

CITY OF ONEONTA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Comprehensive Planning Process

Comprehensive planning activities play an important role in the continued development of a community. The Comprehensive Planning function is an organized manner by which a community can identify its needs and establish goals and objectives for future development. Development and implementation of a comprehensive plan is an effective and efficient means to achieve meaningful and desired change in a steady, incremental manner. Furthermore, the comprehensive plan serves to identify changes or trends that are desirable or undesirable in the community.

In order to develop cogent, effective decisions regarding change and the degree to which change will occur, there is a basic need to gather pertinent facts and data, accurately developed and analyzed; principles and standards, goals and objectives; and community discussion and understanding. Generally, the planning process encompasses several steps.

Step one establishes organization and the formulation of the mission statement. Step two involves an inventory and analysis of the City's resources, strengths, weaknesses, and environmental features. Step three consolidates steps one and two into a vision statement, objective, and strategy for a useful long-term Comprehensive Plan. At step four, annual objectives, programs, policies and action steps are included in the document. An exemplary balance of these four steps is necessary to produce a useful Comprehensive Plan. If thorough research and realistic goals are established, the document will serve as a useful guide for future development.

Development of the City of Oneonta Comprehensive Plan has followed said identified process. The Comprehensive Planning Committee formally adopted a mission statement at its meeting of November 17, 1993 which states:

To create a cohesive, unified vision for the City of Oneonta in order to meet the needs and challenges of the twenty-first century and beyond. The vision will reflect the resources of the community, identify strengths and weaknesses and propose a series of goals and objectives to guide the City in its future development. It is the intent of the Comprehensive Plan to identify an implementation strategy with appropriate review and update mechanisms to keep the plan up-to-date.

The Committee then proceeded with the Inventory and Analysis component of the plan. The Committee broke into working sub-groups in order to facilitate the inventory process. Each Sub-group was guided by a mission statement. A listing of the Sub-groups and each respective mission statement are provided in the ensuing pages.

Visual, Cultural, Environmental

Identify and preserve the visual, cultural and environmental resources of the City of Oneonta through the preservation of significant artifacts, records, landscapes, structures and sites.

Promote a greater diversity of theatrical and other cultural activities. Increase local awareness of all visual, cultural and environmental resources.

Land Use and Zoning

Promote development uses, patterns, densities and a mixture of activities which will reduce conflicts between various land uses and encourage positive investment in the form of new construction, restoration and improvement of existing structures and the protection of important land resources.

Transportation, Government Services and Utilities

Maintain and enhance the existing roadways and sidewalks in the City. Ensure that future improvements are beneficial in shaping the environment of the City. Promote the development, maintenance and enhancement of government services and community facilities to meet the needs of the residents of the City of Oneonta in the most cost-effective manner practicable.

Housing and Neighborhood Quality

Seek to promote a variety of quality and affordable housing opportunities that are accessible to all residents of the City. Seek to improve and enhance the quality of life and appearance of all neighborhoods in the City.

Economic and Demographic Analysis

To promote an encouraging economic climate in the City of Oneonta and its surrounding communities and to analyze current economic and demographic conditions and trends in order to identify the needs of the various sub-groups of the City's population in order to provide necessary services and opportunities.

Open Space and Recreation

Improve and expand recreational facilities in the City of Oneonta that are readily available to all residents. Preserve and enhance permanent open space that protects significant scenic and environmentally important areas.

Education

Identify the present educational assets of the community and the beneficiaries of the various programs and projects. Project educational and training needs of our community over the next 10 to 15 years. Suggest methods to direct our energies and resources toward the achievement of

those projected goals.

Governmental Organization

To provide information to the Comprehensive Planning Committee so that it can determine the best governmental structure for the City of Oneonta.

Upon completion of the Inventory and Analysis, the Committee identified a number of visions/themes which were prevalent throughout the entire sub-group information gathering process. Based upon the inventory of the City's resources as well as the overall themes, a community survey was distributed to a sample of residents. A series of programs, policies and action steps were recommended as a result of these activities. Periodic re-evaluation will occur to ensure the plan's completeness given rapidly changing circumstances.

1.2 Locational Analysis

The City of Oneonta, Otsego County is located approximately halfway between the urban areas of Binghamton and Albany. The City is situated on the Susquehanna River and is nestled in the foothills of the Catskill Mountains. Refer to COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FIGURE 1.1: REGIONAL LOCATION MAP, for a graphic representation of the City's location.

1.3 Transportation Access

The City of Oneonta is located along Interstate 88, the major east/west transportation route between Albany and Binghamton. The City is serviced by New York State Route 7 which connects the City of Oneonta with Albany and Binghamton. New York State Routes 23 and 28 also service the City of Oneonta. In addition to vehicular transportation routes, the City of Oneonta is serviced by a municipal airport located on Upper East Street and railway access, albeit currently only for freight shipment.

1.4 Historical Perspective of the City of Oneonta

The following historical tracing of the City of Oneonta is premised upon the Future for Oneonta Foundation brochure entitled, "We Welcome You to Oneonta."

Prehistoric Perspective

For thousands of years before the white man, the Algonquin and Iroquois Indians inhabited the land now known as the City of Oneonta. Evidence still remains of their long occupation. Many village, camp and trail sites have been discovered.

Traces have been found of Folsom man, the earliest Indian to inhabit North America. Four distinct

stone age Indian cultures have been identified from artifacts found in the area and there are many evidences of later Iroquois occupation. The Indians of the Six Nations who made the valley their home were mainly Mohawks, Oneidas, with a few Senecas and Tuscaroras.

Indian archeology is greatly indebted to Willard E. Yager, a native Oneontan, who spent most of his life and a great deal of money studying the Indians and writing about them. His collection of over 6,000 artifacts, now owned by Hartwick College in Oneonta, is one of the best in the state.

Historic Perspective

The first settlers to make this area their home were Palatine Germans and Dutchmen from the Schoharie and Mohawk Valleys who settled here shortly before the Revolutionary War. The pioneer settler was Henry Schramling, who acquired a thousand acres on the Plains near the mouth of Otego Creek. He was followed by John Vanderwerker who in 1775 built a log cabin in the dense hemlock forest near the lower entrance to Neawha Park.

The early settlers in the region were driven from their log cabins when the Revolutionary War turned Otsego County into a bloody battlefield and there were frequent clashes between patriots and the British, Tories and Indians.

In 1779, General James Clinton's Continental Army passed down the Susquehanna from Otsego Lake to join General John Sullivan's forces to the west. On their march, they laid waste to the Indian villages along the river.

When danger was over, many of the original settlers returned and others came in from the eastern New York counties. John Vanderwerker, who had been a captain during the war, brought in parts of a sawmill which he erected on the banks of the Susquehanna in 1780. At about the same time Aaron Brink erected a log house near the present viaduct, and this became the first hotel in the hamlet. Four years later Simeon Walling, who had gone down the river with the Clinton expedition and had liked the looks of the land, came in from Massachusetts and built a log cabin where the United Presbyterian Church now stands at the corner of Walling Avenue and Main Street.

At first the hamlet was called either McDonald's Mills or McDonald's Bridge. In 1808, John McDonald had built a second bridge across the river, a crude affair which replaced one erected by Vanderwerker in 1786.

When McDonald opened the first post office in his tavern in 1817, the community was officially called Milfordville, the area being then in the southern part of the town of Milford. It acquired the name Oneonta in 1832. The name first applied to the creek in the East Street valley.

The village developed slowly. For many years the village was a picturesque frontier community. Because of the frequent tavern brawls, it acquired at that time the descriptive name of Klipnockie.

In 1822 Eliakin Ford came to town, and until he died in 1873 he was the town's leading citizen. He first opened a general store at the corner of Main and Maple Streets, later moved to the corner of Chestnut

and Main and then to River Street opposite the McDonald Tavern.

When the Charlotte Turnpike opened in 1843, it shifted the center of activity from the section around the McDonald mills to what is now the main business center of the city. E.R. Ford then bought the Frederick Brown farm and built a stone store at the corner of Main and Broad Streets and a large stone mansion where the Wilber Bank is now.

E.R. Ford, Harvey Baker and Colonel W.W. Snow, the first congressman from the area, were greatly instrumental in the building of the Albany and Susquehanna Railroad, or more commonly known today as the Delaware and Hudson. When the railroad reached Oneonta in 1885 and adequate transportation was assured, the town began to grow. In the early 1870's extensive railroad shops were built, and Oneonta became a railroad center of national importance.

The D & H roundhouse was once the largest and its turntable the longest in the world. Almost 72 passenger trains operated in and out of Oneonta each day on the two steam railroads and the electric line which then served the community.

Around the turn of the century, cigar making was a big industry in Oneonta with several million being hand rolled each year. Cigar rolling in Oneonta ended in 1945. At the same time in history, more milk was produced within 25 miles of Oneonta than in any other area of like size in the world, and more grain was handled here than any place in the state except Buffalo and New York City.

Oneonta was most important in the formation of IBM. In 1889, Harlow E. Bundy patented the "International Time Recorder" and used it at the local post office where he was postmaster. The Bundy Electric Manufacturing Company joined with George W. Fairchild's International Time Recording Company later that year becoming the forerunner to IBM.

The Village of Oneonta was incorporated as a city in 1908.

Oneonta's second major endeavor in its history, next to the railroad, was in the field of education. Two major colleges were founded: Hartwick College, originally Hartwick Seminary, and the SUNY Oneonta, originally Oneonta Normal School. Their history is very much a part of Oneonta's past and very much part of the City's future.

Hartwick College was founded in Oneonta in 1928. It is an outgrowth of Hartwick Seminary established in 1797 by the executors of the Will of John Christopher Hartwick, a Lutheran missionary.

In 1928 there were 235 students enrolled at the college. Hartwick College experienced steady growth with the enrollment today approximately 1,465 students with a staff of 486 employees.

SUNY Oneonta is an outgrowth of the Oneonta Normal School. The early curriculum provided for two-year training after the achievement of the college entrance high school diploma. In 1923, the three year curriculum was established, and in 1938, the four year program. The first Bachelor of Education degrees were awarded in 1942. Enrollment today is approximately 5,800 students with a staff of 965 employees. This employment figure includes full- and part-time faculty, staff, support personnel and

Oneonta Auxiliary Services (OAS) employees.

Contemporary Perspective

The City of Oneonta today is a much different place than in its not so distant past. The City's population has remained steady at just under 14,000 persons since the mid twentieth century. The City has grown from an Indian council site to trading post, to city, to the educational, cultural, business, retail and professional center for the tri-county area (i.e., Otsego, Delaware and Schoharie Counties).

Times have changed the employment scenario in Oneonta. Most families once depended on the railroad for employment. Today, the labor market is much more diverse. Major employers include A.O. Fox Hospital, Hartwick College and SUNY Oneonta, the Oneonta Job Corps Center, Pope and Talbot, Inc., New York State Electric and Gas (NYSEG), NYNEX, Corning Corporation, Wilber National Bank, the Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC), Astoria Federal Savings and Loan, Astrocom Electronics, F.N. Burt Company, Custom Electronics, *The Daily Star*, Key Bank, and the Mold-a-Matic Corporation. The retail and service sectors also employ a significant number of residents. Additionally, many of the surrounding school districts and Otsego County Government employ a significant number of City residents.

Residents and tourists have no problem finding recreational activities in and around the City of Oneonta. The area abounds with lakes, streams and scenic countryside. A number of golf courses, located outside the City, provide golfing pleasure to many. Oneonta has two major parks, Neahwa and Wilber, which are oriented to both passive and active recreational activities. Centerpieces to the community are Damaschke Field, home of the Oneonta Yankees, and the planned Clyde Wright Soccer Campus to be located in the Town of Oneonta. Additionally, Hartwick and SUNY Oneonta both provide for soccer and baseball enjoyment for the region. Furthermore, the Sixth Ward Athletic Club and the Oneonta Tennis Club provide residents with alternative recreational and social activities.

The City today provides numerous cultural activities for its residents and visitors. Hartwick and SUNY Oneonta both provide a variety of programs which include a dinner theater, noted speakers, and television and press notables. Furthermore, SUNY Oneonta provides the City with a public access television channel which offers a 24 hour visual information source in addition to governmental, cultural and educational programming.

Additionally, there is the Orpheus Theater, the Catskill Symphony, the Catskill Conservatory, and the Upper Catskill Community Council of the Arts, the Catskill Choral Society and the Oneonta Concert Association, the Glimmerglass Opera, located in Cooperstown, providing musical enjoyment for the entire region. The City, further, supports a summer concert series in Neahwa park every summer.

The area is also serviced by a number of museums, most notably the Leatherstocking Railway Historical Society, the Yager Museum at Hartwick College, the National Soccer Hall of Fame, The National Baseball Hall of Fame, The Fenimore House and The Farmer's Museum.

1.5 Previous Comprehensive Planning Activities

The City of Oneonta was guided by a master plan adopted in 1974. The 1974 Plan was entitled, "Comprehensive Plan Update" and was developed by the Crandell Associates. The Crandell plan updated the previous Master Plan developed by John Calbreath Burdis Associates adopted in 1965 entitled: "The Master Plan: An Action Program".

While the Burdis plan discussed issues such as demographics, economic base, regional traffic and others, the Calbreath plan only addressed land use, public utilities, community facilities and environmental assessment.

1.6 Issues and Challenges Facing the City of Oneonta

The City of Oneonta is faced with many challenges but many opportunities also abound. The comprehensive plan is designed to provide the City with the appropriate direction necessary to guide its growth and development and to adequately address the issues and challenges facing the community. The comprehensive planning process has identified a number of opportunities and constraints for the City of Oneonta.

Visual, Cultural and Environmental

Historic Ambiance

The City of Oneonta possesses a turn of the century character which can be capitalized on for future economic development initiatives. The historic character of the community, especially in the downtown area and in the Walnut Street Historic District, provides the City with unique and attractive tourist amenities. Preservation of locally significant sites may offer expanded cultural opportunities for a growing population by protecting a part of the City of Oneonta which could otherwise be lost forever.

Another attribute of the City of Oneonta which is of interest to many in the community is the City's railroad history. Many tourists have made special trips to the City for special viewings of the caboose in Neawha Park and to see other railroad memorabilia.

Recreational Amenities

The City of Oneonta contains a significant inventory of well maintained recreational and open space resources which attract visitors from outside the City. The City has become a recreational hub. However, since the parks are so well maintained they, at times, are at capacity.

Cultural Amenities

The City of Oneonta possesses a significant number of cultural resources such as theaters, museums and art galleries which have made the City a cultural hub. The community has attracted many artisans from

the New York City Area primarily due to the City's rural, small town character.

Environmental Features

The City of Oneonta possesses a number of important ecologically important resources such as streams and wetlands. Streams can provide opportunities for linear greenspace and pedestrian trails. Wetlands can provide aesthetic and passive recreational opportunities, albeit, very limited.

Land Use and Zoning

Land Use

The City of Oneonta does not possess a significant amount land for expansion opportunities. However, there a number of opportunities where further development could occur and would not be in conflict with surrounding land uses.

Zoning

The Zoning Code is generally adequate to meet the current needs of the City. Recent changes in the code as they relate to signs, home based businesses and the creation of an MUX classification have created greater flexibility in the code. A number of other changes have been identified and are related to decreasing selected setback and lot size requirements in a number of zoning districts.

Transportation, Government Services and Utilities

The transportation, government services and utilities are generally adequate in the City of Oneonta. The water, sewer and stormwater systems are sufficient to meet the current and future needs of the City. The Municipal Airport is a resource that is currently underutilized and offers some future economic and other potential.

Housing and Neighborhood Quality

The general quality of the housing stock and of the neighborhoods is adequate and poses no serious challenges to the City. However, during recent years there has been a movement to revert many multiple family homes back into single family homes. There is currently a need for greater emphasis on home ownership in the City.

Economic and Demographic Analysis

As the City continues to transition from a manufacturing, railroad, and industrial economy to an educational and service economy, economic opportunities will need focus by city officials to ensure the continued viability of the City's economic base. The City also contains a large population of persons between the ages of 18 and 24 which presents both economic opportunities as well as challenges in other areas such as housing and neighborhood quality.

Open Space and Recreation

The City of Oneonta currently possesses excellent park, recreation and open space facilities which provide residents with a diverse array of recreational opportunities.

Education

The City of Oneonta possesses a diverse array of educational opportunities for all residents.

Governmental Organization

The current City government structure is generally adequate to meet the needs of residents. However, it may be beneficial to examine the efficacy of creating a greater degree of intergovernmental cooperation between the City and neighboring municipalities. Also, some revisions to the City of Oneonta Municipal Code may be necessary to reflect current governmental practices.

1.7 Comprehensive Plan Vision Statements

Based upon identified issues and challenges, a number of visions were developed which serve as the basis for the Comprehensive Planning Document. These are highlighted below:

Community Vision

The City of Oneonta will have maintained its small town atmosphere and sustained the "sense of community" residents feel the City possesses. City government will have worked toward balancing the economic and social needs of future growth as desired by the residents to maintain the City's small town ambiance.

Cultural and Recreational Opportunities Vision

The City will continue to serve as a regional hub; to provide a nurturing environment that will encourage growth and development of cultural and recreational activities. Both students and residents will derive mutual benefit from both active and passive participation in these activities.

Economic Development Vision

The City of Oneonta will have strengthened its capacity to respond to marketplace shifts and changes, seize new economic development opportunities, and sustain its local and regional vitality. Furthermore, the City will have assured its basic services, attracted new investment

which enhances the quality of life of its residents, communicated its improved image through a well defined public relations campaign, and generated support from citizens, government leaders, and other institutions for making the community hospitable and enthusiastic about attracting new companies, investment and visitors to the community.

Environmental Protection Vision

The City of Oneonta has and will continue to successfully utilize the options and resources available to it to effectively maintain and preserve its visually and environmentally sensitive resources, and its historically and architecturally significant buildings and structures. The City will seek to protect the environmental integrity of its natural resources as well as the overall health and safety of the community. Aesthetic improvements like the Tree City Program will continue to improve the environmental quality of the City.

Government Vision

The City will continue to provide basic services efficiently and innovatively. The City and Town of Oneonta will have fostered a greater willingness to work together to benefit the Greater Oneonta Area. New cooperative agreements to more closely link the two communities together will have been developed and existing linkages will have been strengthened.

Housing and Neighborhood Quality Vision

Oneonta will have a stock of affordable and well maintained housing for all of its citizens. The City will have economic and culturally integrated neighborhoods.

Infrastructure Vision

The City of Oneonta will maintain its physical infrastructure and public services at the highest level through modern, innovative technology and it will expand and improve these services to meet any future needs of its citizens.

Land Use and Zoning Vision

The City will achieve a harmonious mix of residential, commercial and public land appropriate and supportive of a well planned, dynamic community that values family life, education, work and recreation.