



Tompkins County
Comprehensive Plan

2004

Planning *for our* Future

Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan Planning for Our Future

Adopted December 21, 2004 by the
Tompkins County Legislature
Ithaca, New York

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F o r e w o r d

The Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan contains Principles, Policies and Actions that can help lead our community to a bright future. The Plan is based on the overarching principle that we must work together, between different levels of government and among public and private sectors, if we are to be successful as a community. Working together within the framework of this plan, we can envision the Tompkins County of twenty years from now as a place where:

- An improved housing supply serves a modest increase in population. A greater diversity and variety of housing options helps meet the needs of a changing population and the increase in supply, along with efforts to serve the needs of special target populations, helps support greater affordability.
- Traffic congestion is mitigated by locating new housing closer to jobs and services. An enhanced public transit system, as well as pedestrian paths and bikeways, link population nodes and employment centers, making at least one viable alternative to the private automobile convenient to a majority of commuters. Transportation infrastructure and service improvements to our arterial road network and air service strengthen Tompkins County's economic links to the region, the nation, and the world.
- The local economy remains strong with increased opportunity for all. Community economic development partners provide support for entrepreneurs, particularly in emerging sectors of the economy, and provide education and training to allow all residents to find meaningful employment at a fair wage. Our institutions of higher education remain preeminent and underpin our economic and community vitality. Tompkins County continues to emerge as a regional cultural center, and tourism flourishes as Ithaca and Tompkins County become recognized as the most exciting gateway to the Finger Lakes region.
- Rural communities are thriving, in large part due to sustainable use of agricultural and forest resources. There is increased diversity in the agriculture sector, often serving local and regional markets, and an emerging clean energy component based on renewable resources. Forest lands are conserved and managed to provide multiple benefits to water resources, sustainable yields of forest products, wildlife habitat, and reduction of greenhouse gases.
- A clean Cayuga Lake is the centerpiece of the community, and is fed by clear-flowing, green-belted streams. Public access to the lake is enhanced with new and improved parks, and a vibrant urban waterfront has developed in the City of Ithaca. Plentiful clean surface and ground water provides for domestic, commercial, industrial, and recreational uses.

Water is recognized as an important community asset in a world where an abundant supply of clean water is an increasingly scarce commodity.

- The landscape of the county looks much the same as it is today but public access to our natural wonders has been improved. Protected forests and natural areas increase from 13 percent to about 20 percent of the land, and about one-third of the county is active farmland. Within this landscape, outstanding natural features, including gorges, stream corridors, lakeshores, forested hillsides, wetlands, and wildlife habitats are protected, defining the natural character of the community, maintaining its scenic beauty, and sustaining its biological diversity.
- Livable neighborhoods, vibrant commercial districts, and thriving employment centers have become more integrated and are increasingly linked by pedestrian paths and bikeways, supporting a more convenient, healthy, and less stressful way of life. A trail system links all four of the county's state parks. A more physically active and socially healthy community has developed. Efforts to accommodate growth in existing communities have allowed historic elements of the built environment to be used in ways that maintain their integrity and functionality.
- Growth in population is concentrated around existing population centers in accordance with local comprehensive plans. Most new development is built at increased density and designed to include attractive buildings, landscaping, and streetscapes that promote neighborly interaction and greatly enhance the quality of life. In accordance with local community plans, "new villages" are developing in places like South Lansing, Danby, and Jacksonville to complement modest growth in and around existing villages, hamlets, and the City of Ithaca.
- Finally, improved regional planning and increased intermunicipal cooperation results in greater fiscal efficiency. Combined with a strong local economy, this reduces and stabilizes the impact of the cost of public services on local homeowners, small businesses and major employers. Local residents view county, town, city, and village governments as a system that provides services in the most efficient manner possible while enhancing participatory democracy at the local government and neighborhood level.

It is within our reach to become this place, a place that reflects our community's values, builds on our many assets, and improves the quality of life for all our people. The Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan can serve as a guiding document to help define the steps we need to take to reach this future, monitor progress as we go, and provide a framework within which to adjust strategies along the way.

Edward C. Marx, AICP
Commissioner of Planning
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