

# Chapter 5: Land Use

***Sustainable** land use is environmental and community spatial planning through the intentional design and organization of space through the use of well-crafted land use tools and policies.*

Over time, implementation of good land use policy can shape a quality of life environment that people and investors are drawn to. The way we use our land, the patterns of development, transportation networks, and open space we lay out across the Central New York rural landscape and urban areas shapes our economies, our environment, and our health.

Because New York State is a “Home Rule” state, authority over land use decision-making resides largely with local municipal boards, within local boundaries; however, local land use decisions have consequences across municipal boundaries, and can have significant impacts to shared resources like lakes, rivers, streams, air quality, and view sheds. Many of the region’s most valued resources lie across several municipal jurisdictions. Protecting these shared resources from development decisions and patterns is often impossible where governing authorities are not working together in the effort. Because land use regulatory decisions determine how much land surface is rendered impermeable to rainfall and stormwater runoff, they directly impact surface and groundwater quality as well as water reserves and downstream flooding. Land development location, type, and densities determine where wastewater discharges are concentrated, the availability and quality of agricultural products, where traffic congestion or other traffic issues occur, and whether people have opportunities for

transportation, employment, housing, public space, walking, or biking safely in their communities.

The typical regulatory criteria for shaping development in our communities, e.g. the dimensions and number of required parking spaces for a commercial business, types of allowable uses, or codes addressing renewable energy systems, result in decisions that shape our communities. The criteria set for land use decisions are not inconsequential. The smallest such decisions based on local municipal regulation, applied regionally, become big picture acts of design that accumulate and shape environments that are either enjoyed or suffered by individuals and communities. Thoughtful, well-crafted land use tools and controls have enormous potential to both transform our communities and to preserve those things most valued about them. For these reasons, effective implementation of sustainable land use practices requires a broader regional or multi-municipal approach that addresses limitations of home rule governance, especially where shared resources are concerned.

Sustainability land use means implementing effective planning and development policies focused on maintaining the region’s natural and cultural capital for future generations even as they are used and enjoyed today. It means making choices in what, where and how land is developed based on protecting

biodiversity, human health, cultural resources, as well as air, water and soil quality at standards sufficient to sustain human life and well-being for ourselves and for future generations. The kind of development that ensures a healthy cycle of use and replenishment of resources requires land use efficiencies that arise from compact development patterns, public transport, and energy conservation. These efficiencies are inherent in re-use of existing buildings and sites, infill development in underperforming areas, and mixed uses. Local planning authorities can gain access to new guidelines and criteria that take aim at shaping sustainable land use and community development if inter-agency working partnerships are established and tasked with implementing a more broadly effective planning effort to ensure that local regulatory authorities have the tools needed to implement sustainable land use patterns. In this chapter, an effort is made to review the general land use history of the Central New York Region, and through inventory and analysis of its existing conditions, land use characterization, and previous studies, make conclusions with goals, strategies, and project recommendations for sustainable land use initiatives.

Central New York includes the five counties of Onondaga, Cayuga, Cortland, Oswego and Madison, measures 4,146 square miles (2,653,440 acres) of land and waters from the southwest shore of Lake Ontario to the Chenango River in eastern Madison County, and from the southwest shore of Oneida Lake to the eastern shore of Cayuga Lake south to the Town of Marathon in Cortland County. The region, rich in surface water bodies in corridors between rolling glacial moraine and drumlin land forms, is unique ecologically due to its glacial geology, topography, climate, and cultural history.

The region today is interlinked by an extensive transportation network of federal, state, county, and local roadways. With the City of Syracuse at its core, located at the prime north-south crossroads of the eastern U.S., the region enjoys a high concentration of world-class medical facilities, and institutions of higher education in its population centers. Urban and rural settlements across the region have retained varying degrees of their historic centers. Formerly, the region was characterized by a diverse collection of small scale, resource-driven industrial and agricultural



Historic map of the Erie Canal

settlements. Today the region's smaller settlements are characterized largely by farming and residential uses.

Prior to the earliest colonial settlement in the region and New York State land purchases of 1795 and 1807, Central New York was the home and seasonal hunting and fishing grounds of the Haudenosaunee, Native Americans of the Iroquois Confederacy. The earliest colonial settlers to the region established water-powered saw mills across the region to process harvested lumber with the abundant perennial stream flow as forests were cleared and productive farmlands established, and by the mid-nineteenth century, grain mills producing flour, and creameries producing milk and butter, along with cheese, meat, wool and other local products were being shipped from settlements in the region to markets as distant as New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia and Boston.

The New York State Barge Canal (completed in 1825) and an extensive system of railroads (beginning in 1826) laced across the region providing direct connections between the smallest rural settlements of Central New York to bustling metropolitan centers of the northeast U.S. Ingenuity, available immigrant labor and talent in traditional trades, and the wealth of natural resources in the region brought an influx of commerce and land use development and the growth of bustling communities, productive farmlands, and commercial ventures.

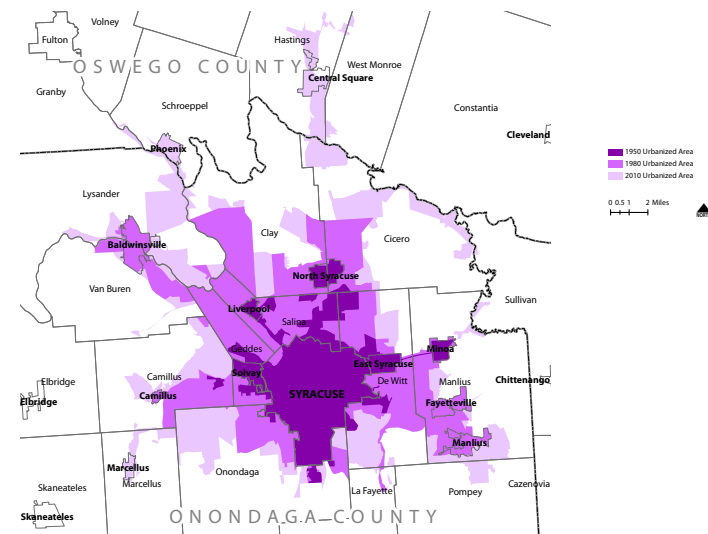
By the early-twentieth century, Central New York, with the City of Syracuse its' center had become a collection of productive, small- to mid-sized commerce- and industry-driven centers located along its' major waterways. Surrounded by vast acres of farmland, mainly producing field crops and dairy cows, communities in the region were growing, but remained centered on their churches, schools, post offices and libraries. The most robust employment centers in the region historically were Syracuse, Auburn, Cortland, Oneida, Oswego, and Fulton. Rural centers located along primary travel routes, active canalways and railways including Pulaski, Skaneateles, Cazenovia, Phoenix, Elbridge, Canastota, Moravia, Homer, Baldwinsville, Springport, Aurora, and King Ferry also experienced impressive development through the early twentieth century.

With the rise of the automobile and the decline of the extensive railroad system and use of the barge canal system in the region, rural centers that once hosted diverse and thriving businesses lost their transit-connected competitive advantage, and many soon returned to less vibrant and less populated agricultural centers. The realities of urban residential life, congested and old, with limited space and heavy industrial environmental

conditions combined with the long-term impacts of 1930's federal policy and disinvestment in the region's urban centers. Combined postwar population growth and 1950's federal highway policy spurred continued movement of urban populations toward developing suburban areas with now easy commuting to outlying areas and with attractive larger lots, scenic views, and newer schools. To meet the demands of this new suburban development, infrastructure, commuter roadways and schools district services expanded across the region.

The 2010 census indicated a reversal in previous population loss trends in Onondaga County with 2% growth in population since 2000. The Downtown and Lakefront neighborhoods within the city of Syracuse experienced significant growth over the past decade. These most recent figures may indicate a trend that mimics national trends in the housing market. Young professionals, empty nesters (e.g. retiring baby boomers with no more children at home), and other households without children are beginning to repopulate urban centers throughout the U.S. In fact, market-rate rental properties within Downtown Syracuse are at 99% occupancy with nearly 1,350 units, and an additional 570 in the planning stages or under construction. It is important to note that forty percent of

MAP 1—Change in Urbanized Area, 1950-2010



Source: CNY RPDB



downtown residents are associated through employment with University Hill.

Since 2000, the City of Oswego has also experienced an increased interest in loft-style development within the central city. A housing market analysis conducted by the city in 2011 indicated a 99% occupancy rate within all market rate housing units in the city. Business Improvement Districts and Downtown Partnerships in the Cities of Cortland and Auburn are also working to ignite a healthy mix of downtown development.

Over the past sixty years, many initiatives have contributed important successes in regional land use and development. Conservation efforts to preserve valued cultural and natural resources across the region have been ongoing between State agencies, municipalities, land trusts and private organizations. Land acquired by New York State and protected as state forests, along with municipal and land trust conservation easements that protect critical habitat and recreational parks and trails now totals nearly 250,000 acres (390 square miles or 11%) of land in the region. The Central and Finger Lakes NYS Parks regions include twelve State Parks

and Historic Sites in Central New York in addition to the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, the North Country National Scenic Trail, the Finger Lakes Trail, and many County Parks and Land Trust preserves that offer myriad hiking, camping, picnicking, boating, fishing, bird watching, swimming and site seeing experiences in the region. There are 2,950 miles of recreational trails in Central New York, however, nearly 75% (2,193 miles) of these are snowmobile trails.

Regarding urban revitalization numerous projects have been undertaken in communities across Central New York. Perhaps the most noteworthy has been the redevelopment of the Syracuse lakefront with the development of Destiny USA, a major commercial shopping center that was constructed on a former brownfield in the City of Syracuse. Other catalytic projects which have been developed in the region's urban center include construction of the Carrier Dome, revitalization of the CNY Regional Market, the historically-sensitive redevelopment of Armory Square, and the downtown Civic Center. More recent development efforts including the OnCenter, Near West Side Initiative, the Connective Corridor linking University Hill with downtown via a transit, bike and pedestrian corridor, SUNY Upstate Medical University housing, many



Destiny USA

new downtown residential and commercial developments, Phase One of the Onondaga Creekwalk (2.6 miles) from Onondaga Lakefront to Armory Square, and the planned Inner Harbor Development. Syracuse has added 1.5 million square feet of developed space on University Hill, the Center of Excellence, CNY Biotechnology Center, the new WCNY headquarters, St. Joseph's Hospital Developments, and the CENTRO Downtown Transit Hub.

On-going efforts in community development and downtown revitalization across the region include the North Jefferson Street Revitalization project in the historic village of Pulaski, where a c.1938 Theater is being rehabilitated to become a regionally significant 400 seat performance and event space (the Pulaski Performing Arts Center) along the Salmon River Greenway Trail. The City of Oswego is working to revitalize the downtown and waterfront areas of the region's own international port of call on the St. Lawrence Seaway. West **Linear Park** in Oswego provides shore access to the west side of the Oswego River with wheelchair accessibility. Riverwalk in Brewerton is a 215 acre residential development site that includes 100 acres of forested walking trail preserve owned and stewarded by the Central New York Land Trust with access to the Oneida River and 5 acres of river-side land owned by the State of New York.

The downtown Auburn Arts District will be the home of the Finger Lakes Musical Theatre Festival and a 15,300-squarefoot art, education and performance center, and a 10,000-square-foot scenic design and set production facility on the site of a former downtown Auburn building. The Schwartz Family Arts Education and Performance Center in Auburn is one of four venues for the Finger Lakes Musical Theatre Festival, and will be the home of a new 384-seat arts education and performance Center to be utilized by Cayuga Community College during the academic year as additional classroom and workshop space and by the festival during its summer season. The City of Cortland has recently launched a Gateway Development Project.

Canal Landing Park in the Village of Fayetteville consists of 18 acres, will include a parking area for visitors, along with bathroom facilities, a pavilion, recreation trails and a playground. The Town of Dewitt has implemented several 'green initiatives' in land use including the planting of 85 trees along Town's Right-Of-Way, and installation of a rain gardens and rain barrels at Ryder Park Pavillion and the Town Hall Building.



Fireworks at Oswego Harbor



## EXISTING CONDITIONS- INVENTORY

### Land Uses

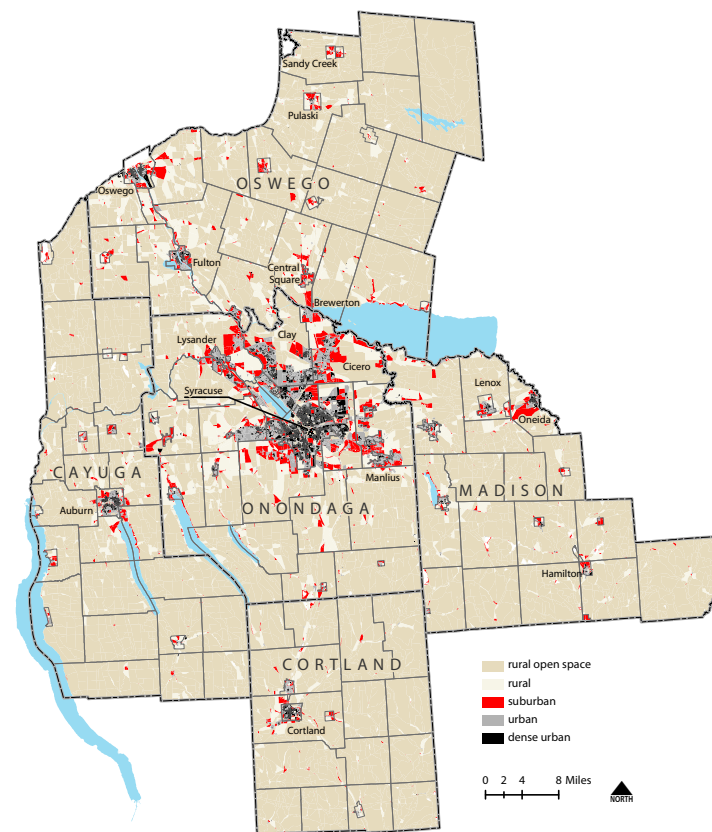
Population of the region in the year 1900 was 373,970. In seventy years, by 1970, the population in the region had more than doubled at 759,840. Twenty years later, in 1990, the region reached its peak decennial population of the twentieth century at 791,140. During the next 10 years, the population declined, but by 2010, the total population of the region was up to a new high at 791,939.

Central New York today is characterized by land uses ranging from farm fields, lakes and forested lands to sparsely settled rural areas, compact rural hamlets and villages, suburban residential developments, industrial nodes, commercial strips, and dense urban clusters. Land use in the region is comprised of 31% residential use, 29% agricultural use, 21% vacant land (land that is not classified in any other category), 11% wild, forested, conservation lands and public parks, 1.5% commercial services, 1.5% public services, 1.5% community services, 1% recreation and entertainment, and .7% industrial use.

Central New York is noted for its strength in “centeredness” of settlement areas where concentrations of people live and work. Compact hamlet and village form, and the surrounding rural-agrarian spatial character throughout much of the region has been consistently identified by residents as one of the most highly-valued features of their communities. In the above map, the transition of rural open space to a less sustainable pattern of development (indicated in red) has resulted in rising infrastructure costs to municipalities and taxpayers, and a growing trend in vehicle miles travelled.

Central New York has experienced many years of land development patterns typical of industrial era metropolitan areas with population loss and concentrated poverty in its urban center, and in many smaller cities and rural villages. Between 1992 and 2006 about 100,000 acres (156 square miles) were urbanized, a trend in land consumption that has continued in Onondaga County, with almost 7,000 new residential parcels created, including 147 major subdivisions over 2,600 acres, since 2000. In 2003, CNY had the 8<sup>th</sup> highest ratio of new residential construction to household formation (Bier and Post 2003).

**MAP 2**—“Centeredness” and Density of Developed Lands in Central New York



Source: CNY RPDB

The Smart Growth Network's **MEASURING SPRAWL AND ITS IMPACT** report, a multi-dimensional analysis of sprawl in 83 metro areas nationwide, ranked Central New York as the 16<sup>th</sup> most sprawled region in the US. In the last 20 years, land development has largely occurred in former farmlands in Onondaga County, southern Oswego County, western Madison County and eastern Cayuga County. According to a Brookings Institution study, the region ranks 33<sup>rd</sup> out of 100 metropolitan areas in highest per capita carbon footprint at 2.682 metric tons, and 9<sup>th</sup> in terms of highest automobile-based emissions at 1.333 metric tons per person (Brown et al. 2008). While the region, with its historic

development pattern of rural villages and hamlets exceeds national levels of centeredness, it has very low levels of density, mixed use and accessibility of its street network (Ewing, Pendall and Chen 2002).

Many urban and rural centers in the region today do retain a healthy mix of public, community, commercial and industrial land uses that were historically (and in some cases still are) surrounded by vast areas of agriculture and forested lands. However, twentieth century land use trends led to a separation of uses through the implementation of single use zoning districts, expansive areas of exclusive commercial or commercial/industrial land uses that are common across the region today.

## Natural Resources

Central New York includes three ecologically distinct systems or "ecoregions." A significant area of Northern Appalachian-Boreal Forest exists in northeastern Oswego County and is home to many boreal and cold-water species vulnerable to climatic changes. The Great Lakes Ecoregion crosses Cayuga, Oswego, Onondaga and Madison Counties. The High Allegheny Plateau Ecoregion encompasses the southeast corner of Cayuga County, all of Cortland County, the southeast corner of Onondaga County, and the southern edge of Madison County. Laced with significant forest cover, freshwater rivers, perennial streams, and lakes of significant size, Central New York features a large number and wide distribution of 100+ acre parcels of land. Many important natural resources including lakes, aquifers, and significant natural areas cross municipal (land use regulatory) boundaries, and therefore have inconsistent, and in many municipal jurisdictions, few or no land use protections in place. This means that opportunities for protecting sensitive ecosystems, water quality, public access, and other important community needs and benefits are often subject to impacts from the least thoughtful or effective land use regulation.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service considers all of Central New York within their Finger Lakes Onondaga Focal Area, significant for aquatic resources supported by an extensive lake and river system. Threatened and endangered species of plants, birds and other species and habitats in need of protections include those that support the Ontario Plover, American Woodcock, Bobolink, American Black Duck, Bog Turtle, Bog Buckmoth, Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake, and Bald Eagles.

There are six Critical Environmental Areas (CEAs) in Central New York. To be designated as a CEA, an area must have an exceptional or unique character such as a benefit or threat to human health as provided by

aquifers and public water supply sources; a natural setting (e.g., fish and wildlife habitat, forest and vegetation, open space and areas of important aesthetic or scenic quality); agricultural, social, cultural, historic, archaeological, recreational, or educational values; or an inherent ecological, geological or hydrological sensitivity to change that may be adversely affected by any change. Designation as a CEA does not provide regulatory or policy protections of any kind, but can help to bring attention to important environmental areas during planning efforts.

There are 13 Wildlife Management Areas in Central New York counties on 43,671 acres of upland and wetland habitat. These state managed

MAP 3—Central New York Land Use



Source: CNY RPDB

areas are enjoyed for birdwatching, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, camping, scenic vistas, boat access, hunting, fishing and trapping. They include Cross Lake Islands and Northern Montezuma Wildlife Management Area in Cayuga County; Tioughnioga Wildlife Management Area in Madison County; Cicero Swamp Management Area, Hamlin Marsh Management Area, Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area in Onondaga County; Curtiss-Gale Wildlife Management Area, Deer Creek Marsh Wildlife Management Area, Happy Valley Wildlife Management Area, Little John Wildlife Management Area, and Three Mile Bay/Big Bay Wildlife Management Area in Oswego County. The 2009 New York State Open Space Conservation Plan identifies thirteen "Priority Conservation Projects" where land conservation efforts are critical in the region to ensure the protection of the most sensitive and diverse ecosystems and habitats.

## Regional Plans

Analysis of previous planning studies and existing conditions in the region provide the basis for identifying prime targets and a plan for working toward regional land use sustainability. As a part of the land use inventory for the region, several relevant reports were reviewed including; **THE NEW YORK STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN, THE NEW YORK STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN, 2009 NEW YORK STATE OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION PLAN, SYRACUSE LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PLAN 204,0 AND SYRACUSE SUSTAINABILITY PLAN**, both components of the **SYRACUSE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2025**.

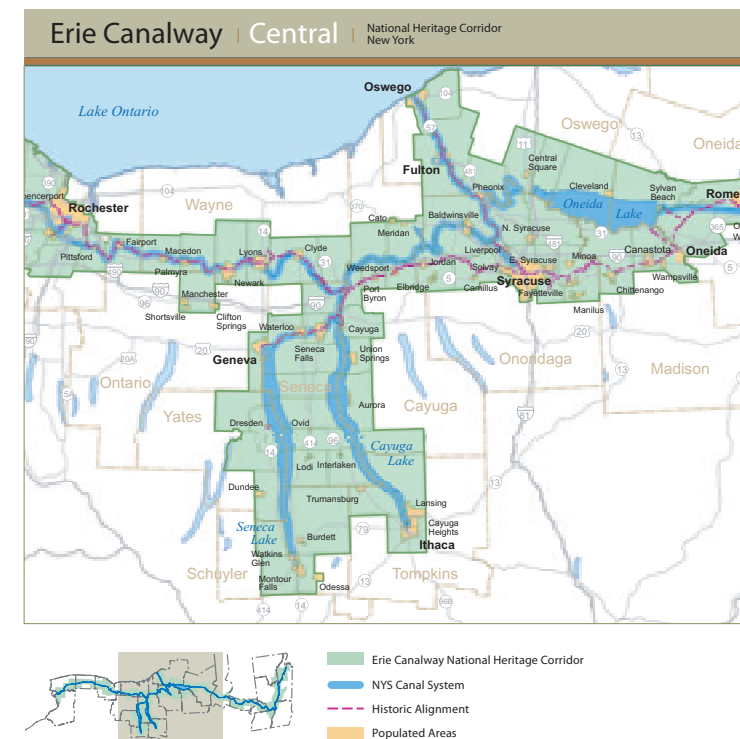
### *The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor 2011-2016 Strategic Plan*

In this plan, the National Park Service is proposing to work through a wide range of partnerships, to preserve and interpret our nation's past, provide world class recreational and educational opportunities, foster economic revitalization, improve quality of life in Corridor communities, and guide the reemergence of the Erie Canalway as a 21st century "River of Commerce and Culture." The plan recommends activities including partnership building, inventory, documentation, mapping, preservation, management, promotion, and linking of corridor communities and sites via car, rail, boat, bike and pedestrian routes.

The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor follows the New York State Canal System and the historic Erie Canal stretching 524 miles across upstate New York and through a large swath of Central New York

including northern Madison, Onondaga, central and western Oswego and Cayuga Counties. In Central New York, this National Heritage Corridor encompasses four cities, 19 towns, and 24 villages across four Counties, and represents an important collective historic and recreational resource.

The National Park Service has called the heritage corridor "a place with stories to tell, great works of architecture to see, history to be learned, and hundreds of miles of scenic and recreational waterway and trails to explore." Central New York communities within or adjacent to the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor are just beginning to realize some of the potential economic and cultural benefits of the preservation and development of this unique historic resource. The Oswego Canal corridor alone, connecting Central New York's metropolitan center at the City of Syracuse with the International port City of Oswego on the St. Lawrence Seaway, passes by historic sites, waterfront parks, and rail infrastructure through 15 municipalities in two counties by way of three navigable rivers.





### *2009 New York State Open Space Conservation Plan*

In this plan, several important focus areas in Central New York are specifically designated for open space planning. The following areas are the region's identified priorities for conservation efforts: Tug Hill Core Forests and Headwater Streams; Lake Ontario Shoreline; Camillus Valley and Nine Mile Creek; Carpenter Falls and Bear Swamp Creek Corridor; development of a State Park in Cortland County; Fair Haven Beach State Park; the Link Trail including links to the Finger Lakes Trail, the North Country National Scenic Trail, and the Erie Canal Trail; Nelson Swamp; The North Shore Oneida Lake Open Space Project; Erie Canal State Historic Park Trailhead Buffer and Historic Protection; the Onondaga escarpment; Peter Scott Swamp; the Salmon River Corridor; Summerhill Fen and Forest Complex; Cayuga, Owasco, Skaneateles, and Otisco Lake Shorelines; Finger Lakes Water Trails network; Owasco Flats; Camp Barton on Cayuga Lake; and the Northern Montezuma Wetlands.

One important natural resource in Central New York deserving of special consideration and protection in future land use planning efforts is the approximately 17-mile stretch of land referred to as the Eastern Lake Ontario Dune and Wetland Complex. On the eastern shore of Lake Ontario. A unique and delicate natural resource, the area is designated as a NYS Natural Heritage Area (one of only two in the State of New York), and is an integral part of a coastal barrier system consisting of beaches, sand dunes, embayments and wetlands. This barrier system contains the largest and most extensive freshwater sand dune formations in New York State. The dunes in this unique coastal area form a barrier that absorbs the energy of storm-driven lake waves, creating calmer conditions in the low-lying expanse behind the barrier where extensive high quality wetlands have developed. The Eastern Lake Ontario Dune and Wetland Complex is home to two rare or threatened plant species, and the highest concentration of state designated Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitats in New York State, yet remains threatened with development-related impacts due to ineffective or lacking regulatory tools and practices.

### *The New York State Historic Preservation Plan*

Although there are no specific projects identified for preservation in the NYS Historic Preservation Plan, there are culturally-valued building, structure, and landscape types across the region recognized for their important cultural capital and potential role in community development and economic growth. Although there are no specific projects identified for preservation in the NYS Preservation Plan, there are culturally-valued buildings, structures and landscape types across the region recognized

for their important cultural capital and potential role in community development and economic growth.

One such type of development in need of protection and creative alternatives to their loss are the working landscapes and farm lands that have characterized rural CNY for over 200 years. Other categories are formerly important civic buildings and religious properties found at the heart of most cities, villages and hamlets throughout the region.



New Hope Mills

### *The New York Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan*

This plan does not list specific projects, but specific actions recommended include improving present trail systems; constructing additional miles of single and multipurpose trails; rehabilitating and constructing additional miles of public forest access roads; expanding, improving or constructing recreational facilities such as lean-tos, horse-stabling areas for the public and for people with disabilities; developing RMPs for International Paper/Lyme Timber conservation easements utilizing the public recreation management planning process; identifying and allocating funding for

**MAP 4**—Central New York Recreation Corridors



Source: ???

the development of recreational facilities on easements with approved final RMPs; and beginning development of recreational facilities. The vision for recreation in New York State is 'to provide a system of safe and enjoyable recreational and interpretive opportunities for all New York State residents and visitors and to protect and improve the quality of the valuable natural, historic and cultural resources.'

The Preservation League of New York State has identified buildings and landscapes in Central New York to be listed on its "Seven to Save Endangered Properties" list. The statewide list draws attention to the plight of New York's agricultural landscapes and structures, architecture of the recent past, early public housing complexes and the need for appropriate commercial revitalization. Resources listed are in danger of disappearing because of insufficient funding and financial incentives, insensitive public policies, general neglect, disinvestment, and in some cases, demolition. In Central New York, these important historic resources include the Hop Kilns in Madison County, where 35 kilns remain from the estimated 100 once in use, and five of these are in danger of collapse; the U.S. Route 20, the Cherry Valley Turnpike, is a National Scenic Byway that crosses Central New York and is threatened with inappropriate development, economic decline, and a lack of coordinated planning, the Hamlet of Sherwood, the Town of Scipio, New York has been designated a National Register-Listed Historic District, the 'Sherwood Equal Rights Historic District', but continues to face threats of vacancy and neglect. Beginning in the 1830s and continuing for more than 70 years, the activism of Slocum and Hannah.

The Central New York Regional Economic Development Council's **STRATEGIC PLAN 2012-2013** cited several land use related projects, priorities, strategies and transformational initiatives including supportive development of arts and culture with potential to generate increased visitation to the region and play a far larger economic role as a key regional employment cluster. Tourism, arts, and cultural land uses can together generate economic synergies in the region to catalyze substantial growth. In "Onondaga County alone, 5,117 jobs are directly supported by \$133.4 million in economic activity generated by arts and cultural institutions [and] in the CNY region, tourism generated \$1.1 billion in visitor spending in 2011, a 6.2 percent increase from the previous year."Central New York's natural and cultural assets already generate substantial economic benefit, but the most important economic benefit of planning for nature- and culture-based tourism is the potential they offer to transform places that support both tourist visitation and quality of life based on the region's unique assets.



The **ONONDAGA COUNTY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PLAN** highlights recommended practices for smarter growth and more sustainable and fiscally responsible development patterns. Key policy areas in the Plan call for the protection of the environment through the support and enforcement of practices to protect the natural environment, strengthen and support the City of Syracuse as the regional center of commerce, culture and innovation, maximize the use of existing infrastructure, protect the region's strong agricultural tradition, conserve rural landscapes, reduce energy demand, embrace cleaner energy options, use resources wisely, and create quality places and opportunities for all. The County's Sustainability Plan offers specific guidance in support of these policy areas in its Action Plan.

F.O.C.U.S. Greater Syracuse's **CITIZENS' STRATEGIC PLAN – A ROAD MAP FOR ACTION** sets prioritized strategies to meet citizen-identified challenges including to: provide safety for walkers, hikers, and wheelchair users; provide safety and security for cyclists; teach everyone



Onondaga Lake Loop the Lake Trail

how to share the road safely; and encourage walkable communities and accessible urban trails.

## Assets and Opportunities

Central New York has a wealth of freshwater resources, an abundance of lakes, rivers, and perennial streams; scenic open space and unique glacial landscape form; compelling history as a center of the abolition and women's rights movements; vibrant arts and cultural life; and a wealth of prime agricultural soils and picturesque working landscapes. Several New York State Scenic Byways cross the region, including Rt. 3 - The Seaway Trail, Rt.13 - The Revolutionary Trail, and Scenic Routes 20 and 90. These scenic waterways and roads connect the region's diverse collection of National, State and local natural and cultural heritage trails and areas, wineries, rural villages, and 3,000 working farms. Between them, an extensive network of recreational trails provide a basis for four season outdoor recreation including hiking, cross country skiing, horseback riding and snowmobiling. Water trails in the region where former canals connect to rivers, lakes and wetlands provide kayak and canoe enthusiasts opportunities to enjoy the region's rich aquatic and riparian wildlife habitats and a few hours on the water. For these many reasons, Central New York receives consistently high marks on quality of life indicators and was recently ranked fourth on Forbes' list of "Best Places to Raise a Family".

A region that aims to draw top employers and keep top graduates must offer a quality of life reflected in the designed physical environment, and implemented through thoughtful land use planning, transportation, and economic development decisions. Capitalizing on Central New York's existing natural and cultural assets as a basis for smart growth makes sense in this natural resource-rich region. The development of "recreational corridors" with coordinated programmatic linkages between urban and rural centers, recreation-related land uses, events, and infrastructure can catalyze a compatible new sector of economic growth.

## Compact Development Patterns

Land use strategies that will contribute to long-term sustainability and help Central New York communities retain, improve, and pass along quality of life to future generations, are employed through thoughtful development in terms of spatial pattern, structure, scale, and relational processes. Because spread-out, low density development cannot be accessed easily or affordably by alternative transportation, it leads to ever increasing vehicle miles travelled (VMT), the result of which has



been increased CO<sub>2</sub> warming our atmosphere, reductions in air quality, and declining public health. Compact development that leads to a smaller footprint of developed land and creates interlinked paths and trails to facilitate more walking and bicycle use, can be achieved through the implementation of land use tools such as “conservation subdivision” design requirements, purchase or transfer of development rights (PDRs, TDRs), and prioritized infill development. These tools can help to limit the growth of low density development that lacks significant centers, and the accompanying expansion of costly infrastructure.

Central New York has a legacy of strong settlement centers that provide a foundation for sustainable development initiatives. Historic settlement patterns featured a mix of uses, including residential, centered in cities and villages substantially more dense than surrounding towns. Central business districts in the region still account for a substantial share of metropolitan employment with the region's largest employers in close proximity to a high concentration of affordable housing and highly accessible public transportation. Studies have shown that the economic health of an entire region, from property values to its ability to attract new business investment depends on the vitality of its downtown cores.

Programs and policies that promote brownfield and infill redevelopment are key, particularly mixed use projects that add residential units in core downtown areas, increase density, and enable greater public transit service and use. Redevelopment and reuse of existing buildings and previously developed sites through targeted tools such as local, state and federal tax credits and other incentives are also important, as is slowing the pace of “greenfield” development that is removed from urban or rural centers.

Because Central New York is a region that retains much existing built infrastructure and formerly developed lands from a productive industrial past, as well as once largely self-sufficient rural settlements, there is a wealth of opportunity for infill development, re-development, and repurposing of existing buildings and sites. These site and building redevelopment opportunities are the new frontier of sustainable land use and community development. With the implementation of improved land use and transportation standards and criteria, spatial land use efficiencies create opportunities for rebuilding more self-sufficient communities through compact development.



Onondaga Lake Park

## *Green Infrastructure*

The material composition of our built environment can have significant cumulative environmental impacts. Dark thermal masses of non-permeable material such as asphalt parking lots and black rooftops divert large volumes of unfiltered rainfall, mixed with petroleum and other pollutants, directly into tributary waters that supply public drinking water resources and contribute to declining water quality. The use of permeable pavements for surface parking lots allows rainfall to filter through the surface (rather than run off of it), a process that removes pollutants and contributes cleaner water to subsurface water supplies (aquifer recharge).

Asphalt also absorbs and re-radiates heat into the urban environment causing a “heat island effect” in the summertime, increasing ambient temperature by several degrees. “Albedo” refers to the fraction of solar energy (shortwave radiation) reflected from surfaces on the Earth back into space. By moving toward the use of high albedo (highly reflective) concrete, or other lighter and more reflective materials for use in urban structures, summertime urban temperatures and cooling costs can be reduced. The survival of urban trees also increases with less heat stress, and the addition of trees in urban areas improves air quality and reduces symptoms of some respiratory diseases. In the years ahead, cities, and those who live, work, and play in them, will benefit from strategic retrofits to mitigate the intensifying “heat island effects” of a warming environment. While it is critical to reduce the acceptable footprint area of development, including impermeable surfaces like roads and parking lots; growth and development can occur sustainably through increased land area dedicated to green infrastructure systems that mitigate stormwater pollution, the potential for downstream flooding events, and introduce high functioning subsurface wetland treatment systems for wastewater.

## *Protecting Resources*

Land use-related planning decisions made locally in New York State have impacts that are not just local, but multi-municipal or regional in scope. Inter-municipal and interagency collaboration and working partnerships between local, state and federal agencies, the public, and private organizations with shared resource concerns and planning expertise (historic preservation, environmental, and transportation) will be critical in facilitating planning that protects Central New York’s shared resources. Reestablishing interconnected green and blue networks that allow wildlife migration, habitat protection and biodiversity, and accessible

public access to natural resources for low impact recreation is critical to regional sustainability.

Agriculture is a pillar of the Central New York economy and rural character, both highly valued by Central New York residents. There are 25 agricultural districts in the five county Central New York Region. One of the most important benefits of the Agricultural Districts Program is the opportunity provided farmland owners to receive real property assessments based on the value of their land for agricultural production rather than on its development value. Farmers receiving agricultural assessment in New York State collectively save over \$70 million annually. Protecting prime agricultural soils and productive agricultural operations that employ environmental best management practices must be a priority land use concern in the region. To protect and grow the region’s capacity for sustainable agriculture and local food resources, municipalities must have access to, and implement land use tools such as local Conservation Advisory Councils, supportive ordinances, agricultural business (AB) districting, buffers to incompatible uses, farmland preservation plans, and local agriculture market incentive programs.

A diverse and healthy regional tree canopy is critically important for regional sustainability. Aside from the intrinsic value and beauty of healthy forested lands, trees in the landscape provide valuable ecosystem services in the form of clean, oxygen-rich air, maximum filtration of pollutants in the atmosphere and pollutants and sediments in stormwater runoff. These natural services support human health and a diversity of life in the region with critical habitat support for a diversity of flora and fauna species. Changing environmental conditions continually challenge our forests with new biological threats from disease and infestations like the Emerald Ash Borer and the Hemlock Woody Adelgid. As of 2012, the species that threatens our Hemlock trees is at the region’s doorstep in Seneca, Tompkins, Tioga and Broome Counties. Local land use regulatory measures that encourage tree inventories and vulnerability assessments focused on specific threats to species diversity and health, and ordinances that allow municipalities to deal with infested trees on private property will help to prevent potential public safety risks and other associated costs of devastating wide-spread tree losses that can occur suddenly. Steep slope zoning protections, local tree preservation incentives, greenspace incentive zoning, and conservation subdivision design process are other critically important land use tools municipalities can implement to cultivate local environmental health.

Land uses that support renewable energy production and use is increasingly important for the region. Municipalities that establish





Paper Mill Island, Baldwinsville



inventories and preservation plans for prime renewable energy sites are a step ahead in taking advantage of budgetary opportunities these practices will present as the cost of non-renewable energy climbs. Implementing related regulation and supportive local ordinances for solar, wind, and biofuels, including “by right” permitting and incentives, will advance a transition to the economic and environmental cost savings of renewable energy use. Where tilling of sloping agricultural lands tend to impact valued water resources, incentives for no-till biomass production could provide additional water quality benefits.

### *Implementing Effective Land Use Tools*

Municipal zoning, subdivision regulations, and site plan review processes are the instruments of land use decision-making in Central New York. State statutes provide that zoning regulations must be in accordance with a municipal comprehensive plan, however; there is no requirement that municipalities adopt a comprehensive plan, or establish zoning regulations. When municipal bodies lack effective land use planning and regulatory tools, the door is open to potentially destructive development and its impacts and costs to communities. The New York State Legislative Commission on Rural Resources published the Survey of Land Use Planning & Regulations in NYS in 2008. The survey found that, of the 147 land use regulating municipalities in Central New York, 66% had a Comprehensive Plan in place, and 74% had any zoning at all in place. 72% had a site plan review process, 77% had subdivision regulation, and 89% had Planning Boards.

Well-conceived land use regulatory tools ensure significant benefits to communities through access to clean water, safe roads, protection of valued community character and property values, and the expansion of the tax base. These are powerful incentives for progressive planning and development instruments, and good local land use regulation. Proactive land use efforts taken by local governments entrusted with the authority to regulate land use not only assure the protection of public health, safety and welfare, but can also manage the development of land in a community in a way that brings new economic and cultural benefits to the community. Key to these efforts is establishing zoning, subdivision regulation, or site plan review that is well-suited to a particular community’s needs; encouraging a healthy mix of land uses like residences over shops in downtown locations; and special purpose zoning controls that promote particular community development goals through incentive zoning, conservation subdivision design process, transferable development rights, planned unit development, and overlay zoning.

Central New York has a strong foundation for sustainable land use and community development in its traditional settlement patterns, abundant forested lands and natural areas, pristine lakes, streams, and prime farmland. Planning for future compact development will help to preserve this strong foundation and lead to more walkable, mixed use neighborhoods with a variety of housing types, commercial and community services, transportation choices, and employment opportunities.

Although there are downtown areas in the region that are currently experiencing economic growth and revitalization, many main street areas in Central New York cities, villages, and hamlets are facing significant vacancy issues and a continuing decline of the core downtown environments and population. Housing stock in the region is in need of significant repairs that could be supported through local and state policies that incentivize housing rehabilitation coupled with energy- and location-efficiency. With the proportion of the population over age 65 in Central New York expected to significantly increase over the next two decades along with the desire to age in place, the need for affordable and accessible housing options is critical. The efficient location of affordable housing for all demographics maximizes the value of existing infrastructure. This also allows households to save on transportation costs while reducing environmental impacts. Repurposing existing buildings and developed sites can catalyze community development and enhance



economic competitiveness. Transforming existing historic downtowns into vibrant areas through land use policy that encourages place-making initiatives and mixed-use development is key to regional sustainability and critical to retaining residents and workers.

Open space conservation efforts in the region have included projects to connect, buffer, and expand State forests and wildlife areas. Sustainability also depends on the preservation of historic resources, prime agricultural lands, and water resources through the implementation of preservation

districts, agricultural best management practices, buffers, and linkages between regional resources through low impact blueway (water trails), greenway trails, and public access to waterfront areas. The forests and agricultural lands of Central New York serve as significant carbon sinks that offset some of the region's greenhouse gas emissions. Carbon sequestration strategies can be expanded to include the benefits of no till farming and vulnerability protections to assure continued forest species diversity and health.



Syracuse University, Marshall Street and University Avenue

## LAND USE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GOAL

More than a commodity to be bought and sold, land carries with it natural and cultural heritage to be considered in development decisions. Whether land development is planned related to a unique natural or cultural heritage landscape, the former confluence place of two historic transportation canals, pre-colonial sacred places of historic importance to indigenous people, or a remnant apple orchard tended by 19<sup>th</sup> century settlers; landscapes are vessels of some measure of biodiversity and cultural meaning. Discovering, preserving and sharing the natural and cultural landscape heritage of Central New York through informed and wise land use choices offers important societal benefits that might otherwise be wasted, from education to economics.

Working toward regional sustainable land use requires an on-going scientific basis for the analysis, planning and management of landscapes, both urban and rural. Sustainable land use planning that is founded on the principles of 'landscape ecology' considers the impacts and interrelationships of spatial pattern; the structure of landscapes, human activity within landscape pattern, process and change; and the effects of scale and disturbance. Through this lens, more effective strategies and integrative land use tools can be developed and made applicable to solving problems in future land use and site planning and decision-making in the region and locally.

### Goal

Manage the region's economic and physical development through the efficient and equitable use of land to conserve its natural and cultural resources and revitalize its urban cores, main streets and existing neighborhoods.

### Targets

Per capita land consumption

Total amount of land that is developed in acres (188,591) divided by the total population of the region (791,939) = .23 acres of developed land per person (From 2006 MRLC National Land Cover Database). This represents a doubling of the per capita land consumption for the Central New York Region from approximately .11 acres per person in the 15 years since 1991.

Target: Decrease per capita land consumption by 10% by 2030

Percentage of jobs and population occurring inside municipal centers

Total jobs within municipal centers of region (177,525) ÷ total jobs in region (316,855) = 56%

Proportion of population within existing municipal center (328,688/791,939) = 41%

Increase proportion of population within existing municipal centers to 65% by 2030

Increase the number of acres of the region's pristine shoreline, scenic farmland, rugged gorges, and forestlands in nature preserves open to the public and in conservation easements on private lands.

### Strategies

1. Employ targeted development initiatives (regionally catalytic) through land use planning to support existing urban cores, rural centers, main streets, neighborhoods, and improvements to local quality of life conditions -focused on connectivity, visual quality, accessibility, human-scale pedestrian amenities and mixed uses.
2. Leverage the region's exemplary natural and cultural resources as well as its anchor institutions in education, health and medicine.
3. Implement safe and accessible pedestrian, car-top boat, and bicycle infrastructure that connects homes, places of work, community services, and natural resources across the region.
4. Establish municipal policy frameworks and incentives to redevelop underperforming areas with mixed-uses that are supportive of local needs including jobs, healthy foods, and access to healthy lifestyles; introduce urban design standards for plantings, benches, lighting, art, and universal accessibility playgrounds, waterfronts, parks, and nature areas; implement mixed-income housing options, transit-oriented development, waterfront development and Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) districts that provide access to community services.



5. Increase infill development and prioritize the preservation, energy-efficient rehabilitation, remediation, and reuse of the region's historic and older existing vacant or underused buildings and brownfield sites in urban, suburban and rural population centers for mixed uses including affordable housing.
  6. Implement policies and incentives such as targeted technical assistance programs and model "Transfer of Development Rights" (TDR) regulation, Uniform Tax Exemption, expedited permitting, mortgage recording fee exemptions, shared parking and access management or other mechanisms, consistent with New York State law, which can be easily adopted by local municipal governments to allow higher density of development in priority investment areas such as commercial and mixed use areas.
  7. Establish policy and incentives to increase the long-term protection of high value natural areas, the use of protective buffers, low impact development, green roofs, limits or reductions in the area of impermeable paving surfaces, as well as diversified public green spaces and public waterfront access.
  8. Encourage development and implementation of wastewater treatment wetlands where the costs to municipalities for traditional municipal sewer infrastructure limits development and rehabilitation in existing rural community centers.
  9. Establish strong working relationship processes and initiatives between local communities, municipal governments, and NYS agencies such as DOT, DEC and DOS to align priorities and coordinate investments.
  10. Prioritize and increase funding that serves community development goals in low-income and underserved neighborhoods including improving preK-20 educational attainment.
2. Construct the connecting link of the Erie Canalway Trail between Camillus and DeWitt through the City of Syracuse with connections to the Onondaga County Loop the Lake Trail, the NYS Fairgrounds, and the phase two and three completed Onondaga Creekwalk.
  3. Develop a Master Plan for the Restoration and Protection of the Eastern Lake Ontario Barrier Beach and Wetland Complex (for the entire dune and wetland complex as defined by the NYS Natural Heritage Area designation).
  4. Develop and implement a world-class wayfinding program design for Downtown Syracuse (e.g. London's wayfinding program) that captures the unique identity of the City as the historic center of the scenic Central New York Region, registering both with visitors as welcoming, interesting, and easily enjoyed destinations.
  5. Initiate cooperative planning for the Southern Hills Recreation Corridor and scenic bike touring route linked through thematic wayfinding, and connecting a string of hamlets with scenic corridors (Downtown Syracuse to Cortland via Jamesville, La Fayette, Apulia Station, Tully, and Truxton).
  6. Prepare a regional Recreation and Heritage Plan.
  7. Link the Eastern Finger Lakes to the Nation Parks System Finger Lakes Water Trails & Water Access Planning project; and implement safe, well-designed recreational boating infrastructure, and improved public access to the region's key waterbodies (i.e., Owasco Lake in City of Auburn and Town of Scipio, Otisco Lake, the Oswego River and Lake Ontario).
  8. Complete trail projects such as the Owasco River Greenway Trail (six-mile multi-modal trail system along the Owasco River extending from Emerson Park at Owasco Lake to Wadsworth "Park" on the City of Auburn's west side), the Waterfront Trail Extension from Breitbeck Park to Sheldon Beach in the City of Oswego, the extension of the Jug Path Trail along Carpenter's Falls from the Bahar Preserve to the Hamlet of New Hope in Cayuga County, and the Ridge-To-Ridge Trail through Bear Swamp State Forest connecting conservation lands around the south end of

## Project Recommendations

1. Complete the construction of the Loop the Lake Trail around Onondaga Lake.

Skaneateles Lake with the scenic Skaneateles Lake overlook on Rt. 41.

9. Develop net-zero or “low-carbon development” demonstration projects at the neighborhood or district scale in each of the region’s counties (i.e., Inner Harbor, Loguen’s Crossing, ShoppingTown Mall).
10. Complete an environmentally sensitive waterfront development project at Selkirk in the Town of Richland with an eco- and heritage tourism focus that accommodates both public space and private enterprise.
11. Rehabilitate and reuse former industrial structures such as Camillus Cutlery, c. 1895; Erie House Canal Store; and vacant historic houses of worship throughout the region.
12. Complete an investigation of redevelopment/infill opportunities along the Rt. 298 Industrial Corridor in DeWitt and Salina.
13. Complete community planning, and implementation of new low impact recreational use for the Onondaga Lake Wastebeds in the Towns of Camillus and Geddes, to include an off-road section of the Erie Canalway Trail linked to the New York State Fairgrounds.
14. Develop a collaborative Technical Assistance “Green Rehabs” Program to inventory and incentivize priority redevelopment/reuse projects and implement them through capacity building training workshops in technical trades geared to “Green Rehabilitation” of existing buildings.
15. Establish model incentive zoning programs to assist municipalities in establishing local watershed preservation overlay districts (buffer strips) that will protect critical waterways such as Great Gully and Yawger’s creeks at Cayuga Lake from agricultural runoff and sedimentation plumes.
16. Establish systematic conservation easement purchase programs to target productive farmland, undeveloped lakeshore, southern Skaneateles Lake Forest, Bear Swamp Creek Corridor, and the regions many potential scenic overlooks such as along State Route 41 in Onondaga County.
17. Design and implement a subsurface wetland treatment demonstration project at a rural hamlet center such as Locke in Cayuga County, or La Fayette in Onondaga County, that supports a hamlet-centered reuse project or low impact sustainable development.
18. Develop a region-wide “Circuit Rider” Technical Assistance Program to assist municipalities with Comprehensive Planning and updates to existing, and new land use regulatory frameworks.
19. Create a cooperative regional redevelopment initiative and masterplan for the Oswego Canal corridor, from the City of Oswego to Onondaga Lake.
20. Develop and implement historic preservation plans for identified priority buildings and landscapes in Central New York including the historic Hamlet of Sherwood in southern Cayuga County, the Madison County Hop Kilns, and Route 20 National Scenic Byway.

