

TOWN OF SOMERSET
2016 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE



Adopted – 12/21/16



Town of Somerset Town Board

2016 TOWN OF SOMERSET COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

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Somerset Town Board

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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

Somerset prepared its first Comprehensive Plan for the Town in 1972. In 2003, the Town adopted an Update to the Comprehensive Plan that incorporated previous planning efforts while integrating more current planning concepts. The 2003 document was useful for the Town for nearly a decade. However, at that time, a number of changes to the community necessitated a fresh look at planning for the Town. One of the most critical issues was the pending bankruptcy of the AES Somerset power plant. The power plant is the largest tax payer in the Town and County, and a major source of employment and economic development for the region. These factors and others required a 2012 update (started in 2011) to refine the 2003 plan. The 2012 update addressed new issues, such as economic development, that were and still are important to the Town.

The 2012 revised Comprehensive Plan provided general direction to guide future growth and development in the Town of Somerset. It also provided an update of information and data relevant to planning the future of the Town of Somerset. The effort of preparing the 2012 update entailed a hard look at the Town's goals and objectives. The goals were modified, including the addition of a new goal addressing economic development. The 2012 revised Comprehensive Plan should be viewed as a summary of the policies and priorities of the people of the community as of 2012. The guide was intended to help guide decision-making, especially regarding land use in the Town. Critically, the 2012 plan stated that its first goal was to "Maintain the Rural and Agricultural Character of the Town".

To keep a Comprehensive Plan up-to-date, it is recommended that the plans be updated approximately every five (5) years or if major events warrant them to be re-evaluated. In the Implementation Section of the 2012 Plan, it states that, "Every five years the Town should evaluate the need for any major updates to the Plan".

It has been approximately five years since the 2012 Update was started. Since that time, the Town has seen potential users interested in developing the western end of the Power Plant site. The Town has also become aware of a proposal for a large scale Wind Energy Conversion System (Wind Turbines) project. The footprint of the proposed Industrial Wind Energy Facility would span from the Town of Somerset into the Town of Yates. Both the power plant proposals and the Industrial Wind proposal have prompted another hard look at the Comprehensive plan. Like the previous update, the Town has received multi-faceted input from its citizens (including a specific survey of the residents, public meeting input, e-mails, letters, etc.). Based on citizen input, the Town has decided to again update the Plan in order to strengthen and clarify the goals and objectives already stated in the 2012 plan, and to better reflect the concerns and priorities of the Town's residents.

This document is an update to the 2012 Plan and will serve as a guidebook for achieving the community's visions. This update does not alter the fundamental vision of Somerset as a primarily agricultural, residential, and rural community. This update merely clarifies the goals and objectives already stated in the 2012 Plan. Although some land uses were implicitly inconsistent with the 2012 Plan, this revision is intended to clarify the 2012 Plan by expressly stating that some land uses are not in keeping with the goals and objectives of the Town, and its vision. This revision provides a variety of tools and options that can be used immediately or in the future. Implementation of the revised comprehensive plan is the responsibility of elected officials and

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appointed boards serving the Town of Somerset. The Implementation Section provides a range of recommended actions that the Town could undertake, including zoning and other land use codes; capital improvements; economic development activities and other actions.

PURPOSES OF PLANNING

A comprehensive plan carefully assesses strengths and opportunities inherent in the community in order to develop a rational basis for proposed policies, codes and other activities. In New York State, the right to zone land is premised on having a comprehensive plan for the community. Land development is strongly influenced by zoning, public investment, and availability of infrastructure and transportation access. A comprehensive plan addresses all of these issues.

In order to develop a meaningful and useful comprehensive plan, many sources of background information must be provided. This strong basis in data helps local legislative and administrative boards determine where growth should take place and how it should be phased. These background elements comprise an updated inventory of planning data and mapping of various features, followed by careful analysis of trends and issues. Based upon the findings of these basic elements, along with significant input from Town residents, goals and objectives are developed to guide future development. Then specific recommendations are made intended to help the Town make progress toward achieving those goals. As appropriate, these policies are presented on the Vision Plan (Map 11). The Vision Plan does **not** represent proposed land use patterns or zoning, but is intended to visually depict a vision for the community. It illustrates the general principles that should guide growth and development in the Town.

The revised Comprehensive Plan is the community's message to its residents, to developers, to industry, and to other levels of government, that the Town of Somerset has given consideration to its environs and has proposed a program of development based upon sound planning principles and direction, with public input and support. It is important for the Town to have such a statement of policy, with supporting documentation that led to that policy. This ensures that the Town's interests are clearly stated, and provides guidance for the Town in evaluating proposals that come before it. Adoption of a Comprehensive Plan also lends weight to the Town's position when conflicts arise, because this position is based on sound planning and has public consensus behind its findings.

Policies, plans and capital improvement programs instituted by higher levels of government -- at the national, state, regional and county levels-- often play a significant role in shaping the future of local communities. The Town's Comprehensive Plan clearly communicates the Town's consensus in regard to its future. This Plan has been prepared with an understanding of regional and State trends and policies. Where appropriate, it is consistent with these higher government programs; where there are variations, it explains the rational basis for any differences.

The recommendations and policies in this comprehensive plan grew out of existing land use patterns, its strategic waterfront location, future vision, and practical considerations of access to infrastructure and transportation, with an eye to preservation of important natural features. Business and industrial firms and, to some extent, individual homeowners are all engaged in looking into the future from time to time in order to provide some direction to their day-to-day activities. Most businesses, for instance, project their anticipated needs and goals for at least a five-year period. A community likewise must have some direction to its day-to-day activities. In fact, it is even more important for a community to think ahead, due to its size and complexity; the environmental importance of its assets; and the enduring and long-reaching nature of its decisions, particularly in regard to land use. A comprehensive plan can provide insight and

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direction for the future of the community, to protect its resources; plan for prosperity and provide improved local quality of life.

It should be noted that Somerset, as a waterfront community, has a separate Plan for its waterfront area, the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP). In completing this Comprehensive Plan Update, the LWRP was referenced extensively. This Plan includes a recommendation for minor updates to the LWRP to better reflect the overall vision of the Town established during this Update. Please refer to the Town's LWRP for more information on the Town's important waterfront initiatives.

A comprehensive plan provides a number of benefits:

- Dealing with minor problems so that they do not become major problems in the future.
- Limiting the impact of changes which can be foreseen and which will occur in the future.
- Shaping new development to the community's needs and preferences.
- Guiding both public and private action to save money, time and effort.
- Providing continuity of future programs for community improvement.
- Improving coordination between municipalities, especially between the Town of Somerset and the Village of Barker.
- Providing a unifying focal point for the efforts of all community interests.

SECTION II

BACKGROUND ANALYSES/EXISTING CONDITIONS

A. THE REGIONAL SETTING

With the current focus on regional planning, it is important to look at how the Town of Somerset fits within the context of the wider region. Somerset is a rural waterfront Town located on Lake Ontario, at the outer limits of the Buffalo-Niagara metropolitan area. (See Map 1: Regional Setting). Much of the Town's labor force works outside of Somerset but within the two-county metropolitan area. As such, local development policies must recognize Somerset's dependence on the metropolitan economy and transportation networks.

The Town's waterfront location is also an extremely important asset to the Town and the region. It has drawn people to live and recreate in the Town, and businesses, such as the power plant, have chosen to locate in the Town to take advantage of the waterfront attributes.

The metropolitan area, which consists of Erie and Niagara Counties, has experienced significant population declines over the past decades. Between 1970 and 2010, the total population of the two county region decreased from 1,349,211 to 1,135,509, a drop of 15.8 percent over the past forty years. Population decline has been leveling off, with a two-region decrease of just 3.0 percent between 2000 and 2010. Much of the decline is focused in Erie County, particularly the City of Buffalo and its inner ring of suburbs. Population in Niagara County has experienced more modest population loss. Between 2000 and 2010, the population of Niagara County decreased just 1.5 percent, compared to 3.3 percent in Erie County, and between 2000 and 2010, the population of Niagara County essentially remained unchanged, with a decrease of only 0.4 percent. Population projections prepared by the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council suggest that population declines may be reversing, although the projections are conservative for transportation planning purposes, and tend to be optimistic. The projections indicate that Niagara County will increase in population to 245,930 by the year 2030, an increase of 13.6 percent, or approximately 29,500 persons.

The *Regional Framework for Erie and Niagara Counties*, a regional policy plan for the two counties, promotes the concept of Somerset remaining rural. The regional document sets forth preferred development patterns, which focus growth on urban and rural centers while preserving the rural character of outlying areas. The Town of Somerset is identified as a rural area, which is defined as an area that is less intensely developed with large, contiguous blocks of farmland and forested areas, with more compact residential, commercial and public uses concentrated in Villages, such as Barker. The document identifies Barker as a "Rural Center" – an area that serves as "the social, cultural, economic and often historic heart of the region's rural communities." Strategies for rural areas promote limited development, encourage reinvestment in the rural centers and discourage the development of rural and agricultural lands. This emphasis on preserving rural character is consistent with the Town's vision for its own future.

The Town is also part of the 5-county Western New York Region. The Western New York region is a State designation prompted by the State's new approach to economic development. Increasingly, State activities will be organized and distributed on the regional level, particularly in regard to economic development, grants and financing. To be competitive for these funds, municipalities need to examine how they are integrated into the region and its priorities. The recently completed regional economic development strategic plan, "*A Strategy for Prosperity*" (and its yearly updates), addresses the region's economic vitality and viability. It outlines a

regional agenda intended to promote “a more dynamic and sustainable economy” for the region. The Regional Strategy emphasizes job readiness, smart growth and entrepreneurship, factors that resonate with the Town’s needs and assets. It targets 8 industry sectors, including advanced manufacturing, agriculture, energy and tourism, which are sectors that could be compatible with the Town of Somerset’s assets. It should be noted, as discussed later in the Plan, that neither regional document mentions the Somerset power plant, which represents a multi-billion dollar investment in the region, and is the largest tax payer in Niagara County.

B. THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The Town’s natural environment consists of the physical characteristics of the land and ecology of the Town of Somerset. This section of the plan considers the natural environment, focusing on the sensitive environmental features that require some degree of protection from development.

Topographic Features - Steep Slopes

Topography is one of the prime physical characteristics determining an area's development potential. Relief and grade levels often dictate the extent and character of land development. Land that is nearly flat or has gentle slopes (0-5 percent), lends itself more advantageously to development than land characterized by greater slopes or variation in elevation. The Town of Somerset is generally characterized by gently sloping topography and has only a few limited areas where there are steeper slopes. Topography, therefore, sets very few limits to the prospective pattern of development in the Town. It also lends itself to long lines of visibility and impacts to view sheds from large scale development, such as Wind Turbines. The exceptions are the steep slopes along the Lake Ontario shoreline. These slopes present some serious concerns, which must be addressed through planning policy. The problems will be discussed later in the section on the coastal zone.

Somerset is typical of towns found within the Iroquois Plain, which extends from the south shore of Lake Ontario, southerly to the Niagara Escarpment. The Escarpment traverses, in an east-west direction, the Towns of Lewiston, Cambria, Lockport, and the northern part of Royalton. South of the Escarpment, elevations of 500-600 feet are typical. North of the Escarpment, elevations of below 500 feet are most common. Lake Ontario itself is at an elevation of approximately 250 feet above sea level. The Town of Somerset, which lies between the Escarpment and the Lake, ranges in elevation from a high of approximately 370 feet above sea level at the south town line, near Johnson Creek Road, to a low of 250 feet at lake level, a drop of 120 feet.

The Town, overall, has a change in elevation difference of approximately one-foot per thousand feet (0.1 percent) throughout its north-south length, to approximately Lower Lake Road. From Lower Lake Road northward, topography recedes toward the Lake at a rate of 50 feet per 1000 feet, or 5 percent slope. Areas to the west of Quaker Road have steeper topography up to 6 to 8 percent slopes on the northern extension of Hartland Road and Lower Lake Road. Immediately adjacent to the Lake, there are bluffs of 20 to 40 feet for approximately 80 percent of the Town's lakefront. These bluffs have inhibited denser lakefront development. The majority of lakefront residential and recreational development has encroached on the lakefront bluffs north of Lakeview Drive in an area from Quaker Road, easterly to the west edge of Golden Hill State Park.

Natural Drainage, Floodplains and Wetlands

Natural drainage refers to how surface water travels across a watershed. An understanding of the natural drainage system is important in understanding watersheds, the management

of storm water, protection of water quality, and also the design and development of constructed sanitary sewer and natural storm water run-off systems.

Topographically, the entire northeastern part of Niagara County is drained toward Lake Ontario by several major drainage courses including Johnson and Marsh Creeks. These creeks extend easterly into Orleans County. Fish and Golden Hill Creeks and their tributaries are also important creek corridors through the Town of Somerset. (See Map 2: Environmental Features)

Natural drainage within the Town of Somerset is provided by two separate drainage basins: the Golden Hill Creek basin and the Johnson Creek basin. The Golden Hill Creek divides the Town in half, running from the extreme southwest corner of the Town to the northeast corner through Golden Hill State Park. All land south of Golden Hill Creek and land for a parallel distance of approximately 1,000 feet north drains toward Golden Hill Creek. All land lying generally north of a line 1,000 feet north of Golden Hill Creek, and below an elevation of 330 feet, drains to the north into Fish Creek or one of its tributaries, or a small west branch of Golden Hill Creek. There are two small exceptions. An area on the AES Somerset property drains directly into Lake Ontario and a portion of the southeast corner of the Town drained by Marsh Creek lies within the Johnson Creek basin. The upstream area of the Johnson Creek basin lies in the Town of Hartland, and its downstream basin area is in Orleans County.

As the Town of Somerset shares its drainage basins with other towns, it does not have complete control over its drainage problems. The Town itself may develop and put into effect sound policies to prevent drainage problems, only to have such problems arise through inappropriate regulation by upstream towns. The importance of this situation is such that it should be the basic policy of the Town to coordinate its drainage system planning efforts with those of other towns which share its drainage basins.

As noted above, the Town of Somerset is crossed by a number of creeks, the most significant one being Golden Hill Creek. These creeks not only serve an important drainage function, but also provide attractive natural settings and offer opportunities for recreation. Golden Hill Creek and Fish Creek have experienced some salmon runs, and may have the potential to become an attraction for sport fishing. The goals and policies section of the comprehensive plan suggests specific policies to guide local decision making in order to protect the creek from the adverse effects of development. The implementation of these policies would allow these waterways to maintain their important natural purposes, their environmental attractiveness, and their recreational potential.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) issued new Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) for the Town of Somerset in 2010, replacing the maps from 1982. The FIRMs delineate flood hazard boundaries which provide the basis for the implementation of the regular program phase of the National Flood Insurance Program within the Town. The flood hazard areas (100 year floodplains) are depicted in general form on Map 2 and include the Lake Ontario shoreline, much of the land along Golden Hill Creek and land near the outlet of Fish Creek. Map 2 should be used only for general planning purposes. Persons interested in determining the exact locations of the flood hazard boundary areas should refer to the official map on file at the Town Clerk's office, particularly in regard to the need for flood insurance for a property.

In order for property owners to take advantage of the National Flood Insurance Program, the Town Board is required to adopt federally approved floodplain management regulations to manage land use and development within the designated flood hazard areas. Flood hazard regulations were developed as part of the Town's Coastal Energy Impact Program

and incorporated into the Town's zoning ordinance. Had the Town failed to enact such provisions, property owners within designated flood hazard areas would lose their eligibility to receive federal flood insurance. No federally insured mortgage money would be available to buyers within the Town and federal funds would be withheld.

Under the New York State Freshwater Wetlands Act, DEC has prepared a wetlands map for Niagara County. A wetlands map for the Town of Somerset is on file and the Town has adopted a wetlands law. There are large areas of wetlands in the southern portion of the Town near the Town of Hartland. All mapped state-regulated wetlands are in the southern part of Somerset. Additional areas of wetlands under federal jurisdiction are located throughout the Town, as depicted on Map 2. Map 2 illustrates federal and state wetlands that have been mapped. There may be additional areas of unmapped wetlands located in the Town of Somerset.

This Comprehensive Plan sets basic Town policies for protecting the Town's important drainage features: the creeks, the floodplains and the wetlands. The policies, carried out through effective regulation, are intended to protect the public interest from the adverse effects of development that disregards the drainage system. There are many benefits associated with protecting drainage features. By acting as a natural sponge to trap stormwater, snowmelt and other surface waters, they reduce the volume and speed of run-off. This protects areas from negative impacts associated with flooding and helps reduce risk of erosion. They add natural beauty to the Town, and provide important habitats for wildlife. Avoiding development in floodplains prevents risks associated with serious flood damages. Too often the public at large bears the cost of development which disregards the drainage system by having to pay for engineering and public works measures to reduce the risk of flood damages. These costs and potential damages can be minimized by establishing proper natural resource policies to guide local development actions. These policies may best be utilized by providing the basis for establishing a master plan for drainage.

Generalized Soil Characteristics

The study of soil characteristics constitutes another important determinant of future development potentials. The ability of local soils to sustain development greatly affects the nature and intensity of development in the Town. Of primary importance is the ability of soils to facilitate surface water runoff. To an extent, this capability is related to and dependent upon local topographic conditions. Surface water drainage is more difficult to manage in areas that are relatively flat. In these areas, soil composition must accommodate a greater percentage of this surface water through seepage, or the cost of storm water drainage becomes extremely expensive. In areas where septic tanks are utilized, residential development must be kept at a density that permits the proper percolation of septic tank effluent. The ability of soils to accept sanitary sewage effluent is very important if an area is to remain free from health problems.

The majority of land within the Town of Somerset will continue to be utilized for agriculture and rural uses over the next 20 years. Therefore, the land's suitability for agricultural use is of continuing and perhaps increased importance. As other areas are consumed for development, fewer areas remain for agricultural production. Any area that is well suited to food production from a soil, climatic, and available land standpoint, should be considered as much for its inherent agricultural qualities as for its capability to support what may be unnecessary urban sprawl.

The primary source of information for soil data is the publication "Uses of Soils for Community Development and Recreation Use," prepared by the U.S. Department of Agriculture at the Niagara County Soil Conservation Service. The soil types within Somerset and Barker have

been grouped into categories and simplified for presentation purposes. The basis for these classifications is drainage conditions and topography. It should be understood that the soil description which follows is general in nature, and if any questions arise for a specific area, a more detailed on-site soil survey would be required. Table 1 summarizes this information on soils in Somerset. In addition, Map 3: Agriculture District and Generalized Soils, provides information on the soil types within the Town.

Soils within the Town vary greatly because of their initial creation as glacial drift deposits mixed with alluvium from the prehistoric recession of Lake Ontario. Although deposits of gravel are common in glacial formations, most of the soils in Somerset are alluvial deposits of silt and are heavy textured. Silts in particular have a soil composition in which moisture cannot be retained and a tight structure through which water cannot pass. This impervious soil structure, which inhibits the absorption of moisture, can be found in many areas of the Town, but is particularly evident in the swampy area in the southeast section, in the vicinity of Carmen, Johnson Creek and the Hartland-Somerset Town Line Roads.

The majority of soils in the Town can be productive if they have good natural drainage or can be mechanically drained by tile lines or ditches. With adequate drainage, only one of the numerous soil types found within the Town is of limited agricultural value. High soil suitability for grain crops, fruits, and some vegetables coupled with late springs and long falls (typical along Lake Ontario) combine to provide better growing conditions than in most other areas within the state. These two natural phenomena help to explain the relative stability that farming has had in the Town of Somerset. According to the U.S. Census of Agriculture, in 2007, the most recent year available, there were 59 farms in operation in the 14012 zip code, which corresponds roughly to the Town of Somerset. There were 865 farms across Niagara County in that year, and increase of 8 percent since 2002, when there were 687 farms in the county.

While there has been a national trend toward larger and larger farms, the trend in Niagara County is toward moderate sized farms (this may be misleading as more acreage is being rented and separate parcels may all be rented by a single farmer) In Niagara County, the average number of acres per farm was 185 acres in both 1997 and 2002. In 2007, it dropped to 165 acres. Most farms in the county are 10 to 48 acres (37 percent) or 50 to 179 acres (37 percent) in size. In 2007, the value per farm was \$351,933, and the value per acre was \$2,134.

As can be seen in Table 1, most of the soils in the Town will not readily accept dense urban development patterns without the extensions of water and sewer lines, because of high water tables and impermeable soils. The existing sewer-served areas of the Village and Town contain sufficient capacity to more than accommodate the needs for future growth during the next ten to twenty years. Growth will benefit the public investments in sewer and water lines costs if it is concentrated within the existing sewer and water district areas. Not only will adding customers within the districts help permit less costly district charges and maintenance costs for landowners, it will indirectly stabilize and enhance the area's agricultural economy by reducing the potential of scattered residential development throughout farming areas. Concentrating residential development largely within the sewer district will also help promote a sense of community and stronger neighborhood ties that cannot be created by scattered sprawl development along major highways.

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Table 1
Generalized Soil Limitations
Town of Somerset, Niagara County, NY

Predominant Soil Types	Slope	Erosion	Capabilities for Septic	Capabilities: Home Sites	Capability for Agricultural Production
Total Town Area					
Type 44	0-2% 2-6%	Little to none Slight	Severe- a, d	Moderate- a	Highly suitable with drainage
Type 86	0-2%	Little to none	Severe- d	Moderate- a	Suitable, most crops
Type 46	A	Little to none	Severe- a, d	Severe- a	Suitable with drainage
Type 93	0-2% 2-6%	Little to none Slight	Severe- a, d	Severe- a	Suitable with drainage
Type 85	0-2%	Little to none	Severe- d	Moderate- a	Suitable, most crops
Type 71	0-2% 2-6%	Little to none Slight	Moderate- a, b	Moderate- a	Highly suitable, most crops
Type 112	0-2%	Little to none	Severe- a, c, d	Severe- a, c	Limited suitability
Type 88	0-2%	Little to none	Severe- a, d	Severe- a	
Lakeshore Area					
Type 93	0-2% 2-6%	Little to none Slight	Severe- a, d	Severe- a	Suitable with drainage
Type 44	2-6%	Slight	Severe- a, d	Moderate- a	Highly suitable with drainage
Type 86	2-6%	Slight	Severe- d	Moderate- a	Suitable, most crops
Type 63	0-2%	Little to none	Severe- a, d	Severe- a	Suitability, with drainage
Along Creeks					
Type 2	0-2%	Little to none			Highly suitable, most crops

NOTES:

- a. Seasonal high water table, generally 1½ to 2 feet below the surface
- b. Severe pollution hazard
- c. Shallow bedrock: 1 to 3 feet
- d. Slow permeability at depths of 8" to 2 feet

Source: *Uses of Soils for Community Development of Recreational Use*, Soil Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Niagara County, NY—taken from *Comprehensive Plan-Town of Somerset and Village of Barker*, 1972.

Woodlands

Woodlands are important environmental features of the Town of Somerset that merit some degree of protection from development. Woodlands provide attractive natural settings, offer important habitats for wildlife and contribute to the rural character of the Town.

According to an inventory by the Niagara County Environmental Management Council (EMC), the Town of Somerset had 6,091 acres of woodlands in 1978, covering about one-fourth of the total land areas of the Town. Some 4,400 of these acres were in brushland,

while the remaining acres were in mature woodland. There are areas of “old growth” forest with trees dating back to the 19th century in the Town. One such location is the 5.3 acre area behind the Town Hall (see appendix for a NYSDEC report on this site). Much of the brush land will eventually mature, adding to the forest resources of the Town. A comparison of the EMC inventory with a comparable inventory by the State of New York in 1968 indicates that the area of brush land in the Town increased by about 1,200 acres between 1968 and 1978. This trend could be due to the retirement of land from farm production, or may be due to differences in methodologies. The 1978 inventory of woodland has never been updated, and the current status of woodlots in the Town must be estimated. Based on aerial photographs of the Town, it is estimated that the amount of land coverage in woodlands has decreased since 1978, to an estimated 15 to 20 percent of the Town. Map 4: Aerial Imagery is an aerial photograph of the Town of Somerset. Wooded areas can be seen as dark green on this map. As can be seen on the aerial, this loss of woodlands is not due to residential or commercial development. A current acreage of woodlands has not been calculated.

Coastal Zone/Waterfront Areas

One of the most important environmental features in the Town of Somerset is its coastal zone, the Lake Ontario shoreline. This area is regulated through the New York State Coastal Zone Management Program. In 2005, the Town completed a Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP), which enabled stronger local control over development in the coastal zone. The LWRP provides a complete inventory of Somerset’s coastal area and its assets. It establishes local policies and programs to guide development in this important area, and identifies preferred future land uses and project for the waterfront area.

The 2005 LWRP identified a number of issues affecting the coastal zone in the Town of Somerset:

- Industrial and commercial properties account for a significant amount of the land area within the Local Waterfront Revitalization Area (LWRA). The AES power plant is a major property owner, with control over ¼ of the Town’s shoreline.
- There are a number of vacant or undeveloped properties that could be subject to development pressures.
- There is public sewer along the western end of the LWRA, but there are dense areas of residential development with no public sewer.
- Shoreline erosion is a major problem. The coastal area is characterized by steep bluffs that are highly susceptible to erosion. Existing shoreline protection structures are in various states of disrepair.
- Waterfront access is limited to Golden Hill State Park. The Village’s Barker Bicentennial Park offers views of the lake, but topography precludes access to the water.

Since the LWRP was prepared, the former AES power plant has experienced economic difficulties. It entered bankruptcy in 2012 and was sold. The power plant is a major property owner in the Town and along the lakeshore, as well as the largest taxpayer in Somerset and Niagara County, and the future of the former AES property is of major concern to the Town. The primary concern is the potential economic impacts of the potential loss of this industry. The Town is also interested in preserving the future potential of the “Multiple Use Plan” for waterfront lands owned by AES. As part of the Coastal Energy Impact Program many years ago, the Erie and Niagara Counties Regional Planning Board prepared a multiple use plan for a portion of the Somerset power plant site. The development program included a variety of recreation activities, such as active play areas, picnic grounds, water based recreation, and a nature trail, that were designed to take advantage of the lakefront, its scenic vistas and associated resources. Although there are no immediate plans to implement this multiple

use plan, the Town wants to retain these concepts for potential future implementation. The development of the multiple use concepts would expand public access to the shoreline and increase recreational options in the Town.

The waterfront area also includes important stream corridors, fishing habitats and is an important International Bird corridor and area for migrating birds. With regards to this important bird corridor and migratory area, a recent US Fish and Wildlife Service study utilizing radar has developed a tremendous amount of information about the bird populations in the Great Lakes area. Based on this study, the US Fish and Wildlife Service has recommended that no wind turbines be built within three (3) miles of a Great Lakes shoreline. Other organizations, based on this study have recommended greater setbacks; five (5) to ten (10) miles.

Another extremely important and unique component of the Town's "Recreation/Tourism" opportunities and of the Town's Waterfront is the location of the Great Lakes Seaway Trail in the Town. This scenic driving route connects Lake Erie, the Niagara River, Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River in New York and Pennsylvania. It is a National Scenic Byway that includes unique historical locations and cultural heritage sites in addition to outstanding views and scenic vistas.

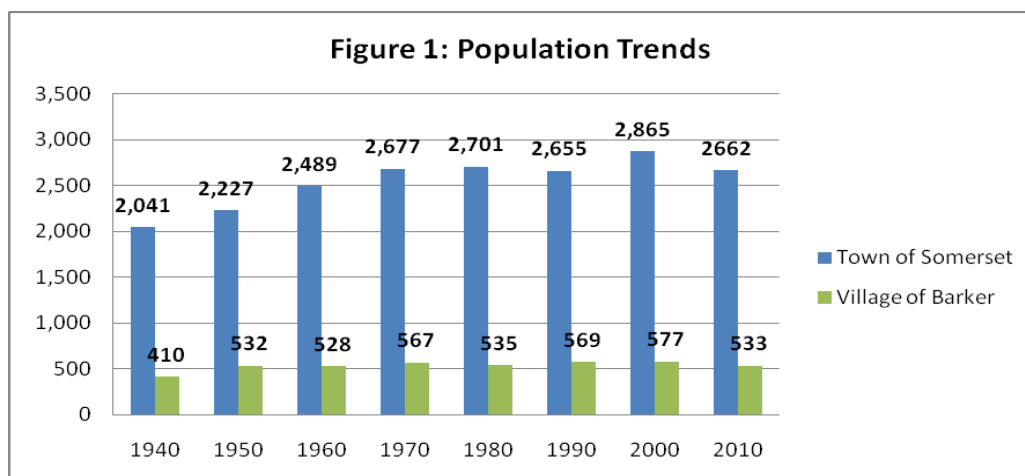
C. THE CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

The cultural environment of the Town of Somerset is made up of its people, its land uses, and its public facilities. This section of the document addresses these issues.

Population and Housing

The metropolitan area, which consists of Erie and Niagara Counties, has experienced a decline in population over the past decades. Between 1990 and 2010, the total population of the two county region decreased from 1,189,288 to 1,135,509, a drop of 4.5 percent over the past twenty years. Much of the decline resulted from losses in Erie County, which lost 5.1 percent of its population, compared to Niagara County, which lost 1.9 percent. While the region is still losing population, the steep decreases experienced in the 1970's have moderated. Between 2000 and 2010, Niagara County lost 1.5 percent of its population, and Erie County lost 3.3 percent. Population projections prepared by the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council indicate that Niagara County will increase in population to 245,930 by the year 2030, an increase of 13.6 percent, or approximately 29,500 persons. These figures, prepared to assure adequate capacity for transportation planning purposes, are generally considered optimistic.

Population trends for the Town of Somerset are depicted in Figure 1 and Table 2. The Town grew steadily between 1940 and 1980, increasing from 2,041 to 2,701 (32 percent). In the 1980s, the population dropped slightly (-1.7 percent), followed by strong growth between 1990 and 2000, when the population increased by 7.0 percent. These increases were essentially erased in the past decade (2000 to 2010). The population in 2010 (2,662) is essentially the same as it was in 1990 (2,655). The American Community Survey's 2010-2014 estimate shows the Town's population increasing to 2,718, but the margin of error is +/- 165. For the purposes of this update, it is assumed that population has remained stable. In contrast, the Village of Barker has maintained a relatively stable population. In 2010, the Village had nearly the exact same population as in 1950.



The number of households in the Town of Somerset decreased slightly over the past 10 years. There are currently 988 households in the Town, compared to 1000 in 2000. This represents a decrease of 1.2 percent over the past decade. In Barker, the number of households remained essentially unchanged, with the loss of one household between 2000 and 2010, to a total of 210 households in 2010.

**Table 2
Population Trends**

Population	Town of Somerset		Village of Barker		Town outside Village	
1940	2,041		410		1,631	
1950	2,227		532		1,695	
1960	2,489		528		1,961	
1970	2,677		567		2,110	
1980	2,701		535		2,166	
1990	2,655		569		2,086	
2000	2,865		577		2,288	
2010	2,662		533		2,129	
Change/Trends:						
	Town of Somerset		Village of Barker		Town outside Village	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1940-1950	186	9.1%	122	29.8%	64	3.9%
1950-1960	262	11.8%	-4	-0.8%	266	15.7%
1960-1970	188	7.6%	39	7.4%	149	7.6%
1970-1980	24	0.9%	-32	-5.6%	56	2.7%
1980-1990	-46	-1.7%	34	6.4%	-80	-3.7%
1990-2000	210	7.9%	8	1.4%	202	9.7%
2000-2010	-203	-7.1%	-44	-7.6%	-159	-6.9%

Source: US Bureau of the Census

	1990	2000	2010	Change: 1990-2010		Change: 2000-2010	
Households							
Somerset (all)	940	1,000	988	48	5.1%	-12	-1.2%
Barker	218	211	210	-8	-3.7%	-1	-0.5%
Somerset (part)	722	789	778	56	7.8%	-11	-1.4%

Source: US Bureau of the Census

As the table above illustrates, population decline exceeds household loss. This is due to the fact that average household size has been declining throughout the country, and Somerset has also experienced this trend. The decline has been due to a reduction in the birth rate, combined with an increase in single person households, separations and divorces. The effect of this trend has been to create a demand for new housing, even in communities that have experienced a stable population. As the population ages and the number of single person households continues to increase, this trend is expected to continue. In Somerset, the average size of a household in 2010 was 2.68 persons, which is significantly lower than it was in 2000. Village patterns parallel Town trends: in Barker, the average size of households increased from 2.62 persons in 1990 to 2.85 persons in 2000, then fell back down to 2.54 in 2010.

Table 3
Household Size Trends

	Town of Somerset	Village of Barker
1990	2.84 persons per hh	2.62 persons per hh
2000	2.85	2.85
2010	2.68	2.54

In addition, the number of housing units has been steadily increasing. In 1970, there were 927 housing units in the Town. By 2010, the number had increased to 1,141, representing a growth of 23.1 percent over the past forty years. This is partly due to increased numbers of second homes, and a larger proportion of unoccupied units in the Town. This growth continued modestly in the past decade (9 net new units), even while population and household numbers decreased.

Existing Land Use Analysis

The study and analysis of existing land uses within a community is one of the fundamental elements of a comprehensive planning program. A comprehensive plan will assess the patterns and relationships of existing land use, providing guidance for making decisions on how to address zoning, potential future growth and how land is developed. Land use can be classified into several generalized categories. The categories include:

Agricultural/Active Farmland - Land which is currently under cultivation or producing a crop directly related to sustaining farming operations. Included are pasture land, hay fields, field crops (wheat, oats, etc.), wood lots, and associated lands that are part of an active operation, including fallow fields.

Residential- Land containing one or more dwelling units, including seasonal housing and mobile homes. (A dwelling unit is a group of rooms in which a family lives, independent of any other unit.) Residential land use can be further categorized as single family, multi-family, multiple residential (e.g. institutions), or rural residential (very low density).

Commercial/Business - Land where goods or services are offered for sale to the public. Examples include grocery stores, offices, gasoline stations, etc.

Industrial - Land where a product is manufactured, fabricated, constructed, stored or assembled, or any combination of industrial activities including product or material handling, storage or treatment including the extraction of natural resources from their parent site, and research related activities that lead to the development or refinement of industrial products.

Government/Public Facilities - Land with or without structures, which is used or maintained by a governmental or institutional organization for the benefit of the residents of the community. Included are schools, churches, fire stations and libraries.

Parks/Outdoor Recreation - Land with or without structures, which is used for both active and passive recreational purposes by the public. Included are state and local parklands.

Vacant and Other Underdeveloped Land - Land which is currently not being used or is not suitable for active farming operations. Included are wooded areas, freshwater wetlands, forests, outlands and water bodies.

Utilities/Infrastructure – Land used for various utilities uses, such as pipelines, rail and electric transmission lines.

There have been some changes in land use in the Town of Somerset over the past decades, but generally, the Town remains predominately a rural and agricultural community. The construction of the Somerset Power Plant entailed the purchase of 1800 acres in the 1970s. More recently, there have been modest increases in residential development. Most of the residential development has been low densities, although there are areas of more concentrated residential development in the Village of Barker, in the hamlet of Somerset at the intersection of Lake Road and Quaker Road, and in some areas along the lakeshore. Certain streets, such as Quaker Road between the Village of Barker and the hamlet of Somerset, have experienced strip frontage development for residential uses. Elsewhere, residential development is scattered at a fairly low density along the frontage of highways. Other large land users include the Somerset power plant, which occupies nearly 1,100 acres of land, representing the vast majority of industrial land in the Town. Golden Hill State Park is another large parcel.

Much of the Town of Somerset is included in state-designated agricultural districts, as shown in Map 3: Agricultural District and General Soils. The exception is the southeast portion of the Town, which is characterized by woodlands and wetlands. The agricultural district boundary is set by the Niagara County Legislature and the State Department of Agriculture and Markets pursuant to the provisions of Article 25 AA of the State Agriculture and Markets Law, and represents lands that consist primarily of viable farming soils. By being located within a designated agricultural district these lands receive an extra layer of protection from development. The district was created as a means of stabilizing farming in the county, to protect agricultural investments and to encourage expansion of farmland wherever possible. Local land use policies should complement the objectives of the agricultural districting program in order to support farmland preservation. Current land uses based on assessment data are shown on Map 5: Existing Land Use.

Land Use Controls

Two of the major tools in controlling land use in a community are zoning and subdivision regulations. The Town of Somerset has regulations for both; Chapter 171 - Subdivision of Land, and Chapter 205 - Zoning. Both are found in the Code of the Town of Somerset, which have been codified with all the codes of the Town.

Subdivision Regulations

The Town's subdivision regulations are fairly standard regulations, with procedures for both minor subdivisions (4 or less lots, not involving public infrastructure improvements or extensions), and major subdivisions (more than 4 lots). A minor subdivision approval is a two

step process: sketch plan and minor subdivision plat review. A major subdivision requires three steps: sketch plan, preliminary plan review, and final plat review.

The remainder of the subdivision code sets forth plan specifications, development standards, required improvements and penalties. The regulations do not include any creative subdivision techniques such as rural cluster development (see zoning code for cluster development regulations) or other rural development regulations.

Zoning

The zoning code of the Town is also a fairly standard code, including sections on the following: nonconforming uses, the zoning districts, supplemental regulations (including cluster developments and planned unit developments), parking regulations, site plan review, administration and enforcement, and Board of Appeals.

Zoning in the Town includes four residential categories (agricultural, single-family, single and two family, and a lake shore residential district), one business, two industrial zones (industrial and general industrial), and a mixed use floating zone, PUD. The R-2 district allows medical centers or clinics by special use permit, and the "planned business areas" of the code encourages PUD's in the R-2 district.

The Town has kept its zoning map in general conformance with the goals and objectives of the community. In 2001, several zoning revisions were enacted in keeping with this vision. These zoning map amendments included the following:

- Making all lands within 500' of the high bank of Lake Ontario either "residential lake shore" or agricultural (excluding the power plant site).
- Removal of some isolated commercial zonings in areas no longer commercial in nature.
- Removal of some industrial zoning in areas that are agricultural in nature, and making them agricultural zoning.
- Adding consistency in the industrial zoned areas by adding some railroad property back into the industrial zone.
- Adding a PUD designation over the AES power plant site, acknowledging the present uses on the property. The PUD allows many types of uses, but any changes to the property would require a zoning amendment (new PUD designation). The western portion of the AES property was not zoned PUD, and it was stated that it would not be rezoned to PUD until a plan for the property was submitted and accepted.

A copy of the Town's zoning map is included in this report as Map 6: Existing Zoning.

In general the Town's zoning map represents that land use vision of the community, and the code only needs minor updates to provide better direction to developers in the Town. The code was updated in 2000 with improvements made to the "I" and "GI" districts, site plan review regulations, parking regulations, and the PUD category.

Other Codes

Other codes in the Town of Somerset that affect land use in the Town are as follows: "Bed and Breakfast establishments", "Campgrounds and Vehicle Parks", "Environmental Quality Review", "Excavations", and "Mobile/Manufactured Homes". The Town also updated the Wind Energy Law in 2016 and is presently working on a Solar Law.

- "Bed and Breakfast establishments" are allowed by special use permits throughout the Town.
- "Campgrounds and Vehicle Parks" establishes a yearly permit requirement for these uses that are allowed in an agricultural district by special use permit.
- "Environmental Quality Review" is the SEQR (State Environmental Quality Review) requirement for all development projects in the Town (this code is outdated).
- "Excavations" regulates excavation activities in the Town.
- "Mobile/Manufactured Homes" establishes standards for these types of uses which are allowed by special use permit in agricultural districts (controlled by yearly license).
- The updated Wind Energy Law (§205.43.5 of the Code of the Town of Somerset) was enacted in 2016 to regulate the placement of commercial and industrial wind energy conversion systems in accordance with the goals and objectives of the 2012 Comprehensive Plan and the Goals and Objectives of the Town.

In addition, the Town has adopted a "Right to Farm" law intended to support agricultural use in the Town, and protect agricultural operations from nuisance complaints.

Transportation

As a predominantly rural town, the Town of Somerset has a relatively simple roadway system. Route 18 is the principal east-west route in the Town, and Route 148 is the main north-south route. Both are state highways, as is County Line Road south of Route 18. All other roadways in Somerset are under local or county jurisdiction. Primary east-west roadways include Lower Lake Road, Haight Road, West Somerset/Coleman Roads and Town Line Road. North-south routes include Hosmer Road, Hartland Road, Quaker Road, Johnson Creek Road and Carmen Road. During the construction of the power plant, Hartland Road was rebuilt as a heavy haul road.

Traffic counts indicate that Route 18 (Lake Road) and Hartland Road (CR 108) experience the most traffic in the Town. According to statistics provided by the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC), the average daily traffic along Lake Road is in the range of 1,200 to 1,400 vehicles per day. On Hartland Road, the most recent traffic counts indicate volumes of 1,200 vehicles per day. Traffic counts have been declining slightly: in 2001, traffic counts along ranged from around 1,400 to 1,500 vehicles daily on these two roadways. Traffic volumes are very low on other roadways in Town. On roadways where traffic counts were taken, average annual daily traffic (AADT) is 700 vehicles per day or less.

An active rail line runs through the western end of the Town, providing access to the Somerset power plant. The railroad right-of-way continues eastward through the Town, but this portion of the rail line is in private ownership and is not in operation. There is no public transportation service in Somerset. According to the Buffalo-Niagara bicycle route map (2010) prepared by the GBNRTC, Lake Road and Hartland Road are designated on-road bicycle routes. They are rated as in "acceptable" condition. Quaker Road north of Lake Road and Lower Lake Road are designated as a "Local Bicycle Connector", tying the Village to the State Park.

Major transportation features, including available traffic counts, are shown on Map 7: Transportation. 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. The year that each traffic count was taken, which ranges from 1993 to 2010, is also shown on the map.

Community Facilities

The availability of efficient municipal services contributes to quality of life and can be seen as an essential component of a successful community. This portion of the comprehensive plan analyzes existing community facilities in Somerset and their physical condition to determine what deficiencies may exist. The following facilities and services were studied:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Parks and Recreation | 6. Educational Facilities |
| 2. Fire Protection | 7. Water Supply & Distribution |
| 3. Police Protection | 8. Sanitary Sewerage System |
| 4. Administrative Facilities | 9. Storm Water |
| 5. Public Library | 10. Refuse Disposal System |

These features are illustrated on Map 8: Community Features and Infrastructure.

1. Parks and Recreation

The need for recreation space is an important component of any community. Space for people of all age levels to enjoy recreational pursuits is an important part of our daily life. The Town of Somerset has a number of recreational lands within its borders.

There is one Town-owned Park and recreation facility in the Town of Somerset, located on the Town Hall and Town highway garage complex at 8700 Haight Road. The site contains 17.5 acres of land, with approximately 15 acres in active recreation use. The park has softball diamonds, playground equipment areas, a basketball court, volleyball court, shuffleboard court, a horseshoe court and a multi-purpose building with a lunch stand and rest rooms used primarily for the baseball events on the site. There are also some nature trails.

The largest park facility in the Town is the Golden Hill State Park. This park is a 511-acre state-owned facility that contains a campground, nature trails, picnic areas and shelters, and playgrounds. The park is located on the Lake Ontario shoreline. The park's facilities include a state-operated boat launch, and the park offers public access to the lake for fishing, boating and other water-related recreational uses. A unique feature of this park is the Thirty-Mile Point Lighthouse, a historic lighthouse built in 1875. The lighthouse, which is listed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places, is a popular tourist attraction, and was featured on a US Postal Service postage stamp in 1995 as the representative for Lake Ontario in a series of lighthouse stamps. Excellent views of the Lake Ontario shoreline are available from this site.

There is potential for future park facilities. As part of the approval of the Siting Board in the mid-1970's granting NYSEG permission to build what is now known as the Somerset power plant, the power company was directed to work with local officials to prepare a multiple use plan for the site. The intent of the multiple use plan was to provide for the recreational needs of the community and to replace land previously designated by the Town for future recreation use. The staff of the Erie and Niagara Counties Regional Planning Board prepared a plan for approximately 30 acres of the power plant site. This plan, which was adopted by the Town Board, the Town Planning Board, the power company, and various regulatory agencies, provided for continued access to the lake and a combination of active and passive recreation uses to be implemented over a long term period.

The Town recognizes that the current status of the power plant is a barrier to implementation of the multiple use plan, and there is no immediate pressure for

additional recreational facilities in the Town. Also, in the event that the proposal was to move forward, the plan was prepared over thirty years ago and would need to be updated to reflect current needs. However, the Town wishes to retain its rights for the future in the event that conditions change. With the change in ownership of that property, it is important to preserve the vision of a portion of the power plant site being used for recreation and public access to the waterfront at some point in the future. The Village of Barker owns two park sites of approximately one acre each. One is at the intersection of Quaker Road and Main Street, and the other is at the north end of Quaker Road, on the lakefront. The sites are used primarily for passive recreation purposes, but include a seasonal ice skating rink. Also partially within the Village, the Barker Central School facilities provide active recreational lands and playground facilities, used extensively for school sport programs. There is also a nature trail on the school property. The school facilities are available to the residents of the entire community.

2. Fire Protection

The Town and Village are served by one volunteer Fire Company, the Barker Fire Department. One fire station, located on Quaker Road in the Village of Barker, serves the Town and Village. This station is conveniently accessible to most areas of the Town. It is especially well located in relation to the central business area of the Village.

As with most fire departments throughout the state, the Barker Fire Department is part of a countywide mutual aid fire protection plan. Under the mutual aid system other outside fire departments can be called in to fight fires in Barker and Somerset or cover for the Barker Fire Department, from throughout Niagara County. At present time, Olcott in Niagara County and Lyndonville in Orleans County are the most immediately available fire companies to provide equipment with travel times of approximately fifteen minutes to the Village.

Due to the remoteness of the Town, Mercy Flight is an important component of emergency services in the Town.

There are two major concerns in regard to fire protection in the Town. There is the need to continue to recruit volunteers to serve as fire fighters. A number of incentives have been developed to encourage new members to join. There is also a concern about an area of the lakefront where development is characterized by densely developed, wood-frame private cottages. The combination of limited accessibility, remoteness from the fire station and susceptible construction raises concerns regarding fire hazards in this area. The problem is particularly hazardous in the winter since many cottages are on private roadways which are not plowed in the winter. With this exclusion, the Town has good fire coverage. The Village and all Town roads have a public water system adequate for sustained fire defense. Other areas are protected by water available in farm ponds and creeks or by the fire department's pumper trucks and tank truck.

3. Police Protection

In the past, the town of Somerset contracted for police services from the Village of Barker. In 2012, the town voted to establish its own police department, which became operational in April 2012. The town of Somerset Police department provides law enforcement services throughout the entire Town, including the Village. The police force is not full-time but police constables are assigned strategically to patrol during the late afternoon and through early morning hours when call volume for police services is

typically greatest. Patrol is assigned each night of the week during the year and typically responds to approximately sixty percent of entire calls for service in the Town. The primary focus of the Town of Somerset Police Department is to protect life and property for Town residents and businesses. A heavy emphasis is placed upon physical areas, business, private property and house checks. The supplementary focus of the agency is to promote safe roadways for vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian traffic by enforcing vehicle and traffic law and conducting safety checks.

Additional police patrols within the Town and Village are provided on a twenty-four hour basis by the Niagara County Sheriff's Department and the New York State Police, either by routine road patrol or by telephoned requests from residents of the community. Through the cooperative efforts of these law enforcement agencies, the Town enjoys good quality police protection.

4. *Administrative Facilities*

The Town of Somerset Office Complex at 8700 Haight Road was opened in 1978 and enlarged in 1986. It is located on 17.5 acres of land, which also contains the Town's Highway Garage and Town Park facilities described earlier. The site is centrally located in the Town and is adjacent to the Village. The Town Hall complex represents a strong commitment by the Town to provide improved governmental services to its residents.

The Village's offices are located in the former railroad station with the Barker Library, on Main Street in the Village. The building is sound, the interior lighting and space is adequate and the patron parking immediately accessible. The building also houses other Village functions. The renovation has been tastefully designed and is a tribute to the residents of the Village and Town.

5. *Public Library*

The Barker Free Library is located on Main Street, sharing the former railroad station with the Village offices since 1969. A new addition to the building was constructed in 1990 to house the library's expanding collection. The addition of a children's library, completed in 2001, has further expanded the available space for the library and made it possible to offer a wider range of programming, including children's programs. In addition to books, the library provides reference materials, books-on-tape, magazines, videos, and public Internet access. It also houses a local history collection. The Friends of the Barker Free Library sponsors events and helps raise funds for the library.

In addition to its own collection, the Barker Free Library offers access to interlibrary service to all libraries in the Nioga Library System. The Nioga Library system includes all public libraries in Niagara, Orleans, and Genesee Counties, and has access to other reference data throughout the state. Participation in the Nioga Library system increases accessibility to a wider range of materials for residents of Barker.

6. *Educational Facilities*

Barker Central School, located at the intersection of Haight and Quaker Roads, provides public school facilities for the children in the Towns of Somerset, Hartland, Yates, Ridgeway, and a portion of the Town of Newfane. The school originally covered less than one-quarter its present physical plant size, and considerably less than the present site. Enrollment has been dropping. In 2004, it was approximately 1200 students, while in 2010-2011 there were 937 students. Current year enrollment (2012/2013 school year) is 885

students, with 50 students in the entering Kindergarten class. The school district has 150 employees, including 86 teachers.

The Barker Central School site has been developed into a central campus school, with all grades, K-12, attending at one location. The school has adequate space to accommodate its students and programs. The school site presently extends from Haight Road southward to the Penn Central railroad right-of-way then easterly to Golden Hill Creek and the rear property of houses facing Quaker Road. The site includes the old Trade School Airport. There is adequate space for any future expansion that may be needed. Current enrollments are below the district's rated capacity. It is anticipated that any future increase in enrollment of school students from Somerset and adjacent areas could be assimilated into the existing facilities without major renovations or new construction.

7. Water Supply And Distribution

At the present time, all of the Village of Barker and all of the Town of Somerset are served by public water from the Niagara County Water District. Service is provided to Barker through a 10-inch line located on Quaker Road, which connects to a 24-inch line coming easterly on NYS Route 31 from the direction of Lockport. There are also two 10-inch water mains located along Route 18 and West Somerset Road that tie into the Town of Newfane, which are part of the Niagara County Water District. In general, the Town is well interconnected to the Towns of Newfane and Hartland, and the water system is up-to-date and in good condition. Water is now supplied to the Town of Yates through interconnection off of County Line Road. Areas of the Town served by public water lines are depicted in Map 8: Community Facilities and Infrastructure.

8. Sanitary Sewer Service

The Somerset-Barker Sewer District was created in 1977, with construction commencing in 1978. The system, serving the central area of Somerset and the entirety of the Village of Barker, extends north to Lake Ontario and west, north of the Lake Road as depicted in Map 8. The Sewer District was extended around 1980 to provide domestic sewerage treatment to the power plant.

The sewage treatment system has sufficient surplus capacity to meet projected population growth. The sewage treatment plant is located on a 40-acre tract of land on the southwest corner of the intersection of Lower Lake Road and Quaker Road, with an outfall into Lake Ontario east of Camp Kenan.

9. Storm Sewers

The Village of Barker, storm water sewer system contains four independent tile systems, which deliver the surface water either directly to Golden Hill Creek, or to open drainage ways that empty into Golden Hill Creek. There are no public mechanical drainage systems in the Town of Somerset. However, storm runoff has not become a major problem because of proper highway construction and an annual program to maintain and clean ditches. This program has successfully minimized flood conditions and has helped to maintain the viability of active farmland.

Efforts must be continued to keep roadside ditches and culverts open and free from growth and debris. Further, drainage considerations must be included in all development proposals.

10. Refuse Collection And Disposal

Modern Disposal currently provides refuse collection and recycling services in the Town. Weekly curbside collection of household trash and recyclables is offered to Town residents. Residents may also put out one large item for pickup weekly. Electronic waste and tires can be disposed of at drop-off events at the wastewater treatment plant.

SECTION III

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals and objectives of a Comprehensive Plan articulate priorities for the Town of Somerset. These goals and objectives express the Town's Vision for its future, and as such, they provide guidance for policy makers regarding the preferred direction for development and other activities in the Town.

The goals and objectives delineated here represent a written statement of the manner in which the Town desires to see development directed. The goals are numbered in order of general importance and should be provided relative weight accordingly in any decision making process. In addition to assisting in the creation of laws, policies, rules, regulations and other Town actions, the statements provide a blueprint for the investment of public dollars for community facilities and services.

1. Maintain the Rural and Agricultural Character of the Town

- a. Foster agriculture through the adoption of land use regulations which encourage farming operations within the Town's agricultural areas.
- b. Promote policies and activities that foster the growth of farming and farming related activities and businesses.
- c. Concentrate future development within the existing sewer district and other targeted areas; protecting farmland from encroachment of non-agricultural uses.
- d. Strive to protect important features, such as woodlots. Wetlands and important views and features that contribute to the rural character and visual appeal of the Town.
- e. Protect the Town from Land Uses that do not support and maintain the Rural Character of the Town and the Vision expressed in this Plan.
- f. Promote standards for roadways and other infrastructure that are compatible with the character of the surrounding area, such as rural, agricultural, Village or lakefront areas.

2. Protect Important Environmental Resources from Adverse Effects

- a. The Town of Somerset encompasses a shoreline on Lake Ontario of unique natural beauty. Wherever feasible the shoreline should be preserved for the benefit of all Town residents, present and future. Where public preservation is not practical, private development must be carefully controlled and limited to specific areas.
- b. The Town's shoreline and areas surrounding this important waterfront area also include important environmental features including bluffs, wetlands, stream corridors and wildlife habitats including significant bird habitats and migratory bird areas. These features must also be protected and preserved.
- c. Coordinate drainage activities with those of neighboring towns that include the same drainage basins as the Town of Somerset, and carefully evaluate the effects on drainage of all proposals for development.
- d. Develop actions to protect the important natural systems identified in the Erie and Niagara Counties' Framework for Regional Growth document, other Regional Planning

documents and this Plan.

- e. Encourage the dedication of easements along creeks and other major drainage ways to protect their character, enhance environmental sustainability, allow for their maintenance and reduce the risk of flood damages.
- f. Maintain wetland areas in their natural state by controlling draining, filling, and development in these areas.
- g. Regulate development within flood hazard areas so as to minimize potential property damage from flooding.
- h. Strive to protect significant woodland areas.
- i. Support the policies and programs identified in the Town's Local Waterfront Revitalization Program, which regulate development in the coastal zone so as to minimize potential property damage from shoreline erosion and to afford increased public access to the shoreline.
- j. Protect the environment from pollution by carefully controlling waste disposal policies.

3. Create a vital and sustainable economy for the Town of Somerset that provides a strong tax base and jobs for our citizens.

- a. Promote rural economic development.
- b. In support of the Western New York Regional Strategy for Prosperity, target the appropriate industrial sectors for the Town of Somerset.
- c. Support, expand and diversify the agricultural economy in the Town.
- d. Promote the vitality and viability of existing businesses and industries in the Town and support their expansion efforts.
- e. Encourage entrepreneurship and local new business development.
- f. Identify underutilized sites and areas within the sewer district where economic development is appropriate and identify appropriate industrial sectors for those locations.
- g. Prioritize economic development opportunities in and around the Village of Barker and within the existing sewer district, supporting a seamless expansion of the Barker Rural Center.
- h. Evaluate strategic expansions to the sewer district to accommodate economic development opportunities consistent with the community's vision.
- i. Identify opportunities to foster and support agricultural support enterprises.
- j. Promote Agri-tourism in the Town and target the northeastern end of the Town for an area that will accommodate Agricultural uses, Agri-tourism uses and expansion of tourism opportunities (capitalizing on the existing State Park, the Seaway Trail and other waterfront features).

- k. Identify areas surrounding the Village appropriate for economic development opportunities that can promote connections between the Village and the Town, and encourage an expanded Rural Center.

4. Achieve a Pattern of Development which Minimizes Travel Time, Adheres to Smart Growth Principles and Establishes a High Standard of Design

- a. Concentrate residential development in areas that are highly accessible to employment opportunities, commercial services, and the Barker Central School.
- b. Concentrate commercial and industrial development within well-defined nodes.
- c. Support efforts to improve and build upon the commercial center of Barker where feasible.
- d. Require adequate landscape screening and separation between residential areas and non-residential uses to minimize land use conflicts and achieve high visual appeal.
- e. Achieve a high quality of design in residential subdivisions through such measures as cluster development, conservation subdivisions and rural design guidelines to protect natural features, conserve energy and reduce public service costs.
- f. Strive to have a variety of goods, services and facilities readily accessible to the residents of Somerset.

5. Meet the Housing Needs of the Community by providing for a Variety of Choices in New Housing and by Encouraging the Improvement of Existing Housing

- a. Provide sufficient land area in appropriate areas of the Town to meet the prospective demand for an appropriate variety of housing styles, including garden apartments, townhouses and other alternative forms of housing. Such development should be located in areas which provide active settings for such uses and be required to meet high standards of design and construction.
- b. In an effort to provide affordable housing and housing for seniors, encourage developers to take advantage of federal and state housing assistance programs, including programs which provide assistance for the construction of new single family and multi-family housing and rental assistance programs for existing housing.
- c. Maintain the integrity of residential areas by allowing only those uses which are compatible with the nature and intensity of neighboring residential use. Protect these residential areas from incompatible uses.
- d. Maintain and enhance the quality of the residential environment through programs to improve the existing housing stock.

6. Provide High Quality Community Facilities and Services at an Acceptable Cost to the Local Taxpayer

- a. Carefully plan capital improvements so as to avoid significant increases or fluctuations in the Town tax rate.
- b. Provide for adequate maintenance, repair and replacement of existing Town facilities,

including sewer and waterlines, Town buildings and cemeteries, parks, roads and drainage facilities.

- c. Expand the opportunities for recreation on the Lake Ontario shoreline.
- d. Improve and expand existing Town recreation facilities adjacent to the Town Hall consistent with local needs.
- e. Address drainage needs and issues in the Town.
- f. Work closely with County and State officials and advise them of local concerns, particularly with regard to improvements to Golden Hill State Park and County and State highways within the Town.
- g. Coordinate activities with the School District and assist them with providing education and other community services in a cost effective manner.
- h. Pursue intermunicipal agreements so as to provide community facilities and services in an efficient and cost effective manner.
- i. Support local efforts at economic development and grantsmanship in cooperation with the Regional Economic Development Council strategies.

7. Provide for the Future Movement of Traffic through the Town in a Safe and Efficient Manner

- a. Promote a safe system that reduces hazardous curves, misaligned intersections or other highway safety problems.
- b. Discourage "strip" development (road frontage development) that hinders the smooth flow of traffic.
- c. Support safe alternatives to vehicular traffic by encouraging the development of facilities and trails for pedestrians and bicyclists, particularly in the vicinity of the Village, the Barker-Somerset residential corridor and along the lakefront.
- d. Minimize, to the extent feasible, the number of individual access drives to highways in order to maintain their safety and carrying capacity.
- e. Encourage rural public transportation and other options.
- f. Connect the rural center of Barker to "developed area" destinations identified in the Framework for Regional Growth document.
- g. Help to minimize conflicts with agricultural use of the roadways and use for residential and business purposes.

SECTION IV FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This Section presents observations and findings for the Town of Somerset, based on an assessment of existing conditions, compared to the Town's preferred future as articulated in the Goals and Objectives. It has also been informed by input received from the public (including a survey of the Town residents on the issue of Wind Turbine development and a public hearing on 11/30/16 and 12/21/16), the 2012 Plan steering committee, the Town Board, and regional planning documents.

Following the observations are initial recommendations for each category. These recommendations represent the ideas for the direction that the community should take to move toward achieving its goals, based on input from the public the Town Board and the previous Comprehensive Planning efforts. This listing of "recommendations" has not been prioritized, but prioritization of goals is expressed in Section III of this document. This listing can be utilized as a "tool box" by the Town in establishing actions in the coming years. Some ideas may be long term or never utilized to implement the Plan.

The next section of this Comprehensive Planning document focuses on Implementation and Action Items that present specific activities that have been prioritized in the 2012 Plan and the 2016 Update. The Town can undertake these activities to help move toward achieving their Goals and Objectives. This section has been organized to parallel the goals for the Town. Because there is significant overlap and interrelationship among the goals, many issues could fall into more than one category. They have been cited in the section that seems most consistent with the intent, but clearly, findings and recommendations Items under one category may also be relevant for other categories.

Maintain the Rural and Agricultural Character of the Town

Observations:

- Agriculture remains a strong industry in Somerset and a major local employer. Between 2002 and 2007 (most recent year available), the number of farms in Niagara County grew from 801 to 865 (8 percent increase) according to the Census of Agriculture. Over the same time frame, the market value of agricultural products sold increased from \$59.9 million to \$103.6 million.
- The average size of a farm in Niagara County is 165 acres. The majority of farms fall between 10 acres and 179 acres in size, although there are some farms over 1,000 acres in size (It has been verbally reported and observed that the farms tend to be smaller in the Town of Somerset).
- Sales per farm in the County have been increasing. The average market value of products sold in 2007 was \$119,820 per farm, an increase of 60 percent over 2002 figures. Even after adjusting for inflation, the increase was significant: 50 percent.
- The amount of land in agricultural use in the County decreased by 4 percent. Approximately 80 percent of land in farms in the county is in cropland. Just under 10 percent is woodlands and 11 percent are other uses.
- There is a variety of farming in the Town. Information from the Town identifies 30 active farms in the Town, with specialties in livestock/beef (7); orchards/fruit trees (7); dairy (6); various vegetables (4); corn/ soybeans (3); and field crops/hay (3). Other types of farms represented in the Town include a cidery, a nursery and cash crops. Many farms are producing more than one type of product.

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- In the Town of Somerset, land use analysis confirms that the largest land use by acreage is agricultural and/or rural uses.
- While maintaining rural and agricultural character is a priority, there has been relatively minimal development pressure in the Town. Since 2005 (through 2011), the Town has issued building permits for 17 new residences, or an average of less than 3 homes per year.
- A large proportion of the Town falls within a State-designated Agricultural District (see map).
- Much of the active agricultural uses are in the northeast and southwest quadrants of the Town. The southeast quadrant is rural, with significant areas of wetlands and wooded areas, but it tends not to be in productive agricultural use.
- The Rural and Agricultural Character of the Town is primarily achieved through large acreages of farm fields, wooded areas and low density residential development patterns. The addition of large Industrial uses outside of targeted areas, such as Industrial Grade Wind Turbines, in inappropriate areas would be inconsistent with the rural character of the Town.
- Some have argued that the leasing of agricultural lands for wind turbines is good for farming as it offers another opportunity for improving farm incomes. Others have stated that this leasing of land only benefits the income of a few farmers, does not help actual farming, and has too many negative impacts on surrounding property owners and reduces other economic opportunities for the Town. Industrial Grade wind turbines are not protected under Agricultural laws as they are not agricultural uses.
- High energy costs are a factor for farms. Natural gas is not available everywhere in the Town. If more natural gas becomes available, energy costs may be significantly reduced. It would also be important to have three phase power and high speed internet available to more farmers and Town residents. The Town is working on a solar energy ordinance that would assist farmers with trying to offset power costs through the installation of solar panels.
- Agricultural support industries, such as Mayer Brothers, are also significant employers in the Town.
- While there is much talk about "Shovel Ready" in communities like Somerset, it is as important to consider how to be "Plow Ready".
- Road and Bridge Infrastructure: Local roads must have adequate width and shoulders to accommodate large farm machinery and bridges must be able to support the weight of this equipment.
- Drainage: Ditches and swales need to be operational and maintained, particularly in areas where soils are poorly drained.
- Utilities: in general, the sewer district falls outside areas within the Agricultural Districts.
- The current agricultural zoning district in the Town allows a wide range of uses by special use permit.
- Agricultural operations are currently supported by agencies such as the Niagara County Soil and Water District and the Cooperative Extension of Niagara County.

Recommendations:

- There needs to be adequate infrastructure in support of farming and farming related activities. This includes adequate roads, shoulders and bridges for large farm machinery as well as utilities required such as water, sewer (only in agricultural business areas), three phase power, natural gas and high speed internet access.
- More creative approaches to Agricultural zoning could allow other small businesses at farms (e.g. small engine repair). The Town should update the zoning code to allow a greater variety of appropriate uses on active farms. These non-agricultural uses should not have adverse impacts on adjoining properties or the Goals and Objectives of the Town.
- The Town should help find assistance to farmers to help make them profitable through efforts such as grants, advice, etc.
- The Town should investigate ways to help develop agricultural support industries.

- The Town should consider revisions to the Town's Agricultural zoning district to more carefully control uses on non-agricultural properties.
- The Town should consider adopting rural design guidelines.
- The Town's new wind law (enacted in 2016) is consistent with both the 2012 Comprehensive plan and this Update, and only new wind turbines meeting the substantive and procedural siting requirements of the law should be allowed (the law and any proposed projects requires conformance with the Town's Comprehensive Plan. See the Vision map and related sections of this Plan to see where these type facilities may or may not meet the Goals and Objectives of the Town).
- If any portion of the new wind law is found to be preempted by state or federal law, the remaining substantive requirements of the wind law should be followed to the greatest extent possible, to safeguard the Goals and Objectives of the Comprehensive Plan, including, most importantly, the protection of the character of the Town.
- The Town should amend its zoning map and code to reflect the Vision Map and the discussion of allowed uses in Section V, Paragraph D – Vision Plan.
- The Town needs to finalize and adopt a solar ordinance that will help to site solar installations (all forms) in appropriate areas of the Town and not impact its character or environmental resources.
- The Town should promote policies and activities that foster the growth of farming and farming related businesses, such as farm stands, farmers' markets, pick-your-own farms, wineries, etc.
- The Town should continue to support and fund the Niagara County Soil and Water District and the Cooperative Extension of Niagara County.

Achieve a Pattern and Quality of Development which Minimizes Travel Time, Adheres to Smart Growth Principles and Creates a High Standard of Design

Observations:

- The Town could use more local shopping opportunities, particularly for local convenience goods such as a local grocery store and a hardware store.
- New retail development should be focused primarily in Barker.
- Barker- Somerset Corners could be developed as a walkable/ bikeable Community.
- School enrollment is down and the local population is aging. Efforts should be made to find ways to keep people in town.
- The primary constraint for youths is the lack of job and business opportunities.
- A primary factor for elderly residents is the need for local health care; a shortage of appropriate housing for the elderly is another concern.
- The "Framework for Regional Growth" document strongly emphasizes Smart Growth principles, which are now required for major projects under State Law. The Framework:
 - ✓ Encourages re-using existing buildings and/or developing land in or around the Village.
 - ✓ Discourages the continued subdivision of rural road frontage.
 - ✓ Encourages the preservation of agriculture.
 - ✓ Mandates the concentration of growth to areas with existing sewer and water, and recommends reducing existing sewer district boundaries in areas where there are no sewer lines and no plans to extend them.
 - ✓ Recommends potential enhancements to the waterfront area.
- The "Framework for Regional Growth" identifies the Village of Barker as a Rural Service Center. As such, it is a location where redevelopment and infill growth is encouraged.
- The Town is located in the far northeast corner of Niagara County, with nearest population centers and major support services located in Lockport and Medina.

- The *Strategy for Prosperity* requires that for project approval or funding, the project must promote Smart Growth principles, and must target one or more of eight target industries, which include:
 - ✓ Advanced manufacturing;
 - ✓ Agriculture;
 - ✓ Bi-national logistics;
 - ✓ Energy;
 - ✓ Health and life sciences;
 - ✓ Higher education;
 - ✓ Professional services; and
 - ✓ Tourism.
- New development should be encouraged to locate adjacent to areas where there is already more concentrated development, including the Village of Barker and historic 'hamlet' centers. This policy will also help maintain the rural, scenic character of other areas of the Town.

Recommendations:

- Explore ways to accommodate more elderly housing. The expansion of Barker Commons may be one option.
- Assess whether lot sizes make sense (both in and out of the sewer district).
- The subdivision and zoning laws need to be assessed to determine if they are helping the Town achieve its goals. Consider revisions that support more creative housing options.
- Incentive zoning could be utilized to encourage growth in the appropriate areas.
- The Village is an important partner and should be involved with the planning effort.
- The Town and Village could support the following target industries in appropriate areas: agriculture, professional services, small scale energy or green energy uses in the appropriate areas, tourism, and, at some level, advanced manufacturing.

Meet the Housing Needs of the Community by Providing for a Variety of Choices in New Housing and by Encouraging the Improvement of Existing Housing

Observations:

- There is not a lot of diversity in regard to housing options in Somerset. The vast majority of housing is single-family homes. Census data indicate 86 percent of units are one-family units, with mobile homes making up an additional 4 percent of units in the Town.
- There is a demand for more affordable senior housing options. Support systems to allow seniors to remain safely and comfortably in their own homes are also lacking.
- Often the only alternative for a senior looking for a smaller housing type or supportive housing is to leave town.
- Lack of local health care options also affects seniors' ability to remain in the community.
- Many seniors do not drive and transportation alternatives are needed.
- There are 24 units at Barker Commons, which was built in the mid - 1980's. This property was originally for seniors only, but it has been suggested that a growing number of tenants are eligible non-senior tenants.
- It has been suggested that there could be interest in other types of housing products, such as easier to maintain patio homes.
- Much of the housing on the lakeshore has converted to year-round residences.
- The zoning of the Town allows one-family homes in Agriculture (A), Single-Family Residential (R-1), and Lake Shore Residential (RLS) districts. Two-family homes are allowed in the Single-

and Two-family Residential (R-2) district. Multi-family homes larger than doubles are not allowed in any zoning district in the Town.

- Areas of existing clusters of residential development should be protected from non-compatible land uses that would negatively impact property values or would impact the continuing viability of these residential hamlet type areas.
- Cluster residential developments are allowed in the A, RLS, R-1 and R-2 districts with a special use permit from the Town Board.
- The zoning code allows for residential Planned Unit Developments that allow business uses within the A district; however, the regulations require a minimum of 100 homes. Given building permit trends in the Town, a development that large is unlikely.

Recommendations:

- The Town should explore ways to encourage a greater variety of housing options. In particular, more options for seniors should be considered and encouraged.
- Support services for seniors, such as health care and social opportunities, are also lacking. Perhaps the Barker Commons could be expanded to assist in some way as a clinic and a gathering place.
- Programs to help homeowners maintain their properties could help improve the existing housing stock.
- More creative approaches to housing options could help diversify the housing stock.
- For seniors, supportive services may help them remain in their homes, and therefore in the Town of Somerset. For example, transportation services or visiting nurse services can help residents avoid having to move to supported housing, which means moving out of town.
- The Town should create a Zoning District to support multi-family housing and apply it in appropriate places.
- Continue to enforce and create new legislation that protects the denser areas of residential development.
- Consider the investigation of rural development guidelines or a “rural transect” to protect the rural areas of the Town and maintain the rural character.
- Improve the PUD and Cluster Development Laws.

Protect Important Environmental Resources from Adverse Effects

Observations:

- The Town has an adopted Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) to protect waterfront lands.
- The Local Waterfront Revitalization Area (LWRA) in the LWRP document was expanded to increase the area within the Town eligible for waterfront grants. However, parts of the expanded LWRA are distant from the shoreline. Since all development within the LWRA is subject to consistency review, this can create problems for projects on non-waterfront lands that fall within the LWRA.
- Shoreline erosion is a concern along portions of the Town’s waterfront.
- The south central and south eastern portions of the Town have significant environmental features such as wetlands and woodlots.
- A 1978 survey found that woodlands covered approximately 25 percent of the Town; more recent estimates suggest woodland coverage has declined to perhaps 15 to 20 percent of the Town.
- There are areas of significant woodlands in the Town. One such area is the area behind the Town Hall which has 5+ acres of old growth forest.
- It was noted in public meetings that there are other important woodland and other environmental features (salt springs, bald eagle habitats, etc.) that should be included in

mapping of the Town. These areas should be protected and potentially used in bringing visitors to the Town. Some of these sites are privately owned and therefore cannot be used for public purposes.

- Golden Hill Creek is the major drainage channel in the Town and an important environmental feature of the Town. It should be protected.
- Other creeks (Johnson, Fish and Marsh Creeks) also run through the Town and should be protected.
- The Town's waterfront and surrounding areas support an abundance of wildlife including an important international bird migratory corridor.
- The Town is split into two drainage basins. The northeastern part of the Town drains toward Lake Ontario, while the remainder of the Town drains southerly into the Johnson Creek basin in Hartland.
- Signage identifying the watersheds (drainage basins) could raise public awareness of watershed issues.
- There are areas of floodplains along the lakeshore and along Golden Hill Creek.
- There are five identified brownfield sites in the Town and Village, where former uses resulted in some level of contamination that inhibits redevelopment.
- One brownfield site, the former Barker Chemical site, is located in the Town outside the Village. Currently a study grant has been awarded through the County to review what has been accomplished to date, verify previous findings and make recommendations for future action and/or uses. The program is scheduled to be awarded to a private contractor in April with results by December of 2012. The contractor will be required to obtain local input during the study process.
- The Barker Chemical site is adjacent to the Barker Central School property, and also presents a potential risk to Golden Hill Creek.
- Currently, public access to the Lake is provided at two locations: the Village of Barker Park and Golden Hill State Park.
- There have been suggestions to expand the harbor and the boat launch facility at Golden Hill State Park.
- It has been noted that there are no docking facilities at Golden Hill State Park, which effectively prevents boaters from visiting the park.
- New flood plain maps have been prepared since the prior Comprehensive Plan was completed in 2004.
- New interconnection of water system at Hartland Road at Townline has improved available fire flows and provides backup supply source for the Quaker Road line.
- One interesting feature of the Town noted by residents is the "Dark Sky" nature of the Town. It has been reported that the International Dark Sky Association sees the Town as being very unique in this aspect.

Recommendations:

- The Town should inventory major ecological resources, important scenic areas and other valued environmental features within the Town (map features like the salt springs, old growth forest areas, historic structures, eagle nest areas, important swamps, etc.) so it has a good baseline of where important environmental features are located; so that they can be protected.
- The Town should consider creating a creek corridor overlay district for Golden Hill Creek, and possibly other creek corridors in the Town. These overlays would protect the environmental quality of these creeks by providing appropriate setbacks and instituting other protections within their watersheds.
- Consider protection measures for the south central / southeastern portion of the Town to protect important wetlands and woodlots in this area. All major types of development should be severely restricted in these areas.

- The Town should support activities and programs to redevelop the Barker Chemical site.
- Assess the local demand for lake access (survey residents).
- Consider joint planning with adjacent communities to promote effective drainage.
- Evaluate the LWRA to determine whether the expanded area is appropriate.
- Consider developing 'best practices' manual for landowners along sensitive resources (lakefront, creeks, wetlands, woodlands) for how to be proper stewards of these resources.
- Establish regulations that will protect these important stream corridors and highly restrict large scale users from these areas.
- Continue to support measures to help alleviate shoreline erosion.
- Increase public awareness of the location and importance of area watersheds.
- Review the Town's laws to ensure that they protect the significant wildlife habitats and migratory bird corridor.
- Development proposal should evaluate their impacts on the "dark sky" nature of the Town. Zoning Codes could be amended to address this issue.

Provide High Quality Community Facilities and Services at an Acceptable Cost to the Local Taxpayer

Observations:

- The Town Hall complex and other municipal facilities are currently providing adequate services to the Town's residents.
- As noted in the environmental section, drainage is a concern. A Drainage Plan could assist farmers, since many of the soils in the Town are rated as good for agriculture when drained. Keeping ditches cleared helps support the agricultural economy.
- Natural Gas: It has been suggested that the lines should be expanded to cover more homes along the lake. Extending natural gas to farms could help drive down the cost of drying corn and other products.
- Lake Access/ Multi use site: the siting decision for the AES power plant set aside lakeshore frontage for the town as recreation space. This site has never been developed for that use, but the Town has retained the option. There is concern with the change of ownership that past plans may be lost.
- If this recreation space were to be developed, activities and resources on the site should not duplicate or compete with Golden Hill. One consideration is whether to provide public access at the site.
- A right-of-way for the Hojak line runs through the Town. However, portions of it have been sold to adjacent private owners, which would complicate converting this right of way into a hiking or a bike trail.
- Golden Hill State Park is a State facility and the Town has very little control over what happens at the Park. The Town should look into what the State's long range plan for this facility is and assess how Somerset fits into these plans.
- Options for Golden Hill State Park include an expanded boat launch, docking facilities, camping and fishing opportunities.
- Development of docking facilities at the State Park would enable increased visitation from boaters, who currently are not able to moor.
- The Seaway Trail is an important feature of the Town.
- School enrollment is down, and the population is aging.
- Fire Protection: there is adequate equipment: new equipment was purchased since the prior Comprehensive Plan. There is a problem with recruiting volunteers.
- Development is occurring outside the sewer district.
- There is very little waterfront access outside of State Park.

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- The wastewater system has capacities to accommodate additional growth.
- The water system is a strong system capable of supplying adequate daily, peak and fire flows throughout the Town.
- The power plant is the largest tax payer in the Town; changes in the payment arrangements from this facility would create problems with the Town's tax structure.

Recommendations:

- The Town should consider conducting a drainage plan, possibly in conjunction with adjacent communities.
- The Town should investigate whether the sewer system should be expanded to accommodate future growth, particularly for economic development purposes.
- It has been suggested that the Town look into increasing lake access/ access to the water.
- Connect this NYS Park area with the Seaway trail, the Agricultural Tourism area of the Town, other environmental features, and the Village to encourage tourism and agri-tourism (trails, signage, expanded shoulders, etc.).
- The Town should explore options for the "Multiple Use" site adjacent to the power plant.
- The Town should assess the feasibility of the expansion of natural gas in the community, targeting the AES site and other business/ industrial areas.
- The Town needs a coordinated plan to improve tourism in the Town and "connect" existing and future features (see the Town's Vision Plan).

Provide for the Future Movement of Traffic through the Town in a Safe and Efficient Manner

Observations

- Transportation between communities needs to be addressed. Transportation within the Town is very automobile-oriented, with no options other than the private vehicle. This creates hardships for those that do not have a car or those that cannot drive any more.
- Traffic counts have actually decreased in the Town along major roadways.
- There may be potential for enhanced rail access and/or use of the Ho-jack line.
- More transportation alternatives are needed, such as trails, bicycle routes, and rural transportation options.
- It was suggested that there should be better connections to the Canalway Trail.
- There are abandoned rights-of-ways that could be converted to trail use; however, in many areas adjoining property owners have purchased this land.
- The rural nature of the Town, with its low density of development, makes it difficult to provide efficient public transportation.
- Roadways are an important resource of the Agricultural community.

Recommendations:

- Investigate the feasibility of multi-use trails in the Town, using abandoned rights-of-way.
- Look into the feasibility of adding bike lanes along existing major roadways.
- Consider developing better pedestrian/bike links to State Park.
- Assess continuity of sidewalk network within the Village.
- Conduct a connectivity assessment to explore whether extensions of the sidewalk and/or trail connections to destinations in proximity to the Village make sense (e.g. Town Hall).
- Investigate options for rural transportation services, such as vans, particularly for seniors.
- Create programs, signage and laws to help reduce conflicts between agricultural use of the roadways and residential and construction activities. Consider identifying important agricultural routes and establishing new road standards for these areas.

Create a vital and sustainable economy for the Town of Somerset that provides a strong tax base and jobs for our citizens.

Observations:

- Agriculture is an important component of the Town's economic profile.
- The former AES power plant is a major revenue generator for the Town and the County.
- There are few properties zoned to allow business in the Town (business zone is limited in geographic area).
- Some business uses are allowed with a special use permit in the agricultural zoning district of the town.
- Residential density in the Town is unlikely to support significant amounts of retail development.
- Physical Infrastructure: All areas of the Town have water service. There is a significant amount of undeveloped land within the sewer district.
- Natural gas service and three- phase power are lacking in many areas and that could hinder development. The lack of natural gas service increases heating costs for residents and increases operations costs for farmers due to the need to use more expensive propane fuel.
- The gas line currently ends at Johnson Creek Road. Extending it to County Line Road would provide natural gas service to a number of homes and to two farms that have significant grain drying operations.
- Brownfields: there is the opportunity to redevelop the Barker Chemical property with the County brownfield grant to study, review/test and recommend further courses of action and possible uses for this property.
- There are other underutilized formerly developed sites that could be redeveloped. These properties should be identified and inventoried.
- Tourism could be enhanced in Somerset with agritourism. Possible developments include an extension of the wine trail, an expansion of Mayer Brothers and further development of the cidery in town.
- AES is the largest employer and source of revenue for local government.
- Large scale industrial wind facilities require substantially larger and more distributed project area than the existing power plant facility currently uses. The existing Somerset power plant site is located in a small isolated area. Conversely, a large scale industrial wind facility would be spread throughout large areas of the Town, and would create significant impacts on the fundamental character of the Town.
- Shovel Ready: Term needs to be more clearly defined to make it clear that it represents more than just an open piece of property. Actions to make property Shovel-Ready need to include efforts to make sure there is appropriate zoning, environmental issues are addressed, potential new uses are identified, and all needed infrastructure and utilities are in place, including adequate services such as three-phase power, high speed Internet fiber optic cable, natural gas connections, road access, drainage, etc.
- Farming and related agricultural businesses employ many people. The Town should consider how to produce an environment where farms and agricultural-related business continue to thrive and expand.
- As enrollment in schools shrinks, there should be thought put into how to put excess building space to good public use.
- There are vacant buildings in the area that should be redeveloped or demolished, depending on their condition.
- The former Shoreline Fruit facility employed about 90 people at one time; it could be suitable as some type of food processing center.

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- With the bankruptcy of AES and new owners taking over, this represents a threat and an opportunity. The Town and County should begin dialogues to support the new owners, and develop strategies to keep the facility viable.
- The power plant property includes large acreage and different 'use' areas:
 - ✓ Main site includes two landfills in addition to the power plant itself.
 - ✓ The west property is zoned PUD.
 - ✓ The "Mixed Use Site" is proposed as a future park.
 - ✓ Southside of Lake Street, AES owns land as "noise buffer" (between Hartland and extending to west side of Hosmer Roads).
- Regional economic development documents provide little guidance for economic development in the Town of Somerset.
- Consider creative approaches to agricultural issues. One suggestion was to develop a methane digester to produce methane fuel from agricultural waste. The facility could be either privately or publically owned.
- Types of businesses that were identified as appropriate for Somerset include data storage, light business park, farm stands, wineries, health center, and a senior living complex.
- Fels Road was suggested as a good location for future business development. It was questioned whether the area is shovel ready.
- The Town should be better prepared for another "Verizon Project": appropriate "Shovel Ready" sites in the appropriate areas of the Town should be identified in advance of businesses looking for sites.
- Sites across from Town Hall may be suitable for business development.
- Jobs are an issue. The largest employers in Town are Mayer Brothers, the School District, the Somerset power plant, and agriculture.
- The Town should explore how to better support agriculturally-related business.
- Agritourism, such as the Wine Trail, is expanding. There are no wineries in Somerset, although there is one in Appleton, just west of the Town, and a new cidery has opened.
- The PUD for the proposed "Verizon" site is specific to the development that was proposed; the Town should consider rezoning to a new PUD plan to better support new development on the property.
- The "Multi-Use Site:" the Town needs to consider their preferences for this site: Recreation or economic development?
- It was suggested that a Theme Park/ amusement park may be an option, although this would need further investigation into the market potential.
- Small scale, distributed Alternative Energy (wind turbines/ solar, etc.) in targeted areas is an option to explore. Large scale industrial grade wind turbines spread throughout the Town would negatively impact many of the Town's Goals and Objectives, and should be avoided.
- Somerset has larger parcels. It can be difficult to find sites of 100 acres or more.
- Assess what types of businesses could be successful in Somerset (e.g. not transportation dependent businesses).
- Review the success of JT Precision on Haight Road and how the Town could help them further and utilize strategies for other businesses.
- Support continued success of local businesses: Town should be supportive of business expansion planning and training needs.
- Assess where growth areas in the Town should be – where is there high speed Internet, appropriate utilities, etc.
- There is potential to bring in visitors to events. Many suggestions were raised, including sporting events, community events; sledding hill at AES landfill site.
- It was suggested that a deep water port may have potential. It would facilitate access to Canada and could be an economic driver.
- Since 2004 the Town has adopted several new laws (Right-to-Farm; Noise; Wind energy). A new Wind Energy law was adopted in 2016 to better protect the goals and objectives of the comprehensive plan.

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- New development since 2004 includes four small wind turbines and JT Precision on Haight Road.

Recommendations:

- The Town should establish an economic development group to support and coordinate efforts to increase business activity in the Town.
- The Town should support agriculture as an important business and employer in the Town.
- Support and become actively involved in the planning for the former Barker Chemical site.
- Explore Agri-tourism efforts and marketing, working cooperatively with the County. The Agri-tourism area identified in the Vision map should be protected from incompatible uses that would negatively affect the ability of this area to support these types of uses (amend the Zoning in this area).
- The Seaway Trail, a national scenic byway with outstanding views and scenic vista's, represents an extremely important component of the Town and its future. The Seaway Trail needs to be protected from non-compatible uses and connected to important features. It is an important economic component of the Town and its tourism economy.
- Consider zoning changes that encourage new business development in targeted areas.
- Identify properties appropriate for business development and make progress towards facilitating future redevelopment of these properties.
- Coordinate with County and regional economic development agencies to promote business development in Somerset. The sites around the power plant should be added to County and Regional marketing efforts (completed since the last plan).
- Investigate ways to better link the educational system and industry to promote an appropriately trained work force.
- Work with Regional and State Agencies to help ensure that the AES Plant remains a vital business in the community.
- Large scale industrial grade wind turbines spread throughout the Town would negatively impact many of the Town's Economic Goals and Objectives as expressed in the 2012 Comprehensive Plan and this Update, and should be avoided (see Vision Plan).
- The power plant area (including all of the Somerset Operating Company owned properties) should be considered for economic development.
- A joint School District / Town Government Task Force should be formed to evaluate future scenarios and issues.
- The former AES properties should be evaluated for future uses and a new PUD created to encourage development (this has been accomplished). See the PUD Plan for the combination of uses that could be placed on this site.
- The Town should work with the Regional Economic Council and State Agencies to establish a Plan for the largest tax payer in Niagara County (power plant).
- The Barker Chemical Site should have a redevelopment plan completed (this has been completed) and implemented.
- Push for the expansion of natural gas in targeted areas in the Town.
- An Agricultural Committee working with regional and state agencies should investigate future agricultural trends and work with local farmers to evaluate how they can better prepare for and take advantage of these trends. Participate and input to Niagara County's update to their Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan.
- Pursue potential shovel ready designations and potentially pre-permitting sites that are targeted for economic development opportunities.
- Evaluate tools such as expanded 485 (b) programs to encourage existing businesses to grow and expand in the Town.

SECTION V

IMPLEMENTATION

A. TARGET AREAS

In developing the Comprehensive Plan, the Town identified some concepts that represent higher priority target areas for implementation. Other recommendations and ideas remain valid, but the areas outlined below are the focus areas that merit more emphasis. Based on the research and discussions during the development of the Plan, these concepts emerged as having the greatest potential to help ensure that the Town achieves its vision, and represent the topics most likely to be prioritized as initial implementation actions.

1. Protection of the Rural, Agricultural, and Residential Character of the Town

The protection of Somerset's rural, agricultural, and residential character town should be the primary consideration in any land use or planning decision. Proposed uses that are facially inconsistent with this goal, or that will have a substantial impact on the character of the Town, should be discouraged. Other important components of this character are the environmental resources of the Town; waterfront areas, woodlands, wetlands, stream corridors, wildlife habitats, bird corridors, etc. and features such as the Seaway Trail.

2. Development and redevelopment in and around the Village of Barker

As noted in the Framework for Regional Growth, the Village of Barker is a Rural Center. Rural Centers are targeted growth areas; they represent the heart of the region's rural communities. Development in the Town of Somerset adjacent to the Village should strive to complement the Village, match development patterns and strengthen the Village's role as the civic center of the Town.

- *East of the Village:* Development in this vicinity should complement Village development, matching and extending existing land use patterns. In the southern portion of the eastern boundary, this would entail extension of the Village grid of residential neighborhoods. In the Fels Road area, the Town should capitalize on the success the Village has had with commercial development and continue to fill this area in with businesses.
- *West of the Village (Barker Chemical site):* Feasible options depend upon the results of Phase II ESA. The Town would like to see some level of light industrial/ commercial development out towards the road, while keeping the more sensitive lands in the center of the site open to avoid environmental issues. The rear of the property has potential for development but has access issues.
- *South of the Village:* Currently, this area is mostly residential development. Additional options include neighborhood level commercial and mixed uses (small commercial with residential uses).
- *North of The Village:* This area has the greatest potential for extending the Village character north toward the Somerset hamlet along Quaker Road. Town Hall and the school facilities are located in this vicinity. Future plans should ensure that these facilities are tied into the Village. See focus area 3 for discussion of Haight Road.

To accomplish the above items, the Town could take the following approach:

- East of the Village
 - a. Evaluate infrastructure needs and environmental restrictions for the development of this area.
 - b. Evaluate zoning alternatives, including a new zoning to meet the needs of this area.
 - c. Meet with the Village to discuss how to best mesh with the development occurring in the Village in this area.
 - d. When applicable and if needed, invest in the infrastructure needs of this area.
- West of the Village
 - a. Once the current study is completed and accepted by the Town and County (see copy of the draft report sections in the Appendix), evaluate the proposed future development options and the needs for that development.
 - b. If additional clean up is necessary (or other activities), work with the County to find monies to accomplish this clean up or work.
 - c. Working with the County, evaluate options for marketing the site for re-development (incentives may be necessary).
- South of the Village
 - a. Evaluate the use of a neighborhood / hamlet type zoning district for the area.
 - b. Evaluate the infrastructure needs in this area and determine the appropriate areas for prioritized development (senior housing could be an option).
- North of the Village
 - a. Evaluate the use of a Hamlet Zoning District for this area (establish extent of area – see the Vision Map for suggestions).
 - b. Look at existing infrastructure for areas for targeted development. Longer term development may necessitate infrastructure improvements.
 - c. Create an Overlay of this “hamlet” area (see vision map) that protects this area from uses and actions that are not consistent with this residential area.

3. Development around the Somerset power plant site

The power plant site is the largest industrial site/user in the Town and is extremely important to the region. The WNY Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan targets “Energy” as a key WNY Industry Sector, and states, “The Electric Power sector is the fastest growing share of the energy economy in New York, the United States, and most of the world. This growth requires considerable investment and planning by power generating companies and State agencies.” The properties formerly owned by AES on the north side of Lake Road are zoned PUD to allow the power plant and associated commercial and industrial uses. It must be noted that under Article 8 of the New York State Public Service Law, the Town does not have jurisdiction over power generation activities on this site. Other, non-power generating related uses can be affected by local laws and ordinances. Some properties along the railroad, south of Lake Road, are zoned industrial. A Mayer Brothers facility is located to the west of the power plant. Much of the surrounding area is agriculture.

- “Verizon site”: This site consists of property on the north side of the lake, adjacent to the power plant and previously proposed for a Verizon Data Center. The Town should explore getting this site designated as “Shovel-Ready” for light industrial and business uses. This would help support economic development in the Town, in an area where there is already similar development types.
- *Northwest Sector of Town*: The area west of “Verizon” site to Mayer Brothers’ facility represents an opportunity for additional economic development, but given the

agricultural nature of the area, proposed uses include a mix of businesses, focusing on agriculture-related opportunities, similar in nature to Mayer Brothers, and possibly some residential uses along the lakeshore.

- *South of Lake Road/ West of Hosmer:* this area is another area where agricultural related business and light industrial agricultural related uses could be supported. East of Hosmer Road, north of Haight Road should also be reserved for agricultural related business.
- *Power Plant Property:* contains the power plant and its related uses and accessory uses. Efforts should continue to keep this important regional, State and national Energy provider and strategic Industry Sector in operation.

4. Other areas appropriate for economic development/ business expansion

As a first priority, development is encouraged to occur in the areas around the Village and in the vicinity of existing commercial / industrial businesses in the Town. However, other economic development options exist in the Town.

- *Haight Road in the vicinity of Town Hall:* This area has potential for business development, focusing on small businesses such as JT Precision. It should not be encouraged as a retail corridor, as retail development should be concentrated in the Village center.
- *Agritourism:* As opportunities present themselves, the Town should encourage agritourism enterprises. The greatest potential is in the northeast sector of the Town, near the cidery on Lower Lake road, as the cidery exists as an anchor and the area is in the vicinity to the State Park, where there is a concentration of potential visitors (see below for more information on agriculture). There also needs to be connections from the State Park and waterfront to the Seaway Trail.
- *"Hamlets":* Small scale, nodal development in the character of a small hamlet can be encouraged in key areas such as the Somerset hamlet. Any non-residential uses should be small-scale, locally supportive, such as small convenience outlets.

5. Agricultural economic development

Agriculture continues to be an important part of the Town, its economy, and its character. The Town should be exploring how it can encourage the continuation of farming in the community, and work with the agricultural community to help them prosper. Initial concepts include the following:

- Allowing more creative uses on farms, while discouraging uses that might change or convert the agricultural assessment of any parcel.
- Support of farming-related businesses.
- Explore what the needs are for farmers in Somerset and support the farmers by helping them achieve their goals.
- Agri-tourism can be part of the Town's agricultural economy. The Town can help look for new markets and marketplaces.

To accomplish these actions related to agriculture, the following approach could be taken:

- a. Establish a Town Agricultural Committee. They can work with agencies such as the Niagara County Soil and Water District, the Cooperative Extension of Niagara County, the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, and other agricultural groups and organizations

- b. Review and update, as necessary, the agricultural information gathered for this plan update (working with the County as they do their Ag plan).
- c. Obtain assistance from the County, Regional and State Agencies and groups to help evaluate agriculture in the Town and provide input on the trends in agriculture.
- d. Make sure the zoning of the Town does not inhibit these creative agricultural approaches (amend zoning as necessary).
- e. Work with the County and others to help establish what the viable agricultural markets are for farmers in Somerset, and help market these agricultural products.
- f. The Town should seek grants to help the farmers with transitioning to these new agricultural activities.
- g. Support and champion the extension/expansion of three phase power, natural gas and high speed internet in appropriate areas,

6. Sustainable Smart Growth

To be in accordance with regional plans (Framework for Regional Growth, County Comprehensive Communities Plan, Regional Economic Plans) and with State "Smart Growth" legislation, the Town should plan for sustainable Smart Growth. This pattern of growth and planning will help to make the community more economically viable, improve community characteristics, and help in obtaining funding support from State and Regional programs. Elements of Smart Growth that would fit in with the rural character of Somerset include the following:

- Make the community more walkable/bikable.
- Promote design standards to improve the quality of development.
- Encourage more housing diversity. In particular, there is evidence of a need for more options for senior housing. Senior housing ideally would be located in or near the Village, close to services.
- Other growth should occur primarily within the sewer district and around the Village. Non-sewered areas of the Town, with the exception of the economic development corridor adjacent to the power plant, should remain agricultural, with some low density residential development.
- Agriculture protection and strengthening of the agricultural nature of Town should be encouraged if not required.
- Preservation and protection of important environmental resources is another Smart Growth priority.

The following actions could be taken to help accomplish the above:

- a. Provide a map in greater detail illustrating potential connections (bike and pedestrian) between the Town and the Village. Once completed work with the Village to ascertain costs and potentials for grant applications.
- b. The Planning Board should review sample design standards / guidelines from other communities, to see what applies to Somerset.
- c. For senior housing, the Town should work with the County to identify senior housing developers in the region. The Town should talk to these developers to see if demand exists and their interest in potentially developing in Somerset. Evaluate infrastructure needs and further target areas for this type of use.

7. Expansion of tourism, recreational opportunities and waterfront access

A very important component of the Town is its waterfront and issues related to it, including recreation and tourism and the Seaway Trail. The Town needs to protect this very important asset, while also taking advantage of this asset. Elements to consider include:

- Fishing connections, building on Niagara County's successful fishing tourism initiative.
- Festivals, events, and other activities to draw visitors.
- Careful consideration of how to address the "Multiple Use Site" development.
- Encouraging New York State to provide additional amenities for visitors to the Golden Hill State Park, such as docks.
- Capitalizing on visitors to the Seaway Trail by connecting it to the waterfront.
- Building on Wine Trail synergies: although there are no wineries in the town, the cidery is a related attraction that could draw visitors.
- Enhance the connections between the State Park, the Village, the Seaway Trail, the Wine Trail and other community features.

All of these actions require coordination with County, Regional and State Agencies, and Town Board representatives should be assigned to lead these efforts.

This area must be protected from incompatible uses that would negate the tourism and scenic components of this area.

8. Protection of environmental features

The Town of Somerset is blessed with some significant environmental features. These environmental features are important to the character of the community and can directly and indirectly affect the economic conditions of the community.

- Inventory significant woodlands and wetlands; tie into regional plans
- Protection of stream corridors, fishing sites, etc.
- Monitor issues and policies affecting Lake Ontario, especially policies that affect lake level control.
- Create Environmental Overlay Zoning Districts to help protect these resources. All proposed uses would need to show that they are not impacting these resources.

The above can be accomplished as follows:

- a. Utilize GIS mapping, local knowledge and site visits to update the environmental features map.
- b. Generate and add information concerning the stream corridors and fishing sites within the Town.
- c. Tie these efforts into the agri-tourism planning efforts. These features and important sites could assist in attracting more people to the Town for tourism related activities.
- d. If necessary, the Town could seek grants to help with improvements needed to capitalize on these features.

B. GENERAL IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

1. Once adopted, add the new plan to the Town's website and provide copies to appropriate Town officials and agencies.
2. The Town should form an implementation committee consisting of Planning Board representatives, Town Board members, and other Town representatives. This committee will be responsible for organizing and helping to implement the Plan. They will also provide a yearly report that includes a summary of achievements for the year, suggestions for Plan modifications, and actions to be completed for the coming year (including any funding needs).

3. The Town should look for community volunteers to help “man” focus groups that are needed in implementing the Plan (such as the agricultural group).
4. The Town Board should include funding each year to implement the Plan.
5. Every five years, or more frequently if circumstances warrant, the Town should evaluate the need for any major updates to the Plan.
6. Amend the Town’s LWRP to reflect the new Somerset Comprehensive Plan.

C. OTHER IMPLEMENTATION ITEMS

Building upon the recommendations outlined in the Observations and Findings sections of this document, this section of the document includes a list of potential implementation items to help achieve the goals (and their priority).

Support Agriculture:

1. Create an agricultural committee that can help maintain communication between Town government and the farming community. The committee can also help look for opportunities to help improve agricultural operations and potentially seek grants (priority action).
2. Evaluate Town infrastructure, particularly roads and bridges, as to whether they are adequate to accommodate agricultural traffic (e.g. widths, weight limits). Prioritize needed upgrades and develop a capital works plan to address problem areas, and develop a grants strategy to help support the needed improvements (priority action).
Work with County and State agencies to focus them on this issue with County and State Jurisdictional roadways.
3. Investigate ways to promote more agricultural tourism (proper attractions, support services, marketing, etc.)
4. Support creation of “value added” processing ventures, which package/ market/ brand agricultural products.
5. The Town could work with the County more aggressively in exploring the creation of an Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC) in the model of the Hudson Valley ADC. An ADC is an economic development agency with a focus on the viability of the agricultural economy. Such an agency would support marketing, promotion, financial support, agricultural entrepreneurship and other activities in support of the rural economy.
6. Work closely with Niagara County on their update to the County’s Agricultural Protection Plan.

Promote Smart Growth:

1. Create ‘nodal’ growth centers (areas of more concentrated development) around the Village and other areas of denser population (such as West Somerset and Somerset Corners).
2. In the more rural areas (outside the sewer district), provide opportunities for rural business, home occupations, and community services.
3. In and surrounding the Village, provide a variety of connections to allow residents to drive, walk and/or bike to locations throughout the Village center.
4. Work with the Village to create a vibrant village center that is supported by the Town.
5. Create design standards for targeted growth areas.
6. Evaluate the Town’s subdivisions regulations to determine if they are supportive of a ‘smart growth’ approach (e.g. rural cluster design that protects the rural character of undeveloped areas).
7. Support and promote economic opportunities in the Town and Village.

8. Consider adoption of rural development guidelines.

Encourage Greater Housing Diversity:

1. Investigate alternative housing types that could be located around the Village center.
2. Assess the Town's zoning to accommodate a greater diversity of housing choices. (Currently, only one- and two-family homes are allowed in the Town).
3. Consider zoning changes to allow creative housing approaches, such as accessory apartments or elder cottages.
4. Work with the county to identify entities that develop alternative housing and promote the Town to these entities.
5. Investigate the need for housing programs to support a stable and well-maintained housing stock.

Protect Environmental Resources

1. Inventory major ecological resources, important scenic areas and other valued environmental features within the Town (as noted in the Recommendations Section).
2. Consider a creek corridor overlay district for Golden Hill Creek, and possibly other creek corridors in the Town.
3. Consider protection measures for the south central / southeastern portion of the Town to protect important wetlands and woodlots in this area.
4. Assess the local demand for lake access (survey residents).
5. Consider joint planning with adjacent communities to promote effective drainage.
6. Using the completed study of Barker Chemical site, continue to explore appropriate reuse strategies.
7. Evaluate the LWRA to determine whether expanded area is appropriate.
8. Once the environmental inventory is completed, consider having site plan and subdivision plats reference important features.
9. Consider developing 'best practices' manual for landowners along sensitive resources (lakefront, creeks, wetlands, woodlands) for how to be proper stewards of these resources.
10. Continue supporting funding opportunities for shoreline erosion control.
11. Increase public awareness of the location and importance of area watersheds.

Provide Quality Community Facilities and Services

1. Explore options for the "Multiple Use" site adjacent to the power plant.
2. Assess the need for additional waterfront access.
3. Support the expansion of natural gas in the community, targeting the AES site and other business/ industrial areas.
4. Consider areas for careful expansion of the sewer system.
5. A drainage plan should include field tiling and an analysis of soil types. Drainage-related activities should be coordinated with adjoining towns.

Promote Transportation Options:

1. Conduct a feasibility study for developing better bicycle and pedestrian access in the town through the development of multi-use trails and/or bike lanes along existing major roadways.
2. Conduct a connectivity assessment to assess existing gaps in sidewalk/ pedestrian access, as well as exploring potential for sidewalk and/or trail extensions/ connections to destinations in close proximity to the Village.
3. Investigate options for rural transportation services, such as vans, particularly for seniors.

Create a Vital Local Economy

1. Establish an economic development group responsible for supporting and coordinating efforts to increase business activity in the Town.
2. Explore ways to support agriculture as an important business and employer in the Town.
3. Support and become actively involved in the planning for the former Barker Chemical site.
4. Work cooperatively with the County to explore agri-tourism efforts and marketing.
5. Consider zoning changes that encourage new business development in targeted areas.
6. Identify properties appropriate for business development and make progress towards facilitating future redevelopment of these properties.
7. Coordinate with County and regional economic development agencies to promote business development/redevelopment in Somerset.
8. Investigate ways to better link the educational system and industry to promote an appropriately trained work force.

D. VISION PLAN

The Vision Plan for the Town of Somerset is shown in Map 9. The Vision Plan, together with the goals and policies described previously, is intended to guide decisions which affect the future development of the Town. The recommendations portrayed on the Vision Plan map are based upon an analysis of the existing land use patterns and roadway system, economic conditions and environmental resources and constraints, in conjunction with the issues and opportunities identified by the public. It is a graphic representation of the general preferred future development of the Town, and it mirrors the intent of the goals and policies for the Town. The Vision Plan does not directly represent land use or zoning, and is not meant to rigidly depict the specific type of development that should occur on a particular parcel. Various development patterns could be consistent with the ideals it portrays. The Vision Map, in conjunction with the goals and objectives should guide an interpretation of what type of development is appropriate in any particular area. There is considerable flexibility in the Vision Plan, but the Town should encourage future development to occur within areas where growth is appropriate, and discourage intensive development in areas identified for a more rural character.

The following concepts are illustrated in the Vision Plan:

- The majority of the land area of the Town will remain rural; largely as agricultural or open space uses. Any area not specifically called out for some other designation is presumed to remain rural in character and be protected from incompatible growth that does not promote the Goals and Objectives of the Town.
- New residential development is encouraged primarily within and adjacent to the village and within the sewer district. This area is designated as the "Expanded Village", shown in dark yellow on the Vision Map. The concept is to strengthen the Village as the center of Town and concentrate denser development within the area where there are services to accommodate it. Other small pockets of residential growth indicated on the Plan should also be protected from unacceptable uses.
- For longer-term future growth, a "hamlet" area, depicted in gray, shows how growth should continue to expand from the central Village core (It is in the existing Town sewer district). This area must also be protected from uses that would impact this long term residential growth area.

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- The Community/Village Center area represents an area of the Town/Village that all development proposals must be evaluated for their impact on the Village Center.
- Business activities should be concentrated within the Village and an area designated as “Town Center” along Haight and Quaker Roads. Development in the “Town Center” area should be job-creating and non-retail types of businesses, designed to complement, not compete with commercial activities in the Village of Barker.
- A portion of the shoreline of Lake Ontario is designated as a “shoreline protection” area to protect this resource and its recreation potential, while accommodating expanded public access to the lake in appropriate locations (see LWRP).
- Industrial/business development (purple) is shown adjacent to the Village, where services and transportation are available, as an extension of the Village industrial area. The “Barker Chemical” site (site on the western side of the Village) has been further studied, and the Town should continue to work with the County of Niagara and other agencies to determine the appropriate light industrial/business related uses that could be developed on the different portions of this site. Industrial uses are also shown for the lands owned by the power plant north of Lake Road, and the Mayer Brothers site in the northwest corner of the Town. The other areas of the Town are not appropriate for large scale Industrial development.
- The power plant site is currently zoned PUD and under that zoning would only allow the present power plant and related accessory uses on that site. This site is shown as Industrial/Business on the Vision Map to provide greater flexibility for the Town to entertain a rezoning that would allow other industrial and business uses on this site, if rezoning became necessary for this site to remain viable as an economic engine for the Town. It must be noted that under Article 8 of the New York State Public Service Law, the Town does not have jurisdiction over power generation activities on this site. Other, non-power generating related uses can be affected by local laws and ordinances.
- The area directly west of the power plant site has been designated for new business development in support of economic development for the Town. Shown in orange on the Vision Map, the concept is to facilitate business development at this location, possibly through getting the site designated as “Shovel-Ready” under New York State’s business development program.
- The eastern portion of the power plant properties is shown as the “Multiple Use Site,” depicted in turquoise on the Vision Map. As part of the permitting for the power plant, a study was completed in 1979 aimed at developing recreational uses on these lands. While never implemented, the concepts are retained here for possible future development. The power plant purchased additional lands after the study was completed. These additional lands could be incorporated into the multiple use plan and are represented as “Multiple Use Expansion” on the Vision Map. The full 1979 study for the Somerset Power Plant Multiple Use Plan is included as Appendix B. This “Multiple Use Site” area was a mitigation to the potential long term impacts from the construction of a power plant on the waterfront in the Town. At that time, a plan was developed that included recreational development on this site. This site, 30 years later, still represents an important mitigation for the Town. The needs of the Town and region have changed over this time period and the recreational plan would need to be updated if it is going to be implemented. If the recreational plan cannot be implemented, another beneficial plan/use for this site should be developed and implemented. This new plan should reflect the needs of the community, this valuable waterfront asset, and make

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economic sense for the Town and its residents. It is imperative that the multiple use plan or a revision to it be implemented as it represents the mitigation for the use of a large area of the Town's waterfront for a power plant.

- The area to the east of the Multiple Use site is "cross-hatched" and referenced as the "Multiple Use Site Expansion Area". This area was not originally owned by the power plant and was acquired after the Multiple Use Plan was completed. These lands abut Hartland Road and have sewers available. This "expansion area" should compliment what will be done on the Multiple Use Site and further strengthen the economic opportunities in this area. Development of this area could be commercial/businesses, light industrial or tourism/recreational related.
- The northwest corner of the Town is designated as mixed use/ agricultural support businesses. The intent is to support the agricultural economy with businesses that provide agricultural support services, similar to the Mayer Brothers' food processing facility already located in this vicinity. Creative agricultural operations would also be considered such as wine related, craft breweries, etc. Agricultural uses would also be appropriate.
- The northeastern portion of the Town is identified as an area to encourage agriculture and agricultural/ tourism activities. Agri-tourism would include farm stands, farm tours, etc. Ties to the Niagara County Wine Trail are encouraged. Attracting people to support the existing Agriculture and Tourism facilities and future Agri-Tourism and recreation is important to the success of this area. This area must be protected from incompatible uses to ensure this vision.
- The southeast portion of the Town has been identified as an area that is environmentally sensitive, due to the number of wetlands and wooded areas in this region. Development occurring in this quadrant of the Town should respect these environmental features, which serve important roles in the Town's environmental sustainability. Any development should be very small scale and not impact the features or character of the area.
- The major stream corridors through the Town should be protected. The intent is to discourage development within the floodplain, and encourage environmental conservation of the areas immediately adjacent to the creeks.
- The Seaway Trail is depicted on the map and connective features from the Seaway Trail to the State Park, along Lower Lake Road and to the Village of Barker. A Rails to Trails area is also shown on the Vision Map.
- With respect to the issue of large-scale Industrial grade Wind Turbines, the following areas are not appropriate for these types of uses based on the Vision for these areas; the "Expanded Village" and Hamlet/rural center areas, the Village of Barker and surrounding business and residential areas, the Environmentally Sensitive area, the Agriculture/Agriculture Tourism area, the waterfront protection area (residential), the mixed use –Agriculture/Agriculture support business area. Also, per the US Fish and Wildlife recommendation, large scale wind turbines should not be within three miles of the shoreline (line shown on the Vision Plan). This should involve further investigation.

SECTION VI

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

A Comprehensive Plan is categorized as a Type 1 action under the State's Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) Act. As such, the Town, as Lead Agency, is required to examine the potential environmental impacts of the plan. To facilitate this requirement, the comprehensive plan itself can be set up to represent the components of a GEIS (see §272-a.8 of Town Law). This format enables the reviewers, the Lead Agency, all 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. The inclusion of this chapter is intended to help in the environmental evaluation.

Potential Significant Adverse Environmental Impacts

The underlying purpose and a major goal of a Comprehensive Plan is to promote appropriate land use and avoid significant adverse environment impacts in the community that it covers. The Part 2 of the EAF does not identify any potentially moderate to large impacts and no significant environmental impacts. 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 Somerset, the following potentially significant adverse environmental impacts could occur if the community 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 to lessen the negative impacts of land use and development decisions.

A. **Impacts on Land** (see Map 4: Environmental Features; Map 5: Agricultural Districts and Generalized Soils)

- The Town of Somerset is rural in nature, a characteristic that is valued by area residents. Inappropriate planning and development actions could negatively impact the land resources of the Town.
- The Town of Somerset has areas of hydric soils, and some wetlands and floodplains. There are also some areas in the Town with slopes greater than 15 percent. Improper development of these areas could result in drainage, flooding and/or erosion problems within the Town and in downstream areas.
- There are large areas in Somerset where the soils are categorized as prime farmland, or prime farmland when drained. There are extensive areas covered under agricultural districts and many farms. Development of these areas could displace irreplaceable resources.
- Some locations in the Town of Somerset contain significant areas of mature woodland. Inappropriate development of these areas could have a negative impact on the rural character of the Town and important open space.

Impacts on Water (See Map 4: Environmental Features)

- Fish Creek, Golden Hill Creek, and Marsh Creek and tributaries of these waterways run through the Town of Somerset. Floodplains surround portions of these waterways. Inappropriate development could lead to flooding or drainage problems, and hazards

to public safety. These creeks are also important for environmental protection, open space preservation, drainage, wildlife habitat and aesthetics.

- Much of the Town's development is on municipal water and is not dependent upon groundwater resources for their water supply. Many residences in the Town use groundwater for the discharge of sanitary waste (septic systems). Only a portion of the Town has public sewers.
- There are areas of wetlands and hydric soils. Inappropriate development in these areas could lead to flooding and drainage problems, and adversely impact groundwater resources.
- The waterfront area of the Town has floodplains, wetlands and is an important environmental feature of the community. Inappropriate development in this area could cause many problems.

B. Impacts on Flora and Fauna

- The Town's expansive areas of open meadows, fields and woodlands, waterfront areas as well as the wetlands and creek corridors, support many non-threatened and non-endangered plant, avian and animal species. These areas provide important habitat for many resident and migrating species, and are an important element of the rural character of the Town. Over- development and poor site planning decisions could adversely impact these resources.
- The Town and its waterfront are considered International Bird corridors that by recent studies show areas within 3 miles of the waterfront should be protected from structures that would interfere with these bird populations.
- Some of the streams are considered to be Class A streams.

C. Impacts on Agricultural Land Resources (See Map 5: Agricultural Districts and Generalized Soils)

- Most of the Town is located in a State designated agricultural district. The predominant land use and economic activity in the Town is agricultural, and most of the Town is zoned agricultural.
- Agricultural uses have been slowly declining over the past decade, although agriculture remains important in the town.

D. Impacts on Aesthetic Resources

- The aesthetic resources of the Town of Somerset include significant views (especially in the waterfront region of the town), open spaces, parks, historic buildings, a National scenic Byway and creeks. These resources contribute to the atmosphere and character of the Town, and could be negatively affected by inappropriate development.
- These natural and man-made resources, and the development patterns of the Town contribute to its rural character, which is the primary goal of the Town (protecting the Town's Rural Character).

E. Impact on Open Space, Parks and Recreation

- Parks and recreation resources in the Town of Somerset are identified in Section III.
- The Town also has important open space resources, with large portions of the Town including undeveloped woodlands and meadows.
- Inappropriate development, including increased demands caused by population increases, could have an adverse effect upon these resources. Present population

statistics show a large number of seniors, and children under the age of 18 compared to county averages.

F. Impact on Critical Environmental Area

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

G. Impact on Transportation

- The transportation system in the Town of Somerset is heavily based upon roadways and automobiles. Public transportation is very limited, and the rail line is used for very limited commercial and freight uses only. No passenger rail is available.
- The major roadway corridors in the Town are described in Section III.
- Travel for pedestrians and bicyclists can be difficult in the Town.
- Poorly planned development in the Town has the potential to adversely impact the transportation network. Although the roads are mostly level of Service A, localized problems could occur if development is not planned and designed properly. Development within the Town also affects the traffic in the Village. Development in the surrounding communities may also have impacts on the Town's transportation system.
- Additional development may also increase potential conflicts between automotive and non-automotive modes of transportation.
- The Agricultural community depends on the road system to support their fields and operations, and for the transport of their goods. These roadways need to be protected and when necessary maintained, repaired and upgraded to meet these needs.

H. Impact on Growth and Character of Community or Neighborhood

- The population of the Town of Somerset has been relatively stable. While there was population growth between 1990 and 2000, recent Census data indicate population has returned to 1990 levels.
- The rate of new households being generated in Somerset experienced a similar trend, strong growth between 1990 and 2000, partly reversed between 2000 and 2010.
- The growth in number of households has been strongest in the Town outside the village, which saw an 8 percent increase between 1990 and 2010, compared to a 4 percent decline within the Village.
- The Comprehensive Plan supports directing residential growth mainly toward the areas of Town in or adjacent to the Village and north of the Village along Quaker Road.
- The Village of Barker serves as the central business district and service center for the Town of Somerset. The Town recognizes the importance of the Village and wishes to provide support for these businesses.
- The Town supports non-retail commercial and industrial growth in certain designated areas of the Town in order to support tax base and employment opportunities.
- With targeted, well planned growth, the Town's character should not be adversely affected.
- The Town's Vision for the Community has been expressed in this Plan, and actions supporting this vision should be implemented and those that do not support this Vision should be opposed and not entertained.

Adverse Environmental Impacts that Cannot be Avoided

With or without the adoption and implementation of a Comprehensive Plan, the region will

continue to have new development that will impact 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 completion of this study will still be subject to the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) process on a site specific basis. This plan can assist with the review of those future development actions.

Growth Inducing Aspects of the Plan

Most of the implementation actions outlined in this study will help to control and moderate growth within the Town, and encourage growth in specific areas where it can be best supported. Specifically, redevelopment in and around the Village of Barker, and within areas with sewers will be encouraged. Certain areas adjacent to the power plant have also been identified for potential economic development, (non-retail commercial and industrial uses are encouraged).

Mitigation Measures

It is the objective of any comprehensive plan to help to reduce the potential impacts that could be caused by the present development trends in the planning community. This can be accomplished by providing techniques for changing the development trends of a community, such as amending zoning or other development regulations, or by providing tools to help mitigate the possible impacts of those development trends, such as providing for improved infrastructure, increased/improved standards for development, etc. A good comprehensive plan will supply techniques for modifying or clarifying the direction of the community, and the tools for reducing the impacts of development that themselves do not create other adverse environmental impacts. The following section discusses the study's recommendations and the logic as to why and how they help mitigate the potential impacts of future growth.

A. Impacts on Land

- The plan recommends a number of measures to protect the land and environmental resources of the community.
- The plan supports the protection of agricultural lands in the Town. Techniques include strengthening the economic viability of farms, encouraging agricultural support services, and maintenance of policies, such as the Town's Right to Farm legislation, that support farmers.

B. Impacts on Water

Surface Water

- The plan supports directing development away from the designated stream corridors, and recommends an overlay zone to protect these resources.
- The plan supports increased drainage standards and avoidance of poor soil areas to further reduce impacts to surface waters from development.
- New requirements, when necessary, will also help to protect these resources.

Groundwater

- Directing growth to areas with public infrastructure will help in the protection of groundwater resources in the Town of Somerset.
- Possible expansion of the sewer system to areas along the waterfront could help to reduce problems.

C. Impacts on Plants and Animals

- As discussed previously, the Somerset community will be taking efforts to protect and preserve the stream corridors and open spaces in the community. By targeting these important habitats for protection, the Town is minimizing impacts to the flora and fauna of the region. Projects that impact these important resources will be discouraged if not restricted.
- The plan also identifies important features like floodplains, wetlands and unique environmental features, so that they can be incorporated into designs and/or preserved.

D. Impacts on Agricultural Land Resources

- As previously discussed, the Town will be coordinating activities to protect and preserve agricultural land and agricultural operations.
- Other programs and ideas will be attempted as needed to try and assist farmers to stay in business. If the economics of farming (related to Agriculture) can be helped, farming may continue which will assist with the agricultural land preservation. These mechanisms will allow for creativity without impacting surrounding non-farm property owners and the environment.

E. Impacts on Aesthetic Resources

- The preservation of community character is one of the major goals of this Plan. Community character includes the aesthetic resources of the community such as significant views, open spaces, farmland, important structures and the Towns' overall rural character. The community has identified these resources and the plan identifies actions to be taken by the community to protect these features. Development guidelines will help to maintain the rural character of this community.

F. Impacts on Open Space, Parks and Recreation

- The plan identifies these resources and provides methodologies to protect and preserve them during development.
- Major features are identified in the Plan and some are incorporated into the vision map and are considered an integral part of the Town's future. The Plan requires that development follow the recommendations in the Plan and the Vision articulated in the Goals and Objectives and illustrated on the Vision Map.

G. Impacts on Critical Environmental Areas

- There are no CEA's in the Somerset community.

H. Impacts on Transportation

- Transportation in the community is heavily based on roadways and automobiles. Generally, traffic counts are low and there is not significant congestion.
- Actions such as access management plans are being suggested to minimize potential impacts from traffic.
- One of the other issues of transportation relates to the region's accommodation of pedestrians and bicycles. The plan recommends continuing to improve pedestrian and bicycle access around the Village.
- Public transportation in the region is minimal and Somerset will continue to work with the County and Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority in trying to improve public transportation.

- The railroad running through Somerset is an important asset to the region. The community has planned around this feature (continuing access to industrial areas and preventing encroachment of incompatible uses), and is strongly interested in the railroad being improved and remaining active.

I. Impact on Growth and Character of Community or Neighborhood

- Population trends suggest that the growth rate in the Town of Somerset will remain modest.
- Economic development and local jobs has become a larger issue, and the plan attempts to proactively support additional targeted locations for job supporting development.
- This economic development will be focused, will not impact the important resources of the Town and preserve the rural character of the community.

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 residents, private property rights, and the vitality of the community.

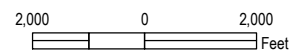
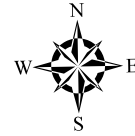
It must be noted that long term recommendations were not thoroughly evaluated in this section since these actions are only to be considered in extenuating circumstances where the Town is seeing greater levels of growth pressure or where short term recommendations are not achieving the desired results.

Under the present growth conditions in the Town, the "No Action" alternative was considered. However, to enable the Town to properly plan for its chosen future, to prepare for potential development activity over the next 15 years, and to better direct and manage such growth and development, this alternative was deemed inappropriate. Furthermore, the chosen action plan will provide greater protection to the environment than the present course of action. For example, without adhering to this Plan and implementing it, the proposed Industrial Wind Turbine Project could have a significant impact on not only the environment but many of the Goals and Objectives and Vision of the Town and this Plan.

Town of Somerset Comprehensive Plan

Vision Map

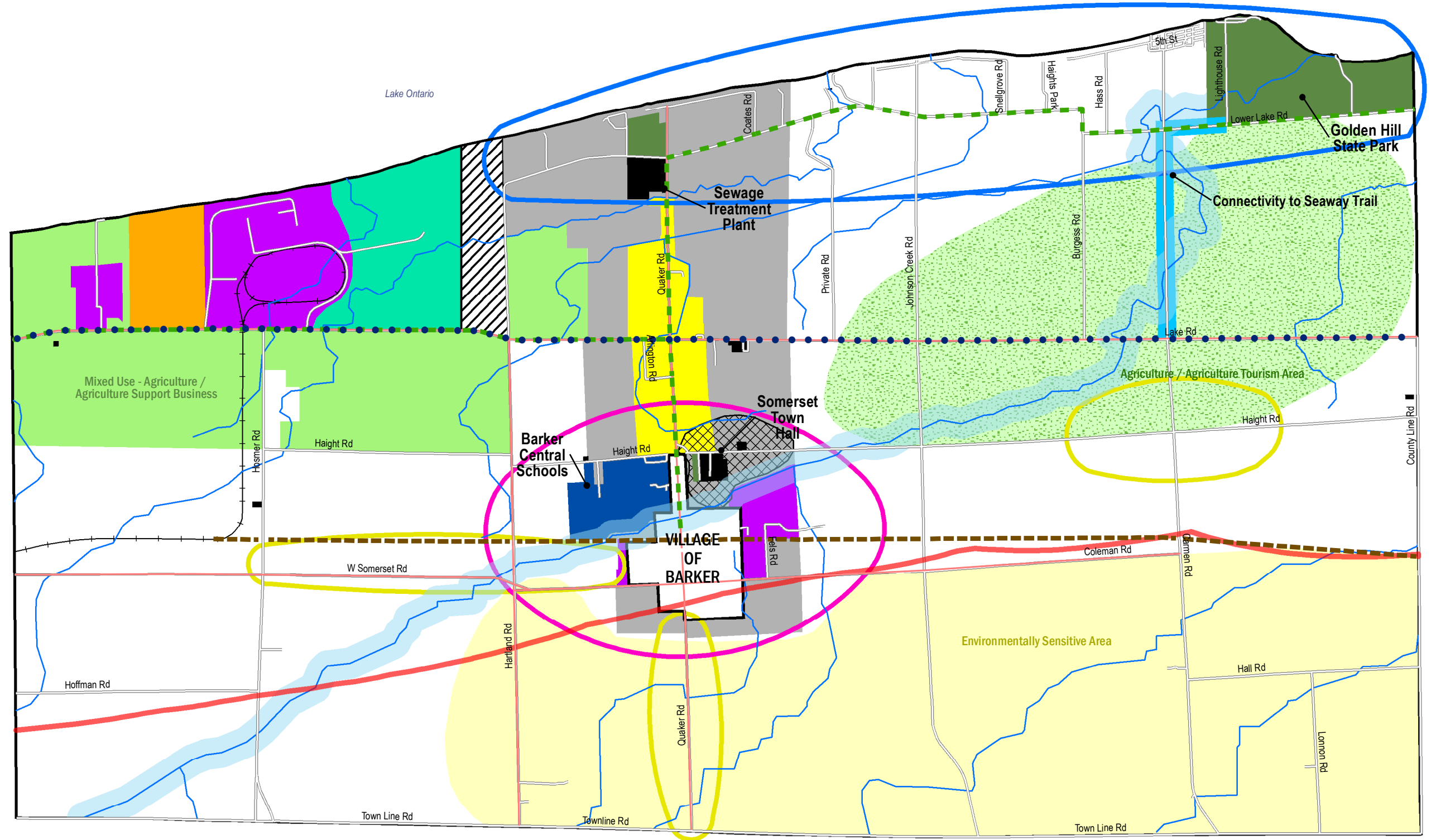
Map 9



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DATA SOURCES: TOWN OF SOMERSET, NIAGARA COUNTY, NYS DEC, USFWS, FEMA, NYS GIS CLEARINGHOUSE



* This map is not a future land use map and should only be utilized in conjunction with the concepts in the Comprehensive Plan Document.