

Town of West Seneca



*Comprehensive Plan
Strategic Update*

2016

**Adopted
April 25, 2016**



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Note: In an effort to eliminate duplication of work, selected language has been included from the previous 2006 Comprehensive Plan drafted by Wendel Duchscherer.

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Comprehensive Plan Purpose

The primary purpose of this Comprehensive Plan update is to put West Seneca's vision for its future on the record. Any development action, project, program, or investment, whether private or public, should take into consideration the Town's vision as expressed in this Plan, and should be consistent with these stated priorities.

Vision Statement

West Seneca will be a place where people, business, and industry come together in support of our community. Our Town will be known for its efforts to maintain and enhance its assets by actively promoting:

- *Community identity and livability;*
- *Environmental quality and sustainability;*
- *Safe and attractive neighborhoods;*
- *Economic development and reinvestment opportunities;*
- *Safe, connected, and multi-modal transportation systems;*
- *Healthy, active lifestyles; and*
- *Sound governmental decision-making and regional partnerships.*

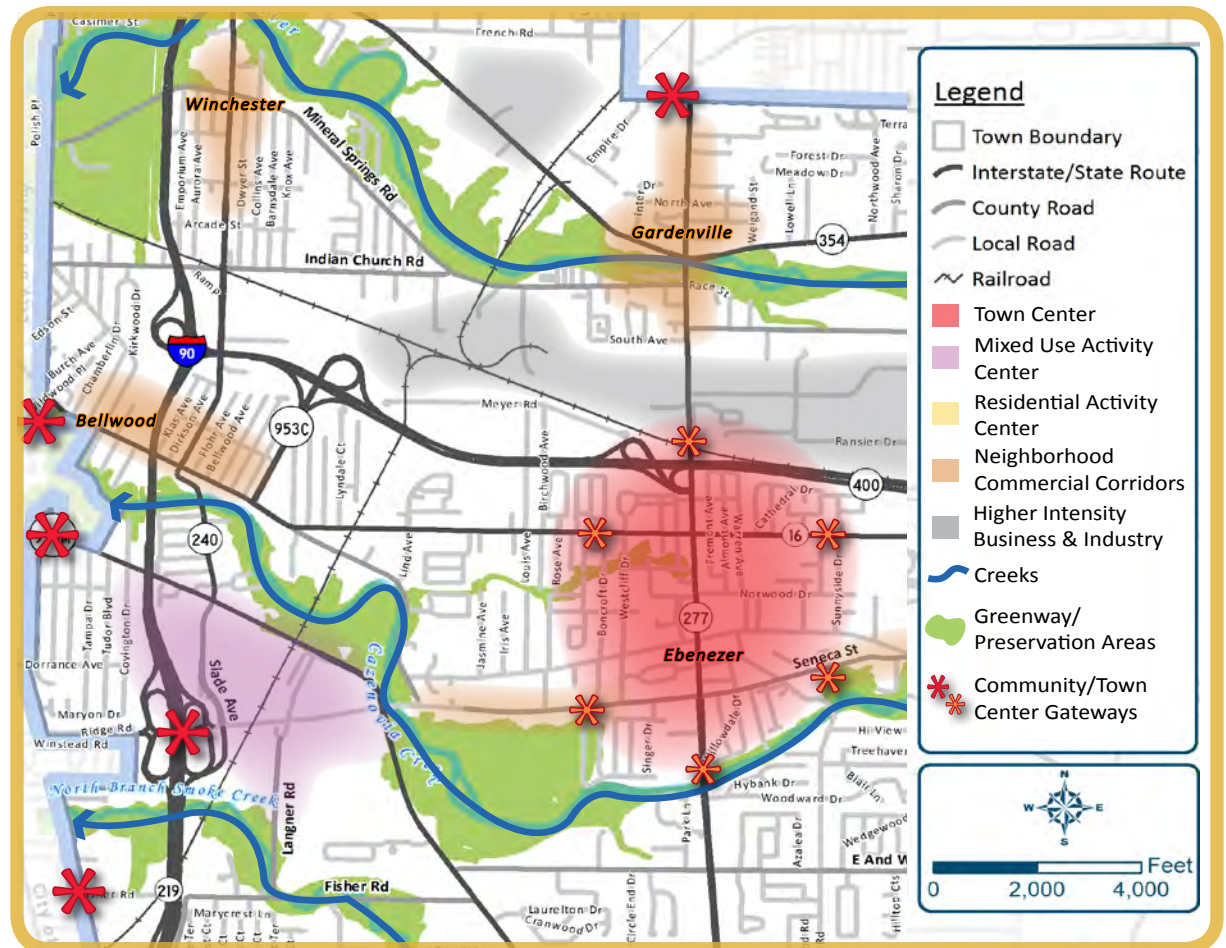
To achieve a sustainable and successful future, we will implement our Community Development Strategy. This Strategy is designed to revitalize our community fabric through focused investment in a manner that respects our heritage and appeals to future generations.

The vision statement is the leading piece to the Town's Policy Framework, which begins on page 36.

Community Development Strategy

The purpose of articulating a Community Development Strategy (CDS) is to equip the Town with a future land use decision-making tool that will better inform public and private investments over the next decade. The CDS achieves this by providing a development framework that focuses on key sites, neighborhoods, and networks throughout West Seneca. This approach addresses the community's land use preferences, but also the desired character and connectivity of significant transportation corridors, greenways, blueways, and gateways.

An excerpt of the CDS Map is provided below. The elements depicted on the map are intended to convey a generalized vision of the Town's development framework for the next decade. Unlike a Zoning Map, the CDS Map is not intended to represent clear regulatory boundaries. As a result, the exact size of each area may change as new information arises over time. However, the application of the Map should still remain consistent with the overall intent of this Plan and the Community Development Strategy. More information on the CDS and Map can be found on page 54.



Priority Action Table

The table below is a list of action items from this Plan's Policy Framework that were identified by the Steering Committee as priority items for the Town over the next decade. These items include key ideas or catalytic projects that the Committee feels warrant immediate attention from the Town for implementation. That is not to say the other action items listed in this Plan are not important or significant to the future success of the Town. Rather that these action items have been highlighted for their potential to achieve a greater overall positive impact to the community. The complete Priority Action Plan section begins on page 68.

Conclusion

This Comprehensive Plan update is not intended to foreclose future decision-making, but rather serve as a guidance document for both current and future elected officials, appointed committees, and other community leaders as they continue to shape the Town over the next decade. The Plan does not simply prescribe change for change's sake, but seeks to make policy and program recommendations that build on assets and enrich quality of life in the Town for all.

Because of the future-oriented nature of this Plan, it should be viewed as a "living document" that requires continual updates to ensure that it accurately addresses the changing environment of the Town. As markets vary and continue to develop, this Plan should be revisited and revised to reflect the ever-evolving opinions, desires, and needs of our community.

"As for the future, your task is not to foresee it, but to enable it."

- Antoine de Saint Exupery

Policy Area	Action Item	Partner(s)
Community Identity & Livability	Improve the aesthetics of major north/south corridors (Union Road, Transit Road, Harlem Road, Orchard Park Road) with a streetscape plan that includes but is not limited to landscaping, façade, and right-of-way improvements.	NYSDOT, ECDOT, Developers, Property Owners
Neighborhoods	Maximize the revitalization activities in neighborhoods by researching and securing funding sources (CDBG, Homestead Program, NYS Consolidated Funding Process, etc).	Property Owners, Developers
Economic Development & Reinvestment	Support small, local businesses looking to expand or locate in Town.	Chamber
	Enhance tourism and community marketing efforts by working with local economic development resources.	Chamber, ECIDA
Transportation, Access & Connectivity	Develop a Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan that inventories and analyzes existing and potential pedestrian, bicycle, and transit routes for improved connectivity and access.	Consultant, NYSDOT, ECDOT, NFTA
	Develop a direct access connection to North America Drive Industrial Park from Route 400.	NYSDOT, Developers
	Consider adopting standards that require minimum accommodations for pedestrians, such as sidewalks, crosswalks, benches, shade trees, walking paths, and amenities.	Planning Board, Zoning Board
Public Health & Wellness	Develop a community center that includes recreational, professional, and educational accommodations, such as a gym, pool, meeting rooms, classrooms, etc.	Youth Center, Community Groups
	Market the Town Hall Campus as a multi-service complex to residents.	Chamber
Governmental Partnerships	Work with local, county, and regional economic development agencies to coordinate programs and projects.	Local, County, State Agencies
Community Development Strategy	Establish Ebenezer and the area surrounding Town Hall as a stronger "Town Center."	Community Groups
	Encourage and support the application of a mixed-use development approach in areas where the CDS indicates an increased density may be desirable.	Developers, Planning Board, Zoning Board



Cazenovia Creek
Photo: Playferfun, panoramio.com

Comprehensive Plan Introduction

Plan Purpose & Intent

The primary purpose of a Comprehensive Plan is to put the community's vision for its future on the record. Any development proposal or action, whether private or public, should take into consideration the Town's vision as expressed in the Plan, and consistent with these stated priorities. An adopted Comprehensive Plan provides an accessible and clear guide for entities seeking to undertake a project in the community. It provides them with a better understanding of what the Town is likely to approve and the types of actions that are preferred. It also provides the Town with greater leverage to influence planning activities and programs instituted by other governmental authorities, such as Erie County or New York State agencies, who are required to take local plans into consideration.

It is important to note that this Plan is consistent with New York State Municipal Law. According to NYS Town Law Section 272-a, a Comprehensive Plan is defined as:

"...the materials, written and/or graphic, including but not limited to maps, charts, studies, resolutions, reports and other descriptive material that identify the goals, objectives, principles, guidelines, policies, standards, devices and instruments for the immediate and long-range protection, enhancement, growth and development of the Town."

"Among the most important powers and duties granted by the legislature to a local government is the authority and responsibility to undertake comprehensive planning and to regulate land use for the purpose of protecting the public health, safety and general welfare of its citizens."

- NYS Town Law §272-a(1)(b)

Modern comprehensive plans go beyond land use, zoning, and infrastructure issues. A Comprehensive Plan provides guidance toward the priorities and concerns of local residents regarding what they consider important to their quality of life. It establishes goals and objectives that reflect those priorities, and provides a set of recommendations and actions to help the Town achieve those goals. While there are recommendations that pertain to land use, zoning, and infrastructure, other actions and priorities are also articulated.

Once completed, a Comprehensive Plan directly or indirectly informs a number of municipal functions and initiatives. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- » **Grant acquisitions** - Federal and State funding is increasingly tied to a community's Comprehensive Plan. The projects and programs that have public support and are identified in the Plan are more likely to be successful in obtaining funding than those that are not.
- » **Zoning, subdivision and land development** - A Comprehensive Plan can inform future regulatory changes in a municipality. Over time, regulatory tools such as zoning, design review, subdivision requirements and

environmental protection overlay districts should be brought into conformance with the Comprehensive Plan.

- » **Budgeting and capital improvement planning** - The Comprehensive Plan can be used as a tool during the development of a municipality's annual budget. The projects and programs contained in the Plan are often included in the budgeting process to ensure the community's priorities are being considered and addressed.
- » **Cultural and economic development efforts** - An increasing number of municipalities are beginning to undertake more non-traditional efforts to foster community vitality. Examples include the creation of arts and cultural venues and programming as well as economic development initiatives to reduce commercial vacancies. The need and support for such efforts is often determined through the comprehensive planning process and documented in the Plan itself.

Planning Horizon

The planning horizon is defined by the length of time for which the Plan is considered relevant and representative of the community. It may also quantify the length of time necessary to implement a majority of the Plan's recommendations. The planning horizon for this comprehensive planning effort is 10 years, or to the year 2025. This allows for information obtained in the 2020 Census to be included in the next comprehensive planning effort. However, it is recommended that the Town review the information contained in this document every one to two years in order to ensure that it is still relevant and beneficial prior to 2025.

Utilization of the Plan

The Town of West Seneca Comprehensive Plan was adopted by the West Seneca Town Board on **April 25, 2016**, and shall be the policy of the Town of West Seneca to reference the Comprehensive Plan for all rezonings and infrastructure projects planned by the Town and proposals from other governmental agencies. A copy of this Plan was provided to county and state agencies to assist with their plans and projects in the West Seneca area.

For each budget year, the implementation section of the Plan will be referenced and actions, new laws, and regulations will be incorporated into the Plan for the coming year.

Planning Process

The planning process utilized to accomplish the 2016 Comprehensive Strategic Plan Update was overseen by the project's Steering Committee. The Steering Committee for the Plan consisted of individuals who volunteered their time and effort to take on this important process. Committee members included community residents, business owners, and stakeholders, as well as representation from Erie County. The role of the Steering Committee was to provide a preliminary direction for the Plan and help draft and review documents throughout the process. The general timeline of key milestones associated with the planning process is provided below:

Committee Kick-Off Meeting.....	April 2014
Youth Workshop	June 2014
Community Workshop	July 2014
Community Input Summary	July 2014
Draft Community Profile	Nov 2014
Draft Vision & Goals	Dec 2014
Preliminary Draft Plan.....	Feb 2015
Draft CDS & Map.....	April 2015
Draft Plan Update	Nov 2015
Draft Plan Committee Review.....	Dec 2015
Open House & Public Hearing	Mar 2016
Plan Adoption.....	April 2016



Acronyms Used

There are numerous agencies, organization, and planning references used throughout this document. The following list provides the acronyms for the most commonly used names and titles:

- » **ACS** American Community Survey
- » **CDBG** Community Development Block Grant
- » **CDS** Community Development Strategy
- » **DEC** Department of Environmental Conservation
- » **DEP** Department of Environment and Planning
- » **DOH** Department of Health
- » **DOT** Department of Transportation
- » **DPW** Department of Public Works
- » **EC** Erie County
- » **NYS** New York State
- » **SEQRA** State Environmental Quality Review Act
- » **US** United States

Public Participation

In an effort to ensure that the Plan also addressed the desires and concerns of the public, opportunities were provided to engage Town residents and stakeholders in the development of the Plan's content. A Community Workshop was held in the first phase of the project to solicit input from the general public, as well as a Youth Workshop that reached out to young adults in the local school district. Additionally, the public will be given the opportunity to provide their comments on and suggestions for implementation of the Draft Comprehensive Plan at a Public Meeting prior to the Public Hearing and presentation to the Town Board for adoption. The following is a brief summary of the preliminary public workshops held in the first phase of the project:

» **Youth Workshop** - A Youth Workshop was held on June 12, 2014, with a senior Participation in Government class at West Seneca East High School. The workshop provided an opportunity for students to share their perceptions on what they liked and disliked about growing up in West Seneca. This exercise helped guide the Plan in terms of the pros and cons young people see in the community, and how to address them.

The workshop also provided an opportunity for students to discuss their overall perceptions of the Town. When asked what they would address if they were King or Queen for a day, overwhelmingly the students said that they would install more sidewalks and fix potholes. A more detailed summary of their responses can be found in the Appendix.



The Youth Workshop provided an open forum for the students to talk about their likes and dislikes about growing up in West Seneca.

» **Community Workshop** - In July of 2014 a Community Workshop was held at the Senior Center to which all community residents and stakeholders were invited. The purpose of the Workshop was to introduce the public to the Comprehensive Plan Project, review the process to be used to complete the Plan, and to solicit input from the community.

Those in attendance took a Community Preference Survey, which asked each individual to rate a series of images on a scale of 0 to 9 based on the desirability of the development shown. Overall, the results showed that images with more greenery and architectural character scored higher than those with typical suburban features, such as poorly

screened parking elements. The results of the Community Preference Survey will be discussed later on in the Future Land Use Section; however, a full summary of the scored images is also included in the Appendix.

Attendees also participated in a key issue brainstorming exercise to identify the community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT Analysis). A partial list of the topics raised by the public in the SWOT Analysis are listed on the following page. These issues and opportunities were incorporated directly into this Comprehensive Plan Update (A complete list from this exercise is provided in the Appendix).



At the start of the Community Workshop, a brief presentation was given outlining the Comprehensive Planning Process and its benefits.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

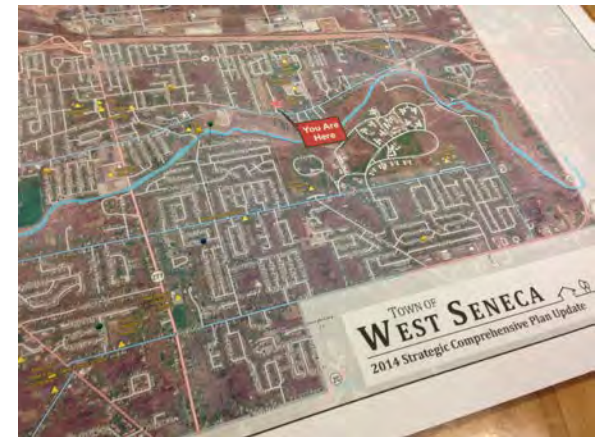
- Small town feel
- Schools
- Economically livable
- Affordable housing
- Proximity to Buffalo, the airport, expressways
- Parks and the creeks
- Shopping opportunities

Weaknesses

- Lack of sidewalks and bike paths
- Lack of Town Center
- Lack of identity and vision for community
- Disappearing greenspace
- Limited restaurant offerings
- Taxes are too high in comparison to adjacent towns
- Lack of services and accessibility for senior and disabled populations
- Traffic issues - congestion



Pictured above is Justin Steinbach, of Clark Patterson Lee, facilitating his group in a SWOT brainstorming exercise.



Attendees were asked to mark where they live on a map of West Seneca to help provide a picture of resident representation.

Opportunities

- Redevelop old Seneca Mall property
- Make Union Road corridor more pedestrian friendly and visually appealing
- Create a Town Center
- Reuse of NYS Developmental Center
- Preservation of greenspace
- Preserving community character through development opportunities

Threats

- Dwindling tax base
- Flooding issues
- Sewer improvements and expansion is needed for potential development
- Age and condition of housing stock
- Blight
- Drugs
- Poorly planned/too much development
- Aging population

Town History

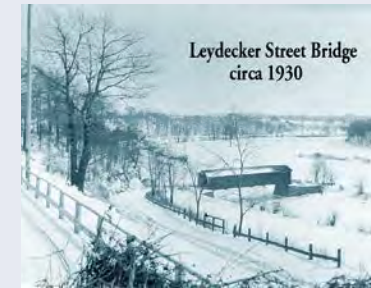
The Town of West Seneca was incorporated in 1851. However, its history can be traced back to its earlier inhabitants, the Seneca Indians.

What is now West Seneca was first occupied by Indians over 10,000 years ago. Some of these Indians are known today as Senecas, members of the Iroquois Confederacy. In the late 1790's, with the purchase of 2.6 million acres of land from local Indian tribes represented by Chief Cornplanter of the Seneca tribe, the Buffalo Creek Indian Reservation was formed, the site of what is today the Town of West Seneca. In 1835, the Indians were persuaded to dispose of the Buffalo Creek Reservation and migrated to the Cattaraugus Indian Reservation in Southwest Erie County.

Soon after, a group of German Lutherans, the Community of True Inspiration, (also known as the "Ebenezers") arrived in the area and purchased 5,000 acres of the recently vacated Buffalo Creek Reservation at \$10.50 an acre.

More than 800 of these immigrants came to America from Germany between April 1843 and October 1845, establishing four hamlets - Middle Ebenezer, Upper Ebenezer, Lower Ebenezer and New Ebenezer. Many of these new residents took up residence in the original Seneca structures. The Ebenzers formed their own governing body and had essentially a communal society where jobs, goods, food and services were given to the community for use by all.

The Ebenzers were well known as excellent farmers and skilled craftsmen. (Several of the buildings originally constructed in this time period are still present in the Indian Church



Photos: Town of West Seneca webpage

Road - School Street - South Avenue area) Other German settlers seeking religious freedom began to move in and foster Catholicism and as the population around them continued to grow, the Ebenezer community began to feel that its way of life was threatened. A new land purchase was made in Amana, Iowa along the banks of the Iowa River. There the Ebenezer community set up hamlets and continued to grow and continue their lifestyle. Even today this community still carries on certain parts of the original communal plan of the 1840's.

In 1851 parts of Cheektowaga, Hamburg, and East Hamburg were organized into the town of "Seneca". On October 16, 1851, the New York State Legislature officially incorporated the town. The name was changed to West Seneca the following year to avoid confusion with a Town of Seneca in eastern New York State. On March 2, 1852, the first West Seneca Town Meeting was held in the home of Morgan S. Whitney. The first supervisor elected was Levi Ballou and Morgan Whitney was made the first town clerk.

During the Civil War, fifty-four men served in the Union Army. In 1862, a special tax of \$50 was raised for each Town volunteer in the Union

Army.

Road improvements and erection of bridges followed soon after the formal organization of the Town. The first railroad was routed through West Seneca in 1866. Until 1869, the town's population was such that there was one election district to cover West Seneca, but with the normal growth of population, it was necessary to divide the Town into two election districts. More districts would be added within the next five years. In 1887, the Hook and Ladder Company was formed at Gardenville-Union Road and in 1896, the Union Fire Company was organized. The first voting machines were issued in 1904.

West Seneca has basically been a farming community throughout its history, but new residential developments were created and commercial/industrial development has followed. A great transformation has occurred in this area in the past 10,000 years. Movement has been made from an Indian settling point to the flourishing suburban area of today.

Source: Town of West Seneca webpage, 2015.

Community Profile

The previous Comprehensive Plan, completed in 2006, was based on demographic and economic data from the 2000 U.S. Census and projected out to 2025. As a result, one of the more significant components of this strategic update is the use of the latest U.S. Census figures (2010) and recent American Community Survey Estimates (2008-2012) to more accurately assess the existing make-up of the Town's residents. By utilizing current data and trends, the Town will be better equipped to make informed decisions on a wide range of topics, such as identifying the need for community services or various housing types.

Where applicable, the 2006 Plan will be referenced for comparison. Unless otherwise noted, the data and trends provided in the updated community profile can be traced back to the aforementioned U.S. Census and American Community Survey sources.

Location

The Town of West Seneca is located in the central portion of Erie County, which borders the eastern tip of Lake Erie. Within Erie County, West Seneca is situated at the southeast corner of the City of Buffalo, as highlighted in **Map 1** on the opposing page. The Town is one of four inner-ring suburban towns surrounding the City of Buffalo, excluding the City of Lackawanna. By comparison, the Town is among the smallest in terms of land area at 21.4 square miles or 13,711 acres. Additionally, the Town is the smallest of the four in terms of population, which was reported to be 44,711 in the 2010 Census.

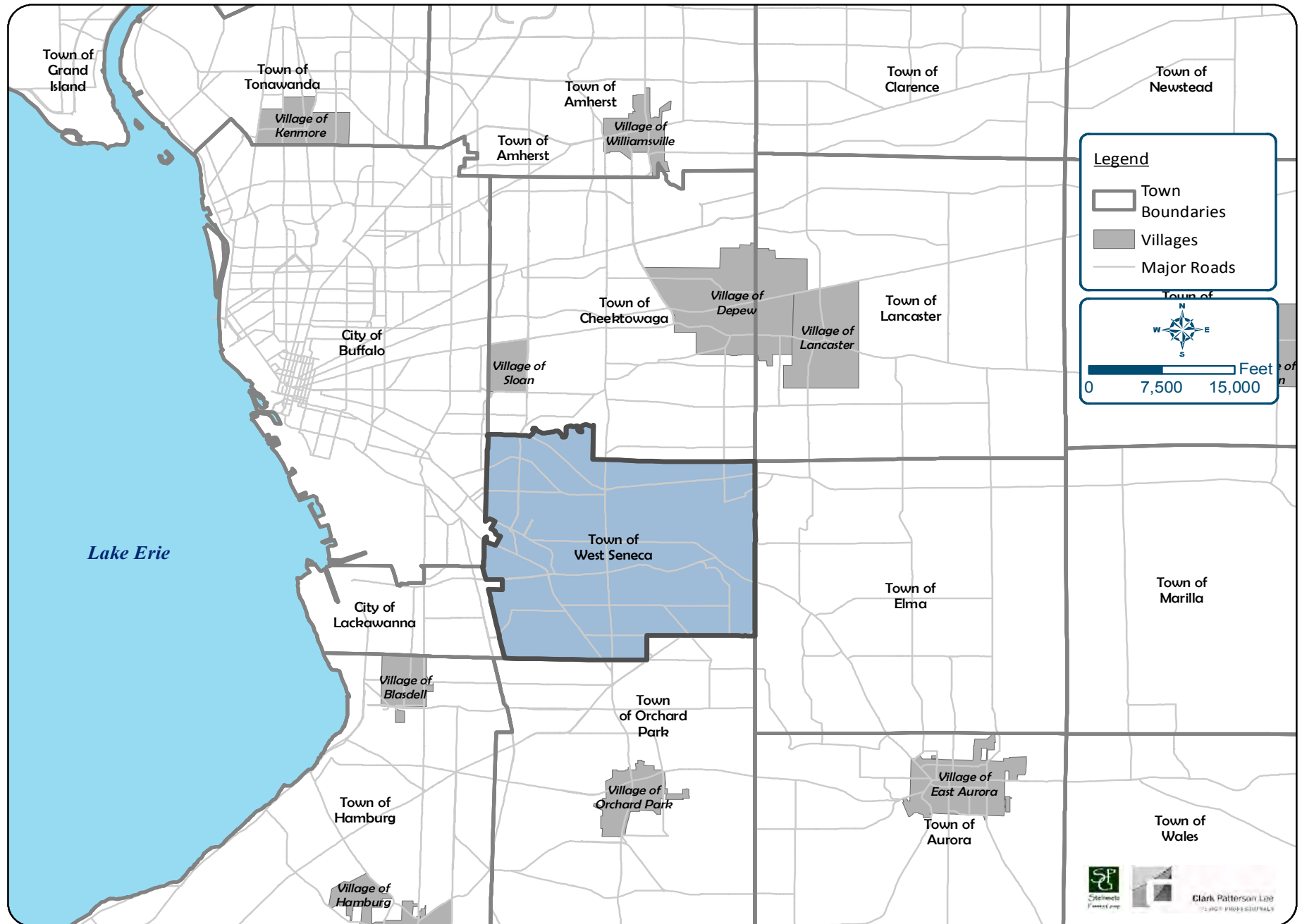
Due to West Seneca's central location, there are many major roadways that connect the Town to the greater Western New York region, most notably Interstate 90 running along the west side of the Town providing a significant north-south connection.

Other major roadways within the Town make up many of the community's prominent industrial and commercial corridors, such as State Highway 400, Transit Road, Orchard Park Road, and along the shared border with the Town of Cheektowaga. Although West Seneca is a primarily residential community, these corridors provide ample access to the industries and businesses located within West Seneca as well as in nearby communities.

Although there is no official community center outlined within the Town, a majority of local municipal services and functions are located in the central core of the Town along Union Road, north of Main Street.



Adjacent to Town Hall at 1250 Union Road is the recently designated Walkway of Freedom, which showcases banners for the various military division, dedicated benches, and a gazebo for visitors.



Demographics

Population & Households

As of 2012, it is estimated that the Town of West Seneca is home to approximately 44,738 people, lower than decades past. The Town's population peaked in the 1980's at 51,210; slowly losing population since that point like many of the other towns in Erie County. Although the population has been dropping, it has been doing so at a decreasing rate, with population projections predicting an initial period of leveling off followed by slight growth from 2020 to 2040 (see Figure 1-1). These estimates show a smaller increase in population than predicted in the 2006 Plan of 50,000 by 2025. West Seneca still remains in the top 25% of the most populous communities in the County behind Buffalo, Amherst, Cheektowaga, Town of Tonawanda, and Hamburg, respectively.

A review of household size and composition changes can provide an indication of future housing need and potential increases in demand for various municipal services. Households are defined by the number of individuals residing under one roof and they can be related or unrelated, unlike families which must all be related. The 2006 Plan noted that despite the population losses in the past, households continued to increase. Figure 1-2 shows the rise in the number of households from 1960 to current estimates in 2012 and continues to show an increase well into 2040. These figures show a larger increase in households than originally anticipated in the 2006 Plan.

This can be attributed to the rising number of single-person households, which comprised approximately 32% of the total households in 2012. By comparison, single-person households made up only 26% of the total in 2000. As a result, average household size is decreasing.

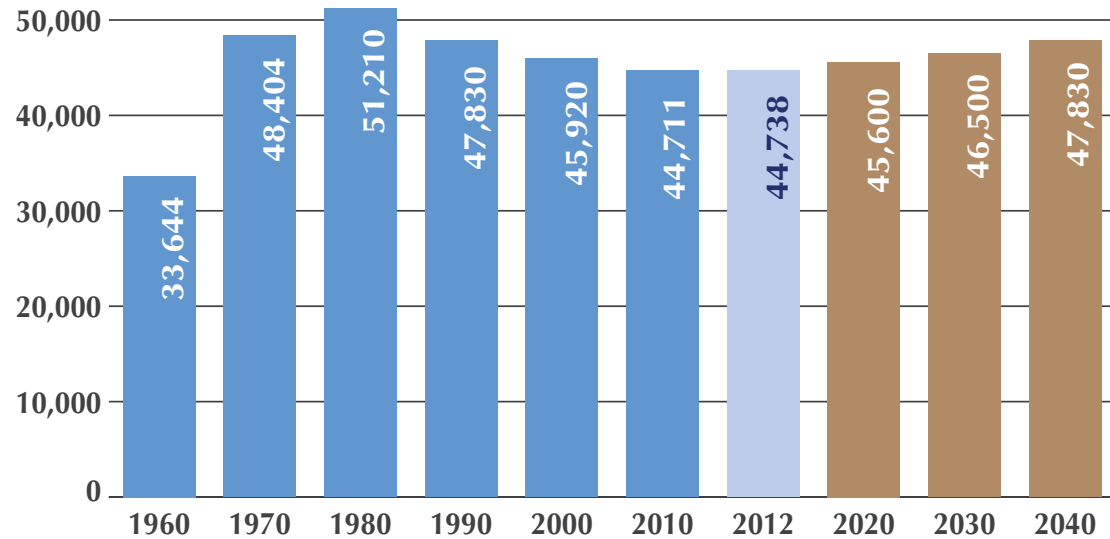


Figure 1-1: Population Trends (U.S. 2010 Census, GBNRTC 2040 MTP)

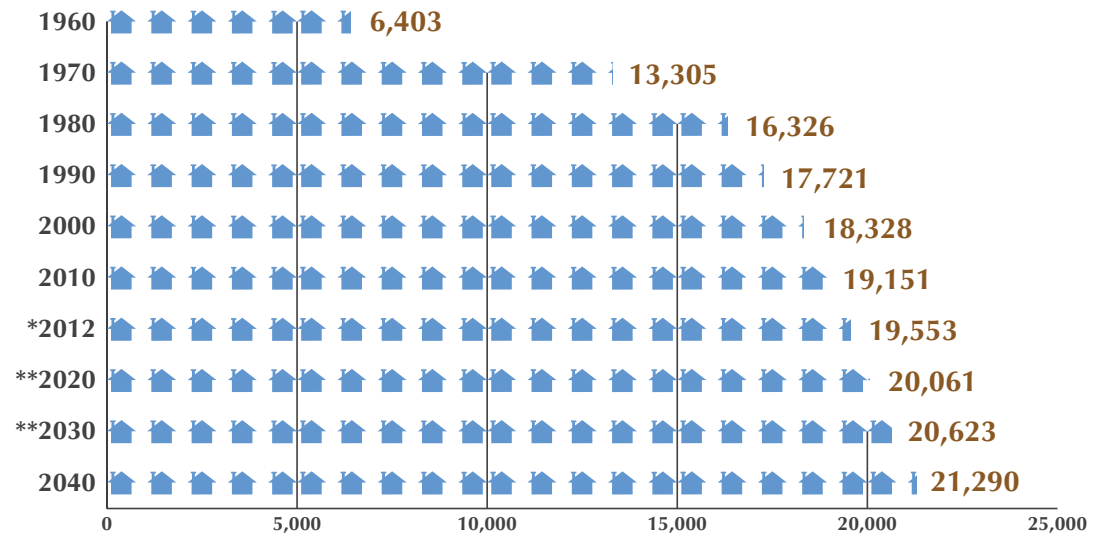


Figure 1-2: Households (U.S. Census, *2012 ACS, **GBNRTC 2040 MTP Interpolated)

This figure dropped from 2.71 persons in 1990, to 2.47 in 2000, and 2.35 in 2012.

Age Distribution

The general trend throughout the United States is that our population is aging, evidenced by an overall rising median age and share of individuals entering their senior years (65+). This demographic change has the potential to impact a number of social issues, such as community service delivery, transportation needs (public and private), healthcare access, income and finances, and employment. West Seneca is also experiencing an aging of its population. In 2000 the median age was 41.1 years, while that number has increased to 44.7 years according to the 2010 U.S. Census.

Figure 1-3 provides a snapshot of the Town's 2010 population by age cohort. The 25 to 54 year olds, typically young professionals and working families, remain the largest age group within the Town at nearly 40%. The school-age and young adult generations (0 to 24 years), or those generally looked upon to continue to sustain the Town's population in the future, make up just over 25% of the total population. The remaining third includes those 55 years of age or older. The 55+ age group is often classified as retired or soon-to-be retired individuals and seniors.

A review of the population age group trends from 2000 to 2010 in **Figure 1-4** indicate that overall there are fewer youths (under 25) and more older adults (55 and older) in the Town since 2000. There has, however, been a slight increase in the 20 to 24 age cohort, which could be attributed to the number of colleges and universities in the region and may provide some age stabilization in the future if this group can be retained.

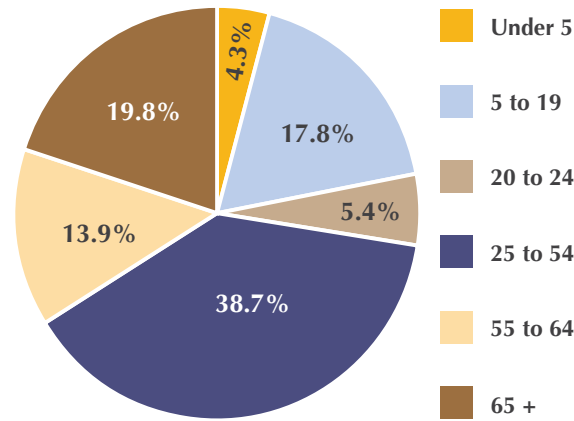


Figure 1-3: Age Breakdown (2010)

So what do these trends indicate? As previously noted, in general there is a potential for an increased need for community services, social activities, mobility and transportation options, healthcare services, and a more attractive employment and housing environment. By identifying and addressing these issues, the Town can better serve it's growing senior population while attracting young professionals and families to sustain its future.

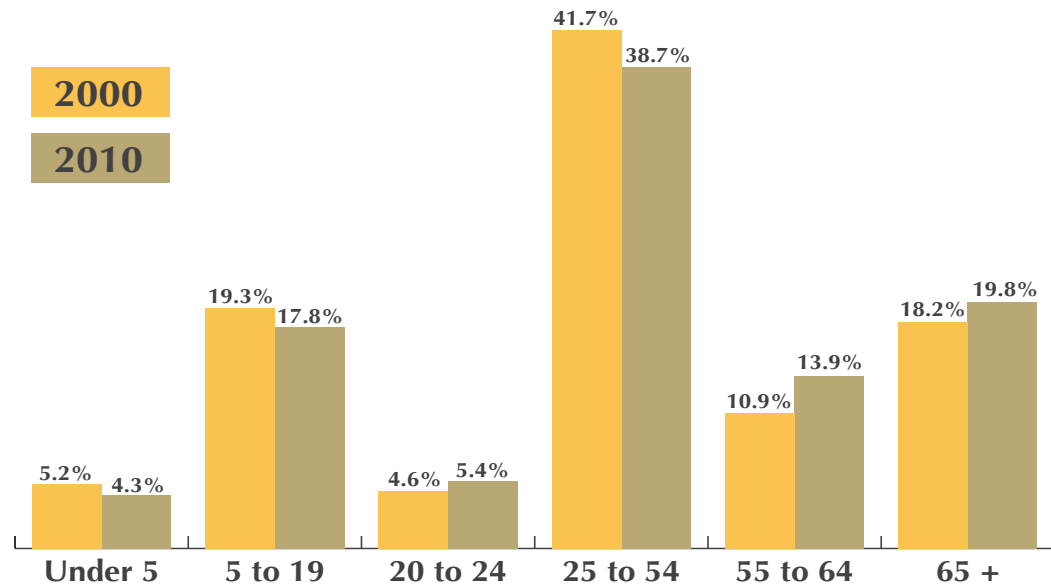


Figure 1-4: Age Breakdown Trends (2000 - 2010)

Housing Market

The supply of housing continued to increase from 1990 and 2000, albeit at a declining rate. The slowdown has been a common occurrence throughout the nation due to the state of the economy since 2008 and its direct impact on housing. Between 1990 and 2000, a total of 1,171 new units were constructed in the Town (6% increase), while only 823 (4%) were constructed in the following decade. Occupancy rates within the Town remain high at 95% in 2010, with a slight decrease in owner-occupied units, as shown in **Figure 1-5**. The increase in renter-occupied units may be attributed to the rise in the college-aged population as well as the empty nester and senior populations. These groups tend to seek more affordable housing in addition to the latter likely downsizing.

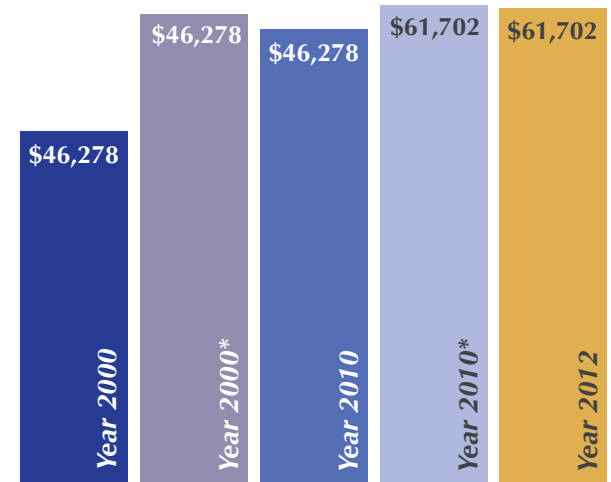
Occupied Units				
	2000		2010	
Owner	14,368	78.4%	14,588	76.2%
Renter	3,960	21.6%	4,563	23.8%
Total	18,328		19,151	

Figure 1-5: Housing Tenure

Single-family dwelling units comprise the greatest percentage of housing units within the Town at 70%, followed by duplexes at 12%. Median housing value of owner-occupied units continues to increase in the decade between 2000 and 2010, with a gain of approximately 22%.

When compared to latest Census estimates and adjusted for inflation, the increase in housing value can be seen as marginal between 2000 and 2010 with a slight decrease occurring in 2012 (see **Figure 1-6**). Despite the impact of inflation, these figures indicate a relatively stable housing market over the past decade. Additionally, the Town's median home value is higher than that of Erie County's which was \$123,400 in 2012.

Although there is no single standard definition of housing affordability, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defines a household as "cost burdened" when 30% or more of its gross income is dedicated to housing costs. According to the most recent American Community Survey, 26% of West Seneca's households are housing cost burdened, compared to 32% for Erie County. This would indicate that West Seneca has a relatively higher rate of housing affordability compared to that of the overall County.



* Figures adjusted for inflation (2012 Dollars)

Figure 1-6: Median House Value

Since 1970 the percentage of new homes built within the Town has dropped each decade. As previously stated, nearly 1,200 new homes were built between 1990 and 2000, and only 823 in the next decade. If past trends continue, the Town could assume that under 1,000 new homes would be in demand every ten years. This would include demolitions and rebuilds. The high percentage of older housing would indicate the need for more emphasis on code enforcement for structure maintenance and potential rehabilitation to protect and enhance existing neighborhoods.

There are 4,248 renter-occupied housing units in West Seneca. The median rent is \$717, which is about \$13 higher than the median rent for all of Erie County. At the same time, lower income renters are far more likely to be cost burdened than low income homeowners. About 70% of the renter households that are cost burdened earn less than \$35,000 a year. This is about 1,556 renter households.

- Strengthening WNY's Safety Net: A Community Report, Town of West Seneca (May 2014) -

Household Income

Although not included in the 2006 Plan, household income is an important component of the community profile as it provides an indication of community wealth. Between 2000 and the 2012, the income distribution of the Town shifted to slightly higher percentages of households earning more than the median income (\$56,170), while the proportion of those earning less decreased. As shown in **Figure 1-7** below, the Town's largest income group remains the low- to middle-income range (\$25,000 to \$49,999). However, there was significant growth in the number of affluent households, which increased 150% in the \$100,000+ income bracket.

Income Level	2000	2012
Under \$25,000	24.5%	20.0%
\$25,000 - 49,999	29.9%	24.4%
\$50,000 - 74,999	24.8%	20.9%
\$75,000 - 99,999	13.3%	15.7%
\$100,000 or More	7.6%	19.1%

Figure 1-7: Household Income Trends

However, when the median income in 2000 is adjusted for inflation (to 2012 dollars), it is clear the median household income has actually decreased (see **Figure 1-8**). This is not specific to West Seneca or Erie County, but is an overall trend throughout the country. Nationally, median household income figures have been on the decline since their peak around 2000.

Falling Income Levels

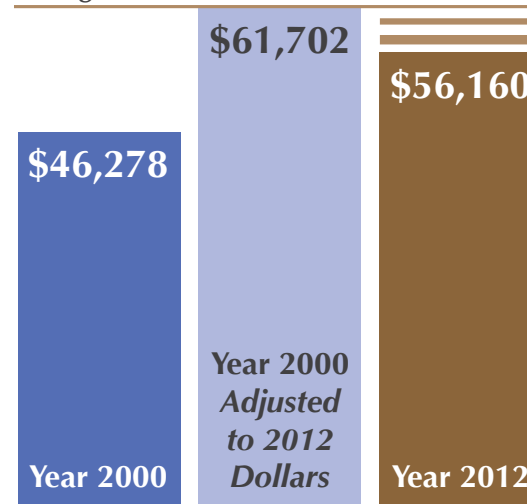


Figure 1-8: Adjusted Median Household Income

Education

A well-educated community provides a window into the quality of schools as well as income levels and general employment industries of a community. **Figure 1-9** shows the trend of educational attainment for the Town's residents from 2000 to 2012. Today, the largest group still consists of individuals that received a high school diploma or equivalent. This is consistent with the Town's history as a middle-class/ blue collar community. However, the number of residents having attained some level of post-secondary education has increased for all degree levels (Associates, Bachelors, and Graduate or Professional) from 2000 to 2012. Furthermore, the percentage of those whose highest level of attainment is a high school degree has decreased in the same decade. These trends indicate that overall the Town has a more educated workforce (individuals age 16+) than in years past.

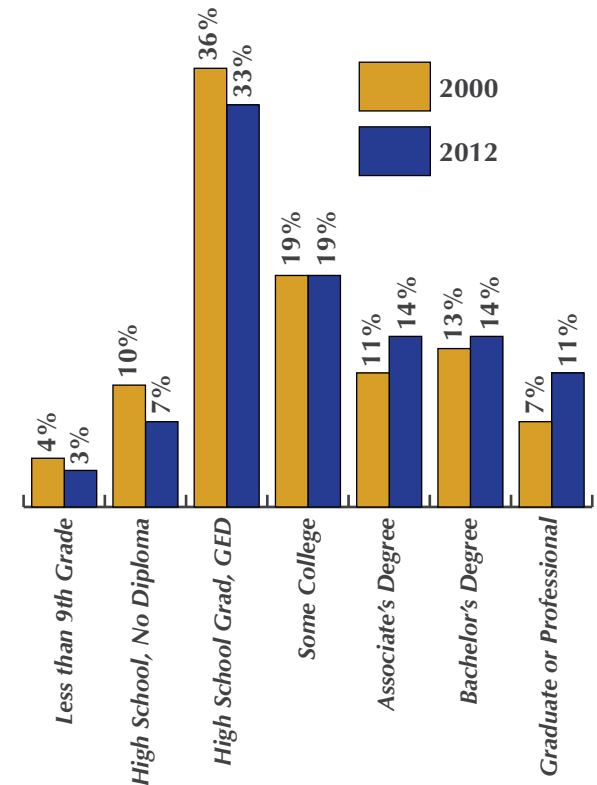


Figure 1-9: Educational Attainment

**STRENGTHENING
WNY's Safety Net**

A COMMUNITY REPORT
Town of **WEST SENECA**



Report prepared for
The John R. Oishei Foundation
by the University at Buffalo
Regional Institute
May 2014

To view the Report in its entirety, visit the
Mobile Safety-Net Team of Western New
York web page at
www.msntwny.org
and search for West Seneca under
"Reports."

The University at Buffalo Regional Institute, in partnership with the Mobile Safety-Net Team, prepared a community report on 12 communities in the Buffalo-Niagara region to analyze the overall level and need for social and human services, as well as develop recommendations to strengthen them. The Report teams reached out to residents and agencies within West Seneca and analyzed key statistical information from various local, state, and federal sources. As a result, the Report contains a wealth of valuable data and findings that can help drive future policies and decision-making in the Town when used in conjunction with this Comprehensive Plan. Rather than duplicate the efforts of the Report, the following pages include some excerpts of its key infographics that are an excellent resource for visualizing the existing conditions of the Town's low-income or under-served population.

As indicated by the accompanying graphics, an increase in poverty levels has been occurring over the past 20 years, with the greatest percentage of people concentrated in Census Tract 114 along the City of Buffalo border. The highest percentage of the population that is at or below the federal poverty level (\$15,510 for two-person household) are those aged 18 or younger, indicating a greater need for outreach and/or intervention to this group in schools and other youth-centered social facilities.

**A large
population
in poverty
or close
to it...**

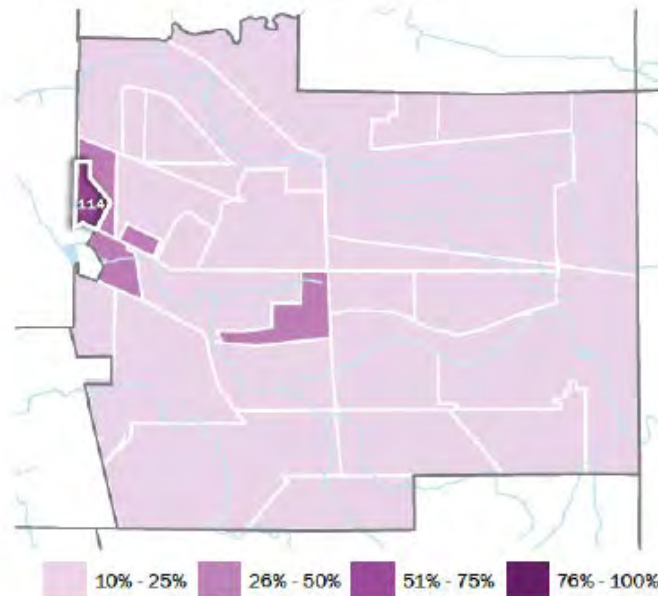
Among West Seneca's population of 44,670...

...about
2,700
residents live on
incomes under the
federal poverty level.

...an additional
5,905
aren't in poverty but are
close to it with incomes
between 100-200% of
poverty.

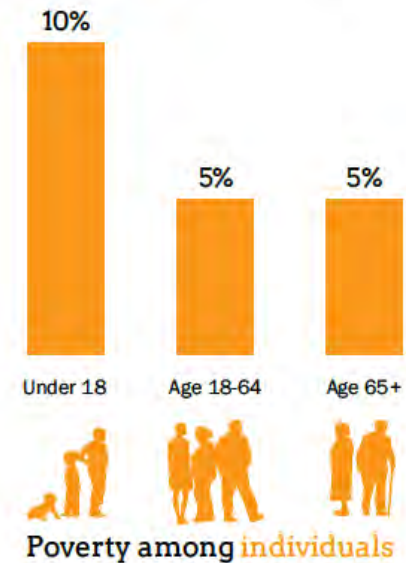
...about
8,605
are doing poorly or
struggling financially.
This is more than one
out of every five.

Population in or near poverty, 2010



Source: 2006-10 American Community Survey. Census tracts that are mentioned in the text below are labeled on this map.

Population in Poverty by Age, 2011



Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey

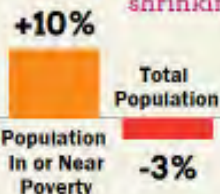
Beyond poverty, other alarming indicators and trends...

Need is growing. While the total population has declined 3% since 2000, the number of those living in or near poverty has risen 10%, leaving the town and service providers with a smaller funding and resource base to support higher levels of need.

84% of those in poverty are under age 65

West Seneca is an aging community. Roughly one third of all residents are age 55 or older and one in five is over 65. Nearly 3,000 seniors in the town live alone. Most are on fixed incomes and may be unable to manage the cost of repairs and maintenance of homes, roughly half of which were built before 1960.

Poverty is growing as population is shrinking



1 out of 3 is age 55+

More vulnerable households own their home. That means many families with stretched resources may face costly home repair or maintenance expenses they can't handle and that may force them to make painful choices between housing and food or medicine.

There are pockets of concentrated poverty in West Seneca. In one census tract near the Buffalo city line, 40 percent of children live in poverty – a figure much more like the 48 percent poverty rate in Buffalo than ten percent in the town.

COMMON URGENT CONCERN

money for food

There are fewer households with children under 18 than ever before. Roughly one quarter of households in West Seneca are families with children. Yet, **single parent families make up an increasing share of all families with children.** And single parent families are more likely to be in poverty. As a result, support for public education may be weakest at a time when the needs are increasing.

* Findings come from a survey of 117 at-risk households in West Seneca, reflecting a statistically significant sample size at a confidence level of at least 95% and with a confidence interval of 3%.

As part of the Report, 117 households were surveyed within West Seneca to inform the Community Needs Assessment. Respondents indicated that being turned away for services due to income limits was the most common barrier they faced. Among the specific service barriers noted in the Report, the top responses were:

- » **Transportation:** Lack of transportation options to get to services or get out of the house
- » **Food:** "Food insecurity," cuts in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, reliance on food stamps for seniors

- » **Jobs with limited growth:** low-wage jobs only within walking distance (high cost of car ownership)
- » **Health insurance and healthcare:** Changes and turbulence in coverage causes uncertainty and limited access
- » **Social isolation of the elderly:** Need for social interaction, impacts to physical well-being for the increasing senior population
- » **Mental health services are limited:** Only one agency in Town supported by Medicaid

The most common types of benefits reported by those who receive support

Food Stamps	59%
HEAP	51%
Medicaid	43%
SSI/SSD	38%

2 out of 5 residents surveyed in West Seneca say they have encountered difficulty getting services.



Community Assets

The existing physical and natural features that make up the Town in general have not changed since the development of the 2006 Plan. However, as part of this Plan update, a general overview of some of the more important features in the Town is needed to provide adequate context for future land use policies and decisions, with more current information added where relevant.

Current Land Uses

The Town of West Seneca is predominantly a residential community as noted in **Map 2** and **Figure 1-10**, with over 48% of the land area dedicated to residential uses. In addition to the largest land area, these uses also constitute the greatest taxable value - over 70% of the total value of the Town. Residential uses span the entirety of the Town, largely the result of its early history as a community of many unique and diverse neighborhoods, some still known by name today. Of the 15,251 residential parcels, over 90% of them are classified as single-family residential, 7% are two-family, and only 1% are multi-family (three or more units). Although the

second highest land values are the commercial uses, they only make up 9.5% of the total land area. Vacant lands comprise the second largest category in terms of acreage and number of parcels.

The largest parcel in the Town is the 496-acre NYS Children's Psychiatric Center Campus located on East and West Road. A portion of this facility was identified in 2014 for closure, which comprises the single largest potential redevelopment site in West Seneca.

The large amount of vacant land represents a potential for development or land conservation depending on the location, capacity, and characteristics of the land. For example, lands adjacent to Cazenovia Creek that are within the floodplain (**see Map 5**) are currently classified as vacant, yet due to the potential for flooding would be better off conserved rather than developed. With the significant amount of floodplains in the Town and their importance for natural flood control measures, some of the

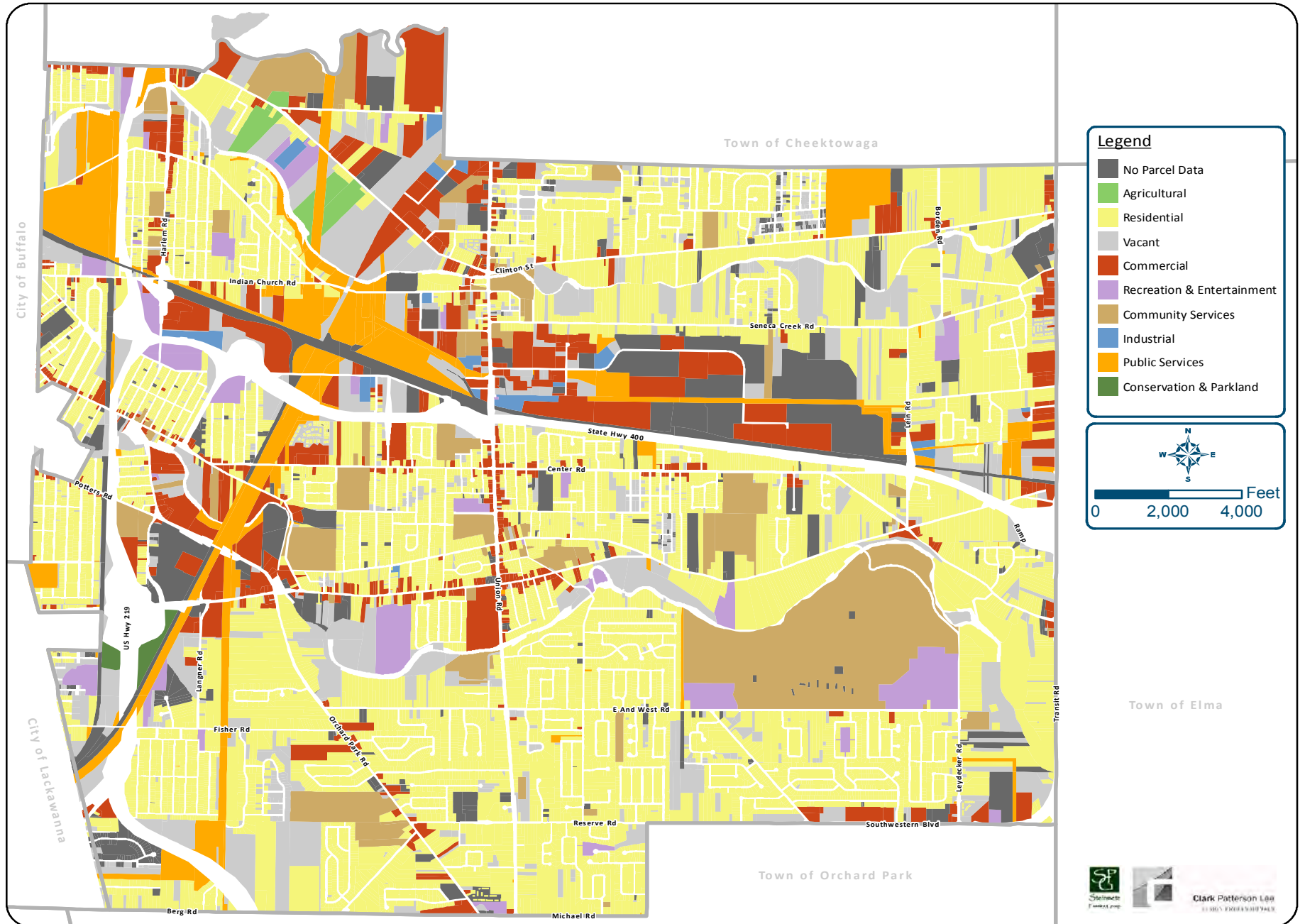
currently classified vacant lands could potentially be reassessed to help ensure their vitality.

Commercial properties are primarily found along major corridors with the greatest concentration along Union Road and Seneca Street, Seneca Street at Orchard Park Road, and Transit Road, as well as in the industrial park north of Route 400. Many of these properties are smaller stand-alone stores or commercial strip development, with larger scale and regional centers found on Transit Road and the Ridge Road/Seneca Street/Orchard Park Road area. Some agricultural uses are also classified as commercial in the northwestern part of Town.

The two smallest land use categories include agricultural use and conservation/parkland; the latter comprises dedicated municipally-owned public parks, private parks, and conservation lands. The few remaining agricultural properties are located in the northwest section of the Town and consist of a number of greenhouses, a plant nursery, and some field crops.

Code	Property Class	No. of Parcels	% Total	Acreage	% Total	Assessed Land Value	% Total	Assessed Total Value	% Total
100	Agricultural	5	0.0%	44	0.4%	\$245,500	0.1%	\$647,200	0.0%
200	Residential	15,251	82.9%	5,620	48.9%	\$150,151,500	68.5%	\$937,899,205	71.8%
300	Vacant	1,469	8.0%	1,583	13.8%	\$350,000	0.2%	\$11,900,426	0.9%
400	Commercial	715	3.9%	1,089	9.5%	\$43,276,627	19.8%	\$196,984,982	15.1%
500	Recreation & Entertainment	36	0.2%	318	2.8%	\$2,424,600	1.1%	\$5,734,400	0.4%
600	Community Service	80	0.4%	1,028	9.0%	\$14,291,140	6.5%	\$123,470,250	9.5%
700	Industrial	19	0.1%	65	0.6%	\$1,566,814	0.7%	\$9,787,700	0.7%
800	Public Services	139	0.8%	764	6.7%	\$6,747,168	3.1%	\$19,272,370	1.5%
900	Forest, Parks & Conservation	2	0.0%	22	0.2%	\$11,300	0.0%	\$11,300	0.0%
0	Not Classified	686	3.7%	950	8.3%	\$0	0.0%	\$0	0.0%
	TOTAL	18,402	100%	11,483	100%	\$219,064,649	100%	\$1,305,707,833	100%

Map 2: Existing Land Use



Current Zoning District Framework

The existing zoning districts for the Town are shown on **Map 3**. A review of this map indicates that the zoning districts reflect that of aforementioned existing land uses; a primarily residential character with manufacturing districts located along the expressways and commercial along local corridors. Some of the key components of each district or district grouping are outlined below.

» **Business.** The business zoning districts within the Town are as follows:

- **C-1**
- **C-2**

These districts permit a number of commercial uses, but these tend to be strip-style in nature and primarily are located on shallow parcels along major corridors. Some larger and deeper lots are sporadically located throughout the Town, such as those along Seneca Street west of Union Road. Higher intensity commercial uses (larger lot coverage, higher traffic volumes, and overall more physical impacts) are geared towards C-2, while the C-1 district permits slightly less intensive uses. In addition to commercial, residential uses are also permitted in both districts.

» **Residential.** There are currently nine residential zoning districts in the Town including:

- **R-50**
- **R-60A**
- **R-65**
- **R-65A**
- **R-75**
- **R-75A**
- **R-90**
- **R-90A**
- **R-100A**

Divided based on a minimum lot width and minimum lot size, the residential districts start with R-50 (a 50 foot minimum width and 8,500 square foot minimum lot size) and go up to R-100A (100 foot minimum lot width and 20,000 square foot minimum lot size). Single-family dwellings are allowed across all districts with two-family dwellings permitted in more than half (R-50 and those with an "A" designation) and multi-family dwellings by special permit in R-50 and R-60A.

A number of accessory uses are also permitted in these districts, including home offices and occupations, except in three of the districts (R-65, R-75, and R-90). Various specially permitted uses are also included in each district, although they are not clearly identified as they are included within the listing of permitted uses. R-65 represents the largest district by land area (approximately 20% of the Town), followed by R-75 and 75A.

» **Manufacturing.** The following are the manufacturing zoning districts utilized within the Town:

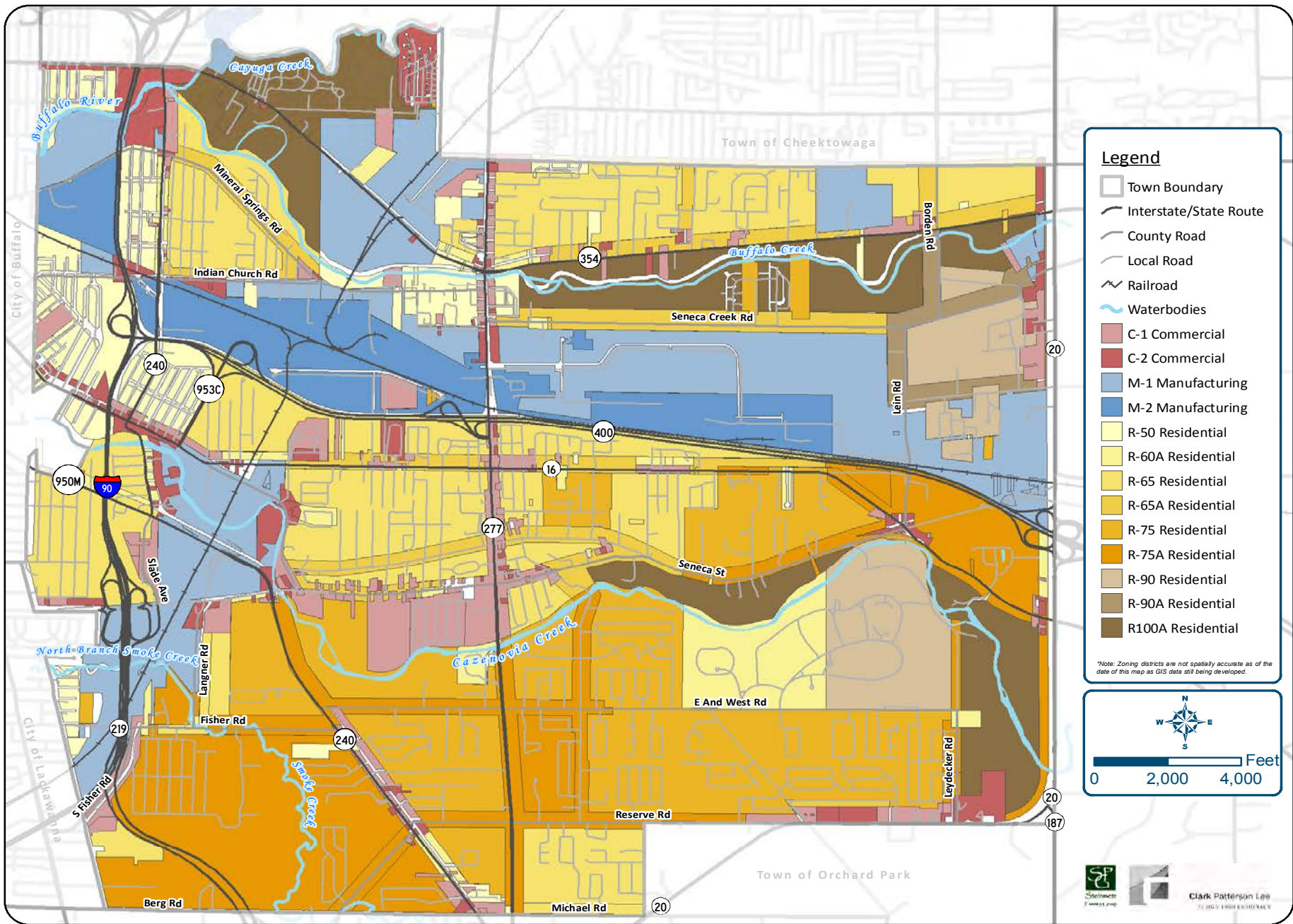
- **M-1**
- **M-2**

Located primarily along the railroad corridors, these districts allow many of the same commercial and residential uses permitted in the non-manufacturing districts as well as more intensive light industrial uses, research, assembly, terminals, storage facilities, and repair facilities. Although the districts adjoin some residential districts, special zoning regulations address several important issues to ensure compatibility, such as setbacks, landscaping, screening, buffering, and other development standards.

In addition, a special Industrial Park Overlay Review District is included that outlines additional standards and requirements for site design. However, this only pertains to the North America Center as this time.

The M-1 district is the largest non-residential district in the Town, encompassing approximately 17% of total land area.

Map 3: Zoning Districts



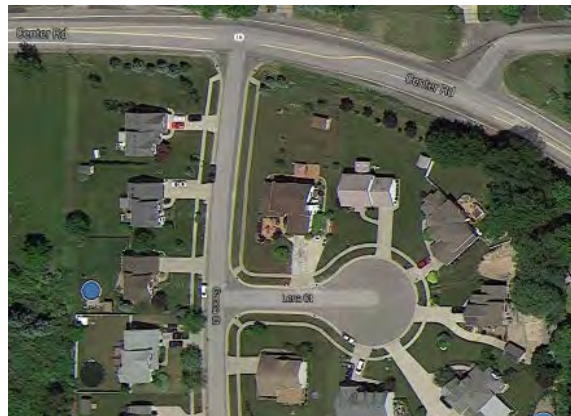
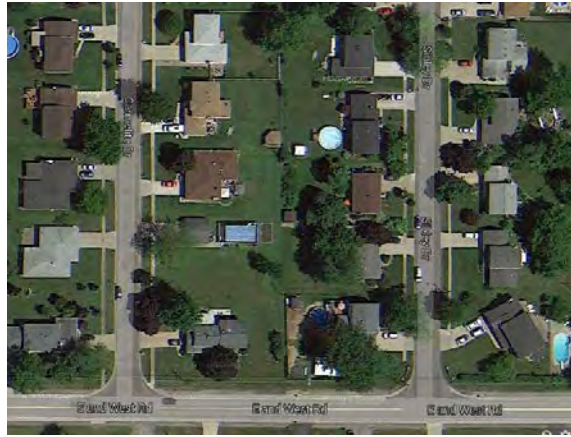
Transportation Network

The following is a summary of the transportation system provided within West Seneca. **Map 4** on the opposing page indicates the current layout of the system throughout the Town. A simplified version of this map indicating the roadway ownership within the Town has also been provided in the appendix.

Roadways: The Town of West Seneca is well served by an extensive road network, with Interstate 90 and State Route 400 providing high-speed, high-volume connections for north/south and east/west connections, respectively. Other minor arterials and collector-level roads, whether State, County, or Town maintained, provide further access throughout West Seneca. The Town is solely responsible for approximately 110 miles of roadways.

Neighborhoods: Within the Town there are generally two types of residential streets. The first type includes the largest portion of the Town's housing stock, which was built before 1970. These older neighborhoods typically have an interconnected street network with few cul-de-sacs. This development pattern increases travel options and often results in reduced traffic congestion. By comparison, the second type is more characteristic of recent suburban neighborhood development patterns that utilize cul-de-sacs and have more limited street connections.

Sidewalks: Regardless of the level of connectivity, nearly all of the Town's established neighborhood streets are equipped with sidewalks. Older neighborhoods and newer subdivisions alike provide significant buffers to sidewalks from the edge of the roadway, helping to calm traffic and make pedestrians feel more comfortable on the street. However, almost all of the neighborhood sidewalk networks terminate at the entrance to their collector or connecting



Neighborhoods in West Seneca generally have sidewalks regardless of design (shown above). However, these networks fail to connect along major corridors as seen along East and West Road in the photo below. (Google, 2015)



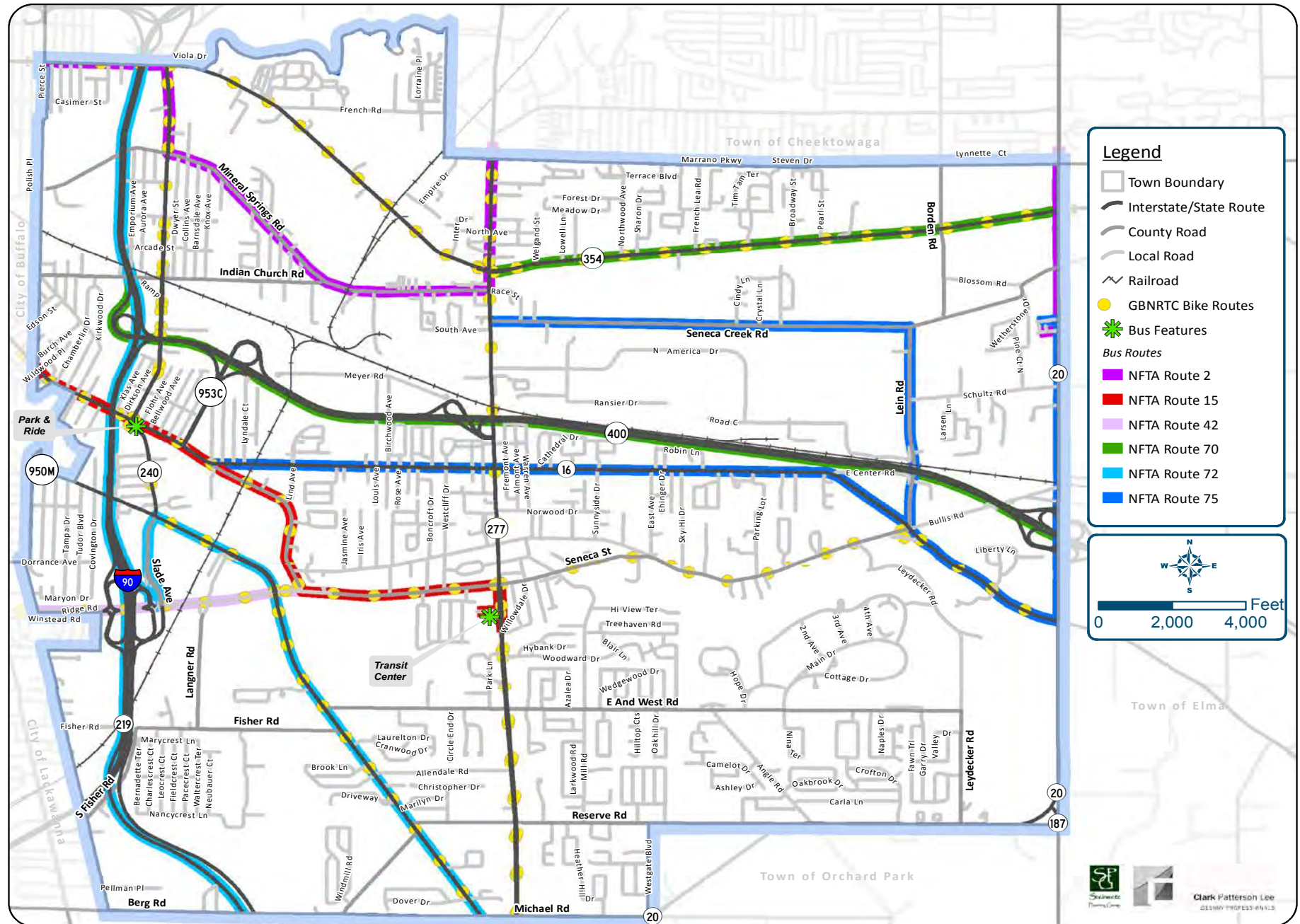
roadways. This lack of connectivity forces pedestrians to walk in the gutter or shoulder along more heavily trafficked roadways, which often feels unsafe and uninviting. Connecting neighborhoods and destination centers will be key for completing the pedestrian network of the Town, and increasing its overall walkability.

Transit: Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) provides public transit service throughout the region and maintains six lines in West Seneca. These lines serve all of the Town with the exception of the southeast corner and link the major commercial and business areas. In addition to the bus line, NFTA also operates the Buffalo-Niagara International Airport, Metro Rail, and the Lake Erie boat harbor, all within a reasonable driving distance of the Town.

Rail & Air: Other transportation options in West Seneca include the Buffalo Airfield on Clinton Street and two major rail freight lines. The two-runway airfield is a private facility that is open to the public and on average has 150 air operations per day with 23 aircraft based there. The facility includes fuel services, covered and open craft storage, and repair services. However, there is no terminal or control tower.

Norfolk Southern Railway Corporation (NSR) owns and maintains the two rail lines through the Town with NSR, CSX, and Buffalo & Pittsburgh Railroad (a subsidiary of Genesee & Wyoming) providing Class 2 and 3 freight service. These lines generally run the same direction as the Thruway and State Route 400 and include siding and spurs for the North America Center Industrial Park.

Map 4: Transportation



Water Features

Creeks and Watersheds: Four major streams traverse the Town as highlighted in **Map 5** - Buffalo Creek, Cayuga Creek, Cazenovia Creek and Smoke Creek. These are the most prominent natural features in the Town and consequently have a significant impact on land use decisions. The largest creek and watershed is Cazenovia Creek, which runs through the center of Town. Cazenovia and Buffalo Creek generally run east/west and divide the Town into three distinct physical areas. Due to the large amount of residential and commercial development adjacent to these two creeks, they act as natural greenways through the Town that should be capitalized upon and preserved.

Cazenovia and Buffalo Creek are also classified as "B" water bodies and are therefore protected by the NYS DEC. Class B water bodies are suitable for fishing and recreation, but not for drinking or food prep. Although the streams are a prominent feature in the community, public access and visibility is limited due to dense development and significant vegetation in spots.

Smoke Creek, Cayuga Creek, and the Ebenezer Brook are classified with a water quality of "C" and are not protected. These waters are suitable for fishing and some recreational use, but they have a lower water quality than Class A or B waters.

In addition to providing natural habitats and passive and active recreational opportunities, all four creeks are valuable assets for flood management due to their adjacent floodplains and wetlands. Floodplains and wetlands can act as natural sponges and buffers to rising waters provided they are maintained and protected.

Floodplains: The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has mapped areas that are considered at risk for flooding on FEMA



An ice jam in Buffalo Creek caused the flooding of 70 homes in the Lexington Green neighborhood in January of 2014. Residents faced thousands of dollars in property damage as a result.

Flood Insurance Rate Maps. There are significant areas of the Town that fall within what FEMA designates as the 100-year floodplain. Lands adjacent to each of the four major creeks and Ebenezer Brook are all classified as floodplains (**See Map 5**). The largest area of floodplain is located in northwestern corner of Town, on lands along Buffalo Creek and the Buffalo River. Nearly all of the area west of the Thruway and north of the rail right-of-way is located within a floodplain.

The western portion of Town along Cazenovia Creek also has relatively large areas of potential flooding, particularly where the creek begins to turn north, near Orchard Park Road. The eastern section of Cazenovia Creek cuts through steeper local relief, creating steep stream banks. In these areas the regulatory floodway is contained due to the extreme top of bank elevation.

Floodplain Zone A and AE (1% annual chance of flooding) are generally located along the streams and creeks located in the northwestern portion of the Town adjoining the City of Buffalo.

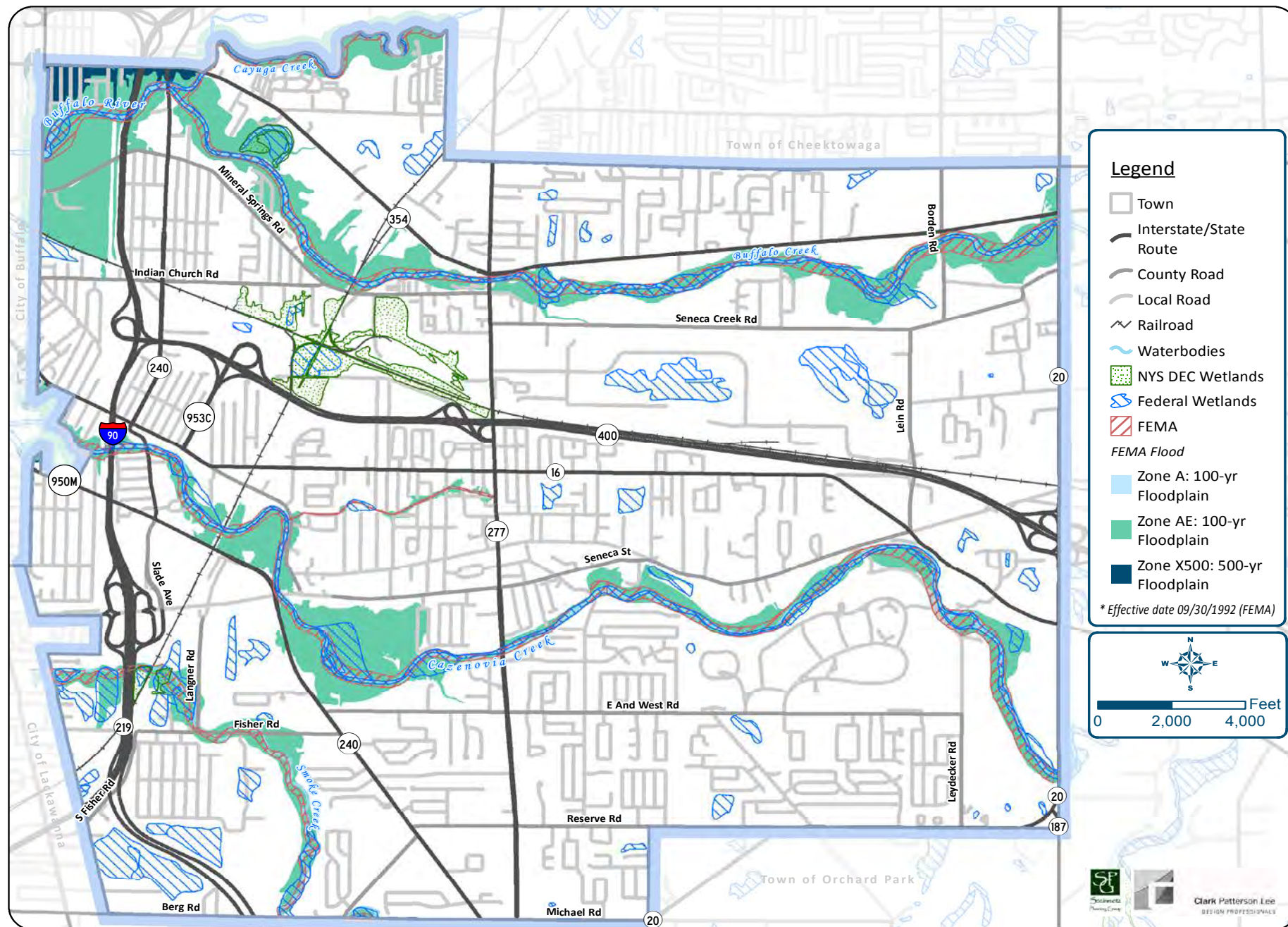
Wetlands: Wetlands can be under the jurisdiction of the Federal and/or the State government. State wetlands, usually 12.4 acres or larger, are identified by a combination of factors, including the type of vegetation that is present. Federal wetlands are generally smaller, are identified by the type of soils, and may also include surface waters. State wetlands are officially mapped by the DEC, while wetlands potentially subject to federal regulation are not necessarily mapped. **Map 5** shows the location of both significant state and federal wetlands within the Town.

Most of the federal wetlands in West Seneca are located in the western portion of the Town. They generally are located within stream corridors or the 100-year floodplain. The largest area of federal wetlands is located along Cazenovia Creek, near a confluence with one of its tributaries. Federal wetlands also exist within the floodplains along Smoke Creek and the Buffalo River. There are also a few isolated federal wetlands outside of floodplain areas, but these are generally fairly limited in size. The Oxbow Wetland (NYS BU-17) is located in West Seneca between the Buffalo Creek and Clinton Street in the northwestern section of Town. This area is also classified as a federal wetland.

There are three locations of NYSDEC regulated wetlands within the Town. The largest (NYS BU-13) is located north of the 400 Expressway where the Norfolk Southern Rail lines merge.

Given the presence hydric soils in West Seneca, there may be other areas of small, unmapped wetlands potentially subject to federal regulation elsewhere in Town.

Map 5: Water Features



Community Features

Significant community features are identified in **Map 6**, including schools, school districts, and community facilities. The Town is primarily served by one school district; West Seneca Central. There are 10 public schools and several private schools located within the community as well. Orchard Park Central School District services residents living in the southeastern corner of the West Seneca.

Mirroring the population changes and subsequent changes in age groups in the Town over the past decade, school enrollments have declined leading to the recent closure of one school in the district and uncertainty if there will be pressure to close more. The 2006 Plan indicated that the school enrollment during the 2002-2003 school year was 7,636 students, while the latest district figures (2012-2013) identified 6,820 students, an almost 11% decline.



The West Seneca Marching Band is organized through the West Seneca Central School District, providing students with the opportunity to participate in a competitive marching program. The band current competes in the Large School 3 Class of the New York State Field Band Conference, and took home the Championship trophy in 2010, 2011, 2013, and 2015.



Including the facilities available at the schools, the Town has an extensive system of parks, playgrounds, and other public and private recreational facilities. The features identified on the map also include other passive and open space resources such as agricultural lands, cemeteries, and conservation lands, which all contribute to the overall recreation and open space in the Town.

The 2006 Plan provides an extensive list of specific recreational amenities available at each facility. Town government services, police, and the library are all located at the municipal campus on Union Road south of Center Road while the Highway Department is located on South Avenue, north of Center Road.

"Owners of small companies ranked recreation/parks/open space as the highest priority in choosing a new location for their business."

- Trust for Public Land

COMMUNITY PROFILE



Emergency Services

Various emergency services provide coverage to Town residents and businesses, as shown in **Map 7**.

Fire & EMS Services: West Seneca is divided into six fire districts, each with at least one station providing fire protection and first response capabilities through volunteer members. The majority of the calls received by each fire company annually is for EMS response followed by fire response and rescue. Since 1990, each company has seen their emergency response calls increase significantly. For example, between 1990 and 2000, Union Fire has had a 66% increase in service calls, and between 2000 and 2013 experienced another increase of 50%. EMS-related calls will more than likely continue to rise with the increasing number of seniors and elderly residents in the Town.

In addition to the fire department, emergency services are also provided by Rural/Metro Medical Services. Rural/Metro is a contracted ambulance company that provides basic and advanced life support and transport.

Police Services: The Town maintains its own 95 person police force, including non-sworn officers. It is headquartered at Town Hall and includes a road patrol division, detective bureau, records department, and other specialized units.

For a complete summary of recent and past West Seneca Police Department Call Statistics, visit: www.wspolice.com and go to the "Records Department" page.

Disaster Preparedness: The mission of the West Seneca Office of Disaster Preparedness is to mitigate the results of natural and man-made disasters and to protect the general public from the growing specter of acts of terrorism through planning, detection, communication, response, public information, and training.

The department assists in the response to major incidents with all first responders. Under the Office of Disaster Preparedness, the West Seneca Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) is trained to assist the members of our communities and workplaces following an event when responders (law enforcement, fire, and EMS) are not immediately available to help. They are always prepared to assist, upon request, those professional responders in every area for which they have been properly trained. West Seneca C.E.R.T. support emergency response agencies by taking an active role in emergency preparedness projects in our community.

The West Seneca Office of Disaster Preparedness and the West Seneca C.E.R.T. program also helps train local citizens to be prepared to respond to emergency situations in their communities. The reality is that citizens could very likely be on their own during the early hours of a catastrophic disaster. When emergencies occur, West Seneca C.E.R.T. members can give critical support to first responders, provide immediate assistance to victims and organize spontaneous volunteers at a disaster site. The team members can also help with non-emergency projects that help improve the safety of the community.



Gardenville Fire District building located on Union Road.

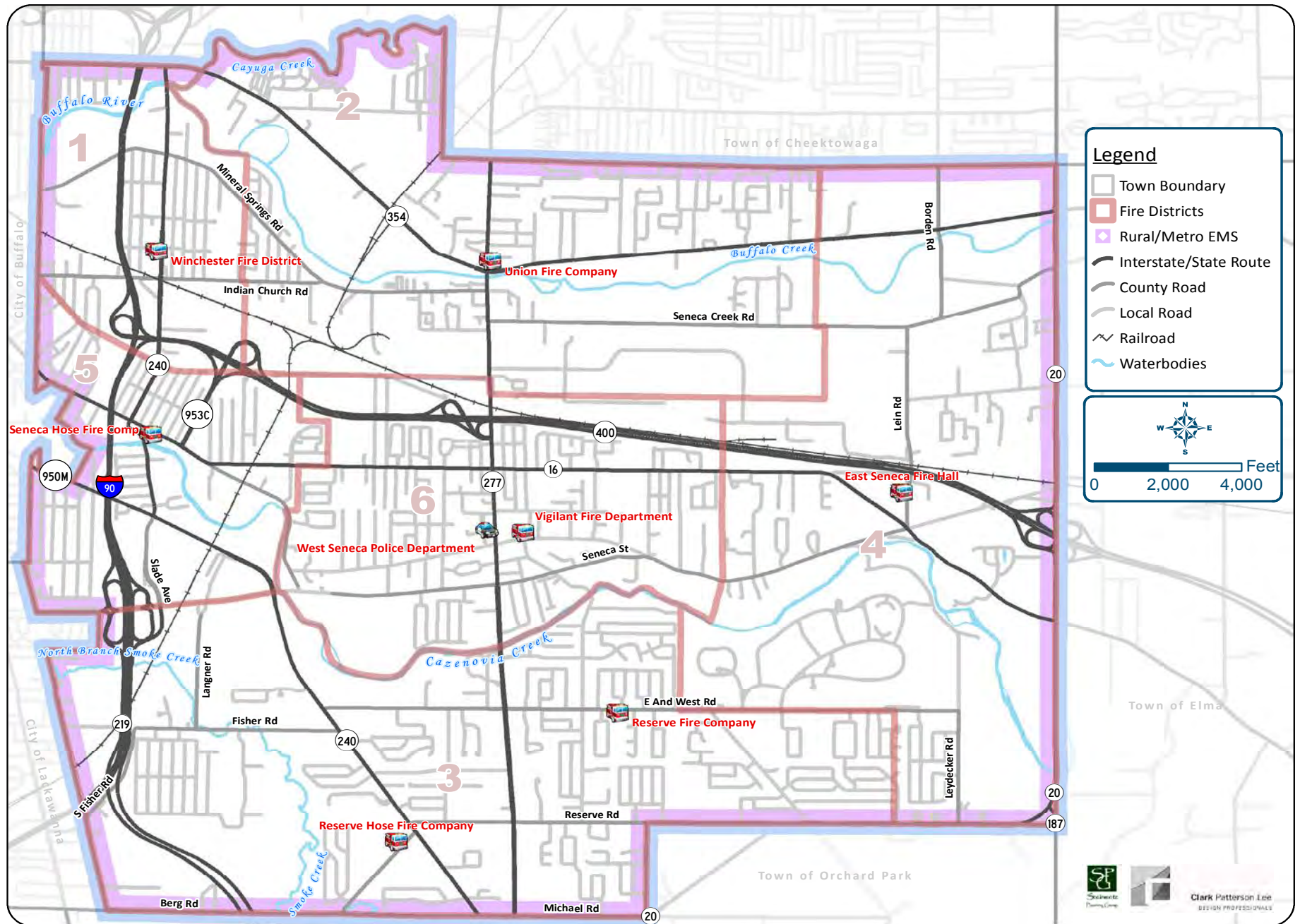


Further information on the West Seneca Office of Disaster Preparedness efforts can be found at www.wscert.net and on the Town webpage.



The Office of Disaster Preparedness is located on 900 Mill Road, with the West Seneca School District and other community services.

Map 7: Emergency Services



Implications

Upon the completion of the draft community profile there were a number of implications that stood out to the Steering Committee as key points to address in the Comprehensive Plan Policy Framework and Action Plan. Although the Town may not be able to impact each of these factors directly, it is still in good practice to acknowledge their occurrence.

The following nine items summarize the most relevant implications, formulated as questions, that this Plan update seeks to answer:

- 1) *The Town will experience a modest growth in population over the next 25 years. Where will this occur and what will it look like?*
- 2) *The Town's population is aging. How will the Town respond to the shifting demands in housing choice, community services, transportation options, etc.?*
- 3) *The Town experienced an increase in young professionals & families. What changes (if any) will the Town need to make to continue this trend?*
- 4) *Renters within the Town pay a greater portion of their income for housing. What changes need to be made to better accommodate the needs of our renters?*
- 5) *1 in 5 residents are doing poorly or struggling financially. How do we improve overall quality of life and affordability through better service delivery, higher paying jobs, and housing?*
- 6) *There are four creeks in the Town. How does the Town preserve them while capitalizing on their recreation potential?*
- 7) *The Town has six established neighborhood centers. What improvements should be made to revitalize them while building on their history and character?*
- 8) *Most of the Town's neighborhoods have sidewalks within them, but not between them. How do we connect neighborhoods to each other and various destinations?*
- 9) *There is significant redevelopment potential in the Town Center, Seneca Place, and NYS Developmental Center Campus. What types of public and private investment in each of these areas should be encouraged?*

"Solutions are often obvious once you get the questions right."

- John Sculley, CEO of Apple Inc.



End of Community Profile.



Our Policy Framework

In order to be successful, a Comprehensive Plan must be developed and implemented on multiple levels. It must address the short and long term needs of a community as well as provide varying levels of detail. The intent of the policy framework is to be future-oriented, acting as a guide to achieve the community's vision. This Plan has four key elements:



Photo: WGRZ

- » **Vision** - A general statement that describes the aspiration of the Town; it is an end towards which all actions are aimed. The Vision should not dramatically change over time, but rather be consistent throughout the planning horizon. Ideally, the Vision contained in this Plan should be useful for the 10-year planning horizon.
- » **Policy** - Similar to a vision in that it is a general statement of a future condition towards which actions are aimed. However, the scope of a policy is much more narrow. It should support the vision by addressing a particular area or issue facing the community. Policies should not dramatically change over time but rather be consistent throughout the planning horizon. Ideally, the policies contained in this Plan should be useful for the 10-year planning horizon.
- » **Objective** - A statement of a measurable activity to be accomplished in pursuit of the policy; it refers to some specific aspiration which is reasonably attainable. Think in terms of actions such as “increase”, “develop”, or “preserve.” It should be noted that the municipality may already be undertaking some of the objectives articulated in this Plan and have included them to ensure that they continue to do so over the next decade. The lifespan of an objective is usually 6 to 10 years.
- » **Action Item** - A specific proposal to do something that relates directly to accomplishing a strategy; it can take the form of a plan, project, or program. The lifespan of an action item can vary from one to 10 years depending on the item.

Each policy is intended to function as part of this document or to be used as a standalone work plan that can be taken out, copied, and assigned to a group, organization, or committee to undertake.

Our Vision

West Seneca will be a place where people, business, and industry come together in support of our community. Our Town will be known for its efforts to maintain and enhance its assets by actively promoting:

- » **Community identity and livability;**
- » **Environmental quality and sustainability;**
- » **Safe and attractive neighborhoods;**
- » **Economic development and reinvestment opportunities;**
- » **Safe, connected, and multi-modal transportation systems;**
- » **Healthy, active lifestyles; and**
- » **Sound governmental decision-making and regional partnerships.**

To achieve a sustainable and successful future, we will implement our Community Development Strategy. This Strategy is designed to revitalize our community fabric through focused investment in a manner that respects our heritage and appeals to future generations.



Burchfield Nature & Art Center
Photo: Yelp.com, Theresa R.



Upstate Farms Facility in the North America Center



Parkside Drive looking south to Cazenovia Creek
Photo: Google, 2015

Community Identity & Livability

Our Town will employ high-quality land use planning and design practices to enhance the public and private realms, while preserving our cultural identity and improving livability for all residents. The features of our natural and built environments, streets and blocks define our community character and identity. Therefore, future development and investments affected by the Town will recognize the value and importance of connectivity, architecture, and well-designed places in context with the desired aesthetic of the community. Although each neighborhood and district will highlight its own history and character, all should positively contribute to the Town's overall identity and livability.



Objectives

- A:** Encourage identity-building efforts as part of developing a strong community character.
- B:** Improve the site design and aesthetics of our shopping and business districts to create inviting environments and more predictability for new investment.
- C:** Ensure the compatibility of new development proposals with neighboring uses.
- D:** Stress the importance of placemaking techniques in all new public and private developments.
- E:** Encourage additional cultural and tourism-related uses within our neighborhood centers.
- F:** Preserve the historical integrity of the Town's buildings, sites, and monuments.

Placemaking (noun) [pleys•mey-king]:

1. A process by which we shape our public spaces in order to maximize their potential and shared value. Placemaking is more than just promoting better urban design, it facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution. (*See Project for Public Spaces - www.pps.org*)

Action Items (by Objective)

- A**
 - 1) Meet with developers, business owners, and residents in annual forums to detail the requirements that need to be met by new construction or remodeling projects.
 - 2) Establish an Architectural Review Committee and draft design guidelines to assist the Planning Board in the review of development applications.
- B**
 - 1) Review and update the Town Zoning Code to improve building and site design controls, sign regulations, and enforcement.
 - 2) Provide incentives to commercial property owners to make improvements to their properties through tax incentives, façade programs, community educational forums, etc.
- C**
 - 1) Formalize a preliminary sketch review process as part of a pre-application conference for new development applications.
 - 2) Review and revise Site Plan Review language to provide better approval criteria and a more predictable process for new commercial development and redevelopment.
 - 3) Expand the industrial park overlay to other industrial areas of the Town to offer design guidelines and protection of neighboring uses.
- D**
 - 1) Improve the aesthetics of major north/south corridors (Union Road, Transit Road, Harlem Road, Orchard Park Road) with a streetscape plan that includes but is not limited to landscaping, façade, and right-of-way improvements.
 - 2) Require the creation of more pleasant pedestrian connections and access within development sites (e.g. between stores, parking, etc.).
- E**
 - 1) Define and strengthen the identity of the original settlements, such as Ebenezer and Gardenville.
 - 2) Promote the Gardenville/Burchfield neighborhood center as a tourism hub in the community.
- F**
 - 1) Identify and facilitate the preservation of historic structures, Native American cultural sites, and archaeologically sensitive areas.
 - 2) Mark historic sites and buildings with unique plaques denoting their construction date and/or significance.
 - 3) Utilize the State and National Historic Registry and their associated programs to help guide and fund the rehabilitation of historic structures.
 - 4) Pursue enrollment in the Certified Local Governments program.

Natural Resources & Sustainability

The Town recognizes the intrinsic value of its natural resources and will continue to conserve our ecological assets for the health and enjoyment of current residents and future generations. Our community benefits from the Town's unique natural environment defined by healthy creeks, diverse wetlands, rich woodlands, pastoral open spaces, and active parks. We will continue to promote the natural, visual, and recreational significance of these assets. In order to ensure the future quality of these resources and prevent their degradation, the Town will pursue sound development practices and employ appropriate land use regulations focused on long-term environmental protection and sustainability.



Objectives

- A:** Protect major creeks and floodplains.
- B:** Strengthen and support the Town's park system.
- C:** Preserve areas of rural character and open space.
- D:** Identify and protect important habitats, green space, trees, and woodlots.
- E:** Improve public access to environmental features.
- F:** Educate the community on the value and significance of the Town's natural resources.
- G:** Incorporate environmentally friendly development practices and standards.

The Town of West Seneca recognizes the importance of planning for better strategies to respond to climate change. A more detailed report containing specific strategies and efforts that may assist in taking action against climate change can be found in the One Region Forward document "Resilient Buffalo Niagara" on www.oneregionforward.org.

Action Items (by Objective)

- A**
 - 1) Implement a stream corridor and floodplain overlay district with development restrictions and guidelines (see page 66 for sample Floodplain Overlay District language).
 - 2) Review and update the Buffalo and Cayuga Creeks Corridor Restoration Study (1997) and Town of West Seneca Municipal Open Space and Greenway Protection Plan (1999) for further preservation and recreation opportunities.
 - 3) Promote the DEC designated fishing areas within the Town.
- B**
 - 1) Maintain and preserve existing Town park land and facilities.
 - 2) Utilize the vacant rail corridor along the NYS Thruway to link West Seneca to the regional rails-to-trails system.
 - 3) Investigate the feasibility of locating a park in the northeast and northwest corners of the Town.
- C**
 - 1) Identify valuable open space and consider programs such as the use of conservation easements and purchase of development rights to acquire and protect valuable open spaces.
 - 2) Identify and protect Town-owned parcels via the development and adoption of conservation policy language.
- D**
 - 1) Protect Leydecker Woods from any potential development pressures and consider opportunities for public access along the creek corridors (see the DEC Plan for Wildlife Management Areas at www.dec.ny.gov for more information).
 - 2) Ensure the protection of wooded areas and trees with new development via the Tree Ordinance.
 - 3) Develop a "re-tree" strategy, program, or ordinance that would provide new or additional trees to developments and residential neighborhoods.
 - 4) Consider developing a Wildlife Management Plan for the purpose of natural resource and habitat conservation.
- E**
 - 1) Improve the connection between Fireman's Park and Sunshine Park.
 - 2) Create and maintain a public trail system, providing multi-use paths through parks and open spaces.
 - 3) Provide reasonable access to public parks or open spaces within all new and existing neighborhoods.
 - 4) Establish trails and connections that link the Town to the Niagara River Greenway Plan and proposed Seneca Creek Pathway.
 - 5) Explore opportunities to reuse the abandoned Norfolk Southern railroad right-of-way for off-road trails or other recreational uses.
- F**
 - 1) Continue to support community driven efforts to educate residents and developers on our environmental assets and ordinances.
- G**
 - 1) Review and revise the Town Zoning Code to permit and encourage the use of green infrastructure, natural stormwater management, and environmentally sustainable development practices.
 - 2) Promote sustainable stormwater management and reduction techniques within development (bioswales, rain gardens, etc.).
 - 3) Adopt a Green Streets initiative (see www.gogreenstreets.org for more information).

Neighborhoods

The Town will create and maintain neighborhoods and residential living opportunities that are safe, attractive and foster a sense of community. We will strive to promote walkability within our established neighborhoods and provide convenient access to shopping, schools, parks, and other community resources. Preservation of the existing residential character of our single-family neighborhoods will continue to be a priority for the Town. As new housing is built it should foster physical and social connectedness, while providing a wider variety of living options. Our Town is a dynamic community with a changing population; therefore, we will need to be proactive in ensuring our housing stock meets the needs of current and future resident lifestyles.



Objectives

- A:** Preserve housing quality and affordability.
- B:** Pursue sustainable residential development that provides a variety of living options to residents.
- C:** Consider ways to permit adaptability of existing housing stock to meet changing resident needs.
- D:** Enhance sidewalk connections between residential neighborhoods and destination/activity centers.

Action Items (by Objective)

- A**
 - 1) Review and revise the Town's property maintenance law to better meet current needs and expectations.
 - 2) Maximize the revitalization activities in neighborhoods by researching and securing funding sources (CDBG, Homestead Program, NYS Consolidated Funding Process, etc).
 - 3) Analyze the infrastructure, housing stock, and community needs of neighborhoods, particularly in the northwest of Town.
 - 4) Continue the Town's Affordable Housing Program in the Erie County Home Consortium.
 - 5) Work with the Buffalo Erie Niagara Land Improvement Corporation to address vacant housing issues throughout the Town.
- B**
 - 1) Ensure the demand for seniors to age-in-place can be met in terms of housing choice (affordable downsizing options, independent living, etc.).
 - 2) Conduct a housing market study to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the Town's owner and renter housing supply.
 - 3) Consider the desirability of permitting infill development of smaller homes in some neighborhoods to provide quality, affordable single-family housing options.
- C**
 - 1) Review and update the Town Zoning Code to accommodate multi-generational housing.
 - 2) Research and draft policy for short-term rental properties or lodging, such as Airbnb and other rental/extended-stay options.
- D**
 - 1) Utilize existing "paper streets" (unused rights-of-way) running through neighborhoods to create off-street bicycle and pedestrian connections (see lower right photo).
 - 2) Identify areas where neighborhood sidewalks terminate and establish new connections to nearby destinations and activity centers in order to complete the pedestrian network.



Example of the diversity in housing stock of West Seneca neighborhoods.



Paper Streets in neighborhoods north of Seneca Street (Erie County On-Map).

Economic Development & Reinvestment

Our Town will foster economic growth and competitiveness through the application of sound development and reinvestment strategies. Prosperity in our community will be driven by the contributions of our vibrant commercial, industrial, and agricultural industries in the form of jobs, tax base, and charitable contributions. All residents will share in our economic successes through raising our standard of living and reducing poverty. Our close proximity to the City of Buffalo and the presence of several major transportation corridors makes West Seneca a prime location for a variety of business operations. Facilitating the infill of existing industrial sites within the Town will remain a priority of the community. We will actively engage with our local and regional partners to grow existing operations, support new enterprises, and recruit investors into the Town.



Objectives

- A:** Encourage the redevelopment of underutilized, vacant commercial properties and areas that have suffered from disinvestment.
- B:** Support and encourage the continuation of businesses and operations within the agricultural industry.
- C:** Support and encourage the build-out of existing industrial parks and properties.
- D:** Diversify and increase the office, commercial, and retail offerings within activity centers.
- E:** Protect important rail corridors for continued freight service.
- F:** Encourage increased tourism development and expanded tourism services.
- G:** Encourage the incorporation of a mixed-use approach in areas where increased density is desirable.

Action Items (by Objective)

- A**
 - 1) Review and address areas in the Town Zoning Code that may restrict opportunities for redevelopment.
 - 2) Assist developers with grant applications and funding sources for the purchase and development of vacant or dilapidated buildings.
 - 3) Identify ways to assist incoming businesses and start-ups with retrofitting existing buildings for adaptive reuse.
- B**
 - 1) Review Town policies to ensure that they protect and support existing agriculture related operations (food manufacturing/processing, etc).
 - 2) Consider the feasibility of implementing an agricultural/farmland conservation program.
- C**
 - 1) Continue to market the North America Drive Industrial Park to potential operators.
 - 2) Promote the commercial revitalization of the Gardenville Industrial Park.
- D**
 - 1) Support small, local businesses looking to expand or locate in Town.
 - 2) Work with West Seneca Chamber of Commerce and the ECIDA to focus on business redevelopment by enhancing business assistance programs and outreach.
- E**
 - 1) Identify compatible land uses for areas of growth along freight corridors so that they can be maintained as industry support systems.
- F**
 - 1) Enhance tourism and community marketing efforts by working with local economic development resources, such as the Chamber of Commerce and ECIDA.
- G**
 - 1) Review and revise the Town Zoning Code to permit upper-floor residential units where desirable and appropriate.
 - 2) Incorporate mixed-use development permissions and regulations in the zoning code where appropriate.
 - 3) Review the current cluster development zoning regulations and determine when and where they may be best utilized.



Great Lakes Station Ice Cream



Vacant building along Route 400



View of industrial activity along Route 400

Transportation, Access & Connectivity

Our Town's transportation system will be an asset for the community that meets the needs of our residents and stakeholders as well as the traveling public. Maintaining and improving access and connectivity throughout the Town and greater Western New York region will remain a priority. We will develop a public realm that is more supportive of non-automotive users and promote healthy, active lifestyles. Transportation facilities will be designed and retrofitted to entice walking and biking between destinations by providing comfortable, attractive on- and off-street amenities. The Town will strive to accommodate all modes of travel wherever possible in a manner that improves user safety and level of service, while strengthening the overall character and identity of the community.



Objectives

- A:** Develop a transportation system that contributes to the overall character of the community and promotes a sense of place.
- B:** Work with local, regional, county, and state transportation authorities to identify and mitigate system deficiencies and maintain existing infrastructure.
- C:** Implement traffic-calming measures where desired and appropriate.
- D:** Provide efficient and strategic connections to industrial parks for heavier truck traffic.
- E:** Expand networks and connections for all modes of travel.
- F:** Support the expansion and improvement of transit opportunities.

The Vision, Policies, and Community Development Strategy contained in this Plan are consistent with and supportive of the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council's 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan. For more info, visit: www.gbrrtc.org/metropolitan-transportation-plan/

Action Items (by Objective)

- A**
 - 1) Develop a Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan that inventories and analyzes existing and potential vehicular, pedestrian, bicycle, and transit routes for improved connectivity and access.
 - 2) Develop a Streetscape Plan that outlines pedestrian and bicycle friendly street design standards for key roadways and connections (maximum lane width, turning radii, bike lane considerations, increased shoulders, grass buffers, etc).
 - 3) Consider adopting standards that require minimum accommodations for pedestrians, such as sidewalks, crosswalks, benches, shade trees, walking paths, and amenities.
- B**
 - 1) Review and revise the Zoning Code for improved access management provisions that focus on the major thoroughfares.
 - 2) Institute a snow clearing system for the sidewalks throughout the Town.
- C**
 - 1) Reduce curb cuts along major thoroughfares and identify opportunities for shared parking between compatible uses and sites.
 - 2) Consider traffic calming methods to improve the comfort of the Union Road corridor for all modes of travel.
 - 3) Consider traffic roundabouts and safety improvements at problem intersections such as Orchard Park at Reserve Road/Berg Road, and Clinton Street at Old French Road.
- D**
 - 1) Develop a direct access connection to North America Drive Industrial Park from Route 400.
- E**
 - 1) Identify and implement bikeways that connect the various destination and activity centers throughout the Town and connect to the regional trail system (Buffalo Greenway System).
 - 2) Adopt a Complete Streets policy (see page 73 and www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets for more information).
 - 3) Identify and improve areas where there are gaps in the pedestrian and bicycle networks.
 - 4) Incorporate on-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities in transportation improvements to major thoroughfares.
 - 5) Ensure transportation system improvements accommodate the unique needs of seniors and persons with disabilities (ADA accessible, well-maintained sidewalks, etc).
- F**
 - 1) Post the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) emergency snow routes where they can be readily accessed by residents and businesses.
 - 2) Identify and improve areas that serve as key transit nodes.

Public Health & Wellness

The physical, intellectual, and emotional health and wellbeing of all our residents will continue to be a priority for the Town. We will strive to maintain public services, social organizations, and educational institutions that support the quality of life of our children, adults, and senior citizens. Our police, fire, and emergency responder units are vital to maintaining the Town's public safety and peace of mind, while our utility, transportation, and natural systems directly support community health, wellness and the mitigation of natural disasters. Local school districts as well as community resources such as the public library, historical society, faith community, and service organizations sustain the intellectual wellbeing of our residents. Collectively these public services and civic groups are an invaluable asset to the community, and as such should have their current levels of service adjusted over time to meet changing resident demand.



Objectives

- A:** Provide recreational and educational programming and activities to residents of all ages.
- B:** Ensure public service operations and Town facilities have adequate space and resources to meet demand for operation.
- C:** Assess the future needs of senior citizens with regard to services and programming.
- D:** Support and further develop Town sponsored festivals, events, and functions.

Action Items (by Objective)

- A**
 - 1) Develop a community center that includes indoor recreational, professional, and educational accommodations, such as a gym, pool, meeting rooms, classrooms, etc. that can be used by residents of all ages.
 - 2) Continue to support and develop important cultural assets, such as the library, Charles E. Burchfield Nature and Art Center, and Historical Society Museum.
 - 3) Investigate interest and support for additional youth recreation opportunities and develop indoor recreation facility alternatives to school facilities (i.e. replacing the Kiwanis Youth Center).
- B**
 - 1) Market the Town Hall Campus as a multi-service complex to residents.
 - 2) Evaluate and implement the Municipal Campus Plan.
 - 3) Identify new location for Youth Center to better accommodate their increasing programming and demand.
- C**
 - 1) Increase awareness of and enrollment in the Special Needs Registry for individuals living alone through the Office of Emergency Preparedness, especially the elderly and those with medical needs.
 - 2) Inventory the current programming and recreational opportunities available to seniors within the community and address any deficiencies.
- D**
 - 1) Inventory the Town's programming and facilities available to residents and publish for reference.
 - 2) Promote the availability of parkland and amenities such as the Veteran's Park band shell for outdoor entertainment.



Photo: Senior Center



Photo: Public Library

Governmental Partnerships & Decision-making

It is essential to the success of our Town to employ efficient and effective practices for the delivery of governmental services and decision-making. Our Town values open communication between residents, stakeholders, and community leaders and will continue to foster an environment within the Town that provides such an opportunity. We will create and maintain local and regional partnerships that strengthen our economy, protect our natural environment, and enhance our quality of life. The Town realizes that its wellbeing is directly tied to that of our region—city, county and state; therefore, our participation and support of these partnerships is essential to our desire for a sustainable future.



Objectives

- A:** Improve and encourage the ability of residents, local businesses and organizations to communicate with and participate in governmental decision-making.
- B:** Strengthen relationships with surrounding municipalities and public agencies to pursue common goals.
- C:** Improve delivery and efficiency of governmental services.

Stakeholder (noun) [steyk-hohl-der]:

1. A person or group that affects or can be affected by the actions and conditions of the Town. Community stakeholders may include residents, property owners, neighborhood organizations, community interest groups, civic organizations, etc.

Action Items (by Objective)

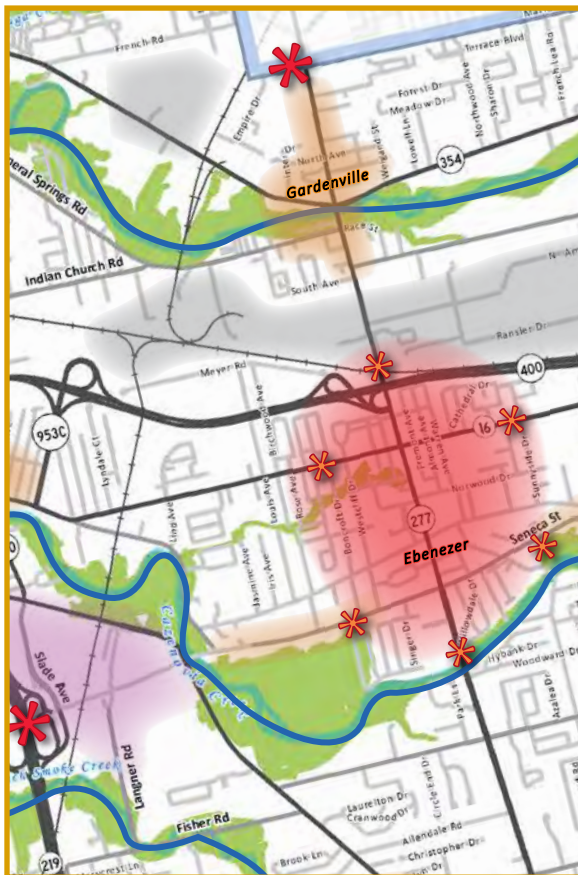
- A**
- 1) Enhance public information systems through the increased use of the Town's webpage, social media, and community calendar.
 - 2) Implement neighborhood meetings and events to help raise resident interest and identify needs.
 - 3) Increase and enhance use of new resident brochures.
 - 4) Work to establish relationships and improve communication with commercial and industrial property owners within the Town.
- B**
- 1) Continue to work with local, county, state, and federal agencies on flood control and natural disaster relief efforts.
 - 2) Work with local, county, and regional economic development agencies to coordinate programs and projects.
 - 3) Partner with adjacent municipalities to pursue joint grant opportunities to help fund local and regional projects.
 - 4) Work with the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning to discuss regional efforts that may be beneficial to West Seneca.
 - 5) Draft and adopt a Climate Change policy with regional partners as a proactive step in addressing potential negative impacts on the greater community.
 - 6) Continue to partner with the local school districts to ensure efficient provision of local educational and community opportunities.
- C**
- 1) Explore potential for staffed positions the Town is lacking, such as media and communications, planning, and economic development.
 - 2) Consider the feasibility of more shared services with surrounding communities.
 - 3) Draft and adopt purpose statements for the districts listed in the Zoning Code.
 - 4) Continue to research ways of lowering costs of priority services to residents (e.g. potential sewer district consolidations).
 - 5) Continue the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee to conduct a biannual review of the Plan.

The Town currently utilizes shared service agreements with a number of local municipalities and agencies in order to fulfill community needs efficiently. For example, the Town currently upholds a shared service agreement with the Town of Elma for the Citizen Emergency Response Team and Assessor's Office. The Town should continue to review the efficiency and adequacy of these agreements and consider the approval of new agreements as the needs of the West Seneca community change over the next decade.



Community Development Strategy

Our Town will welcome redevelopment and growth as we seek to transform the fabric of our community to ensure West Seneca is a vibrant place to live, work, and visit. The Community Development Strategy will serve as the Town's guide for future investment, recognizing our traditional neighborhoods, commercial corridors, greenways, activity centers, and thriving industrial sector as the building blocks for a sustainable future. Historic neighborhoods such as Ebenezer, Gardenville, Winchester, and Bellwood will each continue to serve as cultural micro-centers of our community, providing a unique balance of goods, services, housing, and employment along their commercial corridors that is essential to the Town's overall vitality. Development and reinvestment will be targeted to priority investment areas such as retail or residential activity centers and industrial parks. The Town will strive to redefine the character of these neighborhoods and activity centers to better promote the desired identity of West Seneca, highlighting the heart of the community in Ebenezer. Finally, the establishment of the Town's greenways will promote health and wellness while connecting residents and visitors to activity centers and our natural environment.



Objective:

Encourage and develop land use patterns that are consistent with the Community Development Strategy and supporting Map.

A complete CDS Map, statement of intent, and summary of recommendations has been included on pages 54 to 66.

Action Items

- 1) Streamline review processes and approvals for development that fits the character and intent of the Strategy.
- 2) Encourage and support the application of a mixed-use development approach in areas where the CDS indicates an increased density may be desirable.
- 3) Identify, brand, and enhance the primary gateways into the Town.
- 4) Establish Ebenezer and the area surrounding Town Hall as a stronger "Town Center."
- 5) Develop master plans for each of the neighborhood centers and their respective corridors.
- 6) Focus higher intensity commercial and industrial operations on the east and west sides of Union Road, north of NYS Route 400.
- 7) Recognize the Southgate Plaza's location as an anchor to the "Town Center" and physically link it with the business districts along Seneca Street and Union Road.
- 8) Develop a future plan for the Seneca Mall Property that incorporates mixed-use, low-impact commercial investment and redefines the site as a viable activity center.
- 9) Develop overlay zoning districts or design standards to help achieve the desired character within priority development areas.
- 10) Work with the State of New York, residents, private developers and others to plan the potential reuse of the vacated West Seneca Developmental Center property.
- 11) Utilize and enhance relationships and communication with state offices in Albany for local issues, such as eligibility for the Brownfield Program.
- 12) Maintain relationships with the NYSDOT for assistance with transportation improvements.

Community Development Strategy (CDS)

Why is the CDS important?

The purpose of articulating a Community Development Strategy (CDS) is to equip the Town with a future land use decision-making tool that will better inform public and private investments over the next decade. The CDS achieves this by providing a development framework that focuses on key sites, neighborhoods, and networks throughout West Seneca. This approach addresses the community's land use preferences, but also the desired character and connectivity of significant transportation corridors, greenways, blueways, and gateways.

The organization of land uses in a municipality defines the way its residents perceive their community, experience their environment, and interact with each other. Land use and transportation patterns establish a sense of place and contribute to the overall character of a community. For example, cities are comprised of dense blocks with a wide variety of uses in close proximity to each other. This development pattern typically serves to foster a high degree of social interaction and vitality in a compact, pedestrian-friendly environment. By comparison, land uses in rural and suburban towns are more widespread and fewer in number. The lower density development pattern found in towns typically results in a greater reliance on the automobile and more limited interaction among residents.

What is the intent?

Since its incorporation in 1851, the dominant land use pattern of the Town of West Seneca has changed from a mostly rural community to a network of self-sustaining, mixed-use neighborhoods, to the well-connected,

suburban setting it is today. The intent of the CDS is to provide direction for the preservation of the Town's existing natural features and historic neighborhoods, while identifying a redevelopment strategy that will help to redefine the character of West Seneca as a vibrant, connected community. The primary components of the CDS are listed below:

- » *A Town Center surrounding the intersection of Union Road and Main Street*
- » *Seven historic Neighborhood Commercial Corridors*
- » *A Mixed-Use Activity Center in the area bordered by the NYS Thruway, Ridge Road, and the Cazenovia Creek*
- » *A Residential Activity Center located on the former Developmental Center Site*
- » *Higher intensity Business Centers that include the North America Drive Industrial Park*
- » *Greenways, Creeks, and Preservation Areas along the Town's many waterways*
- » *Gateways that serve to welcome residents and visitors into the community and the Town Center*

~ One of the primary roles of a comprehensive plan is to inform future land use decisions for local governments. The tool for accomplishing this in West Seneca is the Community Development Strategy ~

Why do we need a Map?

Map 8 on the opposing page is a visual representation of the Community Development Strategy for the Town of West Seneca. The elements depicted on the map are intended to convey a generalized vision of the Town's development framework for the next decade. Unlike the Zoning Map shown on page 25, the CDS Map is not intended to represent clear regulatory boundaries. As a result, the exact size of each area may change as new information arises over time. However, the application of the Map should still remain consistent with the overall intent of this Plan and the Community Development Strategy. As redevelopment and reinvestment efforts arise, the Town should continue to evaluate the availability of existing infrastructure (transportation network, water supply, sewer service, etc.) to support the desired development pattern.

It is recommended that the Town revisit this strategy and map every three to five years to ensure it remains an accurate reflection of the Town's vision.

Note: The CDS and accompanying map do not negate any limitations on development due to environmental limitations such as wetlands, steep slopes, or floodplains.

Town Center

Many towns across Upstate New York have a single hamlet or village characterized by a walkable, mixed-use “Main Street” that serves as the social, civic, and economic heart of the community. However, West Seneca developed uniquely over time as a Town of many historic neighborhoods that each held their own cultural identity. In an effort to create a unified vision for the Town and establish a heart of the community, West Seneca’s 2006 Plan identified the development of a Town Center in Ebenezer as a key community initiative. This area is shaded in **red** on the CDS Map.

As part of this comprehensive plan update process, it was confirmed that Ebenezer was the prime location for such an effort due to its central location and existing presence of the Town’s municipal campus. As the literal epicenter of West Seneca, it is recommended as part of the Community Development Strategy to capitalize on the location of municipal services in Ebenezer and to continue its development as a social hub and gathering place for the community.

The municipal campus within Ebenezer is situated to the northwest of the Union Road and Main Street intersection. The campus is the current location of the Town Hall, Supervisor’s Office, Police Department, Public Library, and Veteran’s Park. Although the surrounding area is predominantly residential, a number of commercial and office uses line this segment of Union Road.

Union Road carries approximately 30,000 motor vehicles per day. In order to provide a safe, comfortable, and inviting environment along this automobile dominated corridor, improvements must be made to increase the walkability and the “sense of place” of the streetscape. Accomplishing this will require improvements

Existing Streetscape



Photo: Google, 2015

Potential Improvements



“The Union Road, Municipal complex, Southgate Plaza area will act as the downtown/central business district of the Town Center.”

~ 2006 Comprehensive Plan

to both the public right-of-way and the private development sites lining Union Road.

The top photo to the left shows the existing conditions of the Union Road streetscape adjacent to the Police Department (shown on the west or right side of the image). The existing cross section of this road consists of four travel lanes with a center turning lane. The east side of the road contains a large number of curb cuts (or driveways) of varying widths. Many of these driveways serve a single commercial establishment and provide access to parking lots that abut the public sidewalk. The cumulative impacts of these site development practices create a streetscape that is dominated by curb cuts and asphalt, resulting in an uncomfortable pedestrian environment in comparison to the generally uninterrupted expanse of sidewalk and tree lawn on the west side of Union Road.

To create a successful Town Center, this segment of Union Road from Center Road to Seneca Street will need to become a stronger destination. This destination should consist of a mix of retail, office, service, and public uses in close proximity to residential neighborhoods offering a variety of living options. Currently this area of the Town has the necessary commercial activity and community services near well-established single family neighborhoods to build upon. However, the character of Union Road needs to be significantly improved. The bottom photo to the left shows the highest rated streetscape image scored by the public in the Community Preference Survey (CPS) given as part of this planning process. What sets the lower image apart from the current conditions along Union Road is the combination of public and private realms that create an inviting environment for walking and biking but also for more social activities such as outdoor dining.

TO BE AVOIDED

TO BE ENCOURAGED

TO BE ENCOURAGED

Public Realm



1



2



3

Private Realm



4



5



6

In order to achieve the objective of developing a more walkable Town Center along this stretch of Union Road, the Town must make deliberate efforts to improve the character of both the public and private realms over time. The following recommendations include efforts that would provide traffic-calming effects as well as improve the aesthetics of the overall streetscape and strengthen the sense of place within the Town Center.

Specific action items related to the development of the Town Center concept can be found on pages 74-76 of the Priority Action Plan.

Public Realm

- » Provide frequent opportunities to cross Union Road on foot and ensure these crossings are highlighted to ensure better visibility of crosswalks.
- » Narrow crossing distances for pedestrians at intersections. (As shown in images 2 and 3)
- » Include tree lawns with street trees a maximum of 40 feet apart along both sides of Union Road. (As shown in image 3)
- » Reduce the number of lanes or lane widths if feasible by reducing the overall road width or with the placement of a landscaped median(s). (As shown in image 3)
- » Reduce the number of curb cuts and driveways along Union Road.

Private Realm

- » Require shared access and encourage shared parking agreements.
- » Require parking lots to be located to the rear or side of buildings. (As shown in images 5 and 6).
- » Require additional screening of parking lots that front Union Road.
- » Encourage the development of multi-story, visually interesting buildings.

Mixed-Use Activity Center

The area of the Town bordered by the NYS Thruway, Ridge Road, and the Cazenovia Creek (shaded in **purple** on the CDS Map) contains some of the most intense commercial activity in West Seneca. Some of the major anchor tenants include but are not limited to Tops, Kmart, ALDI, Wegman's, Big Lots, Home Depot, and Uncle Bob's Self Storage. Currently the predominant development pattern of the area consists of large, single-store retail stores with uninterrupted expanses of parking lots, which is shown in the aerial image from Google Earth provided in the next column. It is recommended that the Town foster a more mixed-use approach to future redevelopment in this area.

Currently the zoning of this area is predominantly the M-1 Manufacturing District, which permits all uses of the C-2, C-1, and R-60A Districts (except permanent residential structures). This includes all varieties of retail, office, agricultural, and industrial uses that are conducted in an enclosed building as well as adult uses by special permit.

Based on the preferences expressed by the public in the results of the Community Preference Survey (CPS) it is clear that there is a desire for commercial development patterns to reflect that of a lifestyle center. Lifestyle centers are shopping centers or districts that promote the mixing of retail, office, and residential uses in a traditional neighborhood development pattern, or walkable blocks, while incorporating well-designed public spaces. Building scale, layout, and design are all important aspects of achieving a successful lifestyle center as well as the inclusion of pedestrian accommodations both within and between development sites.



Photo: Google, 2015

Efforts to redevelop and redefine the existing Mixed-Use Activity Center in West Seneca should strive to achieve the following objectives:

- » Foster a vertical and horizontal mixing of land uses.
- » Provide a range of housing options within the area in close proximity to commercial establishments.
- » Promote smaller scale developments as opposed to large, monolithic buildings and sites.
- » Improve pedestrian connections and accommodations both on-street and within developments.

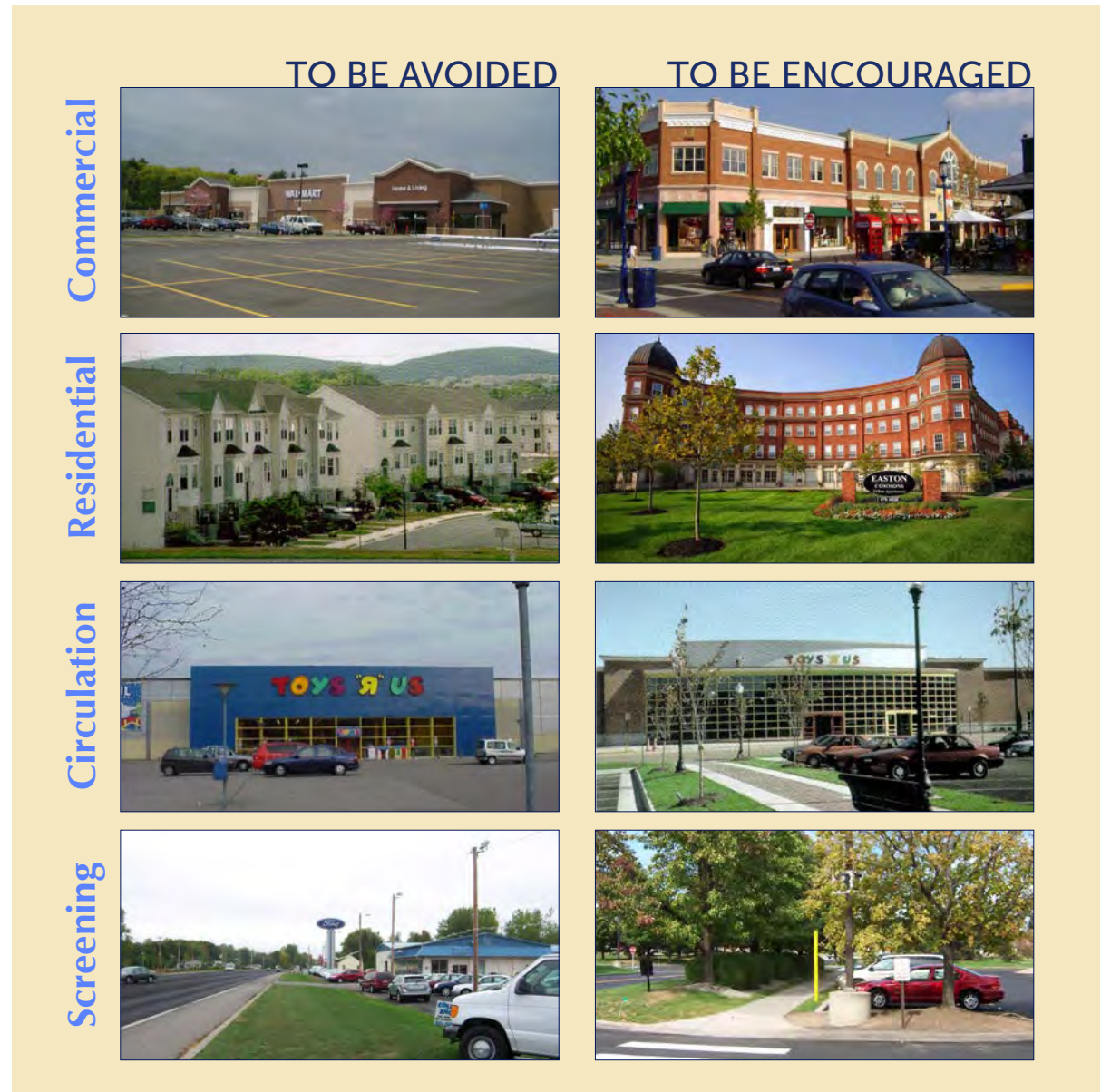
The redevelopment of the former Seneca Mall site is an opportunity that could serve as a catalytic project towards the redefinition of this area as a walkable lifestyle center.

The annual tax yield per acre of mixed-use, low-rise buildings is more than 11 times that of traditional single-story, single-use commercial developments. Dense, walkable development patterns have a much larger pay out for local governments than big-box retail.

~ New Urban News, Vol. 15 - No. 6 (2010)

In order to accommodate the preferred type and pattern of development in this area, it is recommended that the Town's Zoning Code be updated to reflect the following in the Mixed-Use Activity Center requirements:

- » Limit the height of buildings to no more than 4 or 5 stories (50 to 60ft);
- » Create a maximum setback requirement;
- » Require a minimum of 50 to 60% of the lot frontage to be occupied by building frontage, decorative architectural walls, or other site amenities such as public art;
- » Require parking lots to be located to the side of rear of a building;
- » Ensure parking lots are adequately landscaped (e.g. 10 ft planted islands per bay of 20 spaces) and screened from adjacent streets or walkways;
- » Require an internal circulation system that promotes pedestrian and vehicular connectivity to the street, public sidewalk network, between parcels, and through parking lots;
- » Permit mixed-use buildings that would provide retail space on the lower floors and residential or office above;
- » Consider building and site design techniques to help create smaller, walkable blocks within a development; and
- » Develop building and site design standards that promotes a visually interesting and human-scaled architecture and streetscape.



The Town should consider adding a Planned Unit Development (PUD) provision to its code. A PUD provision may assist the Town and potential developers in creating a Mixed-Use Activity Center that achieves the vision for the community and meets the objectives listed on the previous page. For more information on a PUD, please refer to page 61.

Residential Activity Center

The Residential Activity Center (Shown in **yellow** on the CDS map) contains approximately 500 acres and encompasses the former West Seneca Developmental Center, the NYS Children's Psychiatric Center, Leydecker Woods, Volunteer Fireman's Park, and Sunshine Park. The Developmental Center, which closed in 2011, comprises nearly 400 acres of the identified Residential Activity Center. Therefore, the reuse of this site is critical to the success of the area's redevelopment.

Currently the area is regulated by two zoning districts. The image to the right shows the zoning break down - yellow indicates R-60A and pink is R-90. Permitted uses within the R-90 District include single-family homes, churches, and private, nonprofit schools. Meanwhile R-60A permits the same uses plus two-family and multifamily residential, medical uses, hotels, and limited studio or office uses. The minimum lot size requirements within the majority of the Developmental Site (R-90) would allow for the development of approximately 1,000 single-family units at 3.5 units per acre. Although the preferred land use of this site is predominantly residential, the desire for some diversity in housing choice was identified as a key issue as part of public input received during this Plan's development.

In an effort to satisfy the Town's need for more diverse housing options and prevent the over-development of single-family housing, it is recommended that the redevelopment of this site include a mix of residential uses and densities with supporting limited commercial uses. It should be noted, that any redevelopment efforts will need to take into consideration the available water and sewer system capacity and any infrastructure improvements that will be required to service the proposed density of the site.

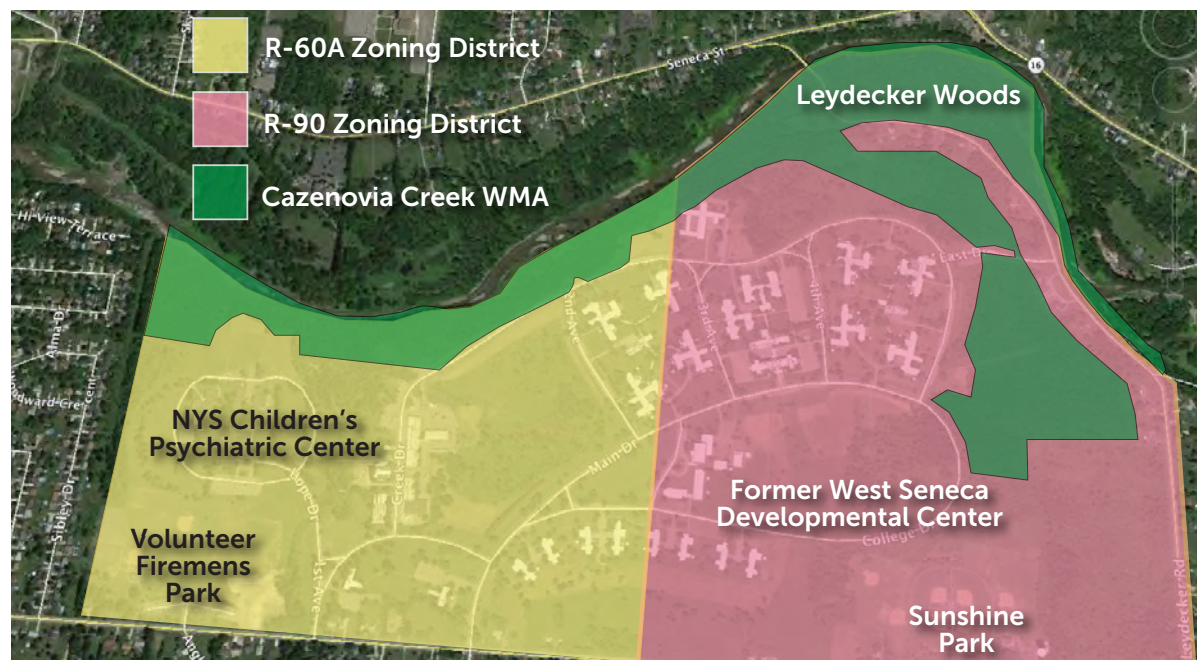


Photo: Google, 2015. Edited by: SPG

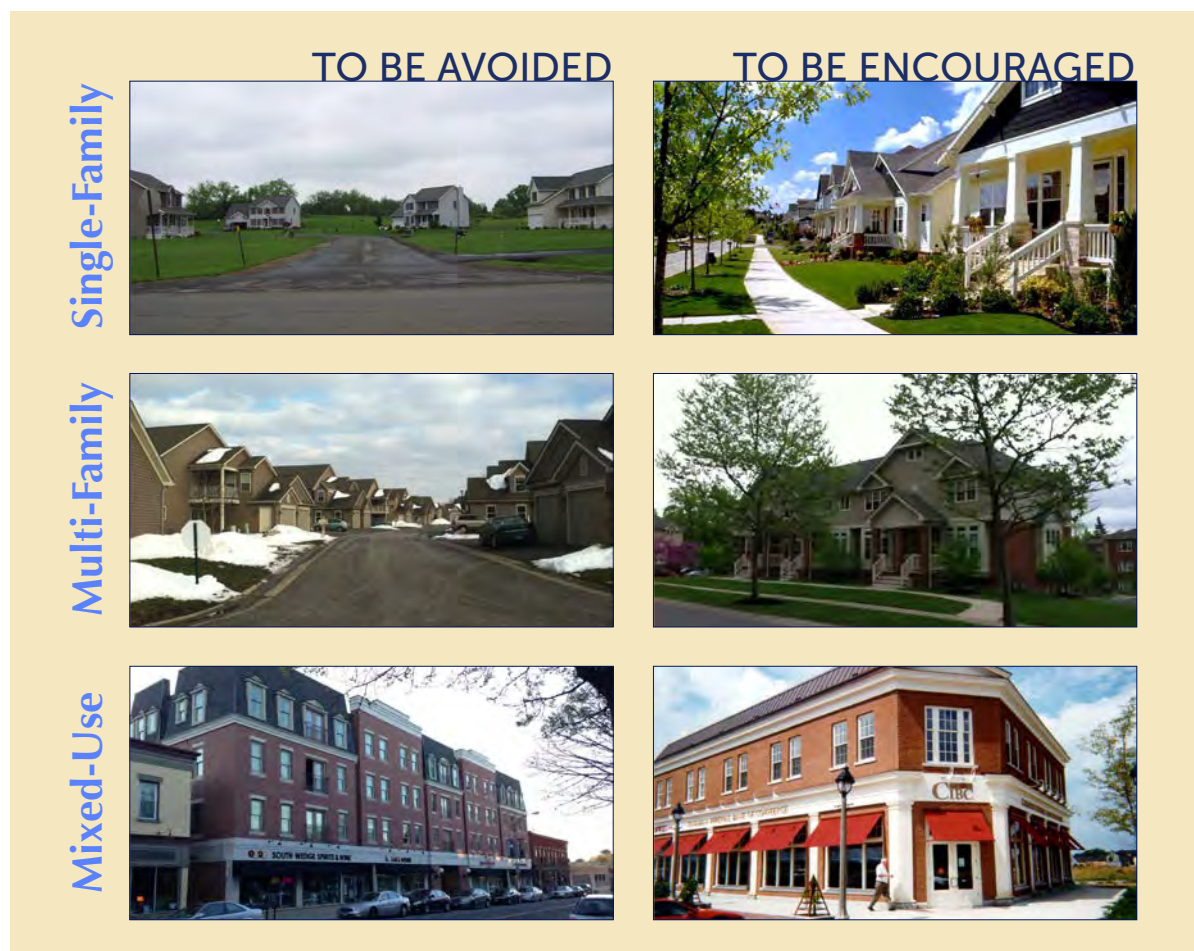
Rather than creating a suburban residential development pattern with meandering roads and cul-de-sacs, the residential activity center should be compatible with the adjacent existing neighborhoods' traditional development pattern. This can be accomplished by dividing the site into blocks to develop an interconnected street network with a high degree of walkability and connectivity.

It may be desirable to limit the portion of single-family units within this area in order to encourage the development of two-family and multi-family units. A rezoning will need to occur in order to permit higher density residential uses as well as the placement of limited commercial uses.

Limited commercial uses in the Residential Activity Center may include small-scale supporting retail or office type uses in the lower

floors of mixed-use buildings or as carefully placed, out parcels. By limiting the building square footage of these uses from 2,500 to 4,000 square feet, it is less likely to generate large traffic volumes like those associated with large commercial stores. In addition, residents benefit from having small cafes, shops, or even medical offices within walking distance of their homes.

The Cazenovia Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA), shown in green in the image above, borders the entire Leydecker Woods. This site contains over 100 acres of important forest land, currently owned and maintained by the NYSDEC. As the future of this site is considered, the Town should ensure development does not negatively impact the natural features located on the site. Preserving and maintaining public access to this Wildlife Management Area should remain a priority.



As the images above indicate, the Town should encourage the development of smaller-scale, medium-density, visually appealing units. The ideal mix of residential development types (single-family, two-family, and multi-family) may best be determined based on needs identified in a Town-wide Housing Study. It is recommended, however, that the Town utilize a PUD and clustering approach to ensure proper building size, design, and placement.

In order to achieve the desired development pattern of the Residential Activity Center, all future development should be consistent with the following objectives:

- » Establish neighborhoods that are consistent with the scale of adjacent neighborhoods and oriented towards pedestrian activity;
- » Accommodate a variety of housing types, neighborhood amenities, community resources, and public facilities;
- » Ensure residences and community resources are interwoven within the neighborhood and are in close proximity to each other;
- » Create a network of interconnecting streets and blocks that maintains respect for the natural landscape;
- » Ensure natural features and undisturbed areas are incorporated into the open space of the neighborhood;
- » Develop well-designed squares, plazas, greens, landscaped streets, preserves, and parks that are woven into the pattern of the neighborhood and dedicated to the social interaction, recreation, and visual enjoyment of the residents; and
- » Design the public and private realms using architecture, landscaping, and other elements that are human-scaled and pedestrian oriented.

A **Planned Unit Development (PUD)** is a large, integrated development adhering to a comprehensive plan and located on a single tract of land or on two or more tracts of land that may be separated only by a street or other right-of-way. Properly written and administered, PUD's can offer a degree of flexibility that allows creativity in land planning, site design, and the protection of environmentally sensitive lands not possible with conventional subdivision and land development practices. (See APA's Planning Advisory Service for more info: www.planning.org/pas)

Neighborhood Commercial Corridors

Shown in **orange** on the CDS Map, the Neighborhood Commercial Corridors (NCCs) identify areas within West Seneca where a concentration of commercial uses line a major thoroughfare, and are surrounded by residential development. The seven corridors identified have an established significance to the Town as each neighborhood developed its own character and identity over time. These corridors may not function as “town centers,” but they provide social activity centers for the residents living within the surrounding neighborhoods. The CDS seeks to reverse the impact that auto-centric development has had on each NCC and improve their overall walkability and aesthetics not only for the benefit of immediate residents, but also to enhance the overall character of the Town.

The Town should develop individual master plans for each of these areas to better inform decision-making based on each neighborhood center’s unique needs with regard to infrastructure investments, regulatory provisions, and economic development strategies.

Gardenville

As one of the original settlements within West Seneca, Gardenville holds a significant amount of history for the community. In the neighborhoods originating from Union Road, a traditional neighborhood development pattern can be observed. However, the main commercial strip along Union Road, from Seneca Creek Road to Gardenville Parkway West, is now dominated by curb cuts and parking lots.

Winchester

Located along the area surrounding Harlem Road from the Buffalo River to Indian Church



Most of the commercial development located along these corridors cater to vehicular access with many curb cuts and access drives as well as large expanses of parking. (Photo: Google, 2015)



The C-1 and C-2 Zoning Districts currently permit a suburban style of commercial development characterized by large building setbacks, parking in the front, and large building footprints (Photo: Google, 2015)

Road, Winchester is predominantly residential with a large suburban retail development anchoring the neighborhood to the north. Small commercial and institutional out-parcels can be found as you travel south along Harlem Road from Mineral Springs Road. Pedestrian connectivity along this corridor is inconsistent and does not provide comfortable access to the commercial development that currently exists.

Bellwood

Interstate 90 runs directly through the center of Bellwood, which stretches along Seneca Street from the Route 400 exit to the western Town line. Like the other NCCs, Bellwood’s traditional neighborhood development pattern is largely preserved by the residential homes surrounding

the corridor. By comparison, the commercial uses lining Seneca Street are generally characterized by large parking lots adjacent to the street and multiple curb cuts catering to motorists. The pedestrian environment suffers as a result.

East Seneca

There are a limited number of neighborhoods abutting the western side of Transit Road, but at a much lower density than other NCCs. However, Transit Road still functions as a major commercial corridor within West Seneca. As one of the more heavily trafficked roadways, the character of the East Seneca corridor is very auto-oriented both in site design and types of land uses. To the north of Schultz Road is predominantly commercial zoning, while to the south is manufacturing. The uses are located on larger lots than the traditional NCCs, and have vast expanses of parking lining the streetscape. Although a sidewalk is provided along both sides of Transit Road, the environment is auto dominated with multiple curb cuts, large building setbacks, and little to no barriers between pedestrian zones and vehicular zones.

Reserve

The intersection of Orchard Park Road and Reserve Road is the center of the Reserve Neighborhood. This intersection, like the other NCCs, is dominated by driveways and parking lots, has no crosswalks, and provides little to no pedestrian connections. The residential development pattern and density of Reserve is similar to that of Transit Road as it is comprised of newer developments with single access points off of Orchard Park Road. The neighborhoods are fitted with sidewalk connections, but the auto-oriented nature of the Orchard Park Road commercial corridor creates a very uninviting and unfriendly environment for pedestrians and bicyclists.

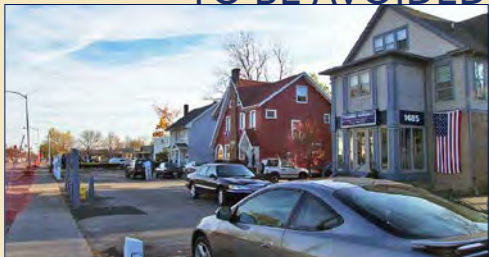
In order to begin to redefine the character of these corridors and promote appropriate commercial development patterns for the NCC, the Town will need to review and revise its local policies. The Town should work to adopt policies that acknowledge the desire for a more pedestrian-friendly and aesthetically pleasing environment while fostering the economic viability of these corridors. The following is a list of policy recommendations that the Town should address over the next decade:

- » Reduce off-street parking space requirements for uses to modern standards and encourage the use of shared parking where feasible;
- » Limit the number and spacing of curb cuts at each site and require shared access provisions between adjacent sites;
- » Require the location of parking lots to be to the rear or side of buildings as well as requiring adequate landscaping and screening;
- » Ensure building setbacks do not exceed desired limits by establishing a maximum building setback;
- » Encourage the development of human-scaled and visually interesting buildings that reflect the desired character of the area;
- » Develop streetscapes that calm vehicular traffic and comfortably accommodate pedestrian and bicycle activity; and
- » Ensure residential neighborhoods are well-connected to the corridors and their commercial activity nodes via sidewalks and/or bike lanes.

TO BE AVOIDED

TO BE ENCOURAGED

Parking Lot Screening



Commercial Architecture



Streetscape Elements



Seneca Street Corridors

The two segments of Seneca Street shaded on the CDS map, to the east and west of Union Road, have been included as part of the NCCs because of their combination of commercial uses along Seneca Street in close proximity to well-established residential neighborhoods.

The intent of identifying these NCCs is to identify areas where there is a desire to foster a more traditional, walkable mixed-use commercial development pattern along the corridor that supports the needs of the surrounding neighborhoods. New development and investment should respect the scale of the surrounding environment, while also contributing to the corridor's walkability and connectivity.

Higher Intensity Business & Industry



View of North America Drive site from Union Road at Route 400. (Photo: Google, 2015)



The business and industrial uses located in these areas are typically large operations that require a significant amount of land area.



The infill of the sites along North America Drive continues to be a priority of the Town's.

The Town of West Seneca is well-connected to major travel routes (Route 400, I-90, Route 219, etc.) that make it a prime location for higher intensity business and industrial uses that rely on more frequent truck traffic. The **gray** areas on the CDS indicates the designated areas where these more intense uses have been deemed appropriate.

As of the writing of this plan, the Town has a successful industrial park at North America Drive. There is a significant amount of available land for continued investment to the east and west of Union Road. These areas are already zoned for manufacturing uses, so the intent of the CDS is to ensure that future development in these areas is consistent with the overall vision and desired character of the Town.

Union Road bisects the Higher Intensity Business and Industrial Area, and provides a gateway to the community from Route 400. It is important that the Town consider limiting the intensity and appearance of uses located along this gateway to help provide a more

visually appealing entrance to West Seneca. More specifically, industrial uses with significant outdoor operations or storage needs may better be accommodated internally to the industrial park.

One way the Town may improve access to the North America Drive Industrial Park while reducing truck traffic impacts on Union Road would be to build an entrance/exit ramp directly from Route 400 into the site.

It is also recommended that the Industrial Park Overlay Review District be revised to include additional screening and buffering regulations for higher intensity uses adjacent to major viewsheds, gateways, commercial corridors, or residential neighborhoods.

For example, there are a number of residential homes located along Seneca Creek Road, to the north of the North America Drive site. In the past there has been conflict between the residents and new development occurring within the industrial park. As development continues, additional tree plantings, shrubbery, fencing, and berming, or some combination thereof, should be required to provide an increased natural barrier between the industrial sites and the existing neighborhoods.

Gateways

Gateways

The major gateways into the Town are identified by a **red star** on the CDS map. As part of its effort to redefine the identity of the West Seneca, special consideration should be given to these community arrival points. Gateways are important not only to improve the aesthetics of entering a community, but also to attract passersby and create a positive first impression with visitors.

One of the simplest ways to convey a unified and welcoming community identity at these gateways is to utilize coordinated, quality signage, abundant landscaping, and highlighting local history. The shape, size, color, and message of these signs should be consistent with the overall branding strategy of the Town, while conveying the local historical and character of the adjacent neighborhood or development. (A preference for wooden signs with raised or recessed lettering was expressed by the public as part of the Community Preference Survey).

The physical character of the area surrounding these gateways has a significant impact on how they are perceived by visitors and residents. As opportunities arise to redesign or renovate the public and private realm surrounding these entrance points, the Town should give special consideration to the following:

- » Appropriate scale and architectural character of buildings visible from the gateway point;
- » Additional landscaping, screening, or buffering needed to help minimize visual impacts of undesirable or incompatible uses;
- » Traffic calming measures that provide a more aesthetically pleasing and inviting

streetscape, such as planted medians, round-a-bouts, brick pavers, street trees, or banners.

- » Increased parking lot screening and buffering techniques that limits exposure while also contributing to the aesthetics of the streetwall and streetscape.

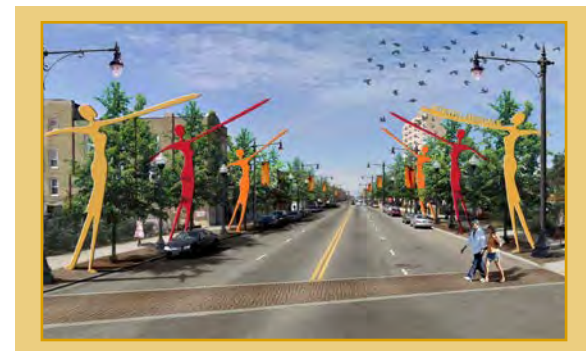
Town Center Gateways

The gateways to the Town Center are indicated by slightly smaller **orange stars** on the CDS map. These have been identified separately as they play an additional key role in helping better highlight and establish the significance of the Town Center. It should be noted that the placement of these gateways is approximate, as the actual transitional gateway point will depend on the implementation of the Town Center concept.

Although all signage and gateways features should be coordinated throughout West Seneca, there is an opportunity for special or additional treatments to these arrival points. The design and character of the Town Center gateways should celebrate West Seneca and foster a strong sense of community for the heart of the Town.



The Short North neighborhood in Columbus, Ohio, showcases lit steel arches as gateway features along its major thoroughfare, High Street. (Photo: Jenny Bachsmith, wordpress.com)



The North Lawndale neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois, hired a design firm to create several preliminary gateway concepts like the one above. (Photo: www.site-design.com)



The Town entrance from Interstate 270 for Westerville, Ohio, is highlighted by a monument sign, landscaping, and streetlights with banners. (Photo: Google, 2015)

Creeks & Greenways

The major creeks within the Town are highlighted in **dark blue** on the CDS Map. The portions of the areas highlighted in **green** indicate the greenways or priority preservation areas along the waterways. The Town's existing floodplains constitute a majority of the greenways highlighted in the map (See Map X: Water Features). The intent of including local creeks and their respective flood zones in the CDS is to illustrate the significant areas of land cover and connections that these creeks and greenways create within the Town.

Not only are these features important for their aesthetic and environmental value, but also for their potential to connect residents and visitors to the greenspace of the Town. These blueways and greenways provide opportunities for off-road east-west connections that could accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, and even kayakers across West Seneca.

Currently there are only a limited number of designated public access points to the creeks such as:

- » The trail and park located at the Charles E. Burchfield Art and Nature Center;
- » The Leydecker Woods area along Cazenovia Creek;
- » The DEC fishing access point at 880 Harlem Road.

The images at right show the existing conditions of Buffalo Creek (top) along Indian Church Road and the addition of a trail (bottom). The development of a comprehensive trail system along both Buffalo Creek and Cazenovia Creek, as well as between the previously mentioned public park areas would help to protect and enhance the greenways and blueways

Existing Buffalo Creek



Potential Trail Connection



Photo Simulation: CPL, 2015

throughout West Seneca, while also improving public access to them.

It is also recommended that the Town utilize floodplain protection policies above and beyond that of the DEC's existing regulations to limit future development along the creeks. The intent of this would be to protect the floodways and floodplains from further development pressures and changes, while also protecting the land for the implementation of a trail system as previously mentioned.

One way the Town can achieve this is by adopting a Floodplain Overlay (FPO) District. A sample purpose statement for a FPO District has been included below.

Floodplain Overlay (FPO) District

Certain areas of the Town are subject to periodic flooding that can result in loss of life, property damage, health and safety hazards, disruption of commercial and governmental services, extraordinary public expenditure for flood protection and relief and impairment of the tax base, all of which adversely affect the public health, safety and general welfare of the residents of this Town. These flood losses are caused by the cumulative effect of obstructions in the floodplain causing increases in flood heights and velocities and by the occupancy in flood hazard areas by uses that are inadequately elevated, floodproofed or otherwise protected from flood damage. It is the purpose of the FPO District to prevent public and private losses due to flood conditions in certain areas by provisions designed to:

1. *Protect the health, safety and welfare of the residents of the Town;*
2. *Minimize public expenditure for flood-control projects;*
3. *Minimize the need for relief and rescue efforts;*
4. *Minimize prolonged business interruptions;*
5. *Minimize damage to public facilities and utilities;*
6. *Help maintain a stable tax base by minimizing flood damage to private and commercial property; and*
7. *Identify those structures and properties that are located in areas of special flood hazard and maintain such information for public inspection.*



Priority Action Plan

The table on the following page is a list of priority action items as identified by the Steering Committee as part of this Comprehensive Plan Update process. These items include key ideas or catalytic projects that the Committee feels warrant immediate attention from the Town for implementation. That is not to say the other action items listed in this Plan are not important or significant to the future success of the Town. Rather that these action items have been highlighted as a top priority due to their potential for a greater overall positive impact to the community.

The table is organized by policy area and provides basic information on the priority action items for ease of reference. Each column includes:

- » **Policy:** The policy area under which the action item can be found in the Policy Framework.
- » **Action Item:** A description of the specified action item as part of the Priority Action Plan.
- » **Page:** The page number of the Plan where the action item can be found within the Policy Framework, as well as the objective that it contributes to for that policy area.
- » **Partner(s):** Any group, agency, organization, or board that the Town may desire to partner with in order to implement the specific action item.

In the following pages of this section (pages 68 - 75), the Plan seeks to provide additional information and guidance to the Town of West Seneca on the implementation of the Action Items listed as part of the Priority Action Plan.

Policy Area	Action Item	Page	Partner(s)
Community Identity & Livability	Improve the aesthetics of major north/south corridors (Union Road, Transit Road, Harlem Road, Orchard Park Road) with a streetscape plan that includes but is not limited to landscaping, façade, and right-of-way improvements.	39, D	NYSDOT, ECDOT, Developers, Property Owners
Neighborhoods	Maximize the revitalization activities in neighborhoods by researching and securing funding sources (CDBG, Homestead Program, NYS Consolidated Funding Process, etc).	43, A	Property Owners, Developers
Economic Development & Reinvestment	Support small, local businesses looking to expand or locate in Town.	45, D	Chamber
	Enhance tourism and community marketing efforts by working with local economic development resources.	45, F	Chamber, ECIDA
Transportation, Access & Connectivity	Develop a Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan that inventories and analyzes existing and potential pedestrian, bicycle, and transit routes for improved connectivity and access.	47, A	Consultant, NYSDOT, ECDOT, NFTA
	Develop a direct access connection to North America Drive Industrial Park from Route 400.	47, D	NYSDOT, Developers
	Consider adopting standards that require minimum accommodations for pedestrians, such as sidewalks, crosswalks, benches, shade trees, walking paths, and amenities.	47, A	Planning Board, Zoning Board
Public Health & Wellness	Develop a community center that includes recreational, professional, and educational accommodations, such as a gym, pool, meeting rooms, classrooms, etc.	49, A	Youth Center, Community Groups
	Market the Town Hall Campus as a multi-service complex to residents.	49, B	Chamber
Governmental Partnerships	Work with local, county, and regional economic development agencies to coordinate programs and projects.	51, B	Local, County, State Agencies
Community Development Strategy	Establish Ebenezer and the area surrounding Town Hall as a stronger "Town Center."	53, A	Community Groups
	Encourage and support the application of a mixed-use development approach in areas where the CDS indicates an increased density may be desirable.	53, A	Developers, Planning Board, Zoning Board

Community Identity & Livability

>> Improve the aesthetics of major north/south corridors (Union Road, Transit Road, Harlem Road, Orchard Park Road) with a streetscape plan that includes but is not limited to landscaping, façade, and right-of-way improvements.

Throughout the planning process it was made clear that the community desires to improve overall livability is through the creation of unique and aesthetically pleasing streetscapes. Many of the Town's major thoroughfares are lacking character and design elements that would attract and accommodate alternate modes of travel.

The top image to the right shows an existing cross section of Union Road, which is very auto-dominated. Although there are sidewalks and a crosswalk along this stretch, the overall streetscape environment is not attractive or comfortable for pedestrians or bicyclists.

In contrast, the photo simulation (lower right) shows examples of improvements that may be made to the public right-of-way to better accommodate both bicyclists as pedestrians. These improvements include the addition of designated bike lanes, wider sidewalks, and street trees, as well as on-street parking to act as a buffer from automobile traffic. Additionally, this photo simulation shows the impact of placing two-story infill development at the corner of Union Road and Legion Parkway. This approach to development brings the building to the street and creates a more inviting and intimate pedestrian-scaled environment along the corridor.

Union Road Looking North at Legion Parkway



Potential Union Road Improvements (CPL, 2015)

Neighborhoods

>> Maximize the revitalization activities in neighborhoods by researching and securing funding sources (CDBG, Homestead Program, NYS Consolidated Funding Process, etc.).

The NYS Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program is a great resource for the Town to continue to utilize for community reinvestment. Not only does this federal funding source have grants available for housing rehabilitation, home ownership, and public water/wastewater system assistance, but also for economic development projects that benefit low- to moderate-income persons and small businesses. The Town should consider ways in

which it can capitalize on the use of these funds for infrastructure improvements and economic investment in areas with high shares of low-income residents, such as the northwest corner of the Town adjacent to the City.

The Urban Homestead Program is a local initiative in the City of Buffalo that facilitates the purchase of vacant City-owned property for low costs. Applicants must meet certain financial requirements and commit to establishing residence on said property for a minimum of 36 months. The Town of West Seneca may benefit from implementing a similar program to incentivize home-ownership.

Economic Development & Reinvestment

>> Support small, local businesses looking to expand or locate in Town.

In an effort to garner more local business within West Seneca the Town should consider the development of small business incentives and incubator programs. Many communities have a desire to grow and attract local, small businesses, and utilize incentive programs that provide specific benefits to local entrepreneurs and start-ups.

Although there are incentives on federal, state, and countywide levels, in-town support can go a long way to helping small businesses and create a vibrant local economy. Not only will it keep money in town and create jobs, but it will give residents a local option to purchase goods and services. Current agencies and organizations that may assist in this effort include:

- » **West Seneca Town Staff**—Permit assistance, coordination of local incentives, real estate site selection, small business counseling services, access to public sector financing, introduction to appropriate town officials, bankers, and business people.
- » **Small Business Development Center**—provides start-ups and small businesses management and technical assistance.

The Town should also give consideration to the following policy and program opportunities to support small, local businesses within West Seneca:

- *Maintain an inventory of abandoned or vacant land, or vacant commercial buildings can help entrepreneurs find a place to do business.*
- *Improve access to information such as regulations and incentive programs, and help interpreting them.*
- *Improve permitting and regulatory processes to clear up confusion and help streamline small business creation and facilitate start-ups.*
- *Provide business classes or materials that will help newly established enterprises be successful.*
- *Compile an accessible list of local businesses and encourage collaboration between them.*
- *Create a venue (e.g. small business fair) where local businesses can be gathered and residents can see and talk to owners.*
- *Require public entities buy from local small businesses when possible.*
- *Sponsor a Local/Small Business Day.*

>> Enhance tourism and community marketing efforts by working with local economic development resources.

In addition to a governmental website many communities have websites and mobile apps devoted to local attractions, events, and businesses as an easy way to promote them. West Seneca could create online and mobile



Both the Android and Apple App stores host community and tourism based apps that residents and visitors can access and download, such as the Buffalo Niagara Visitor Guide above.

resources highlighting historical or natural places as well as local establishments that would draw people to visit. It would also be beneficial for the Town to tie into regional information sites and mobile apps such as www.visitbuffaloniagara.net, www.exploreny.net, www.greaterniagara.com, and the Buffalo Niagara Visitor Guide app.

Short-term solutions to improve visitorship to the Town of West Seneca may include:

- *Continue to promote community events regionally to help increase number of visitors.*
- *Develop in-town signage to help direct visitors to local business and entertainment options to increase their time spent in town.*

Transportation, Access & Connectivity

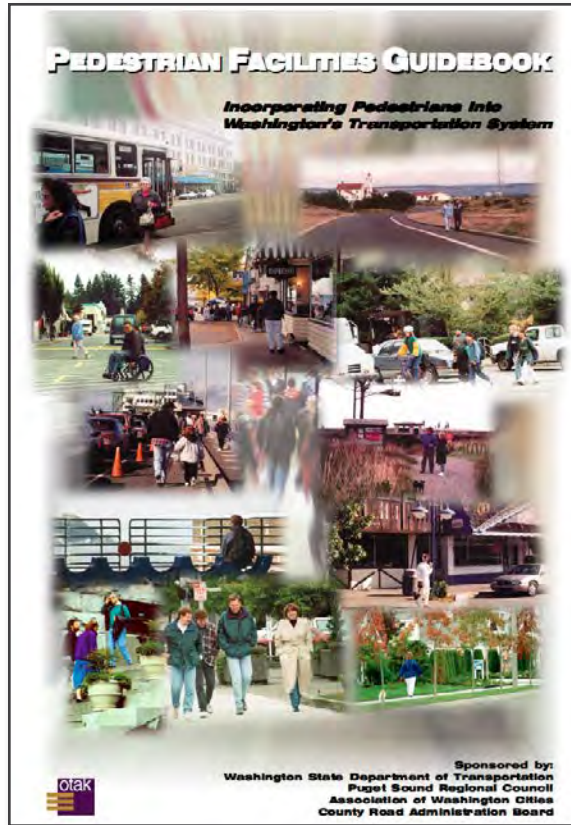
>> Develop a Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan that inventories and analyzes existing and potential pedestrian, bicycle, and transit routes for improved connectivity and access.

As previously stated, many of the Town's issues and opportunities raised in this planning process were closely related to the condition and lack of pedestrian and bicycle accommodations throughout the community. While this Plan includes goals for alternative forms of transportation (i.e. other than personal cars), a dedicated Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan would provide a more refined direction for the Town.

By completing a Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan the Town can adequately analyze traffic volumes, accidents, connections to regional trail systems, and address the community's needs with regards to bicycle and pedestrian facilities. A good Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan will consider both on- and off-street accommodations, including but not limited to sidewalk gaps, major bike routes, trail development, connections to transit, and the overall level of service of roadways for each anticipated class of user.

A typical Scope of Services for a Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan may include:

- » A Public Input Plan;
- » An Inventory of Existing Conditions;
- » A Needs and Opportunities Assessment;
- » The Development of Alternatives and Preferred Alternatives; and
- » A Project Recommendations Summary.



The Washington State Department of Transportation was one of the first agencies to implement a Pedestrian Facilities Guidebook (1997).

>> Develop a direct access connection to North America Drive Industrial Park from Route 400.

In general, obtaining access to a state highway for commercial property consists of three steps:

- 1) Initial proposal review (review access options and determine if a traffic impact study is needed);
- 2) Design review (comprehensive review and construction plans); and
- 3) A Final submission.

Because State Route 400 is a limited access highway and North America Drive is more than just a commercial property, a traffic impact study would be required. Additionally, considerations would need to be given to access over the Buffalo & Pittsburgh Railroad, Inc. rail-line and available lands for on and off ramps.

>> Consider adopting standards that require minimum accommodations for pedestrians, such as sidewalks, crosswalks, benches, shade trees, walking paths, and amenities.

The inclusion of minimum standards for pedestrian-oriented amenities in the development review process can help to minimize the burden on the Town to provide improvements, while also ensuring that the pedestrian network and environment is enhanced with new private investment in the community. There are many ways to implement such standards, such as revising the zoning code to include pedestrian-oriented development language or adopting a Complete Streets Policy and/or Pedestrian Facilities Guidebook.

Complete Streets



What are they?

Complete streets are those that are designed for all types of users, regardless of age or ability. They accommodate a balance of pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and public transportation users by addressing the needs of each within the public and private space available. There are no specific design guidelines for a complete street, rather the context of the community is used to dictate the type and nature of the facilities that will be provided.

Benefits

Complete streets *improve safety* for all modes of transportation by providing for each type of user when appropriate. They *promote an active lifestyle* by making it easier and attractive for users to walk or bike on streets. They *improve connectivity and accessibility* within communities. Finally, they also *foster strong communities* by bringing more people to the street, creating a safe, friendly environment for local residents and visitors.

Types of Facilities

- Sidewalks
- Bike lanes
- Bicycle boulevards
- Bus lanes
- Accessible and comfortable bus stops
- Median islands
- Frequent, safer crossing opportunities
- Curb extensions
- Narrower vehicular travel lanes
- Accessible pedestrian-activated signals
- Shared-use lanes



Madison, NJ (Source: New Jersey Bicycle and Pedestrian Resource Center)



East Boulevard Road, Charlotte, NC (Source: North Carolina DOT Complete Streets)

The adoption of a "Complete Streets Policy" is listed as an action item on page 47, under the Transportation, Access, and Connectivity Policy Area.

Creating a "complete street" does not require the addition of facilities for every type of user (bus, car, bike, and pedestrian). The intent of complete streets is to accommodate users in a way that balances the type of roadway facility and level of traffic, with the anticipated non-vehicular traffic and surrounding land uses. For example, the images above are both complete streets, but each utilize different facilities due to the size and intended users of each roadway. The left-hand image is a neighborhood street that added sidewalks and bike lanes to improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety, while the right-hand image is a more heavily utilized collector street turned boulevard with designated space for cars, buses, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

Visit: www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets for more information!

Public Health & Wellness

>> *Develop a community center that includes recreational, professional, and educational accommodations, such as a gym, pool, meeting rooms, classrooms, etc.*

>> *Market the Town Hall Campus as a multi-service complex to residents.*

The Town's Community Center Building (Kiwanis Building) is in dire disrepair. Age and type of original construction have taken the building beyond the Town's ability to maintain it structurally. The Town is currently considering replacement options for the facility. As the Town searches for a replacement of the Community Center, the Library has become outdated by today's standards and is at capacity. The building is in need of modernization and expansion.

The opportunity to combine the two facilities (community center and library) under one roof would allow the Town to consolidate these resources, while maintaining high levels of service for each. The facilities could form a new civic center at the Town Campus and allow the public an opportunity to access a facility for youth activities, business functions, senior services and perhaps even a casual cup of coffee. A new library and community center would present the Town the opportunity to ensure its built infrastructure engages Union Road and give the campus its first walk up facility, setting the stage for future investment along Union Road.



Proposed Library Redesign (CPL, 2015)

Library Design Considerations

The new library and community center would be comprised of two distinct architectural vocabularies, separated by a wide central corridor bisecting the entire complex, and connecting the old and new facility at the center of the corridor a stone fireplace and public seating ties the entire complex together, promoting community interaction and providing a notable architectural feature and unique identity to the building library.

The library could invoke the clean horizontal lines and rhythmic interplay of solid masonry columns and natural light reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright's residential work, and creating a balance with the natural elements and prairie style Town Hall. Exposed glue-lam beams would carry the roof above, complimenting the window light and masonry textures of the north wall, defining the edge of the open library plan and allowing for maximum flexibility.

Governmental Partnerships

>> *Work with local, county, and regional economic development agencies to coordinate programs and projects.*

There are a number of organizations and agencies currently working to improve economic development efforts in Erie County and throughout New York State. A listing of local resources that the Town may seek to continue and improve communication and coordination with can be found on the City of Buffalo Economic Development webpage. This includes, but is not limited to the following groups:

- » Erie County Industrial Development Agency—promote and assist private sector industry in the region.
- » Empire State Development Corporation—provides assistance to businesses to encourage economic investment and help solve challenging problems, generate opportunities for growth, and develop short- and long-term goals.

Community Development Strategy

>> *Establish Ebenezer and the area surrounding Town Hall as a stronger "Town Center."*

At the physical core of West Seneca is a mix of residential, commercial and municipal facilities clustered around a two-mile stretch of Union Road. In previous planning efforts this area has been identified as a desirable area to foster a "Town Center" environment. In recent years, the Town has taken steps to invest in its central municipal campus; however, there have been a number of barriers to the full-fledged realization of this area as a walkable, village-esque Town Center.

Union Road At Town Hall Campus



Potential Union Road Improvements (CPL, 2015)

For starters, Union Road is a NYS roadway and has in the past been the subject of several manipulations aimed at moving higher volumes of vehicles through the corridor at faster speeds. The resulting manifestation of asphalt is a 60-foot curb-to-curb cross section with two drive lanes in each direction and a center turning lane. The right-of-way is not hospitable to pedestrians and is extremely difficult to cross on foot. Additionally, the development pattern along this corridor promotes an auto-dependent environment with single-story buildings set back from the street, parking lots with frontage along the roadway, and minimal accommodations for pedestrians on and off site.

The cross sections above show images of the existing conditions along Union Road (top) and potential right-of-way improvements for the corridor, specifically in the area adjacent to the municipal campus. These improvements would reduce Union Road to two lanes and a center turn lane, with on-street parking and designated bicycle facilities. However, the exact nature of the reconfiguration would need to be determined after a thorough assessment of traffic conditions in coordination with NYSDOT.

The opportunity to rethink the zoning along Union Road in the Town Center provides the Town with the ability to create a pedestrian-

scaled and multi-modal neighborhood. The Town should seek to define its public infrastructure investment and relative zoning as follows:

- *Locate a transit stop(s) in this center.*
- *Provide comfortable travel routes for residents to travel by foot within a five-minute walk of the center, roughly 0.25 miles.*
- *Provide a variety of dwelling types so that people from all ages, lifestyles, and incomes may find places to live.*
- *Provide a variety of shops and offices to supply the weekly needs of a household.*
- *Permit small ancillary buildings or garage apartments within the backyard of each house to be used as a rental unit or place to work in certain areas (for example, an office or craft workshop).*
- *Implement complete streets initiatives within the Town Center neighborhood to form a connected circulation network.*
- *Continue to emphasize shade tree plantings along connecting roads in addition to Union Road.*
- *Revise the zoning code to require buildings in the Town Center be placed close to the street, creating a well-defined "outdoor room."*
- *Revise the zoning code to limit the exposure of parking lots along the street.*

The Town should work with NYSDOT to rethink and adapt the Union Road corridor to pedestrian-scale and to create better opportunities for pedestrian access both along and across the road. The corridor should include street trees, pedestrian crossing signals, pedestrian-scaled street lighting, a decrease in number and width of travel lanes, and the inclusion of bike lanes and on-street parking. Traffic-calming measures such as roundabouts at intersections, mid-block crossings, and enhanced crosswalks should be studied to make the physical changes to the street design possible.

>> *Encourage and support the application of a mixed-use development approach in areas where the Community Development Strategy indicates an increased density may be desirable.*

The application of mixed-use zoning practices in areas of the Town where there is a desire to foster a development pattern with increased density and activity would have a number of financial benefits to the community. Public Interest Projects (PIP), a for-profit development company, has conducted a number of studies comparing the tax yield of 15 counties across the US by development style, such as single-story big-box commercial, and multi-story mixed-use.

The study's findings indicated that on average, multi-story, mixed-use developments have a much higher return on their tax revenue when considered per acre, as opposed to the traditional calculation of tax yield per lot or per unit. Out of all 15 counties it was reported that two-story mixed-use developments earned over 6.5 times the tax revenue per acre than that of a Walmart or strip-mall, while a three-story mixed-use development earned 13 times the tax revenue of the same per acre.

The studies also found that permitting the development of multi-story, mixed-use buildings may also help to repay their associated infrastructure costs more quickly (e.g. water, sewer, roads, etc.). The study found that when you calculate the infrastructure costs against the tax revenues for a typical suburban-style multi-family housing development compared to a mixed-use building (calculated for its residential portions only) the mixed-use development paid back its infrastructure costs 13 times faster (3 years versus 42).

For the Town of West Seneca permitting two- to three-story mixed-use developments in the areas identified as part of the Community Development Strategy will help to increase the tax revenue and fiscal benefit the Town appreciates by transitioning the land from sprawling single-story, single-use development patterns.

For more information on the Public Interest Projects (PIP) Study showing the benefits of multi-story mixed-use versus sprawling single-use developments read:

"The Smart Math of Mixed Use Development" by Joseph Minicozzi, AICP - Planetizen (2012)

And, New Urban News, Vol. 15 - No. 6 (2010)

End of Priority Action Plan.





Buffalo Creek
Photo: Krzysztoślaw, panoramio.com

Conclusion

As The Town of West Seneca seeks to become more prosperous over the next decade, this Comprehensive Plan will serve to articulate the community's overall vision and objectives, while ensuring that future decisions are consistent with those outlined in this Plan.

This document is not intended to foreclose future decision-making, but rather serve as a guidance document for both current and future elected officials, appointed committees, and other community leaders as they continue to shape the Town over the next decade. The Comprehensive Plan does not simply prescribe change for change's sake, but seeks to make policy and program recommendations that build on assets and enrich quality of life in the Town for all.

Because of the future-oriented nature of this Plan, it should be viewed as a "living document" that requires continual updates to ensure that it accurately addresses the changing environment of the Town. As markets vary and continue to develop, this Plan should be revisited and revised to reflect the ever-evolving opinions, desires, and needs of our community.

A natural next step for the Town upon completion and adoption of this Comprehensive Plan Update would be to conduct a complete review and revision of the Town Zoning Code, originally drafted in 1963, to ensure consistency with modern development practices and the regulatory recommendations that have surfaced as part of this planning process and that of the 2006 Comprehensive Plan.

For each budget year, the Town will refer to the Policy Framework of the Plan as well as the Action Items to determine which new laws, regulations, capital projects, or programs may be beneficial to undertake in the coming year.

While the Town will endeavor to undertake some of the action items as part of its governmental practice, the implementation of this Comprehensive Plan was designed to occur at many levels. In order for the Town to be successful, we must have the cooperation of the private sector, community groups, school districts, and neighboring communities to achieve many of our common policies.

Though all of the objectives contained within this Plan are considered important to the community, they cannot be accomplished simultaneously. Rather, the implementation of these objectives and action items will be staged over a period of years, dependent upon their respective time and monetary requirements.

With the formal adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, it is the Town's hope that the community will collectively take the next step towards embracing and implementing this Plan for the betterment of all residents and community stakeholders for years to come.

"As for the future, your task is not to foresee it, but to enable it."

- Antoine de Saint Exupery