

# Town of Wheatfield Comprehensive Plan

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## SECTION 5 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section of the Report summarizes the major issues and ideas that emerged during this study, and outlines findings and recommendations for the Town of Wheatfield. An effective Comprehensive Plan includes provisions and recommendations addressing the range of activities that will be required to guide Wheatfield into the future. Many of the recommendations pertain to land use, but many of the Town's issues are outside of the realm of land use, and involve quality of life measures. Examples include public projects such as infrastructure; redevelopment programs; incentive programs; non-traditional zoning techniques such as overlays; conservation programs; grants; and joint pursuits with adjacent municipalities, among others.

Recommendations in this section are ideas to potentially help accomplish the Goals and Objectives of the Town. They are a toolbox of actions that the Town can choose from over the implementation period of the Comprehensive Plan. Not all recommendations will be completed, and other actions can be developed to accomplish the Town's goals. The implementation section provides some prioritization of these actions. Some recommendations are repeated under different Goals and Objectives. These recommendations are typically higher priority since they serve to help implement more than one goal of the Town.

### 5.1 Maintain and preserve community character

Protecting the quality of life in Wheatfield is a major priority of residents. Residents acknowledge that change is occurring, but they strongly support preserving critical elements of community character, including important open space, farmland and parks, as well as important natural features, such as creeks and wood lots.

For many residents of the Town of Wheatfield, farmlands and rural atmosphere are very important to the character of the community. As such, they support the protection of agricultural uses and efforts to maintain farming as a viable economic activity in the Town. However, farmers in the Town recognize that their farmland is their primary asset. In many cases, the next generation has made other career choices, and farmers want to retain their right to sell their farmlands upon retirement. In practical terms, farmers stand to make more money selling the land as development lots than as open farmland. This presents a very real constraint to maintaining agricultural lands and farming as a viable economic enterprise in the Town of Wheatfield.

Other elements of community character include aesthetic issues, particularly in the more developed areas of Town. There is support for higher standards in regard to landscaping and property maintenance, and stricter controls over non-desirable uses, such as junkyards and used car lots.

#### ➤ **Protect Agricultural Lands**

##### ***Findings:***

- Agricultural land is located primarily in the northern half of the Town.
- Most of the farms are located in State Agricultural Districts.
- Location within an Agricultural District places limits on development options.

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- A number of parcels were removed from the Agricultural Districts during the recent renewal review.
- Most of the farms are zoned A-R.
- The farms in the northern-central part of the Town (between Ward and Nash) are shown as Residential Low Density areas in the Master Plan map, but are zoned as A-R, suggesting a concession that these areas will develop as residential, not farming uses.
- Farming to the northwest can be easier to protect. Farms in the east and northern-central areas of Town are under the most pressure due to residential development.
- Farming is compatible with the rural characteristics of northern Wheatfield and the rural residential areas in Lewiston, Cambria, and Pendleton.
- Most farmlands are being developed as standard road-frontage lots, which cuts off visual access to any farmlands remaining on the interior parcels.

### **Recommendations**

1. The State Agricultural District should be maintained as intact as is feasible. Future withdrawals of parcels from the districts should be discouraged, if possible.
2. The A-R zoning district should be reinforced, or an agricultural zoning overlay put in place in order to strengthen the ability of the Town to guide development in a manner supportive of continued farming.
3. Farmers have a right to develop their lands, but the Town should explore improved standards to promote appropriate development that is compatible with remaining farmland.
4. Standards should also include buffers between residences and farms to minimize conflicts between these uses. The developer of the residential use would be responsible for establishing these buffers.
5. Zoning regulations in the A-R district could be rewritten to provide different options for development. In particular, more creative site planning can help minimize the visual impacts of development, helping to preserve a rural "character" even if active agricultural uses are no longer viable.
6. Rural Cluster Development or Conservation Subdivision regulations could allow for some creativity in subdivisions on former farms. These types of regulations allow cluster development without the need for new streets, focusing on rural appearances. They allow and encourage creativity in design so that building lots are not laid out in a uniform, monotonous pattern along the street frontage. The regulations can be written in such a way that there are disincentives for standardized developments and rewards or incentives for those developments that show more creativity, flexibility and sensitivity to local setting in their design of building lots.
7. Create Agricultural Protection Guidelines.
8. The Town should continue supporting the Agricultural Committee and its ideas such as the Farmer's Market, Agricultural Vehicle Signage, etc. The focus should be on how to help keep farmers farming, and help them to stay a viable business in Town (see next objective).

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### ➤ Support Farming as a Viable Economic Activity

#### ***Findings:***

- The farming community did not provide a lot of input to the planning process. In general, they don't want their rights restricted, and they want the ability to operate their business.
- Farms in Wheatfield are more likely to be adjacent to non-farming uses, such as residential or even commercial uses, than is the case in most communities, leading to a greater potential for complaints from neighboring uses.
- Farming as an economic activity in Wheatfield is under pressure due to the increasing value of the land for development and conflicts with surrounding land uses.
- The trend in farming nationally is toward larger farms, and farming is increasingly competing as a global industry. Many of the farms in Wheatfield are smaller, isolated farms that are most at risk.
- The Town of Wheatfield does have a Highway Tax, school taxes and special district property taxes. These are all significant cost to farmers.

#### **Recommendations**

1. The Town government should explore measures it can take to help farming (sponsor activities, help with grant applications, consider PDR's-- purchase of development rights program, etc.) The Town has begun to explore a Farmland Preservation Program and this should be continued until it is determined what the best strategy is.
2. Creative recommendations could include the possibility of relaxing the zoning regulations with regard to farming, such as allowing viable farms of a certain size the right to operate small businesses or carry on other ancillary activities.
3. Regulations could provide for greater buffer requirements between residential and farming uses.
4. The Town could consider means of alleviating the property tax load on farmers, through either assessment policies or tax structure (e.g. do not assess farmed land based on its market value, or value as developable land, but on its value as vacant land).
5. Expand upon the concepts of the Farmer's market, and help to create more opportunities for farmers and agriculture in the Community.

### ➤ Enhance Visual Character of the Community

#### ***Findings:***

- Northern part of Town is rural-agrarian.
- Niagara Falls Boulevard is an important central corridor of the Town.
- River Road is in the waterfront area and represents an important aesthetic component of the community.
- Strip road frontage development is occurring.
- The Town's visual character is influenced by the surrounding communities.
- There are complaints about property maintenance and landscaping standards.
- Need a coordinated image for the Town of Wheatfield.
- Wheatfield's farms and open space features are an important part of the character of the Town.

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## **Recommendations**

1. Rural development guidelines would help direct development in the rural areas of the Town.
  2. The Town should continue to improve the Niagara Falls Boulevard overlay district to better direct future development.
    - a. Strengthen language for Niagara Falls Blvd Overlay requirements
    - b. Create quality standards for development (Improve Design Standards for Niagara Falls Boulevard and other appropriate areas of the Town)
  3. Some proactive measures may be needed along Niagara Falls Boulevard: planting program, façade program, beautification contests, streetscaping on next NYSDOT project (coordinate these actions with the City of North Tonawanda).
  4. Higher quality design standards should be considered, particularly in relation to site planning (landscaping, parking, etc.). These standards can be used to help ensure new development is compatible.
  5. Stricter controls of undesirable uses (junkyards, junked vehicles, used car lots, on-site storage, dumpsters, etc.) should be considered, including requirements for screening, etc.
  6. Waterfront programs, activities and projects taking place south of the Town should be considered in Wheatfield.
  7. Guidelines for the height of buildings should be considered on Niagara Falls Blvd (establish areas on the Blvd for varying heights of buildings).
  8. Consider “Welcome” signs at major intersections (gateways) along Niagara Falls Blvd to create an inviting image of the Town –Illuminated Signs; adding features to welcome signs, etc.
  9. Apply to the Dept of Transportation demonstration programs for signs.
  10. New York State Seaway Trail concepts should be incorporated into the Town’s waterfront.
  11. Consider gateway improvement projects at the important gateways into the Town.
  12. Utilize the Town’s Greenspace Plan to preserve greenspace in the community.
- **Build upon the Public Facilities in the Town Hall area to create a "Town Center"**

## ***Findings:***

- There is no definable "Town Center" in the community.
- The Town Hall complex is centrally located and is accessible to a major east/west route (Niagara Falls Boulevard) and a north/south route (Ward Road).
- Niagara Falls Boulevard in this region is the busiest road in Town.
- The Town Hall site is not visible from Niagara Falls Boulevard (no major features visible from Niagara Falls Boulevard).
- Current concepts for the creation of a Town Center at the Town Hall complex are being discussed (A Town Center Focus Group was formed and continues to be an active group).
- Creating a Town Center will help with defining Wheatfield’s community character.
- The Town Hall area should be an “activity center” with a variety of attractions and uses.
- There are other “hamlet areas” within the Town (for example Bergholz).

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## **Recommendations**

1. There should be more features, such as sidewalks and paths, which connect the Town Hall area to Niagara Falls Blvd and to the rest of the Town.
2. Develop the Town-owned lands surrounding the Town Hall site with compatible uses that complement the “Town Center” concept.
3. Improve the features in the Niagara Falls Boulevard area of the Town Hall—signage, streetscape, other physical changes.
4. Create physical and visual links to the Town Hall from Niagara Falls Boulevard.
5. Consider encouraging smaller concentration of uses at hamlets as ancillary “mini-town centers”.
6. Centralize activities to bring people to the Town Center area.
7. Encourage multiple entrances to the Town Center
8. Encourage working with New York State DOT to develop a crosswalk from Oppenheim Park to Witmer Road, which will ultimately lead to the Town Center.
9. Provide connections to Niagara Falls Blvd.
10. Develop consistent design with the concept plans.
11. Amend the Zoning Code to allow for this type of development to take place.
12. Provide flexibility as a ‘key’ to the Town Center concept.
13. Promote public private partnerships for the development of the Town Center.
14. Work with other appropriate groups, organizations, committees, etc. on creating the Town Center.
15. Create a link from the Town Center to the Niagara River.

## **5.2 Carefully Plan for and Manage New Growth to Take Advantage of Existing Assets While Minimizing Potential Negative Impacts**

Residents acknowledge that continued growth will occur in their Town. Their main concern is that the potential negative impacts of growth are controlled. In particular, the loss of greenspace, increased traffic and sprawl are concerns. There is strong support for the concept of “infill” development, where new building or development occurs on vacant parcels in areas that are already primarily developed. While the capacity of public facilities and services has not been a concern, this issue should continue to be monitored to ensure it does not become a problem, particularly in the case of schools.

### ➤ **Monitor and control new growth (for adequate public facilities and schools).**

#### ***Findings:***

- The Town’s growth rate is above average (26.6% persons, 32% households and 130-150 residential building permits per year). *Between 2000 and 2007, growth rate was 17.9% (between 2000 and 2010 it was 28.6%).*
- Citizens are observing increased traffic and losses of green space.
- Presently there are no problems with public facilities or schools.

#### **Recommendations**

1. Continue to monitor growth and approved lots.

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2. The Town may wish to consider a cap on residential permits.
3. A Build-out analysis could be completed to show worst case scenario.
4. Farmland preservation program and open space preservation will help control growth in the Town.
5. Consider an annual review of special permit procedures to ensure that they are up to date, strengthen its provisions, and provide greater control over the granting of special use permits.
6. Special use permits should not be defined as specifically being allowable uses. Criteria should be established, as requested special uses allowed only if meeting all of the criteria. Consider creating a section of the code that specifically addresses the requirements for a particular special use.
7. Improve enforcement techniques and strengthen the enforcement of existing regulations.
8. Coordinate building rate information with schools and look at long term impacts to growth patterns.

➤ **Address drainage issues and ensure new development does not aggravate this problem**

***Findings:***

- The Town is characterized by poor soils, wetlands and floodplains
- Drainage is a major problem in the Town.
- New Floodplain Maps were adopted in September 2010. These maps will have a significant impact on the Town of Wheatfield.
- The Town has studied and implemented some Town wide drainage improvements.

**Recommendations**

1. New development should be required to assess impacts to drainage, and have a realistic and effective mitigation strategy.
2. The Town should continue to monitor the need to update their standards to be more stringent and in accordance with the State regulations.
3. Consider the use of Green Infrastructure standards to the reasonable extent possible.

➤ **Promote infill development in preference to building on previously undeveloped lands**

***Findings:***

- Infill development is defined as building on vacant lots or redevelopment of unused sites within already developed areas.
- Commercial Development is focused by the Town's zoning code and map in the area around the Niagara Falls Boulevard corridor.
- Industrial development is focused in the northwest and southeast, with additional vacant industrial lands in the southwest, near the waterfront.
- Residential development is extending northerly along the Town's north/south routes.
- There are sites suitable for development or redevelopment within established areas.

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### **Recommendations**

1. The Town should explore the possibility of offering incentives to promote infill development (tax incentives, zoning bonuses, etc.).
2. The Town should consider amending the zoning in A-R district to help stop sprawl along corridors to the north.
3. Consider creation of “hamlet” centers at specified locations, encouraging denser, more walkable scale of development, with a mix of residential, commercial and recreational uses, incorporating relevant aspects of “new urbanist” ideals.
4. Industrial development should be encouraged to occur within already designated areas and existing industrial parks, and discouraged elsewhere in Town.
5. Continue to promote economic development around the airport.

### ➤ **Plan in advance to address potential negative impacts of growth.**

#### ***Findings:***

- Drainage is a major problem in the Town due to the soils and topography of the Town (see above).
- There is increasing demand for recreational facilities and open space on the part of the Town’s residents.
- Visual impacts of development are an area of concern, particularly as it relates to community character (looking “overbuilt”).
- Traffic impacts: see section on transportation.

### **Recommendations**

1. While there are requirements that residential development must set aside parkland or make a contribution to a recreation fund, the Town needs to develop more effective standards to guide the amount, location and nature of this contribution.
2. Consider changing setback requirements on Niagara Falls Boulevard to facilitate access management efforts and provide for higher landscaping standards.
3. Consider areas where assembly of parcels into larger, consolidated development lots is feasible.
4. Particularly valuable areas of open space should be identified and targeted for preservation, where feasible (consider mandatory cluster developments in areas of prioritized open space).
5. Density standards and design requirements should be adjusted to better manage the impacts of development (control sprawl, minimize visual impacts).
6. Require an assessment of impacts to traffic, particularly along Niagara Falls Boulevard and other major routes, and require mitigation measures, such as shared access.
7. Revise the Town code to support and encourage creative approaches to development, such as clustering or alternative housing types.
8. There should be a greater emphasis on greenspace buffers between residential development and other land uses.
9. Especially in the northern part of the town, rural development guidelines and creative road frontage development techniques should be instituted to try to maintain the rural

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- character. These include varied lot sizes, varied setbacks, encouragement of clustering and varied home placement and lot layout to avoid “suburban” atmosphere.
10. Where appropriate, consider planned unit developments, which incorporate greenspace and different housing types into the entire development concept.
  11. Encourage mixed development.

### 5.3 Ensure a Safe Transportation Network for Automotive and Non-automotive Travel

Wheatfield has a limited transportation network, with relatively few alternative routes or “cut-throughs”. As a result, the major north-south and east-west routes tend to have fairly high traffic counts. High speeds are also a problem. This impedes traffic flow, and also discourages pedestrian and bike travel, as people do not feel safe walking or biking on roads where there are large numbers of cars traveling.

- **Continue to promote access management techniques to improve traffic flow and safety.**

#### ***Findings:***

- Traffic counts are relatively high, particularly along Niagara Falls Boulevard, which handles between 15,900 and 26,700 vehicles per day on average.
- Other major routes also have problems with speeding and traffic.
- Residents indicated that truck traffic is a problem along Lockport Road.
- Traffic problems are being exacerbated by driveway connections along travel routes.
- Access along Niagara Falls Boulevard is complicated by the presence of Sawyer Creek on the north side, which requires culverts or bridges to provide access.
- There is some concern that providing alternate access to subdivisions (entrances on more than one major road) could result in increased “cut-through” traffic.
- Interconnections between subdivisions are an important planning technique (but see above).

#### **Recommendations**

1. The Town should remain actively involved in planning with the New York State Department of Transportation for Niagara Falls Boulevard, to ensure that it includes features such as curbing, etc.
2. The Town should consider conducting a more thorough transportation plan that addresses access management and appropriate responses to congestion.
3. Road frontage lots on high traffic roadways should be carefully regulated, with encouragement given to shared driveways, shared parking lots, parallel “access” drives, etc.
4. The Town should also consider instituting stricter controls on access—for example, requiring shared driveways in certain instances.
5. Road frontage residential development should be strongly discouraged on Niagara Falls Boulevard. It should be strictly controlled on other high traffic roadways unless shared access is provided.
6. In some instances, the Town should consider making some road connections off Niagara Falls Boulevard “one-way” (e.g. Maple Road one-way, with access from, but not to, the

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Boulevard.) The idea is to confine more turn movements to signalized intersections. This action would need a traffic study prior to implementation.

7. As a long-term policy, the Town may consider identifying areas where new connecting roads could be provided. If this option is pursued, the Town will need to take proactive steps to steer development away from the area identified as a potential future right-of-way.
8. Since much of the traffic on Niagara Falls Boulevard originates from outside Wheatfield, consider establishing a Niagara Falls Boulevard Task Force, with representation from the NYS Department of Transportation, Niagara County, and adjacent communities to study access issues.
9. When planning a new subdivision, interconnections to other subdivisions should be strongly encouraged. Connections to more than one major road can be accomplished without encouraging cut-through traffic by making these connections circuitous.
10. To promote safe transportation on Town roads, consider regulations that accommodate farm equipment.
11. Address North/South roads (consider improving North/South routes) and traffic controls.
12. Work with the GBNRTC on transportation issues.

➤ **Increase non-automotive transportation options in the Town.**

***Findings:***

- Many comments were received indicating the residents want to be able to get to parks, residential developments and other activity centers in Town without having to use their cars.
- It was also frequently noted that the current transportation system does not support non-automotive travel.
- Stream corridors can provide some north/south non-automotive connection features.
- The road network is characterized by a few major routes with relatively high traffic counts, making pedestrian and bike travel difficult.
- There is a need to connect major features, such as subdivisions, parks, etc.
- Connections do not necessarily have to follow major roadways.

**Recommendations**

1. Sidewalks or walkways should connect major public facilities and residential areas (subdivisions).
2. Wherever feasible, and especially in identified hamlet areas, physical design should support walking and biking.
3. The Town should identify areas where off-road connections are feasible, and determine whether rights-of-ways or easements can be secured to provide pathways.
4. Trails may be feasible along some stream corridors.
5. Map out desired linkages, and ensure new development does not foreclose future pedestrian connections in these locations.
6. Continue progress with the access management program.
7. Where GBNRTC designated bike paths are on-road (e.g. Niagara Falls Boulevard), clear signage, crosswalks and other features that emphasize the presence of non-automotive traffic will help promote safety.

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- Public transportation would be difficult at this time (density does not warrant expansion), but the Town should consider alternatives to transit, such as van service and other forms of “paratransit”. Rides Unlimited, located in Wheatfield, does offer ride service for seniors in the Town.

### 5.4 Promote Attractive and Well-Planned Economic Development

Residents of the Town of Wheatfield support additional economic development efforts in order to balance the tax base, provide jobs within the community, and provide for the future. Such development, however, needs to be attractive and well planned, and compatible with adjacent land uses. If the Town is serious about agricultural preservation, agricultural businesses should also be promoted as an important industry in the Town of Wheatfield.

- **Concentrate commercial development along the Niagara Falls Boulevard corridor and discourage non-commercial uses along this route.**

#### ***Findings:***

- Niagara Falls Boulevard has traditionally been a retail and commercial corridor.
- There are residential homes located along Niagara Falls Boulevard, and some agricultural properties.
- Residential uses are allowed in commercial districts.
- There are some commercial areas off the Niagara Falls Boulevard.
- There are more businesses along Niagara Falls Blvd since the 2004 adoption of this plan.
- The eastern section of the Blvd. has also been widened since the adoption of the 2004 plan.

#### **Recommendations**

1. Consider targeting tax incentive programs to promote commercial uses where preferred.
2. Consider restricting or prohibiting residential uses along Niagara Falls Boulevard.
3. Avoid rezoning property to commercial outside this corridor and other targeted areas of Town that are designated for commercial development.
4. Residential uses could be allowed as an accessory use to a business. Consider allowing mixed-use projects in certain areas, particularly in residential areas off Niagara Falls Boulevard where a more mixed-use, hamlet-type of development is desired.
5. Evaluate the current traffic, economic clusters and business trends along Niagara Falls Blvd.
6. Identify and develop incentives that enhance the developed business cluster and encourage new business along Niagara Falls Blvd.
7. Business Development Focus Group to make recommendations for business development along Niagara Falls Blvd.
8. Business Development Focus Group to identify consistent design guidelines for Niagara Falls Blvd and recommend these ideas to the Planning Board.
9. Develop and recommend zoning changes to the Task Force.
10. Work with the Town, County, and State agencies to get information on economic development.
11. Obtain and retain economic development and market information about the area.

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12. Continue working with the NFTA on Airport planning.

➤ **Capitalize upon the Town's assets to attract new businesses.**

***Findings:***

- The Town presently seems to have a good mix of commercial, industrial and residential properties. Rates of commercial/industrial development are in good balance with residential development. (Many believe balance helps the tax structure.)
- Some guidelines suggest that communities should have 12 acres per thousand residents for current industrial needs and 12 acres per thousand for future needs (Planning Advisory Service of the American Planning Association). This would suggest a need for about 350 acres of industrial lands.
- Other guidelines (PAS) suggest that in suburban communities, approximately 10% of the land should be set aside for commercial use.
- The airport could have a large impact on commercial/industrial development in the Town.
- The Town has excellent high-tech infrastructure (fiber optics).
- The active rail line is an asset not found in many communities.

**Recommendations**

1. Redevelopment and development along Williams Road in the southwestern section of the Town may provide additional commercial and industrial development opportunities.
2. The Town should remain actively involved in planning for the airport property.
3. Areas around the airport should have a focus on industrial/commercial and agricultural land uses. Avoid residential development in the "flight path"—agricultural or industrial use is preferred.
4. The Town should participate in regional efforts at economic development.
5. Consider rezonings to provide additional industrial land in the southeastern part of Town where there is strong demand for light industrial, campus-style economic development.
6. All industrial development should be required to meet strict standards of buffering, aesthetics, landscaping, etc.
7. Capitalize on and continue to improve high tech infrastructure.
8. Promote development of businesses adjacent to Niagara Falls airport.
9. The Town should continue to support the economic committee and their projects. Focus should include not only attracting new business but ensuring that existing businesses stay within the Town.

➤ **Ensure high quality, attractive commercial and industrial development**

***Findings:***

- Much of the Town's existing industrial development is attractive.
- Commercial design standards are uneven. Commercial areas within the Town, especially along Niagara Falls Blvd, show irregular patterns.

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### **Recommendations**

1. Consider providing more guidance regarding standards in the Niagara Falls Boulevard Overlay, particularly for signage, landscaping and other aesthetic issues.
  2. Ensure that standards regarding set-backs, landscaping, architectural standards, signage and other features provide adequate guidance and protection.
  3. Encourage the use of greenspace to buffer development from adjoining uses.
  4. Provide incentives to existing businesses to make improvements and enhance the aesthetics of their establishments.
  5. Restrict additional billboards along Niagara Falls Boulevard.
  6. Review the “shovel readiness” of areas designated for growth, and provide tools to help accomplish the desired economic development (pre-permitted sites, and other incentives).
- **Build upon existing recreational and tourism assets in the Town for tourism and recreational-related business development**

### ***Findings:***

- Assets in Wheatfield include the Niagara River and the Erie Canal (Tonawanda Creek) waterfronts.
- The Town also has a strong base of private recreational facilities (skating, and go-carts).
- The Town’s proximity to Niagara Falls provides opportunities, as does its location midway between Buffalo and Niagara Falls.

### **Recommendations**

1. More creative planning should be applied to the Town’s waterfront area, with the potential of linking to the “lakes” area as a recreation/tourism area along the waterfront.
  2. The Town should work cooperatively with adjacent communities in regard to waterfront planning, particularly in regard to trailways along the Niagara River and the Erie Canal (Tonawanda Creek).
  3. Recreational uses along Niagara Falls Boulevard should be encouraged.
  4. Coordinate tourism efforts with Niagara Falls officials and County tourism initiatives.
- **Investigate Alternative energy choices for the Town, its businesses and its residents**

### ***Findings:***

- Definition of Alternative Energy: energy derived from nontraditional sources e.g., compressed natural gas, solar, hydroelectric, wind; this energy does not use up natural resources or harm the environment.
- Energy prices have continued to increase since 2004 and are projected to continue increasing into the next decade.
- Trends, and policies and programs in NYS are heading towards more smart/sustainable growth, and the incorporation of alternative energy solutions.

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## **Recommendations**

1. Study Energy Alternatives
2. Research programs, grants and other incentives that would help encourage the use of alternative energy sources.
3. Take pro-active measures to help citizens and businesses to achieve alternative energy solutions.
4. Develop policies regarding the installation of alternative energy systems.
5. Other Recommendations:
  - a. Commercial Properties:
    - Town Tax incentive for the following:
    - Solar or energy efficient parking lot lights
    - Solar sidewalk snow melt systems
    - Solar building or LEED energy efficient signage
    - Solar outdoor building flood lights
  - b. New Residential Homes:
    - Town Tax or Energy Efficient Incentive for the following:
    - Each home could be set up for solar roof panels
    - A three (3) inch PVC pipe from roof to basement for installation of solar equipment
    - Builders who build homes for maximum energy efficiency
  - c. Town buildings and new locations:
    - Solar parking lot lights
    - Solar motion detector lights on the exterior of Town owned buildings
    - New buildings should utilize solar energy
  - d. Other Suggestions:
    - Town vehicles, when possible, could be electric
    - Lighting for all towers in the Town should not use strobe lighting
    - "Go Green" when practical

## **5.5 Emergency Management Plan**

### ***Findings:***

- The Town Board approved the Town's Emergency Management Plan subsequent to a public hearing on January 24, 2011, and identified locations for a primary and alternate Emergency Operations Center location. The goals and objectives are outlined in the text of the document, the "how to" protocols are contained within the supporting annexes. The annexes are for "official use only."
- The Table of Contents is as follows:
  1. Purpose & Objectives
  2. Response and Assignments
  3. Vulnerability Responses
  4. Emergency Responses

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- a. Direction and Control
- b. Organization and Assignment Responsibilities
- c. Administration and Logistics
- d. Communication
- e. Evacuation
5. Emergency Operation Center (EOC)
6. Medic Aid
7. Reporting Procedures
8. Specific Hazard to the Town
9. Security
10. Declaring a State of Emergency

The annexes consist of an EOC organizational structure, EOC staff job descriptions, Town critical data, Niagara County support data, Wheatfield fire company data, maps, contact data, transportation & evacuation resources, manpower data, medical aid, hazard specifications, and personnel recall listings by department.

Distribution of the plan was made to town officials, town fire companies, town department heads, and the Fire Advisory Board. "Flash drives" containing all the information appearing in the Emergency Management Plan, including the annexes, were distributed to each recipient. Also, where a dependence on another jurisdiction or agency is referenced in the plan, the contents were shared and reviewed, in person, with that jurisdiction or agency. For example, the American Red Cross commented that the Town's plan content was practical, excellent and commended the scope of the planning. The Niagara County Emergency Manager commented that there is no municipality in Niagara County that can compare with the Town plan.

### **Recommendations**

1. Firm up communication needs within the Emergency Operations Center, including: Radios, cable, telephone lines, standby jacks, "air cards", cell phones, walkie-talkies, Wi Fi, etc.
2. Radio improvements/upgrade planning can proceed now that the Niagara County Legislature awarded a countywide communications contract.
3. Memoranda of Understanding needs to be initiated with intended support agencies, e.g., truckers, heavy equipment supplier, bus companies, etc.
4. SEMO training for personnel identified for assignment within the Emergency Operations Center.
5. Scheduling periodic "desk top" exercises, using outside agencies.
6. Designing and printing identification tags via coordination with Niagara County Sheriff's office.

### **5.6 Protect Important Open Space, Environmental and Recreational Assets**

Preservation of open space and greenspace in Wheatfield is a strong priority of residents. In a sense, this desire underpins each of the previous goals. Greenspace in the Town contributes to community character; it can only be preserved through carefully planned growth and economic development efforts; and trails and greenspace corridors should form an important component of a safe transportation system.

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- **Ensure all new development includes adequate greenspace.**

### ***Findings:***

- The Town has a Greenspace Master Plan that was written in 1995 and is presently being updated.
- The Town has a new report, produced by the University at Buffalo's Department of Urban and Regional Planning Graduate Workshop, dated spring 2010, and titled, "Preserving and Enhancing Wheatfield's Landscape".
- Wheatfield is characterized by a greater "mixing" of land uses than many communities.

### **Recommendations**

1. Create and adopt a "Conservation Subdivision Design Ordinance".
2. Adopt legal "Town Easement Guidance Document" on the various forms of Easements to preserve Greenspace areas currently already owned by residents.
3. The Town should consider prohibiting development that would limit or prohibit development of the Shawnee Nature Preserve; and, develop (in addition to similar additional initiatives) a Boardwalk system and Nature Education System in the Preserve.
4. Use Town Authority to gain access and preserve designated areas from development to protect and preserve wetlands and forest areas.
5. Greenspace Wetland and Forest Maps will guide the Town on areas to protect.
6. Reassess and reprioritize elements in the Greenspace Plan to ensure its relevancy and to incorporate major changes since its creation.
7. Utilize the existing Greenspace Plan to guide efforts to preserve high priority open space, woodlands and natural resources.
8. Utilize the UB Graduate workshop document to help guide efforts to preserve open space within the Town.
9. New development proposals should be evaluated in relation to the Greenspace Plan. The Town should consider requiring developments to take its recommendations into consideration in site plan design, attempting to preserve important features identified in the plan.
10. Greenspace buffers between conflicting land uses should be required.
11. New residential development design standards are required to provide greenspace. There should be clearer and stricter guidelines governing the nature, location and characteristics of this greenspace. More greenspace should also be incorporated into the lots themselves.
12. There should be a greater effort to provide consolidated parcels or linked greenspace, instead of small, isolated plots.
13. Consider using greenspace corridors for trail linkages in addition to open space preservation.
14. Consider writing a tree protection ordinance to discourage the loss of trees.
15. The Town should evaluate a protection program that includes purchasing development rights. This should be coordinated with such agencies as the Western New York Land Conservancy.
16. Address Waterfront Rehabilitation - LWRP.

## Town of Wheatfield Comprehensive Plan

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### ➤ **Protect important stream corridor lands**

#### ***Findings:***

- Wheatfield's stream corridors play an important role in drainage and flooding and erosion control
- They also provide habitat for wildlife, and contribute to the character of the Town
- Establishing a "buffer" zone along the creeks can help minimize flooding problems, protect rural character and improve property values

#### **Recommendations**

1. The Town should consider completing a Comprehensive Stream Survey that includes (but not limited to) plans for the maintenance of drainage systems, clearance of navigatable waterways, bank stabilization, and stream bank stabilization.
2. Investigate methods of protecting the integrity of the stream corridors, including the possibility of regulations, establishment of buffer zones, or other techniques.
3. See Map 9: Vision Map for possible locations.

### ➤ **Promote increased trails within Wheatfield, and linkages to adjacent communities.**

#### ***Findings:***

- Trails can provide greenspace and corridors for wildlife in addition to serving transportation and recreational purposes.
- Given roadway patterns in Wheatfield, in many cases, off-road trails can provide more direct and safer connections.
- Adjacent communities are creating trail networks that Wheatfield residents can take advantage of, if connections are made.

#### **Recommendations**

1. Complete a Town's Parks Plan to specify development of the Town's major parks and acquisitions necessary for their development.
2. Complete plans for the Niagara River Greenway Trail
3. Complete documentation for the Comprehensive Trail Plan
4. Promote increased trail linkages to parks and open space.
5. Explore the feasibility of extended trails along rights-of-way and abandoned rail corridors.
6. Create trail segments that link to trails in adjacent communities, such as North Tonawanda, Amherst and Niagara Falls. For example, a trail along Lockport Road can connect into the Erie Canalway, a route that eventually will cross New York State.
7. The Town should consider alternative routing of the bike trail along River Road, to take it inland into the "lakes" area, with the long-range plan of eventually extending the segment north to the proposed Town Center at the Town Hall property.
8. The Town should continue to pursue State and federal grant monies to extend its trail system.

## Town of Wheatfield Comprehensive Plan

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- **Provide a variety of recreational opportunities, including active and passive uses.**

### ***Findings:***

- Standards indicate that 10-15 acres of park/recreation land be set aside per thousand residents in a community. Therefore these standards would indicate a need of 140-210 acres of land. These facilities can be large sport complexes, community parks or neighborhood parks or facilities.
- The Town has 62 acres of parkland in the two major parks (Fairmount and Mario's), plus 75 acres in the county-owned Oppenheim Park. There are additional recreational facilities associated with local fire companies and churches.
- Based on these standards, the Town of Wheatfield currently has an adequate amount of parkland, but as population grows, additional park land may be required to accommodate additional residents and stay within standards.
- The Town requires recreational land from new subdivisions, but this land is not always useful for recreational purposes.
- The Town has a 1995 Greenspace Plan.
- The Town has a new report, produced by the University at Buffalo's Department of Urban and Regional Planning Graduate Workshop, dated Spring 2010, and titled, "Preserving and Enhancing Wheatfield's Landscape."
- Open space and environmental features are important to the Town's rural character and to the wildlife in the community.

### **Recommendations**

1. Larger plans for housing developments should include provisions for local community parks. These parks can be maintained by Homeowners Associations or in some circumstances dedicated to the Town.
2. Provide clearer standards regarding the type and nature of recreational land required from new subdivisions.
3. Ensure an adequate mix of recreational offerings, including small neighborhood playgrounds.
4. Support efforts of Conservation and Firearms Safety Committee regarding extension of trails and passive recreation areas in Wheatfield.
5. Include consideration of privately owned recreational lands in planning efforts (e.g. fire companies, churches). Where these parcels are adjacent to other open space areas, consider obtaining formal easements to create linkages.
6. Consider redevelopment plans for the "lakes" area that includes recreational use.
7. Enhance recreation throughout the Town.
8. Append the Greenspace Plan to the Comprehensive Plan to include ideas and suggestions outlined in the University at Buffalo report.

- 5.7 Accomplish Smart Growth in accordance with State Policies, the Framework for Regional Growth (Erie and Niagara County Plan), the Niagara County Comprehensive Plan (The Niagara Communities Plan), and "A Strategy for Prosperity in Western New York" (The WNY Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan).**

## **Town of Wheatfield Comprehensive Plan**

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### **Findings:**

- In general, the existing Town development pattern and the Town's vision for the future, matches the Goals and Vision of the Regional Framework for Growth, the Niagara Communities Plan and the WNY Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan.
- The Town has also incorporated Smart Growth principles in accordance with New York State Legislation.
- Wheatfield has three different Land Use / Growth Regions referred to in these Regional Plans as; Growth Corridors / Urban type areas / developed areas, suburban / developing areas, and Rural / Agricultural / Greenspace – Conservation areas. There are no hard boundaries for these areas, but in general, are located in the southern area, central area and northern part of the Town, respectively.
- The WNY Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan has no direct references to Wheatfield, but includes reference to the Niagara Falls Airport, and tourism in and around Niagara Falls.
- The Niagara County Communities Plan references the OZ Project and the needs for the area surrounding that proposed project.
- The LWRP promotes the protection of community character along the waterfront, traffic safety and pedestrian travel improvements along River Road, and other enhancements to allow for improved public access and recreation in appropriate areas.

### **Recommendations**

1. Create corridor enhancements along Niagara Falls Boulevard; work with the County, State and surrounding communities to improve and build upon this regionally significant corridor. In accordance with the WNY Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan, this will build upon a strength of the area, create a regional impact and improve the region's image.
2. Continue generating ideas and needs for the expansion of economic development around the airport.
3. Develop projects to submit for assistance that are in accordance with the WNY Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan; supporting the industry sectors identified in the Plan.
4. Plan for and protect the important natural systems and agricultural lands in the Town.
5. Set the framework and atmosphere for allowing great projects in Smart Growth areas that promote entrepreneurship, are inclusive and, when possible, oriented toward youth. The Town Center Project is one such project and the Town should continue to move forward with this plan.

## Town of Wheatfield Comprehensive Plan

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6. Strive to improve safety along River Road through the implementation of traffic calming techniques to slow traffic flow and enable safer bicycle and pedestrian travel.

### 5.8 Vision Plan

The Vision Plan for the Town of Wheatfield is shown on Map 9. This map, together with the recommendations in this section, is intended to guide decisions that affect the future development of the Town. The map is a graphic representation of the general future direction of growth and land use in the Town. It is not a proposed land use or zoning map, and does not dictate the future uses of any particular parcel in the Town of Wheatfield. Various development scenarios could be accommodated within the realm of the map and not all of the elements illustrated may be achieved. The map portrays the vision and desires for future land use in the Town, as derived from the community and public officials. Therefore, the Town should strive to ensure that development is consistent with the spirit of the map and the intent of the vision it portrays.

The following concepts guide the Vision Map:

- Encourage continuation of agriculture in the north-central portion of the Town.
- Encourage commercial, Light Industrial, and retail growth at identified locations, including the now vacant Summit Park Mall property, the Niagara Falls International Airport area, and Niagara Falls Boulevard. Allow limited restricted commercial activity in other designated areas (including hamlets and along roads indicated on the Vision Map).
- Provide stronger guidelines for development along the Niagara Falls Boulevard corridor to improve visual character, control traffic movement and address issues related to Sawyer Creek.
- Consider connections or trails between major activity centers in Town (parks, hamlets).
- Discourage residential development within the flight paths of the airport.
- “The Lakes” area and the Shawnee Nature Preserve area are special areas of Town that merit careful planning.
- Consider establishing a strong “Town Center” in the vicinity of Town Hall.
- Focus economic development and industrial development at identified locations (airport area and existing industrial parks). The airport area should be a mixture of uses that can support the success of the airport.
- Open space and greenspace areas are important components of the Town and efforts should be made to preserve these areas, which will provide for a connected network throughout the Town.
- Investigate specific plans and action needed to improve and build upon the hamlets of Bergholtz and Shawnee. Coordinate planning efforts in the Sanborn area with the Town of Lewiston.