

## Chapter 2

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# Community Vision



## **Chapter 2: Community Vision**

Community vision is the expressed desire for a future condition or state of being. A well defined community vision will forecast—and set the stage for—the preferred outcomes in a defined area.

For the Waterfront Land Use Plan Update, the community vision focuses on the town’s aspirations for the Niagara Riverfront and adjacent lands. The vision for the area was developed with input and guidance from residents, businesses, land owners, community leaders and other stakeholders through a series of meetings. A summary of community input is contained in Appendix B.

The vision statement, goals and strategies defined in this chapter were developed to guide future decision making and investment. They are the foundation for the future land use plan and site specific recommendations contained in subsequent chapters of this plan. They should provide a framework for future development and redevelopment efforts within this area. They will also serve as guideposts for updates to the Town’s Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Code and other municipal regulations related to this area in the Town.

### **Vision Statement**

Vision statements are intentionally broad and idealistic. They encompass diverse, but interconnected, concepts and ideas that will achieve a desired end when addressed comprehensively. In order for this vision statement to be meaningful and to be actively supported in future policy and decisions, it must be community based.

The vision statement developed in this process is a product of community input. It reflects and honors past planning efforts while at the same time addresses evolving community priorities and planning strategies. The core elements of the vision were derived through input received from advisory committee members, town leaders and the public at large. The vision was refined several times during the planning process in response to community, town staff and committee feedback.

### ***Vision for the Tonawanda Waterfront***

“The Town of Tonawanda desires a highly valued waterfront that encourages diverse activities and sustainable investment. The waterfront area will attract water-focused businesses, support existing industries, encourage passive and active recreation, allow for natural areas and open space, accommodate appropriately located residential development and balance the diverse uses located within the waterfront region.

The Town, along with community stakeholders, will continue to act as environmental stewards and ensure sustainable planning and design solutions are implemented by public and private partners. In this way the waterfront will improve as a key amenity that both enhances public access and fosters new investment.”

## Goals and Strategies

In community planning, goals are broad statements. They are broad statements that define the community's desired condition(s) related to a specific issue or topic addressed in the larger vision. Goal statements help to answer the question, what is desired or preferred? The community's vision was broken down into the following elements:



*Residents from the study area participated in an educational session to learn more about land use planning and provide their input about future land uses in the study area.*

- ***Waterfront***
- ***Sustainability***
- ***Environmental Stewardship***
- ***Economic Development***
- ***Community Design***

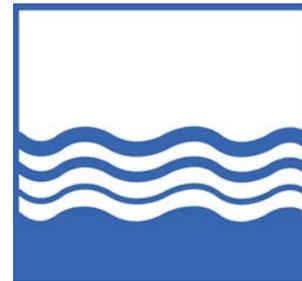
These goal areas have been individually defined; however, they need to be considered and implemented in an integrated fashion in order to fulfill the Town's vision for its waterfront.

Understanding the “what” is an important step in determining future direction and helping to ensure that well-aligned, vision-supporting decisions are made. However, additional guidance is needed to provide the right path for Town's leaders, stakeholders and residents and to keep them on it.

With so many moving parts—various administrative actions by many departments, leadership transitions, personnel changes and other community dynamics—it is important to know how the goals can and should be achieved over time. Strategies defined within each goal area provide that “how-to” information. Strategies drill down to give more specific ideas about the means by which the goals can be achieved. If a goal describes the destination then the corresponding strategies provide insight about the possible routes the community can take to get there. This plan's goals and strategies are designed to allow adaptability and flexibility over time. They also provide the basis for the land use and phased implementation outlined in other sections of the plan.

**Waterfront**

The Town recognizes that Niagara River and waterfront areas are valuable assets that offer unique opportunities and inherent stewardship. Future land use and development decisions must be sensitive to the waterfront, increase public access to and views of the river, enhance trail linkages to and through the study area, and enhance connections among local and regional destinations. The Town’s waterfront will be a place where economic and environmental sustainability are consistently balanced.



Strategies

1. Increase public access to and views of the waterfront. Physical and visual access to the waterfront should be a cornerstone of all future improvements within the study area boundary. Waterfront access provides a host of recreational, economic and social/psychological benefits for the community.
2. Encourage water-dependent uses and expanded passive recreation along the water’s edge. Future development and redevelopment on parcels located immediately adjacent to the river should depend directly and/or indirectly on the waterfront presence.
3. Relocate ill-suited development as opportunity and resources are available, especially those that negatively impact air quality and, in turn, public health. Actively engage public and private stakeholders to relocate non-water dependent development to other viable location within the Town.
4. Engage regional partners to pursue joint initiatives. The Town must recognize and celebrate its regional connections and explore opportunities to develop projects and policies that mutually benefit multiple communities. The Town should seek joint grant funding opportunities (e.g. Niagara River Greenway) to implement regional initiatives.



*The Niagara River shoreline offers many unique areas to enjoy the surroundings. These views and resources should be integrated with future development in a positive manner.*

## Sustainability



Future land use and development will promote sustainability by encouraging appropriate development patterns, encouraging eco-friendly site and building design and employing green construction techniques. The physical, environmental, economic and social implications of decision making in Tonawanda will be considered in order to promote long-term community health and prosperity.

### Strategies



*The Town already has various locations that have explored and actively installed renewable energy sources as part of their individual business practices. Continued encouragement of these resources through building and site design standards or guidelines will help to spur additional development.*

1. Implement green building and site design standards. The Town should clearly define its minimum requirements for the use of green building and sustainable site development practices, including those employed as part of New York State's "Smart Growth" principles. These requirements need to be universally implemented in the town, with special emphasis in the waterfront area.
2. Encourage adaptive and beneficial reuse of vacant industrial facilities and landfill sites. The study area's brownfields and vacant industrial/commercial structures and sites present critical opportunities for redevelopment. Consider ways that existing structures can be repurposed and retrofitted to meet today's development needs.
3. Encourage and expand green technology businesses. Building on current successes in the area, the Town should identify preferred green industries and work with the economic development community to position the Town for future investment.
4. Expand connectivity to and through the study area. Land use patterns that allow active transportation and multi-modal access will be more sustainable in the future. The Town should explore capital improvements that will expand trail and street connections through the study area to allow user-friendly pedestrian and bicycle access.

**Environmental Stewardship**

Future land use and development decisions will consider the environmental implications to unique environmental characteristics and habitats. The Town and its private and public partners will foster opportunities to preserve and restore natural resources, including the Niagara River, wetlands, streams, woodlots and other environmental features.



Strategies

1. Continue and expand efforts to improve environmental and human health conditions at existing industrial facilities. The Town will continue to engage industries through the E3 program and find additional opportunities to influence facility operations and site management practices that minimize potential environmental and health threats.
2. Encourage best practices for shoreline stabilization and restoration. The River’s ecosystem, including water quality, water quantity, and the plants, fish and wildlife that depend on the river, is important to overall quality of life. Understanding the context of the landscape, the local ecosystem(s), the landowners’ goals, the regulatory framework, and former/future alterations to the landscape will help ensure restoration projects along the shoreline will be effective.
3. Work with state and federal partners and private landowners to implement environmental remediation at known sites. Public and private partnerships will be needed to comprehensively address environmentally compromised parcels and improve air quality in the community.
4. Consider human health impacts of proposed projects. Tonawanda’s environmental challenges increase the Town’s interest in considering human health in its project review processes. Consider regulatory and policy changes that would integrate human health factors into the decision making framework.



*The Huntley Generation Station is a prominent presence along the River.*

## Economic Development



Future land use and development of the study area will support existing successful business and industrial enterprises while identifying and encouraging new opportunities for smart economic development and redevelopment. The Town will provide the appropriate land use regulations to provide opportunities for private investment in line with these local goals. The Town will consider physical enhancements needed to meet the evolving needs of emerging markets and industries. The Town will encourage and support public-private partnerships to redevelop brownfields, to expand smart industry and to increase the Town's tax base and local jobs.

### Strategies



*The Riverview Solar Technology Park home to various businesses, including the worldwide corporate headquarters of Unifrax, LLC.*

1. Support existing successful industrial and commercial enterprises in the study area and work towards improving emissions and environmental quality of these businesses. The Town should work proactively to ensure existing thriving businesses stay in Tonawanda. The industries and commercial businesses located in the study area are an important component of the community's tax and employment bases.
2. Pursue brownfield redevelopment funding and encourage more eco-friendly industries (e.g. Riverview Solar Park). The push for "green" businesses is universal, particularly in the Greater Buffalo Region. Tonawanda should be working to identify local and regional opportunities to capitalize on this trend within the study area.
3. Invest in public improvements to improve the Town's "climate" for private investment. The public sector's investment in a defined area can improve the climate for investment from the private sector. The Town should work with other municipal partners to identify key infrastructure enhancements that may attract new development.
4. Develop a brand - either locally or regionally - to attract future business investment. Community branding will give Tonawanda an much needed opportunity to define, refine and promote its identity.

### **Community Design**

Future land use and development in the waterfront area should be designed to improve visual appeal and create a defined sense of place. The unique mix and design of industrial, commercial and residential uses within the area will be coordinated through the Town’s regulatory programs and design guidelines. Public and private development projects will feature improved landscaping to create visual interest and adequate buffers. Corridors, public spaces and individual sites will utilize appropriate materials and incorporate pedestrian-scaled amenities where appropriate to improve the look and feel of the area. Neighborhood and district design themes will be encouraged, especially at gateways and key destinations within the study area to foster community pride and branding.



#### Strategies

1. Implement greening and buffering strategies throughout the study area. The large scale buildings and large swaths of vacant and industrial lands need to be transformed by restoring natural landscapes throughout the study area. Lush landscaping will signify community pride and investment while at the same time enhancing the human scale of existing and future development within the study area.
2. Utilize and enhance design standards to achieve better site and building designs. The Town should incorporate graphic-based guidelines and/or standards to ensure that redevelopment achieves the visual appeal and scale of development desired for the study area, especially on and near the waterfront parcels.
3. Develop design themes to distinguish and connect attractions and destinations. The study area boasts many unique assets that should be celebrated and interpreted. The Town should identify physical enhancements that will help share its story visually and encourage residents and visitors to spend time exploring this unique area.



*The Old Town neighborhood in the Town of Tonawanda is one of the oldest neighborhoods in the Town and is the only one with direct views of the Niagara Riverfront.*