

# ADVANCE AMHERST RECOVERY PLAN

Adopted



" When we created the Advance Amherst Recovery Plan, we designed it to be a **catalyst for change**. This started at the onset of the pandemic with Amherst recognizing an **opportunity to diversify** the Town's approach to economic development. This comprehensive Recovery Plan provides Amherst with a **roadmap to emerge** from this health crisis **stronger**."

- Brian Kulpa, Town of Amherst Supervisor

## ADVANCE AMHERST RECOVERY PLAN

### Developed by:

Dave Versel, THE VERSEL GROUP

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Laurie Stillwell, Amherst Emergency Operations Center Planning Section Chief

### Acknowledgements

The Advance Amherst Recovery Plan would not be possible without the following individuals who volunteered their time and expertise towards the plan's development:

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Councilman Michael Szukala

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## TOWN DEPARTMENTS

Assessor's Office

Attorney's Office

Building

Central Fire Alarm

Comptroller's Office

Contract Compliance & Administration

Department of Information Technology

Economic Development

Emergency Services & Safety

Engineering

Finance

Highway

Human Resources

Office of the Supervisor

Planning

Police

Senior Services

Town Clerk

Town Court

Youth and Recreation

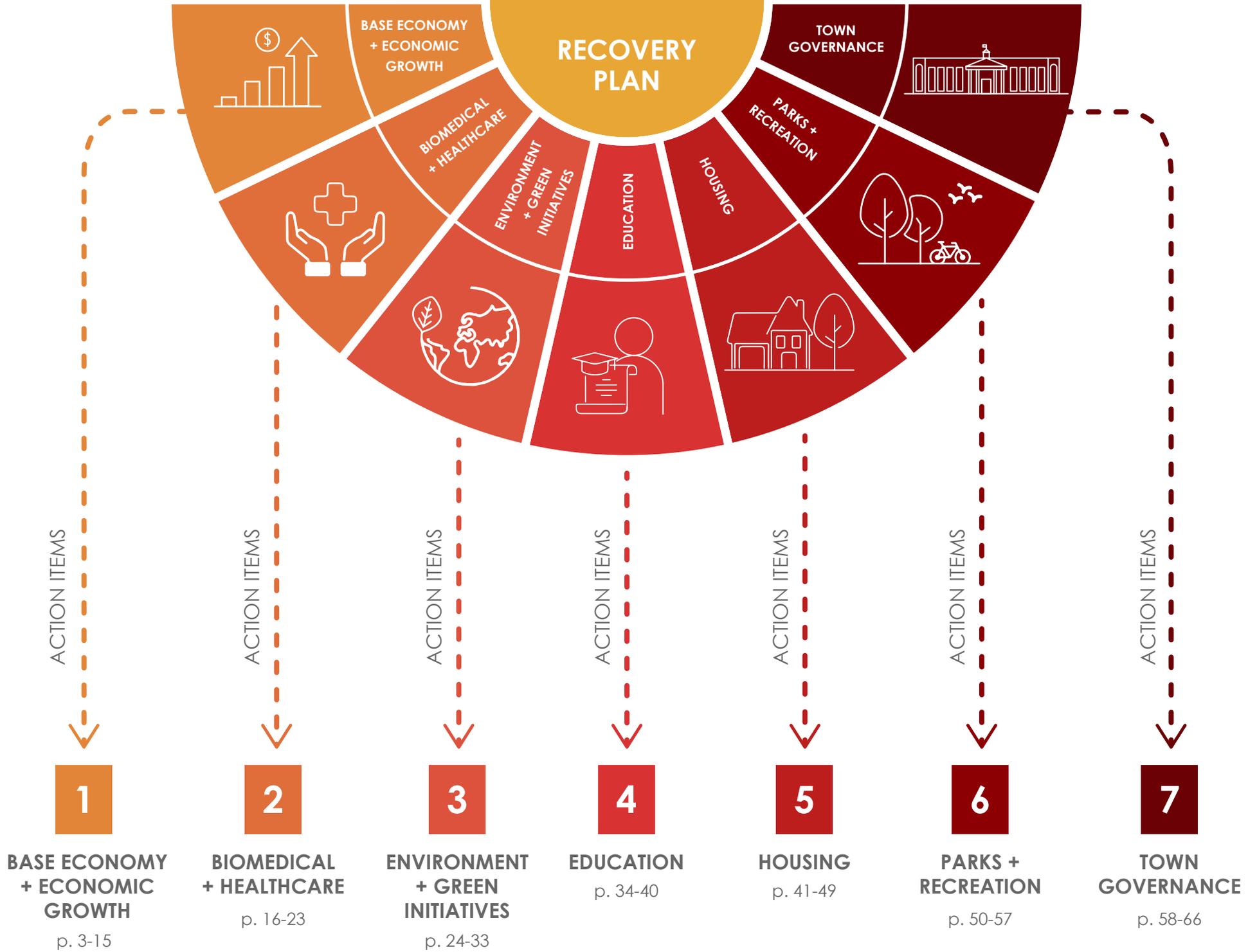
## CORE COMPONENTS OF THE RECOVERY PLAN

In March 2020, during the earliest days of the COVID-19 crisis, the Town of Amherst quickly activated an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to coordinate its efforts to react to the public health, economic, and social trauma caused by the pandemic. From the outset, the Town wanted to ensure that the EOC's work did more than just react to the pandemic. Instead, the Town's leadership communicated with the community and business leaders, with the aim of building the groundwork for a better Amherst that would be even more prosperous, resilient, and equitable.

Since the outset of the pandemic, the Town has coordinated with numerous working groups, its consulting team, and a wide range of stakeholders to understand how Amherst has been changed by the pandemic and to position itself for a stronger future. This Recovery Plan examines the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on the Amherst community and presents an Action Plan that will guide the Town's recovery efforts over the next few years.

The Recovery Plan is organized into seven components, each with a series of Action Items, which in turn will be used to carry out initiatives by the Town.



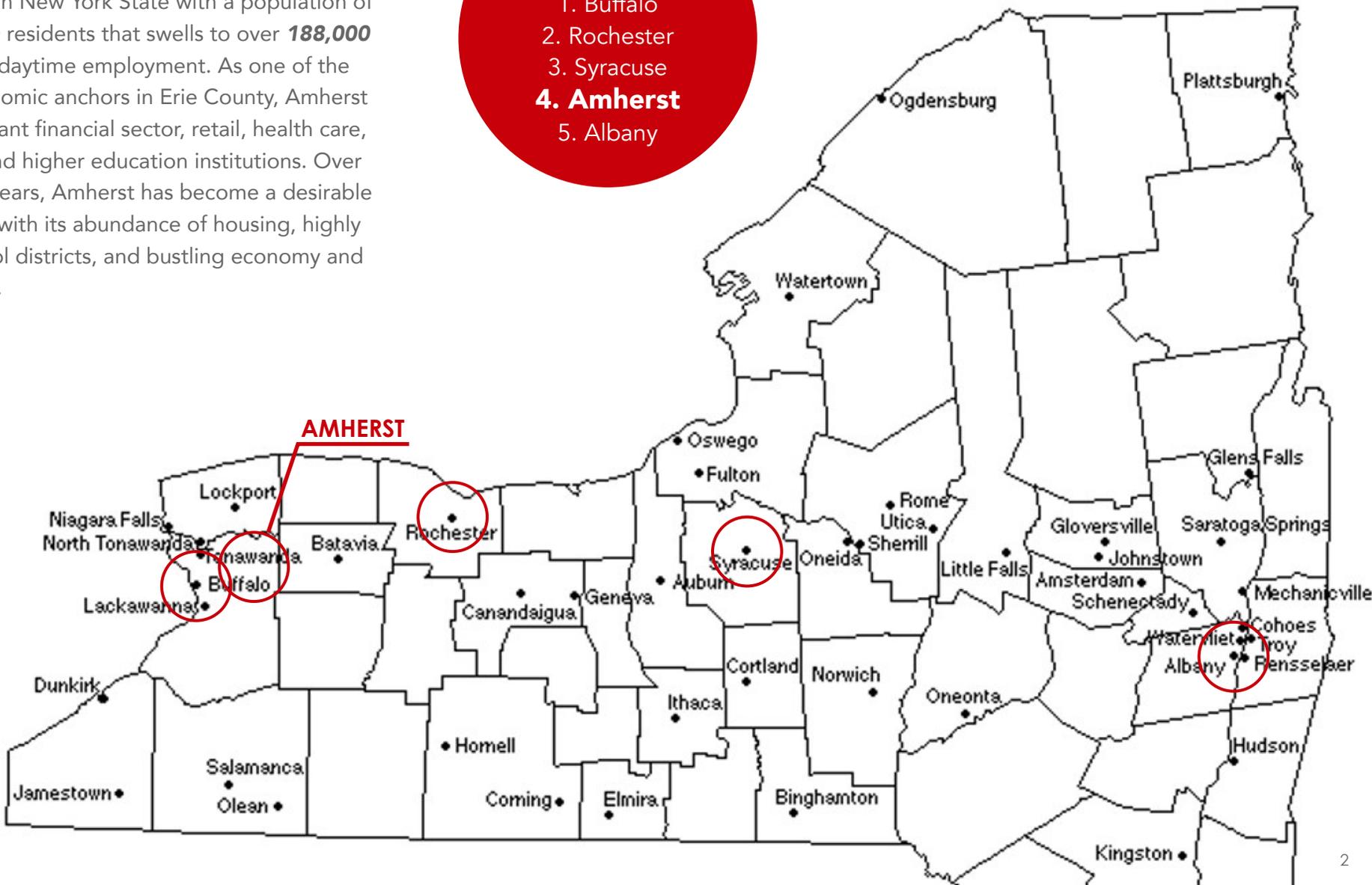


## ABOUT AMHERST

Located just northeast of the City of Buffalo, the Town of Amherst is the premier Township in Western New York. Amherst is the **fourth largest** upstate municipality in New York State with a population of over 129,000 residents that swells to over **188,000 people** with daytime employment. As one of the biggest economic anchors in Erie County, Amherst hosts significant financial sector, retail, health care, hospitality and higher education institutions. Over the past 50 years, Amherst has become a desirable place to live with its abundance of housing, highly ranked school districts, and bustling economy and job offerings.

### Upstate NY Populations:

1. Buffalo
2. Rochester
3. Syracuse
4. Amherst
5. Albany



## BASE ECONOMY + ECONOMIC GROWTH

In 2016 the Town of Amherst completed an Economic Study that examined the changing demographic, economic, and real estate market forces that were driving growth in the community.

Two central recommendations from this study were:

- Take a more holistic look at the Town's economic development activities
- More proactive efforts such as industry targeting, marketing, and site assembly.

In response to these recommendations, the Town established an Economic Development Department in 2019. Since its inception, the department has greatly improved the Town's relationships with the real estate and business communities. It has had success pursuing specific projects and initiatives such as the Boulevard Mall redevelopment and Amherst Central Park. The Town is eager to build on these successes, beginning with the creation of a long-term vision and strategic plan for economic development in Amherst. These action items lay out how the Department should proceed with pursuing these efforts.



Population Change, 2010-2019

## BASE ECONOMY + ECONOMIC GROWTH



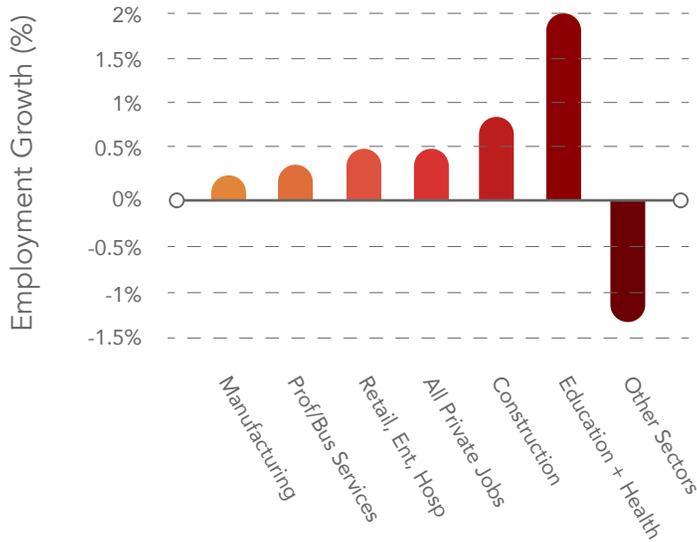
1. Develop a Strategic Plan for Economic Growth
2. Cultivate International Business
3. Provide Startup and Business Incubation Support
4. Provide Small Business Support
5. Facilitate Commercial Revitalization





## EMPLOYMENT & POPULATION GROWTH

The following data depicts employment growth by industry in the Buffalo Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) from 2015-2019.



**8,649** Private Sector Jobs Added in the Buffalo MSA

**7,000** Jobs Added to Education + Health Services Sector

In 2020, the COVID pandemic caused significant damage to the WNY economy. The most resilient sectors after the initial losses in March 2020 were Manufacturing and Construction. The Retail and Hospitality sectors were slower to recover.

**21%** Private Sector Jobs Lost in the Buffalo MSA

**75%** of these Private Sector Jobs were Recouped by November 2020

## GROWTH FORECASTS

The Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) maintains estimates and forecasts of population, housing, and employment change for all Census Block Groups in Erie and Niagara counties. The current set of forecasts are for 2050, based on 2015 estimates. These forecasts have been aggregated to correspond with the six Planning Analysis Areas (PAAs) in the Town of Amherst.

### AMHERST

**+5,375** residents  
by 2050



**+135,000** JOBS\* in 6 major sectors:



Manufacturing

Office



Wholesale/  
Warehouse

Health/Education/  
Government



Retail Trade

Service/Other



\*Buffalo MSA



## DEVELOP A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

- >>> Conduct an **economic assets & challenges assessment**. This exercise will examine Amherst's relative strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of a site selector. It will closely examine the Town's standing across a broad range of key demographic, economic, labor force, infrastructure, regulatory, and quality of life issues and provide a complete picture of Amherst's current competitive position. The results of this exercise will shape the understanding of how Amherst can compete for key industry types it is looking to grow and attract, as well as identify areas that may need to be improved to appeal to those businesses.
- >>> Conduct an **industry target study**. An essential step in building economic development programming is to identify industry sectors that are both desirable for Amherst and likely to be attracted to the community. This process will begin with assembling a "list" of industries and subsectors that Town leadership seeks to attract. This list will then be vetted to assess the viability of each industry in Amherst, resulting in a final list of recommended targets.
- >>> Create an **economic development vision & strategy**. As Amherst approaches the next phase of its growth and development, a clear vision and branding approach is needed to best articulate Amherst's value proposition to potential investors, employers, and professionals. This vision will be part of a unified brand for all internal and external communications and marketing efforts by the Town.
- >>> Undertake a **marketing campaign**. Implementation of the Strategic Plan will begin with a marketing campaign to target industries and businesses. It will also contain a strategic plan for identifying and connecting with potential investors and target businesses including a plan and budget for direct marketing, advertising, and sponsorships.
- >>> Establish **formal relocation/attraction strategy** with regional partners. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic the widespread acceptance of remote work has fueled a wave of relocations of professionals from higher to lower-cost markets. Amherst is particularly well positioned to attract new businesses and residents from the New York/New Jersey region and other larger and higher-priced markets. The Town should take an active role in supporting these efforts.



## CULTIVATE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

- >>> Leverage **international communities** for recruitment opportunities. The Town's robust international populations have access to networks of investors and entrepreneurs that go well beyond what local economic development leaders typically can access. The Town should work with local leaders from these communities to tap into their networks as a means of attracting entrepreneurs, venture capital, and overseas investments from alternative sources such as the EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program.
- >>> Expand efforts to **attract Canadian investment**. In spite of its proximity to Southern Ontario and the Greater Toronto + Hamilton Area (GTHA), Amherst has not historically had great success at attracting investment and trade activity from Canadian companies. Amherst's combination of a skilled workforce, transportation infrastructure, and available sites and buildings should position the community well for marketing to Canadian interests. The Town should proactively work with Invest Buffalo Niagara and other regional groups to identify and pursue leads to market its office, warehousing, and manufacturing opportunities to Canadian companies.
- >>> Support **establishment of international food festival/pop-up** events. Amherst's emergence as a haven for immigrants and international communities has fueled the proliferation of a variety of restaurants serving cuisine from all over the world. There has been some interest from the owners of several of these restaurants in establishing an International Food Festival to showcase the culinary diversity of Amherst. The Town, together with the Amherst Community Diversity Commission, should convene interested participants to help plan events of this sort and provide suitable venues for it.



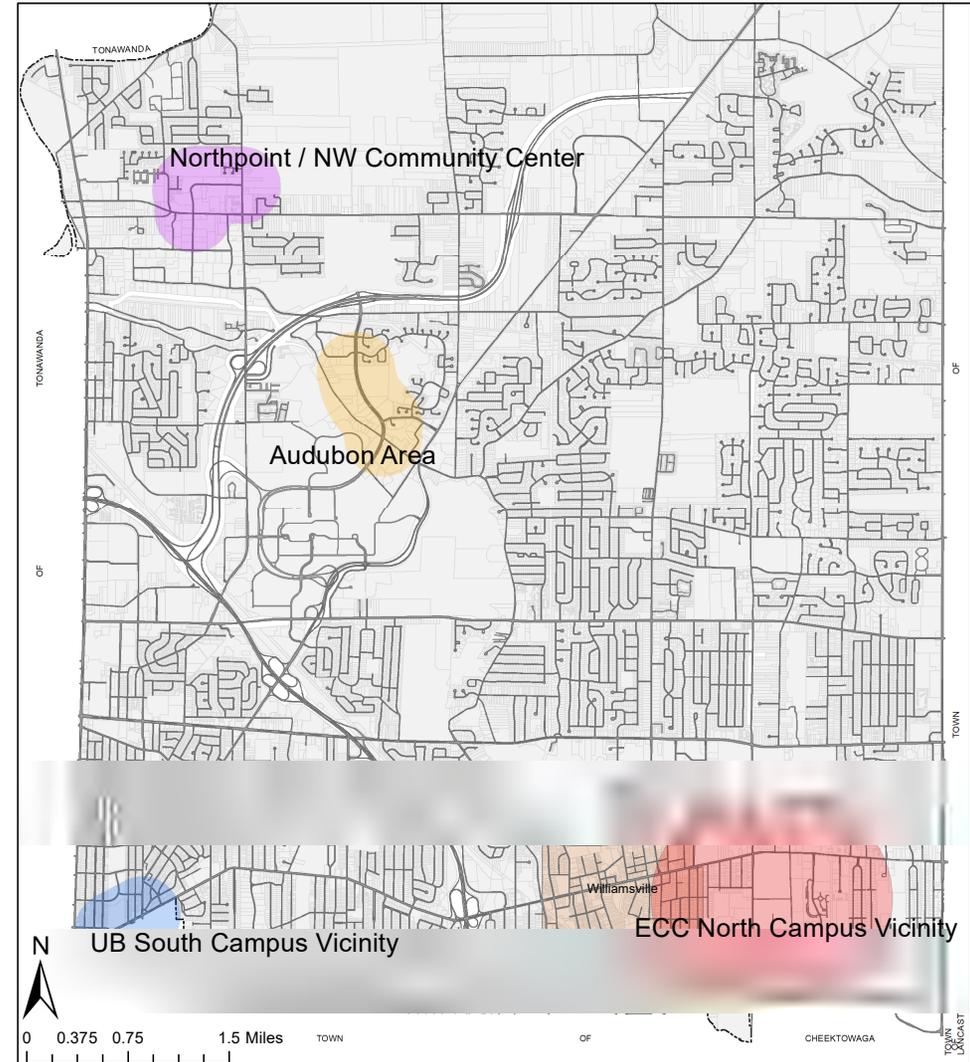
As the **home** of the University at Buffalo's North Campus, Amherst attracts immigrant communities from **all around the world**.



## STARTUPS AND BUSINESS INCUBATION SUPPORT

- >>> Connect **support services with business/employment needs**. The Town should work with privately-run shared office facilities in Amherst to provide enhanced support services to businesses at these established locations. Potential services to be offered include business planning, transportation services, administrative and accounting support, childcare, technology training, and connections to potential employees and interns.
- >>> Explore feasibility of **incubators for small manufacturers/maker spaces**. There has been strong growth in recent years among small-scale manufacturers and so-called "maker spaces." In addition to the services needed by office-based businesses such as back-office support and childcare, operators of small manufacturing businesses have needs for expensive equipment such as 3-D printers, wood and metalworking machinery, and high-end computer systems, but these items are often beyond the budget of startups. The Town can play a key role in helping to attract and grow small manufacturers by providing access to these resources.

Town of Amherst Potential Incubator Locations



### Legend

- Northpoint / NW Community Center
- Audubon Area
- UB South Campus Vicinity
- ECC Campus Vicinity
- Town boundary
- Parcels



## SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT

- >>> Designate a **small business liaison** in Town government. A common best practice in economic development is to designate an official point of contact within the local government for all matters related to business retention and regulation. The Economic Development Department should designate an individual as its official Small Business Liaison. In addition to being the primary point of contact for business owners, the Business Liaison will also be responsible for providing guidance to businesses on how to navigate the Town's review processes.
  
- >>> Review & **assess current Town regulatory procedures** for businesses. Although Amherst has made great strides in improving its image with the local business community, there are still many old and often outdated regulations that are located in different parts of the Town Code. The Town should take immediate action to review the entire spectrum of regulations related to business activity. This review is intended to produce changes and updates to codes that will streamline and simplify processes for starting and running businesses in Amherst.
  
- >>> Create **how-to guide for starting a business** in Amherst. Related to the review of business regulations is the need for a comprehensive guide for prospective business owners that provides information on the permitting and approval processes necessary for opening a new business in the Town. The guide (produced in multiple languages) will include information, links, and Town government contacts related to zoning, development, building, operations, financing, and related items and should be provided as both a webpage and a printed guide.
  
- >>> Conduct **small business training** for town staff. Municipal staff often do not have personal experience running small businesses and therefore may not be sensitive to the needs of entrepreneurs and business owners. The Town should work closely with its business community to identify some of the "blind spots" related to small businesses and develop a training program to educate public-facing staff members in key departments on how to effectively work with small business applicants.



## SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT, CONTINUED

- >>> Create **centralized calendar of events** and programs. An ongoing challenge for Amherst residents and business owners is the lack of a one-stop shop for information regarding business-related events. One of the elements of the restructuring of the Town website will be to provide this calendar of relevant events being held by the Town, Amherst IDA, Chamber of Commerce, and other local and regional business groups. This calendar will need to be updated regularly and the Town will need to take additional steps to publicize events on the calendar via listservs, social media, and other forms of communication.
  
- >>> Explore opportunities to support small business growth through **creative financing tools** and incentives. Many small businesses have been hard hit by the Pandemic, some experiencing extreme fluctuations in income, available workers, supply chain interruptions, and new competition from e-commerce. The Town is well positioned with the new Economic Development Department and the Amherst Development Corporation to explore what it can do in terms of programming and incentives to better support its start-ups and small business community. One such example may include establishing a Small Business Bond Program that works to connect small businesses with everyday investors through a financial marketplace platform.



## COMMERCIAL REVITALIZATION

- >>> Conduct **comprehensive study of underutilized office space**. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic Amherst was already experiencing vacancy in older business parks and commercial corridors, and this trend may not be reversed post-COVID. The Town should work with owners of high vacancy and/or obsolete properties to determine potential reuse/redevelopment opportunities; update the town's Office Building (OB) and Research & Development (RD) zoning districts; and consider incentives necessary to execute reuse projects.
  
- >>> Pursue **redevelopment plan for Audubon Parkway** Office Area. The Audubon Parkway area, located to the north of the University at Buffalo's North Campus, primarily contains low-rise office buildings on large lots in a campus setting which is a less desirable model today. With pressure increasing for residential and higher-density mixed-use development around UB, the Town should undertake a plan to guide redevelopment of the Audubon area, including exploring feasibility of an innovation district. Given the scope and complexity of this initiative, the Town should consider involving national experts from the Urban Land Institute or a similar organization.
  
- >>> Establish **facade improvement program**. In older commercial districts in Amherst, many businesses own small buildings and lack the resources to invest in improving their appearances. The physical condition of these buildings often constrains businesses from growing and thriving. The Town should explore the creation of a fund that targets exterior improvements to older, owner-occupied buildings. This fund should be administered at the local level and should be independent of federal funding programs. A pilot program is recommended for the Bailey Avenue corridor in Eggertsville. The program should be used to provide initial funding for architectural design work and then matching funds for construction of improvements to buildings.



## COMMERCIAL REVITALIZATION, CONTINUED

- >>> Explore **food incubators** as part of retail area redevelopment. The proposed redevelopment of the Boulevard Mall promises to be a transformative project for Amherst and Western New York. Plans for the property focus on multifamily residential development and walkable retail streets. This new Boulevard Central district would offer a unique opportunity to provide a food hall, agri-business incubator, or shared kitchens that can allow chefs and restaurateurs' opportunities to test new concepts.
- >>> **Acquire public infrastructure, utility corridors, right of ways, and public space** for the Boulevard Mall site. To accelerate the revitalization of the mall and adjacent areas and solidify public uses and corridors prior to redevelopment, the town should consider property and right of way acquisition through eminent domain action, as necessary. The Amherst Development Corporation can be a partner for management and oversight of these actions as future public infrastructure installations will be managed and financed through the PIFF district currently being developed.

### Design Advisory Board (DAB)

The DAB supports the Planning Board/Director in an advisory manner on matters related to building and site design for projects located within mixed-use zoning districts. The DAB was created to foster attractive and vibrant mixed-use development by applying design guidelines that foster closer attention to detail on site layout, building features and façade design, and public amenities as the town strives to revitalize older commercial areas.



## TRANSFORMATIVE PROJECT SNAPSHOT



“a chance to  
and redevelop one of its  
**largest** and **most successful**  
commercial areas in a  
comprehensive manner”



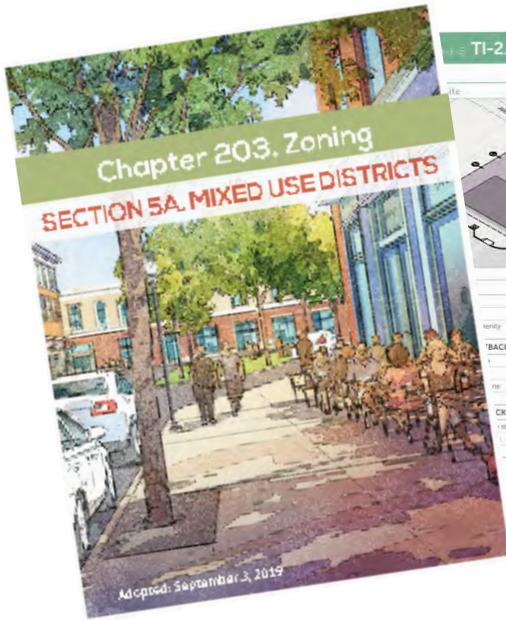
### BOULEVARD MALL REDEVELOPMENT

The Mall has gone through many transformations, and the most dramatic lies ahead. The Town has completed a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS), adopted an Action Plan, and rezoned the property. We are proud to be working hand in hand with Douglas Development on one of the WNY region’s most inspiring economic redevelopment projects and use this opportunity to bring true, transit-oriented development to the Town.





# TRANSFORMATIVE PROJECTS SNAPSHOT



### TI-2.5 Traditional Infill 2.5

**BUILDING HEIGHT**

- Top plane height: 2 stories/24' max.
- Building height: 2.5 stories/35' max.
- Roof pitch: 18.12' max.

**BUILDING LENGTH** See SA-2 Infill Frontages

**STORY HEIGHT** See SA-2 Infill Frontages

**ACTIVATION USE** See SA-8 Use Regulations

### Village Core Frontage

**STORY HEIGHT**

- Ground floor elevation: 0' min / 2' max
- Ground story height: 13' min / 15' max
- Second story height: 70% min
- Third story height: 20% min
- Fourth story height: 15' min
- Regularized: 30' min

**TRANSPARENCY**

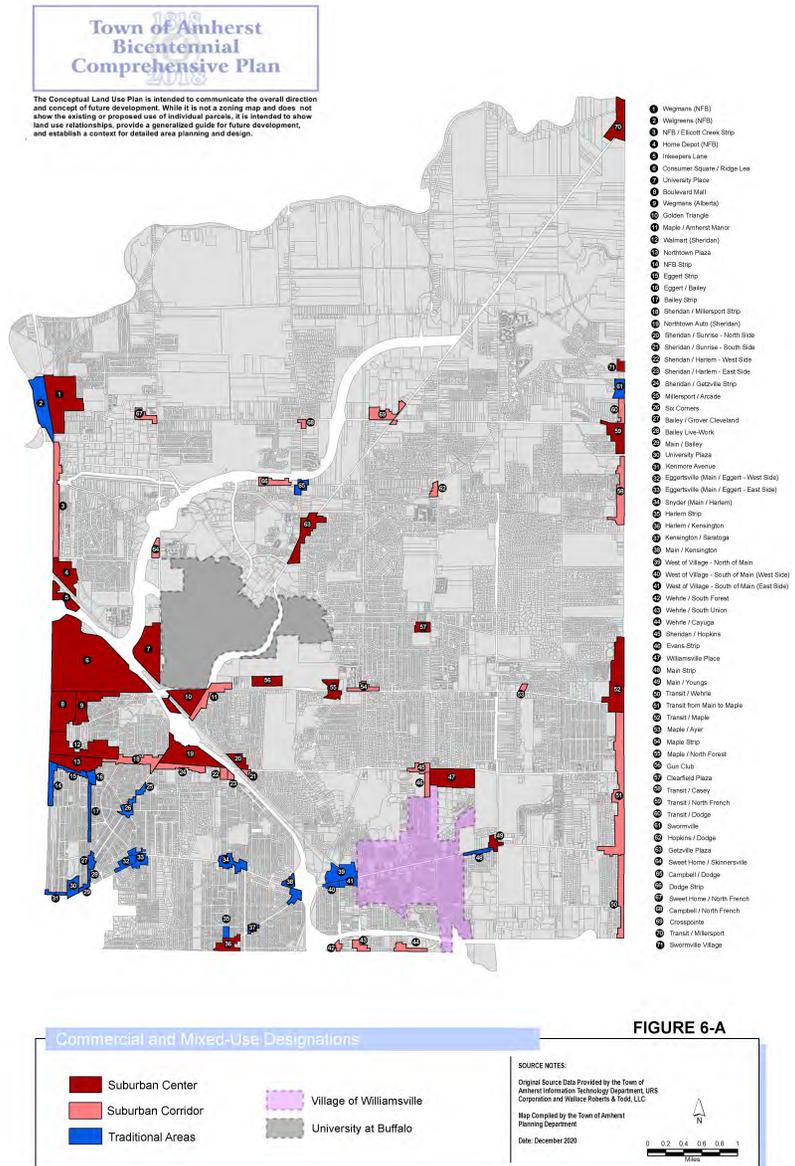
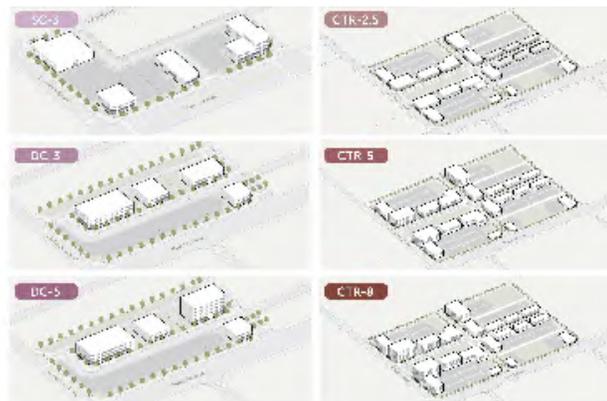
- Ground story: 70% min
- Second story: 20% min
- Third story: 15' min
- Fourth story: 30' min

**PEDESTRIAN ACCESS**

- Street-facing entrance: Required
- Street-facing entrance: 30' min

## Zoning Updates + Form-Based Codes: Development of Mixed Use Districts

“The goal is to **encourage mixed-use development** and increased density, maximize economic investment and tax revenue, improve mobility and pedestrian access via public transit, bicycling, and walkability, invest in aged infrastructure systems, and protect and enhance surrounding residential neighborhoods.”





## BASE ECONOMY + ECONOMIC GROWTH SUMMARY + TIMELINE

	PROJECTS	LEAD	TEAM/DEPARTMENT	2022	2023	2024	2025	PROJECT CHARTER
STRATEGIC PLAN FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	Conduct Economic Assets + Challenges Assessment	Economic Development	Planning / AIDA / Chamber of Commerce	—————				✓
	Conduct Industry Target Study	Economic Development	Planning / AIDA / Chamber of Commerce	—————				✓
	Create Economic Development Vision + Strategy	Economic Development	Planning / AIDA/ Chamber of Commerce / Regional Economic Partners	—————				✓
	Undertake Marketing + Lead Generation Campaign	Economic Development	AIDA/ Regional Economic Partners	— — — — —	—————			✓
	Establish Formal Relocation / Attraction Strategy with Regional Partners	Economic Development	Chamber of Commerce / Buffalo Niagara Partnership / Invest Buffalo Niagara	—————				✓
CULTIVATE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS	Leverage International Communities for Recruitment Opportunities	Economic Development	Chamber of Commerce / AIDA / CHAI / Chinese Chamber of Commerce / Other Local Cultural Business Leaders	—————→				✓
	Expand Efforts to Attract Canadian Investment	Economic Development	AIDA / Buffalo Niagara Partnership / Invest Buffalo Niagara	— — — — —	—————			✓
	Support Establishment of International Food Festival / Pop-Up	Parks Administration	Economic Development / Chamber of Commerce / Amherst Community Diversity Commission	—————				✓
STARTUP + BUSINESS INCUBATION	Connect Support Services with Business / Employment Needs	Economic Development	UB / ECC/ Erie 1 BOCES / Regional Economic Partners	—————→				
	Explore Feasibility of Incubator for Small Manufacturers / Maker Space	Economic Development	Planning / Community Development / Private Operators	— — — — —	—————			✓

Note: Project teams reflected here are not comprehensive and will be developed during project charter set up. Start dates subject to change.



## BASE ECONOMY + ECONOMIC GROWTH SUMMARY + TIMELINE, CONTINUED

	PROJECTS	LEAD	TEAM/DEPARTMENT	2022	2023	2024	2025	PROJECT CHARTER
SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT	Designate Small Business Liaison	Economic Development	Town Board	█				✓
	Review and Assess Current Town Regulatory Procedures for Businesses	Economic Development	Chamber of Commerce / AIDA / Building Dept / Planning	█				✓
	Create How-To Guide for Starting a Business in Amherst	Economic Development	AIDA / AMH Development Corporation / Planning / Chamber of Commerce / Building Dept	█				✓
	Conduct Small Business Training for Town Staff	Economic Development	Chamber of Commerce / Local Business Leaders		→			✓
	Create Centralized Calendar of Events and Programs	Economic Development	IT	█				✓
	Explore Growth through Creative Financing Tools	Economic Development	Chamber of Commerce / AIDA / AMH Development Corporation	→				✓
COMMERCIAL REVITALIZATION	Conduct a Comprehensive Study of Underutilized Office Space	AIDA	Planning / Economic Development / Town Assessor	█	█			
	Pursue Redevelopment Plan for Audubon Parkway Office Area	Planning	Economic Development / AIDA / Town Attorney / Empire State Development Corp		█	█		✓
	Establish a Facade Improvement Program	Economic Development	AIDA / AMH Development Corporation / Planning / Chamber of Commerce / Building Dept	→				
	Explore Food Incubators as Part of Retail Area Redevelopment	Economic Development	Planning / AIDA / Youth	█	█			✓
	Acquire Public Infrastructure for the Boulevard Mall	Economic Development	Planning / Engineering / Town Attorney/ AMH Development Corporation	█				✓

Note: Project teams reflected here are not comprehensive and will be developed during project charter set up. Start dates subject to change.

## BIOMEDICAL + HEALTHCARE

This section summarizes research completed by The Versel Group on the Healthcare & Life Sciences cluster in the Buffalo Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and explores the potential for further growth and development of this cluster in Amherst. The complete research report is found in [Appendix C](#).

For the purposes of this research, the Healthcare Cluster was divided into two major subsectors: Healthcare and Life Sciences:

- The Healthcare subsector is comprised of medical and related practices that provide patient care, primarily to local or regional populations.
- The Life Sciences subsector includes Research & Development (R&D), manufacturing, wholesale/distribution and other functions that are geared to a broader population.

“Healthcare  
is the new retail”

83,081

Workers employed in the Buffalo MSA Healthcare Cluster

1,645

Jobs Added over the past 5 years in the Healthcare Cluster

## BIOMEDICAL + HEALTHCARE



1. Conduct Strategic Plan for Healthcare Market
2. Regulatory Reform
3. Medical Tourism

“The health of every New Yorker depends on a strong, stable, and equitable healthcare system, and healthcare workers are its very foundation. With the largest ever investment in healthcare, we will retain, rebuild, and grow our healthcare workforce and ensure we deliver the highest quality healthcare for New Yorkers.”  
- Gov. Kathy Hochul, 2022 State of the State Address





## HEALTHCARE CLUSTER SUBSECTORS



### HEALTHCARE

medical and related practices that provide patient care, primarily to local or regional populations

- Employs ~ **73,500** people in the Buffalo MSA, and posted moderate growth over the past 5 years (increase of 3.2 percent).
- Largest employment category in this subsector is **General Medical and Surgical Hospitals** (20,800 jobs in 2020), followed by **Physicians** (11,200 jobs) and **Nursing Care Facilities** (8,300 jobs). These three categories account for more than half of the region's total Healthcare jobs.
- **Most job gains** over the past 5 years are Home Health Care Service, Outpatient Mental Health and Substance Abuse Centers, Residential Disability Facilities, and General Medical and Surgical Hospitals.
- **Most job losses** over the past 5 years were Nursing Care Facilities, Offices of Dentists, Other Residential Care Facilities, and Freestanding Surgical and Emergency Centers.
- **Strong levels of concentration in the region** relative to national averages include Residential Disability Facilities, Psychiatric/Substance Abuse Hospitals, Outpatient Mental Health and Substance Abuse Centers, and Specialty Hospitals.
- ~60% of those employed in the Healthcare subsector have jobs that are directly classified as Healthcare Practitioners or Healthcare Support. The remaining 40% fall under office, administrative, social service, or other categories. The top specific occupations are: **Registered Nurses** (8,400 jobs), **Personal Care Aides** (6,400 jobs), and **Nursing Assistants** (4,800 jobs).

### LIFE SCIENCES

R&D, manufacturing, wholesale/distribution and other functions that are geared to a broader population



- Employs ~ **9,600** people in the Buffalo MSA. This subsector has lost employment over the past 5 years (-600 jobs) and is expected to continue to lose jobs over the next 5 years.
- Largest employment category in this subsector is **R&D within Life Sciences** (4,000 people in 2020), followed by **Pharmaceutical Preparation Manufacturing** (1,200 jobs), **Medical Supplies Wholesalers** (900 jobs), **Surgical/Medical Instrument Manufacturing** (900 jobs), and **Biological Product Manufacturing** (760 jobs).
- **Biological Product Manufacturing** has shown the strongest growth with **550 jobs** added in the past 5 years.
- Majority of sectors in **Life Sciences lost jobs** in the past 5 years. Job losses were most acute for Drug Wholesalers (-550 jobs), Surgical Appliance & Supplies Manufacturing (-480 jobs), and Surgical/Medical Instrument Manufacturing (-170 jobs).
- **Strong levels of concentration in the region** relative to national averages include Biological Product Manufacturing, In-Vitro Diagnostic Substance Manufacturing, Dental Laboratories, and R&D in Life Sciences.
- Top occupational categories in the Life Sciences subsector include: **Medical Scientists** (372 jobs), **Sales Representatives** (277 jobs), **Software Developers** (266 jobs), **Inspectors/Testers/Sorters** (261 jobs), and **General and Operations Managers** (256 jobs).



## GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

As part of the research effort, The Versel Group conducted **interviews with leaders in Amherst's Biomedical & Healthcare** sector. These interviews focused on the opportunities and challenges related to future growth of the sector in Amherst. The findings presented here represent an aggregate of the opinions of interviewees. To protect the confidentiality of participants, no specific comments are attributed to any single individual.

- **Amherst is gaining strength as a center for healthcare business activity.** Nearly all of the major healthcare institutions and businesses are actively expanding or planning to expand their facilities and services in Amherst. The Town's accessibility, affluent resident base, excellent public schools, and strong residential growth are all driving expansion activity.
- **The healthcare delivery model is changing rapidly.** The healthcare industry is rapidly shifting away from a model that consolidated resources around large hospitals and medical centers. The new model—which emphasizes convenience and personalization—includes boutique practices, micro-hospitals, telehealth, and distributed office locations.
- **Healthcare is the new retail.** Multiple stakeholders shared this sentiment, which closely ties to the preceding point that the nature of healthcare service delivery is changing. Providers and landlords both view healthcare as a key component of walkable, mixed-use developments, and clearly see strong potential for health-related uses to replace vacant buildings and storefronts.

- **A regional medical corridor is emerging in Amherst.** A variety of medical practices and healthcare related organizations are located along the I-290 corridor between Main Street and Millersport Highway. Several of the stakeholders have either recently announced or have imminent plans to announce significant investments in healthcare facilities along this corridor.
- **Workforce development is a major obstacle to growth.** Nearly all employers expressed difficulties in attracting and retaining healthcare workers at all pay levels. Western New York has long struggled to retain graduating doctors, dentists, and research scientists, most of whom leave the region after completing degrees. For Registered Nurses, the pandemic exacerbated burnout and accelerated retirements, adding to other trends creating a nursing shortage that may take years to address.
- **The Town must do more if Amherst wants to become a medical tourism destination.** The Town currently has multiple practices and facilities treating patients from beyond Western New York. Practices that draw visitors from outside the area have commented that Amherst needs to offer better lodging, dining, and walkable environments to appeal to medical tourists.

The following individuals were interviewed as part of this research:

**Dr. Michael Brogan**, Senior VP for Academic Affairs, Daemen College  
**Dr. Michael Cropp**, President & CEO, Independent Health  
**Paul Ciminelli**, President & CEO, Ciminelli Real Estate  
**Dr. Ben Oppenheimer**, Owner, Concierge Dental  
**Michael Osborne**, VP of Business Development, Catholic Health  
**Sunita Panesar**, Executive Director of Business Development, Roswell Park CCC  
**Dr. Todd Shatkin**, Owner, Aesthetic Associates  
**Daniel Scully**, CEO, Buffalo Medical Group  
**Mark Wolbert**, VP of Business Development, Excelsior Orthopaedics  
**Martha Metz**, President of WNY Professional Nurses Association



## CONDUCT STRATEGIC PLAN FOR HEALTHCARE MARKET

- >>> Identify **future growth needs** in a comprehensive market study. Building the biomedical and healthcare sector in Amherst will require a broader understanding of the needs of current and future practices and businesses. The Town should initiate and maintain a dialogue with its healthcare community to understand how and where it may be looking to grow in the future. Town staff should regularly engage with the healthcare community to monitor growth needs and plan for future development.
- >>> Build-upon the **I-290 medical spine** brand. The corridor along Interstate 290 between Main Street and Millersport Highway is already one of the leading concentrations of biomedical and healthcare activity in Western New York. This corridor includes campuses of the University at Buffalo, Daemen College, and multiple significant private medical practices. Several of these organizations have recently announced plans for significant expansions in their facilities along this corridor. The Town of Amherst recognizes the importance of this corridor to its economy and should develop a marketing and promotional strategy around this brand as part of its economic development efforts.
- >>> Identify suitable space and **land for future development**. Town staff should take the lead on determining existing buildings and sites that can accommodate the types of healthcare space needed to help grow the sector, along the I-290 Medical Spine and other areas with concentrations of health care providers. This process will likely involve coordination with commercial brokers and property owners to screen potential sites and determine opportunities and challenges for their development. It will also likely include exploring improvements to support infrastructure such as broadband, 5G, and cybersecurity/data management.
- >>> Host a **Future of Nursing Summit** to initiate conversations between major healthcare employers, providers, educational institutions, healthcare workers, unions and advocacy groups to discuss some of the working condition trends exacerbated by the pandemic. The intent being to begin to discuss policies and practices to ensure a future that maintains a high-quality workforce, with reduced turnover, improved working environments, increased support for new graduates, plus advocacy for state policies that will continue to improve WNY's reputation for quality-of-care.
- >>> Work to **improve access to healthcare providers**. Healthcare providers are increasingly turning to decentralized models of service delivery and increased reliance on telemedicine and remote services. Despite these efforts, some populations still have limited access to services. This includes transit-dependent populations and those who do not have access to computers or the internet. Both of these categories tend to primarily include elderly and/or very low-income residents. The Town should explore how to increase both physical and virtual access to healthcare resources for these populations.



## REGULATORY REFORM

- >>> Implement recommended **zoning changes** relative to healthcare. The existing Office Building zoning districts in Amherst do not permit biomedical laboratory space or related uses. In other zoning districts, parking or dimensional requirements may impede the ability of developers and businesses to build new facilities or repurpose existing buildings for medically related uses. The Town is already in the process of updating standards in several of its commercial and office zoning districts to ensure that land use regulations are not preventing growth in this sector. The recommendations of this study should be implemented immediately upon completion.
- >>> Explore ways to **streamline development & construction processes**. Although most healthcare stakeholders interviewed during this planning process commended Town leadership for seeking to improve the regulatory environment, the often-slow process for reviewing development projects was cited as an ongoing obstacle. Town staff should conduct a review of its processes for healthcare related development to identify potential ways to reduce the time and complications involved in review processes.
- >>> Research additional **regulatory obstacles to healthcare development**. The biomedical and healthcare field changes very rapidly, and government regulations often do not keep pace with the needs of the industry. The Town should maintain an active dialogue with key medical providers, businesses, and support industries to ensure that its regulations are not preventing growth and investment. This will also require coordination with other municipal governments and the state legislative delegation, as there will likely need to be changes to state laws and regulations.
- >>> Explore **alternative incentive programs**. Economic incentives for businesses and real estate developments in Amherst have traditionally been provided by the Amherst IDA. However, state laws governing IDAs severely limit its ability to provide such incentives to projects in the healthcare sector. The Town and IDA should collaborate to explore opportunities to expand policies and incentive programs so that they may be applied to biomedical and healthcare businesses. This will likely include advocating for reforms to statewide policies that have limited the use of incentives for certain business types, particularly healthcare and retail.



## MEDICAL TOURISM

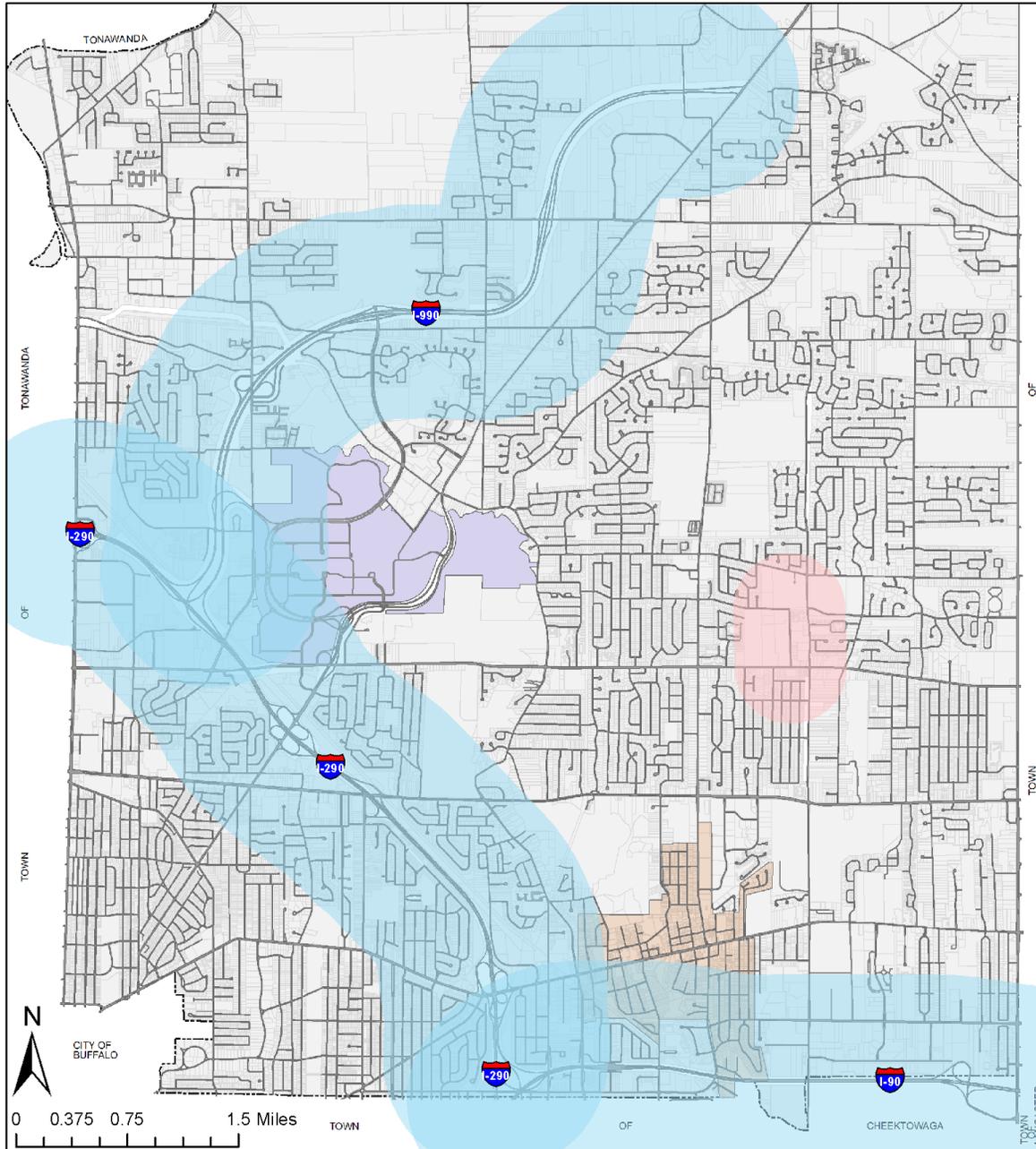
- >>> Inventory & **address gaps in medical tourism system**. This planning effort includes some research into existing medical tourism activity in Amherst. The preliminary finding from this research is that there are several medical practices that draw patients from outside Western New York, including selected specialists that had been successfully drawing Canadian patients prior to the closure of the border during the pandemic. There are also some institutions that attract visitors to medical related seminars and conferences. The Town should continue this research to get as complete a picture as possible of current medical tourism activity and plans for future growth to help shape discussions and planning efforts related to medical tourism.



UBMD Ambulatory Surgery Center



## TRANSFORMATIVE PROJECT SNAPSHOT



### TOWN OF AMHERST INTERSTATE MEDICAL SPINE AREAS

The I-290 Medical Spine is generally centered on the biomedical and healthcare activities located along Interstate 290 between Main Street and Interstate 990, but also includes the cluster of medical employers located around Millard Fillmore Suburban Hospital on Maple Road. Amherst has recognized the importance of this corridor to the WNY North towns' healthcare economy and aims to advance investment through a marketing and promotional strategy.

#### Legend

- Interstate Medical Spine
- Millard Fillmore Suburban Hospital Node
- Parcels
- SUNY UB North Campus
- Village of Williamsville
- Town boundary



## BIOMEDICAL + HEALTHCARE SUMMARY + TIMELINE

	PROJECTS	LEAD	TEAM/DEPARTMENT	2022	2023	2024	2025	PROJECT CHARTER
CONDUCT STRATEGIC PLAN FOR HEALTHCARE MARKET	Identify Future Growth Needs in a Comprehensive Market Study	Economic Development	Planning / Biomedical + Healthcare Stakeholders					✓
	Build Upon the I-290 Medical Spine Brand	Economic Development	Planning / AIDA / Chamber of Commerce					✓
	Identify Suitable Space + Land for Future Development	Planning	Economic Development / AIDA / Town Assessor / Healthcare Providers					✓
	Host a Future of Nursing Summit	Emergency Services / Economic Development	Planning / WNY Professional Nurses Association / Educational Institutions / Healthcare Providers / Unions					✓
	Work to Improve Access to Healthcare Providers	Planning	Senior Services / Local Healthcare Providers / Broadband Providers					✓
REGULATORY REFORM	Implement Recommended Zoning Changes Relative to Healthcare	Planning	Building Dept / Medical Providers / Commercial Developers					
	Explore Ways to Streamline Development and Construction Processes	Planning / Building Dept	Engineering Dept / AIDA					
	Research Additional Regulatory Obstacles to Healthcare Development	Economic Development	Planning / Supervisor's Office					
	Explore Alternative Incentive Programs	AIDA	Economic Development					
MEDICAL TOURISM	Inventory and Address Gaps in Medical Tourism System	Economic Development	Visit Buffalo Niagara / Local Hospitality Businesses					

Note: Project teams reflected here are not comprehensive and will be developed during project charter set up. Start dates subject to change.

## ENVIRONMENT + GREEN INITIATIVES

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Prior to the pandemic, the Town of Amherst had already made it a priority to expand its land and water conservation efforts, including an Agricultural Protection Plan and a Local Waterfront Revitalization Program. The pandemic revealed the importance of greenspace to the community, as the push for social distancing led to significant increases in outdoor activity of all types.

Looking ahead, the Town intends to make continued investments in environmental stewardship and green initiatives in areas where public initiatives can make an impact and also couple such initiatives in meaningful ways to economic opportunities and sustainability. To do so, there are four main components the Town is focusing on: Development Review; Stormwater/Green Infrastructure; Energy Creation & Consumption; and, Solid Waste Management.

### ENVIRONMENT + GREEN INITIATIVES



1. Development Review
2. Stormwater + Green Infrastructure
3. Energy Creation + Consumption
4. Solid Waste Management





## DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

- >>> Create an **environmental index** to measure environmental impacts of development. The Town of Amherst intends to create an index that measures the compatibility of a proposed development project with the Town's goals and targets for land and water conservation. This Index will be the Town's primary tool to shape conservation activities through private development. The purpose of the Index is to provide guidance to the Planning Board and Town Board regarding a project's adherence to the Town's sustainable development targets. For maximum impact, this Index should be written into the Town's development code.
- >>> **Formalize native tree/planting list** for new developments. The Town of Amherst is in the early stages of implementing its ambitious five-year Million Trees Initiative, which will include planting on both public and private property. Regardless of land ownership, the Town has made it a priority to ensure that new plantings are native plant and tree species that grew in Amherst prior to its development. The Town is committed to identifying these species types for different areas in the community and ensuring that new plantings match this approved list. As with the Environmental Index, this list should also be incorporated into the Town's development code.

*“Amherst is starting to experiment with **co-locating solar photovoltaic (PV) systems and agriculture.**”*





## STORMWATER + GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

- >>> Determine **priority locations for green infrastructure** town-wide. As major new developments are undertaken in the Town of Amherst, the Town is committed to prioritizing the introduction of green infrastructure as part of the public environment of future development projects. The Town has already begun a dialogue with the developer of the Boulevard Mall redevelopment project to explore installing biofiltration facilities along the project's proposed inner street corridors. The Town should identify additional redevelopment opportunities in which green infrastructure could be incorporated.
- >>> Establish **funding and operational plans** for maintaining green infrastructure. As with any infrastructure, green infrastructure requires ongoing maintenance to remain effective. The Town must take care to have an operational plan in place for any such project undertaken on Town-owned land , as well as, a model operational plan for private developers who will be installing green infrastructure in their projects.
- >>> **Incorporate green infrastructure & stormwater reduction** requirements into development codes. To ensure that stormwater reduction, biofiltration and other green infrastructure elements are incorporated into future private developments, the Town should require these elements as appropriate into development codes. These requirements should be designed for larger-scale commercial and mixed-use developments. Incentives should also be considered.
- >>> **Establish incentives to reduce stormwater** on commercial properties. Existing commercial properties account for a tremendous amount of impervious surfaces in the Town. The Town should leverage any redevelopment or retrofitting of older commercial properties to reduce impervious surface and add green infrastructure. For properties that are continuing to operate in their current uses, the Town should explore ways to reduce stormwater runoff, including creating incentive programs to accelerate these improvements.



## STORMWATER + GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE, CONTINUED

- >>> Create **continuous maintenance agreements** for subdivision stormwater. Older Subdivisions and Home Owner Association (HOA) Boards have limited understanding of stormwater infrastructure and over the years many drainage areas have been improperly maintained or built upon by adjacent property owners. This lack of correct maintenance creates drainage issues for these residential areas and is outside of the Town's ability or responsibility to maintain. The Town should develop new operational/maintenance agreements with HOAs and Neighborhood groups in order to ensure proper maintenance of such facilities occur.
  
- >>> Develop **green infrastructure jobs** program. There is a lack of trained maintenance staff for green infrastructure, as it is a new and specialized field in which many traditional landscape firms lack proper training. To ensure proper future maintenance of green infrastructure installations in town and create opportunities for skilled jobs placement, the Town should work with regional workforce development organizations to create a jobs-training program to fill this skill gap.
  
- >>> Pursue **biodiversity projects** on town-owned properties. The Town should continue to identify and pursue opportunities to initiate smaller innovative projects in its neighborhoods and key commercial areas. These projects can beautify underutilized land and help regenerate ecosystems that will support biodiversity at the local level. Neighborhood level projects should be leveraged to include educational and outreach components. The Town should coordinate with local schools to incorporate green infrastructure projects into instructional opportunities.
  
- >>> Develop a **robust Re-Tree Program** to support Amherst's Million Trees Initiative. The Initiative aims to plant a million trees on public and private property over the next five years through collaboration with public, private and non-profit partners. Suburban reforestation will enhance the Town's ability to combat climate change as well as support clean air and water, reduce storm water run-off, and improve community character. Amherst's Division of Forestry & Highway Department with the assistance from the Tree Board will establish planting species plans and procedures, volunteer involvement (where possible), and oversee management of publicly located trees.

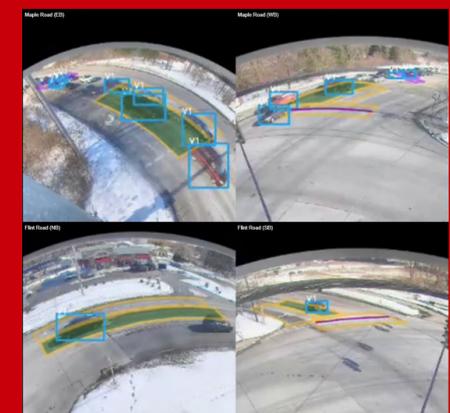


## ENERGY CREATION + CONSUMPTION

- >>> **Convert the Town's automotive fleet to electric-vehicles (EV)** and install electric car charging stations. Town staff operate approximately 155 sedans and trucks. As Town vehicles come up for replacement the Town should switch them over to electric-vehicles, where appropriate. Also, to support this change and emerging transportation fuel infrastructure, the Town should work to identify appropriate public facilities through a facilities assessment for the installation of electric-vehicle (EV) charging stations.
- >>> **Conduct energy performance reviews and evaluate generation options for Town buildings** in order to improve efficiencies and offset operational costs. Some town owned facilities have a higher energy output than others and with technology advances in energy performance and alternative generation the timing is right for the Town to evaluate opportunities for efficiency and net-metering. In addition, the Town's Wastewater treatment plant may also be uniquely situated to capture and resell methane gas or employ hydrogen electrolysis for improved wastewater treatment. Where opportunities exist for such improvements, full feasibility and design should be developed.
- >>> **Participate in state incentives for renewable energy and energy conservation**, including but not limited to Community Choice Aggregate (CCA). Recent NYS retail energy market reforms paved the way for CCA, which can include an increasing ability of individuals and communities to manage energy usage and bills; facilitate deployment of clean energy, including energy efficiency, large-scale renewables and distributed energy resources (DER); and increase the benefits of retail competition for residential and non-residential customers. Amherst should evaluate successful CCA models, NYSERDA's new Regional Clean Energy Hubs and Blended Power initiatives, and propose a programming options for the Town Board to consider.

## MIOVISION TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

"The way that we built signals and built signal timing over the years is not conducive to moving the traffic volumes that we see currently."





## SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

- >>> Expand **Composting/Biomass Program**. The Town of Amherst already has a composting program and picks up loose leaves from residences each November. The Town should explore not only how to expand collection, but also how to provide compost to members of the community. This program can be particularly valuable in working with neighborhoods and schools on the maintenance of community gardens.
- >>> Explore **ways to reduce plastic waste**. Amherst's biomedical industry makes a significant contribution to the local economy but is also a major producer of plastic waste. The Town is currently renegotiating its waste contract with Modern and is working to understand what types of plastics can and cannot be recycled. This process should be used to expand recycling efforts related to the biomedical sector. The Town should also launch a broader marketing campaign to promote plastics recycling among its businesses and residents.



# TRANSFORMATIVE PROJECTS SNAPSHOT



- 1 INCLUSIVE BASEBALL FIELD**  
Features include a circular field for children of all abilities on a soft surface. The park and play surfaces will allow children with disabilities to access and use the field. New "argents" seating will be available.
- 2 MULTI-USE SURFACE**  
Features include a porous asphalt surface. This porous surface will allow for water to permeate into the ground and help reduce the amount of stormwater runoff.
- 3 BIORETENTION POND**  
Features include a bioretention pond that will help to filter the stormwater as part of the site's stormwater management and provide a habitat for local plants and animals. The pond will consist of three existing proposed plantings.

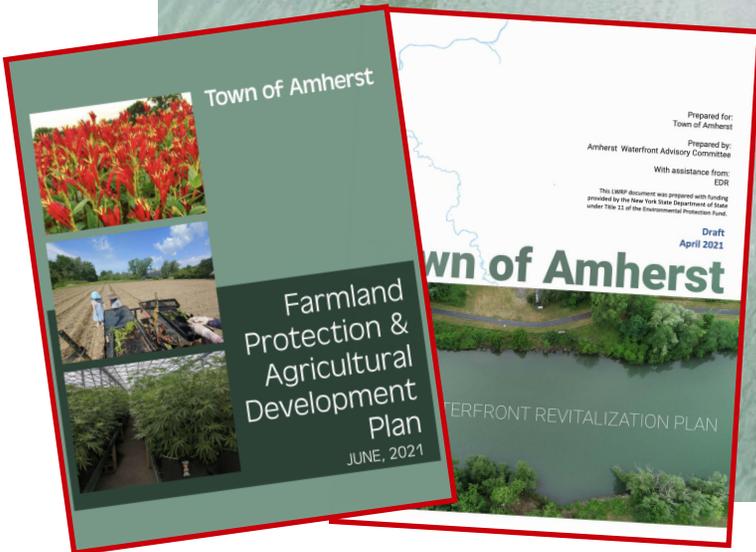
- 4 ENHANCED PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS**  
The connections to the site will include on-street crosswalks and pedestrian crossings. There will be on-street parking, as well as the parking into the existing Canal Field. Pedestrian crossings with signage and high-visibility striping will be provided. As a replacement park, the residents are encouraged to walk to use through the existing sidewalk network.

## DELLWOOD PARK + SATTLER FIELD GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE





## TRANSFORMATIVE PROJECTS SNAPSHOT



## AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND LOCAL WATERFRONT REVITALIZATION PROGRAM (LWRP)



## ENVIRONMENT + GREEN INITIATIVES SUMMARY + TIMELINE

	PROJECTS	LEAD	TEAM/DEPARTMENT	2022	2023	2024	2025	PROJECT CHARTER
DEVELOPMENT REVIEW	Create Environmental Index to Measure Environmental Impact of Development	Town Board	Planning / Building Dept / Engineering Dept / Town Environmental Committees	→				✓
	Formalize Native Tree / Planting List for New Development	Planning	Amherst Tree Board / Highway	→				
STORMWATER + GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE	Determine Priority Locations for Green Infrastructure	Engineering	Planning / Highway / Environmental Review Committee		→			✓
	Establish Funding and Operational Plans for Maintaining Green Infrastructure	Engineering	Planning / Building Dept / Highway / Economic Development		→			
	Incorporate Green Infrastructure + Stormwater Reduction Requirements into Development Codes	Town Board	Planning / Building Dept / Engineering Dept / Town Environmental Committees / Local Environmental Organizations	→				
	Establish Incentives to Reduce Stormwater on Commercial Properties	Town Board	Building Dept / Engineering Dept / Town Environmental Committees / Local Environmental Organizations	→				
	Create Continuous Maintenance Agreements for Subdivision Stormwater	Engineering	Planning / Building Dept / Town Attorney / Highway		→			
	Develop Green Infrastructure Jobs Program	Engineering	Economic Development / Highway / HR / Unions / EC Stormwater Coalition		→			✓
	Pursue Biodiversity Projects on Town-Owned Properties	Engineering	Engineering Dept / Highway / School Districts			→		
	Develop a Robust Re-Tree Program	Highway	Amherst Tree Board / Landscape Architect	→				

Note: Project teams reflected here are not comprehensive and will be developed during project charter set up. Start dates subject to change.



## ENVIRONMENT + GREEN INITIATIVES SUMMARY + TIMELINE, CONTINUED

	PROJECTS	LEAD	TEAM/DEPARTMENT	2022	2023	2024	2025	PROJECT CHARTER
ENERGY CREATION + CONSUMPTION	Convert Town's Fleet to Electric Vehicles	Various Departments	Finance / Clean Energy Community Committee	→				
	Conduct Energy Performance Reviews	Engineering	Finance / Facilities / Engineering Dept / Building Dept	→				
	Participate in Incentives for Renewable Energy + Energy Conservation	Town Board	Clean Energy Community Committee	→				
SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT	Expand Composting / Biomass Program	Highway	Town Environmental Committees	—				
	Explore Ways to Reduce Plastic Waste	Highway	Town Board / Recycling Committee	→				

## EDUCATION

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Education is at the core of the Town of Amherst's Identity. Amherst is home to the State University of New York at Buffalo (UB) North Campus, the largest public university in New York State, as well as Daemen University, SUNY Erie Community College, Bryant and Stratton College, some of the highest-ranked K-12 public schools in Western New York, and a variety of early childhood and K-12 private schools. These resources provide a very solid foundation for Amherst's planning, economic, and community development efforts, but the Town understands that more can and should be done to maximize their value.

**\$1.7 Billion** | UB contributes ~\$1.7 billion to the regional economy

### EDUCATION



1. Town-Gown Planning
2. Training Programs
3. Broadband + Virtual Learning







## TOWN-GOWN PLANNING: UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO

- Increase **engagement with UB for planning** around North and South Campuses. Both the Town and UB acknowledge that the two parties have not historically done an effective job of coordinating their planning and development activities due to the various administrative divisions in the SUNY system. There are several major efforts underway that offer unique opportunities for a new level of collaboration, including the redevelopment of Boulevard Mall, the University Heights Initiative around South Campus, and discussions regarding transit and mobility between the two campuses.



South Campus Area Streetscapes Plan – Main & Kenmore Concept



## TOWN-GOWN PLANNING: DAEMEN UNIVERSITY

>>> Support **Daemen University's new collaborative initiatives** bridging medical sector needs with higher education and making place based improvements for students and Town residents. Over the last several years Daemen University has been building on its role as WNY's premier health sciences educator. In 2021, a robotic-assisted rehabilitation center, the Todd and Leslie Shatkin Institute for Mobility Innovation & Technology (IMIT) was completed through philanthropic and private sector partnerships. The collaborative facility will be available to clinicians across the region, offering services currently unavailable, including exoskeleton-based gait training and robotics-based services for the treatment of neurodegenerative, orthopedic and other conditions. Daemen has also begun solidifying its presence as the anchor institution in the Snyder neighborhood. The Town should continue to support projects that build on this presence, such as the Royal Park project.



Todd and Leslie Shatkin Institute for Mobility Innovation & Technology (IMIT)

**“With a longstanding foundation of medical expertise** at Daemen, the addition of the Todd & Leslie Shatkin Institute for Mobility Innovation & Technology will further advance the vision for **promoting a medical spine** in Amherst that offers cutting-edge services,”  
- Brian Kulpa, Town of Amherst Supervisor



## TRAINING PROGRAMS

- >>> Work with **business community/higher education** to identify skills gaps/program needs. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated many trends in the economy, leading to a rapid shift in the skills needed by companies to fill their positions. Even prior to the pandemic there were existing gaps, particularly for occupations that require specialized training but not four-year college degrees. The Town has a unique ability to serve as a convener that brings together the local business community with educational providers to determine what skills gaps exist and how they can be addressed.
  
- >>> Coordinate **micro-credentialing programs** to target hiring needs. There is a growing trend in higher education towards short courses that train workers in specific skills needed for high-demand occupations. These so-called “micro-credential” programs provide targeted training in less time than a full degree or certificate program. Micro-credentialing programs can offer workers career advancement opportunities without major commitments of time or expense. These programs will need to be designed and implemented in close coordination with the employers that have a need for the skills being generated by such programs.
  
- >>> Work to **expand pre-apprenticeship programs** for key industries. Many employers have workforce needs for which on-the-job experience is more desirable than classroom training. This is particularly true for the restaurant/culinary arts, agriculture, and building trades fields. Pre-apprenticeship programs for high school students and recent graduates are an appropriate tool for meeting the needs of these employers. The Town and its partners should work to identify needs for apprentices, coordinate with employers to design programs, and work with schools to recruit participants.



## BROADBAND + VIRTUAL LEARNING

- >>> **Inventory existing coverage gaps.** The past school year put a spotlight on the need for universal Internet access to provide remote learning opportunities for students of all ages. It is known that Amherst has gaps in the availability of high-speed Internet service, with many neighborhoods not having access to broadband and many households that could access it lacking the ability to pay for it. The Town should conduct a comprehensive study that documents its broadband availability gaps.
  
- >>> Improve access with **goal of offering affordable broadband** to all residents. Once the gaps and needs have been identified, the Town should undertake a campaign to offer universal broadband access to all Amherst residents. This will likely involve a combination of funding and technical assistance strategies, as well as intensive collaboration with Internet service providers. More research will need to be done on this topic to identify best practices from other communities before proceeding.



## EDUCATION SUMMARY + TIMELINE

	PROJECTS	LEAD	TEAM/DEPARTMENT	2022	2023	2024	2025	PROJECT CHARTER	
TOWN-GOWN PLANNING	Develop ECC North Area Plan	Chamber of Commerce	ECC / Erie County / Planning / Economic Development		—				
	Increase Engagement with UB for Planning around North and South Campuses	Economic Development	Planning / AIDA / UB / UB Foundation / SUNY Facilities / UB Athletics / UB Office of the President / SUNY Chancellor's Office	→				✓	
	Support Daemen University's New Collaborative Initiatives	Economic Development	Planning / Building Dept / AIDA	→				✓	
TRAINING PROGRAMS	Work with Business Community + Higher Education to Identify Skill Gaps + Programs Needed	Economic Development	Chamber of Commerce / AIDA / K-12 + Post-Secondary Education Providers	—	→			✓	
	Coordinate Micro-Credentialing Programs to Target Hiring Needs	Economic Development	Chamber of Commerce / AIDA / K-12 + Post-Secondary Education Providers / Faculty	—	→			✓	
	Work to Expand Pre-Apprenticeship Programs for Key Industries	Economic Development	Chamber of Commerce / School Districts	—	→			✓	
BROADBAND + VIRTUAL LEARNING	Inventory Existing Coverage Gaps	Emergency Services / Police	IT / Community Development / Economic Development / Planning	—					✓
	Improve Access with Goal of Offering Affordable Broadband to All Residents	Emergency Services / Police	IT / Community Development / Economic Development	—	—	—		✓	

Note: Project teams reflected here are not comprehensive and will be developed during project charter set up. Start dates subject to change.

## HOUSING

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For more than 50 years, Amherst's growth and prosperity has been driven by its status as a desirable place for families to buy single-family homes in safe, well-kept neighborhoods. With few sites remaining for new home development and a severely limited inventory of resale product, newer homes in Amherst are out of reach for a growing share of households. Although the Town's older housing stock tends to be more affordable, many of these units are small and outdated, and the cost of renovations or additions can be prohibitive.

Another key contributor to Amherst's historic appeal is the strong reputation of its public school districts. However, while high performing public schools are still a strong factor in where people purchase homes, as demographics shift, other neighborhood amenities may feature more prominently in housing selection. As noted in the following sections, single-family units account for 67 percent of the Town's existing housing stock, but only 25 percent of its households have children under 18. This mismatch creates housing demand that is not directly driven by public schools, but is instead geared to walkability, amenities, neighborhood character, access to health care, proximity to parks and open space, and other factors. In this environment Amherst must rethink its role in the regional housing market and provide new models for housing to remain competitive.

## HOUSING



1. Comprehensive Housing Strategy
2. Neighborhood Improvement
3. Post-Pandemic Housing Stabilization

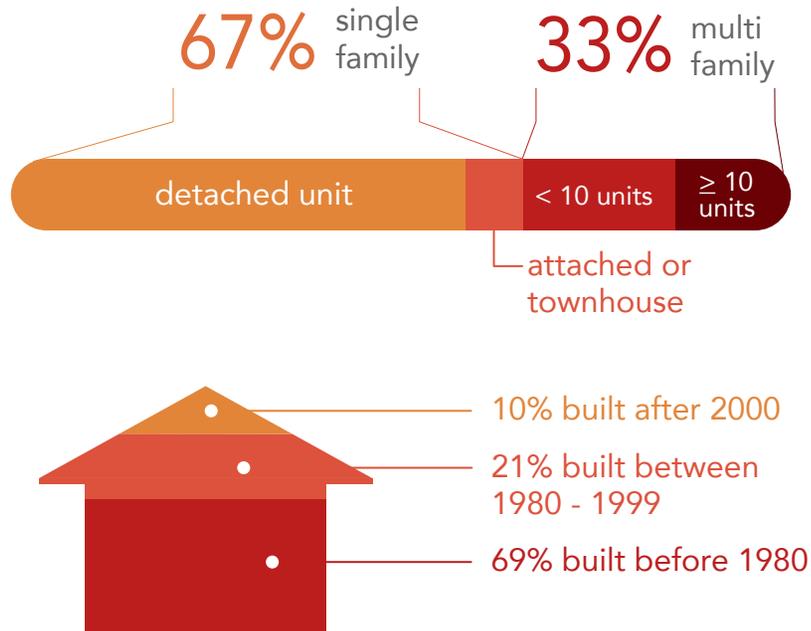




## ASSESSMENT OF HOUSING NEEDS

The COVID-19 pandemic created massive upheaval in the housing market and resulted in an immense amount of unforeseen pressure on both rental and for-sale markets across the United States. In Western New York, increased demand for all types of housing has reduced the available inventory to virtually zero. The Town of Amherst understands the impacts of this shock to the market and recognizes the need to plan now in order to mitigate the effects of a similar unprecedented event in the future.

This section examines recent trends in the housing market in Amherst and Western New York. It also explores relationships between economic and housing growth in Amherst and Western New York to forecast the future demand for different types and price points of housing. Additional data and tables are found in [Appendix B](#).



## HOUSING MARKET TRENDS + FORECASTS SNAPSHOT

Home values in Amherst have shown a strong increase over the past decade, with a pronounced increase in the past year. As of March 2021, the average home value reported by Zillow for the entire Town was \$231,500, an increase of 57 percent from the March 2010 value of \$147,300. This represents a 4.2 percent annual average rate of increase. From March 2020 to March 2021, the average home value in Amherst increased by \$24,000, representing a one-year growth rate of 12.4 percent during the Pandemic.

### Home Value Index

Location	2010 01/01/2010	2021 01/01/2021
14051	~\$245k	~\$375k
14068	~\$215k	~\$325k
14221	~\$185k	~\$290k
14228	~\$165k	~\$245k
TOWN TOTAL	~\$150k	~\$235k
14226	~\$135k	~\$220k



## ASSESSMENT OF HOUSING NEEDS, CONTINUED

Forecasts for future housing demand are tied to expected job growth in the region over the next 30 years, developed from employment forecasts produced by the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC). The Recovery Plan's Housing Assessment & Demand Forecast (Appendix B) anticipates an annual average increased need of:

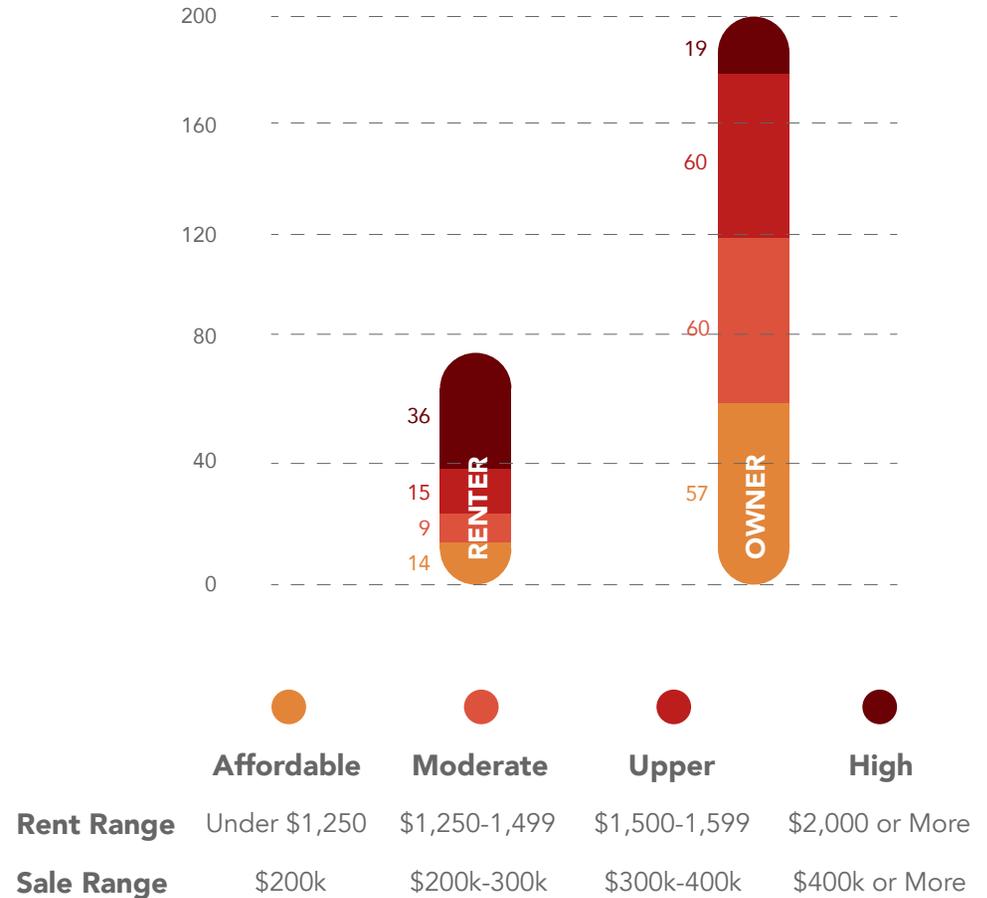
- Annual Average Increase in Housing Need\*
  - 1,800 New Housing Units Regionally
  - 270 New Housing Units in Amherst

\*The Demand Forecast does not consider current unmet housing demand, which if insufficient would only increase these figures further.

Further evaluation by employment/income factors presented in the Demand Forecast anticipates how the 270 new housing units needed annually could develop by housing type and price point:

- Annual demand for 270 housing units by Type & Price point:
  - 196 owner-occupied
  - 74 renter-occupied

**Projected Annual Housing Demand in Amherst 2050**



While owner-occupied unit demand are similar across all price-points, about half of expected rental unit demand from future growth is anticipated for units priced above \$2,000 per month.



## COMPREHENSIVE HOUSING STRATEGY

- >>> **Monitor housing supply & demand** conditions. The changing housing trends have been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with a strong increase in demand for housing in many parts of Amherst. In order to keep up with ongoing trends in the market, the Town should maintain an ongoing database of market statistics and update it at least once a year. The Town should maintain a set of housing demand forecasts by unit type, tenure, and price point, and adjust these figures as needed. This market knowledge will be a critical tool for ongoing planning and development initiatives.
  
- >>> Identify **needs & opportunities for future development**. With increase in demand for housing shifting away from detached single-family homes on large lots, the Town must focus on the types of housing that will be in demand and how to provide them. Research and outreach conducted as part of this planning effort identified several housing types/models that are already in high demand, including:
  - > **Affordable/Workforce Housing**, particularly for households earning in the 40-60 percent of Area Median Income (AMI) range. This translates to a household income of about \$30,000 to \$50,000 for an average household, though higher for a family with children.
  - > **Active Adult Communities** that target affluent residents who may be looking to sell their single-family homes but cannot find suitable places to move. This product type would fill a strong market need and would have the added benefit of spurring market activity in established neighborhoods with very low available inventory.
  - > **Missing Middle Units**, both rental and for-sale market-rate units that are attainable for households earning between 60 and 100 percent of AMI. As documented in the Housing Demand Forecasts, most demand for for-sale housing in Amherst will be for units priced between \$200,000 and \$400,000, which matches this income range. There is very little availability of units in this price range currently. Given the cost of land and building materials in Amherst, new construction of missing middle units would likely focus on condominium, townhouse, and small, cottage-type detached units.
  - > **Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)**, which can include multiple models: in-law suites, “granny flats”, carriage houses, garage lofts, etc. ADUs are an effective tool for increasing the supply of affordable housing in single-family neighborhoods without harming character, scale, or appearance if regulated appropriately. ADUs can also make units attainable for younger buyers, as they can reduce their housing costs by collecting rent from tenants.



## COMPREHENSIVE HOUSING STRATEGY, CONTINUED

- >>> **Update zoning & building codes** as appropriate. Existing development and zoning codes present an impediment to diversifying the housing stock in many areas of Amherst. The Town has already taken action to modernize and improve development codes in key locations such as the Boulevard Mall area and needs to pursue similar initiatives in other areas, where appropriate. Updates will need to address mixed-use development, residential uses in commercial/business districts, Accessible Dwelling Units (ADUs), parking requirements, densities, live-work spaces, building codes, and related issues. The Town should also consider the use of incentive zoning to encourage developers and builders to provide alternative housing types.
  
- >>> Identify **priority sites** and **pursue targeted acquisition & disposition**. During the recovery planning process, a Housing Working Group discussed and considered multiple opportunity sites that could be attractive targets for transformative residential or mixed-use developments. The Town should assemble a priority list of sites and create strategies for the redevelopment of these sites. This effort may also include the proactive rezoning of sites and the solicitation of developers to construct community-led plans for redevelopment.
  
- >>> Market **development opportunities to regional/national developers**. Western New York has not experienced many of the innovative trends in housing being seen in other parts of the country due to its status as a smaller metro area with slow growth. As such, local residential developers have been less likely to embrace new development models than those in larger and more dynamic regions. The Town of Amherst should seek out developers that are undertaking workforce, active adult, missing middle, and other new models and market local sites to these interests. This marketing campaign should be tied to the priority site strategy described in the preceding action item.



## NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT

- >>> Identify **priority locations for improving local streets/parks**. Streets, sidewalks, and medians are often the “windows” through which people assess the condition of a neighborhood. Investments in beautifying these environments can have a dramatic effect on changing perceptions and boosting civic pride. An example of this is on Allenhurst Road, where improvements to the road median has contributed to recent improvements to property values and conditions in the neighborhood. The Town should evaluate conditions of street environments along public rights-of-way in its older neighborhoods and select high-impact projects for similar improvements.
- >>> **Improve code enforcement activities** in residential neighborhoods. The Town understands that neighborhoods struggling with a blighted property tend to be associated with an absentee owner. The Town has recently adopted the Rental Registry and Property Manager’s Laws so that a registry of all rental units in noncommercially zoned properties are individually inspected and have a contact who is legally accountable. The Building Department faces a high volume of complaints, making it very difficult to stay ahead of code issues at the neighborhood level. The Town should expand the capacity of Code Enforcement Officers, and increase its complaint platforms to simplify complaints and manage enforcement.
- >>> Continue **inventory and redevelopment plans** for “zombie houses”. Vacant and/or problem properties, known as “zombie houses,” can have a severely negative effect on the image and property values in neighborhoods, which often leads to a proliferation of similar conditions in the surrounding area. Working with neighborhood groups in selected neighborhoods, the Town should maintain a comprehensive inventory of these properties and then utilize legal tools to spur redevelopment. This should center on more aggressive code enforcement as well as enforcing tax liens to place properties in receivership as appropriate, amongst other legal options.
- >>> Expand **acquisition and rehab program in select neighborhoods**. The Town of Amherst’s Acquisition-Rehab-Resale Program acquires dilapidated housing and fully rehabilitates it for sale to a first-time income-qualifying homebuyer. This program works well as a means to address spot-blight in select neighborhoods and also assist homebuyers in securing housing in quality school districts. However, HUD funding and regulations limit the capacity of the program. If funded with non-federal sources the Town would be able to address additional houses and larger sections of neighborhoods in need of major rehabilitation, making the program more impactful and injecting neighborhoods with ownership pride. The Town should explore ways to supplement this program with additional funding.



## POST-PANDEMIC HOUSING STABILIZATION

- >>> Proactively **prevent foreclosures** with mortgage assistance program. The threat of foreclosures due to COVID-19 had been deferred due to Federal action to provide supplemental unemployment payments and to extend forbearances for those who cannot pay their mortgages. The Town should continue to track foreclosures and extent of forbearances locally and maintain the COVID-created Mortgage Assistance Program. Also, creating a central information resource for at-risk homeowners that communicates regional resources to needed residents. The Town should additionally engage with local lenders to help prevent foreclosures and to explore acquiring foreclosed properties to keep them out of the hands of absentee investors in select neighborhoods.
  
- >>> **Reduce evictions to stabilize households** and rental markets. Early on in the Pandemic the Town established the Emergency Rental Assistance Program to stabilize households at threat of eviction due to a COVID-19 generated financial hardship. To date the program has assisted over 40 rental households. The Town should continue to maintain the program a few years out from the eviction moratorium end-date. Besides preventing homelessness and helping to rebuild familial wealth, the program should be looked at as a tool to blunt the impact of unexpected shocks to the rental housing market and thereby assisting to maintain reasonable rental rates and affordability.
  
- >>> Provide **property tax relief** for qualifying homeowners. Older homeowners and those on fixed incomes face a growing burden from property taxes. The Town already offers property tax exemptions for several categories of homeowners, including low-income seniors, individuals with disabilities, Veterans, and the state School Tax Relief (STAR) credit. These programs are helpful, but the Town could expand the program to exempt necessary improvements required for residents to remain in their homes. It could also include temporary relief for first-time homeowners who make certain improvements to homes. This item will need further study and refinement prior to implementation.
  
- >>> Support the **expansion of financial literacy programs**. Another aspect of housing market stability is financial literacy, as potential homebuyers often need to eliminate debt and improve credit scores. Many homeowners also do not fully understand the financial tools they may access during their lifetimes. The Town should inventory the types of financial literacy and counseling programs available in the region and work with area schools, housing counselors and continuing education providers to expand on financial class topics.



# HOUSING SUMMARY + TIMELINE

		PROJECTS	LEAD	TEAM/DEPARTMENT	2022	2023	2024	2025	PROJECT CHARTER
COMPREHENSIVE HOUSING STRATEGY		Monitor Housing Supply + Demand Conditions	Planning	Community Development / Building Dept / Town Assessor / Regional Housing Partners	—————				✓
		Identify Needs & Opportunities for Future Development	Planning	Community Development / Building Dept / Regional Housing Partners	— — — — —	—————			✓
		Update Zoning + Building Codes as Appropriate	Planning	Community Development / Building Dept	— — — — —	—————			✓
		Identify Priority Sites and Pursue Targeted Acquisition + Disposition	Planning	Community Development / Economic Development / Amherst Development Corporation	—————				✓
		Market Development Opportunities to Regional / National Developers	Economic Development	Planning / Community Development / AIDA	— — — — —	—————			
NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT		Identify Priority Locations for Improving Streets / Parks	Planning / Community Development	Highway / Engineering Dept	—————→				✓
		Improve Code Enforcement Activities in Residential Neighborhoods	Building Dept	Community Development / Police / Neighborhood Groups	—————→				✓
		Continue Inventory and Redevelopment Plans for "Zombie Houses"	Planning / Community Development	Building Dept / Town Assessors	—————→				✓
		Expand Acquisition + Rehab Programs in Select Neighborhoods	Planning / Community Development	Neighborhood Groups / Non-Profit Partners / Real Estate Agents / Lenders / Investors	— — — — —	—————			✓

Note: Project teams reflected here are not comprehensive and will be developed during project charter set up. Start dates subject to change.



## HOUSING SUMMARY + TIMELINE, CONTINUED

Study/Preparation

Project Work

	PROJECTS	LEAD	TEAM/DEPARTMENT					PROJECT CHARTER
				2022	2023	2024	2025	
POST PANDEMIC HOUSING STABILIZATION	Proactively Prevent Foreclosures with Mortgage Assistance Program	Community Development	Housing Service Agencies / Local Lenders	→				
	Reduce Evictions to Stabilize Households and Rental Markets	Community Development	Economic Development / Housing Service Agencies	→				
	Provide Property Tax Relief for Qualifying Homeowners	Town Assessors	Planning / Community Development			→		✓
	Support the Expansion of Financial Literacy Programs	Community Development	Economic Development	→				

## PARKS + RECREATION

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The importance of parks to the residents of Amherst came to the forefront during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to data from mobile phone “pings” collected by Google, the areas around Nature View Park, the Great Baehre Swamp and multiple golf courses were the only locations in Amherst that saw more visitors in May and June 2020 compared with the pre-pandemic months.

The Town of Amherst boasts an attractive network of parks and recreational resources that provide a variety of opportunities to its residents. The management of its facilities and programs is currently dispersed among multiple Town departments and community organizations, presenting challenges in the planning and implementation of new initiatives. The Town is also working to develop the ambitious and potentially transformative Amherst Central Park. The planning of this project has revealed many organizational challenges that must be addressed prior to its execution.

### PARKS + RECREATION



1. Parks + Recreation  
Management Systems

2. Amherst Central Park

3. Accelerate Recreation + Parks  
Master Plan Implementation





## PARKS + RECREATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

- >>> Explore **establishing centralized parks administration**. The Town of Amherst is investigating creating a new system for parks, administration that will be more responsive on all property, facilities, and programs related to parks, trails, recreational centers, and related locations. This should include exploring models for management structuring between the Youth & Recreation Division and Highway Department, which currently share management/administration duties. A new structure will greatly improve the Town's ability to respond to maintenance issue and resident desires for a future parks system.
- >>> Establish and **maintain townwide information hub** for youth programs. Youth programs and sports in Amherst are largely offered by private clubs that are specific to sports and/or geographic areas. In addition, youth-oriented programming in areas of Town are provided by partners such as the Boys & Girls Club of Buffalo and the Williamsville Youth & Recreation Committee. Because each of these organizations is independently organized and operated, it can be challenging for residents to be aware of all resources. The Town should take the lead in organizing an information sharing service and calendar that allows for easy access to announcements, updates and schedules for each of these organizations.
- >>> Implement **new platform for simplified registration**. Online registration for Town recreation programs is currently confusing and difficult to navigate. The Town should pursue the implementation of programs like CivicRec that can automate and streamline registration for users and management on the Town's administration side.
- >>> Assess **maintenance & improvement needs** at existing park facilities. The Town acknowledges that it has not historically done an effective job of planning for longterm maintenance and upgrades at its parks and recreation facilities. This is underscored by the fact that the 2018 Recreation & Parks Master Plan did not fully investigate maintenance issues. A first step will be to conduct a full review of needs for immediate maintenance and future improvements at Town facilities. This review should then be adapted into future operating and capital budgets.
- >>> **Address barriers to public-private partnerships**. The Recreation & Parks Master Plan (2018) identified several barriers to forging partnerships with private businesses and citizens related to the development and programming of parks and recreation facilities in Amherst. A core issue identified is a need to improve the contract process. Currently, contract requirements are too strict for many partners and is lacking a template for such agreements. The Town should create a blanket agreement template for potential partners that includes a "maintenance umbrella" that applies to local partners. The Town should also explore ways to reduce insurance costs for partners, as this has come up as a concern.



## AMHERST CENTRAL PARK

- >>> Complete **master plan for central park** and connected areas. The Town has completed a conceptual plan for Amherst Central Park and will initiate a comprehensive public outreach campaign to further develop and refine the conceptual plan. Planning will need to go beyond just physical planning and will need to address funding, programming, accessibility, maintenance, equity, and community impacts. This process will include continued participation related to environmental remediation on the former Westwood Country Club and shoreline improvements to Ellicott Creek.
  
- >>> Complete **land transactions in support of park plan**. The planning of Amherst Central Park is centered around the acquisition of the 170-acre former Westwood Country Club site. This transaction would bring a total of 325 acres of property under Town control and pave the way for the execution of the Master Plan for the park. Once the Westwood site is remediated, the Town should pursue purchase/land transactions.
  
- >>> Address **zoning on key parcels** adjacent to park. A core proposition of Amherst Central Park is that it will catalyze investment and development on surrounding parcels and in neighborhoods. The Town should explore zoning and regulatory issues that need to be addressed to ensure compatible land uses adjacent to the park along Sheridan Drive, Maple Road, and North Forest Road.
  
- >>> Create **management plan prior to opening** of park. The operation of Amherst Central Park will require a well-defined plan for management and ongoing maintenance. Given the Park's large size, multiple facilities, and myriad of partners, a structure to manage all aspects of the Park prior to its opening is required. This structure will need to be continuously monitored and refined once the Park is open and operating.



## AMHERST CENTRAL PARK, CONTINUED

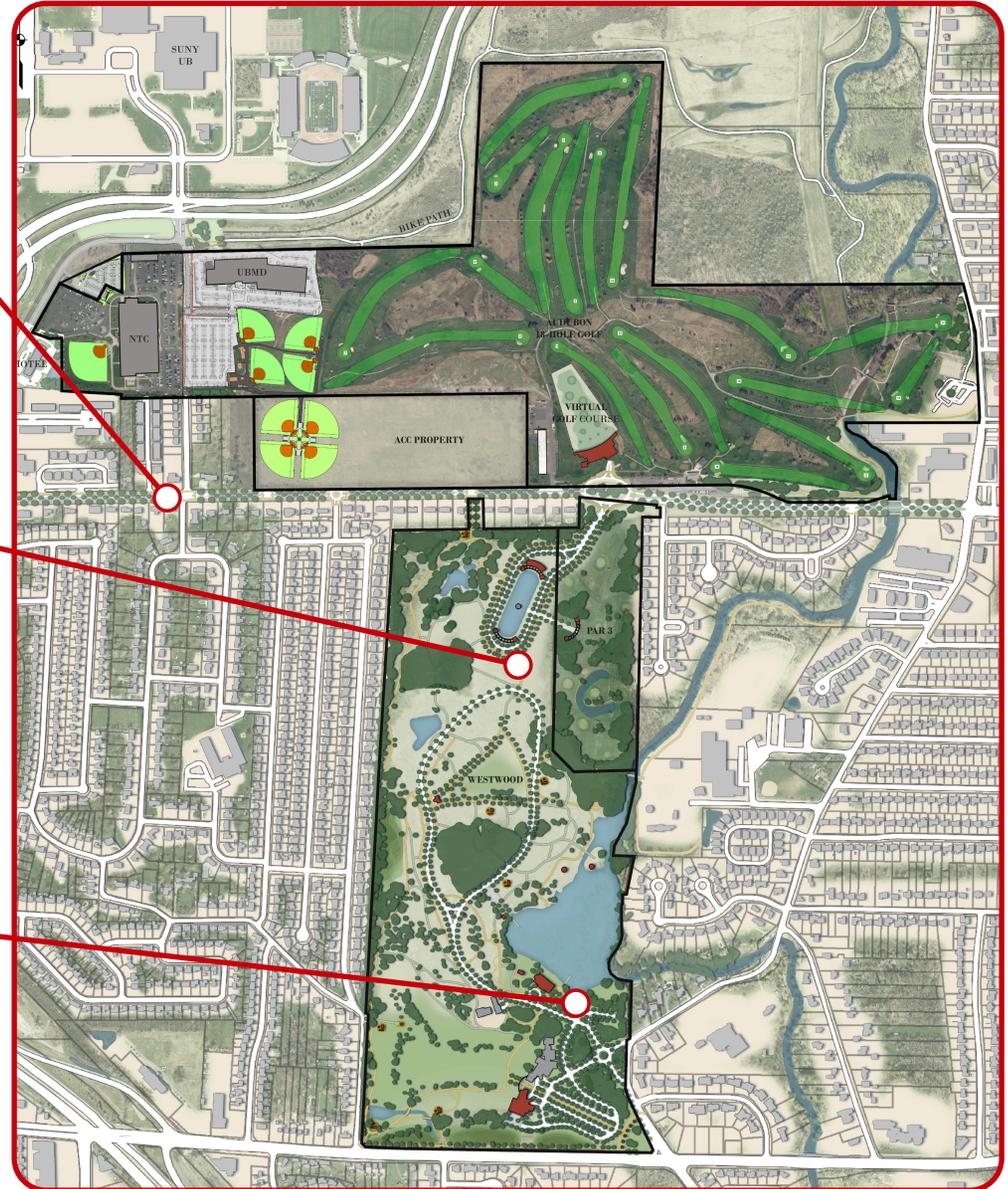
- >>> Explore a **townwide parks conservancy**. A national best practice for the management of large parks and park systems is to have a nonprofit conservancy as a partner. This type of organization can leverage private donations, fundraising opportunities, and volunteers to supplement what the Town can do via its funding and staffing and help optimize the performance of the entire system. This conservancy will be a critical partner for the planning and management of Amherst Central Park (see below). A possible model for this type of organization is the Chestnut Ridge Conservancy, which provides these services for Chestnut Ridge Park in Orchard Park.
- >>> Explore the **utilization and circulation of Northtown Center's parking lots** along Amherst Manor Drive and the addition of a 5th Ice Rink. In the last few years, the Northtown Center has added new complementary uses adjacent to the facility, including a skate park, hotel complex and the upcoming UBMD Orthopedics building. A 5th ice sheet has long been identified as need at the Center due to the tremendous growth in ice-time demand and the facility's ability to attract large scale events. From 2011 to 2015, the Center brought in between \$10.2 - \$14.4 Million annually in regional economic impact from local house, regional, state-wide and national events. A 5th ice sheet is anticipated to increase local revenue by another \$1.3 Million (Northtown Center at Amherst Ice Sheet Expansion Study 2015). The Town should pursue the addition of a 5th ice sheet and concurrently take a renewed look at the utilization and circulation of the parking lot areas along Amherst Manor Drive.



Proposed 5th Ice Rink Rendering



AMHERST CENTRAL PARKDRAFT CONCEPT





## ACCELERATE RECREATION + PARKS MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

- >>> **Continuous audit of plan implementation.** The Recreation & Parks Master Plan (2018) guides all future parks development and programming. Although it contains many timely and potentially impactful recommendations, due to the structural issues with the Town's current system, very little of the plan has been implemented to date. A central function of the new parks administration structure should be to establish a system to audit the implementation of the Master Plan and to update it on an annual basis.
  
- >>> **Activate local waterfront revitalization** program. The Town of Amherst has formulated a Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (LWRP) along the shores of Tonawanda Creek and Ellicott Creek. In early 2021, the Town completed a draft plan for the program that addresses accessibility, water quality, land uses, and related issues along the creek shorelines. Recommended key projects include working with Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper on its Living Shorelines program to restore creeks and shorelines and to improve kayak/canoe access at several locations. The plan is currently under review by the New York State Department of State (NYS DOS). Following approval, the Town will need to implement the LWRP.
  
- >>> **Improve access to parks.** When the Town originally designed its parks system, it prioritized automobile access, rather than pedestrians or bicyclist, resulting in limited access to many parks and park facilities from surrounding neighborhoods and commercial areas. The implementation of the Master Plan needs to improve alternative access to parks. This will include connections to sidewalks, bike paths, and trails, as well as exploring connections to current and future transit options. Accessibility to parks should also be a key consideration in the development review process, with new projects connecting to the park, trail, and open space network as much as possible.
  
- >>> Increase **public art & social program incorporation** into the parks. Public art installations, programs and performances add depth to enjoyment and use of local parks. The Town should incorporate physical art installations in partnership with local artists and art galleries, as well as create opportunities for performances, such as music, theatre and dance. Social programs, such as the Senior Center's COVID Park Pop-ups, provided safe meet-ups and social interactions during COVID, and proved to be well-valued additions to park enjoyment.



# PARKS + RECREATION SUMMARY + TIMELINE

	PROJECTS	LEAD	TEAM/DEPARTMENT	2022	2023	2024	2025	PROJECT CHARTER
PARKS + RECREATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS	Explore Establishing a Centralized Parks Administration	Town Board	Highway / Youth + Recreation / Human Resources					
	Establish + Maintain Town-Wide Information Hub for Youth Programs	Community Services	IT / Youth Sports Organizations					
	Implement New Platform for Simplified Registration	Community Services	IT					
	Assess Maintenance + Improvement Needs at Existing Park Facilities	Community Services / Highway	Planning / Building Dept / Finance / Facilities					
	Address Barriers to Public/Private Partnerships	Community Services	Town Attorney / Human Resources / Local Non-Profit Partners / Facilities					
AMHERST CENTRAL PARK	Complete Master Plan for Central Park + Connected Areas	Planning	Town Board / Youth + Recreation / Engineering / Highway					✓
	Complete Land Transactions in Support of Park Plan	Town Board	Economic Development / Planning					✓
	Address Zoning on Key Parcels Adjacent to Park	Planning	Economic Development / Highway / Engineering Dept					✓
	Create Management Plan Prior to Opening Park	Town Board	Community Services / Central Park Task Force / Highway					✓
	Explore a Park Conservancy	Town Board	Community Services / Town Attorney					
	Utilization and Circulation of Northtown Center's Parking Lots	Planning	Engineering / Economic Development / Youth + Recreation					✓

Note: Project teams reflected here are not comprehensive and will be developed during project charter set up. Start dates subject to change.



## PARKS + RECREATION SUMMARY + TIMELINE, CONTINUED

	PROJECTS	LEAD	TEAM/DEPARTMENT	TIMELINE				PROJECT CHARTER
				2022	2023	2024	2025	
ACCELERATE RECREATION + PARKS MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION	Continuous Audit of Plan Implementation	Town Board	Community Services / Facilities / Engineering / Recreation Commission	→				
	Activate Local Waterfront Revitalization Program	Various Departments	Youth + Recreation / Highway / Engineering / Amherst Conservancy Advisory Council	→				
	Improve Access to Parks	Planning	Youth + Recreation / Highway / Senior Services / Traffic Safety Board			- - - →		
	Increase Public Art + Social Program Incorporation into the Parks	Town Board	Economic Development / Community Services / Albright Knox Art Gallery / Musicallyfare / Arts + Culture Committee	→				

## TOWN GOVERNANCE + OPERATIONS

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From the early days of the Pandemic, it was understood that this was no normal emergency for the Town to manage and operate under, rather it was a long-term situation with several unknowns and very dynamic components that would prove extremely challenging for every aspect of Town operations and governance. Knowing this, and knowing that past emergency situations provide fruitful opportunities to learn from, take corrective actions, and better serve the public, the Town evaluated internal Pandemic operations over the last year.

Also, various Town Boards and individual departments have periodically evaluated operations internally and initiated changes over-time to move the town, albeit slowly, towards a greater ideal of good governance. However, the opportunity presented by the Pandemic and a core purpose of the Advance Amherst Recovery Plan, is to move the needle in a much more meaningful way (and at a faster pace) in this post pandemic period to best position the town for an accelerated recovery.

This component of the Recovery Plan was born out of those two necessary aspects of self-reflection – 1) pandemic highlighted weaknesses/limitations, and 2) initiate more meaningful comprehensive change across departments in support of critical recovery efforts. The resulting action items reflect four main areas for improvement/advancement.

### TOWN GOVERNANCE



1. Communications

2. Technology + Data

3. Operational Excellence

4. Recruitment, Retention + Building Tomorrow's Leaders





## COMMUNICATIONS

- >>> Establishing a town-wide **Public Information Officer** (PIO) is necessary to improve citizen engagement and the dissemination of information, as well as, communicate the Town's brand messaging for economic growth. Having someone solely dedicated to this role can streamline communications across various platforms, expand messaging reach, and support departmental staff in incorporating consistent and effective messaging. The role could also be shared with a Business Liaison position, serve the EOC in emergency response events, and oversee Town website content.
  
- >>> Develop and implement the **Amherst Responds Information Service**. It can be difficult for residents to navigate to the correct department or person for a particular service within the Town. Formalized customer service access and information systems exist in larger communities around the country, such as 311 operated by the City of Buffalo. Amherst's scale and breadth of service warrants an inquiry and information exchange system to quickly connect people to the correct department/staff to address their needs. The Town should develop a unified Internet portal to encourage more streamlined communications both within and outside Town government.
  
- >>> Implement town-wide **Emergency Dissemination Procedures**. During emergencies it is imperative to communicate critical information amongst town personnel effectively, and ensure staff at all levels understand how to document and share information, assign critical tasks, and effectively communicate internally and with appropriate partner agencies. The scale of the Pandemic outlined a need to organize departments, personnel, and Town Board into that communications structure in a way that is easily understood, thereby reducing delays and confusion. To do so the Town should outline and train a larger volume of staff for emergency communications procedures, encompassing how information should be shared during all phases of an event. Additional tools, such as an employee information webpage that can be paired with operational policy updates and departmental task assignments would also be useful.



## TECHNOLOGY + DATA

- >>> Commit to **E-Service Delivery and Project Management Options**. Going forward the Town must commit to shifting services to online electronic formats where it makes sense to do so through a formal E-Service Strategy. The strategy's development should start with evaluating which departments could best benefit from shifting applications, programming, or operations over and then vetting the correct software and platforms needed to do so, while also considering cost-benefit and end-users. The strategy can then be incorporated into the Town's Technology Improvement Plan for implementation over time. Aside from expanding E-Services and online project management, the Town should also regularly test its remote-work functionality, so that switches to remote-work are seamless in future emergency events.
- >>> Develop a town-wide **Technology and Information Management Plan**. The Town currently manages a Technology Improvement Plan (TIP), which focuses on replacing outdated computers and other equipment, and investing in new technology, albeit with a limited budget. The pandemic has showcased the need to transition the TIP plan into a much more comprehensive technology plan, one that proactively plans for the management of information and longer-term evolution of technology upgrades needed to support information management and project management systems. The plan should more formally address what/how the town collects and creates data; document and storing of information; access and disseminating information; and archiving. The plan should also outline roles and responsibilities for implementation of the plan across the various departments tasked with oversight and technology integration/interfaces.
- >>> Develop a **Cyber Security Plan**. Cyber threats such as email fraud, malware, network breaches, software piracy and cyber-extortion are real and costly issues to correct. While the town has made considerable investments and forethought into protecting the Town's network, public data, and online systems the threat of cyber-attacks are a constant that will only continue to evolve. In an effort to prepare for new security threats, the Town will develop a written Cyber Security Plan that focuses on existing threat types, the Town's defenses that are in place, as well as the response plan in the event of a security related incident. This plan must be fluid and modified as new threats emerge and the Town should pre-plan and budget for additional security components as they become available or necessary.
- >>> Adopt **new technologies and procedures for more efficient data and records management**. Individual town departments are responsible for managing archiving of records in a way that meets NYS laws and as technology has improved, archiving and records management has made gradual progress. However, new technology platforms and the implementation of E-based project management systems warrant new consideration, records management practices and archiving tools. Many communities successfully combine archiving advances and data retrieval to IT systems in a way that is streamlined and efficient for Town staff and more responsive to public inquiries and FOIL requests. The Town of Amherst should explore new technology and records processing practices to improve archiving and data retrieval efficiencies. Town departments should also assign staff to be directly involved in the exploration and implementation of new records management procedures and technology improvements.



## OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

- >>> Explore ***codifying the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan***. Over the last 10 years the Town of Amherst has been affected by numerous severe weather events, utility failures and biological incidents like H1N1, SARS, West Nile, in addition to Covid-19. For each event Town departments manage the event and make minimal adjustments during and after the event to more effectively respond in the future. However, over time those adjustments to improve operations in and out of emergency situations can be lost to staff changes, retirements, and changeover of Town Leadership. The Town Board should evaluate ways to codify key elements of the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan in order to ensure lasting operational improvements are implemented, continuity of operations protocols are discussed and decided outside of time-limited emergency situations, and staff are continuously rehearsing emergency operations in trainings and drills.
  
- >>> Require ***Basic Emergency Management and Incident Command Training***. Emergency Management training can simply be defined as learning how to operate within a community's limits in response to an event. It's knowing where to go based on what happened. What we tell to who, how we share information, who makes decisions, how an incident is addressed and by whom, what's an operational period, how do we procure what we need, track what we've got and get reimbursed for what is eligible. There are four levels of Incident Command training that should be required for upper level department staff for the Town to develop a significantly expanded cadre of personnel ready to respond to large or long-term events.
  
- >>> "Build the Bench" for ***Emergency Management within Departments***. The Pandemic exposed a need to have back-up personnel from all departments who are able to step in and manage assigned tasks for long-term emergency events. Traditionally the Town relies on Police, Highway, and Emergency Services to manage emergency events, but the length and severity of the Pandemic created a situation that required back-up and expanded support from all departments. Going forward the Town must have staff trained and at-the-ready from all departments in the Town who can easily step-in for shift work, relief work or a fresh look at incident operations, as needed. This will involve identifying staff that can be loaned-out, able to dedicate time to training, and participation in emergency drills/planning.



## OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE, CONTINUED

- >>> Invest in and **expand Human Resources Department offerings**. The importance of Amherst's Human Resources (HR) Department exponentially increased over the last 20 months, with HR staff lending expertise and insight on everything from public health regulations and HIPAA laws, to establishing remote work policies and reopening public facilities safely. Pre-pandemic Amherst HR focused on traditional roles, such as benefits, policy violations, hiring and employee/union relations. Going forward there's a need for HR to play a more expanded role in fostering operational excellence. More specifically: supporting training and resources on effective management and leadership best practices; staff development for general skill building, such as project management; opportunities for talent development; managing employee performance, and workflow efficiencies.
  
- >>> Reduce burdens on HR Staff with **Improved Efficiencies**. This department has ever-increasing demands on its time. With limited staff capacity, the HR department may need to look at ways to free up time in order to address expanded demands generated from the pandemic or to support expanded programming. One way to do so may be to invest in ways to automate management of HR systems or implement new technology, online systems or service platforms that can reduce inquiries to staff and free-up some of their day-to-day responsibilities.
  
- >>> **Implement the recommendations of the "We Are Amherst" Police Reform Collaborative.** The Town of Amherst, in partnership with the Amherst Police Department formed the "We Are Amherst" Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative in August 2020. The Collaborative's mission is to proactively review, evaluate, modify, and modernize the Town of Amherst's current policing policies, procedures, and practices to better address the needs of its citizens and stakeholders, and to improve and promote public safety, community engagement and trust. In April 2021, the Collaborative issued the "We Are Amherst" Police Reform Collaborative Action Plan, which provides 5 main recommendation categories developed through extensive public engagement and evaluation. The Town, Police Department and Collaborative should continue to work to implement these recommendations over the next few years.



## RECRUITMENT, RETENTION + BUILDING TOMORROW'S LEADERS

- >>> Formalize **Cross-Training Procedures and Skill Building Standards**. The pandemic highlighted a need to be able to shift workers temporarily into different jobs based on the emergency need at hand. Unfortunately, limited opportunities to provide out-of-title skills training were highlighted as a shortcoming during reflective self-assessments. To be better prepared for the next emergency situation Town Departments should identify positions where cross-training and additional skill building opportunities make sense and work collaboratively with the Emergency Operations Center, Human Resources, and the unions to prepare and utilize staff in such scenarios.
  
- >>> Conduct **Staff Development/Succession Planning** for Departments. The Town of Amherst has been fortunate to have a knowledgeable workforce led by experienced department heads and other senior staff. A recent wave of current and pending retirements has created a need to fill these leadership roles. To maintain operational excellence even during times of transition, formal staff development, training opportunities and succession plans should be maintained across all Town Departments.
  
- >>> Establish **Emerging Leaders Program**. The Town should establish an Emerging Leaders program to train new managers and supervisors on their new roles and responsibilities, as well as prepare middle management staff and support their growth as possible emerging leaders in the future. An Emerging Leaders program is a comprehensive leadership development program for high-potential employees new to supervisory and management positions. These programs typically include coaching, mentoring, and formal training, giving participants exposure to information, experiences, and resources otherwise unavailable. An ancillary benefit to this program is that participants can develop an informal peer network across departments, increasing collaboration and support systems.



## RECRUITMENT, RETENTION + BUILDING TOMORROW'S LEADERS, CONTINUED

- >>> Reduce barriers to **Employee Recruitment/Hiring**. Pandemic hiring has proven difficult for many organizations and municipalities are no different. However, in some cases the lack of available applicants for open positions may be due to unforeseen consequences of some Town policies. For example, with housing values increasing over the last several years it is no longer attainable for entry level and other lower paid positions to be able to meet the employee residency requirements without a two-earner household. To rectify these situations, the Town should evaluate its employment requirements and recruitment methods that may hinder hiring and present corrective options for the Town Board and Unions to consider.
- >>> Develop a **Labor Recovery Plan**. Going into the pandemic the Town had labor constraints resulting from the loss of 79 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employees in 2006 that left some departments struggling to fulfill duties. The labor situation has not recovered over these last 16 years and has led to such common constituent complaints as longer service wait times, permitting delays, and poor park maintenance. In some cases the labor lost has resulted in increased costs for the Town through the need to hire contractors at prevailing wage, assign additional over-time, and completely replace playground structures. Existing labor constraints were exacerbated by the Pandemic, through illnesses, retirements and pandemic hiring competition. To address these issues going forward, the Town must undertake a Labor Recovery Plan to evaluate labor needs and opportunities for efficiencies to better align with Town priorities.
- >>> Develop **Donation Program for Paid Time Off (PTO) or Sick Leave Bank**. Benefits are critical to recruitment, retention, and ensuring equitable access to jobs. While civil service positions maintain an attractive pension benefit that is rarely available in the private sector, the Town has identified that the time it takes for new employees to accumulate benefits like sick leave and paid time off, is not on-par with private sector offerings. This can make it hard for departments to recruit staff in some instances, especially potential employees with life situations or other events that warrant additional PTO or sick leave. Amherst's Employee Extended Sick Leave with Pay Committee should work with HR to develop a PTO or Sick Leave donation program, where well vested employees can choose to donate unused time into the bank for use by another employee in certain circumstances. The committee successfully implemented a similar program for the Amherst Police Union in 2017 that has been well received.



## TOWN GOVERNANCE SUMMARY + TIMELINE

	PROJECTS	LEAD	TEAM/DEPARTMENT	2022	2023	2024	2025	PROJECT CHARTER
COMMUNICATIONS	Establish a Town-Wide Public Information Officer	Town Board	Emergency Services / IT / Economic Development					
	Develop + Implement the Amherst Responds Information Service	IT / Town Clerk	Various Departments					
	Implement Town-Wide Emergency Dissemination Procedures	Emergency Services	PIO / IT / Highway / Police					
TECHNOLOGY + DATA	Commit to E-Service Delivery and Project Management Options	IT	Building Dept / Planning / Town Clerk / Engineering Dept / Youth + Recreation / Highway					✓
	Develop a Town-Wide Technology + Information Management Plan	IT	Various Departments					
	Develop a Cyber Security Plan	IT	Emergency Services / Police					
	New Technologies + Procedure for Data / Records Management	Town Clerk / IT	All Departments					



## TOWN GOVERNANCE SUMMARY + TIMELINE, CONTINUED

	PROJECTS	LEAD	TEAM/DEPARTMENT	2022	2023	2024	2025	PROJECT CHARTER
OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE	Explore Codifying the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan	Emergency Services	Town Board	→				
	Require Basic Emergency Management + Incident Command Training	Emergency Services	HR / Unions / Police	→				
	Build the Bench for Emergency Management within Departments	Emergency Services	HR / Unions / Police	→				
	Invest In / Expand Human Resources Department Offerings	HR	Town Board / Unions		→			
	Reduce Burdens on HR Staff with Improved Efficiencies	HR	IT / Town Comptroller	→				
	Implement "We Are Amherst" Police Reform	Police Department	Town Board	→				
RECRUITMENT, RETENTION + BUILDING TOMORROW'S LEADERS	Formalize Cross-Training Procedures + Skill Building	HR	Emergency Services / All Departments / Unions	→				
	Conduct Staff Development / Succession Planning for Departments	HR	All Departments		→			
	Establish Emerging Leaders Program	Employee Suggestion Committee	HR / Councilmember Liason		→			
	Reduce Barriers to Employee Recruitment / Hiring	HR	All Departments			→		
	Develop a Labor Recovery Plan	Town Board	Human Resources		→			✓
	Develop Donation Program for PTO or Sick Leave Bank	HR	Town Board / Unions / Employee Extended Sick Leave with Pay Committee	→				

Note: Project teams reflected here are not comprehensive and will be developed during project charter set up. Start dates subject to change.

## NEXT STEPS + IMPLEMENTATION

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Recovery Plan implementation is anticipated to be different based on each Action Item presented in the Plan. Some Action Items are steps of a larger project or process, while others are standalone undertakings. Numerous Action Items require the participation of several departments and outside stakeholders. Also, with COVID restricting the Town's ability to fully engage community members and regional partners during the development of the Recovery Plan, many Action Items are preliminary recommendations that require further development into a full project scope. Because of this, it is recommended that some Action Items be organized for implementation more formally through the Town's Project Charter process.

Project Charters involve outlining in-depth a project's main aims, plus all the elements needed to ensure a successful process and execution, such as identifying the project manager and team, timelines, resources, stakeholders, planning/project structures, public engagement, etc. The Action Item Summary and Timeline Charts presented at the end of each component outline the assigned department lead, preliminary project teams and start dates/timelines for each Recovery Plan Action Item, as well as where project charters are anticipated. Prior to initiating projects that are not already underway, Department Leads will develop full Project Charters for approval by the Town Board.

