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## TOWN OF TONAWANDA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN PROJECT INITIAL FINDINGS

According to New York State Law, a Comprehensive Plan provides a Town with the “guidelines, policies, [and] standards. . . for the immediate and long-range protection, enhancement, growth and development of the municipality.”

The Town of Tonawanda’s existing Comprehensive Plan was completed in 1955. It helped establish the location of parks, schools and other community facilities in a Town that was growing and developing.

Over the past 49 years since that plan, the Town has largely been built up. The emphasis of this current planning project focuses more on the protection and enhancement of the Town. The issues facing the Town now are very different from those of the 1950’s and 1960’s. New guidelines and standards are needed to help the Town make sure it remains a great place to live, work and play.

An extensive examination of “where we are now” has been conducted, looking at various aspects of the Town. A summary of major points follows:

### ***Demographic—what is the population like—***

- The population of Tonawanda is decreasing—the Town lost about 5% of the population between 1990 and 2000
- Over the same time period, the number of households (occupied homes) remained about the same.
- This is because families are getting smaller.
- The biggest increase is in the number of one-person households. Nearly one-third of all households in the Town are now occupied by a single-person.
- The Town of Tonawanda remains a family community— nearly two-thirds of all households are families (people living together who are related by blood or marriage). But fewer households still have children living at home. The most common family type in the Town is a married couple with no children under the age of 18.
- About 28% of all households have a child under the age of 18 living at home.
- About 36% of households have a senior citizen living in them (age 65 or older).
- Despite the trend toward aging population, there is actually a fairly even age distribution in the Town. About 22% of the population are minors and another 22% are seniors. About 33% are younger adults (age 19-44) and the remaining 23% are older adults (45-64).
- The average age of the population of the Town is 41.8 years old.

### ***Environmental—the natural environment and environmental issues***

- The Niagara River, and Tonawanda, Ellicott and Two-Mile Creeks provide an important role in the Town for drainage, open space, and aesthetics.
- There are some environmental issues in the Town, and a priority is the continued clean-up of these sites
- Some areas of wetlands and flood plains remain in Town, which merit protection
- Strawberry Island is officially designated as a significant habitat of Statewide importance

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### ***Land Use and Zoning—how the Town is developed in general***

- The Town is densely built up, with a diverse mix of residential, commercial and public uses, particularly in the eastern part of Town.
- The Town has a number of strong neighborhoods, which merit recognition and support
- The western part of Town is primarily industrial, with the beginnings of change toward a more recreational orientation, with the RiverWalk and Isle View Park.
- Two-thirds of the housing in the Town was built over a five year period immediately following World War II.
- The Village of Kenmore serves as the traditional business core of the Town, but additional commercial centers and commercial uses are spread throughout the Town.
- Much commercial development is in a strip pattern along major roadways, such as Niagara Falls Boulevard, Sheridan, Kenmore, Delaware and Elmwood.
- There are also scattered, smaller neighborhood shopping districts, such as Colvin-Brighton, that serve a more localized market
- There is a strong mix of industrial uses, from heavy manufacturing to light industrial and warehousing uses.
- While there is remaining industrial land in the Town of Tonawanda, in most cases, additional work is needed before it is fully “shovel-ready” for development. The North Youngmann Commerce Center, also known as the “Mud Flats” site, is the closest to ready. This site needs some transportation improvements (access road) before development could proceed, but these improvements are currently under design, and the site is expected to be fully ready for development in the near future.
- There are a few areas that have been the focus of special studies, such as the waterfront and the Sheridan-Parkside neighborhood. These plans will be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan.

### ***Housing and Neighborhoods- the areas that create a sense of “community”***

- The Town’s housing stock is relatively homogeneous. It consists primarily of smaller single-family homes, with the majority of units built between 1940 and 1959
- About 80% of the housing in the Town is over 40 years old (including the Village)
- Vacancy rates are low, and owner-occupancy is high, which are positive signs
- The area is very affordable
- Many of the residents of the Town have lived at their current address for a long time—38% had lived at the same address for over 20 years, while 26% had lived in the same home over 30 years.
- Based on household types, it is expected that the strongest demand is for “empty-nest” type units—smaller, easy to maintain homes targeted at families with no children living at home or persons living alone.
- Tonawanda has strong neighborhoods. There is a strong neighborhood watch system, some neighborhood/ community organizations, and an awareness of neighborhoods on the part of many residents
- This strength needs to be nurtured, as newer residents do not always have the awareness or appreciation of strong neighborhoods, which can help stabilize areas and improve quality of life factors, such as crime and property maintenance issues
- There is a distinct character to different neighborhoods that should be supported— unlike many suburban communities, where it all blends together
- Tonawanda has a strong system of neighborhood schools, neighborhood parks, and other community facilities that help to anchor neighborhoods
- There is still some scattered neighborhood retail—to a much greater extent than many other communities. The Town should encourage reinvestment and upgrading of these

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neighborhood retail centers, but at neighborhood scale for smaller pockets of retail. The goal is to create convenience retail centers for neighborhood use, not major retail centers.

- To the degree possible, neighborhoods should be made “walkable” to encourage non-automotive travel within the neighborhood (to corner store, library, school, etc.)
- The plan supports the existing Sheridan-Parkside redevelopment plan, which aims at a greater mix of incomes and housing styles in that neighborhood.

### ***Transportation- Roads, transit, sidewalks, trails and rail***

- The Town has good access to the region and the interstate system beyond Western New York, by means of I-190 and I-290
- Sheridan Drive is the major east-west route through the Town.
- There are several major north-south corridors, including Military, Elmwood, Delaware and Colvin.
- Traffic patterns in the western part of Town are very different from the eastern roadway network.
- On certain roadways, there is a tension between their function as a transportation corridor and as a means of access to neighboring properties. This does not exactly correspond to the classification of the roadway—there are roadways that have been classified as major arterials where congestion is not as great a problem as on minor arterials. Major problem areas include Sheridan Drive, Niagara Falls Boulevard, Highland/Englewood, Colvin Boulevard, Delaware Road, Kenmore Avenue and Brighton Road.
- Traffic concerns include congestion, difficulty in making left-turn lanes, and certain “problem intersections”.
- Compared to most suburban communities in Western New York, Tonawanda has better transit service. However, it is still limited, particularly east-west service.
- Most of the Town has sidewalks, making it easier to walk than in many other communities
- There are attractive greenways in the waterfront area, which connect into a wider network of trails for recreational use.
- Rail is still an active use in the Town, servicing industrial users.

### ***Infrastructure—water, sewer, utilities***

- The Town has full water, sewer, and other utilities throughout the Town
- Water and wastewater treatment services are regional, with the Cities of Tonawanda and North Tonawanda
- The infrastructure is older, but in generally good shape

### ***Economic Development- job opportunities for residents and tax base for the Town***

- The Town has been proactive in terms of working with regional economic development entities, and is starting to see the benefits of that cooperation
- The Empire Zone program has been an asset in attracting businesses
- The Town has a diverse workforce. Town residents work in a variety of industries, with greatest concentration of residents working in the fields of education, health and social services (28% of all workers living in the Town work in one of these fields.) Around 13% of employed persons in Town work in Manufacturing industries, and 13% work in retail industries. The rest of employed residents are fairly evenly distributed among all other industries.
- The Town is strongly white collar. Approximately 35% of workers are management/professional; 31% sales/ office occupations.
- 61% of those 16 and older are in the labor force. The unemployment rate is 4.3%.
- 7.3% of residents live below the poverty line. This rate is slightly higher than Amherst (6.4%) or Cheektowaga (6.5%), but is much lower than Erie County (12%)

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- Median household income is \$41,300, compared to \$38,600 in Erie County. Median family income is \$51,100. Most of the non-family households in the Town of Tonawanda are single- persons.
- Most people (79%) work for private companies. 17% work for the government; 4% are self employed
- Nearly all drive to work, either alone or in a carpool- 94%.
- The average commute is just over 19 minutes, which is typical in WNY
- Just under 24% of residents work in the Town. In percentage terms, this places the Town of Tonawanda approximately in the middle, with roughly half of other communities in Erie County with higher percentage and half lower. However, in terms of the numbers of residents who are able to find employment in Tonawanda, only by Buffalo, Amherst, Cheektowaga, and – narrowly- Town of Hamburg have larger numbers of residents working within the Town of their residence.

### ***Community Facilities—parks, libraries, senior services, emergency services, historic resources***

- In general, Town residents enjoy a high level of community services
- The Town has an excellent park system, with parks distributed throughout the Town
- Police and emergency services are rated high by local residents
- Highway services (road repair, garbage collection, recycling, snowplowing, etc.) are also rated highly on surveys and comment forms.
- The Historical Society buildings, housed in the oldest structure in the Town, has undergone a recent renovation.
- High municipal services are highly valued by residents, with many stating that this is the reason they chose to move to the Town of Tonawanda.
- There is concern about the status of the Town's libraries, but there is no consensus on the appropriate solution. Many are in favor of a more centralized system, while many others value the neighborhood based libraries.

### **ANY COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS:**

The Town welcomes your comments, suggestions or ideas. They should be sent to the firm assisting the Town in this effort:

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