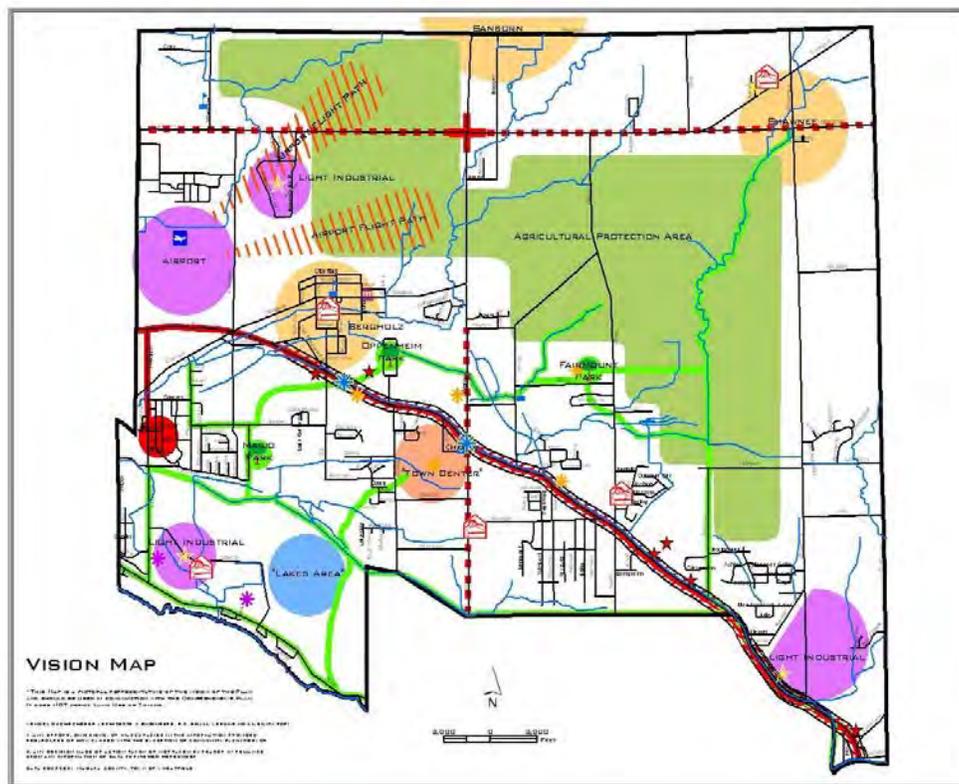




# TOWN OF WHEATFIELD COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Adopted

January 2004



# Town of Wheatfield Comprehensive Plan

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## SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

The Town of Wheatfield government has been conducting an on-going effort to produce a comprehensive planning document that addresses development and growth in the Town. The Town is committed to achieving an appropriate balance of agricultural, industrial, commercial and residential development, while taking into consideration issues such as drainage, green space and economic development. Wheatfield is also committed to ensuring that the proposed mix of land uses in the Town is consistent with the community's goals and objectives for its future.

The Town of Wheatfield adopted its original Comprehensive Plan in 1959, which was followed by updates in 1980 and again in 1990. Each update was not intended to replace the previous plans, but to revise and expand upon them. The 1990 update was summarized in a six-page pamphlet that included a Master Plan map illustrating future land use/zoning. In the year 2000, the Town Planning Board and Zoning Board undertook a Master Zoning map revision to the Master Plan map that was based on issues and problems that had arisen over the years since 1990, and which was approved by the Town Board following two public hearings. The update involved rezoning of several parcels of land, primarily along the Niagara Falls Boulevard corridor. As part of this process, the Town studied these zoning issues, revised the Master Plan map, held public hearings, completed the SEQR process, and adopted the Zoning Master Plan. (See Map 10)

In 2001, the Town of Wheatfield Land Use Study was prepared. The 2001 study had a dual purpose. In the immediate term, it was designed to assess the Zoning Master Plan revisions adopted in 2000. The study supplemented the public input already received under the 2000 Master Zoning Plan update, and provided additional support and verification of the previous efforts. On a broader scale, the document had a second purpose. It formed the preliminary work toward creation of an updated Comprehensive Plan for the entire Town of Wheatfield. Since specific rezonings could not be adequately assessed without a strong understanding of the Towns' goals, the study summarized goals and objectives for the Town based on previous planning initiatives, supplemented with additional citizen input. It also looked at Wheatfield's role in relation to its neighboring communities, and summarized general information about the Town of Wheatfield, with a focus on issues pertaining to the 2000 Master Plan Update. The information contained within the 2001 Land Use Study represented another stage in the process of developing a comprehensive plan for the Town.

In 2002, the Town sponsored a Phase 2 Land Use report, which was a continuation of previous efforts. Building upon the work completed in earlier studies, the 2002 Phase 2 Land Use study completed the visioning of the community's future, addressed a wider range of topics and extended the data compilation to a town-wide basis. By compiling all this information in a single document, the Phase 2 report allowed the community to confirm the shared the vision for their Town.

This document represents the next step in this process, and molds all previous efforts into a new Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Wheatfield. This documents contains Recommendations for the future of the Town, with an Implementation Plan that outlines the steps the Town can take to help implement the vision developed throughout this process. This is the final stage of the three-year planning effort that created this document. Once adopted, the building of the current Comprehensive Plan will be complete. However, the process of implementing and evaluating the plan will be a continuing effort.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The Town of Wheatfield Comprehensive Plan was made possible through the efforts of:

### **Town of Wheatfield Town Board**

Timothy E. Demler, Supervisor  
Gilbert Doucet  
Larry Helwig  
Arthur Palmer  
Kenneth Retzlaff

### **Town of Wheatfield Planning Board**

Richard W. Muscatello, Chair  
Donald Proefrock  
Gary DiMatteo  
Melissa Germann  
Clarence Kroening

### **Local Officials**

Much data, help and assistance was also contributed by employees of Town, County and State Departments—our thanks to all who assisted.

### **And the Citizens of the Town of Wheatfield**

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A special thanks to Richard Muscatello, Planning Board Chair, for his commitment of time and energy to this project. His assistance has been invaluable.

### **Project Consultant**



## **SECTION 2: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The Goals and Objectives of a community are its vision of its future. They establish the priorities of the Town, and provide guidance and direction in the consideration of future land use and planning decisions. The Goals and Objectives for the Town of Wheatfield were developed based on input from the community, derived from a series of public input meetings, written comment forms and leadership on the part of public officials.

### **2.1 Public Input Process**

Public input for this plan occurred over a three-year period. The Town of Wheatfield held a total of four facilitated workshops to solicit public and officials' comments on the community's vision for its future. A range of different interest groups were invited (by direct mailing) to participate in the workshops, including public officials, business representatives, manufacturers, farmers, seniors, economic development officials, representatives from schools and churches, and the general public. There was also representation from adjoining communities, as well as Niagara County Departments at the meetings. In addition to the invited representatives, the meetings were well publicized in local newspapers and open to the public. The third meeting, where the goals were finalized, had extensive publicity, including paid advertisements and articles in the local press, direct mailing invitations to a wider group of residents, and a notice on the Town's website. Over sixty persons attended the third meeting. Goals and objectives were verified at a fourth meeting, held at the end of the process, which focused on the application of the goals as implementation ideas.

At all public input meetings, attendees were invited to voice their recommendations and concerns, and raise issues pertaining to development, growth and land use in the Town of Wheatfield. The format was highly interactive, with all attendees given multiple opportunities to speak on a variety of topics.

The input and comments received at the first meeting were combined with a review of existing studies, an overview of the background information, and lists of goals and objectives from previous planning efforts. Based on these sources, we developed a preliminary set of draft goals and objectives. All persons invited to and/or attending the first workshop were invited to the second workshop, where the draft goals and objectives were presented for additional comment. Citizens attending the second workshop also participated in a hands-on "visioning" process: using blank maps and markers, they articulated their opinions and ideas for future land use in the Town. At the third meeting, attendees were given a variety of choices for providing input. For the first part of the meeting, citizens were able to make verbal comments to the entire group. For the second portion of the meeting, attendees were invited to provide more detailed comments and questions on a one-to-one basis, either verbally, in writing, or in graphic form on blank maps of the Town. Public input questionnaires were provided to each attendee that they could mail-in with additional comments. These questionnaires were also mailed to each invitee, and available at the Town Hall for those who could not attend. In the final year of the process, the fourth public input meeting was held, primarily to focus on recommendations and action steps. A second questionnaire, designed to elicit opinions of the direction of the plan was also distributed.

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## 2.2 Goals and Objectives

The issues and concerns raised by Wheatfield residents have remained relatively consistent throughout the planning process. The goals and objectives derived from these comments provide general guidance toward a vision of what the community desires for the future of their Town. The following list is the Goals and Objectives for the Town of Wheatfield.

### ➤ **Maintain and preserve community character**

Wheatfield contains a mix of rural and urbanized areas that combine to provide the community its unique character. Residents are committed to maintaining local character, with an emphasis on protecting the more rural areas of the Town.

- Protect prime agricultural lands
- Support farming as a viable economic activity in the Town
- Ensure new development is compatible with existing development
- Enhance the visual character of the community
- Preserve significant natural resources and features
- Encourage the inclusion of sufficient greenspace and recreational facilities with new residential development
- Maintain high standards of aesthetics, landscaping etc. for all new development
- Build upon the public facilities in the area of Town Hall and the Community Center to establish a "Town Center"

### ➤ **Carefully plan for and manage new growth to take advantage of existing assets while minimizing potential negative impacts**

Residents of the Town of Wheatfield recognize the importance of continued growth in the Town, but are committed to ensuring that it occurs at an appropriate pace and in appropriate locations.

- Monitor and control new growth to ensure existing public facilities and services are adequate to accommodate it, particularly with respect to schools
- Address drainage issues and ensure new development does not aggravate this problem
- Promote infill development in existing commercial, industrial and residential areas in preference to building on previously undeveloped lands
- Promote industrial development in existing industrial parks
- Plan in advance to address potential negative impacts of growth, such as increased traffic or noise, in areas where growth is likely to occur
- Allow planned unit developments which incorporate greenspace and different housing types in appropriate locations

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### ➤ **Ensure a safe transportation network that can accommodate the needs of both automotive and non-automotive travel**

Residents of the Town of Wheatfield want a balanced transportation network of roadways, bike paths and walking trails that are safe to use and that promote connectivity between popular destinations in the Town.

- Promote access management techniques to improve traffic flow and safety, particularly along major roadways in Town
- Increase non-automotive transportation options in the Town, particularly sidewalks, trails and bikeways
- Provide safe connections between residential concentrations and recreational facilities and other destinations within the Town, particularly for non-automotive travel (bikes and pedestrians)
- Minimize automobile and pedestrian conflicts
- Monitor and enforce appropriate speed limits on major roadways

### ➤ **Promote attractive and well-planned economic development**

Economic development is important to balance the tax base, to provide job opportunities for local residents and to provide for the Town's future. Wheatfield residents recognize that economic development must be well planned and attractive, not only to minimize negative impacts to residents, but also to attract potential commercial or industrial users.

- Provide for a proper balance of commercial, industrial and residential growth, consistent with the character of the community
- Concentrate commercial development along the Niagara Falls Boulevard corridor and discourage non-commercial uses along this route
- Capitalize on the Town's assets, such as the airport, the Mall, its high technology infrastructure, its existing industrial parks, and transportation corridors (air, road and rail) in order to attract new businesses
- Improve the availability of job opportunities within the Town of Wheatfield for its residents
- Support the recruitment of light industry to fill vacancies in existing industrial parks
- Promote agriculture as an important industry in the Town of Wheatfield
- Ensure high quality, attractive and well-planned commercial and industrial development through the use of setbacks, landscaping standards, buffers and other means
- Build upon the existing recreational and tourism assets in the Town, including the Niagara River and Tonawanda Creek waterfronts, to attract tourism and recreational-related businesses
- Provide incentives to existing businesses to grow and become stronger, and to improve the aesthetics of their facilities

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### ➤ **Protect important open space, environmental and recreational assets in the Town**

The Town of Wheatfield contains important open space areas and parks that contribute to community character, provide recreational resources and help protect the environment. These resources should be preserved, protected and expanded, as appropriate.

- Ensure all new development includes adequate greenspace and takes drainage into consideration to minimize negative environmental impacts
- Protect important stream corridor lands, especially Sawyer Creek, as important drainageways and greenspace corridors in the Town
- Utilize and implement the existing Greenspace plan to preserve high priority open spaces, woodlands and natural resources
- Promote increased trail linkages to parks and open space in Wheatfield
- Encourage trail linkages to trails in adjacent communities
- Provide a variety of recreational opportunities, ranging from passive open space to active neighborhood playgrounds
- Help support farmland protection

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## SECTION 3 REGIONAL SETTING

The Town of Wheatfield is subject to pressures and influences from adjoining communities. Public input from both the Planning Board and those attending the public workshops made it clear that residents feel that planning in Wheatfield must take into consideration what is occurring in the communities surrounding the Town. Development and economic activity in North Tonawanda, Amherst, Niagara Falls and other adjacent municipalities have an influence on what can and/or should occur in Wheatfield. Looking at the regional context can help in determining the appropriate balance of commercial, industrial, residential and agricultural land uses within Wheatfield. Having a clear understanding of the pressures and influences around the periphery of the Town will also help Wheatfield plan for their potential impacts. The goal is to take advantage of positive influences and pressures that Wheatfield can benefit from, while minimizing any potential problems or negative impacts.

### 3.1 Adjacent Communities

The Town of Wheatfield is located in the Buffalo-Niagara metropolitan region between the region's two major cities, Buffalo and Niagara Falls, New York. (See Map 1: General Location Map) Niagara Falls Boulevard, a major arterial that links Buffalo and its suburbs to Niagara Falls, is the major roadway through the heart of the Town of Wheatfield. River Road is another important connector in the region that runs through the Town and connects the Buffalo metropolitan area to Niagara Falls. The Town of Wheatfield also is located between the Cities of Niagara Falls and Lockport, and Lockport Road is an important link between these two municipalities that runs through the Town of Wheatfield. The Town of Amherst, the largest suburban Town in Erie County, borders the southeastern edge of Wheatfield, as does the City of North Tonawanda, the second largest community in Niagara County.

This section of the report provides an overview of activity in five comparable communities bordering on Wheatfield, focusing primarily on the areas adjacent to Wheatfield. The five comparative communities, selected by the Planning Board, are the Towns of Amherst, Lewiston and Niagara, and the Cities of North Tonawanda and Niagara Falls.

### 3.2 Adjacent Communities: Land Use and Zoning

Land adjacent to the Town of Wheatfield along the northern and eastern borders is primarily rural and/or residential. To the south, land uses in the City of North Tonawanda are largely residential, with the exception of a portion of the boundary which runs along Niagara Falls Boulevard, where there is a mix of uses (residential, commercial and industrial). The western border of the Town of Wheatfield is dominated by the Niagara Falls International Airport. (See Map 2: Surrounding Communities Land Use) North and south of the airport, land use in the Town of Niagara and the City of Niagara Falls adjacent to the western border of Wheatfield is generally residential in nature, with some commercial uses also. There is a significant concentration of retail development in the Town of Niagara along Military Road, including a major mall, the Prime Outlets at Niagara Falls, as well as other plazas and retail outlets.

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Most of the Town of Lewiston near the Wheatfield border is low-density residential development and agricultural uses. The exception is the hamlet of Sanborn, located along Route 31 near the intersection of Route 429, which, as a hamlet, is more densely developed than the surrounding rural areas. Sanborn also has a small concentration of retail development, including a small convenience plaza at the crossroads of Routes 31 and 429. Niagara County Community College (NCCC) is near this area in the adjacent Town of Cambria. The recently completed Master Plan for Lewiston identifies the Sanborn area as a rural service center, and supports some additional growth around the hamlet as a mixed-use area of moderate density. The plan recommends that the remainder of the southeast section of Lewiston remain as rural agriculture land. The zoning in the Town of Lewiston is currently being revised in accordance with the plan. These plans and zoning districts in Lewiston are consistent with existing and planned uses in Wheatfield. There are no immediate growth pressures in Lewiston in the area adjacent to Wheatfield, and no development is proposed in the vicinity.

The Town of Niagara and the City of Niagara Falls abut the Town of Wheatfield on its western border. In the Town of Niagara, the northeastern corner of the Town (north of the railroad track) was formerly housing for the Air Force Base. It is predominately residential at a higher density. Some new housing development has occurred in the area, including Wildwood Acres, a residential development with apartments, townhouses and single family homes, and the Tuscarora Village Mobile Home Park. The area is zoned R-4, which allows multiple-family dwellings and mobile home parks.

The area in the Town of Niagara south of the railroad track to Lockport Road (north of the airport) is relatively undeveloped. It is characterized by residential and agricultural uses. Despite this land use, the area is zoned for heavy industrial use, due to its proximity to the airport. There are no immediate development pressures in this area for industrial uses. In fact, two parcels in this area have been rezoned from industrial to residential use to accommodate a group home and a school associated with the United Cerebral Palsy Association. The airport property itself in the Town of Niagara is zoned for light industrial use. The Town of Niagara extends to a small area south of Niagara Falls Boulevard at Williams Road. This area is zoned for commercial use. The Towns of Wheatfield and Niagara and the City of Niagara Falls worked cooperatively to successfully encourage David Chevrolet Pontiac to locate in this vicinity. This joint effort of the three municipalities has been an example of regional cooperation on a small scale. It is clear that future proposed uses and zoning in this area will benefit from continued coordination between these municipalities. Plans for the redevelopment of the airport property should also be incorporated into these efforts. If properly planned, with leadership from the Town of Wheatfield, this area will provide a hub of business activity and economic development benefiting all three communities.

Existing zoning categories in the Town of Niagara are generally compatible with those of the Town of Wheatfield, although there is some potential for conflicts at the northern end of Town, where residential development in the Town of Niagara may be adjacent to industrial development in the Town of Wheatfield. There are no proposals for any new development in the eastern part of the Town of Niagara at this time. The greatest potential generator of any growth pressures is the airport, which straddles the Towns of Niagara and Wheatfield.

In the City of Niagara Falls, the area along Niagara Falls Boulevard is a commercial/retail area generally similar in nature to the Town of Wheatfield. The density of development gets

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progressively more intensive as one travels west toward Military Road. This area is zoned for Commercial use, and it is expected that it will remain commercial and retail in nature. The area south of the Boulevard is primarily residential, and is fully developed. South of Colvin Boulevard is the former Love Canal neighborhood, which is largely vacant, with some residential development. This land is zoned “NPD”, or Negotiated Planned Development. Any future use would need to be assessed in terms of environmental impacts, and there are no active proposals to redevelop this area. The frontage along Buffalo Avenue (Route 265/384) in Niagara Falls is zoned commercial, and the southeastern part of the City is zoned Public Space (PS). It is currently a closed garbage dump, but long-term plans are to convert this area to recreational use.

Currently, the City of Niagara Falls is concentrating development efforts in the western part of the City, focusing on the tourism area surrounding the Falls and the redevelopment of the downtown area. Given this focus, it is unlikely that there will be significant direct development pressures in the eastern edge of the City for the foreseeable future. Most of the properties are fully developed, with the exception of the Love Canal site, which is unlikely to be redeveloped in the short term. The possible exception would be continued commercial redevelopment along Niagara Falls Boulevard, extending eastward from the Military Road retail district. Such development is consistent with Wheatfield’s goals for this corridor, and would support the Town’s efforts.

The City of Niagara Falls could exert significant indirect influence over the Town of Wheatfield if current redevelopment plans are implemented. There are many proposals and projects in the downtown/tourist area of the City, including the Seneca Casino and the proposed new Convention Center. The presence of additional tourism and economic development projects in a revitalized downtown Niagara Falls would be likely to increase traffic along the Niagara Falls Boulevard corridor. It could also lead to the possibilities of “spin-off” tourism-related businesses in Wheatfield.

The City of North Tonawanda extends along the southern border of Wheatfield. Most of the adjacent properties are either residential or vacant. The exception is where the border between the two municipalities runs along Niagara Falls Boulevard. This area consists of a mix of land uses and zoning districts in the City of North Tonawanda, with homes, commercial properties and industrial uses. The largest development in this area is the Wurlitzer Park development, which is a mixed industrial, retail and commercial complex. The Majestic Theater is also in this vicinity.

The Town of Amherst shares a small border with the Town of Wheatfield along Tonawanda Creek. Niagara Falls Boulevard connects the two Towns. In general, the Niagara Falls Boulevard corridor through Amherst is characterized by dense commercial and retail development. However, at the northern end of the Town of Amherst, there is a significant amount of vacant land along Niagara Falls Boulevard. Directly adjacent to Wheatfield (along the Creek), the land in Amherst is zoned for single family residential use on both the east and west sides of Tonawanda Creek. Land use is a mix of vacant land with some residential development. On the east side of Niagara Falls Boulevard, the residential district is smaller than on the west side. Directly south of the residential area on the east side of Niagara Falls Boulevard is an area of vacant land that is zoned for commercial non-office development. This area is being actively marketed by real estate companies as available for development. Retail uses are most likely to occur.

A large cemetery is located south of the residential area on the west side of Niagara Falls Boulevard, and land in this area on both sides of the Boulevard is zoned Community Facilities, although the eastern portion is currently vacant. The remaining parcels along Niagara Falls Boulevard in the

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northern part of Amherst are zoned for commercial non-office development. South of the cemetery, most available parcels are developed, and contain retail uses. Typical development patterns include plazas with grocery stores, commercial nurseries and chain restaurants.

The Town of Amherst has the smallest border with the Town of Wheatfield, but it has one of the greatest potentials for affecting growth patterns in Wheatfield. According to the 2000 Census, a total of 116,510 people live in Amherst, exerting a large influence. The City of Niagara Falls, the next largest adjacent community, has just under 55,600 people, less than half the population of Amherst. The Amherst Bicentennial Comprehensive Plan that is currently underway identifies the northwestern portion of Amherst as an area where trends indicate that there will be modest population growth but more substantial employment growth. In general, the Amherst plan has an increased focus on office development over retail or industrial development. Additional employment growth is likely at the "new community" area north of the State University of New York at Buffalo North Campus.

It is expected that development pressures will extend north along Niagara Falls Boulevard, influencing demand for residential, commercial and industrial development in Wheatfield. Some of the market for development in Wheatfield is "spillover" from Amherst, where there is a perception that it is "over-developed". Wheatfield, with a more rural atmosphere, is likely to feel pressure for development that skips over Amherst and locates in Wheatfield, where taxes are lower, and land tends to be less expensive. In particular, we expect there will be continued pressure for commercial development along Niagara Falls Boulevard. Also, as employment grows in northwestern Amherst, there will be increased demand for residential development in Wheatfield, which is easily accessible to the new employment centers.

In addition to the specific comparable communities examined here, there are two municipalities that have had similar growth patterns as the Town of Wheatfield. They are the Town of Lockport in Niagara County and the Town of Orchard Park in Erie County. All three communities are considered "second ring"<sup>1</sup> suburbs with extensive public infrastructure (water and sewer). All have seen residential development pressures and growth, and all have an industrial base. Lockport and Orchard Park are also similar in the fact that they have seen commercial development, with retail corridors similar to Niagara Falls Boulevard in Wheatfield: Transit Road in Lockport, and Southwestern Boulevard in Orchard Park. Where the similarities end is that both Lockport and Orchard Park have "downtown" areas (the Village in Orchard Park, and the City in Lockport). These communities are mentioned here to help understand that these other Towns have issues similar to those affecting the Town of Wheatfield. Understanding these similarities can help guide Wheatfield in completing their comprehensive plan.

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<sup>1</sup> "First-ring" suburbs are municipalities adjacent to the metropolitan center (Buffalo). "Second-ring" suburbs are located a step further out from the metropolitan center, adjacent to first-ring suburbs.

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### 3.3 Demographic Profiles

In terms of population growth, none of the comparable communities are growing at a rate comparable to Wheatfield. The Town of Lewiston grew by 5.2% over the past decade, and the Town of Amherst grew by 4.3%. The remaining comparable communities lost population between 1990 and 2000. The Town of Niagara decreased by 9% and the City of Niagara Falls lost 10% of its population between 1990 and 2000. The City of North Tonawanda decreased by about 5%. Household trends follow a similar pattern. The number of households in Lewiston, the fastest growing comparable community, increased by about 13%, less than half the rate of Wheatfield, where there was nearly a 32% increase in households. Based on average household size information, households in Wheatfield are larger than households in the other communities, with an average of 2.58 persons per household. The City of Niagara Falls has the smallest average households, at 2.27 persons per household. The other communities range from 2.42 to 2.50 persons per household.

Residential development trends, as measured by the increase in number of housing units, show that Wheatfield is experiencing much stronger growth trends than the other communities. Wheatfield experienced a net increase of 1,318 new housing units between 1990 and 2000, a growth of 31.1%. In comparison, Lewiston increased by 14.0% new housing units, and Amherst grew by 8.1%. North Tonawanda had a slight increase in the number of units (3.0%), while the Town of Niagara and the City of Niagara Falls each experienced a slight decrease in the number of housing units in their communities (in the range of 2-3%).

Vacancy rates in the Town of Amherst and Lewiston are slightly lower than rates in Wheatfield. The other communities have higher vacancy rates. In all the communities except the Town of Amherst, the rental vacancy rate is high, suggesting that there may be more apartments available than are needed in the area. Owner-occupancy rates in the comparable communities are similar to those in Wheatfield, except in the cities of North Tonawanda and Niagara Falls, where rental units comprise a greater proportion of the occupied housing. These statistics suggest that many of the families moving to Wheatfield are looking for the opportunity to own their own single-family home.

Median household income in the Town of Wheatfield is \$51,700. This income compares favorably to the Niagara County comparable communities, where median household incomes range from a low of \$26,800 in the City of Niagara Falls to \$50,819 in the Town of Lewiston. Across Niagara County, median household income is \$38,136. Per capita income figures follow a similar pattern, with the exception that per capita income in the Town of Lewiston is slightly higher than in the Town of Wheatfield. This reflects the fact Wheatfield has a slightly larger average household size, and a higher proportion of children under the age of 18.

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## SECTION 4: EXISTING CONDITIONS SUMMARY

This section of the report summarizes major findings for existing conditions in the Town of Wheatfield. It focuses on the areas deemed most relevant to current planning efforts in the Town. More detailed tables and data are included in appendices provided in the Land Use Study-Phase 2 and are available for reference in that document.

### 4.1 Land Use

The Town of Wheatfield is characterized by a broad mix of land uses, ranging from agricultural land to heavier industrial uses. In general, the northern portion of the Town is primarily agricultural and residential in nature, except for the area on the western border north of Niagara Falls Boulevard, which is dominated by the Niagara Falls International airport. (See Map 3: Existing Land Use)

There are a number of active farms remaining in Wheatfield. Designated agricultural districts cover a large proportion of the northern and northeastern part of Wheatfield, which is where the majority of agricultural land uses are concentrated. Additional farmland is distributed throughout the Town on isolated parcels. (See Map 4: Agricultural Districts)

Public and institutional uses, such as fire halls, schools and churches, are scattered throughout the Town of Wheatfield. Town Hall and the adjacent Community Center are located near the center of Town, off Church Street. Highway and Sewer Department facilities are on Ward Road, and the Water Department is located on Niagara Falls Boulevard. There are a several parks and playgrounds in the Town. The largest is Oppenheim Park, a 75-acre County park on Niagara Falls Boulevard. Fairmount Park, at Nash and Steig Roads, is the largest Town-owned recreational facility.

Residential uses are common throughout the Town, but the nature of residential land use varies. Residential homes in the northern part of Town are generally on larger lots, intermixed with agricultural uses. There are some smaller frontage lots along major thoroughfares, such as Lockport and Ward Roads, and residential development tends to be denser in the hamlet of Bergholz and, to a lesser degree, in the area of Shawnee. There are a few small subdivisions in the northern part of Town, but more intensive subdivision activity is located primarily in the southern portion of the Town. Residential density increases from the central portion of Wheatfield south towards North Tonawanda. Most residential development in this area of the Town is of a suburban style and density. Wheatfield has experienced a significant amount of new residential growth in the past two decades. There are a number of newer subdivisions located throughout the Town, particularly in areas off the Niagara Falls Boulevard corridor, and off Shawnee Road. These newer subdivisions presently contain a mixture of new single-family homes and undeveloped lots. The densest residential development in the Town of Wheatfield is located in the vicinity of the Summit Park Mall. There are a number of apartments in this area, including Wheatfield Towers, a high-rise apartment building for seniors, Sawyer Gardens and Rivercrest Senior Apartments.

There are two major commercial retail concentrations in Wheatfield. The Summit Park Mall is a regional shopping center located on Williams Road. This area is characterized by larger retail uses and apartments. Niagara Falls Boulevard is the other major retail concentration. The Niagara Falls

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Boulevard corridor is characterized by an increasing amount of retail, commercial and recreational uses, particularly in the central part of Town. Commercial uses along Niagara Falls Boulevard include a mix of older businesses and newer developments, and range from small independently owned businesses, motels and stores, to plazas and business parks. Reflecting the Boulevard's past as the primary route to Niagara Falls, many of the businesses along this corridor are tourism and/or recreation-related. While increasingly commercial, the Niagara Falls Boulevard corridor has a wide variety of land uses, including parkland, farms, cemeteries and residences, as well as industrial uses at either end of the Town. Additional small scattered retail and commercial properties are located throughout the Town.

Industrial uses are primarily located near the eastern and western borders of the Town. Industrial areas include the area surrounding the airport in northwest Wheatfield, including property along Niagara Falls Boulevard and the Vantage International Pointe Industrial Park northeast of the airport. Additional industrial uses are located in the southwest corner of Town, off Liberty Drive and in the northeast corner off Lockport Road. There is also a mix of older and new industrial development in the southeast corner of the Town, off Niagara Falls Boulevard in the vicinity of Shawnee Road. The new industrial development in this area is targeted to light industrial users, and consists of a more "campus" style of industrial park.

### **4.2 Governmental Structure: Boards, Departments and Committees**

The Town of Wheatfield is run by a Town Board consisting of a Supervisor and four Town Council members. Issues of planning and zoning are under the jurisdiction of the Town Planning Board, while rezoning requests are considered by the Town Board. The Town has Boards overseeing Firearms Permit Reviews, Assessments, Plumbing and Zoning Appeals.

Town Departments include Assessment, Building, Town Clerk, Highway, Receiver of Taxes, Recreation, Sewer and Water. The Town also has two Justices operating the Town Court.

The Town has a number of standing committees, which are responsible for a variety of issues such as economic development, recreation, conservation, the Town web site and drainage. These committees have accomplished a great deal towards improving the quality of life in the Town, and some have successfully obtained funding for specific projects.

The Town also has a Shared Services Task Force. This is a cooperative effort involving the Town of Wheatfield, the Niagara-Wheatfield Central School District and the Starpoint Central School District. The Task Force investigates ways in which the three entities can better share services and reduce duplication, with the goal of reducing the tax burden on local residents.

### **4.3 Demographic Trends**

The Town of Wheatfield is one of the fastest growing communities in Niagara and Erie Counties. Between 1990 and 2000, the Town grew by 2,961 persons, an increase of 26.6 percent. The current population of the town is 14,086 persons. In population projections prepared for the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Committee, it is projected that the population of the Town

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will be 16,000 by the year 2020. This represents a growth rate of approximately half of current trends, and may be conservative.

The median age of residents of Wheatfield is 40.1 years. Approximately 23 percent of the population is aged 18 or younger. Adults aged 19 to 44 comprise about 36 percent of the population, and adults aged 45 to 64 make up 25 percent of the population. The remaining 16 percent of the population are seniors aged 65 or older. The fastest growing segment of the population is the 35 to 44 age group, which increased by 831 persons between 1990 and 2000. This is in contrast to most communities in Niagara County, where this age group is generally losing population.

There are 5,305 households in the Town of Wheatfield. The Town added a total of 1,283 new households over the past 10 years, an increase of 31.9 percent. The number of households in the Town is increasing at a faster rate than the population due to decreases in the number of persons in each household. Average household size decreased from 2.72 persons per household in 1990, to 2.58 in 2000. Most households in Wheatfield are either traditional family households (73 percent), or single persons living alone (23 percent). Of all one-person households, just under half (47 percent) are seniors aged 65 or older living alone.

### **4.4 Housing**

There are 5,555 housing units in the Town of Wheatfield. This represents a significant growth over the past decade. The housing stock in the Town grew by 1,318 units between 1990 and 2000, an increase of 31.1 percent. Of these units, 5,305 are occupied. The other 250 housing units, or 4.5 percent, are vacant. While this represents a slight increase over the 1990 vacancy rate of 4.1 percent, it is still within the range of what is considered a "normal" vacancy rate to account for mobility (houses for sale or rent, or sold but not yet occupied). The vacancy rate for owner occupied units is very low (0.7 percent). Vacancy among rental units is higher, at 7.7 percent. Close to 80 percent of households in Wheatfield are owner-occupied. Just under 21 percent are occupied by renters.

The housing stock in the Town of Wheatfield is generally new and in very good condition. In contrast to much of Western New York, much of the housing stock is very new: 28.8 percent of houses in the Town were built in the past 10 years. Over half of all structures (55.6 percent) are less than 30 years old, and only 12.6 percent of the housing stock dates from before 1939. In comparison, less than 10 percent of the housing stock in all Niagara County (including the Town of Wheatfield) is less than 10 years old and 29.8 percent was built before 1939.

In general, housing is considered affordable if it costs no more than 30 percent of a household's monthly income. According to the Census, approximately 64 percent of renters and nearly 80 percent of all homeowners in the Town of Wheatfield report that their housing costs are less than 30 percent of the household income. To a large degree, this reflects the relatively strong income figures in the Town. Median household income in Wheatfield for 1999 was \$51,700. There are two affordable senior housing complexes in Wheatfield. Wheatfield Towers has 101 one-bedroom apartments, and Sawyer Gardens has 58 one-bedroom units. Both projects are restricted to low-income senior citizens. A newer complex, Rivercrest Senior Apartments on Williams Road, has 60

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independent living apartments. Eventual plans are to provide a continuum of care, including assisted living apartments. Construction of the 60-unit Canterbury Gardens project is scheduled to start in 2003.

### 4.5 Environmental Features

The Town of Wheatfield conducted a Greenspace Master Plan in 1995 that provides extensive information on important environmental features in the Town. That report is included by reference in this document. To briefly summarize here, Wheatfield has a variety of important natural resources, including creeks and ditches, lakes/ponds, wetlands, woodlots, hedgerows, parks and public lands. The Greenspace Master Plan categorizes and prioritizes these assets, and makes specific recommendations regarding the preservation of important features. Map 5: Environmental Features illustrates the environmental features of the community.

The Town of Wheatfield, topographically, is very flat, and soils in the Town tend to be finely textured, with large areas of hydric or potentially hydric soils. Hydric soils are soils that do not drain well, and typically are characterized by problems with flooding, ponding or saturation with water. As a result, drainage and wetlands issues are important. The Town is characterized by large areas of wetlands, and three significant floodplain areas: Bull Creek, Bergholz Creek and Cayuga Creek. Some areas of floodplain are also associated with Sawyer Creek. Bergholz Creek in the central part of the Town has the most extensive floodplain area. It runs through the fairly densely developed Bergholz hamlet area. Development within floodplains should be carefully designed to avoid causing additional flooding and damage to developed properties.

Wheatfield is crisscrossed by a number of creeks and drainage ditches, and there are numerous ponds throughout the Town. These water features are especially important for drainage and erosion control. They provide habitats for wildlife, and can be used for recreational purposes (trails, etc.). They are also visual resources, contributing to the attractiveness of the Town. Sawyer Creek, which cuts through the center of the Town parallel to Niagara Falls Boulevard, is the most visible to non-residents. Tonawanda Creek, which is the route of the Erie Canal, forms the southern border of the Town.

Mapped wetlands exist throughout the community, but are concentrated in the eastern and southern portion of the municipality, and along the major creeks. Mapped Federal and State wetlands are typically unbuildable, and remain as undeveloped property.

Vegetative features, such as wooded areas or hedgerows, provide habitats and contribute to the character of the Town, reflecting its heritage as an agricultural community. All the identified environmental features help contribute to community character and support a positive image for the Town. The reader is directed to the Town of Wheatfield Greenspace Master Plan (1995) for greater detail about these features.

There are four sites in the Town of Wheatfield that are identified as "brownfields" in the Niagara County Brownfield study. It should be noted that the definition of brownfields, as set forth by Niagara County for this study was very specific. It should not be considered a complete listing of sites with potential environmental concerns. These sites are also identified on the Environmental Features Map (Map 5).

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### 4.6 Utilities

The Town of Wheatfield has public water and sewer throughout the Town. Drainage is a major issue in the Town, and through the efforts of the Highway Department and Drainage Committee, Wheatfield is systematically and aggressively addressing all major drainage channels in the Town. Existing creeks and ditches are being cleaned and new drainage systems are being constructed as necessary. The Town received grant funding through the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to clean out Sawyer and Bergholz Creeks to improve drainage in that area of the Town. Currently, the Southern Drainage System is a new system being constructed to mitigate flooding in the areas south of Krueger Road and areas along Ward and Witmer Roads. The Town also addresses individual property owner concerns.

The Town also provides garbage and recycling collection.

### 4.7 Transportation

Niagara Falls Boulevard (Route 62) is the major thoroughfare through Wheatfield. Annual average daily traffic counts (AADT) on this route range from 15,900 at the western end of the Town, to 26,700 at the eastern end. Traffic consists of both local residents and through-traffic, serving business, industrial and tourism uses. The Greenway Master Plan identifies the Niagara Falls Boulevard corridor as a major opportunity for image enhancement in the Town.

Other major east-west roads in Wheatfield are Lockport Road in the northern part of the Town, and River Road along the southern border. Major north-south roadways in the Town are Williams, Walmore, Ward (Route 429), Nash and Shawnee (Route 425) Roads. Williams Road is currently undergoing road work. This four-lane roadway connects River Road and the western end of the LaSalle Expressway to Niagara Falls Boulevard.

Map 6: Transportation illustrates the transportation system in the Town of Wheatfield, including roads and rail. The AADT figures on the major roadways of this map show the average annual daily traffic, or the typical number of vehicles using these roadways on a daily basis. Most of the counts were taken either in 1999 or 2000.

According to the most recent Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), Niagara Falls Boulevard between Nash Road and the North Tonawanda City line is scheduled for improvements in 2004, when the DOT will begin the actual design stages. The initial plans are to reconstruct this segment of the road, and perhaps add a center turn-lane. This project is currently in the design stages. Work on the section between Nash and Walmore Roads will be the next phase of reconstruction on Niagara Falls Boulevard. This section, originally scheduled for 2006, has been deferred.

The Town of Wheatfield, unlike many communities in Western New York, has active freight rail service. The rail line runs parallel with River Road, then turns north in the vicinity of Williams Road, running past the airport property. It connects to an active line running from the City of Niagara Falls eastward through the northwest corner of the Town of Wheatfield, which continues eastward to the City of Lockport and across New York State. Inactive rail lines cut through the southeastern corner of

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the Town. According to information from the GBNRTC, these lines are active in the adjacent City of North Tonawanda.

There are several routes in Wheatfield that are designated as on-road bicycle routes by the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) in the Bicycle Master Plan for the Erie-Niagara County region. These include River Road and Niagara Falls Boulevard. The Town also submitted the Lockport Avenue Erie Barge Canal Pathway project for funding under the TEA-21 program. This project, which would have provided a bike and walking path adjacent to the Tonawanda Creek/Erie Canal in Wheatfield, was not funded.

### 4.8 Economic Development

The Town of Wheatfield has become a competitive location for economic development activities in Western New York. Major concentrations of industrial and/or commercial activity are located along Niagara Falls Boulevard, around the airport, in the southwestern portion of Town around Summit Park Mall, and the newly emerging industrial concentration off Shawnee Road. Scattered business activity is also present along other major routes in Town.

There has been a significant amount of development activity in the Town of Wheatfield over the past decade. Building permits for a total of 1,373 residential units were issued in the Town of Wheatfield between 1991 and 2000. This represents an average building rate of about 137 units per year, although actual building rates varied. The majority of new residential units in Wheatfield (81 percent) were single-family detached homes, representing an average of about 112 units per year. Approximately 16 percent were for apartment units. The remaining permits were for condominiums, townhouses and duplexes. The peak year for issuing building permits was 1998.

The rate of building permits in Wheatfield is consistent with Census data, which shows a net increase of 1,318 housing units between 1990 and 2000. The difference between the Census figures and the building permits (55 units) represents a combination of permits that did not lead to construction, demolitions, and conversions of residential units to non-residential use.

Commercial and industrial development has also been strong. A total of 242 new commercial and industrial building permits were issued between 1991 and 2000, for an average of over 24 new businesses per year. In addition, permits for additions and improvements to commercial and industrial properties were issued for 69 properties between 1991 and 2000. While these do not represent new businesses in Wheatfield, they do represent continued investment in the community, and increased tax base.

Assessment figures confirm the increase in the tax base. Between 1997 and 2000, the total full value of property in Wheatfield grew by 12.5 percent. Residential and commercial growth was balanced: the assessed value of both increased at about the same rate over those three years. Residential properties make up approximately 69 percent of total assessed value of the Town.

Some of the building that has occurred has required rezonings. Over the past 10 years, the Town of Wheatfield has received a total of 16 applications requesting rezonings. Half of these requests have

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been to rezone for a commercial use, with the majority located along Niagara Falls Boulevard. Six of the eight requests for commercial zoning were approved. All of the rezonings that were approved on Niagara Falls Boulevard have resulted in new or expanded businesses in the Town. The one rezoning approved on River Road has not yet led to new development.

Three rezonings were for manufacturing use: all of these rezonings requests were approved and have resulted in new industrial development (Motorad, Silipos, and the new Industrial Park at Niagara Falls Boulevard and Shawnee). Four of the rezoning applications were requests to rezone for residential use. Two were approved: the Spice Creek subdivision is currently in its final phase, and the Alterra Assisted Living Center is built and occupied. In addition, a parcel located at Shawnee and Loveland was rezoned to a Planned Unit Development (PUD). This development contains a mix of single-family homes and smaller patio homes, which are being built and sold. A small convenience retail plaza that is also part of the PUD has not yet been built. The rezoning request history suggests that there is demand for additional commercially zoned land, particularly along Niagara Falls Boulevard, and for industrially zoned land.

Wheatfield was ranked favorably in the regional economic development study entitled *Sites Analysis and Development Strategies for Erie and Niagara Counties*, prepared for Buffalo-Niagara Enterprise by Deloitte & Touche with Fantus in late 2001. This report analyzes the development readiness of a number of sites in the Buffalo-Niagara region. Five sites in Wheatfield were evaluated, with three of the sites being retained for future marketing efforts: Vantage International Pointe, Summit Business Park, and Woodlands Corporation Center.

Advantages of the Wheatfield sites included competitive land rates (\$30,000 to \$50,000 per acre, compared to over \$100,000 per acre in adjacent Amherst), the availability of all utilities, (including fiber optic communications at Woodlands Corporate Center), and availability of rail at Vantage Industrial Pointe and Summit Business Park. The ranking factors for the Site Analysis report were targeted for specific industry clusters, and therefore did not cover a full range of potential users.<sup>2</sup> In most cases, the areas of concern noted for the three sites in Wheatfield that were retained for future consideration were related to the specific needs of the identified target industries, and would not be issues for many users. For example, the sites in the Woodland Corporate Center were seen as possibly too small for the target industries, but the size would be acceptable to other types of companies.

The two sites that were not judged favorably were the Forest City properties off River Road and Williams Road. Issues affecting the marketability of these sites to industrial users include wetlands, lack of full utilities, and image problems (proximity to sewage treatment facility and Love Canal containment facility). While the portion of the site off Williams Road (closest to the mall) was identified as having future potential, the larger, southerly portion of the site was eliminated from further consideration.

The airport site also represents potential for future economic development. The Niagara County Industrial Development Agency and Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority are in the process of

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<sup>2</sup> The target industries were Information Technology, Research and Development (Medical Tech), Medical Device Manufacturing, Back Office Operations, and Warehousing and Distribution.

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devising plans to develop the facility as an international air cargo hub. The intent is for the airport to become a hub of regional economic development efforts.

### 4.9 Public and Cultural Resources

The Town of Wheatfield Town Hall is centrally located off Niagara Falls Boulevard. The building is in very good condition, and houses many Town offices and the Town Court. The new Community Center/ Senior Center is located adjacent to the Town Hall, and provides additional community meeting and activity space. The Town owns a significant amount of undeveloped property adjacent to the Town Hall/Community Center site, which is available for future purposes. A new youth center is now operating in a leased facility on Niagara Falls Boulevard. Other Town offices are located on Ward Road (Highway and Sewer), Niagara Falls Boulevard (Water) and Nash Road (Parks and Recreation). (See Map 7: Community Facilities)

Police service is provided through the Niagara County Sheriff's Department and the New York State Police. Five volunteer fire departments provide fire protection service in the Town. These fire companies are Bergholz, Shawnee, Adams, St. Johnsburg and Frontier Fire Departments. Fire district boundaries are shown on Map 8. The nearest hospitals are in North Tonawanda and Niagara Falls, but health care facilities for routine care are available within the Town, including the Summit Healthplex on Williams Road, an affiliate of the Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center that offers a range of health care services.

Most of the Town of Wheatfield is within the Niagara-Wheatfield School District. The eastern portion of Wheatfield is in the Starpoint Central School District. Higher educational services are available in adjacent Towns: Niagara County Community College is located in the Town of Cambria near the border of Wheatfield, Niagara University is in Lewiston, and the State University of New York at Buffalo is in Amherst. Additional area colleges, including private, public and religious schools, are within easy commuting distance from Wheatfield.

There are ten sites where telecommunications facilities (cell towers) are located in the Town of Wheatfield. These are primarily in the south and central portion of the Town. The location of these towers is controlled, and facilities seeking to locate in the Town of Wheatfield must conform to local regulations. (See Map 9: Cellular Tower Sites)

Library services for Wheatfield residents are available through facilities in Sanborn and North Tonawanda. These libraries are part of the Nioga Library System, which offers access to interlibrary service to all public libraries in Niagara, Orleans, and Genesee Counties. The Nioga Library System also has access to reference data from libraries throughout the state through interlibrary loan agreements.

"Das Haus" German Heritage Museum is located in the hamlet of Bergholz. This 1843 log home is one of the original houses built by the first settlers to the area. The museum features the house itself, which has been restored to its 1888 appearance, and "Der Stall", a replica of a barn typical of that era. Interpretive displays relate to Prussian immigration, craftsman artifacts from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and antique farm tools and equipment. It is open to the public on Sundays, May through October.

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### 4.10 Recreation / Parkland / Open Space

Public lands include parks, schools and play areas. They are recreational resources, and preserve open space. There are a number of parks in the Town of Wheatfield. The largest Town-owned facility is Fairmount Park, at Nash and Steig Roads. Fairmount Park is 50 acres with athletic fields, a large playground with a variety of play equipment, and picnic areas with shelters. There are facilities for soccer, tennis, baseball, volleyball, basketball, bocce, roller hockey and horseshoes. Additional facilities include walking and jogging paths and a pond for fishing and ice skating. The Town also owns and maintains Mario Park, a 12-acre park off Deborah Lane. Passive recreation areas in Wheatfield include Don Janaecke Memorial Park in the southern part of the Town, and an area with trails off Moyer Road.

Niagara County maintains Oppenheim Park, a 75-acre park on Niagara Falls Boulevard. The park features a man-made lake for fishing. Amenities include volleyball nets, tennis courts, basketball courts, baseball diamonds and a horseshoe pit. The park also has a playground and wading pool, and picnic facilities.

In addition to these publicly owned parks, there are a number of private recreation areas in the Town of Wheatfield, maintained by the Fire Companies or other non-profit entities. These small recreation facilities broaden the range of recreational options available to Wheatfield residents. The Town of Wheatfield also has a number of private recreational facilities, including a golf dome, an indoor firing range, a go-cart track, an indoor ice rink, and a nationally recognized skate park.

The Town has a recreational master plan that was completed by graduate students at the University of Buffalo School of Planning. This plan is becoming dated, but contains valuable information. Also, the Town's 1995 Greenspace Plan depicts many of the environmental and open space features contributing to the passive recreational opportunities in Wheatfield.

## **SECTION 7 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

Typically the potential environmental impacts of a Comprehensive Plan are evaluated through a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS). To meet this requirement, the Comprehensive Plan itself can be set up to represent the GEIS (see §272-a.8 of Town Law). 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.

A GEIS, like an Environmental Impact Statement, includes a section on environmental setting. Section 3 of this Comprehensive Plan provides a review and analysis of the environmental setting of the Town of Wheatfield as it exists now, including the natural environment and the cultural environment.

### **7.1 Potential Significant Adverse Environmental Impacts**

The underlying purpose and a major goal of the Comprehensive Plan is to avoid significant adverse environment impacts in the Town it addresses. 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 Wheatfield, 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.

#### **A. Impacts on Land**

- The Town of Wheatfield has areas that remain 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.
- The Town of Wheatfield contains areas of hydric soils, wetlands, floodplains and creek corridors. These areas have been identified on maps in Section 4. Improper development of these 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 greatest extent practicable, to maintain the rural character of the Town and preserve areas of open space.
- There are areas in Wheatfield where the soils are categorized as suitable for farming. Development of these areas could result in the loss of irreplaceable resources.

**B. Impacts on Water**

- Sawyer Creek, Bergholz Creek, Bull Creek and tributaries of these waterways run through the Town of Wheatfield. Also, the Niagara River forms the southern border of part of the Town. There are significant areas of flood plains associated with these waterways. These flood plains present limitations for development. Inappropriate development in these areas could lead to flooding or drainage problems, and/or hazards to public safety. These creeks also represent important areas for wildlife habitat and open space that should be protected, and contribute to the aesthetics of the community. Sawyer Creek parallels Niagara Falls Boulevard, and presents a distinct and unique image for the Town.
- 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.
- Most of the Town's development is serviced by public water supply and is not dependent upon groundwater resources.
- The Town of Wheatfield has large 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.
- The waterfront area of the Town along the Niagara River is largely developed, but there are vacant lands in this area, and in the adjacent "ponds" area which are important for habitat protection, scenic and aesthetic resources, environmental protection, open space preservation, drainage and community character. Inappropriate development in these areas could lead to negative impacts.

**C. Impacts on Flora and Fauna**

- The Town has areas of open meadows, abandoned and active farm fields and woodlands, as well as the wetlands and creek corridors. These environments support many non-threatened and non-endangered plant, avian and animal species. These areas provide important habitat for many resident and migrating species, and lend to the rural character of the Town. Over development and poor site planning decisions could adversely impact these resources.

**D. Impacts on Agricultural Land Resources**

- Agriculture is a significant land use in the northern portion of Town, and much of this area is within a State designated agricultural district. Scattered farms are located elsewhere in Town. The Town's zoning supports agricultural uses in the north portion of Town.
- There has been a loss of agricultural land in the Town of Wheatfield, and the amount of land protected by State agricultural districts decreased at the most recent renewal.

- Agricultural lands are considered an important part of the character of the Town of Wheatfield. Development pressures could have a major negative impact on these resources.

**E. Impacts on Aesthetic Resources**

- There are many aesthetic resources in the Town of Wheatfield, including the creek corridors, areas of open space, woodlots, farmlands, the waterfront, the hamlets, historic structures, and parks.
- The Niagara Falls Boulevard corridor is an area where aesthetics are a concern. Ill-planned patterns of development could have a negative effect on these resources.

**F. Impacts on Historic and Cultural Resources**

- The Town has several locally significant historic structures that warrant preservation. In particular, "Das Haus", the German Heritage museum in the hamlet of Bergholz is an asset that represents both a historic and cultural resource. Other locally significant buildings, particularly in the older hamlets, contribute to the character of the Town. Proper planning that establishes guidelines and restrictions on the redevelopment of these structures can help preserve these resources.

**G. Impacts on Parks and Recreation**

- There are parks and recreation areas at several locations throughout Town.
- The Town also has open space resources and trails that offer recreational opportunities.
- Inappropriate development, including increased demands from population increases, may have an adverse impact on these resources.

**H. Impacts on Critical Environmental Areas**

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

**I. Impacts on Transportation**

- Niagara Falls Boulevard (Route 62) is the major thoroughfare through the Town of Wheatfield. Other major roadways include Shawnee Road (Route 425), Ward Road (Route 429), River Road (Route 384), Williams Road and Lockport Road.
- Traffic impacts on Niagara Falls Boulevard can have a significant effect on local residents, on quality of life, on economic development efforts and other issues.

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- The transportation system is heavily based upon roadways and automobiles, although a few public transit routes run through the Town.
- There are a limited number of through-streets in Wheatfield.
- Travel for pedestrian and bicyclists can be difficult in Wheatfield. Particularly along Niagara Falls Boulevard, high traffic volumes and speeds inhibit pedestrian and bicyclist activity. The availability of pedestrian crosswalks and signalized intersections is limited.
- There is an active rail line, which is utilized for commercial and freight purposes. No passenger rail is available.
- Additional development has the potential to adversely impact the transportation network. In particular, more intensive development may aggravate areas where traffic congestion is a problem, or result in new areas of congestion. Development in the surrounding communities, most notably Amherst and Niagara Falls, may also have impacts on the Town's transportation system.
- More intensive development may also result in increased conflicts between automotive and non-automotive modes of transportation.

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

- Wheatfield has been experiencing significant population growth over the past decades, increasing in population by nearly 27 percent between 1990 and 2000. Projections by Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council estimate a population of 16,000 in the Town by 2025. This estimate may be conservative: if current growth rates were maintained, the population in the Town of Wheatfield would be an estimated 17,835 persons by 2010.
- There has also been strong growth in residential construction. The number of building permits for residential housing has averaged over 100 units a year over the past decade.

### **7.2 Adverse Environmental Impacts that Cannot be Avoided**

With or without the adoption and implementation of the Comprehensive Plan, the Town of Wheatfield will continue to have new development that will have impacts on the environment. The adoption of this plan and implementation of the suggested actions will allow the Town to better manage growth and development, and reduce potential environmental impacts. All development actions taking place after the adoption of this plan will still be subject to the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) process on a site specific basis. This plan, however, will be a resource to facilitate the review of proposed development actions.

### **7.3 Growth Inducing Aspects of the Plan**

Most of the implementation actions outlined in this plan will help to control and moderate growth within the Town of Wheatfield. 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. Intensive development in the northern, more rural area of Town will be discouraged.

### **7.4 Mitigation Measures**

A main purpose of any comprehensive plan is to help to reduce the potential impacts that could be caused by unplanned development in the subject community. The plan sets forth means of achieving this goal. These can include techniques for changing undesirable development trends, such as revised zoning or other development regulations. Alternatively, it can provide tools to help mitigate the potential impacts of development, through such means as improved infrastructure, increased or improved standards for development, or other methods. A good comprehensive plan will provide these tools in a manner that does not itself result in negative environmental impacts.

The following section addresses the recommendations contained in the plan, and discusses why and how the recommendations help mitigate potential impacts of growth and development.

#### **A. Impacts on Land**

- The Plan contains a number of provisions designed to protect the rural character of the Town and its environmental resources.
- Town has certain existing regulations, and new regulations are proposed, that are aimed at directing development away from problematic land use areas in the Town. Other existing regulations will be amended, as required, to more properly guide development to areas where impacts to the environment will be reduced.
- Recommendations include zoning amendments, other regulations (site plan, subdivision regulations), creative zoning techniques (rural design guidelines, clusters, overlays), and other techniques.

#### **B. Impacts on Water**

- The creeks and streams within the Town have been identified. Recommendations have been made for improving their protection through the use of the Town's Conservation regulations, and other measures.

#### **C. Impacts on Plants and Animals**

- Areas deemed valuable as habitat for wildlife have been identified in the Town's Greenspace Plan, which has been incorporated by reference into the Comprehensive Plan document.
- The plan recommends that environmental features be incorporated into site plan designs, and preserved where feasible.

**D. Impacts on Agricultural Land Resources**

- The plan contains a number of recommendations designed to preserve and protect existing agricultural land resources in Wheatfield. Zoning changes, possible agricultural overlays, encouragement of State Agricultural Districts and other programs will help encourage agricultural land uses.
- The plan also includes ideas attempting to assist farmers to stay in business. Improving the economics of farming will help encourage the continuance of agricultural land uses.

**E. Impacts on Aesthetic Resources**

- The aesthetic resources of the Town of Wheatfield are varied, and are composed of rural atmosphere, farmlands, the Niagara Falls Boulevard commercial corridor, areas of woodlands and creek corridors, the waterfront, parks and large open areas. This Plan makes a number of recommendations to protect and preserve these resources, and contemplates the adoption of guidelines and/or standards to control the design and character of new development to protect and enhance the aesthetic quality of development in the Town.

**F. Impacts on Historic and Archaeological Resources**

- The plan identifies major historic resources in Wheatfield. These resources are protected under current conditions.

**G. Impacts on Parks and Recreation**

- This plan includes several recommendations to improve recreational facilities and parks in the Town of Wheatfield. In particular, linkages to parks and trails are recommended to improve access to recreation in the Town. Such facilities will alleviate the need for automobile travel to reach local parks and reduce the demands on existing recreational resources in the area.

**H. Impacts on Critical Environmental Areas**

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

**I. Impacts on Transportation**

- Niagara Falls Boulevard is a major thoroughfare through the Town where traffic improvements are needed. The plan calls for access management and other techniques to alleviate congestion and promote a better visual environment along this route, as well as other high traffic roadways in Town.

- The railroad within the Town could be an important component of the Town's future economic development. This corridor should be preserved for future opportunities for business and industry, as well as the long term potential for residential usage (i.e., commuter line).
- The Plan calls for a number of provisions to improve pedestrian and bicycle access in Town, including trails, possibly sidewalks, and bike paths.

**J. Impact on Growth and Character of Community or Neighborhood**

- The Town is growing rapidly, and the Comprehensive Plan provides the Town of Wheatfield with a means to control growth and keep a portion of the community semi-rural, with designated areas for more intensive development. The actions suggested throughout the Plan and this section should help the Town in achieving this goal. Although the plan proposes actions that may encourage growth, it is proposed in a more managed and deliberate fashion so as to protect community character and important natural resources within the Town. It is acknowledged that Wheatfield will continue to grow, but the Plan helps minimize the potential impacts of this growth.

**7.5 Evaluation of Alternatives**

Throughout the Planning process, alternatives for helping the Town achieve its Goals and Objectives were evaluated. These recommendations and implementation alternatives were evaluated for not only their desired results, but also their impact to the environment, the needs of local resident and private property rights, and the vitality of the community.

It must be noted that long term recommendations were not thoroughly evaluated in this section since these actions are only to be considered in extenuating circumstances where the Town is seeing greater levels of growth pressure or where short term recommendations are not achieving the desired results.

Under the present growth conditions in the Town, the "No Action" alternative was considered and determined to be inappropriate. 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 prepare for potential development activity over the next 15 years.

The adoption of the Comprehensive Plan will enable the Town to address issues of community character, environmental features, open space, farmlands, economic development and transportation issues in a more effective manner.

## **SECTION 5: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

### **5.1 Issues Analysis:**

The Town of Wheatfield is a community in transition. Traditionally a rural community, it is now one of the fastest growing communities in Western New York, with significant new development in both residential and light industrial uses. Agriculture is being replaced, and the amount of land within protected State Agricultural Districts is declining. Areas of Town remain predominately rural, but growth is particularly strong in the eastern part of the Town, where there is significant growth in the number of subdivisions, and the Woodlands Corporate Center is now proposing 700,000 square feet of new office, warehouse and flex space.

The Town of Wheatfield is a community where surrounding municipalities have significant influence on the community. As noted, growth pressures are strongest, both for commercial and residential development, in the eastern portion of Town, which has easy access to the Town of Amherst. Wheatfield offers a lower-cost and less congested alternative to the Town of Amherst, and demand for new development is expected to continue.

The northern part of Wheatfield remains more rural in character, consistent with adjoining communities of Lewiston and Cambria. This is where there is the strongest opportunity for agricultural protection. Areas of the Town of Wheatfield south of Niagara Falls Boulevard are largely developed as residential subdivisions, with no major changes envisioned in the near future.

The northwestern border of Town is dominated by the Niagara Falls Airport and Air Force Base. The future of this parcel will have significant impacts on the Town of Wheatfield. The airport is a unique asset, which can result in economic development opportunities, but also represents a constraint in that its redevelopment is likely to result in increased traffic, noise and other impacts which should be planned for. In particular, residential uses should be discouraged in close proximity to the airport, particularly within the flight paths, where new residential development should be strongly discouraged or prohibited. Agricultural and industrial uses are preferred in the vicinity of the flight paths. This will help prevent potential future conflicts between increased use of the air base and adjacent uses. As the federal government becomes more aggressive about shutting down facilities, ensuring compatibility between adjoining users becomes more important. Having this prohibition in place will help maintain a federal presence at the air base.

The Riverfront area is largely developed, and no major changes are expected in the area south of River Road in the Town of Wheatfield. However, the "Lakes" area north of the waterfront is a very large vacant area that offers significant opportunities for new development options. Currently zoned for industrial uses and PUD, consensus seems to be emerging that the area should have a mix of uses, including some provision for public access. One suggestion for public access is for recreational

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uses such as trails tying into the waterfront. Niagara Falls and North Tonawanda are completing their segments of a waterfront trail extending the length of the Niagara River. Wheatfield represents a gap in this trail system. An abandoned rail corridor runs parallel to River Road for part of this route, and represents an opportunity for the continuation of the trail. A spur trail extending into the Lakes area would offer a unique enhancement to the riverfront trail system. Although Wheatfield has a very limited frontage on the canal, the Town should consider this frontage an asset, and should cooperate with the adjoining communities in efforts to improve the quality of the canal corridor.

The new community center adjacent to Town Hall is an asset, and there is support for the establishment of a stronger "Town Center" in this area. This Town Center would be essentially a campus of public uses, with better links to adjacent neighborhoods, and not a traditional "central business district" type of center. The Town Center complex could include additional recreational uses and trails tying through to the Lakes area.

Retail uses are most appropriately located along Niagara Falls Boulevard, and most new retail and commercial development should occur along this corridor. The exception is that some small, limited commercial uses should be allowed at certain other crossroads for convenience-type uses only, primarily in the northern part of Town. Niagara Falls Boulevard is the primary impression most non-residents have of Wheatfield, and the corridor needs stronger development controls, such as access management techniques and design guidelines. Sawyer Creek, which parallels Niagara Falls Boulevard for much of its length, is a unique feature. Often seen as a barrier or constraint to design around, it could be incorporated more effectively into new site plans as an aesthetic feature that adds character to the area.

Demand for industrial uses is strongest in the eastern part of Town, but there is a limited amount of land available for much more expansion in that area. Areas identified for potential future industrial development include the airport area and the southwestern corner of the Town (Liberty Drive). These two areas also have access to the rail line. The Town also has some industrial parks that are not fully occupied, where additional industrial development can occur.

The following sections make specific findings and recommendations, organized around the Goals and Objectives for the Town of Wheatfield.

### **5.2 Maintain and preserve community character**

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

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

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

### ➤ **Protect Agricultural Lands**

#### *Findings:*

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

#### *Recommendations:*

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

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### ➤ **Support Farming as a Viable Economic Activity**

#### *Findings:*

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

#### *Recommendations:*

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

### ➤ **Enhance Visual Character of the Community**

#### *Findings:*

- Northern part of Town is rural-agrarian.
- Niagara Falls Boulevard is an important central corridor of the Town.
- River Road is in the waterfront area.
- Strip road frontage development is occurring.
- The Town's visual character is influenced by the surrounding communities.
- There are complaints about property maintenance and landscaping standards.

#### *Recommendations:*

1. Rural development guidelines would help direct development in the rural areas of the Town.
2. The Town should continue to improve the Niagara Falls Boulevard overlay district to better direct future development.

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3. Some proactive measures may be needed along Niagara Falls Boulevard: planting program, façade program, beautification contests, streetscaping on next NYSDOT project (coordinate these actions with the City of North Tonawanda).
4. Higher quality design standards should be considered, particularly in relation to site planning (landscaping, parking, etc.). These standards can be used to help ensure new development is compatible.
5. Stricter controls of undesirable uses (junkyards, junked vehicles, used car lots, on-site storage, dumpsters, etc.) should be considered, including requirements for screening, etc.
6. Waterfront programs, activities and projects taking place south of the Town should be considered in Wheatfield.

➤ **Build upon the Public Facility in the Town Hall area to create a "Town Center"**

**Findings:**

- There is no definable "Town Center" in the community.
- The Town Hall complex is centrally located and is accessible to a major east/west route (Niagara Falls Boulevard) and a north/south route (Ward Road).
- Niagara Falls Boulevard in this region is the busiest road in Town.
- The Town Hall site is not visible from Niagara Falls Boulevard (no major features visible from Niagara Falls Boulevard).

**Recommendations:**

1. There should be more features, such as sidewalks and paths, that connect the Town Hall area to the rest of the Town.
2. Develop the Town-owned lands surrounding the Town Hall site with compatible uses that complement the "Town Center" concept.
3. Improve the features in the Niagara Falls Boulevard area of the Town Hall—signage, streetscape, other physical changes.
4. Create physical and visual links to the Town Hall from Niagara Falls Boulevard.
5. Consider encouraging smaller concentration of uses at hamlets as ancillary "mini-town centers" in appropriate locations.

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

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

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

*Findings:*

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

*Recommendations:*

1. Continue to monitor growth and approved lots.
2. The Town may wish to consider a cap on residential permits.
3. Build-out analysis could show worst case scenario.
4. Farmland preservation program and open space preservation will help control growth in the Town.
5. Consider rewriting the special permit procedures to strengthen its provisions, and provide greater control over the granting of special use permits.
6. Special use permits should not be defined as specific allowable uses. Criteria should be established, as requested special uses allowed only if meeting all of the criteria. Consider creating a section of the code that specifically addresses the requirements for a particular special use.
7. Improve enforcement techniques and strengthen the use of existing regulations.

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

*Findings:*

- The Town is characterized by poor soils, wetlands and floodplains
- Drainage is a major problem in the Town.

*Recommendations:*

1. New development should be required to assess impacts to drainage, and have a realistic and effective mitigation strategy.
2. The Town should update their standards to be more stringent and in accordance with the State regulations.

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

#### *Findings:*

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

#### *Recommendations:*

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

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

#### *Findings:*

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

#### *Recommendations:*

1. While there are requirements that residential development must set aside parkland or make a contribution to a recreation fund, the Town needs to develop more effective standards to guide the amount, location and nature of this contribution.
2. Consider changing setback requirements on Niagara Falls Boulevard to facilitate access management efforts and provide for higher landscaping standards.
3. Consider areas where assembly of parcels into larger, consolidated development lots is feasible.
4. Particularly valuable areas of open space should be identified and targeted for preservation, where feasible (consider mandatory cluster developments in areas of prioritized open space).
5. Density standards and design requirements should be adjusted to better manage the impacts of development (control sprawl, minimize visual impacts).
6. Require an assessment of impacts to traffic, particularly along Niagara Falls Boulevard and other major routes, and require mitigation measures, such as shared access.

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7. Revise the Town code to support and encourage creative approaches to development, such as clustering or alternative housing types.
8. There should be a greater emphasis on greenspace buffers between residential development and other land uses.
9. Especially in the northern part of the town, rural development guidelines and creative road frontage development techniques should be instituted to try to maintain the rural character. These include varied lot sizes, varied setbacks, encouragement of clustering and varied home placement and lot layout to avoid "suburban" atmosphere.
10. Where appropriate, consider planned unit developments, which incorporate greenspace and different housing types into the entire development concept.

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

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

#### ➤ **Promote access management techniques to improve traffic flow and safety.**

##### *Findings:*

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

##### *Recommendations:*

1. The Town should remain actively involved in planning with the New York State Department of Transportation for the Niagara Falls Boulevard reconstruction, to ensure that it includes features such as curbing, etc.
2. The Town should consider conducting a more thorough transportation plan that addresses access management and appropriate responses to congestion.
3. Road frontage lots on high traffic roadways should be carefully regulated, with encouragement given to shared driveways, shared parking lots, parallel "access" drives, etc.
4. The Town should also consider instituting stricter controls on access—for example, requiring shared driveways in certain instances.

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5. Road frontage residential development should be strongly discouraged on Niagara Falls Boulevard. It should be strictly controlled on other high traffic roadways unless shared access is provided.
6. In some instances, the Town should consider making some road connections off Niagara Falls Boulevard "one-way" (e.g. Maple Road one-way, with access from, but not to, the Boulevard.) The idea is to confine more turn movements to signalized intersections. This action would need a traffic study prior to implementation.
7. As a long-term policy, the Town may consider identifying areas where new connecting roads could be provided. If this option is pursued, the Town will need to take proactive steps to steer development away from the area identified as a potential future right-of-way.
8. Since much of the traffic on Niagara Falls Boulevard originates from outside Wheatfield, consider establishing a Niagara Falls Boulevard Task Force, with representation from the NYS Department of Transportation, Niagara County, and adjacent communities to study access issues.
9. When planning a new subdivision, interconnections to other subdivisions should be strongly encouraged. Connections to more than one major road can be accomplished without encouraging cut-through traffic by making these connections circuitous.

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

#### **Findings:**

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

#### **Recommendations:**

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

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

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

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

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

#### *Findings:*

- Niagara Falls Boulevard has traditionally been a retail and commercial corridor.
- There are residential homes located along Niagara Falls Boulevard, and some agricultural properties.
- Residential uses are allowed in commercial districts.
- There are some commercial areas off the Niagara Falls Boulevard.

#### *Recommendations:*

1. Consider targeting tax incentive programs to promote commercial uses where preferred.
2. Consider restricting or prohibiting residential uses along Niagara Falls Boulevard.
3. Avoid rezoning property to commercial outside this corridor and other targeted areas of Town that are designated for commercial development.
4. Residential uses could be allowed as an accessory use to a business. Consider allowing mixed-use projects in certain areas, particularly in residential areas off Niagara Falls Boulevard where a more mixed-use, hamlet-type of development is desired.

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

#### *Findings:*

- The Town presently seems to have a good mix of commercial, industrial and residential properties. Rates of commercial/industrial development are in good balance with residential development. (Many believe balance helps the tax structure.)
- Some guidelines suggest that communities should have 12 acres per thousand residents for current industrial needs and 12 acres per thousand for future needs (Planning Advisory Service of the American Planning Association). This would suggest a need for about 350 acres of industrial lands.
- Other guidelines (PAS) suggest that in suburban communities, approximately 10% of the land should be set aside for commercial use.
- The airport could have a large impact on commercial/industrial development in the Town.

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- The Town has excellent high-tech infrastructure (fiber optics).
- The active rail line is an asset not found in many communities.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Redevelopment and development along Williams Road in the southwestern section of the Town may provide additional commercial and industrial development opportunities.
2. The Town should remain actively involved in planning for the airport property.
3. Areas around the airport should have a focus on industrial/commercial and agricultural land uses. Avoid residential development in the “fly zone”—agricultural or industrial use is preferred.
4. The Town should participate in regional efforts for economic development.
5. Consider rezonings to provide additional industrial land in the southeastern part of Town where there is strong demand for light industrial, campus-style economic development.
6. All industrial development should be required to meet strict standards of buffering, aesthetics, landscaping, etc.

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

#### **Findings:**

- Much of the Town’s existing industrial development is attractive.
- Commercial design standards are uneven.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Consider providing more guidance regarding standards in the Niagara Falls Boulevard Overlay, particularly for signage, landscaping and other aesthetic issues.
2. Ensure that standards regarding set-backs, landscaping, architectural standards, signage and other features provide adequate guidance and protection.
3. Encourage the use of greenspace to buffer development from adjoining uses.
4. Provide incentives to existing businesses to make improvements and enhance the aesthetics of their establishments.
5. Restrict additional billboards along Niagara Falls Boulevard.

### ➤ **Build upon existing recreational and tourism assets in the Town for tourism and recreational-related business development**

#### **Findings:**

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

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### **Recommendations:**

1. More creative planning should be applied to the Town's waterfront area, with the potential of linking to the "lakes" area as a recreation/tourism area along the waterfront.
2. The Town should work cooperatively with adjacent communities in regard to waterfront planning, particularly in regard to trailways along the Niagara River and the Erie Canal (Tonawanda Creek).
3. Recreational uses along Niagara Falls Boulevard should be encouraged.
4. Coordinate tourism efforts with Niagara Falls officials and County tourism initiatives.

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

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

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

### **Findings:**

- The Town has a Greenspace Master Plan that was written in 1995.
- Wheatfield is characterized by a greater "mixing" of land uses than many communities.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Reassess and reprioritize elements in the Greenspace Plan to ensure its relevancy and to incorporate major changes since its creation.
2. Utilize the existing Greenspace Plan to guide efforts to preserve high priority open space, woodlands and natural resources.
3. New development proposals should be evaluated in relation to the Greenspace Plan. The Town should consider requiring developments to take its recommendations into consideration in site plan design, attempting to preserve important features identified in the plan.
4. Greenspace buffers between conflicting land uses should be required.
5. New residential development is required to provide greenspace. There should be clearer and stricter guidelines governing the nature, location and characteristics of this greenspace.
6. There should be a greater effort to provide consolidated parcels or linked greenspace, instead of small, isolated plots.
7. Consider using greenspace corridors for trail linkages in addition to open space preservation.
8. Consider writing a tree protection ordinance to discourage the loss of trees.
9. The Town should evaluate a protection program that includes purchasing development rights. This should be coordinated with such agencies as the Western New York Land Conservancy.

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

#### *Findings:*

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

#### *Recommendations:*

1. Investigate methods of protecting the integrity of the stream corridors, including the possibility of regulations, establishment of buffer zones, or other techniques.
2. See Vision Map for possible locations.

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

#### *Findings:*

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

#### *Recommendations:*

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

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

#### *Findings:*

- Standards indicate that 10-15 acres of park/recreation land be set aside per thousand residents in a community. Therefore these standards would indicate a need of 140-210 acres of land. These facilities can be large sport complexes, community parks or neighborhood parks or facilities.
- The Town has 62 acres of parkland in the two major parks (Fairmount and Mario's), plus 75 acres in the county-owned Oppenheim Park. There are additional recreational facilities associated with local fire companies and churches.

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- Based on these standards, the Town of Wheatfield currently has an adequate amount of parkland, but as population grows, additional park land may be required to accommodate additional residents and stay within standards.
- The Town requires recreational land from new subdivisions, but this land is not always useful for recreational purposes.
- The Town has a 1995 Greenspace Plan.
- Open space and environmental features are important to the Town's rural character and to the wildlife in the community.

### Recommendations:

1. Provide clearer standards regarding the type and nature of recreational land required from new subdivisions.
2. Ensure an adequate mix of recreational offerings, including small neighborhood playgrounds.
3. Support efforts of Conservation and Firearms Safety Committee regarding extension of trails and passive recreation areas in Wheatfield.
4. Include consideration of privately owned recreational lands in planning efforts (e.g. fire companies, churches). Where these parcels are adjacent to other open space areas, consider obtaining formal easements to create linkages.
5. Consider redevelopment plans for the "lakes" area that includes recreational use.

## 5.7 Vision Plan

The Vision Map for the Town of Wheatfield is shown in Map 11. The Vision Map, together with the recommendations in this section, is intended to guide decisions which affect the future development of the Town. It is a graphic representation for general future direction of the Town. It is not a proposed land use map, and does not dictate the future uses of any particular parcel in Wheatfield. Various development scenarios could be accommodated within its provisions, and not all of its elements shown will be implemented. However, the Town should strive to ensure that development is consistent with the spirit and the intent of the vision portrayed in the map.

The following concepts guide the Vision Plan:

- Encourage continuation of agriculture in the north-central portion of the Town
- Encourage commercial and retail growth at identified locations, including Summit Park Mall and Niagara Falls Boulevard, with limited restricted commercial activity in other designated areas
- Provide stronger guidelines for development along the Niagara Falls Boulevard corridor to improve visual character, control traffic movement and address Sawyer Creek (Overlay District)
- Consider connections or trails between major activity centers in Town (parks, hamlets)
- Discourage residential development within the flight paths of the airport
- "The Lakes" area is a special area of Town that merits careful planning
- Consider establishing a stronger "Town Center" in the vicinity of Town Hall
- Focus economic development and industrial development at identified locations (airport and industrial parks)

## **SECTION 6- IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

The Town of Wheatfield understands that local planning is an on-going process. This current Comprehensive Plan is the product of three years of effort, which itself was built upon work contained in previous studies and reports. The Town clearly recognizes the importance of keeping planning efforts current with changing circumstances.

An effective Comprehensive Plan establishes a process that ensures that the document remains relevant and is continually updated. The Plan itself is a roadmap to the actual end product, which is an improved and better-planned community. The Comprehensive Plan cannot be considered a success unless its provisions and recommendations are implemented. This section of the report outlines an implementation strategy for accomplishing the recommendations contained in this document, thereby moving the Town toward achieving its goals.

The recommendations and the priorities provided here were generated throughout the planning process, by referring to previous efforts, requesting comments and priorities from members of the Town Board and Planning Board and other officials involved in the process, assessing public input (surveys and comment forms), and applying general planning principles. This section reflects current circumstances and current priorities. However, as local conditions change, the Town should revisit the priorities given to these items and reassess the continued applicability and/or timing of these actions.

For each item contained in the Implementation Section, we have assigned a priority, ranking the item as a high, moderate or long-term action. These actions should be considered a "toolbox" of recommendations to be utilized by the Town in achieving vision and responding to changes in the community. It is up to the Town to decide which implementation measures to undertake at any given time. Items with lower priority may be implemented prior to other items if circumstances are such that it makes sense; if, for example, a funding source becomes available for that type of activity, or if it is an item that is easily implemented. Other items with a higher priority may take longer to actually achieve. Cost estimates are also provided. These estimates are generally provided as a range, and actual cost will depend upon circumstances (how much is done by volunteers, level of detail that is provided, etc.)

Each year, the Town Board (with recommendations from others) will decide on the need for any implementation actions, and address any updates to the plan. As noted below, we highly recommend that the Town Board establish a committee to review the progress of the Town annually in regard to the Plan. This Committee would be responsible to make recommendations to the Town Board regarding the need for any specific implementation items, and address any updates, corrections or revisions to the Plan that are required, including revisions to listed priorities.

Section 6.1 outlines the immediate actions to undertake in order to adopt and begin implementation of the plan. Recommendations more specific to various goals and objectives are then listed in priority order, with higher priority items listed in Section 6.2, medium priority items in Section 6.3, and longer-term issues in Section 6.4.

# Town of Wheatfield Comprehensive Plan

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## 6.1 General Implementation Actions

The following actions are general instructions for adoption, review and updates to the Comprehensive Plan document:

- **Comprehensive Plan Adoption:** the Town Board, after holding the appropriate public hearing and completing the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) process, should adopt the comprehensive plan.

Priority: Immediate  
Responsibility: Town Board  
Cost: Minimal

- **Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee:** the Town Board should form a comprehensive plan implementation committee by resolution. The composition of the Committee is at the discretion of the Town Board, but it is recommended that a Town Board or Planning Board member chair the Committee. Representation should include the Town Board, the Planning Board and other Town departments, boards and/or committees. This committee would meet at scheduled times throughout the year. Generally, meetings would need to be more frequent (two to four meetings per year) in the first couple of years after adoption and would likely decrease to one to two times per year thereafter. The responsibilities of the committee would be to help ensure that the plan is being implemented, evaluate the results of actions, re-prioritize implementation actions as necessary, and suggest modifications to the plan as required.

Priority: High  
Responsibility: Town Board to establish Committee; Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee to then take the lead  
Cost: Minimal (general administrative support)

- **Copies of the plan distributed:** The Town should provide copies of the plan to the Town's boards, departments and committees. When providing these plans, a meeting should be scheduled to explain the plan, and how it should be utilized.

Priority: High  
Responsibility: Town Board  
Cost: Copying of report

- **Implementation Budget:** Each year at budget time, the comprehensive plan implementation committee will provide the Town Board with an approximate budget needed for the coming year's implementation actions. The committee will also provide assistance to the Town Board in identifying and seeking grants for these actions. The Town Board will then budget for these actions and/or apply for grants.

Priority: High  
Responsibility: Town Board, with assistance from Implementation Committee  
Cost: To develop budget: minimal; Cost of actual budget items will vary

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### 6.2 Priority: High or Near-term Issues

#### Zoning Issues:

- Niagara Falls Boulevard Overlay: strengthen provisions to provide clearer design guidelines; strengthen access management (driveway access to Niagara Falls Boulevard)

Responsibility: Planning Board - make recommendations to Town Board  
Cost: \$500 - \$1,000

- Airport Vicinity: review zoning to ensure that it clearly prohibits or strongly discourages residential development around the airport, especially in designated flight paths.

Responsibility: Town Board, Planning Board  
Cost: \$0- \$250

- Rezoning: consider further limitations to residential development along Niagara Falls Boulevard, and discourage rezonings to commercial outside designated commercial areas. Study feasibility of adding additional industrial zoned lands in southeast corner of town where demand for industrial uses is high.

Responsibility: Town Board, Planning Board  
Cost: \$0 - \$1,000

- Update/revise the zoning and subdivision regulations to require preservation/ incorporation of important natural resources to any development proposal. Use the Greenspace Plan as source of identified natural resources.

Responsibility: Town Board through the Planning Board  
Cost: \$1,000

- Agricultural zoning: review A-R provisions to add more creative site planning (Rural Development Guidelines; Rural Cluster Development regulations) and possibly strengthen provisions to protect farming. Alternatively, the Town could explore adding an agricultural overlay that provides stronger protections to agricultural uses.

Responsibility: Planning Board - make recommendations to Town Board  
Cost: \$1,000 - \$3,000

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- Buffers: review zoning regulations to ensure adequate buffers are required between uses, particularly between agricultural and residential properties. The residential development shall be responsible for providing the buffer space.

Responsibility: Planning Board - make recommendations to the Town Board  
Cost: Minimal

- Special Use Permits: revise criteria for granting special use permits to strengthen provisions, and put "burden of proof" on applicant rather than the Town.

Responsibility: Town Board, Planning Board  
Cost: Minimal if done by Town; \$500 - \$1,000 if by consultant

### Other Regulations:

- Site Plan review: priority open space elements identified in the Greenspace Plan should be taken into account in site plan review. Site plans should be required to reference this plan and identify important features.

Responsibility: Town Board and Planning Board  
Cost: Minimal

- Site Plan Guidelines- Trailways: consider requiring site plans to take into consideration potential trailways identified in the Greenspace Master Plan in their design.

Responsibility: Town Board, Planning Board, Conservation & Firearms Committee  
Cost: Minimal

- Undesirable Uses: stricter regulations to control uses such as junk yards, junked vehicles, on-site storage and dumpsters, etc. should be developed, to require screening and other measures to reduce visual impacts. Regulations would control where such uses would be allowed, setback and screening requirements, etc.

Responsibility: Town Board, Planning Board  
Cost: \$500 - \$1,000 (consultant)

- Greenspace: provide clearer guidelines regarding greenspace required from major subdivisions- including nature, location and characteristics of acceptable greenspace.

Responsibility: Town Board through Planning Board  
Cost: Minimal

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- Buffers: provide clearer requirements regarding buffers between new development and existing uses

Responsibility: Town Board through Planning Board  
Cost: Minimal

### Other Actions

- Enforcement: improve enforcement of existing regulations, particularly in regard to quality of life issues (aesthetics).

Responsibility: Code Enforcement Office  
Cost: Minimal unless manpower is an issue.

- Niagara Falls Boulevard Improvements: consider instituting beautification measures along Niagara Falls Boulevard, such as streetscaping, plantings, façade programs, beautification contests, signage, etc. Coordinate with NYS DOT regarding enhancements that can be provided with street improvements.

Responsibility: Town Board or Committee  
Cost: Minimal for investigation; cost of implementation will depend upon nature of actions taken (minimal if DOT provides improvements; significant for streetscape improvements).  
Grants: TEA-21 (SAFETEA); DOT Enhancements; Small Cities (business district improvements)

- Airport: continue to be actively involved in planning for airport property.

Priority: Moderate to high  
Responsibility: Town Board, possibly through committee  
Cost: Minimal

- Greenspace Plan: assess priorities and recommendations in the Greenspace Plan as to their current relevancy, and update the document to reflect current conditions.

Responsibility: Town Board through a Committee, possibly consultant  
Cost: Moderate (\$2,000 - \$5,000)

- Continue to implement provisions of the Greenspace Plan, as updated.

Responsibility: Town Board and Committees  
Cost: Variable for projects

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- Trailways: explore options for recreational trails, particularly in the "Lakes" area and in areas where such trails would complete regional trail linkages, such as along the waterfront or along Tonawanda Creek.

Responsibility: Town Board and local committees, especially Conservation and Firearms Safety Committee

Cost: High (construction costs for trailways)

Grants: NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation; TEA-21 (SAFETEA); Erie Canalway for Tonawanda Creek; CMAQ

- Coordination with NYS DOT: work with DOT regarding Niagara Falls Boulevard reconstruction project to ensure design is consistent with Town's vision and priorities for this corridor, particularly in regard to landscaping, curbing, etc.

Responsibility: Town Board (could delegate to a committee)

Cost: Minimal

- Coordination with GBNRTC: provide input on future transportation needs, including pedestrians and bicyclists. Provide a copy of the Town's plan and attend yearly meetings with the GBNRTC.

Responsibility: Town Board

Cost: Minimal (reproduction of plan and attendance at meetings)

### 6.3 Priority: Moderate or Mid-range Issues

#### Zoning Issues

- Density Standards: assess existing density standards to determine if they are encouraging the appropriate scale of development in the appropriate locations.

Responsibility: Planning Board, Town Board

Cost: Minimal

- Conservation Areas: monitor application of Conservation Areas regulation to ensure it is providing adequate protection for setbacks from the creek, drainage and erosion control, and other issues such as viewshed protection.

Responsibility: Town Board

Cost: Minimal

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### Other Regulations:

- Drainage Regulations: update required drainage standards to conform to State standards, and ensure that the required mitigation standards for development are sufficient.

Responsibility: Town Board, Planning Board  
Cost: \$500 - \$2,000

- Site Plan Guidelines- Access Management: consider strengthening guidelines in site plan regulations regarding curb cuts, shared driveways, etc. particularly along high traffic roadways.

Responsibility: Town Board, Planning Board  
Cost: Minimal

- Site Plan Guidelines- creative subdivision layout: consider revisions to subdivision regulations to encourage or even require more creative designs that incorporate open space, incorporate varying lot sizes and provide more variety and "rural" character. This is particularly encouraged in the northern part of Town. Consider developing Wheatfield design guidelines.

Responsibility: Town Board with Planning Board  
Cost: \$2,000 - \$4,000 (consultant)

- Access Management Ordinance: strengthen provisions in the code regarding access management, especially along Niagara Falls Boulevard.

Responsibility: Planning Board, consultant  
Cost: Estimated \$1,000 - \$2,000. (Modify NYS DOT sample Access management ordinance to fit local circumstances, and then go through an adoption process.)

- Design Guidelines: assess existing design guidelines for industrial and commercial properties to assess whether they are providing sufficient standards, particularly in regard to buffering, landscaping, and aesthetics, and strengthen if necessary.

Responsibility: Town Board  
Cost: \$1,000 - \$2,000

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- Tree Preservation Ordinance: consider creating a tree preservation ordinance to discourage loss of trees.

Responsibility: Town Board and Planning Board  
Cost: \$500 - \$1,000 (using sample legislation from other communities)

- Rural development guidelines: guidelines would be referenced in the zoning and subdivision regulations, and would be required in the agricultural zoning district. To accomplish, the Town would obtain sample legislation from other areas and revise to reflect local situation.

Responsibility: Planning Board - make recommendations to Town Board  
Cost: Minimal: adoption through local procedures.

- Landscaping standards: evaluate existing landscaping standards, and determine if more guidance is needed.

Responsibility: Town Board or Committee  
Cost: \$1,000 - \$2,000

- Setback standards: assess required setbacks on Niagara Falls Boulevard as to whether they provide enough depth for desired access management, landscaping standards.

Responsibility: Town Board or Committee  
Cost: Minimal

### **Other Actions:**

- Access Management Plan: study specific areas of Town, particularly Niagara Falls Boulevard but also other high traffic roadways in Town, as to specific access management features to institute. This plan would help in resolving some existing problems in the Town.

Responsibility: Town Board, NYSDOT (Access Management division)  
Cost: Moderate  
Grant Sources: TEA-21 (SAFETEA); NYS DOT funds (contact NYS Department of Transportation representatives)

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- Drainage Studies: continue to address areas of Town that need detailed drainage studies.

Responsibility: Drainage Committee, Town Board  
Cost: monitoring and evaluation, minimal; actual drainage work cost would be significant  
Grant Sources: SEMO (State Energy Management Office), FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), New York State EPF (Environmental Protection Fund)

- Encourage infill development: consider incentives to promote development in already developed areas in preference to undeveloped areas, particularly for commercial and industrial growth. Targeted tax incentives, targeted business assistance, or supportive zoning are options.

Responsibility: Town Board or Economic Development Committee, with assistance from Town Assessor and Town Building Department  
Cost: Investigation: minimal; actions: minimal to significant

- Monitor growth and approved lots: keep up-to-date inventory of approved lots by location and type. If number becomes large enough to suggest problems, Town can evaluate whether to institute stricter measures, such as a permit cap.

Responsibility: Planning Board, Town Assessor, Town Building Department  
Cost: Minimal (could utilize GIS to track)

- Sidewalks and trails: identify where sidewalks or connecting trails are needed, and budget funds in capital budgeting process to fund them. Priority areas for pedestrian facilities are between major subdivisions and other activity centers (parks, Town Hall area); and in hamlet areas.

Responsibility: Town Board, Capital Budgeting committee  
Cost: Moderate to high  
Grant sources: NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (trails grants); TEA-21 (SAFETEA); Small Cities if in support of "Main Street" type efforts

- Trailways: identify areas where new trailways could be provided, and steer development away from potential future rights-of-way. Greenspace Master Plan provides guidance in regard to priority locations.

Responsibility: Town Board, Planning Board  
Cost: Identification of right-of-way: low; building of new trails, high  
Grant sources: NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (trails grants); TEA-21 (SAFETEA)

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- New Roadways: identify areas where new connecting roads could be provided, and steer development away from potential future rights-of-way.

Responsibility: Town Board, Planning Board

Cost: Minimal to identify potential rights-of-way; more significant to accomplish, which is a longer-term issue

- GBNRTC-designated Bikeways: work with GBNRTC and NYSDOT in regard to designated bikeways to ensure they have adequate signage, crosswalks and other features to promote safety.

Responsibility: Town Board through Committee

Cost: Minimal (coordination)

- Targeted Incentives: consider targeting business incentives programs (tax incentives, etc.) to areas of Town designated for commercial uses in order to encourage commercial development in designated areas. Incentives could also be offered for fixing up or improving existing commercial and industrial properties.

Responsibility: Town Board, Town Assessor

Cost: Depends upon incentives

- Participate in regional economic development efforts

Responsibility: Town Board

Cost: Minimal

- Maintain State agricultural districts: establish a Town policy supporting the maintenance of existing agricultural districts, and encouraging property owners to remain within the district at renewal time. As new renewal period approaches, this item will increase as a priority.

Responsibility: Town Board

Cost: None

- Waterfront development: consider improvements to the waterfronts in Town, particularly in ways that build upon improvements in adjacent communities, to help spur tourism and economic development efforts, and improve local quality of life.

Responsibility: Town Board

Cost: Variable, depending on level of improvements

Grants: Environmental Protection Fund, NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Small Cities if can be related to State priorities

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### 6.3 Priority: Low or Long-range Issues

- "Town Center": consider physical improvements to area around Town Hall to begin to establish a "campus" of public facilities in this area. Improvements could include landscaping, additional compatible uses (most likely open space/parks related), signage, etc. Better visual and physical linkages between Town Hall and Niagara Falls Boulevard will help strengthen "sense of place" for the Town.

Responsibility: Town Board or Committee- possibly professional assistance  
Cost: Variable- most likely would require capital budgeting

- Right-to-farm law: consider adopting a local law protecting farming activities. Samples can be obtained from NYSDOS, American Farmland Trust and other entities.

Responsibility: Town Board  
Cost: Minimal: Costs are for local law adoption.

- Agricultural preservation programs: continue the work of the Farmland Preservation Program, and evaluate measures to help farming, such as transfer of development rights (TDR), purchase of development rights (PDR), creative tax relief and other programs that may be available, such as PACE (purchase of agricultural conservation easements), etc.

Responsibility: Town Board through a committee  
Cost: Minimal for the investigation; cost of implementation will depend upon recommendations. (PDR programs require a 50% local match)

- "Hamlet Overlays": consider creating hamlet overlay zones to encourage development of denser, more walkable communities at specified locations, such as Bergholz or Shawnee, where this type of development should be encouraged.

Responsibility: Planning Board, Town Board, possibly consultant  
Cost: Minimal if done by Town, \$2,000 - \$3,000 if done by consultant

- Planned Unit Developments: evaluate existing planned unit development regulations. Consider incentives or other measures to encourage their use in appropriate locations.

Responsibility: Planning Board, Town Board  
Cost: Minimal

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- Niagara Falls Boulevard Task Force: consider creating a task force cooperatively with NYS DOT, adjacent communities, and Niagara County to deal with traffic issues on Niagara Falls Boulevard in a coordinated manner.

Responsibility: Town Board (delegate to committee)  
Cost: Minimal

- Tourism: study tourism potential, focusing on recreational support services and waterfront related tourism.

Responsibility: Town Board through committee  
Cost: None (volunteers- time commitment is required)

- Investigate possibility of more aggressive open space protection programs, such as purchasing development rights or conservation easements. This effort should be coordinated with agencies such as the Western New York Land Conservancy.

Responsibility: Town Board (delegate to committee)  
Cost: Significant  
Grants: Environmental Protection Fund

- Private recreation areas: consider privately owned recreation areas, such as playgrounds associated with churches and fire companies in recreational planning. Consider establishing formal agreements or easements to ensure continued public access to these areas.

Responsibility: Town Board, Committees  
Cost: Low unless easements must be purchased

**SECTION 8 ANNUAL REVIEW**

The Town of Wheatfield Town Board shall establish a Committee to conduct an annual review of the Comprehensive Plan to ensure that the plan remains a dynamic and useful document, and judge the accomplishments of the Town in implementing and enforcing the goals and objectives of the plan. This Committee will most likely consist of members of the Town Planning Board, assisted by representatives from the local community, as designated by the Town Board. The annual review shall include the following.

- All Site plan and subdivision approvals issued during the previous two years will be reviewed in conjunction with the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan to determine where this activity has occurred, if it has occurred consistent with the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan, and the overall impact of these planning approvals on general land use trends in the Town.
- All major rezoning decisions approved during the previous two years will be reviewed in conjunction with the Comprehensive Plan to determine if these actions were consistent with the recommendations of the plan and the overall impact of the rezoning decisions on the general land use trends in the Town.
- The priority listing of zoning amendments specified in the Comprehensive Plan will be reviewed to determine which items were accomplished and which ones should be undertaken in the coming years. The overall impact of these rezoning decisions should be evaluated with respect to general land use trends in the Town. The Planning Board should also determine if there are any new zoning actions that should be added to this list.
- The list of other priority items, as contained in the implementation section of the Comprehensive Plan, will be reviewed to determine which items were accomplished during the previous two years. It should also be determined if there is a need to update or amend this list.
- Comments from Town Board, departments and committees and public input gathered during the previous two years will be evaluated in conjunction with the information ascertained from the reviews outlined above, and an action plan for Comprehensive Plan implementation activity in the coming two years will be developed.
- The Committee will prepare a statement outlining the accomplishments of the past two years, including a listing of all site plan, subdivision and rezoning approvals, and a list of accomplishments in terms of zoning code amendments and other implementation achievements, as specified in the Comprehensive Plan. This information, along with the action plan for the continuing implementation of the Comprehensive Plan, should be presented to the Town Board for their review and approval.

By following this procedure, the Town will be able to continually monitor the effectiveness of the Comprehensive Plan in achieving the vision it articulates. It is anticipated that the Committee will need to meet several times during the first year in order to establish procedures and review the priority actions. As items are implemented and the procedure becomes more established, annual meetings may be sufficient. The adjustments, amendments and changes recommended by the

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Committee and approved by the Town Board will be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan by acceptance by the Town Board, and provided as an annual update document.

Approximately every five years, or sooner if circumstances indicate the need, the Comprehensive Plan should be more thoroughly reviewed and updated as necessary to reflect current priorities, needs and goals, using the annual update reports to assist in this effort. 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 public hearings 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 re-adoption procedures will be relatively 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, and help the citizens of Wheatfield build a Town that meets their goals for its future.