

# Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

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## INTRODUCTION

### **The Comprehensive Plan**

New York State Town Law §272-a authorizes a local municipality to develop and adopt a comprehensive plan and offers the following support:

*“Among the most important powers and duties granted by the legislature to a town government is the authority and responsibility to undertake town comprehensive planning and to regulate land use for the purpose of protecting the public health, safety, and general welfare of the citizens.”*

*“The town comprehensive plan fosters cooperation among governmental agencies planning and implementing capital projects and municipalities that may be directly affected thereby.”*

The Town of Royalton developed a Comprehensive Plan in the 1970’s; however, it was never officially adopted. In 2005, the Planning Board undertook the initiative to begin developing a comprehensive plan for the Town. The Board collected background data and began to develop goals and objectives for the Plan. In late 2007, the Town hired Wendel to assist with the completion of the comprehensive plan. This comprehensive plan builds upon the work of earlier efforts, providing a vision for the Town. It includes goals and objectives to guide future growth of the Town while preserving the rural character that enhances the quality of life, and recommendations and implementation strategies for achieving those goals.

As the Planning Board noted in their initial work on the plan, “The comprehensive plan is the single most important document for managing a community’s physical growth.” There are many concrete benefits of a Comprehensive Plan. One critical benefit relates to the Town’s power of zoning. Municipalities are given the power to regulate land uses within the community, but these decisions should be based on sound planning principles and developed through a process that represents a consensus of the community. The process of developing a Comprehensive Plan provides a rational basis for decisions regarding zoning and other land use regulations. This helps ensure better decision-making, while providing the Town with a powerful tool to help direct growth in a manner and intensity that meets the community’s vision for its future.

There are other benefits of a Comprehensive Plan. The Plan helps guide local officials, who can look to the stated vision for the community for assistance in making decisions in

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a manner that is consistent with that vision. It also has an influence on other levels of government. All plans for capital projects of any State or federal governmental agency on land included in the comprehensive plan must take the plan into consideration in their decision-making. The comprehensive plan, developed with the support and input of the both the municipal officials and the general public, acts as a standard for ensuring that the Town's land use regulations are built on a solid foundation and represent a consensus of the community.

A comprehensive plan provides a vision for a community and consists of goals and objectives that guide future growth of the Town and reflect the principles and concepts that the community feels will enhance the character and quality of life. The comprehensive plan provides an assessment of where the community is, identifies what the community would like to be, and sets forth recommendations and strategies to attain the goals and objectives of the community. A comprehensive plan also shows cooperation and commitment of the community which can aid in seeking governmental grants. In short, the Town's Comprehensive Plan provides the Town with an effective tool for shaping its future. It influences not only local actions on the part of the town and its citizens, but can influence the actions of County and State agencies within the Town of Royalton.

### ***The Town of Royalton***

The Town of Royalton is located in the southeastern corner of Niagara County, New York. The Town is bordered by the Town of Hartland on the north and by the Town of Lockport to the west. The southern boundary of the Town is Tonawanda Creek; the creek is also the southern boundary of Niagara County. The Towns of Clarence and Newstead in Erie County border the Town to the south. The Town of Shelby in Orleans County and the Town of Alabama in Genesee County form the eastern boundary of the Town.

The Town of Royalton was first settled in 1800. The first tavern was opened in 1808 in Royalton Center. A post office and several businesses, including a 'large frame hotel' would also be established in Royalton Center, according to the Town history. Royalton was incorporated as a Town in 1817 when it separated from the Town of Hartland. A small portion of the Town was transferred to the Town of Lockport in 1824; the Town is currently just over 70 square miles in size. Its location on the Erie Canal, Tonawanda Creek, the railroad and what was known as the 'Niagara Road' led it to be one of Niagara County's most populous communities in its early years. It was the third largest town in population after Niagara and Lockport in the late 1890's. Traditional centers of the Town, in addition to the Village of Middleport, include the hamlets of Gasport and Wolcottsville.

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From its early days, agriculture was the foundation of the Town, supplemented by trade along the canal in support of Middleport and Gasport. The Town remains a rural community, with a total population of 7710 in 2000. Middleport, the only incorporated village in the town, has traditionally been the business and civic center of the Town. The most recent Census (2000) has the population of the village as 1,816 residents. The hamlet of Gasport, along State Route 31, is the next largest settlement within the Town, with a population of 1,248. The next largest settlement, Wolcottsville, is not large enough to be considered a 'place' by the US Census. Wolcottsville, however, was a prominent center in the early history of the Town. The Town history notes that in 1875, Wolcottsville was home to seven hotels, five stores, five wagon and blacksmith shops, a saw mill, a cigar factory, two churches and 1000 residents.

The Town remains a rural community. In 2000, at the time of the last Census, the Town had a population of 7,710 persons, including 1,816 residents who live within the Village of Middleport. In addition to Middleport, Gasport and Wolcottsville, there are several smaller unincorporated hamlets in the Town. Dysinger is located on State Route 93 in the central portion of the Town near the intersection with Bunker Hill Road. Terry's Corner, McNall's, Royalton Center, and Gilberts Corner are all hamlets located along State Route 77. In the northern section of the Town along the Erie Canal lie the hamlets of Orangeport and Reynales Basin.

### ***The Plan Document***

This Comprehensive Plan document contains several sections. The Inventory of Existing Conditions outlines the current state of the Town. It provides baseline information on a range of information about land use, zoning, environmental resources, the transportation network, utilities, and public, historic and cultural facilities. The section on goals sets forth the broad vision for the Town of Royalton's future, developed through working with the community to articulate their preferred future. The section on Findings and Recommendations assesses existing conditions in relation to the preferred vision in order to point out issues and concerns, as well as highlight assets and opportunities. It then provides a listing of recommended actions designed to help the community move toward achieving its goals. The Implementation section organizes the recommendations into a 'to do' list for the community. The final section of the document, the Environmental Resources, is intended to provide a hard look, as required under the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) act, at the plan and its recommendations in order to complete the required SEQR assessment of this document.

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## INVENTORY OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

### LAND USE & ZONING

#### ***Existing Land Uses***

The Town of Royalton is dominated by agricultural and rural land uses. These uses include agricultural lands, forested areas, fallow fields, vacant lands and large rural residential lots. State agricultural districts cover the majority of lands in the Town, with the exception of the northwest corner. In contrast to the rural uses characterizing most of the Town, there are several areas which are more densely developed with a traditional mix of residential, commercial, industrial and community uses. These include the Village of Middleport and the areas in the Town immediately adjacent to the Village, and the hamlets of Gasport and Wolcottsville. In addition, there are other, smaller hamlet areas in the Town. These include McNalls, Royalton Center and Terrys Corners, and the area along Route 31 west of Gasport near the intersection of Canal Road. These traditional rural centers represent the original settlements in the Town. The Tonawanda State Wildlife Refuge area is located in the southeast portion of the Town, and the Tonawanda Indian Reservation is located in the extreme southeast portion of the Town. (See Map 1: Existing Land Use).

***Agricultural Lands:*** According to State assessment data, the Town has over 300 parcels categorized as agricultural lands. The most common agricultural uses are field crops and fallow lands (productive vacant agricultural lands). Other agricultural operations in the Town include dairy farms, horse farms and cattle/hog farms and orchards. A total of 53 percent of the Town's land area is in agricultural use, according to assessment data.



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### *Residential Uses:*

Most residential development in Royalton is rural in nature, with homes located along Town roadways on large lots. As noted above, there are some hamlet areas and lands near the Village where homes are closer together. The majority of homes in the Town are single-family units, although there are some two- and three-family homes.



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### *Commercial and Industrial Uses:*

Most commercial lands in the Town of Royalton are clustered either near the Village of Middleport or in the hamlet of Gasport. There are also commercial uses along Route 31 (Rochester Road). Most commercial users are small businesses, located on small parcels. Industrial uses are located in and around the Village of Middleport, including the FMC facility and the former mining operation



located on Route 31. A former dumpsite is located on Griswold Road, which is a NYSDEC cleanup site, and some dumping also occurred on a parcel on Mackey Road directly across from the airport. There is a potential brownfield located at the Gasport Cold Storage. A Phase 1 Environmental audit was completed for that site, and further investigation is planned.



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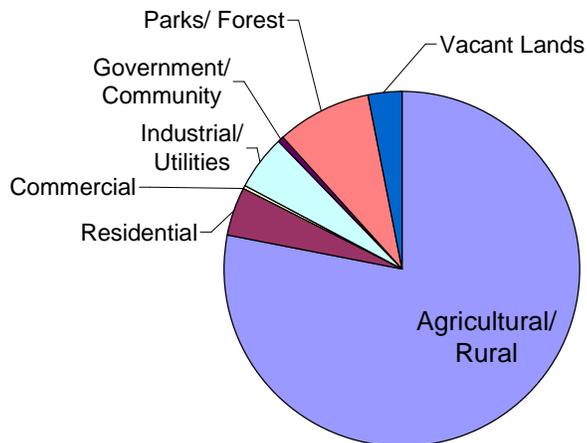
**Public Uses:** Public uses are primarily located near the Village or the hamlets. Public uses in the Town of Royalton include the library, the school, Town facilities and several fire stations. There are also several cemeteries and churches in the Town. Further discussion of public uses is included in the section on community facilities.



The total breakdown of uses by percentage of land in the Town is as follows:

	Acres	Percent
Agricultural/ Rural	29,371.3	78.0%
Residential	1670.1	4.4%
Commercial	187.6	0.5%
Industrial/ Public Utilities	1,835.0	4.9%
Government/ Community Facilities	163.2	0.4%
Parks/ Forested Lands	3,323.4	8.8%
Vacant Lands *	1,119.3	3.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>37,669.8</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

*Note: figures based on Town assessment records and exclude acreage in Town dedicated to rights-of-way, surface water and other lands not included in property valuation system.*



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### **Zoning**

The Town of Royalton adopted its current Zoning Code in 1999. The code establishes the following six zoning districts (See Map 2: Existing Zoning):

- Agricultural District (A)
- One and Two Family Residential District (R)
- Multiple Family Residential District (MR)
- Business District (B)
- Light Industrial District (LI)
- General Industrial District (GI)

The vast majority of the Town is zoned Agricultural (A) which is intended primarily for agricultural and rural residential uses. The Agricultural zoning district essentially includes all lands starting at a distance 300 feet back from the street right-of-way, unless the parcel is zoned for multiple residential, business, light industrial or general industrial use. Lands in the first 300 feet from the right-of-way are zoned Residential. Given typical parcel depths in the Town, most parcels have dual zoning (Residential for the frontage and Agricultural for the remainder of the parcel).

The Agricultural zoning district establishes a 45,000 square foot minimum lot size with a minimum 150 foot of frontage required for all uses. The code also specifies required front, rear and side yard setbacks, depth and height requirements. Maximum lot coverage for dwellings and accessory structures is 35 percent of the total lot area. Only one dwelling is allowed on a lot.

Uses permitted by right in the Agricultural zoning district are one and two family dwellings, accessory apartments and agricultural operations and uses. Certain setback requirements are specified for agricultural uses. The code specifies uses which are allowed only with Special Use Permits. This list includes certain agricultural uses, such as pig farms and industrialized poultry farms, in addition to a range of other types of uses.

The One and Two Family Residential District (R) is intended “to provide a stable environment for one and two family residential developments free from incompatible uses.” Although the code states that the district is intended for higher density areas that are serviced by public water or where densities are high enough to support public water in the future, in practice most frontage lands in the Town are zoned as the One and Two Family Residential District. Allowed uses by right are one or two-family dwellings, accessory apartments, family day care home (day care for no more than six children provided in a family home), gardening and certain agricultural uses, and home occupations.

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The minimum lot size in the R district is 45,000 square foot with a minimum 150 lot of frontage for all uses, except when public water and sewer service is available. For lots with public water and sewer, the minimum lot size is 15,000 square feet with a minimum 100 foot of frontage. The code specifies required setbacks and maximum lot coverage, which are the same as in the Agriculture district.

The Multiple Family Residential District (MR) allows denser development, including multiple family dwellings (apartments). The district is intended for areas with public water and sewer, or where densities are high enough to support such facilities. Allowed uses are the same or similar to the R district, except that accessory apartments are not allowed, and rooming houses are allowed. Minimum lot size is 45,000 square feet, unless there is a lot is connected to public water and sewer, in which case the minimum lot size is 15,000 square feet. Minimum frontage is 150 feet on lots without public water, and 100 feet for lots with public services. The code establishes required front, side and back setbacks and maximum lot coverage. In addition, there are additional standards for multiple dwellings. These include maximum gross density (8 units per acre); minimum gross floor area requirements (by unit type); road access and parking requirements; and different standards for setbacks and aggregate lot coverage. Plans submitted for site plan approval for apartments must indicate provisions for sewage disposal, water supply, storm drainage, parking, garbage disposal and landscaping and lighting.

The Business District (B) is intended to provide business establishments servicing the needs of area residents and visitors, especially in the nature of retail and service businesses. Permitted uses represent a range of general business, services, retail, warehousing and commercial uses. Uses requiring special use permit are specified. There is a 45,000 square foot minimum lot size with a minimum 150 foot of frontage required for all uses, except when public water and sewer service is available in which the minimum lot size is 15,000 square feet with a minimum 100 foot of frontage required. Setbacks and maximum lot coverage is also specified, with expanded setbacks for business uses or structures if the lot line abuts a residential district. All business uses are subject to site plan review prior to obtaining a building permit or making any change of use of the premises.

The Light Industrial District (LI) is intended to provide for light manufacturing, assembly, and storage facilities as well as research and development activities and office uses. Permitted uses include all uses permitted as of right in the Business district, subject to the same regulations in the B district; and a variety of light manufacturing uses. Additional uses are allowed with a special use permit, with restrictions to avoid negative impacts on adjoining uses (setbacks, buffers, restrictions on noise, etc.) Site plan approval is required. The minimum lot size is one acre, with a minimum 150 feet of frontage required for all uses. The code establishes minimum side, front and rear yards, and maximum height restrictions.

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The General Industrial District (GI) provides for industrial activity in the Town “helpful in the development of a balanced economy.” Permitted uses include industrial or agri-industrial businesses, as long as they are “not detrimental to the environment, not inherently unsanitary, not a menace to the public health, not a nuisance in law or in fact and . . . not noxious or offensive by reasons on the emission of odor, dust, smoke, gas, fumes or unusual, continuous or vexatious noise.” Signs, storage and off-street parking are allowed as accessory uses. Certain uses, such as junk yards, animal sales lots and bulk storage of certain products are allowed with a special use permit. Residential uses are explicitly prohibited. The code includes certain standards to control impacts, such as the requirement that all industrial processes occur within an enclosed building, and industrial structures must be a minimum of 100 feet from any non-industrial district. Site plan approval is required. There is a 3 acre minimum lot size required for all uses.

The following table summarizes required bulk standards, including setbacks for front, side and back yards, minimum lot frontages and depths, height regulations and minimum lot size. For the Multiple Residential and Business Districts, the bulk regulations vary, depending on whether there is public water and sewer available to the lot. Lots in areas with public services can be built at a higher density.

**Bulk Standards by Zoning District**

	A	R	MR*	B*	LI	GI
Front Setback	50'	50'	50'/40'	50'	50'	70'
Side Setback	10'	10'	10'/5-10'	15'	50'	50'
Rear Setback	35'	35'	40'/25'	20'	50'	50'
Min. Frontage	150'	150'	150'/100'	150/100'	150'	--
Min. Depth	300'	300'	--	300'	--	--
Max. Height**	35'	35'	35'	35'	35'	--
Min. Lot Size (sf)	45,000	45,000	45,000/15,000	45000/15000	1 acre	3 acres
Max. Lot Cover	35%	35%	35%	35%	--	--

\* without public water & sewer/ with public water and sewer

\*\* certain structures are exempt from height restrictions (silos, personal wind towers, etc.)

Article III of the Town of Royalton Zoning Code provides for the application of the regulations, including greater detail about dimensional and use regulations; minimum dwelling size; signs; temporary uses; parking; off-street loading; fences; ponds; camping trailers and recreational vehicles; slopes of yards; alternate energy systems (private solar and wind energy); telecommunications towers; personal wireless telecommunications service facilities; home occupations; satellite parabolic antennae; and seasonal roadside stands. It also specifies regulations for non-conforming uses, lots and structures.

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The Zoning Code establishes procedures for Special Use Permits and Site Plan review. Article VII of the Zoning Code (“Special Conditions and Safeguards for Certain Special Uses”) provides supplemental regulations for a number of uses including:

- Airports and landing strips;
- Animal husbandry;
- Automobile laundry;
- Bed and breakfast establishment;
- Clubs, lodges, fraternal organizations;
- Day care centers;
- Excavation and mining;
- Farm labor camps;
- Fur Farms
- Home businesses;
- Hotels and motels;
- Industrialized poultry farm;
- Kennels and animal hospitals;
- Multiple family dwellings;
- Livery and commercial stable;
- Mobile home parks;
- Motor vehicle/ heavy equipment repair shops;
- Motor vehicle sales;
- Permanent roadside stands;
- Pig farms;
- Planned commercial industrial park;
- Planned residential development;
- Public and semi-public buildings and grounds;
- Public utility substation;
- Retail gasoline outlet/ service station;
- Seasonal tent, trailer, or recreational vehicles camp.

These additional regulations are intended to avoid conflicts between land uses. They include provisions for greater setbacks, requirements for landscaping or screening, regulations specific to a particular use and similar provisions. Excavation and mining for any and all materials, including clay, is explicitly prohibited in all zoning districts, except for soil excavating as part of the Town ditching program.

The Zoning Code also describes the required processes for obtaining permits, and for the Zoning Board of Appeals, and establishes the process for amending the code.

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### **Land Subdivision Regulations**

The subdivision regulations for the Town of Royalton were adopted in 1975. The subdivision regulations control the division of land into smaller lots, blocks, sites or parcels. The intent of these regulations is to ensure for the “orderly, efficient and economical development of the Town.” The subdivision regulations ensure that when new parcels are created, their lay out takes into consideration issues of needed improvements (water, wastewater), traffic, safety, grading, and other physical features, while taking into consideration ‘harmony with the development pattern of the neighboring properties.’”

Subdivision is defined by the Royalton regulations as “the divisions of any parcel of land into two or more lots, blocks, or sites, with or without streets or highways and includes re-subdivision.” Subdivisions can be categorized as “major” or “minor”. Major subdivisions consist of 10 or more lots, or any subdivision that requires a new street or the extension of any municipal facilities, such as water lines. Minor subdivisions are any subdivisions that have not been categorized as major. They generally consist of more than four lots but not more than ten lots, all of which front on an existing road. Any split of land that creates less than four lots is not categorized as a subdivision, as long as the action does not require a new street, “easement for purpose” or the extension of municipal facilities. Subdivision of any land into parcels for agricultural purposes is also not subject to subdivision regulations, as long as the parcels are larger than five acres and no new streets, easements or extensions of municipal facilities are involved.

The regulations provide for the required procedures for filing subdivision applications. The owner first submits a sketch plan for Planning Board review. The Planning Board classifies the action as a Minor or Major subdivision. The Planning Board also has the authority to make recommendations regarding the layout of the proposed subdivision to the applicant.

For subdivisions classified as minor at the sketch plan stage, the applicant may directly submit a plat for approval. For major subdivisions, the applicant must follow a two-step process after the sketch plan, first submitting a preliminary plat for Planning Board review and approval, and then submitting the final plat for approval.

The regulations specify specific submittal requirements for each stage of the process (information to be included on the sketch plan, the preliminary plat and the final plat). They also outline time frames for the approval process. For any subdivision (minor or major), the applicant must attend a Planning Board meeting to discuss the plat and a public hearing is required. The Planning Board has the option of approving, approving with modifications or disapproving the Subdivision Plat.

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The subdivision regulations outline the requirements for general requirements and design standards for improvements. The design standards provide the applicant with guidance regarding street layout, block size, street design (widths, required improvements, grades, curve radii, etc.), and street names. They provide standards for the configuration of lots and set forth required drainage improvements. Applicants are required to provide at least 3 acres of recreation space per 100 dwelling units, up to 10% of the total area, although the Board may accept a recreational fee for each lot in lieu of land. The regulations promote the preservation of natural features “wherever possible”. Planning Board approval is required prior to the removal of any mature trees (8 inches in diameter or more). The regulations also provide minimum standards for required improvements, such as streets, sewer lines and water lines.

### **Agricultural Protection**

The vast majority of the Town of Royalton falls within a designated State Agricultural District, subject to the regulations set forth in Article 25-AA of the New York State Agriculture and Markets Law (See Map 3: Agricultural Districts). Portions of three separate Agricultural Districts fall within the Town of Royalton.

Lands within the State Agricultural District have additional protections and incentives to encourage continued agricultural use of these lands. These include favorable tax assessments, protection against unreasonable laws and other provisions. To qualify to be included within an Agricultural District, the lands must meet certain criteria, and each Agricultural District must go through periodic recertification.



There are a number of benefits for agricultural landowners located within an Agricultural District. Agricultural land is assessed on its value as farmland, not on its potential development value, which reduces the tax burden on agricultural lands, especially in areas that are experiencing growth. Local laws may not unreasonably restrict farm operations within an Agricultural District and existing and proposed laws are subject to review by the State Department of Agriculture and Markets to ensure that they comply with the law and are not overly restrictive. Real estate agents are required to disclose to potential buyers that the property they are about to acquire is located in an Agricultural District or within 500 feet of any farm operation and/or farmland. In addition, any application for special use

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permit, site plan approval, use variance, or subdivision on lands within an Agricultural District or within 500 feet of any farm operation and/or farmland must submit an agricultural data statement to the reviewing authority.

The Agricultural Districts Law mandates that governmental agencies must avoid or minimize potential adverse impacts to farming operations when undertaking, acting upon or advancing funds for projects within an Agricultural District that involve the acquisition of land or the use of public funds for construction purposes. Such projects must be reviewed by the staff of the State Department of Agricultural and Markets to assess its impacts on farmland. They may recommend actions designed to minimize negative impacts.



The State has also established a Right-to-Farm Law. The State Right-to-Farm Law provides that agricultural practices conducted on farmland shall not be found to be a nuisance if these agricultural practices are reasonably and necessary to the particular farm operation, conducted in a manner that is not negligent or reckless and consistent with accepted and sound agricultural practices. Agricultural practices, to be protected, also must not violate any local, state, and federal laws

or constitute a threat to public health, safety, or welfare, or unreasonably obstruct the use of navigable waters or public roadways. Any disputes of farm nuisances are resolved by the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board.

The Town of Royalton adopted a Right-to-Farm law in 1993 and Niagara County adopted a Right-to-Farm Law in 2007. These laws provide additional support to the protection and encouragement of agricultural interests within the Town of Royalton.

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### DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographic background, including population, housing, income, and economic data for the Town of Royalton is based on the 2000 U.S. Census. Although this data is eight years old, it provides the most comprehensive data for the area. For the purposes of developing the comprehensive plan, the analysis includes the Village of Middleport, unless otherwise noted.

#### **Population**

The most current available population count for the Town of Royalton indicates that the Town has a total of 7,710 residents. Of those residents, 1,816 live within the Village of Middleport, and the remaining 5,577 persons live in the Town outside the Village. Population in the Town experienced a slight increase between 1990 and 2000, with an increase of 3.4%. Over the same period, population in the County decreased by 0.4%. The hamlet of Gasport, while it has no legal status as a municipality, is categorized by the Census as a 'place'. In 2000, there were 1,248 residents of Royalton who lived in Gasport. Together, population in Middleport and Gasport represents 41 percent of all Town residents, and Gasport represents 21 percent of all Town residents who live outside the Village.

Recent population estimates indicate that the population of the Town is essentially stable. The estimates suggest that the Town has seen a slight decrease in population (-1.4%), but the decreases are so small that they could fall within the margin of error for the estimate. For example, total population loss for the Town outside the Village represents a total of only 10 persons. Population losses within the Village are projected to have been greater than in the Town outside the Village, with an estimated decrease of approximately 5 percent. Niagara County is estimated to have decreased in population by 1.7 percent between 2000 and 2006.

#### Population

	1990	2000	2006 (est)
Total Town	7,453	7,710	7,599
Town Outside Village	5,577	5,793	5,783
Village of Middleport	1,876	1,917	1,816
Niagara County	220,756	219,846	216,130

	1990-2000		2000-2006	
Total Town	257	+3.4%	-111	-1.4%
Town Outside Village	216	3.9%	-10	-0.2%
Village of Middleport	41	2.2%	-101	-5.3%
Niagara County	-910	-0.4%	-3,716	-1.7%

*Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census*

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### Age Composition

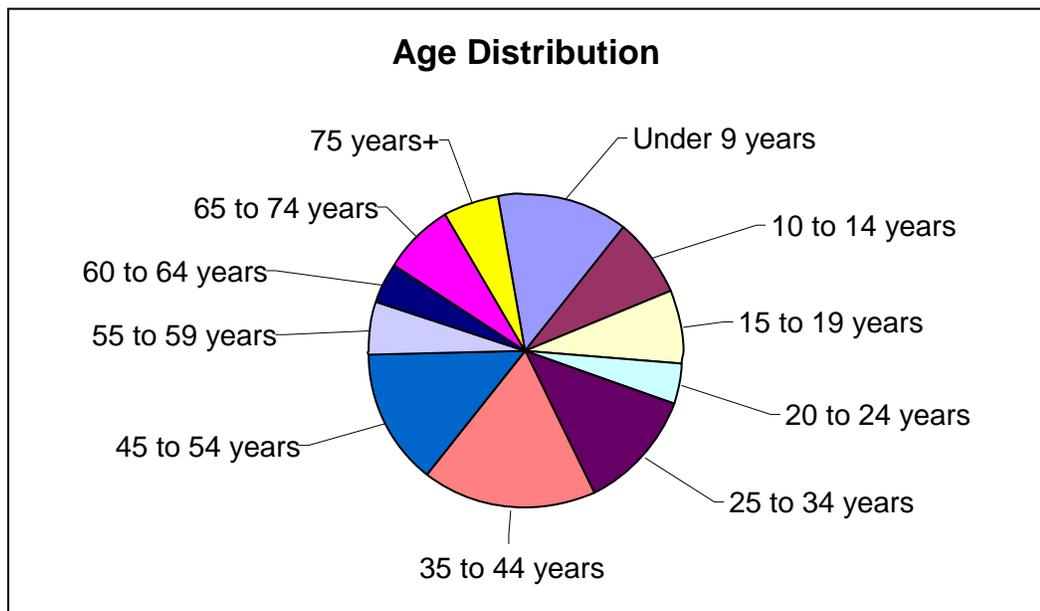
The Town's population aged slightly between 1990 and 2000. In 2000, senior citizens aged 65 and over represented 13.1 percent of the population, a slight increase over the 12.3 percent of the Town's residents who were seniors in 1990. At the same time, the Town is significantly younger than the County, where over 15 percent of the population in 2000 was aged 65 or older. Median age for the Town was 37.4 years in 2000, compared to 38.2 years for Niagara County.

There were 2,041 persons in the Town of Royalton under the age of 18, making up 26.5 percent of the population, up slightly from the 2,023 under the age of 18 in 1990, which represented 27.4 percent of the population. The proportion of adults aged 18 to 64 remained unchanged between 1990 and 2000, at 60.4 percent. Royalton has a slightly larger proportion of minors than the county, with 26.5% of the population under the age of 18, compared to less than 25% for the County.

### Age Distribution

	Royalton, 1990	Royalton, 2000	Niagara County 2000
Under Age 18	27.4%	26.5%	24.7%
Age 18 to 64	60.4%	60.4%	59.9%
Age 65 and older	12.3%	13.1%	15.4%

*Source: US Bureau of the Census*



*Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2000*

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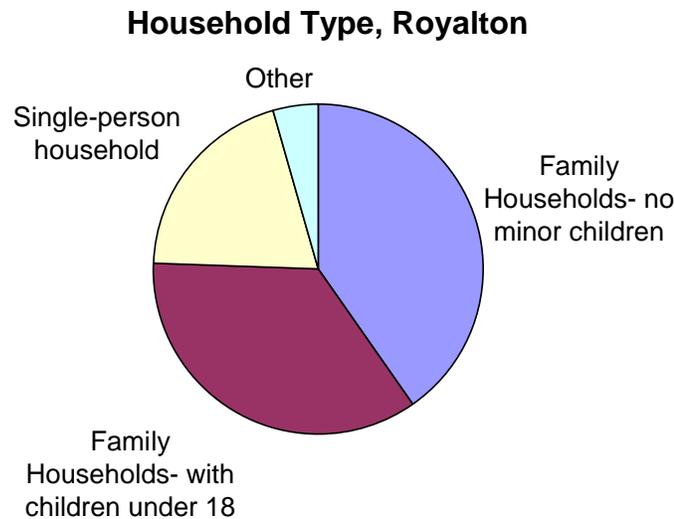
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### Household Trends

In contrast to population trends, the number of households in the Town of Royalton grew between 1990 and 2000. There were 2,624 households in 1990 and 2,810 in 2000, which represents an increase of 186 households (7.1 percent). This is because, in conformance with national trends, the size of households in Royalton has been decreasing. In 1990, the average household size in the Town was 2.81. In 2000, the figure had decreased to 2.71. This figure is significantly higher than the County, where the average household size was 2.56 in 1990 and 2.45 in 2000.

The majority of households in Royalton are categorized as families. Fully 75.5% of all households in the Town are families. About 20% of households are single-person households.<sup>1</sup> The remaining 4.5% of households are unrelated persons living in the same home (roommates, unmarried couples, etc.) In Niagara County, only 66.7% of households are families, while close to 29% are single-person households.

Close to two-fifths (38.0%) of all households in Royalton include children under the age of 18. At the other end of the spectrum, approximately one-quarter of households (24.0%) include persons aged 65 years or older.



*Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2000*

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<sup>1</sup> Under Census definitions, a person living alone is not categorized as a family household.

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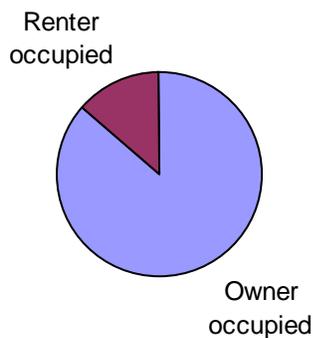
### Housing

The number of housing units in the Town of Royalton has also been increasing. At the time of the 2000 Census, there were 2,994 housing units in the Town, which represents an increase of 251 units, or 9.2 percent since 1990. New housing growth is taking place primarily in the Town outside the Village, which accounted for nearly 88 percent of new housing units in the Town between 1990 and 2000. Because the number of new units exceeds the number of new households, however, housing vacancy rates have also increased in Royalton. In 1990, vacancy represented 4.3 percent of all housing units in the Town. In 2000, 6.1 percent of housing units were vacant. Much of the vacancy is located within the Village of Middleport, which had a vacancy rate of 8.7 percent in 2000. Vacancy rates for Niagara County as a whole were 8.2 percent. Homeowner vacancy in Royalton is particularly low, at only 1.4 percent. Rental vacancy rates in the Town are higher, at 7.8 percent.

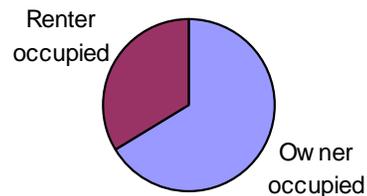
The majority of housing in the Town of Royalton is owner-occupied. Fully 81 percent of the Town's housing units are owner occupied, and only 19 percent are rental units. In comparison, approximately 70 percent of the County's housing stock is owner-occupied. Rental housing in the Town of Royalton tends to be concentrated within the Village. Of the 533 occupied rental units in the Town, nearly half (254 units) were located within the Village of Middleport.

### Tenure

Town outside Village



Village



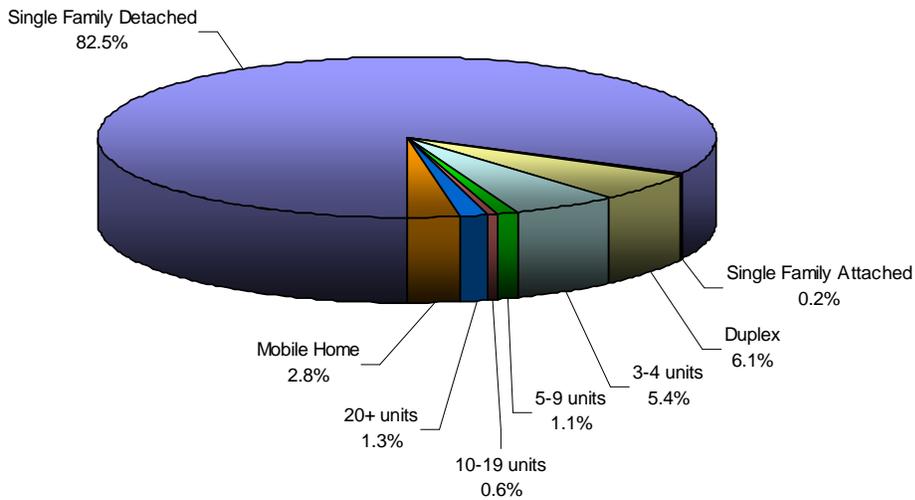
Source: US Bureau of the Census

## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

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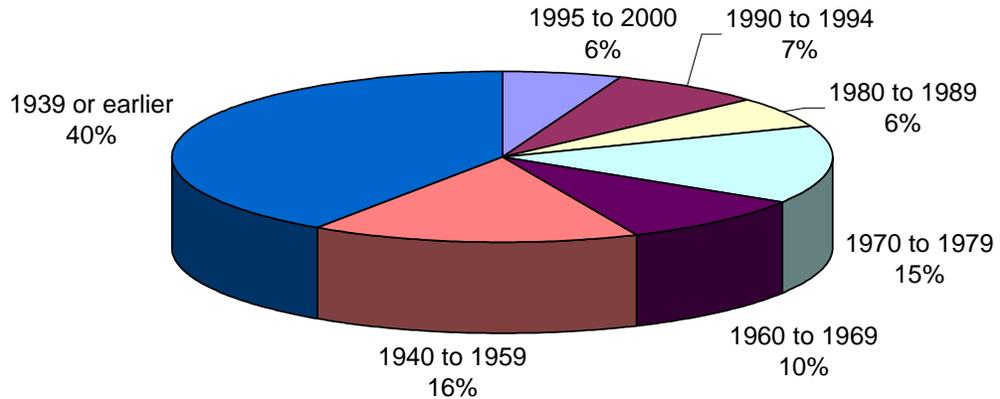
The majority of housing units in the Town (85.3 percent) are single-family homes. Mobile homes account for 85 housing units, 40 of which are outside the Village. Just over 6 percent of the housing stock consists of doubles and 8.3 percent of the housing stock is in buildings with 3 or more units per structure).

**Town of Royalton Housing Units: Unit Type**



Slightly more than 40 percent of the housing units in the Town were constructed prior to 1939, with another 16 percent constructed between 1940 and 1959. Approximately 15 percent of the Town's housing stock was built in the 1970's and 13 percent of the housing stock was constructed between 1990 and the time of the Census in 2000.

**Town of Royalton Housing Units: Year Built**



*Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2000*

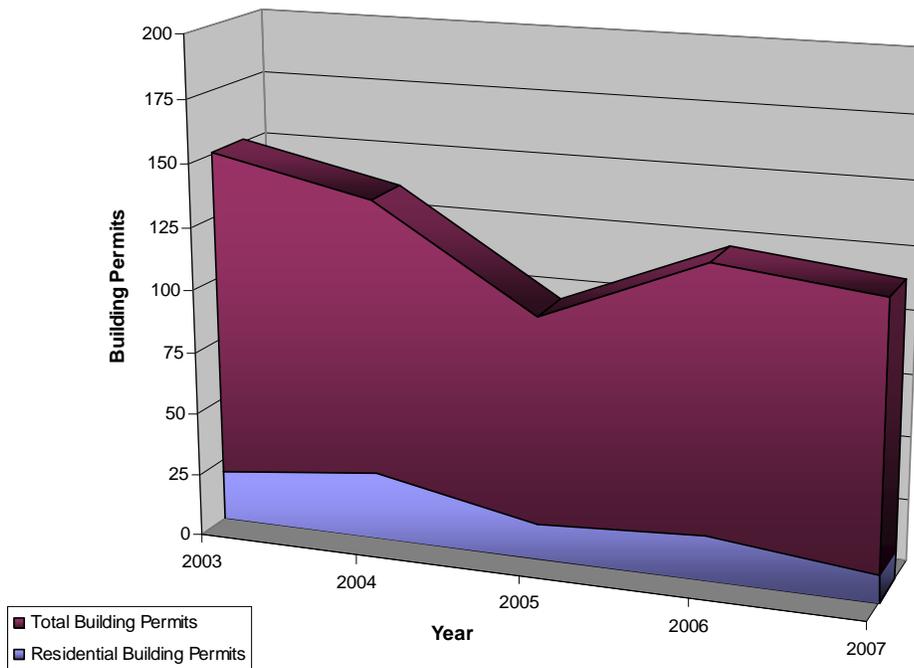
## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

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### **Building Permit Trends**

There has been continued growth in housing development in the Town. There were a total of 536 building permits issued in the Town between January 1, 2003 and December 31, 2007. Most of these permits were for repairs or modifications to existing buildings, but 90 of the permits issued were for new residential construction, representing an average of 18 new homes per year. The year 2003 saw the highest total number of building permits issued (131). The greatest construction value was experienced in 2004 (\$5,717,800), which includes both new construction and repairs and renovations. The following chart shows the building permit activity in the Town between 2003 and 2007.

**Building Permit Activity**



*Source: Town of Royalton Building Department*

## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

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### **Economic Profile**

In 2000, approximately 60 percent of the Town's population over the age of 16 was employed, with the unemployment rate hovering around 3.3 percent. This represents very low unemployment; by comparison, unemployment in the County was 6.1 percent. Nationally, unemployment in that year was 5.8 percent.

The manufacturing industry has continued to leave its mark on the Town of Royalton as 22.5 percent of the Town's workforce is employed in that sector. Some of the larger industries include Barden Homes, Middleport Cold Storage, FMC Corporation, and Lafarge- Gasport Aggregate. The educational, health, and social services sector accounts for an additional 19.7 percent of the Town's workforce. Other strong employment sectors include construction, retail trade, transportation and warehousing, and utilities, finance, insurance, and real estate, and professional services, with each employing greater than 5 percent of the labor force. Nearly 3 percent of the Town's workforce makes their living from agriculture. The following table is a breakdown of employment in the Town.

Occupation:	Employed in 2000	% Employed in 2000
Agriculture	100	2.8%
Construction	310	8.7%
Manufacturing	801	22.5%
Wholesale Trade	163	4.6%
Retail Trade	344	9.6%
Transportation, Warehousing & Utilities	212	5.9%
Information	67	1.9%
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	189	5.3%
Professional, Management & Administrative	202	5.7%
Educational, Health & Social Service	701	19.7%
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	153	4.3%
Public Administration	170	4.8%
Other Services	155	4.3%

*Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2000*

## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

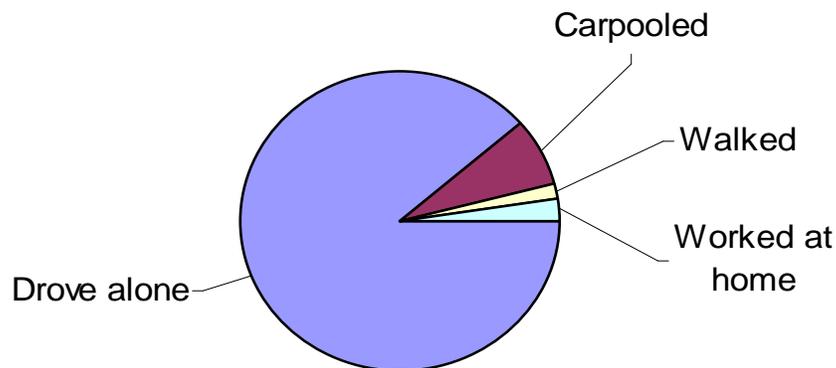
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### Commuting Patterns

Consistent with trends across the region, in 2000, 88.6 percent of Royalton workers drove alone to work, with 7.6 percent carpooling. Only 1.4 percent walked, and 2.4 percent worked from home.

Nearly one quarter of Royalton workers who do not work from home have a commute that is less than 15 minutes to work. Slightly more than 44 percent of workers have a 15-30 minute commute, about 17 percent commute 30-45 minutes, about 10 percent commute 45-60 minutes, and slightly less than 4 percent have a commute that is more than an hour each way. Nearly 40 percent of Royalton residents who were employed worked outside of Niagara County in 2000.

**Commuting Patterns, 2000**



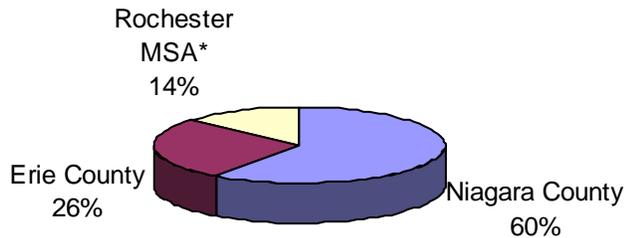
*Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2000*

According to Census data from 2000, approximately 60 percent of employed workers aged 16 or older in the Town of Royalton worked at businesses located in Niagara County. Another 26 percent work in Erie County. Approximately 14 percent of employed workers work within the Rochester metropolitan area, which includes Orleans and Genesee Counties, in addition to Monroe, Livingston, Ontario and Wayne Counties. Less than one percent of the workforce (0.3%) work outside these counties. Given available Census data, it is not possible to determine where in Niagara County employees from Royalton are working, although data on commuting suggest that many are not working far from home.

# Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

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## Place of Work



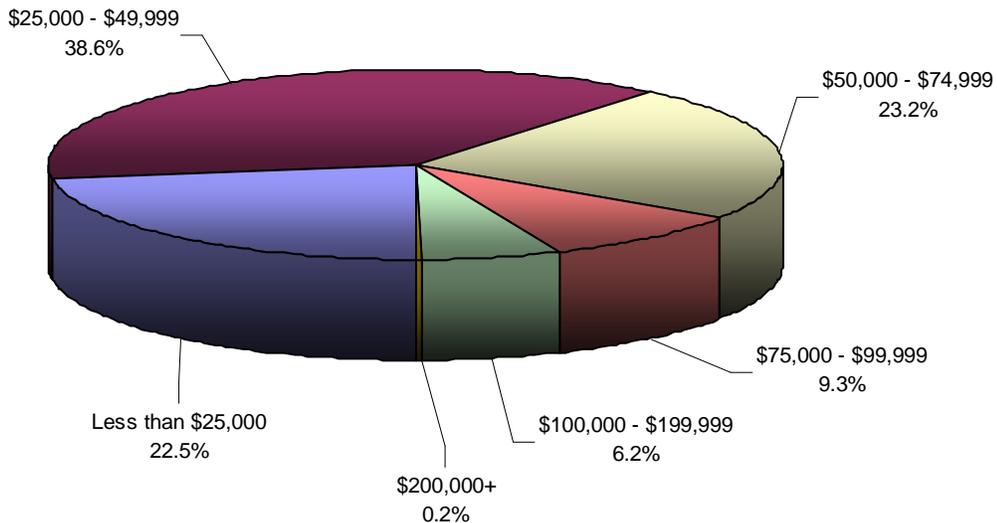
\* Note: Rochester MSA includes Orleans County.

Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2000

## Income

In the year 2000, nearly one out of every five households in the Town of Royalton earned an income less than \$25,000, slightly less than two out of five households earned between \$25,000 and \$50,000, and about one out of every five households earned between \$50,000 and \$75,000. The median household income in 2000 was \$43,516, up from \$34,972 in 1990 (dollars not adjusted for inflation). In comparison, the 2000 median household income for the Village of Middleport was \$36,464 and for Niagara County was \$38,136. The following chart shows the breakdown of household income for the entire Town (including Village) in 2000.

## Income Distribution, 2000



# Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

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## ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

### **Topography**

The topography of most of the Town of Royalton ranges from relatively flat to gently rolling. The most prominent topographical feature in the Town is the Niagara Escarpment, a geological ridge that runs from west to east across the northern part of the Town, paralleling the Erie Canal and Route 31. The Escarpment's drop off is much less steep through Royalton than is seen in places west, but the drop is still between 100 and 150 feet. At 667 feet, the highest point in Niagara County is located in the Town of Royalton, just north of Bunker Hill Road.

### **Soils**

The primary generalized soil units in the Town of Royalton include the following (noted in order of their location in the Town from north to south):

1. Niagara-Canandaigua-Collamer – These soils are deep, somewhat poorly drained to poorly drained, medium textured soils. These soil can be found north of the Escarpment and in the southern portion of the Town along Tonawanda Creek.
2. Darien-Cazenovia-Nunda – These soils are well drained to moderately drained, medium textured soils. These soils can be found throughout the northern and central portions of the Town.
3. Hudson-Rhinebeck-Collamer – These soils are deep, moderately drained to well drained, medium textured to moderately fine textured soils. These soils can be found in the northern part of the Town near the Escarpment and in the southern part of the Town.
4. Honeoye-Ontario-Lima – These soils are deep, well drained, medium textured soils. These soils can be found along the eastern portions of the Town.
5. Wassaic-Farmington-Lairdsville – These soils are shallow to moderately deep, well drained to moderately well drained, medium textured soils. These soils can be found in the northern portion of the Town south of the Escarpment.
6. Teel-Wayland-Hamlin – These soils are deep, poorly drained to very poorly drained, medium textured soils.
7. Madalin-Rhinebeck-Canadice – These soils are deep, somewhat poorly drained, poorly drained, or very poorly drained, medium textured soils. These soils can be found in the extreme southeastern portion of the Town.
8. Minoa-Arkport-Lamson – These soils are deep, somewhat poorly drained, poorly drained, and very poorly drained, medium textured to moderately coarse soils. These soils can be found along portions of Tonawanda Creek.

Many of the soils in Town are categorized as prime agricultural soils, including many areas where the soils are farmland of statewide importance. The areas of prime agricultural soils are depicted on Map 4.

## **Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan**

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### **Drainage/ Water Features**

The water features in the Town of Royalton account for less than a half percent of the total surface area in the Town. Water features include a number of creeks and lakes and the Erie Canal. The Town also contains a vast amount of wetlands.

Water in the Town is conveyed to two distinct drainage systems. The northern portion of the Town drains northerly, down the Escarpment, eventually emptying into Lake Ontario. The southern portion of the Town drains southerly to Tonawanda Creek, which empties into the Niagara River, upstream from Niagara Falls. Tonawanda Creek generally forms the southern border of the Town. Mud Creek originates in the eastern portion of the Town and is the major tributary that conveys drainage from the southern portion of the Town to Tonawanda Creek. Mud Creek empties into Tonawanda Creek in the Town of Pendleton. The northern portion of the Town drains northerly to the East Branch of Eighteen Mile Creek, Johnson Creek, or to Jeddo Creek, all of which originate in the Town and eventually convey water to Lake Ontario. Various other tributaries and intermittent streams throughout the Town convey water to one of these major creeks.



There are a limited number of lakes or ponds in the Town. Mirror Lake is located along East Branch of Eighteen Mile Creek in Gasport and the Middleport Reservoir is located along Jeddo Creek, south of the Village of Middleport. The Reservoir used to supply water for the Village of Middleport's water system, but is no longer used for that purpose.

The Erie Canal runs east-west through the northern portion of the Town. The Canal acts as a recreational and shipping channel and not as a drainage system. Many creeks are grade separated from the Canal.

### **Wetlands**

A substantial portion of the southeast portion of the Town is inundated with state and federal wetlands, known collectively as the Tonawanda State Wildlife Management Area. There are also numerous state and federal wetlands scattered throughout the Town, especially along many of the creeks and tributaries. See Map 5: Environmental Features.

## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

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State wetlands are those under jurisdiction of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) and are identified by the existence of certain species of vegetation that grow well in wet soils. The Freshwater Wetlands Act protects all wetlands of 12.4 acres (5 hectares) or larger. The State also regulates the land area within 100 feet of protected wetlands. Wetlands smaller than this size may be protected if they are considered to be of local importance. State wetlands are ranked in four classes ranging from Class I, which is a wetland of greatest importance and contains the highest restriction, to Class IV. Regardless of the wetland class, a permit is required to conduct any regulated activity within a wetland area or the 100 foot buffer that surrounds a wetland.



Federal wetlands are regulated under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers through Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, irrespective of their size, and Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899. Many wetlands that are state wetlands are also federal wetlands; however, many smaller wetlands that do not meet the state's minimum size requirement are only under federal jurisdiction. Under the law, a permit is required for any structure or work

that takes place in, under, or over a navigable waterway or wetlands adjacent to navigable waters (such as dock construction, dredging, and shoreline protection). In addition, any activity that involves a discharge of dredged material or fill material into navigable waters or associated wetlands requires a permit, as well as activities that would drain or flood wetlands or significantly disturb the soil, such as land clearing, ditching, stream channelization, and excavating. Currently, wetland mapping for the Town is being redone. The environmental map included in this document is based on most recent available information, but may not be fully accurate as wetland areas are remapped.

### **Floodplains**

A flood is defined as "a general and temporary condition during which the surface of normally dry land is partially or completely inundated"<sup>2</sup>. Flooding can be caused by heavy rains, melting snow, by inadequate drainage systems and other sources. Floodplains are areas situated adjacent to rivers and streams that are likely to experience recurring floods. Floodplains are therefore "flood-prone" and are hazardous to

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<sup>2</sup> Source: US Legal, Inc.

## **Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan**

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development activities. In Royalton, there are two types of floodplains that exist within the Town: 100-year floodplains and 500-year floodplains. The 100-year floodplain is the area surrounding a water feature that is inundated with water during a 100-year flood event, or a flood that has a 1 percent chance of occurring in any given year. The 100-year flood is more technically referred to as the 1 percent annual chance flood. The 500-year floodplain is the area surrounding a water course that is inundated with water during a 500-year flood event, or the 0.2 percent annual flood. The 100-year floodplain is divided into the floodway and the floodway fringe. The floodway is the portion of the floodplain which includes the stream's channel and any adjacent areas that must be kept free of encroachments that might block flood flows or restrict storage of flood waters. The flood fringe is the area covered by flood waters but that does not carry strong currents of flood waters.

The extent of 100-year floodplains throughout the Town is confined to the areas along Tonawanda Creek, Mud Creek, East Branch of Eighteen Mile Creek, and Jeddo Creek, and to areas within the Tonawanda State Wildlife Management Area. The extent of the 500-year floodplains in the Town is confined to an area in the southwestern portion of the Village of Middleport, near Jeddo Creek. FEMA is currently in the process of amending the flood maps for Niagara County, and preliminary maps issued in late September 2008 suggest that there will be significantly more lands in the Town of Royalton that fall within the "special flood hazard areas subject to inundation by the 1 percent flood." The preliminary maps are currently subject to public review and comment. Final maps are tentatively scheduled to be established by December 2009. Based on the preliminary maps, additional lands subject to flooding are located along Tonawanda Creek, Black Creek, Mud Creek, Johnson Creek and the East Branch of 18-Mile Creek within the Town of Royalton.

### **Habitats**

The Tonawanda State Wildlife Management Area, located in the southeastern portion of the Town, is a 5,600 acre designated habitat for waterfowl that straddles the Niagara-Orleans-Genesee County lines. The area acts as a large resting ground for migrating birds and as a nesting area for resident birds.

Eighteen Mile Creek and Johnson Creek are both designated as Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitats upstream near Lake Ontario, although none of the designations reach into the Town of Royalton.

### **Aquifers**

There are two aquifers located within the Town of Royalton. One is in the northwest portion of Town and extends westward into the Town of Lockport. The other is in the south central portion of Town, and extends southward into the Town of Newstead.

# Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

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## TRANSPORTATION

### *Highway Network*

The transportation system in the Town of Royalton consists of a series of north-south and east-west roads that transect the Town. The majority of roads within the Town are hard surfaced. See Map 6: Transportation Network.

The following major state and county roads are located in the Town of Royalton:

- State Route 31 runs between Lockport and Medina, passing through Gasport and Middleport, and paralleling the Erie Canal in the northern portion of the Town. The route is functionally classified as a Rural Minor Arterial and handles 7,000-8,000 vehicles per day.
- State Route 31E branches off SR 31 and runs through Downtown Middleport and extends east to Medina. This corridor is classified as a Rural Major Collector that handles about 3,000 vehicles per day.
- State Route 77 runs through the center of the Town, extending from Lockport southeast to Corfu and Java Center. This roadway is classified as a Rural Major Collector and handles about 2,000-2,500 vehicles per day. South of the Town of Royalton, Route 77 contains an interchange with the New York State Thruway in the Town of Pembroke.
- State Route 93 runs through the southern portion of the Town, running from Youngstown and Lockport to Akron. The road is classified as a Rural Major Collector, except for the portion west of Akron Road, which is classified as a Minor Arterial. This corridor experiences 2,500-3,000 vehicles per day.
- State Route 271 begins in Middleport and runs north to State Route 104 in the Town of Hartland. This road is classified as a Rural Major Collector and handles about 1,400 vehicles per day.
- Akron Road, northwest of SR 93 is classified as a Collector and handles about 1,300 vehicles per day.
- Bunker Hill Road (County Route 136) is classified as a Collector and experiences about 1,700 vehicles per day.
- Gasport Road, (County Route 10) is classified as a Rural Major Collector that handles anywhere from 3,500-4,000 vehicles per day.
- Griswold Road (County Route 905) is a Rural Major Collector between SR 77 and SR 31 that handles 1,400 vehicles per day.
- Hartland Road (County Route 108) is classified as a Rural Major Collector that handles close to 2,900 vehicles per day between Gasport and the Hartland Town Line.
- The remainder of the road system in the Town consists of two-lane county and local roads that handle less than 1,000 vehicles per day.

## **Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan**

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### **Railroad**

There is one railroad line that runs through the Town, parallel to the Erie Canal. The line is operated by the Falls Road Railroad, a Class III Short Line that provides access between the CSX railroad line in Lockport and Brockport. The railroad line is used primarily for shipments to and from the ethanol plant in Medina.

### **Public Transportation**

The Niagara County's Rural Niagara Transportation operates a fixed route between Middleport and Lockport with buses servicing the route twice a day. The closest NFTA Metro Bus stop is in Lockport.

### **Airport**

The Royalton Airport, located on Mackey Road, is a small general aviation airport owned by Tanger-Aire, Inc. that is primarily used for private single engine aircraft. The airport averages 116 operations per week.

### **Water**

The Erie Canal runs east-west through the northern portion of the Town, and is part of the New York State Canal System that is under authority of the New York State Thruway Authority. The Canal consists of a varying width of about 120 feet and a draft depth of approximately 12 feet. Although once used as an important shipping channel, the Canal is primarily used today for recreational boating. There is one lock along the Canal located just east of the hamlet of Gasport in the Town.

### **Bicycle and Pedestrian**

Sidewalks and other pedestrian facilities in the Town are limited mainly to the Village of Middleport and hamlet of Gasport. The Erie County Heritage Trail along the north side of the Erie Canal offers walking, hiking, bicycling, and cross-country skiing opportunities. Royalton also has a State-designated on-road bicycle route: State Bicycle Route 5 is located along Route 31 through the Town. It continues west to Niagara Falls and east to the New York-Massachusetts border.

### **Trails**

Erie Canal is designated as the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor and is paralleled by the Erie Canalway Trail. The trail consists of portions that contain a dirt surface, a gravel surface, and a paved surface.

# Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

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## UTILITIES

### **Public Water**

Public water in the Town of Royalton is provided by the Royalton Townwide Water District. The source of District water is purchased surface water, which it buys from the Niagara County Water District. A major Niagara County Water District line runs along Route 31. There have been unauthorized tap-ins into the County line within the Town of Royalton. Town plans are to extend a parallel town line so these tap-ins can be relocated to the town system. According to the Town district's annual water quality statement, the Town's water meets all State and federal drinking water health standards. There are 2,195 active service connections to the system, and the district delivered 207,529,000 gallons of water to its customers in 2007.

The Town sponsored a study to investigate improvements to the district and extend water lines to additional parts of the Town. Due to funding limitations, no action is currently in place to extend additional water lines.

### **Public Sewer**

The Town of Royalton does have public sewers available in portions of the Town. Sewers are available in and around the Village of Middleport and in the vicinity of the hamlet of Gasport. The Town's sewerage lines are older, and there are significant problems with inflow and infiltration (I/I) in the pipes. The lines are a combined system, with sanitary and storm flow all using the same pipes.

The Town's wastewater treatment plant is located at 4244 Bolton Road in Gasport. The system is currently operating essentially at capacity, creating difficulties for any future developments that would want to tie into the sewer system. A study is planned beginning in the spring of 2009 to investigate the I/I problem and devise potential solutions.

Map 7: Utilities depicts the location of the Town's water and sewer lines.

### **Other Utilities**

There are other utility mainline easements through the Town. Major gas and electric utility distribution lines cross the town of Royalton. There are also inactive utility rights-of-way. Natural gas lines are available to many homeowners, with approximately 40 percent of households using natural gas as the primary means to heat their homes. There are some areas where high-speed internet is available, but much of the town does not have access to this service.

# **Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan**

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## **COMMUNITY FACILITIES & SERVICES**

### ***Municipal Buildings***

The Royalton Town Hall and highway garage are located at 5316 Royalton Center Road. The wastewater treatment plant is located at 4244 Bolton Road in Gasport.

### ***Schools***

The majority of students in the Town of Royalton attend the Royalton-Hartland Central School District. This school district covers most of the Towns of Royalton and Hartland, and also extends into areas of the Town of Lockport and Orleans and Genesee Counties. Royalton-Hartland Middle School and High School are located in the Village of Middleport, while Royalton-Hartland Elementary School is located in Gasport. The southern portion of the Town is served by the Akron Central School District.

### ***Fire, Police & Emergency Services***

The Town of Royalton is serviced by five fire departments, Gasport Fire Company, Terrys Corners Fire Company, Middleport Fire Company, Wolcottsville Fire Company and Rapids Fire Company.

The Niagara County Sheriff provides police coverage for the Town and the Sheriff's Marine Division patrols the waters of the Erie Barge Canal. The New York State Police can assist the Sheriff Department on calls within the Town. The Town also contracts with the Village of Middleport police department for police coverage. The County operates an E911 system that dispatches emergency personnel.

### ***Garbage Pickup/ Recycling***

Garbage pickup and recycling in the Town is done by contracted waste management services through Modern Disposal. Large garbage items and recycling can also be taken to the Niagara County Landfill & Recycling Center in Lockport.

### ***Parks & Recreation***

The Niagara County Parks & Recreation Department operates the 146 acre Royalton Ravine Park on Gasport Road just south of Gasport. The Park offers picnic shelters, a baseball field, a fishing pond, nature trails, waterfalls, and restroom facilities. Veterans Park, located in Gasport, offers softball, picnic, and restroom facilities. There is a small park, sometimes known as "Flame Park" on the canal in Gasport, and a public boat launch located along the Erie Canal east of Middleport along Route 31E.

The Tonawanda State Wildlife Management Area, located in the southeastern portion of the Town, is a 5,600 acre designated habitat for waterfowl that straddles the Niagara-Orleans-Genesee County lines. The area acts as a large resting ground for migrating

## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

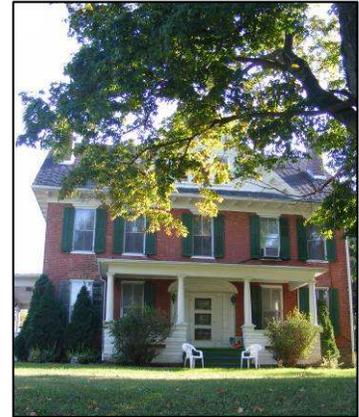
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birds and as a nesting area for resident birds and also offers recreational opportunities such as canoe and kayaking, camping, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, picnicking, hiking and nature trails, hunting, fishing, and bird watching.

### **Historic and Cultural Sites<sup>3</sup>**

Royalton has a number of sites that are locally significant, including historic houses and cemeteries. The following list summarizes these sites:

- Orangeport Christian Cemetery: the oldest cemetery in Royalton, it has been in use since 1804. The cemetery is located on Orangeport Road, north of the canal.
- Orangeport Union Cemetery: established in 1885, it was the site of the first public house of worship on the Holland Land purchase between the Genesee River and the Niagara River. This cemetery is also located on Orangeport Road, north of the canal.
- Bugbee Brick House: built around 1818 at 7928 Slayton Settlement Road. This home competes with the McNall house (Lewiston Road) as the oldest brick house in Royalton.
- Mabee Mill (ruins): although exact dates are uncertain, the Mabee Mill was probably built prior to 1852. A fire on February 20, 1880 destroyed the mill but the massive stone walls still stand to this day. The ruins are located on Quaker Road near the intersection with Slayton Settlement Road.
- Lewiston and Chestnut Ridge Road: the old Lewiston Trail/ Niagara Road was the first and most historic trail/ road in Niagara County. The road ran from Batavia in Genesee County, all the way to Lewiston, New York. Used by the French missionary priests until 1759, the road was later used by the English. In 1775, the entire Mohawk Indian Nation traveled to Lewiston on the trail. Mohawk Chief Joseph Brant and his warriors, along with Butler's Rangers, attacked American settlements on the western end of the trail. During the Revolutionary War, thousands of captives and bushels of scalps were brought to Fort Niagara along this route. On December 19, 1813, American refugees fled eastward along the trail to Batavia and beyond to escape the English-Indian raids. This left most of Niagara County completely depopulated. The route has served as a stagecoach



**Bugbee Brick House**

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<sup>3</sup> Information provided by Town of Royalton Historian, Jesse Bieber

## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

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and wagon train route, and was used as early as 1787 for cattle drives from New Jersey to Fort Niagara.

- Terry Homestead: built in 1835. Located at 7735 Chestnut Ridge Road, this home is rumored to have been a stop along the Underground Railroad. The abolitionist Frederick Douglass stayed at the house for a while when he was in the area giving speeches. Mr. Terry wintered his bees in the attic.
- McNalls Tavern, 7971 Chestnut Ridge Road: built around 1818. This part brick and part cobblestone building was a tavern on the old stagecoach route. It was also the site of the post office at McNalls. It competes with the Bugbee House on Slayton Settlement Road as the oldest brick house in Town. Belva Lockwood also lived here with her first husband Uriah McNall and his family.
- Brick home, 8401 Chestnut Ridge Road: Built in 1831, this home was the probable site of early meetings for the Masons after the Morgan affair.
- First Universalist Church: cobblestone building.
- Cobblestone Houses:
  - 4585 Griswold Street (gingerbread trim)
  - 4545 Freeman Road
  - 9065 Chestnut Ridge Road (formerly known as Colonial Ridge Stables)
  - 8642 Dewhirst Road
  - 8239 Bunker Hill Road (Dysinger homestead). This home was also the site of the Dysinger Post Office and tavern.



**Cobblestone: Chestnut Ridge Road**



**Cobblestone: Freeman Road**

## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

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- Belva Bennet McNall Lockwood birthplace: Griswold Street. Belva Lockwood was probably the most famous person from the Town of Royalton. She was the first woman permitted to practice law before the Supreme Court (1879). She was also the first woman to run for President of the United States to receive officially recognized votes (1884).
- 4434 Main Street, Gasport: oldest frame house in Gasport. Built around 1824, the building was formerly used as a telephone company office.
- Gas well: the Town's park at the intersection of main Street and State Street is located on the site of the first gas well in Gasport (circa 1880's)
- Sunset Drive-In, 120 Telegraph Road, Middleport: built in 1950, the Sunset Drive-In remains in operation.



**Sunset Drive-In**

### ***Other Community Facilities***

The Middleport Free Library in Middleport is available for use by Town residents. The Library contains a collection of 17,000 volumes along with other media.

Major community facilities are shown on Map 8.

# Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

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## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Goals and Objectives of a Comprehensive Plan set forth a shared vision for the Town's future. They represent the values and priorities of the community and serve as a guide in making future land use and planning decisions. The shared vision articulated in the community's goals also provides guidance for decision makers at the local, county and State levels. The goals in the Comprehensive Plan are general in nature, so they can remain relevant over the long-term. These goals also form the foundation for the specific actions that the Town will undertake to achieve the vision.

The following represent the goals for the Town of Royalton:

- *Maintain and enhance the rural character of the Town of Royalton*
- *Maintain and enhance the agricultural economy of the Town of Royalton*
- *Protect the environmental resources of the Town of Royalton*
- *Encourage various types of economic development in the Town of Royalton*
- *Encourage a balanced transportation system in the Town*
- *Assure an adequate, well-maintained housing stock while maintaining rural character*
- *Maintain effective public facilities*
- *Protect the important cultural and historic resources of the Town of Royalton*

### ***Maintain and enhance the rural character of the Town of Royalton***

The Town of Royalton is a rural community. Elements that contribute to the Town's rural character include open fields, forested lands, protected environments such as wetlands, and active farms. The Village of Middleport and the hamlet of Gasport also contribute to the rural character of the Town, as do the scenic views, the escarpment and the Erie Canal.

**It is a priority of the Town to ensure that new development is an asset to the community and does not detract from its rural character.**

- ◆ New development should be sensitive in location and design to surrounding uses.
- ◆ Denser development should be concentrated in the northern portion of the Town, near the historic Canal settlements of Middleport and Gasport, where there is available services and capacity for growth.
- ◆ Important elements in the community's character, such as the escarpment, farm fields, open space and mature trees, should be preserved where feasible when new development occurs.
- ◆ New development should avoid sensitive lands, such as prime agricultural soils and wetlands.

## **Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan**

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- ◆ New growth in the Town should occur at an appropriate scale, style and pace, and in locations that are suitable for the type of development being proposed.
- ◆ New development should be compatible with neighboring uses.
- ◆ Preserve and enhance rural viewsheds, particularly from atop the Niagara Escarpment.

### ***Maintain and enhance the agricultural economy of the Town of Royalton***

Agriculture is an integral part of the character and economy of the Town of Royalton. It provides employment, preserves open space and is an important element of the Town's rural character.

### **It is a priority of the Town to support the continued economic viability of agriculture in the Town of Royalton.**

- ◆ Town policies and regulations should not present undue burdens on agricultural operations.
- ◆ Non-agricultural development should be discouraged on prime agricultural soils, particularly soils classified as having Statewide Significance.
- ◆ Maintain the integrity of State-designated Agricultural Districts.
- ◆ Support "Right-to-Farm" initiatives and manage conflicts between farms and new residents.
- ◆ Business and industrial economic development should not sacrifice viable farmland.
- ◆ The Town should support creative ways to support the viability of farming as an economic activity, such as agricultural related tourism and supporting farm-related businesses.
- ◆ Promote the protection of farms and farming-related activities.
- ◆ Support farming and agriculture activities to provide jobs and economic activity for residents in the Town.
- ◆ Protect and promote farming activity as a priority to preserve open space and scenic vistas that help shape the rural character of the Town.
- ◆ Encourage and allow farm-related businesses as support service to farming.

### ***Protect the environmental resources of the Town of Royalton***

The Town is home to several important natural habitat areas and other environmental resources that contribute to the rural character and beauty of the community. The Tonawanda State Wildlife Management Area, the Niagara Escarpment and Royalton Ravine are some of the more prominent features of the Town that should be preserved. Additionally, there are numerous wetlands and floodplains that are vital environmental resources. Conversely, former landfills and brownfields should be cleaned-up

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### **It is a priority of the Town to maintain the quality of its environmental resources.**

- ◆ Protect the Niagara Escarpment, Royalton Ravine, the Tonawanda State Wildlife Management Area and other important resources in the Town.
- ◆ Protect important open space.
- ◆ Promote the protection of natural drainage and stream corridors in the Town.
- ◆ Promote the protection of floodplains.
- ◆ Promote sound farming techniques that reduce non-point source pollution.
- ◆ Protect sensitive wetlands.
- ◆ Support the clean up of former landfills and other brownfield sites.

### **Encourage various types of economic development in the Town of Royalton**

Commercial and light industrial growth and other economic development activities help provide jobs, services and a stronger tax base for the community. Specific attention should be paid to the Village of Middleport and to Gasport, historic communities that are representative of the settlements that grew up along the Erie Canal and are important assets to the Town.

### **Economic development in the Town of Royalton is most appropriately located along State routes, truck routes and near the airport.**

- ◆ Encourage businesses and industries along major transportation corridors, such as Routes 31, 77 and 93, and in areas of the Town with water and sewer service.
- ◆ Encourage redevelopment of vacant, formerly commercial or industrial properties
- ◆ Support activities of existing viable businesses.
- ◆ Develop policies that promote small businesses and encourage entrepreneurial start-ups.
- ◆ Realize economic potential of tourism, agriculture and agriculturally-related tourism.
- ◆ Promote tourism related to the Erie Canal.
- ◆ Encourage reinvestment in Gasport.
- ◆ Focus commercial redevelopment in Gasport.
- ◆ Encourage use of the airport.

### **Encourage a balanced transportation system in the Town**

The Town of Royalton has more transportation options than is typically the case with rural communities. The Erie Canalway Trail provides a dedicated bike path across the Town, and the Canal offers recreational boating opportunities. The Town has an airport and an active rail line. The Town's roadway system currently meets vehicular needs, and no new roadways are suggested. At the same time, most roads in the Town are designed to accommodate vehicular travel only. There are opportunities to promote more

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transportation opportunities. Also, the Town should work to make sure that the impacts of transportation through the Town are controlled: trucks are confined to designated truck routes; rural roadways retain their rural character while maintaining safe operations; and there are provisions to protect the public from hazardous freight.

- ◆ Promote mixed use paths and support facilities for bicycling and walking along the Erie Canal.
- ◆ Support the development of scenic byways.
- ◆ Promote development of bicycle access along rights-of-ways for roadways and transmission lines.
- ◆ Support infrastructure, such as sidewalks, crosswalks and trails, that make the hamlet of Gasport more pedestrian-friendly.
- ◆ Continue support for the airport.
- ◆ Control impacts from rail transport through the Town and ensure rail safety.
- ◆ Keep truck traffic to designated state routes.
- ◆ Support needed maintenance to ensure canal bridges remain safe and available.

### ***Assure an adequate, well-maintained housing stock while maintaining rural character***

Royalton needs to make sure its housing stock meets the housing needs of a range of family types, sizes and budgets, while at the same time preserving the rural character of the community.

- ◆ Allow for a range of housing types to accommodate the differing housing needs of seniors, young families and others
- ◆ Ensure that housing style and density is appropriate for the location
- ◆ Concentrate denser development and mixed uses in Gasport and around Middleport
- ◆ Restrict housing density within agricultural districts
- ◆ Ensure new housing development is aware of right-to-farm policies

### ***Maintain effective public facilities***

The Town of Royalton maintains a number of public facilities, including town buildings, parks, a recreation program, and water and sewer lines. These facilities contribute to the Town's quality of life, but they also require continued investment and support to remain effective.

The Town is responsible for the management of public water and sewer service. The Town's sewer lines are currently near capacity and there are problems with aging infrastructure. There have been recent improvements to the water line along Route 31.

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There are plans for water line improvements to address issues and improve services. Utility extensions, particularly sewer lines, can have the effect of encouraging growth, and should be carefully planned.

- ◆ Concentrate investments in public utilities on improvements to existing facilities.
- ◆ Control the number of new tap-ins permitted along existing utility lines to avoid exceeding capacity of the system.
- ◆ Concentrate new development in areas already serviced with utilities to limit need for extensive new investments in infrastructure.
- ◆ Continue to support existing Town parks and County facilities in the Town.
- ◆ Build upon the recreational opportunities afforded by the Canal.
- ◆ Consider the development of a centralized community center for adults and children.

### ***Protect the important cultural and historic resources of the Town of Royalton***

The Town of Royalton has a number of cultural and historic resources that are important to the community. Several of these resources are reminiscent of the Canal age and the growth of the Town in this era. These cultural and historic resources are important to the character of the Town and should be protected.

- ◆ Promote public education of the importance of preserving the Town's cultural and historic resources.
- ◆ Protect historic cemeteries and other historic resources throughout the Town, including cultural and historic resources related to the Erie Canal.
- ◆ Promote the preservation of hamlet areas in the Town.
- ◆ Discourage demolition of historically or culturally significant structures.
- ◆ Support improvements to the Seaway Trail and Canalway Trail systems.

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## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following observations and findings are based on an analysis of the inventory of existing resources. These findings are followed by recommendations for the Town, organized around the Town's goals and objectives.

### FINDINGS

#### ***Land Use and Zoning:***

- The Town is dominated by agricultural and rural land uses, with 78 percent of the assessed land area<sup>4</sup> in the Town categorized as either agricultural or rural.
- Parks and forested lands represent the next most common land use, representing just under 9 percent of the Town's assessed land area.
- Agriculture is also important to the economic base of the community
- Agriculture and rural character is valued by the residents
- Commercial and industrial development in the Town is concentrated in the northern portion of the Town, particularly in the Middleport and Gasport areas, with scattered commercial lands elsewhere in the Town.
- Most commercial development consists of small businesses on small parcels.
- The Village of Middleport and the hamlet of Gasport are more densely developed than the remainder of the Town, with a traditional mix of land uses, including residential, commercial and public uses
- Outside of the Middleport and Gasport, development is typically low density, generally along major roadways.



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<sup>4</sup> Figures are based on assessment records and exclude rights-of-way, the canal and other lands not included in the property valuation system.

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- There has been modest growth in development within the Town. In the five year period between 2003 and 2007, building permits for an average of 18 new homes per year were issued.
- Pressure for development is most likely to be from the Town of Lockport from the west.
- The majority of the Town is zoned Agricultural (A)
- A large number of uses are allowed in the Agricultural (A) zoning district with a special use permit. Many are agriculturally related (industrial agricultural enterprise, kennels, animal hospitals) but there are also uses that may not be desirable (mobile home park, motor vehicle/heavy equipment repair shop).
- The zoning ordinance does provide additional regulations for a significant number of certain special uses to ensure adequate setbacks, screening and other provisions to try to avoid conflicts with adjoining uses.
- All lands in the first 300 feet from the right-of-way are zoned One & Two Family Residential (R), which creates potential conflicts with agricultural uses. It also presents a potential threat to the rural character of the Town.
- The Multiple Family Residential zoning district (MR) is a denser residential district that allows apartments, rooming houses and lodging houses by right. Accessory apartments are not allowed, although they are allowed in both the Agricultural and the One & Two Family Residential Districts.
- The zoning map does not clearly depict the locations of either the One & Two Family Residential or the Multiple Family residential zoning districts.
- The current locations of the Business (B), Light Industrial (LI) and General Industrial (GI) zoning districts appear to be based on where existing/former businesses are located and not on an assessment of where such uses should be encouraged.
- There is relatively limited amount of appropriately zoned land available for new commercial or light industrial development (other than on sites of existing businesses).
- The former FMC facility is the only site zoned for Industrial (I) use.
- In practice, there is very little difference between the Town's Agricultural zoning district and the One & Two Family Residential district other than the "intent"

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sections. Minimum lot size, maximum lot coverage, setback and lot frontage/ depth requirements are identical. The list of allowable uses is also very similar for each district. Each district allows one- and two-family homes, accessory apartments and agricultural uses. In the Agricultural zoning district, allowed agriculture uses are defined as “Agricultural Operations and Uses” and set backs are established for animals, storage of odor-producing substances and greenhouse heating plants. In the One & Two Family Residential district, agricultural uses are defined more vaguely as “Customary Agricultural Uses,” and no setbacks are specified. The zoning ordinance includes definitions for “Agriculture” and “Agricultural business establishment (Agri-business)” but does not provide any guidance on the distinction between “Agricultural Operations and Uses and “Customary Agricultural Uses.”

- Bulk standards are similar for other districts as well. All non-industrial districts have a frontage requirement of 150 feet unless there is public water and sewer available. Properties with public utilities located in the Multiple Family and Business Districts can have a frontage of 100 feet. A similar situation applies to lot size, which is 45,000 square feet for all non-industrial districts, unless the property is located in the Multiple Family and Business districts and is served by public water and sewer, in which case, minimum lot size is 15,000 square feet.
- Properties in the Light Industrial (LI) zoning district actually require a slightly smaller minimum lot size (1 acre, or 43,560 square feet) than other districts. The General Industrial (GI) district requires a 3-acre minimum lot, but only one parcel falls within that district.
- There are provisions in the zoning ordinance to cover signs, temporary uses, parking, off-street loading, fences, ponds, recreational vehicles, alternate energy systems, personal wireless telecommunications service facilities, satellite antennae and seasonal roadside stands.
- The zoning code draws a distinction between home occupations, home businesses and home professional offices, and includes a section regulating home occupations. Home occupations are allowed by right in all districts except Agricultural (A), where they are allowed with a special use permit, and the General Industrial District, which does not allow any residential use. There are greater controls over Home Businesses and Home Professional Offices, which are allowed by right in the Business (B) and Light Industrial (LI) districts and with a special use permit in the Agricultural (A), One and Two Family Residential (R) and Multiple Family Residential (MR) zoning districts.

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## **Agricultural Protection**

- Over three-quarters of the assessed land area in the Town of Royalton is categorized either as agricultural or rural.
- Agriculture is not only the predominant land use, but also an important element of the local economy.
- Most of the Town falls within a State designated Agricultural District.
- Consistent with national trends, agriculture in the town is experiencing a trend toward concentrating operations in fewer farms and larger farms.
- The areas outside of the Agricultural districts generally are appropriately located (areas surrounding Gasport and Middleport)
- The town has very good agricultural soils, including significant areas of lands designated as “farmland of statewide significance.”
- The Town and the County both have right-to-farm laws.
- There are many active farms in the town and agriculture tends to be relatively stable in Royalton. However, the Town is subject to the national pressures on the agricultural economy seen elsewhere.
- The larger threat to agriculture in the Town is not development pressures, but the economics of farming.
- Agricultural Zoning district is inadequate to protect farms. Having all frontage lands zoned for residential use can negatively affect operations and creates potential conflicts. Also, required lot sizes and frontages tend to be relatively small.
- Farming is a strong element of the character of the community, and there is strong community support in favor of agricultural uses.
- Smaller farms are being bought up by larger farms.



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- While development pressures have not been excessive, there is some concern about conversion of prime farmlands to residential uses. Lands that are good for farming are also good for building.
- Many of the agricultural lands in the Town are not owned by the farmers actually working the land, but are leased from absentee owners, who live outside the Town.
- The most common active agricultural use is field crops. There is a significant amount of inactive farmland that is part of an operating farm. Other types of farms in the Town include dairy farms, beef farms, horse farms and orchards.
- There is a limited amount of parcels classified by assessment data as “abandoned farmland,” representing 55 parcels and approximately 1,900 acres.

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### **Demographics**

- Population in the Town has been decreasing at a rate similar to Niagara County as a whole.
- Population declines are more pronounced within the Village. The population of the town outside the village actually increased between 1990 and 2000, and is estimated to have remained stable since 2000.
- In contrast to the number of people, the number of households has increased in the Town. These contrasting trends are due to the fact that the number of people in each household has been decreasing. Therefore, despite population losses, there is still increased demand for housing units. The number of occupied housing units increased by just over 7 percent between 1990 and 2000. The trend toward smaller households is expected to continue, but most likely at a slower pace.
- As with population, the growth in the number of housing units is strongest in the area of the Town outside the Village of Middleport. Nearly 88 percent of new housing units in the Town are located outside the Village.
- Growth in the number of housing units has exceeded growth in households, leading to higher vacancy rates in the Town. Most of the vacancy is concentrated in rental units within the Village. Vacancy rates in owner-occupied housing are extremely low, at only 1.4 percent.
- Most of the housing in the Town (81 percent) is owner-occupied. Rental housing is primarily concentrated within the Village.
- Approximately 13 percent of the Town's housing stock was built since 1990, compared to only 9 percent of the housing stock of all Niagara County, where 9 percent of units were built after 1990.
- Based on building permit data, an average of 18 new homes per year were built in the Town in the 5 years between 2003 and 2007.
- Most residents of Royalton who are employed outside of the home work within a 30 minute drive (69 percent); and the median length of commute is 24 minutes. At the same time, nearly 40 percent of employed residents worked outside of Niagara County. Approximately 26 percent of workers commute to Erie County, while about 14 percent commute east toward the Rochester metropolitan area, which includes Orleans and Genesee Counties.

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## Natural Environment

- The Town has several very significant natural features, including the Tonawanda State Wildlife Management Area, Royalton Ravine and the Escarpment.
- Royalton also has many other important resources, including numerous creeks, wetlands, ponds, the Erie Canal and two small aquifers.
- The town falls within two separate watersheds, with lands north of the escarpment draining north into Lake Ontario, while the southern portion of the town drains into Tonawanda Creek.
- There are minimal lands currently within designated floodplains, but new preliminary FEMA flood maps released in late September 2009 suggest a significant increase in the amount of lands that fall within the ‘special flood hazard areas subject to inundation by the 1% annual chance flood’ (100-year floodplain).
- Flooding is a problem in certain areas, with areas where roads get flooded out. The new flood maps are probably more accurate in regard to where flooding is occurring.
- Wetland mapping is currently being redone.
- Overall, the most valuable lands have not been threatened and remain in good quality.
- Some of these resources can be the basis for eco-tourism, increased visitation to the Town.
- The Town lacks regulations to protect some of these important environmental features. For examples, there are no protections to control development along creeks.
- The Town lacks an open space / greenspace plan to identify specific important environmental resources. Such a plan would facilitate prioritization of protecting certain features.
- The Escarpment is under threat from development and blasting for stone.



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### Transportation

- The Town benefits from a full range of transportation modes, including road, rail, air, transit, water, sidewalks (in Gasport and Middleport) and recreational trails.
- Major roadways in the Town include State Routes 31, 77 and 93.
- Traffic counts in the Town are generally manageable. The road with the highest traffic volume is Route 31, which handles approximately 7,000 to 8,000 vehicles per day on average, depending on the segment.
- The next highest traffic counts are on Gasport Road (County Route 10), which handles 3,500 to 4,000 vehicles per day.
- State Route 77 and State Route 93 each see an average of approximately 2,000 to 3,000 vehicles per day.
- A rail line traverses the Town. The line is primarily used for shipments to and from the ethanol plant.
- There are no emergency plans in the event of a train accident.
- There could be a market for tourism use of a train.
- The Erie Canal also runs east-west through the Town.
- There are concerns about accessibility across the Canal, as four bridges have been closed in recent years. This creates a problem not only for circulation through the town, and has the potential to affect emergency service responses.
- The Royalton Airport is fairly well used by private aviators, seeing an average of 116 operations per week.
- While there are some sidewalks in Gasport, the system is not complete. In particular, there are gaps in front of the school.
- There is strong potential to build a wider recreational trail system, with loops/ links to the Erie Canal trail.



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## **Utilities, Community Facilities and Services**

- The Town has water throughout most of the Town and sewer service in the vicinity of Gasport and Middleport.
- There are unauthorized tap-ins to the County water line on Route 31.
- The Town sponsored a study for extending water lines but does not currently have funding available to implement the plan.
- There are problems with capacity at the sewer treatment facility.
- The town is currently beginning a study to investigate inflow and infiltration in order to address some sewer capacity issues.
- The Town is responsible for several municipal buildings: Town hall, the highway garage and the wastewater treatment plant. Generally, the town-owned facilities are in good condition.
- There are several recreational assets in the Town. Parks in the Town include the State Wildlife Management area, Royalton Ravine, a county-owned facility; and Veterans Park in Gasport.
- The Town is home to a number of historically significant buildings and cemeteries, including many historic cobblestone buildings.
- There is good emergency service in the Town, with four fire companies, EMS and sheriffs patrols.
- There is interest in ensuring adequate police protection and public safety, particularly in the Gasport area.
- The cost of services, particularly for improvements to utilities lines, is a concern.



# Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

This section of the Comprehensive Plan makes some specific recommendations for the Town, based on the inventory information, the findings, an assessment of the community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) and public input. They are organized around the goals and objections of the community and are intended to provide guidance on how the Town can move toward achieving the Town's vision. The recommendations attempt to capitalize on the strengths of the community and the opportunities that exist in the region, while recognizing potential weaknesses and threats that may impact the Town's goals.

This section is best thought of as a "tool box" of recommendations for possible use by the Town; they do not represent things that must be done. The Implementation section of the plan will prioritize these recommendations, and give direction on how to make these recommendations into reality.

***Goal 1: Maintain and enhance the rural character of the Town of Royalton***

### ***Major Issues Affecting this Goal***

- While the rate of development within the Town is relatively small, development pressures from adjoining communities with higher growth rates could present problems in the future.
- Much of the Town's rural character comes from the agricultural nature of the Town, which is somewhat dependent on farming remaining economically viable in the community.
- In addition to farmlands, wood lots, the escarpment area, the Royalton Ravine, the Tonawanda State Wildlife Refuge, the Erie Canal and other important open space features also greatly add to the rural nature of the community.
- The "small town" aspect of the Village of Middleport and the hamlets like Gasport and Wolcottsville are also important components of the community's rural character.
- Development patterns and styles affect rural character. Community character can be affected by how future development occurs in the community. Current zoning requirements control lot size and frontage, but little else.
- The current zoning pattern of the Town, where the front 300 feet of lands along all roadways are zoned residential, is not conducive to preserving the rural character.

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Much of the Town's character is derived from the views obtained while driving down its roads.

- Allowing residential development along all road frontages provides flexibility to landowners, but limits the Town's control over where development occurs. It also increases the possibility of conflicts between agricultural and residential uses.
- Many of the other goals of the Town will help in maintaining the Town's rural character.

### **Recommendations**

1. The Town needs zoning regulations that promote the protection of the Town's rural character.
  - a. Rural cluster development regulations could allow small subdivisions of land to be laid out more creatively to preserve the rural character of the Town.
  - b. Rural design guidelines would give direction to developers on the style of development in the Town. These design guidelines would be created to match Royalton's individual character.
  - c. Zoning overlays for the hamlets and other commercial development areas could provide additional guidance on rural design standards and greater control over how development in these important, visible areas occurs.
  - d. Each of the above design guidelines should also include incentive clauses to ensure that development is not forced away by overly restrictive regulations.
2. The Zoning Map should be amended to better represent the vision of the community.
  - a. Rezone some of the frontage areas presently zoned residential back to agricultural (see Vision Map)
  - b. Add the zoning overlays for the hamlet areas (see 1c).
  - c. Consider adding conservation districts
  - d. Identify targeted areas where commercial development would be encouraged to better direct where commercial uses are located in Town.
3. Support agriculture in the community (see goal 2)
4. Ensure adequate protections for the important open space features of the Town.
  - a. Consider creating a targeted Conservation Easement program
  - b. Create an Open Space/Green Space inventory that identifies key features, and institute an Open Space/Green Space plan to preserve them.
  - c. Monitor the loss of Green Space features identified in the inventory.
  - d. Consider creating overlay zoning districts to institute addition protections for high priority features, such as the Escarpment, areas along major creeks, etc.

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5. Help to create and sponsor community clean-up programs.
6. Work with Niagara County and the NYS Department of Transportation to ensure that future road projects are consistent with the rural nature of the Town, using design guidelines for road design that help maintain rural character (use of ‘context-sensitive roadway design’).
7. Encourage growth to occur in the appropriate areas by zoning changes and Incentive programs.
8. Major highways and entrances to the Town should be specific targets for maintaining character. The creation of these ‘gateways’ should focus on signage, road conditions, buildings and landscaping and agricultural features.
9. Subdivision regulations should require developers to take important environmental or open space features into consideration in their design, to try to incorporate their continued presence into they layout. An inventory of important features is needed in order to implement this recommendation (see Goal 3).
10. Help protect and enhance historic structures within the Town. Create an inventory of structures, determine their viability, and look for ways to help (tax programs, grants, etc.)
11. Draft a Wind Energy Conversion System (WECS) law to better control placement and safety with windmill development within the Town.

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### **Goal 2: Maintain and enhance the agricultural economy of the Town**

#### **Major Issues Affecting this Goal**

- Agriculture is a business, and its continued viability is subject to economic trends. The business of farming is increasingly challenging.
- It is frequently the case that an off-farm income is necessary to maintain the stability of the household, for income and/or cash flow reasons.
- The Town is fortunate in having very good soils for agriculture.
- The Town's current zoning is not protective of agriculture.
- Royalton is experiencing the same national trends affecting many farms, with greater consolidation of lands into fewer and larger farms.
- Development can create conflicts with agriculture. There can be conflicts based on operations (complaints about noise or odors from adjacent residents). Development patterns can also create conflicts (break up integrity of fields, making it more difficult to work the fields).
- The Town is currently well covered by State designated Agricultural Districts. These districts must be renewed on a regular basis.

#### **Recommendations**

1. Develop zoning regulations that support and protect farming.
  - a. Create more flexible zoning that allows the farmer some development but in a way that better protects the farming operation (See Goal 1)
  - b. Strengthen restrictions on areas with soils of Statewide Significance
  - c. Consider allowing additional uses and accessory uses on larger farms to help the farmer better make ends meet.
2. Subdivision regulations should also be examined to ensure they are not creating problems for agricultural uses. Consider establishing conservation subdivision design regulations.
3. The Zoning Map should be amended to better represent the vision of the community (see Goal 1)

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4. The Town should establish and support an Agricultural Advisory Committee to serve as a liaison to the agricultural community, identify issues and develop programs and policies in support of agriculture in the Town.
5. Consider Agricultural District density zoning, which focuses on density instead of lot size.
6. The Town should be proactive in supporting agriculture in the community.
  - a. The Right to Farm Law is supported by the Comprehensive Plan.
  - b. The Town should provide stronger outreach and education to new residents about the agricultural nature of the Town and the Right to Farm regulations.
  - c. The Town should help investigate grant programs for local farmers to help improve their businesses.
  - d. The Town should consider pursuing joint efforts with the County and possibly some surrounding communities to investigate programs and techniques for helping farming operations.
  - e. Investigate conservation farming.
  - f. Support the maintenance of the existing State Agricultural Districts and discourage landowners from withdrawing from the district.
7. Create an Agricultural Protection Plan for the Town. State grant monies are available for the completion of agricultural plans, which look in greater detail at methods for supporting agriculture.
8. Monitor and report yearly on farming operations in the Town, looking at trends in ownership patterns, type of farms, acreage in farming use, etc. This could be a task for an Agricultural Advisory Committee.
9. Consider conducting outreach/education to farmers about sustainable options
10. As a more aggressive approach, in the future, the Town could investigate programs such as PACE (Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement) and PDRs (Purchase of Development Rights).

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### **Goal 3: Protect the environmental resources of the Town**

#### **Major Issues Affecting this Goal**

- The town has many very significant environmental features.
- There is no centralized inventory of features.
- Initial FEMA mapping suggests that there will be a significant increase in the amount of areas identified as floodplains in the Town.
- There are no town regulations protecting important features.
- Preserving important features not only helps maintain community character, but can be an economic benefit, through eco-tourism and more sustainable development.

#### **Recommendations**

1. The escarpment is a valuable environmental asset that should be protected. Consider adoption of an Escarpment Protection Overlay Zoning District that would control development along the escarpment to protect steep slopes, preserve views and ensure development on the escarpment does not have negative impacts.
2. Areas of poor drainage soils are identified in this plan. Current areas of flooding are shown, although these are currently under review by FEMA. Zoning and subdivision regulations should divert development away from these areas.
3. The Town should create a full inventory of brownfields in the Town (old landfill, FMC, Cold Storage site in Gasport), possibly in conjunction with Niagara County. Where appropriate, the Town should consider working with the County and New York State to encourage investigation and remediation of these sites. New York State has a Brownfield Opportunity Area program (BOA) to help promote redevelopment of brownfield areas, which the Town could consider using.
4. Mining is an issue in the Town, especially as it relates to Clay Mining. Although the NYSDEC regulates Mining operations, the Town has the power of zoning to establish where mining would be allowed and not allowed. In addressing this issue, the Town will consider the following.
  - Mining does not provide any benefits to protecting the visual characteristics of the Town
  - Smaller scale clay mining may provide an economic benefit to farmers

## **Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan**

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- Mining should not be allowed in or near environmentally sensitive areas such as the escarpment
5. Consider conducting a Watershed Management study to protect water quality.
  6. The Town should develop an accurate map of the aquifers located in the Town. If necessary, the Town should promulgate an Aquifer Protection Law. This can be done in association with a Watershed Management Study.
  7. The Town should complete an Open Space/Green Space Inventory and then a plan that depicts the strategies to protect these assets. This plan can also be utilized in reviewing subdivisions and site plans and reference to this plan would be included in these regulations. Elements to be included in the inventory could include wetlands, floodplains, major creek corridors, major wood lots, soils of statewide significance.
  8. When needed, the Town could establish Open Space/Greenspace fees that would be charged for subdivision development in the Town on a per lot basis.
  9. The Town should maintain records on failed or failing septic systems and any wells with quality problems. If necessary, the Town can work with State and Federal agencies to search for methodologies and monies to help with this problem. Some techniques include education programs for home owners and farmers.
  10. The Town can adopt laws to restrict and regulate development within floodplains.
  11. The Town can promote sound farming techniques that reduce non-point source pollution.

# Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

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## **Goal 4: Encourage various types of economic development in the Town.**

### **Major Issues Affecting this Goal**

- Several major State Routes (Rtes. 31, 77, 93) go through the Town.
- There are opportunities for tourism-based development, with the Erie Canal, the Seaway Trail, wineries, agri-tourism, etc.
- There is a good basis for recreationally-based tourism.
- Middleport and Gasport are quaint canal towns with an existing economic base. These areas serve as the ‘downtown’ for Royalton.
- Agriculture is a strong proportion of the economic base, and consistent with desired community character.
- The Town’s airport creates additional economic development opportunities.
- The area is seen as remote for many types of businesses.
- There are gaps in infrastructure for development (sewer capacity, high-speed internet)
- People increasingly go out of Town to shop

### **Recommendations**

1. Create Zoning regulations that help to support various economic development activities.
  - a. Consider new more modern zoning districts in targeted areas. For example, mixed use zoning and/or traditional neighborhood design-based zoning could be considered for the hamlet areas.
  - b. Amend the Zoning map to promote commercial development in appropriate places (see Vision Map)
  - c. Consider revising the Business district to be more clearly a commercial district.
2. Tourism Development: support aspects of tourism-based development within the Town. Potential markets include:
  - Rail/ Tourism Train
  - Hunting/Fishing opportunities
  - Canalway Trail

## **Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan**

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- Wineries
  - Seaway Trail/Scenic Byways
  - Underground Railroad
  - Agri-Tourism and farm markets
  - Day trips: “Day in the country”
  - Bed and Breakfasts
3. Implement Gasport Plan (appended to Comprehensive Plan)
  4. Encourage the redevelopment/ reuse of vacant commercial structures.
  5. Work with sponsors of the Tourism Train (Medina to Lockport/ possibly to Niagara Falls) regarding potential development of a local stop in Gasport.
  6. Expand the Town’s trail system to include connections to local destinations within the Town (wineries, parks, etc.)
  7. Create better linkages between attractions to increase perceived ‘density’ of attractions and encourage cross-visitation.
  8. Consider establishing a local tourism promotion committee.
  9. Improve infrastructure in areas where development should be encouraged, to ensure adequate service and capacity.
  10. Windmills may be a source of income for the Town and farms. Careful investigation and consideration should be given to placement.
  11. Help to ensure high speed internet connections; help to create a technology plan for local businesses.
  12. Targeted development areas include Route 31 between Telegraph and Cottage Roads.
  13. Protect Bridge Crossings of the Canal. Having adequate access is important to economic development efforts in the Town.
  14. Support Farming/Agriculture (See Goal 2)
  15. Investigate whether it makes sense for the Town to adopt a targeted 485b program.
  16. Investigate ways of encouraging specific target markets, such as medical offices.

## ***Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan***

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17. Join rural economic development groups.
18. Work with Niagara County to target appropriate businesses
19. Survey/interview local businesses to find out needs to help ensure they remain economically viable and do not close or relocate.

## **Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan**

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### **Goal 5: Encourage a Balanced Transportation System**

#### **Major Issues Affecting this Goal**

- The Town does not suffer major transportation or traffic issues.
- The Town has a fairly balanced transportation system for a rural community, an asset that the Town should try to keep.
- Transportation needs in the hamlets and Village are different than for the rest of the Town.

#### **Recommendations**

1. Adopt rural road standards and work with Niagara county and NYSDOT to ensure that they adhere to the rural nature of the Town.
2. The comprehensive Plan supports all efforts to keep all of the Bridges across the Erie Canal open. These are critically important transportation features and are depicted on the Town's vision map.
3. Work with railroad operators to evaluate plans to include a stop in Gasport and possibly tourism runs that could link Gasport, wineries, and other important stops along the system.
4. There should be a complete system of sidewalks in the hamlet of Gasport, linking residential areas to the hamlet 'downtown', to parks and to schools. Sidewalks linking to schools should be a priority for improvements.
5. The Town should consider completing a Bike Path plan in conjunction with the GBNRTC, the County and the Village of Middleport. This plan should evaluate connecting important features throughout the Town and tie into the Canal Pathway systems and the Seaway Trail. This Plan should also evaluate all forms of non-automobile forms of transportation.
6. There is some interest in recreational trails, focusing on safe looped routes that families can bike or walk together.
7. Work with the GBNRTC and the NYSDOT to evaluate truck traffic/routes in the Town, especially those affecting Gasport.

## ***Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan***

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8. The airport is an important transportation and economic development factor in the Town and the flight/glide paths should be protected. The Town would support the airport obtaining reliever status.
9. Consideration should be given to conducting an emergency rail plan in the event of a rail accident.

# Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

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***Goal 6: Assure an adequate, well maintained housing stock while maintaining rural character***

***Major Issues Affecting this Goal***

- Housing development in Royalton has been steady but not excessive, averaging about 18 new units per year in recent years.
- Proactive measures to better control location and density of residential development can be more easily implemented before development pressures are strong.
- Housing in the area of the Town outside of the Village tends to be fairly stable, but fairly homogenous (mainly owner-occupied single-family homes).
- The Town should consider whether there is an adequate range of housing types in the Town (senior housing, apartments for younger people, etc.)

***Recommendations***

1. A denser housing development pattern can be established in the Gasport hamlet.
2. Consideration should be given to the possibility of housing for seniors in this area. Proactive measures may need to be taken to attract this type of housing.
3. Some mixed uses should also be considered in the Hamlet, with apartments allowed above or behind storefronts, if feasible.
4. Consider stronger restrictions on density in agricultural areas.
5. Zoning changes are needed in support of appropriate housing development.
6. The Town could also consider incentive zoning to encourage appropriate development in appropriate locations.
7. The town should implement rural design standards for housing and subdivisions.

## **Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan**

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### **Goal 7: Maintain Effective Public Facilities**

#### **Major Issues Affecting this Goal**

- The Town has water and some sewer service, but its infrastructure is aging and will see increasing maintenance and repair needs.
- The location of water and sewer service can result in growth pressures.
- Capacity and condition of systems is a concern.
- A crucial need of the Town is to have areas of the community suitable for appropriate economic development and housing needs. This will also help to target growth and avoid sprawl issues that could affect the Town's rural character, its important agricultural base and its environmental resources.
- It is important to have adequate public facilities in areas targeted for new development.

#### **Recommendations**

1. Maintenance of existing facilities should be a priority of the Town. These facilities include water and sewer lines, the parks, the library, town public buildings. Expansions should be deferred until needed upgrades are completed.
2. The Town should continue to investigate their public facilities to have a clear picture of what improvements will be needed and develop a priority list of targeted improvements.
3. Waterlines are valuable assets that should be properly maintained. Work should be done to ensure adequate fire flows and pressures in the existing system (especially in critical areas like the school)
4. An updated Facilities Plan should be completed by the Town to identify maintenance issues and target capital investments. Issues such as ways to improve operations costs can also be explored (energy efficiencies, etc.)
5. An important public facility in the Town is the Erie Canal. The Town should support continued investment in this important asset. Consideration should be given to extending the Canal wall to provide more canal-related facilities in Gasport.
6. Growth areas should be targeted to take advantage of existing infrastructure.

## ***Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan***

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7. The town should consider preparing a Parks Plan that assesses recreational amenities, including parkland, recreational trails, etc. The plan could also assess the potential need for a centralized community center.
8. The Town should ensure there is appropriate disaster planning (EMS, fire, police, evacuation, other emergencies)
9. The Town should retain ownership of the parcel south of Town Hall for future use.
10. Consider investigating alternative energy sources, such as wind and geothermal, and implementing energy efficiencies in order to lower town utility costs.
11. Consider increasing police presence in the hamlet of Gasport, perhaps through the establishment of a substation in the hamlet.

## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

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### **Goal 8: Protect the important cultural and historic resources of the Town**

#### **Major Issues Affecting this Goal**

- The Town has numerous historically significant buildings and cemeteries that contribute to the community character of the Town.
- These assets include canal-era buildings, but also more recent structures like the Sunset Drive-in.
- There is potential to capitalize on interest in heritage tourism.

#### **Recommendations**

1. Historic structures:
  - a. The Comprehensive Plan has an initial inventory of significant buildings. This list should be expanded and updated as needed.
  - b. The Town should consider implementing a recognition program similar to the “150 year homes” program in Middleport.
  - c. In the longer term, concepts in support of restoration include tax programs, grants, small revolving loan fund, etc.
2. Historic Cemeteries:
  - a. The Comprehensive Plan has an initial inventory of historic cemeteries. This list should be expanded and updated as needed.
  - b. The NYS Department of State has a program in support of historic cemeteries if it is not in public ownership.
  - c. The Town could support volunteer clean-up programs.
  - d. The Town could consider installing signage/ interpretation/ driving tour of historic cemeteries in support of heritage tourism.
3. Erie Canal
  - a. Support investment in the canal
  - b. Consider supporting an extension to the Canal wall to provide better access.
  - c. Consider implementing better physical connections from the Canalway Trail to other resources in the Town, such as parks, schools and other destinations.
4. Strengthen the hamlet areas (see rural character, economic development)

## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

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### IMPLEMENTATION

Planning is an on-going effort, and the preparation of the Town’s Comprehensive Plan is only a first step. It provides a clear statement of the preferred vision of the town, and establishes a number of recommendations for how to move toward that vision. As important is the continued work that must occur after the adoption of the Plan, when the town moves forward on implementing the vision through the recommendations. This implementation section summarizes and organizes the various recommendations contained within the Plan to help the town accomplish its goals.

Each item in this section has an assigned priority, ranked as high, medium or low. High priority items are important to achieving the goals of the Town. Typically, these items have the greatest importance or urgency. While it may take a long term to accomplish some of these items, but it is recommended that initial steps begin in the near term. Items with moderate to low priority are actions that the Town can shift to future action. On the other hand, some items with low priority may be relatively easy to accomplish, and it may make sense for the Town to pursue a lower priority item that can be completed in advance of a higher priority item that is more complex or costly.

These prioritizations should be viewed as flexible. For example, if funding becomes available for a particular item, the Town may choose to reassign it a higher priority, in order to take advantage of the opportunities to lower local costs. It is important to continue to monitor progress and reprioritize implementation actions as circumstances change. The Town should maintain the Comprehensive Plan committee to oversee the process of implementing the plan. This committee can celebrate accomplishments, encourage continued momentum and make adjustments to recommendations and priorities over time.

<b>Administrative</b>				
<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority/ Time Frame</b>	<b>Type of Action</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Admin-1: Adopt Comprehensive Plan	High Immediate	Legislation	Town Board	
Admin-2: Authorize Implementation Committee	High Immediate	Procedural	Town Board	
Admin-3: Distribute Copies of the Plan (Boards, Departments, etc.)	High Near- term	Administrative	Town	photocopy or electronic distribution
Admin-4: Establish an Implementation Budget	High Near-term	Administrative	Town Board	

## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

<b>Goal 1: Maintain and Enhance Rural Character</b>				
<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority/ Time Frame</b>	<b>Type of Action</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Comments</b>
RC-1: Zoning changes: revised zoning map: rezone some frontage lands away from residential	High Near-term	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	
RC-2: Zoning changes: possibly new zoning districts (conservation district)	Moderate Near- to mid-term	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	Conservation district would be more strictly regulated than Agricultural zone
RC-3: Zoning changes: possible new areas designated for commercial uses	Moderate Near- to mid-term	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	To encourage growth in specific areas. Include assessment of B zone
RC-4: Zoning changes: possible new traditional commercial area zone	Moderate Near-to mid-term	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	To allow for mixed-uses, more traditional style of development
RC-5: Zoning Overlays: commercial areas	Moderate Mid-term	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	Alternate approach to new zone
RC-6: Subdivision regulations: revise to promote rural cluster development	Moderate Mid-term	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	Samples provided
RC-7: Subdivision regulations: require consideration of key elements	High Near- to mid-term	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	Requires completion of open space/ green space plan to identify/ inventory key features
RC-8: Design guidelines: rural design standards	High to Moderate Near- to mid-term	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	Samples provided
RC-9: Zoning Overlays: Conservation protection (creeks, escarpment, etc.)	Moderate Mid-term	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	
RC-10: Conservation Easement Program	Moderate Long-term		Agricultural Committee, County extension, WNY Land Conservancy	Possible funding source: open space programs

## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority/ Time Frame</b>	<b>Type of Action</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Comments</b>
RC-11: Create an Open Space/ green space inventory	High Mid-term	Planning	Open Space committee (new committee)	Pre-requisite for requiring consideration of these features in subdivision plans. Also Env-7.
RC-12: Tracking of key open space/ green space	Moderate On-going	Planning/ monitoring	Open Space committee (new committee)	On-going update/ tracking of inventory
RC-13: Create inventory of historic resources	High Mid-term	Planning	Town Historian	Inventory would help town obtain preservation funding. See also Goal 8.
RC-14: Community clean-ups	Low Intermittent	Volunteer	Town, Citizens	
RC-15: Rural Design standards for Roadway improvements	Moderate Immediate	Cooperative	NYS DOT, Niagara County, GBNRTC	Town input/ support of regional transportation planning
RC-16: “Gateways” at major entrances to Town (signage, landscaping, etc.)	Moderate As funding allows	Capital Improvements	Town	Can be accomplished in stages/ incrementally
RC-17: Maintain an inventory of historic structures	Moderate On-going		Town	See C-1, below
RC-18: Wind Energy Conversion System (WECS) law	High to moderate Near-term	Regulatory	Town	

## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

<b>Goal 2: Maintain and enhance the Agricultural Economy</b>				
<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority/ Time Frame</b>	<b>Type of Action</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Ag-1: Zoning changes: Changes to Agricultural zoning district	Moderate Near- to mid-term	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	Increasing flexibility
Ag-2: Zoning changes: Changes to Agricultural zoning district	Moderate Near- to mid-term	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	Allowing additional accessory uses to increase farm income
Ag-3: Zoning changes: density zoning	Low to moderate	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	Explore as alternative
Ag-4: Subdivision regulations	Moderate	Regulatory/ planning	Town Board, Planning Board	Review existing regulations to ensure they support agricultural uses. See also Goal 1.
Ag-5: Zoning changes: revised zoning map: See goal 1.				See Goal 1
Ag-6: Establish Agricultural Advisory committee	Moderate to high On-going	Monitoring/ advocacy	Town Board to establish.	Committee can take advocacy role in support of agricultural issues, serve a liaison between Town, agricultural community
Ag-7: Reaffirm Right-to-Farm law	High On-going	Advocacy	Town Board	
Ag-8: Outreach and Education to new residents	High On-going	Educational	Agricultural Committee	
Ag-9: Investigate available grant programs	Moderate On-going	Grants	Agricultural Committee	Potential sources: NYS Ag & Markets
Ag-10: Cooperate with County, adjacent Towns regarding Ag issues	Moderate On-going	Cooperation, Education, Research	Agricultural Committee	

## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority/ Time Frame</b>	<b>Type of Action</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Ag-11: Conservation Farming	Moderate	Research	Agricultural Committee	
Ag-12: Maintain State Agricultural Districts	High Periodic		Agricultural Committee	
Ag-13: Agricultural Protection Plan	High Near-term	Planning	Agricultural Committee	State funds are available for these plans through Ag & Markets. Can be used for zoning changes that support agriculture.
Ag-14: Annual report on “State of Agriculture” in the Town	Moderate On-going	Advocacy, research	Agricultural Committee	
Ag-15: Sustainable Agriculture	Low Long-term	Research, Outreach	Agricultural Committee	Research into techniques; educate agricultural community
Ag-16: PACE or PDRs	Low If needed	Funding	Town Board	More aggressive approach to be considered if needed.

## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

<b>Goal 3: Protect environmental resources</b>				
<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority/ Time Frame</b>	<b>Type of Action</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Env-1: Escarpment Protection Overlay zoning district	Moderate Mid-term	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	See also RC-9
Env-2: Revise Zoning & subdivision regulations to avoid sensitive environmental features	Moderate Mid-term	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	See also RC-2, RC-7
Env-3: Inventory / address brownfields	Moderate Mid- to long-term	Monitoring	Town, Niagara County, NYS DEC	Potential funding through DEC (ERP program, NYS DOS (BOA program)
Env-4: Mining regulations	Low Mid- to long-term	Regulatory	Town Board	Regulations to avoid negative impacts without banning all mining
Env-5: Watershed Management study	Moderate Mid- to long-term	Research/ Planning	Town, consultant	
Env-6: Aquifer Protection Law	Moderate to low Mid- to long-term	Regulatory	Town	Requires accurate map of aquifers. Can be completed with Env-5.
Env-7: Create an Open Space/ green space inventory	High Mid-term	Planning	Open Space committee (new committee)	Same as RC-11.
Env-8: Open Space/ Greenspace fees	Low/Long-term (if needed)		Town	Fees per lot for new subdivisions to protect greenspace
Env-9: Monitor failing septic systems (maintain records/ map)	Moderate On-going	Monitoring	Town, DEC, DOH, federal agencies	Possible federal or state agency help for addressing the problem
Env-10: Education regarding septic system maintenance	Moderate	Education	Town, DEC	
Env-11: Floodplain regulations	Moderate	Regulatory	Town	In cooperation with FEMA mapping
Env-12: Sound farming techniques (reduce non-point pollution)	Moderate	Education	Town	

## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

<b>Goal 4: Encourage various types of economic development</b>				
<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority/ Time Frame</b>	<b>Type of Action</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Ec-1: Zoning revisions for hamlet areas	Moderate Near- to mid-term	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	See RC-4, RC-5.
Ec-2: New areas zoned commercial	Moderate Near- to mid-term	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	See RC-3.
Ec-3: Support tourism	Moderate Mid-term	Outreach/ Advocacy	Town Board, County, Tourism agencies, Private Sector	
Ec-4: Implement Gasport Plan	High to Moderate Near to mid-term	Various		
Ec-5: Redevelop/ reuse vacant commercial structures	High to Moderate On-going	Economic development	Town, Private Sector	Possible grant funds (RestoreNY, NY Main Street)
Ec-6: Local stop on Tourism Train	Moderate to Low Long-term		Town, Private Sector, Niagara County	
Ec-7: Expand trail system – tie into local destinations	Moderate Long-term	Capital investment	Town	Grant funds: Transportation enhancements, NYS Parks
Ec-8: Cooperation, linkages between tourism destinations	Moderate Long-term	Cooperation, Marketing	Private Sector	
Ec-9: Local tourism promotion committee	Low Long-term	Outreach, Marketing	Town, Private Sector, Niagara County	
Ec-10: Infrastructure Improvements	High to Moderate Mid-term	Capital investment	Town, County, State, federal	To ensure adequate services in areas targeted for economic development
Ec-11: Windmills	Low Mid- to long-term		Town, wind companies	Possible revenue source for Town- must be balanced with other goals.
Ec-12: High speed internet service	Moderate Mid- to long-term			

**Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority/ Time Frame</b>	<b>Type of Action</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Ec-13: Bridge crossings over canal	High On-going			Maintain access
Ec-14: Agricultural development	High On-going			See Agricultural goals
Ec-15: Investigate 485b tax incentive program	Low Long-term	Incentives	Town Board	To determine if worthwhile and whether and where to target
Ec-16: Join rural economic development groups	Low Long-term	Networking		
Ec-17: Cooperate with Niagara county econ. development programs	Moderate On-going	Networking, cooperation	Town, County	
Ec-18: Survey local businesses re. needs	Low Mid- to long-term		Town	

## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

<b>Goal 5: Encourage a Balanced Transportation System</b>				
<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority/ Time Frame</b>	<b>Type of Action</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Comments</b>
TR-1: Rural Design standards for Roadway improvements	Moderate Immediate	Cooperative	NYS DOT, Niagara County, GBNRTC	See RC-15.
TR-2: Bridge crossings over canal	High On-going			See Ec-13
TR-3: Local stop on Tourism Train	Moderate to Low Long-term		Town, Private Sector, Niagara County	See Ec-6
TR-4: Complete sidewalk network in Gasport (esp. to schools)	Moderate to high Long-term	Capital improvement	Town	Possible funding through NYS DOT, federal programs
TR-5: Bike path/ Connectivity Planning	Moderate Mid- to long-term	Planning/ Capital	Town, GBNRTC, consultant	Possible funding through NYS DOT, federal programs
TR-6: Recreational Trails	Moderate Mid- to long-term	Capital improvement	Town	Possible funding through NYS Parks, federal programs
TR-7: Truck Routing	Moderate Mid- to long-term	Planning	Town, GBNRTC, DOT	
TR-8: Support Airport	Moderate On-going	Advocacy		
TR-9: emergency planning	High to moderate Mid-term	Emergency planning		

## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

<b>Goal 6: Assure an adequate, well maintained housing stock</b>				
<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority/ Time Frame</b>	<b>Type of Action</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Comments</b>
H-1: Consider adjusting density requirements in Gasport	Low Long-term	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	Must be balanced with infrastructure capacity
H-2: Senior housing	Moderate Long-term	Research	Town Board, County office of the Aging	Initial stage is research into needs. Development would be by private or non-profit sector
H-3: Mixed uses in hamlets/ allowing apartments in commercial buildings	Moderate Near- to mid-term	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	See RC-4
H-4: consider adjusting density requirements in agricultural areas	Low to moderate	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	See Ag-3
H-5: zoning changes/ incentive zoning to encourage specific development type	Low As needed	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	
H-6: Rural design standards	High to moderate Near- to mid-term	Regulatory	Town Board, Planning Board	See RC-8.

## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

<b>Goal 7: Maintain Effective Public Facilities</b>				
<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority/ Time Frame</b>	<b>Type of Action</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Comments</b>
PF-1: Prioritize maintenance of existing facilities	High On-going	Investment	Town	Includes water, sewer lines, parks, public buildings
PF-2: Develop prioritized list of targeted improvements	Moderate Near-term	Capital planning	Town	
PF-3: Waterline improvements	High to moderate	Capital improvement	Town	Ensure adequate fire flows, pressures
PF-4: Facilities Plan	High to moderate	Capital Planning	Town	Can be a tool to lower operations & maintenance costs
PF-5: Support investment in Erie Canal facilities	Low Long-term	Capital Planning	Town, Village, Canal Corporation, NYS	Enhancements such as extending canal wall, parks, docking, trail links
PF-6: Targeted growth to match facilities capacity	High On-going	Planning	Town	Converse of EC-10.
PF-7: Parks Plan	Low Long-term	Planning	Town, consultant	Assess recreational facilities and needs.
PF-8: Disaster Planning	Moderate Mid- to long-term	Planning	Town	
PF-9: Land bank	Moderate On-going	NA	Town	Maintain ownership of parcel adjacent to Town Hall
PF-10: Energy improvements	Moderate Mid- to near-term	Assessment	Town, consultant	Investigate alternative energy; conduct energy audits to lower costs

## Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan

<b>Goal 8: Protect important cultural and historic resources</b>				
<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority/ Time Frame</b>	<b>Type of Action</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Comments</b>
C-1: Inventory of significant buildings	Moderate On-going	Research	Town Historian	
C-2: Recognition Program	Low	Outreach	Town	
C-3: Incentive programs	Low If needed	Funding	Town	Grants, revolving loan fund, etc. if needed in future
C-4: Inventory of historic cemeteries	Moderate On-going	Research	Town	
C-5: Apply to DOS Abandoned cemetery fund	Low If needed	Grants	Town	Must meet state criteria
C-6: Volunteer clean-up programs	Low Intermittent	Volunteer	Town, citizens	See RC-14
C-7: Interpretive materials (signage, driving tour, etc.)	Low Long-term	Tourism	Town, volunteers, tourism groups, chambers of commerce	
C-8: Support investment in Erie Canal facilities	Low Long-term	Capital Planning	Town, Village, Canal Corporation, NYS	See PF-5
C-9: Strengthen hamlet areas	Moderate			See Goals 1 and 4

# **Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan**

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## **UPDATING THE PLAN**

It has already been noted that the Town of Royalton Town Board should establish a Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee to help implement the recommendations of the Plan. It is also recommended that this committee undertake a more comprehensive assessment of the plan document to ensure that the plan remains an effective, relevant and useful document.

The committee can also assist the Town with a periodic review of the Comprehensive Plan to ensure that the plan remains a dynamic and useful document. Periodically, this committee should look at the accomplishments of the Town in implementing the goals and objectives of the plan and review the implementation list to see what has been accomplished, what remains to be addressed, and what should be revised in light of new circumstances. Some of the specific actions that the committee could review for consistency with the plan and impact on land use in the Town include:

- Any site plan and subdivision approvals
- Any major rezoning decisions
- Progress toward the listing of zoning changes recommended in the Plan
- Evaluation of any new zoning actions to be added to the recommendations
- Progress toward other priority items in the implementation section
- Evaluation of whether there is a need to update or amend the implementation list.

It is recommended that the Committee meet several times during the first year in order to make progress toward accomplishing some of the recommendations highlighted in the Plan. As items are implemented and the procedure becomes more established, the committee can meet less frequently, on an as-needed basis. The adjustments, amendments and changes recommended by the Committee and approved by the Town Board will be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan by resolution of the Town Board. These changes and updates become part of the Town Comprehensive Plan by reference.

Approximately every five years, or as circumstances indicate the need, the Comprehensive Plan should be more thoroughly reviewed to make sure that it remains relevant and that it reflects current priorities, needs and goals. If there are significant changes at the end of this more extensive review and update, the Town should incorporate all changes into an updated plan, and undergo formal adoption procedures (including a public hearing and SEQR review) to accept the updated plan. Unless there are major changes to circumstances or conditions in the Town, it is anticipated that these reviews and procedures will be simple. They are important, however, in order to ensure that the Comprehensive Plan remains a relevant and useful document to guide growth and development in the Town. It also shows a level of commitment and citizen involvement that will help the Town with other benefits associated with having an adopted Comprehensive Plan, such as obtaining grants, influencing the decision making of State agencies, and helping the citizens of Royalton build a Town that meets their goals for its future.

By following this procedure, the Town of Royalton will be able to continually monitor the effectiveness of the Comprehensive Plan in achieving the vision it articulates.

## ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Under the New York State Environmental Quality Act (SEQRA), the adoption of a municipality's land use plan or Comprehensive Plan is classified as a Type 1 action, which requires a more careful look at potential environmental impacts. To this end, the Town of Royalton, as part of the adoption procedures for this document, will complete a Full Environmental Assessment Form (EAF). This section of the Plan fulfills the function of Part 3 of the EAF, providing an evaluation of potential impacts. This format enables the reviewers, the Lead Agency, involved and interested agencies, and the public to review one comprehensive document that outlines plans for the future and the potential environmental implications of these plans. This section of the Comprehensive Plan has been provided to assist with the environmental review for this document.

The Inventory and Analysis section of this Comprehensive Plan provides a review and analysis of the environmental setting of the Town of Royalton as it exists now, including the natural environment and the cultural environment.

### A. Potential Significant Adverse Environmental Impacts

The underlying purpose and a major goal of the Comprehensive Plan is to promote appropriate land use and avoid significant adverse environment impacts in the Town that it covers. However, it is important here to acknowledge and discuss potential adverse impacts.

#### ***Short term/long term and cumulative impacts***

Based on the environmental setting of the Town of Royalton, the following potentially significant adverse environmental impacts could occur if the Town does not plan adequately and provide the proper tools for the management of growth and development. The comprehensive plan is designed to properly guide growth in the Town in order to lessen the potential negative impacts of land use and development decisions.

#### **Impacts on Land**

- The Town of Royalton remains largely rural in nature, which is a characteristic that is valued by area residents. Inappropriate planning and development actions could impact the character of the Town, and be a detriment to the rural character of the community.
- The Town of Royalton contains areas of wetlands, floodplains and creek corridors. These areas have been identified on the Environmental Features map in this report. Improper development of these sensitive environmental areas could result in drainage, flooding and/or erosion problems within the Town and in outlying areas.
- Some locations in the Town contain significant areas of mature woodland that should be protected, to the extent practicable, to maintain the rural character of the Town and preserve areas of open space.

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- There are large areas in Royalton where the soils are categorized as prime farmland or prime farmland when drained and some areas where the soils are classified as Farmland of Statewide Importance. Development of these areas could result in the loss of irreplaceable resources.

### **Impacts on Water**

- Tonawanda Creek, Mud Creek, Johnson Creek, Black Creek, the East Branch of 18-Mile Creek and tributaries of these waterways run through the Town of Royalton. These creeks are important for open space preservation, drainage, wildlife habitat and aesthetics.
- There are currently mapped areas of floodplains associated with Mud Creek and Tonawanda Creek. New draft floodplain maps being prepared by the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) as part of a county-wide remapping effort indicate that there may be additional areas of floodplain within the Town. Inappropriate development in these floodplain areas could lead to flooding or drainage problems, and/or hazards to public safety.
- The Town has concentrated areas of wetlands, with mapped wetlands along waterways and in other scattered locations throughout the Town. Inappropriate development of these areas could lead to flooding and drainage problems.
- The Tonawanda Wildlife Management Area is a large area of wetlands in the southeast corner of the Town.
- The Town of Royalton falls within two watersheds. Inappropriate development in these watersheds could have adverse impacts on groundwater resources and habitats in the Town, and in downstream communities.
- While the Town has waterlines in most areas, there are some residents of the Town who do not have public water supply and are dependent upon groundwater resources. Inappropriate development could have an adverse effect on groundwater supply and/or quality.
- There are sewers in some areas of the Town, but a majority of the Town is served by on-site septic systems to treat sanitary waste. Inappropriate development could lead to stresses on the groundwater supply or quality.
- The Town of Royalton has areas of poorly drained soils throughout the Town. The environmental constraints associated with these soils should be considered when making planning and development decisions so as to reduce environmental impacts.

### **Impacts on Flora and Fauna**

- The Town has areas of open meadows, hedgerows, active and fallow farm fields and woodlands, wetlands and creek corridors, as well as the State Wildlife Management Area. These environments support many non-threatened and non-endangered plant, avian and animal species. These areas provide important habitat for various resident and migrating

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species, and contribute to the rural character of the Town. Over development and poor site planning decisions could adversely impact these resources.

### **Impacts on Agricultural Land Resources**

- Agriculture is a significant land use throughout the Town of Royalton. Agriculture is an important part of the local landscape and a significant element of the local economy. Large areas of prime farmland soils exist throughout the Town, including lands classified as “farmland of Statewide Importance.”
- Most of the geographic area of the Town falls within a State designated Agricultural District. Areas not within an Agricultural District are the areas surrounding Gasport and Middleport, the LaFarge mine, Royalton Ravine, the State Wildlife Management area, and some lands along the border with the Town of Lockport.
- There are active farms that fall outside the designated State Agricultural Districts.
- Agricultural lands are considered an important part of the character of the Town of Royalton. Development pressures could have a negative impact on these resources.

### **Impacts on Aesthetic Resources**

- There are many aesthetic resources in the Town of Royalton, including the creek corridors, areas of open space, woodlots, farmlands, the hamlets, historic structures, historic cemeteries and parks.
- Ill-planned patterns of development could have a negative effect on these resources.

### **Impacts on Historic and Cultural Resources**

- The Town has many historic structures and sites. None are officially listed on the National Register of Historic Places, although there are structures that could qualify.
- There are areas of potential archeological significance within the Town.
- Inappropriate development could have a detrimental effect on historic resources within the Town.

### **Impacts on Parks and Recreation**

- There are parklands in the Town, including Royalton Ravine (Niagara county facility) and two small town parks in the Gasport area.
- Inappropriate development may have an adverse impact on these resources.

### **Impacts on Critical Environmental Areas**

- There are no designated critical environmental areas in the Town of Royalton.

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### **Impacts on Transportation**

- The three major State routes through the Town of Royalton are Route 31, Route 77 and Route 93. State Route 271 runs from Route 31 north through the Village of Middleport.
- The transportation system is heavily based upon roadways and automobiles, although there is limited public transit available.
- There is one active rail line through the Town, utilized primarily for commercial purposes. There has been a tourism train that crosses through the Town, but there is no station or train stop within Royalton.
- The Town also has a small airport for private aircraft.
- The Canalway Trail is a multi-use trail (pedestrians and bicyclists) that runs along the Erie Canal. A state designated on-road bicycle trail is located on Route 31 in the Town (NYS Bike Route 5). According the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Commission (GBNRTC), Route 77, Route 93 and Gasport Road have on-street bicycle paths in “suitable” condition, while Griswold Street has a bike path where “caution is advised.”
- There are some areas with sidewalks in the Village of Middleport and the hamlet of Gasport.
- Currently, the transportation system meets Additional development has the potential to increase demands on the transportation system, or increase potential conflicts between automotive and non-automotive traffic.
- The Royalton Comprehensive Plan does not recommend any development patterns that would significantly alter transportation patterns in the Town.

### **Impacts on Growth and Character of Community or Neighborhood**

- Royalton is a stable community, with no major increases in population projected.
- The rate of residential construction has been modest.
- The Comprehensive Plan identifies areas that are the most suitable for future growth at an appropriate pace and scale.

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## **B. Adverse Environmental Impacts that Cannot be Avoided**

With or without the adoption and implementation of the Comprehensive Plan, the Town of Royalton will continue to have limited new development that will result in impacts on the environment. The adoption of this Plan will allow the Town to better manage growth and development and minimize potential environmental impacts.

The adoption of this plan and implementation of the suggested actions will allow the Town to better manage growth and development, reduce potential environmental impacts, and ensure better consideration of the environment in municipal decision-making. All development actions taking place after the adoption of this plan will be subject to the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) process on a site-specific basis. Nothing contained in this document supplants the necessity of adequate review of future actions. However, this comprehensive plan will be a resource that can be used to facilitate the review of proposed development actions.

## **C. Growth Inducing Aspects of the Plan**

Many of the implementation actions outlined in this plan will help to control growth within the Town of Royalton. Certain actions will act to encourage development in specific areas of the Town and redevelopment in targeted areas. These areas have been deemed to be the most appropriate areas for development. The plan also discourages development in certain areas that are identified as more suitable for agricultural and low intensity uses.

## **D. Mitigation Measures**

A main purpose of any Comprehensive Plan is to help to reduce the potential impacts that could be caused by future development in the Town. This can be accomplished by providing techniques for guiding development that may occur, such as revised zoning or other development regulations. Alternatively, the plan can provide tools to help mitigate the potential impacts of development, through means such as planning investments in infrastructure, increased or improved design standards for development, or other methods. This Comprehensive Plan suggests a number of techniques for guiding the direction and nature of growth in the Town of Royalton, and tools for minimizing potential impacts of development on the environment.

The following section addresses the recommendations contained in the Town of Royalton Comprehensive Plan, and discusses why and how the recommendations help mitigate potential impacts of future growth and development.

### **Impacts on Land**

- The Plan contains a number of provisions designed to protect the rural character of the Town and its environmental resources. These include revisions to existing zoning, recommendations regarding infrastructure, and protection of important features.

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- A number of recommendations are designed to encourage continued agricultural land uses.
- Town has certain existing regulations, and new regulations are proposed that are aimed at directing development away from problematic areas in the Town. The plan proposes some changes to existing regulations to more properly guide development to areas where impacts to the environment will be reduced.
- Recommendations include changes to zoning and other land use regulations, creative zoning techniques (rural design guidelines, rural clusters, overlays), and other techniques.
- In general, the Plan supports new growth being focused in the areas surrounding Gasport and Middleport and in areas where there is sufficient capacity infrastructure to support new development. It supports the preservation of prime agricultural lands for agricultural purposes, and directs growth away from these areas.

### **Impacts on Water**

- The creeks and streams within the Town have been identified. Recommendations have been made for improving their protection.
- A goal of the Plan is the protection of stream corridors and better control of floodplain areas.

### **Impacts on Plants and Animals**

- Open areas, such as stream corridors and woodlots, which are recommended as important resource areas for the Town are also areas which serve as important habitats for wildlife. By targeting these areas for protection, the Town is minimizing impacts to flora and fauna in these areas, and providing for habitats.
- The plan recommends that environmental features be incorporated into site plan designs, and preserved where feasible.

### **Impacts on Agricultural Land Resources**

- The plan contains a number of recommendations designed to preserve and protect existing agricultural land resources in Royalton. Zoning changes, possible agricultural overlays, support of State Agricultural Districts and other programs will help encourage continued agricultural land uses.
- The plan supports avoiding development in prime agricultural lands.

### **Impacts on Aesthetic Resources**

- The aesthetic resources of the Town of Royalton include rural atmosphere, scenic views, farmlands, historic structures and cemeteries, areas of woodlands, creek corridors, the escarpment and parkland. The Plan makes a number of recommendations to protect and preserve these resources, and contemplates the adoption of guidelines and/or standards to

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control the design and character of new development to protect and enhance the aesthetic quality of development in the Town.

### **Impacts on Historic and Archaeological Resources**

- Future development will need to assess impacts on other historic or archeological resources on a site-specific basis.

### **Impacts on Parks and Recreation**

- The plan supports the parks and recreational facilities in the Town of Royalton. None of the recommendations would have an adverse impact on these resources.

### **Impacts on Critical Environmental Areas**

- There are no designated critical environmental areas in the Town of Royalton.

### **Impacts on Transportation**

- There are no significant roadway deficiencies in the Town.
- The plan does not recommend any development patterns that would significantly alter transportation patterns in the Town.

### **Impact on Growth and Character of Community or Neighborhood**

- The Town of Royalton is not experiencing strong growth pressures. It is expected that growth rates will remain modest.
- In the event that there are stronger growth pressures, the recommendations in the plan will help manage growth, and target it to appropriate areas, thereby minimizing negative impacts to the character of the Town.

## **E. Evaluation of Alternatives**

Throughout the Planning process, alternatives for helping the Town achieve its Goals and Objectives were evaluated. The recommendations and implementation alternatives were designed not only to achieve desired results, but also to promote beneficial impacts to the environment, the needs of local residents, private property rights, quality of life, and the vitality of the community.

It must be noted that long-term recommendations have not been thoroughly evaluated in this section. These actions are optional, designed to be considered only when circumstances within the Town indicate a need for more creative or aggressive techniques. For example, if the Town is seeing greater levels of growth pressure or where short term recommendations are not achieving the desired results.

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The "No Action" alternative was considered. Under the "No Action" scenario, the Town would not have a Comprehensive Plan document to guide growth and development, properly plan for the Town's chosen future, and protect important community features.

The adoption of the Comprehensive Plan will enable the Town to address issues of community character, environmental features, open space, farmlands, economic development, transportation and other issues in a more effective manner. It forms the basis for zoning and other changes to the Town's regulations, and helps guide future decisions regarding important issues, such as infrastructure and public spending.

The proposed plan more effectively allows the Town to achieve its goals and vision, and provide greater protection to the environment than the continuance of present trends under the No-Action alternative.