

## SECTION II      **Inventory and Analysis**

The Town of Wheatfield has limited areas of waterfront, which are well-established with residential uses. These areas have retained a rural character that is enhanced by their shoreline locations. With limited areas of public land, the Town desires to provide opportunities for public access to the greatest extent possible. The Town would also like to establish a multi-use trail that would become part of the regional Niagara River Greenway system, allowing a connection with the adjoining Cities of Niagara Falls and North Tonawanda. This program is aimed at improving the quality of life in the waterfront areas and taking advantage of existing assets along the Niagara River and Tonawanda Creek (Erie Canal).

### **2.1      Summary of Issues and Opportunities in the Waterfront Revitalization Area**

#### **2.1.1      Assets and Opportunities**

- The Wheatfield waterfront areas have small town, rural character, making them attractive places for residents and visitors alike. Scheduled
- River Road, in Sub-Area 1, is a designated segment of the New York Great Lakes Seaway Trail and a State-designated Scenic By-Way, validating the scenic and cultural importance of this shoreline thoroughfare.
- The LWRA areas are served by public sewers and public water supply, and there is capacity at the Niagara County wastewater treatment plant to accommodate future development.
- The Town owns 4.6 acres of land with shoreline access in Sub-Area 1 that offers potential for public access and recreation.
- Baisch Park, in Sub-Area 2, offers opportunities for passive recreation.
- The waterfront areas are situated immediately adjacent to public parks in neighboring communities that offer boat launching and access to the waterfront.
- The Niagara County Sewer District property offers an opportunity for limited waterfront access for viewing and passive recreation along the Niagara River.
- Abandoned railroad corridors in Sub-Area 1 provide opportunities for the development of multi-use trails.

### **2.1.2 Issues and Concerns**

- The waterfront is primarily residential in nature; there are limited water-dependent uses, waterfront commercial and public recreation opportunities.
- Public Access is very limited in both sub-areas of the LWRA. Although there are numerous private docks in Sub-Area 1 and a few small private docks in Sub Area 2, there are no opportunities for public fishing access or public docking facilities in either area.
- River Road, in Sub-Area 1, accommodates a significant volume of commuter traffic that has adversely impacted the use and safety of this roadway for local residents.
- Control of signage along River Road to improve visual quality.
- Baisch Park, in Sub-Area 2, requires drainage improvements and enhancement with additional public amenities to improve its use and enjoyment.
- There is shoreline protection along many riverfront residences, but some of the existing erosion protection structures are in various states of disrepair.
- Water quality issues in the Niagara River and Tonawanda Creek have resulted in fish consumption advisories.
- Properties in Sub-Area 1 are narrow; many residential lots do not conform to current Code requirements.

## **2.2 Region Setting, Historic Context and Community Characteristics**

The Town of Wheatfield was formed in 1836 from the Town of Niagara. It is situated in the southwest part of Niagara County, surrounded by the Town of Lewiston and Town of Cambria to the north, Town of Pendleton to the east, City of North Tonawanda and Niagara River to the south, and the City of Niagara Falls and Town of Niagara to the west (see [Map 2](#)). Within the western New York region, Wheatfield is situated approximately 25 miles outside the Buffalo metropolitan area. The River Road (waterfront) section of the Town became a prosperous farm area in the 1920s and included the showplace "Wheatfield Farms". During the early to mid 1900's, there were vacation cottages, beaches, an amusement park, and nightclubs found along the Niagara River. Permanent housing has replaced many of the cottages and remnants of some bygone structures are still visible along River Road today.

The Town of Wheatfield measures 28.6 square miles in size and has about 3.5 miles of shoreline, including approximately three miles of shoreline along the Niagara River in Sub-Area 1 and approximately one-half mile along the Erie Canal in Sub-Area 2.

Although both sub-areas are predominantly rural in nature, much of the shoreline has been developed with medium density residential uses. As previously noted, the Wheatfield riverfront in Sub-Area 1, has long been popular as a summer residential area, with numerous cottages and smaller, modest

homes. Over the past few decades, the area has become increasingly attractive for residential use, with many cottages (over 90 percent) transitioning to year-round residences. The Sub-Area 1 waterfront includes distinct neighborhoods, which are characterized by narrow roadways lined with small homes and mature trees. These areas include Sunset Drive, Hird Street, York Road and Willow Lane. In addition, the area includes a mix of residential and commercial uses along River Road and a large manufactured/mobile home park. Access to the Niagara River in Sub-Area 1 is gained from private docks situated on residential properties that front along the river. There are no public parks, marinas or other waterfront amenities in this area.



*Sub-Area 1: Niagara River*

*Sub-Area 2: Erie Canal (Tonawanda Creek)*

The Erie Canal portion of the waterfront (Sub-Area 2) follows properties along Lockport Avenue, which extends below Niagara Falls Blvd., essentially splitting the area into two sections. Both sections are residentially developed. The eastern side, abutting West Canal Marina Park in the Town of Pendleton, has housing along both sides of Lockport Road, whereas the western section, near the City of North Tonawanda only has housing on the upland side of Lockport Road. This area is rural in nature, with limited access to the Canal.

## **2.3 Overview of Coastal Resources Planning Efforts**

### **2.3.1 Regional Planning**

There are a number of regional plans that are available to help guide land use and other activities in the Town of Wheatfield and Niagara County, as a whole.

- *Framework for Regional Growth for Erie and Niagara Counties*

The Framework for Regional Growth for Erie and Niagara Counties, New York is the regional planning document. The Framework was finalized in October of 2006 and establishes basic policies and principles to guide the future growth and development of the region. Specifically, the Framework provides:

- A vision for how the region should grow over the next 15 years.

- Direction regarding growth and redevelopment matters for County decision makers and other regional organizations that are linked to the two counties by way of funding, membership or other relationships.
- Information on the ways local governments, private sector and non-profit actions and initiatives can reinforce the overall regional vision.
- Mechanisms to insure that the goals, concepts and recommendations of the Framework for Regional Growth are implemented in an efficient and accountable manner.

The Framework's recommendations build on the recognition that the Region's communities cannot effectively plan in isolation or independently address important issues, as almost every challenge faced by a locality has a regional dimension. The Framework is not a conventional zoning or land use plan or capital improvement program. It is designed to help County and regional leaders make better policy and investment decisions, more effectively leverage limited resources and provide more consistent direction and useful support to municipalities.

The Framework for Regional Growth establishes planning policy areas that define, in broad terms, where County policies encourage development and public investment, where development and public investment may be appropriate subject to careful evaluation and where conservation strategies generally take precedence over plans for development and public investment. The planning policy areas include Developed Areas, Developing Areas and Rural Areas. The Town of Wheatfield waterfront area falls into the Developed Areas category because it is situated between the Cities of Niagara Falls and North Tonawanda, and includes suburban development that is served by public sewer, water and transportation infrastructure. The policies and strategies for the Developed Areas include:

- sparking investment, attracting new households and businesses,
- supporting the conservation and stabilization of existing neighborhoods,
- supporting new compact, pedestrian oriented, mixed-use development on vacant and underutilized sites, and
- improving livability and economic vitality.

■ *Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan*

The Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan (NCCP) is a county-wide planning document that emphasizes a multi-municipal approach for planning and decision making. The NCCP provides a framework for achieving five high priority goals:

- Encouraging desirable and appropriate growth and development,
- Strengthening the local economy,
- Improving the delivery of services,
- Prioritizing and coordinating capital improvements, and
- Improving the quality of life for County residents.

The Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan is intended to unify existing county wide planning efforts, while recognizing the important planning initiatives undertaken at other levels of government, as well as the efforts of community organizations and agencies. The Plan is a guiding document for assisting future decision making by providing direction for ongoing and future planning efforts. The Plan also recommends various strategies and potential projects, and will be helpful for securing funds necessary to undertake these initiatives.

#### Niagara River Greenway Plan

The Niagara River Greenway Plan is a guidance document for creating connections between the various constituents, organizations and municipalities that comprise the Niagara River Greenway. It is an initiative with broad-based support aimed at fostering consensus. Under the umbrella of the Niagara River Greenway, these entities can advance local and regional agendas for community livability, environmental sustainability, tourism and economic revitalization.

The Niagara River Greenway Plan (NRGP) establishes a unified vision and a set of principles for the Niagara River Greenway. It identifies assets and resources that make up the Greenway. It sets priorities that suggest the types of activities to target in the near-term. It identifies potential funding sources, partnerships and linkages, and, in conjunction with the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), addresses key transportation issues that affect the Greenway. The Plan also discusses several high priority Implementation Concepts, which describe system-wide approaches and strategies for Greenway development.

The principles and goals for the NRGP represent the general values for guiding greenway planning toward achievement of the vision. These principles and goals are centered on promoting high-quality, ecologically sensitive and sustainable activities and development.

The central theme is aimed at improving access to the Niagara River, making connections between communities and filling gaps in the trail system, protecting and restoring environmental systems, celebrating the history and heritage of the region, sparking revitalization and renewal, promoting long term sustainability and extending the Frederick Law Olmsted legacy for future generations.

A fundamental goal of the Niagara River Greenway Plan is riverfront preservation and restoration to fulfill the vision for Lake Ontario to Lake Erie access along the shoreline. Recognizing that much of the waterfront is held in private ownership, increasing public access and awareness through trails, conservation easements and other means is important. The recommendations in the Niagara River Greenway Plan identify two projects for the Town of Wheatfield waterfront. These include the development of a proposed multi-use pathway extending along the length of the waterfront connecting the Town with the adjoining communities of Niagara Falls and North Tonawanda, and the development of a waterfront park on a five-acre shoreline parcel owned by the Town.

- *2008 Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan for Erie and Niagara Counties*

The 2008 Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan sets forth the vision for making bicycling and walking an integral part of daily life in the Buffalo and Erie/Niagara region. This plan recommends projects, programs and policies for the next ten years to encourage use of these practical, non-polluting and affordable modes of transportation. The plan looks at streets for cycling and walking, parking, transit connections, education and marketing (health promotion), law enforcement and implementation. The plan contains goals and objectives, with over 100 suggested actions that detail how to implement the objectives in realistic, meaningful and cost effective ways.

The express purpose of the Master Plan is to provide coordinated guidance for the implementation of a safe, efficient and accessible transportation system designed for walking and bicycling. By reassessing previous goals and objectives, the intent is to adjust and reaffirm a regional vision regarding bicycling and pedestrian activities, including the establishment of interconnected bicycle and pedestrian networks for transportation. Such networks provide for focused treatments and sometimes separate facilities to promote walking and bicycling, and add a critical multi-modal element to a transportation system often geared toward motor vehicle travel. It furthermore reflects current federal goals to increase the amount of local bicycling and walking, and to increase safety by reducing the number of accidents. The Master Plan serves as a framework for facility investments and assists in promoting mobility options, healthier lifestyles, reducing air pollutants, and decreasing traffic congestion.

The goals of the 2008 Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan align with the Town's goal to construct a multi-use pathway along the abandoned railway corridor, situated north of River Road. The plan outlines objectives that support the Town's vision for the waterfront pathway, including the adaptation of existing roadways to allow for safe and convenient bicycle travel, the incorporation of innovative designs to expand and enhance the regional bikeway network, making intersections bicycle and pedestrian friendly, and identifying and eliminating hazards to pedestrian and bicycle movement.

- *2035 Long Range Transportation Plan Update*

This plan acts as the multimodal blueprint for transportation systems and services and is aimed at meeting the transportation demands of existing and future development in Erie and Niagara County. The plan provides forecasts for the year 2035 for both population and employment. The plan devotes 70 percent of funding to maintaining the existing transportation infrastructure system.

- *Transportation Improvement Program, 2011-2015*

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is the capital programming component of the Long Range Transportation Plan consisting of all federally funded roadway, transit, and

major transportation projects being considered within the region through 2015. The TIP also includes those regionally significant transportation projects being advanced by state and local entities with non-federal funding.

- *Niagara County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP)*

This plan was developed to enhance Niagara County's ability to manage emergency situations, with the focus on rapidly and adequately responding in order to minimize injury and speed recovery. It consists of three components: disaster prevention and mitigation, disaster response, and disaster recovery. The CEMP defines roles and responsibilities in prevention, response, and recovery, including a detailed chain of command during an emergency. The plan places an emphasis on the role of local jurisdictions as first-line responders, but identifies the key role that County departments play in the process. The CEMP points out the importance of land use controls and development regulations in hazard-prone areas (e.g., floodplain development) for disaster avoidance and minimization.

### **2.3.2 Local Planning**

- *Town of Wheatfield Comprehensive Plan*

Local planning plays a big part in how the waterfront in the Town is used and developed. The Town has been pro-active in planning for growth in the Town and adopted a Comprehensive Plan in 2004, which was updated in 2012. Although the Town acknowledges that some of the information in this plan is falling out of date, the Plan still provides guidance for managing land use along the waterfront. The Comprehensive Plan recognizes that the waterfront areas are largely developed, and no major changes are expected in the area south of River Road or along Lockport Avenue. As public access is lacking in the area, the plan suggests recreational uses, such as trails to tie into the waterfront.

- *Stormwater Management Plan*

The Town of Wheatfield is a member of the Western New York Stormwater Coalition. The Coalition developed a Stormwater Management Plan as a shared resource to help local municipalities comply with the NYSDEC General Permit for Stormwater Discharges from Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4). This Plan, which was adapted for the Town of Wheatfield, provides policy and management guidance, including minimum control measures and best management practices for Public Education and Outreach, Public Involvement and Participation, Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination, Construction Site Runoff Control, Post-Construction Stormwater management, and Pollution Prevention / Good Housekeeping for Municipal Operations. In support of this Plan, the Town adopted a local law for stormwater management and erosion and sediment control and a local law for prohibiting illicit discharges, activities and connections to separate storm sewer systems. The town also appointed a designated Stormwater Management Officer.

- *Town of Wheatfield Greenspace Master Plan*

The Wheatfield Greenspace Master Plan was developed to help the Town preserve and incorporate greenspace into future development to maintain the ambiance and character of the community. The Plan includes an inventory of all parklands and greenspace for public access; identifies future greenspace areas for public access, emphasizes passive and active recreational needs and defines the quality of life in Wheatfield. This Plan, which is currently being updated, recommends capitalizing on the abandoned railway corridor to create a trail connection between Niagara Falls and North Tonawanda (at the east and west ends of Sub-Area #1) and other areas of the Town. It also recognizes the undeveloped Town-owned property located on the Niagara River shoreline, which proposed for use as public parkland.

## 2.4 Demographics and Economic Considerations

### 2.4.1 Population and Household Characteristics

The waterfront areas in the Town of Wheatfield cannot be captured easily by Census geography. Accordingly, the following discussion is based on Town-wide data, and is intended to provide the general context of the Town and how it may affect waterfront planning.

The population of the Town of Wheatfield was 18,117 persons in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The Town is the fastest growing town in Western New York, with very strong growth in population over the past decades. Since 1990, the population has increased by nearly 7,000 residents, an increase of almost 63 percent. This strong growth suggests growing development pressure throughout the Town, including the waterfront areas. It also suggests increasing demand for recreational assets in the Town.

**Town of Wheatfield Population 1990 – 2010**

	Population	Change	
		Number	Percent
1990	11,125	n/a	n/a
2000	14,086	+2,961	+26.6%
2010	18,117	+4,031	+28.6%

*U.S. Census Bureau, 2010*

Median age of Wheatfield’s residents in 2010 was 42.4 years, which is slightly older than Niagara County, where the average age was 41.9 years. Age distribution is similar for the Town and the County. Wheatfield has a higher proportion of older residents (age 65 or older) than the County, and slightly fewer very young residents (under age 5). Correspondingly, the Town has more residents in the middle age ranges, both minors age 5 to 19, and adults aged 18 to 64. The following table shows the comparison of the Town and the County.