

## 2.0 Plan Concept

### 2.1 PLANNING PROCESS

The Amherst Bicentennial Comprehensive Plan was prepared using a planning process that responded to the issues and values expressed by the community as the basis for the Plan's concepts, strategies, and actions. The process was structured around a community involvement program consisting of the following components:

The **Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC)** provided overall policy direction for preparation of the Comprehensive Plan. Comprised of Planning Board members and representatives of the various community systems that operate within the Town (neighborhood, business, environmental, and other civic interests), the CPAC met approximately once a month throughout the planning process.

**Community meetings** were held at key junctures in the planning process to provide for broader public input into Comprehensive Plan development. Three series of open meetings were held in locations throughout the Town in September 2000, February/March 2001, and November 2001. The meetings featured presentations of materials related to the Comprehensive Plan and opportunities for citizens to provide input and explore ideas in large and small group settings.

Early in the planning process, interviews were conducted with a broad range of **stakeholders** to learn about the community and the range of perceptions regarding key issues. Persons interviewed included:

- Neighborhood association representatives
- Representatives of key agencies and organizations (e.g., school district administrators, regional transportation agencies)
- Environmental and historic resource advocates
- Business leaders and development interests
- Housing advocates
- Town officials
- Representatives of surrounding communities

In addition to the above components, the Town has maintained an active Comprehensive Plan website to further disseminate information and receive input on the Plan. Functions of the Comprehensive Plan website include:



*Residents comment on the Draft Plan at a Public Hearing.*

- Providing information on scheduled meetings and events
- Providing interim reports and products for citizen review
- Allowing users to view and query planning analysis maps of the Town using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology
- Providing an email address for citizens to send ideas and comments
- Providing an online forum for discussion of planning issues

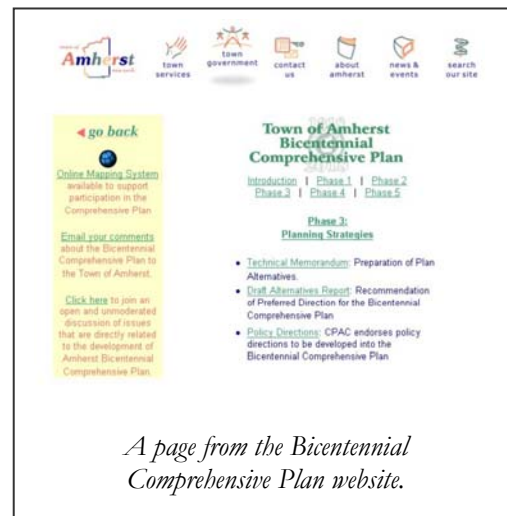
The planning process itself consisted of the following major phases of work:

- **Current Conditions/Future Vision:** This phase involved two major tasks. First, current conditions and trends that will affect Amherst’s future were evaluated and documented in the *Inventory and Analysis Report*. Second, a Vision of Amherst’s future at its bicentennial anniversary (2018) was prepared based upon the issues and values expressed by citizens.
- **Plan Alternatives:** Alternative scenarios for Amherst’s future were considered to provide a basis for defining preferred policies and directions to guide plan development. Alternatives considered included:
  - The **Trend Growth Scenario**, which assumes a continuation of current development trends without changes to the Town’s regulatory and investment policies.
  - Potential responses to Trend Growth to achieve the desired future for Amherst defined in the Vision Statement. These responses took the form of **Key Initiatives** and **Policy Choices** for the topical elements of the Comprehensive Plan (Land Use and Development, Natural and Cultural Resources, Economic Development, etc.).

The Plan Alternatives phase culminated in the selection of **Final Policy Directions** to be developed into a full Comprehensive Plan.

- **Comprehensive Plan Preparation:** The Comprehensive Plan was developed in this phase of work and included town-wide policies for the Plan Elements and strategies that apply the town-wide policies to six focal planning areas. In accordance with the requirements of the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR), a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) was prepared to assess impacts associated with the Comprehensive Plan.

- **Plan Implementation and Review:** After issuing a Findings Statement as required under the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act, the Town Board “accepted” the Comprehensive Plan as its policy guide for



*A page from the Bicentennial Comprehensive Plan website.*

**Steps in the Planning Process**

- Determine current conditions and trends
- Articulate a Vision of Amherst’s future
- Evaluate trend growth and alternatives to trend growth in comparison to the Vision
- Define Preferred Policy Directions
- Prepare Comprehensive Plan

growth and development in February of 2004. Between 2004 and 2007, major plan-consistent revisions to the Zoning Code were drafted and adopted. In early 2007, the Amherst Bicentennial Comprehensive Plan was formally adopted by the Town Board in compliance with New York State Town Law Section 272-a. During 2007, the Town Board adopted two Opportunity Review Plan Amendments in accordance with Section 11.6. Later that year, the Planning Board was designated as the agency responsible undertaking the first Annual Review of the Plan and recommending amendments to the Town Board for their consideration. Those amendments and the Opportunity Review amendments adopted during 2007 have been incorporated into this document.

From a conceptual standpoint, the key organizing components of the Comprehensive Plan are the Vision Statement and the Key Initiatives. As a shared expression of community values and aspirations, the **Vision Statement** (Section 2.2) defines community expectations and directions for the future; frames the mandate for Comprehensive Plan policies and action programs; and provides the benchmark to measure progress in implementing the Plan. The **Key Initiatives** (Section 2.3) are major changes in direction that the Town should pursue to move towards a position of excellence in support of the Vision Statement. They provide a focus and means to prioritize the policies contained in the Plan Elements.

*Visioning is the process by which a community envisions the future it wants, and plans how to achieve it. It brings people together to develop a shared image of what they want their community to become. Once a community has envisioned where it wants to go, it can begin to consciously work towards that goal.*

*A vision is the overall image of what the community wants to be and how it wants to look at some point in the future.*

*A vision statement is the formal expression of that vision. It depicts in words and images what the community is striving to become. The vision statement is the starting point for the creation and implementation of action plans.*

Source: Oregon Visions Project, "A Guide to Community Visioning"

## 2.2 VISION STATEMENT

In the Vision of Amherst in the Year 2018, the Town is renowned for an **exceptional quality of life** that derives from three fundamental attributes:

- **Livability:** Our healthy neighborhoods, outstanding public facilities and services, and active community life make Amherst an exceptional place to live and raise a family.
- **Community Character:** We wisely manage growth to preserve natural and historic resources, maintain green space throughout the community, and revitalize older neighborhoods and commercial corridors while accommodating quality new development.
- **Shared Direction:** As partners in the renewed prosperity of the Buffalo-Niagara region, we work together with neighboring communities and institutions and balance our multiple roles as a premier residential community and a complementary regional center of economic, cultural, and educational activity.

In this Vision of the Future, we define our quality of life by the following valued **characteristics of community**:

## LIVABILITY

- Our **livable neighborhoods** offer a range of lifestyle and housing choices in urban, suburban, and rural settings.
- Pedestrian-friendly, interconnected, mixed-use **development patterns** provide citizens with convenient access to services and facilities and encourage walking, biking, and use of public transportation as alternatives to automobile trips.
- A safe, functionally efficient, and well-maintained **transportation system** provides choices for citizens through interconnected roadways, sidewalks, bike lanes, multi-use and natural trails, and transit options.
- The **community facilities and services** offered by the Town and other providers such as accessible parks and recreational programs, outstanding public schools, and public safety services that help maintain our reputation as one of the safest communities in America, are an integral part of our exceptional quality of life.
- Our active **community life** – culture and entertainment, sports and recreation, programs for people of all ages, and other activities, events, and places for people to gather – provides opportunities for all citizens to participate and enjoy shared experiences.



*Island Park in the Village of Williamsville.*

## COMMUNITY CHARACTER

- Vibrant **older neighborhoods**, such as Eggertsville, Snyder, Swormville, Getzville, and Williamsville, and the **commercial areas** serving them are revitalized and attract continuing investment.
- We protect and preserve valued **open spaces** and **natural and scenic resources** throughout the community.
- We respect our **history and heritage** by preserving historic resources and by remembering and interpreting Amherst's history for future generations.
- We maintain a clean, **healthy environment** by dedicating resources to protect against noise, light, air, and water pollution.
- We set high standards for the **quality of development and redevelopment** to complement our established community character.

- The **visual character** of the Town is enhanced by landscaping, protection of woodlands and tree canopy, and careful attention to the design of roadways, scenic corridors, and public places.

### SHARED DIRECTION

- The Town takes a leadership role in promoting **intergovernmental cooperation** and in pursuing partnership initiatives to address issues shared with our neighboring communities.
- Our healthy, **diverse economy** provides a strong tax base and good job opportunities, contributing to the retention of our talented youth and attracting others to live, work, and invest in our community.
- In **carefully managing growth**, we **balance** the benefits of economic development with the need to maintain livability and preserve community character.
- The Town, together with the **University at Buffalo and other educational institutions**, work together to address issues of common concern, such as retaining young people in the community, diversifying the economy, and strengthening neighborhoods around the campuses.
- **Town government** exercises leadership, responds to the concerns of citizens, and challenges them to become positively involved in community affairs.

## 2.3 KEY INITIATIVES

***Comprehensive Plan Key Initiatives***

- Aesthetic/Community Character
- Education
- Revitalization
- Governance

Four “Key Initiatives” are proposed to provide a focus for the Town’s efforts to achieve the Vision Statement. These initiatives represent areas in which the Town will “raise the bar” in order to move towards a position of excellence consistent with the Vision

- ***Aesthetic/Community Character:*** To be renowned for the beauty, character, and environmental quality of the Town – its parks, greenways, tree canopy, and protected open space; a diverse environment, including areas with rural character; walkable, livable neighborhoods; and high aesthetic standards for commercial development. Examples of Comprehensive Plan policies that will support this initiative include:

*3-5 Apply design standards to enhance community character and sense of place*

*3-6/6-1 Designate “special character roads” as scenic corridors and apply design standards to maintain their appearance*

3-13 *Designate a town-wide open space and greenway network to be achieved through a variety of mechanisms*

4-11 *Implement a “Greening Amherst” planting initiative consistent with a program to manage the “Town Landscape”*

- **Education:** To become known as a leading national "knowledge-based" community that has set high standards for public education and fully integrated a major university into the life of the community. Areas of potential focus include economic development, sports and culture, information and research-based technologies, and life-long learning initiatives. The following Comprehensive Plan policies will support this initiative:

5-4 *Work with educational institutions on lifelong learning and other programs to train, attract, and retain a skilled workforce*

5-7 *Work with UB to create mixed-use activity centers around the periphery of the campuses*

5-8 *Work with UB to promote more educational, social, and cultural ties to the Town and to reinforce the role of both campuses as activity centers.*

5-9 *Establish an ongoing, collaborative planning structure with UB*

- **Revitalization:** To become a model for effective reinvestment and revitalization of older neighborhoods and commercial areas, though creative use of investment incentives targeted toward revitalization and reduced pressure for the development of raw land at the suburban-rural fringe. Examples of relevant Comprehensive Plan policies include:

3-8 *Provide tax incentives for reinvestment, revitalization, and redevelopment of commercial properties and housing in older areas with significantly less emphasis on new “greenfield” development*

3-9 *Rezone and/or provide incentives for reuse of underutilized/obsolescent land for economically viable uses*

3-10 *Tailor commercial zoning districts to the unique physical characteristics of older commercial areas in need of revitalization*

8-7 *Initiate a neighborhood revitalization program to promote revitalization of designated neighborhoods through measures such as code enforcement, capital improvements, and design standards*

- **Governance:** To exercise leadership at the local and regional levels by:
  - Retaining the Town's reputation for excellent services and facilities while ensuring fiscal balance
  - Establishing a framework for managing development that promotes predictability, fairness, and quality and eliminates conflicts over development decisions

Examples of relevant Comprehensive Plan policies include:

- 3-16 Improve the predictability and consistency of the zoning and other development approval processes through the application of clear town-wide land use policies*
- 3-17 Set clear standards for development quality to increase the level of certainty in the development review and approval process*
- 9-1 Establish an on-going system to identify and prioritize community facility and service needs*
- 9-8 Reconcile needs for community facilities and services with the fiscal capacity of the Town through the capital programming process*

