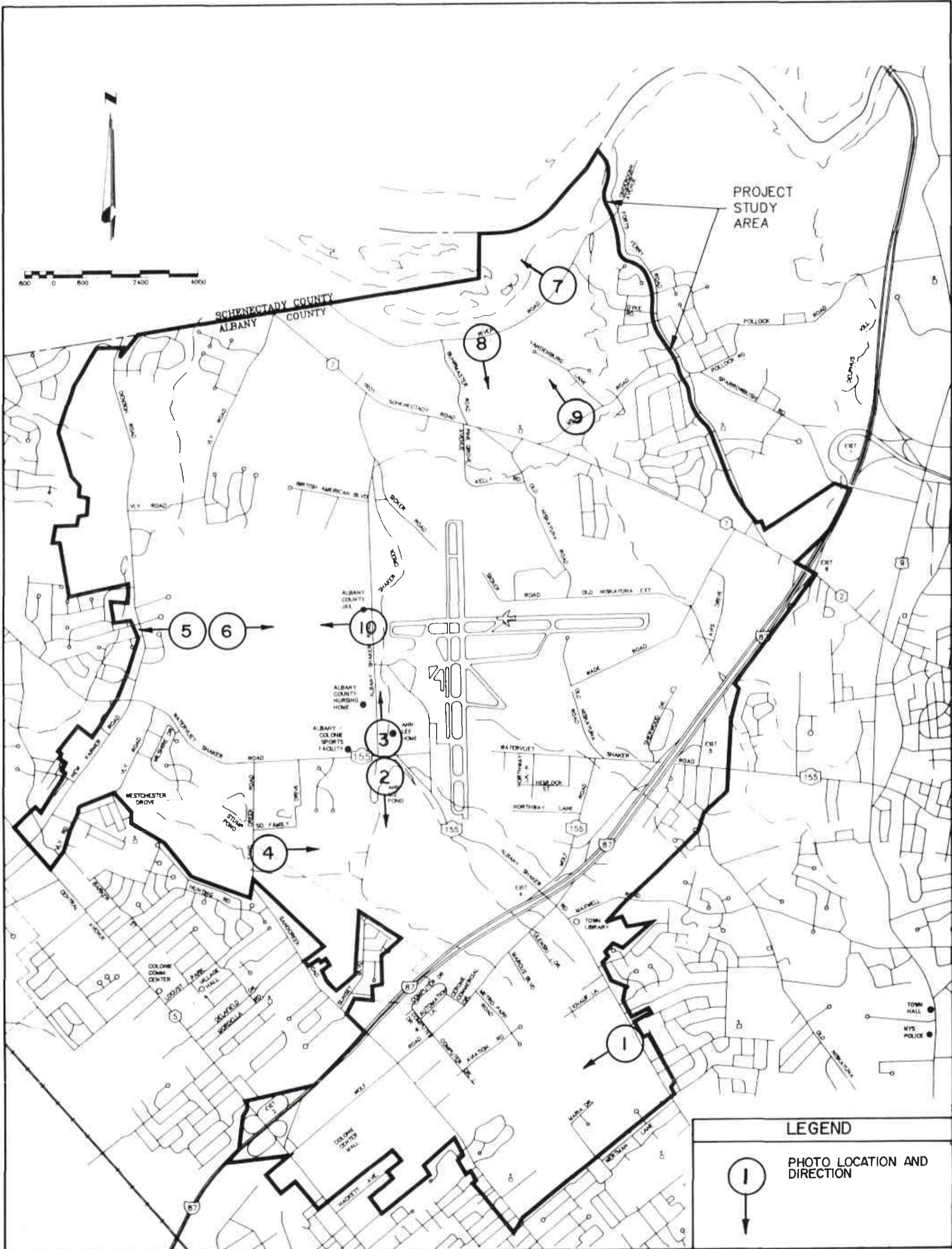
Running in a east-west direction, there are significant views of open farmland surrounded by wooded areas to the east of Wolf Road and south of Albany Shaker Road. This area contains a mix of commercial/retail/office land uses along Wolf Road with residential uses off Albany Shaker Road. The view looking to the west from the intersection of Timberland Avenue and Albany Shaker Road consists of a scenic framing of the Helderberg Mountains.

2. Ann Lee Pond:

This scenic and historic area, which contains the earliest known settlement of the Shaker religious sect, includes an orchard, cemetery, and several buildings. The focal point, as seen from the intersection of Route 155 and Watervliet Shaker Road, is Ann Lee Pond. This scenic area is comprised of an open pond with two small wooded islands. The pond is surrounded by marsh and wooded swampland, agricultural land and maintained meadows with open parking for public use.

3. Route 155 Corridor and Sand Road Corridor:

The viewsheds along Route 155 approaching the Albany County Airport from Wolf Road are composed of active farmland to the east and mixed brushland interspersed with marshlands on the west as it blends into Ann Lee Pond. On the western section of Route 155 between Albany Shaker Road and New Karner Road heading west is an active agriculture area followed by single family residential development leading up to Memory Gardens Cemetery. This cemetery is one of the points of highest elevation within the Town of Colonie. From the cemetery the viewer has a primarily unobstructed, panoramic view into the Study Area and of the Helderberg Mountains in the distance. Along the Sandcreek Road corridor there is a



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**VIEWSHED PHOTO INVENTORY**

EXHIBIT NO.

**II - N - I**

**AIRPORT AREA GENERIC  
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

fairly uninterrupted view of the Shaker farm area which is comprised of active agricultural fields surrounded by scattered deciduous trees intermixed with old fields.

4. River Road Corridor:

This is one of the more significant viewsheds in the Study Area. The Hudson-Mohawk bike trail, which runs from the City of Albany to the Town of Rotterdam, offers the viewer impressive vistas looking north at the Mohawk River. This area is encircled to the south by gently rolling landscapes with an intermingling of brushlands and wooded areas.

5. Mill Road Public Golf Course:

Concentrated primarily west of Vandenburg Road and north of Mill Road, the Mill Road Golf Course offers a viewshed consisting of open, grass covered fairways which are encircled by deciduous wooded areas with moderate-density single family homes in the background.

6. Albany Shaker Road Corridor:

Running in a north-south direction, there are significant views from Watervliet Shaker Road to Sicker Road. The area contains a mix of commercial/retail/office uses along with large tracts of open space and the Shaker Ridge Golf Course.

Impacts and Mitigation Measures:

Future development will undoubtedly have an impact on the visual and aesthetic character of the Study Area. However, if there is close cooperation between the Town and potential developers, sensitivity in site design and layout

can be utilized so as to minimize possible impacts to the aesthetic character and unique viewsheds within the Study Area.

The six viewsheds which have been identified within the Study Area are susceptible to visual impacts from proposed development. Guidelines for protecting and enhancing the aesthetic character of these areas should be developed and specifically tailored to mitigate the visual impacts of project development under the Cumulative Growth Scenario. General mitigation measures which can be implemented include:

- o limit the number of curb cuts along major highway corridors;
- o encourage proper circulation of interior subdivision roads which permit the design of residential lots that are sensitive to existing drainage patterns, that minimize disturbance to natural vegetation and buffer zones, and maximize existing topographic conditions to create a more imaginative design;
- o encourage circulation of interior subdivision roads that avoid typical grid type pattern layouts;
- o encourage cluster type development where appropriate so as to protect existing vegetation, scenic views, and natural drainage courses;
- o encourage the use of buffer zones between residential and commercial land uses and maintenance of natural vegetative cover;
- o require all new development to install electric, telephone, and cable TV utilities underground;

- o require parking for commercial and retail land uses to be located behind buildings along with proper screening (i.e., berms, landscape, fencing) of the parking lots; and
- o require a specific setback in commercially zoned corridors so as to maintain the openness of the road while reducing the number of roadside distractions.

In addition to the above, there are specific mitigation measures that should be implemented in the following viewsheds:

1. View east of Wolf Road and south of Albany Shaker Road:

A constraining factor in the development of this area is the open uninterrupted view of the Helderberg mountains. Therefore, development in this area should give careful consideration to building height and scale. Opportunities exist so as to allow development to take advantage of this exposure, while at the same time implementing site development construction techniques which will protect the viewshed.

2. Ann Lee Pond:

This scenic and historical area is of vital importance to the community from many aspects. Development in this area must be especially sensitive to the historical and architectural character of existing structures so that new buildings are designed in a compatible manner. Maintaining the appropriate setbacks is also important for any new construction so that the visual integrity of the area is maintained.

3. Route 155 and Sand Creek Road Corridor:

The viewshed along this corridor is quite varied and unique. The panoramic view from Memory Gardens Cemetery should not be impacted due to the expectation that there will be no change in the existing land use. Other views along this corridor may be protected by requiring that the height and bulk of new buildings be compatible with those adjacent uses. Possible use of cluster type development and the use of both vegetative and physical visual barriers will reduce the overall potential aesthetic impacts.

4. River Road Corridor:

Proposed development in and around River Road should be constructed with careful consideration given to building height and scale. Any new development should be compatible with the existing homes located in this viewshed. The siting of any structure should also take advantage of the rolling landscape to screen the structure from roadways, the Hudson-Mohawk bike path, and the Mohawk River.

5. Mill Road Public Golf Course:

Any development which occurs in this viewshed will have significant visual impacts unless adequate open space preservation techniques are employed. Encouraging building placement along the fringes of the golf course, clustering of housing, and landscaping with native vegetation will help ensure that the value of this viewshed is not lost.

**6. Albany Shaker Road Corridor:**

Development in this area consists of a mixture of commercial, retail, and office uses interspersed with large tracts of open space. Increasing setback requirements for new construction combined with vegetative buffers and limiting curb cuts will reduce the overall potential aesthetic impacts created by new development.

**7. Exit 3 Proposal:**

Section II,H, Transportation of this FGEIS includes the identification of the need to construct a new Exit 3 on I-87 to adequately serve future vehicular traffic anticipated under the Cumulative Growth Scenario. Two alignment options, named Option 1 and Option 2, have been identified and are also described in Section II,H. While more detailed, site specific environmental analyses must be undertaken as design of the proposed Exit 3 improvements is advanced, this FGEIS has identified the generalized impacts which each of the two alignment options will have on visual resources in the Study Area. Various mitigation measures to minimize these impacts are also discussed.

**a. Option 1 Improvements**

Roadway improvements proposed under Option 1 will have severe impacts on the viewshed surrounding Ann Lee Pond, which is significant to the community both as a recreational and historical resource (Photos 2,3). The impacts which this 4 lane north-south arterial will have on this viewshed may be difficult to mitigate. This roadway will directly affect views within the Watervliet Shaker Historic District and will impact on the aesthetics of the structures and the open



space/agricultural setting of the Shaker Community. Option 1 will have significant impacts to both short and long range views to and from the South Family homestead.

Some measures that should be considered to mitigate visual impacts include the creation of landscaped berms parallel to new roadways to visually screen the traffic from adjacent land uses. These berms should consist of vegetation that is indigenous to the area so that these man-made landscape elements blend with the surrounding landscape. A partial below grade highway could also mitigate the loss of any long range views.

**b. Option 2 Improvements**

Roadway improvements proposed under Option 2 will have significantly reduced impacts on visual resources within the Study Area than improvements proposed under Option 1. Most roadway improvements under Option 2 will be undertaken within existing R.O.W. or away from significant viewsheds. Most important, the roadway improvements avoid traversing most of the wetland areas to the south of Ann Lee Pond.

The use of appropriate landscaping and man-made berms should be required to minimize views of traffic along new roadways in the Study Area. Careful consideration should be given to preserving or enhancing the character of historical structures adjacent to roadway improvements with appropriate landscape treatment. This may include adjusting roadway alignments to make use of the existing topography to screen traffic or specimen planting of large shade trees or flowering shrubs to complement existing structures.