

1.0 Introduction

The Town of Amherst is located in Erie County in Western New York, abutting the City of Buffalo to the southwest (Figure 1). As the Town looks forward to a new century and celebration of its two hundredth anniversary in 2018, this Comprehensive Plan provides a strategic policy framework and a guide for action by town decision-makers and citizens to manage growth and change over the next two decades. The Town of Amherst recognizes that comprehensive planning is a dynamic process which requires the prudent use of a number of resources to accomplish its purposes. The Comprehensive Plan of the Town of Amherst consists of this written plan along with the materials written and/or graphic, including but not limited to maps, charts, studies, resolutions, local laws and ordinance reports and/or other descriptive materials utilized by the Town Board that identify the goals, objectives, principles, guidelines, policies, standards, devices and instruments for the immediate growth and development of the Town located outside the limits of any incorporated village or city (Amended 2-28-11; BCPA-10-2).

1.1 COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING AND AMHERST

Amherst has a long history of formal planning that began with the establishment of its Planning Board in 1949, and continued with the formulation of four comprehensive plans completed in 1955, 1961, 1968, 1975, and two sector plans for Southeast and Northeast Amherst in 1985 and 1993 respectively. Through this comprehensive planning program the Town has successfully guided its development into a prosperous and desirable community. The importance of planning to the success of Amherst cannot be understated, and the role of the comprehensive plan has been a key factor. The following section describes what a comprehensive plan is and its role in guiding the future of Amherst.

A. The Comprehensive Plan and why it is important

- The Bicentennial Comprehensive Plan is an official document that serves as a guide to the long-range physical development of a community. A reflection of the community's preferences for future development, the formulation of a comprehensive plan combines technical analyses of past and future trends and highly interactive public involvement. Amherst's plan is a

product of a process called Values-Based Planning which seeks to attain the desirable environment stakeholders value while maintaining high quality of services delivered by the Town and promoting the economic health of the community.

- The Plan is comprehensive in that it deals with the entire geographic area of the town not individual neighborhoods, districts or sectors. It is also comprehensive in that it guides all of the responsibilities or functions of the town. The Bicentennial Comprehensive Plan also features Focal Area Plans that are provided to add another more specific layer of recommendations and policies to address the unique opportunities and issues of smaller geographic areas. As indicated in the preamble to Chapter 10 (Focal Area Plans) these smaller plans are meant to compliment, not supercede the Plan's town-wide policies and recommendations.
- The Plan is long-range. It does not suggest that all policy and action recommendations can or should be implemented immediately. It does however, provide guidance as to the order or priority in which policies and action items should be undertaken. It also implies that many of the goals will be accomplished over an extended period of time. Some will be accomplished as opportunities arise.
- The Plan is a policy plan intended to describe such community objectives as quality, character, location, and rate of growth and how those objectives are to be realized. As such, all appropriate policies affecting a specific decision must be viewed, understood and analyzed during the decision making process. No one policy should govern the outcome of a specific decision.
- The Plan is a framework upon which other administrative and regulatory documents relating to land development are based. The Plan is not a zoning code, subdivision regulation, building code, capital improvement program or official map. It does however, present the town's growth and development policies and should guide the development of these and other regulations.
- The Plan should guide decision making by the Amherst Town Board, Planning Board and the numerous committees and boards that deal with growth and development issues.
- The Plan is dynamic. In order for it to be effective, it must be an evolving document that responds to a rapidly, ever-changing community. According to NYS Town Law, periodic reviews and updates are a necessary element of a comprehensive plan (Section 272-a 10). The Amherst Plan calls for an annual review, and updates every five-years as a

mechanism for keeping it current with changing environmental, social, and economic conditions. It also provides for short-term reviews that respond to specific development opportunities.

B. How the Plan is Used by the Town

The Plan is organized into a series of elements that cover community functions such as Land Use, Transportation and Infrastructure. Each element describes a set of goals, objectives and policies that are designed to achieve that aspect of the Vision Statement. Policies and action statements are coordinated and mutually supportive across all plan elements. In order to understand the conformity of a prospective action with the plan, the user must read all of the appropriate policy statements. No one policy is intended to override another. This is particularly true of the land use policies that tend to receive more attention than other policies that are equally important.

The Plan represents a long-range guide for short-term decision making by the Town. Specific uses, decisions and actions that are appropriately guided by the goals, objectives, and policies of the Plan include, but are not limited to the following.

- Consideration of proposed amendments to the Town Zoning Code, Subdivision Regulations and other growth management regulations
- Completion of environmental assessments required under the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA)
- As the primary resource for reviewing public and private development applications, such as site plans
- As the basis for decisions by the Planning Board on proposed subdivisions and for recommendations on actions referred to them by other agencies including the Town Board
- Development of priorities for capital projects proposed by town agencies and community groups for inclusion in the Capital Improvement Program (CIP)
- As the policy framework for preparing facilities plans for infrastructure and all plans for capital projects proposed within the community by other governmental agencies.
- As a general guide for the activities of town departments that involve regulating aspects of growth or whose programs or service delivery are driven by the location, characteristics, numbers and density of residents
- As policy level guidance to the design of regional infrastructure within Amherst particularly those constructed and maintained by higher levels of government

In addition to its role in guiding the formation of policies and decision making, the Comprehensive Plan represents an expression

or statement of the desired future by the Town to outside agencies and interests.

- The Plan represents a local expression of growth and development patterns. Although not binding on County, State and Federal agencies, it is incumbent upon them to avoid local controversy and accommodate the provisions of the Plan.
- As a reflection of the community's preferences for future development, the plan is a powerful tool that can provide the town with an advantage in obtaining grants and funding from outside agencies. Grants applications that are supported by policies and actions defined in a comprehensive plan routinely receive higher priority scores and are funded more frequently.

Development of the Plan was led by a citizens' group (the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee, or CPAC) and included extensive opportunities for public input. Based upon this input, community values were identified and expressed in a Vision Statement describing the positive attributes of the Town of Amherst as citizens wish it to be in the bicentennial year of 2018.

Alternative choices for achieving the desired future were considered and a preferred direction defined in the form of specific policies to be followed by the Town with respect to topics such as land use, transportation, and community facilities. These policies are described in the Comprehensive Plan, which contains the following sections:

- **Chapter 2.0 (Plan Concept)** describes the conceptual basis of the Plan, including the planning process, the Vision Statement, and key initiatives to be pursued by the Town to realize the Vision.
- **Chapters 3.0 to 9.0 (the Plan Elements)** establish goals, objectives, and policies to guide decisions and actions by the Town in the following areas:
 - Land Use and Development
 - Natural and Cultural Resources
 - Economic Development
 - Transportation
 - Infrastructure
 - Housing and Neighborhoods
 - Community Facilities

While the policies are organized into separate elements, they are designed to be interrelated and mutually supportive in guiding the Town toward achieving the Vision Statement. Because individual policies can contribute to achieving goals and objectives for more than one topical element, there are numerous cross-references between elements. (For example,

Plan Structure

- Vision Statement
- Key Initiatives
- Plan Elements
- Focal Planning Areas
- Implementation

Policies 3-13 to 3-15 of the Land Use and Development Element and 4-1 to 4-3 of the Natural and Cultural Resources Element address establishment of a town-wide network of parks, open spaces, and greenways.)

- **Chapter 10.0 (Focal Planning Areas)** describes the application of the town-wide policies contained in the Plan Elements to six “focal planning areas.” Smaller geographic areas within the Town identified by the CPAC for more detailed evaluation in the Comprehensive Plan, the six focal planning areas are:
 - Northwest Amherst
 - North Amherst
 - University (UB’s north campus and surrounding area)
 - Eggertsville
 - Snyder
 - Williamsville (the Main Street corridor)
- **Chapter 11.0 (Implementation)** lays out a strategy for implementing the Comprehensive Plan.

To provide a sound basis for policies and actions recommended in the Comprehensive Plan, existing conditions and trends that are shaping Amherst’s future were documented as part of the planning process. The results of this work are contained in the *Town of Amherst Bicentennial Comprehensive Plan Inventory and Analysis Report* (December 2001), which is considered part of the Comprehensive Plan.

Several **concurrent planning initiatives** provide recommendations that are incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan policy framework. These initiatives include:

- ***Eggertsville Action Plan:*** This plan identifies short-term actions needed to revitalize commercial areas in the vicinity of Eggertsville. The Plan identifies barriers to redevelopment that have constrained investment and revitalization. Recommendations for code amendments, conceptual capital projects, and financing options are provided to encourage public and private investment.
- ***Amherst/Pendleton Joint Local Waterfront Revitalization Program:*** This project will provide the Towns of Amherst and Pendleton with a coordinated plan for the future of the Erie Canal waterfront and its adjacent upland area. It will ensure protection of its natural, recreational, and historic resources and maximize waterfront opportunities for visitor use.
- ***Recreation and Parks Master Plan:*** This update to the 1992 *Recreation and Parks Master Plan* will establish requirements to meet the parks and recreation needs of Amherst residents.

Concurrent Planning Initiatives, such as the *Eggertsville Action Plan* and *Amherst/Pendleton Joint Local Waterfront Revitalization Program,* contain recommendations that are incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan policy framework.

- **Transit Road Arterial/Access Management Study:** This joint project between the Towns of Amherst and Clarence will define strategies for land use and access management along Transit Road and other highways to foster continued economic development while preserving surrounding character and enhancing the efficient and safe movement of traffic.

In addition to the above plans, the *Guiding Principles for Countywide Land Use Planning*, published by the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning in 1999, is an important regional planning initiative that has been taken into consideration in developing the Comprehensive Plan. Resources of countywide significance identified by the County for Amherst that are addressed by the Comprehensive Plan include:

- **Farmland Protection:** Erie County Agricultural District #17 in North Amherst
- **Rural Service Centers:** Swormville, located in Amherst and Clarence
- **Utility Service Areas:** Amherst Sanitary Sewer Districts No. 1 and 16
- **Historic and Cultural Resources:** Amherst Museum, Musicfare Theater at Daemen College
- **Environmental Preservation:** Wetlands, floodplains, watersheds
- **Parks and Open Space:** Erie Canal Trail, Ellicott Creek Bike Path, Great Baehre Conservation Area
- **Stream Corridor Preservation:** Ransom Creek, Tonawanda Creek/Barge Canal, Ellicott Creek
- **Waterfront:** Resources along Tonawanda Creek/Barge Canal, including the Canal Trailway, Crystal Cove, Amherst Veterans Park, and Amherst Museum

Plan policies that apply directly to these resources are discussed throughout the Comprehensive Plan. Readers should consult the County report for discussion and recommendations for these resources.

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Town of Amherst
Bicentennial
2018
Comprehensive Plan

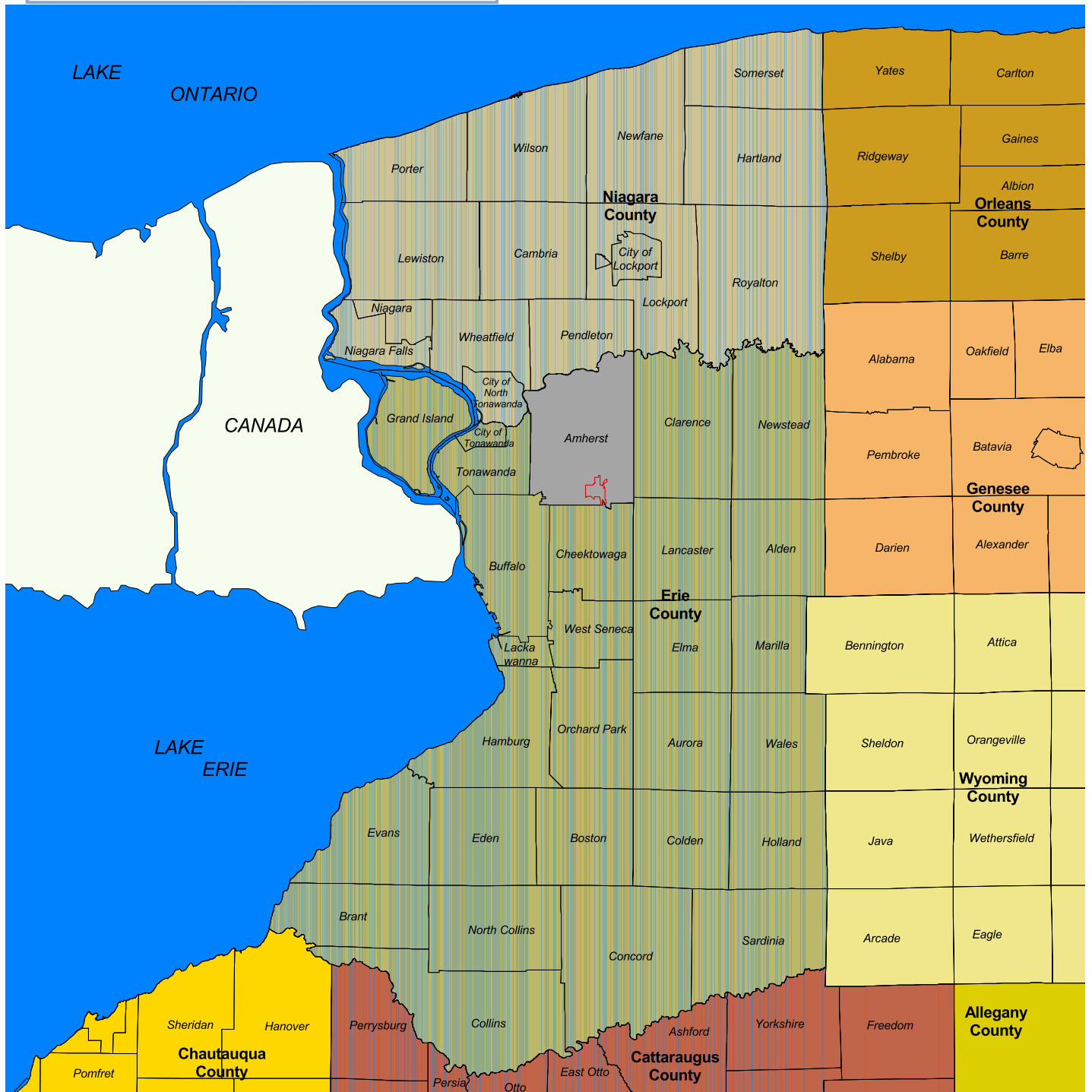


FIGURE 1

REGIONAL CONTEXT

LEGEND

- Municipal Boundary
- Village of Williamsville Boundary
- Town of Amherst
- Surface Water Body

SOURCE NOTES :

Original Source Data Provided by the Town of Amherst
 Map Compiled by URS Corporation
 Date: February, 2004

