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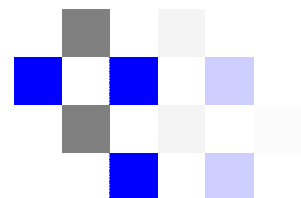
# **NIAGARA COUNTY BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & COMMERCIAL REVITALIZATION STUDY**

**Villages of Lewiston,  
Youngstown, and Wilson**

*Prepared for the*  
**Niagara County  
Industrial Development Agency**

**Samuel M. Ferraro,  
Commissioner**

**June 2005**

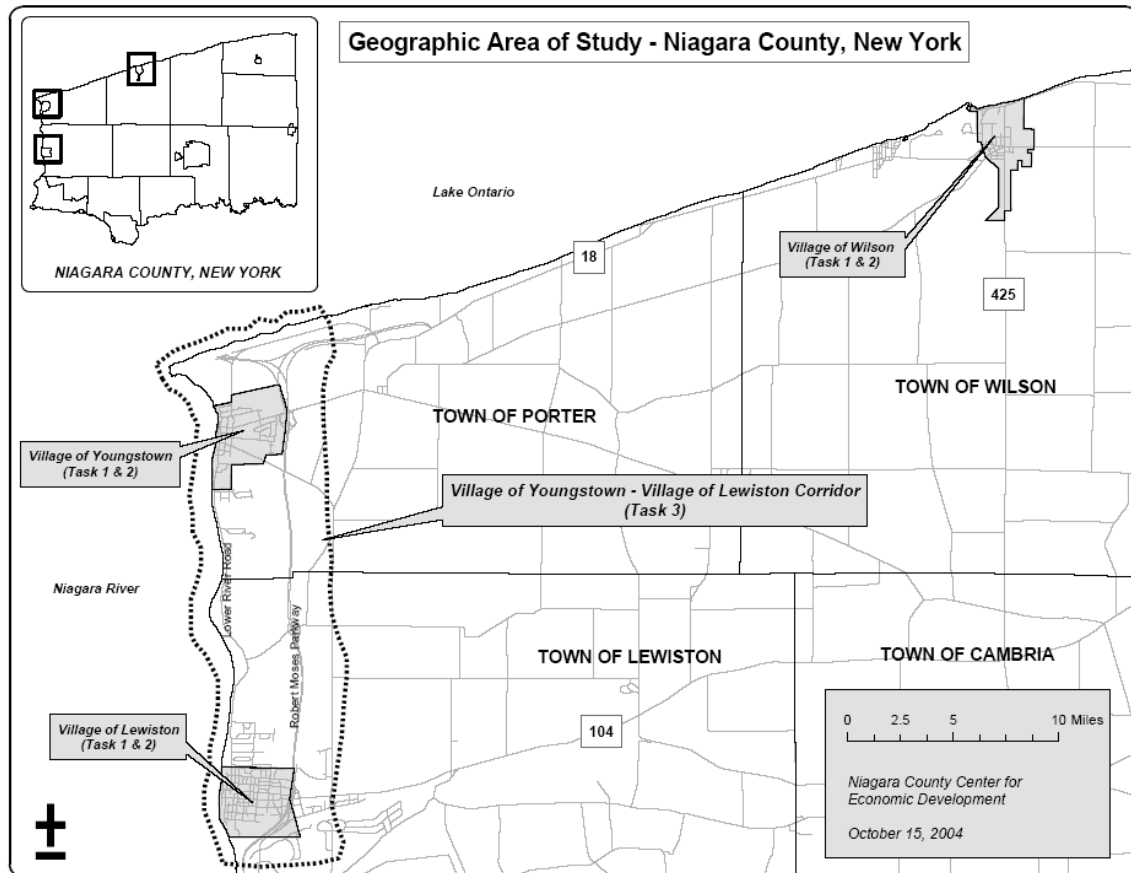


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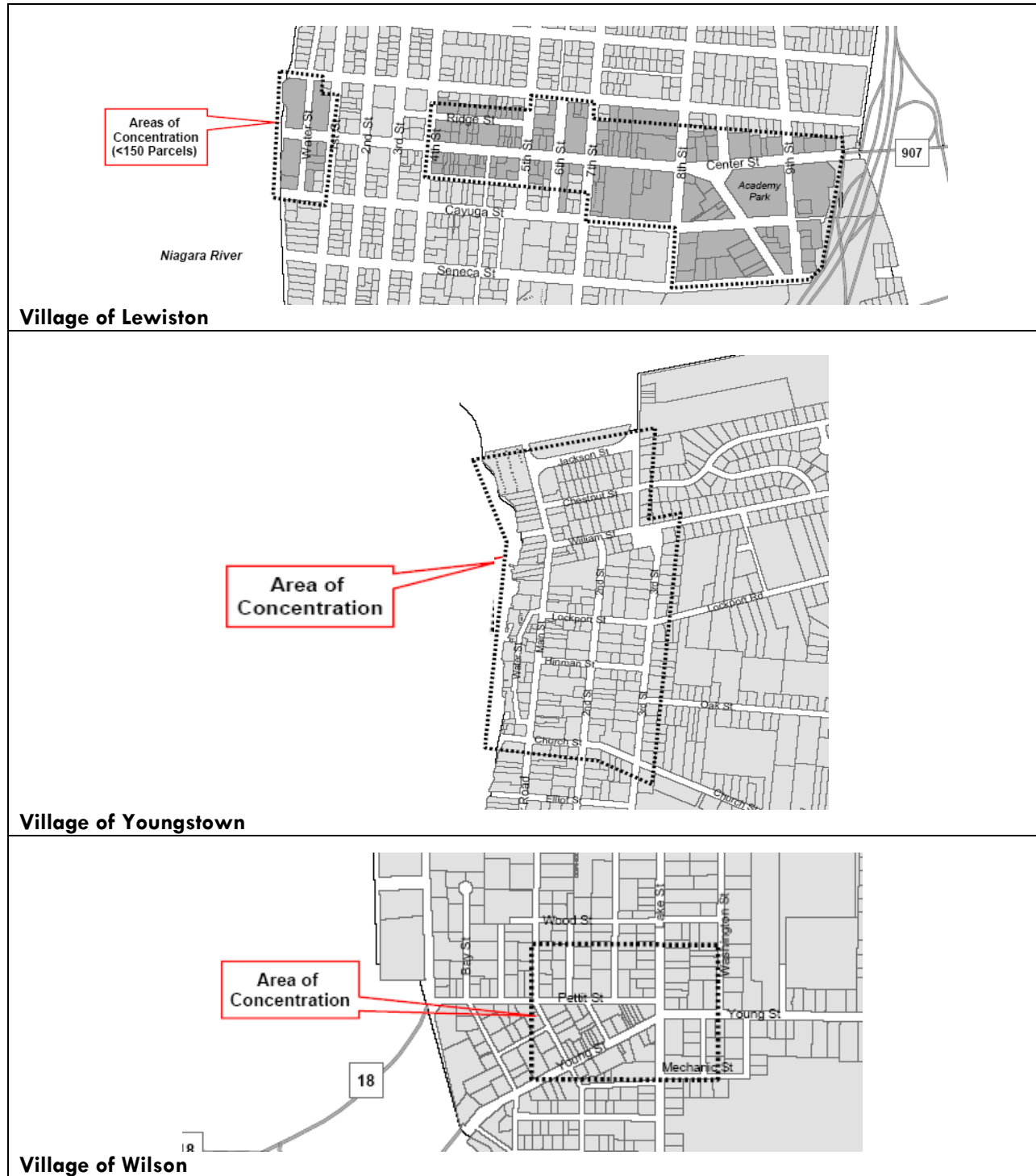
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## Introduction

The Niagara County Business Development and Commercial Revitalization Study was commissioned by the Niagara County Industrial Development Agency (NCIDA) with Community Development Block Grant funding provided through a technical assistance grant from the New York State Governor's Office for Small Cities. The study focused on three commercial areas in the Villages of Lewiston, Youngstown, and Wilson (see map below). Camoin Associates was hired to conduct the study, with GIS maps to be developed by Panamerican Consultants, Inc.



The scope of work for the project provided for a market analysis, inventory of downtown properties, business survey, and the development of recommendations for business development, marketing, and commercial revitalization. In addition, the consultants worked with the County to augment and update existing GIS data pertaining to the three villages. For the purposes of the GIS work, the NCIDA identified three areas of concentration, as shown in the maps on the following page.



Street maps, field maps, and study area maps showing additional details, including aerial views of each of the villages, are provided in the appendix. As the subsequent components of this report make clear, the scope of this project extends beyond the defined study areas in each village.

## **Planning Context**

### **Village of Lewiston**

The Village of Lewiston adopted a new Master Plan in October 2004. The Village's last Master Plan update, in 1977, "provided guidance for the revitalization of the Central Business District and better utilization of the Waterfront." Subsequently, "the Village diligently sought out funding programs to help implement various improvements to the Central Business District..." These included a \$3 million, ISTEAF-funded streetscape enhancement project along Center Street in 2002 and the construction of the Onondaga Trail linking North Fourth to North First Street. In addition, the Village of Lewiston adopted a Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (LWRP) in 1990 and expanded its docking and fishing areas, leasing a site along the waterfront to a private investor for a seasonal restaurant. The most recent Master Plan identifies the need to address the transitional area on Center Street (west of Fourth Street) to the waterfront and improve the pedestrian environment.

As noted in the 2004 Master Plan: "The combination of shops, historic architecture and small town atmosphere make the Village truly unique in the Niagara Frontier." Lewiston has many structures of historical significance and a Historic Preservation Law to protect, enhance, and perpetuate buildings, structures, sites or districts of a historic nature, as well as a Historic Preservation Commission to assist the Planning Board with review of developments of a historic nature. Although virtually all parcels with road frontage have water and sanitary sewer service available, there are few vacant developable parcels remaining.



As indicated on the Village of Lewiston Zoning District Map in Appendix B, there are four zoning classifications for commercial uses in the study area: B-1, General Business; R-B-2, Retail Business; W-D, Waterfront Development District; and R-B, Restricted Business. Much of Center Street, particularly between Fourth and Eighth Streets, is zoned R-B-2. B-1 covers Center Street east of Eighth Street, as well as some of the properties along parallel streets (e.g., Cayuga and Seneca Streets) from Seventh to Ninth; properties along Ridge between Fourth and Fifth are in the R-B, Restricted Business zone. W-D is restricted to the vicinity of South Water Street.

The vision for the Village of Lewiston as presented in the Master Plan includes continuing to develop the Village "as a historic, cultural, and economic center"; developing the Village as a "walkable community" via connecting sidewalks and linking bike paths; enhancing the streetscape, parks, and waterfront district; and developing visitor accommodations as the retail business area and mix of attractions in the Village expands.



### **Village of Youngstown**

The Village of Youngstown was incorporated in 1854. Proximity to Fort Niagara and its large waterfront were important influences on its development. Lumber, shipbuilding, and fishing were important industries in the 1800s. Other contributors to growth were the area's moderate climate, rich soils, and closeness to Canada. In the early 1900s, Youngstown was a popular summer resort.

Although the Village of Youngstown does not have its own comprehensive plan, the Town of Porter, in which the Village is located, adopted a comprehensive plan in December 2004. Principles for the future of the Town

of Porter, as presented in the plan, include preserving the waterfront and ensuring its accessibility to all residents, and promoting denser development in the Village. Residents have recognized the role of tourism to the local economy; at a public meeting for the plan in March 2004, more than three-quarters of attendees strongly agreed that tourism was an important aspect of the economy. Specific plan goals, policies, and actions related to the Village include:

- “Strengthen ties with Niagara-on-the-Lake and other lower River communities, to... build on the physical relationship of the two communities, their accessibility to boaters and their history” including, perhaps, a formalized scenic drive as a destination
- Maintain a working relationship with the Village of Youngstown, including discussion regarding consolidation of services
- Promote development within existing commercial centers – “historically, retail, commercial and restaurant development has occurred at these locations”
- Promote vacant lands surrounding Youngstown for more dense development, including retail sales and services and a variety of residential uses
- Coordinate efforts to encourage small tourism-based businesses

Niagara Mohawk’s Community Renaissance program recognizes “projects that have created or restored social and economic vitality within the community.” In 2004, the Village of Youngstown received a Thomas Edison Lighting Award under this program for its Main Street Lighting Project. The project involved the revitalization of the business district through the selection, installation, and funding of nineteenth century lighting:

*The plan, which involved the entire business community, many resident volunteers, Village civic organizations, and all area utilities, paralleled the Village Waterfront Revitalization Plan [adopted in 1989 to facilitate business growth in the Main Street business district adjacent to the waterfront]... To date, we have accomplished installation of thirteen of the period lights, all the in-ground electric service, an underground sprinkler system to water the surrounding streetscape green area and flowers and the realignment of overhead power lines was completed in July 2004...*

*The long term plan for continuity and even larger beautification impact will be to continue the period lighting installation north to the Fort Niagara State Park entrance and east to the 110-year old Village Hall on Third and Lockport Streets [this is expected to be completed by early 2006]... The lighting project has affected the whole community of Youngstown by drawing residents and visitors to local restaurants and shops at night. It also encourages those attending summer evening concerts in the nearby park to stroll along the business district or enjoy a snack before heading home. Walkers have become more commonplace and because of the lighting, street dances can take place on the Main Street business strip.<sup>1</sup>*

As shown on the Village of Youngstown Zoning District Map in Appendix C, there are four zoning classifications for commercial uses in the study area: C – Commercial; W – Waterfront; and WC-1 and WC-2 – Waterfront Commercial. The northern and southern portions of the study area – generally north of William Street and south of Hinman Street, respectively – are zoned residential. C- Commercial applies to the area in the vicinity of Lockport and Second Streets; to the west are the W, WC-1 and WC-2 districts. The only other parcels in Youngstown with the C – Commercial designation are located along Third Street between Church and Campbell Streets.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.shovelready.com/documents/2004winning\\_com\\_ren\\_awards.pdf](http://www.shovelready.com/documents/2004winning_com_ren_awards.pdf)

### Village of Wilson

Incorporated in 1858, the Village of Wilson is located on the shores of Lake Ontario, twelve miles east of Old Fort Niagara. The well-protected small boat harbor contains several marinas and boat launching facilities and reportedly, some of the best trout, bass and salmon fishing around can be found in adjacent waters. The Village has a small commercial district, approximately one mile south of the waterfront, with basic services and a successful community pharmacy. Wilson-Tuscarora State Park is located a short distance from the Village on Route 18, directly on Lake Ontario.



The Village of Wilson does not have a current comprehensive plan, nor has it prepared a Local Waterfront Revitalization Program. Development in the Village is, however, guided by a zoning ordinance originally adopted in 1970 and subsequently amended. As indicated on the Village of Wilson Zoning District Map in Appendix D, the core of the commercial district is zoned C-C, Central Commercial. Other commercial zoning in the Village includes H-C, Highway Commercial, on the south end of the Village, and W-C, Waterfront Commercial, at the north end of Harbor Street near Tuscarora Bay.



## Market Analysis

### Resident Demographics

This section analyzes population, household, income, and age characteristics of residents in the Villages of Lewiston, Youngstown, and Wilson. The purpose of this analysis is to understand local demographic trends, the purchasing patterns of village residents, and their potential impact on market opportunities in each of the village commercial districts. The data used in the analysis is derived from the U.S. Census Bureau and Claritas Data Services, a leading national provider of market information.

### Population

The table below summarizes population trends in the three villages and Niagara County from 1990 projected through 2009. With an estimated population of 2,694 in 2004, the Village of Lewiston is the largest of the five incorporated villages in Niagara County. Between 1990 and 2000, however, the Village of Lewiston's population declined, from 3,048 to 2,781 individuals. The population is projected to decline to 2,577 persons by 2009.

Market Area Population							
Market Area	1990	2000	2004 (est.)	2009 (proj.)	Average Annual Change %		
					1990-2000	2000-2004	2004-2009
Village of Lewiston	3,048	2,781	2,694	2,577	-0.9%	-0.8%	-0.9%
Village of Youngstown	2,075	1,957	1,923	1,893	-0.6%	-0.4%	-0.3%
Village of Wilson	1,307	1,213	1,184	1,143	-0.7%	-0.6%	-0.7%
Niagara County	220,756	219,846	216,623	212,360	0.0%	-0.4%	-0.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Claritas Data Services, and Camoin Associates.

Similar trends are evident in the Village of Youngstown to the north. During the 1990s, Youngstown experienced a 5.7% decrease in population, from 2,075 to 1,957 persons. According to Claritas, the population will shrink further to 1,893 by 2009.

The Village of Wilson had an estimated 1,184 residents in 2004. Between 1990 and 2000, the population of the Village of Wilson decreased by nearly 100 individuals, a decline of over 7.2%. The projection for 2009 is 1,143 residents.

A review of demographic data from the surrounding area indicates that the population decline in the three villages is typical of densely populated communities in the western New York region. In contrast, many towns have experienced an increase in population over the last ten years. The Towns of Lewiston and Wilson both fit into the latter category. This may be due, at least in part, to the availability of vacant land for new residential development. The Town of Porter, in which Youngstown is located, had a slight decrease in population of 1.2% between 1990 and 2000.

The decline in population has an impact on local economic conditions in that businesses are forced to reach out to a larger market area, including visitors from other parts of the U.S. and Canada, in order to be successful. There may be a need for all three villages to work on long-range plans to attract new residents, particularly young adults and families. This will require a variety of strategies, from promoting the small-town quality of life to encouraging the development of housing that meets today's needs.



## Households

According to the Census Bureau, a household includes all persons who occupy a housing unit. The occupants may be a single family, one person living alone, two or more persons living together, or any other group of related or unrelated individuals who share living arrangements outside of an institution. While population data allows the total size of the market to be quantified, household data provides insight into the composition of the market.

As shown below, there are currently an estimated 1,246 households in the Village of Lewiston, 806 households in the Village of Youngstown, and 499 in the Village of Wilson. As with population, the three villages are not experiencing any appreciable growth in the number of households, although Niagara County did have an increase in the number of households from 1990 to 2000.

Market Area Households							
Market Area	1990	2000	2004 (est.)	2009 (proj.)	Average Annual Change		
					1990-2000	2000-2004	2004-2009
Village of Lewiston	1,285	1,268	1,246	1,212	-0.1%	-0.4%	-0.5%
Village of Youngstown	798	809	806	809	0.1%	-0.1%	0.1%
Village of Wilson	521	505	499	488	-0.3%	-0.3%	-0.4%
Niagara County	84,809	87,846	87,204	86,289	0.4%	-0.2%	-0.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Claritas Data Services, and Camoin Associates.

Within the villages, there is considerable variation in household composition. As the table below indicates, 22.3% of Village of Lewiston households, 32.4% of Village of Youngstown households, and 33.3% of Village of Wilson households have children under age 18 present. Most of the households with kids are traditional married couple families. The majority of the households in general, however, do not have children under 18. This is particularly true of the Village of Lewiston.

Distribution of Households by Type, 2004						
	Village of Lewiston		Village of Youngstown		Village of Wilson	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Married couple family with people < 18	206	16.5%	196	24.3%	130	26.1%
Male or female householder, with people < 18	71	5.7%	60	7.4%	34	6.8%
Non fam HH, with people < 18	1	0.1%	5	0.6%	2	0.4%
<b>Subtotal - households with people &lt; 18</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>22.3%</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>32.4%</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>33.3%</b>
Married couple family with no people < 18	360	28.9%	255	31.6%	154	30.9%
Male or female householder, with no people < 18	77	6.2%	45	5.6%	23	4.6%
Non fam HH, with no people < 18	531	42.6%	245	30.4%	156	31.3%
<b>Subtotal - households with no people &lt; 18</b>	<b>968</b>	<b>77.7%</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>67.6%</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>66.7%</b>
<b>Total - all households</b>	<b>1,246</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>806</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>499</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

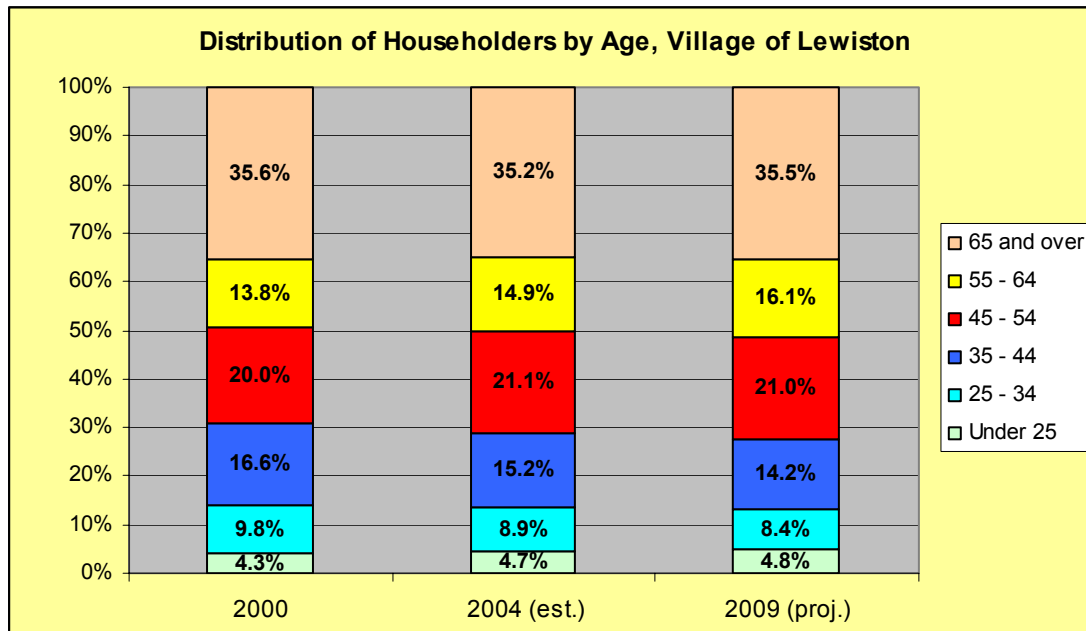
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Claritas Data Services, and Camoin Associates.

## Householder Age

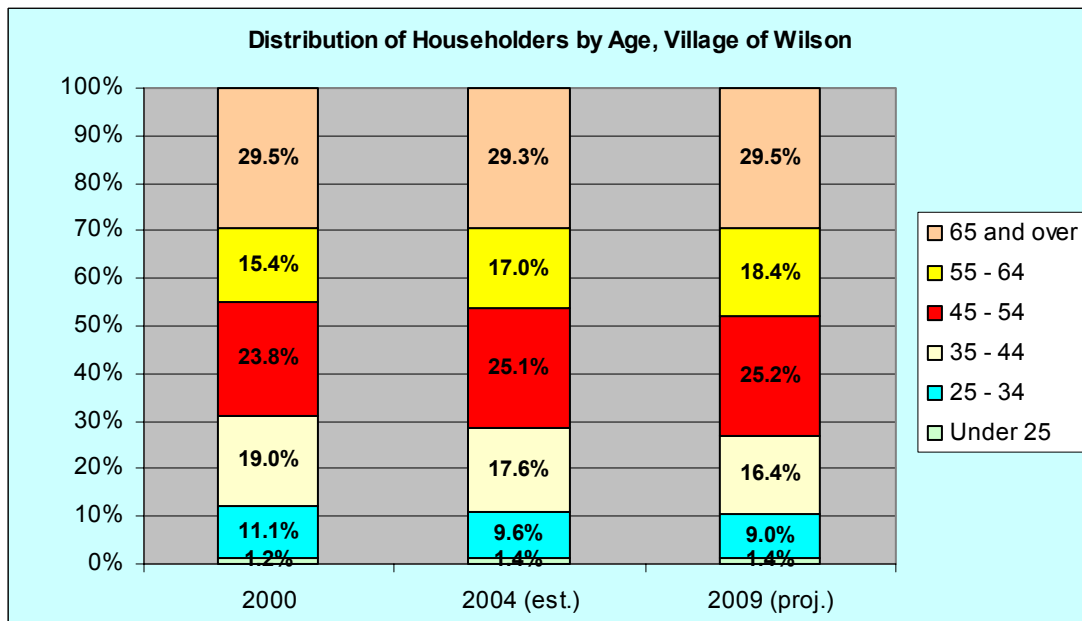
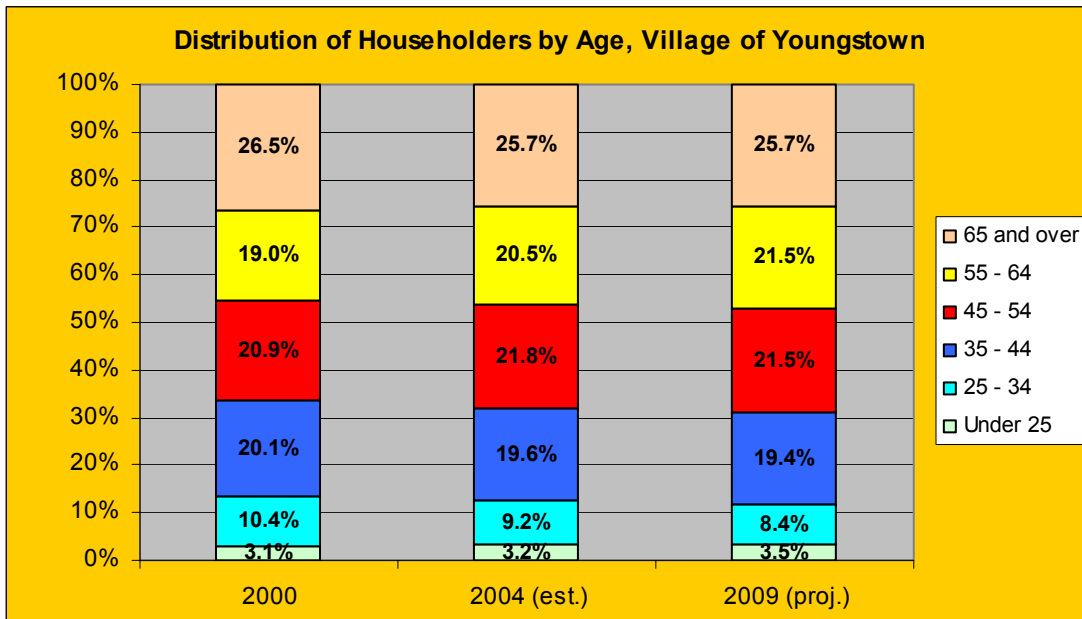
One of the most important factors impacting the marketplace is age. During the 1990s, the aging of the vast baby boom generation resulted in a significant increase in the number of households headed by individuals between the ages of 45 and 54.

The charts on the following pages illustrate the age distribution of householders (heads of household) in the villages from 2000 to 2009. All three villages are experiencing significant growth in the proportion of householders age 45 and older, with a concurrent decline in the share of householders in the 25-34 and 35-44 age groups. In the Village of Lewiston, for example, householders age 45 and older represented 69.3% of the market; by 2009, this proportion is projected to increase to 72.6%.

It is important to recognize that the aging of the population is not limited to this area, but is due to stagnant population growth in upstate New York and significant out-migration, particularly among younger adults, to other regions of the United States. According to a recent report from the Buffalo Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, upstate New York lost roughly 20% of people ages 20 and 34 between 1980 and 2000. By comparison, this age group increased nearly 10% nationwide.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Richard Deitz. "Population Out-Migration From Upstate New York." *The Regional Economy of Upstate New York*. Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Winter 2005. [http://www.newyorkfed.org/research/regional\\_economy/upstatenews.html](http://www.newyorkfed.org/research/regional_economy/upstatenews.html)



The implications of this trend are expected to be most acute with respect to the growth and age structure of the labor force. It is likely to impact market trends as well. One trend that is already evident in the Niagara region is the demand for housing that is easy to maintain and close to or even within walking distance of local shops, services, and amenities.

While fixed incomes often mean tighter budgets, seniors tend to spend money maintaining what they have already accumulated. Health care costs such as drugs, health insurance, and medical supplies are significantly more than average. As they spend more time at home, seniors also direct a larger chunk of their budgets to food to be eaten there. According to the 2003 Consumer Expenditure Survey conducted

by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, consumers between the ages of 65 and 74 allocate 8.6% of their expenditures to food at home, while those aged 75 and over allocate 9.0% – significantly higher than the U.S. population at large, which spends an average of 7.7%. Overall spending by consumers aged 65 and over on food at home totals nearly \$59 billion annually. Conversely, seniors spend considerably less than average on apparel and furniture.

### Household Income

Household income is a good indicator of the spending potential of the community, since it correlates with retail expenditures. The table below shows the changes in median household income for the Villages of Lewiston, Youngstown, and Wilson and Niagara County from 1990 to the present and projected into 2009. *Please note that all figures are stated in 2004 constant dollars.*

All three villages had median household incomes (MHI) above the County MHI in 1990. Today, however, the MHI in both Lewiston and Wilson is below that of Niagara County overall, while the MHI in Village of Youngstown is more than 30% higher than the County's. Moreover, Youngstown is continuing to experience household income growth well above the rate of inflation.

<b>Market Area Median Household Income (In Constant 2004 Dollars)</b>							
Market Area	1990	2000	2004 (est.)	2009 (proj.)	Average Annual Change		
					1990-2000	2000-2004	2004-2009
Village of Lewiston	\$23,675	\$34,062	\$37,259	\$34,769	4.4%	2.3%	-1.3%
Village of Youngstown	\$23,944	\$44,742	\$53,276	\$53,209	8.7%	4.8%	0.0%
Village of Wilson	\$20,541	\$34,014	\$38,026	\$35,877	6.6%	2.9%	-1.1%
Niagara County	\$19,888	\$35,365	\$40,947	\$40,651	7.8%	3.9%	-0.1%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Claritas Data Services, and Camoin Associates. Inflation adjustment based on CPI.*

The income data suggest that new business development in the Villages of Lewiston and Wilson may need to focus and capitalize on markets outside their boundaries (i.e., visitors). The picture is slightly different in the Village of Youngstown; with household incomes rising or at least stabilizing in real terms, there may be additional opportunities for commercial development serving both resident and visitor markets.

### Retail Sales

The tables on the following pages provide an overview of the retail sector in each of the three villages by compiling the total number of establishments, estimated sales, and the distribution of sales for each store type.

<b>Retail Sales Profile - Village of Lewiston</b>			
<b>Store Type</b>	<b>Store Count</b>	<b>Estimated Total Sales (millions)</b>	<b>Sales Distribution</b>
<b>Eating &amp; Drinking Places</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>\$14.7</b>	<b>33.9%</b>
<b>Convenience Retail</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>\$16.4</b>	<b>37.9%</b>
Building Materials & Garden Supply	1	\$0.6	1.4%
Grocery Stores	1	\$0.6	1.4%
Food Stores (Other Than Grocery)	5	\$11.1	25.6%
Drug Stores	2	\$3.0	6.9%
Automotive, Boat, & Motorcycle Dealers	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Gasoline Service Stations & Auto Supply	1	\$1.1	2.5%
<b>Shopping Goods Retail</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>\$12.2</b>	<b>28.2%</b>
General Merchandise	2	\$1.1	2.5%
Apparel & Accessory Stores	3	\$0.4	0.9%
Furniture & Home Furnishings Stores	3	\$2.6	6.0%
Computer Hardware & Software Stores	2	\$2.0	4.6%
Liquor Stores	1	\$0.4	0.9%
Antique Stores	2	\$0.6	1.4%
Sporting Goods, Bicycle and Gun Stores	3	\$1.4	3.2%
Jewelry Stores	1	\$0.1	0.2%
Hobby, Toy, and Game Shops	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Gift and Souvenir Stores	5	\$0.8	1.8%
Sewing, Needlework, and Craft Stores	1	\$0.1	0.2%
Florists	2	\$0.5	1.2%
Pet Shops	0	\$0.0	0.0%
All Other Retail Stores, Including NEC	6	\$2.2	5.1%
<b>Total Retail Sales</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>\$43.3</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Claritas-Business Facts.

Based on data provided by Claritas-Business Facts, which includes data from infoUSA, retail establishments in the Village of Lewiston generate an estimated \$43.3 million in annual sales. Overall, retail activity in Lewiston is dominated by the sales of food and beverage items. The leading retail categories include eating and drinking places (i.e., restaurants and bars), with \$14.7 million in sales; non-grocery food stores, principally meat and seafood markets (\$11.1 million); and grocery stores (\$0.6 million). Taken together, these establishments represent 44% of the retail businesses and 26% of the sales in the Village of Lewiston.

The remainder of the retail sector is quite balanced, with approximately 28% of sales generated by so-called "shoppers' goods retail" stores, which compete for customers based on quality, price, and selection rather than convenience. Relative to New York State as a whole, sales per capita in the Village of Lewiston are above average for sporting goods and bicycle stores, food stores (other than grocery), florists, liquor stores, and gift stores, among others.

The retail sector in the Village of Youngstown is much smaller, with 16 establishments and a total of \$19.6 million in annual sales. Nearly two-thirds of this total, or \$12.6 million, can be attributed to boat dealers, indicating the importance of sailing and boating to Youngstown's economy. Eating and drinking places (\$4.8 million) and drug stores (\$1.2 million) comprise the other major retail categories. In comparison to the Village of Lewiston, there is a much more limited variety of goods available, with few specialty retailers.

<b>Retail Sales Profile - Village of Youngstown</b>			
<b>Store Type</b>	<b>Store Count</b>	<b>Estimated Total Sales (millions)</b>	<b>Sales Distribution</b>
<b>Eating &amp; Drinking Places</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>\$4.8</b>	<b>24.5%</b>
<b>Convenience Retail</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>\$14.1</b>	<b>71.9%</b>
Building Materials & Garden Supply	1	\$0.3	1.5%
Grocery Stores	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Food Stores (Other Than Grocery)	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Drug Stores	1	\$1.2	6.1%
Automotive, Boat, & Motorcycle Dealers	2	\$12.6	64.3%
Gasoline Service Stations & Auto Supply	0	\$0.0	0.0%
<b>Shopping Goods Retail</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>\$0.7</b>	<b>3.6%</b>
General Merchandise	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Apparel & Accessory Stores	1	\$0.1	0.5%
Furniture & Home Furnishings Stores	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Computer Hardware & Software Stores	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Liquor Stores	1	\$0.3	1.5%
Antique Stores	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Sporting Goods, Bicycle and Gun Stores	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Jewelry Stores	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Hobby, Toy, and Game Shops	1	\$0.1	0.5%
Gift and Souvenir Stores	1	\$0.2	1.0%
Sewing, Needlework, and Craft Stores	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Florists	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Pet Shops	0	\$0.0	0.0%
All Other Retail Stores, Including NEC	0	\$0.0	0.0%
<b>Total Retail Sales</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>\$19.6</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Claritas-Business Facts.

In the Village of Wilson, Claritas-Business Facts reports a total of 19 retail establishments and an estimated \$21.0 million in annual sales. Eating and drinking places and grocery stores together represent 42% of the retail businesses and 87% of the sales. Like Youngstown, however, the Village of Wilson has a limited variety of store types.

<b>Retail Sales Profile - Village of Wilson</b>			
<b>Store Type</b>	<b>Store Count</b>	<b>Estimated Total Sales (millions)</b>	<b>Sales Distribution</b>
<b>Eating &amp; Drinking Places</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>\$12.0</b>	<b>57.1%</b>
<b>Convenience Retail</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>\$8.3</b>	<b>39.5%</b>
Building Materials & Garden Supply	2	\$0.8	3.8%
Grocery Stores	2	\$6.2	29.5%
Food Stores (Other Than Grocery)	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Drug Stores	1	\$0.5	2.4%
Automotive, Boat, & Motorcycle Dealers	2	\$0.8	3.8%
Gasoline Service Stations & Auto Supply	0	\$0.0	0.0%
<b>Shopping Goods Retail</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>\$0.7</b>	<b>3.3%</b>
General Merchandise	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Apparel & Accessory Stores	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Furniture & Home Furnishings Stores	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Computer Hardware & Software Stores	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Liquor Stores	1	\$0.1	0.5%
Antique Stores	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Sporting Goods, Bicycle and Gun Stores	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Jewelry Stores	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Hobby, Toy, and Game Shops	3	\$0.3	1.4%
Gift and Souvenir Stores	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Sewing, Needlework, and Craft Stores	0	\$0.0	0.0%
Florists	1	\$0.1	0.5%
Pet Shops	1	\$0.2	1.0%
All Other Retail Stores, Including NEC	0	\$0.0	0.0%
<b>Total Retail Sales</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>\$21.0</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Claritas-Business Facts.

Notably, the following store types are not present in any of the villages, according to Claritas:

- Household appliance stores
- Radio, TV, and electronics stores
- Music, video, CDs, and tape stores
- Bookstores
- Stationery stores
- Camera and photography supply stores
- News dealers and newsstands.

## Conclusion

The Villages of Lewiston, Youngstown, and Wilson have relatively similar demographic profiles, including aging populations and a slow but steady decline in the number of residents. Although a sales leakage analysis was outside the scope of this study, the resident market demographics do not seem to support additional retail development in most categories. Interestingly, nearly 60% of the total retail sales generated by establishments in the three villages can be attributed to food and beverage items, either at restaurants or at grocery and other food stores. This represents a potential opportunity, and market niche, on which these communities can build. A proportion of these sales can probably be attributed to the strong



senior market in the area. Tourism is also a significant factor. Another 15% of total retail sales can be attributed to boat dealerships in the Village of Youngstown, and indicates the importance of the boating/sailing market to the local economy. With many retail categories becoming increasingly competitive with the proliferation of big box stores, the Villages of Lewiston, Youngstown, and Wilson may be more successful pursuing “niche” retail, including restaurants, specialty stores, and businesses that cater to boating enthusiasts.

## **The Regional Tourism Market**

This section analyzes the regional tourism market, examining information on visitor origins, interests, and demographic characteristics from a variety of sources. The purpose of this analysis is to better understand the impacts of tourism and identify potential opportunities for the commercial districts in the Village of Lewiston, Youngstown, and Wilson.

### **Visitation to the Niagara Region**

Data on visitation to the Niagara Falls area has been presented in various reports and studies, including the *Niagara Experience Center Feasibility Study* (2003) and *USA Niagara Development Strategy: A Blueprint for Revitalization of Downtown Niagara Falls* (2002), prepared by Hunter Interests, Incorporated; the *Gateway Point Feasibility Study* (2002), developed for the City of North Tonawanda by Architectural Resources; and the *Love Canal Education/Interpretation Center Market Study* (2001) prepared by Allee King Rosen & Fleming. These reports generally cite statistics compiled by state or provincial agencies, supplementing these figures with attendance data from area attractions.

Annual visitation to both sides of Niagara Falls has been estimated in the range of 12 million to 20 million. Overseas visitors comprise 10% of this market. According to the most recent Hunter Interests study, total attendance at representative regional attractions equaled 21 million in 2001. Adjusting for repeat visitation and attendance at multiple attractions, the consultants estimate that the Falls receive 16 million visits – including 6 million to the U.S. side – each year.

<b>Attendance at Selected U.S. Attractions in the Niagara Region, 2001</b>	
Niagara Reservation State Park (aggregate)	7.5 million
Parks Walk-Ins/Tours (estimated)	3.7 million
Falls/Rapids/Gorge Overlook (estimated)	2.8 million
Niagara Reservation Tower	689,000
Cave of the Winds	288,000
Aquarium of Niagara	146,000
Niagara Power Project Visitors' Center	140,000
Viewmobile	114,000
Niagara Gorge Discovery Center	36,000

*Source: Hunter Interests, Inc. Figures have been rounded.*

Attendance data for selected U.S. attractions in the Niagara region is shown in the table at left. With the exception of the Falls and adjacent attractions, most Niagara County attractions capture a very small share of the total Niagara Falls visitor market – no more than 2 or 3 percent.

U.S. Niagara Falls tourism has declined, however, as gaming facilities, theaters, museums, and other attractions have been developed on the Canadian side of the river. In fact, the most popular attraction in the region is Ontario's Casino Niagara, which draws an average of 9 million visitors per year. The new Niagara Fallsview Casino Resort, a more upscale, Las Vegas-style casino, is also attracting large numbers of people. According to the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., the Fallsview has averaged about 25,000 visitors a day since its opening in June 2004. With several large flagship hotels being constructed and additional private investment, the hospitality and tourism market on the Canadian side of the falls continues to grow. The Ontario government spends \$40 million annually promoting the Niagara region, double the budget of the "I Love New York" marketing campaign for the entire state.

The loss of U.S. market share has also been attributed to the condition of properties and amenities on the U.S. side. To address these circumstances, New York State, through the USA Niagara Development Corporation, has committed significant funding to revitalize downtown Niagara Falls with new facilities and attractions. Projects include the new Seneca Niagara Casino, New York State's only full service casino, which opened in 2002; a new conference center in the heart of the City; the redevelopment of the 1929 United Office Building; and family oriented attractions such as the Niagara Aerospace Museum and the Niagara Experience Center. Future plans call for the construction of a \$120 million, 450-room luxury

hotel and parking facility adjacent to the casino. These facilities and attractions are expected to increase visitation to the U.S. side of the Falls and reposition the City as a world-class tourism destination.

At the same time, Niagara County is looking for ways to move people north and east from the City of Niagara Falls, connecting them to attractions in Lockport, North Tonawanda, Lewiston, Youngstown, and other communities via a tourist train, trolley, or bus. The purpose of this effort is to encourage visitors to remain in the County longer, providing economic benefits to the communities outside the City of Niagara Falls.

In January 2005, the Buffalo Niagara Cultural Tourism Initiative released its blueprint for cultural tourism development in Erie and Niagara Counties entitled *A Cultural Tourism Strategy: Enriching Culture and Building Tourism in Buffalo Niagara*. The strategy was based on an intense, two-year planning process that involved more than 200 stakeholders from various cultural, arts, and heritage organizations, government agencies, tourism representatives, and foundations in the region. Key tenets of the strategy include strengthening cultural, artistic, and historic organizations; expanding individual opportunities for creativity and interpretation; helping the regional economy grow; enhancing the community quality of life; advancing the image and identity of the region; and building the region's reputation as a world-class tourism destination.

The report proposes a three-pronged strategy to promote cultural tourism in Buffalo Niagara and capture a growing market of travelers interested in cultural experiences: (1) coordinated programming; (2) targeted marketing; and (3) systemic improvement to the cultural tourism system. In addition to developing specific marketing strategies through shared promotional initiatives and packaging, the report calls for developing "generic" marketing strategies: "The first involves programs, messages and media for encouraging long-distance Niagara Falls tourists to visit other regional attractions. A second should focus on attracting a natural audience of cultural tourism visitors through centerpiece promotions. A third should concentrate on drawing visitors from a broad regional market – the 'rubber-tire traffic' – in Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Toronto and upstate New York." These strategies are consistent with the recognition that the region has much to offer beyond Niagara Falls; the key is to package and more effectively promote these attractions.

In 2004, the Niagara Tourism and Convention Corporation (NTCC) contracted with the Center for Community Economic Development Through Hospitality and Tourism at Niagara University to conduct quarterly surveys of visitors to the region. Between March and June 2004 (the first quarter during which surveys were conducted), tourists were surveyed at Clarence and Angola Information Centers as well as at Prospect Park and Maid of the Mist. The visitors represented nine countries and 30 different states. Consistent with the findings of a study conducted in the 1990s, New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio were the top states of origin.

Between July and September 2004, tourists were surveyed at The Prime Outlet Mall in Niagara Falls as well as at Goat Island, Cave of the Winds, and Maid of the Mist. The second quarter visitors were more diverse, representing 16 different countries and 47 different states, but New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio were again the leading states of origin. Future surveys will continue at these sites as well as adding many of the other top ten tourist destinations and the new NTCC visitor center downtown. Additional findings of the NTCC surveys are summarized below:

- Travel to Niagara Falls: 85% of the first quarter and 82% of the second quarter visitors had traveled to Niagara Falls by car.
- Information sources: 47% of the first quarter and 51% of the second quarter visitors had obtained travel information on Niagara Falls from the Internet, while 24% of each group indicated that they had used the NTCC's visitor information guide.

- Length of visit: The largest share (34% of the first quarter and 35% of the second quarter visitors) indicated that they were planning to stay in the Niagara Falls area for 2 days. Significantly, one out of every four visitors planned to stay in the area for less than a day (the choices were “4-6 hours” or “7-10 hours”). According to Statistics Canada, people stay in Niagara Falls, Ontario for nearly two days, on average.
- Visiting Canada: Fully 57% of the first quarter and 59% of the second quarter indicated plans to visit the Canadian side of the Falls during their trip.
- Place of stay: 70% of first quarter and 65% of second quarter visitors said they were staying overnight on the U.S. side of the Falls, with the majority staying at a hotel or motel, or with friends or relatives.
- Demographics: Visitors to Niagara Falls are well-educated; 56% of all visitors surveyed had a bachelor’s degree or higher. Approximately 73% of first quarter and 68% of second quarter visitors had an annual household income of at least \$50,000; 46% of first quarter and 43% of second quarter visitors had an annual household income of \$75,000 or more. The largest share of visitors is in the 35-44 and 45-54 age groups, with a slightly younger age profile among the summer visitors.
- Evaluation: Asked to evaluate “Niagara, USA” as a place to visit and provide suggestions to make their next visit more enjoyable, spring and summer visitors both indicated that more nightlife, nicer hotels and restaurants, better signage, and improvements in the appearance and cleanliness of the city and region are needed.

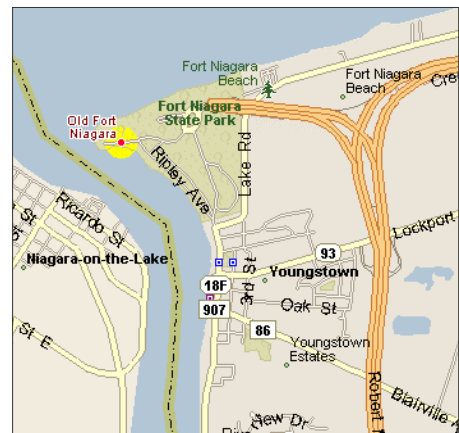
### Attractions and Visitation in the Study Area

Attractions for visitors in and around the Villages of Lewiston, Youngstown, and Wilson include several state parks with extensive recreational amenities, a state historic site, a theater and arts complex, wineries, and a designated birding trail, as well as access to recreational boating, sailing, and fishing along the Niagara River and Lake Ontario.

**Fort Niagara State Park** is a 504-acre state park located just north of the Village of Youngstown (see Official Street Map of the Village of Youngstown in Appendix C). A significant amount of the park’s acreage is located under water; actual operating acreage is approximately 280 acres. The Old Fort Niagara State Historic Site is located within the park.

The park’s 10,600 feet of shoreline and two boat launches provide access to the Niagara River and Lake Ontario for fishing, swimming, and sailing. Additional features include wooded trails, walking and bike paths, nature programs, a swimming pool, 18 soccer fields, three small playgrounds, and five pavilions with picnic tables that can be rented for company parties and family reunions.

In the last five years, estimated annual park attendance has averaged about 669,000 persons. Park Manager David Clark believes that roughly 80% of visitors are local or from the western New York region. Because it is directly adjacent to the Village of Youngstown, many visitors walk rather than drive into the park.



The state park, which is open year-round, also receives some traffic from tour buses visiting nearby Niagara Falls.

Several special events are held at Fort Niagara State Park, including the Niagara Pioneer Soccer League's International Tournament. The largest regional soccer tournament in the nation, this event brings as many as 30,000 people to the area and reportedly has a total estimated economic impact of \$13 million to \$15 million. (The Village of Wilson also has a Youth Soccer League that has games two evenings per week from May through July at Thomas Marks Elementary School.) This summer, the Youth Lacrosse National Championships are also being held at the state park, bringing 192 teams to the area.

In the late 1990s, the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) released a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the adaptive reuse and redevelopment of four buildings on land within Fort Niagara State Park. Dating back to the 1930s, the buildings are the only surviving structures from the Fort's days as an active U.S. Army post, which ended in 1963. The state subsequently contracted with a private developer, who proposed to convert the buildings into an inn and bed-and-breakfast, with a small café, conference center, health club, and theater. Although some interior remodeling was completed on the commandant's house, however, the project never achieved fruition due to the death of one of the principals.

Following a second RFP process, the state selected and is currently in discussions with a new developer. The proposed uses of the buildings and the desired terms of the agreement are similar: private investment and operation, with the state retaining ownership of the property. It is assumed that the developer would exercise due diligence regarding the feasibility of the project. The NYS OPRHP administrator involved in Fort Niagara project characterizes its status as "in very preliminary stages."

**Old Fort Niagara** is a State Historic Site located in Fort Niagara State Park, just outside the Village of Youngstown. Although the Fort is owned by the State, the Old Fort Niagara Association, Inc. manages the Fort in cooperation with the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

Old Fort Niagara consists of approximately 23 acres of land and Lake Ontario bottomland at the mouth of the Niagara River and includes fortifications, outworks, six eighteenth century buildings, significant archaeological remains, and the early post cemetery. Active educational programs and special events, including reenactments, take place on a regular basis.

<b>Old Fort Niagara Visitation Totals, 2000-2004</b>					
	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
<b>May</b>	10,678	11,323	11,467	9,340	9,100
<b>June</b>	15,535	16,904	15,270	13,090	13,594
<b>July</b>	25,537	26,616	22,031	20,057	18,670
<b>August</b>	19,128	17,449	16,666	14,549	14,364
<b>September</b>	7,951	8,242	8,241	5,984	7,888
<b>Total Summer</b>	78,829	80,534	73,675	63,020	63,616
<b>Summer As % of Total</b>	78.4%	80.4%	78.7%	81.1%	92.4%
<b>Annual Total</b>	100,516	100,177	93,573	77,746	68,823

The Fort has about 100,000 visitors annually. Over the last several years, however, Old Fort Niagara has experienced a notable decline in visitation, as shown in the table above. According to Executive Director Bob Emerson, the trend is consistent with the drop in tourism throughout the region post-9/11. The Fort has also experienced a decline in the number of school groups, which account for about 20% of total visitation. This is attributed to problems with transportation and budget issues at schools within an hour's drive.



Visitors to Old Fort Niagara include families and couples from throughout the U.S. as well as Canada, Europe, and Asia. Most visitors come from the states of New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan. Although the majority of Fort visitors come by way of Niagara Falls, special events draw a much stronger regional audience of perhaps 15,000 per year.

Old Fort Niagara is in the process of developing a new, 10,000 square foot visitor's center that will include an orientation theater, special exhibits, and public restrooms. The Fort has raised \$6 million for the project and hopes to break ground soon, with opening anticipated for May 2006.

The **Joseph Davis State Park** is a 388-acre state park on Route 18 in the Town of Lewiston. Open year-round, this facility offers a nature trail and walking paths, snowshoeing/cross country skiing and snowmobile trails, opportunities for fishing and hunting in season, and a 27-hole golf course. A playground, snack bar, shelters, picnics tables and restrooms are also provided.

With support from the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and the Niagara County Environmental Fund, the Buffalo Audubon Society is developing a new Birds of Prey Nature Center to be located at Joseph Davis. The new center, which could open as early as October 2005, will serve an educational role and feature live species of eagles, hawks and owls. An exhibit hall, auditorium, and classrooms will be built on the site. The Audubon Society believes that the center will increase the number of visitors to the park and support the local tourism industry. With a 94-year record of natural history education, this Center will be Buffalo Audubon's second nature center and will work together with the Beaver Meadow Audubon Center to provide nature center programming and educational services across Western New York.



The Center will focus on indigenous birds of prey, their life cycles, and their habitat in the Niagara River Important Bird Area. The Niagara County Environmental Fund, administering the legacy of the settlement funds stemming from Love Canal, awarded Buffalo Audubon a startup grant to begin the development of the Birds of Prey Center.

The **Wilson-Tuscarora State Park** is a day-use facility located in the Town of Wilson, just west of the Village line (see Official Street Map of the Village of Wilson in Appendix D). The park is open year-round and consists of 395 acres of mature woods, open meadows and marshland. Tuscarora Bay, which is divided from Lake Ontario by a strip of land called "The Island," has a boat launch. A four-mile nature trail in the park is used for hiking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. Other recreational opportunities at the park include swimming, fishing, picnicking, a children's playground, and viewing wildlife and plant life. The master plan for Wilson-Tuscarora identifies the need to further develop recreational opportunities at the park.

**Artpark** is a unique visual and performing arts complex on the site of a 150-acre state park on the south side of Lewiston (see Official Street Map of the Village of Lewiston in Appendix B). Recreational facilities, such as nature trails, picnic areas, and fishing docks are available. The hiking trails take visitors along the edge of the Niagara River Gorge.

## ARTPARK'S SPOTLIGHT ON AREA DINING LEWISTON, NEW YORK

**Water Street Landing 754.9200**  

115 South Water Street, Lewiston  
Casual & upscale dining overlooking the Niagara River Gorge. An outdoor patio & live entertainment makes this Niagara's premier destination!

**Schimschack's 731.4111**  

2943 Upper Mountain Road, Sanborn  
'Enjoy dinner with a view!' Fine dining overlooking the Lewiston Vineyards & Lake Ontario. [www.schimschacks.com](http://www.schimschacks.com)

**Tin Pan Alley 754.4330**  

775 Cayuga Street, Lewiston  
Tin Pan Alley has developed a reputation for serving the area's best wings, ribs & burgers in a casual lounge & dining room setting! Located in the Village Plaza.

**The Steelhead Irish Pub 754.8181**  

453 Center Street, Lewiston  
Enjoy a perfect pint of Guinness in a classic Irish Pub! World's best Reuben, sandwiches, salads, traditional Irish fare. Friendly staff, moderate prices.

**Olde Fort Inn 745.7141**  

110 Main Street, Youngstown  
We take pride in our made-to-order dinners. Menu includes steaks, fresh seafood, BBQ ribs and -on weekend nights- prime rib. New menu, lower prices! [www.oldefortinn.com](http://www.oldefortinn.com)

**Artpark's Musical Revues**  
**Cole: A Musical Tribute to Cole Porter**  
On Stage August 5-11  
**World Goes 'Round: The Songs of Kander & Ebb**  
On Stage August 18-24  
[www.artpark.net](http://www.artpark.net) (716) 754-4375

Artpark's mission is to bring the finest performing and visual arts to the public. It offers entertainment ranging from free concerts, music and cultural festivals at the outdoor amphitheater, to Broadway musicals, popular music concerts, and Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra performances in the Main Theater. Artpark also offers art, theater, and video camps for youth, as well as a variety of family programs on Saturdays. In 2004, the organization experienced its most successful summer ever with an influx of over 140,000 visitors to park events. An estimated 85,000 people came to the 13-week "Tuesday in the Park" free outdoor summer concert series, including 12,000 at a Blood Sweat and Tears show in August. About 12,000 people came to Broadway musicals last year; Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra concerts drew approximately 10,000; and big band performances brought 5,000 visitors to Artpark.

According to Artpark's Director of Marketing and Development, the majority of the patrons attending events at its Mainstage Theater are local, coming from western New York, Ontario, and the Rochester area. The audience for musical and big band performances is largely made up of couples age 60 and older. Many of these patrons dine at restaurants and pubs or shop in Lewiston and Youngstown prior to shows (Artpark has produced a dining guide, shown at left, to promote local restaurants to theater and concert patrons).

The audience for the free outdoor activities, including the Tuesday in the Park concerts, is much more diverse and includes singles, couples, and families with children of all ages. While local acts generally draw from within 50 miles of Artpark, national acts draw

from a much wider area. Some people travel to Artpark from other parts of the country to see headliners after finding out about the concert from the band's own website. Tuesday in the Park patrons often stop in Lewiston or Youngstown after concerts.

Artpark and the NYS OPRHP are currently working to explore expansions to the Upper Park and Outdoor Amphitheater area to handle the public's enthusiastic response to its Tuesday in the Park concerts. In 2004, the NYS OPRHP conducted some much-needed upgrades to the Mainstage Theater area. Artpark believes that these improvements will have a "ripple effect," enhancing visitation in the Lewiston-Niagara corridor and in the Niagara region.

Based in the Village of Lewiston, **Lewiston Council on the Arts** is a nonprofit group incorporated in 1969. Its purpose is the promotion of the visual and performing arts, and the promotion and development and understanding of various art forms within Lewiston and the surrounding area for the enjoyment and enrichment of the general public. The Council's mission is accomplished by supporting local artists, creating an audience for the arts, and fostering diverse opportunities for art education and appreciation.

The Council's premier event, the annual Lewiston Outdoor Fine Arts Festival, is held the second weekend in August and is now in its 39<sup>th</sup> year. Festival attendance is estimated at 30,000 with over 150 participating artists from the U.S. and Canada. The Council presents a number of other special events, including A Taste of Lewiston, Blue Mondays, Jazz Wednesdays, and the Lewiston Christmas Walk Fine Arts Sale, that attract people to the village.



The **Niagara Wine Trail** is a new initiative that highlights five award-winning wineries located between the Niagara Escarpment and Lake Ontario. This area has a unique microclimate suitable for growing grapes, cherries, and apples. The Wine Trail offers a series of events each year, including a Wine & Cheese Weekend, Harvest Festival, and summer concerts. The trail also features restaurants, bed-and-breakfasts, farm stands, and historic sites. Some local restaurants have agreed to offer Niagara County wines on their menus in support of the initiative. By 2006, there will be a total of seven independently owned and operated wineries in the region.

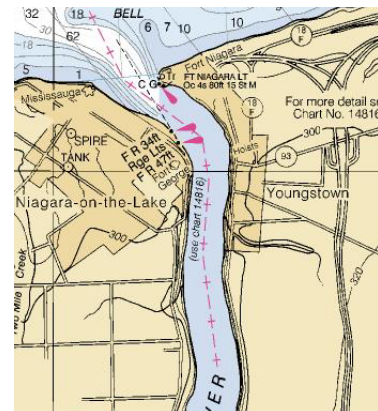


The Niagara River is a significant migratory stopover for a large and diverse population of birds and waterfowl. The **Audubon Niagara Birding Trail** follows the Niagara River corridor, extending 115 miles from Woodlawn Beach State Park in the south, to Fort Niagara State Park in the north and Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge in the east. The route includes one of the prime wintertime gull locales in North America. The birding trail is listed on a variety of websites for birders, such as *BirdWatcher's Digest* and the American Birding Association (ABA). According to the ABA: "The whole birding-trail phenomenon is part of

what's been called 'birding economics' for many years. This is another demonstration of community involvement and commitment to preserving natural resources based on responsible tourism and bird appreciation."

The North Trail starts in Niagara Falls and passes through Joseph Davis, Fort Niagara, and Wilson-Tuscarora State Parks. In an effort to increase awareness of the Niagara River Corridor Important Bird Area (the first bi-nationally designated Important Bird Area in North America), the Buffalo Audubon Society has published the "Nature Tourism in the Buffalo-Niagara Guide," which includes a description and map of the birding trail. The guide also features family nature attractions, nature centers, parks, and birding hot spots in the region.

Each year, the **Youngstown Level Regatta** takes place at the Youngstown Yacht Club in the Village of Youngstown. This event is reportedly one of the largest freshwater regattas in the world and attracts thousands of people to Youngstown and the surrounding area. In 2005, for the first time ever, Lake Ontario's two premier sailing events, the Level Regatta and LYRA [Lake Yacht Racing Association] Regatta are being held back-to-back at the same venue during the last week in July.



In addition to private marinas, the state parks in the region provide access to the Niagara River and Lake Ontario for **recreational boating**. Charter boats are available throughout Niagara County for fishing excursions. According to the manager of Fort Niagara State Park, boaters represent a "mixed bag" in terms of their impact on the local economy; with the opening of the casino, some are staying in hotels in Niagara Falls to gamble in the evening instead of spending the night in Youngstown or Lewiston. On the other hand, a local realtor notes that a charter boat rental can cost as much as \$1,000, and boaters and their spouses often contribute further to the local economy by visiting shops and restaurants.

**Recreational fishing** is an important contributor to tourism in Niagara County. To assess the impact of trout and salmon fishing on the seven counties that border Lake Ontario, angler surveys have been

conducted during one of the sport's major local events, the Lake Ontario Counties (LOC) Trout and Salmon Derby. Key findings of the most recent survey (2002) include the following:

- Of participating anglers, 35.2% resided in the lakeshore counties, 24.3% in other New York State counties, and 21.4% in Pennsylvania.
- Fully 94% of participants were male; 62% were over age 45.
- The direct revenue generated by anglers within the seven-county region was estimated at \$1,167,029, of which 32.5% was spent in Niagara County.
- The derby anglers spent an average of \$408.91 while participating in the ten-day event. This figure included \$104.48 (22.5%) on boat services; \$90.36 (19.4%) on fishing tackle; \$65.59 (14.1%) on lodging/camping; and \$62.42 (13.4%) on restaurants/bars.
- The total economic impact of the 2002 Derby on Niagara County was estimated at \$905,485.
- There has been a steady increase in the percent of entrants not residing in the lakeshore region; in 1990, for example, just 24.8% came from out of state, compared with 40.5% in 2002.

The Sporting Goods Manufacturing Association (SGMA) produces an annual study of outdoor recreation in the U.S. that includes data on participation in a broad range of activities. According to the SGMA study, freshwater fishing is one of the most popular forms of outdoor recreation, with 43.8 million participants nationwide. Participation has been flat, however, declining 4.3% between 1998 and 2003. It is not clear how this has impacted recreational fishing on Lake Ontario. The increase in the number of non-locals in the fishing derby would suggest that the Niagara region is becoming better known for the quality of its fishing.

## **Conclusion**

The Villages of Lewiston, Youngstown, and Wilson share many of the same issues faced by other communities in Niagara County: encouraging visitors to Niagara Falls to explore attractions on the U.S. side of the border rather than leave for the better-known Niagara-on-the-Lake and for attractive, self-funded provincial parks in Ontario. Interviews suggest that even people who visit Old Fort Niagara will often return to Niagara Falls directly via the Robert Moses Parkway rather than taking the "slow route" back through the villages.

At the same time, the visitors who *do* come to the area appear to have different interests than the "typical" Niagara Falls casino tourist. The arts, history, wineries, birding and boating tend to appeal to more upscale markets. According to the Travel Industry Association of America, historic/cultural travelers – i.e., those interested in visiting museums, art galleries, and historic sites and attending concerts and theater events – are older, have higher educational attainment and income levels, travel longer, and spend more on vacation than the average tourist. They are also more inclined to stay at a hotel, motel, or bed-and-breakfast.

The addition of new, high-quality lodging facilities would allow the village commercial districts to capitalize on the growing market of travelers interested in history and culture. Opportunities also exist in the villages with respect to fine dining restaurants and specialty retail stores. While restaurants already represent a significant portion of the retail sector in the Village of Lewiston, they are somewhat more limited in number in the Villages of Youngstown and Wilson. There is a particular need to expand the mix of goods and services in Youngstown, which is beginning to experience increased visitation through the Level Regatta, special events at Old Fort Niagara, and other activities. Many visitors savor the shopping experience while on vacation, viewing the purchase of unusual or locally-produced items as a form of recreation.

A proposal by the federal government to require passports at all U.S. borders by 2008 could impact tourism in the Lower Niagara River region. Critics, including the Lower Niagara River Chamber of

Commerce, point to the potential effect on U.S. tourism from Canadians crossing the border into western New York and other border regions for shopping and entertainment. On the other hand, it is possible that the requirement would also discourage U.S. travelers from going to Canada for short stays. At this time, the outcome of this proposal is unknown, but regional representatives have been lobbying against it, fearing that it will be detrimental to the regional economy.

Changes in the Canadian exchange rate could impact tourism in the Lower Niagara region as well. In recent years, unfavorable exchange rates combined with duties and taxes imposed by the Canadian government have made the U.S. a less attractive destination for Canadian shoppers than in years past. Little can be done at the local level to mitigate the effects of exchange rate fluctuations on the regional tourism industry. As the Canadian dollar strengthens, however, there may be an opportunity for the Villages of Lewiston, Youngstown, and Wilson to attract more visitors from the other side of the border. In this case, consideration should be given to actively promoting the village commercial districts to the Canadian market.

## Business Survey Results

To assess business needs and perceptions of the downtown business environment, the County's consultants conducted a survey of business owners in the Villages of Lewiston, Youngstown, and Wilson in early 2005. Survey forms were mailed by the

Business Location	Surveys Distributed	Surveys Received	Rate of Participation
Village of Lewiston	140	61	43.6%
Village of Youngstown	31	22	71.0%
Village of Wilson	34	13	38.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>46.8%</b>

Niagara County Industrial Development Agency to businesses identified by the Lower Niagara River Chamber of Commerce and the Village Clerk in Wilson, along with a cover letter and a pre-addressed envelope allowing respondents to mail completed surveys directly to the consultant for tallying. Surveys directed to businesses in Lewiston and Youngstown also included a letter from the director of the Lower Niagara River Chamber of Commerce encouraging them to participate. A total of 96 surveys were completed and returned, resulting in an overall response rate of 46.8%; there was a significantly higher rate of response among Youngstown businesses, perhaps suggesting a higher level of interest.

## Business Characteristics

Q1. What is your primary business activity?

Q1. Primary Business Activity						
	V. of Lewiston		V. of Youngstown		V. of Wilson	
Retail Sales	16	26.2%	3	13.6%	5	38.5%
Food Services	8	13.1%	6	27.3%	2	15.4%
Hospitality Services	3	4.9%	3	13.6%	0	0.0%
Finance, Insurance, or Real Estate	8	13.1%	2	9.1%	0	0.0%
Professional Services	3	4.9%	0	0.0%	1	7.7%
Health Care Services	4	6.6%	1	4.5%	0	0.0%
Personal or Repair Services	7	11.5%	4	18.2%	3	23.1%
Arts, Recreation or Entertainment	1	1.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Other	11	18.0%	3	13.6%	2	15.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

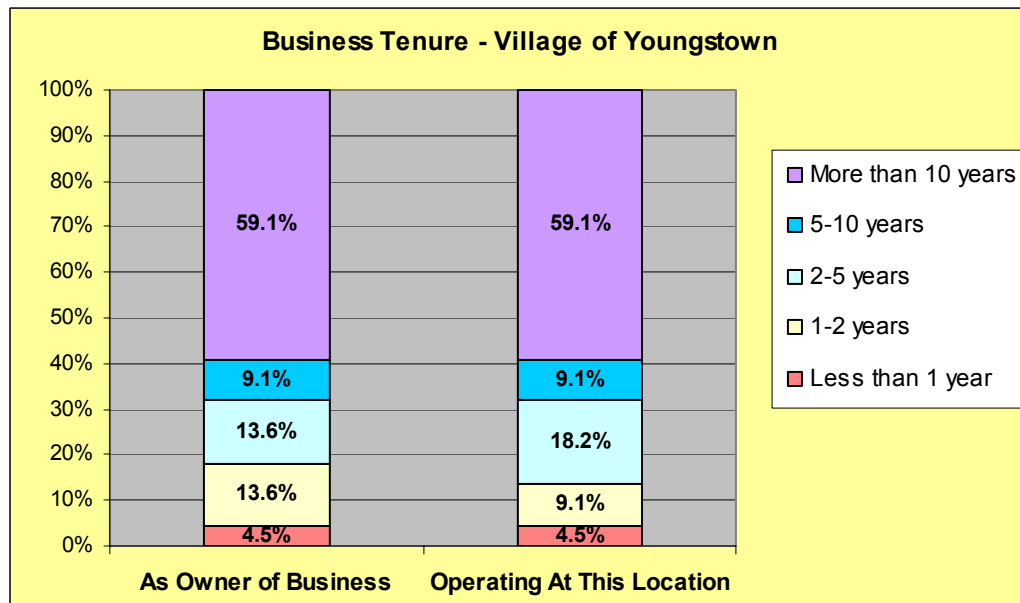
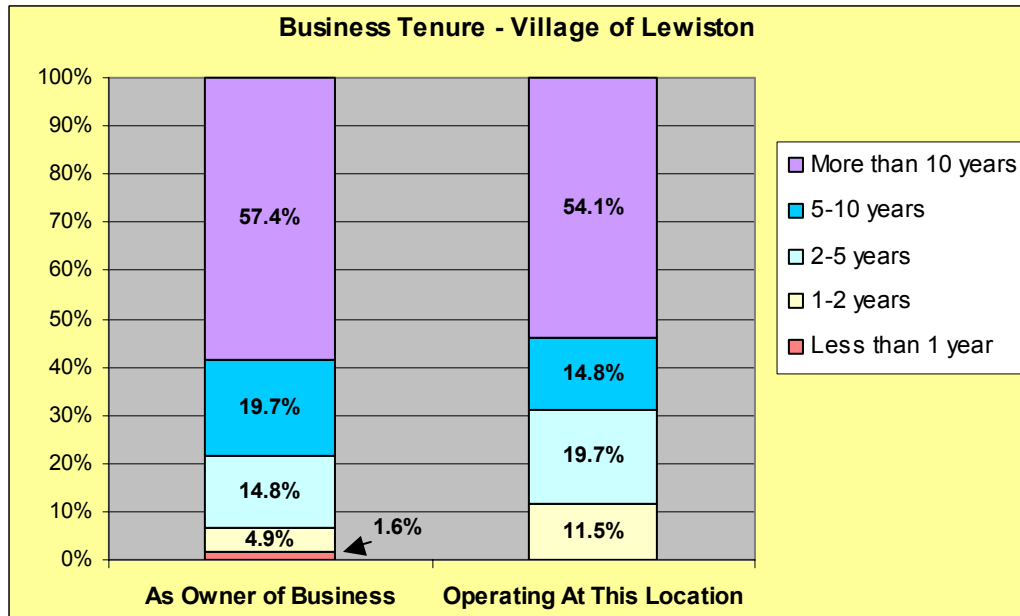
The predominant business mix in all three villages can be characterized as retail, service, and financial establishments. Approximately 61% of Lewiston businesses, 59.1% of Youngstown businesses, and 46.1% of the businesses in the Village of Wilson are in categories *other* than retail and food services (i.e., restaurants). There may be a need to attract more retail businesses to increase economic activity and pedestrian traffic in the villages.

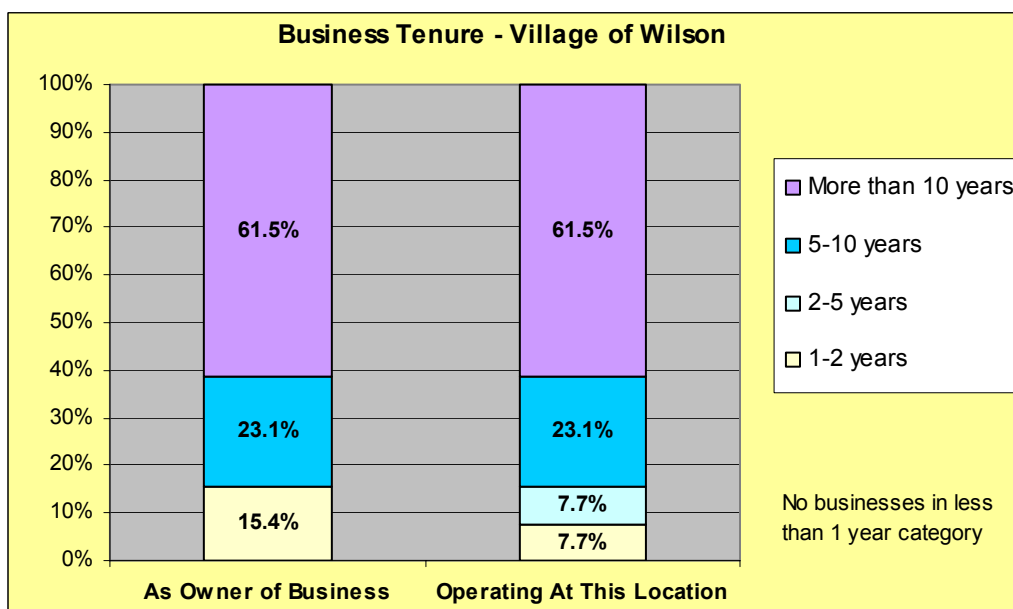
Q2. How long have you been the owner of this business?

Q3. How long has your business been operating at this location?

As shown in the tables on the following pages, the vast majority of the respondents report that they have been in the village commercial district for a long time. As shown in the charts below, 54.1% of Lewiston businesses, 59.1% of those in the Village of Youngstown, and 61.5% in the Village of Wilson have operated at the same location for more than ten years. Business ownership is also long-term and stable. On the other hand, the survey results suggest that there are relatively few newer businesses in the villages. Only one business, a restaurant in the Village of Youngstown, has been located in the commercial district for less than a year. This may be a serious concern moving forward, as older business owners decide to sell or close their establishments, if little recent business development has occurred.

According to Lower Niagara River Chamber of Commerce President Sandra Hays Mies and Lewiston Mayor Richard Soluri, the Village of Lewiston has added several new businesses in the last year, including the Brickyard Restaurant, Orange Cat Coffee Company, and Pets in the Garden, among others. In addition, according to Mayor Soluri, established businesses are being purchased by new, often younger owners.





Q4. Which of the following statements applies to this business?

Q5. Does your business own or rent the space in which it is located?

Q4. & Q5. Business Characteristics						
	V. of Lewiston		V. of Youngstown		V. of Wilson	
It is a sole proprietorship	34	55.7%	16	72.7%	5	38.5%
It is family owned & operated	16	26.2%	4	18.2%	6	46.2%
It is a franchise	2	3.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
It is a business with more than one location	11	18.0%	2	9.1%	3	23.1%
Own my space/location	25	41.0%	14	63.6%	8	61.5%
Rent my space/location	36	59.0%	7	31.8%	5	38.5%

A high percentage of the businesses in the Villages of Lewiston, Youngstown, and Wilson are sole proprietorships and/or are family owned and operated. Family owned businesses average two generations in Lewiston and Youngstown and three generations in Wilson. There are very few franchises, however, and only a couple of businesses have more than one location, office, or facility. It appears that most village businesses, then, are locally owned and have strong ties to the community in which they are located.

The survey results indicate that the majority of the business owners in the Villages of Youngstown and Wilson hold title to the buildings in which their business is located. The reverse is true of the Village of Lewiston, where most business owners lease their properties. The latter may have an impact on property conditions and maintenance; owner-occupied properties are often better maintained than those owned by “absentee” landlords, who may live some distance away.

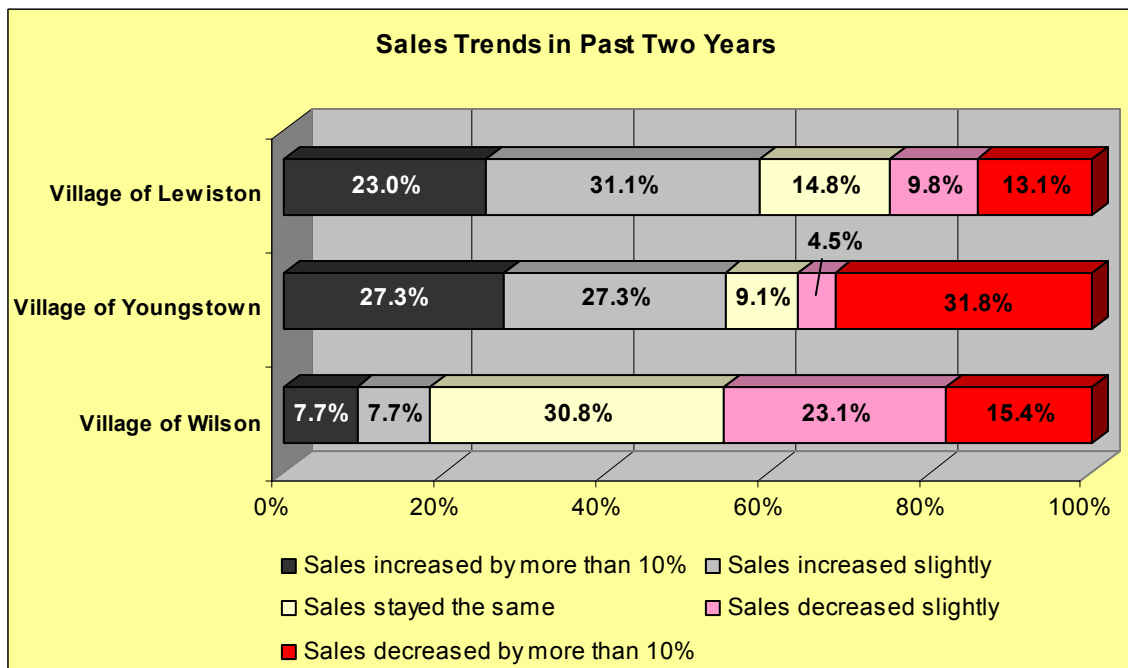
**Q6. How many persons are currently employed by your business?**

Employment data for the responding businesses is summarized in the table at right. Most of the businesses in the Villages of Youngstown and Wilson are very small. Less than two-thirds (63.6%) of the Youngstown businesses and 84.6% of Wilson businesses have full-time employees, averaging 3.3 and 1.7 full-time workers, respectively. In contrast, 93.4% of the businesses in the Village of Lewiston have full-time employment, with an average of 5.0. A relatively small number of the survey respondents reported seasonal employment.

<b>Q6. Employment Reported by Survey Participants</b>			
	<b>Village of Lewiston</b>	<b>Village of Youngstown</b>	<b>Village of Wilson</b>
Total Full-Time	301	72	22
Total Part-Time	269	65	60
Average Full-Time	5.0	3.3	1.7
Average Part-Time	4.5	3.0	4.6
# Businesses With Seasonal Employees & Total Seasonal	8 (327)	6 (74)	2 (15)

**Sales and Revenue Trends**

**Q7. Which of the following best describes your sales trends over the past two years?**



The good news is that approximately one in four businesses in the Villages of Lewiston and Youngstown report that their sales increased by more than 10 percent. However, an even higher proportion of Youngstown businesses report a significant decrease in sales, and the somewhat negative report from businesses in the Village of Wilson is a cause for concern.

There appears to be a correlation between a significant increase or decrease in sales and the type of business. Of the 21 businesses that experienced a sales increase of more than 10 percent over the last two years, only one is in retail and three are in food services (i.e., restaurants). The remaining establishments in this category are in finance, insurance, and real estate, professional and business services,



health care, and other non-retail / service-oriented industries. Conversely, of the 17 businesses that experienced a sales decrease of more than 10 percent, seven are retailers and five are restaurants.

**Q8.** What three factors contributed the most to an increase or decrease in sales over the past 2 years?

Factors reported to have contributed the most to *increased* sales included advertising and marketing; referrals/word of mouth; new products, programs, and/or services offered by the business; and village or community festivals. Local and regional economic conditions; the loss of retail businesses and associated foot traffic; and weather are among the factors identified as contributing to *decreased* sales. Several businesses also noted changes in the regional tourism industry, including a decrease in Canadian tourism to the area and competition from the casino.

A complete list of the factors reported to have contributed the most to an increase or decrease in sales is provided in Appendix A.

### **The Market**

**Q9.** Where would you say the majority of your customers (e.g., 80%) come from?

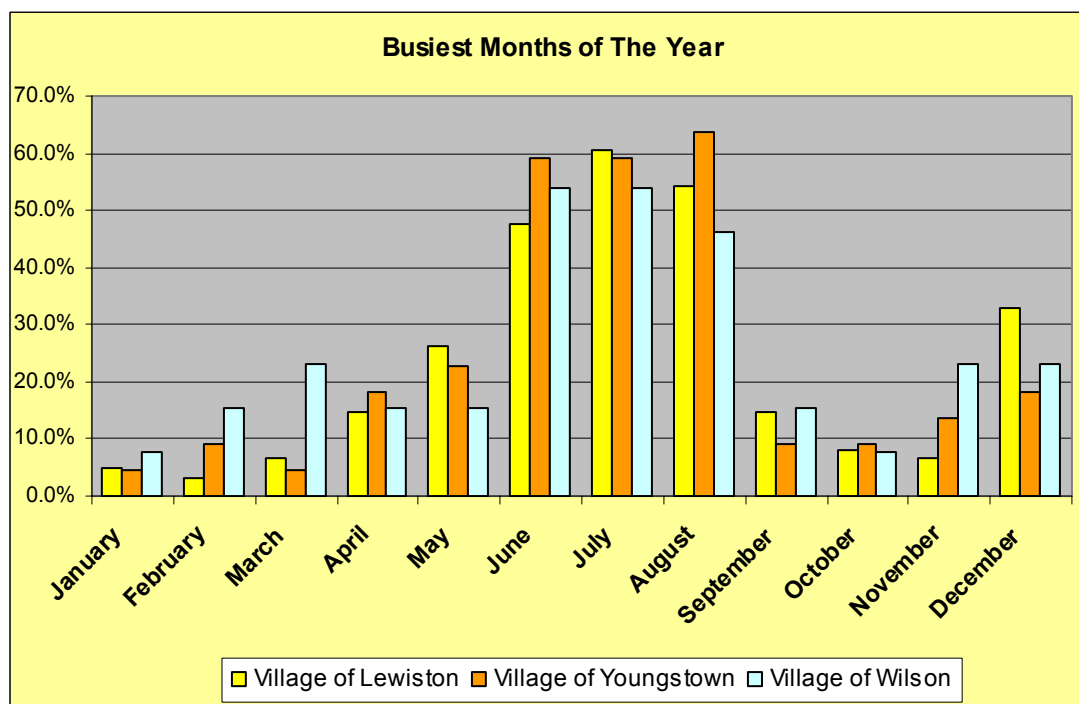
<b>Q9. Customer Base</b>						
	<b>V. of Lewiston</b>		<b>V. of Youngstown</b>		<b>V. of Wilson</b>	
The Village(s)	19	31.1%	10	45.5%	7	53.8%
Niagara County	25	41.0%	4	18.2%	4	30.8%
Buffalo/Niagara Falls Region	3	4.9%	2	9.1%	0	0.0%
Western New York	4	6.6%	0	0.0%	1	7.7%
New York State	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Tourists & Visitors	4	6.6%	4	18.2%	0	0.0%
Other	4	6.6%	1	4.5%	1	7.7%

The majority of the businesses serve the village in which they are located, or Niagara County as a whole. Businesses in the Village of Lewiston tend to serve a larger trade area than those in the other two villages, however. Notably, of the 36 businesses that identified their trade area as their village, *fully three-quarters* reported increased sales over the last two years (from Question 7). Of the respondents that identified Niagara County as their trade area, approximately 50% reported increased sales, while 40% experienced a decline in sales. There does not seem to be any pattern with respect to the *type* of business.

A handful of the businesses draw from the Buffalo/Niagara Falls region or Western New York. Eight businesses in the Villages of Lewiston and Youngstown – all but two of them classified as lodging facilities – chiefly serve tourists and visitors. None of the Wilson businesses responding to the survey fall into this category.

**Q10.** What are the three busiest months of the year for this business?

As shown in the chart below, the busiest months of the year for businesses in the Villages of Lewiston, Youngstown, and Wilson are clearly the summer months: June, July and August. Other important months are December and May. The results of this question suggest that the seasonal economy is an important issue, not only for retail and tourism-related establishments, but for other types of businesses as well.



## Future Plans

Q11. What are your plans for this business over the next 12-24 months?

<b>Q11. Plans For Business Over Next 12-24 Months</b>						
	<b>V. of Lewiston</b>		<b>V. of Youngstown</b>		<b>V. of Wilson</b>	
Expand, renovate, or improve space	21	34.4%	5	22.7%	5	38.5%
Hire additional employees	9	14.8%	3	13.6%	2	15.4%
Expand services or product lines	22	36.1%	4	18.2%	6	46.2%
Relocate within SAME municipality	6	9.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Relocate to a DIFFERENT municipality	1	1.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Sell or close the business	3	4.9%	2	9.1%	3	23.1%
Downsize the business	2	3.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
No changes	21	34.4%	8	36.4%	4	30.8%
Other	8	13.1%	5	22.7%	0	0.0%

Some of the respondents are considering changes for their business over the next one to two years. These changes include plans to expand, renovate, or improve space; expand services or product lines; or hire additional employees.

On the other hand, approximately one-third of the businesses in each of the three villages do not plan any changes in the coming months. A total of 8 business owners, most of whom have experienced declining sales, indicated the possibility of selling or closing their establishment. This is definitely a concern, as it reflects a lack of confidence in the commercial district and potential disinvestment.

## Issues Affecting the Business

Q12. Has your business been affected by any of the following?

<b>Q12. Issues Affecting the Business</b>						
	<b>V. of Lewiston</b>		<b>V. of Youngstown</b>		<b>V. of Wilson</b>	
Difficulty recruiting employees	11	18.0%	4	18.2%	0	0.0%
Difficulty retaining employees	7	11.5%	2	9.1%	0	0.0%
Increased health insurance costs	22	36.1%	5	22.7%	6	46.2%
Difficulty securing financing	4	6.6%	1	4.5%	1	7.7%
Poor economic conditions	27	44.3%	18	81.8%	11	84.6%
Competition from local independent stores	9	14.8%	2	9.1%	2	15.4%
Competition from national chains	11	18.0%	3	13.6%	5	38.5%
Increased shipping costs	15	24.6%	3	13.6%	3	23.1%
Changing customer base / market	14	23.0%	6	27.3%	3	23.1%
Seasonal fluctuations	30	49.2%	13	59.1%	8	61.5%
Other	5	8.2%	2	9.1%	4	30.8%

Like many small businesses in upstate New York, businesses in the Villages of Lewiston, Youngstown, and Wilson face a variety of issues. The number one issue, according to the respondents, is the regional economy, which is perceived negatively by more than four in five businesses in Youngstown and Wilson and 44% in Lewiston. Seasonal fluctuations also impact the business community, as suggested by the responses to Question 10. There may be a need for more businesses that could be sustained, and/or for more activities and special events to attract shoppers and visitors, during the off-season. Other issues affecting a large proportion of businesses included increased health care costs, increased shipping costs, and a changing consumer market.

## Perceptions of the Village Commercial Districts

Q13. What types of stores, services, or other businesses are *most* needed and would be successful in your village?

Q14. How would you rate your village's commercial district with regard to safety and security, overall appearance, road maintenance, the quality of goods and services, building code enforcement, the enforcement of land use regulations, the variety of goods and services, the cost of goods and services, and the quality of commercial building space?

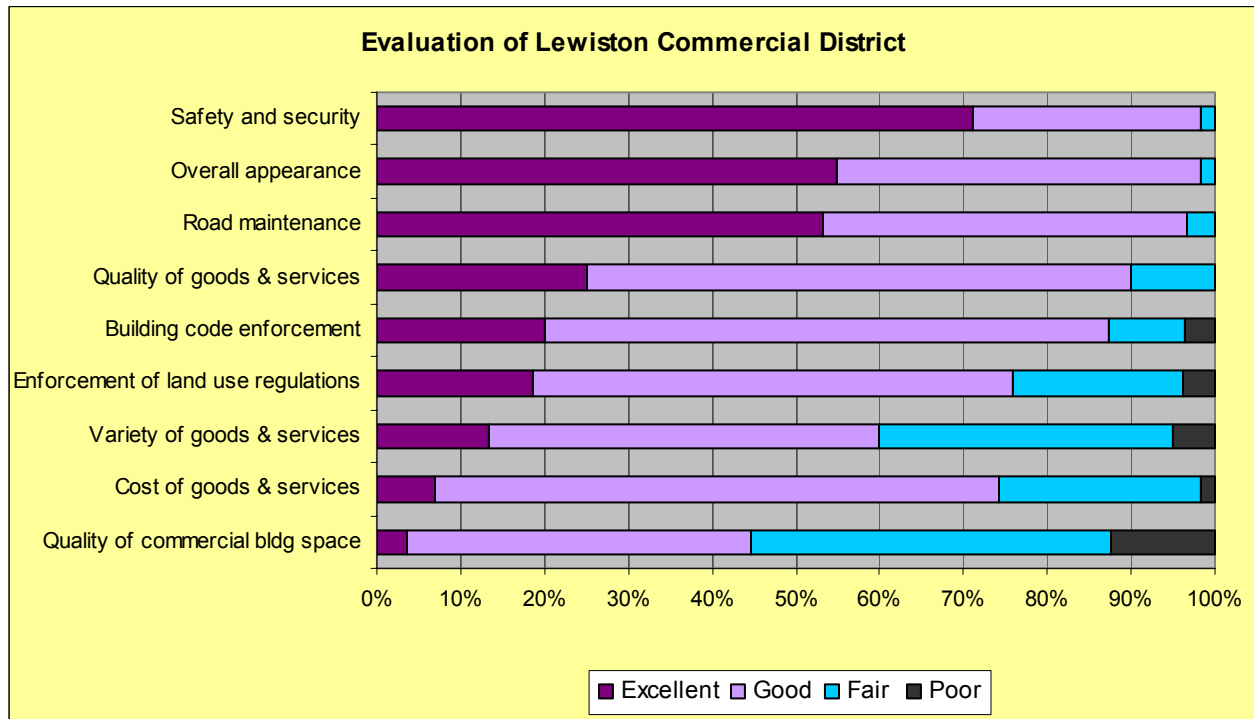
Q15. How do you feel about the general availability of parking in your village's commercial district?

Q16. Which improvements would most benefit your business and/or the village in which it is located?

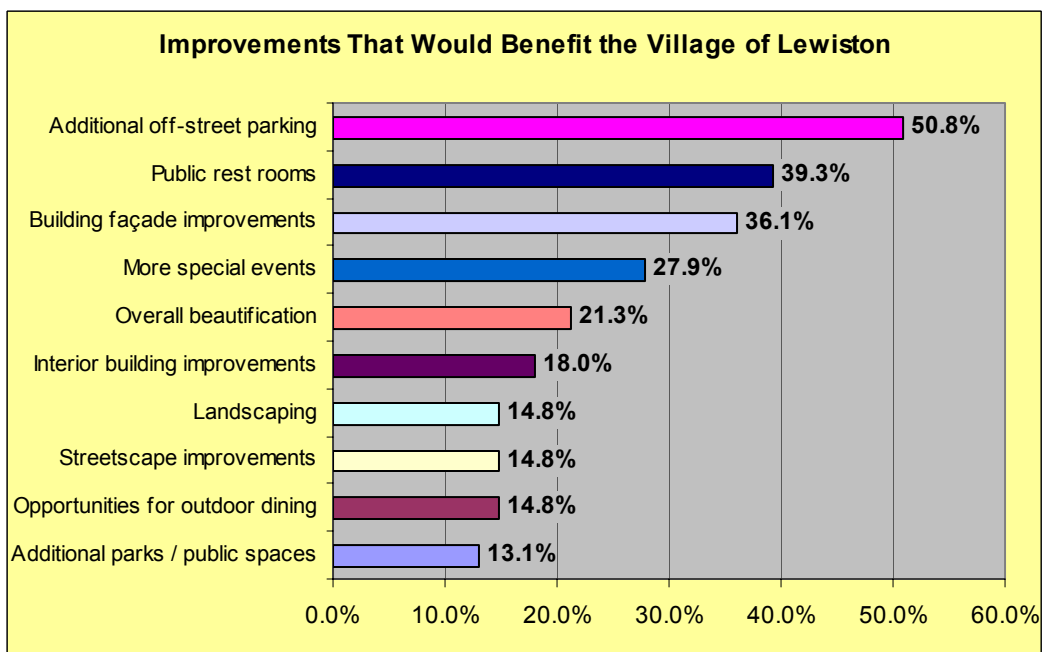
The responses to each of the preceding questions are summarized by community below. A complete list of the narrative responses is provided in Appendix A.

Village of Lewiston – Asked to identify the types of stores, services, and/or businesses needed in the Village of Lewiston commercial district, the most common responses (out of a total of 87) were:

- Hotel, motel, inn, and/or bed and breakfast – 14 responses
- Retail stores (unspecified) – 7 responses
- Clothing store – menswear, women's clothing, reasonably priced – 7 responses
- Fast food restaurant – 7 responses



The results indicate that Lewiston business owners are very satisfied with safety and security, overall appearance, road maintenance, and the quality of goods and services in the commercial district. In addition, the majority of business owners perceive the enforcement of building codes and land use regulations as good or excellent. Opinions are mixed regarding the quality of commercial building space and the variety of goods and services, however.

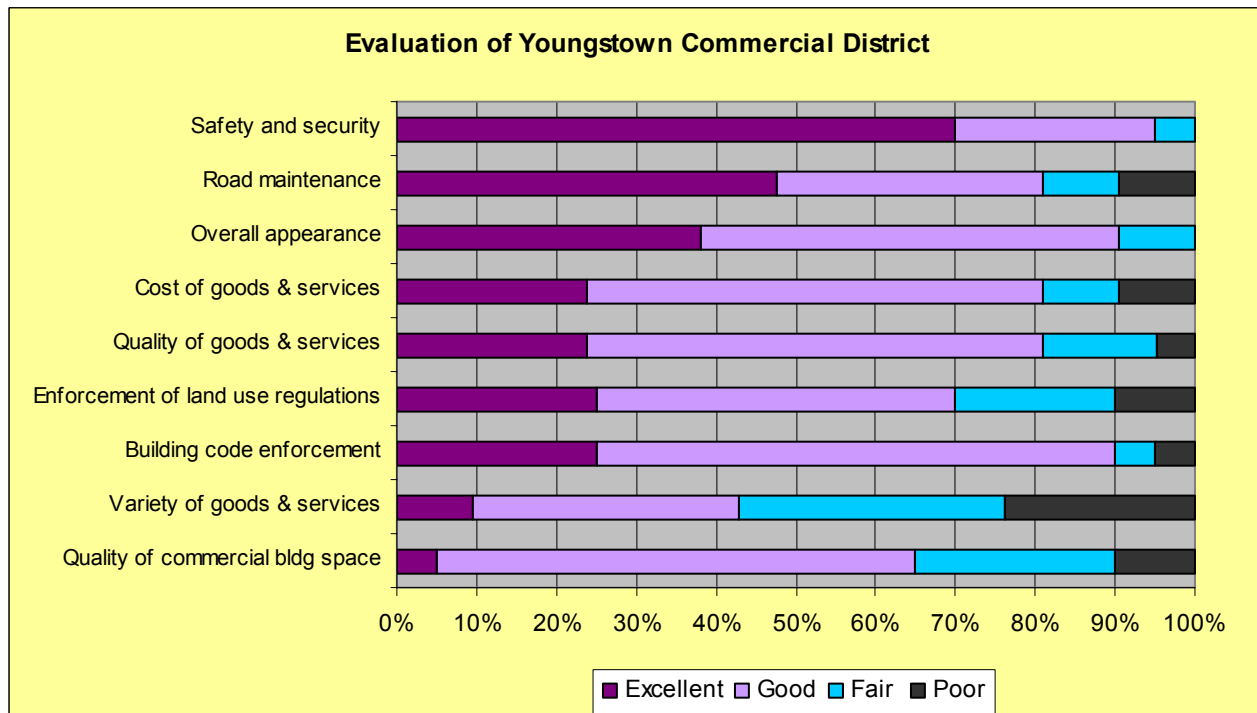


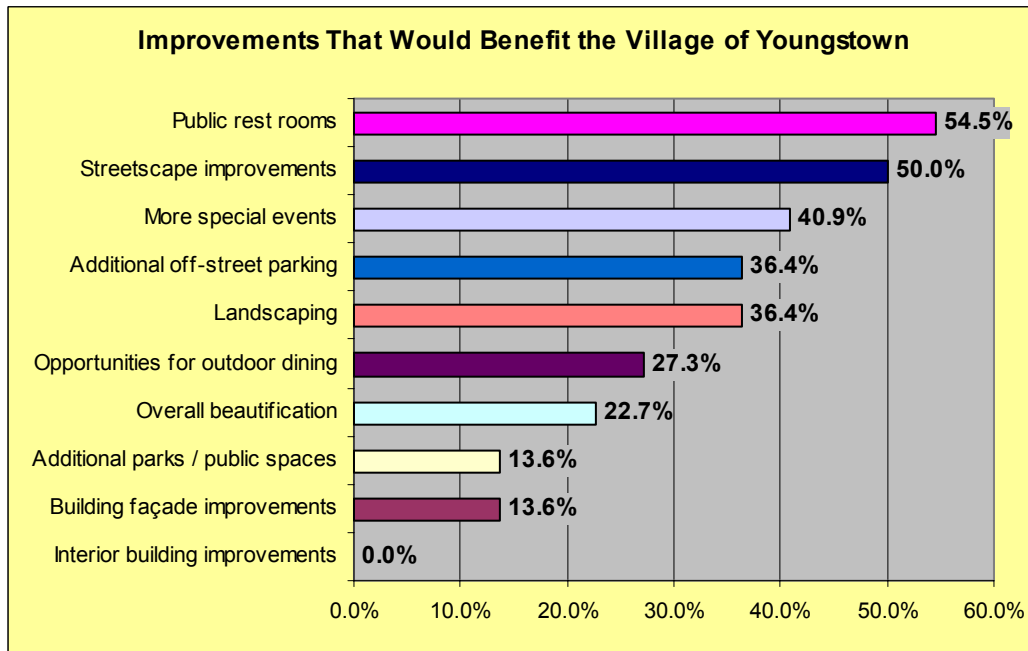
Although 40% of the businesses feel that parking is “very available” for both customers and employees, more than half of the respondents are in favor of creating additional off-street parking in the Lewiston commercial district (see Off-Street Parking Map for the Village of Lewiston in Appendix A). This is an issue that Mayor Soluri agrees should be addressed, he also noted that parking does not seem to be a problem during the annual Peach Festival that has been held in Lewiston for the last forty years. Approximately 39% feel that public restrooms would be beneficial to the district, while 36.1% district believe that building façade improvements are needed. It should be noted that public restrooms are in fact already available in Lewiston behind the visitor center.

Village of Youngstown – Asked to identify the types of stores, services, and/or businesses needed in the Village of Youngstown commercial district, the most common responses (out of a total of 29) were:

- Catalog stores – 3 responses
- Activities for visiting tourists and families – 3 responses
- Retail stores (unspecified) – 2 responses
- Hardware store – 2 responses

Similar to the Village of Lewiston, Youngstown business owners are very satisfied with safety and security, road maintenance, and the overall appearance of the commercial district. However, the majority of businesses feel that the variety of goods and services in the district is fair to poor. This is consistent with the findings of the retail sector profile. The quality of commercial building space is also a concern among some respondents.





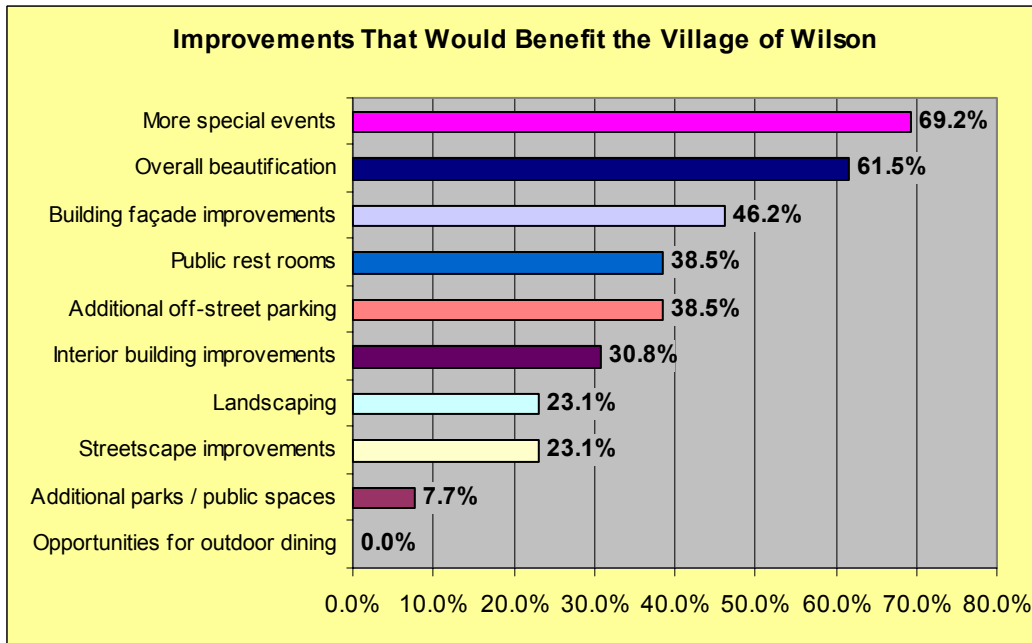
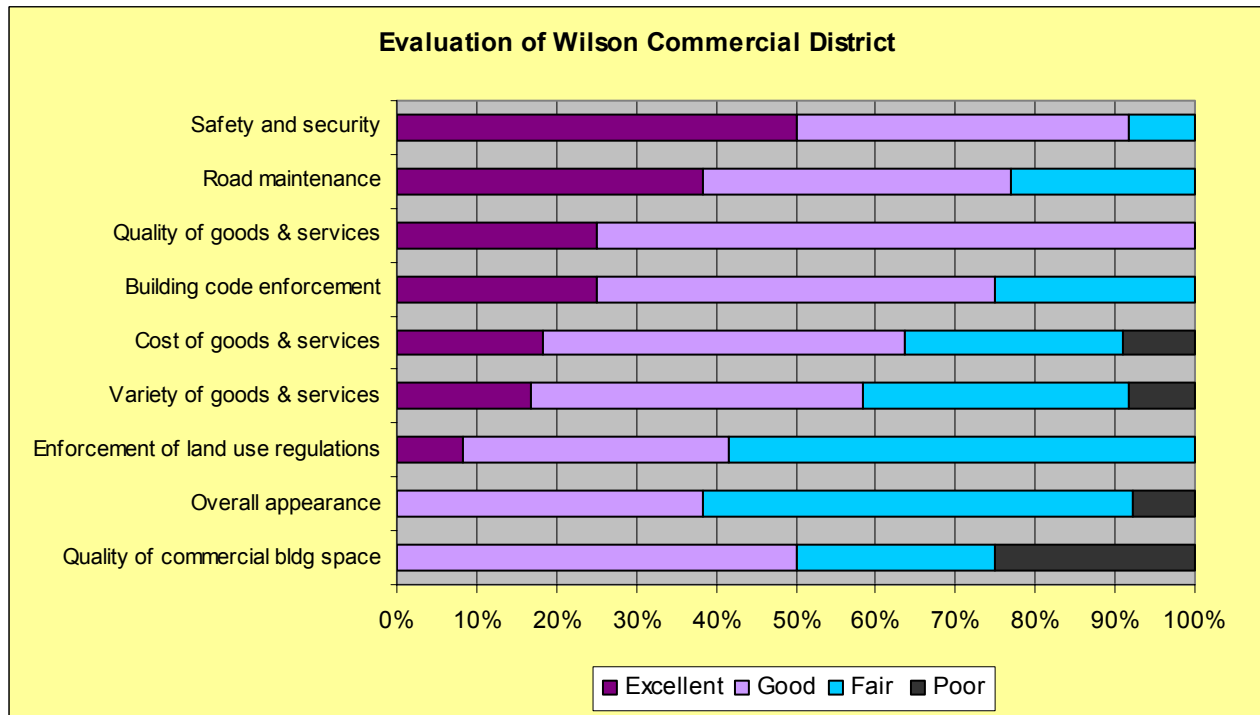
With respect to the availability of parking, 45.5% of the business owners characterized customer parking as “somewhat available” and 31.8% as “very available.” Parking for employees was perceived favorably with 72.8% indicating that it was either somewhat or very available. (See Appendix C for the Off-Street Parking Map for the Village of Youngstown.)

Improvements that business owners would support in the Village of Youngstown include public rest rooms (54.5%); streetscape improvements (50.0%); and more special events (40.9%). As previously noted, Youngstown installed new lighting fixtures on Main Street last year and plans to extend the improvements north to Fort Niagara and east along Lockport Street in 2005 or 2006.

Village of Wilson – Asked to identify the types of stores, services, and/or businesses needed in the Village of Wilson, the most common responses (out of a total of 17) were:

- Car wash – 3 responses
- Children’s activities / stores – 2 responses

The survey results indicate that Wilson businesses are generally very satisfied with safety and security, road maintenance, the quality of goods and services, and building code enforcement in the commercial district. Of the issues listed, the quality of commercial building space was evaluated as “poor” most often. Wilson had a relatively low rate of response to the business survey, however, and it would be overstating the case to say that the three businesses who rated the commercial building space as poor are representative of *all* businesses in the Village.



Asked which improvements would be most beneficial to their business and/or the village commercial district, the most common responses among Wilson business owners were more special events (selected by 69.2%), overall beautification (61.5%), and building façade improvements (46.2%). Unlike Lewiston and Youngstown, Wilson does not have an active, community-based business organization to coordinate events planning and beautification. It may be up to individual business owners and/or the public sector to initiate these activities in Wilson.



## **Resources for Business Development and Revitalization**

### **Lower Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce**

The Lower Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce emerged in January 2005 as an outgrowth of the Greater Lewiston Business and Professional Association (GLCBPA). With more than 300 members, the chamber represents businesses in Lewiston, Porter, Ransomville, Sanborn, and Youngstown. The mission and goals of the organization are: (1) to unify the Lower Niagara River Region and to promote it as a premiere place to live, work and play; (2) to coordinate efforts in the marketing and promotion of tourism, business development, quality of life and the history and culture of the region; and (3) to enhance business and community cooperation among stakeholders.

With a staff of four, the chamber addresses issues affecting businesses in the Lower Niagara River Region, coordinates local festivals and events, and produces a regional marketing brochure targeted at the tourist market that highlights area attractions, accommodations, restaurants and retail outlets. The group has developed positive working relationships with the Niagara County Center for Economic Development, Niagara Mohawk, the Niagara USA Chamber and the Niagara Tourism and Convention Corporation, and community and elected officials that allow the chamber to provide both information and services and advocate for the business community in the region. The chamber recently applied to the NYS Department of State for a \$40,000 grant through the Quality Communities Demonstration Program. The grant would be used to offset administrative costs associated with collaboration between the municipalities in the region.

The chamber supports several smaller business groups in its service area, including the Lewiston Retailers Association, the Youngstown Business and Professional Association, the River Region Restaurant Group, and the newly organized Lewiston Business Advisory Group. Each of these groups is run by volunteers, although the business associations are incorporated. There are no current plans by the chamber to expand its service territory.

According to chamber president Sandy Hays Mies, the Lower Niagara River Region has developed a strong reputation for its festivals and its restaurants. In addition, the high quality of life has encouraged some in-migration from other parts of the Niagara region, particularly among seniors. In the next two years, the Lower Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce hopes to create a new website for the region; expand its membership base; and hire a group/tour marketing coordinator, whose role would be to package and sell the region's offerings for the tour bus market. In interviews for this study, the mayors of Youngstown and Lewiston both expressed their support for the chamber and the efforts that the chamber has made to promote the area.

### **Niagara USA Chamber of Commerce**

The Niagara USA Chamber of Commerce represents businesses throughout Niagara County. Its mission is to "lead with a single voice to advance economic development, promote commerce and tourism, provide value-added services to members, advocate for business, and by these actions, improve the quality of life for the region." Based in Sanborn, the Chamber offers a variety of products and services to its membership, including group health insurance, long-distance packages, and wireless communications.

The Niagara USA Chamber is one of the co-sponsors of an upcoming series of free training workshops to be held throughout Niagara County. Designed for business owners and entrepreneurs, the workshops will outline resources and programs available to current or prospective Niagara County businesses. Co-sponsors and presenters at the seminars will include the Small Business Development Center at Niagara County Community College, Niagara County Department of Employment and Training, and Empire State Development.

### **Niagara County Microenterprise Program**

Sponsored by the Niagara County Industrial Development Agency (NCIDA), the Niagara County Microenterprise Assistance Program has been operating since 1995. The program offers classroom training on managing a small business, business planning assistance, and micro loans for up to \$25,000.

The NCIDA contracts with the Small Business Development Center at Niagara County Community College (NCCC) in Sanborn to conduct the classroom instruction component. Each round of classes is held twice each year beginning in February and September and includes 12 sessions on such topics as budgeting, recordkeeping, marketing and promotion, financing, legal considerations, insurance, computer applications, business taxes, and leadership. The nineteenth round of classes was completed in May.

Interviews are conducted with program applicants by phone and selections are made by a selection committee consisting of NCIDA staff and outside participants – a banker, a businessman, and a county legislator. Between 55 and 70 applications are submitted each round, and 20-25 are selected to participate. This includes both existing and proposed businesses.

A second element of the Microenterprise Assistance Program is technical assistance in the preparation of a business plan. Program participants initially prepare the initial elements of a business plan based on guidance provided in the classes. After this is submitted and reviewed by the NCIDA's consultant, a task order is prepared with the approval of the NCIDA to the Small Business Development Center to assign a technical assistance advisor to work with the participant on his or her business plan.

In addition to a business plan, a micro loan application must also be completed for submission to the NCIDA for those seeking a loan. Micro loans are available for up to \$25,000. The interest rate is 80 percent of prime or 5 percent, whichever is higher. Loans are available for inventory, equipment and working capital. Applications are reviewed by the Loan Committee of the Niagara County Development Corporation and recommended to the NCIDA Board for formal approval.

Since the inception of the Niagara County Microenterprise Assistance Program in 1995, the NCIDA has received a steady stream of applications, with roughly 70% from the Cities of Lockport, North Tonawanda, and Niagara Falls, according to the NCIDA's consultant. Lewiston residents/businesses have been fairly active participants in the program, although some are outside the village commercial district and others are no longer in operation. A total of 8 micro participants have come from the Village of Wilson, including two (Wilson's Community Pharmacy and Kathy's Flower Garden) that received micro loans, resulting in the creation of ten jobs.

### **Niagara University – College of Hospitality and Tourism Management**

Niagara University is a private, liberal arts institution located in the Town of Lewiston. The University has a total enrollment of approximately 3,400 students, including 250 students in the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management – one of only four hospitality and tourism programs in the country to achieve college status. According to the College's website:

The focus of our curriculum is on practical industry applications... The curriculum is regularly evaluated by industry leaders to ensure that the College educates students with the skills required by industry. The two other curricular emphases are a strong technology component and a focus on internationalization... Students selecting a major in Hotel and Restaurant Management may choose from concentrations in: Foodservice Management; Hotel and Restaurant Planning and Control; and Restaurant Entrepreneurship for people who want to own their own business. Concentrations available to Tourism and Recreation

Management majors are: Tourism Marketing; and Recreation and Sports Management, a concentration that takes advantage of the fact that many recreation jobs are found in the hospitality and tourism industry such as in resort properties, spas, and country clubs.<sup>3</sup>

The Lower Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce notes that many local entrepreneurs have, in fact, received training through the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management. The College also established a mentorship program in 2002 to pair students with alumni who have at least five years of experience in the field.

It should be noted that in addition to Niagara University, Niagara County Community College offers Associate's Degree programs in Hospitality Management, Culinary Arts, and Baking & Pastry Arts through its Business Education Division. These programs not only provide education and training for local business owners; they can also be considered potential resources for business development and entrepreneurship in Niagara County.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.niagara.edu/hospitality/facts.htm>

## Commercial District Conditions and Real Estate Market Trends

### Study Area Existing Conditions

Based on data from the Niagara County Office of Real Property and Tax Services and on-site fieldwork, properties within each of the three village commercial districts were inventoried and classified with respect to current use, occupancy and condition, historic significance, and other characteristics. The data was then mapped to illustrate existing conditions and selected environmental features in these areas. All maps can be found in the appendix to this document and are listed, in order, below:

- Official Street Maps
- Study Areas
- Zoning Districts
- Building Occupancy
- Building Use
- Building Conditions
- Business Type
- Business Names
- Off-Street Parking
- Historic Properties
- FEMA 100 and 500 Year Floodplains
- Soil Survey Geographic Map

Some of these maps are referenced in other portions of this document. In addition, a brief summary of existing conditions in each of the study areas is provided below.

#### Village of Lewiston

As shown in the Building Use Maps, Lewiston's waterfront has a mix of uses, including commercial (a restaurant and a motel), recreation/entertainment (Moose Club), public services (the sewage pump station, a public picnic area), and residential. Along Center Street, commercial uses predominate, with some parcels classified as community services (mostly religious buildings); residential uses are generally located on side and parallel streets. Zoning districts covering the study area are described on page 3.

Most commercial structures in the western portion of the study area are fully occupied (see Building Occupancy maps). One of the few vacant structures is the former Village Inn at 65 Center Street, which has been proposed for redevelopment. Building occupancy is somewhat lower in the eastern side of the study area, but vacant and partially vacant properties are not concentrated in any particular block. As indicated by the Building Conditions Maps, with the exception of a few properties in the 800 block of Center Street, low occupancy is not necessarily correlated with poor condition. The majority of the commercial and mixed-use buildings in Lewiston's commercial district appear to be in good to excellent condition between Fourth and Sixth Streets, and in fair to good condition east of Sixth Street, based on an exterior survey.

The results of the business survey indicate that the availability of off-street parking is a major concern of business owners in the Village of Lewiston. As shown in the Off-Street Parking Maps, many of the properties located along Center Street between Fourth and Sixth Streets have limited or no off-street parking available. In contrast, there is ample off-street parking available in the waterfront area, and several large parcels in the eastern portion of the study area (e.g., a grocery store, bowling alley, funeral home) have thirty or more off-street parking spaces.

It should be noted that the study area in the Village of Lewiston is not located in a floodplain area (see FEMA 100 and 500 Year Floodplains Maps). There are, however, many historic structures in the Village that potentially impact development. (See further discussion in the Historic Structures section, below.)

#### Village of Youngstown

Maps for the Village of Youngstown study area are included in Appendix C. As shown in the Building Use Maps, the majority of the properties in the northern portion of the study area are in residential use, with the exception of an historic church, St. John's Episcopal, and the Old Fort Inn Restaurant. Residential uses predominate in the southern portion of the study area as well, with notable exceptions along the waterfront where marinas, a public boat launch, and other water-dependent uses are located.

The central section of the Youngstown study area represents the core of the central business district and includes a range of commercial, recreation/entertainment, government, and religious uses. The Business Type and Business Names Maps covering this section indicate that retail uses in the CBD are relatively limited, but there are several restaurants and miscellaneous service establishments. Some residential properties are located to the north of Lockport Street, along Second and Third Streets.

A handful of vacant parcels are located in the commercial core, including one at the intersection of Water, Main, and Lockport Streets. This is an important intersection, which also contains an attractive, roughly 15-foot high directional sign leading drivers and pedestrians to various attractions and services in the Village.

As indicated by the Building Conditions Maps, the condition of commercial structures throughout the study area ranges from fair to excellent, with only one classified as being in poor condition based on the exterior survey. There may be a need for a more comprehensive survey to evaluate the quality and condition of commercial space in Youngstown.

The Off-Street Parking Maps for the Village of Youngstown indicate that many of the properties on the western side of the study area have no off-street parking available. Most other commercial properties, however, do have some off-street parking to accommodate employers and customers, although parking can be difficult at certain times of the year (e.g., during the Level Regatta).

As shown in the FEMA 100 and 500 Year Floodplains Map, floodplain areas in Youngstown impact only the properties located directly on the waterfront. As with Lewiston, there are many historic structures in the Village, and any commercial development proposed will need to consider the potential impact on Youngstown's historic character, which represents a major community asset.

#### Village of Wilson

As shown in the Building Use Map for the Village of Wilson, much of the study area is in residential use. Properties classified as commercial and community services are generally concentrated at the core of this area along Young, Mechanic, and Lake Streets. Two adjoining vacant parcels that appear to be the site of a recent demolition exist near the intersection of Warren and Young Streets. The Building Occupancy Map indicates that the majority of commercial buildings in the study area are fully occupied. The zoning districts covering the study area are described on page 5.

The Building Conditions Map suggests that the buildings in the study area range from fair to excellent condition based on an exterior survey. Five properties, one of which is vacant, are classified as being in poor condition and may require rehabilitation. Although these structures are not concentrated on any one block, it is worth noting that the business survey identified concerns about the quality of commercial building space and the potential need for a façade improvement program in the Village of Wilson.

As shown in the FEMA 100 and 500 Year Floodplains Map, floodplain areas have little to no impact on the village commercial district, as they are generally west of the Village boundaries and along limited portions of the waterfront.

### Historic Structures

Historic Properties Maps for the Villages of Lewiston, Youngstown, and Wilson are included in the appendix. These maps indicate properties that (1) are on the National Register of Historic Places; (2) have been determined by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to be individually eligible for listing on the State and/or National Register of Historic Places; (3) have been determined by SHPO as *not* eligible for listing on the State and/or National Register of Historic Places; and (4) have not yet received a determination of eligibility by SHPO. The maps also show structures that appear to be more than 50 years old, and thus have the *potential* for eligibility.

The following structures are listed on the National Register of Historic Places:

**Frontier House, 460 Center Street, Lewiston (1824):** Frontier House is a 3½-story Federal stone inn built in 1824 for Benjamin and Samuel Barton, then two of the most prominent businessmen in Lewiston. According to the National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Frontier House is “one of the State’s best preserved early nineteenth century stone taverns... It stands today as an enduring record of the commercial and architectural history of the Niagara Frontier.” As shown on the Historic Properties Map for the western section of the Village of Lewiston, Frontier House is located on Center Street between Fourth and Fifth Streets.

**St. John’s Episcopal Church, 117 Main Street, Youngstown (1878):** Gothic Revival frame church.

**Fort Niagara Light, Niagara River, Youngstown (1871-72):** A 50-foot high octagonal limestone lighthouse built 1871-72; raised 11 feet in 1900. Part of the United States Coast Guard Lighthouses and Light Stations on the Great Lakes Thematic Resources.

No properties in the Village of Wilson are currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. However, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has determined two properties in Wilson as individually eligible for the National Register: 240 Lake Street (residential, a “pink gingerbread house”) and 345 Lake Street (Our Lady of the Rosary Church). The latter is currently undergoing renovation. Another property that has been determined as eligible for the National Register is 358 Main Street in Youngstown, currently occupied by the Ontario House “Stone Jug.”

The Village of Lewiston has a SHPO-Listed Historic District, as indicated on the Historic Properties Map. The district designation essentially means that the SHPO considers the area as a whole eligible for inclusion on the National Register, even though the various structures *within* the district do not rise to the level of being individually eligible. Known as the Center Street Historic District, it encompasses commercial and residential structures ranging in date of construction from circa 1815 to 1870. The commercial buildings are of three functional types – stores, hotels, and offices – and reflect the Village’s early nineteenth century commercial prosperity.

In addition to the properties described above, the website of the Niagara Tourism & Convention Corporation includes buildings in the Villages of Youngstown and Wilson as part of a self-guided tour of historic cobblestone homes in Niagara County:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.niagara-usa.com/attractions/cobblestone.html>

**914 River Road, Youngstown (1836):** “This 2-story structure was built for Isaac Swain [one of Youngstown’s founders] about 1836... and the rear addition dates to about 1850. Note the cobblestone bridge at the edge of the road. The home is built on the foundation of one burned by British troops during the War of 1812. Note that, on the front wall, customary lintel stones are used above the door and windows. However, on the side walls, blocks of limestone set on edge are used for arches over the windows. This is the site of the famous Battle of LaBelle Famile; the bloody, historic struggle between the French, the British and their Indian allies. The creek is known as ‘Bloody Run.’”

**81 Lake Street, Wilson (1835):** “This home, built for Captain Luther Wilson about 1835 (early period) utilizes lake-washed stones with quoins of red sandstone. The front wall has been stuccoed over. This 2-story Greek Revival style home with belly windows under the eaves has a stately front entrance with side lights.” This building is not in the study area.

**300 Lake Street, Wilson (1844):** “This structure was built for Luther Wilson about 1844 (middle period) on the site of the Village's first schoolhouse. It now houses the ‘Wilsonian Club’ and restaurant. This 1-1/2 story structure with hip roof and half windows was built with small water-washed stones throughout – excellent state of preservation depicting very fine workmanship.” The current site of the Wilson House Inn (shown as 310 Lake Street on the map), the building has been determined not eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, for reasons unknown.

According to the Cobblestone Society, which operates a museum in Albion, Orleans County, about 700 cobblestone structures were built in upstate New York from about 1825 through 1860. Wayne County has the most cobblestone buildings with about 150 structures. Orleans, Monroe and Ontario counties each have approximately 100 cobblestone structures. Several other cobblestone structures exist in Niagara and Erie counties.

### Commercial Real Estate Market Conditions

Village of Lewiston – Local realtors describe the commercial real estate market in the Village of Lewiston as very strong right now. According to Mayor Richard Soluri, the turning point for the Village was three years ago, when a \$3 million, federally-funded streetscape project was completed. Covering an approximately five-block portion of Center Street, the main commercial strip in Lewiston, the project provided new streetlights, sidewalks, granite curbs, trees, and benches and reduced the number of lanes on Route 104 from four to two lanes plus a turning lane. In addition, attractive burgundy and white street signs were installed.

Since then, Lewiston has become a “quaint” and highly desirable place to visit and a bedroom community for Niagara Falls. An extensive schedule of summer festivals, proximity to Artpark and Fort Niagara, excellent access for fishing and boating, and an array of popular eateries and shops are among the features attracting visitors as well as business owners and investors to Lewiston. Not all of the commercial demand involves specialty stores and restaurants, however; a bank and a printing company are also looking to locate in the village commercial district, and a dentist recently renovated an old motel for use as a dental arts building.

There is considerable demand for housing in and around the Village, which offers small town living and attractive homes within walking distance of shops and services. In some cases, people from the area are “coming home” after living elsewhere. Lewiston has become quite popular among seniors, though not exclusively. Local realtors note that seniors and empty nesters are seeking “patio homes,” smaller homes that require less maintenance; also, because they may live in Florida for part of the year, they want a place they do not need to worry about while away. A 168-unit residential subdivision that includes patio homes was recently approved for the Town of Lewiston, with prices of \$220,000 and up.

Additional lodging has been a goal of the Village of Lewiston for many years, as there are only about 40 rooms available to accommodate overnight visitors. Several lodging facilities have been proposed recently, including a 20-room inn in the former Village Inn at the intersection of Center and Water Streets; a 60- to 80-room hotel with meeting rooms, shops and restaurants at the historic Frontier House; and a 32-room inn and day spa near the riverfront in a residential neighborhood. One realtor believes that despite the demand, Lewiston “is not big enough for three hotels,” but acknowledges that a hotel and two smaller inns may be feasible.

One issue with the potential to impact further growth and development of the Lewiston commercial district is the fact that “everyone wants to be on Center Street,” particularly between Fourth and Seventh Streets. The supply of commercial property in this area is extremely tight, with very little unoccupied space. In addition, vacant land is limited, and the historic nature of many properties in the Village serves as a significant barrier to any redevelopment involving demolition. As one person said: “Outside investors believe Lewiston is ready to burst.” In response, the Village has extended the defined commercial district further towards the waterfront. However, some homeowners have been vocal about the perceived incompatibility between residential neighborhoods and commercial uses. As shown in the Village of Lewiston Zoning Maps in Appendix B, most property along Center Street west of Fourth Street (with the exception of the waterfront) is zoned residential. There seems to be resistance among residents to changing the residential character of this area.

Ultimately, it appears that some commercial uses may be developed in outlying areas in the Town of Lewiston. There has been at least one proposal for a golf course with a residential component, and local realtors fully expect that a golf course will be constructed in the Town in the next five years. Depending on its location, convenience-type retail may be needed to support this affluent market.

Village of Youngstown – Like the Village of Lewiston, the Village of Youngstown is seen as a quaint village and bedroom community, and most commercial property does not stay on the market very long. According to local realtors, there has been an increased interest in Youngstown over the last several years, with a strong market for commercial space, especially along Main Street, River Road, and Route 93.

Again similar to its neighbor to the south, Youngstown has much to offer the visitor as well as the potential investor, including the Level Regatta, proximity to Fort Niagara and Niagara Falls, and excellent river access for fishing and boating. Youngstown is particularly active during the summer months, when boaters from both the U.S. and Canada fill a small number of restaurants and pubs. According to Mayor Neil Riordan, bed-and-breakfast establishments are busier than ever.

Since adopting its LWRP over a decade ago, the Village has focused on redeveloping its waterfront. The Village recently received a \$485,000 grant from the NYS Department of State to rebuild the south piers; the project is expected to commence this summer. Work on the north docks was completed about four years ago.

There has been discussion of a fast ferry service between Toronto and the Fort Niagara area, but the project is by no means assured. Another possible future project is to bring back the historic ferry service between Youngstown and Niagara-on-the-Lake that was phased out in the 1960s.

With respect to the residential market, the demand for housing in Youngstown seems to be strong. Homes in the \$300,000-\$400,000 range have been constructed along the lakeshore, and a proposal for 90 new homes in the northeastern part of the Village was recently approved. Few areas of the Village remain available for development. An independent living facility for seniors has been proposed on the site of an old coal storage facility next to Veteran’s Park.



One local realtor suggested that the number of boaters coming to the area may require additional docking sites and boat storage facilities in Youngstown. Youngstown could also benefit from Lewiston “spillover,” as rising prices and a tight supply of commercial space make the latter community less affordable.

Village of Wilson – Local realtors characterize the market in the Village of Wilson as much more stagnant than in Lewiston and Youngstown. As shown in the Village of Wilson Land Use Map (see Appendix D), Wilson’s commercial district is relatively small in size, comprising just a few blocks, and is surrounded by residential uses. Although the local drugstore and a bank are seen as stable, most of the businesses serve strictly local markets. Car shows bring people to the Village on weekends, but the real “action” is along Lake Ontario. Boaters come from the northeastern United States and Canada to drink, dine, and enjoy a summer music series at the Boat House Restaurant, a successful seasonal establishment on the harbor. The commercial district and the waterfront, however, are over a mile apart.

Several factors impact opportunities for business growth and development in the Village of Wilson. The area surrounding Wilson can be described as predominantly residential or agricultural; one realtor believes that Wilson would have more stores if there was industrial development in the area. In addition, parts of the Village lack public infrastructure. Finally, while Lewiston and Youngstown are protected by the Niagara River, Wilson is located right on Lake Ontario, and is prone to unpredictable “lake-effect” weather. As a result, businesses that rely on limited summer seasons are at the mercy of weather patterns.

Nevertheless, realtors do perceive opportunities for Wilson to benefit from the regional demand for homes within walking distance to amenities, and associated retail development. Large, older houses could also be used to provide in-law spaces for extended families.

## Conclusions & Recommendations

Based on the market analysis, business survey results, assessment of existing conditions, real estate market trends, interviews with various stakeholders, and the consultant's experience with communities across New York State, Camoin Associates has developed recommendations for business development and commercial revitalization in the Villages of Lewiston, Youngstown, and Wilson. It should be noted that the recommendations are not listed in any particular order. Recommendations that apply to all three villages are listed separately. At the end of the chapter, potential funding sources for recommended initiatives are identified.

### Recommendations for All Three Villages

- Consider a County-wide program to finance the construction and renovation of lodging facilities. With funding through the Governor's Office for Small Cities, a similar program was successfully implemented in Hamilton County in the Adirondack region, providing an opportunity for business owners to upgrade and modernize their facilities.
- Consider the establishment of a partnership with the Niagara University College of Hospitality and Tourism Management and/or the hospitality management and culinary arts programs at Niagara County Community College. There may be opportunities for business organizations (such as chambers of commerce), individual businesses, and/or other entities to receive technical assistance from qualified students or faculty. For example, students could evaluate existing lodging facilities in the three villages and make recommendations regarding the quality of the accommodations, customer service, or marketing.
- Pursue the installation of wireless internet service. Assemblywoman Francine DelMonte, who represents the Lewiston area, recently announced that she is working with the Niagara County IDA to obtain grant funding for such a project, which would allow people to use wireless devices in key outdoor locations. This would enhance the range of amenities available to visitors, business travelers, boaters, and students as well as residents. The "Wi-Fi" project would cover the Villages of Lewiston, Youngstown, and Wilson.
- Continue to promote the Niagara County Microenterprise Assistance Program to existing businesses as well as potential entrepreneurs in the Villages of Lewiston, Youngstown, and Wilson. Loans under this program can be used for inventory, equipment and working capital.
- Develop a community history trail. Themed "trails" such as the Audubon Niagara Birding Trail and the Niagara County Wine Trail provide a tool for marketing multiple sites as a single attraction. The County could define a route linking various historic sites and buildings in the Niagara region and promote its use with a map, brochure, and roadside signage. This would complement the range of attractions in Niagara County. It would also encourage visitation to multiple communities.

### Recommendations for the Village of Lewiston

Along with excellent waterfront access, the current strength of the Lewiston market is likely to stimulate business development in the Village. The majority of businesses are experiencing increased sales activity, and there is a great deal of interest by investors in commercial development. While perhaps not on the scale of Niagara-on-the-Lake in Ontario, Lewiston has already made a name for itself regionally as a destination, particularly for those interested in the arts. Historic architecture, an attractive streetscape, and unique shops are among the strengths of the village commercial district. On the negative side, there is a

limited supply of vacant developable property in Lewiston, and many residents are resistant to the idea of expanding the commercial district.

In light of these conclusions, the following activities should be considered:

- Continue to promote the development of additional lodging facilities in Lewiston to support the overall tourism development effort. Artpark's Director of Marketing and Development notes that "hotels are a major request of patrons" visiting the facility. "Visitors who would like to stay in large chain hotels must travel to Niagara Falls, NY to be accommodated." Providing opportunities for visitors to stay overnight in Lewiston will have a positive impact on the local economy.
- Consider other sites to accommodate business growth. Right now the focus is on Center Street, but feeder streets may be suitable for commercial development. Other possibilities include (1) encouraging mixed-use development in selected residential neighborhoods to provide housing as well as space for certain commercial uses (e.g., office); and (2) restricting first floor or street level storefronts to retail use. This would provide the appropriate space needed to meet the growing retail demands of visitors.
- Encourage the development of additional retail shops. To enhance the pedestrian character of the Village, people need places to walk as well as places to stop and browse (and/or make purchases). While general merchandise stores that sell drugs, groceries, and other daily items are important in servicing visitors as well as residents, it is equally important to offer specialty goods and unique items that tourists may not be able to find at home.

### **Recommendations for the Village of Youngstown**

Beginning with the adoption of its Local Waterfront Revitalization Program in 1989, the Village of Youngstown has been active in redeveloping its waterfront to facilitate economic development. It has received grants for a variety of initiatives, and is even considering the future re-establishment of ferry service connecting the community with Niagara-on-the-Lake. These efforts are paying off: the local real estate market is strong; new housing is attracting higher-income households; and visitors with a diverse range of interests (boating, fishing, history) are spending time in the historic commercial district. Based on the results of the business survey, however, the Youngstown business community appears to be in a transition period; while some establishments are doing very well, experiencing growth in sales, others are struggling to stay afloat. In addition, there is a limited variety of retail stores to accommodate residents and visitors.

In light of these conclusions, the following activities should be considered:

- Promote the development of additional lodging facilities, including bed-and-breakfasts and inns. As with Lewiston, there may be an opportunity to capture a higher level of visitor spending in Youngstown if there are more accommodations available. High-quality, upscale lodging facilities in particular may be needed to capture the boaters and history buffs that visit Youngstown. Development should be consistent with the Village's existing historic character.
- Expand the special events calendar in the Village. The Level Regatta brings thousands of visitors to Youngstown's commercial district every year. Additional events are needed, however, to attract attention to the Village and encourage visitation, particularly during the off-season. A history-themed activity might be appropriate given Youngstown's historic character and proximity to Fort Niagara. Coordination of the events could be the responsibility of Village staff and/or the Lower

Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with local business owners, attractions, and/or volunteers.

- Actively solicit businesses that cater to boaters, their needs and consumer preferences. Demographic data on boating and sailing enthusiasts indicates that these individuals have high household income levels. It is important to attract both retail and other types of establishments (such as boat storage and repair) that can build on this market opportunity.
- Purchase the former site of the Eldorado Hotel. Located on the west side of Main Street near Lockport Street, the historic Eldorado Hotel burned down many years ago. Although a mini-mart apparently once operated on the site, the property is currently vacant and roped off. The site appears to have a great deal of potential, however, with excellent views of the water, and deserves to be redeveloped. If purchased by the Village, it could serve as a village center or public park; funding is available through the NYS Department of State for such a purpose. The Village is currently working with the property owner to acquire the site.
- Continue to pursue economic development projects such as the possible re-establishment of ferry service between Youngstown and Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. Although such a service is not available at this time, utilizing the Village of Youngstown and/or Fort Niagara State Park as a docking location could be advantageous, bringing consumers directly to the Village.
- Promote the development of housing for seniors and/or younger adults. Despite the decline in the Village's population over the last decade, the market for certain types of housing – such as townhomes and smaller, one-story structures – is strong in the region. Youngstown could build on this opportunity and market its attractiveness as a place to live. Efforts could include identifying and evaluating appropriate development (and redevelopment) sites, facilitating a housing market study, and initiating discussions with for-profit and nonprofit housing developers.
- Develop a plan for continued streetscape improvements and landscaping. While improvements have been made along the waterfront and on Main Street, extending landscaping, lighting, and other streetscape elements to adjacent roadways would enhance the appearance of the entire commercial district.
- Establish public rest rooms that can be used by visitors. The best location for these facilities would need to be determined.
- Develop, in conjunction with the Niagara County Center for Economic Development, an Essential Goods and Services-type program. This initiative would offer an incentive, in the form of a grant or a loan, to new businesses that intend to provide goods and services previously identified as lacking in the Village. Such a program is currently operating in Livingston and Wyoming Counties, and has been very successful in improving the business mix, filling vacant commercial space, and stimulating private investment in the targeted communities. Niagara County may wish to consider a program targeting several different commercial areas, including Wilson.

### **Recommendations for the Village of Wilson**

In contrast to Lewiston and Youngstown, the Village of Wilson has not been actively engaged in the types of community planning activities that often stimulate a revitalization effort. Although Wilson businesses are listed on the joint Town/Village website, there is no locally-based chamber of commerce representing the business community (perhaps accounting for the relatively low rate of response to the business survey). Located at some distance from the main commercial corridors in Niagara County, Wilson is also more

isolated from large-scale consumer markets. There are opportunities available, however, based on Village assets including an active waterfront and boat harbor, relatively stable business ownership, historic buildings, and proximity to a state park.

In light of these conclusions, the following activities should be considered:

- Improve connections between the Wilson commercial district and the waterfront. Pedestrian links and signage could be used to encourage visitors to the harbor to patronize businesses in the commercial district, and vice-versa. Signage to and from Wilson-Tuscarora State Park and the Seaway Trail (Route 18) is also needed. The large directional sign at Water, Main, and Lockport Streets in the Village of Youngstown would be an excellent model.
- Create a more inviting village center. The commercial area should stand out as an attractive place to locate a business and to spend time and money as a consumer. Capital investments might include new streetlights, sidewalks and crosswalks, trees, etc., particularly along Lake and Young Streets. Landscaping and stamped brick crosswalks at the intersection of Lake, Young, and Pettit Streets, and cleaning up the rubble from a recent demolition on Young Street, would greatly improve the image of the area.
- Develop and encourage special events in the village commercial district. Special events can create a sense of activity and excitement, and at the very least, draw people to the Village to patronize local businesses. Given the agricultural character of surrounding community, a seasonal farmer's market or harvest festival could be used to attract people to Wilson. There may be a need to establish an appropriate staging area or public facility in Wilson to accommodate events.
- Coordinate with the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council and/or the NYS Department of Transportation (NYS DOT) regarding the installation of sidewalks along Route 18 west of Lake Street to the harbor. Sidewalks in this area would address the "missing link" for people who want to walk north from the commercial district to the waterfront. It is not known whether the NYS DOT has any projects planned for this segment of Route 18.
- In partnership with the Town of Wilson, pursue the development of a Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan through the NYS Department of State. The LWRP could be used to establish policies and identify appropriate waterfront development projects to benefit the area.
- Establish an overlook on the waterfront at the northern end of Lake Street. Public amenities, such as a parking area and rest rooms, along with seasonal vendors, could be included.
- Organize a Wilson business and commercial property owners' group to promote and coordinate festivals and events; communicate business needs to municipal and County leaders and state representatives; and spearhead commercial district improvement efforts. Businesses in Wilson are eligible for membership in the Niagara USA Chamber of Commerce; however, they are not represented by a business association focused specifically on the Wilson community.
- Establish a façade improvement and/or commercial building space improvement grant program. Enhancing the condition of commercial buildings in the Village of Wilson would complement streetscape improvements and promote new investment. As an initial first step, a survey of study area property owners should be conducted to determine potential interest in such a program, which could be funded through the Governor's Office for Small Cities.

- Develop, in conjunction with the Niagara County Center for Economic Development, an Essential Goods and Services-type program. See description under Recommendations for the Village of Youngstown, above.

### Potential Funding Sources

Resources for commercial revitalization in the Villages of Lewiston, Youngstown, and Wilson – some of which are referenced in the recommendations above – include the following state and federal programs:

- **New York State Department of State, Environmental Protection Fund, Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP).** This program offers 50/50 matching grants to local governments for (1) urban waterfront redevelopment; (2) preparing or implementing a waterbody/watershed management plan; (3) coastal education and NYS Coastal Resources Interpretive Program (NYSCRIP) signage programs; (4) making the most of your waterfront – community visioning and the development of revitalization strategies; (5) completing or implementing a Local Waterfront Revitalization Program; and (6) creating a blueway trail. Funding may be used for planning, design, and/or construction; note, however, that construction sites must be in public ownership. *Applications for the 2005-2006 round are due on June 30<sup>th</sup>.* For more information and application materials, visit [www.nyswaterfronts.com](http://www.nyswaterfronts.com).
- **Governor's Office for Small Cities, Small Cities Program.** The New York State Small Cities Program provides grants to towns, villages and cities with a population under 50,000 and to counties with an unincorporated population under 200,000. Under the annual competitive round, towns, villages and cities can receive a maximum of \$400,000 and counties and joint applications can receive \$600,000 for Housing and Public Facilities grants. All applicants can receive a maximum of \$400,000 for MicroEnterprise grants and \$650,000 for Comprehensive grants. Applicants must ensure that 70% of all activities funded under the Small Cities Program primarily benefit low-and moderate-income households. Each Small Cities funded activity must also meet one of the national objectives: benefiting low- and moderate-income households, aiding in the prevention or elimination of slums or blight, or meeting community development needs having a particular urgency. For more information, visit [www.nysmallcities.com](http://www.nysmallcities.com).
- **New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), Environmental Protection Fund.** The Environmental Protection Act provides funding for several programs at OPRHP. The Parks Program, for example, provides matching grants for the acquisition and/or development of parks and recreational facilities and the protection of open space. The Historic Preservation Program provides matching grants for the acquisition and/or rehabilitation of properties listed on the National or State Registers of Historic Places; funded projects must be available to the general public for a specified period. For more information and application materials, visit <http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/grants/index.html>.
- **New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, New York Main Street Program.** The purpose of this program is to provide financial and technical resources to help communities with their efforts to preserve and revitalize mixed-use (commercial/civic and residential) main street/downtown business districts. Eligibility is restricted to not-for-profit community based organizations and business improvement districts; local governments are *not* eligible. Eligible activities include façade renovation, building renovation, downtown anchors (cultural or business anchors that are identified in a local plan as key to a revitalization effort), and streetscape enhancements. Programs must be carried out in a concentrated target area. For more information, visit <http://www.dhcr.state.ny.us/ocd/progs/nymainstreet.htm>.