

Visual Impact Assessment
for the proposed
Ashford Estates Subdivision

Located in:
Town of Chester & Town of Goshen
Orange County, New York

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Town of Chester & Town of Goshen, Orange County, New York

Introduction

As part of a subdivision application in the Town Of Chester, a visual impact assessment is required by §98-26 of the Town of Chester Code. This section of the Code stipulates that:

Any new structure within the Ridge Preservation Overlay District for which a building permit is required shall be located to the maximum practical extent so as not to be visible from any point on Pine Hill Road, Bull Mill Road, Black Meadow Road or on a state, county or interstate highway, and if such structures cannot be completely obscured they shall be made to blend as unobtrusively as possible into the hillside to avoid breaking the natural ridgeline.

The site of the proposed Ashford Estates Subdivision is located in an area mapped by the Town as a Ridge Preservation Overlay District. The Town has not identified any particular visual concerns or vantage points to be studied relative to this project. Therefore this assessment has been conducted following the methodology outlined in the NYSDEC policy and guidance memorandum "Assessing and Mitigating Visual Impacts", as relates to possible visual impacts from locations within the Town of Chester on the roads identified in the Code.

This visual impact assessment study entailed the following tasks:

- Determine the potential viewshed of the site within the Town of Chester using available USGS topographic mapping. Evaluate potential visibility relative to specific roadways identified in §98-26 of the Town of Chester Code.
- Visit potential vantage points and take photographs. Prepare a series of photographs showing potential views to the site (if any), each indicating the site location.
- Prepare sight line profiles from key locations using a digital plotting technique with available USGS topographic mapping to demonstrate the existence of or lack of views.
- Describe the potential impact of project visibility, incorporating the photographs and visual profiles in a report for submission to the Town Planning Board. Include recommendations on building design and landscape buffer planting, if appropriate to minimize visual impacts.

This assessment was conducted by a NYS Registered Landscape Architect in accordance with generally accepted professional methods to determine whether the proposed action is potentially visible from the Town-designated roadways and whether there are potential significant impacts that require measures to eliminate, mitigate or compensate for an adverse visual effect. Much of the terminology in this assessment comes from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation policy and guidance memorandum (NYSDEC 2000)¹ relating to assessing and mitigating visual impacts of facilities that are located in visual proximity to sensitive land uses.

¹ NYSDEC, "Assessing and Mitigating Visual Impacts", Program Policy DEP-00-2, NYSDEC Division of Environmental Permits, July 2000.

Viewshed is defined as the geographic area from which a facility may be seen. An *aesthetic resource* is a formally designated place visited by the public for the purpose of enjoying its beauty. For purposes of this assessment, the following roadways were considered aesthetic resources for the visual assessment: Pine Hill Road, Bull Mill Road, Black Meadow Road, and State, County and interstate highways generally within the Town of Chester (the "study area").

The visual assessment incorporated the use of computer technology to create graphic line-of-sight analyses to demonstrate potential visibility of the proposed project from particular viewpoints located within the study area. A *line-of-sight profile* is a to-scale graphic depiction of the topographic relief taken along a straight path between the proposed activity and an identified viewpoint, with a straight line depicting the line of sight between those two locations. This evaluation is based on available topographic mapping and verified through in-field reconnaissance.

Existing Conditions

Existing Visual Character of the Site and Environs

The project site is an irregularly shaped parcel with the bulk of the property surrounded by woodland. To the east is a sizable residential subdivision. The property consists of a patchwork of woodland or former agricultural fields. A topographic ridgeline runs through the eastern portion of the property generally in a NE/SW direction, with a high point near the center of the ridgeline. The high point of the site is not unlike numerous other small hilltops in the site vicinity of similar elevation and thus, the ridgeline is not visually prominent. The undulating topography of the site area and the predominance of dense tree cover in the area make views into the site from area roads very limited, even during seasons when leaves are not on the trees.

The site environs consist of rural and suburban land uses common to Orange County.

Visual Survey

A visual survey was conducted of the project area in June 2012 to identify locations on the study roads in the vicinity where the project site may be visible (Pine Hill Road, Bull Mill Road, Black Meadow Road, and State, County and interstate highways generally within the Town of Chester). The extent of the survey was initially determined by inspection of US Geological Survey topographic maps with the aid of 3D viewing computer software (*Terrain Navigator Pro*), which reveal the potential visibility of the project site based on topography alone. Thus, the initial survey task established the *potential viewshed* of the proposed project.

Field survey refined this assessment based on limiting factors of the actual visibility of the site, accounting for topography, vegetation, and buildings. Photographs were taken from the most prominent vantage points on the study roads looking toward the project site to depict the character of existing conditions and are identified below. The field survey identified the specific publicly-accessible locations in the site viewshed where the site, and potentially the proposed project, would be visible. Given the existing dense tree cover on the property and surrounding land, and the undulating and curvilinear pattern of the local roads due to topography, the actual visibility of any activity on the site from any study vantage point was found to be very limited.

There is no off-site location from which the entire project site is visible.

Potential Visual Impacts

The Ashford Estates project depicted in the Cluster Sketch Plan Alt. 4 (the "project plan") by Pietrzak & Pfau engineers is designed as a cluster subdivision, thereby concentrating the development in one portion of the property while preserving the majority of the site in its existing condition. Implementation of the proposed project as presently designed will result in the clearing of discreet areas of existing woodland and open fields in the east-central portion of the property and construction of individual dwellings and their amenities with an internal subdivision road that connects to the existing subdivision road to the east. Most of the proposed development area is actually cleared of trees at present so that there will be a very limited extent of tree removal from the ridge line.

Construction of new houses will occur largely in existing open areas, and the tree cover to remain will provide natural buffers to possible views from off-site vantage points. The results of the visual assessment conducted for each designated roadway in the Town of Chester is described below and illustrated in the accompanying figures.

Figures 1 through 5 show the line-of-sight cross sections. The ground line is represented in brown -- as previously mentioned, the sections depict conditions devoid of existing trees, which typically rise 40 to 50 feet above the ground line. The sections are drawn to scale and the vertical scale is exaggerated for clarity. Figure 6 shows the locations of the cross sections on a USGS base map.

County Route 94 (CR 94) is located in the northern area of the town and is generally oriented in a NE/SW direction. Two locations on this road were investigated. Southwest of the project site there is intervening topography between CR 94 and the site such that the potential for site visibility is limited to a short section of this roadway in the vicinity of Glenmere Road (2.4 miles away). Sight line profile 1 (Figure 1) was prepared showing the potential line-of-sight between the hilltops, assuming there is no intervening vegetation. (Figure 6 shows the profile location.) However, a photograph taken from this vantage point (photo 1 in Figure 7, indicating the position of the project site in the view) shows that the intervening trees obscure actual view of the site. No further evaluation from this point is warranted.

CR 94 also passes within one mile of the site to the east/southeast. The field survey found that there is intervening tree cover between CR 94 and the site such that the potential for site visibility is limited to one location at Johnson Road directly east of the site, assuming there is no intervening vegetation. A photograph taken from this vantage point (photo 6 in Figure 9) shows that the site occurs at the horizon, however, the project plan indicates that existing trees on the eastern side of the property will be retained that will provide a natural buffer to this potential view. No further evaluation from this point is warranted with respect to visual impacts.

Black Meadow Road is located in the west-central area of the town and is generally oriented in a NE/SW direction. Intervening topography between this road and the site, particularly hilltops close to the project site, limits the potential for site visibility to a short section of this roadway (3.2 miles away). Sight line profile 2 (Figure 2) was prepared showing the potential line-of-sight, assuming there is no intervening vegetation, however, there is vegetation on the intervening high point in the vicinity of Hambletonian Avenue which obscures this view to the site. (Figure 6 shows the profile location.) A photograph taken from this vantage point (photo 2 in Figure 7

indicates the distant position of the project site in the view. No further evaluation is warranted with respect to visual impacts.

Pine Hill Road is located in the southwest area of the town at least 3.6 miles from the project site and is generally oriented in a NW/SE direction. There are several intervening topographic high points between this road and the site such that there is no potential for visibility of the subject site. Pine Hill Road is located at the southerly end of Cross-sections 1 and 2 in Figure 6, and at the extreme left hand edge of Cross-sections 1 and 2 (Figures 1 and 2), showing the intervening hilltops. No further evaluation is warranted with respect to visual impacts from this road (and no photographs were taken).

County Route 13 (CR 13) is located in the central area of the town and is generally oriented in a N/S direction. There is intervening topography between CR 13 and the site (notably Durland Hill) such that there is no potential for visibility of the subject site. Sight line profile 3 (Figure 3) shows the intervening hilltop. (Figure 6 shows the profile location and Durland Hill.) A photograph taken from this vantage point (photo 3 in Figure 8 indicating the position of the project site in the view) shows the hill that obscures any potential view. No further evaluation is warranted with respect to visual impacts.

County Route 45 (CR 45) is also located in the central area of the town and is generally oriented in a NNE/SSW direction. There is intervening topography between this road and the site such that the potential for site visibility is limited to a short section of this roadway in the vicinity of Lazy Hill Road (at the south end of the section line shown in Figure 6). Sight line profile 4 was prepared (Figure 4) showing the potential line-of-sight from this vantage point, showing there is intervening topography. A photograph taken from this vantage point (photo 4 in Figure 8 indicating the position of the project site in the view) shows that trees on the nearby hilltop obscures any potential view. No further evaluation is warranted with respect to visual impacts.

Bull Mill Road is located in the southeast area of the town at least 4.0 miles from the project site. There is a significant intervening ridgeline between Bull Mill Road and the site (ridge from Sugarloaf Mountain to Goose Pond Mountain) such that no site visibility is possible from any location on this roadway (see Figure 6). No further evaluation is warranted with respect to visual impacts (and no photographs were taken).

County Route 17M (CR 17M) and US Route 6/CR 17 (future to be designated Interstate Route 86) cross the northern area of the town essentially parallel to each other, and generally oriented in a NW/SE direction. Two locations on these roads were investigated. From the west, CR 17M and CR 17 pass about 0.8 mile from the site. The field survey found that there is intervening tree cover between these roads and the site such that the potential for site visibility is virtually nonexistent, and further limited by the angle of any potential sight line (nearly perpendicular to the orientation of the roadways on which viewers would be traveling at moderate to highway speeds. No further evaluation is warranted with respect to visual impacts (and no photographs were taken).

CR 17M and CR 17 also approach the site from the east. From approximately 3.0 miles away, there is potential site visibility from these roadways from north/westbound vehicles in the vicinity of the town line. Sight line profile 5 (Figure 5) shows the potential line-of-sight to the site from CR 17, assuming there is no intervening vegetation. However, the field survey found that there is intervening tree cover between these roads and the project site. A photograph taken from CR

17 (photo 5 in Figure 9, indicating the position of the project site) shows the lack of visibility of the site. No further evaluation is warranted from these roads with respect to visual impacts.

County Route 82 (CR 82) and County Route 5 (CR 5) are located in the southern area of the town some 5 miles or more from the subject site (see Figure 6). There is intervening topography between these roads and the site such that there is no potential for visibility of the subject site. No further evaluation is warranted from these roads (and no photographs were taken).

Generally speaking as applies to any view from a roadway, the potential for experiencing a view of a particular property is limited to locations where the road is oriented generally toward that site, or where openings in roadside vegetation are such that a person in a vehicle traveling on the road might look in that direction. The curvilinear roads that occur in the site area make one-directional views very infrequent. Additionally the experience of the viewer is significantly affected by numerous factors, including the distance and breadth of the view, other physical elements in that view, distractions for the driver and passenger such as road signs, other vehicles, and activities inside the vehicle, such that the visual sensitivity of any change at the subject site is typically relatively low where the proposed change is similar to other portions of the view. Distance, in particular, has an ameliorating effect on visual sensitivity except in situations where, for example, there is a framed view in the particular direction of the subject site.

The field reconnaissance did not identify any situation where the proposed change to the site would result in a significant change to the view. The development of Ashford Estates subdivision will not result in a stark contrast in visual character compared to the site environs, either in terms of type of use or the scale and visibility of the buildings. The project as proposed will not dominate the view from any location in the studied viewshed. Overall, this study demonstrates that the proposed action will not significantly impact the identified aesthetic resources

Mitigation Measures

In reviewing the visibility and compatibility of the proposed subdivision, §98-26 states the Planning Board shall consider:

- (1) The building design.
- (2) The location of the structures and nonstructural accessories, and any tree clearing required to locate them.
- (3) The building color and visibility/reflectivity of broad expanses of window and/or skylight glass.
- (4) The planting of appropriate native deciduous and/or evergreen vegetation to screen the structure or its accessories.

At this time specific building designs for Ashford Estates have not been developed, however the homes envisioned for this subdivision will be similar to the homes in the adjacent subdivision -- typically, moderately sized two-story buildings with attached garages, with various exterior siding materials and colors. Architectural renderings of the proposed building designs for the dwellings determined to be located in the Ridge Preservation Overlay District will need to be presented by the applicant to the Planning Board for its review.

This project has been designed as a cluster subdivision, which allows that significant portions of the project site will remain in the existing condition. By virtue of this planning technique, sizable vegetative buffers will remain on the southern, western and northern sides of the project, while the project development will expand the residential neighborhood to the east.

While the topographic position of the project places it within the Town's designated Ridge Preservation Overlay District, the foregoing assessment of the potential changes to views toward the site indicates that the minimal visibility of the project as proposed will be largely a function of the preservation of trees on the property (i.e. minimal tree clearing) and the overall area topography. And while there will be no significant change to the visual character of the community based on this assessment, mitigation measures should be incorporated into the proposed development plan so that it will "fit" into the broader landscape.

Mitigation measures that are incorporated into the project design as proposed include:

- layout of house lots according to a cluster concept that preserves surrounding land cover. The project plan indicates that existing trees on the eastern side of the property will be retained that will provide a natural buffer to potential views from the east.
- specify a limit of disturbance line for each lot on the subdivision grading plan.
- control the area of tree clearing for each house site by marking the disturbance limits in the field before tree clearing begins.
- specify methods of protection of tree roots, trunk and canopy during construction.
- specify a landscape planting program to include street trees.

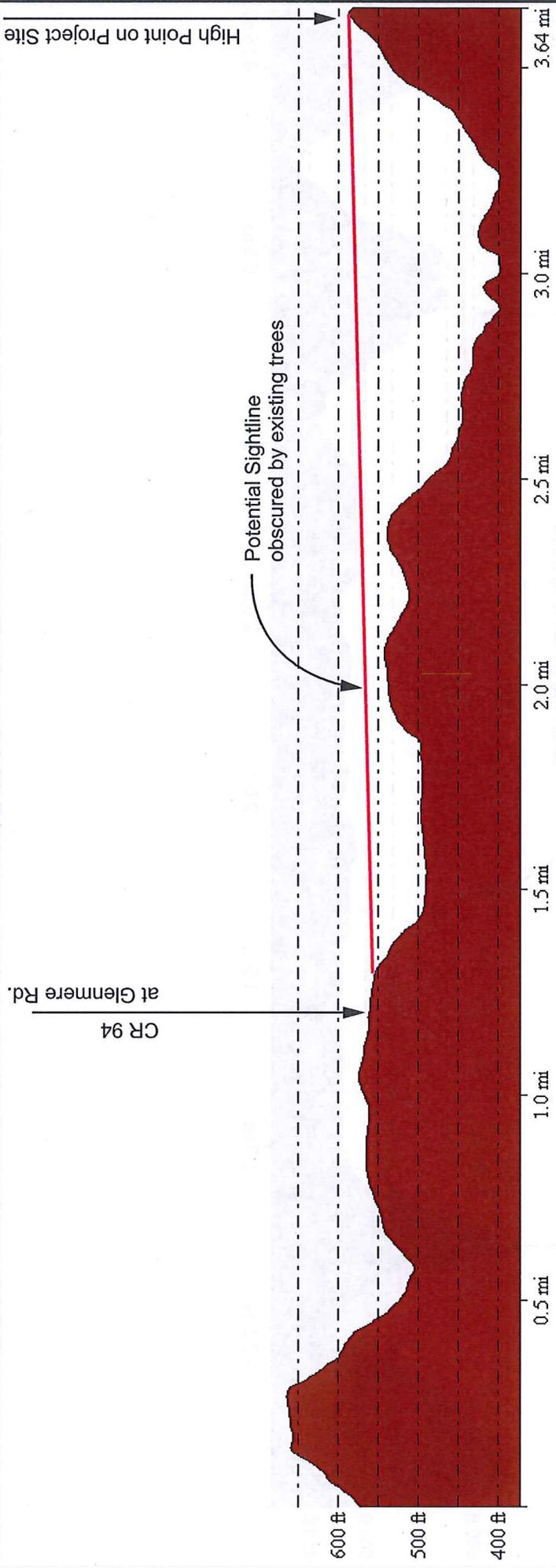


Figure 1: Line of Sight Cross-section #1
 Ashford Estates
 Town of Chester, Orange County, NY
 Scale: Graphic Scale as shown
 Source: NYS GIS Clearinghouse Elevation Data

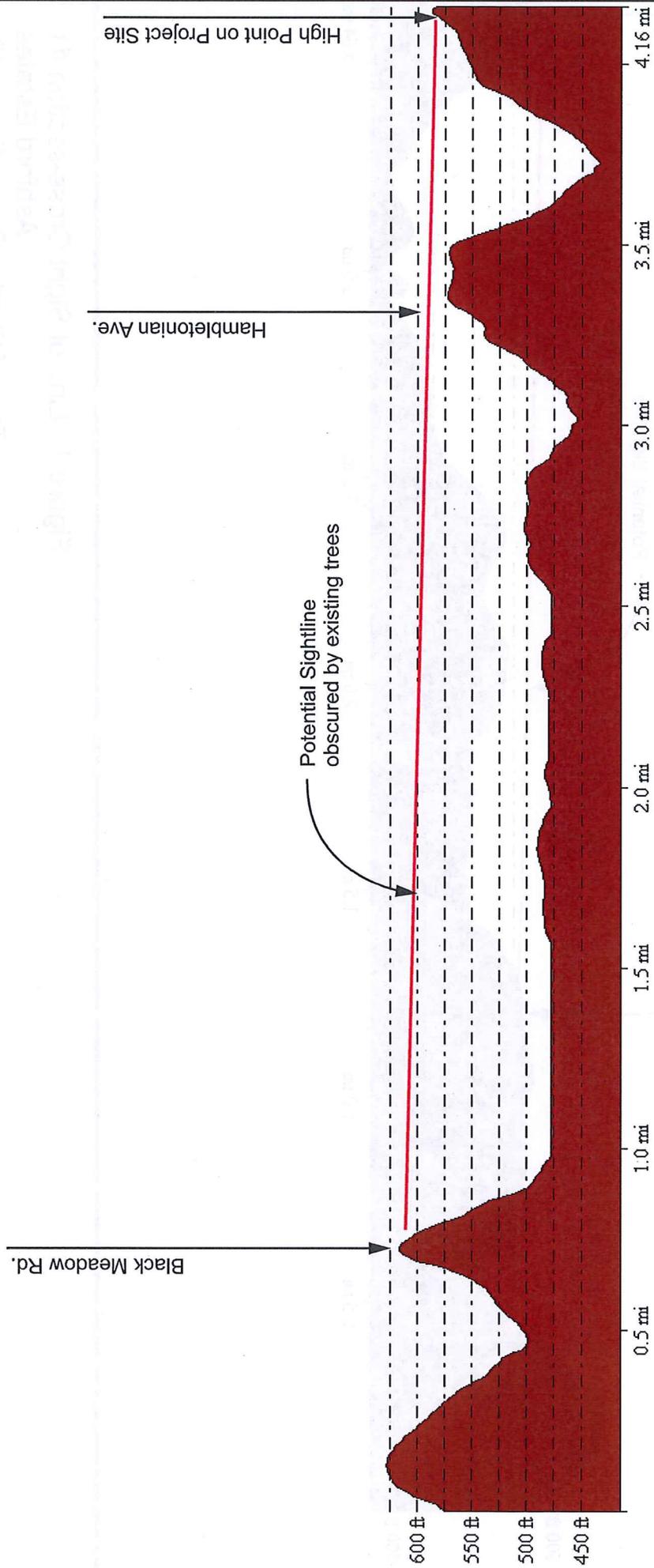


Figure 2: Line of Sight Cross-section #2
 Ashford Estates
 Town of Chester, Orange County, NY
 Scale: Graphic Scale as shown
 Source: NYS GIS Clearinghouse Elevation Data

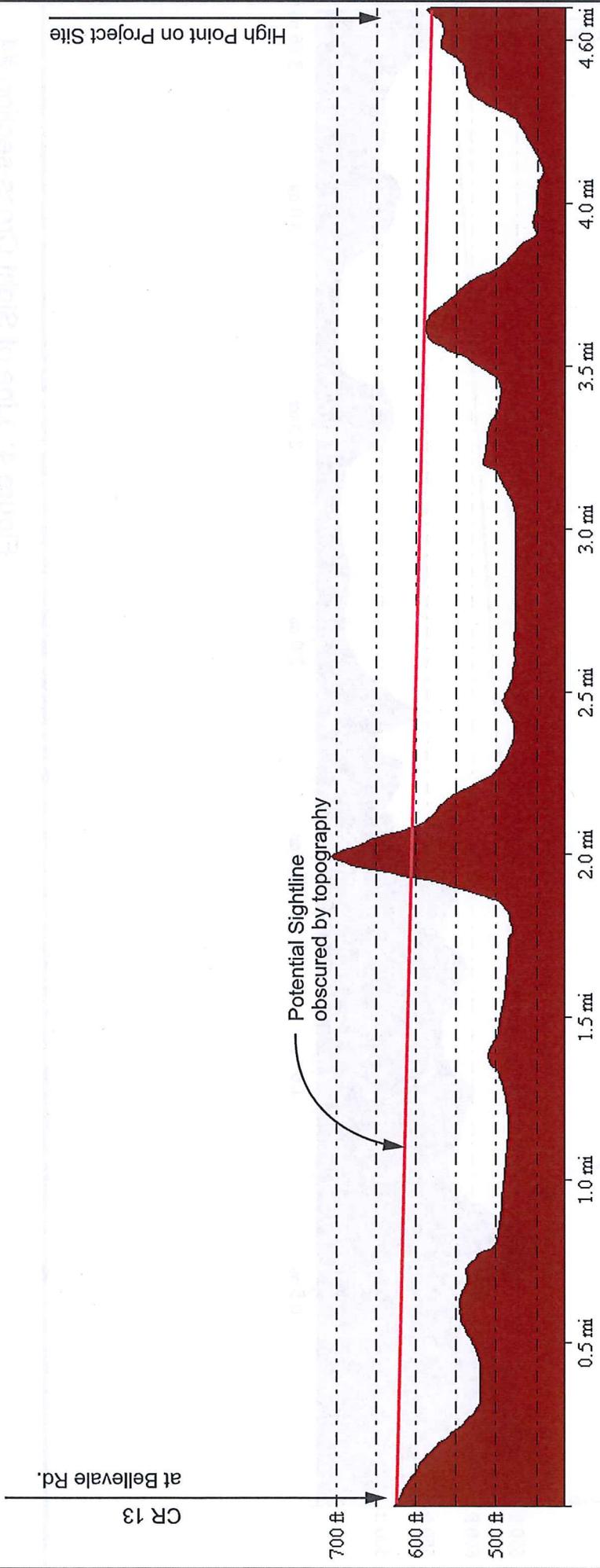


Figure 3: Line of Sight Cross-section #3
 Ashford Estates
 Town of Chester, Orange County, NY
 Scale: Graphic Scale as shown
 Source: NYS GIS Clearinghouse Elevation Data

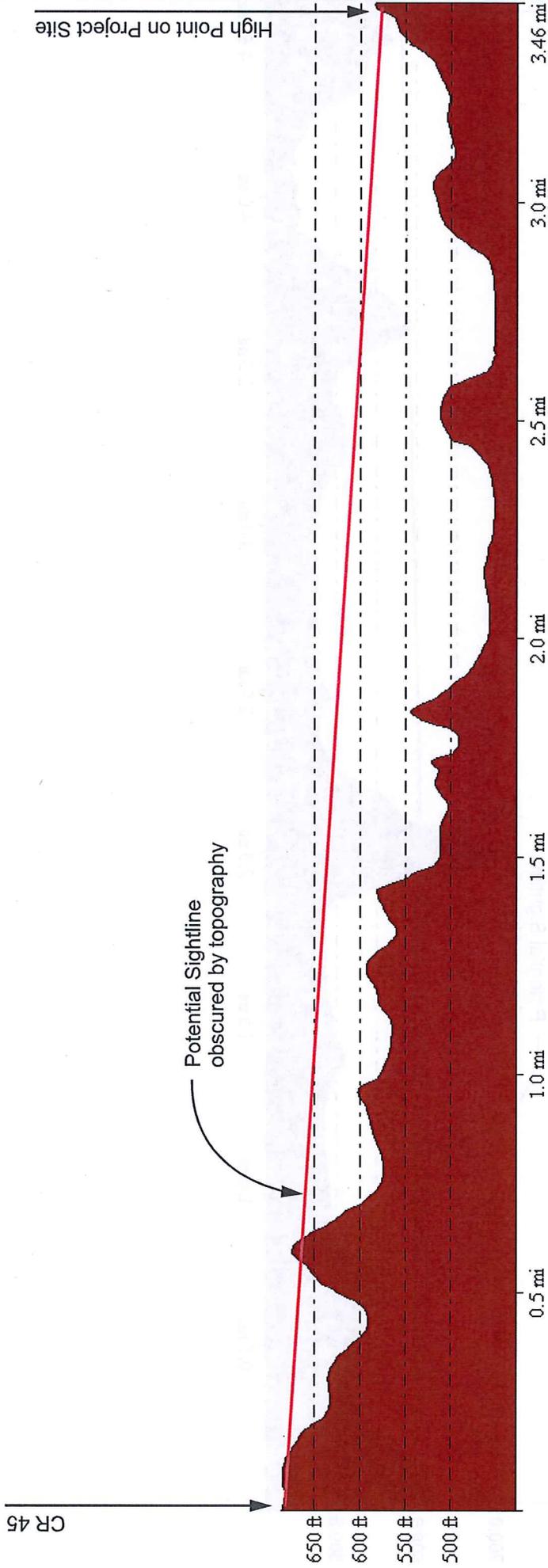


Figure 4: Line of Sight Cross-section #4
 Ashford Estates
 Town of Chester, Orange County, NY
 Scale: Graphic Scale as shown
 Source: NYS GIS Clearinghouse Elevation Data

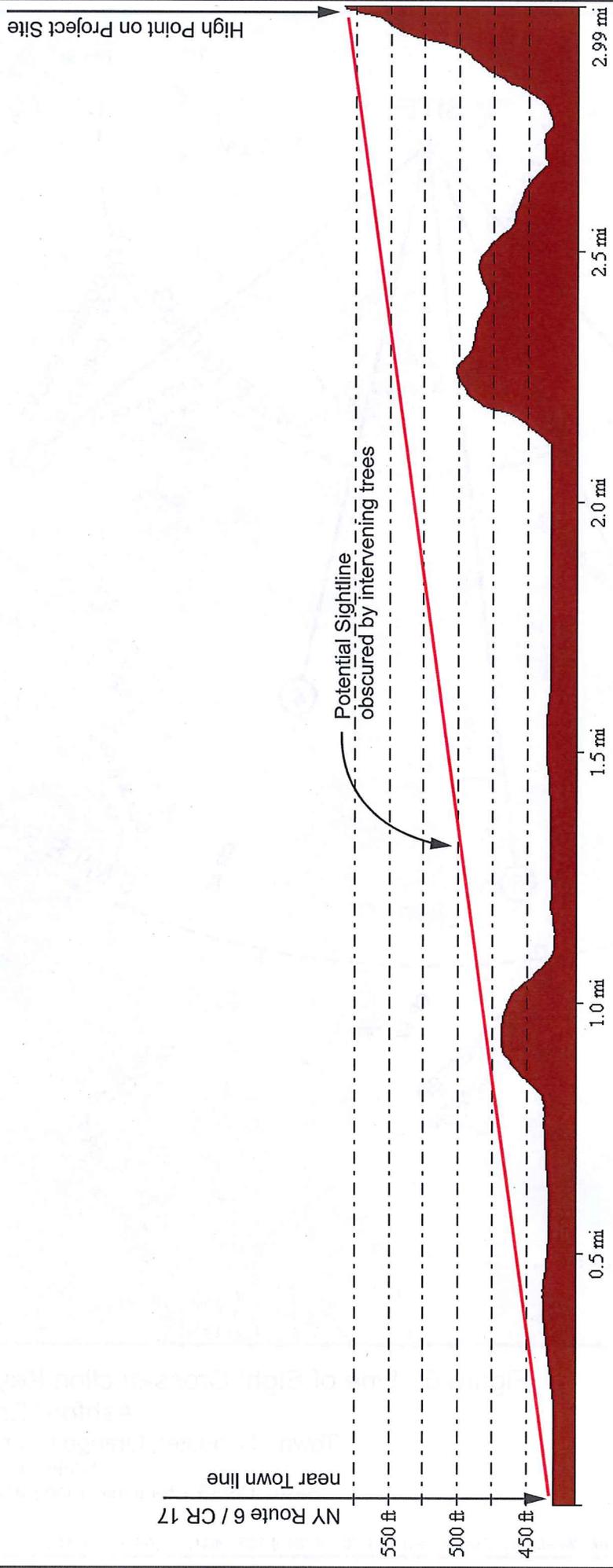


Figure 5: Line of Sight Cross-section #5
 Ashford Estates
 Town of Chester, Orange County, NY
 Scale: Graphic Scale as shown
 Source: NYS GIS Clearinghouse Elevation Data

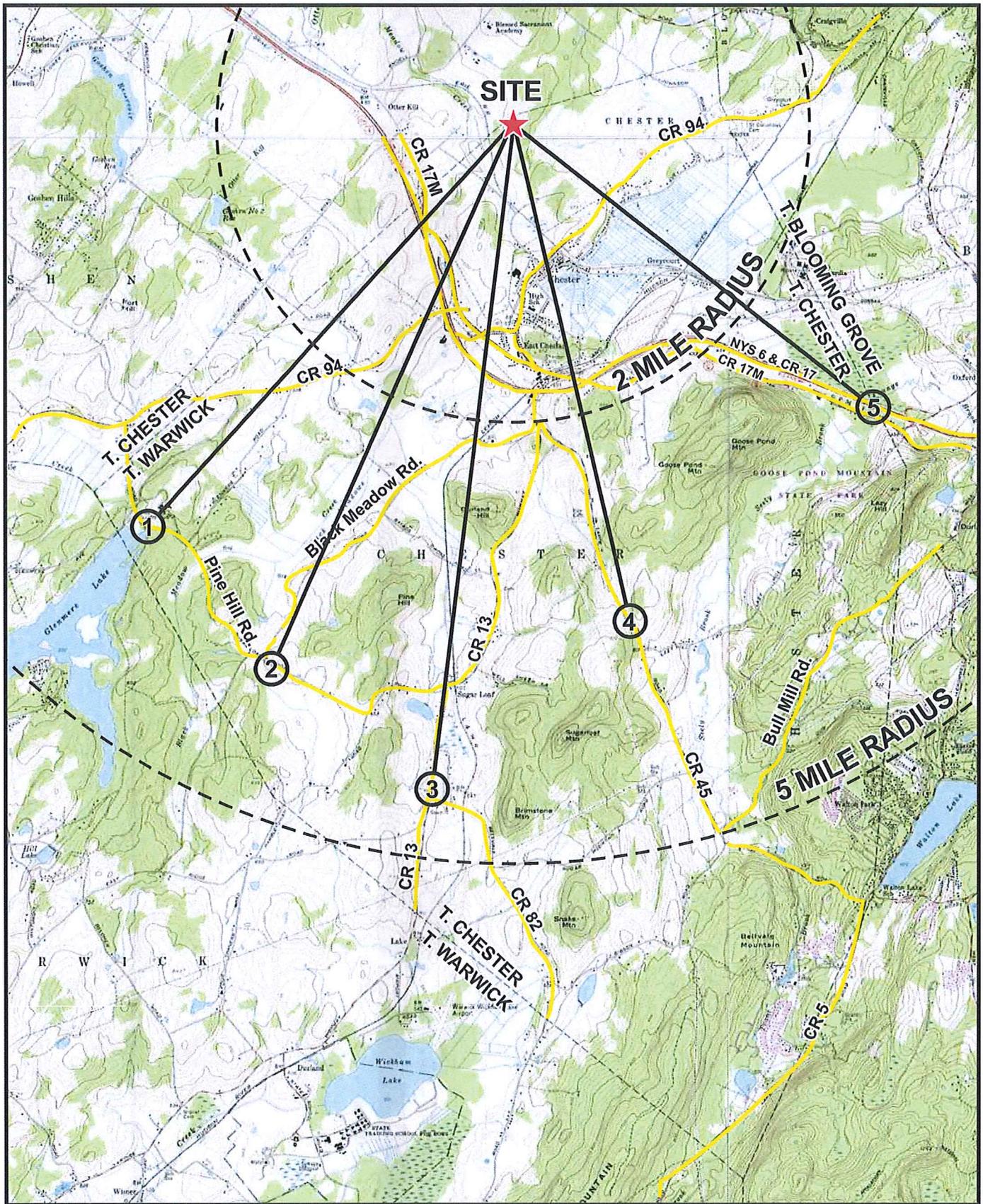


Figure 6: Line of Sight Cross-section Key Map
 Ashford Estates
 Town of Chester, Orange County, NY
 Scale: 1" = 5,000'
 Base: USGS 7.5-minute Topographic Map





1) View Towards Project Site from CR 94 at Glenmere Rd.

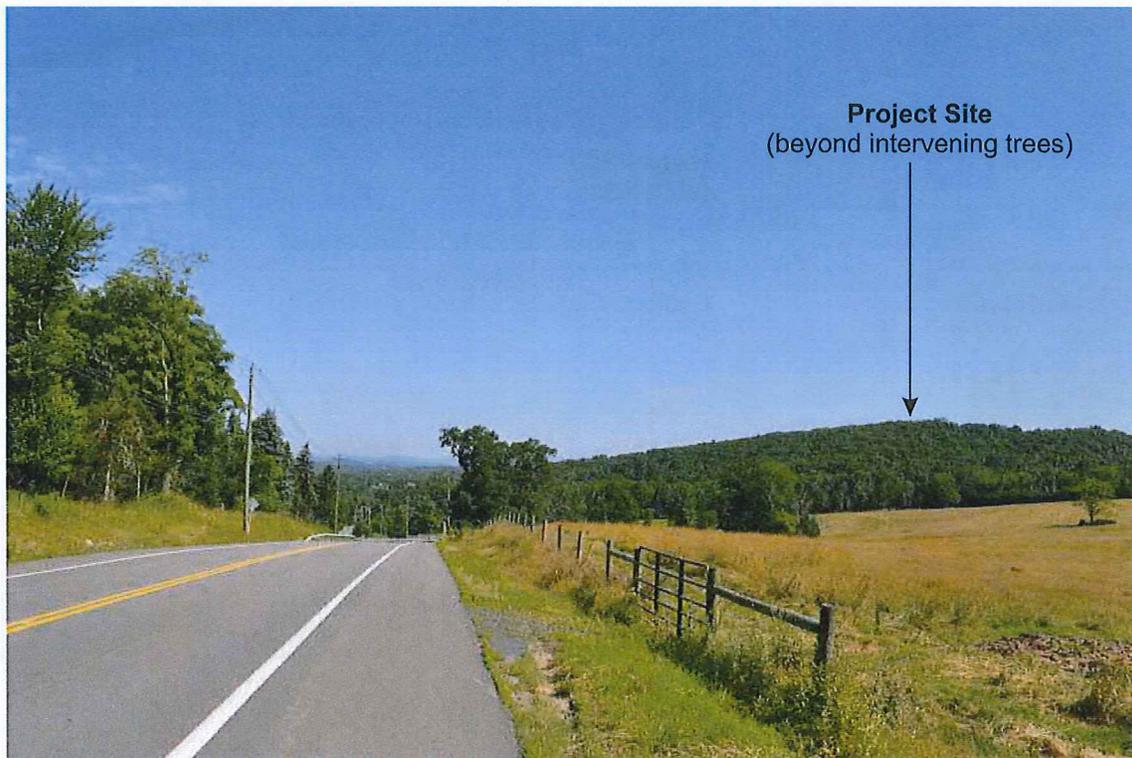


2) View toward site from Black Meadow Rd. at Odyssey Dr.

Figure 7: Photos toward Project Site
Ashford Estates
Town of Chester, Orange County, New York
Source: Tim Miller Associates, Inc., 6/28/12



3) View Towards Project Site from CR 13 at Bellevale Rd..

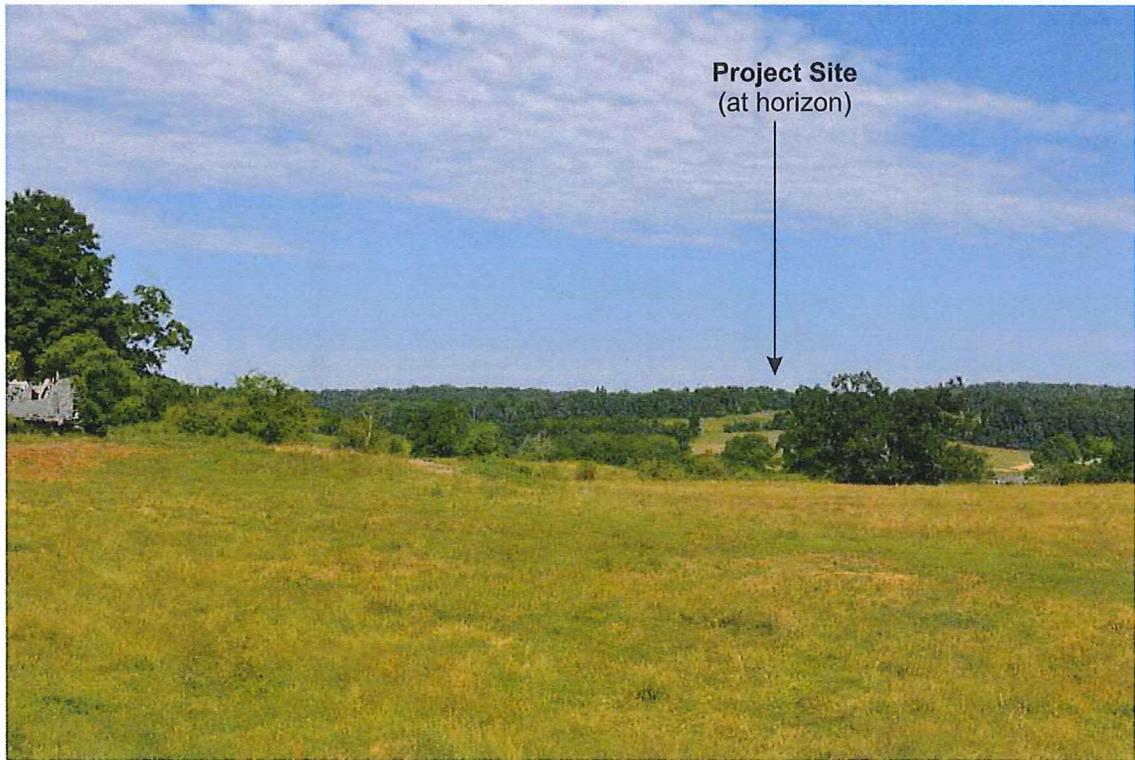


4) View toward site from CR 45

Figure 8: Photos toward Project Site
Ashford Estates
Town of Chester, Orange County, New York
Source: Tim Miller Associates, Inc., 6/28/12



5) View Towards Project Site from NYS Route 6/CR 17 at Eastern Town Line.



6) View toward site from CR 94 at Johnson Rd.

Figure 9: Photos toward Project Site
Ashford Estates
Town of Chester, Orange County, New York
Source: Tim Miller Associates, Inc., 6/28/12

