PLAN ONONDAGA

COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Adopted
July 5th, 2023

J. Ryan McMahon, II
County Executive

A Letter from the County Executive

For the first time in generations, Onondaga County is growing again. We are undergoing an economic renaissance that many never thought was ever possible. This comeback journey means that there needs to be thoughtful planning and preparation on everything from enhancing our neighborhoods, creating more housing, preserving our precious agricultural lands, and investing in our blueways and greenways. With those priorities serving as our foundation, your team in County government got to work and it is my honor share with you with our updated comprehensive plan we are calling "Plan ON".

From our vibrant villages, to our historic urban core in the City of Syracuse, to our nearly pristine agricultural land, Onondaga County offers something for everyone. This comprehensive plan not only provides a roadmap for our community, but allowed us to envision not just what our community needs, but what our families, neighbors and businesses deserve in the community they call home. It will also serve as the blueprint for the inevitable challenges and growing pains we will encounter as Onondaga County continues to see population growth.

A growing community also means that we have to rethink and address how we will get from one place to another. This includes everything from upgrading and enhancing existing modes of transportation and to potentially bringing new ideas to our community like bus rapid transit and the creation of true and dedicated transit corridors. The approach taken in Plan ON with respect to mobility and our transportation future is comprehensive and inclusive because a growing community cannot rule out any options or potential solutions.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this effort. Your voices and contributions were vital to ensuring that Plan ON truly reflects what the next chapter for Onondaga County will look like. With your continued support and investment, Onondaga County will forever be a place that we are all proud to call home.

J. Ryan McMahon, II
County Executive

Sailboats on Skaneateles Lake
Source: Visit Syracuse

Acknowledgments

The Onondaga County Department of Planning would like to thank the County Legislators, municipal representatives, agency stakeholders, thematic focus group participants, County departments, the Onondaga County Planning Board, the consultant planning team, and of course, the residents of Onondaga County for your participation throughout the creation of Plan Onondaga.

County Executive

J. Ryan McMahon, II

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Municipalities

C.Syracuse
T. Camillus
T. Cicero
T. Clay
T. DeWitt
T. Elbridge
T. Fabius
T. Geddes
T. LaFayette
T. Lysander
T. Manlius
T. Marcellus
T. Onondaga
T. Otisco
T. Pompey
T. Salina
T. Skaneateles
T. Spafford
T. Tully
T. Van Buren
V. Baldwinsville
V. Camillus
V. East Syracuse
V. Elbridge
V. Fabius
V. Fayetteville
V. Jordan
V. Liverpool
V. Manlius
V. Marcellus
V. Minoa
V. North Syracuse
V. Skaneatles
V. Solvay
V. Tully

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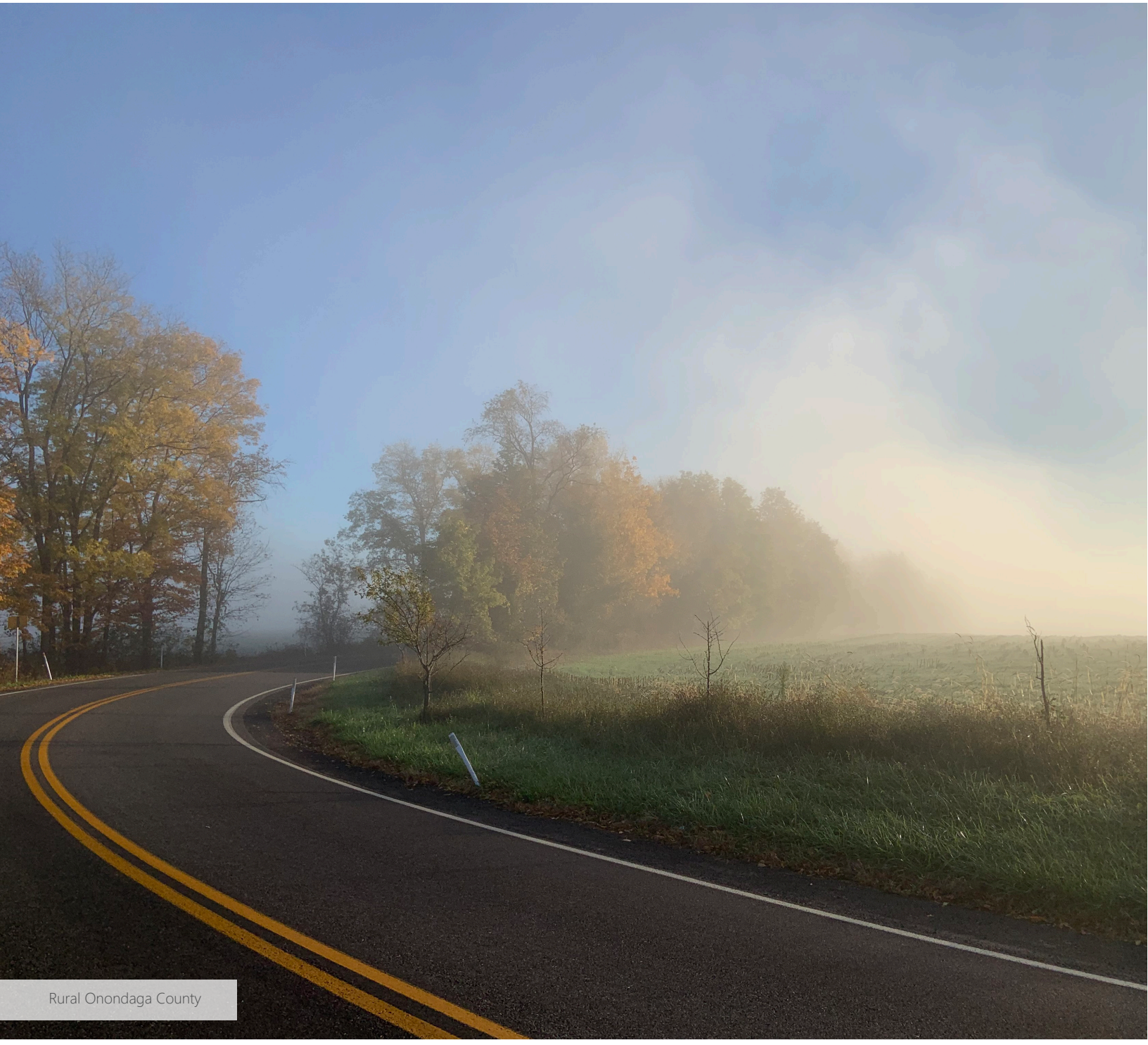

Rural Onondaga County

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What's in this Plan?

Introduction

This section includes background on plan organization, why we are planning, the role of the County in planning, and how this plan was developed.

Community Engagement

Plan Onondaga included an extensive outreach and engagement process. The outreach methods and findings are summarized in this section.

Countywide Profile

The Countywide Profile is a snapshot of the County today. It looks at demographic patterns and trends at play in the County. It also contains a review of previous planning efforts in Onondaga County and how they have treated Plan Onondaga Themes previously.

Plan Themes

Five central themes were formulated to guide the development of Plan Onondaga. The five guiding themes transcend the needs, concerns, and issues that might govern any individual municipal entity within the County. They serve as a guiding framework for establishing goals and strategies for the County. Analysis and goals pertaining to each theme are included in this section.

A Framework for Competitiveness

The Framework for Competitiveness provides a benchmark for Onondaga County against other peer counties in order to frame the County's position in relation to other counties in the U.S. and Upstate New York.

Implementation

This section includes a framework to take the process from plan to reality, and shows how the themes will relate to each other through future planning and development efforts in Onondaga County.

Strong Centers

Strong centers are walkable, people oriented places with a mix of jobs, housing, shopping, dining, culture, public spaces, entertainment, transportation, and services.

Housing and Neighborhoods

Housing and Neighborhoods as a planning theme addresses the needs and desires people have for the structures and places where they live.

Community Mobility

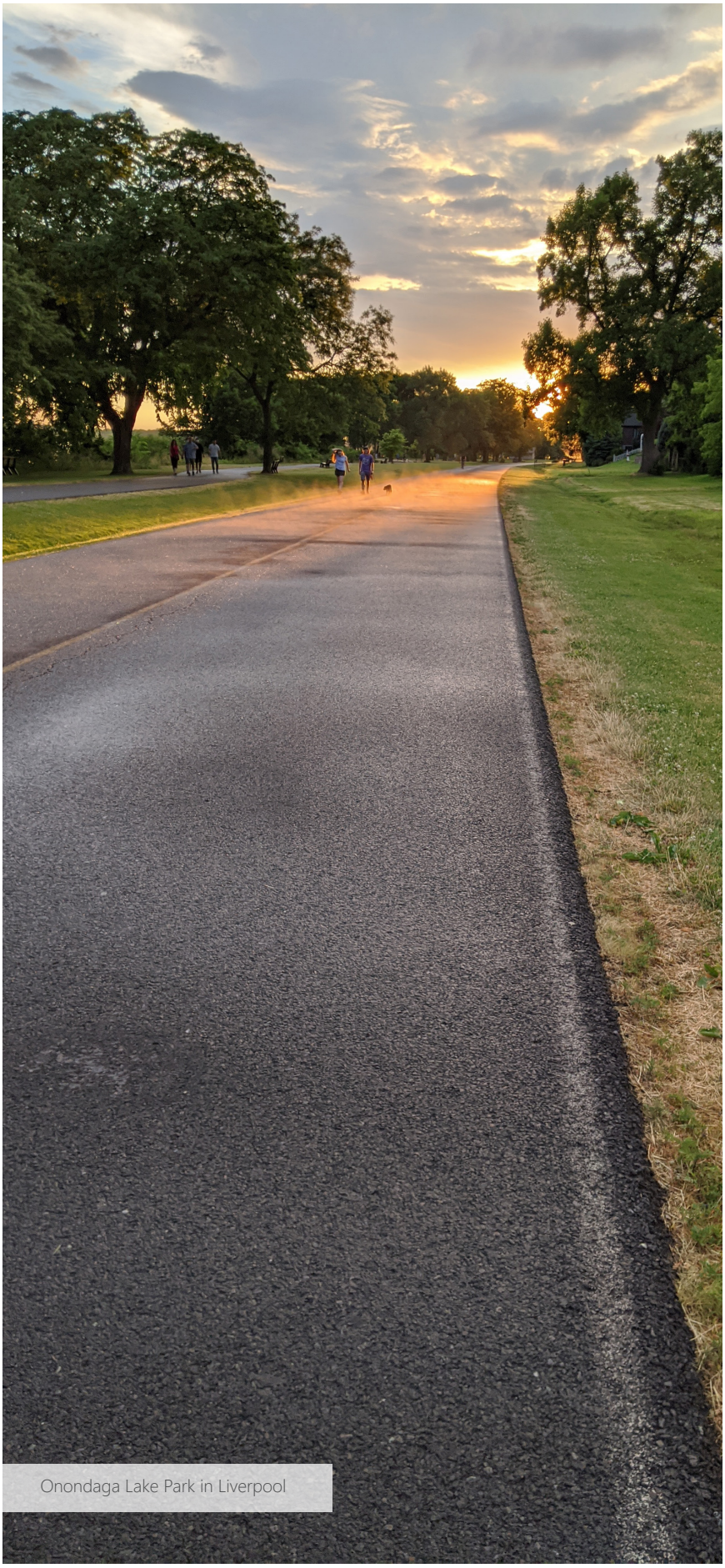
Community Mobility is the ability of people to travel from place to place within Onondaga County. Community mobility strategies aim to provide more choice in the transportation system and to improve safety for all users.

Greenways and Blueways

Greenways and blueways are corridors of open space or waterways that incorporate diverse natural, cultural, and scenic features.

Agriculture

Agriculture is the science, art, and business of cultivating soil, producing crops, and raising livestock. Innovative agricultural and farming practices are needed to promote economic development while also protecting our environment.



Onondaga Lake Park in Liverpool

Why Plan?

A comprehensive plan is a tool that helps guide a community toward its desired future. It offers a process by which a community can ask and answer questions like "Who are we?" "Who do we want to be?" and "How can we accomplish our goals?"

Successful communities understand where they want to go, and they actively work to get there. Because "getting there" requires many entities to work in tandem toward a shared vision, having a plan that can be referenced and understood by everyone is critical to success.

A comprehensive plan establishes a shared set of values which can help to channel available resources and development energy in targeted ways. Shared values lead to the establishment of priorities that guide and inform specific actions that can lead the community toward a vision of future prosperity. Future prosperity means that the County increases its chances to create jobs, attract and retain a mobile workforce and households with choices, and that local communities become stronger with increasing ability to reinvest in themselves and their future.

Onondaga County's Plan

The Onondaga County Comprehensive Plan is based on existing and new relationships with and between the County, its municipalities, businesses and residents. Its purpose is to proactively plan for our collective future. This Countywide plan strives to improve the daily experience for all residents and visitors, and to foster inspiring, healthy places where we can all feel safe and empowered.

Plan Onondaga is intended to:

- Synthesize the important planning and development drivers affecting our communities.
- Build relationships, capacity and awareness across all sectors.
- Inform policymaking, and bridge local needs with state and federal resources.
- Provide for and help prioritize public investments that transcend municipal boundaries.
- Provide guidance, resources and identify training necessary support the collective vision in Plan Onondaga.

With this plan, Onondaga County government can more easily communicate a collective vision for economic growth and an improved quality-of-life to higher levels of government; and in doing so, garner the resources needed to bring these ideas to fruition.

But this plan, and this vision, isn't enough - there is much more work to do. The specific role of the County in enacting necessary policies and projects becomes clearer through the planning process. Onondaga County has begun to play a leadership role on a number of fronts, with new capital projects, housing programs, and planning initiatives with community partners already announced. And the County continues its support of our municipalities through its planning assistance, infrastructure collaboration, and community and economic development programs.

What Role Does the County Play?

A ADVOCATE

Because of its size and political position, the County is able to aggregate the voices of its constituents (e.g., municipalities, businesses, residents) and appeal to regional, state, and federal entities for change. The County can also join forces with other counties to identify and help solve a variety of planning issues.

BC BUILD CAPACITY

In order to achieve the vision presented in this plan, all levels of government will need to build capacity. This capacity building starts with local communities knowing and expressing what they need and what they want to be through comprehensive planning. Private development should complement County and municipal goals, what needs they are trying fulfill and how their project affects the whole community. County Planning plays a large role as a partner and a leader in making sure municipalities and developers have the resources they need to make the best decisions for the community. This may be through education at Onondaga County Planning Federation's Annual Planning Symposium, direct technical assistance with data and mapping to support decisions, or assistance with writing grants to make sure their planning is up to date and in line with the community through adequate engagement.

M MARKET

In the interest of attracting and retaining people and businesses in Onondaga County, one of the County's responsibilities is marketing itself to prospective businesses and residents. In this role the County must understand, develop, and communicate the quality of life features that make the County a great place to put down roots.

I INVEST IN PROGRAMS, INITIATIVES, AND CAPITAL PROJECTS

Through its budgeting process, the County can make funding available to support projects and initiatives that will accomplish the goals in this comprehensive plan. Funding can come in the form of targeted grants for municipalities, capital improvements to facilities, or budgeting for specific programs.

L LEAD

In its role as a leader, the County exercises its ability to bring people representing different backgrounds and interests together to work toward solving problems and achieving goals identified in the comprehensive plan. Because the issues and goals identified in this plan are often complex, the collaboration and resources of multiple groups are necessary. The County can provide space, organization, facilitation, and follow-through to bring people and groups together around large-scale projects that require multi-jurisdictional coordination.

P ESTABLISH POLICY

County policy is a guide for decision making andW resource allocation. The County can develop and implement plans, such as this comprehensive plan as well as set more specific administrative policies related to the management of the County's departments. Policy impacts spending, taxation, operations, and incentives to encourage desired outcomes.

Downtown Syracuse during the Mountain Goat Road Race

How was Plan Onondaga Developed?

The process of developing Plan Onondaga began with targeted outreach by the Onondaga County Department of Planning to local town and village officials to better understand their needs and concerns, and to identify where the County could best align itself with those needs and concerns. Based on these initial conversations, the County identified a guiding framework for this plan including:

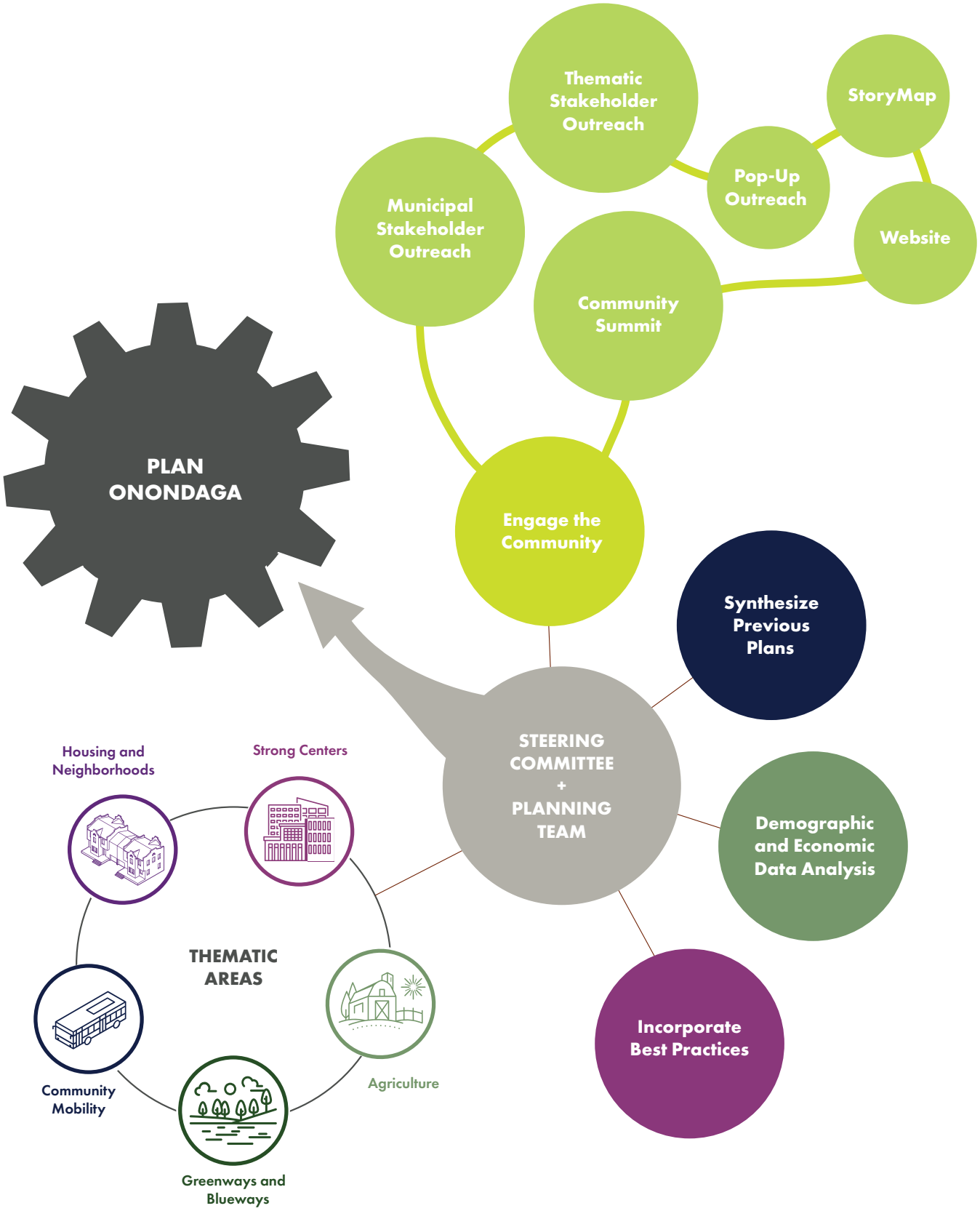
- A focus on the need for the County to strengthen its competitiveness economically to be able to attract and retain jobs and workers to the County.
- Protection and enhancement of the County's quality of life which is a product of its geography, natural features, and historic development patterns.
- The need to continue to engage the residents and stakeholders of the County in a meaningful dialogue about where we are heading as a community.

These early discussions also led to the identification of five specific themes that would be explored through the plan: Strong Centers, Housing and Neighborhoods, Community Mobility, Greenways and Blueways, and Agriculture.

These themes were utilized throughout the development of the plan to frame discussions with stakeholders, pop-up outreach sessions, and the project StoryMap.

The Planning Team was comprised of staff from the Onondaga County Department of Planning and a consultant team that was selected by the County to guide this effort. The Planning Team was guided by the Onondaga County Planning Board which served as the Project Steering Committee.

The Planning Team reviewed previous Onondaga County plans, conducted demographic and economic analyses, developed precedent case studies to identify best practices, and ultimately developed targeted analysis, goals and recommendations for the five thematic areas.


PLAN ONONDAGA
Engage the Community
Thematic Stakeholder Outreach
StoryMap
Pop-Up Outreach
Website
Municipal Stakeholder Outreach
Community Summit
Synthesize Previous Plans
STEERING COMMITTEE + PLANNING TEAM
Demographic and Economic Data Analysis
Incorporate Best Practices
THEMATIC AREAS
Housing and Neighborhoods
Strong Centers
Agriculture
Community Mobility
Greenways and Blueways

St. Joseph's Health Amphitheater at Lakeview
Source: Visit Syracuse

Countywide Profile

Map CP.1 | Municipalities in Onondaga County

Introduction

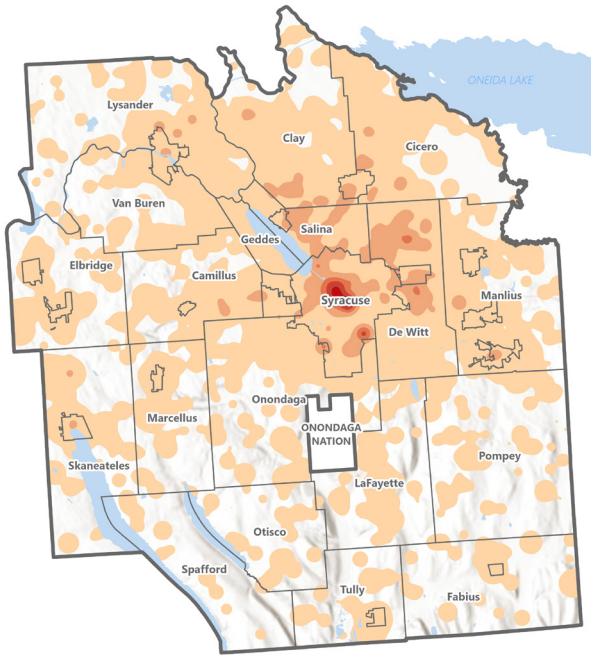
Situated southeast of Lake Ontario in Central New York, Onondaga County offers a high quality of life and access to significant natural and cultural resources. The County is home to the City of Syracuse, 19 Towns, and 15 Villages, which provide a wide range of experiences and lifestyle choices from urban to rural. The eastern edge of the Finger Lakes region occupies the southwestern quadrant of the County. Major employers in the County include SUNY Upstate Medical Center, Syracuse University, and St. Joseph's Health.

In October 2022 Micron Technology Inc. announced that it would be locating its largest semiconductor manufacturing facility in the Town of Clay, in the northern portion of Onondaga County. This facility is the largest economic development project to date in the history of the nation and will provide 9,000 jobs at the facility and an estimated 40,000 induced jobs in the region, especially in Onondaga County. The location of the plant in the Town of Clay will create a dramatic shift in employment centers. The project will also introduce jobs and an industry that will support our existing and planned mixed-use centers. From the initiation of Plan Onondaga, the planning team has been aware that this type of opportunity was inevitable, and the themes and approaches put forward in this plan are consistent with both a fast-growth and slow-growth reality.

Onondaga County, the City of Syracuse, and local towns and villages (**Map CP.1**) collectively have significant investments in highways, water and wastewater systems, parks, schools, libraries, and municipal buildings. These public investments support private sector investments in order to encourage a healthy local economy. The competitiveness of the County, City, and municipalities depends in part on the County's infrastructure systems as well as neighborhoods, main streets, rural hamlets, and the County's natural resources and agricultural lands.

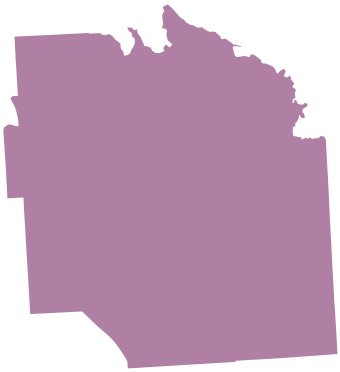
Residents of the County rely on the health of the City, and every town and village, as many residents live in one part of the County but work in another. Urban residents may value the open space resources available in rural towns. Residents of suburban towns and rural areas may value the resources of urban centers for employment, health care, recreation, and cultural entertainment. As reflected in **Map CP.2**, the employment density is concentrated in the City of Syracuse and surrounding towns.

Map CP.2 | Employment Density



Source: U.S. Census On the Map, 2018

Onondaga County at a Glance



476,516
Population (2020)

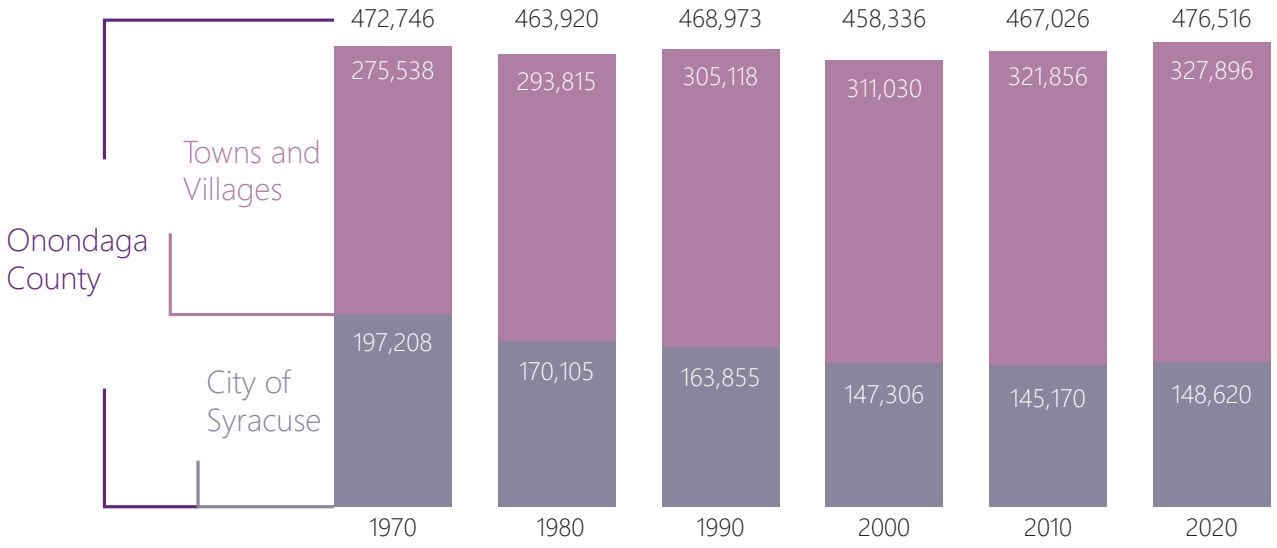
222,141
Total County Employment

$66,012
Median Household Income

As seen in **Figure CP.1**, Onondaga County's population grew slightly over the last decade and in 2020 more people resided in Onondaga County than during any decade since 1970. At the same time the City of Syracuse's population has stabilized over the past 20 years after witnessing large population declines between 1970 and 2000. Approximately 30% of the County's population currently resides in the City of Syracuse.

The County is home to many small businesses. Over 80% of Onondaga County's 46,992 employers have fewer than 20 workers (**Figure CP.2**). The largest employers in the County include Syracuse University, SUNY Upstate Medical University, the Syracuse City School District, National Grid, the United States Army, Lockheed Martin, and Crouse Hospital (**Figure CP.3**).

Figure CP.1 | Population Change in Onondaga County 1970 - 2020



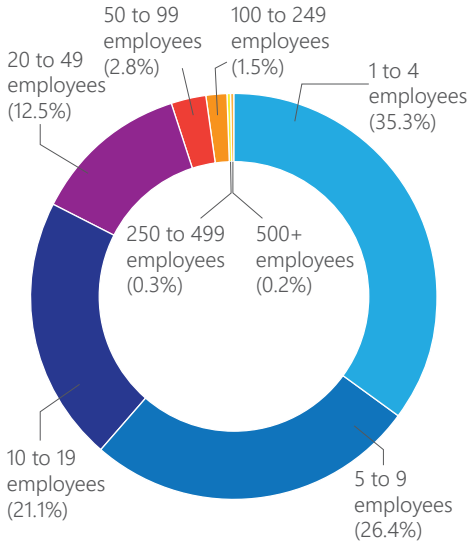
Source: U.S. Census

Key Facts:

- The County's population grew by 2% between 2010 and 2020, increasing by 9,490.
- From 2015 to 2020, jobs declined by 6.4% in Onondaga County from 264,057 to 247,120. This change fell short of the national growth rate of 0.0% by 6.4%. As the number of jobs declined, the labor force participation rate remained essentially unchanged between 2015 and 2020.
- Within Onondaga County 20.2% of residents possess a bachelor's degree (0.1% above the national average), and 12.0% hold an associate degree (3.4% above the national average).
- The top three industries in 2020 are Government, Healthcare and Social Assistance and Retail Trade.
- When measured by its contribution to Gross Regional Product, manufacturing rises to the second largest sector of the County's economy.
- Over 80 percent of Onondaga County's employers have fewer than 20 workers.

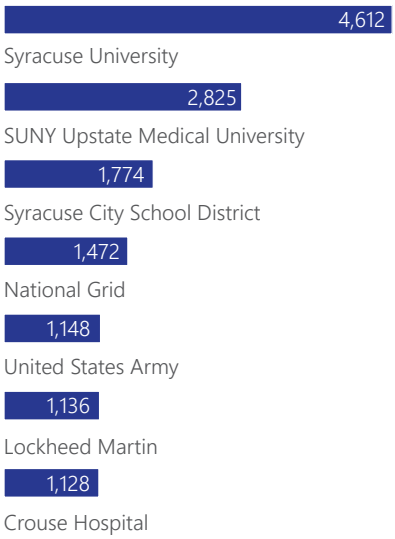
Source: U.S. Census and EMSI Estimates, 2020

Figure CP.2 | Employer Size



Source: EMSI Estimates, 2020

Figure CP.3 | Top Employers by Number of Employees



Source: EMSI Estimates, 2020

County Transportation System

The transportation system within the County is a critical component of its competitiveness (**Map CP.4**). The County's location at the crossroads of major Interstate Routes 81 and 90 (NYS Thruway), proximity to Canada, and strong inter-modal transportation facilities for rail and aviation contribute to the County's strength in freight distribution, warehousing, and shipping (**Map CP.3**).

The network of state, county, and local roads forms the basis of Onondaga County's transportation system which serves as the foundation for the County's land development and settlement patterns.

Significant expansion of the transportation system is not contemplated. Priority has been placed on the maintenance of the existing system. However, there are several regionally significant transportation projects underway that will influence the implementation of Plan Onondaga including:

- **The I-81 Viaduct Project**

  The New York State Department of Transportation is planning for the eventual replacement of the elevated portion of Interstate 81 in Downtown Syracuse.

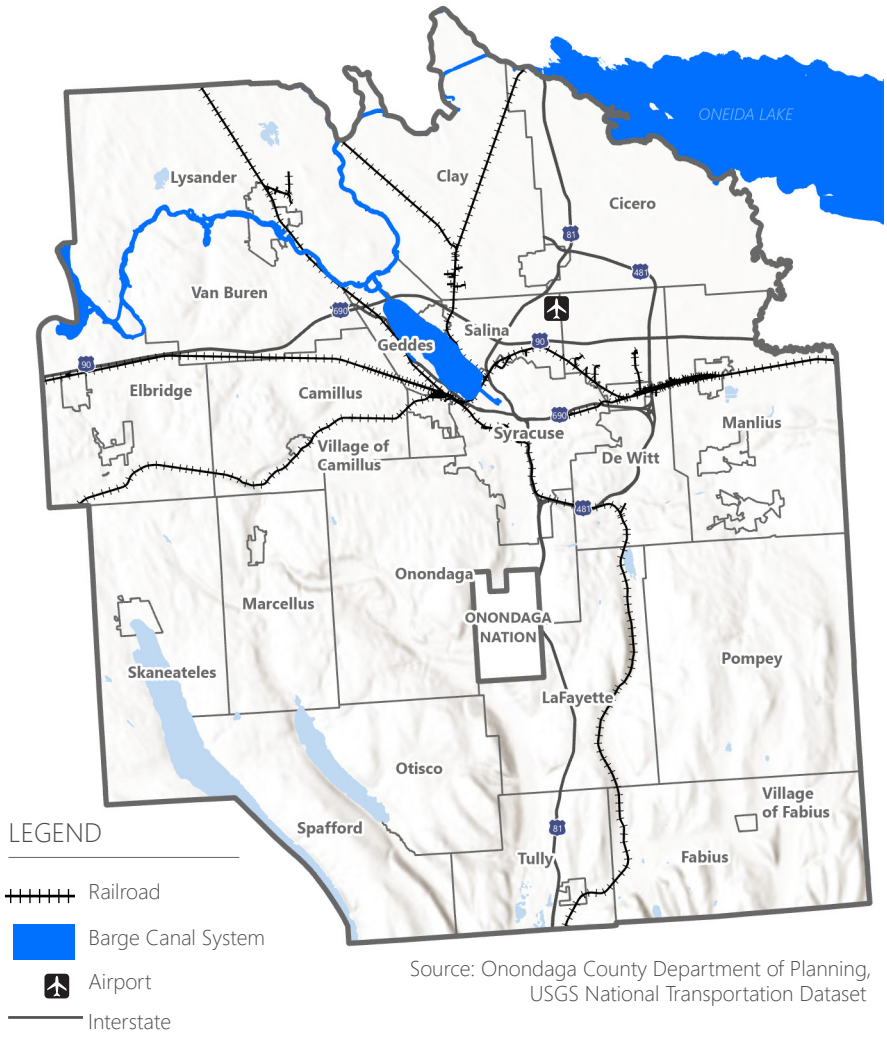
- **Enhancing the Transit System**

  Centro is working in partnership with local communities to invest in the implementation of a Bus Rapid Transit network in Onondaga County (See Community Mobility theme).

- **Expanding the Regional Trail Network**

  Continued investment in the Onondaga County Loop the Lake Trail and the Onondaga Creekwalk, as well as connector trails utilizing local road networks, is ongoing.

Map CP.3 | Regional Transportation Assets



Source: Onondaga County Department of Planning, USGS National Transportation Dataset

Map CP.4 | Road System

Source: Onondaga County Department of Planning

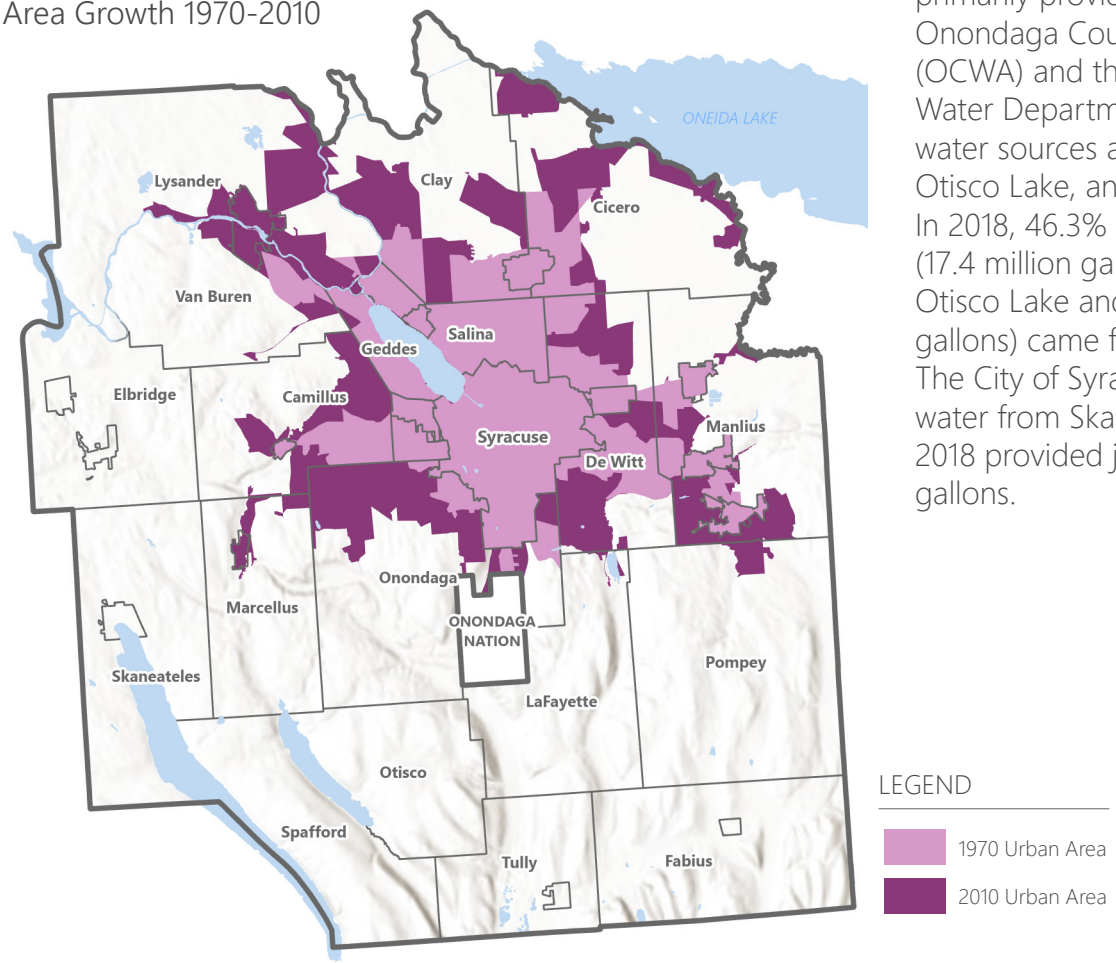
County Water and Wastewater System

Areas served with public water and sewer (**Map CP.6**) are best positioned to accommodate growth and increases in residential densities. The County continues to encourage development in areas already served by water and sewer. Within the Onondaga County Consolidated Sanitary District (CSD), the Department of Water Environment Protection (WEP) owns, operates, or maintains an extensive network of sewers, pump stations, and wastewater treatment facilities.

The CSD was established in the 1970s to accommodate a population of over 700,000, and currently serves 21 municipalities, treating 29 billion gallons of wastewater each year. Though the urbanized area within the County has expanded since 1970 (**Map CP.5**), the total population of the County has remained stable. The County does not anticipate any significant expansion of the sanitary district.

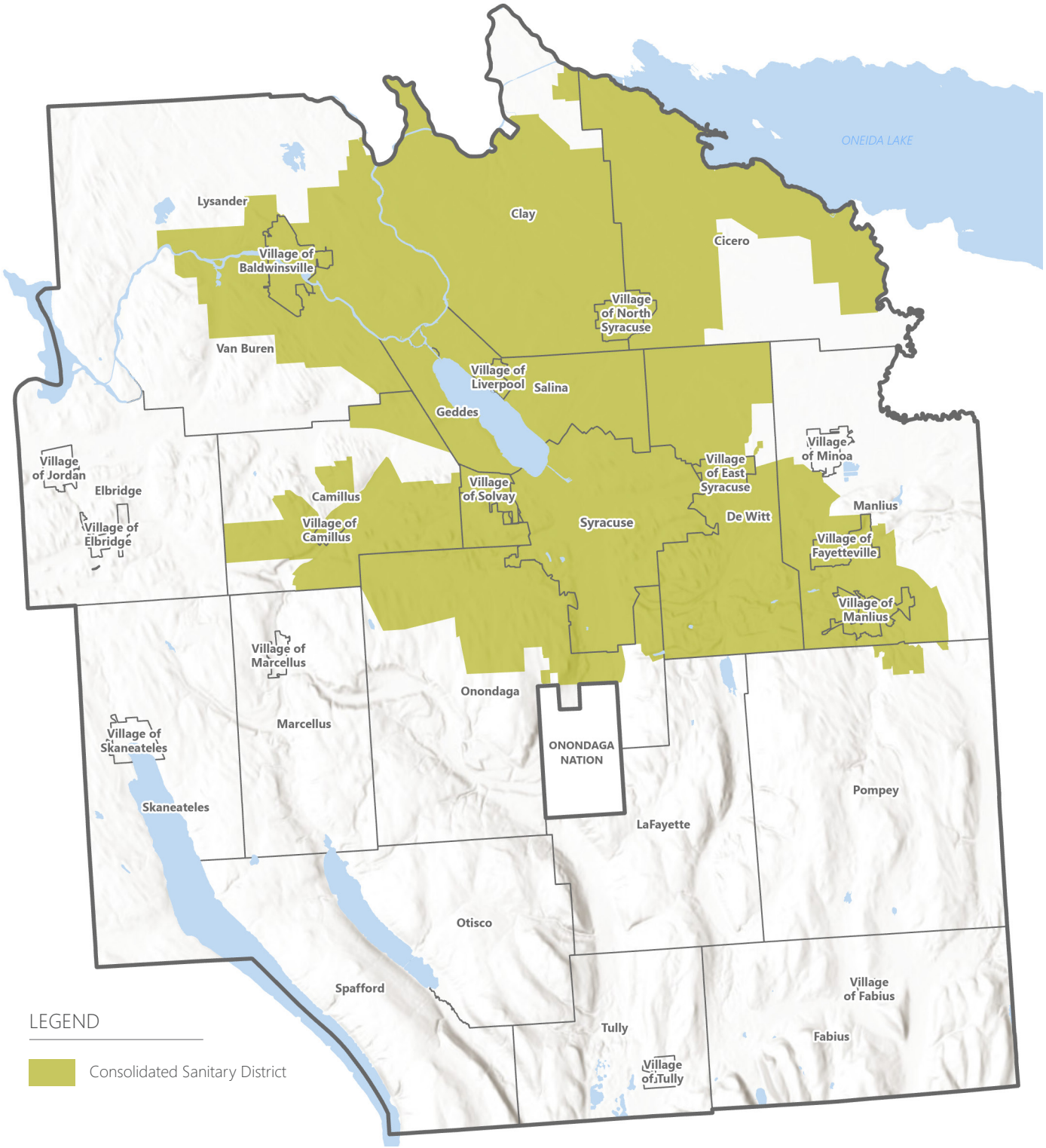
Water service in the County is primarily provided through the Onondaga County Water Authority (OCWA) and the City of Syracuse Water Department. The drinking water sources are Lake Ontario, Otisco Lake, and Skaneateles Lake. In 2018, 46.3% of OCWA's water (17.4 million gallons) came from Otisco Lake and 50.5% (19 million gallons) came from Lake Ontario. The City of Syracuse provides water from Skaneateles Lake and in 2018 provided just over 13 million gallons.

Map CP.5 | Urbanized Area Growth 1970-2010



Source: U.S. Census

Map CP.6 | Onondaga County Consolidated Sanitary District



Source: Onondaga County Department of Planning

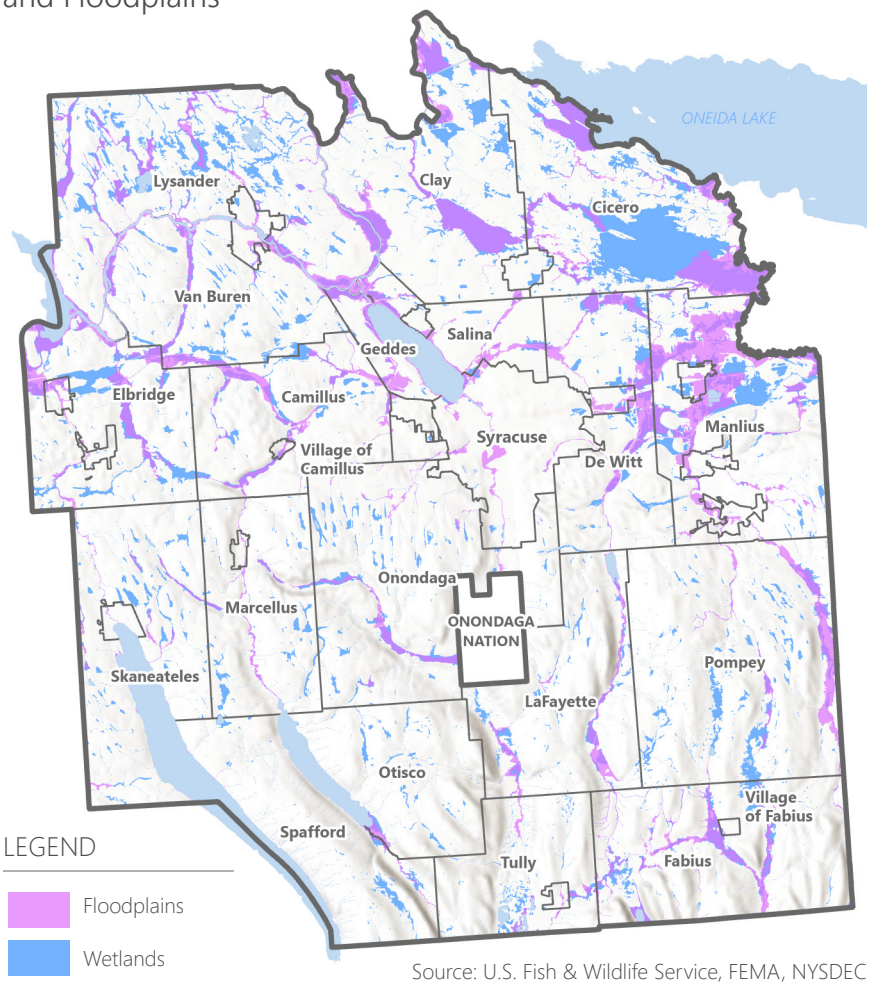
County Parks and Open Space System

The natural landscapes within the County are important contributors to the overall quality of life. These natural systems include public drinking water sources in Skaneateles Lake and Otisco Lake; components of the New York State Barge Canal System Onondaga Lake, Oneida Lake, Oneida River, Oswego River, and Seneca River; numerous stream and creek corridors including Nine Mile Creek, Skaneateles Creek, Onondaga Creek, Butternut Creek, Limestone Creek, Ley Creek, and their associated wetland and floodplain systems (**Map CP.7**). In the southern portion of the County, steep topography has precluded significant development and limits agricultural activity, leading to large expanses of forestland.

Onondaga County Parks operates 11 parks including Onondaga Lake Park, Oneida Shores Park, Beaver Lake Nature Center, Highland Forest, Pratts Falls, the Rosamond Gifford Zoo, and NBT Bank Stadium. In addition to County Parks there are several State Parks including Green Lakes State Park, Old Erie Canal State Historic Park, and Clark Reservation State Park; as well as the Cicero Swamp and Three Rivers wildlife management areas. These protected lands are further supported by the Central New York Land Trust and the Finger Lakes Land Trust which own numerous sensitive environmental areas throughout the County (**Map CP.8**)

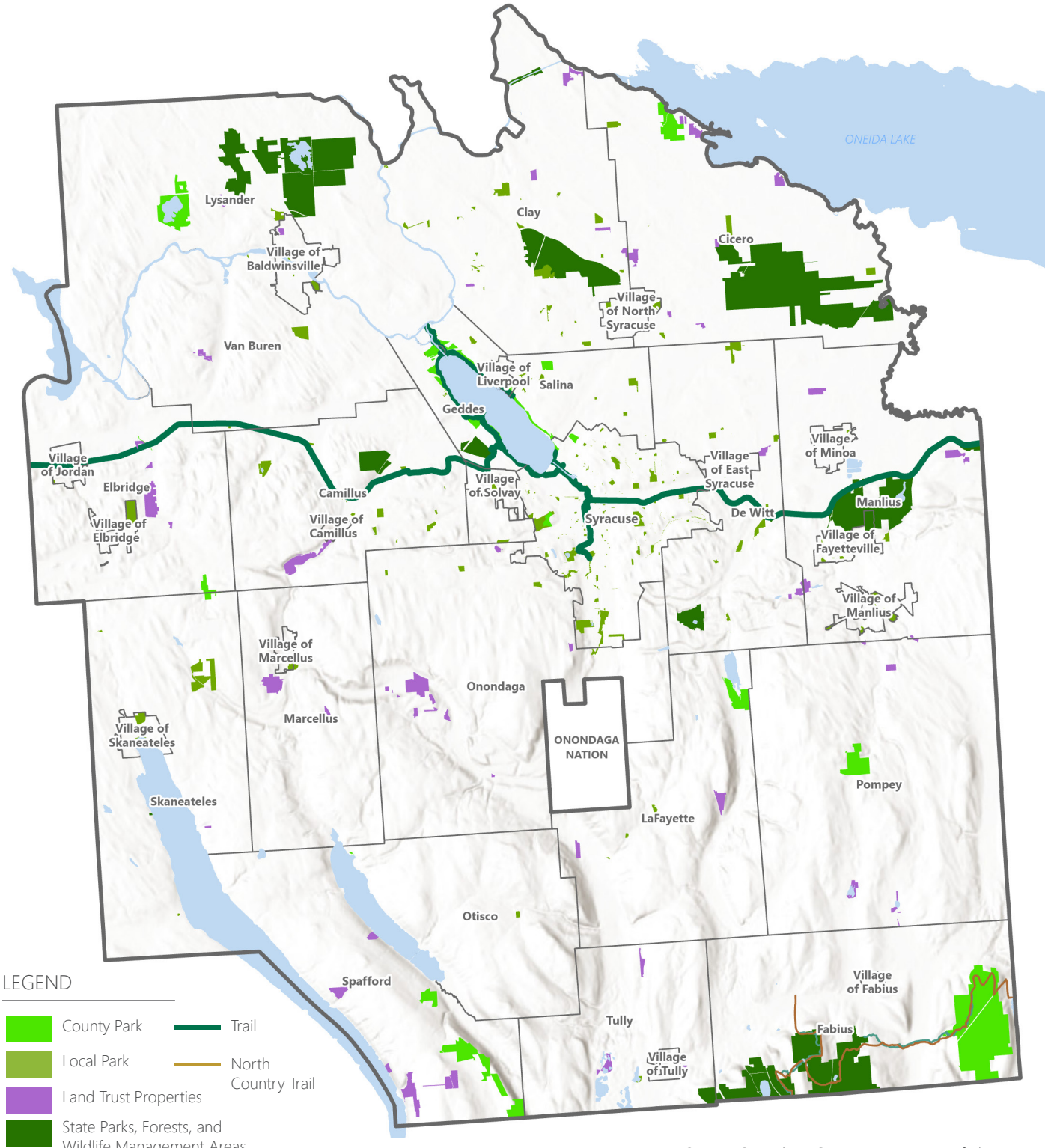
Farmland accounts for about 30 percent of the County's land area and is critical to community identity and scenic resources. Agriculture is a major economic activity in Onondaga County and New York State and is increasingly important for food security and regional farm-based agritourism (See Agriculture Theme). Just over 12,000 acres of agricultural land are currently protected as forever farmland by conservation easements held by local land trusts.

Map CP.7 | Wetlands and Floodplains



Source: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, FEMA, NYSDEC

Map CP.8 | Onondaga County Parks and Open Space System



Source: Onondaga County Department of Planning

The Planning History of Plan Onondaga Themes

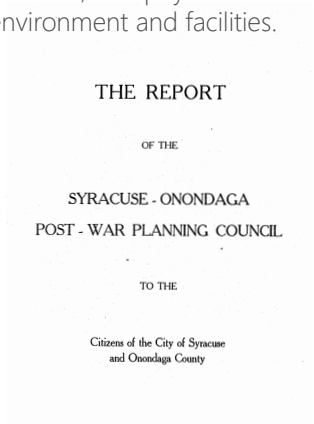
Onondaga County's past planning efforts have included the themes represented in Plan Onondaga. This section includes a brief survey of historic planning reports through the lens of Plan Onondaga's themes of Strong Centers, Housing and Neighborhoods, Community Mobility, Greenways and Blueways, and Agriculture. This analysis reminds us that the themes presented in Plan Onondaga are not new, but have been part of the planning for Onondaga County since the first plans were developed.

Strong Centers Housing & Neighborhoods Community Mobility Greenways & Blueways

1945

The Post-War Report

A primary objective of this report was to record the thinking and planning of multiple community groups to spread awareness and avoid duplicative or clashing efforts. The report's two sections were: economic, social, and cultural activities; and physical environment and facilities.



1962

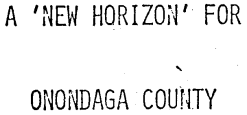
County Plan for the Onondaga-Syracuse Metropolitan Area

This plan was created to guide future public and private actions that would result in safe, convenient, and efficient traffic circulation and recreation and open space areas for the benefit of all citizens.

1972

A "New Horizon" for Onondaga County-The 1990 Development Plan

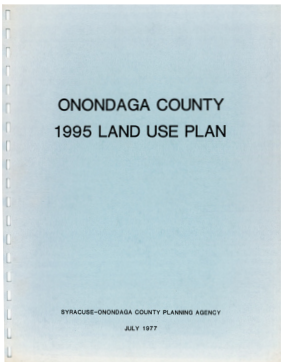
In response to a 210% population increase over a 30 year period, this plan presented a series of development policies to aid in "more orderly growth". At this time rapid growth had resulted in drainage/sewer issues and undesired strip commercial development.



1977

1995 Onondaga County Land Use Plan

This plan provided short- and long-term growth policies which were meant to contain development to areas where necessary infrastructure was 'present or planned-for'.

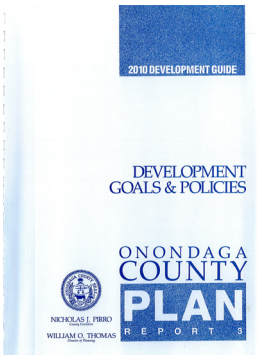


Agriculture

1991

Onondaga County Plan: A Development Guide for 2010

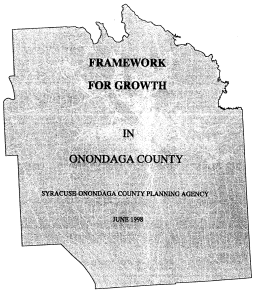
This plan contained three separate reports which were meant to present the County's potential, provide development direction for the next 20 years, and guide future public policies and private initiatives.



1998

2010 Development Guide for Onondaga County

The goals in this plan focused on creating a high quality of life through harnessing the County's assets such as, "community life grounded in tradition and committed to our children's futures, rich in natural resources and economic diversity, vital village centers and distinguishable architecture."



2001

Onondaga County Settlement Plan

Although not adopted this plan was created to serve as a practical toolkit to help municipalities promote the policies of the 2010 Development Guide for Onondaga County. These were demonstrated through pilot projects.

2022

Plan Onondaga

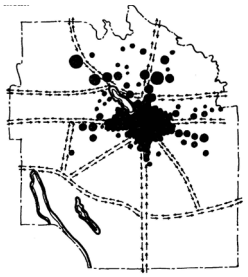
Plan Onondaga represents a continued progression of work to recognize and build on the assets within Onondaga County in a way that will benefit all residents, encourage healthy and thoughtful growth, and protect the natural and built resources that make Onondaga County.

PLAN ONONDAGA

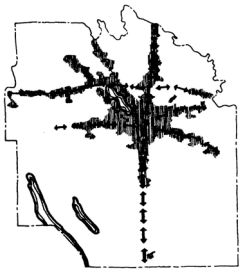
Strong Centers
Planning History

1962

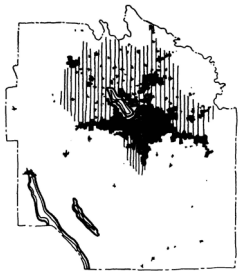
The 1962 plan described a series of growth patterns and process experienced by the County, shown in diagrams below. It recommended a growth pattern called 'Balanced with Satellites' which emphasized that future development would involve (1) a pattern of urban spread distributed more or less evenly around Syracuse, and (2) growth of the satellite communities. The plan stated, "Land close to Syracuse will be developed for a variety of uses, with encouragement given to speed up the development to the south. In such a pattern, a wide range of choices of styles of living is available without the bad effects of urban sprawl or uncontrolled urban spread." The plan stipulated that future discussions would guide the refinement and realization of this strategy.



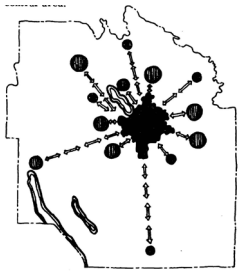
'Urban Sprawl'



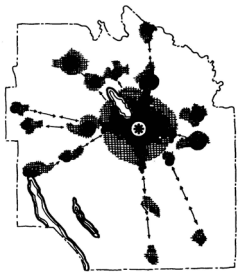
'Ribbon Development'



'Urban Spread'



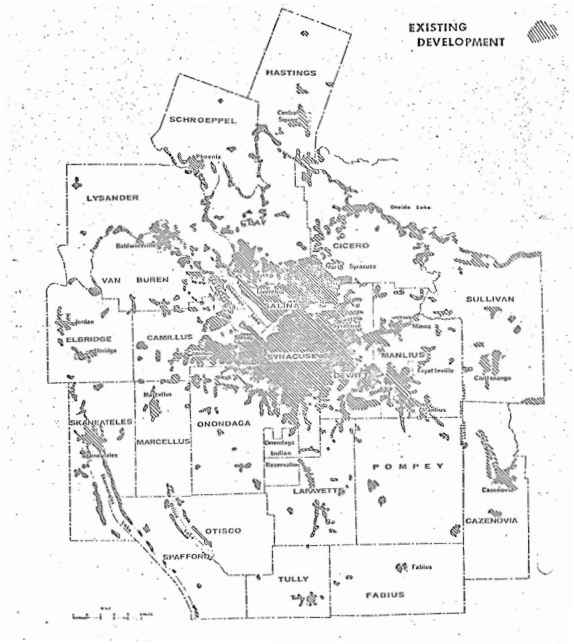
'Satellite Communities'



'Balanced with Satellites'

1972

The 1972 plan stated that population and economic growth should "be encouraged and accommodated through well-planned development which promotes community and neighborhood identity, provides a range of choice in location for all people and economic activities, and promotes compatibility of land uses as well as the urban and rural environments." The policies outlined it the report emphasized that development outside of the urbanized area (i.e., the City of Syracuse) should be contained around satellite centers including hamlets, villages, and also emerging suburban focal points. The report also included a commercial analysis which concluded that population density is critical to commercial success for a variety of types of centers.



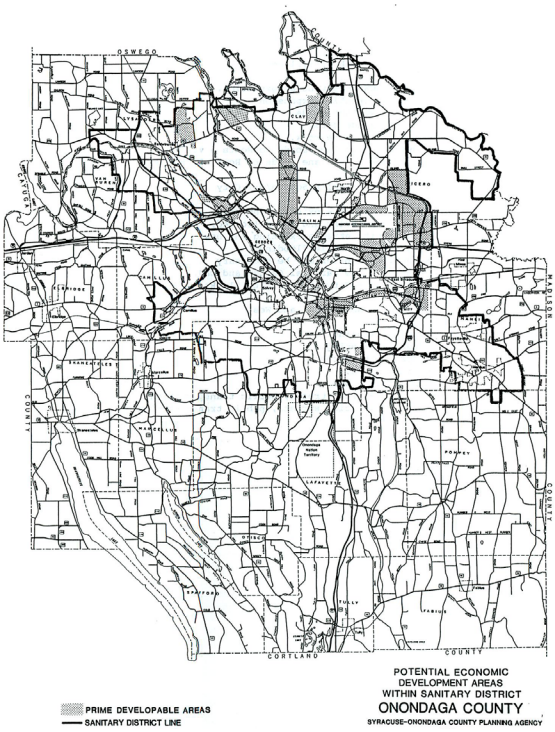
Existing Pattern of Development

The 1977 plan discussed the 'Identifiable Community Concept', which had originally been presented in the 1972 plan, through which a community is evaluated to determine its suitability for accommodating future urban growth. The evaluation considered water and sewer, highway and mass transit, police and fire protection, library services, planning and code enforcement, recreational programs, proximity to employment centers, and commercial activity. The report emphasized that it is unimportant for a center to have an identifying name rather, it is important to ensure that new developments occur in areas with existing or planned necessary establishments and services.

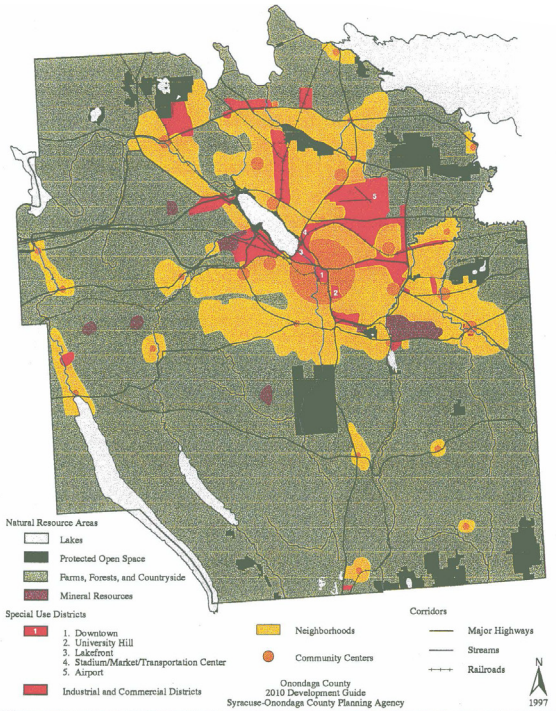
1977

1991

The 1991 plan presented a map with potential economic development areas within the sanitary district. The plan found that "designating suitable economic development sites near interstate highway interchanges will remain essential for growth." The plan noted that the location of future development would be partially driven by County infrastructure decisions. The development of housing goes hand in hand with surrounding strong centers in that there are factors associated with existing development that may influence future residential development, including the quality of school systems, parks, libraries, and other public services. Additionally, "the type, value and appearance of nearby existing developments may also influence the type of new development."



1998



Land Use Vision

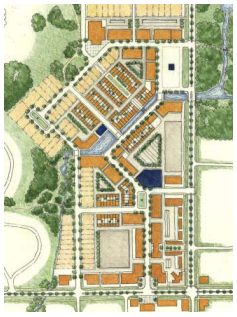
The 1998 plan emphasized that reaching a high quality of life was contingent on the presence of a vibrant civic life. Vibrant civic areas included "attractive public spaces, such as streets, parks, schools, libraries, theaters, and civic buildings." The 2010 Development Guide's Land Use Vision map depicts the ideal locations of community centers throughout the County including city neighborhoods, villages, and hamlets. The Plan states that each of these centers will remain the focus of their surrounding neighborhoods in terms of civic activity and growth and based on their pedestrian scale design, "these centers fulfill the needs of human habitat within a limited geographic area." Each center is well connected by transportation corridors to surrounding neighborhoods and centers which allows for fluid mobility.

The Plan anticipated that the expected growth within 15 years of its publication could be accommodated by the in-place infrastructure. It proposed that the best way to invest in communities was to focus on updating existing infrastructure rather that expanding.

2001

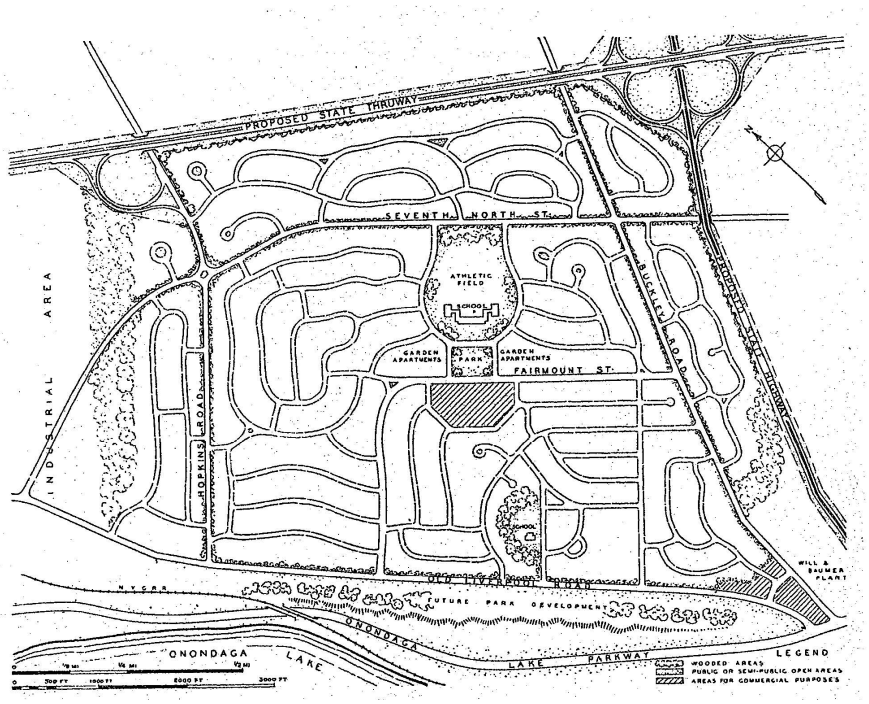
The 2001 plan featured eight pilot projects which provided suggestions and directions about how to improve specific existing developed areas. For example, the pilot project to the right proposed a retrofit of the Fayetteville Mall. The two-step plan systematically broke down the large structure and surrounding parking areas to form a new combination of multi-use buildings. A major draw to the planned development was the suggested daylighting of the creek which runs through the center of the site. This plan was ultimately not implemented in the proposed form.

Interim Plan



Final Plan

Housing and Neighborhoods
Planning History



Study of Development of Residential Area Between Liverpool and Buckley Road

1945

The Post-War report identified a significant need for higher quality rural housing due to aging structures "that often do not meet modern standards of efficient, labor saving, comfortable and healthful housing."

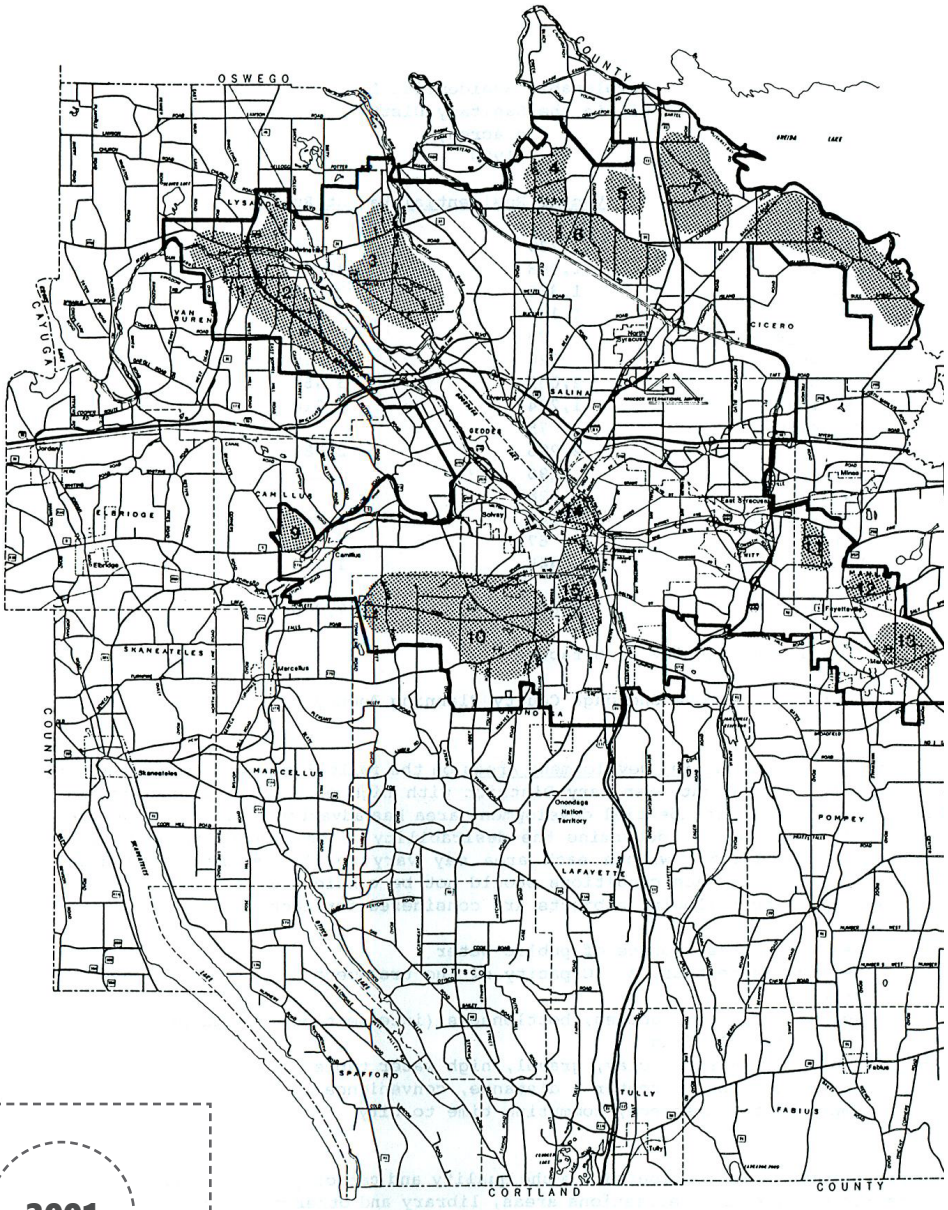
The report listed housing challenges which included a deficit of 2,500 units in the Syracuse area, blighted properties, and poorly planned subdivisions on the fringes of urban areas.

The image to the left shows a proposed residential housing development in Liverpool.

1962

The 1962 plan expected that by 1980 the County's population would increase by 217,000 people, household size would grow from 3.3 to 3.5 persons, and 60,000 new dwelling units would be created. It was thought that the City of Syracuse's population would stabilize and most of the growth would take place in the towns. The plan noted that suburban development was happening at a density of about 6 persons per acre. At that rate, 55 square miles of land (one quarter of the County's developable land) would be needed for housing to accommodate the projected population growth. It recommended planning for a density of 14 persons and 4 dwelling units per acre on average lot sizes of 10,000 square feet. This would theoretically still offer the benefits of suburban living while also reducing isolation, increasing efficiencies of utilities and transportation systems, and conserving land for future development.

Towns	Projected Population		
	1960	1970	1980
Camillus	18, 328	27, 040	38, 400
Cicero	14, 725	21, 840	32, 000
Clay	17, 760	26, 000	40, 960
DeWitt	22, 740	32, 760	46, 080
Elbridge	4, 644	6, 240	8, 320
Fabius	1, 565	1, 600	1, 920
Geddes	19, 679	25, 440	33, 280
Lafayette	3, 379	5, 720	8, 320
Lysander	10, 225	15, 600	21, 760
Manlius	19, 351	29, 120	41, 600
Marcellus	4, 527	6, 760	9, 600
Onondaga	13, 429	18, 720	26, 880
Otisco	1, 188	1, 560	1, 920
Pompey	3, 469	5, 200	6, 400
Salina	33, 076	46, 800	64, 000
Skaneateles	6, 603	8, 320	10, 240
Spafford	974	1, 040	1, 280
Tully	1, 633	2, 600	3, 840
Van Buren	8, 754	14, 040	19, 840
Indian Res.	941	1, 040	1, 280
Total 19 Towns and Reservation	206, 990	297, 440	417, 920
Syracuse	216, 038	222, 560	222, 080
County	423, 028	520, 000	640, 000

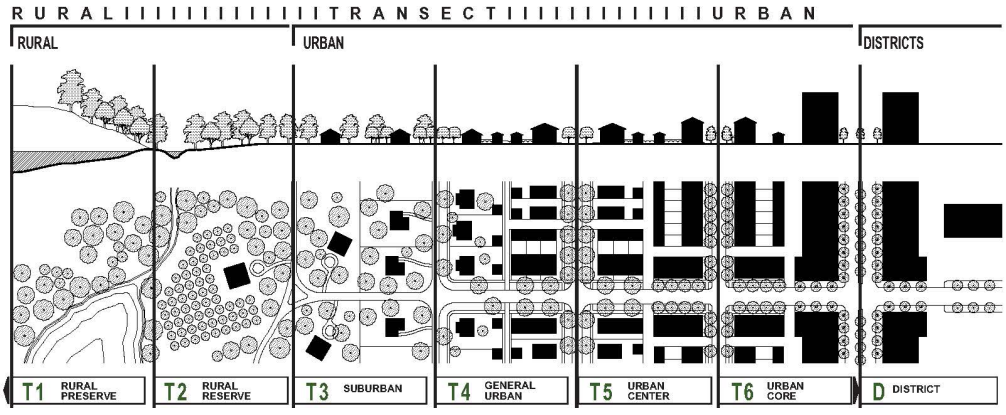


1991

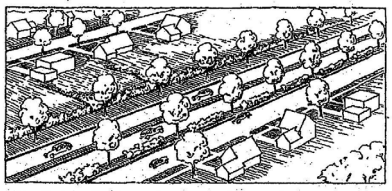
The 1991 plan presented generalized areas within the County Sewer District which were recommended as prime residential development areas (PRDAs). It outlined specific features and potential issues associated with future development in each of the areas. Information was provided for drinking water, sewer infrastructure, roads, drainage and flooding, subsurface, shopping, and employment. The PRDAs are shown as dark areas on the map to the left.

2001

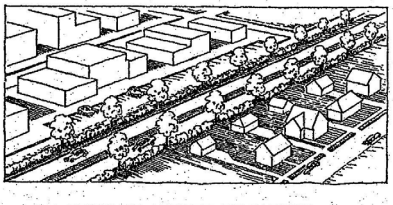
The 2001 plan introduced the concept of a development transect which offers a density gradient from rural to urban. It recommended that Onondaga County ensure that dwelling units are available within each bracket of the transect in order to attract people with a diversity of preferences for housing and neighborhoods.



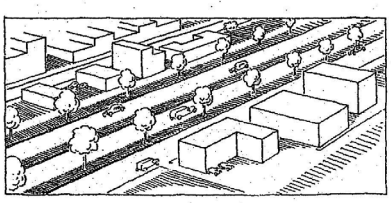
Community Mobility Planning History



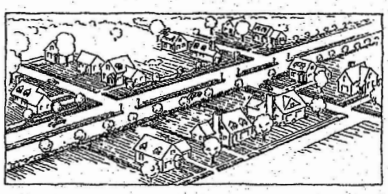
PRIMARY ARTERY PASSING THRU RESIDENTIAL AREA



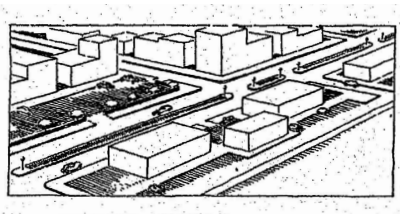
PRIMARY ARTERY BY-PASSING SHOPPING CENTER



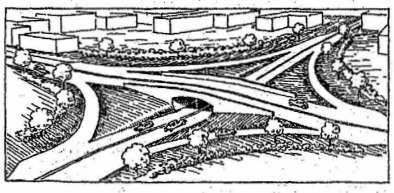
PRIMARY ARTERY IN BUSINESS AND INDUSTRIAL AREA



SECONDARY ARTERY PASSING THRU RESIDENTIAL AREA



SECONDARY ARTERY IN BUSINESS AND INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

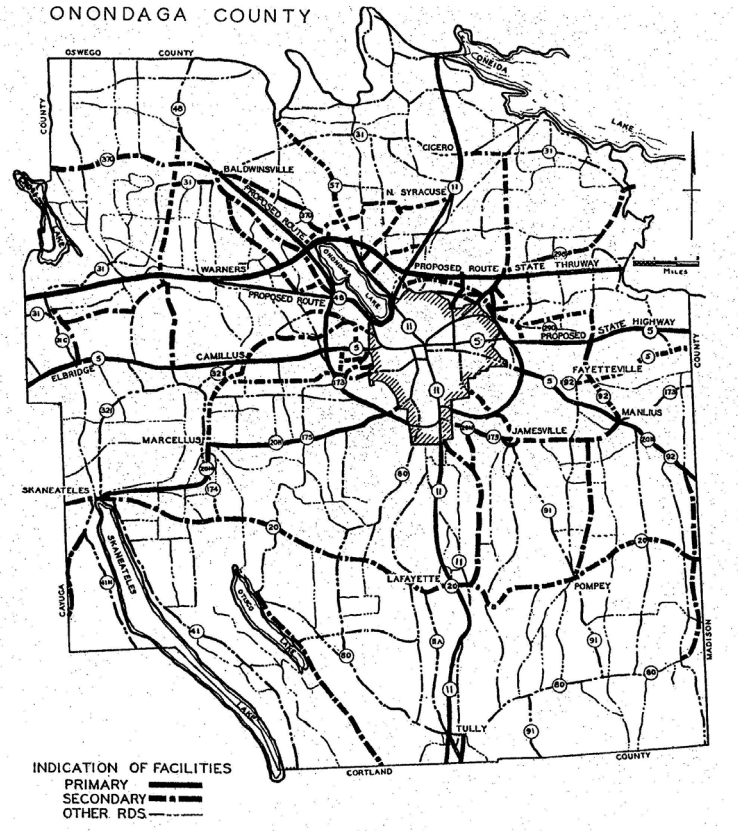


GRADE SEPARATION UTILIZED AT MAJOR INTERSECTIONS

1945

The 1945 report identified an emerging need for safe, comfortable, and fast circulation of people through the city and towns via automobile since "Yesterday's mild trickle of buggies and wagons has given way to a roaring tide of autos and trucks and buses." At the time 88,000 vehicles were registered in the County, and traffic volume was expected to increase 50% within a few years. Solutions focused on separating thru- and local traffic using a new 'spoke and rim' circulation system which would bypass difficult areas following a pattern of radial and circumferential arteries. The goal was to be able to travel into the city center from any corner of the County in 25 minutes of "pleasant, uninterrupted driving."

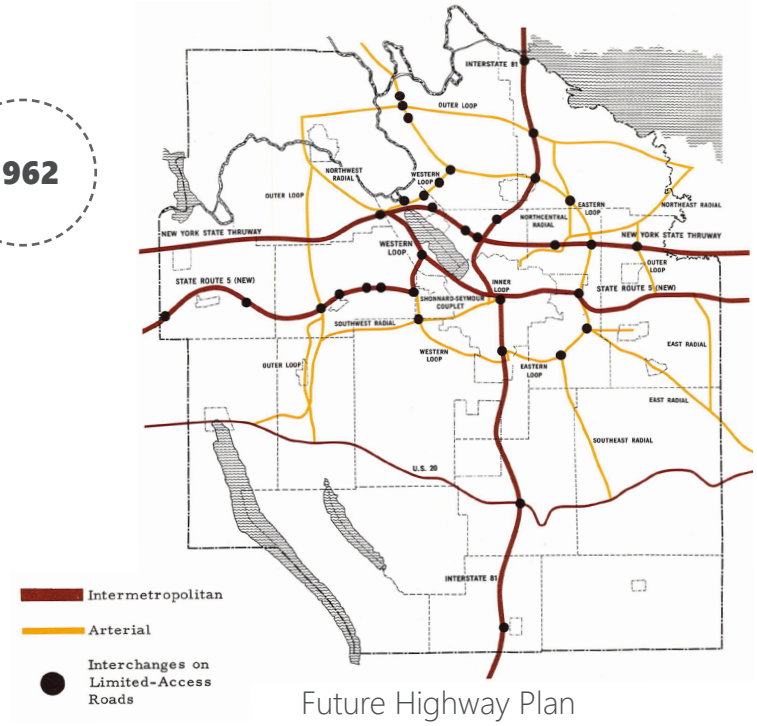
The images to the left show the design and treatment of thruways in a variety of urban and suburban typologies and the map below shows proposed development of traffic facilities in the County.



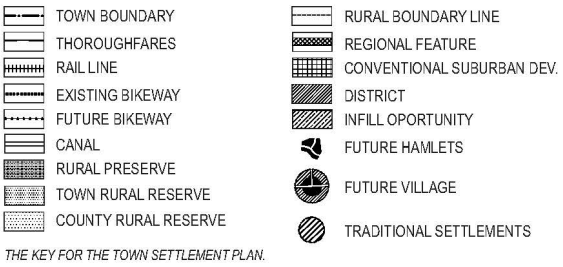
Development of Traffic Facilities

1962

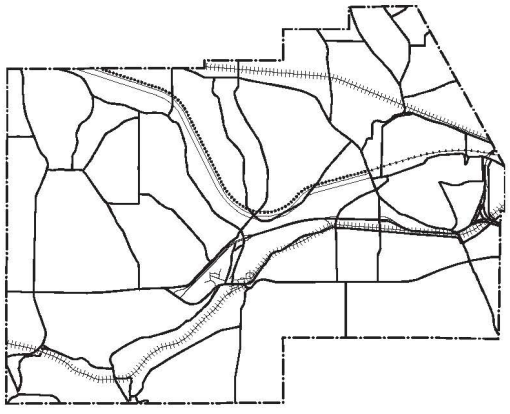
The 1962 plan largely thought of community mobility as the provision of more highways and arterials to move traffic and delineate local from thru traffic. It stated that "...The most important inducements that the County can offer are the construction of highways...The proposed pattern of inter-metropolitan and arterial highways for Onondaga County provides a basic roads framework designed to separate heavy inter-metropolitan through traffic from local traffic. When all the highways shown on the future highway plan are constructed, service to the southern half of the County will provide rapid movement north-south, either through the City of Syracuse via Interstate 81, or around it by way of ether the eastern or western loop. The most important consideration at present is the pace of construction of the highways serving areas to the southeast, the south, and the southwest of downtown Syracuse."



Future Highway Plan



THE KEY FOR THE TOWN SETTLEMENT PLAN.



Corridors in the Camillus Area Plan

2001

The 2001 plan was among the first that considered community mobility in terms beyond just automobile traffic movement. The plan identified three categories (i.e., The Region, The Neighborhood, The Street) of transportation policies that can be used to develop a strong transportation system that promotes mobility. The policies address design standards, the prevention of development along highways, and ways to accommodate and encourage multiple modes of transportation.

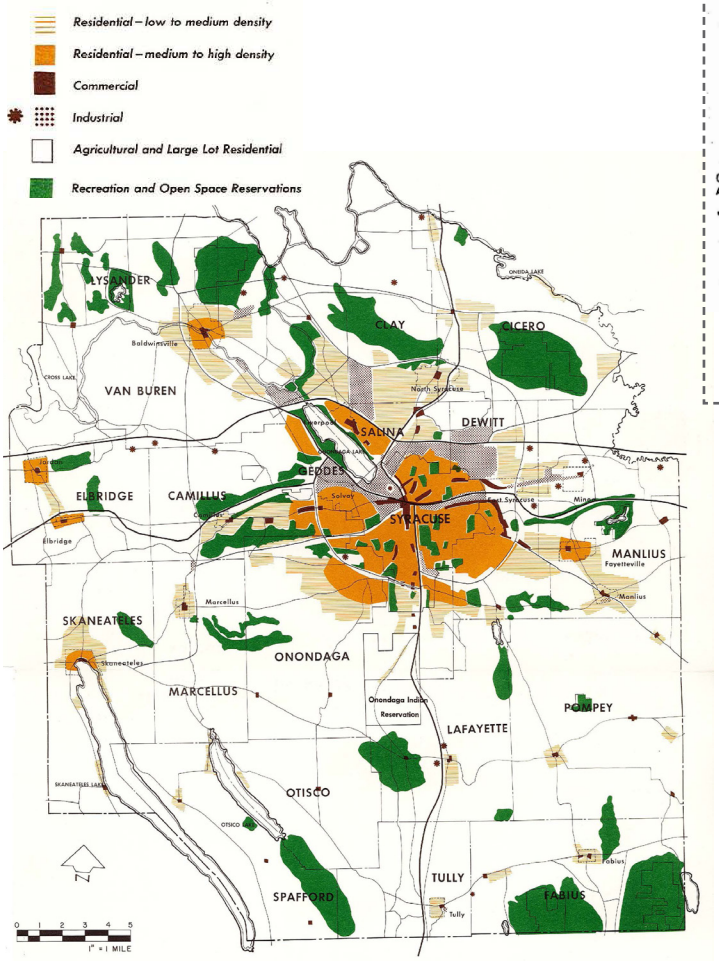
The Camillus area plan to the left shows future bike trails identified for preservation. According to the plan, the continuity of corridors is a topic that deserves special emphasis and they can not be planned for strictly within town boundaries.

Greenways and Blueways Planning History

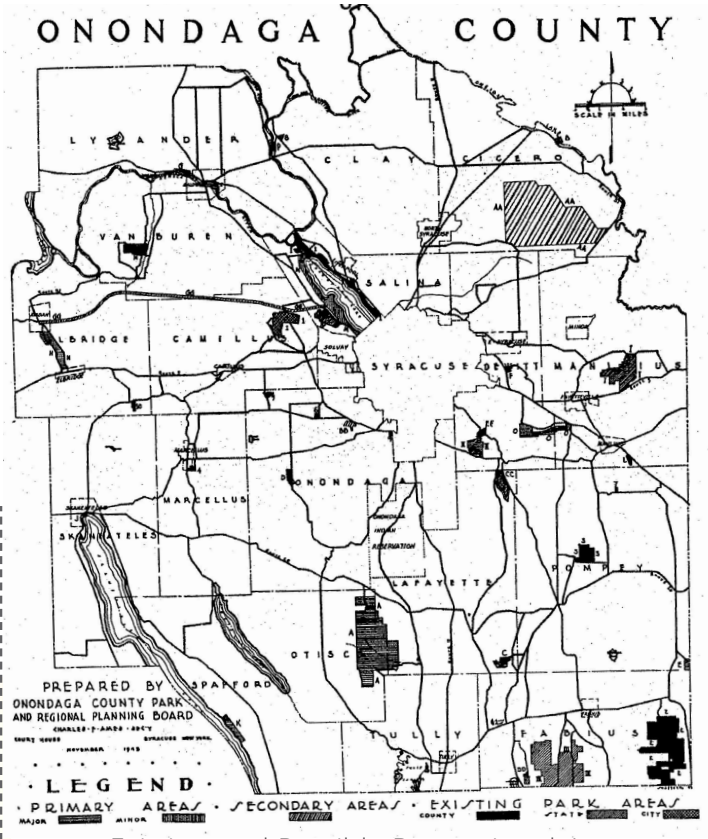
1945

The 1945 Post War Report identified a need to expand the County park system, especially in the northern half of the County as well as preserve specific areas such as Nye Farm in Fabius, Ram's Gulch and Labrador Pond.

The report also identified an expected increase in leisure time in the post-war period. It was thought that commercial enterprises would provide these services but that it was also the responsibility of the community government to provide recreational services (e.g., camping facilities, swimming pool, athletic field and stadium, playgrounds) for all age groups within each neighborhood.



Proposed County Plan



Existing and Possible Recreational Areas

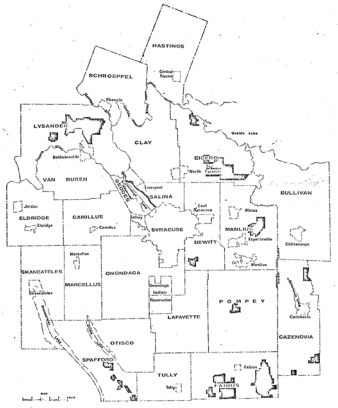
1962

The 1962 report performed an analysis of the County's existing recreation areas and determined a need for additional open space. The analysis considered future population, population distribution, trends in subdivision development, and suitability of available land.

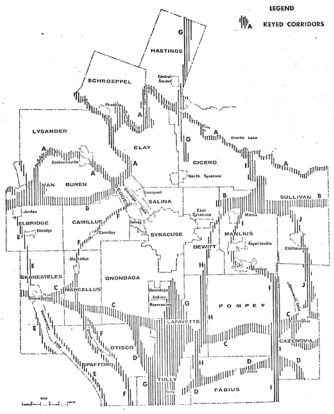
The plan suggested "the provision of a greenbelt to the north, taking certain swampy and wooded areas out of private control to protect them from residential or other types of development." According to the plan the greenbelt should "act to some degree as a barrier against a continuation of the patterns of sprawl and spread now reaching to the north."

1972

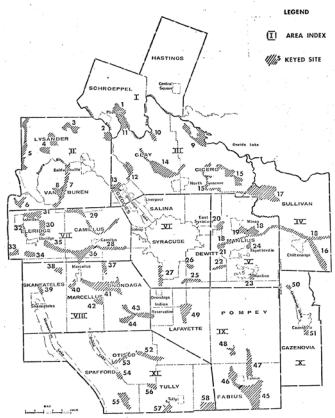
The Open Space and Recreational Plan Program section of the 1972 report states that "the county level of government is responsible for the provision of large tracts of recreational open space, preferably between 100 and 500 acres of land." The report recommends that the County take charge in developing a list of priority natural areas to preserve which would prevent the development of natural areas due to an increased pressure for land development. The plan developed a systems-approach to open space conservation. It mapped existing parks and preserved areas, potential open space corridors and potential open space sites, which are all described in detail in the plan. It then combined them into a composite open space system. It also described methods of program implementation including a variety of acquisition techniques, protective measures, and funding sources.



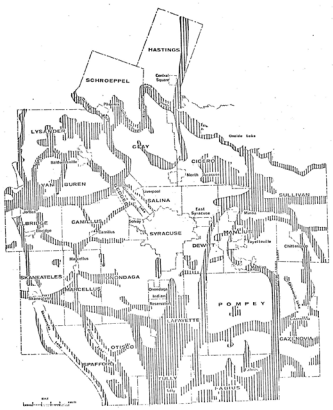
Existing Large Parks & Conservation Areas



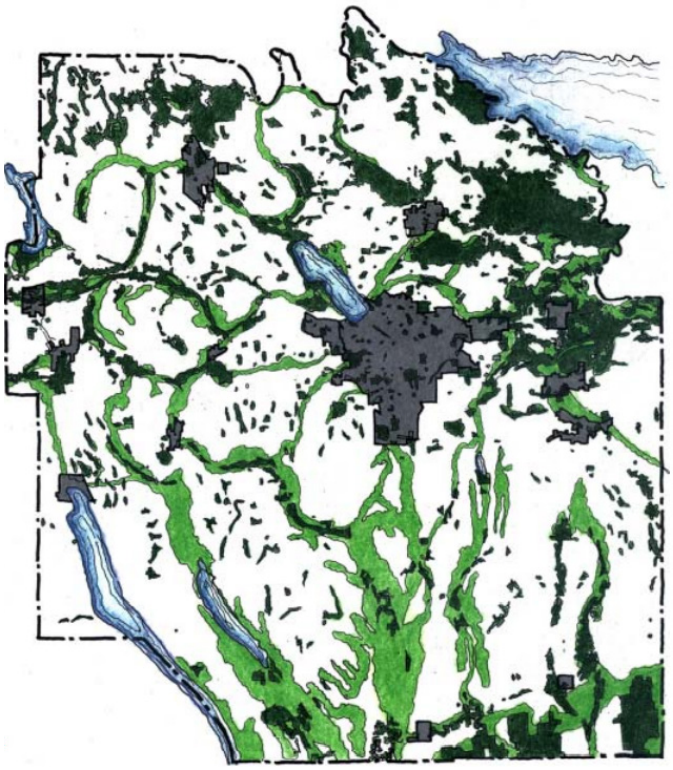
Major Open Space Corridors



Individual Open Space Sites



Composite Open Space System



Open Space Structure

2001

The Onondaga County Settlement Plan identified protected open space (dark green) and unprotected open space areas (light green) that were of great significance to the County's environmental health and natural beauty based on soils, slopes, ridges, valleys, natural corridors, flood plains, etc. It states that future development threatens these currently-undeveloped sites and corridors and that the mechanism for permanent protection of these lands must occur at the local level. "When completing their own town plans, the individual municipalities within the County should start with the information provided here and refine and enlarge it based on their own research..." It identifies strategies for protection including purchase or transfer of development rights, incentives for hamlet development, and concentration of growth at intersections.

Agriculture Planning History

1945

The Post-War Report sought to establish an Agricultural Center to provide services that would promote the prosperity of agricultural operations within the County. The Agricultural Center, which later became the Central New York Regional Market, was intended to provide space for farm related agencies and services. A director was appointed to coordinate the educational, recreational, and social uses of the center. The centralization of agencies and services was believed to benefit farmers by saving them time and providing them with easier access to helpful agencies (Post-War Planning Council, pg. 16) "The Agriculture Committee's recommendations aim at conserving Onondaga's soil, water, forest, and wild-life resources, without which all the proposals for betterment of agriculture are meaningless (Post-War Planning Council, pg. 43)."

1972

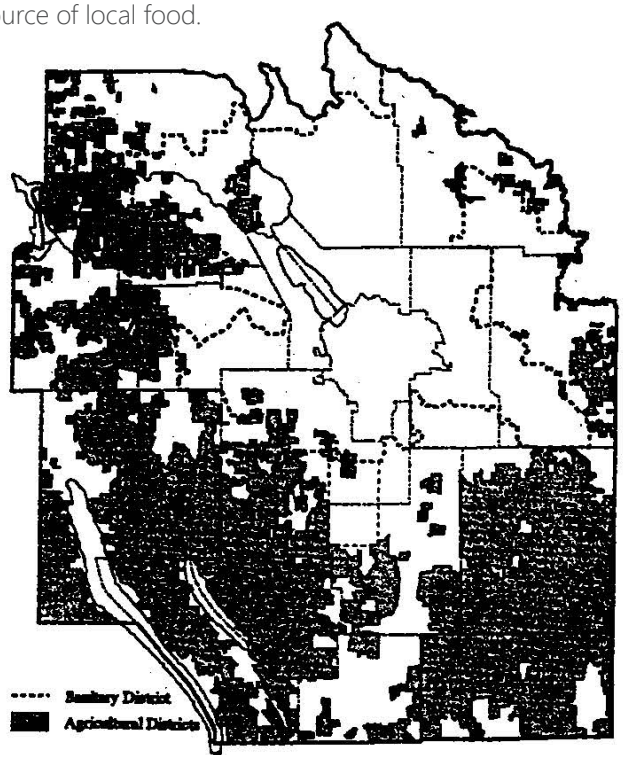
The 1972 plan spoke of agriculture only in terms of desired agricultural development. The plan stipulates that, "Outside the urban area... any dense development should take place around [existing or future] community growth centers. The communities identified as growth centers are those that have the present capability or the potential for providing a full complement of urban services and those around which development is not limited by physical constraints." The plan went on to say that while scattered rural development was anticipated in the countryside, only development dense enough th require water and sewer service and arterial highways should be concentrated in the community growth centers.

1998

The Plan encourages development in rural areas but suggests compact development that will retain the area's rural character and prevent low density sprawl. Promoting high density development in rural areas is vital in preventing the consumption of prime agricultural land throughout the County. Furthermore, the Plan states that development regulations and zoning should be revised to foster the clustering that will ultimately protect farmland.

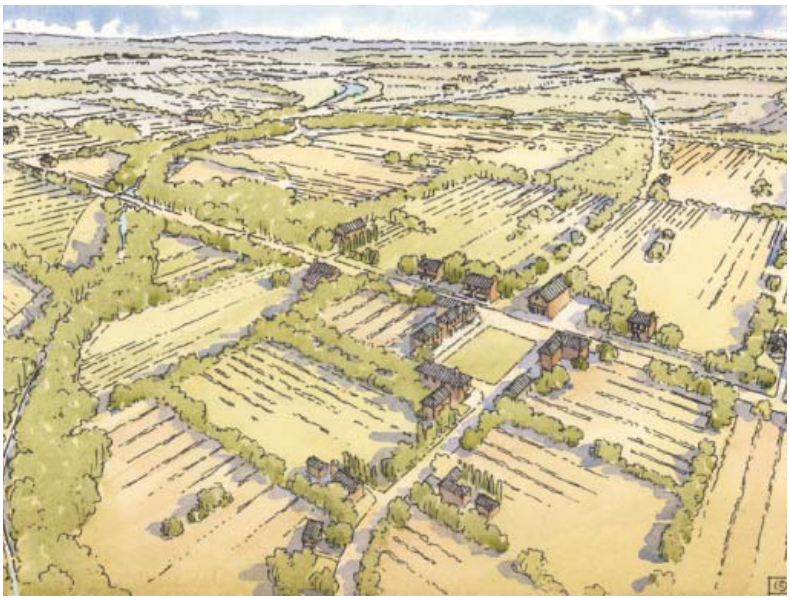
1977

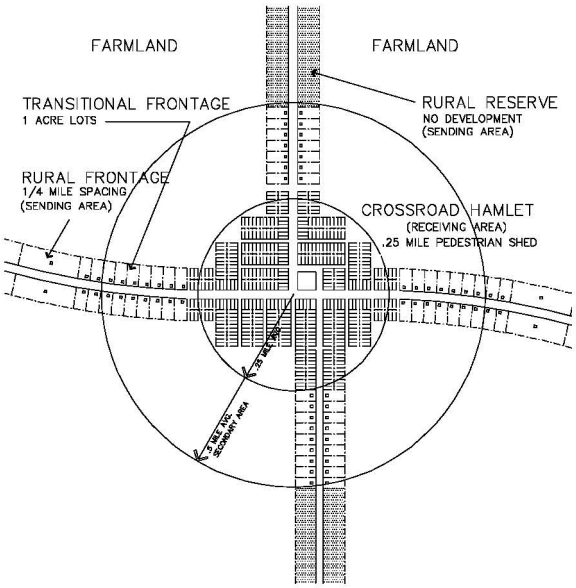
The 1972 plan noted that the "striking rural-urban nature of the County gives the area its character and diversity." Adding that, while agricultural land use and employment had been declining for decades, the sector was still a major income generator and an important and convenient source of local food.

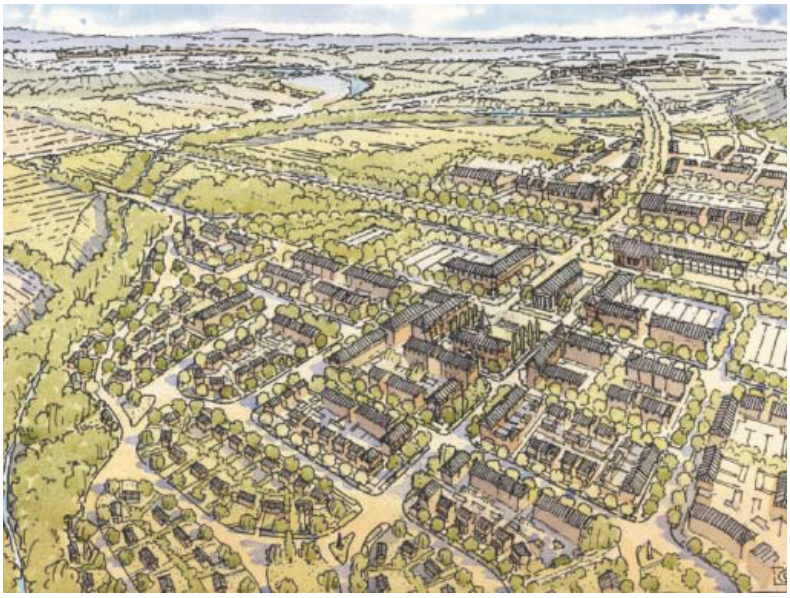


Agricultural Districts

2001







The 2001 plan also approached rural and agricultural preservation through a strategy of managing rural development. The two perspectives on this page illustrate the evolution of a Traditional Neighborhood Development transect. The top example shows a shows a hamlet beginning to form around an a rural intersection, with planned dense development forming around a central public space. Guided by the development regulations shown in the diagram, a village forms over time as more dense development fills the quarter mile central area. Within the next half mile, larger lot development, up to one home per acre, is allowed. Beyond this, transfer of development rights programs are encouraged to preserve farmland and limit sprawl. The scheme theoretically allows for a range of housing choices, which all are allowed the benefit of close proximity to both viable retail and commercial areas as well as natural and scenic resources.

Downtown Syracuse's
Armory Square at Dusk

A Framework for Competitiveness

A Framework for Competitiveness

Plan Onondaga provides a framework for understanding how and where the County can focus its resources in order to support and foster competitiveness in the global economic system. Understanding how Onondaga County compares with other counties, and what it can do to become more competitive starts with defining the characteristics of successful counties.

This section takes a look at what counties need to be competitive, and compares Onondaga County to its peers in Upstate New York and across the U.S. The Framework for Competitiveness measures competitiveness characteristics in Onondaga County and its peer counties, and then uses an index to explore where Onondaga County is doing well, and where it should focus efforts on improvement.

Characteristics of Competitiveness

Characteristics that contribute to competitiveness have been identified through analyzing the aspects of other successful counties[1]. These characteristics can be divided into three major categories: Investments in People, Economic Collaboration, and Strong Centers.

The specific characteristics shown on the next page lay the foundation for the thematic explorations and aspirational goals and strategies identified in Plan Onondaga.

Investments in People

Economic Collaboration

Strong Centers

Investments in People

Social Capital:
Human development is an important key to the 21st century knowledge-based economy and includes a focus on supporting entrepreneurship, innovation, and business formation.

Prioritization of Livability:
A continuous focus on improving quality of life through investments in educational, cultural, and recreational facilities is an important key for attracting top global talent.

Education, Education, Education:
Everyone in the County should have access to high-quality, affordable educational opportunities that prepare them for participation in the workforce.

Economic Collaboration

Leadership and Vision:
Establish a clear far-sighted view of where the County is headed, and utilize a consensus-based approach to getting there.

Institutional Strength:
Support institutions that encourage economic growth, like Onondaga County affiliated agencies, local governments, educational institutions, healthcare, industry associations, and public safety organizations.

Coordination and Collaboration:
As the County is comprised of smaller jurisdictions, it is critically important to work together to develop strong relationships between jurisdictions, and with the private sector to foster growth.

Strong Centers

Forward-Thinking Planning to Guide Organic Growth:
The framework of Plan Onondaga acts as a guide to channel and foster growth in walkable districts, while prioritizing investment in areas served by existing infrastructure.

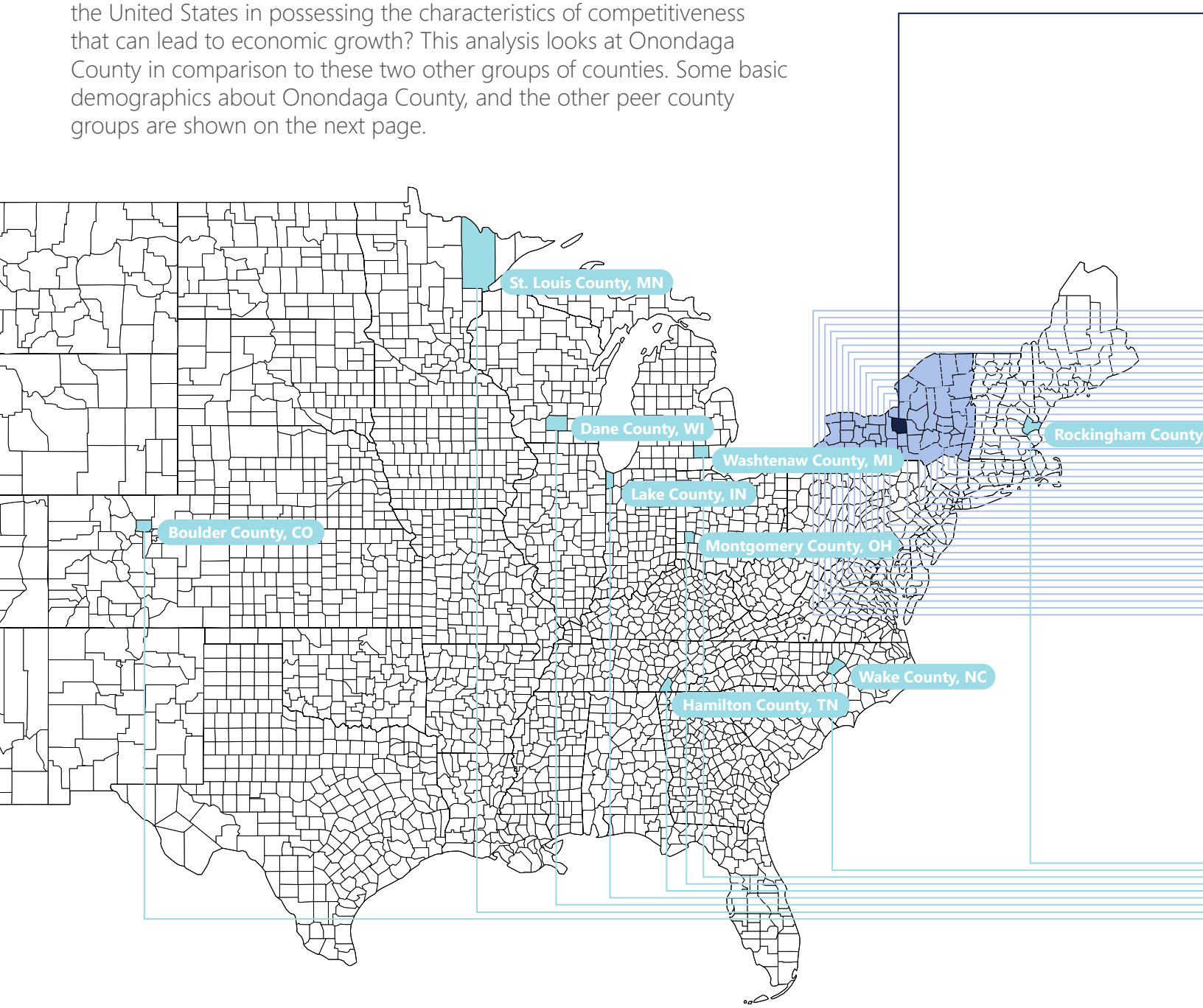
Intelligent Infrastructure Investment:
Strategic investments in public transportation systems, parks and trails, and the County's water and wastewater systems protect and enhance our quality of life.

Closing Infrastructure Gaps:
Infrastructure investments ensure equity so that all people in the County can benefit from future economic opportunities (e.g., broadband and transportation access).

Compact Development:
Development that enhances existing communities is preferable to unmanaged growth. Investments in strong centers and emerging locations are good for supporting business, innovation, arts and culture, and protecting the natural environment.

Peer County Comparisons

Onondaga County is often recognized for its high quality of life which is the result of its geography, history, and people. But how does Onondaga County compare with peer counties in Upstate New York and throughout the United States in possessing the characteristics of competitiveness that can lead to economic growth? This analysis looks at Onondaga County in comparison to these two other groups of counties. Some basic demographics about Onondaga County, and the other peer county groups are shown on the next page.



Onondaga County

Onondaga County's population grew slightly over the last decade and in 2020 more people resided in Onondaga County than any decade since 1970. At the same time the City of Syracuse's population has stabilized over the past 20 years after witnessing large population declines between 1970 and 2000.

POPULATION CHANGE 2000-2020
+4%

POVERTY RATE
14.1%

CHANGE IN EMPLOYMENT 2014-2019
+1%

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME 2010-2019

Peer Counties in Upstate New York

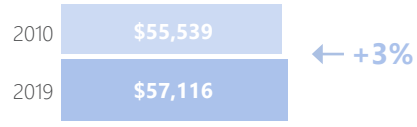
This analysis compares Onondaga County to the aggregate data of 45 Upstate New York counties, which include Albany (City of Albany), Monroe (City of Rochester), and Erie (City of Buffalo) counties. Population growth in Onondaga County between 2000 and 2020 slightly outpaced the average of all Upstate counties and it was also greater than Monroe and Erie Counties individually.

POPULATION CHANGE 2000-2020
+0.7%

POVERTY RATE
13.7%

CHANGE IN EMPLOYMENT 2014-2019
+1%

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME 2010-2019



Peer Counties in the United States

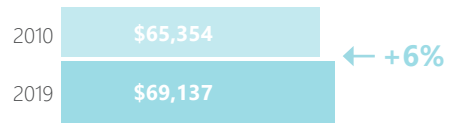
The analysis compares Onondaga County to the aggregate data of nine peer counties located throughout the United States. These counties are out-competing Onondaga in population growth by 19%, and they have also experienced greater gains in employment and household income.

POPULATION CHANGE 2000-2020
+23%

POVERTY RATE
11.9%

CHANGE IN EMPLOYMENT 2014-2019
+10%

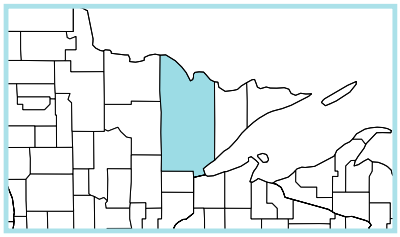
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME 2010-2019



Why Look at Peer Counties in the United States?

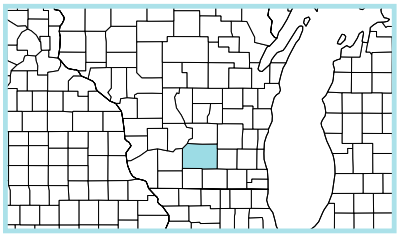
The national peer counties are singled out in this analysis to be aspirational. The national peer counties are similar in size to Onondaga County, and have at least one higher education institution, like Syracuse University in Onondaga County. When people from home and abroad assess their options for where to live, start families, or find jobs, Onondaga County seeks to be competitive with these national peer communities for offering economic opportunities and high quality of life that attract people and continued economic growth and investment.

St. Louis County, MN



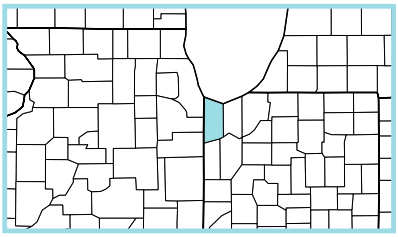
Population (2020) 200,231
Largest City Duluth (pop. 86,691)
Education Institution University of Minnesota Duluth

Dane County, WI



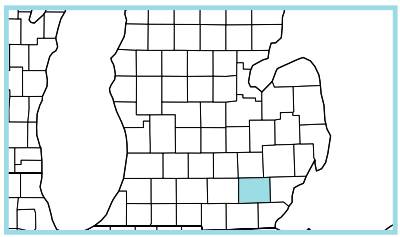
Population (2020) 561,504
Largest City Madison (pop. 269,840)
Education Institution University of Wisconsin

Lake County, IN



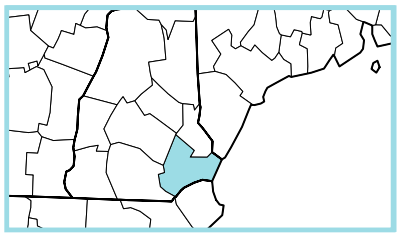
Population (2020) 498,700
Largest City Gary (pop. 68,982)
Education Institution Indiana University Northwest

Washtenaw County, MI



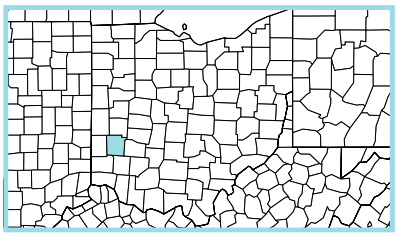
Population (2020) 372,258
Largest City Ann Arbor (pop. 123,851)
Education Institution University of Michigan

Rockingham County, NH



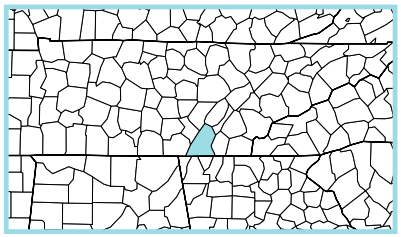
Population (2020) 314,176
Largest City Portsmouth (pop. 21,956)
Education Institution Southern New Hampshire University

Montgomery County, OH



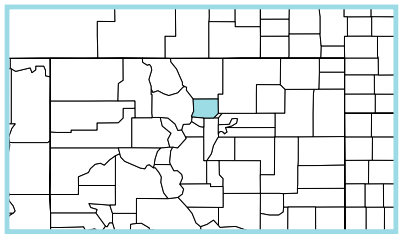
Population (2020) 537,309
Largest City Dayton (pop. 137,644)
Education Institution University of Dayton

Hamilton County, TN



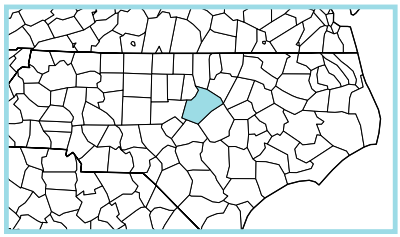
Population (2020) 366,207
Largest City Chattanooga (pop. 181,099)
Education Institution University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Boulder County, CO



Population (2020) 330,758
Largest City Boulder (pop. 108,250)
Education Institution University of Colorado Boulder

Wake County, NC



Population (2020) 1,129,410
Largest City Raleigh (pop. 467,665)
Education Institution North Carolina State

Competitiveness Index Analysis

In order to compare Onondaga County with peer counties in Upstate New York and the United States, specific indicators representative of the Characteristics of Competitiveness (Investments in People, Economic Collaboration, and Strong Centers) were identified and measured. Indicators for competitiveness were identified for each category based on readily available demographic and economic data. These sixteen indicators, shown below, are organized under the three Characteristics of Competitiveness.

Data for each of the indicators were collected and analyzed for Onondaga County, for the aggregate of the 45 Upstate New York peer counties, and for the aggregate of the nine peer counties in the U.S. The results for each were developed into the comparative indices between Onondaga County and each peer county area on the following page.

INVESTMENTS IN PEOPLE:
The ability of locations to produce, retain and attract skilled workers measured by:

1. Population Growth, 2010-20
2. % of population with HS diploma or Less
3. % of the population with some College or an AA degree
4. % of the population with a BA degree
5. % of the population with a Graduate or Professional degree
6. % of Population comprised of Millennials & Boomers (who have greater propensities to live in urban settings)
7. The Diversity of the Population as measured by ESRI's Tapestry Market Segments
8. Median Age

ECONOMIC COLLABORATION:
The ability of locations to support the generation of jobs, income and wealth measured by:

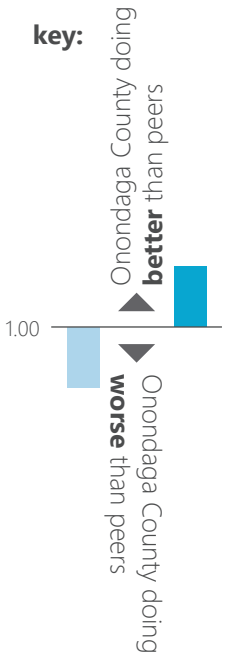
9. Per Capita Income
10. Median Household Income
11. Employment Diversity by Industry
12. Jobs per Household

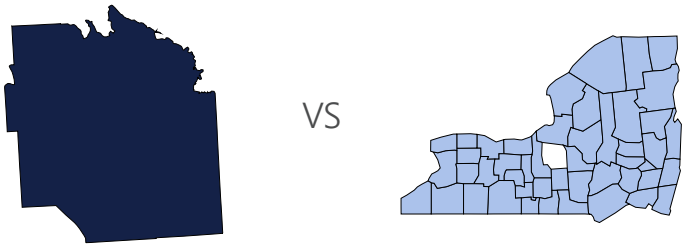
STRONG CENTERS:
The ability of locations to serve as a center for cultural activities measured by:

13. % of Workers with a Commute under 10 minutes
14. Daytime Population as % of Total Population
15. Retail Sales Surplus (the extent to which dollars come into the area), 2017
16. % Employment in Arts

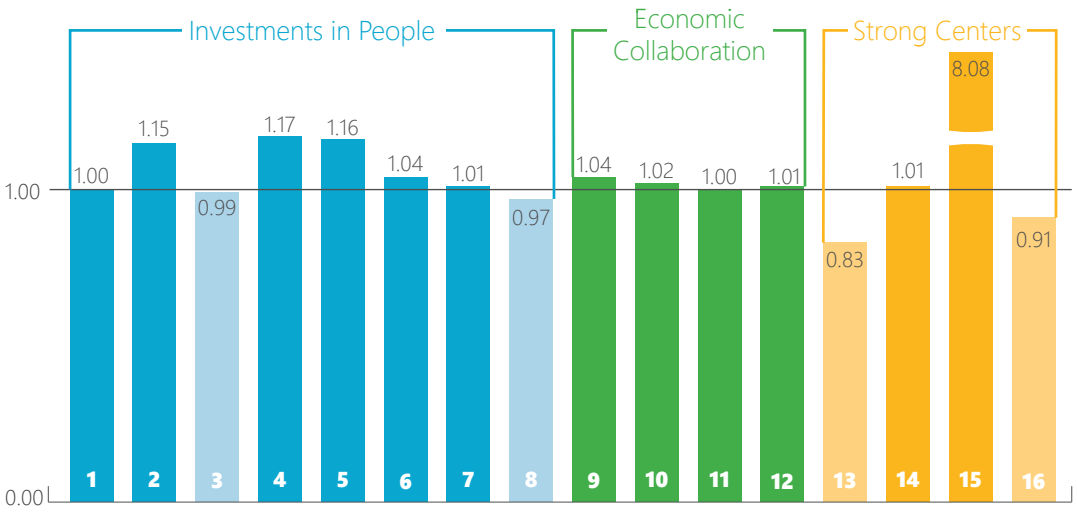
Competitiveness Index Analysis Results

The indicator comparisons are presented in the index bar graphs shown below. In these graphs, Onondaga County is compared to the Upstate New York and United States peer counties through the 16 indicators, which are numbered on the bars and defined in the boxes on the next page. If Onondaga County performs better than the average of the peer county group for any of the indicators, its score will be greater than 1.0 and the bar on the bar graph will be darker. If it underperforms the peer county group, its score will be less than 1.0 and the bar will be lighter. In general, Onondaga County is competitive with the Upstate New York peer counties, but not as competitive with the United States peer counties. The results are discussed in more detail beginning on page 48.





Onondaga County VS Upstate New York Peer Counties Index



INVESTMENTS IN PEOPLE:

the ability of locations to produce, retain and attract skilled workers measured by:

1. Population Growth, 2010-20
2. % of population with HS diploma or Less
3. % of the population with Some College or an AA degree
4. % of the population with a BA degree
5. % of the population with a Graduate or Professional degree
6. % of Population comprised of Millenials & Boomers (who have greater propensities to live in urban settings)
7. The Diversity of the Population as measured by ESRI's Tapestry Market Segments
8. Median Age

ECONOMIC COLLABORATION:

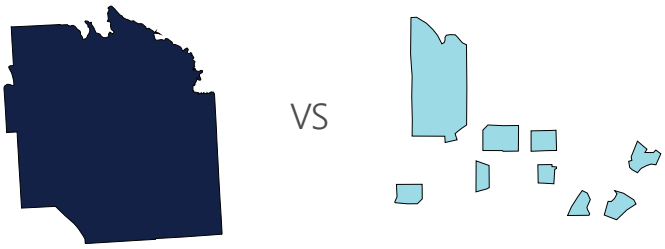
the ability of locations to support the generation of jobs, income and wealth measured by:

9. Per Capita Income
10. Median Household Income
11. Employment Diversity by Industry
12. Jobs per Household

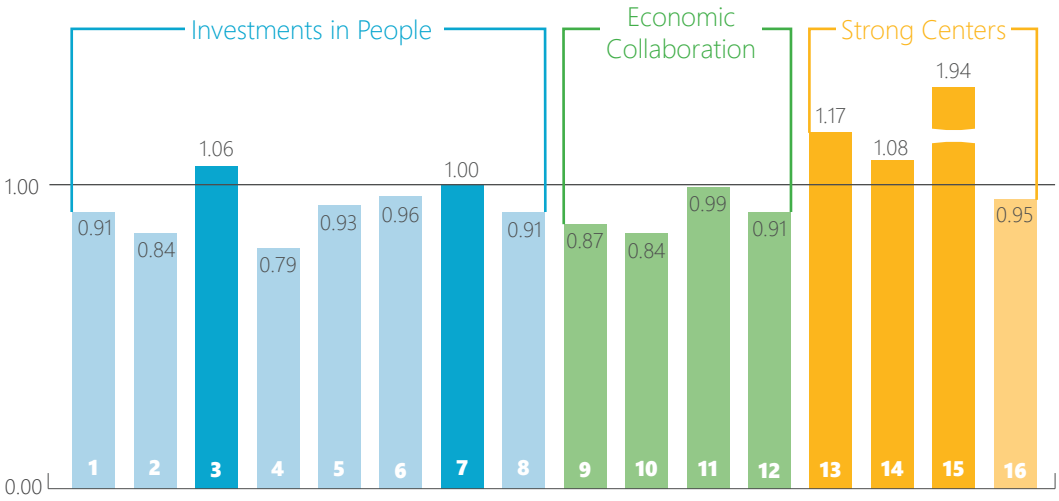
STRONG CENTERS:

the ability of locations to serve as a center for cultural activities measured by:

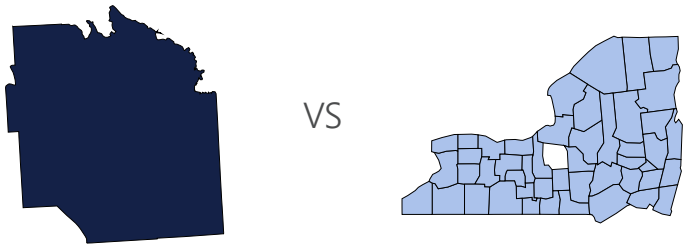
13. % of Workers with a Commute under 10 minutes
14. Daytime Population as % of Total Population
15. Retail Sales Surplus (the extent to which dollars come into the area), 2017
16. % Employment in Arts



Onondaga County VS United States Peer Counties Index

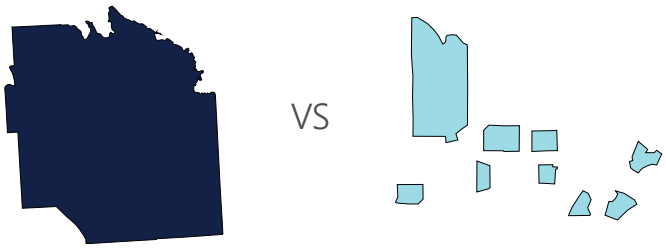


Competitiveness Index Analysis Key Results



Onondaga County VS Upstate New York Peer Counties Key Results

Onondaga County performs better than Upstate in 8 of the 16 measures. It is on a par with Upstate on 6 measures. It's estimated population growth, though modest, is stronger than Upstate. The County's retail surplus (the amount of sales coming into the County, versus the amount leaking out of the County expressed as a percentage of retail sales) is 8 times higher than Upstate. The only two where Onondaga lags behind Upstate is the percent of the working population that commutes less than 10 minutes to work and the percent of employment in the arts.



Onondaga County VS United States Peer Counties Key Results

Onondaga does slightly less well when compared to the 9 peer counties from around the U.S. It trails the nine U.S. counties in 10 of the 16 measures including population growth, educational attainment, per capita and household income. It out-performs those counties on four measures:

- Percent of population with some college or an AA degree.
- Percent of working population that commutes less than 10 minutes to work.
- Daytime population as a percent of total population.
- Retail surplus (the ability to attract retail sales).

It is comparable on two measures:

- Percent of population that is in the baby boomer and millennial generations.
- Employment diversity by industry.

Takeaways

Compared to Upstate NY, Onondaga County is a competitive location, with strength in all three dimensions of Human Capital, Economic Collaboration, and Strong Centers. Compared to the nine peer counties, Onondaga County lags in several competitive dimensions, including investments in people and economic collaboration, though it is comparable to slightly ahead in the measure of strong centers.

This analysis suggests that, while the County may currently have some competitive weaknesses, it has substantial capacity to support economic growth. The pending investment in the White Pine Business Park by Micron Technology, Inc. will have a significant impact on these comparative metrics.

Onondaga County worked collaboratively with New York State, the federal government, and Micron to develop incentives to encourage investment. Public infrastructure investments will support the project, leading to significant job and population growth in Onondaga County and the region. This plan will help ensure a positive impact on the areas where the County currently lags behind peer counties nationally.

Plan Onondaga will support conditions that lead to additional growth and investment in the County and improve quality of life for its residents. The Plan themes focus on producing the conditions that can lead to sustained economic investment.

Concept Illustration for the planned semiconductor fabrication facility in Clay. Source: Micron Technology, Inc.

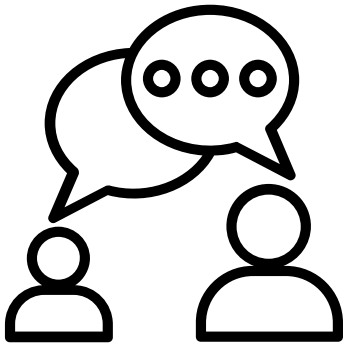
A Framework for Competitiveness

Endnotes

1 World Economic Forum. Competitive Cities and their Connections to Global Value Chains. World Economic Forum Global Agenda Council on Competitiveness. June 2016

Jamesville Balloon Festival
Source: Visit Syracuse

Community Engagement



Engaging the Community

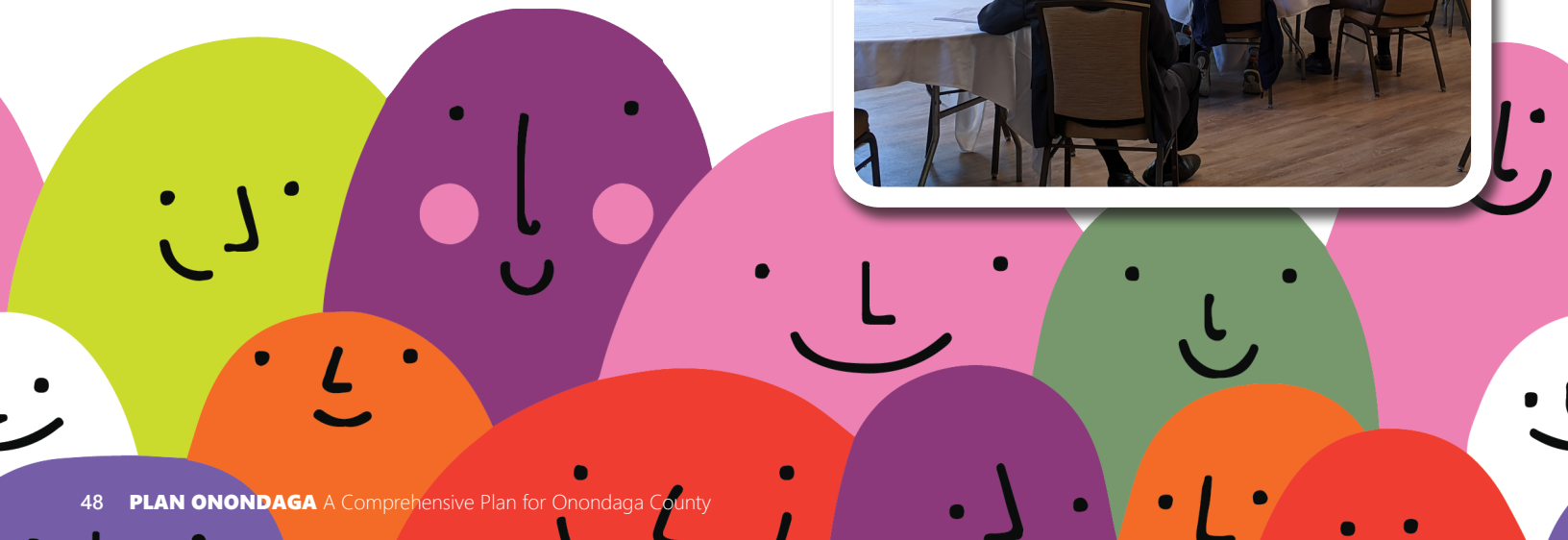
Plan Onondaga was driven by an open and transparent public engagement process. Early and continued involvement of stakeholders and community members was essential in developing a plan that accurately reflects a shared vision for future growth, development, preservation, and enhancement of the overall quality of life within the County.

Project Steering Committee

The Onondaga County Planning Board served as the project steering committee to oversee the plan development. The steering committee and County Planning staff worked closely with the project consultants throughout the process to guide outreach objectives, supplement the data analysis conducted by the consulting team, and review the development of plan sections.

Thematic Focus Groups

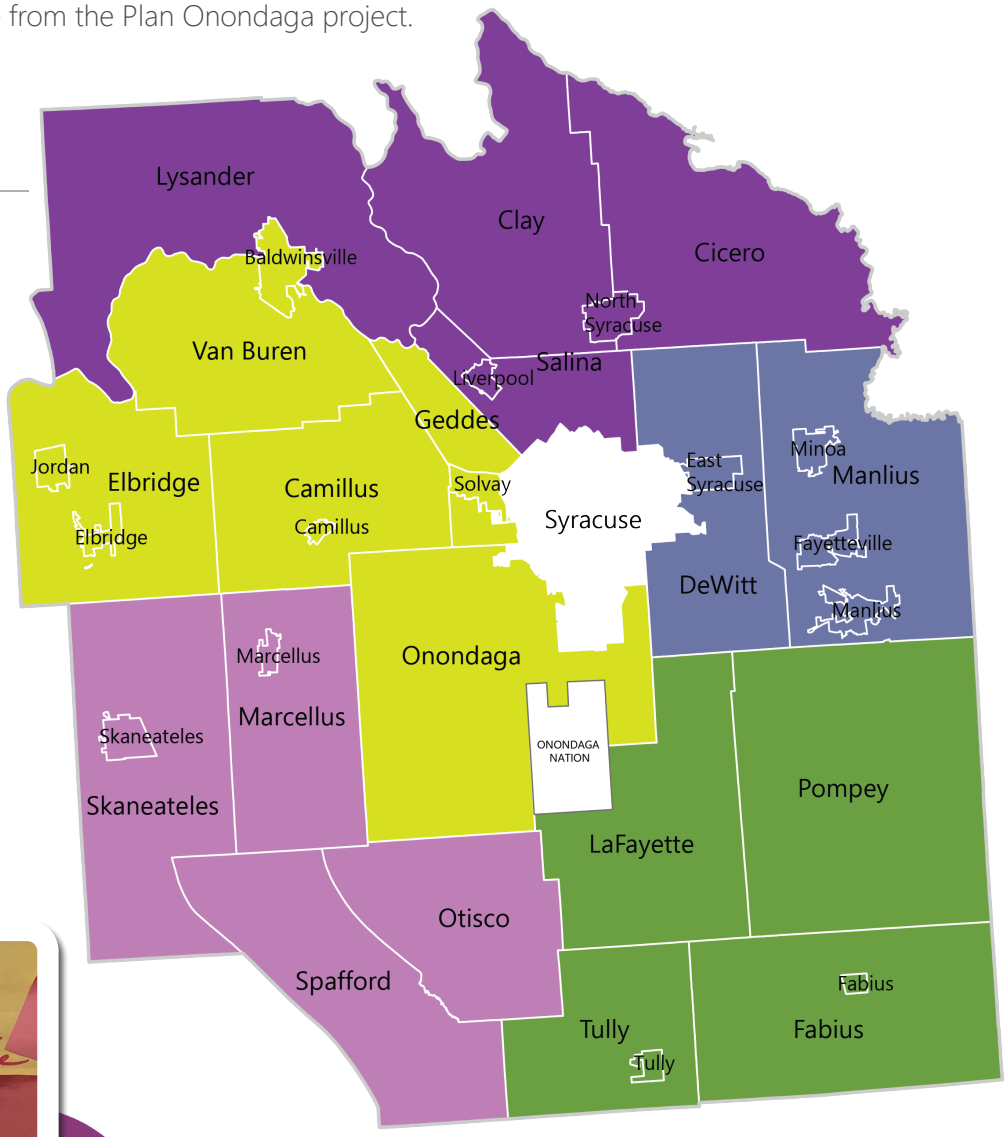
Community and regional stakeholders were invited to attend focus group sessions that were organized by the thematic areas within Plan Onondaga. Attendees were invited to each meeting based on need and topic area discussed. The five thematic area focus group sessions were held early in the planning process. Each focus group session consisted of a presentation and was followed by engaged conversation between the planning team and attendees.

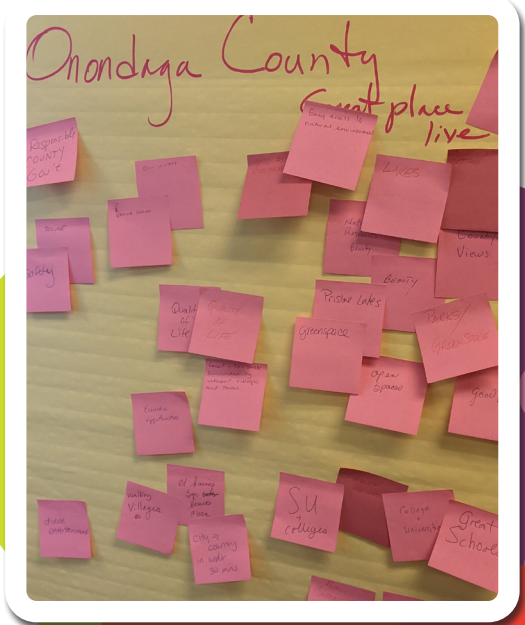


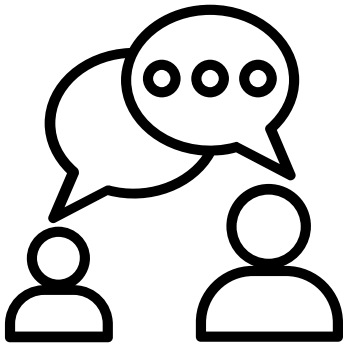
A Plan Onondaga "brand" was developed for the project to provide an easily recognizable graphic identity to the planning effort. These graphics will continue to be used by Onondaga County to draw and illustrate linkages between Plan Onondaga and new planning and implementation efforts that will come from the Plan Onondaga project.

Municipal Focus Groups

Five municipal focus group sessions were held midway through the planning process. The sessions were held in five separate locations in the following geographical areas throughout Onondaga County- southeast, southwest, northwest, east, and north. Town supervisors, village mayors, and legislative officials were invited to each session. Additionally, officials from the City of Syracuse were invited to attend each of the five sessions which provided the opportunity to create a dialog between officials of varying types (e.g., town, city, village) of municipalities regarding issues and opportunities that they face.







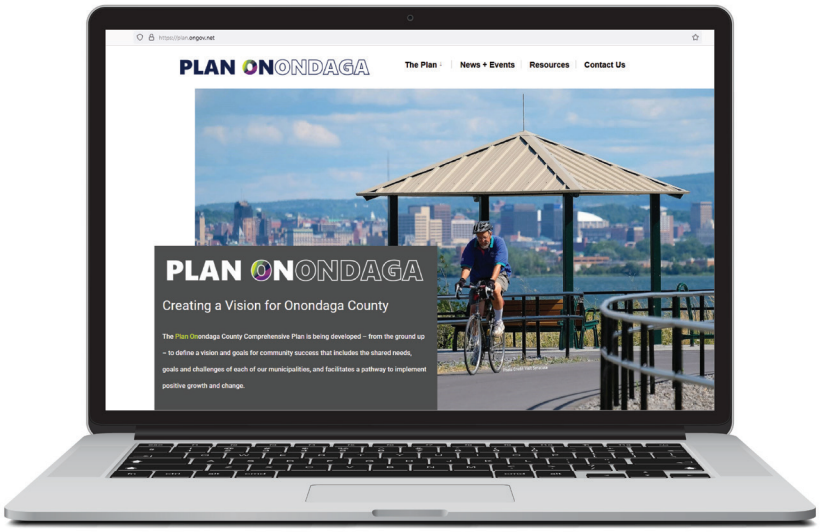
Engaging the Community

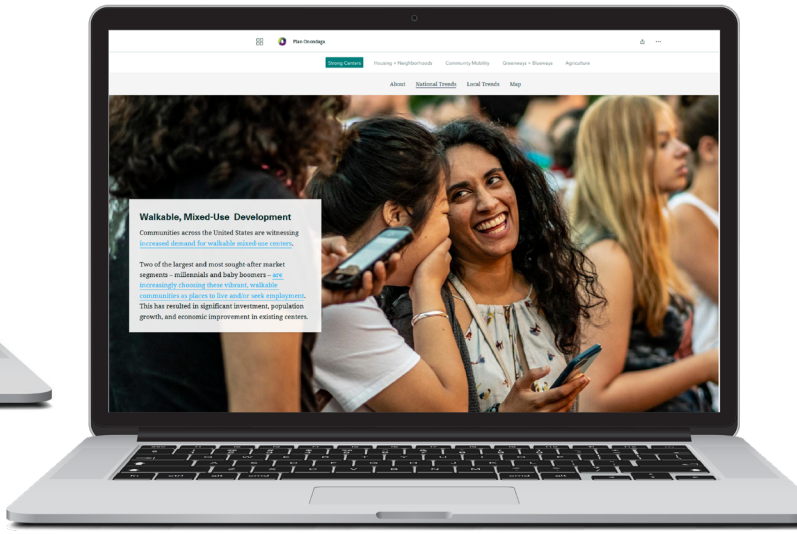
Project Website and Social Media

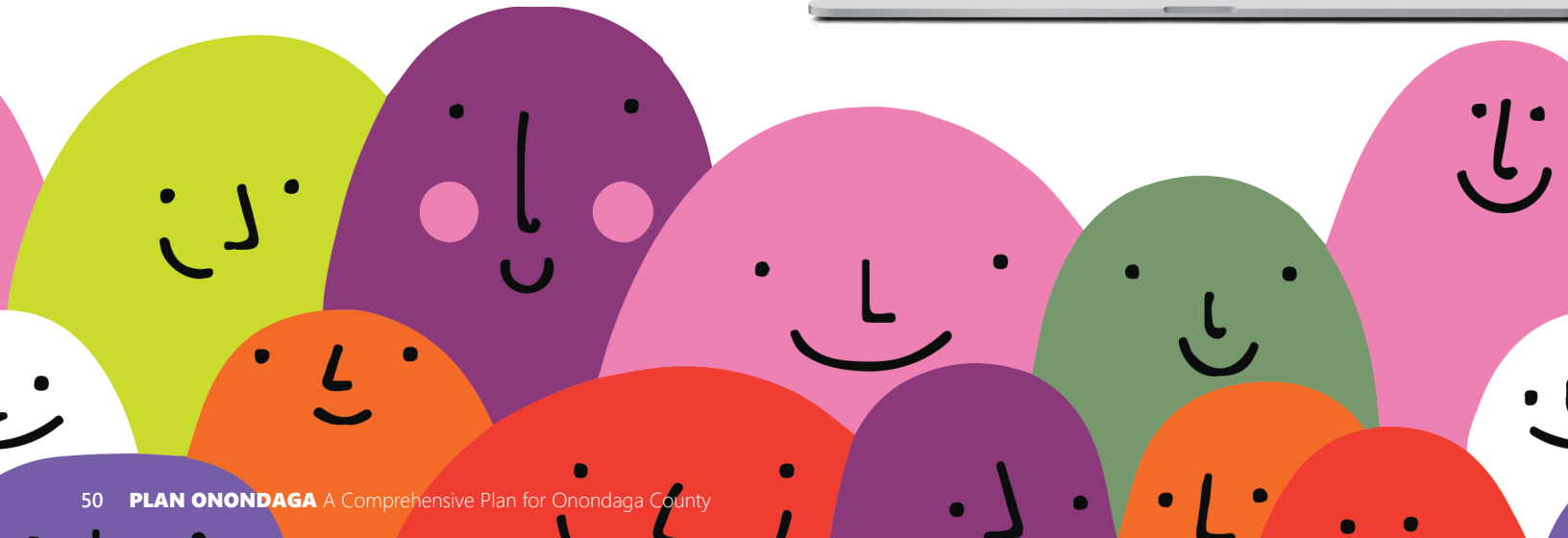
A project website was developed as a repository for information related to Plan Onondaga (**www.plan.ongov.net**). The website includes project and contact information, project schedule, project updates and resource links. It was used to distribute plan drafts for public review. The County also used social media pages on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to communicate project milestones.

StoryMap

The StoryMap is a platform which presents highlights of information from Plan Onondaga. The StoryMap consists of five sections, one for each theme (i.e., Strong Centers, Housing & Neighborhoods, Greenways & Blueways, Community Mobility, and Agriculture). The StoryMap provides a secondary way to explore the contents of Plan Onondaga, and features interesting graphics, mapping, and a survey tool to obtain user feedback and ideas.







Pop-Ups

Pop-up events were held throughout the project in locations such as the LaFayette Apple Festival, On Farm Fest, and the Westcott Cultural Festival. The Plan Onondaga team provided information about the planning process, listened to ideas from the community, and collected feedback about what people love about Onondaga County and what would make it better.

Community Summit

A day-long "community summit" was held in conjunction with the Onondaga County Planning Federation's 33rd Annual Planning Symposium. This event engaged Symposium participants through presentations of the County-wide vision, analysis associated with the various thematic areas of the Plan, and preliminary draft strategies. Participants attended a variety of workshops related to Plan Onondaga themes and a Plan Onondaga keynote presentation and Q&A session with Onondaga County Executive J. Ryan McMahon, II. Future symposiums will continue to feature Plan Onondaga themed programming.

What Did we Hear?

The public provided consistent input on issues and opportunities affecting Onondaga County and local communities. In general, community representatives and members were in support of the need to focus on the five thematic areas within Plan Onondaga.

Walkable centers, with a diversity of housing options, services, food and entertainment venues, are critically important for attracting and retaining residents and workers.

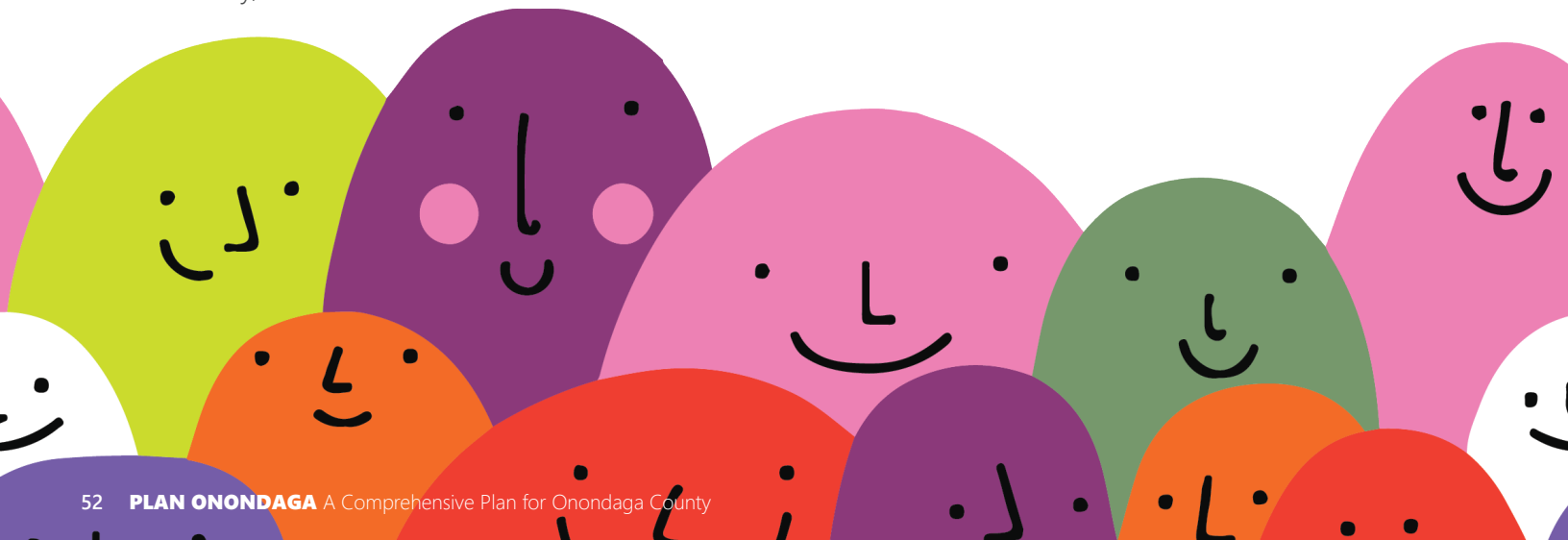
The cost and availability of diverse housing in the County is a critical concern, especially for attracting new workers and providing for aging households.

Strong Centers

- Invest in our main streets and urban neighborhoods to provide gathering spaces, improve walkability, and aesthetics.
- Continue to invest in and develop walkable neighborhood areas with diverse housing options.

Housing and Neighborhoods

- Address the availability and affordability of housing.
- Invest in neighborhoods.



The natural environment in Onondaga County is one of its strongest assets and should be protected and enhanced with public access where appropriate.

Greenways and Blueways

- Continue to invest in parks and trail systems.
- Protect valuable open space networks.

Agriculture

- Continue to invest in the protection of working farmland.
- Support local farms and farm-based businesses.

Improved transit service, trail connectivity, and bike lanes are important quality of life needs in the County, especially for households without a vehicle.

Agriculture is a critical component of the County's rural landscape and character. Working farmland should be protected.

Community Mobility

- Continue to invest in bike lanes and trails.
- Invest in improved public transit service.

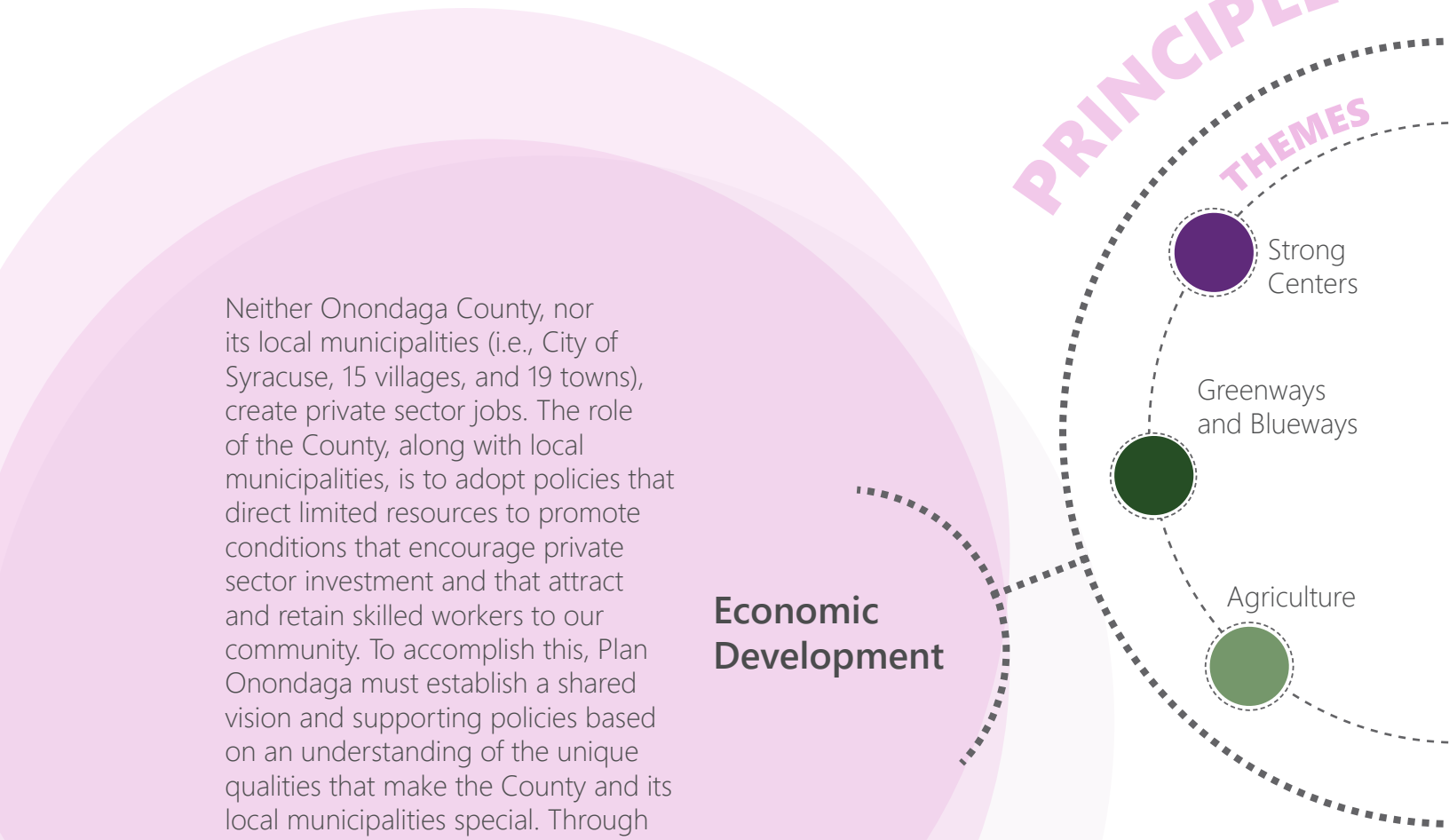
The Old Erie Canal
Source: Visit Syracuse

Plan Principles and Themes

Guiding Principles

Plan Onondaga was developed from the ground up to define a vision for community success that includes the shared needs, goals, and challenges of each of our municipalities, and that facilitates a pathway to implement positive growth and change.

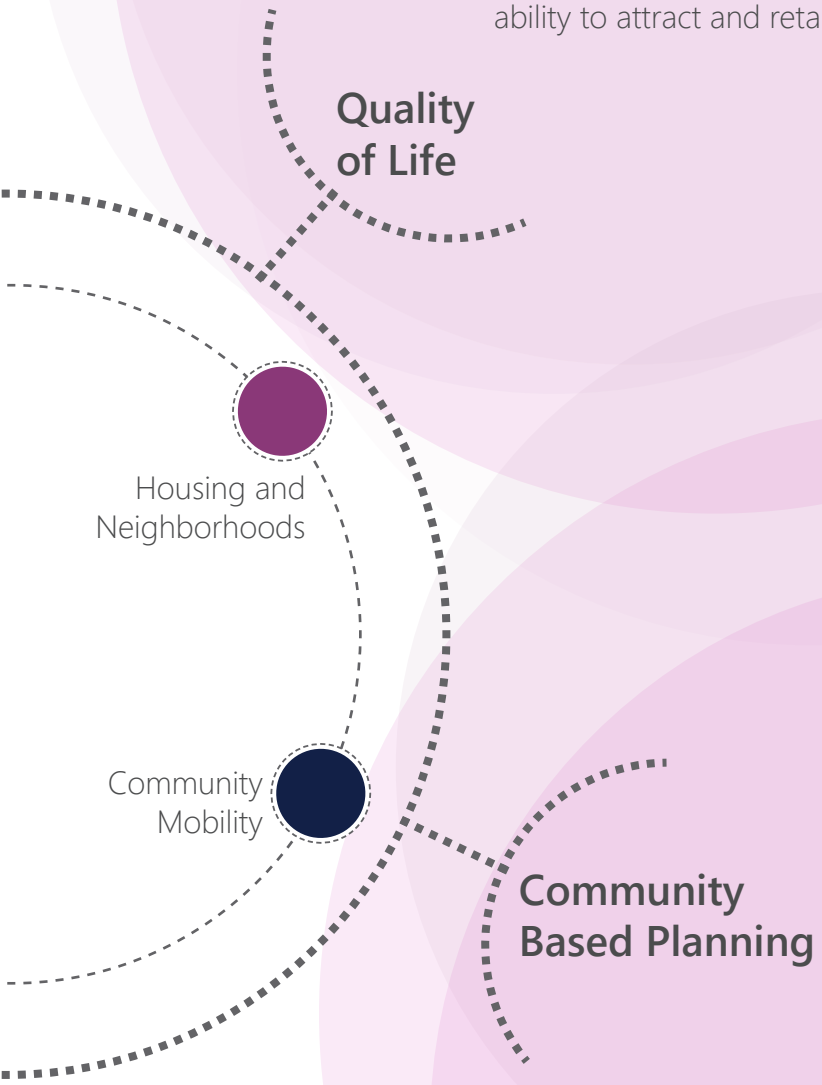
The planning process focused on the linkages between community engagement, quality of life, and economic development and explored five thematic areas as a framework for the identification of strategic initiatives and projects.



Neither Onondaga County, nor its local municipalities (i.e., City of Syracuse, 15 villages, and 19 towns), create private sector jobs. The role of the County, along with local municipalities, is to adopt policies that direct limited resources to promote conditions that encourage private sector investment and that attract and retain skilled workers to our community. To accomplish this, Plan Onondaga must establish a shared vision and supporting policies based on an understanding of the unique qualities that make the County and its local municipalities special. Through listening to the needs, concerns, and aspirations of the County's constituents, and careful analysis of County and local data, Plan Onondaga has formulated a vision, goals, and strategies for future economic growth and development.

Creating an environment supportive of economic growth in the 21st century requires a deep understanding of the quality of life needs of the modern workforce, and of how the assets and unique character of local communities contribute to a community's ability to attract and retain skilled labor.

Quality of Life



Community Based Planning

Onondaga County recognizes that its greatest potential to have a positive impact is through cooperation with the municipalities. To this end, Plan Onondaga embodies inclusive community-based planning. The plan will be implemented by developing community-based planning projects with local municipalities and identifying resources necessary to carry out projects. It is the County's intention to affect and support policies and projects at all levels of government by "doing the work" to build relationships and by being an advocate for good planning county-wide.

Plan Themes

Plan Onondaga was developed using five separate analytical lenses in the form of themes: Strong Centers, Housing and Neighborhoods, Community Mobility, Greenways and Blueways, and Agriculture. Selection of these themes arose from a series of individual municipal and stakeholder meetings held during the initial scoping stages of the Plan Onondaga project, and represent the planning areas of most importance to the County and its municipal planning partners.

The following Plan Onondaga chapters provide an overview of each of these thematic areas. Each theme includes an overview, national trends, local trends and a series of goals and strategies for planning and development in Onondaga County related to that thematic focus area.

The themes are each explored in the plan, and are intended to establish a clear vision for future planning within these areas of focus, both for the County and its municipal government counterparts, but also for the community as a whole.

Strong Centers

Strong centers are walkable, people oriented places with a mix of jobs, housing, shopping, dining, culture, public spaces, entertainment, transportation, and services.

Vision:

Onondaga County will strengthen the quality of life and economic stability of local communities through the development of amenity-rich, vibrant, and walkable centers.

Housing and Neighborhoods

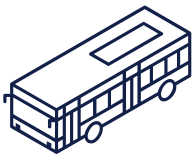
Housing and Neighborhoods as a planning theme addresses the needs and desires people have for the structures and places where they live.

Vision:

Onondaga County will support affordable, attractive, diverse, and efficient housing and neighborhoods to retain and attract future residents.

Community Mobility

Community Mobility is the ability of people to travel from place to place within Onondaga County. Community mobility strategies aim to provide for more choice in the transportation system and to improve safety for all users.



Vision:

Onondaga County will enhance mobility by improving the safety, accessibility, and diversity of options for moving people within and between communities.

Greenways and Blueways

Greenways and blueways are corridors of open space or waterways that incorporate diverse natural, cultural, and scenic features.

Vision:

Onondaga County will protect and expand greenways and blueways to provide unique recreation and ecological health opportunities.

Agriculture

Agriculture is the science, art, and business of cultivating soil, producing crops, and raising livestock. Innovative agricultural and farming practices are needed to promote economic development while also protecting our environment.

Vision:

Onondaga County will ensure that Agriculture remains a viable and integral part of the economy and a defining characteristic of the landscape.

PLAN ON
Strong Centers

Photo: Visit Syracuse

Community Comments on Strong Centers

Strong Centers

Strong centers are walkable, people oriented places with a mix of jobs, housing, shopping, dining, culture, public spaces, entertainment, transportation, and services.

Vision:

Onondaga County will strengthen the quality of life and economic stability of local communities through the development of amenity-rich, vibrant, and walkable centers.

Strong Centers typically include mixed-use development where residential, commercial, retail and/or office uses are integrated into a single building. Centers have historically been in the form of villages and hamlets throughout the County, as well as in neighborhoods like Eastwood in the City of Syracuse. This human scaled pattern of development accommodates necessary amenities for people to live, work, and play within the same block.

Centers occur at different scales in City neighborhoods like Armory Square, a village main street like Oswego Street in Baldwinsville, or a rural hamlet like LaFayette. Each of these examples include sidewalks with multi-story buildings closer to the street and have a mix of residential, retail spaces, restaurants, and office uses. They also have amenities like street trees, pedestrian-scale lighting, and on-street parking. They are places where people gather, find services, and are an important part of the identity of and serve the broader community. There is growing market demand for incorporating strong centers into suburban and even rural areas.

Strong Centers provide multiple benefits for local communities by:

- Offering an attractive and walkable environment to work, shop, dine, and visit with neighbors in close proximity to where people live;
- Attracting employers and creating local business opportunities;
- Offering a variety of housing options that can address issues associated with equity and affordability; and
- Contributing to neighborhood revitalization and stabilization.

Types
of Strong Centers

Different types of strong centers fit different areas of the County and fulfill different needs. This spread illustrates and describes five different centers Onondaga County intends to help develop over the lifetime of this plan and beyond.

TRADITIONAL CENTER

Traditional strong centers include villages and hamlets that already exist in Onondaga County.

EMERGING CENTER

Emerging centers include targeted intersections and the areas surrounding them that have been identified for mixed-use investments, mobility hubs, and transit stops.

Elements
of Strong Centers

COMMERCIAL
Commercial uses and activities come together with other neighborhood features to create place.
- Office
- Retail
- Restaurants

GATHERING SPACE
High quality, public gathering spaces are accessible to all.
- Culture
- Parks
- Streetscape

HOUSING
Housing options are available for all incomes and phases of life in one community to create complete neighborhoods.
- Single-Family
- Multi-Family
- Age-Inclusive

UNIQUE
Features that add to sense of place and community identity, pride, and local flair retain residents and attract visitors.
- Art
- Culture
- Creativity

MOBILITY
Walkable, bikeable environments with access to transit place a lower priority on cars and a higher priority on people.
- Complete Streets
- Accessibility
- Pedestrian Safety

MIXED-USE
Commercial and residential uses within the same building or on the same site contributes to vibrancy.
- Density
- Equity
- Accessibility

TOWN GROWTH CENTER

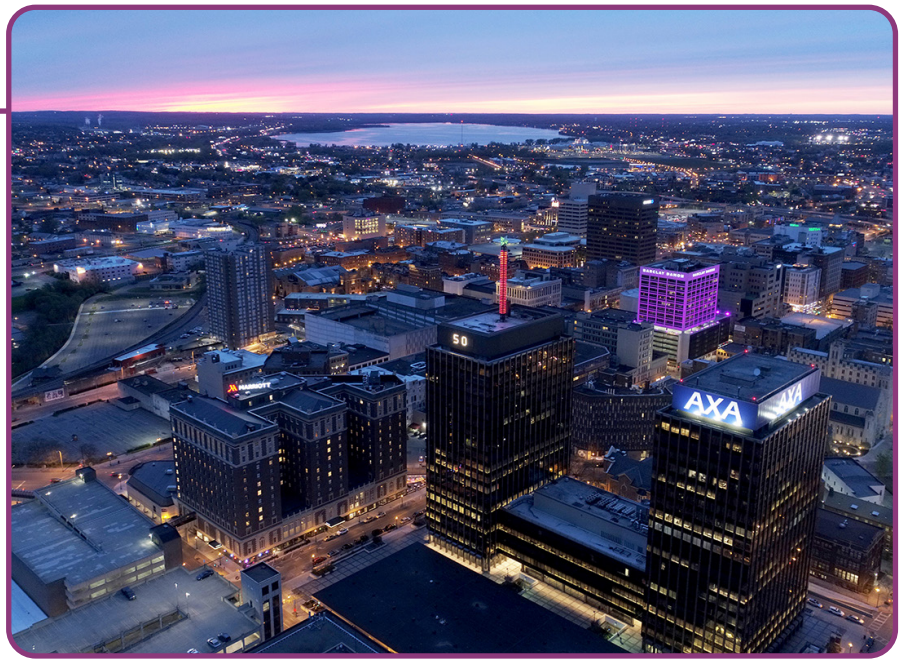
Town growth centers are strategic investment areas targeted for large-scale mixed-use growth. They incorporate transit-oriented development, multiple community intersections, and integrated greenways and are intended to serve surrounding neighborhood areas.

EMPLOYMENT CENTER

Employment centers include dense commercial centers with concentrated commercial or industrial activities and large numbers of jobs. These can be office or industrial parks, or corporate campuses with integrated retail, trails, and amenities.

CITY CENTER

As the largest and most central urban area in the region, the City of Syracuse is the only city center in Onondaga County.



Why Plan for Strong Centers?

Having strong centers is critical for Onondaga County's economic competitiveness. Companies looking to open new offices or branches increasingly choose their location based on quality of life features that can be marketed to prospective employees.

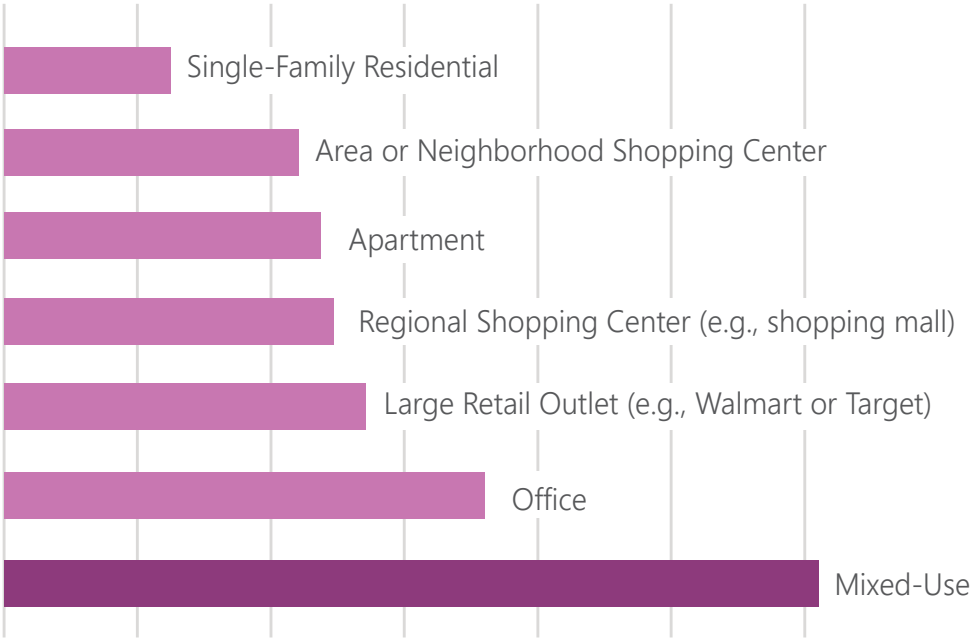
Walkable, mixed-use developments are valued places for young professionals, empty nesters, and seniors. The demand for these types of centers has spread into suburban areas where regional shopping centers have been converted into "lifestyle centers," which seek to establish the same walkable urban environments with combinations of residential, restaurant, entertainment, office, and recreational uses. Planning for these types of investments has fiscal benefits, helps with economic competitiveness, addresses shifting demographics, preserves open space, improves affordability, and creates a foundation for enhanced transit service.

Fiscal Benefits

As a community becomes more dense, municipalities gain more tax revenue per acre. In fact, tax revenue can increase up to 10 times on average with the introduction of mixed-use development in a community.

Figure SC.1 demonstrates the property tax yield per acre for different development types in Onondaga County. Mixed-use generates significantly more per acre than other land use types, and is a more efficient use of infrastructure. Communities that are more dense spend less per unit to own and maintain linear infrastructure such as roads and sewers.

Figure SC.1 | Municipal Property Tax Yield (per acre) in Onondaga County



Note: Only land use types likely to be found in strong centers were included in the analysis above.
Source: EDR Analysis of Onondaga County Real Property File

Retain and Attract Skilled Labor

Having strong centers is critical for Onondaga County's economic competitiveness. Companies looking to open new offices or branches increasingly choose their location based on quality of life features that can be marketed to prospective employees.

Increasingly, skilled workers are seeking to live in mixed-use communities. Many workers find work only after choosing where they want to live. And, as remote working options increase, workers can live anywhere. If Onondaga County wants to compete for high-skilled jobs, it needs to have locations that attract skilled workers, support economic vitality, and serve as centers for shopping and living.

Address Shifting Retail Markets

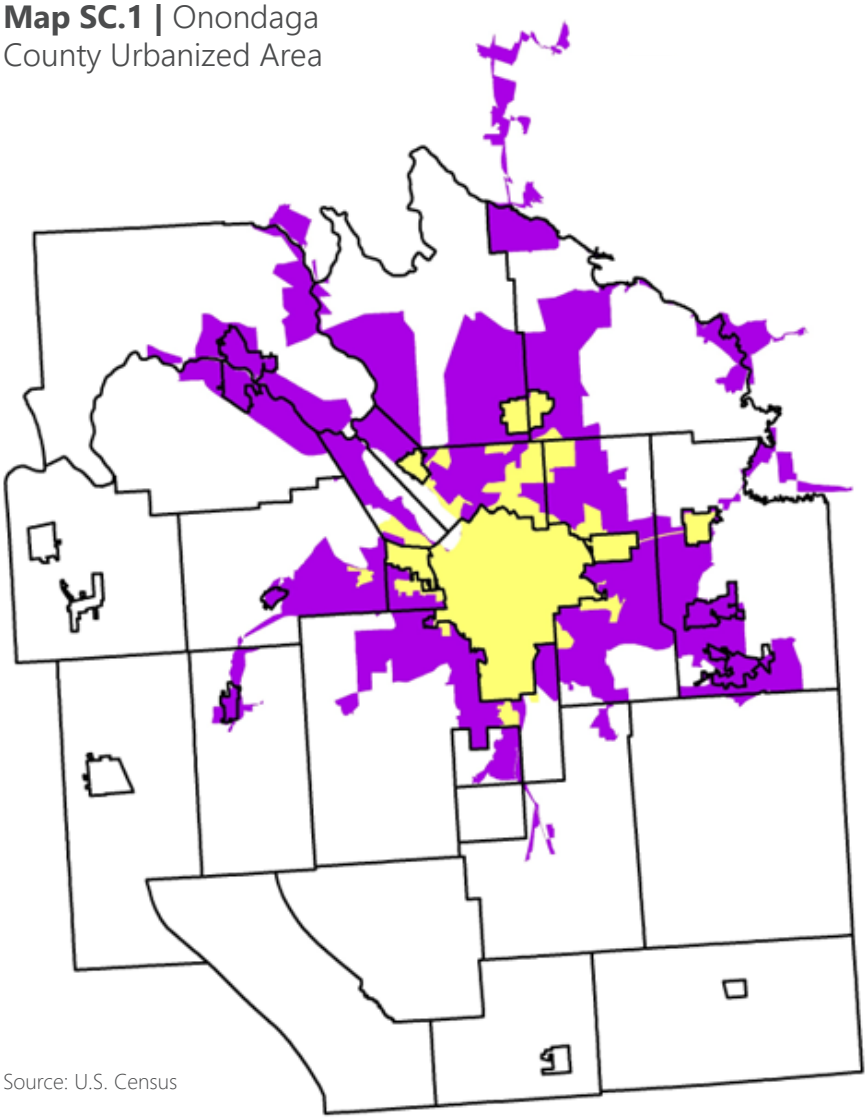
Even in suburban communities, people are expressing a preference for denser, walkable environments that offer authentic, local experiences instead of auto-oriented commercial centers dominated by chain stores[1]. The trend away from traditional strip shopping centers means that local municipalities are reviewing their local site plan review processes and zoning to remove barriers to more compact development patterns.

Small business in Onondaga County's centers
Source: The Sweet Praxis

Changes in the retail market have begun to affect communities with significant suburban strip shopping corridors. In many regions, large suburban shopping malls have closed, like Great Northern Mall and Shoppingtown Mall in Onondaga County. As a result, communities are rethinking land use to incorporate mixed-use development supported by transit service and increased bicycle and pedestrian safety and connectivity (see the Community Mobility theme).

The transformation of traditional suburban strip shopping districts requires more than just overcoming barriers to mixed-use. Often these areas lack sufficient community infrastructure to support a vibrant neighborhood. Amenities such as sidewalks, bicycle lanes, parks, and tight street grids are largely lacking from suburban districts.

Map SC.1 | Onondaga County Urbanized Area



Source: U.S. Census

Open Space Protection

The more development is enabled in areas with existing infrastructure like water and sewer, the less it is likely to occur on or compete with the County's valuable open space and agricultural lands. To illustrate this point, **Map SC.1** demonstrates that the urbanized area of the County expanded considerably between 1970 and 2020, with roughly the same population size.

The County is anticipating a major economic investment in the White Pine Business Park that will bring tens of thousands of new jobs to the community. The resulting increase in development will provide the basis for investing in existing and new centers in order to accommodate new growth while preserving valuable open space and agricultural resources.

Address Affordability Concerns

Strong Centers can address growing concerns related to housing affordability by providing for a broader diversity of housing choice. Housing choice means that there are a variety of housing options available including single-family, two- and three-family, townhomes, condominiums, and apartments. The density of mixed-use centers provides the ability to include a variety of housing types that allow seniors to age in place and provide affordable options for all segments of the County's population.

Support Transit

Public transportation systems rely on sufficient densities in order to be able to provide efficient service. Increasing development in designated centers around transit service will help to strengthen the frequency, reliability, and attractiveness of transit as a mobility alternative.

Eastdale Village in the Hudson Valley, NY is an example of a Regional Growth Center

Trends in Strong Centers

The foundation of strong centers is the mixture of land uses. However, the structure of local zoning in most communities does not allow for mixed-use development because communities have not included it as part of their future land use vision within local comprehensive plans. Historically most community zoning was devised to prevent undesirable or noxious adjacent land uses from occurring near neighborhoods (e.g., factories next to homes or schools across the street from a corner bar). The resulting separation of uses essentially outlawed traditional urban development patterns.

Communities across the state are rethinking their land use vision as part of updates to comprehensive plans. These updated visions have led to the adoption of modernized zoning codes which have been explicitly developed to encourage mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented development. In contrast to traditional zoning that focused on regulating building uses, modern codes focus on the entirety of the site and its context within its neighborhood or district, to create welcoming places (**Figure SC.2**).

As shown in the case study on page "Fairfax Corner, Virginia" on page 71, new development patterns are emerging that cater to a variety of trends in the housing market. As discussed in the Housing and Neighborhoods theme, the percentage of households with children has declined significantly over the past 50+ years which has fueled demand for housing options that differ from the single-family home.

Figure SC.2 | Example of a Modern Zoning Code

GROUND-FLOOR USE	CAFÉ ZONE	PEDESTRIAN ZONE	LANDSCAPE + FURNITURE ZONE	PARKING + PLANTER ZONE	SHARED TRAVEL ZONE
MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL	*Not Applicable* *See Appendix A.5 Private Frontage Guidelines.*	6' - 8'	6' - 8' Tree wells; Street furniture to be provided per *Section 6;* *See Section 3.5 for Street Landscape Standards.*	8' parallel	*See Section 3.3 for Street Type Standards.*
COMMERCIAL	Where Applicable; 6' - 12' *Additionally, See Appendix A.5 Private Frontage Guidelines.*	7' - 10'		16' - 18' head-in diagonal OR 8' parallel Parking Lane Planters (optional)	

Source: Smart Growth America

Mixed-use redevelopment projects like the one depicted above in Fairfax Corner, Virginia are being incorporated into existing as well as new suburban developments around the country. This seemingly well established center was created in a shopping center parking lot.

Strong Centers case study:

Fairfax Corner, Virginia

Located in Fairfax, Virginia (a suburb of Washington, D.C.), this mixed-use area offers shopping, restaurants, a movie theater, community events and residential housing. This infill development was constructed in a former shopping center parking lot and includes walkable streets, public spaces, and impressive architecture that mimics the atmosphere of an urban area. Fairfax Corners includes 228 residential units, over 300,000 sq. ft. of commercial space, and 50,000 sq. ft. of office space. Community members appreciate the range of shopping and restaurant options (both inexpensive and high end), the sense of community, and the convenience of a one-stop, walkable shopping area.

A highlight of the development is the public gathering space that provides for frequent, free community events such as yoga, kids activities, farmers markets, or craft fairs. The fountain plaza in the town center allows for family-friendly gathering space daily. The variety of residential, commercial, and recreational opportunities that are available to a range of residents and visitors make Fairfax Corners a prime example of a strong center.

Site Details

Ownership:

Peterson Companies

Zoning:

Planned Development Commercial District

Total Size:

1,151,000 sq. ft.

Housing Units: 228

Commercial Space (retail/ entertainment): 314,326 sq. ft.

Office Space: 50,000 sq. ft.

Notable Features: Two parking garages and Tesla charging stations

Transit-Oriented Development

Transit-oriented development (TOD) means designing communities so that people, activities, buildings, and public spaces are within easy walking and cycling distances, and near-excellent transit service in order to access work, services, and play.

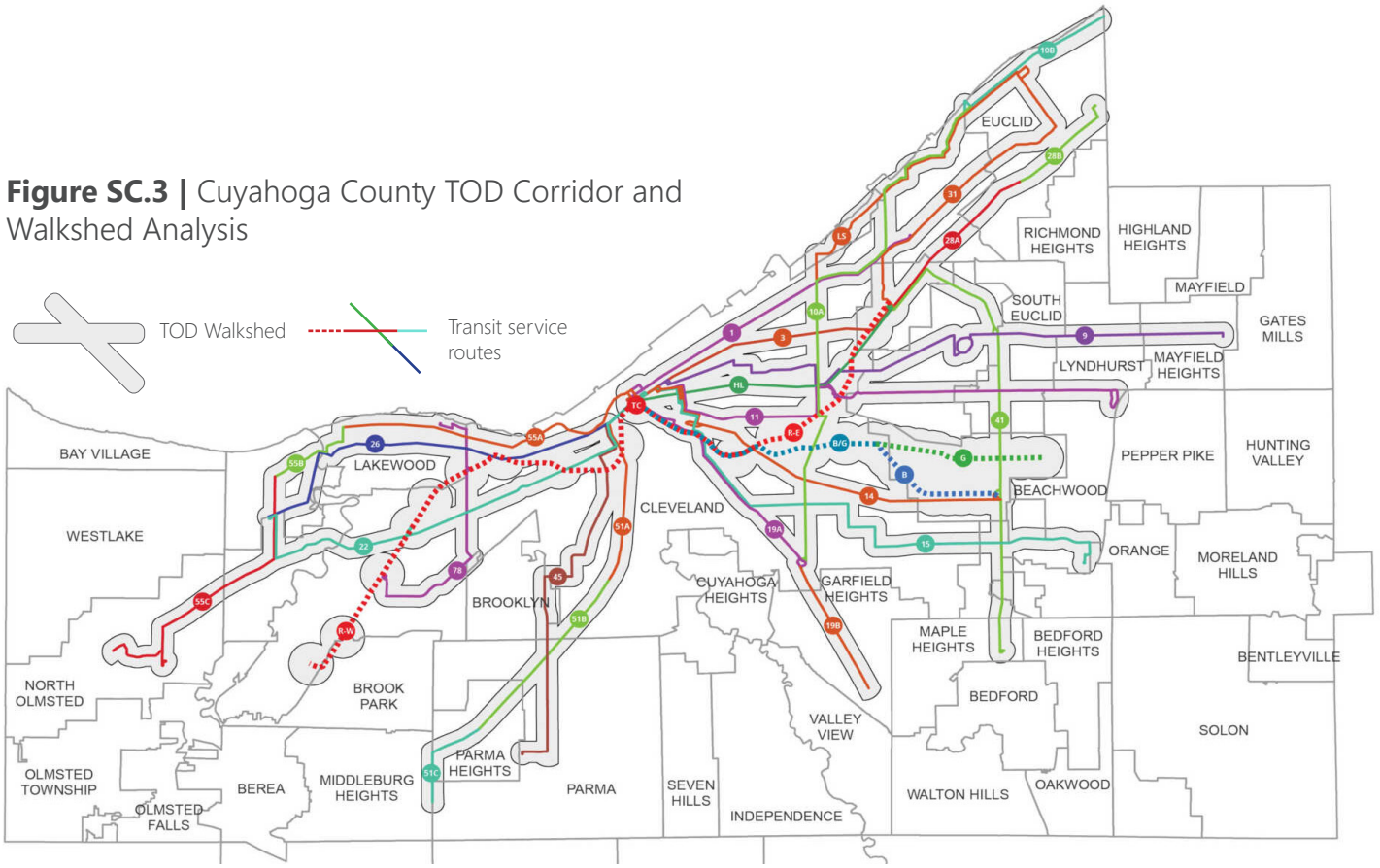
TOD encourages pedestrian-oriented design with a dense mix of land uses including compact residential and commercial areas, smaller block sizes, design features that prioritize pedestrian safety, and local amenities such as parks, street trees, and public art.

At the county scale, the implications of changing demographics and preferences on regional transportation investment priorities are profound. For example, more compact growth patterns will require significant shifts in the types of transportation improvements that will be needed in the coming years. Investments need to be coordinated between transportation departments, transit providers, planners, local planning boards, and developers. These groups can work together to understand and anticipate demographic and market shifts, identify strategic public transportation investments, and prioritize investments in local street networks and mobility infrastructure (See Transit-Oriented Development case study on page "Cuyahoga County, Ohio" on page 73).

Transit-oriented development seeks to foster development patterns that[2]:

- Establish neighborhoods that promote walking;
- Prioritize non-motorized transportation networks (e.g., bicycles);
- Create dense networks of streets, sidewalks, and trails;
- Locate development near high-quality public transportation;
- Incorporate mixed-use;
- Increase and optimize multi-story buildings to support transit services;
- Establish communities with short commutes.

Figure SC.3 | Cuyahoga County TOD Corridor and Walkshed Analysis



Transit-Oriented Development case study:

Cuyahoga County, Ohio

In Cuyahoga County, Ohio (Cleveland), the Cuyahoga Regional Planning Commission (CRPC) conducted a regional TOD corridor and walkshed analysis (**Figure SC.3**) to determine priority corridors for investment in transit service combined with the adoption of model zoning codes to encourage TOD investments.

As a result of the study, 22 transit lines were selected due to their frequent service, existing densities, and/or transit-dependent populations that require more frequent service. There are 26 different community centers located within the defined TOD walksheds (depicted in grey in **Figure SC.3**).[3]

As a result of the coordination of CRPC with local communities $2.9 billion was invested in major projects along TOD walksheds between 2012 and 2021. 22 of the 26 community centers had at least one project that added over $1 million in additional value over the last decade.[4]

Project Details

Partners:

Cuyahoga County Regional Planning Commission

Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority

Components:

Transit Corridor Identification and Investment

Model Ordinance Development

Project Impact:

$2.9 billion in private sector investments

Housing Access and Affordability

Strong Centers are places where multiple housing types can be integrated. Communities are working to address affordability by ensuring that local codes and ordinances support housing choice. Expanding the supply of "missing middle" housing, a term used to describe buildings that range in size and density from Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) to small-scale apartment buildings of ten to twenty units, has become an important component for solving the nation's housing crisis. Small-scale housing such as ADUs and small multiunit buildings like duplexes and four-plexes are referred to as "missing" because they have largely been illegal to build in most neighborhoods throughout the U.S. due to local zoning restrictions[5].

The Importance of Placemaking

After decades of sprawl and suburban growth, cities around the U.S., including Syracuse, have experienced an increase in population, growing employment, and new public and private sector investments in infrastructure, real estate, and placemaking. A great deal of this resurgence can be found in downtown areas, adjacent to waterfronts, and in special innovation districts where research institutions and entrepreneurs come together.

Urban, suburban, and rural communities need to better understand these trends and harness the forces behind them in order to benefit. Successful places are implementing strategies that are broader than individual projects that include reinvigorating arts and creative districts, investing in university and medical districts, redesigning suburban office parks, and improving main streets. Typically investments include public outdoor performance spaces, parks, outdoor seating areas, public art, special lighting, and programming such as festivals. Collectively, these strategies help strengthen the broader regional economy to ensure that all citizens can participate in positive growth.

Festival in Clinton Square in Downtown Syracuse
Source: Visit Syracuse

Strong Centers in Onondaga County

The number of permits for single-family homes have declined, from a surge in the early 2000s, while permits for multi-family units have increased county-wide

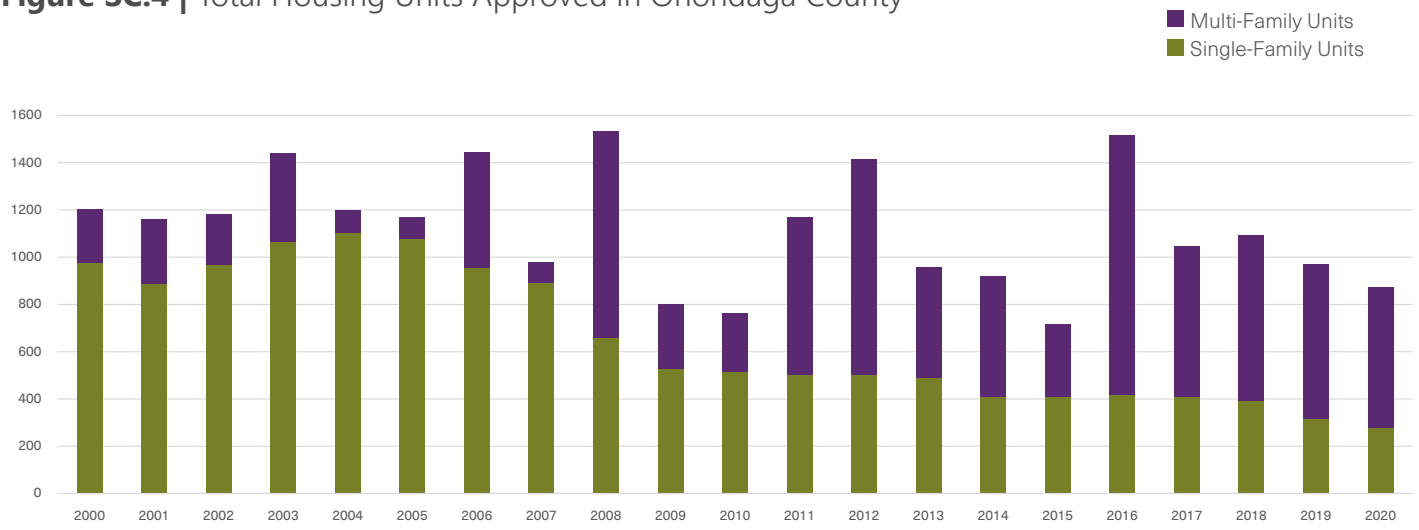
Onondaga County has always had Strong Centers in its villages, hamlets, and city neighborhoods which began as pedestrian-oriented settlements built around main streets or commercial corridors. These places are connected to the history of the County, and are important County assets. Strengthening the traditional design of these communities, as well as adding new centers, can help to preserve the unique sense of place of the County. In addition, the quality of place is an increasingly important differentiator for the economic competitiveness of the County.

Development Trends

Downtown Syracuse and surrounding neighborhoods are the cultural center of Onondaga County. Over the last decade, over $800 million in capital improvements have been completed in Downtown Syracuse; and $265 million in additional projects are anticipated[6]. The growth that the city center has experienced mirrors demographic and development trends throughout the U.S.

These investments have coincided with an increase in population and now over 4,300[7] people live in the city center. A significant amount of that growth is related to the addition of housing units

Figure SC.4 | Total Housing Units Approved in Onondaga County



Source: Onondaga County Department of Planning

within Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods like Franklin Square, Park Avenue, and University Hill.

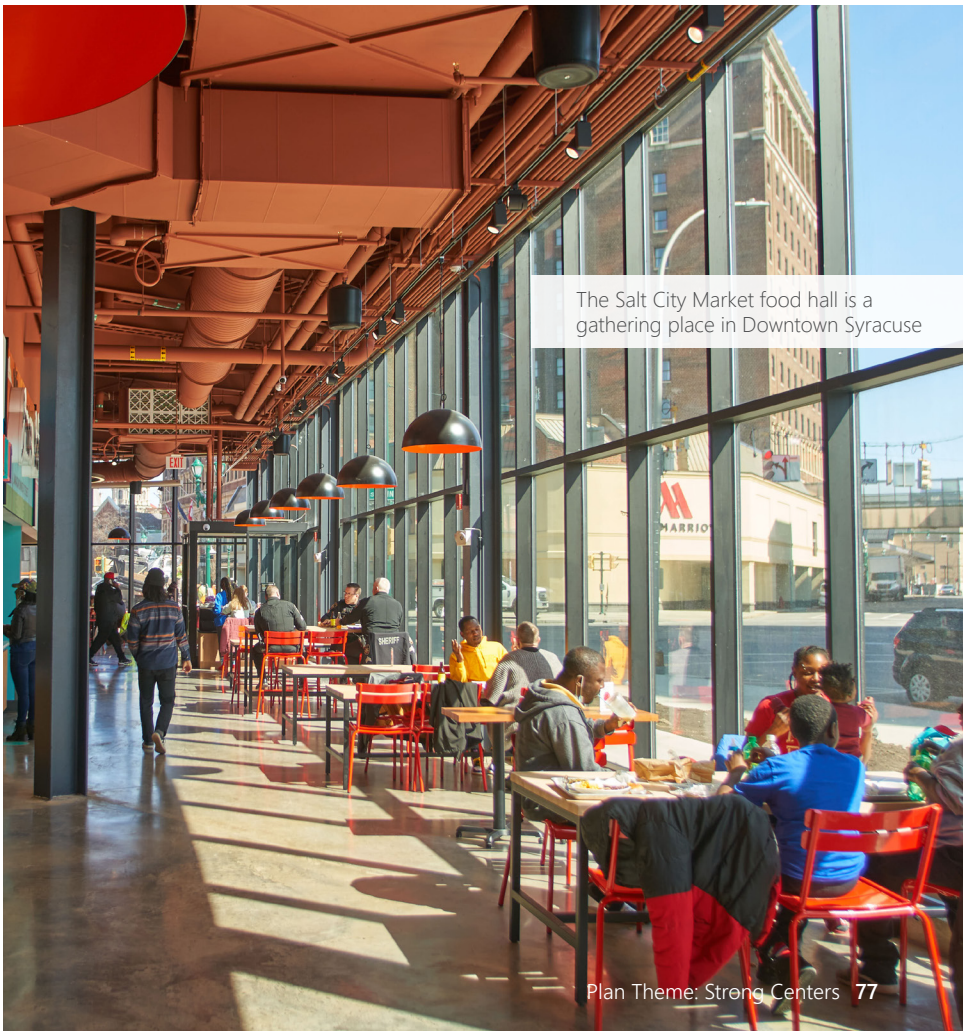
Many of these multi-family projects are mixed-use (like the Salt City Market pictured to the right), meaning that they incorporate not only housing, but also commercial, retail, and community-based uses. Projects like the Salt City Market contribute population growth, liveliness, and economic strength to the city center, further enhancing available amenities, sense of place, and community.

Changing demographics and lifestyle choices (see Housing and Neighborhoods theme) of Onondaga County residents are also evidenced by the trends in residential permits that have been issued in the County between 2000 and 2020. The number of permits for single-family homes declined, from a surge in the early 2000s, while permits for multi-family units have increased county-wide (see **Figure SC.4**).

Not all the growth in multi-family and mixed-use projects have occurred in the City of Syracuse. **Figure SC.5** illustrates that more permits for multi-family projects have been constructed in Onondaga County's towns and villages (5,641) than in the City of Syracuse (4,146).

Figure SC.5 | Multi-Family Housing Units Built in Onondaga County (5-year Increments)

Source: SOCPA Analysis of Building Permit Data



The Salt City Market food hall is a gathering place in Downtown Syracuse

There has been a resurgence in many of the County's urban and village centers.

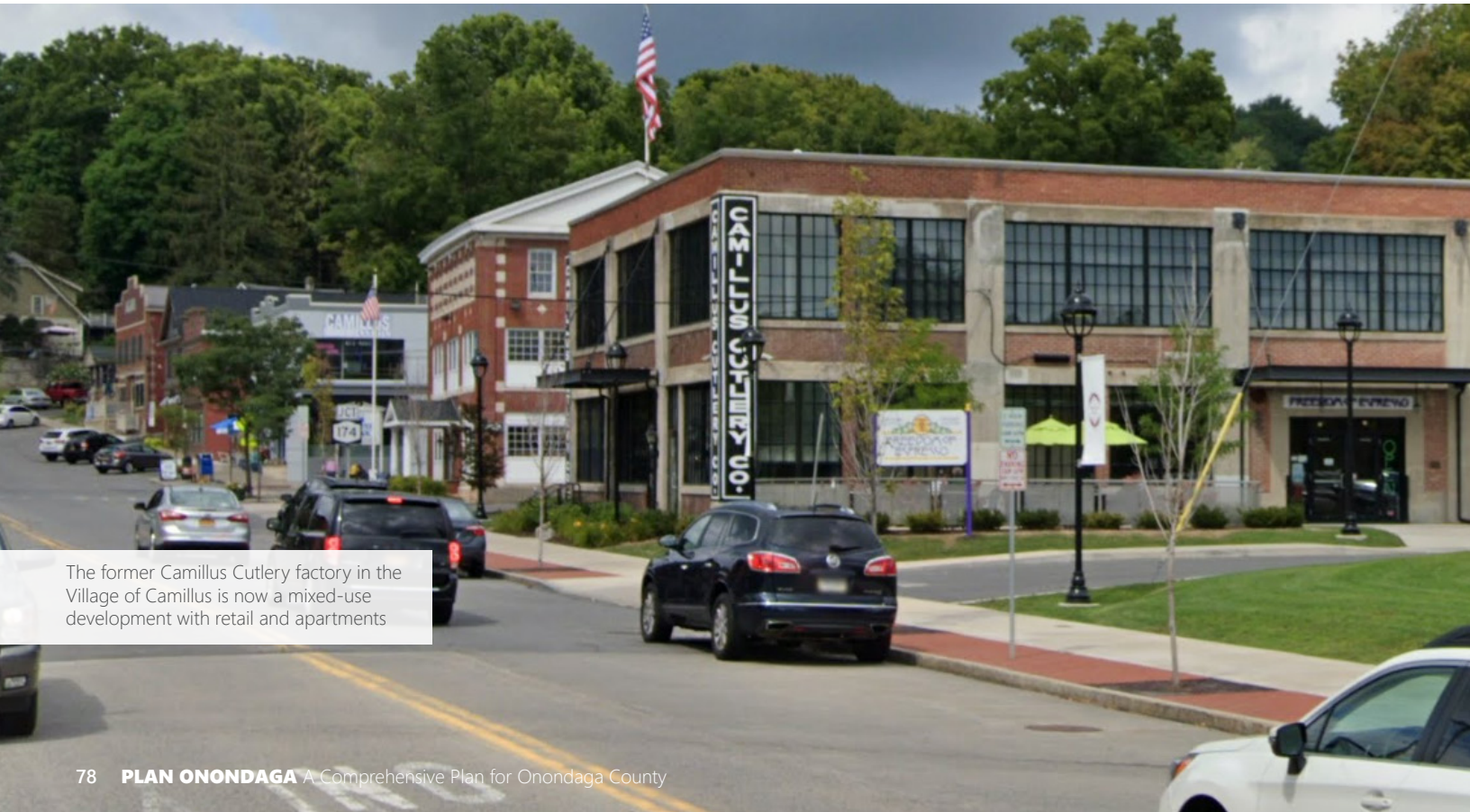
Redefining Centers

There has been a resurgence in many of the County's urban and village centers. Significant investments in Baldwinsville, Liverpool, Camillus, Manlius, and Skaneateles, as examples, have helped to reshape and redefine village centers.

Projects like the redevelopment of the Camillus Cutlery factory in the Village of Camillus demonstrate the importance of reuse of our historic village fabric. Rising demand for walkable "village urban" lifestyles is helping to fuel demand for the creation of mixed-use housing options in village settings.

Outside of our villages, there are also examples of communities that have sought to reinvigorate suburban commercial districts by enabling mixed-use development.

This type of development can be completed with good planning that directs land use policy and includes appropriate zoning of land. The structure of local zoning in communities in the County can facilitate and incentivize mixed-use development.



The former Camillus Cutlery factory in the Village of Camillus is now a mixed-use development with retail and apartments

A recent modification to the Town of DeWitt's zoning laws that creates the Mixed Use Village (MUV) Floating Overlay allows for a mix of uses, inclusive of residential, retail, office, entertainment, and accommodates high-quality pedestrian and transit elements.

Relying on the MUV, Onondaga County is facilitating the redevelopment of the former Shoppingtown Mall.

The proposed project, shown to the right, plans to utilize this overlay zoning district to redevelop the site into a flexible, mixed-use neighborhood.

Rendering of the proposed District East redevelopment of Shoppingtown Mall
Source: DalPos Architects, LLC

Strong Centers case study:

Camillus Cutlery

The Camillus Cutlery Company, one of the oldest knife manufacturers in the United States, opened its main factory in the Village of Camillus in 1894. During World War II, the company shifted its production to support the Allied forces by manufacturing marlinspikes, surgical scalpels, and a folding knife/spoon combination for the Red Cross. After World War II and until 2005, the company transitioned back to producing civilian products until it went bankrupt in 2007. In 2013, the building caught fire and proceeded to lay dormant for five years before being transformed into a mixed-use building. Today, the fully leased apartments are nestled among shops, restaurants, businesses, and civic buildings and adjacent to Nine Mile Creek. This area of the Village of Camillus, along West Genesee Street, provides a highly walkable destination that has grown to attract new businesses and visitors, while maintaining its historic character. Construction of a second phase, that will add an additional 44 units, is currently underway.

Site Details

Ownership:

Camillus Mills Redevelopment

Zoning:

Village Mixed-use

Total Size:

42,000 sq. ft. (additional 60,500 sq. ft. planned)

Notable Features:

Phase I - 29 loft apartments
Phase II - 44 one- and two- bedroom, market rate apartments.

8,500 sq/ft commercial/retail space

Creekwalk along Nine Mile Creek

One thing that all strong centers share is a sense of vibrancy: the feeling of liveliness that comes from many different activities happening close to one another.

Identifying Centers

One thing that all strong centers share is a sense of vibrancy: the feeling of liveliness that comes from many different activities happening close to one another. Plan Onondaga utilized land use codes to identify contributors to vibrancy including retail stores, offices, shopping centers, mixed-use buildings, and grocery stores.

Map SC.2 depicts the results of the analysis which indicate varying levels of vibrancy throughout Onondaga County. **Dark purple** (higher), **purple** (medium), and **lavender** (lower) areas identify where the mix and concentration of land uses and services significantly contribute to vibrancy.

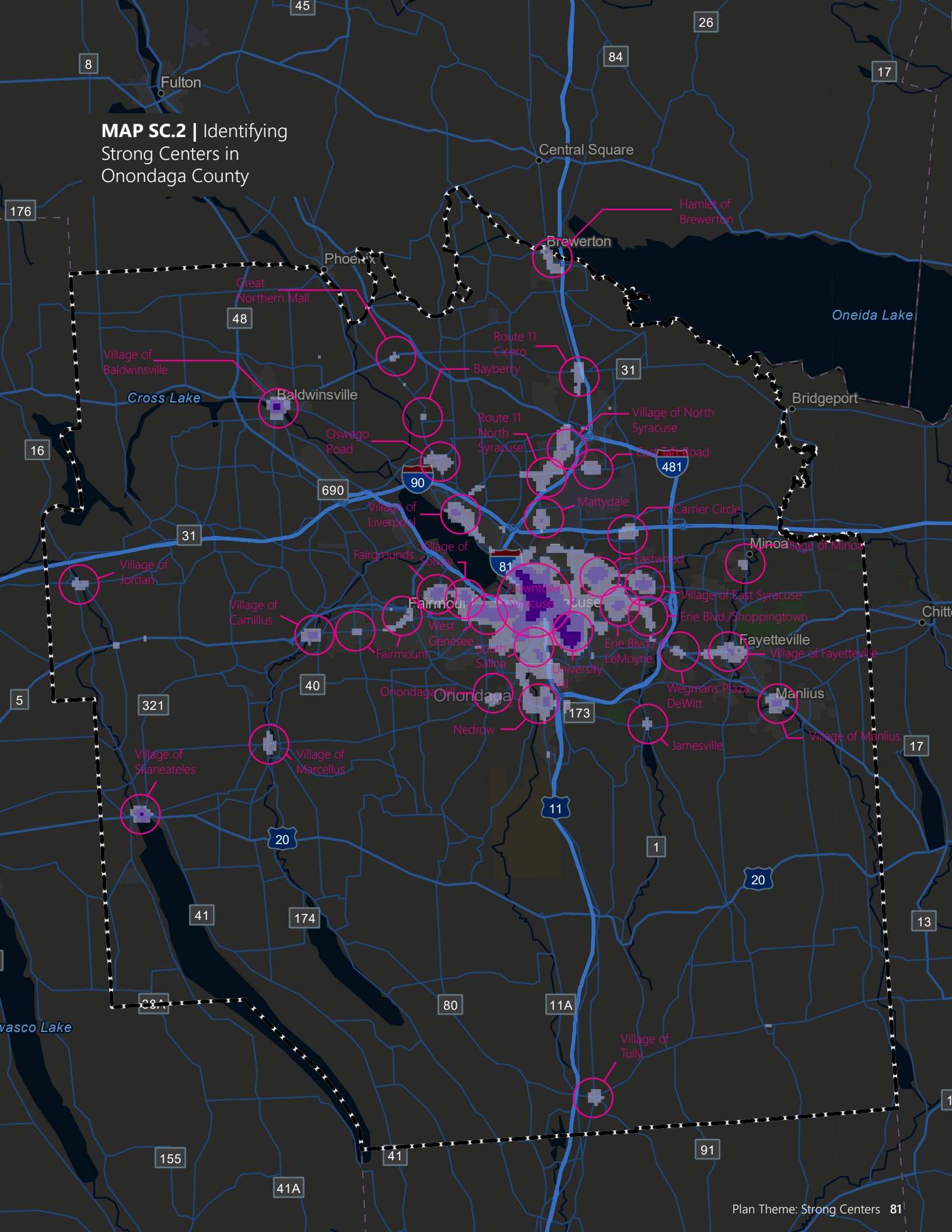
The results of the analysis show that the Franklin Square, Downtown, and University Hill areas within Syracuse have the highest vibrancy scores. Areas such as Eastwood and the West Genesee Street Corridor scored a medium level of vibrancy, along with the village centers of Fayetteville, Manlius, East Syracuse, Liverpool, Baldwinsville, Marcellus and Camillus.

While they exhibit a lower vibrancy level, smaller centers such as the hamlets of Brewerton and Jamesville, or smaller villages like Tully and Jordan, do indicate certain notable elements of vibrancy.

Other commercial areas such as along Erie Boulevard in DeWitt, West Genesee Street in Fairmount, and Route 11 in Clay and the Town of Salina exhibit lower levels; but the incorporation of mixed-use land uses would dramatically increase the overall vibrancy.

There are also locations which do not show in this vibrancy analysis, but still serve as important places in our communities such as the hamlets of LaFayette, Apulia, or Pompey. These hamlets act as a center for their communities, but are missing key land uses, a sufficient mix of land uses, or a concentration of land uses in the data and so they do not show up in this analysis; this does not diminish in any way their importance.

With local input and analysis, vibrancy data can help the county and local communities to identify and prioritize where centers are, and where town centers could be. Once these centers have been identified, an assessment of market health, development barriers, and opportunities can be completed to identify needs and strategies for supporting future growth.


MAP SC.2 | Identifying Strong Centers in Onondaga County
Fulton
Central Square
Hamlet of Brewerton
Brewerton
Great Northern Mall
Oneida Lake
Route 11 Cicero
Village of Baldwinsville
Bayberry
Baldwinsville
Cross Lake
Bridgeport
Village of North Syracuse
Route 11 North Syracuse
Oswego Road
Mattydale
Carrier Circle
Village of Liverpool
Village of Minoa
Village of Jordan
Fairgrounds
Village of Solvay
Eastwood
Village of East Syracuse
Erie Blvd./Shoppingtown
Village of Camillus
West Genesee
Fayetteville
Village of Fayetteville
Fairmount
South Salina
Erie Blvd./LeMoyne
University Hill
Onondaga Hill
Onondaga
Wegmans Plaza DeWitt
Manlius
Village of Manlius
Nedrow
Jamesville
Village of Skaneateles
Village of Marcellus
Village of Tully
Cayuga Lake
176
45
26
84
17
8
48
16
690
90
481
31
81
5
321
40
173
11
1
20
41
174
80
11A
13
155
41A
91

Map SC.3 | Future Land Use Map

Planning for Strong Centers

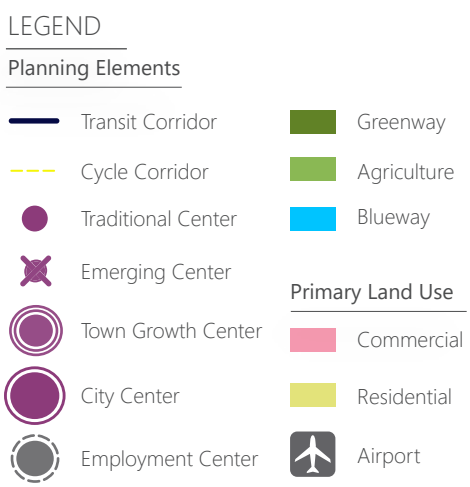
Plan Onondaga seeks to foster investment in existing and new multi-modal centers throughout Onondaga County. Existing and emerging centers have been identified based on their ability to support additional growth, access to water and/or sewer infrastructure, and potential to be located adjacent to transportation infrastructure including enhanced bus service, bicycle lanes, and pedestrian sidewalk and trail networks.

Traditional Center

Traditional Centers represent villages, hamlets, and city neighborhoods that exhibit a longstanding mixture of uses, infrastructure for walkability, parks, schools, and other quality of life amenities. These areas require ongoing investments in infrastructure and amenities to maintain their vibrancy and character.

Emerging Center

Emerging Centers are located along existing commercial corridors where there are opportunities for improving walkability, incorporating mixed-use development, and connecting to transit service. These areas will accommodate new growth and development with a mixture of housing options.



Town Growth Center

Town Growth Centers represent opportunities for the establishment of new mixed-use districts at a neighborhood scale complete with bicycle, pedestrian, and transit facilities. These investment zones will accommodate regional services, offices, dwelling units, park space, entertainment, and restaurants, and will provide integrated mobility access with designated transit hubs that accommodate multiple modes. These areas are intended to respond to future growth pressures with a variety of housing types.

City Center

City Center represents Downtown Syracuse and surrounding neighborhood areas that consist of multi-story mixed-use buildings, arts and cultural institutions, government buildings, colleges and universities, complete bicycle and pedestrian networks and infrastructure, parks, and transit facilities. Downtown Syracuse is the heart of Onondaga County and requires ongoing investments in infrastructure and amenities to maintain its vibrancy.

Employment Center

Employment Centers are unique districts of significant economic activity including traditional and high-tech manufacturing, research and development, warehousing and distribution, logistics, offices, and support services. These areas typically do not include housing, but are accessible by transit. They are connected to the broader mobility system of roads, bicycle infrastructure, and trails. They also require significant ongoing infrastructure investments to provide adequate water, wastewater, power, and telecommunications to support business activities and therefore their siting is important.

Strong Centers

Goals and Strategies

Strong Centers are an important component of maintaining the competitiveness of Onondaga County. There are multiple factors that can contribute to the future growth and development of the County's centers.

Goal 1

Support and Enhance Existing and New Centers of All Scales

Increasingly, skilled workers seek to live in a high-quality community and find work only after choosing where they will live. As Onondaga County wants to compete for high skilled jobs, it needs to have locations that attract skilled human capital, support economic vitality, and serve as centers for living, recreation, shopping, healthcare, and cultural activities.

Strategy 1 » Work in partnership with local municipalities to direct priority capital and programmatic investments toward the development and reinforcement of Centers throughout Onondaga County.

Strategy 2 » Provide coordination and direct planning services to effectively plan for mobility infrastructure, within and connecting to Centers, including sidewalks, bicycle lanes and paths, and transit.

Strategy 3 » Establish incentives to support infill and new housing development in and around existing and planned centers, particularly those with workforce and affordable housing options, or that meet a unique market demand like senior housing.

Strategy 4 » Invest in the public elements that add to quality of place within our centers, such as parks, gathering spaces, public art, and programming to energize public spaces.

Goal 2

Provide Tools, Resources, and Partnerships for the Development of Strategic New Centers

In order to achieve long-term growth and development of strong centers within the County, it will be important to provide tools and resources for local municipalities to facilitate the adoption of best practices in local development processes. These resources will reinforce the capacity of local volunteer board members to oversee the development process, updates to comprehensive plans, and local zoning.

Strategy 1 » Provide appropriate support to the Onondaga County Department of Planning, the Central New York Regional Planning & Development Board, and Onondaga County Planning Federation to provide planning and technical assistance to local communities and related organizations. Activities such as comprehensive planning, sub-area master planning, thematic planning efforts, training of local planners and board members, facilitation of communication with local and regional agencies, toolkits and best practices can enhance local planning capacities.

Strategy 2 » Continue to identify and refine locations for investing in Centers and work with local municipalities to develop local visions for the growth and enhancement of local Centers.

Strategy 3 » Continue to provide financial resources to local municipalities to aid in the development and/or updating of local comprehensive plans, ordinances, and zoning codes.

Strong Centers

Goals and Strategies (continued)

Goal 3

Incorporate Multi-Modal Options as a Central Element of Centers

Utilizing Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) as a model, the County and local municipalities can work to encourage future development patterns that establish communities where people, activities, buildings, and public spaces are within easy walking and cycling distances, near excellent transit service in order to access work, services, and play (e.g., recreation, arts, and culture). By following the future land-use vision that is presented in Plan Onondaga, the County can help to develop and invest in a Countywide vision for mobility. TOD investments will accommodate multi-modal transportation options by establishing and connecting to pedestrian and bicycle networks including sidewalks, bike-lanes, and trails as well as providing transit and micro-transit infrastructure such as station stops (i.e., bus shelters) and bike/scooter share stations.

Strategy 1 » Develop a multi-modal connectivity plan to identify roadways for the inclusion of multi-modal facilities including transit, microtransit, cycling, and pedestrian mobility (See Community Mobility theme).

Strategy 2 » Develop enhanced transit infrastructure that is supported by transit-oriented design, where TOD projects may be provided incentives to encourage locations adjacent to transit and multi-modal investments.

Goal 4

Invest in Public Places and Spaces Within Existing and New Centers

Onondaga County can help bolster the attractiveness of neighborhoods and districts within local municipal jurisdictions by making and supporting investments in sense of place, parks, public art, and access to open space systems and trails. Sense of place is the unique expression of a community, its history and architecture, and the character of its environment, and can be seen in things as small as a detail on a bench, to things as large as the pattern of the neighborhood layout, and the overall quality and conditions of the public realm.

Strategy 1 » Invest in the public elements that add to quality of place within our centers, such as parks, gathering spaces, public art, and programming to energize public spaces.

Strategy 2 » Identify best practices and provide models for the development of local design guidelines to encourage the incorporation of public space and quality urban design within new developments.

Endnotes

1 Urban Land Institute. 2017.

2 Adapted from the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, "Eight Principles for Better Streets and Better Cities."

3 Cuyahoga County Planning Commission. 2022. *Development Trends on TOD Corridors*.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Garcia, David. Alameldin, Muhammad. Metcalf, Ben. Fulton, William. December 2022. Unlocking the Potential of Missing Middle Housing. Terner Center for Housing Innovation. U.C. Berkeley.

6 Downtown Committee of Syracuse. 2023. Downtown Syracuse Development Forecast.

7 Downtown Committee of Syracuse. 2021-2022. Annual Report.

PLAN ON
Housing and Neighborhoods

Community Comments on Housing and Neighborhoods

Housing and Neighborhoods

Housing and Neighborhoods as a planning theme addresses the needs and desires people have for the structures and places where they live.

Vision:

Onondaga County will support affordable, attractive, and efficient housing and neighborhoods to retain and attract future residents.

Housing and neighborhoods are key components of the County's economy and quality life. They are throughout Onondaga County in a variety of settings ranging from urban areas in the City of Syracuse, to suburban housing tracts, to rural locations among farmland, forests, and lakes. This variety is one of the strengths of Onondaga County as it affords many options for meeting people's lifestyle preferences.

The way that people live their lives, form families, and establish households constantly evolves. It is critical to understand the way that the population of the County is changing because it influences the needs and preferences of current and future residents. Changing needs and preferences are understood through analysis of demographic and market trends. The results inform how planning can influence the development of housing and neighborhoods that meet people's needs like aging in place and increased demand for more walkable communities.

The availability and affordability of housing is another critically important consideration in Onondaga County. While the County's stock is generally considered to be affordable, costs are rising for all housing types. Planning for housing choice across the County is needed to inform local decision-makers and the development community about the types of housing that are needed.

Planning for housing and neighborhoods follows a market-based approach that:

- Offers a variety of housing options to provide for changing needs and preferences while also addressing equity, affordability, and the needs of seniors;
- Fosters market confidence - property owners need to have confidence in the housing market in order to make investments in their property;
- Enhances neighborhoods through investments in connectivity to walkable centers as well as greenways, parks, and open space; and
- Invests in access to quality education and living wage jobs.

Components of Housing and Neighborhoods

The term "complete neighborhood" refers to a neighborhood where all residents have safe and convenient access to the goods and services needed for daily life. This includes a variety of housing options, grocery stores, shops and offices, healthcare, quality public schools, public open spaces and recreational facilities, affordable active transportation options and civic amenities. An important element of a complete neighborhood is that it is built at a walkable and bikeable human scale, and meets the needs of people of all ages and abilities.

A greater variety of household sizes and demographics require a greater variety of housing choices.

By 2025 up to 85% of households in the U.S. will be childless.

HOUSING OPTIONS

Complete neighborhoods provide diverse housing options, including two- and three-family homes, townhomes, condos, senior housing, and apartment buildings, in addition to single-family homes. The variety of housing options should integrate seamlessly into existing residential neighborhoods and support walkability, local retail, and multi-modal transportation alternatives. Providing diverse housing options can help to address affordability and the need to age in place by better matching the County's housing stock with shifting demographic trends.

Single-Family

67% of the housing stock in Onondaga County is comprised of single-family homes.

NEIGHBORHOOD AMENITIES

Neighborhoods are supported by the planning themes within Plan Onondaga. Access to vibrant walkable centers is a key to our quality of life. Transportation alternatives help us remain active and access employment. Access to open space keeps us connected to nature. Agriculture provides local food to keep us healthy.

Strong Centers

Agriculture

Community Mobility

Greenways and Blueways

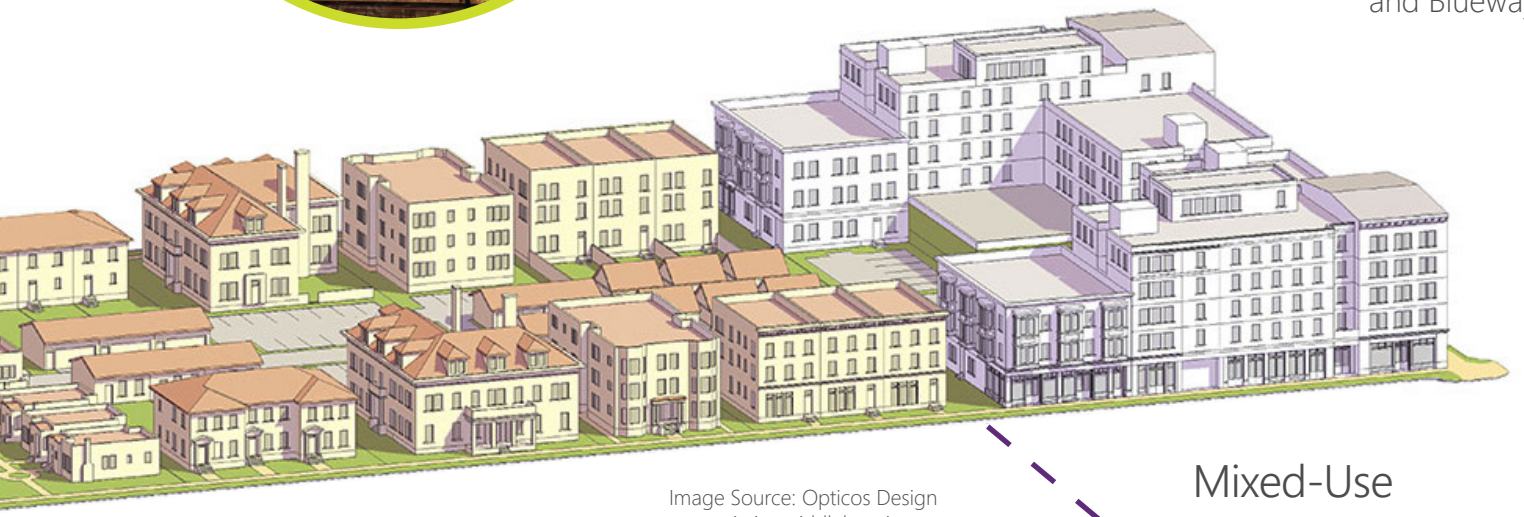


Image Source: Opticos Design
www.missingmiddlehousing.com

Mixed-Use

Missing Middle Housing Options

13% of the housing stock in Onondaga County is comprised of two- to four-family homes.

19% of the housing stock in Onondaga County is comprised of five or more housing units.

Why Plan for Housing and Neighborhoods?

Housing needs and preferences have and are expected to change over time due to changes in household size and family configuration as well as shifting demographic attributes like age and population growth or decline. Current lifestyle preferences like choosing transit or active transportation instead of driving, aging in place, renting versus owing, and an increased desire for walkable and bikeable communities are also influencing neighborhood and housing needs.

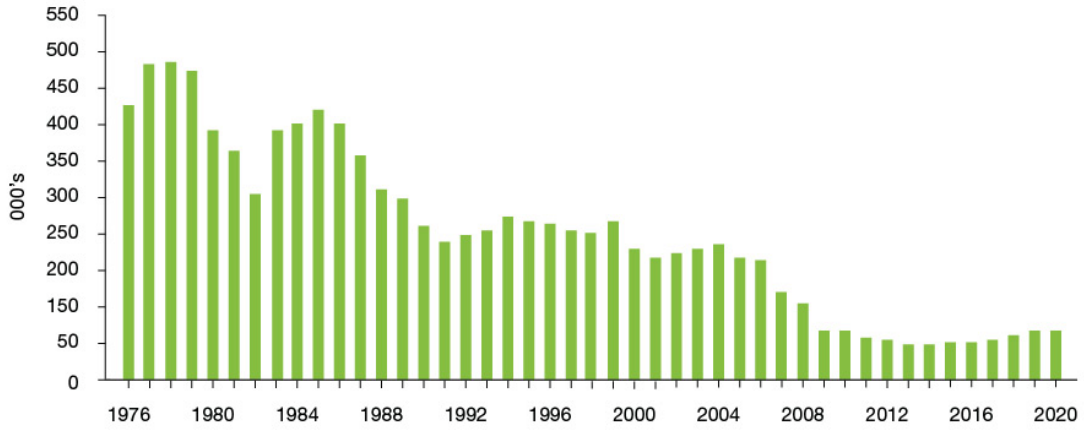
Planning for housing and neighborhoods includes defining housing needs and preferences in the County. Once defined, the task is to determine how to incorporate new housing in existing developed areas and in areas with existing infrastructure. Such planning should also consider the creation of modern transportation and recreation infrastructure.

Updating local plans, laws, and ordinances can help to lessen community opposition to new housing types by demonstrating that these housing types provide benefits to the community, are in alignment with community goals, and often contribute to, rather than diminish, quality of life for existing residents.

Increase Housing Supply

Following the Great Recession (2007-2009) new home construction in the U.S. declined dramatically. In the decade that followed, fewer new housing units were constructed than in any decade since the 1960s[1]. National estimates indicate 3.8 million housing units are needed to keep up with the rate of household

Figure HN.1 | Number of New Homes Constructed in the U.S. below 1,400 Square Feet



Source: U.S. Census

formation. The shortfall has been caused by the long-term decline in the construction of single-family homes that began with the Great Recession. Perhaps more importantly, there has been an even steeper decline in the development of "starter homes," which provide entry-level prices for single-family home ownership (**Figure HN.1**)[2]. While there has been a subsequent increase in the number of apartment units constructed over this same time period, there remains a shortage of units overall.

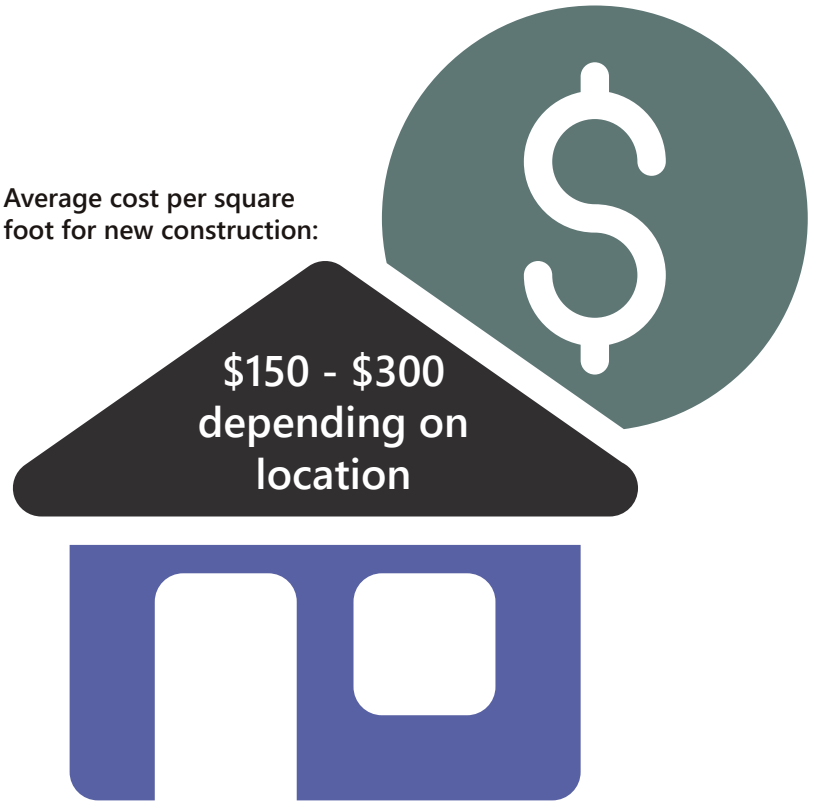
Meeting current and future housing demands means reassessing housing needs and providing pathways for the production of a wider variety of housing options. Local communities cannot meet current needs or future trends, by relying on existing housing alone. Local comprehensive planning is the best way to address housing choice by informing future land use decisions and guiding zoning updates. This can accommodate changing housing needs by allowing for increased diversity in the types of housing that are allowed in a community.

Improve Affordability

Over 41 million, or 35%, of households in the U.S. are considered housing cost burdened, which is defined as spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing and housing related expenses. As housing supply has dwindled, wage earners have seen their wages fall in proportion to rising housing costs. Per square foot costs to build new housing continue to rise which translates to rising purchase and/or rental prices[3].

State and federal programs that provide housing subsidies are

National estimates indicate 3.8 million housing units are needed to keep up with the rate of household formation.

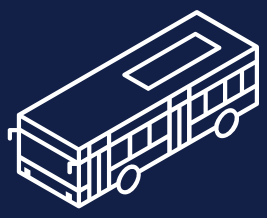


This means that a 1,500 square foot home costs a minimum of $225,000; just within reach for households earning a median income in the U.S. of $70,784, but out of reach for a household in Onondaga County earning 120% of AMI (2021).

typically limited to households that earn 60 percent of Area Median Income (AMI). In Onondaga County AMI is $54,660, far below the national AMI of $70,784 which puts safe, affordable, quality housing options out of reach. Often housing is unaffordable for households earning up to 120 percent of AMI ($65,592 in Onondaga County).

When housing is unaffordable, people are forced to stretch their income, and/or choose longer commutes, which stresses household budgets and creates a drag on the economy.

Community Mobility Connection



Some residents face significant challenges to finding and holding gainful employment that allows them to afford quality housing in safe and healthy neighborhoods.

Strengthening transportation options between neighborhoods and employment centers can help to ensure that all residents have access to living wage jobs to better afford quality housing.

Besides subsidies, affordability could be improved through investment in energy efficiency. The residential sector accounts for nearly one-third of energy consumption in New York State. High energy costs can impact the ability of households to afford their homes and also reduce the amount of money available for other needs such as health care, food, and transportation.

Respond to Shifting Demographics and Lifestyle Preferences

Shifting demographic trends and lifestyle preferences are impacting demands for housing, as millennials and baby boomers increasingly seek proximity to vibrant centers. These trends contribute to the demand and opportunity for creating Strong Centers. Over the past 15 years, due to changing demand, many suburban areas around the country have experienced "urbanization." Changes to housing and infrastructure have transformed existing communities into more compact, walkable communities with more diverse housing options[4].

These changing preferences for millennials and baby boomers, are not being met. There is a lag in the market for housing in a range of types and prices located in walkable neighborhoods in proximity to and served by mixed-use town centers and transit-oriented development like Strong Centers[5].

According to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) Public Policy Institute, the vast majority of people age 50 and older want to stay in their homes and communities for as long as possible. This trend requires planning for a broader range of housing options to benefit a broader range of people and households. In addition, community planning should incorporate access to amenities such as needed services, parks, trails, and transportation networks near existing housing for older populations to meet the needs these demographic changes create.

Reinvest in Older Housing and Neighborhoods

Older housing is often found in neighborhoods with sought after features such as sidewalks, narrower streets, mature trees and landscaping, as well as period lighting and proximity to parks and gathering spaces. These are often near or organized around a community commercial area with local restaurants, schools, places of worship, libraries, and other community resources.

While older homes may need renovations such as new windows, additional bathrooms, updated kitchens, insulation, and other features to meet today's expectations, their location and neighborhoods are often worth the expense. The U.S. Energy Information Administration has found that residential buildings built before 1950 are generally 30 to 40 percent less energy-efficient than those built after 2000. Maintaining or installing energy-efficient features, addressing repair issues, replacing worn-out appliances with energy-efficient models, converting to more efficient and sustainable methods of heating and cooling, and implementing energy upgrades such as insulation and air sealing, can greatly improve the overall energy efficiency of the existing housing stock while saving residents money.

An older home in the City of Syracuse that has undergone renovation.

Changes in Housing and Neighborhoods

Post World War II, demand for large neighborhoods of detached single-family homes was driven by family formation and the resulting population boom (baby boomers). As that population grows older, and demographics shift, housing needs are changing.

Today's housing needs have changed dramatically due in large part to fewer households with children, fewer married households, and an aging population overall. There is an increasing demand for apartments and attached units on small lots in more walkable neighborhoods for example.

Nationally these shifts are causing developers to change focus and build more small-lot or attached units such as cottages and row or townhomes. In order to meet the needs of seniors, specific housing and support services are being incorporated into housing developments. Across the U.S. the repurposing of larger detached homes into apartments, care

Post-War single-family housing development near Carrier Circle in DeWitt.

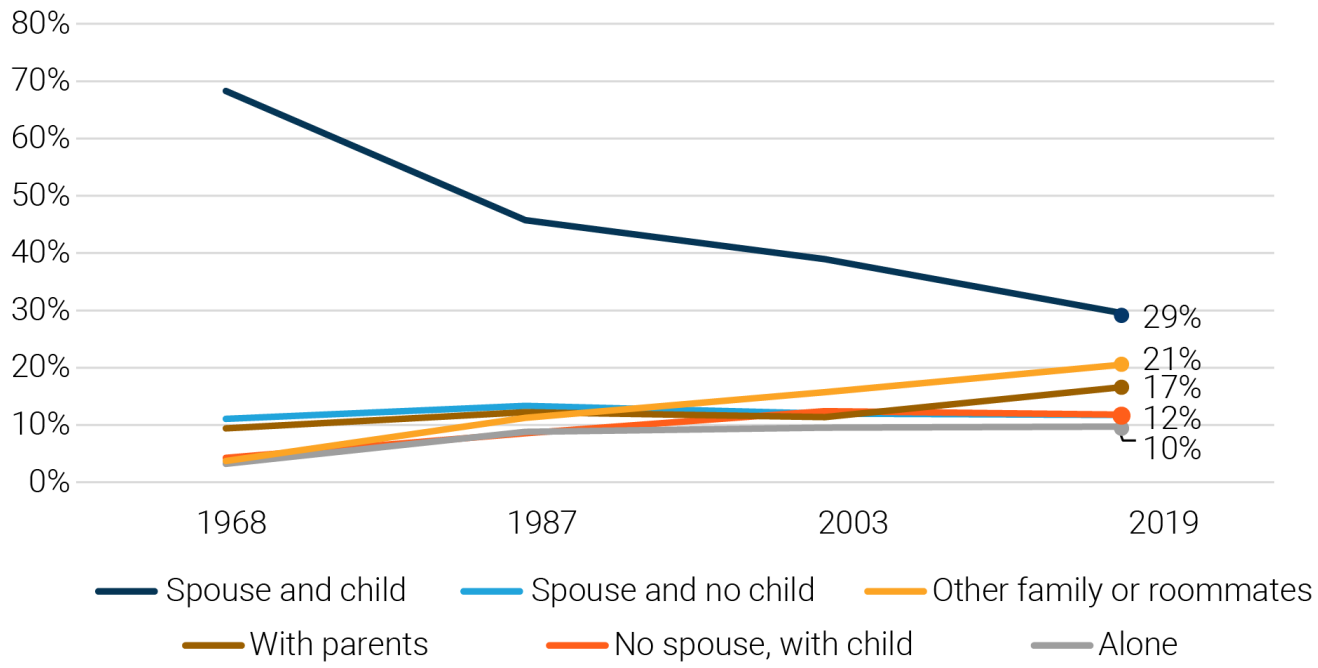
homes, mixed-use buildings, offices, and other uses are increasingly more common.

Lastly, housing affordability is an increasingly important consideration. Housing prices have been rising faster than wage growth in 80% of U.S. markets. Ensuring that a range of housing options are available in a community can help to address affordability concerns.

The Changing Nature of Households

Households in the U.S. have undergone dramatic change over the past 50 years. Household arrangements for people between the age of 23-38 are an important driver for trends in housing needs as they are typical first-time home buyers. In 1968, these households were driven by decisions related to raising a family. **Figure HN.2** demonstrates that in 1968, nearly

Figure HN.2 | Percent of New Homes Constructed in the U.S. below 1,400 Square Feet



Source: Brookings analysis of ACS and Census data via IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.

Metropolitan Policy Program at BROOKINGS

The percentage of older Americans is increasing, many expressing a strong desire to age in place.

70% of American households ages 23 to 38 consisted of parents with children. By 2019 less than 30% of these households were parents with children.

This change in households, from parents with children, to younger adults living with parents, other family members, or roommates is resulting in very different housing needs and preferences today.

Other factors driving housing need are divorce, remarriage, more single person households, and housing affordability. In the U.S., average household size has decreased by 25% since 1960, changing from an average of 3.38 to 2.59 persons per household. Across the U.S., married couples as a percentage of total households decreased from 78% in 1960 to below 50% today. Even without population growth a 25% increase in available housing stock would have been necessitated to keep up with household formation.

The percentage of older Americans is increasing. Since 1980 the percentage of Americans over the age of 65 climbed from 11.5% to 16.2% today. Within the next 20 years it is expected that 34% of households will be headed by someone over 65. Meanwhile, 75% of Americans over 50 have expressed a desire to age in place. Stairs, doorknobs, driving, and many other aspects of daily life all become more difficult for an aging population, as well as an increasingly physically impaired population. This means challenges for existing homes and the ability to age in place as well as challenges to overall mobility outside of the home. Within the next 50 years, there is close to a 60% chance that a new single-family home will house one person with a disability (Wright, 2020).

Housing Choice

Affordability is a key consideration for housing and neighborhoods. Housing affordability is about providing for housing choice through the availability of multiple housing options. Providing affordable housing options within healthy neighborhoods is important for fostering equity within communities. The American Planning Association recommends three main zoning changes for residential neighborhoods to increase affordability:

- Allow for various options including two-family, three-family, and multi-family housing units in traditional single-family neighborhoods.
- Allow for ADUs, or accessory dwelling units. ADUs may serve as a much more convenient and affordable alternative for individuals trying to locate housing.
- Eliminate parking requirement minimums to prioritize housing individuals over cars.

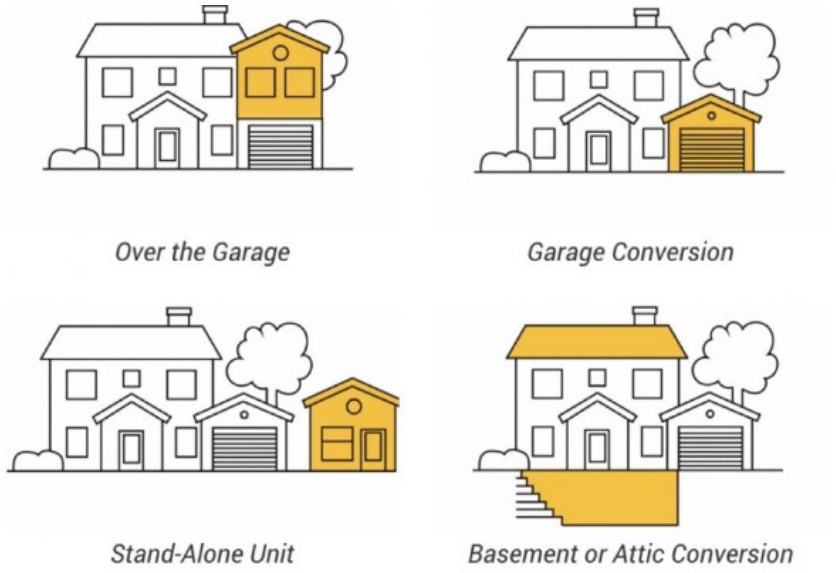
Addressing Housing Affordability

Communities across the U.S. have begun to update local land-use regulations to address affordability through:

- Establishing minimum percentage requirements for affordable units in new construction.
- Shrinking minimum lot-size and minimum building-sizes, and increasing minimum densities.
- Allowing for a wider variety of housing types in local zoning districts that include single, two-family, townhome, and multi-family options.

These strategies are often utilized in tandem with the implementation of transit-oriented Development and the establishment of new development centers.

Figure HN.3 | Accessory Dwelling Units



Source: www.roseman.law

Local communities (and some states) have updated their codes to allow for accessory dwelling units (ADUs) on property that had traditionally been zoned as single-family (**Figure HN.3**). ADUs are not new, traditionally they have been referred to as in-law apartments or "granny flats," but were dropped from many zoning ordinances over the past several decades.

Accessory dwelling units are able to house people of all ages. As an individual's housing needs change over time, an ADUs use can be adapted for different household types, income levels, employment situations, and stages of life. ADUs offer young people entry-level housing choices, enable families to expand beyond their primary home, and provide empty nesters and others with the option of moving into a smaller space while renting out their larger house or letting an adult child and their family reside in it.

Many ADUs are age-friendly and can be created with "universal design" features, such as a zero-step entrance and doorways, hallways and bathrooms that are accessible for people with differences in mobility.

Housing and Neighborhoods in Onondaga County

Onondaga County is experiencing many similar housing and demographic trends to those occurring nationally.

The County's housing market is characterized as soft, similar to many areas across Upstate New York (Upstate) where lower housing demand and stagnant property values have limited housing growth. Onondaga County, similar to Upstate, has experienced slow to stable population growth, aging housing stock, and increasing percentages of older adults.

The County is comprised of a wide variety of neighborhoods that vary in condition, housing types, the built environment, and demographic composition. It is helpful to gain an understanding of how the housing market is functioning in different communities. This information can help policy makers and local officials consider the type of strategy, policy, or program that might be deployed based on the market conditions in a community.

Housing in the Salt Springs neighborhood of Syracuse

Rising Home Sales and Rental Prices

While the housing market in Onondaga County has historically been regarded as affordable, the cost of housing continues to rise. Between 2016 and 2020 single-family home sale prices rose 16% in Onondaga County and 21% in the City of Syracuse (**Figure HN.4**). However, the increase in home sale prices has not been met with increased homebuilding. The lack of available inventory is further driving up housing sale prices, making it more challenging for potential home buyers to purchase a home in Onondaga County.

At the same time shifts in household size, makeup, lifestyle preference; declining willingness or ability to own a home, and available inventory, have led to an increase in demand for apartment units over detached owner-occupied homes. Since 2010 renter households grew by 5%, while the number of owner-occupied households decreased.

Average rental prices increased by 24% between 2017 and 2021[6] as rental vacancy rates decreased from 6.7%. to 4.3%[7] between 2019 and 2021. Rental prices in the Syracuse metropolitan area significantly outpace national averages. These trends are indicators of shifting preferences and needs within the County and suggest a need for the development of more alternatives to single-family housing including multi-family housing options.

An inadequate supply of housing increases demand. Increasing the

In the Syracuse metropolitan area, the average rental price increased by 24% between 2017 and 2021.

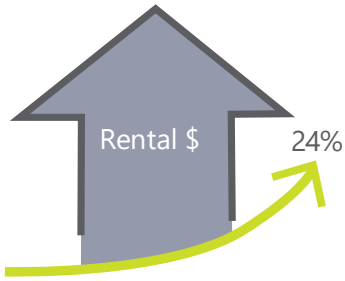
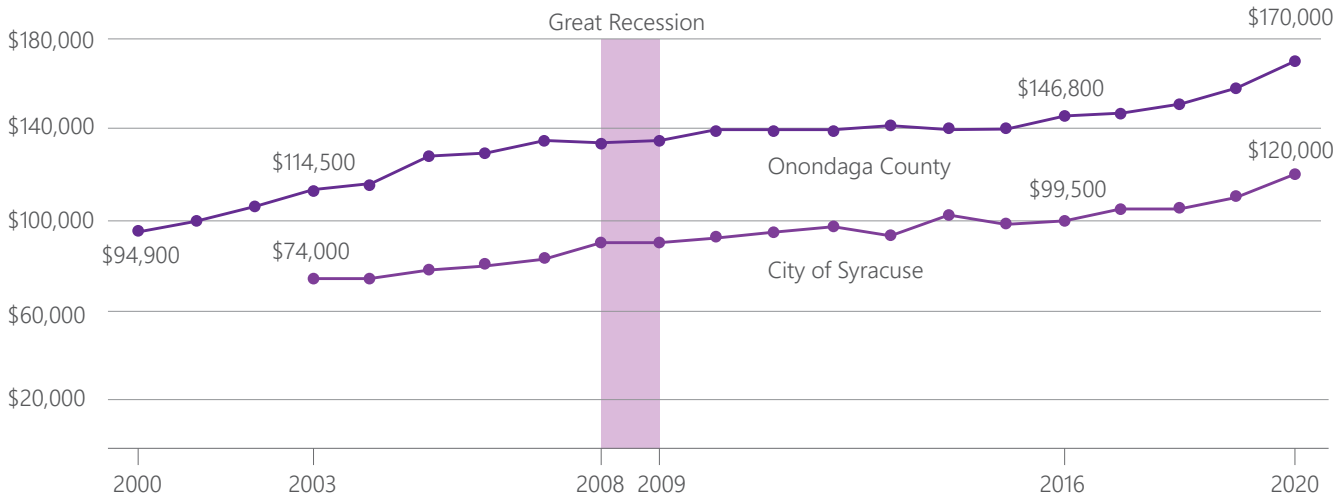


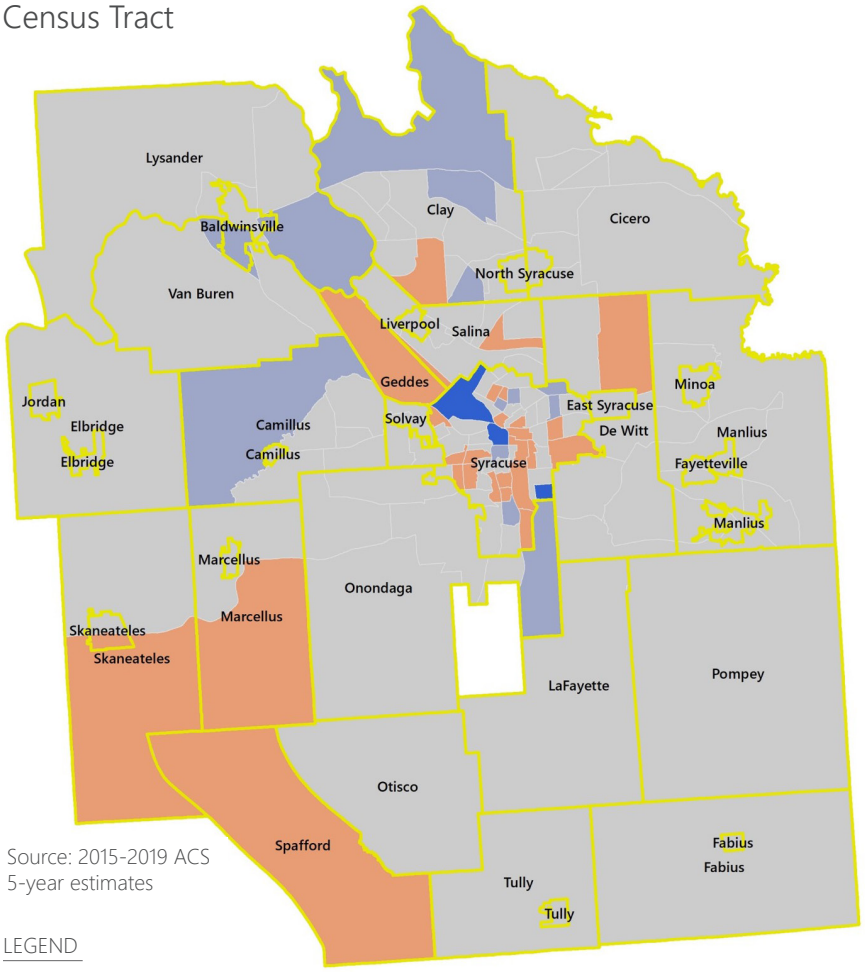
Figure HN.4 | Median Home Sale Prices in Onondaga County and the City of Syracuse



Source: Onondaga County Real Property Sales Data

availability of housing options will become more important over time and especially considering the pending Micron investment in the Town of Clay. Micron's multi-year, $100 billion investment will lead to a tremendous increase in jobs and concomitant growth in demand for housing. It is likely that new worker preferences will mirror the national and county trends in household and neighborhood types.

Map HN.1 | Change in Population in Onondaga County by Census Tract



Population and Household Trends

Onondaga County's population and households grew slightly (2%) over the last decade. As of 2020 more people resided in Onondaga County than any decade since 1970. Between 2010 and 2020 the population of the City of Syracuse grew by 2.4%, the first time in decades. These are important milestones in a region where the City had continued to lose people while the County's population had remained stable.

Changes in population were not felt equally. Some areas witnessed declines while others experienced population gain. As shown in **Map HN.1**, between 2010 and 2019 parts of the County including portions of Clay, Lysander, Baldwinsville, Camillus and the Town of Onondaga experienced increases in population resulting from new single-family home and multi-family unit construction.

The most significant population growth, as a percentage change, occurred in Downtown Syracuse, the Lakefront, and Syracuse University's South Campus. Growth in these areas is associated

with the development of new apartments and mixed-use projects which reflects national trends for increasing demand for walkable mixed-use neighborhoods.

Declining populations in the southwestern portion of the County are likely associated with the increased cost of housing which has caused these areas to be less affordable.

An Aging Population

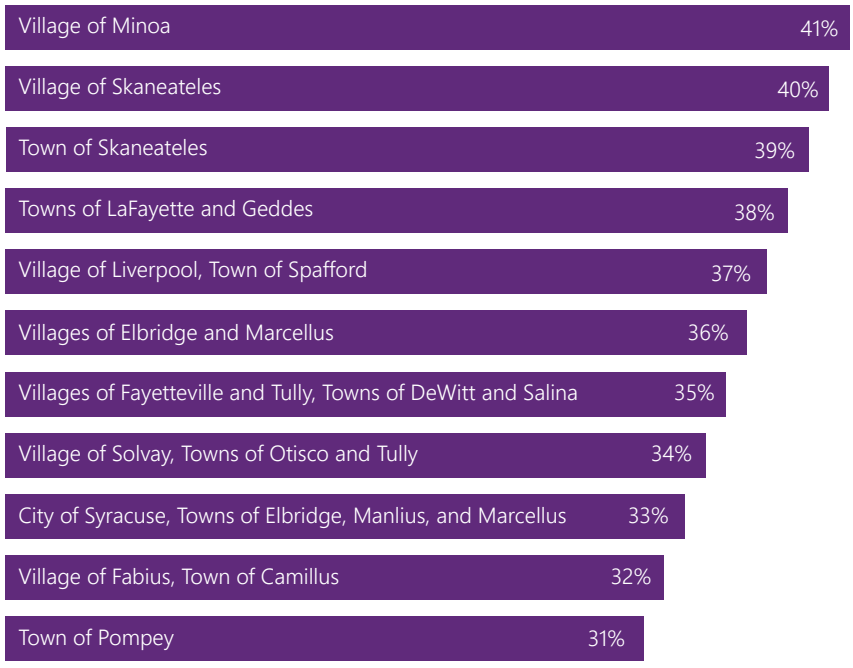
Onondaga County is similar to other Upstate New York counties in that the population is older and aging. The median age is 39 and roughly 30% of households have someone 65 years old or older residing in them.

Among households that own their home, roughly 31% in Onondaga County have a householder that is 65 years old or older. In some towns and villages an even higher share of owner households have a householder 65 years old or older (**Figure HN.5**).

The population of aging homeowners has implications for local communities, the homeowner, and their families, such as:

- Supporting homeowners who wish to age in place with accessibility issues, maintenance, and senior support services; and
- Providing adequate senior housing choices including options for homeowners who wish to downsize.

Figure HN.5 | Percentage of Householders 65 Years Old or Older in Onondaga County by Municipality



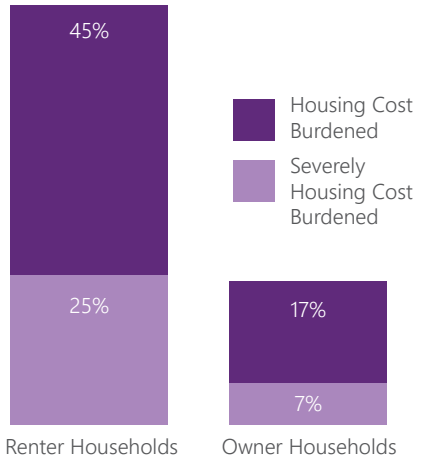
Source: U.S. Census, 2020

Cost-Burdened Households

Despite increasing household incomes, cost burdened households remain significant (**Figure HN.6**). In Onondaga County, almost 50 percent (29,159) of renter households are housing cost burdened and 25 percent (16,041) are severely cost burdened. Nearly 20 percent (20,663) of owner-occupied households are housing cost burdened. The majority of those households are located within the City of Syracuse.

The poverty rate in Onondaga County as a whole is 14 percent. Census Tracts within and around the City of Syracuse have high (20%-39%) and extreme (>40%) poverty rates – far higher than 14%. The poverty rate throughout the remainder of the County is far below the county's average of 14%. The majority of cost burdened households are found within City neighborhoods where households are more likely to be renters. Research has shown that living in communities with high and extreme poverty rates can impact children's and families' long-term outcomes. This can mean inadequate access to health care, quality education, safety, jobs, quality housing, among other things.

Figure HN.6 | Cost Burdened Households



Source: U.S. Census ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2019

Aging Housing Stock

The housing stock in Onondaga County is older. Nearly three-quarters of the units were built prior to 1980, before certain types of hazardous components such as lead and asbestos were banned from building materials. About 8% of the housing stock was constructed after 2000. Older housing stock requires ongoing maintenance, investment, and upgrades, such as to heating and cooling systems to improve energy efficiency and reduce the costs of operation.

Identifying Neighborhood Market Types

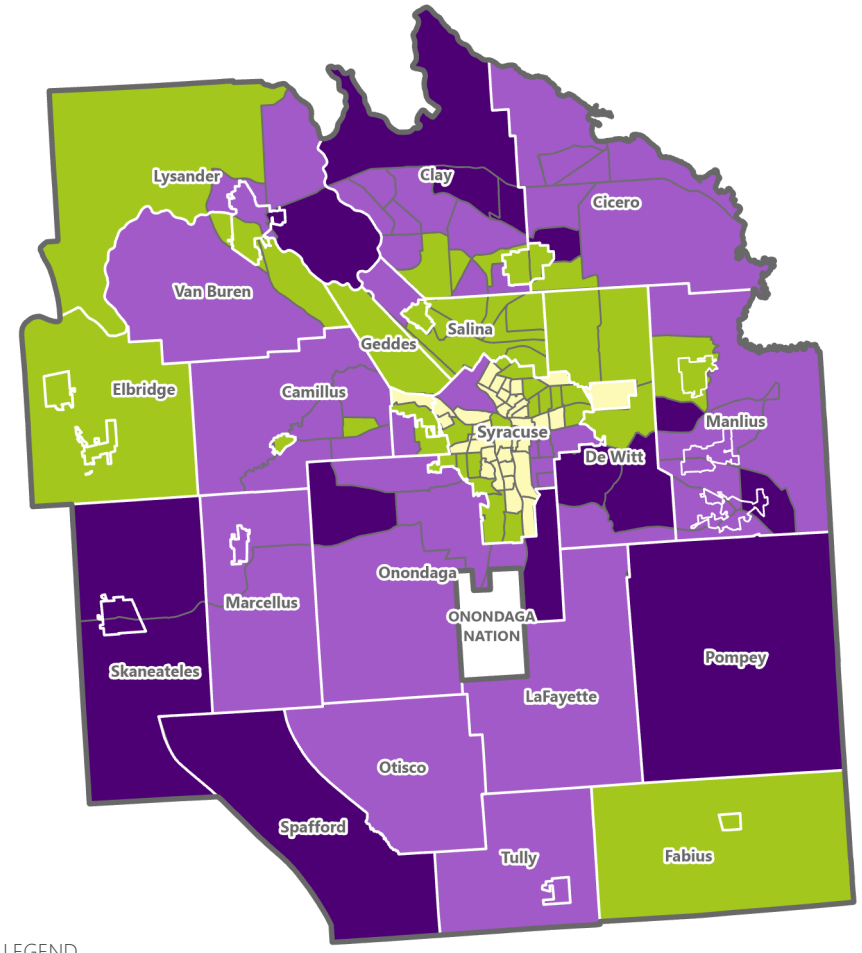
One approach to understanding housing trends in the county is to look at market related data. Careful review of market-based information can help policy makers and local officials consider specific strategies, policies, and/or programs that enhance or stabilize neighborhoods and increase the marketability and value of older housing depending on the local market conditions.

For Plan Onondaga, neighborhood market types were identified through a review of median single-family home sale prices for all arm's length transactions (sales which include a Realtor) from 2016 through 2020, 2019 ACS 5-year estimates of median gross rent, and 2019 ACS 5-year estimates of median household incomes for each census tract in the County.

Each of the three data points were weighted equally and the census tracts were sorted and broken into the four market types listed below. **Map HN.2** shows where the market types are located geographically within the County.

- **Strong market** - areas with significant population growth, the highest median home values, higher incomes, and considerable confidence in the market, but may lack affordable housing.
- **Stable market** - areas with positive population growth, higher median home values, and moderate to high incomes with market confidence that encourages investment in properties.
- **Middle market** - areas with declining populations, lower median home values, lower household incomes, but the strongest in overall affordability of the housing stock. As a

Map HN.2 | Neighborhood Market Types by Census Tract



Source: Analysis of 2015-2019 ACS 5-year estimates, Onondaga County Assessment Data, Multiple-Listing Service Housing Sales Data

result, these neighborhoods have experienced the highest percentage increase in home sale prices.

» **Soft market** - areas where there has been a significant decline in population, the most moderate increase in home values, the lowest median household incomes, and significant poverty. These neighborhoods have the least market confidence and require outside influence to encourage reinvestment in properties.

Figure HN.7 | Percent Neighborhood Market Type within Onondaga County

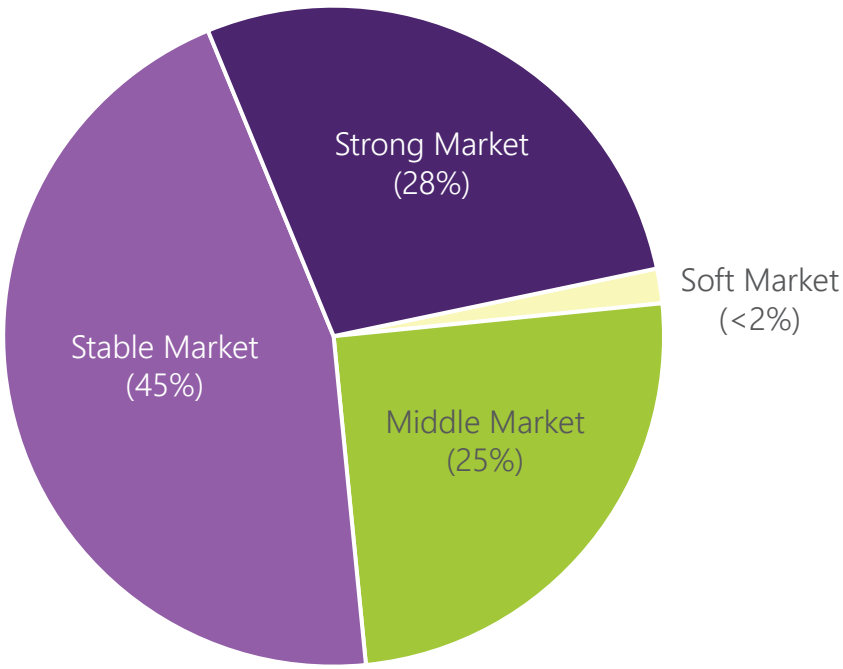


Figure HN.8 on page 101 further summarizes the characteristics of each of the market types.

Stable and Strong market areas tend to be places where households with greater means choose to live. Population and household growth in both of these market types increased between 2010 and 2019, though Strong market areas grew the most. Home prices, rents, and incomes in these areas are rising and there tends to be confidence in the housing market. At the same time, many renter households within these areas experience housing cost burdens.

Middle market areas include parts of the northern inner-ring suburbs, various city neighborhoods and some rural communities in the County. About one-third of households in the County live in a middle market neighborhood. Generally speaking, Middle Market neighborhoods are somewhere in the middle – neither strong nor soft – and this could put these neighborhoods at risk of decline in the future. In fact, the population and households within Middle market areas remained stagnant between 2016 and 2019.

Middle market neighborhoods saw stagnant population and household growth between 2010 and 2019. They are located in proximity

to job centers are have existing infrastructure. These are solid middle-class neighborhoods where homeownership is possible and rental opportunities also exist. The nature of these areas contributes to natural affordability. These neighborhoods are likely places for first-time home buyers and households looking to "downsize." At the same time the housing stock is older and in need of investment. Policies and strategies in these areas should focus on supporting and growing market confidence as well as reinvestment in the housing stock to maintain it for the next generation.

Soft market areas are primarily found in the census tracts that surround downtown Syracuse and include some of the inner-ring suburbs. Collectively, in the Soft market census tracts, the population fell 5.3% between 2010 and 2019. The number of households dropped 3.9% during the same time period.

The population residing in Soft market areas face significant challenges. The poverty rate across this set of census tracts is very high at 40 percent. The people that reside here face other challenges such as high unemployment (12%) and nearly one-quarter of the population does not have a high school diploma or GED equivalent. Three-quarters of the households are renters. In fact 39% of all renters in Onondaga County reside in one of these neighborhoods compared to 18% of all households in the County. Poverty is one of the most pressing challenges in Soft market areas. Policies that seek to address poverty, raise household incomes, increase access to living wage jobs, and education will be vital in these communities. While housing affordability appears to be a challenge in this community, rents and home prices are very affordable within the context of the County and the area is saturated with affordable housing opportunities.

Other key policies should seek to make investments in the aging housing stock and remove and demolish dilapidated buildings that have fallen out of the market. An important goal in the Soft market areas is to rebuild housing market confidence. Residents, property owners, and other stakeholders need to see that investments they make in their homes and properties will be returned if they go to sell their home. Many of the Soft market areas are in close proximity to job centers, including downtown Syracuse and Syracuse University, public transit, and have existing infrastructure. They are likely areas for reinvestment and potential projects should consider maintaining affordability for neighborhood residents.

Figure HN.8 | Characteristics Summary of the Four Market Types in Onondaga County

MARKET TYPE	STRONG	STABLE
Population Change	+4.9%	+1.4%
Household Change	+10.2%	+1.8%
Median Home Sale Price	$248,000	$185,500
% Change in Home Sale Price 2016-2020	+16%	+17%
Median Gross Rent	$1,377	$966
Median Household Income	$100,000	$78,000
% Of Renters that are Housing Cost Burdened	45%	40%
Poverty Rate	4%	7%
Characteristics Summary	» Tend to be areas where people are choosing to live » Population growth trend is positive » Many renter households residing in these areas experience housing cost burdens » May not have infrastructure	» Moderate population growth » Home prices, rents and incomes are rising. » Confidence in the housing market » Some areas lack infrastructure

	MIDDLE	SOFT
	-0.8%	+16%
	-0.4%	-3.9%
	$135,000	$80,500
	+23%	+10%
	$861	$786
	$58,500	$29,500
	38%	52%
	12%	39%
	» Locations with proximity to job centers » Affordable homeownership with rental opportunities » Solid middle class » Existing infrastructure	» Poverty and economic challenges, low household incomes, limited access to living wage jobs » Many of the Soft market areas are in close proximity to job centers, including downtown Syracuse and Syracuse University, public transit » Existing infrastructure

Map HN.3 | Future Land Use Map

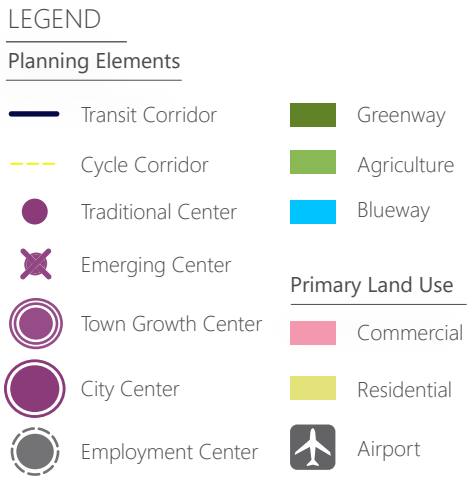
Planning for Housing and Neighborhoods

Residential — Areas where housing is the primary intended land use.

Plan Onondaga seeks to foster investment in housing and neighborhoods that are existing and new. Existing neighborhoods are generally identified with vacant and underutilized land in yellow on the Land Use Map. These areas are, to the extent possible, buffered from agricultural areas in light green so as to prevent land use conflicts.

To more efficiently provide the delivery of transportation and other services, and to support strategic infrastructure investment, people should live closer to these services. Greater housing diversity near identified centers and other commercial areas will help accomplish this goal, as well as contribute to the creation of Strong Centers.

When planning new development and redevelopment, extending mobility and greenway features into or near neighborhoods is required in order to provide equitable access to nearby healthy natural environments and opportunity for recreation.



Housing and Neighborhoods

Goals and Strategies

Quality housing and good neighborhoods are key components of maintaining quality of life in Onondaga County. Maintaining and improving the County's housing stock while investing in neighborhood amenities and assets will help strengthen the County's competitiveness.

Goal 1

Expand Housing Choice

Affordability is a key consideration when planning for housing and neighborhoods. Housing affordability is about providing for housing choice through the availability of multiple housing options. In order to achieve long-term improvements in housing choice, it will be important to provide tools and resources for local municipalities to adopt best practices in their plans and codes. Through County departments and agencies, such as the Department of Planning and Department of Community Development, the County can provide technical assistance, as well as incentives and financial resources to encourage the adoption of policies that follow best practices.

Strategy 1 » With County partners such as the Onondaga County Planning Federation provide training, toolkits, and programs that can help local municipalities bridge gaps in knowledge or expertise to implement changes to the local regulatory and development review framework to allow for an expansion of the types of housing that are permitted.

Strategy 2 » Provide best practices and toolkits for integrating accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in local codes. ADUs may serve as a much more convenient and affordable alternate for individuals trying to locate housing.

Strategy 3 » Provide recommendations for reviewing and reducing local parking requirement minimums to prioritize housing individuals over cars.

Goal 2

Develop Targeted Market-Driven Programs to Support Neighborhood Health

Understanding and defining neighborhood housing markets can help guide policy makers in developing strategies, policies, and/or programs to deploy based on the market conditions in a community. These market-based approaches can help local communities strengthen the tax base and provide a safe and healthy environment for residents.

Strategy 1 » Conduct a Housing Needs Assessment

Strategy 2 » Support the efforts of the Land Bank and developers to remove and demolish dilapidated buildings that are unmarketable.

Strategy 3 » Build housing market confidence in soft and middle market neighborhoods by using available funding and programs to assist homeowners to make investments in their homes.

Strategy 4 » Strengthen connections between soft and middle market neighborhoods and job centers.

Strategy 5 » Work to address poverty, raise household incomes, increase access to living wage jobs, and education in soft and middle market neighborhoods.

Strategy 6 » Support interventions in middle and stable market neighborhoods to avoid decline and to ensure the long-term strength and appeal of housing in these neighborhoods

Housing and Neighborhoods

Goals and Strategies (continued)

Goal 3

Support and Enhance the County's Housing and Neighborhoods

Onondaga County's housing stock and neighborhood areas are key drivers of the quality of life for County residents. Continued investment and updates to housing and neighborhoods can ensure they hold value and are competitive. In creating new neighborhoods, communities need to require the amenities, infrastructure and connections that create high-quality places to live.

Strategy 1 » Plan for, codify and demand the amenities and quality of life infrastructure to create great neighborhoods. Empower local government to demand and require these components of a neighborhood as part of the development process.

Strategy 2 » Continue existing and develop new Community Development programs that support the maintenance of the County's aging housing stock (e.g., energy efficiency, renewable energy technologies, and conveniences).

Strategy 3 » Invest in parks, trails, and open space resources that enhance quality of life, strengthen property values and offer opportunities to connect housing and neighborhood areas with the County's greenway and blueway systems.

Strategy 4 » Identify neighborhoods that would benefit from neighborhood retrofits, where the County can assist the local government and homeowners in a selected area to incorporate missing "complete neighborhood" features like sidewalks, trail connections, street lights, traffic calming features and street trees to increase the attractiveness and value in the neighborhood.

Strategy 5 » In areas near schools, help local communities plan for and utilize Safe Routes to School funding to install neighborhood features that assist students walking or biking to school, and also improve the neighborhood overall for everyone else.

Strategy 6 » Continue to support and utilize Main Street and other housing programs administered by the County Community Development department.

Endnotes

1 Hayward, Jeffrey. October 31, 2022. *U.S. Housing Shortage: Everything, Everywhere, All at Once.* Fannie Mae Perspectives Blog. (Accessed February 2023)

2 *Ibid*

3 American Planning Association. 2019. *Housing Policy Guide.*

4 Urban Land Institute. 2016. *Housing in the Evolving American Suburb.* Terwilliger Center for Housing.

5 *Ibid.*

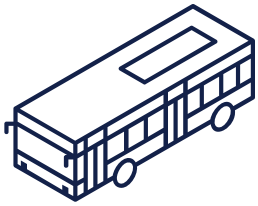
6 Briedenbach, Michelle. "*Sky-high rent in the Syracuse area is stretching budgets, stranding young and old.*" Syracuse.com. August 25, 2021.

7 *Ibid.*

PLAN ON
Community Mobility

Photo: Visit Syracuse

Community Comments on Community Mobility



Community Mobility

Community Mobility is the ability of people to travel from place to place within Onondaga County. Community mobility strategies aim to provide for more choice in the transportation system and to improve safety for all users.

Vision:

Onondaga County will enhance mobility by improving the safety, accessibility, and diversity of options for moving people within and between communities.

Providing multiple transportation options or modes increases safety and convenience for all users of the transportation system. Onondaga County is fairly easy to get around in by car, however not everyone who lives here drives or wishes to drive for all of their trips. Older and younger residents, as well as people who don't own cars, all need options to move around the County safely and efficiently. Infrastructure supporting non-drivers contributes to a higher quality of life for all County residents, resulting in a more attractive, healthier, and economically vibrant and competitive County.

A personal car is the most common mode of travel in the County, however people also travel by using other modes, such as bus, ridesharing (e.g., Lyft, Uber), van sharing, micromobility (bike and scooter share), walking, and bicycling.

The availability of a wider range of transportation options can also impact household financial health. Owning and maintaining vehicles is expensive. The availability of additional transit options can alleviate the need for households to own multiple vehicles. Money saved on private vehicles could be diverted to other household budget needs.

Community Mobility offers benefits to the County and its residents by:

- Enabling all households access to basic needs like work, food, school, and family;
- Providing a diversity of modes (e.g., car, bus, bicycle, walking) in the transportation system;
- Improving community health as more people participate in active transportation options like bicycling and walking; and
- Reducing greenhouse gases as fewer single occupancy vehicles are on the road.

Components of Community Mobility

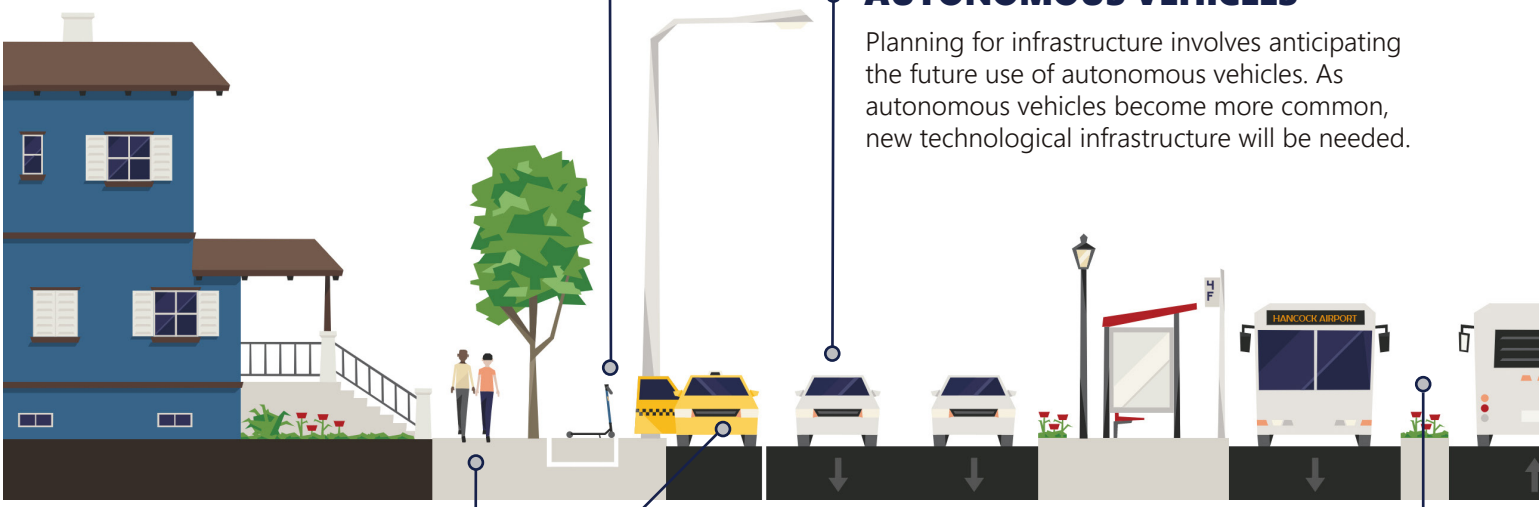
Community mobility may be best understood at the level of an individual street. The components of a street should provide different options for people of all ages and abilities to safely move around in different ways; this variety leads to greater and safer mobility. Streets that provide for multiple modes like the one depicted below are commonly called "complete streets" (see 130). Complete Streets incorporate infrastructure that safely accommodates vehicular traffic, buses, bicycles, and pedestrians in a way that provides for connectivity between transit systems, vehicular travel routes, cycling infrastructure, regional trail systems, neighborhoods, and communities.

MICROMOBILITY

Micromobility options such as scooter and bike share can be inexpensive and flexible transit options to close gaps between transit and destinations.

AUTONOMOUS VEHICLES

Planning for infrastructure involves anticipating the future use of autonomous vehicles. As autonomous vehicles become more common, new technological infrastructure will be needed.



This image was created using Streetmix.net and custom modifications for Plan Onondaga.

PEDESTRIAN SPACES

Pedestrian mobility includes safe sidewalks and crosswalks, making walking an inviting and viable option for transportation. Pedestrian infrastructure and amenities create desirable places.

RIDESHARE AND ON-DEMAND TRANSIT

Rideshare options such as Uber and Lyft, and on-demand services such as van-pooling provide flexibility and convenience for transportation.

BUS RAPID TRANSIT

Bus Rapid Transit includes dedicated bus lanes, signal prioritization and enhanced bus stations. This system can be strategically interwoven in dense population or commercial centers to provide reliable, efficient, effective, and convenient transit opportunities.

LAND USE

Land use and community mobility are strategically inseparable. Land uses should be centered around strategic mobility investments. Mixed-use walkable centers are oriented to transit stops and connected to surrounding, less dense neighborhoods and other uses in the transit corridor, allowing for development patterns that support and depend upon investments in improved transit systems and increased ridership.

BIKE INFRASTRUCTURE

Bike infrastructure such as dedicated bike lanes, bicycle parking, and signage allow for bicyclist (and vehicular) safety and promote community health.

PERSONAL VEHICLES

Safety and movement are enhanced for personal vehicles as well as other modes when multi-modal corridors are successfully implemented.

ENHANCED TRANSIT SERVICE

Providing safe, efficient, and reliable transit options and amenities including bus stops and shelters is essential for successful community mobility.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

In an effort to plan for the effects of climate change, investments such as charging stations should be made to support the use of electric vehicles.

TRAILS

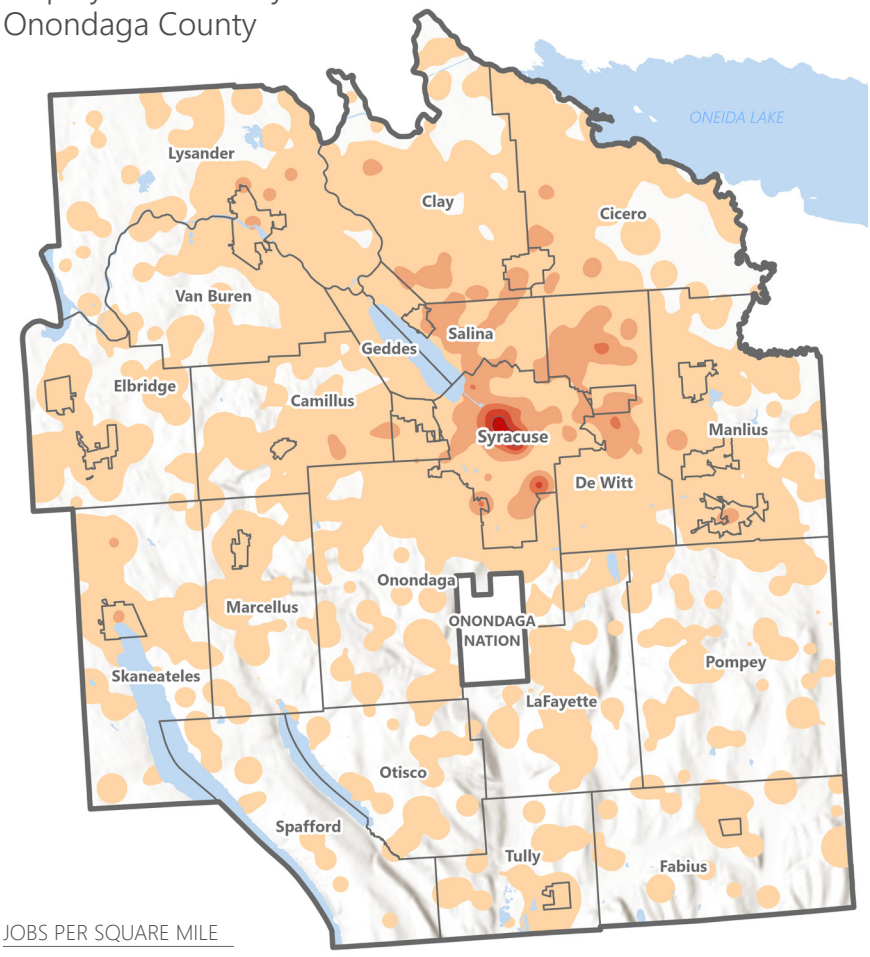
Onondaga County is home to rural, suburban, and urban trail systems. Connecting and filling the gaps in these trail systems enhances pedestrian and recreation mobility options, increases quality of life, and strengthens property values.

Why Plan for Community Mobility?

Public transportation is a convenience for some, but a lifeline for others.

Jobs in Onondaga County are primarily concentrated within Downtown Syracuse and surrounding neighborhoods like University Hill, North Salina, Franklin Square, and the Lakefront, as well as the towns of DeWitt, Salina, and Clay (**Map CM.1)**. Mobility systems are critical to economic opportunity and stability as the transportation system needs to link the places where people live to the places where there are jobs as well as goods and services.

Map CM.1 |
Employment Density in Onondaga County



Source: US Census 2018

Providing Equity

Modes of travel such as public transportation are a convenience for some but a lifeline for others. For example, households without vehicles (**Map CM.2**) need access to public transit to get to work, do their shopping, visit friends and family, access childcare and medical care, or get to school. Households with a car may have members who are unable or choose not to drive, and benefit from a range of community mobility options. People choosing not to drive also need improved options for walkability, bikeability, and improved transit. Enhanced public and alternative transportation networks can help to provide access to employment opportunities and improved quality of life for Onondaga County residents.

Balancing Investment

Transportation infrastructure needs often outweigh available funding, which can lead to difficult choices for how to balance the needs for additional multi-modal investments with ongoing demands for road system maintenance. A vision for future mobility can help to guide the coordination of local, regional, and state actions related to infrastructure investments.

Significant resources are dedicated to the maintenance of the road

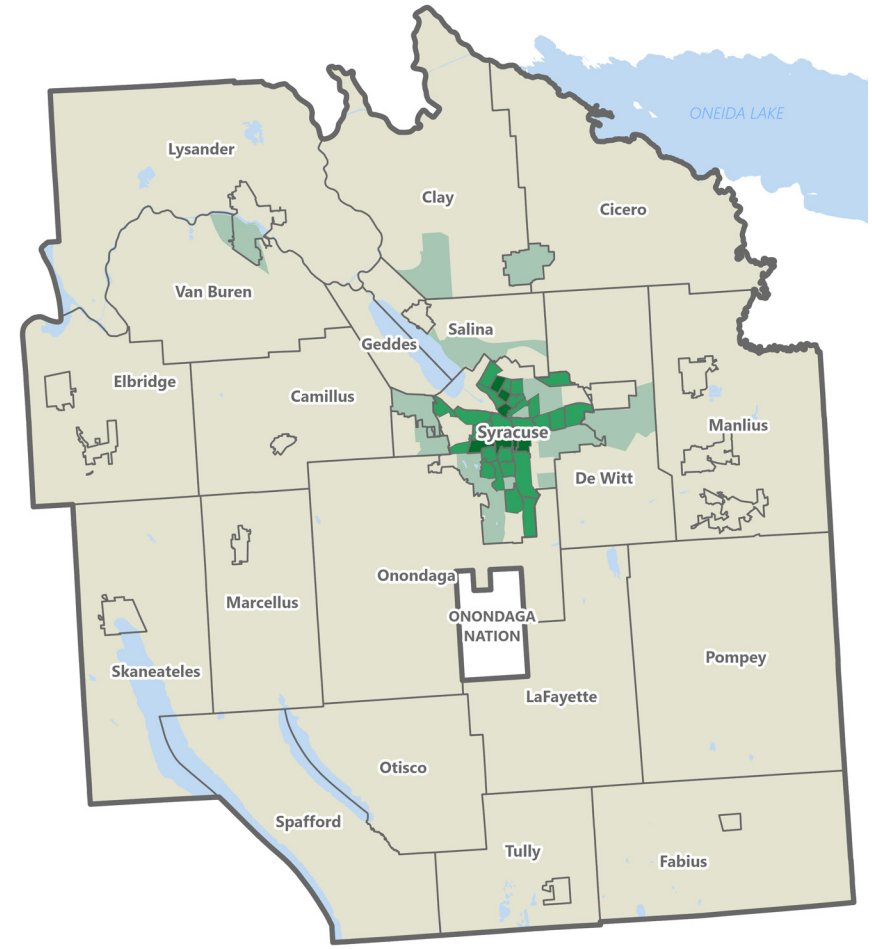
network within the County. Over the course of the next decade, over $5 billion in system improvements are anticipated, with the overwhelming majority targeted toward highway and bridge maintenance, safety enhancements and projects to increase capacity.

Preservation of the existing highway system often takes precedence over projects to benefit cyclists and pedestrian travel and transit operations. However, changes are occurring in federal and state funding programs, with allocations toward bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and new programs dedicated to multi-modal options.

Adapting to Lifestyle Preferences

People of all age groups nationally and locally have expressed interest in mixed-use, human scale development that promotes walkability, active transportation choices, and connectivity to encourage and enable people to work and recreate in proximity to where they live. Incorporating active transportation options (e.g., trail-oriented development, pedestrian-oriented development - see Strong Centers theme) provides a holistic and comprehensive approach to community mobility that incorporates all methods of transportation, ultimately increasing connectivity and mobility.

Map CM.2 | Households Without a Vehicle

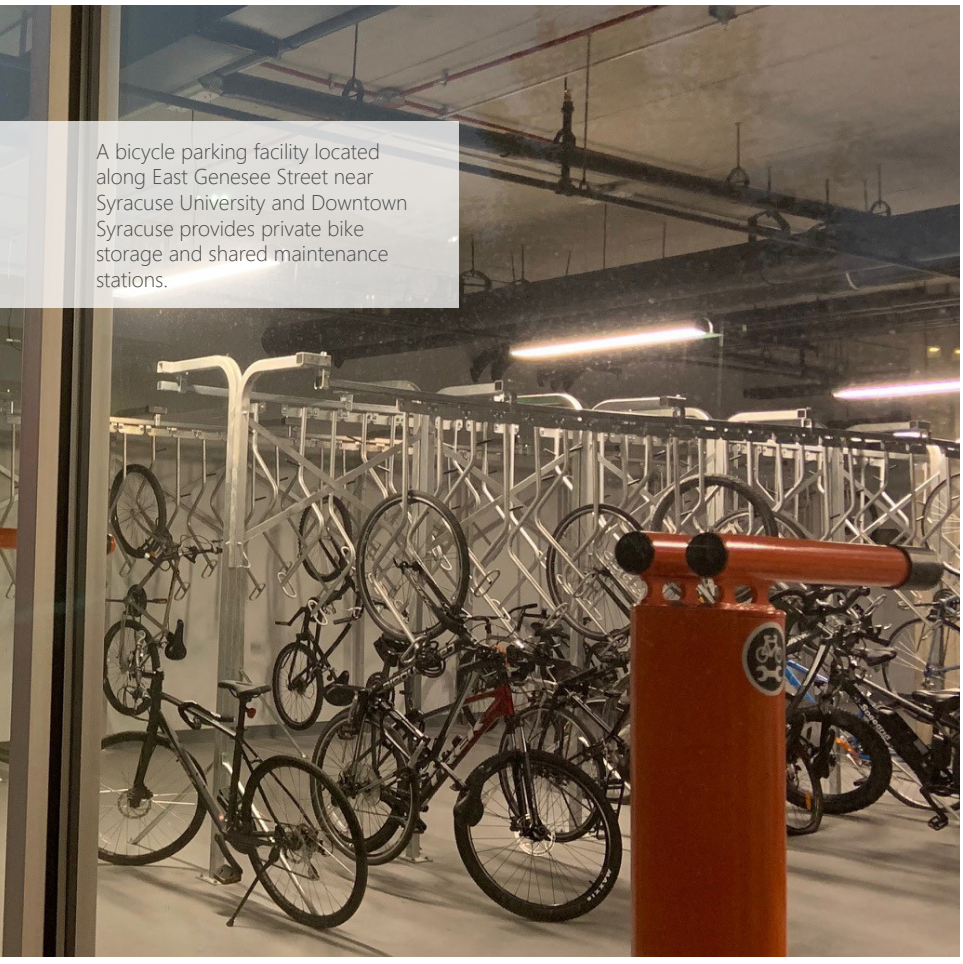


Source: US Census ACS 5-year Estimates, 2021

Investments in trails, bike lanes, and bicycle-sharing systems have high levels of return on investment.

Improving Economic Vitality

Increased mobility associated with the addition of active transportation networks within a community has proven to boost local economies[1]. When pedestrian, bike, and public transportation facilities are available, people spend more money within their community, real estate values increase, and investments in private development occur.



A bicycle parking facility located along East Genesee Street near Syracuse University and Downtown Syracuse provides private bike storage and shared maintenance stations.

Trails, bike lanes, and bicycle-sharing systems can improve pedestrian and bicyclist access to employment centers, recreational destinations, and public transit facilities, thereby enhancing the attractiveness of development along active transportation corridors. In some cases, former industrial districts and towns outside urban cores have benefited from active transportation infrastructure due to improved walking and cycling connectivity.

Investments in trails, bike lanes, and bicycle-sharing systems have high levels of return on investment. Regions and cities have found that relatively small investments in active transportation have outsized economic returns due to improved health and environmental outcomes and reduced negative externalities, such as automobile traffic congestion and poor air quality[2].

Improving Public Health

Community mobility and public health intersect in many ways that influence the County. Increasing mobility options and assisting with the transition to clean energy technologies can help to reduce pollution associated with fossil fuels. Providing infrastructure for active transportation, including safe walking and biking routes, will also encourage and support

active lifestyles and provide access to health-promoting recreational options.

Capitalizing on Our Assets

The County's villages, hamlets, and city neighborhoods began as pedestrian-oriented settlements built around main streets or commercial corridors. Over time, many have lost walkability features like wide sidewalks, street furniture, and mixed-use buildings, as roadways have been widened and redesigned to accommodate more and faster vehicular traffic. In these communities, strengthening pedestrian-oriented design builds upon traditional development patterns and increases safe access to everyday destinations.

In small and rural towns where destinations are far apart, pedestrian-oriented design can encourage a shift from auto-oriented development to spaces where community members have the option to walk. Adding pedestrian-oriented design features can strengthen a community's sense of place and support sustainable economic, environmental, and social conditions that contribute to healthy, walkable, and more inviting places. In more rural areas, a community trail system may be more practical than sidewalks to connect more distant homes and rural neighborhoods with more informal rural hamlets and villages.

A walkable people oriented street in the Village of Skaneateles has wide sidewalks that provide room for outdoor seating as well as pedestrians.

Changes in Community Mobility

Pedestrian fatalities nationally increased by 45 percent between 2010 and 2019.

Contemporary community mobility strategies aim to improve safety and diversify transportation systems by providing attractive options for all modes of transportation, including private automobiles, transit, cycling, walking, and shared transportation services.

Safe Systems

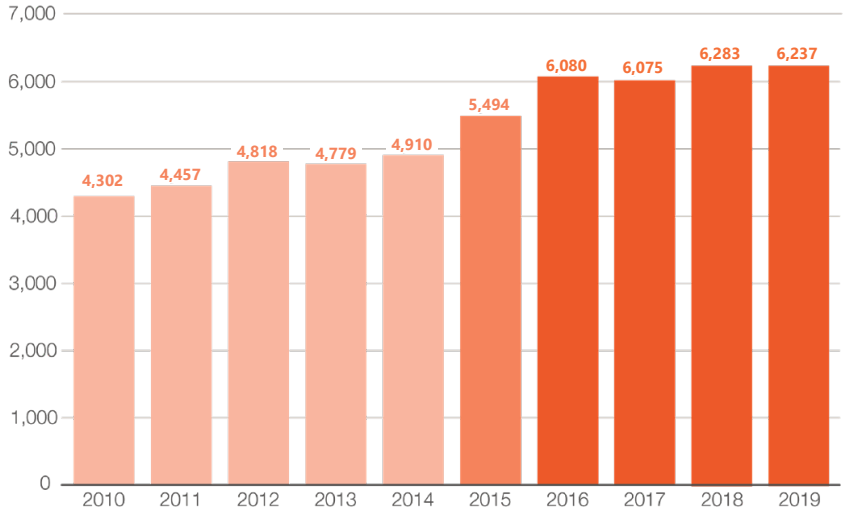
For the past 100 years our national and local transportation systems have been developed through a "car-centric" and "level-of service" (LOS) mindset, which prioritizes and provides added privileges for motor vehicles[3], often in ways that are incompatible with other modes of transportation (e.g., pedestrians, bikes, and public transit). LOS places the highest value on speed, avoiding delays for motor vehicles, with a lower emphasis on safety and access.

Car-centric road networks lack facilities for pedestrians and cyclists like sidewalks and bike lanes, have higher speed limits, and typically have multiple travel lanes that cause pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists to feel unsafe when sharing the roadway. The Empire State Trail Bikeway Case Study on page 131 illustrates the differences between a roadway designed for facilitating vehicular traffic and one that prioritizes bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Largely as a result of the design of our roadways, pedestrian fatalities rose 45 percent nationally between 2010 and 2019[4] (**Figure CM.1**). Onondaga County has been working with New York State and local municipalities to begin to implement bike and pedestrian infrastructure.

Reducing road system fatalities requires the implementation of what has been termed a "safe systems approach." Implementation of safe systems is usually guided by a Vision Zero goal to eliminate fatalities and serious injuries (**Figure CM.2**). The design of roadways should encourage safe speeds and reduce the potential severity of injuries for all users.

Figure CM.1 | Pedestrian Fatalities in the U.S. 2010-2019



Source: Smart Growth America, Dangerous by Design 2021

Vision Zero

Vision Zero is a term that represents a fundamental shift in how we think about and work on the safety of our mobility system. It seeks to eliminate traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, and equitable mobility for transportation system users.

The Vision Zero approach recognizes that humans sometimes make mistakes, so we have a responsibility to design and operate a transportation system that makes those mistakes less severe.

Vision Zero initiatives focus on preventing traffic fatalities and serious injuries through developing an understanding of what and where the most problems are, then prioritizing resources to make systemic improvements.

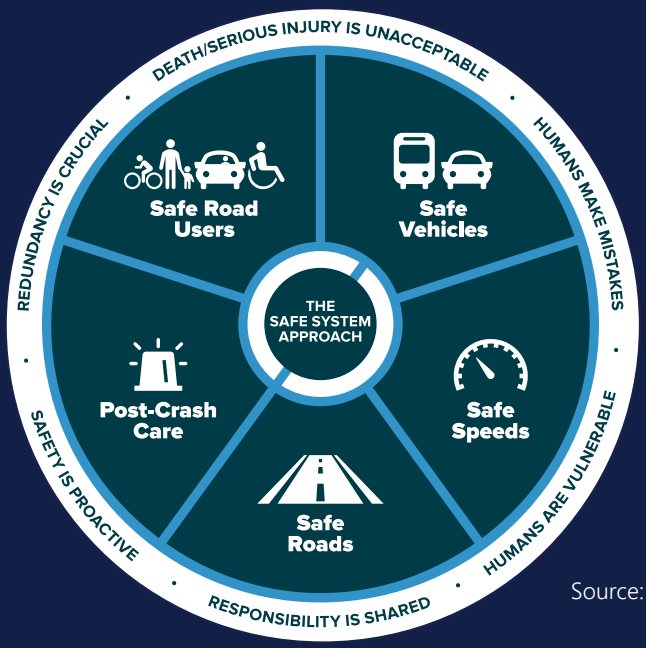
Achieving Vision Zero Requires:

- Building and sustaining leadership, collaboration, and accountability – especially among a diverse group of stakeholders to include transportation professionals, policymakers, public health officials, police, and community members.
- Collecting, analyzing, and using data to understand trends and potential disproportionate impacts of traffic deaths on certain populations.
- Prioritizing equity and community engagement.
- Managing speed to safe levels.
- Setting a timeline to achieve zero traffic deaths and serious injuries, which brings urgency and accountability, and ensuring transparency on progress and challenges.

In 2023 Onondaga County was awarded a Safe Streets 4 All grant to create a qualifying Action Plan to achieve Vision Zero. The $450,000 grant will combine and expand upon currently planned projects, engage the community, and set the stage for seeking up to $30M per year in implementation funds.

Vision Zero is a strategy to eliminate traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all.

Figure CM.2 | The Safe Systems Approach for Reducing Injuries and Fatalities in the Transportation System



Source: FHWA

Complete Streets are roadways that are planned and designed to consider the safety, accessibility, and mobility of all roadway users of all ages and abilities.

Complete Streets

The Complete Streets Act (Chapter 398, Laws of New York) was signed into law on August 15, 2011 and requires state, county, and local agencies to consider the convenience and mobility of all users when developing transportation projects that receive state and federal funding.

A Complete Street is a roadway planned and designed to consider the safety, accessibility, and mobility of all roadway users of all ages and abilities. This includes pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation riders, and motorists; and people of all abilities including children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.

Complete Street roadway design features include:

- A network of sidewalks;
- Bicycle lanes or paved shoulders suitable for use by bicyclists;
- Signage, crosswalks, and pedestrian control signals;
- Bus pull-outs, raised crosswalks, ramps and traffic calming measures;
- Narrow vehicle lanes, curb bump-outs, and islands to shorten pedestrian crossing distances.

The case studies below and to the right illustrate how complete streets are already being implemented here in Onondaga County.

Complete Streets case study:

Syracuse Connective Corridor

Completed in 2015, the Connective Corridor transformed University Avenue into a multi-modal street with new bicycle facilities, sidewalks, street furniture, lighting, and pedestrian crossing amenities. These amenities continue along East Genesee Street linking the University to Downtown Syracuse.

Two-way cycle tracks (also known as protected bike lanes, separated bikeways, and on-street bike paths) are physically separated from vehicular traffic and allow bicycle movement in both directions on one side of the road.

Source: Syracuse University Connective Corridor

Complete Streets case study:

Empire State Trail Bikeway

In 2017, Erie Boulevard East was characterized by six lanes of automobile traffic, with no pedestrian or cycling accommodations. Intersections lacked pedestrian facilities such as crosswalks and there were no sidewalks. In addition, the corridor was dominated by asphalt paving with little landscaping.

Analysis of traffic counts along a four mile stretch of Erie Boulevard, between the Town of DeWitt and City of Syracuse, indicated that the number of travel lanes in either direction could be reduced by one with no noticeable impact to drivers as long as turning lanes were maintained. Through an extensive public engagement process, conducted by the City of Syracuse and the Town of DeWitt, a call for ideas was initiated to solicit alternative design ideas for the corridor.

By 2021, through investments in the New York State Empire State Trail project, vehicular traffic lanes were reduced to four, a center median bikeway was constructed, crosswalks were added, and continuous sidewalk infrastructure was constructed along both sides of the roadway.

Project Details

Ownership:

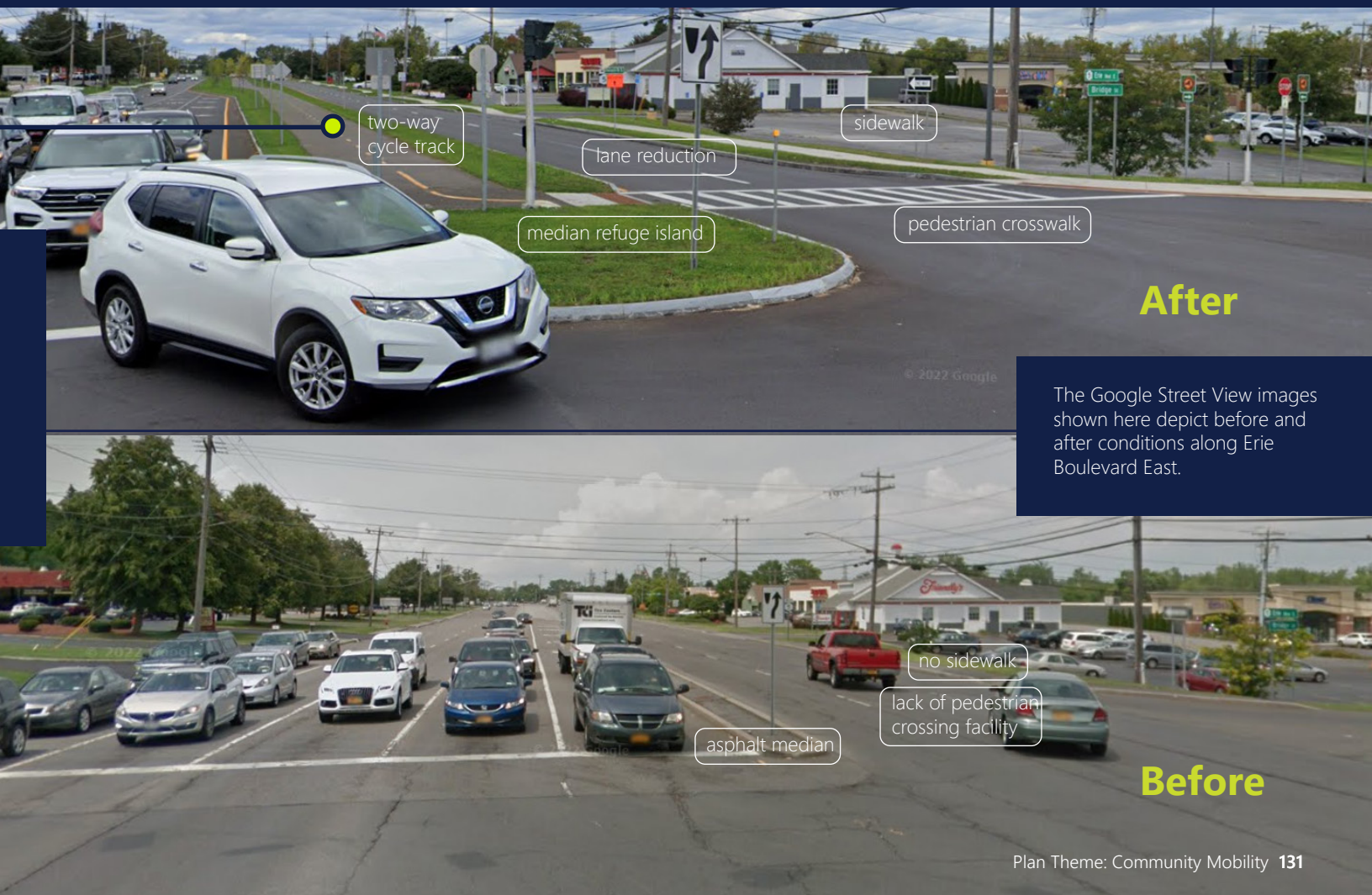
New York State DOT

Total project:

2.75 miles along Erie Boulevard East between Bridge Street in DeWitt and Teall Avenue in Syracuse

Notable Features:

Center-running bikeway and pedestrian safety enhancements



The Google Street View images shown here depict before and after conditions along Erie Boulevard East.

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is a high-quality bus-based transit system that delivers fast, comfortable, and cost-effective services that can approach subway-level capacity.

In many ways Centro operates a service similar to BRT during the NYS Fair. Centro typically records more then ten percent of its annual ridership during the 12+ days of the Fair. In the photo above riders wait in line to take the bus from the parking lot at Destiny USA to the New York State Fairgrounds during the Fair.

Modernizing Transit

Metropolitan areas across the U.S. have begun to implement innovative land use strategies, incentives like fareless transit, new technologies, and updated transit service models in order to increase transit ridership.

Transit-Oriented Development

Regions have been adopting the principles of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD).

TOD projects typically incorporate:

- Walkable mixed-use areas that prioritize pedestrian safety, connectivity, and circulation;
- Dedicated station areas where transit service is centered; and
- Bicycle infrastructure including bike lanes, bicycle parking areas, and in-building amenities like bicycle storage, repair, and cleaning stations.

TOD establishes, or reinforces, compact mixed-use development within walking distances of transit service (e.g., bus, Bus Rapid Transit, light rail, or other). At the county scale, locations can be identified for encouraging TOD investments and these can be coordinated with infrastructure investments to improve transit connectivity and reliability, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and trail connectivity between the TOD locations and adjacent neighborhoods, corridors, and districts.

Fareless Transit

As the majority of riders in many regions are lower income, the cost of service is a recognized equity concern. Free transit can help to provide expanded economic opportunities for riders and can allow low-income households to spend a higher percentage of their income on food, housing, and healthcare. Fareless transit can also benefit youth and seniors by providing more options for transportation, and removing cars from the road reduces traffic congestion and lowers polluting emissions. Columbus, Ohio implemented free transit for downtown workers and residents in 2018; the following year Columbus recorded its highest ever ridership[5].

Technology

There are other ways to provide enhanced transit service in order to increase ridership. For example, Transit Signal Priority (TSP) technology can modify traffic signal timing or phasing when transit vehicles are present. TSP is more commonly used for first responders such as fire engines and ambulances. TSP can significantly improve service reliability and shrink travel times for buses, especially on arterial corridors that have long signal cycles and distance between signals.

Bus Rapid Transit

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is a high-quality bus-based transit system that delivers fast, comfortable, and cost-effective services that can approach subway-level capacity. BRT systems have been implemented throughout the United States. The closest system to Onondaga County is the BusPlus system in the Capital Region connecting Albany and Schenectady.

Riders Board the BusPlus Redline in Albany on South Pearl Street. Source: CDTA

Modernizing Transit case study:

Capital District BusPlus

The Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) began the first BRT service (BusPlus) in Upstate New York in April of 2011. The Red Line was the first route linking downtown Albany and downtown Schenectady along NYS Route 5. Within the first year of operation CDTA's system witnessed a 25 percent increase in ridership. The service is routed through Colonie and Niskayuna where 15% of the region's population and 30% of the region's jobs are located.

Expanding on the success of the Red Line, CDTA is working to connect the three busiest travel corridors in the Capital Region. The corridors combined account for nearly 10 million annual boardings. When the BusPlus system is complete it will span 40 miles and transport over 10 percent of the Capital Region's workforce.

Project Details

Ownership:
CDTA

Total project:
17 miles along Route 5 between downtown Albany and downtown Schenectady

Notable Features: At some intersections, the BusPlus has its own lane and traffic signal priority when behind schedule. Some stations have real-time information signs, and most have bike racks.

Electric and Autonomous Vehicles

Electric vehicles (EVs) continue to be a rapidly growing sector. In the second quarter of 2022, EV sales rose significantly, showing a 12.9 percent increase over the same period in 2021. During that same time, gasoline-powered vehicle sales were down more than 20 percent[6].

Autonomous vehicles, or self-driving cars, are expected to be a key element of the nation's transportation system. The increased use of autonomous vehicles introduces infrastructure challenges that could transform the built environment. It is anticipated that this will decrease parking requirements within dense urban areas, but it is suspected that communities may experience increased traffic congestion and more vehicle trips traveled[7].

These rapidly changing markets have implications for communities and for local governments, including land-use and development changes that will influence future policy, programs, and regulations. For example, EV owners tend to be wealthier as EVs tend to be more expensive up front. As a result, most charging stations tend to be located in higher income areas which may lead to long-term equity concerns for the siting of charging infrastructure.

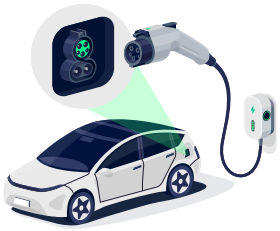
As EVs become more prevalent, there will be increased demand for public level 2 and DC Fast Charge facilities (**Figure CM.3**) which may be located along streets and in municipal or public facilities like libraries, parks, and parking lots, which may help renters and other people who don't have private chargers to make the switch to electric vehicles when they become more affordable.

Zoning ordinances have a wide impact on how and where public charging stations are installed and used. Zoning rules can help determine what types of land uses are appropriate for the different levels of chargers, along with how they should be sited.

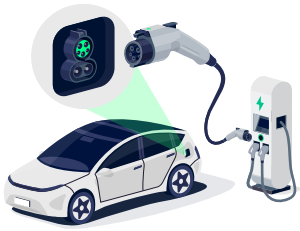
In the not too distant future, autonomous vehicles will likely alter traffic lane design and maintenance standards, along with changes to land use policies, zoning codes, and design standards[8]. Autonomous vehicles will also likely introduce new equity concerns.

Figure CM.3 | Types of Electric Vehicle Charging Stations

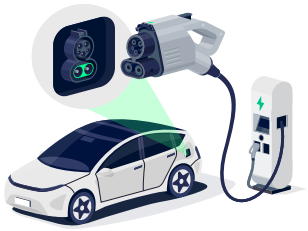
Socket
(Home/Work)



Wall Charger
(Home/Work)



Level 2 Charging Station
(Public)



DC Fast Charging Station
(Public)

Electric Vehicle case study:

City of Atlanta, Georgia Building Codes

Local governments can help speed the growth of charging networks by allowing, incentivizing, or even requiring property owners to make those improvements. In 2017, Atlanta began requiring new homes to be "EV-ready," with the conduit, wiring, and electrical capacity necessary to add chargers later.

Electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

Community Mobility in Onondaga County

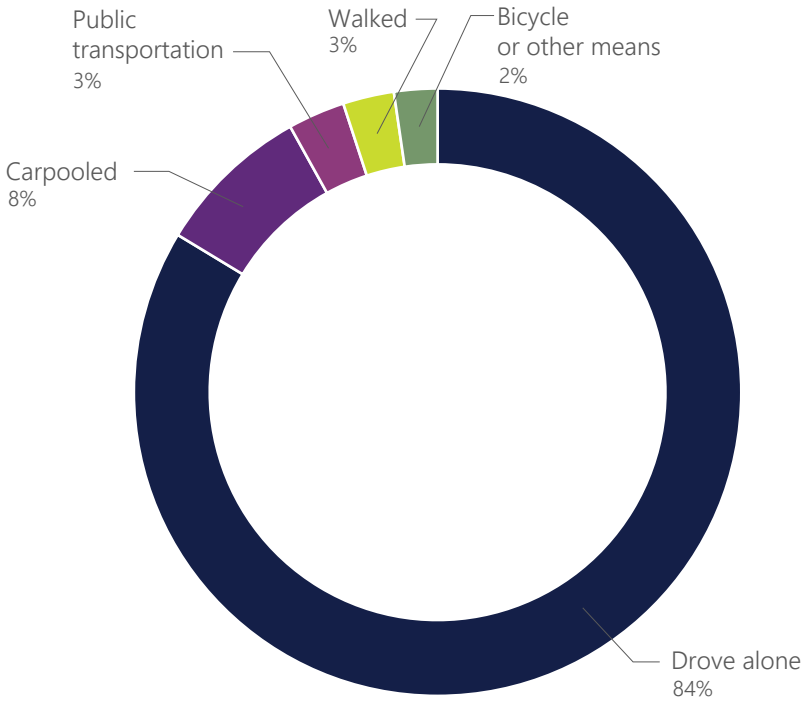
Within Onondaga County, there are multiple initiatives that have been working to modernize our mobility infrastructure. The success of these initiatives will require consistent focus and collaboration across the County involving local municipalities, state, County, and federal agencies. Strengthening mobility systems requires a focus on pedestrian, bicycle, and transit infrastructure in response to lifestyle changes and community needs.

A 2010 community planning survey revealed that Onondaga County residents desired improved transit options and better bicycle and pedestrian facilities[9]. Community engagement for Plan Onondaga showed that residents today continue to desire more and better options.

As shown in **Figure CM.4**, driving alone (84%) is the dominant work trip within the County. When combined with carpooling, 92% of all work trips are made in a private automobile. When broken down by municipality, the drive alone mode share ranges from a low of 68% within the City of Syracuse and a high of 92% in the rural, southern town of LaFayette.

The use of public transportation for commuting to work is highest within the City of Syracuse, and the town of Geddes. These numbers are reflective of local land use patterns and past investments in road infrastructure to accommodate pedestrians and buses. They also reflect the fact that in communities where transit service is convenient, ridership is higher, and in communities with robust pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure alternative trips are more frequent.

Figure CM.4 | Mode of Transportation to Work in Onondaga County



Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey 2019

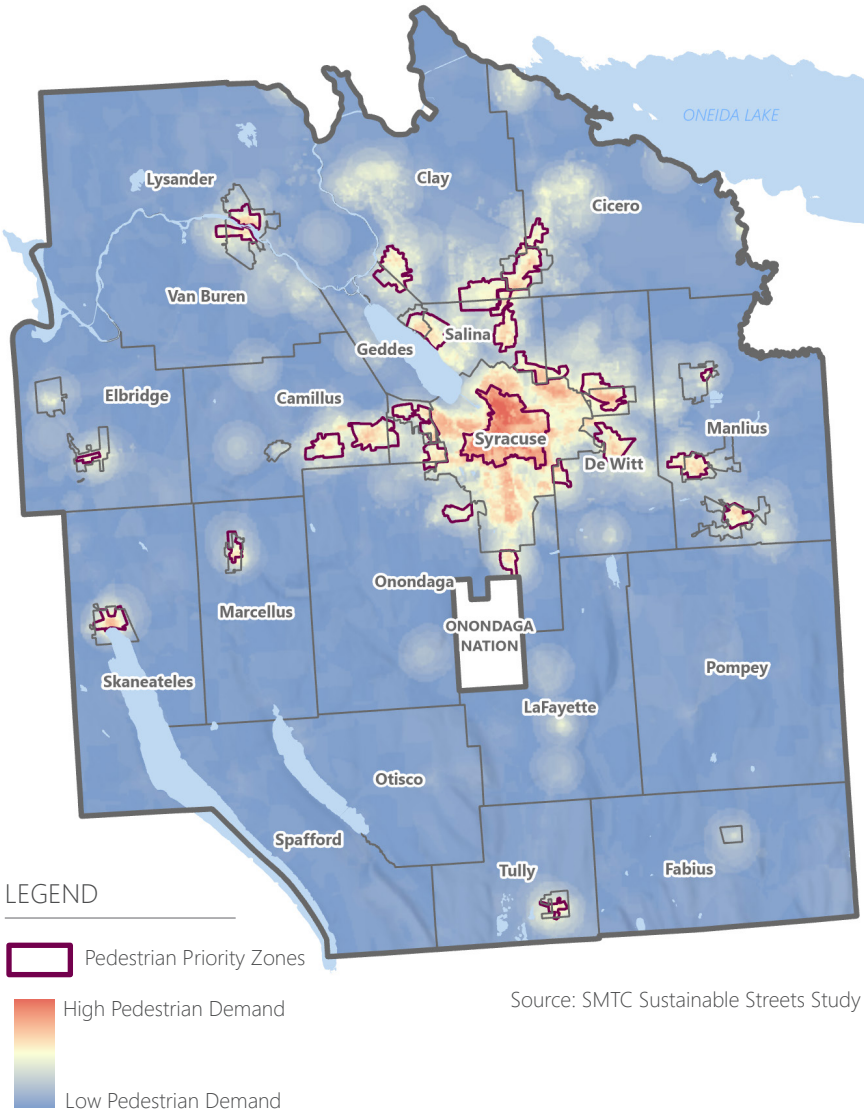
Pedestrian Connectivity

The vast majority of pedestrian infrastructure currently exists within the County's villages and the City of Syracuse. Very little pedestrian infrastructure occurs in other areas of the County despite areas that show potential demand. The Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) has identified 30 Priority Zones for pedestrian improvements within the County. The Priority Zones were identified through a pedestrian demand model (**Map CM.3**), combining factors like distance to schools and shopping, population density, and various demographic data[10].

The pedestrian demand model identifies "hot" areas depicted in red where pedestrian activity will most likely occur. This planning-level tool is a resource for local municipalities (i.e., city, towns, and villages) to focus limited resources on critical gaps in sidewalk infrastructure that may exist along major arterial streets or collector roadways, near schools, or adjacent to major commercial corridors.

Understanding areas of priority for pedestrian infrastructure investment is an important step toward building an interconnected system of pedestrian infrastructure. While the pedestrian priority zones are helpful, further identification of an interconnected network of pedestrian infrastructure (e.g., sidewalks and trails) linking urban and rural areas within Onondaga County would establish a long-term vision for connectivity, building off of the preliminary analysis that was conducted for the Sustainable Streets project.

Map CM.3 | Pedestrian Demand Model Priority Pedestrian Zones



Source: SMTC Sustainable Streets Study

Bicycling Networks

With the completion of the Empire State Trail (EST) project through Onondaga County in 2020, the possibilities for developing a larger, more cohesive network of bicycle infrastructure were greatly expanded.

The EST utilized existing infrastructure within the Old Erie Canal State Historic Park, the Onondaga Creekwalk, and the Onondaga County Loop the Lake trail system to establish an east/west trail that traverses Onondaga County. These combined trail systems connect multiple destinations within the City of Syracuse and surrounding towns and villages.

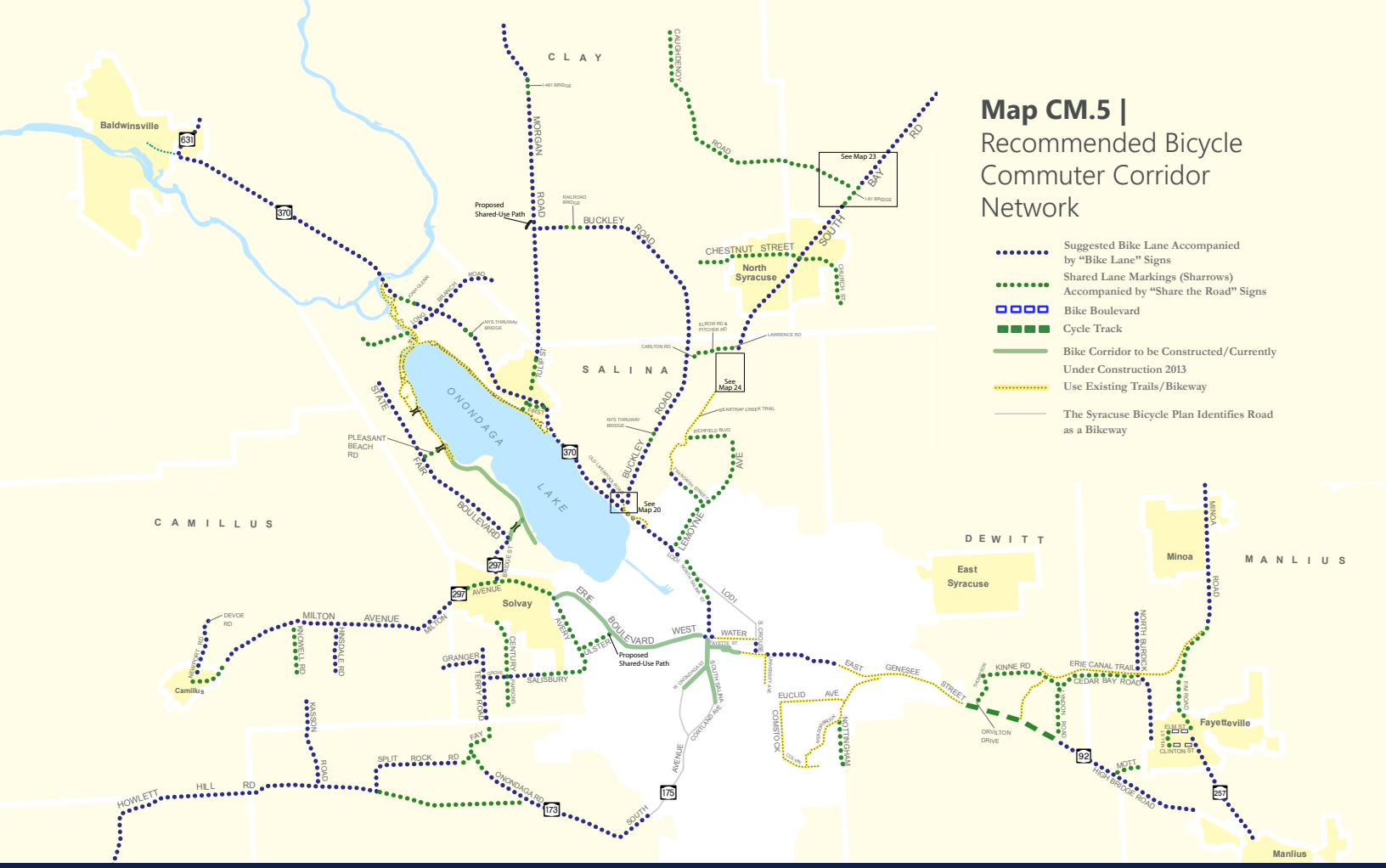
Map CM.4 demonstrates the interconnectivity of the existing trail networks. Outside of these networks, the majority of bicycle infrastructure is located within the City of Syracuse.

The Onondaga County Department of Planning completed a study in conjunction with the SMTC in 2022 that makes recommendations for connecting the EST to adjacent town and village centers to expand bicycle connectivity and strengthen opportunities for economic development.

In 2013, the SMTC published a "Bicycle Commuter Corridor Study", which made recommendations for establishing a comprehensive system of bicycle infrastructure that would connect residents throughout the County to major employment destinations (see Case Study on page 139).

Map CM.4 | Bicycle Infrastructure Network

Source: Onondaga County Department of Planning



The map graphic above illustrates the proposed bicycle commuter corridor system. Source: SMTC

Bicycling Networks case study:

SMTC Bicycle Commuter Corridor Study

In 2013, the SMTC completed the Bicycle Commuter Corridor Study, which identified suburban and urban corridors within the Metropolitan Planning Area that were most likely to maintain high average cycling speeds to encourage commuter cycling from the suburbs to the city. The study was a planning-level assessment, created to inform road owners about cooperative opportunities to develop a seamless bicycle network based on a consistent set of infrastructure design parameters.

The 2013 SMTC Bicycle Commuter Corridor Study was the County's first attempt to systematically identify corridors in need of optimization and investment for bicycle commuting. Since the study, some routes have undergone investment, and many have needs that are still outstanding. In addition, route prioritization has changed since 2013. Some routes have emerged as new or high priorities due to factors such as the planned Micron investments, while other routes have diminished in potential value. An updated commuter corridor study would reflect the County's needs based on current events and completed work since 2013.

Project Details:

SMTC staff considered initial corridors based on where the greatest number of trips existed between origins and destinations. The following items were considered while selecting corridors to study:

- Safety (e.g., fewer accidents, less traffic)
- Use shared-use paths when possible
- Prioritize corridors connecting to trails and schools
- Prioritize flat corridors
- Prioritize corridors that are easily maintained

Enhancing Transit Service

Several important studies have been completed over the past decade that have focused on opportunities for improving public transportation service and ridership within the County. The Syracuse Transit System Analysis (STSA) was completed to support the planning for the Interstate 81 corridor. The STSA identified the following transit needs:

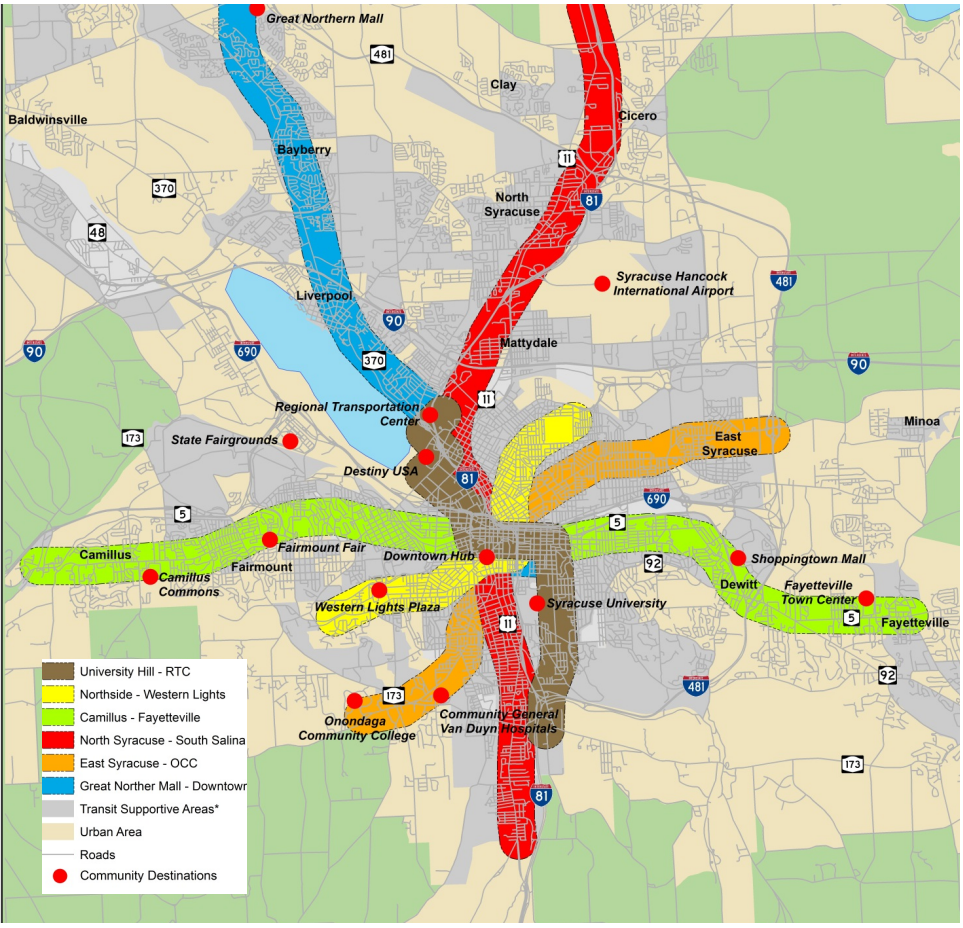
- Improve operations for core ridership that meets existing needs as well as retains riders.
- Attract new ridership, particularly suburban/ commuter ridership, to reduce roadway congestion and parking demand in Downtown and on University Hill.
- Improve the visibility and usability of the system for all riders.
- Utilize transit to improve connectivity between key locations in the Syracuse metropolitan area and provide for economic development opportunities.

The STSA identified multiple "transit enhancement corridors" that could leverage existing areas of high transit use to focus on increasing frequency, improving service visibility, and reducing travel times to benefit services for urban and some suburban areas (**Map CM.6)**.

The STSA further recommended the following transit service objectives:

- Provide direct connections between major origins (residential) and destinations (employment, shopping/retail, cultural, and educational).
- Enhance the usability of the system by increasing rider information and reducing the number of individually numbered routes.
- Reduce transit travel time by 20%.
- Reduce the weekday peak-period time between buses (i.e., headways) to 15 – 20 minutes, and off-peak headways to 30 minutes.

Map CM.6 | STSA Selected Transit Improvement Corridors

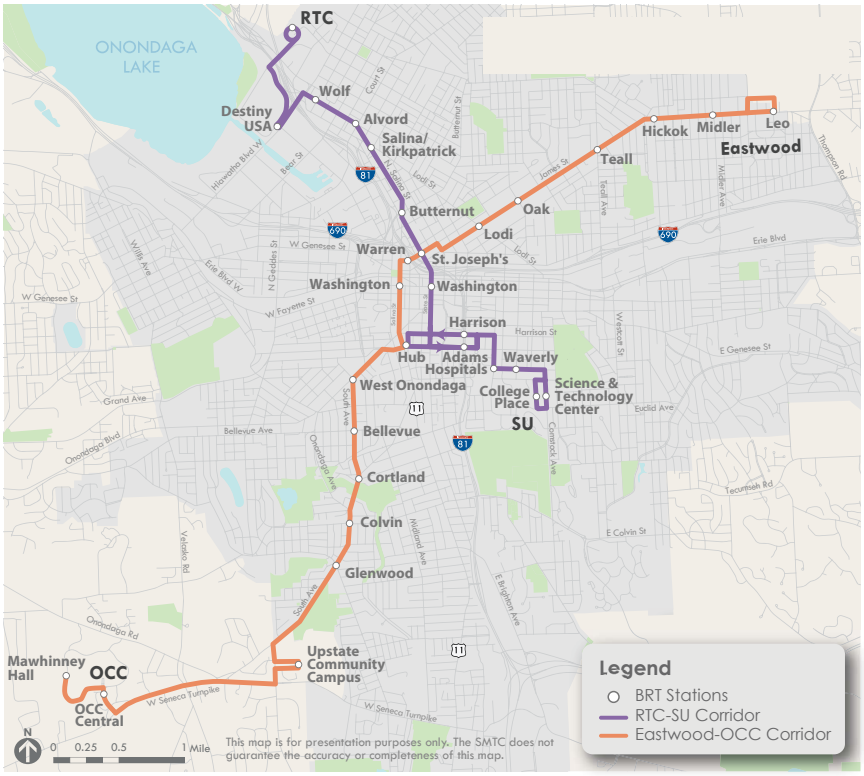


Source: Syracuse Transit System Analysis 2014

- » Expand operating hours on nights and weekends along the transit enhancement corridors.
- » Provide greater system flexibility for commuters by implementing additional peak period express routes.

While there have been some significant changes in transit ridership due to the Covid pandemic, the services objectives listed above are still relevant to increasing transit ridership in Onondaga County. In 2018, the Syracuse Metropolitan Area Regional Transit Study (SMART 1) recommended implementation of a BRT system along the study corridors indicated in **Map CM.7.** Centro has been working to develop funding to implement the recommendations from SMART 1.

Map CM.7 | SMART 1 Proposed BRT System Map



Source: SMTC SMART 1 Study Report 2018

With the recent announcement of investments in high-tech manufacturing associated with Micron and the White Pine Business Park, a broader approach to the implementation of a BRT system within the County is warranted.

Electric Vehicles

With continued growth of the electric vehicle (EV) industry, charging station availability will also need to continue to grow and diversify. If not carefully addressed, charging infrastructure availability could exacerbate equity issues in the County. For example, although there are a concentration of EV charging stations within the City of Syracuse, they are mainly focused around education and healthcare corridors. Charging stations are extremely limited or non-existent within low income and minority neighborhoods. Charging stations availability is also limited in rural areas of the County. Additionally, charging stations infrastructure will need to be incorporated in multi-unit housing and eventually integrated with on-street parking to expand access for all EV drivers.

Map CM.8 | Future Land Use Map

Planning for Community Mobility

Transit Corridor

Transit Corridors include improvements to transit service like dedicated busways, dedicated station stops, and prioritization of buses, along selected corridors to increase ridership.

Cycle Corridor

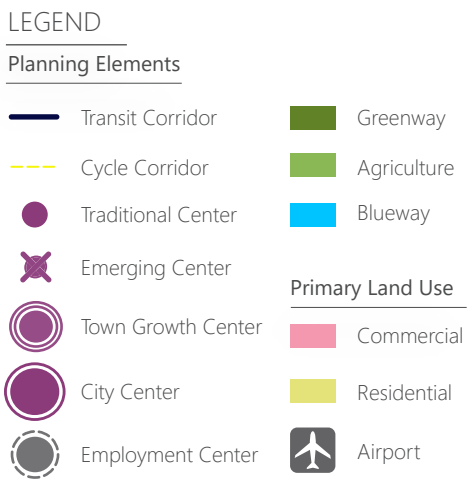
Cycle Corridors contain dedicated bicycle infrastructure like bike lanes and bicycle parking and provide recreational and alternative mobility options connecting residential areas and neighborhoods to employment and entertainment centers.

Pedestrian Priority Zone

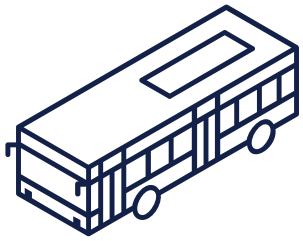
- Traditional Center
- Emerging Center
- Town Growth Center
- City Center

Pedestrian priority zones are concentrated within designated centers and include sidewalks, crosswalks, traffic calming, and other pedestrian oriented infrastructure.

Plan Onondaga seeks to foster the long-term development of transit and cycle corridors as well as improved pedestrian infrastructure that link residential areas with commercial areas, employment opportunities, and open space systems in order to strengthen Community Mobility throughout the County. These corridors and areas are proposed to follow existing public rights-of-way connecting destinations throughout the County.



Community Mobility



Goals and Strategies

Community Mobility is an important component of maintaining the quality of life and economic competitiveness of Onondaga County. There are multiple factors that can contribute to the modernization and development of the County's mobility system.

Goal 1

Become a Vision Zero Community

Initiatives such as Vision Zero and Complete Streets can help Onondaga County and local communities reduce serious injuries and fatalities associated with our transportation system. Diversifying the transportation system and providing active transportation options can also help to improve community health outcomes and quality of life.

Strategy 1 » Adopt the Vision Zero framework to guide investments in the transportation system.

Strategy 2 » Implement Complete Street projects on County and local roads to expand mobility options and improve safety for all road users.

Goal 2

Invest in Transit Corridors

Recent innovations in transit technologies have helped to make bus transit systems more reliable and have encouraged increased ridership. Adoption of bus prioritization technology, and improving service frequency and reliability on designated routes, will help to increase ridership in the County. Improved transit service can help to connect the County's workforce with employers to support economic development initiatives. Transit enhancements should be coordinated with local land use planning to increase residential densities along transit corridors.

Strategy 1 » Implement a countywide bus rapid transit system.

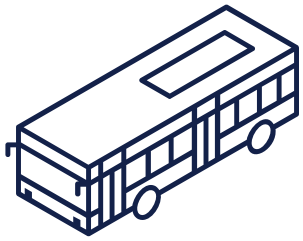
Strategy 2 » Enhance transit with new technologies.

Strategy 3 » Explore fareless transit options.

Strategy 4 » Coordinate with local municipalities to plan corridors to support TOD and provide model zoning for updating zoning along transit routes.

Strategy 5 » Expand micromobility options along transit corridors to connect transit service with adjacent neighborhood areas.

Community Mobility



Goals and Strategies (continued)

Goal 3

Implement an Expanded and Connected Network of Bike Lanes, Trails, and Multi-Modal Corridors

There are multiple planning level projects that have been completed within the County to improve pedestrian and bicycle network connectivity. Continued investment in extending the connectivity of these systems and connecting them to designated centers will further strengthen the County's mobility system.

Strategy 1 » Complete the Loop the Lake and Onondaga Creekwalk trail systems.

Strategy 2 » Invest in pedestrian priority zones and develop an interconnected sidewalk network throughout the County.

Strategy 3 » Invest in an expanded and interconnected system of bicycle corridors with dedicated bicycle infrastructure.

Strategy 4 » Invest in additional connectivity to the Empire State Trail.

Goal 4

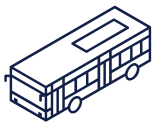
Prepare for Our Transportation Future

The market for and availability of electric vehicles continues to grow, and with it demand for electric vehicle charging infrastructure is also increasing. Autonomous vehicles are also on the horizon and will likely require updates to local land use regulations, streets, and technology needs. Investments in infrastructure, planning, and updating local land use regulations can help to guide these changes.

Strategy 1 » Invest in electric vehicle charging infrastructure at County-owned facilities and public venues.

Strategy 2 » Provide support to local jurisdictions to develop and implement local regulations for guiding investments in electric vehicle charging infrastructure on private property including in residential and commercial locations.

Strategy 3 » Provide support to local jurisdictions in preparing for autonomous vehicle infrastructure and corresponding land use needs.



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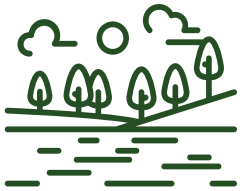
PLAN ON
Greenways and Blueways

Photo: Visit Syracuse

Community Comments on Greenways and Blueways

Greenways and Blueways



Greenways and blueways are corridors of open space or waterways that incorporate diverse natural, cultural, and scenic features.

Vision:

Onondaga County will protect and expand greenways and blueways to provide unique recreation and ecological health opportunities.

The greenways and blueways of Onondaga County provide scenic views, opportunities for recreation and active transportation, wildlife habitat, and ecological diversity. These areas also provide important ecosystem services that result in clean air and water, manage stormwater and flooding, and improve local economies[1].

Most Onondaga County residents enjoy relatively easy access to the outdoors no matter where they live. Access to quality parks, recreation resources, and natural areas enhances residents' quality of life. Many people in Onondaga County enjoy outdoor activities like fishing and hunting, kayaking or paddle boarding, walking, hiking, biking, and appreciating scenic landscapes. Establishing a system of greenways and blueways will enable Onondaga County and its partners to protect and enhance these resources to meet residents' needs now and in the future.

Ongoing investments in greenways in Onondaga County include the Loop the Lake Trail around Onondaga Lake and the Empire State Trail which follows the historical Erie Canal corridor through the County. These trail systems provide a strong basis for capturing economic investment through the burgeoning recreation tourism industry.

Greenways and Blueways strengthen and enhance natural systems and improve quality of life by:

- Protecting valuable and sensitive ecological areas that provide important habitat;
- Contributing to watershed protection, wetland conservation, and floodplain management;
- Conserving the scenic landscape of the County; and
- Providing access to outdoor recreation that enhances people's connection to nature.

Greenway and Blueway System Components

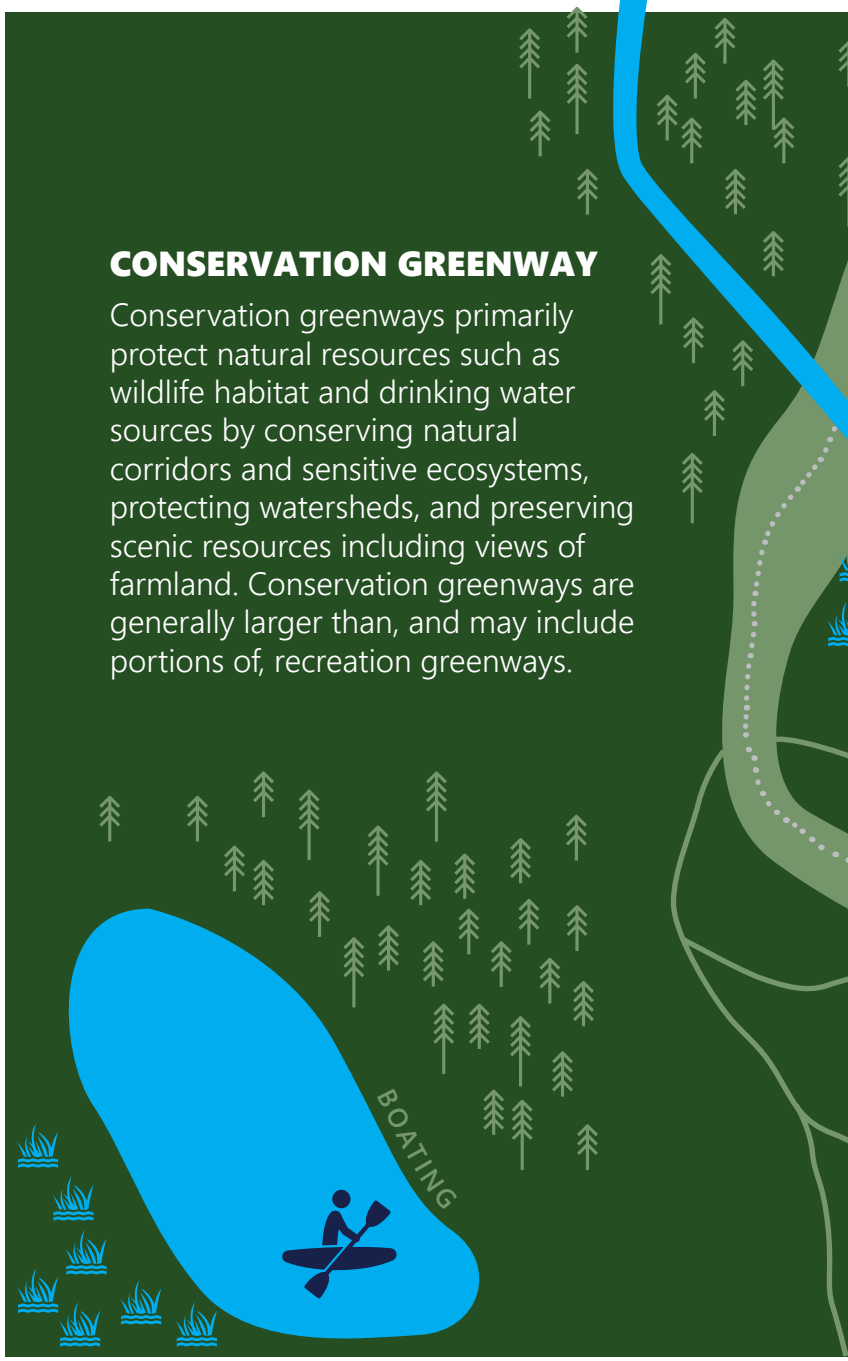
Greenways and blueways work together to provide a connected system of recreation and conservation lands.

GREENWAYS

The proposed Onondaga County greenway system includes two different types of greenways: those intended for the conservation of natural areas and those intended for recreation. The main function of a conservation greenway is to protect natural ecosystems. Little maintenance is required, other then assuring protection of these valuable assets. In contrast, recreation greenways and mobility corridors provide space for outdoor recreation. These areas require maintenance to ensure trails and equipment are kept in proper condition.

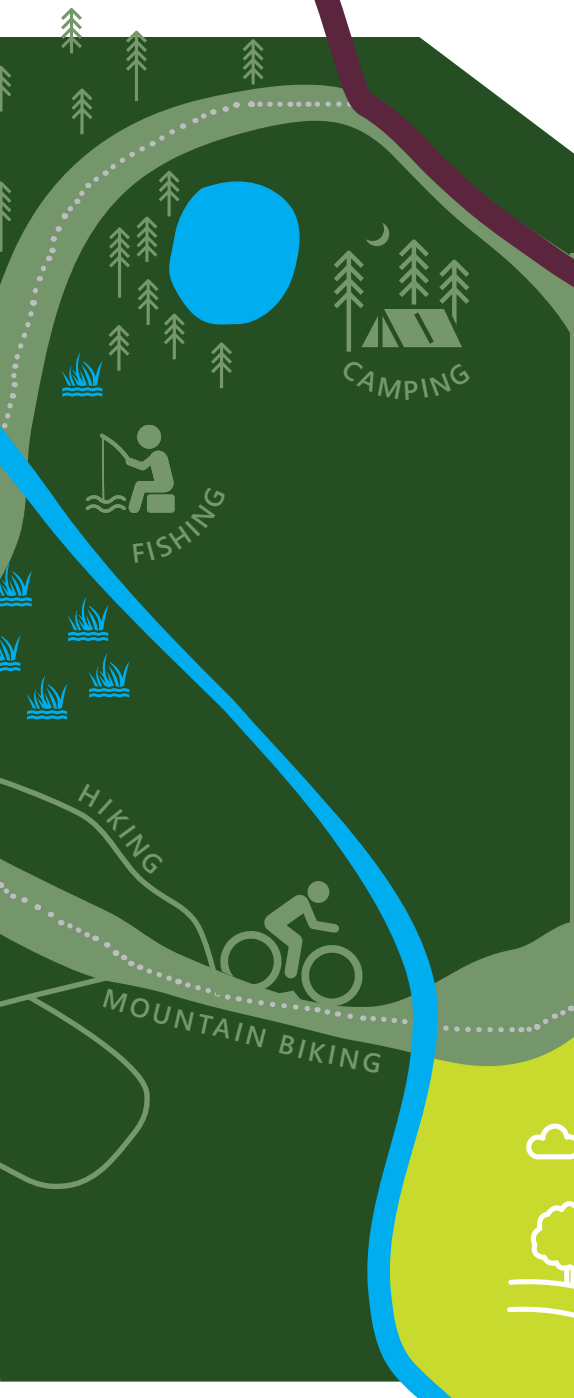
BLUEWAYS

A blueway is a navigable water body which creates the opportunity for recreational water routes. They also provide ecological protection for aquatic and shoreline habitats through conservation and maintenance activities that protect valuable ecosystem functions and water quality while providing public recreation access. Maintenance of blueways includes protection of watersheds to maintain water quality, management of invasive species which can impact waterways, and creation of public facilities to provide access to waterways.



MOBILITY CORRIDOR

A mobility corridor provides connectivity between different areas within and beyond the County. These corridors allow for multi-modal uses such as walking, biking, rollerblading, kayaking, and canoeing. Mobility corridors can cross conservation and recreation greenways and blueways and provide linkages to developed urban areas and municipal parks.



RECREATION GREENWAY

Recreation greenways are primarily established to serve human activities, while providing opportunities to interact with the natural environment and spend time outdoors. Recreation greenways can occur in or adjacent to conservation greenways and can also be established in developed areas. They may be part of a connected system or discrete recreation amenities, such as city parks or trails.

AGRICULTURE

Agricultural lands are often a part of greenway and blueway systems. These working lands are an important component of conservation greenways as they provide connected wildlife habitats, contribute to scenic views, and can be destinations for agritourism. Agriculture also benefits from greenways as they provide pollinator habitat and buffers from residential areas.

Why Plan for Greenways and Blueways?

Onondaga County's greenways and blueways provide diverse habitats for plants and wildlife as well as access to nature.

Greenways and blueways provide a variety of important benefits for regions and local communities. They enhance the local and regional ecology, strengthen the economy, help to address equity, contribute to sense of place, increase connectivity, provide recreational resources that improve quality of life, and make the area a more attractive place to live. (**Figure BG.1**). Planning for greenways and blueways can help to build support, identify potential partnerships, and develop mechanisms and tools for the protection of important natural resources within the County.

Protect Ecosystem Functions and Improve Resiliency

Greenways and blueways in Onondaga County provide diverse habitats for plants and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species. They provide wildlife corridors that facilitate safe travel between seasonal habitats and support increased genetic diversity in wildlife populations.

Wetlands and floodplains within greenways and along blueways not only protect biodiversity, but also provide protection from

Figure BG.1 | Important Aspects of Greenways and Blueways*

ECOLOGY	Greenways and blueways support ecological systems by protecting habitat, improving air and water quality, managing stormwater, and reducing heat islands.
ECONOMY	Greenways and blueways offer economic benefits by improving property values and helping to attract and retain skilled workers by offering a better quality of life and improving public health.
EQUITY	Greenways and blueways can help to advance social equity by improving all residents' access to green space and passive and active recreation resources.
PLACEMAKING	Greenways and blueways protect the natural beauty and integrity of Onondaga County's natural resources, and can also preserve cultural and historic resources.
CONNECTIVITY	Greenways and blueways can connect villages, towns, and neighborhoods with infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists. They can also provide connections between parks, shorelines, and open space systems to create contiguous ecological corridors that support wildlife.

* Adapted from "Greenways for Pittsburgh: Resource Guide 2017"

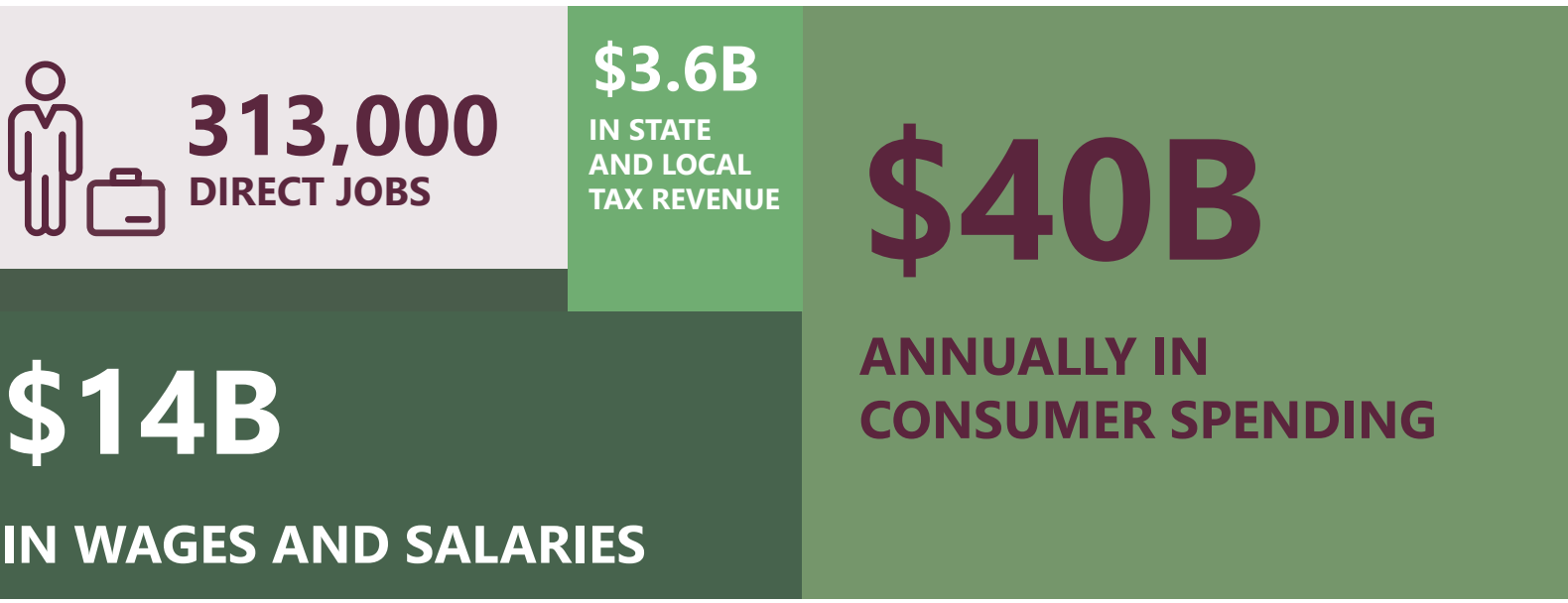
flooding. Trees and plants release oxygen, absorb carbon, and filter air pollutants. Green space within neighborhoods, especially in urban areas, reduces severe heat exposure for residents. Recreational trails along greenways and blueways also provide commuting options that decrease emissions and fuel usage. Furthermore, greenway and blueway systems provide protection and buffers for waterbodies and aquifers, which are valuable sources of drinking water. All of these factors make the County more resilient.

By protecting drinking water sources, communities can save money by avoiding infrastructure investment.

Improve Economic Health

Investment in greenway and blueway systems creates jobs and brings in billions of dollars of tax revenue and consumer spending (**Figure BG.2**). Governments at all levels have invested in creek and river corridors to establish trails and waterfront development as they work to revitalize communities. Brownfield areas (i.e., areas with environmental contamination) have been restored to provide habitat and/or community parks. Nationally, job growth has accelerated in communities and regions known for their outdoor recreation, waterways, and related recreational opportunities as they help to attract employers as well as tourists who bolster local businesses.

Figure BG.2 | Economic Benefits of Greenways in New York State



Source: Parks and Trails New York, 2022

Corporate relocation decisions are based in part on identifying attractive greenway and blueway opportunities for employees and their families, because corporations understand that their workforce considers these quality of life features when making a relocation decision. Tourism and economic development brochures often include images of open space, recreation, and healthy lifestyles to entice corporate investment and tourism.

Enhance Quality of Life

Time outdoors and physical activity are beneficial for physical and mental health. Providing attractive and accessible greenway and blueway trails expands opportunities for people to be physically active. When more people in a community have positive physical and mental health, the entire community benefits by saving on the overall costs of healthcare. Greenways and blueways can also connect neighborhoods and communities, fostering positive relationships. Preservation of greenways, open spaces, and trails can help to strengthen the sense of place within a community through the celebration of historic and cultural locations which might not otherwise receive attention[2].

Increase Connectivity

Comprehensively planning for greenways and blueways at a countywide level will help to identify and protect important resources that may be vulnerable to development. Connections between destinations and local communities, such as a residential neighborhood to a park, nature preserve, or place of employment are a critical component of well-planned communities.

Development of a greenway and blueway system within Onondaga County can influence surrounding regions in the state, and beyond. For example, protection of water quality in Onondaga County improves the water quality of the entire Great Lakes or Susquehanna River watersheds. This then provides benefits to people and wildlife beyond the County's residents. Furthermore, development of a greenway and blueway network that supports the Loop the Lake and Empire State trails will encourage travelers to utilize these assets to explore and visit Onondaga County as well as other connected regions.

Strengthen and Increase Property Values

Greenways and blueways elevate property values. Residential properties that are located in close

proximity to water, open space, parks, and trails are linked to higher property values.[3] Developments that are located near greenway systems, or that have taken steps to preserve land for open space and trails linking to larger trail networks, have been shown to sell more quickly and have a higher rate of presold units when compared to conventional suburban development models.[4]

Provide for Community Conservation

An increasing number of local residents and children are becoming involved with habitat restoration, whether on public lands, school grounds, or private backyards. Citizens are motivated by a desire to attract birds or butterflies to native meadow or woodland habitats. For others, the beauty of native perennial flowers is appreciated. Many property owners have purchased their land partially because of a desire to protect wetlands, forestland, or small springs and streams. Typically these small restorations or protected habitats are dependent on the health and connectedness of a larger system of private and public greenways, which help to sustain the hydrology and diversity of species. For example, a single backyard might successfully create a native perennial garden for certain plants and butterflies, but a series of healthy backyard habitats that link to a nearby protected creek corridor might attract deer, owls, tree frogs, wood ducks, or foxes.

Bridge over Onondaga Creek at the Syracuse Inner Harbor
Source: Canalway Trail Times

Trends in Greenways and Blueways

Successful greenway and blueway systems involve large-scale planning to define connections among numerous communities, neighborhoods, destinations, parks, and businesses.

Historically, development has not prioritized preserving open space resources for recreation or habitat protection. The design of single-family neighborhoods outside of and separate from traditional centers altered the natural landscape. Over the past few decades, however, there has been a trend to preserve open space, retroactively create green space, and restore ecosystems, as in the restoration of former industrial areas along the shoreline of Onondaga Lake. Communities consistently seek to prioritize the protection of green space and pursue public access to it.

Large-Scale Planning

A defining trait of greenways and blueways is connectivity. Connections do not have to occur in a uniform pattern. Oftentimes, greenways are developed by linking paths along a river or creek, to conserved forest land, to a park area, or to a utility right of way. Blueways connect destinations along a shoreline. Shoreline areas can be enhanced to help people navigate along the blueway. The entire connected greenway or blueway system is greater than the sum of its parts.

Successful greenway and blueway systems involve large-scale planning to define connections among numerous communities, neighborhoods, destinations, parks, and businesses. Planning typically includes multiple corridor studies to determine the most feasible methods for establishing desired connections. Greenway and blueway corridors often utilize areas that are difficult to develop such as floodplains, forests and preserves, wetlands, and areas with steep slopes.

Planning efforts require significant data analysis, landowner coordination, and involvement of conservation and 'friends' groups to identify sensitive ecosystems, natural corridors, and opportunities for trail development.

Establishing greenway corridors and systematically planning for protecting open space prior to development is the most effective and beneficial process for greenway protection. The planning process can identify and prioritize connections among the existing parks, trails, and open spaces working with a variety of public, private, and non-profit entities (**Figure GB.3**). The benefits of this approach go beyond measurable accomplishments by building relationships, consensus, and reducing the number or intensity of future disputes by aligning local protections and regulations with stated interests.

Figure GB.3 | The Role of Public and Private Entities in Greenway & Blueway Planning*

ENTITY	ROLE
County and Local Government	Municipal officials can direct growth toward a successful mix of development and conservation through comprehensive planning and zoning. Local and County development reviews can provide direction for conservation. County and local capital projects can incorporate land purchase, ownership, natural system restoration, and encourage stewardship activities and other programming.
Private Property Owners	Participation in an interconnected greenway system does not always mean opening up private land for public use. Property owners may work closely with land trusts, the Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District, and Cornell Cooperative Extension to conserve, manage, or provide access easements to their properties. Grants and tax benefits are available to many property owners who make long-term commitments.
Corporate Ownership	Corporate stewardship has been, and will continue to be, an important component of maintaining privately owned open space for conservation purposes. For example, Honeywell International has partnered with the State, County, and environmental groups on strategies to conserve and enhance significant properties for greenway purposes as part of the restoration and cleanup of Onondaga Lake.
Land Trust and Advocacy Organizations	Groups such as the Central New York Land Trust and the Finger Lakes Land Trust have been responsible for protecting several thousand acres of property for conservation purposes. They have worked with private property owners and also can own land that is open for public use to protect important watersheds and sensitive ecological areas.
Federal and State Governments	Federal and state agencies play a significant role in Onondaga County through their land holdings, statutory authority, review and enforcement procedures, and grant programs.
Educational Institutions	Conservation activities and initiatives can be sponsored or assisted by local colleges such as the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry and coordinated with local secondary and elementary schools.

* Adapted from "Greenways and Blueways: Northwest Indiana Regional Plan

Investments in trails, bike lanes, and bicycle-sharing systems have high levels of return on investment.

Growth of Recreational Tourism and Active Transportation

Greenways and regional trail networks can bring increased economic investment to cities, towns, and villages. They attract tourists and recreational enthusiasts, encourage new trail-related business development, and help revitalize commercial districts. Greenways and trails can also inspire renewed civic pride and provide a fresh focus for community activities.[5]

More than 100 million Americans walk for pleasure, 100 million bicycle, 55 million engage in recreational freshwater fishing, 17 million ride horses, 12 million in-line skate, and 6 million cross country ski. Regions with safe, pleasant trails are becoming highly desirable vacation destinations for these educated and affluent travelers. Trail users, like those just mentioned, need food, lodging, and fuel. They need special clothes, shoes, and equipment. They buy souvenirs, crafts, and other items. They also combine visiting a trail with other money-spending activities.[6]

There are many studies that indicate that trails boost tourism by attracting visitors, extending their length of stay, and adding to the variety of attractions in an area. New recreational visitors, who visit to enjoy fishing, cycling, skiing, and directly benefit local restaurants, lodging, and local services. Increased recreational activity can spur the growth of businesses selling recreational gear and other goods.[7]

Active transportation infrastructure can also catalyze real estate development. Trails, bike lanes, and bicycle-sharing systems can improve pedestrian and bicyclist access to employment centers, recreational destinations, and public transit facilities, thereby enhancing the attractiveness of developments along active transportation corridors. In some cases, former industrial districts and towns outside urban cores have benefited from active transportation infrastructure due to improved walking and cycling connectivity[8].

Focus on Public Health

Investments in greenways and blueways encourage an active lifestyle, which improves the health of people and our environment. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that only about 1 in 4 adults fully meet the physical activity guidelines for aerobic and muscle-strengthening activities and that increasing our physical activity is one of the best things we can do for our health. The Community Preventive Services

Task Force (CPSTF), recommends parks, trails, and greenways as infrastructure interventions that increase physical activity. The Task Force recommends that physical improvements be combined with community engagement to increase awareness, expand programs and enhance access.

Investments in trails, bike lanes, and bicycle-sharing systems have high levels of return on investment. Regions and cities have found that relatively small investments in active transportation have outsized economic returns due to improved health and environmental outcomes and reduced negative externalities, such as automobile traffic congestion and poor air quality.[9]

Economic Impact of the Empire State Trail

In New York State, the Erie Canalway Trail portion of the Empire State Trail system, which runs through Onondaga County, supports more than 3,000 jobs and generates an estimated $274 million in spending, $78 million in labor income, and $28.5 million in taxes within the Upstate New York economy.[10]

Cyclists travel along the Empire State Trail in DeWitt.

Green Infrastructure Solutions

Green infrastructure is the integration of nature and ecosystems in cities, towns, and regions to generate multiple benefits such as clean air, better stormwater management, and public health. At the regional scale, it is a planned network of natural areas and open spaces, such as parks and nature preserves, river corridors, trails, forests, and wetlands that protect ecosystem services. At the neighborhood and site scales, it includes parks, rain gardens, green streets, green walls and roofs, community gardens, and the urban forest.

Urban green infrastructure in the City of Syracuse.

New Tools for Land Protection

Once land area is identified for protection through a comprehensive planning effort, zoning and subdivision regulations can be updated to either require or incentivize developers to preserve land or shorelines to be included in greenways and blueways (**Figure GB.4**). Another regulatory method for protecting green space is the implementation of a special zoning district. For example, overlay zoning is a regulatory tool placed over existing zoning that identifies special provisions or protections in addition to those of the underlying zone. This is particularly useful for establishing conservation greenways that serve to protect scenic viewsheds. Communities can implement scenic viewshed or natural resource protections through the use of new zoning tools to prevent or reduce development on sensitive land or in sensitive areas.

Citizens, corporate entities, and government can support land trusts in their efforts to conserve and protect green space. Land trusts often work with private landowners to establish conservation easements on privately held lands to permanently protect open space. A conservation easement agreement will also ensure proper maintenance and use of the protected land.

Conservation Subdivision

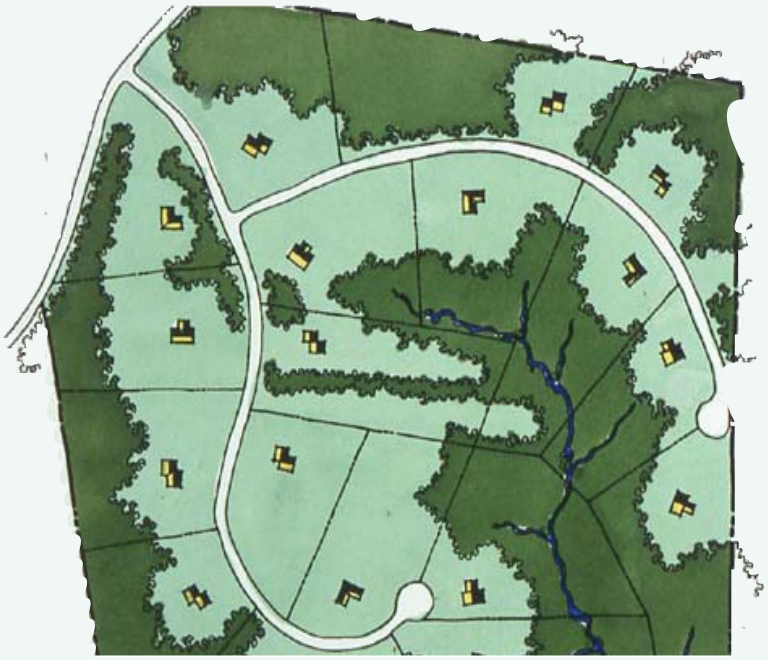
Conservation subdivision design principles can yield the same number of homes on a given parcel as a conventional subdivision, but with increased benefits to both landowners, the community, and the environment.

The difference is the layout of the lots. A true conservation subdivision devotes a portion of the potentially developable land to undivided, permanently protected open space. In doing so, conservation design also results in less expensive linear infrastructure such as roads and sewers, and property owners can still enjoy the scenic qualities of the land.

There are multiple options for ownership and management of the remaining open spaces. Open lands can remain in private ownership, with a protective covenant, or be donated or sold to a conservation organization. Community access to conserved private land can be allowed through easements.

These protected open spaces in a conservation subdivision can be connected and incorporated into a larger greenway network.[11]

Figure GB.4 | Conventional Versus Conservation Subdivision



Conventional subdivision with 18 lots

Conservation subdivision with 18 lots

Source: Rural By Design: Planning for Town and Country, Randall Arendt

Water-Based Recreation

A blueway system includes a planned recreational waterway trail. These systems are often created through inter-municipal coordination to establish consistent goals and policies related to natural resources, economic development, and recreational opportunities.

Establishing a blueway system encourages economic development investments while providing local residents with added amenities and improving quality of life.

Blueway systems are typically comprised of:

- Public access points including docks, fishing, beaches, and boat launches;
- Water trail corridors with branding and signage as well as amenities for users such as kayak/boat rentals, restrooms, eating/drinking establishments, and connections to other regional tourism networks and trails; and
- Events, attractions, and programming along and on the water.

Kayakers paddle in the Old Erie Canal State Historic Park

The Cayuga Lake Blueway Trail provides suggested paddling routes as well as wayfinding and designated water access locations. | Source: www.cayugalake.com

Blueways case study:

Cayuga Lake Blueway Trail

The Cayuga Lake Blueway Trail (CLBT) is a 40-mile long route that connects 12 public waterfront sites along Cayuga Lake. Each site contains informational kiosks to assist users in wayfinding. The CLBT website provides information on each site, day trip suggestions for paddlers which range from 1.5-mile to 11-mile segments, geocaching, and multi-day trip itineraries. The CLBT is adjacent to local recreational networks, including the Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway and the Cayuga Lake Birding Trail, in addition to regional connections to the Cayuga-Seneca Canal and the Erie Canal.

Construction of the Cayuga Lake Blueway Trail was funded in part by the New York State Department of State under Title 11 of the Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program. The blueway connects people to the waterfront while boosting the local economy.

Project Details

Total trail length:

Cayuga Lake is 40 miles long and is accompanied by an 87-mile scenic byway that loops around the lake.

Management:

Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway, Inc. was founded in 2002 to promote and enhance the scenic byway.

Funding:

New York State Department of State

Greenways and Blueways in Onondaga County

The parks and open space systems within Onondaga County are a highly valued resource. In fact, the establishment of a greenway and blueway system has been a priority for Onondaga County since the earliest county-level plans were written (see Countywide Profile).

Celebrating Success

There have been significant efforts over the past several decades to protect, restore, and conserve important natural resources within the County. The cleanup of Onondaga Lake is a national success story that has included the actions of Onondaga County, Honeywell International, New York State, and the federal government.

Onondaga County and its partners have invested significant resources to improve water quality in the lake through various means, including improvements to sewer systems and treatment facilities, in-water and shoreline pollution cleanup, and through the "Save the Rain" green infrastructure program.

Greenways and Blueways case study:

Onondaga Lake Park, Onondaga County

Onondaga Lake Park is an example of a park that largely forms the base for an existing greenway, with potential blueway trails on Onondaga Lake. The greenway encircles the lake along the shore, and is predominantly owned by Onondaga County with only a few minor exceptions along the southern shoreline. The greenway extends beyond the park to include developed areas, the NYS Fairgrounds as well as another County Park, Long Branch Park along the Seneca River and adjoining Onondaga Lake Park. Other features within and adjacent to this greenway include: restored natural areas in former industrial superfund sites, and St. Joseph's Health Amphitheater at Lakeview. The Village of Liverpool in the Town of Salina as well as the City of Syracuse Lakefront Neighborhood are also adjacent to this greenway. These places include many other regional attractions such as Destiny USA, the Central New York Regional Market, and the County's NBT Bank Stadium, home of the Syracuse Mets.

Onondaga Lake as a blueway offers boat and kayak launch facilities, a small marina, and many other park amenities. As part of the NYS Barge Canal System it is connected to a network of national navigable waterways and has immense potential to become a place that supports recreational boaters from home and abroad.

The Onondaga County Loop the Lake Trail is close to complete and will encircle the entire lake with a 14 mile multi-use trail. This trail not only connects surrounding communities with each other, but also connects and forms part of the Empire State Trail, a county and statewide greenway that connects to Buffalo, Albany,

Map GB.1 | Onondaga Lake Park and Trail Connections

New York City and Quebec. The City's Creekwalk Trail connects through the Inner Harbor area to downtown and the Southside neighborhood, with upcoming further extensions through the Valley neighborhood to the City's distant southern boundary with the Town of Onondaga along Onondaga Creek. Onondaga Lake Park alone attracts visitors from across the County and Central New York Region and is a major tourism destination and economic driver.

The Onondaga Lake Greenway is the premier example of all the things a greenway and blueway system can include: villages, trails, urban environments, important habitat, critical infrastructure, and pristine habitats, as well as reclaimed and restored industrial land, an unmistakable identity and character, and cherished source of pride and inspiration in Onondaga County. It also demonstrates that these areas are never "finished" but are always needing maintenance and planning for improvements and additions to the greenway and blueway features. One recently announced planned feature is the planning and design of a marina near the Village of Liverpool as part of Onondaga Lake Park.

Project Details:

Total trail length:

Current 9.5 miles

14 miles when complete

Programming:

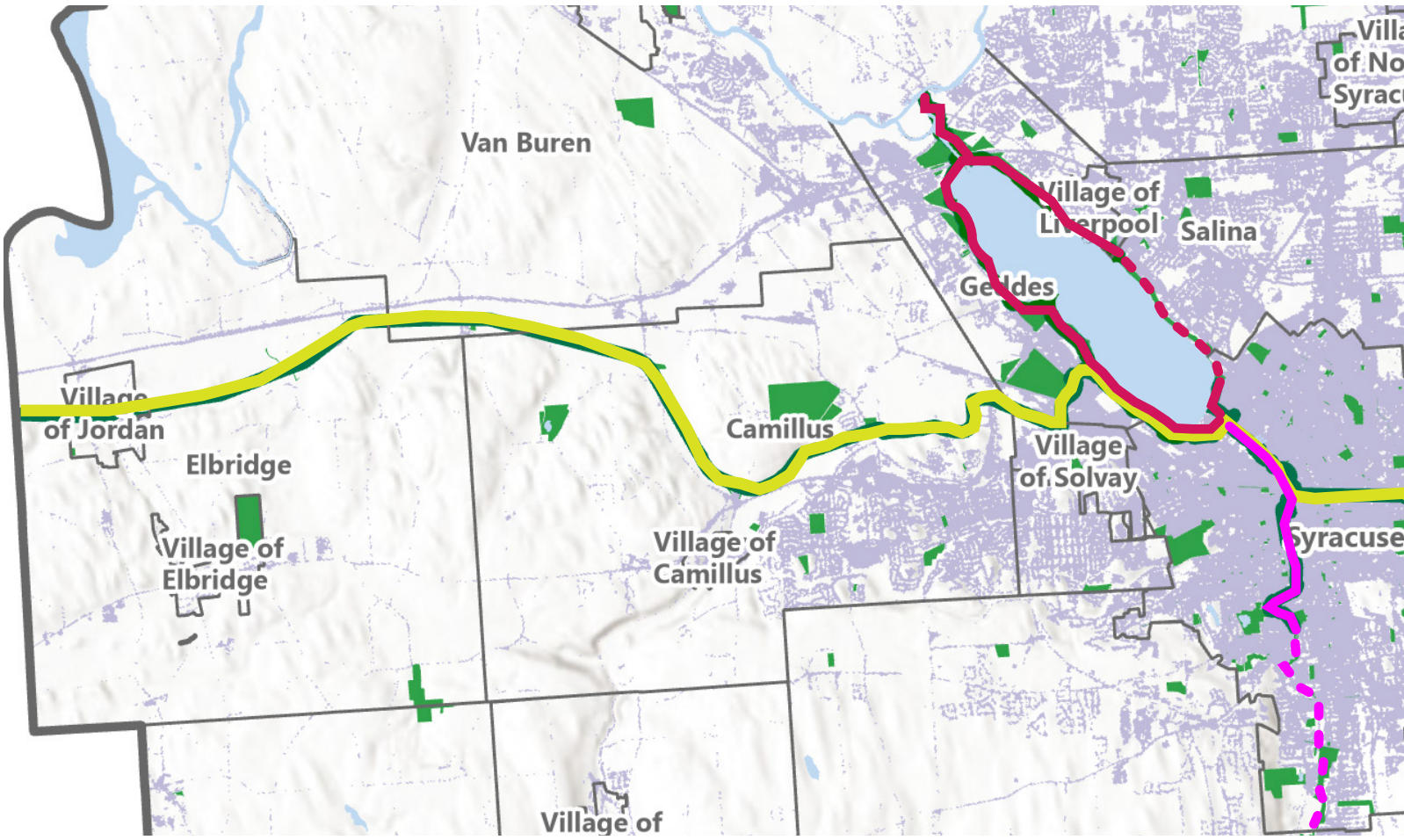
- Multi-use trails for cycling, walking, running, rollerblading
- Lights on the Lake winter festival
- Fishing Tournaments
- Concerts at Lakeview Amphitheater
- Kayak Rentals
- Museums

Ownership:

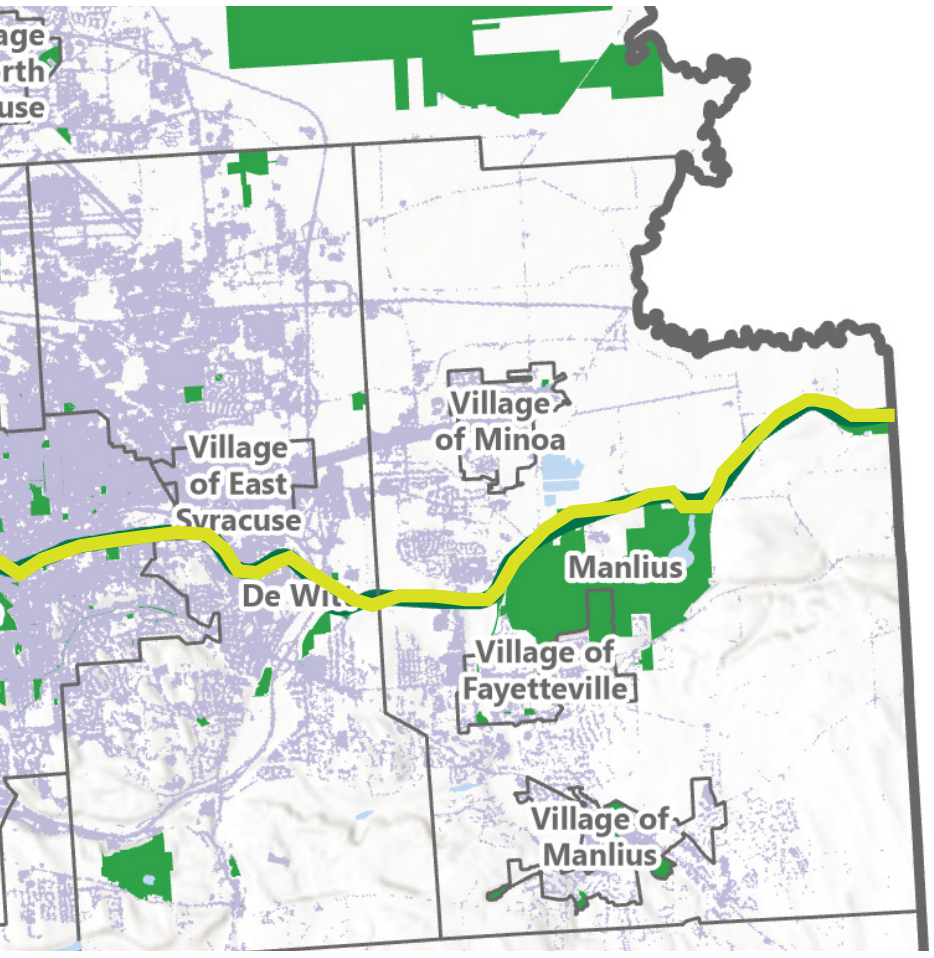
Onondaga County

The recently established Empire State Trail (EST) is also a notable success, which traverses the center of the County between the Town of Elbridge and the Town of Manlius following the historical alignment of the Erie Canal (**Map GB.2**). The EST utilizes portions of the Loop the Lake Trail system as well as the Onondaga Creekwalk in the City of Syracuse. The Empire State Trail Local Economic Opportunities Plan (LEOP), developed jointly between the Onondaga County Department of Planning, the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC), and the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board (CNY RPDB), identifies opportunities to better connect local municipalities to the EST in order to generate economic investment associated with recreational tourism.

Map GB.2 | Major Multi-Use Trails in Onondaga County



The Loop the Lake Trail crosses over the CSX rail line near the southwest corner of Onondaga Lake.

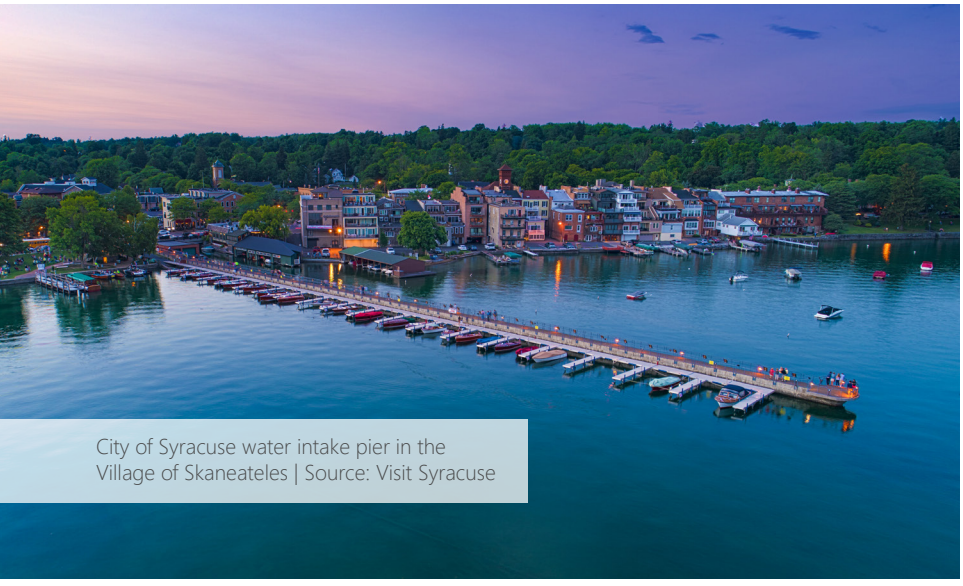


LEGEND

- Loop the Lake Trail
- Loop the Lake Future Trail
- Empire State Trail
- Onondaga Creekwalk
- Onondaga Creekwalk Future Extension
- Parkland
- Developed area

Map GB.3 | Skaneateles and Otisco Lake Watersheds

Source: USGS National Hydrography



City of Syracuse water intake pier in the Village of Skaneateles | Source: Visit Syracuse

Drinking Water Resources

Protection of the Skaneateles and Otisco Lake Watersheds, located in the southwestern portion of the County, has also been a long-term initiative within Onondaga County as they both serve as drinking water sources for over 400,000 customers (**Map GB.3**).

The 59 square mile Skaneateles Lake watershed is home to close to 3,000 residences and over 60 farms with about 2,000 livestock.[12] This watershed, encompassing part of Cayuga, Cortland, and Onondaga Counties, represents a rare, unfiltered source of drinking water. The City of Syracuse, the Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District, the Skaneateles Lake Association, and non-profits have worked in collaboration over several decades with private property owners and farm operators to ensure the protection of this important resource.

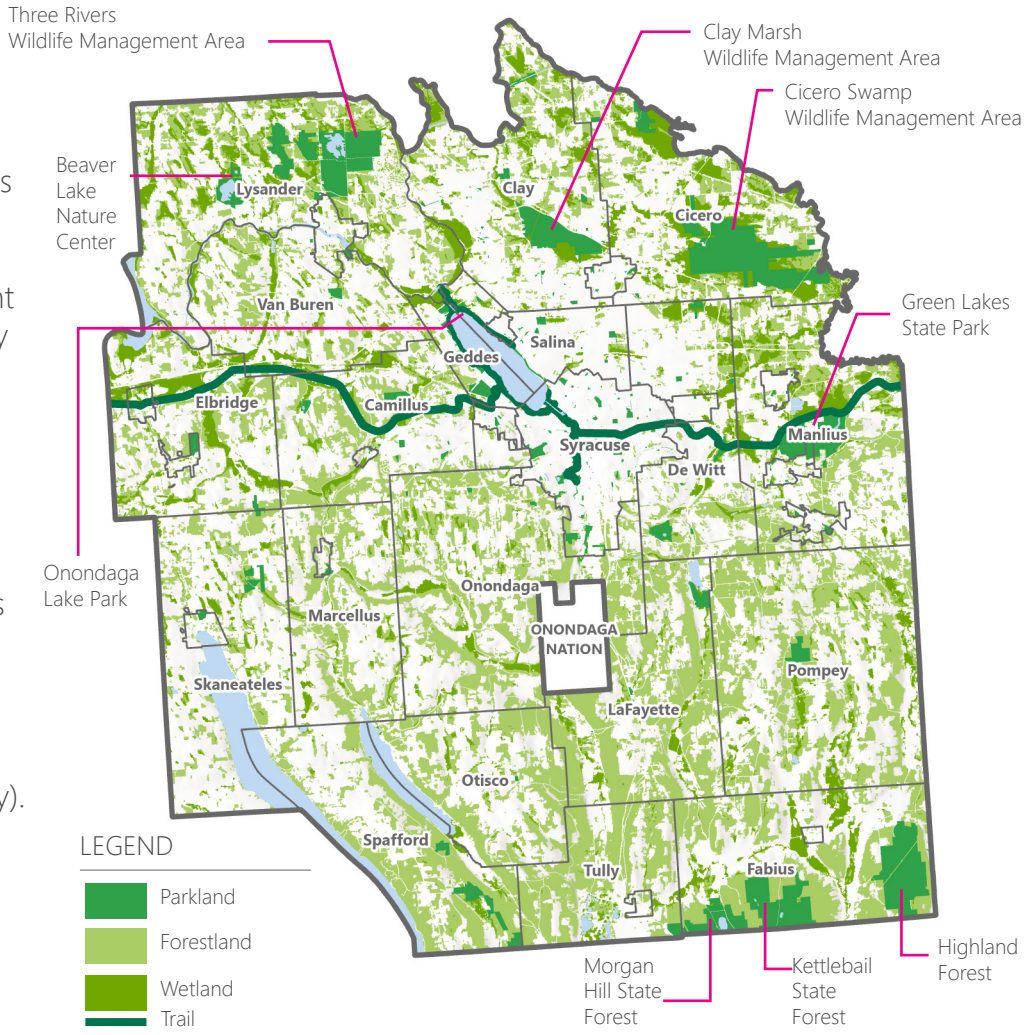
Similarly, stewardship of the 38 square mile Otisco Lake watershed has occurred cooperatively between the Onondaga County Water Authority (OCWA), Onondaga County agencies, the Otisco Lake Preservation Association, and a number of federal and state agencies.

Parks and Open Space

The largest protected open spaces are located in the northern half of the County where marshland and swampland provide important drainage functions in the relatively flat Oneida Lake basin. In the southeast corner of the County forest lands cover steep slopes associated with the Allegheny Plateau (**Map GB.4**).

Over 42% of Onondaga County is comprised of forested land (**Map GB.4**). Six towns are home to just over half the forest cover in the County (Cicero, Fabius, LaFayette, Lysander, Onondaga, and Pompey).

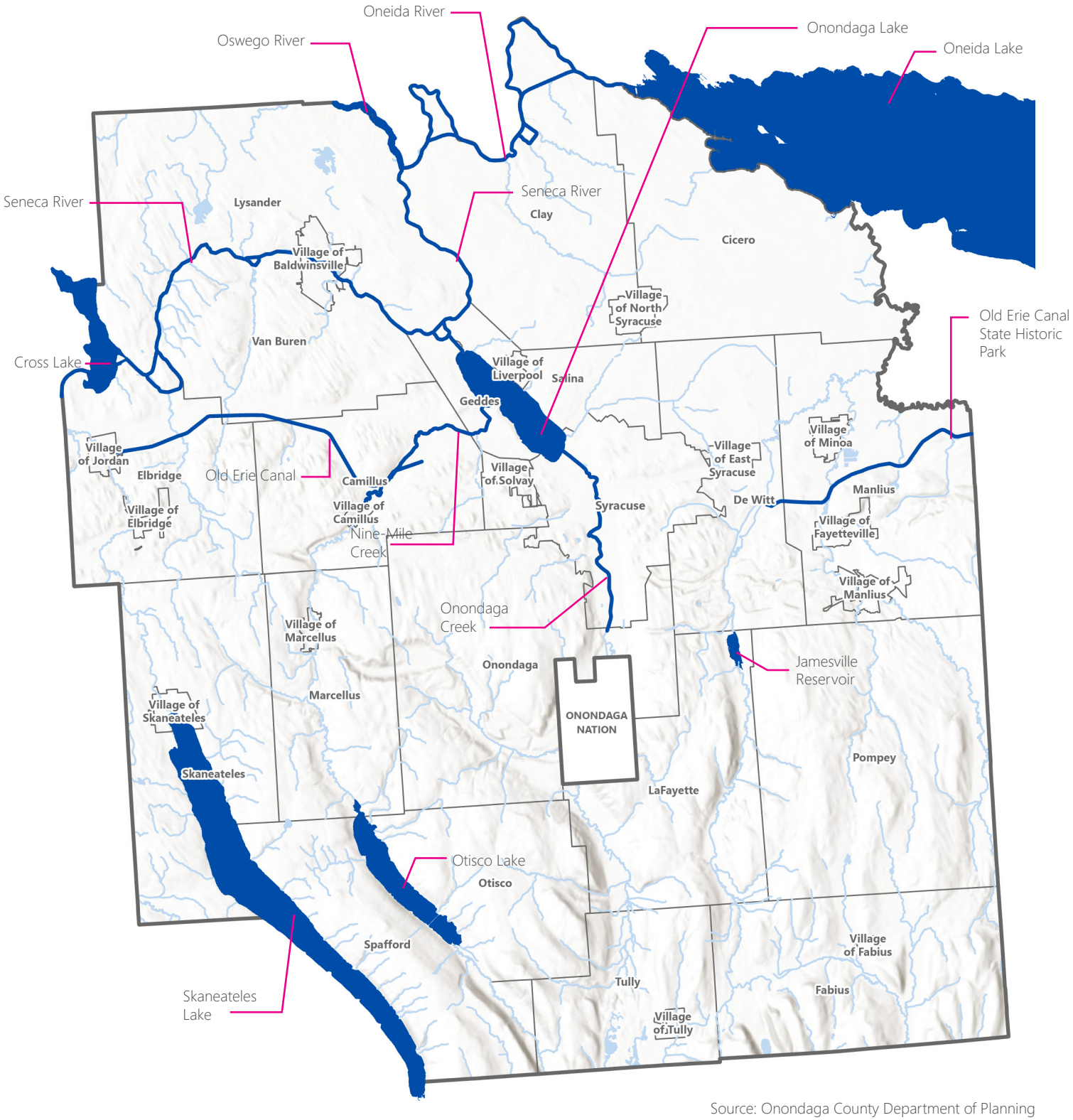
Map GB.4 | Parks and Open Space in Onondaga County



Source: National Land Cover Dataset

Onondaga Lake shore in Onondaga Lake Park

Map GB.5 | Onondaga County Blueways



Source: Onondaga County Department of Planning

Blueways

Onondaga County's blueways (**Map GB.5**) are navigable waterways that have the potential to connect existing parks, trails, and cultural features along water-based trails. Many of these waterways can even provide access to vast areas in North America. For example the Great Loop (**Map GB.7**) passes through Onondaga County along the Seneca River/NYS Barge Canal (**Map GB.6**) along its route to the St. Lawrence River, Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, Mississippi River and back through the Great Lakes.

Onondaga County has hundreds of miles of navigable shoreline that can be enhanced to provide blueway trail features that help people navigate between destinations and experience the unique perspective being on the water affords.

Investment in the development of blueway infrastructure would help to maximize the potential for attracting tourists into the County and would also provide enhancements to the quality of life of residents of the County.

Additionally, though they are not navigable, there are multiple creeks, streams, lakes, and ponds within the County that contribute to the open space network. These watercourses are identified as important resources and are often primary components of the proposed greenway system for the County.

Map GB.7 | The Great Loop

Source: www.greatloop.org

Map GB.6 | The New York State Barge Canal System

Source: Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor

Map GB.7 | Future Land Use Map

Planning for a Greenway and Blueway System

Greenway	Open space corridors containing sensitive ecological systems.
Blueway	Navigable lakes and streams which provide multiple benefits including ecological services and economic development opportunities.

The proposed greenway and blueway system emphasizes connections between existing natural areas and natural corridors in Onondaga County, as well as protection of important drinking water sources in the southwestern corner of the County. The greenway corridors travel through urban neighborhoods, villages, hamlets, and rural areas and are intended to enhance the residential and commercial uses that also exist in those areas.

Outside of the urban areas of the County, greenway corridors follow rivers and creeks as well as the Old Erie Canal. In the southeast the greenway system incorporates Highland Forest and Morgan Hill State Forest. The proposed system provides several north to south and east to west open space corridors that could provide habitat and recreational connectivity. The connected greenway network also provides enhanced access to blueways. The greenway and blueway system is closely intertwined with the agricultural landscape, and in places like the Skaneateles/Otisco Watershed Greenway agriculture uses are anticipated to continue to be an important component.

The proposed system serves as a guide for where to prioritize land protection and acquisition. As Onondaga County grows, preservation of natural ecosystems and recreational spaces is essential to the overall well-being of the community. The proposed greenway and blueway system is an important consideration for future development discussions to ensure that an appropriate balance between growth and natural resource protection is reached.

LEGEND

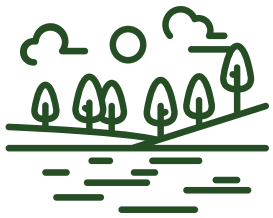
Planning Elements

- Transit Corridor
- Cycle Corridor
- Traditional Center
- Emerging Center
- Town Growth Center
- City Center
- Employment Center
- Greenway
- Agriculture
- Blueway

Primary Land Use

- Commercial
- Residential
- Airport

Greenways and Blueways



Goals and Strategies

Greenways and blueways are important contributors to the quality of life in Onondaga County. There are many opportunities to contribute to the protection and enhancement of the County's plentiful natural resources, parks, and trail systems.

Goal 1

Formalize Greenway and Blueway System Planning

The County seeks to develop a formal approach to the development of a Greenway and Blueway System through targeted planning. The development of a true countywide system will require the participation of multiple stakeholders from across the County's urban, suburban, and rural communities, including existing friends groups and stewardship organizations already working to enhance our natural resource areas. The County can be a catalyst for greenway and blueway planning, coordination, and organization as well as develop tools and resources to assist with implementation.

Strategy 1 » Develop a Greenway and Blueway Plan that identifies specific targets for preservation and active recreation.

Strategy 2 » Conduct a Natural Resources Inventory to identify critical and vulnerable assets, and a means to communicate information to community partners and the development community.

Strategy 3 » Develop a policy and planning toolbox to share with municipal partners, to conserve greenway environments, promote open space protection, and foster implementation of compatible zoning and development regulations and guidance.

Strategy 4 » Facilitate ad hoc coordination of greenway and blueway related activities.

Goal 2

Continue to Invest in the Development of a Countywide Multi-Use Trail Network

Completion of trail networks such as the Onondaga County Loop the Lake Trail and the Onondaga Creekwalk remain a high priority. The Empire State Trail Local Economic Opportunities Plan (LEOP) identifies multiple potential enhanced connections between the Empire State Trail (EST) system and local communities along the east-west EST route. Continued investment in trail connectivity is an important aspect of increasing opportunities for recreation tourism and improving quality of life for area residents. In addition, north-south routes connecting northern suburbs and southern agricultural tourism areas should be identified.

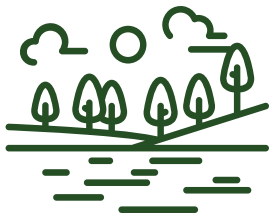
Strategy 1 » Construct the remaining portions of the Loop the Lake and Onondaga Creekwalk trails.

Strategy 2 » Develop a Countywide multi-use trail and active transportation network plan building off of the LEOP.

Strategy 3 » Develop and implement a wayfinding system for existing and newly constructed trails, including connections to and from community destinations.

Strategy 4 » Expand microtransit options and other safety and comfort features on trails.

Greenways and Blueways



Goals and Strategies (continued)

Goal 3

Invest in the Development of a Countywide Blueway System

Onondaga County has abundant water recreation resources. The County straddles two continental watersheds - the Great Lakes and the Susquehanna River - and includes the two easternmost lakes in the Finger Lakes watershed. The original Erie Canal and the New York State Barge Canal cross the County and make water connections to the Great Lakes, Hudson River and through those waterbodies to the Atlantic Ocean and Mississippi River and Gulf of Mexico.

Transportation by water is possible and connects downtown Syracuse with many points in the northern portion of the County. However, this is not widely promoted, and little programmatic or capital resources have invested in making this system accessible to more people. Creating and planning for the establishment of a Blueway system in Onondaga County will provide the means to access these waterbodies for a variety of users. Typically blueway trails focus on non-motorized recreation, but with the size and extent of the potential system in Onondaga County this planning activity will include any necessary resources to assist motorized recreation as well.

Strategy 1 » Create a countywide Blueway Plan, working with NYS DOS Coastal Resources in order to plan for the development of blueway amenities and resources such as fishing access, swimming, boating, wildlife viewing areas, and other shoreline features such as restaurant and entertainment facilities and trail connections.

Strategy 2 » Plan for and invest in landside trail connectivity between blueways, local communities, and shoreline destinations.

Goal 4

Preserve Ecological Assets Within Greenways and Blueways

Conservation of important habitats and corridors within the County will be an important component of establishing a Greenway and Blueway system. The County can assist in preservation efforts by developing mapping resources, providing model planning and zoning tools, supporting land-trusts, and acquiring land and easements.

Strategy 1 » Identify and map sensitive areas within the County where future development should be limited.

Strategy 2 » Identify and conserve important natural corridors to limit habitat fragmentation.

Strategy 3 » Develop model planning and zoning tools such as buffering, conservation subdivisions, and open space zoning to protect open space systems.

Strategy 4 » Provide support for land trust efforts to protect local habitats, open spaces, and shorelines.

Strategy 5 » Utilize land acquisition and develop easements to protect critical environmental resources.

Endnotes

1 United States Environmental Protection Agency. 2022. Ecosystem Services Research. Available at: https:// www.epa.gov/eco-research/ecosystem-services-research#:~:text=Ecosystem%20goods%20and%20services%20produce,and%20often%20taken%20for%20granted. (Accessed December 2022).

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5 Parks and Trails New York.Greenways and Trails: Bringing economic benefits to New York (Brochure).

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PLAN ON
Agriculture

Community Comments on Agriculture

Agriculture

Agriculture is the science, art, and business of cultivating soil, producing crops, and raising livestock. Innovative agricultural and farming practices are needed to promote economic development while also protecting our environment.

Vision:

Onondaga County will ensure that Agriculture remains a viable and integral part of the economy and a defining characteristic of the landscape.

Agriculture is integral to Onondaga County's economy, food system, and landscape. The 623 farms in the County provide $356 million in annual direct and indirect food sales.[1] The growing trend of agritourism is building meaningful connections between the local food system, residents, and visitors to Onondaga County. The County has highly productive agricultural soils and a legacy of farming. The Onondaga County agricultural economy reaches local, regional, national, and global markets.

Agriculture defines a third of the landscape throughout Onondaga County. Through planning, the County can support agriculture and the farming community to enable continued enjoyment of the healthy food, beautiful landscapes, and economic benefits they provide.

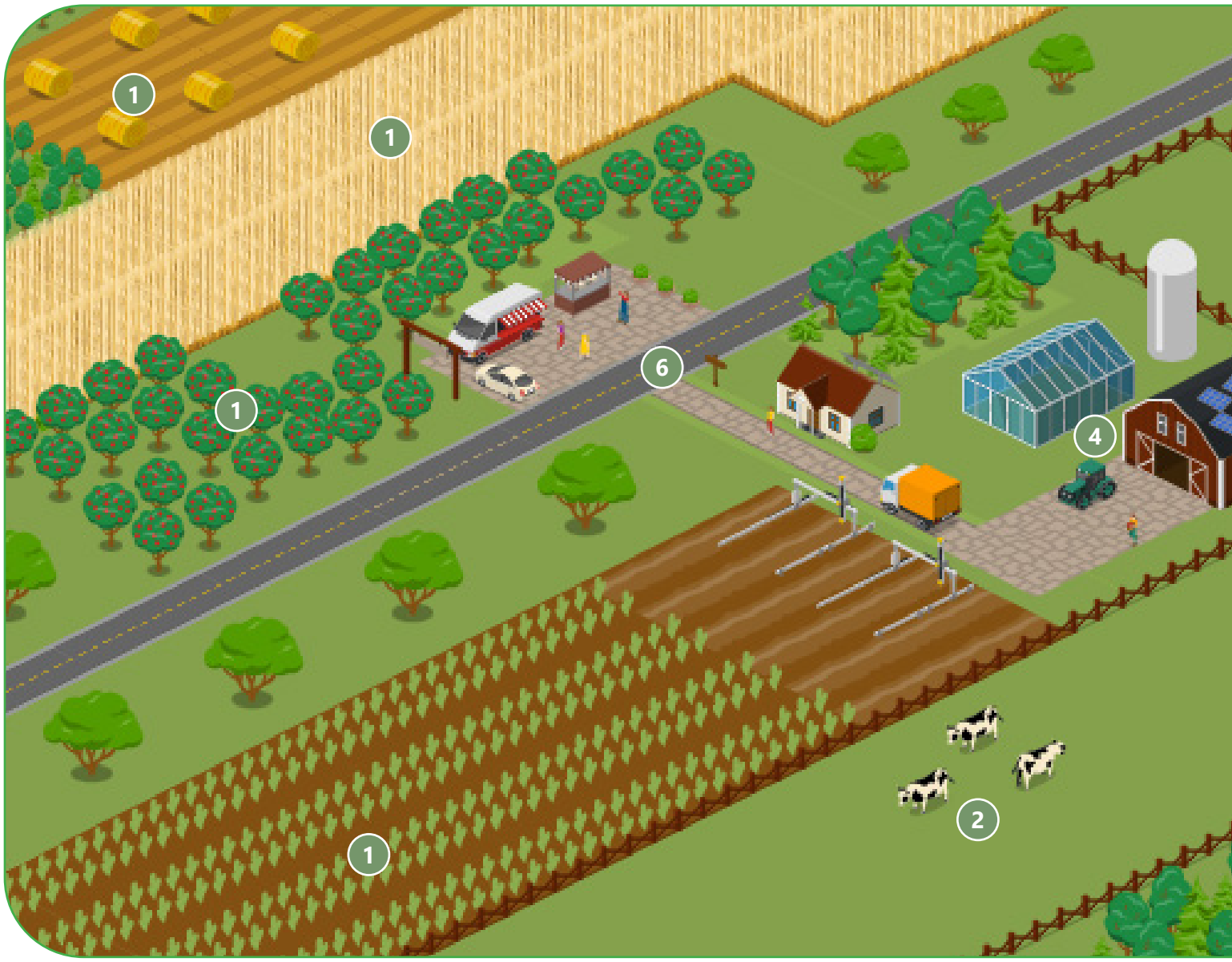
In December 2022, Onondaga County adopted an updated Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan, a comprehensive look at agriculture in the County and a guide to protecting this critical resource. The Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan includes a more in depth and comprehensive description of agriculture in the County. Plan Onondaga focuses on Agriculture in the context of an overall land use strategy in Onondaga County.

Agriculture provides multiple benefits for local communities:

- Provides food to support Onondaga County's communities;
- Protects the natural environment;
- Prevents unplanned sprawl and fiscal strains;
- Conserves rural landscapes and attracts people to the area; and
- Strengthens local economies, especially in rural communities.

Components of Agriculture

Understanding the different components that make up Onondaga County's agricultural system is an important first step toward County-wide recommendations and investments. The diagram below depicts the complexity of farms which undergo constant pressure to find and keep land in production, transport crops to market, and keep operations viable.



1 CROP DIVERSITY

Onondaga County's climate and rich farmland soils allow for a variety of crops to be grown, ranging from grains and vegetables to berries and apples. Agricultural diversity in turn promotes economic diversity.

2 DAIRY

Dairy is the predominate agricultural product in Onondaga County and far surpasses revenues generated by other farm products. Much of the agricultural land in the County is linked to dairy, including grazing areas and cropland for growing feed (e.g., corn and soy).

FARMING COMMUNITY

The farming community is composed of farmers of different ages and farms of different types and sizes. Over time, there has been a loss of mid-sized farms and an aging of farm operators. These changes shed light on the needs facing farmers and current agricultural markets.

FOOD SYSTEM

Beyond farms, the food system includes processing, distribution, and waste/recycling systems. Each of these steps shapes interactions and experiences with food and, in turn, impacts people's relationship to agriculture.

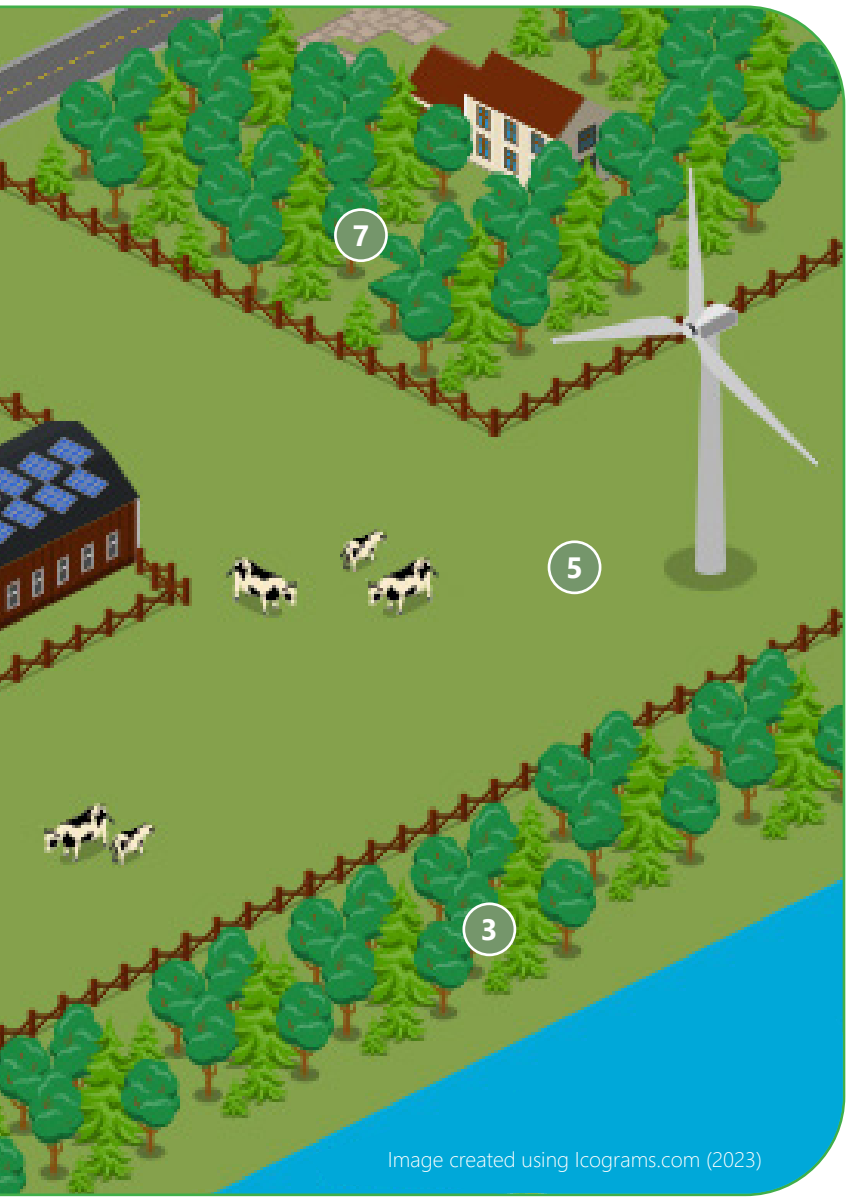


Image created using Icograms.com (2023)

7 RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORS

Agriculture lands are working lands. Occasionally, there can be smells and noises near residential areas. Local laws exist to protect the flexibility needed to run operations. Rural planning tools, like conservation subdivision design, can help to avoid conflicts between residential areas and working lands.

6 AGRITOURISM

Agritourism can improve the economic viability of the agricultural sector while also providing opportunities for learning, experiencing, and enjoying agriculture.

5 RENEWABLE ENERGY

The intersection of agriculture and renewable energy is timely and important as communities aim to balance clean energy and food production with farm viability and viewshed protection.

3 STEWARDSHIP OF NATURAL AREAS

Farmers are stewards of the natural environment. Agricultural lands often include forest and woodlots on steep slopes and marginal farming lands. Stream buffers or other runoff controls can protect water quality and serve as extensions of broader greenway and blueway systems.

4 EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

Improved access to broadband and other rapidly evolving technologies are making farming even more efficient while connecting communities from around the world.

Why Plan for Agriculture?

If needed, agricultural land in Onondaga County could be re-purposed to grow enough food to feed all 476,516 residents[2].

Globally, demand for food is increasing. Farmers are having to meet rising demand by improving the efficiency of agricultural production. At the same time, there is development pressure impacting the cost of farmland and viability of farms. Planning for agriculture offers community benefits in diverse ways, including providing food, supporting the local economy, preventing unplanned development, and protecting natural resources.

Providing Food and Supporting Local Agriculture

If needed, agricultural land in Onondaga County could be re-purposed to grow enough food to feed all 476,516 residents,[2] though today's markets reach far beyond the County. Certain parts of the County are excellent for fruit and vegetable production in particular. Therefore, protection of these areas is critically important.

Localizing food systems and increasing food access can improve food security, increase revenues for farmers and their communities, and improve public health.[3] The disruptions experienced during the Covid pandemic revealed the fragility of food systems. The work necessary to localize food requires collaboration and intentional efforts from a variety of actors including government, the farming community, supply chain businesses, and consumers themselves.

Supporting Local Economies

Beyond food production, economic impacts from agriculture are vital for rural economies and provide $356 million annually in direct and indirect benefits. Agriculture strengthens local economies through jobs and earnings. The economies woven around farming include farm workers and farm operators, equipment manufacturers, veterinary health, food distributors, and other businesses.

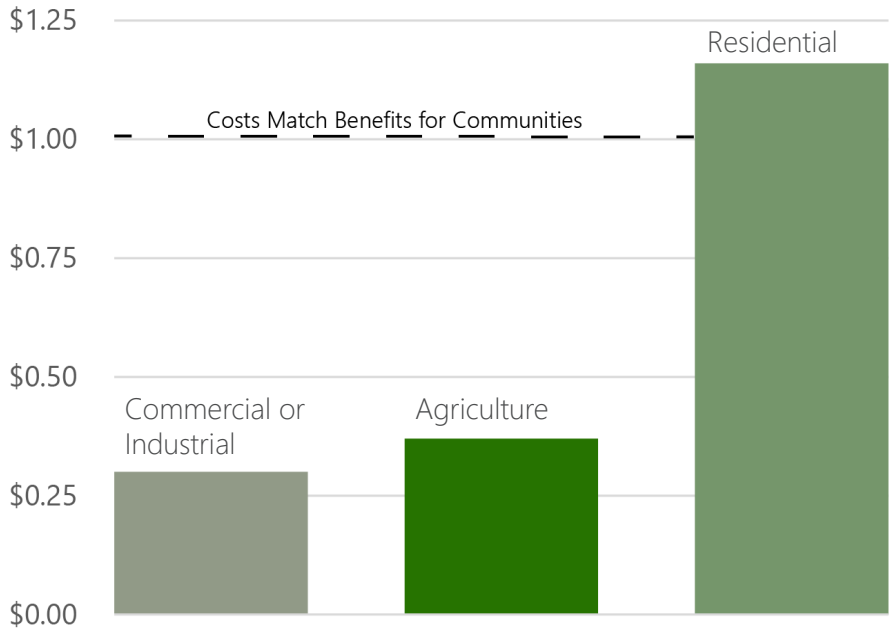
A view of Apple Valley from Route 80 in LaFayette

Like commercial and industrial land uses, agricultural land brings in more revenues through taxes than it costs local governments in infrastructure expenses. Unlike residential land, agricultural land pays more to local municipalities than it demands in government services, a benefit to the overall community (see **Figure AG.1**).

Preventing Unplanned Development

Onondaga County is home to rural communities that require special attention and planning to preserve their unique character and prevent unplanned urbanization. Protecting the agricultural landscape of these rural areas from uncontrolled growth is crucial. Effective planning is needed to ensure that development occurs in a way that meets the needs of rural communities and preserves their cultural and natural resources. Municipalities can use farm-friendly land use tools to encourage appropriate land use and development practices, preserve prime agricultural lands, and protect the County's rural character. By taking proactive steps to manage growth and development in these areas, Onondaga County can maintain its quality of life for residents while promoting economic vitality.

Figure AG.1 | Median Cost of Community Services per Dollar of Revenue by Land Use in Upstate New York



Source: American Farmland Trust, 2016

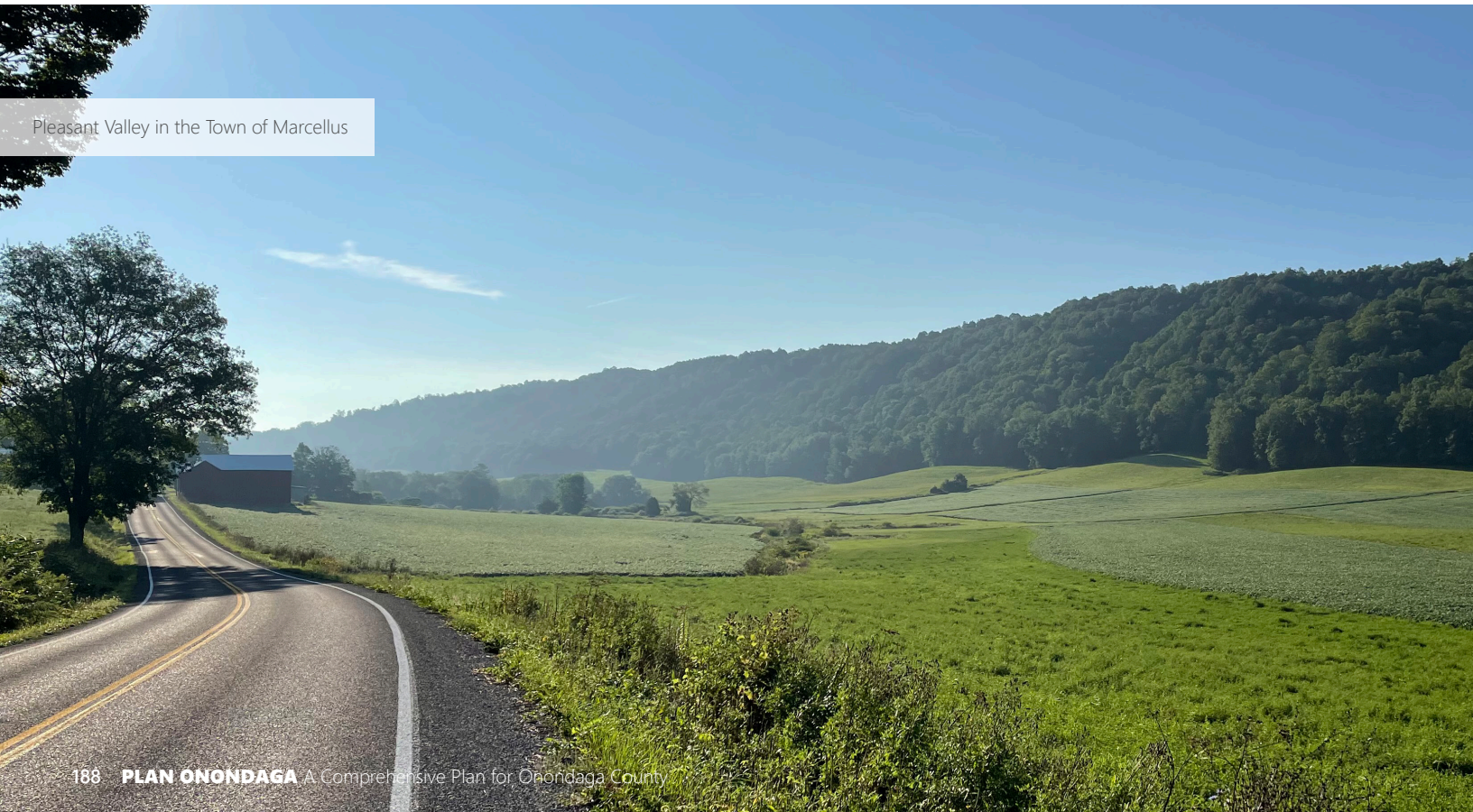
Agricultural land pays more to local municipalities than it demands in government services, a benefit to the overall community.

Protecting Natural Resources

Farmers are stewards of natural resources. Protection of farmland itself is essential for maintaining a viable agricultural economy. There is an intrinsic connection between agriculture and natural resources, ranging from watershed protection and building the health of soils, to supporting other ecosystem functions, like the conservation of forested lands, ecological corridors, and scenic open spaces.

Many incentive-based tools exist to help farmers steward their lands by protecting water quality, increasing carbon mitigation, or addressing pollinator collapse and invasive species. The challenge lies in how to do so without placing added burdens on farmers.

Prized agricultural soils in Onondaga County are plentiful, but are relatively rare globally. The temperate climate of Central New York and availability of water for irrigation make local soils particularly good for a variety of food crops and agriculture uses. One inch of rich topsoil can take several hundred years or more



Pleasant Valley in the Town of Marcellus

to develop.[4] Furthermore, soils are living complex ecosystems of nutrients and microbes. When rich soils are eroded or developed upon, it is very difficult to rebuild them back to their original state.

Protection of prime soils (**Map AG.1**) is critical due to the pressure from residential and commercial development along with other factors that lead to erosion and destruction of healthy soils. Onondaga County has lost nearly 150,000 acres of farmland since the 1950s due to development, however that loss has plateaued in recent years.[5]

Farmers, Onondaga County, and local land trusts have partnered with New York State to permanently protect over 12,000 acres of farmland in Onondaga County. See the Onondaga County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan for more information on protecting farmland.

Map AG.1 | Important Agricultural Soils in Onondaga County

Source: 2021 Soil Survey Geographic (SSURGO) Database, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

IMPORTANT SOILS

Prime Farmland	Exhibits the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops. It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high yields of crops.
Farmland of Statewide Importance	Produces fair to good yields of crops when treated and managed with sound agricultural practices. These farmlands are important to the state in producing food, feed, fiber, forage and oilseed crops and can produce yields as high as prime farmland.
Prime Farmland if Drained	Has the same characteristics as prime farmland, apart from depth to water table. Agricultural use is limited unless properly drained.

Trends in Agriculture

Across the U.S. there is increasing pressure from expanding urban areas to convert farmland to other uses such as residential or commercial development.

There are a variety of factors influencing the viability of agriculture. Across the U.S. there is increasing pressure from expanding urban areas to convert farmland to other uses such as residential or commercial development. This has led to the loss of significant amounts of farmland. In addition, the costs associated with farming continue to increase, which has forced many smaller farms to either cease operations or sell to larger operations. As the farming community in the U.S. continues to age, there has been a decline in the number of new farmers in an industry that has historically been handed down from generation to generation.

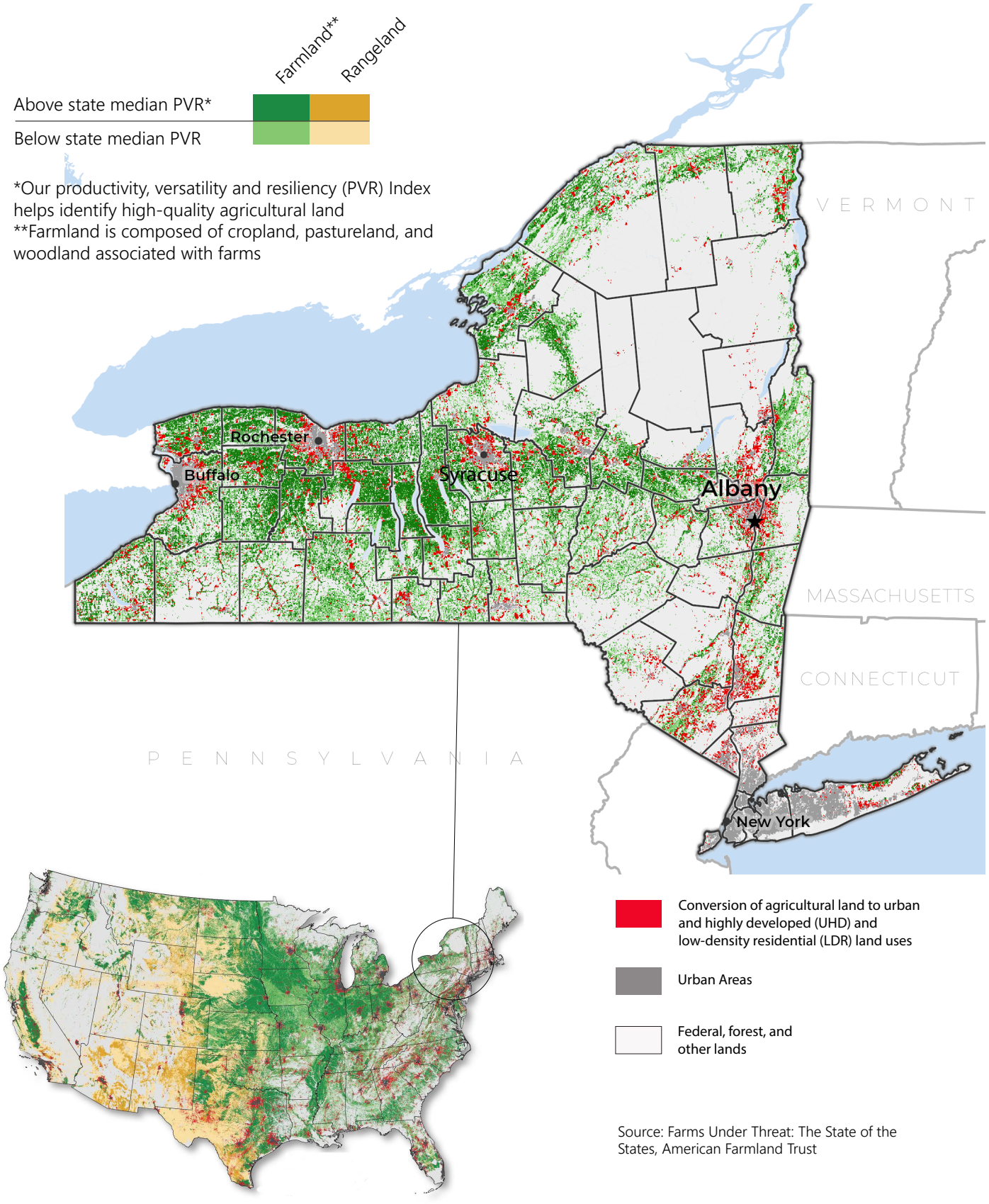
On the flip side, there has been significant growth in agritourism. Agritourism is defined as a farm-based enterprise that links agricultural production and/or processing with retail, educational programs, and entertainment, to attract visitors to a farm in order to generate income for the farm or business owner. These operations play a role in keeping farming as a viable business and part of the landscape.

There are other factors impacting the viability of farming operations, like the deployment of renewable energy systems and emerging technologies. Understanding these trends and how they may be impacting agriculture within the County is an important step in developing effective planning responses.

Loss of Farmland

Across the United States, farmland has been and continues to be converted to non-agricultural uses. More than 2,000 acres a day were converted between 2001 and 2016, which equaled all the U.S. farmland devoted to fruit, nut, and vegetable production in 2017. This conversion threatens the future of agriculture, particularly near urbanized areas. Despite having 10% of the world's arable soils, only 18% of the continental U.S. is nationally significant farmland. New York State has a high conversion threat compared to other states, and a moderately robust set of policy measures and incentive programs to preserve farmland (**Figure AG.2**).

Figure AG.2 | Agricultural Land Conversion 2001 - 2016 in New York



Source: Farms Under Threat: The State of the States, American Farmland Trust

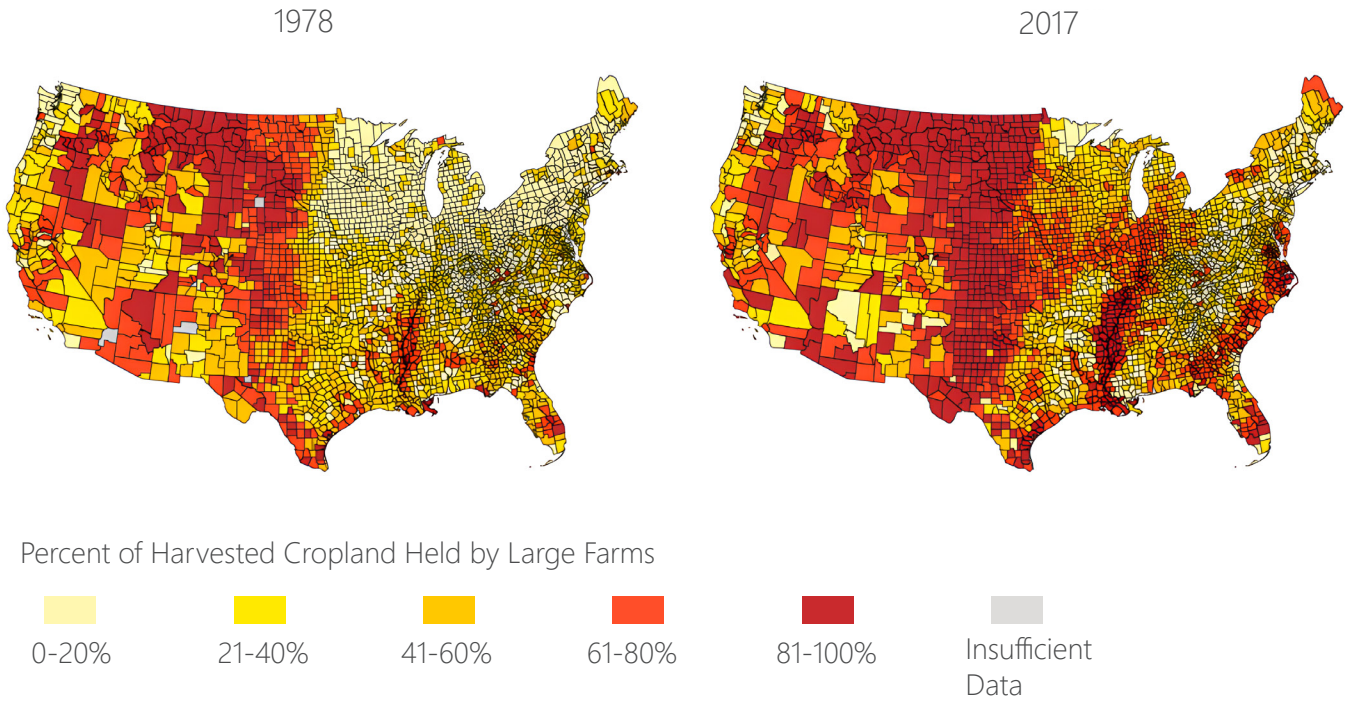
Consolidation of Farms

Farm consolidation occurs when large farms acquire land formerly belonging to smaller farms. This pervasive trend across the country has happened for nearly a century. Over time, this has resulted in fewer total farms as larger farms purchase the land (**Figure AG.3**).

Over the last 40 years, U.S. farmland acreage declined 13%. Meanwhile, the harvested cropland in large farms over 1,000 acres nearly doubled, growing by an area larger than California.[6] Mid-size crop farms (50-1,000 acres) shrank to just half their former number and acreage. Though the number of small farms (less than 50 acres) increased, their total area decreased, indicating that their average size is also shrinking.

There are many impacts resulting from farm consolidation. Larger farms mean fewer people can afford to farm. Large farmers can pay more for land, affecting competition and limiting supply. Less affordable land can result in the exclusion of new farmers and new ideas from underrepresented populations in the agricultural sector. Counties with increasing consolidation typically decline in the number of new farmers, while

Figure AG.3 | Large Farms Are Consolidating Cropland Across the U.S.



Source: 2021 Union of Concerned Scientists based on data from Haines, Fishback, and Rhode 2014, USDA NASS

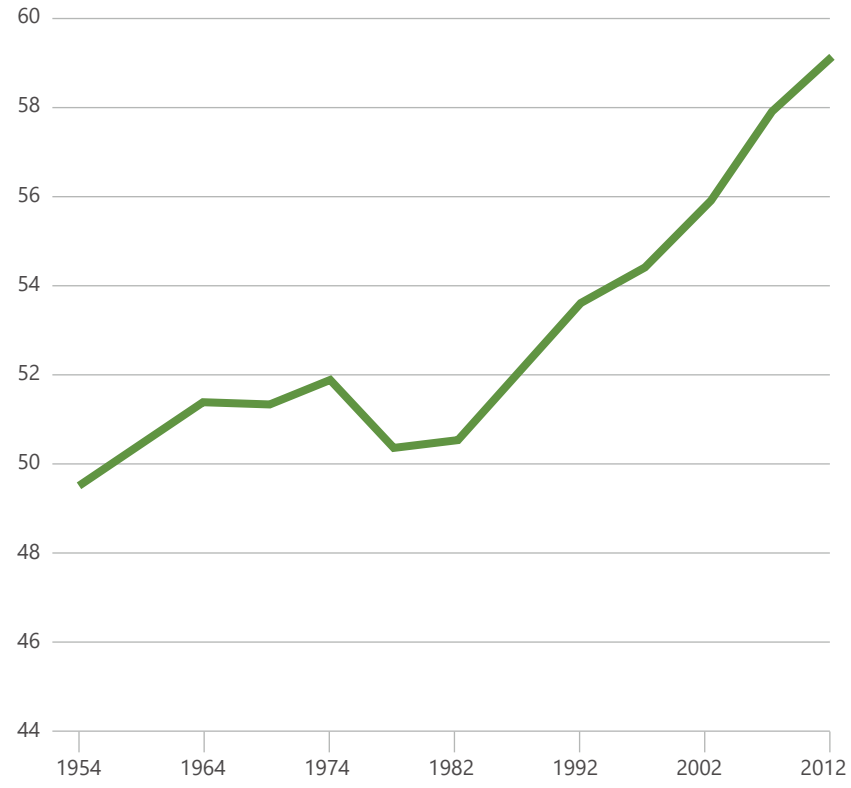
the average age of farm operators increases. Additionally, ultra-large-scale farming can be associated with landscape simplification, requiring more fertilizers, pesticides, and mono-culture crops. This in turn can result in degraded soils with more vulnerability to erosion and climate impacts.

Aging within the Farming Community

Farming has been a family tradition for generations, but it is becoming increasingly challenging to sustain due to various issues such as regulations, labor, globalization, and climate change. As a result, younger generations are less likely to pursue farming as a career, and the existing farmers are getting older (see **Figure AG.4**). The average age of farmers increased by 1.2 years between 2012 and 2017.

Producers in the U.S. tend to be highly experienced. On average across the country, farmers have been on their current farm for an average of 21 years.[7] Agriculture plays a critical role in society, and it is essential that new farmers with a passion for farming have enough access to the knowledge and resources to make a generational transition feasible.

Figure AG.4 | Increasing Average Age of Farmers in the U.S.



Source: U.S. News World Report, 2014 using USDA NASS census data

Passing farming on to the next generation

People are drawn to agritourism because it connects people in what can be a disconnected local food system.

Growth of Agritourism

Agritourism is growing in popularity as a supplemental revenue source for working farms that attract visitors for education and enjoyment. These venues also provide revenue for rural farm communities. Agritourism can include things like hayrides, corn mazes, farm tours, food and drink, and retail sales of locally produced products. Other examples are microbreweries, u-pick opportunities, and farmstands. As an accessory use for active farming operations, agritourism can facilitate learning about local food production.

People are drawn to agritourism because it connects them to what can be a disconnected local food system. Agritourism also expands the awareness and understanding of the local farming community and farming in general.

There has been significant growth in agritourism, and it is easier than ever for farmers to connect with potential visitors via the internet. At the same time, there can be challenges associated with the siting and operation of agritourism operations in rural communities. Tools for planning are evolving to help local communities balance

Connecting to local agriculture through agritourism

the need for additional farming revenues with the protection of rural communities.

Renewable Energy

Agricultural lands attract renewable energy development like wind and solar. Solar energy development is growing rapidly in New York and the U.S. due to technological advances and state renewable energy goals. Wind energy development causes less disruption for farm operations than solar development, however, it has yet to gain traction in Onondaga County. Both offer added payments for farmers and can promote farm viability. A challenge will be to meet clean energy goals while protecting farmland. Using farm-friendly tools, such as model local laws, siting guidelines, and agrivoltaic innovations can help attain this balance.

Agrivoltaic solar development in Upstate NY

Emerging Technology

Agriculture is an innovative industry, regularly developing new products, collaborating, and creating efficiencies. Recent innovations include indoor farming, food safety, and packaging and delivery services. Legalized cannabis is an emerging area spurring a lot of innovation, bringing opportunities for new value-added products to keep farms viable.

Access to emerging technology is crucial for the vitality of the agricultural sector. While technology can require large upfront costs, long-term benefits can improve competitiveness.

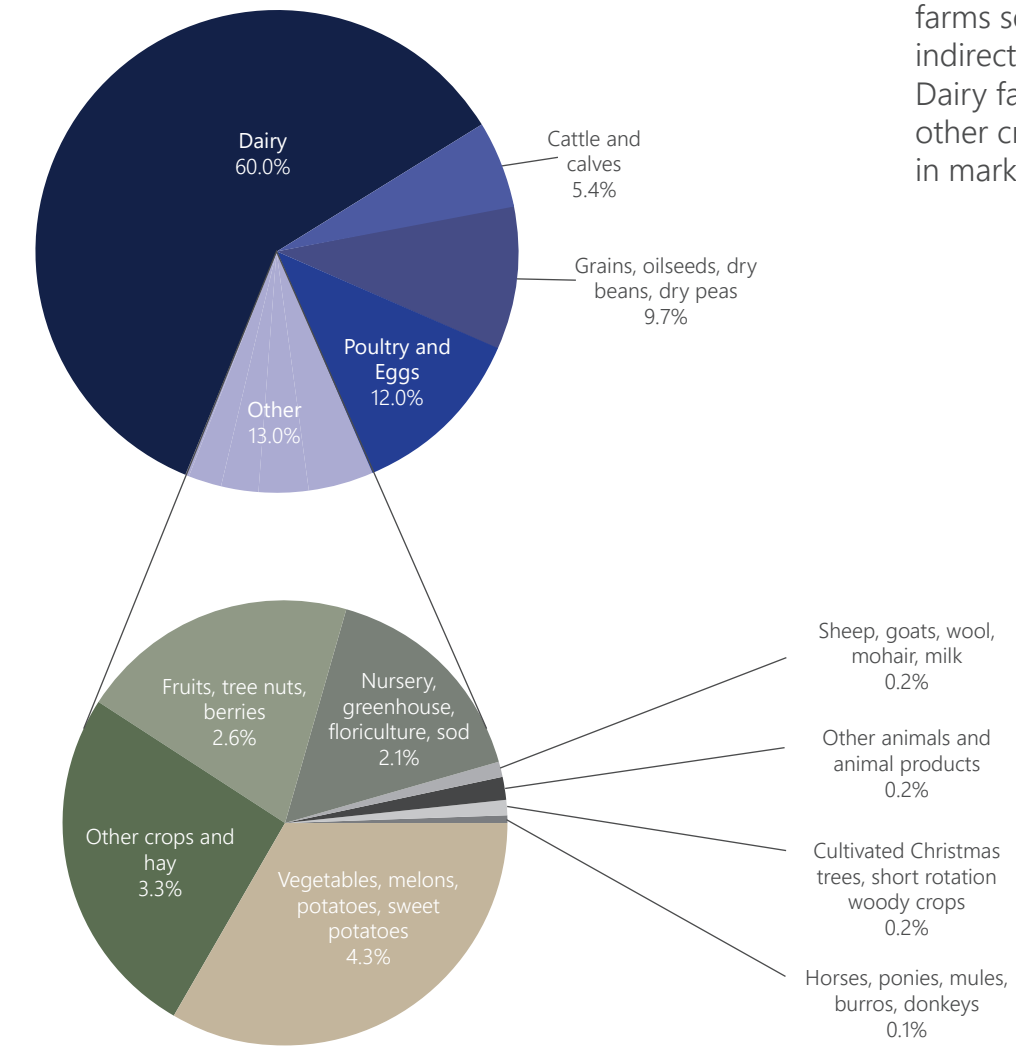
Agriculture in Onondaga County

Farming is a key economic sector for Onondaga County. A variety of agricultural land uses occur in nearly all towns and villages surrounding the City of Syracuse (**Map AG.2**). Farmland is primarily concentrated in the western and southern portions of the County, although there is a diverse array of smaller agricultural properties occurring in Clay, Cicero, and Manlius.

Farms in Onondaga County are among the most productive in the state and are well-connected to local and regional consumers (**Figure AG.5**). The top selling agricultural products are dairy, grains and legumes, and poultry and eggs. Of all counties in New York, Onondaga County ranks third in egg/poultry production and ninth in dairy production.[8]

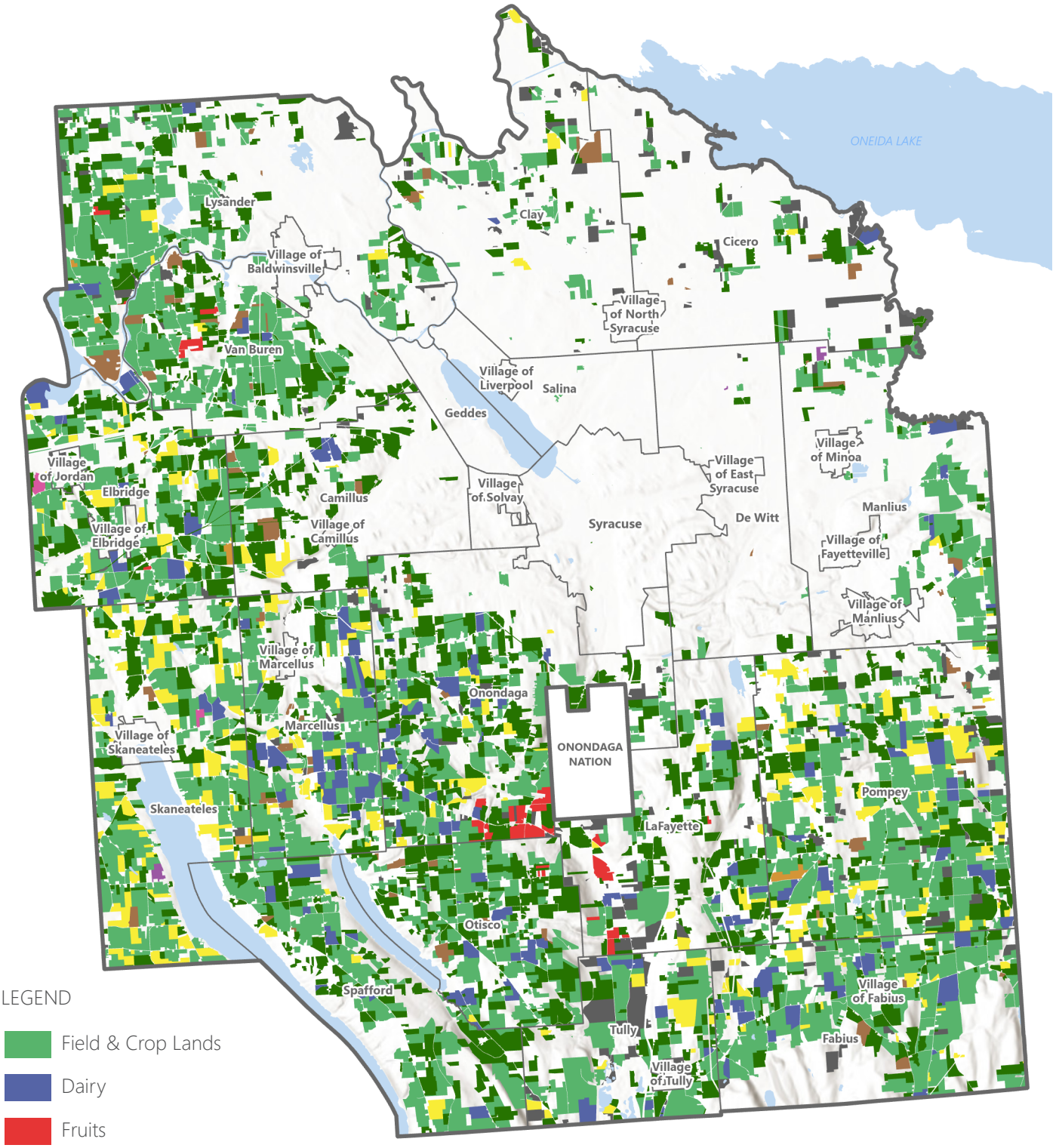
In addition to the $178 million in market sales, Onondaga County farms send another $178 million indirectly into the local economy.[9] Dairy far surpasses the sales of other crops, with over $100 million in market sales on an annual basis.

Figure AG.5 | Sales of Agricultural Products



Source: USDA NASS 2017

Map AG.2 | Types of Agriculture



Source: Onondaga County Parcels (2021). Note: "Other" refers to agricultural parcels identified from Onondaga County GIS Division.

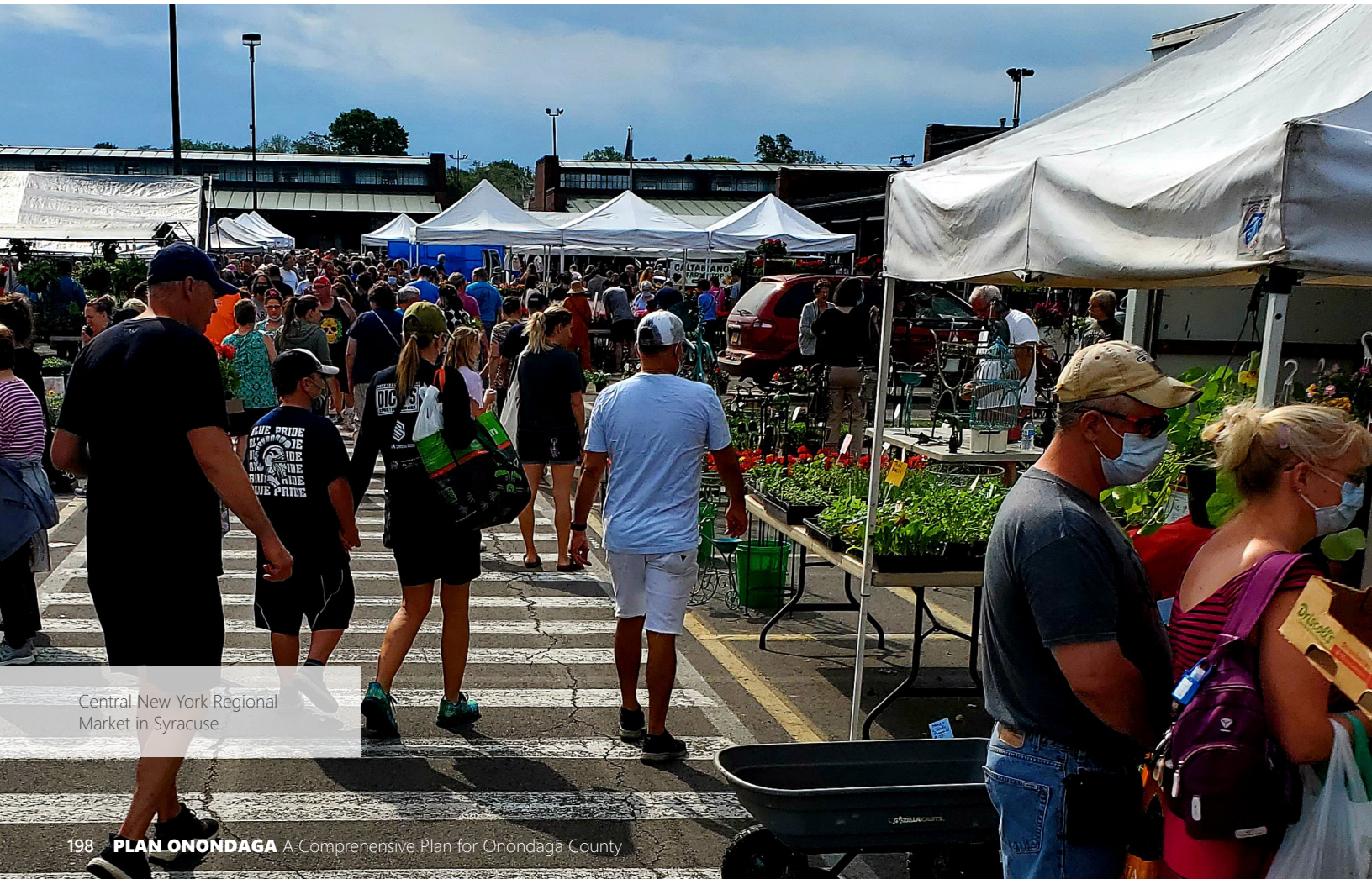
Local Food Distribution

Onondaga County is at the crossroads of Upstate New York. Access to labor, markets, and distribution infrastructure is robust. The County's food distribution sector employs over 1,800 people and is home to 39 wholesale distribution establishments that operate at international, national, and regional scales.

Various organizations, individuals, and government agencies are partnering to address persistent food insecurity challenges and increase the distribution of locally-produced food in Onondaga County. Institutional food service programs for schools or hospitals can be pivotal in connecting County residents to local producers.

Local Consolidation of Farms

As agriculture in Onondaga County evolves, larger farms acquire more land, resulting in consolidation within the industry. Since 2002, the number of farm operations has decreased by 102



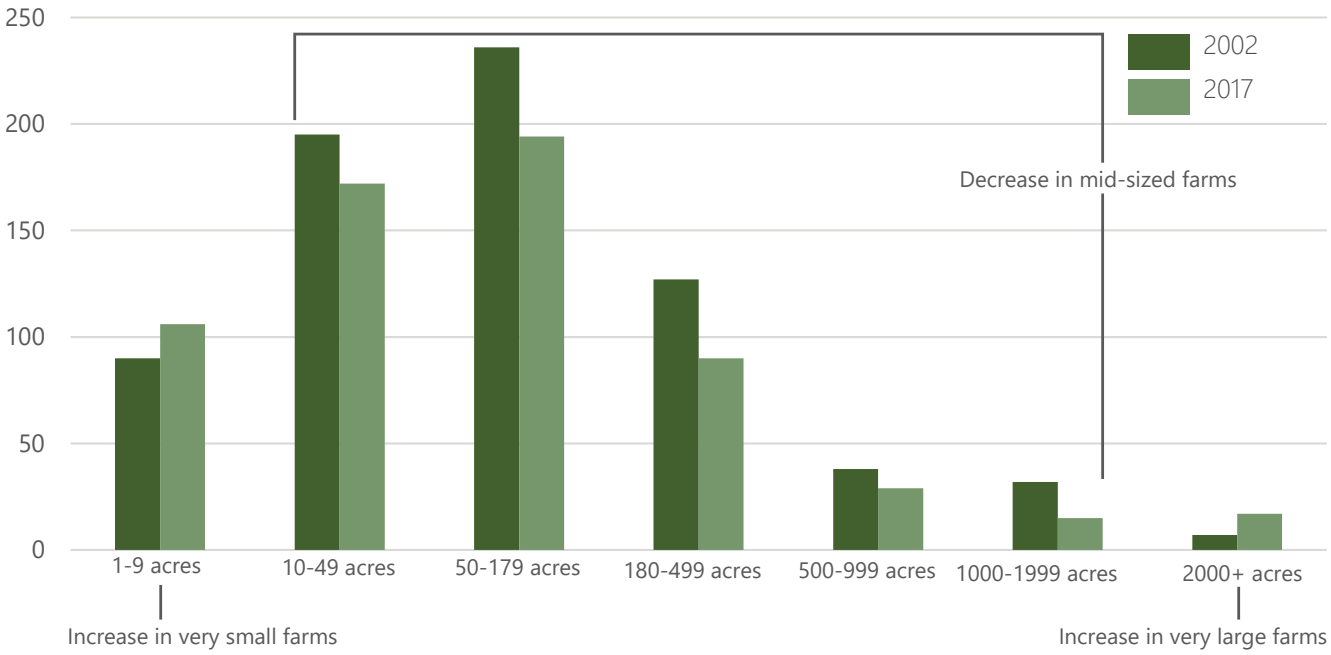
Central New York Regional Market in Syracuse

farms, while total active farmland has increased by 4,433 acres due to larger farms accumulating land (see **Figure AG.6**).

The increase in the largest farms (+10 operations) drives the consolidation trend, with larger farms having efficiencies of scale to increase profits and acquire land more readily. There has been an increase in the smallest of farms (+16 operations) due to new trends in niche or organic agriculture; however, the loss of mid-sized farms (-46%) makes it challenging for new farmers with smaller farms to compete in the markets within Onondaga County and beyond. Larger farms are able to acquire and hold on to land, preventing growth opportunities for smaller farms.

Despite these challenges, the increase in agricultural land provides hope for future agriculture in the County, potentially indicating that the pressure to convert farmland to other uses has lessened in the past twenty years. It may also be possible, however, that large farms are opening up marginal lands for production at a faster rate than land is being developed for other uses.

Figure AG.6 | Changes in the Size Distribution of Onondaga County Farms



Source: 2002 and 2017 USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

Aging within the Agricultural Community

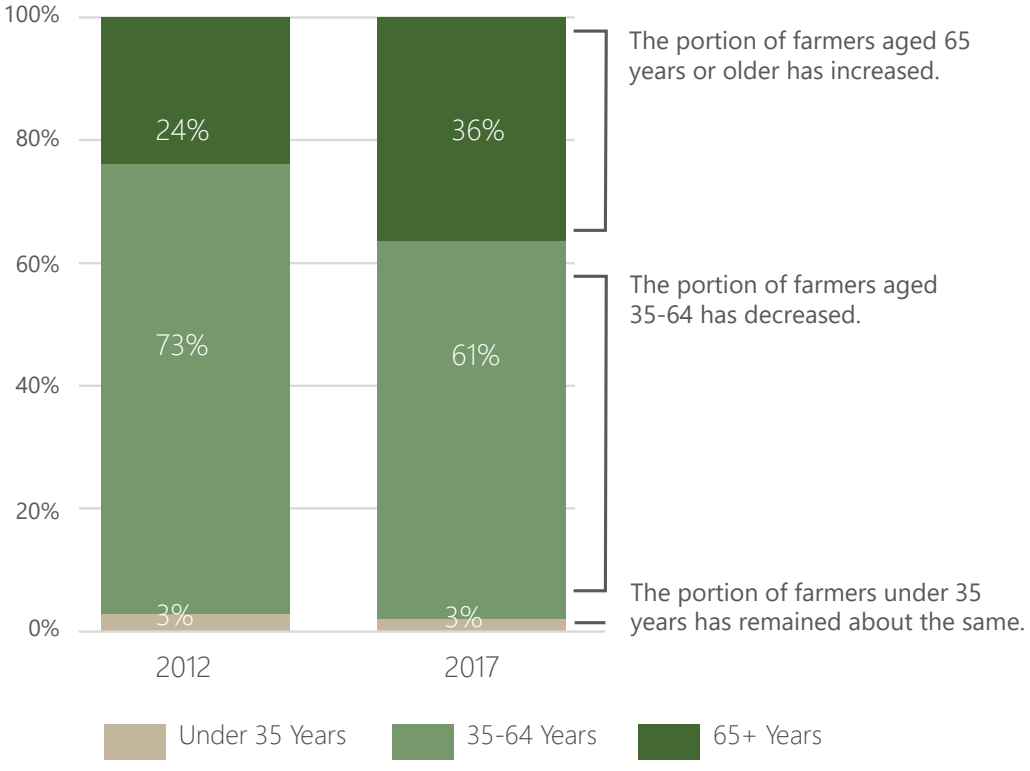
Onondaga County, like many places across the U.S., has seen the aging of its farmers over the past few decades (**Figure AG.7**). According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, the average age of farmers in Onondaga County increased to 57.6 years old, up from 56.6 years old in 2012.

Overall, these demographic changes highlight the challenges and opportunities facing farmers in Onondaga County and the need for continued support and innovation in the agricultural sector.

Growth of Agritourism

Agritourism has become a significant contributor to the local economy in Onondaga County. It offers an opportunity for visitors to learn about farming practices, experience rural life, and purchase fresh local products directly from the source. The County is home to

Figure AG.7 | Changes in Farmer Population Age Groups in Onondaga County



Source: 2012 and 2017 USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

nationally renowned agritourism establishments such as Beak & Skiff Apple Orchards, which attracts over 200,000 visitors each year.

Onondaga County farms that participate in agritourism generate more than twice the average revenue of a typical agritourism operation in New York State, with an average of $100,000 per year.[10] This revenue stream has become increasingly important for farmers of all different operations, from roadside farm stands to larger farms attracting thousands of visitors throughout the year. No matter what scale, agritourism helps to supplement revenue from traditional farming practices.

Agritourism has the added benefit of promoting local food systems. By connecting consumers with local producers, agritourism helps to educate visitors about the importance of supporting small-scale farming operations and the benefits of consuming fresh, locally-grown produce.

Beak and Skiff
1911 Tasting Room
Source: Beak and Skiff

Agritourism case study:

Beak and Skiff Apple Orchards

Located near Route 20 in the Town of LaFayette, Beak and Skiff was founded in 1911 as a wholesale apple farm. In 1975, the farm transitioned into the agritourism industry by becoming a pick-your-own apple orchard. Today, Beak and Skiff is a major agritourism destination, home to a general store, tavern, concert stage, apple barn, bakery, and tasting room. Visitors also have the opportunity to tour an adjacent distillery or stay in a variety of accommodations on the farm owned and operated by Beak and Skiff.

The expansion of Beak and Skiff is reflective of the growth of the agritourism industry as a whole. With its continued growth, the farm has been voted the best apple orchard in America by USA Today readers in 2015, 2017, 2020, and 2021.

Project Details

Location:

Town of LaFayette, Onondaga County

Founded:

1911

Products:

Apples

1911 Hard Cider

1911 Spirits including Gin, Bourbon, and Vodka

Unique features:

Summer Concert Series

Renewable Energy

Like many places in New York State, Onondaga County is experiencing increased non-residential solar energy development. These projects tend to be larger than residential solar development. Developers often select agricultural land for non-residential solar installations due to flat topography, minimal need for land clearing, and proximity to roads and transmission infrastructure.

As of 2022, infrastructure to produce approximately 64 megawatts of solar energy was installed on approximately 384 acres in Onondaga County. Three-quarters of these installations occurred on non-residential roperties. The cumulative amount of installed non-residential solar capacity more than doubled in 2022 compared to the previous year.[11]

Local land use regulations can be used to facilitate a balance between agriculture and solar development. The Farm-Friendly Municipal Toolbox in the recently adopted Onondaga County Agriculture

Agriculture case study:

Farm-Friendly Municipal Toolbox

Project Details

Access the Toolbox:

http://agriculture.ongov.net/toolbox

Prepared By:

Onondaga County Department of Planning, as part of the Onondaga County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan

Prepared For:

Onondaga County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board

Municipalities in Onondaga County

As part of the recent planning process for the County's Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan, the planning team worked with experts and a number of towns – Cicero, Manlius, LaFayette and Onondaga – to review local planning and land regulation related to agriculture. As a result, the Municipal Farm-Friendly Toolbox was created.

The Toolbox serves as a repository of best practices for farm-friendly planning and zoning for Onondaga County municipalities. Planning tools include:

- Planning practices
- Model regulations and definitions
- Agricultural land preservation programs
- NYS Agriculture and Markets Law consistency review
- Links to resources and local documents/programs

The Toolbox can help municipalities integrate and update their land use plans and regulations to support farm operations and agricultural land uses, address new and changing dynamics in agriculture, and ensure consistency with Agricultural District laws.

and Farmland Protection Plan provides information about how municipalities can work towards balancing the protection of farmland with solar development.

Other tools are available through New York State. For instance, the NYS Model Solar Energy Law can assist communities in adopting their own zoning provisions to promote solar energy systems while protecting important environmental characteristics, like prime soils and other agricultural elements. Collaboration and partnerships between landowners and solar developers are also leading to agrivoltaic solutions.

Emerging Technologies

Access is more important than ever for emerging technologies necessary to keep farms viable. Broadband internet is key for marketing, participating in direct sales, and reaching customers. Onondaga County recently committed $15 million of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to provide equal access to broadband in all areas of the County currently not served by providers.

County Support for Agriculture

Onondaga County and local municipalities within Onondaga County are utilizing formal planning mechanisms and promotional activities to advance farmland protection and promote agricultural viability and public awareness. Onondaga County has implemented a variety of programs through the Onondaga County Agricultural Council (OCAC) which conducts promotional programs and offers grant programs to local farmers and other organizations.

Onondaga County also supports the purchase of conservation easements. So far, 12,000 acres have been placed into conservation easements for farmland protection across the County.

The OCAC is a group of County government representatives, local farmers and business owners, dedicated to supporting and promoting the agricultural industry in the region. The OCAC is responsible for overseeing the Onondaga Grown Buy Local Campaign and recently oversaw the development of the Onondaga County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan adopted in 2022 by the Onondaga County Legislature. The plan provides a snapshot of Onondaga County Agriculture to guide local decision-making related to agriculture. It serves as the foundation – the character, values, and priorities – for Onondaga County agriculture.

The plan is available on the Onondaga County website at http://agriculture.ongov.net, along with an interactive mapping tool showing important farmland, farm friendly tools for local municipalities to use to protect farmland, and priority venture proposals to work towards the implementation of the plans goals.

Onondaga Grown Buy Local campaign promotes places like the CNY Regional Market

Agriculture case study:

Onondaga Grown Buy Local Campaign

The Onondaga Grown Buy Local campaign is an initiative of the Onondaga County Agriculture Council aimed at promoting local agriculture and encouraging consumers to buy locally produced food. The campaign has been successful in raising awareness about the benefits of buying locally grown food. Since its launch, the campaign has helped to create new markets for local farmers and locally grown food in the region.

In support of Onondaga Grown, the OCAC has organized and hosted ON Farm Fest, which is in its seventh year and offers a family-friendly day where local farms are open for tours, live music, interactive exhibits, and the sale of local products and food.

Identifying Important Farmland

Farmland is at the core of the agricultural community and farming industry. As such, the Onondaga County Agricultural Mapper website helps municipalities and farmers plan together to protect the most important agricultural lands in the County. The mapper offers a framework and interactive mapping tool for municipalities to protect farmland for the next generation. The website presents searchable, interactive layers of data. Users can zoom in to view specific parcels or click through data layers to see the criteria in the analysis.

The foundation of this analysis is a base dataset of agricultural parcels. Four criteria were used to measure the importance of agricultural lands (see description below). **Map AG.3** demonstrates the aggregated results of the analysis and the distribution of important agricultural lands across the County.

Agriculture case study:

Onondaga County Ag Mapper

Project Details

Access the Ag Mapper:

http://agriculture.ongov.net/ag-mapper

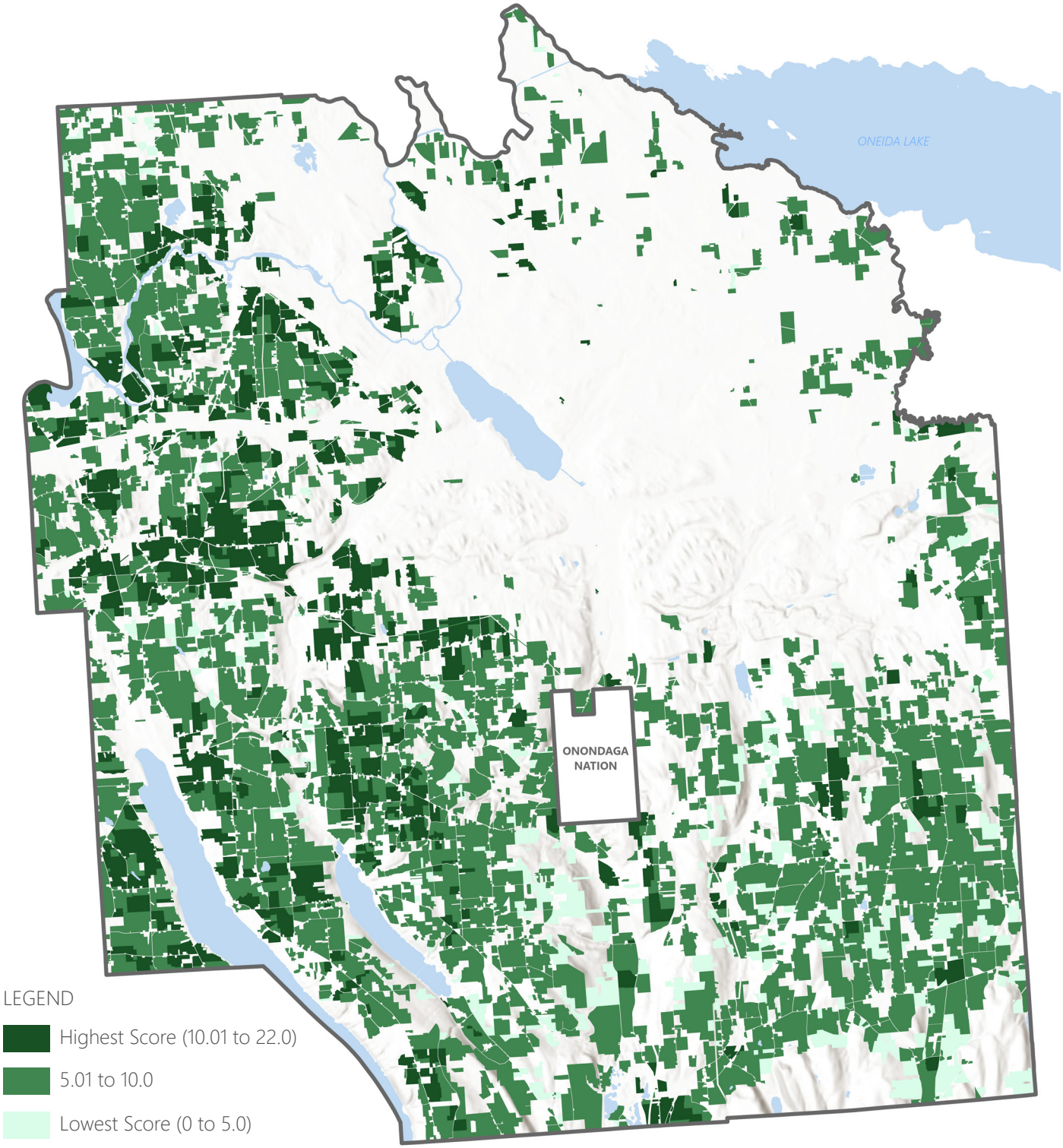
Uses:

- Understand the diversity of our agricultural community.
- Identify important farmland.
- Inform local planning and zoning.
- Assist with the local development review process.
- Strategize farmland protection efforts.

Criteria for the identification of important areas for farmland protection:

- **Important Soils:** Soils are among the most basic and important assets of farmed land. Good soils are an important and limited resource.
- **Farmland clusters**: Concentrating farms in one area can increase efficiency and productivity, preserve farmland, and reduce conflicts with neighboring urban/suburban development, while also increasing access to compatible and affordable lands for farmers. Rural roadways are also less dangerous and burdensome to farmers.
- **Natural features**: Wetlands, floodplains, drinking watersheds, and scenic open space are valued components of agricultural lands: both for the benefits these resources bring to farms and the benefits that farms can have in protecting these resources.
- **Proximity to Urban Areas and Infrastructure:** Development has led to the loss of almost half of Onondaga County's farmland, making it crucial to protect remaining agricultural lands. Residential encroachment can cause conflicts.

Map AG.3 | Overview of Important Farmland



Source: Onondaga County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan 2022.
Note: Data is to be used as planning-level data only, and is subject to refinement and/or corrections.

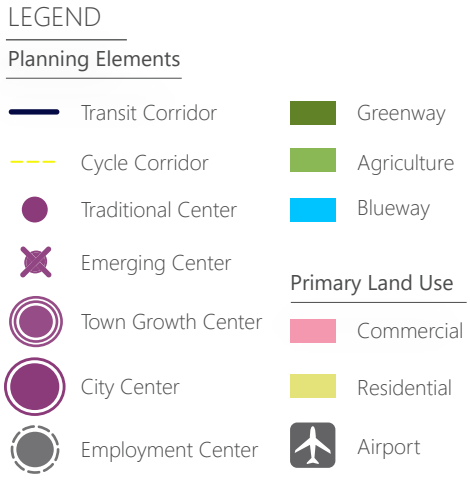
Map AG.4 | Future Land Use Map

Planning for Agriculture

Agriculture Areas where farming is the primary land use.

Agriculture in Onondaga County is a critical primary land use and economic driver. The legacy of local farming has created landscapes that define our sense of place and attract people to the County. Among these working fields and pastures are streams, wetlands, and wooded areas that provide important habitat both locally and globally. Agricultural areas occur in nearly all towns outside the City of Syracuse, and more recently some urban agriculture has been re-established within the City.

The biggest threats to agriculture as a land use are unplanned, wasteful development, competition for land, and conflicting land uses. Agricultural areas are vulnerable to development pressure and therefore these areas are a priority for land protection.



The areas identified as agriculture on **Map AG.4** include a mix of land uses, like private residences, but the predominant and primary land use in these areas is working farmland. The preservation of agricultural lands is essential to community well-being and quality of life.

The majority of working farmland is located outside of the County Sanitary District, which limits the expansion of certain urban infrastructure, and thus reduces development pressure. Continuing to protect these working lands from competing land uses is important for supporting the viability of farmland in the County. Conservation subdivisions, described in the Greenway and Blueway theme on page 163, can be a useful and possibly critical tool for local governments to employ to protect prime soils and viable farmland.

Planning for agriculture can continue to strengthen the connections between agricultural lands and County residents and visitors. Farm stands, pick-your-own operations, and other agritourism destinations connect participants in the food system and, in doing so, facilitate a sense of place and provide economic and social benefits to the community.

Agriculture

Goals and Strategies

Agriculture is a critical component of the economy, landscape, and food system of Onondaga County. There are multiple factors that can contribute to the future growth and sustainability of agriculture in the County. These goals are intended to further the purpose for planning for agriculture as a primary land use to continue to provide food, support the local economy, prevent unplanned development, and protect natural resources.

Goal 1

Provide Food and Support Local Agriculture

The popular Onondaga Grown and OnFarmFest initiatives of the Onondaga County Agricultural Council, along with farmers' markets, farm-to-table restaurants, and agritourism, demonstrate growing public awareness of the importance of local agriculture in Onondaga County. These initiatives should continue and be built upon to promote equitable access to healthy, locally-grown produce, enhance community health outcomes and food system resiliency, and decrease land use conflicts. Supporting agriculture will also provide opportunities for residents to participate in agriculture-related experiences that enhance their quality of life.

Strategy 1 » Continue to support the work of the Onondaga County Agricultural Council and other "Buy Local" programming.

Strategy 2 » Promote and evaluate opportunities for local farmers' markets and other ways to deliver fresh local farm products to residents especially in urban and suburban areas.

Strategy 3 » Support and encourage local farmers' markets in Onondaga County communities.

Goal 2

Grow the Agricultural Economy

Agriculture contributes significantly to Onondaga County's economy but farms face several challenges like the increasing average age and decreasing number of overall farm operators. Promoting strategic economic development for agriculture in Onondaga County can leverage necessary resources to grow the competitiveness of the County's agricultural industry.

- **Strategy 1** » Foster agricultural economic development opportunities such as agritourism and food processing ventures.
- **Strategy 2** » Create an Agritourism Economic Development Plan.
- **Strategy 3** » Support new farmers and the next generation of farmers.
- **Strategy 4** » Continue to support implementation of new technologies that benefit agriculture, such as Onondaga County's $15 million broadband program.

Goal 3

Protect Farmland and Rural Landscapes

Onondaga County has a rich array of agricultural soils, with nearly 70% qualifying as statewide or federally important. These soils keep farms in production and provide the scenic views that characterize Onondaga County. Onondaga County lost a significant portion of these rich agricultural lands over the past century due in large part to suburban development on former agricultural fields. Onondaga County and local government can increase support for the implementation of land use strategies to protect farmland.

Unplanned conversion of farmland to other land uses, like residential, commercial, and energy production threatens agricultural communities. Thoughtful community based planning processes can further establish and create innovative land use policies and encourage protection of farmland.

Agriculture

Goals and Strategies (continued)

For instance, planning that enables the purchase of development rights or uses conservation subdivision design practices enables infill development in existing rural centers and allows for growth and provision of housing without threatening or wasting critical agricultural resources.

Strategy 1 » Continue to support agricultural conservation easement programs by finding ways to increase capacity at local land trusts, and implementing the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan.

Strategy 2 » Work with local communities to facilitate planning and policies that prevent the fragmentation and marginalization of farmland.

Strategy 3 » Create and promote decision-making aids like farm friendly land use information and the Onondaga County Ag Mapper when making land use decisions.

Strategy 4 » Utilize the Onondaga County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board and Agricultural Council programs to support County and local efforts to promote local farms, furthering agricultural economic development efforts, and staying connected to farms, and the public.

Strategy 5 » Evaluate local land use policies against this and other plans when considering investments in new infrastructure and incentives to private development to prevent the conversion of farmland.

Strategy 6 » Promote the adoption of agricultural conservation subdivision regulations in agricultural areas and promote infill development in villages and hamlets where infrastructure is in place.

Strategy 7 » Develop and promote policies to facilitate the balancing of the need to protect viable farmland with the interest to develop renewable energy projects.

Strategy 8 » Develop and promote land use best practices that support agriculture and maintain it as a primary land use in Onondaga County.

Goal 4

Protect Natural Resources and Scenic Views

Onondaga County has plentiful water and productive soils. These are the result of thousands of years of glaciation and geological and ecological processes that have resulted in primary natural resources that are irreplaceable, and critical to survival and to our quality of life. Our lakes and streams are some of our most cherished natural assets and the health of our watersheds influences the health of our waterbodies.

Agriculture and the stewardship of farmers has and continues to play a critical role in maintaining and enhancing our watersheds, and influencing the water quality of our waterbodies. Agricultural lands include important wetland and terrestrial habitats that not only provide habitat for wildlife, but benefit agriculture by providing pollinators and natural insect predators. Because of these and other factors, good stewardship of agriculture is inseparable from environmental conservation of natural resources in Onondaga County.

Strategy 1 » Continue to support agencies like the Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District in assisting farms to implement Best Management Practices that benefit both the farm and the natural environment through outreach and education.

Strategy 2 » Utilize and promote incentive programs for farmers to protect buffers along waterways, wetlands, and other sensitive areas.

Strategy 3 » Recognize and plan for protection of scenic views of and within rural areas.

Endnotes

1 USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2017. "*Census of Agriculture.*" Complete data available at: www.agcensus.usda.gov/ (Accessed April 2023).

2 Peters, C.J., B.L. Nelson, A.J. Lembo, J.L. Wilkins, and G.W. Fick. 2008. Mapping potential foodsheds in New York State: A spatial model for evaluating the capacity to localize food production. *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems: 24(1); 72–84.* doi:10.1017/S1742170508002457

3 Potteiger, M. & E. Weissman. 2021. *Food Plan CNY.* Available at: https://agriculture.ongov.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Food-Plan-CNY.pdf (Accessed April 2023).

4 Soil Science Society of America. 2013. *How long does soil take to form?* Available at https://soilsmatter.wordpress.com/2013/08/29/soil-formation/ (Accessed April 12, 2023).

5 Potteiger, M. & E. Weissman. 2021. *Food Plan CNY.* Available at: https://agriculture.ongov.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Food-Plan-CNY.pdf (Accessed April 2023)

6 Union of Concerned Scientists. April 14, 2021. Reports and Multimedia Feature: Bigger Farms, Bigger Problems. Available at https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/bigger-farms-bigger-problems#:~:text=Over%20the%2040-year%20period%20of%20our%20study%2C%20overall,an%20area%20larger%20than%20the%20state%20of%20California (Accessed April 2023).

7 USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2017. 2017 Census of Agriculture Highlights: Farm Producers. Available at https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Highlights/2019/2017Census_Farm_Producers.pdf (Accessed April 2023).

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). 2017. *Census of Agriculture.* Complete data available at: www.agcensus.usda.gov/ (Accessed April 2023).

11 NYSERDA Solar Electric Programs. 2023. *New York Solar Map: Onondaga County.* Available athttps://nysolarmap.com/

Jamesville Balloon Fest
Source: Visit Syracuse

Vision

Salt City Market in Syracuse

Intersecting Themes in Support of a County Vision

Plan Onondaga presents a picture of the future in Onondaga County expressed through the Future Land Use Vision. The Future Land Use Vision illustrates the themes of Strong Centers, Housing and Neighborhoods, Community Mobility, Greenways and Blueways, and Agriculture (**Map V.1** on page 222 depicts where each of the themes occur within the County.)

The Plan On Vision illustration on pages 226-227 provides a three dimensional picture of a hypothetical location within the County and how the thematic areas could be implemented within the County's communities. Each thematic area is further illustrated and described in the pages that follow, depicting how each theme supports and is supported by the others.

Ultimately, the Future Land Use Vision can start to be achieved through the implementation of the goals and recommendations identified within each of the plan's themes. Beyond proper County and municipal planning, successful implementation will require strategic investments in capital projects and programs and collaboration with local, regional, and state agencies, as well as working with the private sector to identify solutions to barriers for achieving the vision.

Future Land Use Vision

Unlike the towns, villages, and city within it, Onondaga County does not have direct land use authority. In order to achieve its land use vision, the County will focus on what it can do through its other roles as a leader, investor, and convener.

The Future Land Use Vision expresses the big picture for how Onondaga County envisions growth and development over the next several years. It is both visionary and strategic, and will be used to influence decisions about projects, funding, collaborative partnerships, and planning initiatives.

Unlike the towns, villages, and city within it, Onondaga County does not have direct land use authority. In order to achieve its land use vision, the County will focus on what it can do through its other roles as a leader, investor, and convener.

One of Onondaga County's greatest strengths is the diversity of its natural and built environment. The County contains the City of Syracuse - New York's fifth largest city, the eastern portion of the Finger Lakes Region, the New York State Barge Canal System, suburbs which surround the central city, many historic villages and hamlets, abundant forest land, excellent drinking water, and ample agricultural land with prime soils. The Future Land Use Vision seeks to balance the preservation of these distinct parts of the County with population and economic growth.

Map V.1 on page 222 reflects the County's intention to encourage the concentration of new growth and development in areas that are served by existing infrastructure. It is envisioned that this will happen through the development or enhancement of a variety of types of "centers." With respect to housing and neighborhoods, the County seeks to influence an increasing diversity of housing options within walkable neighborhood districts. In the rural areas, the future land use plan reflects the desire to preserve agricultural land and open space and to balance that preservation with other rural land uses such as residential. One of the most effective strategies for accomplishing this is by encouraging development in areas where infrastructure and services already exist.

Achieving this land use vision depends on supporting local municipalities and making sure they have the resources and awareness to make sound land use decisions. The County will support, incentivize, and inspire the implementation of this land use vision.

The Future Land Use Vision is a planning rather than a regulatory document. It translates the policies outlined in the thematic sections of this plan into an illustrative vision to guide future decision-making about capital improvements, maintenance, infrastructure planning, and zoning and subdivision ordinances, which provide the regulatory mechanisms for plan implementation. The

vision is not to the exclusion of other plans or policies, but rather represents the goals which the County and its partners are proactively working toward.

The Future Land Use Vision was prepared based on input from the community as well as analysis of existing infrastructure and other community data. It depicts what Onondaga County envisions as the best opportunities to guide long-term land use decisions, understanding that it may take time well beyond the life of this plan for conditions as represented on the future land use map to occur. Onondaga County will need to continually reevaluate the Future Land Use Vision to ensure it accurately reflects desired conditions.

A Future Land Use Vision is....

- A graphic illustration of Onondaga County's land use vision
- A general expectation for the types of land uses and appropriate locations within the County
- A guide for development or redevelopment locations for residential, civic, commercial, open space, and other uses
- A decision-making tool

... And is not

- A regulatory document
- A parcel-by-parcel analysis of land uses
- A set of rules or provisions that communities must follow

Map V.1 | Future Land Use Vision

LEGEND

Strong Centers

Traditional Center	Core areas within existing villages, hamlets, and urban neighborhoods.
Emerging Center	Targeted intersections and the areas surrounding them that have been identified for investment in mixed-use development, mobility hubs, and transit improvements.
Town Growth Center	Larger areas targeted for strategic mixed-use growth. These areas will incorporate transit-oriented development, integrated greenways, and mixed-use development in important intersections and corridors. They are intended to serve surrounding neighborhood areas.
City Center	The largest and most central urban area in the region, the City of Syracuse is the only city center in Onondaga County.
Employment Center	Dense commercial centers with concentrated commercial or industrial activities and large numbers of jobs.
Commercial	Areas where business is the primary intended land use.

Housing and Neighborhoods

Residential	Areas where housing is the primary intended land use.

Community Mobility

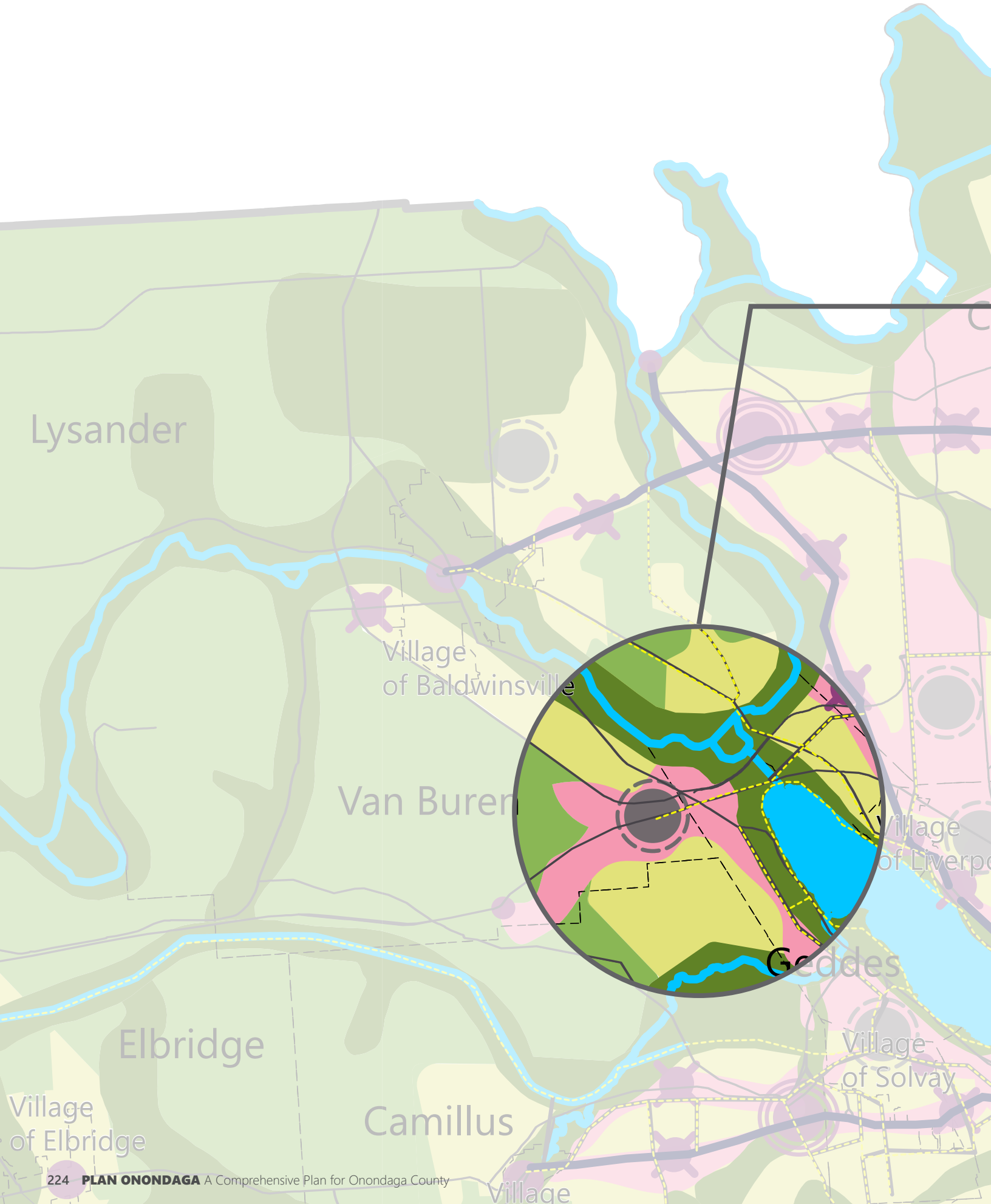
Road	Major roads in Onondaga County.
Bicycle Corridor	Corridors targeted for bicycle infrastructure.
Mobility Corridor	Corridors targeted for enhanced bus service, improved traffic patterns, integration of multiple modes of transportation, alternative transportation and, adjacent transit-oriented development.

Greenways and Blueways

Greenway	Open space corridors containing sensitive ecological systems.
Blueway	Navigable lakes and streams which provide multiple benefits including ecological services and economic development opportunities.

Agriculture

Agriculture	Areas where farming is the primary intended land use.


Lysander
Village
of Baldwinsville
Van Buren
Elbridge
Village
of Elbridge
Camillus
Village
of Solvay

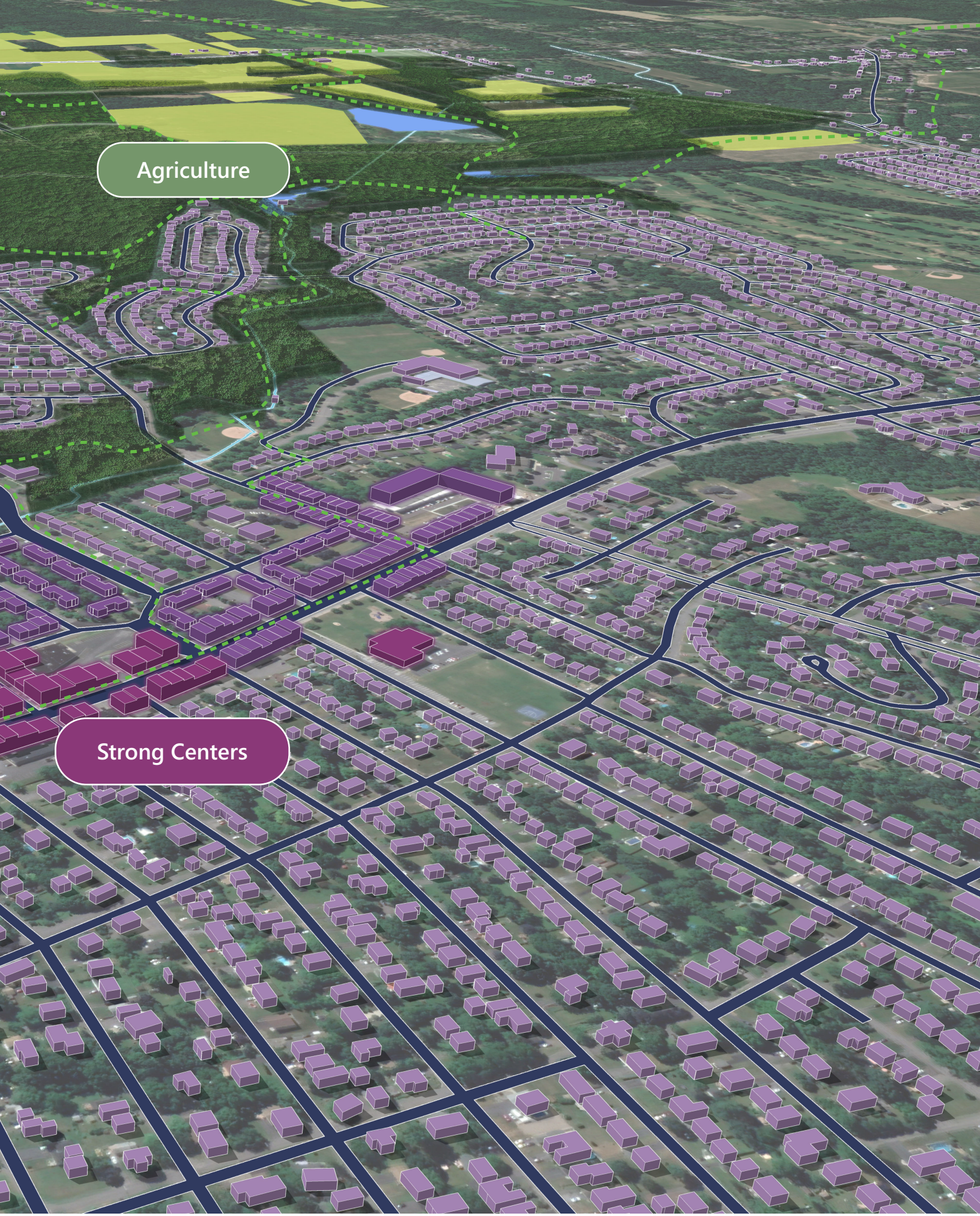
Applying the Future Land Use Vision

This section shows how the future land use vision will be implemented on a more granular scale.

In order to explore the application of the Future Land Use Vision, a hypothetical illustration was developed to depict how the five thematic areas intersect and support one another. The illustration, which appears in full on the following two pages, illustrates the intersection of the five themes: Strong Centers, Housing and Neighborhoods, Community Mobility, Greenways and Blueways, and Agriculture. Each theme is further described in relation to the Plan On Vision illustration on page 226-227. As part of each thematic illustration, there is a description of how each of the remaining four themes supports and is supported by that theme.

The illustrations and descriptions are meant to assist the County and local municipalities in the implementation of the Future Land Use Vision. These are followed by a recap of the goals and recommendations for each theme.

Plan On Vision


Agriculture
Strong Centers

Strong Centers

Plan Onondaga advocates for the development of many different types of centers. The center shown in the Plan On Vision is an Emerging Center in which a major transit corridor and targeted intersections have been identified for mixed-use development, mobility hubs, and transit stops. In this example, mixed-use buildings are located along the main transit corridor, and they also extend to other intersections and streets. Development is at a slightly larger scale in the middle of the intersections. A mobility hub, located at a major intersection on the main traffic corridor, allows commuters to easily arrive to and depart from the center. This center is rich with shops, restaurants, offices, dwellings, entertainment venues, and gathering spaces. Greenway corridors extend into the center, and parks, schools, and other institutions support the lives of nearby residents. Community character is strongest in centers and is expressed through the layout, the natural environment, the design details and materials of the built environment, and the businesses, events, and people who gather here.

Greenways and Blueways

Greenways are integrated into strong centers, even though they may not look the same here as they do in rural or suburban areas. In centers, greenway systems can look like urban linear parkways or bike lanes which are clearly marked with signage and connected with maps, kiosks, or branding elements. The systems within centers connect to the broader greenway system, allowing users to go to and from centers via greenway trails.

Community Mobility

In the Plan On Vision, a mobility hub, a place where multiple forms of mobility converge, is located in the middle of the center. Mobility elements including bus routes, bike lanes, and sidewalks make traveling to and from the center simple and convenient.

Housing and Neighborhoods

Housing is most commonly integrated into strong centers in the top floors of mixed-use buildings. Residential development is an important component for supporting the businesses, shops, and restaurants below, and in creating vibrancy on the street. A ring of townhomes, followed by single-family homes radiates from the center. The people living in these homes can easily access and benefit from the amenities, businesses, and services in the center.

Agriculture

In rural hamlets and villages, agriculture and outdoor recreation plays an important role in defining the character of the center because they are the environmental and economic backdrop. In other types of centers, agriculture may be present in the form of farmers' markets, grocery stores selling local produce, or restaurants that source ingredients locally.

Strong Centers

Goals and Strategies

Strong Centers are an important component of maintaining the competitiveness of Onondaga County. There are multiple factors that can contribute to the future growth and development of the County's centers.

Goal 1

Support and Enhance Existing and New Centers of All Scales

Strategy 1 » Work in partnership with local municipalities to direct priority capital and programmatic investments toward the development and reinforcement of Centers throughout Onondaga County.

Strategy 2 » Provide coordination and direct planning services to effectively plan for mobility infrastructure, within and connecting to Centers, including sidewalks, bicycle lanes and paths, and transit.

Strategy 3 » Establish incentives to support infill and new housing development in and around existing and planned centers, particularly those with workforce and affordable housing options, or that meet a unique market demand like senior housing.

Strategy 4 » Invest in the public elements that add to quality of place within our centers, such as parks, gathering spaces, public art, and programming to energize public spaces.

Goal 2

Provide Tools, Resources, and Partnerships for the Development of Strategic New Centers

Strategy 1 » Provide appropriate support to the Onondaga County Department of Planning, the Central New York Regional Planning & Development Board, and Onondaga County Planning Federation to provide planning and technical assistance to local communities and related organizations.

Strategy 1 (continued) Activities such as comprehensive planning, sub-area master planning, thematic planning efforts, training of local planners and board members, facilitation of communication with local and regional agencies, toolkits and best practices can enhance local planning capacities.

Strategy 2 » Continue to identify and refine locations for investing in Centers and work with local municipalities to develop local visions for the growth and enhancement of local Centers.

Strategy 3 » Continue to provide financial resources to local municipalities to aid in the development and/or updating of local comprehensive plans, ordinances, and zoning codes.

Goal 3

Incorporate Multi-Modal Options as a Central Element of Centers

Strategy 1 » Develop a multi-modal connectivity plan to identify roadways for the inclusion of multi-modal facilities including transit, microtransit, cycling, and pedestrian mobility (See Community Mobility theme).

Strategy 2 » Develop enhanced transit infrastructure that is supported by transit-oriented design, where TOD projects may be provided incentives to encourage locations adjacent to transit and multi-modal investments.

Goal 4

Invest in Public Places and Spaces Within Existing and New Centers

Strategy 1 » Invest in the public elements that add to quality of place within our centers, such as parks, gathering spaces, public art, and programming to energize public spaces.

Strategy 2 » Identify best practices and provide models for the development of local design guidelines to encourage the incorporation of public space and quality urban design within new developments.

Housing and Neighborhoods

The Housing and Neighborhoods theme in Plan Onondaga recognizes that housing choice is essential to the competitiveness and desirability of Onondaga County. A gradient of housing choice can be planned for in neighborhoods which have strong centers at their core. As seen in the Plan On Vision below, a density gradient moves from its highest in the upper floors of buildings in the mixed-use center to its lowest in traditional single-family neighborhoods in suburban areas, with medium-density townhomes in between them. Housing choice also means that a range of styles, ownership and rental options, and affordability are available.

Regardless of density, neighborhoods are more than just a collection of homes. Transportation modes, community character, access to services, nature, and other quality of life amenities all support desirable neighborhoods and, as shown below, should be integrated within them.

Strong Centers

Whether they are urban, suburban, or rural, residential neighborhoods need strong centers. Centers provide access to amenities, services, goods, food, culture, and community. As the most likely location for jobs and shops, they are important economic drivers, and their unique layout and design features often contribute to the character of the surrounding residential neighborhoods. Housing and strong centers are mutually beneficial, and they should be located in close proximity and with easy access to each other.

Greenways and Blueways

When greenways and blueways are integrated into residential neighborhoods, quality of life and connectivity are enhanced. The Plan On Vision shows that greenways can be positioned within and between residential neighborhoods. They can also extend far beyond a neighborhood, providing off-road opportunities to be in nature for longer distances, or to commute to destinations that are farther away. The systems have to link into commercial and residential neighborhoods so that they can be accessed easily.

Community Mobility

Planning for changes and expansions of residential neighborhoods must be synchronized with mobility systems so that the people who live in the neighborhoods have multiple mobility options, including an efficient roadway system, on-time regular bus service, a safe and connected bike route system, and quality pedestrian routes.

Housing and Neighborhoods

Goals and Strategies

Quality housing and good neighborhoods are key components of maintaining quality of life in Onondaga County. Maintaining and improving the County's housing stock while investing in neighborhood amenities and assets will help strengthen the County's competitiveness.

Goal 1

Expand Housing Choice

Strategy 1 » With County partners such as the Onondaga County Planning Federation provide training, toolkits, and programs that can help local municipalities bridge gaps in knowledge or expertise to implement changes to the local regulatory and development review framework to allow for an expansion of the types of housing that are permitted.

Strategy 2 » Provide best practices and toolkits for integrating accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in local codes. ADUs may serve as a much more convenient and affordable alternate for individuals trying to locate housing.

Strategy 3 » Provide recommendations for reviewing and reducing local parking requirement minimums to prioritize housing individuals over cars.

Goal 2

Develop Targeted Market-Driven Programs to Support Neighborhood Health

Strategy 1 » Conduct a Housing Needs Assessment

Strategy 2 » Support the efforts of the Land Bank and developers to remove and demolish dilapidated buildings that are unmarketable.

Strategy 3 » Build housing market confidence in soft and middle market neighborhoods by using available funding and programs to assist homeowners to make investments in their homes.

Strategy 4 » Strengthen connections between soft and middle market neighborhoods and job centers.

Strategy 5 » Work to address poverty, raise household incomes, increase access to living wage jobs, and education in soft and middle market neighborhoods.

Strategy 6 » Support interventions in middle and stable market neighborhoods to avoid decline and to ensure the long-term strength and appeal of housing in these neighborhoods

Goal 3

Support and Enhance the County's Housing and Neighborhoods

Strategy 1 » Plan for, codify and demand the amenities and quality of life infrastructure to create great neighborhoods. Empower local government to demand and require these components of a neighborhood as part of the development process.

Strategy 2 » Continue existing and develop new Community Development programs that support the maintenance of the County's aging housing stock (e.g., energy efficiency, renewable energy technologies, and conveniences).

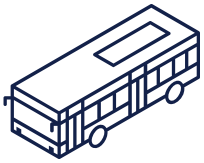
Strategy 3 » Invest in parks, trails, and open space resources that enhance quality of life, strengthen property values and offer opportunities to connect housing and neighborhood areas with the County's greenway and blueway systems.

Strategy 4 » Identify neighborhoods that would benefit from neighborhood retrofits, where the County can assist the local government and homeowners in a selected area to incorporate missing "complete neighborhood" features like sidewalks, trail connections, street lights, traffic calming features and street trees to increase the attractiveness and value in the neighborhood.

Strategy 5 » In areas near schools, help local communities plan for and utilize Safe Routes to School funding to install neighborhood features that assist students walking or biking to school, and also improve the neighborhood overall for everyone else.

Strategy 6 » Continue to support and utilize Main Street and housing programs administered by the County Community Development department.

Strategy 7 » Work with OCIDA to tie incentives with neighborhood improvements where necessary.



Community Mobility

Community mobility reflects the entire range of transportation choices available to people to travel around Onondaga County. Having a variety of mobility options allows people who don't have cars to get to work and other places, accommodates people who can't or choose not to drive, allows for types of development that are not reliant on driving, is more environmentally friendly, and can save families money. Techniques like dedicated bike and bus lanes, mobility hubs, bus rapid transit, data-driven route planning, transit-oriented development, and consistent communication systems can be of use when implementing multiple mobility systems in a single place. The Plan On Vision below includes a mobility hub, where multiple modes of transportation come together in the middle of an emerging center.

Greenways and Blueways

Sometimes community mobility takes the form of a greenway corridor. When greenway corridors take the form of linear trails, they can be used as bicycle or pedestrian commuting routes that connect points of interest, housing centers, or workplaces.

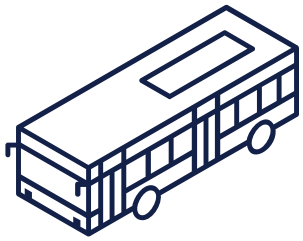
Strong Centers

One of the most important things that community mobility needs to do is make sure that people from all parts of the County can get to work or school. If workplaces are consolidated in strong centers, or if mixed-use strong centers are developed around locations with high concentrations of jobs, it becomes easier for mobility systems to quickly and efficiently bring people to the centers. Bus Rapid Transit routes would prioritize bringing people to job centers along routes which include the highest concentration of residences.

Housing and Neighborhoods

As mentioned above, many people in Onondaga County need or would like to be able to get from their homes to work by selecting from multiple modes of community mobility. People also need to be able to get from their homes to shopping, appointments, school, services, and/or recreation areas.

Community Mobility



Goals and Strategies

Community Mobility is an important component of maintaining the quality of life and economic competitiveness of Onondaga County. There are multiple factors that can contribute to the modernization and development of the County's mobility system.

Goal 1

Become a Vision Zero Community

- **Strategy 1** » Adopt the Vision Zero framework to guide investments in the transportation system.
- **Strategy 2** » Implement Complete Street projects on County and local roads to expand mobility options and improve safety for all road users.

Goal 2

Invest in Transit Corridors

- **Strategy 1** » Implement a countywide bus rapid transit system.
- **Strategy 2** » Enhance transit with new technologies.
- **Strategy 3** » Explore fareless transit options.
- **Strategy 4** » Coordinate with local municipalities to plan corridors to support TOD and provide model zoning for updating zoning along transit routes.
- **Strategy 5** » Expand micromobility options along transit corridors to connect transit service with adjacent neighborhood areas.

Goal 3

Implement an Expanded and Connected Network of Bike Lanes, Trails, and Multi-Modal Corridors

Strategy 1 » Complete the Loop the Lake and Onondaga Creekwalk trail systems.

Strategy 2 » Invest in pedestrian priority zones and develop an interconnected sidewalk network throughout the County.

Strategy 3 » Invest in an expanded and interconnected system of bicycle corridors with dedicated bicycle infrastructure.

Strategy 4 » Invest in additional connectivity to the Empire State Trail.

Goal 4

Prepare for Our Transportation Future

Strategy 1 » Invest in electric vehicle charging infrastructure at County-owned facilities and public venues.

Strategy 2 » Provide support to local jurisdictions to develop and implement local regulations for guiding investments in electric vehicle charging infrastructure on private property including in residential and commercial locations.

Strategy 3 » Provide support to local jurisdictions in preparing for autonomous vehicle infrastructure and corresponding land use needs.

Greenways and Blueways

Greenways and blueways are the network of protected natural systems in Onondaga County. These include ecologically and scenically important land and water resources. The longstanding work of developing a greenway system involves identifying existing natural assets and working to connect and protect them. While recreational greenways such as trails are of particular interest for access to nature, it is important to note that greenways aren't just trails. They also include forests, wetlands, unique geological features such as escarpments, and other special ecological settings that support life in the County. Agricultural lands are also a type of greenway system component because they contribute to the scenic character of the County. Blueways are similar, but for lakes and navigable waterways. As the Plan On Vision below illustrates, greenways are most successful when they are contiguous, and when they are integrated with neighborhoods, farmland, and centers.

Strong Centers

Creating links between strong centers and greenways and blueways is important because people in strong centers need to be able to easily access greenway systems for recreation, health, and access to nature. Individual urban or village parks within strong centers can be considered part of the greenway system. Larger regional trail systems which extend into the center are also important parts of the greenway system. Trail wayfinding signage, mapping, information stations, and branding can help call attention to the trail and greenway systems when they are in strong centers. It is important for people in centers to understand that trails are available to them, and to know where they go and what they connect to.

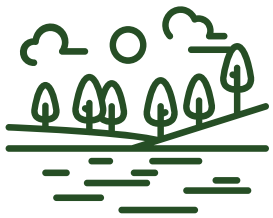
Housing and Neighborhoods

Quality of life in residential neighborhoods is enhanced when greenway systems are integrated and connected into neighborhoods. This can also happen with blueways, as in the case of canal-side or waterfront development. Communities with water systems should look for ways to protect, invest, and revitalize their waterfront resources to support adjacent housing and neighborhood areas.

Agriculture

Agricultural lands are sometimes included in the greenway system. With the growth potential and local interest in agritourism, there will be increasing opportunity in the future to use recreational greenway systems to connect residential neighborhoods and strong centers to agritourism destinations, so that people can travel through the countryside to farm restaurants, entertainment venues, and shopping.

Greenways and Blueways



Goals and Strategies

Greenways and blueways are important contributors to the quality of life in Onondaga County. There are many opportunities to contribute to the protection and enhancement of the County's plentiful natural resources, parks, and trail systems.

Goal 1

Formalize Greenway and Blueway System Planning

- **Strategy 1** » Develop a Greenway and Blueway Plan that identifies specific targets for preservation and active recreation.
- **Strategy 2** » Conduct a Natural Resources Inventory to identify critical and vulnerable assets, and a means to communicate information to community partners and the development community.
- **Strategy 3** » Develop a policy and planning toolbox to share with municipal partners, to conserve greenway environments, promote open space protection, and foster implementation of compatible zoning and development regulations and guidance.
- **Strategy 4** » Facilitate ad hoc coordination of greenway and blueway related activities.

Goal 2

Continue to Invest in the Development of a Countywide Multi-Use Trail Network

- **Strategy 1** » Construct the remaining portions of the Loop the Lake and Onondaga Creekwalk trails.
- **Strategy 2** » Develop a Countywide multi-use trail and active transportation network plan building off of the LEOP.
- **Strategy 3** » Develop and implement a wayfinding system for existing and newly constructed trails, including connections to and from community destinations.
- **Strategy 4** » Expand microtransit options and other safety and comfort features on trails.

Goal 3

Invest in the Development of a Countywide Blueway System

Strategy 1 » Create a countywide Blueway Plan, working with NYS DOS Coastal Resources in order to plan for the development of blueway amenities and resources such as fishing access, swimming, boating, wildlife viewing areas, and other shoreline features such as restaurant and entertainment facilities and trail connections.

Strategy 2 » Plan for and invest in landside trail connectivity between blueways, local communities, and shoreline destinations.

Goal 4

Preserve Ecological Assets Within Greenways and Blueways

Strategy 1 » Identify and map sensitive areas within the County where future development should be limited.

Strategy 2 » Identify and conserve important natural corridors to limit habitat fragmentation.

Strategy 3 » Develop model planning and zoning tools such as buffering, conservation subdivisions, and open space zoning to protect open space systems.

Strategy 4 » Provide support for land trust efforts to protect local habitats, open spaces, and shorelines.

Strategy 5 » Utilize land acquisition and develop easements to protect critical environmental resources.

Agriculture

Agriculture is an important part of Onondaga County's heritage and agricultural lands and farm-based businesses contribute significantly to the economy, food system, and character of the County. The Plan On Vision shows an ideal picture of agriculture where farmland is contiguous in part because rural development is concentrated in hamlets. This strategy allows farmers to retain adequate space and continuity for their farm operations. The Vision also incorporates agritourism sites, which are a growing opportunity for local farms which allow the public to appreciate and enjoy the experience, scenery, products, and food associated with the local farming community. In this view, urban and suburban residential neighborhoods are connected to agricultural areas by a greenway system, which allows people an alternative way of reaching agritourism destinations.

Housing and Neighborhoods

In rural or agricultural areas, housing and neighborhoods primarily occur in hamlets, or small villages. Containing housing and other community developments in these areas allows agricultural parcels to stay intact and connected, rather than becoming segmented or diminished by development. It also provides a benefit to the residents of the hamlets, who are closer to services, amenities, and other community members. Outside of hamlets and rural villages, development practices like conservation subdivisions provide options for rural living while also retaining the integrity of farmland.

Strong Centers

Hamlets and village centers are types of strong centers which occur in agricultural parts of the County. These types of centers tend to have a character which is linked to the surrounding rural lands and operations. They house residents and have shops, restaurants, and amenities used by residents and farmers.

Greenways and Blueways

Agricultural lands are a component of greenways and blueways, and there is increasing potential to integrate trail and water trail systems into the rural landscape. Agricultural land also complements greenways and blueways with natural area buffering, as habitats and corridors for plants and animals by enhancing scenic vistas, and minimizing development in rural areas.

Agriculture

Goals and Strategies

Agriculture is a critical component of the economy, landscape, and food system of Onondaga County. There are multiple factors that can contribute to the future growth and sustainability of agriculture in the County. These goals are intended to further the purpose for planning for agriculture as a primary land use to continue to provide food, support the local economy, prevent unplanned development, and protect natural resources.

Goal 1

Provide Food and Support Local Agriculture

Strategy 1 » Continue to support the work of the Onondaga County Agricultural Council and other "Buy Local" programming.

Strategy 2 » Promote and evaluate opportunities for local farmers' markets and other ways to deliver fresh local farm products to residents especially in urban and suburban areas.

Strategy 3 » Support and encourage local farmers' markets in Onondaga County communities.

Goal 2

Grow the Agricultural Economy

Strategy 1 » Foster agricultural economic development opportunities such as agritourism and food processing ventures.

Strategy 2 » Create an Agritourism Economic Development Plan.

Strategy 3 » Support new farmers and the next generation of farmers.

Strategy 4 » Continue to support implementation of new technologies that benefit agriculture, such as Onondaga County's $15 million broadband program.

Goal 3

Protect Farmland and Rural Landscapes

Strategy 1 » Continue to support agricultural conservation easement programs by finding ways to increase capacity at local land trusts, and implementing the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan.

Strategy 2 » Work with local communities to facilitate planning and policies that prevent the fragmentation and marginalization of farmland.

Strategy 3 » Create and promote decision making aids like farm friendly land use information and the Onondaga County Ag Mapper when making land use decisions.

Strategy 4 » Utilize the Onondaga County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board and Agricultural Council programs to support County and local efforts to promote local farms, furthering agricultural economic development efforts, and staying connected to farms, and the public.

Strategy 5 » Evaluate local land use policies against this and other plans when considering investments in new infrastructure and incentives to private development to prevent the conversion of farmland.

Strategy 6 » Promote the adoption of agricultural conservation subdivision regulations in agricultural areas and promote infill development in villages and hamlets where infrastructure is in place.

Strategy 7 » Develop and promote policies to facilitate the balancing of the need to protect viable farmland with the interest to develop renewable energy projects.

Strategy 8 » Develop and promote land use best practices that support agriculture and maintain it as a primary land use in Onondaga County.

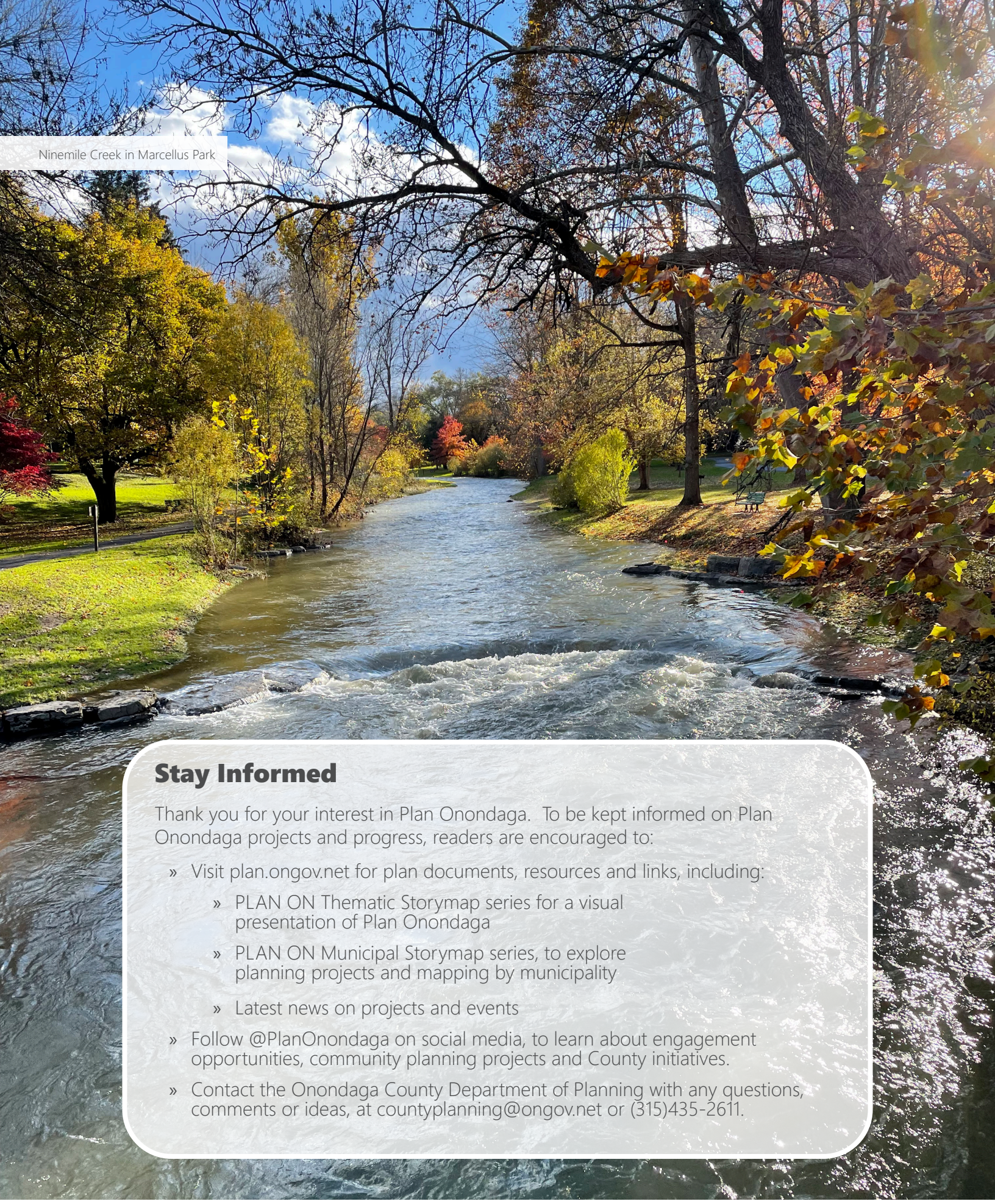
Goal 4

Protect Natural Resources and Scenic Views

Strategy 1 » Continue to support agencies like the Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District in assisting farms to implement Best Management Practices that benefit both the farm and the natural environment through outreach and education.

Strategy 2 » Utilize and promote incentive programs for farmers to protect buffers along waterways, wetlands, and other sensitive areas.

Strategy 3 » Recognize and plan for protection of scenic views of and within rural areas.



Ninemile Creek in Marcellus Park

Stay Informed

Thank you for your interest in Plan Onondaga. To be kept informed on Plan Onondaga projects and progress, readers are encouraged to:

- Visit plan.ongov.net for plan documents, resources and links, including:
  - PLAN ON Thematic Storymap series for a visual presentation of Plan Onondaga
  - PLAN ON Municipal Storymap series, to explore planning projects and mapping by municipality
  - Latest news on projects and events
- Follow @PlanOnondaga on social media, to learn about engagement opportunities, community planning projects and County initiatives.
- Contact the Onondaga County Department of Planning with any questions, comments or ideas, at countyplanning@ongov.net or (315)435-2611.

Next Steps

Plan Onondaga will lead actions and future planning. A variety of stakeholders and individuals contributed to this plan. We will continue to engage and work together to go beyond addressing problems of today and initiate goals and strategies to proactively plan and act to determine our shared future.

This plan starts with 5 themes, and defines goals and strategies, as a starting point for future planning and projects. The power of this plan is in how fully it is implemented, and where we, as a community, take it to determine the future we want.

Plan Onondaga will inform County policies, affect decisions and assist in prioritizing how resources are allocated and where to incentivize and encourage the outcomes we desire. It will also communicate to local government, residents and developers the direction and expectation for development and how it impacts our lives, as well as our investments in infrastructure, people and our communities generally.

The County cannot realize these changes on its own. We can all act in different ways to make Onondaga County an even greater place to live today and in the future. While the County plays an integral role in intermunicipal and countywide initiatives, implementation of the goals and strategies included in this plan requires action on the part of residents, businesses, the development community, local government, state, and federal government. The Micron project demonstrates the need for all of these entities to work together. It required action at all levels of government and will require continued planning and action to realize all of the potential benefits.

Decisions are made daily by hundreds of representatives throughout Onondaga County involved on local municipal boards. Each of these decisions may bring us closer to, or further away, from realizing the vision of Plan Onondaga and our community's vision for economic growth and quality of life.

Efforts designed to enhance the health of Onondaga County will undoubtedly require coordination, collaboration, and partnership. The County can and will provide space, organization, facilitation, and follow-through to bring government, business and citizens together to implement Plan Onondaga.

PLAN ONONDAGA

COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN