

5.0 Economic Development

5.1 OVERVIEW

**Priority Action Programs:
Economic Development**

- Establish a collaborative planning structure with UB to address issues such as business/ employment growth, land use planning, and social/cultural ties
- Pursue collaborations with educational institutions, private businesses, and other partners to promote economic development

Over the past 20 years, Amherst has led the Western New York region in job creation and commercial development. During this time period, the number of permanent at-place jobs in the Town expanded from 38,800 to 75,600, an increase of nearly 37,000 jobs. The overall change in employment in Western New York during this period was about 47,000, meaning that Amherst alone accounted for over 75 percent of the region’s job growth, despite having less than 10 percent of the region’s jobs in 1980.

Taking a closer look at the types of jobs coming to Amherst, about 68 percent of the Town’s employment falls into the “All Other Employment” category, which excludes Manufacturing, Retail, and Wholesale jobs.⁵ These jobs, which number over 50,000, are primarily office jobs. Projections of employment conducted for the Comprehensive Plan show that, of the 28,000 new jobs expected to be created in Amherst from 2000 to 2020, 25,000 (89 percent) will be in the “All Other Employment” category. Clearly, Amherst is and will continue to be a center for office employment in Western New York.

Knowing that efficient office space will continue to be the linchpin of economic growth in the Town of Amherst, the Comprehensive Plan must clearly define how Town policies will influence office growth over the next 20 years. The majority of Amherst’s existing office inventory is housed in campus-style office parks developed since 1980, and not in urban-style downtowns. Although Amherst has several traditional commercial districts like Williamsville, Eggertsville, and Snyder, it lacks a downtown area with a critical mass of office space, such as downtown Buffalo. As projections for the Town indicate that about 4.9 million square feet of office space will be added from 2000 to 2020, the development of this space must be conducted with an understanding of the existing context.

Since the Town’s industrial and retail sectors are expected to grow more modestly than the office employment sectors, steps must be taken in the coming years to ensure that these sectors remain stable. Manufacturing, retail, and wholesale users alike desire flexible space that allows them to keep up with changing technologies and markets. For this reason, the Town’s existing inventory of industrial and retail space must be kept up to date, a

⁵ Employment trends in Amherst and the Western New York region are more fully documented in the *Inventory and Analysis Report*.

process that will include both the rehabilitation of existing buildings as well as the construction of new space that allows flexibility for tenants.

Another element of the economic development program is the preservation of the Town's strong tax base. Although continued commercial development and redevelopment will help to strengthen the tax base, it is equally important that residential property values remain strong. In other words, future commercial development and redevelopment in Amherst must be conducted in a manner that is beneficial to its residential communities, by minimizing negative impacts such as traffic congestion, the reduction of open space, and the loss of community character.

The Comprehensive Plan Vision Statement defines the desired characteristics of future commercial development in the Town. These characteristics include:

- Pedestrian-friendly, interconnected, **mixed-use development** patterns
- **Preservation of open space** throughout the Town
- A **balance** between economic growth and livability
- Revitalized **older neighborhoods and commercial corridors**

The goals, objectives, and policies of the Economic Development Element are designed to guide future decision-making by the Town regarding the direction of economic growth and the balance between growth and community character. Recommendations include programs for the attraction and retention of employment, adjustments to zoning and development standards, partnership programs, and regional development initiatives.

***Vision Statement Directions:
Economic Development***

- Strong tax base
- Good job opportunities
- Mixed-use development
- Balance between economic growth and livability, including protected open space
- Revitalized neighborhoods and commercial areas

5.2 GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES

GOAL

A Town with a strong tax base and ample economic opportunities for a diverse base of employers and employees, housed in attractive, state-of-the-art commercial developments in convenient and accessible locations

OBJECTIVES

- Maintain Amherst's strong tax base
- Attract more high-paying jobs to the Town
- Ensure that economic development and redevelopment respect the character and quality of life of Amherst's residential communities
- Capitalize on the presence of the University at Buffalo to leverage University-related economic development opportunities

- Build partnerships with development agencies, private industry, and educational and research institutions to promote economic development in Amherst and throughout the region

POLICIES

A. Tax Base and Employment

A healthy tax and employment base are essential not only to Amherst's economy, but also to the Town's quality of life. Studies have shown that commercial retail, office, and industrial development partially subsidize the cost of providing high-quality community facilities and services to residents. Without such development, the burden on residential taxpayers would be significantly higher. Competitive employment is also important in providing economic opportunities to Amherst residents.

5-1 Target economic development policies, programs, capital expenditures, and incentives to attract and retain higher paying employment and promote desired forms and locations of development and redevelopment.

While Amherst has emerged as a regional center for office and industrial employment, a major challenge is to increase the number of high-paying jobs in proportion to low to middle-level jobs like production/assembly, data processing, and administrative. Western New York did not fully participate in the national economic boom of the 1990s, with relatively few "new economy" or other high-paying technology jobs created in the region. However, as the national economy has slowed, it affords Amherst and the rest of the region the opportunity to prepare for the next upward cycle. A number of factors contributed to limiting economic expansion in Amherst and the entire Buffalo region during the 1990s. These factors, and how the Town and its economic development partners can respond to them, are as follows:

- ***Cost of doing business:*** Western New York (and New York State in general) is known for its high tax burden. Although the tax incentives offered by the Amherst IDA have been helpful in overcoming this problem to some degree, more can be done. In accordance with the Erie County Industrial Development Agency's Eligibility Policy for Redevelopment, the Amherst IDA is broadening its incentive programs to include more types of uses, as well as to address reinvestment in older parts of town (see Land Use and Development Policy 3-8). The available incentives should be targeted to support developments/businesses that meet the following basic criteria:
 - Provide higher paying job opportunities
 - Locate on sites consistent with the Comprehensive Plan Land Use and Development policies (e.g., to support reuse of existing, vacant buildings)

- Promote forms of development that are consistent with the Land Use and Development policies (e.g., mixed-use, providing transit and pedestrian connections)

Tax abatement programs should be supplemented with other steps to reduce the cost of doing business, particularly in the area of utility costs. The Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation, for example, offers businesses that locate or expand in an Economic Development Zone up to ten years of deep discounts on increased or new electricity and natural gas consumption through its Economic Development Zone Rider (EDZR).

- **Regulatory environment:** Another hurdle to development in Western New York is a perception that the zoning/development review process is difficult, time consuming, and potentially expensive. While Amherst's regulatory environment is certainly among the best in Western New York, more can be done to attract quality employers to the Town. As described in Policy 5-2 below, one of the most important criteria to employers when choosing locations is the ability to grow in place. As a business grows, it needs to expand its physical space, and it is important that the Town have in place flexible regulatory policies that can accommodate the various stages of business development. One possible strategy is to secure approvals on appropriate sites prior to development and make them available to prospective businesses.
- **Loss of educated professionals:** Metropolitan areas that gained the most during the 1990s (i.e., Washington, DC, Atlanta, San Francisco, Dallas) were generally those with large numbers of highly educated professionals who possess the skills needed for the new economy. These cities have, among other advantages, access to graduates from top-notch engineering and/or science programs from universities in their regions. The University at Buffalo (UB) has made strides in improving its profile, but many of its brightest graduates leave the area, often citing the lack of good jobs. This creates a chicken-egg situation, as educated workers leave to find good jobs, while employers with good jobs cannot find qualified employees. The Town can address this problem by promoting better coordination between private businesses and educational institutions (see Policy 5-3).
- **Lower-level job skills:** In addition to highly educated professionals, technology employers must also employ workers with high school diplomas or associates' degrees, but certain skills are required of these lower-level workers. Since Buffalo's economy has traditionally been rooted in

manufacturing and distribution, many less educated workers have skills that have become out-of-date, and these workers must be retrained. Additionally, high school students who do not show interest in attending college often enter the workforce with limited job skills. Policy 5-4 below describes how the Town and its partners can address the issue of developing a skilled workforce.

- ***Climate:*** While Buffalo is known as a cold weather city, this does not need to be an overly negative influence. During the 1990s, other cold weather metropolitan areas like Minneapolis, Chicago, and Boston grew substantially, despite their climates. A great deal of mythology has developed around the harshness of the Buffalo winter, and that mythology can be put to rest with a few simple facts. In selling Amherst to potential businesses, putting together a weather fact sheet may be useful. This fact sheet could demonstrate how Buffalo’s winter is offset by its mild, sunny summers. It can also show that its average January temperature is 24 degrees, which compares well with those of Minneapolis (12), Chicago (22), and Boston (29).

Economic development efforts should build on Amherst’s ***positive assets***, many of which relate to the Town’s outstanding quality of life.

From the standpoint of attracting businesses that offer higher-paying jobs, Amherst already has a number of positives that can be built upon to help with economic development efforts. These positives include:

- Low cost of living
- Affordable housing options
- Good schools and other community facilities
- Low crime
- Variety of cultural and recreational opportunities
- Good transportation network
- Presence of the University at Buffalo
- Location close to the center of the Buffalo metropolitan area
- Location within the New York/Ontario “Golden Horseshoe” (region and world-class city of Toronto, Ontario)

Many of the policies contained in other elements of the Comprehensive Plan are designed to maintain and enhance these strengths, thus supporting the goals of livability, community character, and economic health that are central to the Vision Statement and which are closely related.

5-2 Build flexibility into non-residential zoning so that options are available for the various stages of business development.

In the technology economy, firms grow rapidly and therefore must be able to find spaces into which they may grow.

Technology firms can often shift from incubator space to multi-tenant space to single-tenant, build-to-suit facilities in the space of five years or less. At each stage of development, a firm not only has particular needs; it will also have particular preferences for the age and character of its space, the characteristics of its surrounding areas, and the types of amenities available to its employees.

Of all the communities in Western New York, Amherst is among the best equipped to accommodate firms as they undergo the transition from start-up to multinational. Amherst’s commercial areas bridge the gap from traditional centers to post-World War II highway commercial corridors to modern office parks. However, at the present time, most office businesses wanting to locate in Amherst are limited to office parks, as there are few older office buildings and commercial zoning in older commercial areas is often not conducive to modern office development.

In response, the Town should build flexibility into zoning categories in both generations of its older commercial areas: traditional centers such as Eggertsville and Snyder, and commercial corridors such as Sheridan Drive and Niagara Falls Boulevard. More flexible zoning categories would accomplish two goals. First, office businesses of all types and sizes could find appropriate locations for development. Secondly, underutilized retail sites could be re-used for office and other commercial development.

5-3 Promote economic development through collaborations between government, educational institutions, health care organizations, and private industries.

While the Western New York economy is generally characterized as stagnant and the region has lost population over the last several decades, these actually present opportunities for future growth. As a long-established urban hub, the Buffalo area contains many educational, medical, cultural, and community service organizations, the likes of which are not typically found in less established, growing areas. In addition, the area is home to many high-profile corporations, both old and new, with strong interests in improving the area’s future economic situation.

At the regional level, partnerships for economic development and information exchange already exist (see Policy 5-10), but more can be done to address the core of the challenge. As mentioned in Policy 5-1, a major obstacle to economic development in Amherst and other Western New York communities is an exodus of much of the area’s brightest young talent. The chief goal of any cross-institutional collaboration for economic development should be to slow and ultimately reverse this exodus. The points below describe



Policy 5-3 supports the **Education Key Initiative** to position Amherst as a leading national “knowledge-based” community.

some of the reasons for the loss of young professionals, and potential opportunities for counteracting it.

- ***Lack of quality career opportunities:*** While there is a perception among young professionals that quality job opportunities are limited in the Buffalo area, this perception is not necessarily true. A number of leading employers in Amherst interviewed for the *Inventory and Analysis Report* spoke of not being able to find talent locally to fill high-skill, technical jobs. A large part of the problem is communication, as younger workers are not aware of quality employment opportunities, and employers do not know how to access qualified employees. As the home of both UB (the source of many prospective employees) and many major employers, the Town should collaborate with the Amherst IDA, UB, other higher education institutions (Daemen, Canisius, Buffalo State), and major employers to address this situation. Examples of potential initiatives include:
 - Sponsoring an Amherst “Career Fair”
 - Establishing an Internet-based career placement service

- ***The importance of cultural and entertainment opportunities:*** For young professionals, an active urban environment is often a more important factor in choosing a career path than the job itself. From this standpoint, Buffalo has difficulty competing with cosmopolitan centers such as New York or Boston, or even mid-sized cities like Pittsburgh and Cleveland. However, Buffalo’s standing as a place with an active entertainment scene has greatly improved in recent years, aided by the resurgence of commercial areas like Elmwood Avenue, Chippewa Street, and the theater district. Beyond nightlife, the City has a variety of cultural and recreational opportunities that are both more affordable and more readily available than are similar outlets in larger cities. As part of a program of selling the merits of the Buffalo area to young professionals, partnerships should be pursued that bring employers in Amherst together with professional sports teams, arts and cultural institutions, restaurants and nightclubs, and similar “excitement building” entities to market Buffalo’s allure to young professionals.

- ***Absence of growth industries:*** For young professionals looking at starting careers, long-term prospects in the chosen industry are always a consideration. Currently, few of the larger employers in Amherst are in popular growth fields like biotechnology or software and Internet development. Recent investment by the State of New York indicates that this trend is likely to change, particularly in

the medical and biotechnology industries. The State of New York is investing over \$250 million to establish a Center of Excellence in Bioinformatics at the Buffalo-Niagara Medical Campus in Buffalo. Since the Medical Campus itself has limited opportunities for real estate development, Amherst could be an important partner in this effort. In this respect the Town has two advantages: its proximity to the University at Buffalo's campuses and its reputation as a viable location for research and development facilities. To take advantage of this opportunity, the Town should work with the University and the Medical Campus to market sites to companies seeking to capitalize on the establishment of the Bioinformatics Center.

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

Of all Western New York communities, Amherst has the greatest concentration of educational resources. In addition to the University at Buffalo, Daemen College, Erie Community College, and a number of top-level parochial and private schools, the Town's three public school districts are among the best in Western New York.

With such a depth of educational institutions, the infrastructure is already in place to achieve the goal of training, attracting, and retaining skilled workers. However, one of the challenges faced by the Town of Amherst is to provide its labor force with appropriate job skills for future careers. As stated earlier, the Buffalo region suffers from a mismatch of job skills, as a significant portion of its workforce is trained for jobs that no longer exist in this region. In order to ensure that the entire workforce is prepared for careers in tomorrow's industries, a number of initiatives should be undertaken:

- **Identify future needs of employers:** The Amherst IDA conducts an annual survey of businesses located in Amherst's industrial and business parks. As part of this survey, each company's workforce needs should be identified, so that educational institutions at all levels can continually offer the proper training to prospective workers.
- **Tailor programs to objectives of workers:** Even in top-flight high schools like those in Amherst, not all students intend to continue on to college. Instead, many graduates from these schools choose to enter the workforce directly. In order to ensure that these new members of the workforce can be of service to businesses in Amherst, the Town's public school districts should use the results of the business survey to create and adapt vocational training

programs aimed at keeping graduates employed close to home.

- **Expand adult education programs:** In addition to the public schools, the presence of UB, Daemen College, and Erie County Community College is a key asset. Established workers and professionals are able to continue and enhance their education at these institutions and others with satellite campuses in the Town.

To address the problem of older workers with obsolete job skills, the high schools, Erie Community College, and other vocational schools have programs to help such workers acquire the training they need to remain competitive in the workforce. However, not all workers have the time or the money for college courses. For this segment of the workforce, the Town can work with Erie County and non-profit community service agencies to offer one-time training seminars in particular job skills. Furthermore, the Town could coordinate these seminars with employers and provide them with the opportunity to use such training sessions as mini job fairs.

- **Provide co-op positions for students:** In many technical fields, companies allow students to gain real world experience by working as “co-op” employees for a semester or a summer. If companies in Amherst create more co-op positions, they can give students a taste of the work environment prior to graduating. Co-op positions can also help address the loss of young persons, as they can show students that they need not leave the area to obtain quality employment.

B. Community Character and Quality of Life

As expressed in the Vision Statement, which emphasizes the need for balance between economic development and livability, Amherst’s attractiveness as a place for business depends upon its quality of life and community character. In the past, some land use decisions have resulted in intense non-residential uses located next to established residential areas, creating the potential for adverse impacts. Future decision-making must address the need to safeguard the character and quality of life of Amherst’s residential communities as a fundamental principle, through application of the land use and development policies described in Chapter 3.0. Specifically, commercial retail, office and industrial development should be designed to minimize impacts on residential areas through complementary site locations and development patterns (Policy 5-5) and quality design features that address “edge conditions” and relationships to public roadways (Policy 5-6).

Amherst’s *attractiveness as a place for business* depends upon its quality of life and community character.

5-5 Promote commercial development patterns that reduce neighborhood impacts.

The Conceptual Land Use Plan and related land use policies are designed to focus more intensive development in mixed-use areas that function as centers of activity for the community. By guiding commercial development to these centers, the integrity of surrounding neighborhoods can be maintained and traffic impacts reduced through access management and coordination with transit service and pedestrian/bicycle facilities. A primary goal of both the Land Use and Economic Development Elements is to promote reinvestment in existing commercial centers and corridors in older parts of Amherst, where roads and other infrastructure are available and such reinvestment can contribute to maintaining the health of adjacent residential areas. In developing parts of central and northern Amherst, mixed-use centers are designated in strategic locations to accommodate commercial development in compact rather than dispersed patterns, providing convenient access without infringing upon residential areas and encouraging the formation of commercial strips.



Centerpointe Corporate Park.

5-6 Adopt commercial development standards for neighborhood compatibility with context sensitive design guidelines.

The Land Use and Development Element proposes the establishment of standards to improve the quality of development. As described in Policy 3-5, these standards need to address the impacts of commercial development on adjacent residential uses, including:

- Landscaping, buffer/edge treatment, and screening
- Access management
- Building design elements sensitive to the surrounding context (scale, height/mass, orientation, façade treatment)

In addition, enhanced standards should be put in place to address the appearance of commercial development from public roadways (landscaping, signage, placement of signage, etc.). These standards would help to improve the visual character of neighborhoods adjacent to commercial corridors.

C. University at Buffalo

One of the Town’s outstanding assets from the standpoint both of the economy and quality of life, the University at Buffalo (UB) is central to the Comprehensive Plan initiative to become known as a leading “knowledge-based” community. However, UB’s North Campus has functioned as a largely self-contained entity that has little interaction with the surrounding community. In addition, there has been limited coordination between the University administration and the Town on land use/development and other

issues of mutual concern. However, this has begun to change through initiatives such as the University Community Initiative and the Amherst IDA's partnership in the Office of Science, Technology Transfer, and Economic Outreach and significant opportunities exist for additional collaboration. Such collaboration would yield positive benefits for both entities and help achieve the goals, objectives, and policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

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

The *University at Buffalo* is a major community asset and provides opportunities for increased collaboration to promote economic development and other goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

The number of students living on UB's North Campus is projected to increase from 4,600 in 2000 to 8,500 in 2005. To accommodate this expansion, the University is constructing student housing near the perimeter of the campus and plans to construct additional housing along with a commercial center located within the campus. In addition, demand will increase for off-campus rental housing oriented towards students in areas around the campus. As currently conceived, the University's plans do not address the isolation of the North Campus from Amherst or the potential for ancillary impacts (e.g., increased traffic, demand for public services, effects on neighborhoods).

A significant opportunity exists for the University and the Town to work together to accommodate development associated with North Campus expansion in ways that better integrate UB into the Town and promote Comprehensive Plan policies related to land use and economic development. Specifically, development should be focused in university-related mixed-use activity centers strategically located around the periphery of the campus. Specific components of these centers could include:

- On- and off-campus student/faculty housing and activities
- Small-scale commercial retail and services oriented towards the UB community and nearby neighborhoods
- Incubator and research-related employment parks that help achieve the objectives of the Economic Development Element

Potential activity center locations are designated in the Land Use and Development Element. This concept is further addressed in Section 10.3 of the Focal Planning Area chapter.

The University is currently preparing a new physical master plan to implement the recently completed "UB 2020" academic plan. This effort, called "BuildUB," is seeking to implement many of the same concepts recommended above. Preliminary discussions with the University indicate they are seeking to soften the hard edges of the north campus to better integrate it into the Amherst community. The existing

commercial-retail, student housing, and research-development uses currently planned along the Sweet Home Road corridor in the area directly west of the North Campus may present a real opportunity to integrate Town and University planning efforts to create a second University related mixed use activity center. This concept may be explored with the University as their physical planning efforts progress and considered as part of future annual plan reviews.

In addition to working together on development around the North Campus, the Town and UB should continue to pursue initiatives to strengthen older neighborhoods around the South Campus (located in the City of Buffalo adjacent to Amherst) to address the impacts of the shift in students and academic functions to the North Campus. With respect to economic development, one possible strategy is to seek opportunities to locate University-related incubator/research facilities within nearby commercial/mixed-use areas. Medical-related research and development is a potential focus that would capitalize on proximity to the Medical School on South Campus and the emerging Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus and center for bioinformatics and medical research in downtown Buffalo.

As described in the *Inventory and Analysis Report* (pages 6-20 to 6-25), there are many examples of colleges and universities acting as partners in programs to promote economic development in their communities. Typical activities carried out by these programs include:

- Community development (stabilizing neighborhoods, creating retail opportunities, providing access to capital for reinvestment, etc.)
- Research and development (establishing incubatory/research facilities to encourage startup businesses and to provide research for transfer to entrepreneurs)
- Real estate development (acting as developers/managers of off-campus projects with office, retail, and/or housing components)

The University has already indicated a commitment to its host communities through initiatives such as the University Community Initiative and the existing incubator facility near the North Campus. Additional steps in this direction could help secure its growing reputation as a major academic institution while positioning Amherst as one of the nation's leading university towns. Potential focuses of a collaborative, town/gown approach to securing Amherst's status as a "knowledge-based" community with a skilled workforce and high quality of life include:

- Educational and lifelong learning opportunities

- Economic development and job creation
- Partnerships with multiple institutions and businesses
- Neighborhood and commercial area revitalization, including urban design improvements consistent with Comprehensive Plan objectives

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.

Over the past 25 years, the University at Buffalo has used its North Campus as a means of growing the institution, both physically and in academic stature. As the core of the University has shifted from the South to the North Campus, the institution itself has been transformed into a major presence on the national academic scene. The University today boasts a large, modern campus with many state-of-the-art facilities, as well as a smaller-scale, traditional campus to the south for programs such as the Schools of Medicine, Dentistry, and Architecture.

A consequence of the shift to the North Campus is that the bulk of University operations are no longer located in the City of Buffalo; the University's central area is now located several miles north, in the Town of Amherst. In fact, there has been some support within the institution to change its name to the State University of New York at Amherst, in order to differentiate it from the older Buffalo campus.

Despite this shift to the North Campus, the University has yet to establish the types of connections with Amherst typically seen between "town and gown" at older, more established academic institutions. In fact, when people think of and refer to many universities, simply saying the name of the town serves as a proxy for the university itself (Chapel Hill, Boulder, Ann Arbor, etc.). Even with respect to campuses in urban areas, there are districts that serve the university population first and foremost: Harvard Square, Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley, High Street in Columbus, etc.

However, for a new campus located in a residential, suburban area, it is often difficult to establish a meaningful relationship between town and gown. While the future development of mixed-use activity centers around the periphery of the campuses (Policy 5-7) is designed in part to help knit the North Campus into the fabric of Amherst, the ties that should be developed between UB and the Town of Amherst go beyond land use. In order to truly establish the psychological connections that tie the University and Town together and help position Amherst as a superlative "knowledge-based" community, day-to-day reminders are needed that both exist in harmony. The following outlines some ways in which the

ties between town and gown should be strengthened through programs at both campuses:

- **Educational programs:** As with any university, the core function of UB is educating students. For the most part, students at UB are working towards a bachelor's or master's degree. However, for adults going back to school to learn new skills (Policy 5-4) or advanced high school students looking for more challenging courses, the typical destination is a community college. To help further integrate UB with the community, the Town should encourage the University to offer more programs for non-degree residents as well as one-time or short-term seminars in particular professional skills.
- **Social/recreational activities:** Athletics represents one of the primary means by which universities integrate themselves into the community. The University at Buffalo competes in Division I athletics in the Mid-American Conference, but its athletic teams do not have a very strong profile. Even within its conference, some other schools, such as Miami of Ohio, Marshall, and Ball State, have stronger support from their communities than does UB. In a mutually beneficial arrangement, the Town could organize "UB Days," when large groups of Amherst residents would get together to attend games. Such an arrangement would benefit the Town, as residents would become more involved in the University. It would also benefit the University, which is looking for ways to raise the profile and fan base of its teams.
- **Cultural programs:** In recent years, many people who are able to choose their places of residence, either because they are retired or self employed, have gravitated to college towns. The primary attraction of such locations is the concentration of cultural activities. Many academic institutions have come to recognize the importance of offering first-class cultural opportunities to students, faculty, and the community. For example, as an effort to strengthen both its arts programs and its ties to the community, the University of Cincinnati – like UB, a former commuter school – has invested millions of dollars in state-of-the art cultural facilities (a new museum and a new performing arts center). As a result, these facilities have become draws for not just the University community, but also for the Cincinnati region as a whole. Citing such examples, the Town should encourage the University to expand the cultural opportunities it makes available to Amherst residents.



UB's Center for the Arts.

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

A strong cooperative relationship between the Town and UB is necessary if implementation of Policies 5-7 and 5-8 is to be successful. The following planning structure is proposed to facilitate formal and informal collaboration on issues of mutual concern:

- An “Executive Committee” should be established, comprised of high-level representatives from both the Town and University. This committee would meet periodically (e.g., quarterly or more frequently if needed to address specific issues) to discuss town/gown policy and issues.
- A “Staff Committee” should also be established, comprised of senior professional staff from both parties. This committee would meet regularly (e.g., bimonthly) to provide briefings and discuss development projects, infrastructure, and environmental issues.
- There should be a policy of cross-representation on Town or University planning projects that affect both parties. Precedence for this policy has been set by the University’s representation on the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee.
- The Executive Committee should establish ad hoc groups as needed to work on specific joint projects, such as the University Community Initiative.

As a general rule, both the Town and University should share information on an on-going basis and provide opportunities for input before plans that could potentially impact the other party are implemented.

D. Regional Economic Development

A healthy regional economy is key to Amherst’s future prosperity. The Comprehensive Plan strongly endorses the adage that “a rising tide lifts all boats,” as Amherst’s success will only continue if the region around it remains strong. Towards this end, the goals, objectives, and policies contained in this element are directed to promoting economic development in the Town in the context of the Western New York region as a whole.

5-10 Work with area municipalities and economic development agencies to promote regional economic growth.

Given Amherst’s position as an established leader in the region’s economic development, there has, in the past, been the perception that the Town has operated in competition with its neighbors. However, as evidenced by the newly strengthened partnership between the Amherst IDA and the other IDAs in Erie County, this attitude is changing. Also in

Amherst’s future prosperity is closely tied to the economic health of the **Buffalo-Niagara region** as a whole.

the past few years, communities in the area have begun to eliminate parochial thinking, and Amherst has been a regional leader. At the present time, Amherst is actively working with the City of Buffalo and the Towns of Tonawanda, Cheektowaga, and Clarence on local-area planning for neighborhoods and corridors around its borders.

Beyond local-area planning initiatives, the Town is also becoming increasingly involved in a number of regional economic development efforts led from within Amherst by the Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth at the University at Buffalo. This Institute sponsors the State of the Region report, a comprehensive statistical analysis of Western New York and how it compares with other regions in a number of demographic, economic, and quality of life indicators. The Institute also maintains the Western New York Regional Information Network (<http://rin.buffalo.edu>). WNYRIN is a storehouse of data, contacts, and web links regarding all aspects of regional growth and economic development, and Amherst has been an active participant in its efforts.

Amherst is already taking steps to become more involved with its neighbors in promoting economic growth, at both the community and regional levels. In order to continue to promote regional economic growth, the Town should keep current with future efforts in this direction and build on its collaborative planning efforts with its neighbors. The Town has experienced the value of cooperative projects with UB, the City of Buffalo, Clarence, and Cheektowaga. These projects and relationships will continue to serve Amherst well in the future.

Amherst's relationship with the City of Buffalo is key to the objective of promoting regional economic growth. The initial growth of Amherst in the 20th century was due to its status as a bedroom community to Buffalo, with commercial districts serving suburban population centers like Eggertsville and Snyder. As development in Amherst continued, the Town became more than a residential suburb: it emerged as a center of retail, office, and light industrial employment as well. In growing metropolitan areas, suburban employment centers like Amherst have proven to coexist well with older, central cities, as is evident by the continued vitality of cities like Boston, Washington, and New York.

However, as is well documented, the economy of the Buffalo region has seen little growth over the past several decades. As a result, real estate developers and municipalities often find themselves in competition to attract the same employers. Today, Amherst and Buffalo stand as the two largest employment centers in the region, with Amherst having

significant advantages when it comes to attracting new and/or relocating businesses. To many of today's office employers, the most important factors in choosing locations are: modern, efficient space, technology infrastructure, good highway access, available parking, and room to expand.

Since Buffalo, like other central cities, is at a competitive disadvantage compared to Amherst and other suburban locations, it must rely on other factors to attract employment. The urban environment of downtown Buffalo is an "intangible" factor that is attractive to many employers, as is its proximity to Lake Erie, HSBC Arena, the Theater District, and many restaurants. For certain types of employers, downtown Buffalo's shortcomings as an office location are outweighed by its other benefits.

Within this context, it is not in the interest of Amherst or the region to compete with Buffalo for business and employment. Downtown Buffalo is the historic commercial center of the region, and the public face of the city to the rest of the world. If downtown Buffalo remains in decline, the entire Buffalo region will suffer. A healthy, exciting, attractive downtown benefits everyone – employers, employees, and residents alike. Even for those who do not live or work downtown, it is a cultural amenity for the whole region.

Given the above, Amherst's economic development efforts should focus on attracting new businesses to the region and on growing existing businesses within the Town. It is also worth noting that, as Amherst is built out in the future, it could become susceptible to the loss of business and employment. Amherst should therefore continue to set a positive example for the region by acting in a cooperative and positive manner in regard to its neighbors.

5-11 Position Amherst as a regional technology center.

Within the regional context, Amherst must cooperate with its neighbors, but still should strive to build its own identity as a center of technology business and employment in the region. Pursuing this goal will consist of a three-pronged strategy that balances capital investment, workforce development, and marketing:

- **Capital Investment:** Amherst already possesses a significant network of so-called "Information Technology (IT) Infrastructure," including fiber optic and other telecommunications lines. In addition, Amherst has excellent "standard municipal infrastructure," such as roads, water and sewer lines, and electrical power. From the standpoint of capital investment, the Town's main challenge is in maintaining existing networks of both types of infrastructure in good condition, while encouraging

continuing investment in new technological infrastructure by private providers of high-speed Internet and other technological services.

- **Workforce Development:** As outlined in Policies 5-3 and 5-4, the Town of Amherst can take a number of steps to reverse the exodus of young workers. As part of the efforts to grow and retain a strong workforce, the Town needs to continue to participate in efforts to help the skills of its workforce keep pace with the needs of private industry. The two major partners in this effort should be the companies themselves, which will identify needed skills, and UB and other institutions of higher education, which can help design appropriate training programs.
- **Marketing:** With the proper infrastructure in place and a strong workforce, companies and employees need to be made aware of Amherst and its advantages. The Amherst IDA has long served this role on behalf of the Town, and will continue to do so. Thus it is important, that, as part of the Comprehensive Plan implementation, the Town build on IDA's marketing efforts. Over the course of 25 years, the IDA has built up an international network of contacts, as well as an image of Amherst as a center of "Place-Based Innovation." While this theme continues to be appropriate for the Town, it should be expanded to explicitly reflect Amherst's role as a regional technology center.