



Town of SKANEATELES
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
2020

As of September 2020

Image courtesy of Tom Dwyer



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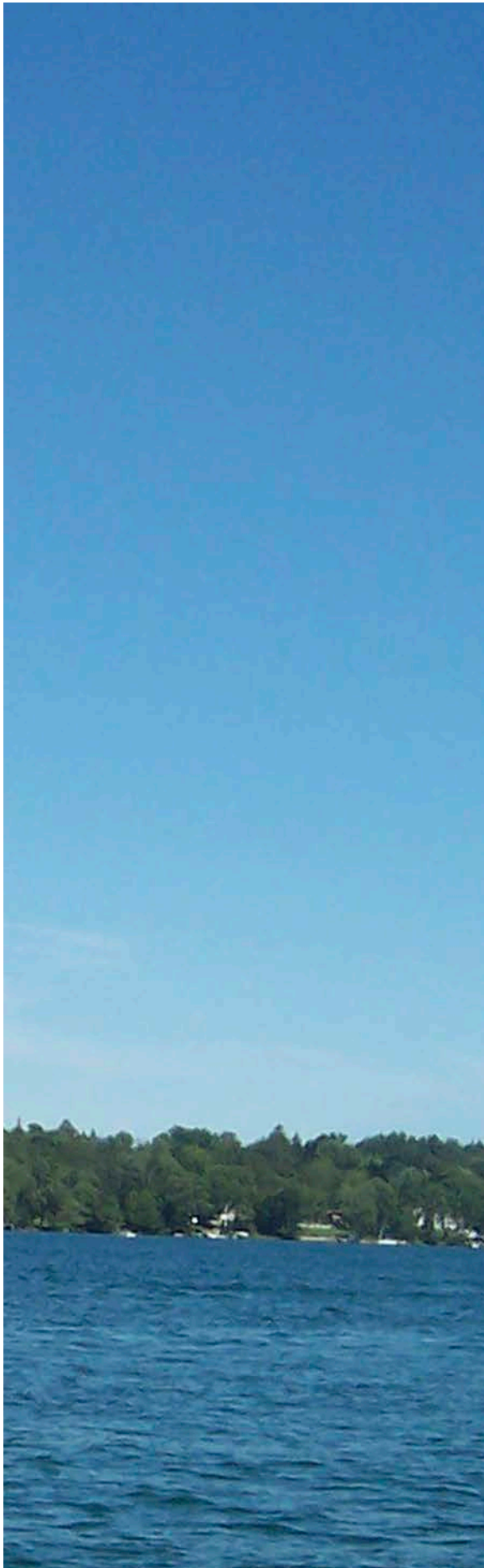


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A. INTRODUCTION

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

- a. This Comprehensive Plan (the Plan) is the fundamental tool for guiding the planning and development process for the Town of Skaneateles, building upon a history of joint comprehensive planning dating back to 1996. As the Town began a revision of its Zoning Law in 2016 to implement the 2015 Joint Plan, it found it necessary to update and correct some information contained in the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan. The original intention of the Plan update was to continue having a joint plan for the Town and Village, while correcting some errors in the 2015 Joint Plan and updating some of its facts. However, after the Plan update had been drafted in 2016 as a joint document and public discussion had begun, officials of the Village of Skaneateles decided not to participate in this Plan Update. As a result, this document is no longer a "joint" comprehensive plan update for both the Village and Town, but rather a comprehensive plan for just the Town. Upon adoption of this Plan Update, there will therefore be two Plans in effect: (1) the 2015 "Joint" Plan, which will remain in effect only in the Village; and this Town Plan Update, which will apply only within the Town outside the Village. The two plans are largely identical and have no significant policy differences; however, there are some differences in content, tone, and emphasis.
- b. As originally drafted, this Plan Update contained planning and action recommendations for both the Town and Village, since the Village and Town are in reality one community. The recommendations from the 2015 Joint Plan that relate specifically to the Village have been carried over into this document, embodying the Town's commitment to a shared vision with the Village. However, recommendations in this Plan that are specific to the Village will not have a binding effect on the Village government. Rather, the Village will continue to rely upon the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan as its primary planning tool. This distinction has little or no practical effect, since the recommendations relating to the Village are almost the same in both Plans. This Plan assumes that cooperation between the two municipalities will continue under the two Plans.
- c. The Plan is based on a group of broad goals and is intended to be used to guide the continued social, economic, and physical development of the Town. The Plan identifies goals, objectives and actions intended to ensure that the community and the environment are preserved for future generations. This Plan builds upon, and refines, prior joint Comprehensive Plans, adopted in 1996 and 2005, as well as earlier planning documents. Skaneateles has a long history of proactive planning for its future and has been a model for other municipalities in the region and beyond. This updated version of the Plan, now applicable only in the Town, represents a general continuation of laws, practices and actions contained in prior plans and that are currently in force in the community. This framework has made Skaneateles a uniquely desirable place to live and visit.





- d. The Plan recognizes that all communities change as a result of environmental, economic, political and other factors. The purpose of The Plan is to influence and channel such change in order to ensure that the fundamental attributes valued by the community are protected for generations to come. In particular, prior comprehensive plans were based upon the premise that Skaneateles was likely to see significant population growth in the near future and needed to provide ways to manage that growth. In fact, the past 20 years have shown a declining population in the community, with changes in demographics that have resulted in fewer school-age children and an increase in the average age of residents. In addition, the number of local jobs has been declining as employers have closed or reduced the size of their workforces. A community that was poised for significant growth has instead witnessed a gradual decline in population. Despite this population decline, the amount of land consumed by development has increased. This is due to both reduced household sizes and the fact that much of the new development that has occurred has been located on large lots on undeveloped land. This Plan must take into account recent trends and likely future changes. To the extent that prior comprehensive plans were based on assumptions that are no longer valid, this Plan must take these changes into account and adapt accordingly.
- e. A comprehensive plan is a guidance document that gives general direction to future decisions. Under New York State law, town and village land use regulations must be in accordance with an adopted comprehensive plan. This has generally been interpreted to mean that future zoning changes should be made in accordance with an adopted comprehensive plan. However, many people confuse a comprehensive plan with a zoning law. A zoning law establishes legally enforceable rights and responsibilities with respect to land use and development, while a comprehensive plan establishes the vision and intentions designed to underpin the zoning law. When this Plan uses the term “actions,” it means that the Plan recommends certain actions, which can only occur when the Town Board (or some other entity with legal authority) formally adopts such actions.
- f. Finally, the Town Board recognizes that prior comprehensive plans, while thorough in their recommendations, were not easily accessible or readable documents for the general public. This Plan, like the 2015 Joint Plan that it updates, builds upon the prior comprehensive plans by taking much of the same content, condensing it, and rewriting it in a format and language that are readily understandable to the citizens of Skaneateles and their elected and appointed officials. The Plan also recommends making the Town’s Zoning Law more user-friendly in the same way that this Comprehensive Plan has done. Accordingly, the Town is adopting a major overhaul of its Zoning Law simultaneously with this Plan to implement that recommendation.

2. VISION FOR SKANEATELES

- a. Settled along historic Route 20 on a pristine lake in a rural setting, Skaneateles is a unique community with abundant natural beauty combined with a quality of life that appeals to year-round residents as well as thousands of annual visitors and seasonal residents. The Plan's vision for the future stems from the past. Prior generations have established an ideal, small, upstate rural town with a charmingly vibrant village center. These characteristics must be preserved.
- b. The goal for Skaneateles is to maintain what currently makes it so attractive – a small community with defined and identifiable areas – rural, hamlets, village – while recognizing that change is inevitable, and in fact, desirable if guided by a set of thoughtful, well-defined principles. It is believed that new development can benefit the community, the economy, and the environment if it is carried out in a manner that embraces a set of principles frequently referred to as “smart growth”.
- c. A “smart growth” planning movement gathered momentum in the mid-1990s that was broadly based on a set of best practices, strategies, and policies that include:
 - i. Mixed land uses.
 - ii. Compact design.
 - iii. A range of housing opportunities and choices.
 - iv. Walkable communities.
 - v. Distinct, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
 - vi. Preservation of open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental areas.
 - vii. Development directed towards existing communities.
 - viii. A variety of transportation options.
 - ix. An atmosphere where development decisions can be predictable, fair, and cost-effective.
 - x. Encouragement of community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.
- d. These smart growth principles have been integrated into prior comprehensive plans for Skaneateles and continue to contribute to the goals, objectives, and actions guiding this Comprehensive Plan.



- e. Consistent with these principles, the Plan encourages incentive-driven, traditional neighborhood development that features pedestrian-friendly, walkable neighborhoods and focused mixed-use development, while protecting large areas of the rural landscape. In addition, by focusing infrastructure improvements in areas where growth is desired, less desirable development becomes less attractive to pursue. Because infrastructure development, particularly provision of public sewage treatment, is a prerequisite for achieving the desired form of development, this Plan continues to encourage the development of such infrastructure in appropriate places and within the financial means of residents.
- f. The Plan provides guidance for achievement of these widely held values and long-range possibilities.



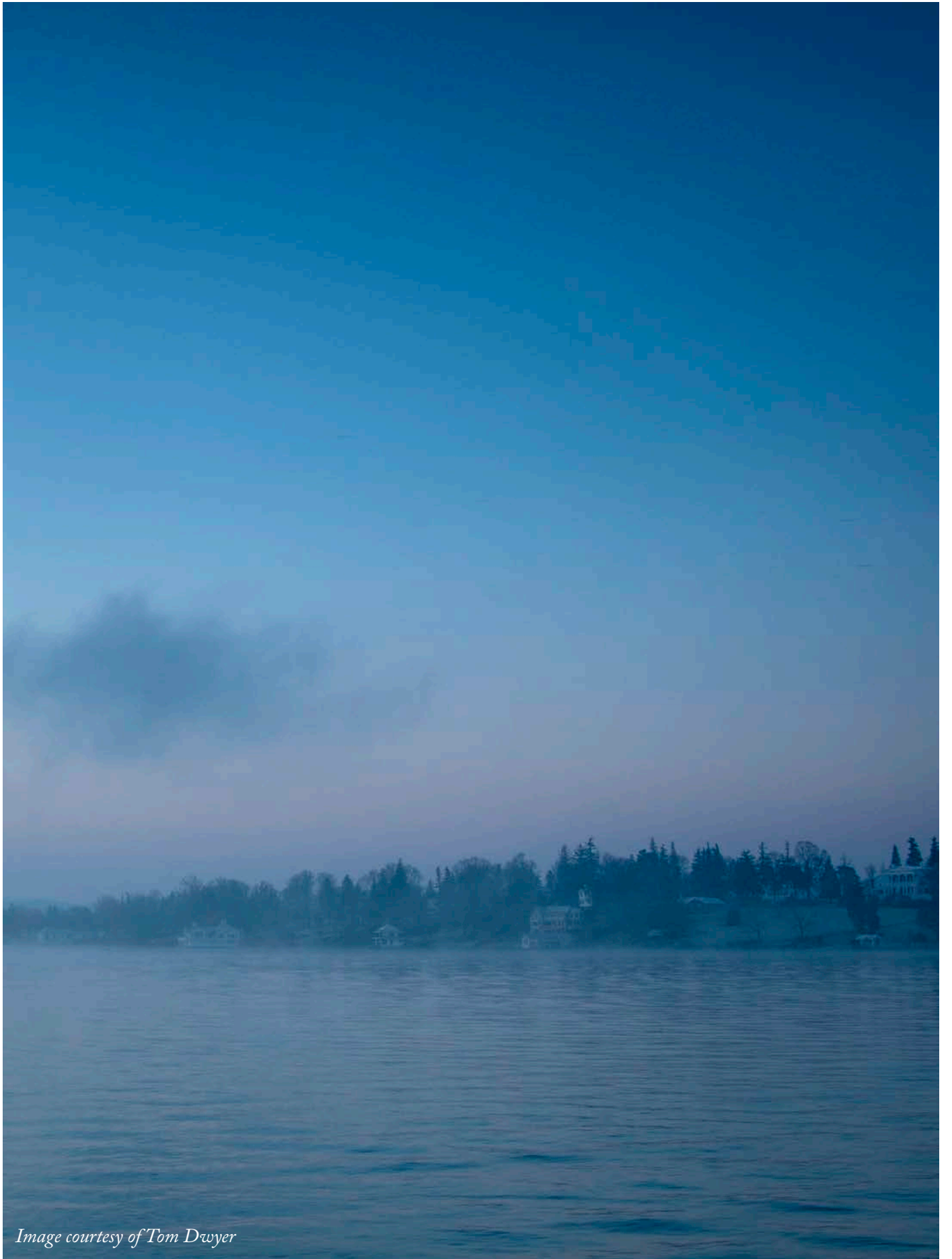


Image courtesy of Tom Dwyer



3. CONCERNS

- a. The Plan is based on issues and broadly held fundamental values recognized as enduring and necessary in shaping the future of Skaneateles. The Skaneateles community particularly values:
 - i. The pristine condition of the lake's waters and the beauty of its surroundings.
 - ii. The historic character and ambiance of the Village and its role as both the commercial and public center in the life of the Village and Town.
 - iii. The beauty and character of the rural and agricultural areas and natural landscapes throughout the Town.
 - iv. The primarily residential and agricultural characteristics of all areas of the community outside of the Village core.
- b. In establishing guidelines for the long-term maintenance of these characteristics, the Plan recognizes that the attributes that make this a desirable community may also attract growth, new residents, and additional visitors, which, if not managed wisely, could endanger the very features that appeal to these newcomers. By maintaining and managing the capacity to grow and change in ways that enhance the community's vitality and attractiveness, Skaneateles can ensure that the current quality of life is preserved for generations to come.



- c. A number of broad issues are addressed in The Plan:

- i. *Threats to the environment, including the purity of Skaneateles Lake:*

The water quality of Skaneateles Lake is paramount to the quality of life in the area. The lake is the source of unfiltered potable water for the City of Syracuse, the Villages of Skaneateles, Jordan, and Elbridge and all or parts of the Towns of Skaneateles and Elbridge. Skaneateles is also endangered by other threats not exclusive to the area, such as the spread of invasive species, non-renewable energy consumption, and threats to the water table.

- ii. *Undesirable land utilization:* While the population of Skaneateles has declined, the number of housing lots has increased. Large residential lots are consuming rural land. In October 2010, the Onondaga Citizens League released a report promoting sustainability in Onondaga County, "What Does it Mean to be Green". That report stated that "...the rate of sprawl in Onondaga County has been nothing short of relentless. Since 1970 the amount of 'urbanized' land in the county has increased 92 percent...all with no new population growth." In 2010, New York State adopted the "Smart Growth Public Infrastructure Policy Act", which requires that state infrastructure funding be consistent with smart growth principles, with funding priority given to existing infrastructure and projects which are consistent with local governments' plans for development.





- iii. Accommodation of visitors:* The very attractiveness of the community that this plan seeks to preserve can be undermined by the community's power to attract. Historically, this community has welcomed visitors to enjoy, alongside the community's residents, this community's charms. Care must be taken to ensure that this historic welcome does not overwhelm and undermine the attractiveness and livability of this predominantly residential and agricultural community.
- iv. Population trends:* During the period from 1970 – 2010, the population of the Town (including the Village) declined by 8 percent, most of which occurred between 1970 and 1980. Between 2000 and 2010, the median age of the town population increased by 5 full years (to 47.3). A declining and aging population can become a problem for a community, as there are functions that require scale and active engagement from its residents in order to offer quality and cost-effective services and robust community activities. For example, sufficient population and a strong tax base are needed to support services such as a superior school system, emergency services, and recreation facilities. In addition, a robust population provides a level of community involvement necessary to sustain the quality of life and environment valued by residents of Skaneateles. As noted above, these population trends conflict with the assumptions contained in prior comprehensive plans, requiring some rethinking of goals, priorities, and implementation actions recommended in prior plans.
- v. Housing availability:* Due to the attractiveness of the area, demand has driven housing and land costs higher than in other upstate New York communities. This has resulted in limited availability of smaller, affordable homes for young families, senior citizens and others. The lack of affordable housing for young families has contributed to the relative aging of the Skaneateles population.
- vi. The future of the northern hamlets:* The northern hamlets (Skaneateles Falls and Mottville) have been the community's center for investment in industrial production and jobs for more than 150 years. But without modern infrastructure and a fresh, pro-active and pro-business approach, it will be difficult for the community to compete for significant new jobs in the years ahead.

4. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- a. The Plan is designed to move the Town in the direction of realizing its desired future. The recommended future land uses, building and development patterns and supporting infrastructure described in the Plan are intended to guide economic, governmental and political forces in an efficient, coherent, attractive, and sustainable direction.
- b. The Plan is intended to be a guide, illustrating desirable outcomes, for ongoing public and private actions in Skaneateles; its broad concepts are intended to be used as a resource in public decision-making. To achieve the Plan's major goals and objectives, it is intended that the Town will use available land development regulatory techniques, environmental review techniques, capital improvement planning, and other measures necessary to accomplish this end.
- c. The Plan itself should evolve and be reevaluated from time to time to adapt to changing circumstances. It is the intent of the Plan that the Town:
 - i. *Establish planning processes and review procedures that are consistent with Plan objectives.* Simple and clear procedures for projects that are consistent with the Plan's goals and objectives will encourage desired actions, while discouraging contrary actions.
 - ii. *Improve the effectiveness of the Town's Open Space Zoning and Subdivision provisions that promote the preservation of valuable farmland, natural habitat and scenic open space.* The Town has had conservation zoning and subdivision provisions since 1996 to encourage or mandate development that fits into the landscape, with less area devoted to costly streets and infrastructure than is found in conventional subdivisions. The goal of these provisions is to protect prized natural features while still allowing landowners reasonable use of their land. The end goal of these provisions is a more attractive and pleasing environment that adds value to the house lots that are developed. However, despite the existence of these provisions for more than 20 years, they have rarely been used, due in large part to the generally small scale of development proposals, which can make conservation development impractical. These provisions need to take into account the typical size and scale of subdivisions in Skaneateles, learning from past experiences.
 - iii. *Create a thoughtful strategy to help attract and shape growth and investment in the hamlets.* Strategic infrastructure investment and financial inducements can be used to attract new jobs and vitality to the hamlets and to spur industrial growth and encourage the development of smaller, more affordable housing for young families, seniors and others. The implementation of this recommendation should be done through a collaborative planning process for each hamlet that actively engages its residents and landowners in planning future development.





- iv. *Develop physical plans to enhance the appearance and function of the village gateways.* Such plans should identify desired and intended land use patterns, densities, building forms, transitional elements, and green space in the village gateway areas. The goal is to provide for incremental growth through a logical extension of the Village’s traditional street and sidewalk network to neighboring parcels in the Town. Along the main traffic corridors, an additional goal is to address signage, landscaping and other ways to improve the physical appearance of the gateways.
- v. *Use the rural-to-urban transect as a conceptual tool for understanding The Plan.* This Plan (as well as previous plans) is predicated upon the desire to protect the rural nature of the town, and to channel housing, retail and industrial development toward targeted areas, the Village and the northern hamlets in particular. The existing system of distinguishing rural zones from village and hamlet zones is essentially the same as the Transect, although it does not use that terminology. It provides a sense of order and logical boundaries for different parts of the community. New commercial development should continue to be directed primarily to the northern hamlets and the areas of the Village zoned for commercial uses (the existing “C” and “D” districts). The “transect” concept is a graphic depiction of this recommended pattern for future planning decisions. A fuller discussion of this concept and its applicability to the “character areas” identified in previous comprehensive plan documents is contained in the paper “Character Areas and the Rural to Village Transect.” (See list of references on page 30.)
- vi. *Update as necessary Town land use regulations to be consistent with the Plan.* The Plan encourages consideration and adoption of the concepts of form-based zoning in appropriate areas where development is desired, as well as concepts described in “Strategies for Sustainable Skaneateles” (See list of references on page 30) and the green and sustainable neighborhood concepts set out in “Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) for Neighborhood Development”. To help users navigate the Zoning Code, the Town should also reorganize and modernize the zoning code so that it is easier to use and ensure that there is a table of contents in the front (which was part of the zoning as adopted in 2005, but was deleted when it was incorporated into the Town Code).
- vii. *Utilize innovative financing mechanisms to aid Plan implementation.* The Plan encourages creation of conservation easements and other tools to preserve valuable farmland and other prized open space. Exploration of various funding mechanisms and best practices already being utilized across Upstate New York is recommended to achieve the desired ends. In particular, the Plan recommends the formation of a non-profit Skaneateles Land Trust to work with landowners, the Town, the State, Onondaga County, the Finger Lakes Land Trust, and the City of Syracuse, to attract funds to purchase development rights on farmland and lake watershed lands.



viii. Create a list of specific criteria against which achievement of Plan objectives can be measured. Appoint a Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee to review implementation of the Plan and from time to time recommend revisions to the Plan as appropriate. The Plan is a document that should be periodically revisited, updated, and improved. Equally important, such a committee should monitor progress by the Town in implementing the provisions of this Comprehensive Plan.

ix. Inform and educate the public about the intent and provisions of the Plan. The Plan outlines a strategic approach to insuring the community's attractive and sustainable future. The more widely the Plan's purposes and provisions are understood, the more successful will be its implementation.



B. GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND ACTION ITEMS

The essence of a comprehensive plan is its statement of community goals, objectives, and recommended action items. This part of the Plan contains a succinct statement of these.

The action items stated below are intended as recommendations that embody a broadly shared agreement among those members of the community who have been involved in the comprehensive planning process. The actual implementation of these recommendations will require further action by various town committees, boards, and other organizations. Such actions should be taken transparently, taking account of landowners' property rights, and with the full involvement of those affected by such actions.

What follows are the specific goals, objectives and actions needed to support the vision for Skaneateles presented in Part A. Some of these actions are intended to be undertaken solely by the Town or Village, some will require joint efforts by both governments, and some will require the cooperation of the private sector, the school district, and/or other agencies or entities. The Plan is meant to be user-friendly and to serve as a continuing reference for Boards and their committees.





GOAL I.

SUSTAIN SKANEATELES' NATURAL RESOURCES FOR CURRENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.

Background

Skaneateles' Natural Resources include Skaneateles Lake, Skaneateles Creek and other major drainage ways, fertile farmland, undeveloped land (meadows and woodlands), mineral deposits, fish and wildlife, wetlands and floodplains. These resources help define the community and contribute to its character.



Skaneateles Lake has exceptionally high water quality and is one of the few large system surface water supplies in the country that is approved as an unfiltered public water supply. Skaneateles Lake and its tributaries are AA rated by the NYS DEC. The purity of its waters is in part the result of many years of active government and citizen oversight with careful attention paid to the avoidance of adverse environmental impacts.

Skaneateles Creek and its watershed is rated C by the NYS DEC. The best usage of Class C waters is fishing. The Village treatment plant carries a NYS DEC SPDS permit for discharge into the creek.



The quality of ground water in the Town of Skaneateles is determined on a site-by-site basis through water sample testing. Past contamination of ground water at the Stauffer Chemical facility has been addressed with DEC coordination. Likewise, previously identified petroleum leaks in the Town and Village have been mitigated with DEC oversight. More information on these sites is available from DEC.

Mineral deposits in the Town of Skaneateles are currently being extracted at eight different mines. Settlement patterns have resulted in controversies in the Open Pit Mining Overlay District (OPMOD in the zoning). New York State has prohibited hydrofracking within the Skaneateles Lake Watershed that supplies Syracuse with unfiltered municipal water. The Town of Skaneateles has extended that hydrofracking prohibition to all parts of the town. This prohibition should be maintained regardless of any state policy changes.

Invasive species are a concern in Skaneateles Lake and on the lands surrounding it. Concerted efforts directed toward the eradication of Eurasian Milfoil have been successful and an active program to prevent its widespread recurrence is managed by the Skaneateles Lake Association.



1. Objective: Accelerate efforts to protect Skaneateles' high water quality.

- a. Action:** Continue coordinated efforts to monitor the water quality of Skaneateles Lake and the groundwater within the Town of Skaneateles. Take necessary actions when and where water quality is threatened.
- b. Action:** Identify components of the Skaneateles Lake ecosystem of special environmental concern as Critical Environmental Areas (CEAs). Encourage similar designations by adjacent Towns and Counties in order to maintain unfiltered, potable water quality. Designation of a Critical Environmental Area requires public notice and a public hearing. The effect of such designation is to require consideration of the environmental values of the CEA in the course of review under the New York



State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA). Such designation does not change any of the property rights of the landowner that are otherwise available under zoning or other law.

- c. **Action:** Continue informal cooperation with the city of Syracuse, the NYS DEC, the USDA, other concerned agencies, neighboring towns and private organizations such as Skaneateles Lake Association (SLA), landowners and private sector professionals in protecting waters and watersheds within the town from chemicals, fertilizers, pesticides, sedimentation and other pollutants emanating from residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural sources. Work with those entities that have regulatory authority in formulating regulations to protect these waters and watersheds.
 - d. **Action:** Educate the general public about the relationship between water quality and the importance of vegetative buffers and voluntary reduction in the use of chemicals, fertilizers and pesticides.
 - e. **Action:** Work with the City of Syracuse and the Skaneateles Lake Watershed agricultural community to apply “Best Farm Management Practices” within the Skaneateles Watershed.
 - f. **Action:** Continue to exert home rule rights to prohibit natural gas and/or petroleum extraction, exploration and/or the production, storage or disposal of extraction wastes.
 - g. **Action:** In order to minimize erosion and sedimentation, consider seeking special legislation to enable the Town and Village to regulate structures located within the Lake, in cooperation with landowners and neighboring municipalities.
 - h. **Action:** Work with the City of Syracuse, other municipalities and public and private agencies as necessary to prepare and implement a state-mandated Skaneateles Lake Watershed Management Plan. Such a plan would outline actions and priorities to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species, to protect the historic character and aesthetic quality of the lakeshore, to maintain water levels, and to prevent shoreline erosion and other negative shoreline impacts.
 - i. **Action:** : Ensure that the Town, Village, County, and State highway departments minimize the use of salt within the watershed and adequately maintain drainage ditches to reduce pollution and sedimentation in the Lake.
2. **Objective:** *Provide enhanced protection of valuable wetlands and watercourses.*
- a. **Action:** Adopt a community wetland and watercourse protection and restoration program.
 - b. **Action:** Create GIS mapping of wetland and watercourse resources and assess the functions and values of these identified wetlands and watercourses to determine areas of special importance.
 - c. **Action:** Prioritize these wetlands and watercourses in terms of preservation and, in the case of degraded assets, restoration potential.



3. *Objective: Protect and preserve high value natural resource areas and maintain varied ecosystems to preserve and protect native fauna and flora.*
 - a. *Action:* Incorporate into this Comprehensive Plan the updated Town of Skaneateles Open Space Plan, adopted simultaneously with this Comprehensive Plan Revision, which identifies all of the priority natural resource areas that need protection, and recommends tools and techniques to preserve them. (See Action 2(b) on Page 19.)
 - b. *Action:* Support the objectives of the Finger Lakes Land Trust and others to purchase and sustain lands in permanent conservation. Support the creation of a Skaneateles Land Trust to work with state, county, and federal agencies as well as private charitable donors to obtain funds to purchase development rights on farmland, important viewsheds, and other lake watershed lands in a manner consistent with this Comprehensive Plan.
 - c. *Action:* Strengthen Town Codes to protect sensitive environmental areas such as streams, drainage ways, ditches, wetlands, wooded areas, steep slopes, stream banks and watersheds.
 - d. *Action:* Strengthen Town Codes to reinforce intent of zoning districts with regard to density, land coverage, and watershed protection, including stronger controls on shared lake rights.
4. *Objective: Provide means for enhanced water quality and recreational opportunities along Skaneateles Creek.*
 - a. *Action:* Take actions that address the sources of pollution entering Skaneateles Creek with the goal of elevating the stream to a higher quality water resource.
 - b. *Action:* Explore opportunities along Skaneateles Creek in the Village, hamlets and rural areas to improve habitat for trout and other cold water fish.
 - c. *Action:* Develop improved access in the Village, hamlets and rural areas for fishing and recreational opportunities along Skaneateles Creek.



GOAL 2.

PRESERVE AND ENHANCE THE TOWN'S LARGELY RURAL AND AGRARIAN LAND.

Background

The rural land and landscape is being consumed by widely-spaced residential development, which follows current zoning for low-density single-use development. Typically, owners of large undeveloped parcels subdivide and sell individual lots along existing roads. This development pattern results in wasteful, high per capita land consumption with the loss of open space that is critical to the character of the area. This development practice undermines the very attributes that attracted people to the community in the first place.

The Town's zoning has attempted to address this issue in the past by enabling the Planning Board to mandate open space subdivisions in which a minimum of 60% of a parcel must be preserved as open space. However, this technique has not worked well in Skaneateles, even with zoning density incentives of up to 100%. This is largely because, in order for this approach to work, a development parcel must be of sufficient size to produce enough lots to make it worthwhile to plan and engineer an open space subdivision and take advantage of the incentives in the zoning. The number of units in developments in Skaneateles in recent decades has been too small for this approach to work well, with small numbers of lots being split off of larger parcels or smaller parcels being split into two or three lots.

Managing this type of development, because it occurs in small increments, has proven to be more challenging than managing development in communities where larger-scale developments are more common. The Town should reconsider this approach and devise other means to protect the rural landscape, while refining the current provisions for conservation analysis and open space subdivisions.

Any approach to managing development and preserving farmland should follow the land use goals of the Comprehensive Plan, while recognizing the importance of property rights and the preservation of landowners' equity in their land, especially farmland. Farming can only continue if it is profitable, and it can only be profitable in the long run if the farmers' equity in their land is maintained so that it can be used as collateral for short-term loans to maintain cash flow. Thus, any zoning changes intended to protect agricultural land should avoid adversely affecting farm owners' borrowing capacity.

1. Objective: *Develop and implement a rural and agricultural preservation program that respects the rights and legitimate expectations of landowners, in order to conserve open land.*

a. Action: Work with the agricultural community and other rural landowners to provide viable alternative development financing options to discourage strip development along existing roads. These may take the form of incentives to develop interior lots on common driveways rather than along existing road frontage and/or establishing a development rights bank to purchase the development rights to frontage lots that a landowner may want



to sell to generate income. The overall goal of such measures is to reduce haphazard development and wasteful use of land, while protecting agricultural and undeveloped land, important rural roadways, and scenic assets, and at the same time respecting existing property rights.

- b. Action:** Review current zoning to improve the open space subdivision process and use development practices that preserve and protect significant topographic and natural features. Update the “conservation analysis” process for open space subdivisions to ensure that it produces outcomes that protect important environmental resources.
- c. Action:** Encourage the use of conservation easements to protect and maintain valued natural features.
- d. Action:** To minimize the impact of development and preserve the rural character of the Town’s rural roadways, encourage the use of common driveways, limit curb cuts along rural roads, and minimize the impact of development occurring along these roads.
- e. Action:** Develop policies and procedures for agricultural lands removed from production.
- f. Action:** Plan to reclaim spent mines as green space or development sites. Advocate within the context of DEC regulation to give the Town more influence over mining operations and reclamation, including the authority to enforce DEC reclamation requirements
- g. Action:** Restrict mining operations to the current Open Pit Mining Overlay District and discourage expansion of land uses adjacent to active mining areas that are incompatible with mining operations. Reduce the size of the current overlay district to exclude established residential areas, wetlands, watercourses, and high value agriculture areas.
- h. Action:** Establish a local “right-to-farm” policy to augment state law and make clear that farming is the preferred use in agricultural areas. Protect the right of farmers to utilize their land productively by requiring adequate setbacks and buffers from agricultural uses on residential properties.

2. Objective: *Support agricultural activities and encourage land use alternatives for open spaces and agricultural lands that preserve the rural character in the Skaneateles and Owasco Lake watersheds.*

- a. Action:** Discourage non-farm development in the watersheds.
- b. Action:** Adopt and implement the updated Open Space Plan to advance open space, recreation, and farmland protection. The updated Open Space Plan is being adopted simultaneously with this Comprehensive Plan and is hereby incorporated by reference (See list of references on page 30.).
- c. Action:** Establish a program for the donation and purchase of development rights and encourage the use of the existing transfer of development rights provisions in the current Town of Skaneateles zoning law as well as other preservation tools to redirect development from valued agricultural and open space zones to priority areas for new investment. (See Goal 1, Objective 3, Action (b)).



- d. *Action:* Establish and promote enhanced, dedicated funding mechanisms such as a Real Estate Transfer Tax (which will require state enabling legislation) on conveyances of certain real property, with the proceeds devoted to open space, recreation, and farmland protection.
 - e. *Action:* Explicitly permit agriculturally-related businesses (e.g. roadside farm markets, vineyard tasting rooms, equestrian centers and other forms of agritourism).
 - f. *Action:* Promote the creation and expansion of agricultural districts under Article 25AA of the Agriculture and Markets Law. Develop agricultural protection zoning in consultation with the farming community designed to stabilize the agricultural land base and land values and discourage land uses other than agriculture.
3. *Objective: Recognize the unique characteristics of the Town of Skaneateles with the thought and goal of preservation.*
- a. *Action:* Review, identify and define exceptional features and areas within the Town for the purpose of preservation. The SAVIT document, which was produced through a committee process during the 1995 comprehensive planning process, was a good beginning that should be updated and expanded. It is listed as a reference document on page 30.
 - b. *Action:* Encourage conservation efforts such as purchasing/acquiring conservation lands and maintaining existing habitats for wildlife and fish.
 - c. *Action:* Establish and maintain a distinct transition between rural and non-rural land uses.
 - d. *Action:* Seek approval from NYSDOT for designation of Routes 41 and 41A as scenic highways.
 - e. *Action:* Develop criteria and a land use approval process for review of new utility and telecommunication structures in the rural landscape.
 - f. *Action:* Continue efforts to limit non-local truck traffic in the Village and Town.
4. *Objective: Protect important lake and rural landscape viewsheds as viewed from roads and other public spaces.*
- a. *Action:* Develop policies and programs designed to identify, preserve and protect viewsheds. Ensure that development approval processes take into account these viewshed conservation recommendations, while giving due consideration to preserving the landowner's equity in the land. This can be done by carefully defining what land is to be protected in a viewshed and either purchasing the development rights to it or allowing development subject to reasonable site planning requirements.
 - b. *Action:* Target viewsheds as important additions to Town conservation holdings. Consider purchase and/or voluntary donation of development rights to preserve and protect the best of these viewsheds.



GOAL 3.

IN COOPERATION WITH HAMLET RESIDENTS, ENCOURAGE GROWTH AND INVESTMENT IN THE NORTHERN HAMLETS SKANEATELES FALLS AND MOTTVILLE IN THE FORM OF MIXED USE AND WALKABLE COMMUNITIES.

Background

Smart growth principles encourage the accommodation of future growth in areas already served by infrastructure and commercial activity, and clustered residential development which supports walking as a viable choice for mobility. Specifically, Goal 3 is centered on promoting clean industry job growth in and around the northern hamlets. In conjunction with clean industrial growth, the development of a variety of housing types that will be affordable to a large cross-section of Skaneateles residents is encouraged, as is neighborhood supportive retail in hamlet population centers where there is sufficient demand to make a service or retail business viable. Any detailed planning for these areas should be conducted in close consultation with residents of the hamlets. Much of this Plan's emphasis on encouraging development in the northern part of the Town and discouraging it in the Lake watershed hinges on the provision of sewer infrastructure in the northern hamlets. Any such infrastructure development will require its own extensive public planning process and environmental review that are beyond the scope of this Plan.

1. Objective: Attract "clean" industry and other compatible businesses to the northern hamlets.

- a. **Action:** Establish a broad-based economic development committee with representation from existing hamlet employers, residents and other interested parties to develop a comprehensive and proactive strategy for attracting and/or expanding desirable businesses in the hamlets.
- b. **Action:** Include in this analysis a thoughtful and strategic economic development program to support growth and investment while adding to the appeal and long-term economic viability of the hamlets.
- c. **Action:** Prepare an economic development plan that enables existing businesses to expand and prosper and that incorporates clean industrial investment side-by-side with the traditional neighborhood development patterns that have existed in the hamlets for more than 150 years.
- d. **Action:** Evaluate the possibility of reintroducing limited hydro energy generation along Skaneateles Creek to encourage investment and job growth.
- e. **Action:** Consider economic incentives to attract economic development consistent with the Plan.



2. Objective: *Encourage development of Town water and sewer infrastructure in and adjacent to the northern hamlets to support targeted economic investment*

- a. **Action:** Engage engineers to provide advice about safe, affordable, and innovative wastewater disposal and treatment technologies and management arrangements, including constructed wetlands and package treatment plants.
- b. **Action:** Consider creating Town sewer districts in and adjacent to the hamlets where innovative wastewater technologies and/or management arrangements such as constructed wetlands can be employed.
- c. **Action:** Evaluate various means of financing and operating potential new water and wastewater facilities in and adjacent to the hamlets that distribute the costs equitably between hamlet residents and other Town residents, recognizing that development in the hamlets fulfills a public planning objective that benefits the entire Town.

3. Objective: *As opportunities allow, in consultation with the neighborhoods, encourage incremental mixed-use traditional neighborhood growth with a diversity of uses and housing types, especially those that serve the needs of young families and senior citizens.*

- a. **Action:** Encourage neighborhoods within walking distance of a mix of clean industry, commercial, residential, recreational, religious and civic uses.
- b. **Action:** Encourage the development of places within each hamlet that serve as neighborhood anchors and informal gathering places.
- c. **Action:** Allow a wider variety of housing types traditional to the region in addition to single-family houses, such as attached row houses, two and three-unit multifamily housing, carriage houses, and residences above stores, while maintaining hamlet neighborhood character.
- d. **Action:** Adopt zoning incentives and programs to encourage housing that is affordable to a broad segment of the Skaneateles community.
- e. **Action:** Encourage the conversion of large older buildings, including barns and mill buildings, to apartments and small businesses.
- f. **Action:** Consider creating a supply of permanently deed-restricted affordable housing using zoning incentives and other mechanisms.



GOAL 4.

ENCOURAGE VILLAGE GATEWAY ENHANCEMENT AND THE EXTENSION OF HIGHER DENSITY, MIXED USE AND WALKABLE NEIGHBORHOODS WITH A DIVERSITY OF HOUSING TYPES TO THOSE AREAS IMMEDIATELY ADJACENT TO THE VILLAGE IN A WAY THAT IS COMPATIBLE WITH EXISTING VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS.

Background

There are about 1.7 square miles within the political boundary of the Village of Skaneateles. However, the effective economic boundary of the village extends further east and west on Route 20, north on Route 321 and south along Route 41 and 41A. The Town should consider planning and zoning changes that accommodate future growth adjacent to the village that is compatible with the attractive and historic building patterns and walkability of the village.

1. Objective: Create gateway areas that provide clear transitions from town to village.

- a. *Action:* Prepare physical development plans for gateway areas at both the east and west Village/Town lines that identify desired and intended land use patterns, streets, trees, and sidewalks, densities, transitional elements and green space. Use the plans as a basis to rezone these areas, to plan public improvements, and to guide the review and approval of proposed development in each zone.
- b. *Action:* Adopt appropriate gateway principles in plans for the other major village gateways at Routes 41, 41A and 321, as well as Fennell Street and Jordan Road.
- c. *Action:* Develop methods and models for financing public infrastructure, and apply for public infrastructure grants to make gateway proposals feasible.
- d. *Action:* Avoid creating large parking areas near and visually intrusive upon adjacent roads. Adhere to zoning requirements that parking areas associated with commercial and industrial sites be located to the rear or side of buildings and to have landscaped screening from the road and adjacent properties.



2. Objective: Consider Village and adjacent Town neighborhoods as an interconnected system.

- a. **Action:** Develop a master street plan that follows major principles outlined in the “Strategies for a Sustainable Skaneateles” report (see list of references on page 30). The extension of new streets from the Village to the immediately adjacent Town should be consistent in character and pattern with the traditional street network of the Village that provides connectivity, promotes the efficient use of land and infrastructure, and reduces traffic congestion by providing alternate routes.
- b. **Action:** Ensure adequate sidewalks and/or walking paths on at least one side (and ideally both sides) of all Town streets and roads that are adjacent to the Village (especially within one mile of schools) to connect Town residential areas with Village services and businesses.
- c. **Action:** Consider creating incentives and bonuses for developers and property owners who conform their development proposals to approved physical plans.
- d. **Action:** Encourage a diversity of housing types, especially those that serve the needs of young families and senior citizens.

GOAL 5.

PRESERVE AND ENHANCE THE CHARACTER AND VIBRANCY OF THE VILLAGE.

Background

This goal has been part of all previous joint plans for the Town and Village and has long been a central principle of planning in Skaneateles. Although implementation of Village plans is beyond the scope of this Town Plan, this goal has been retained because awareness of Village planning goals affects Town planning in important ways. The Village has been and continues to be the residential center of Skaneateles and the Village's downtown has successfully functioned as its commercial, retail and public service core. Set amidst historic neighborhoods, the village center also provided residents and visitors alike with access to public parks offering broad views of beautiful Skaneateles Lake. To keep the village center thriving and its character intact it is desirable to strengthen the retail core with housing options that allow for new downtown residents while maintaining the character of the downtown and adjacent retail areas.

1. Objective: Protect historically significant architecture, valued neighborhood character and important public open spaces throughout the Village.

- a. *Action:* Identify (from prior and supplementary studies) significant buildings and neighborhood attributes and public assets to be retained in the face of development pressure.
- b. *Action:* Develop location-specific design guidelines to be applied through the Village Planning Board's review processes and zoning regulations that can protect traditional Village neighborhoods.
- c. *Action:* Prepare physical development plans for parts of the Village and connected areas of the Town in which significant architecture and valued neighborhood character are present and where new development is desirable and/or likely.
- d. *Action:* Consider additional historically significant parts of the Village for designation as local historic districts. Develop incentives for such designation.
- e. *Action:* Develop, in cooperation with local utility companies, a long-term plan in the Village to eliminate overhead power and telecommunication lines in the downtown area and key nearby locations as designated by the Village Board.

2. Objective: Ensure that the commercially zoned core of the Village (the "C" and "D" zones) remains the primary focus and destination for retail activity and overnight lodging in Skaneateles.

- a. *Action:* Take such steps as are necessary to implement the development recommendations in the Fennell Street corridor study. (See reference on page 30.) Encourage traditional forms of mixed use development along the Fennell Street corridor that are similar to the residential-over-commercial forms that distinguish many of the historic structures along Genesee Street.
- b. *Action:* Limit the scale and type of non-residential development in areas outside of targeted mixed-use development areas. Commercial development should be directed primarily to the hamlets and the commercially zoned core of the Village.





3. *Objective: Develop policies to encourage a broad array of housing in new and existing commercial areas to support local walkable neighborhoods.*

- a. *Action:* Consider modifying the Village Zoning Code to allow for a designated variety of housing types (e.g. townhouses and multi-family housing) in specific zones and locations within the Village, subject to appropriate design standards and site and infrastructure considerations.
- b. *Action:* Formulate and adopt policies that can provide density bonuses and/or reduce or mitigate property tax burdens on property developers for providing housing designated by the Village as furthering the public interest (e.g. accessible housing and multiple family housing).
- c. *Action:* Establish design standards and site and structural requirements for designated areas in the Village where new dense traditional neighborhood development is considered desirable.



4. *Objective: Ensure that public and private parking facilities are available in a reasonable supply to support expected activities and land uses.*

- a. *Action:* Create a downtown parking committee of merchants, downtown property owners, renters, employees and village and town residents who shop and use the downtown to advise the Village Board on parking matters.
- b. *Action:* Work with property owners to encourage cross-easements and shared use of private parking lots to expand the quantity of available parking in the aggregate and for each participating property.
- c. *Action:* Evaluate the feasibility of operating a shuttle bus to serve perimeter parking lots during summer months and on busy weekends.



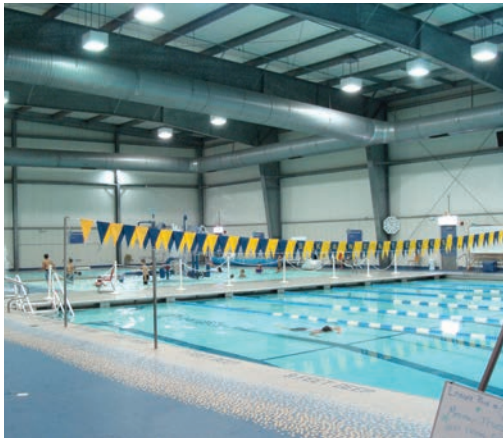
5. *Objective: Extend walkability in the village to all streets and neighborhoods.*

- a. *Action:* Provide adequate sidewalks on both sides of all village streets, supplemented with walking paths as appropriate to provide continuity and to connect all contiguous residential areas with services and businesses and the village center.
- b. *Action:* Provide adequate shade, resting places, and visual enhancements to make pedestrian movement a pleasant experience.
- c. *Action:* Explore the feasibility of construction of a pedestrian bridge over Skaneateles Creek to create improved linkage between the Fennell Street and Genesee Street commercial areas.





Image courtesy of Finger Lakes Land Trust



GOAL 6.

PROVIDE YEAR-ROUND RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE COMMUNITY.

Background

Recreational opportunities for all ages are important in a healthy community. Sports, wellness, fitness, and social opportunities contribute to the overall quality of life in Skaneateles. Fishing, hiking, hunting, swimming, ice skating, skiing (downhill and cross-country), snowmobiling, and boating are just some of the indoor and outdoor recreational activities available to the community. The community has invested in facilities such as the Community Center, but should strive to provide broad opportunities for both indoor and outdoor activities that promote active lifestyles.

1. Objective: Develop and implement a walkable environment.

- a. *Action:* Strengthen zoning and subdivision regulations that address the installation of sidewalks, walking paths and/or creekwalk (as appropriate) in subdivisions and zoning applications, and establishment of creekwalk easements (as appropriate) elsewhere creekwalk easements (as appropriate) elsewhere.
- b. *Action:* Take such actions as necessary to establish continuous sidewalks or paths linking the Eastern Gateway with the Western Gateway.
- c. *Action:* Expand the existing trail system including The Charlie Major Trail and Steve Krause Trail along Skaneateles Creek to create a continuous path from the village center to Skaneateles Falls.
- d. *Action:* Support the Finger Lakes Land Trust's program to develop a recreation trail with scenic views along the eastern highlands, and explore ways to extend the path to eventually connect Borodino with Shepard Settlement.
- e. *Action:* Explore the idea of developing a year-round activity and hiking trail along the western highlands from Mandana to the Village of Skaneateles.
- f. *Action:* Explore the idea of establishing a sidewalk or bike trail from Welch Allyn along Route 321 to the Village center. As Welch Allyn is a major employer of local residents, it would be advisable to establish an easy, safe, and pleasant way to walk or bike to work which would reduce commuters' carbon footprint.
- g. *Action:* Establish a small working group to make and prioritize specific recommendations on where new trails and paths should be located and how best to finance, develop and maintain these facilities.



2. Objective: Create a bicycle-accessible community.

- a. **Action:** Establish bike lanes on major commuter roads and the Fennell Street Corridor.
- b. **Action:** Coordinate with the Towns of Spafford, Scott, Sempronius and Niles to establish a safe and well-identified bike trail around the lake.
- c. **Action:** Install bicycle racks in the hamlets.

3. Objective: Make more public land available for recreation.

- a. **Action:** Acquire additional conservation lands and develop them into accessible natural areas available for recreation such as camping, hiking, and fishing.
- b. **Action:** Identify opportunities to finance and acquire new public lake access for swimming, picnicking, canoeing, and kayaking.
- c. **Action:** Provide for more localized outdoor recreation facilities by providing and maintaining small neighborhood parks as illustrated in “Strategies for Sustainable Skaneateles.”
- d. **Action:** Explore opportunities to establish more park, recreation and public fishing opportunities along Skaneateles Creek.
- e. **Action:** Consider using the approximately 90-acre parcel owned by the Town and located on Route 20 at the junction of Route 175 for recreation. Consider other surplus town-owned land for new and expanded trails and parks.



GOAL 7.

MAKE SKANEATELES A MODEL COMMUNITY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

1. *Objective: Minimize energy consumption in buildings and transportation.*
 - a. *Action:* Encourage development that achieves “net-zero” fossil fuel use and greenhouse gas emissions.
2. *Objective: Make Skaneateles a model community for sustainable and available energy and utilities.*
 - a. *Action:* Prioritize and implement strategies to reduce the Town’s energy use and green house gas emissions.
 - b. *Action:* Develop and expand a “smart grid” for power, data and telecommunications services.
 - c. *Action:* Evaluate the costs and the options available to electric power users to monitor and modulate their power consumption to result in peak load “shaving.”
 - d. *Action:* Review the rate structure for electric power in the Town to create incentives for efficient and economical utilization of power and disincentives for profligate or excessive power use.
 - e. *Action:* Pursue a community-based renewable energy program promoting sustainable energy production with a goal of generating clean carbon-free energy, creating local jobs, and stabilizing current and future energy cost for residents. The program could be modeled after similar programs in Madison County and elsewhere across New York State.
3. *Objective: Set an example of protecting the environment and reducing the community’s carbon footprint using sustainable building practices, renewable energy, and environmentally friendly industrial and agricultural practices and development.*
 - a. *Action:* Encourage alternative storm water management techniques to control quantity and quality of run-off into streams, outlets, and municipal storm water systems.
 - b. *Action:* Incorporate “Complete Streets” in planning new or rebuilt roads, giving equal priority to pedestrian, vehicular and bicycle use, with appropriate road dimensions and enhanced landscaping.
 - c. *Action:* Develop standards and incentives for subdivision design that are consistent with Traditional Neighborhood Design “TND” and/or the principles of “LEED for Neighborhood Development” and educate local builders and building owners on the benefits of sustainable development and building, including integrated design strategies that reduce operational costs and improve building performance.
 - d. *Action:* Implement the Town Climate Action Plan, referenced on page 30.



C. REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Part C of the Comprehensive Plan lists various documents referred to in the Plan that informed its drafting and are useful in understanding and interpreting the Plan. They are not part of the Plan, unless otherwise indicated below, and are listed below by title. These documents are or will be made available on the Town website.

Strategies for Sustainable Skaneateles, Notre Dame School of Architecture Graduate Urban Design Studio, 2010

Town of Skaneateles Zoning Law (Chapter 148 of the Town Code)

What Does it Mean to be Green?, Onondaga Citizens League, 2010

Smart Growth Public Infrastructure Policy Act, Article 6 of the Environmental Conservation Law, 2010

“Character Areas and the Rural to Village Transect,” paper prepared by the Joint Comprehensive Plan Special Board for the 2015 Comprehensive Plan

Town of Skaneateles Open Space Plan, adopted simultaneously with this Comprehensive Plan, and incorporated by reference into the Comprehensive Plan on page 14 above

SAVIT Report

Fennell Street Corridor Study

Village of Skaneateles Climate Action Plan

Town of Skaneateles Climate Action Plan