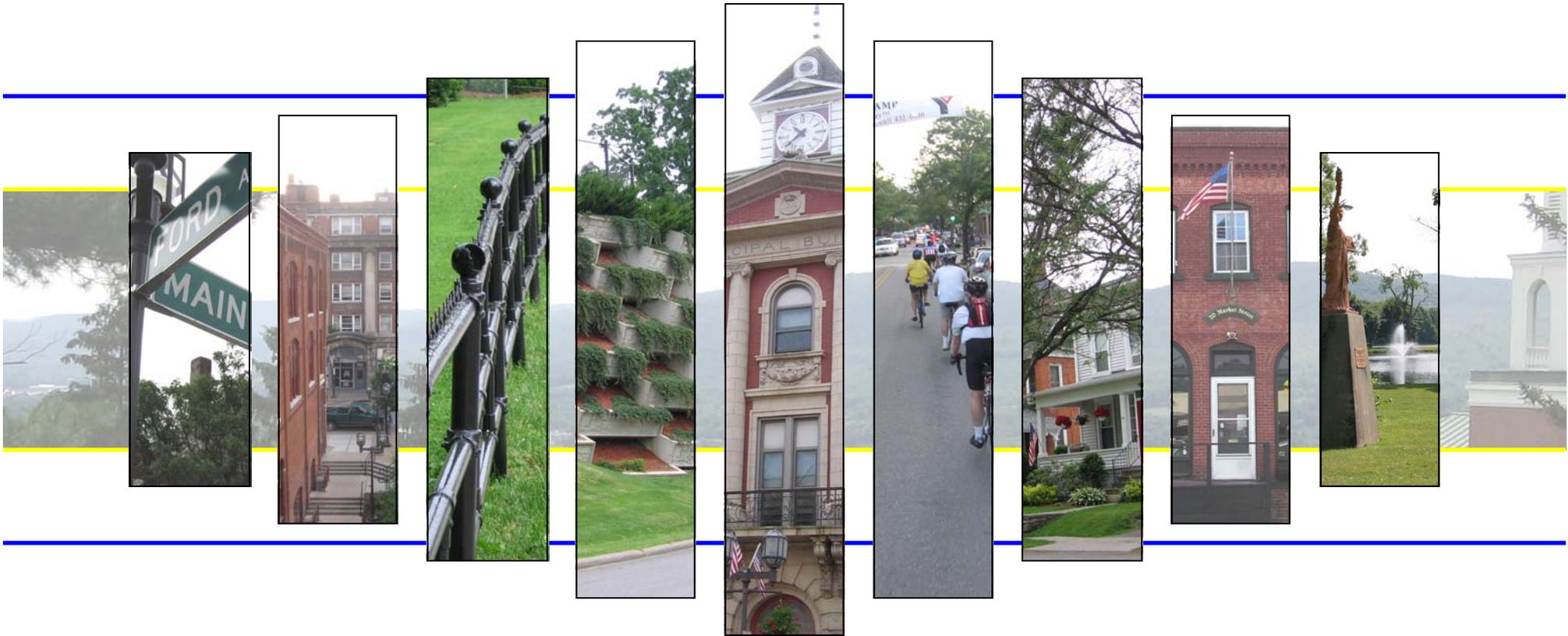




City of Oneonta, NY

John S. Nader, Mayor



2007 Comprehensive Plan Executive Summary

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Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Nestled in the foothills of the Catskills in Central New York lies the City of Oneonta, a charming community with a rich history and excellent quality of life. Approximately 13,000 people live in the city, including students at Hartwick College and SUNY Oneonta, who comprise nearly half the total population. Oneonta is known to many as a quaint college town, though in recent years its identity has expanded to include sports tourism and the arts. Additionally, the city boasts a well-preserved Main Street with grand historic buildings, giving the community a traditional, even Americana, flavor.

Oneonta enjoys many other assets, including stunning natural surroundings, scores of beautiful, historic homes, a tremendous park system, convenient access to Interstate 88, and close proximity to Cooperstown, which attracts hundreds of thousands of tourists every year. Despite these features, Oneonta faces significant challenges as it moves forward into the 21st Century.

The 2007 Comprehensive Plan of the City of Oneonta provides an overall framework for future public and private investment and decision making in the community. Investment can take many forms, such as, but not limited to, financial, civic, and creative resources. In the City of Oneonta, it is this collective investment by residents, businesses, colleges, churches, schools, volunteer organizations, and local government that will shape the physical, social, and economic character of the community.



Main Street Oneonta



View of the Susquehanna River Valley from Hartwick College



Introduction

Extensive public input into the planning process revealed that one of the primary issues facing Oneonta is the need to improve economic conditions, especially in the downtown area. Additional issues include: strengthening the city's identity as a regional and national tourism destination, preserving historic properties, addressing nuisance issues associated with college students and rental properties, beautification of community gateways and other important public spaces, and providing affordable housing for seniors and young families. Finally, many residents believe the structure of local government requires reorganization, namely the city charter, to allow for government officials to more effectively address these problems.



Historic home at Main and Grand



Crosswalk on Main St



Historic marker at Huntington Park



Planning Process

PLANNING PROCESS

Overview

In its simplest form, long-range comprehensive planning includes three key activities: understanding the present state, identifying the desired end state, and determining the best methods for achieving it. The City of Oneonta last adopted a comprehensive plan in 1995. The City has made substantial progress in realizing the goals of the 1995 Plan. However, economic, demographic, and physical environments are continuously evolving, which necessitates the revision of the adopted plan.

The process for the 2007 Plan was initiated to provide the community with an opportunity to participate in the creation of an updated comprehensive plan that will guide the future of the City. As every good comprehensive plan should, this Plan builds upon this community's strengths, addresses its weaknesses, capitalizes on opportunities and identifies the threats to the overall quality of life. The Plan accomplishes this by establishing a community vision and identifying policies, objectives and action items that address numerous issues related to improving the overall quality of life.



Steering Committee Meeting, including some members of the general public

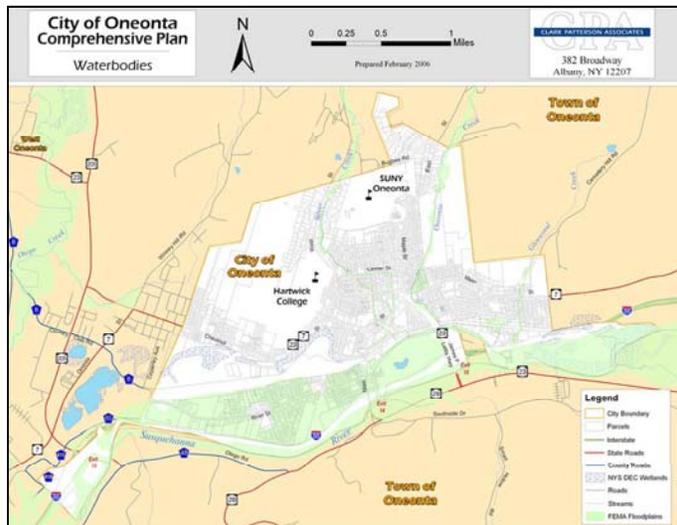
Community Input

In late 2005, the Mayor's Office organized a Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, made up of representatives from businesses, local and county government, the colleges, and the community at large. The Steering Committee was charged with working with planning consultants from Clark Patterson Associates to develop the comprehensive plan.



Planning Process

- Preferred Development Survey - Conducted at the Public Meeting, the PDS asked participants to rank images from different communities based on their appropriateness for Oneonta. Various styles of architecture, signage, site development, and streetscaping were shown. The results of the PDS served to further refine the policies, objectives and strategies in the Plan.
- Institutional Meetings - Meetings were held with representatives from SUNY Oneonta, Hartwick College, and A.O. Fox Hospital. The meetings offered an additional opportunity for the community's largest institutions to discuss current conditions in the city and the potential for improvements.
- Other Input - In addition to these formal activities, numerous emails and letters were sent to the Steering Committee and City staff that included substantial feedback and fresh ideas for some of the more challenging issues.



Existing Conditions Map showing waterbodies in Oneonta

Existing Conditions

The Comprehensive Plan includes a detailed Existing Conditions section. It consists of a detailed inventory and analysis of conditions that affect the social, economic and environmental character of the City of Oneonta. Reliable resources such as the United States Census, the New York Department of Transportation, the New York Department of Environmental Conservation, the Otsego County Real Property Tax Office, and the City of Oneonta were used to compile the data needed for an accurate representation of the community. Collectively, this information illustrates current conditions in the city, providing an important backdrop as the community pursues its vision and goals.



Policy & Implementation

POLICY & IMPLEMENTATION

Overview

A good comprehensive plan builds upon a framework that ties broad ideas and specific activities together, identifying the community's short- and long-term needs. Effective policies that will guide community investment and decision making in the City of Oneonta over the next decade often require a multi-level approach. The Plan's framework is very much like the blueprint of a building. All of the components—from the largest to the smallest—must fit together in a logical way for the structure to stand and function well for years to come. The Comprehensive Plan is the base upon which the community's future direction, development and success will be built.

There are four key elements that comprise the policy and implementation section:

- Community Vision Statement - A general statement about the future condition or state of the community; it is the end toward which all actions are aimed.
- Policy Statements - Similar to a vision in that it is an end toward which actions are aimed, policies are more narrow in scope and tend to target a specific area or topic. Imagine what the community should "have" or "be".
- Objectives - A statement of measurable activity to be accomplished in pursuit of the policy, which is reasonably attainable. Consider broad actions or aspirations, such as "increase," "develop," or "preserve."
- Action Items - A specific proposal to do something that relates directly to accomplishing an objective, which usually takes the form of a plan, activity, project or program.



Policy & Implementation

Community Vision Statement

The Steering Committee meetings, S.W.O.T. Analysis, focus groups, public workshop, preferred development survey, and future land use plan review contained a relatively consistent collection of priorities and values expressed by the community. Using these priorities and values, the City adopted the following Community Vision Statement, which serves as the foundation for all policies, objectives, and action items contained in this Plan.

Vision of the City of Oneonta

Oneonta is a Community that:

- *Will always cherish and protect its traditional urban fabric, its surrounding natural beauty, and its diverse citizenry who value civic engagement;*
- *Will continuously develop strategic partnerships between government, businesses, higher education, and citizens to create a sustainable economic base.*
- *Is well-planned and environmentally sensitive, where all citizens have equal access to services and amenities, including plentiful recreational and cultural activities;*
- *Will continuously improve its standing as a regional destination for the arts, sports tourism, shopping and collegiate activity;*
- *Will provide the necessary infrastructure to support balanced transportation choices;*
- *Will retain existing businesses and attract new businesses that will tap into the tremendous potential of the local workforce, meet the needs of local residents and be designed to respect and improve their surroundings; and*
- *Is governed by officials that aggressively advance the quality of life in the community and are fully-equipped to enforce all of these values and priorities.*



Policy & Implementation

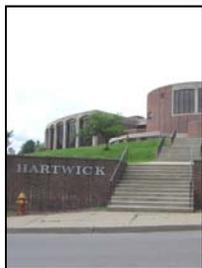
Policy Statements

Using the results of the S.W.O.T. Analysis, five policy areas were identified that would form the framework for the Plan:

- Destination & Image
- Economic Health & Revitalization
- Quality of Life
- Downtown
- Administration & Government

Utilizing the information collected from the survey, focus groups, existing conditions analysis, and Steering Committee meetings, a policy statement was developed for each of the five policy areas. Policy statements are typically broad in nature, in order to form the framework for a variety of objectives.

Policy Area #1 - Destination & Image



It is the City's policy to establish Oneonta as a regional and national destination, expanding and promoting our various assets including higher education institutions, scenic beauty, the arts and cultural community, urban parks, and excellent quality of life. Residents, businesses, and community leaders will work together to make Oneonta a more attractive place, especially in downtown and at the gateways to the city. We will encourage the support of local businesses and work to attract new businesses that will enhance our image as a unique destination. We will play a supporting role to regional assets including sports, scenic beauty, recreation and shopping and commercial destinations.





Policy & Implementation

Policy Area #2 - Economic Health & Revitalization

It is the policy of Oneonta to support existing businesses and encourage the attraction of additional businesses that meet the needs of residents and visitors. The economic vitality of the community depends on having locally supported businesses that offer the goods and services community members need and want. Future commercial and residential development must respect the scale and character of this traditional small city. The community recognizes that much of the perceived and actual economic health of the city revolves around the condition of Downtown. Oneonta will build upon existing assets and growing economic sectors such as environmentally conscious, or “green” technologies, recreational tourism, and arts and culture.



Policy Area #3 - Quality of Life

It is the City’s policy to ensure that Oneonta is a premier city in New York State where people desire to live and raise a family, and have ample employment opportunities. Quality of life in Oneonta consists of multiple indicators, including education, the arts, economic stability, public health and safety, social networks, environmental quality, public services, adequate infrastructure, healthy neighborhoods, and recreational opportunities. Each of these areas must be addressed in order to attract and retain residents, businesses, and tourists. The community will work together in the spirit of civic responsibility to ensure that every citizen, every business, and every visitor will have an enriching experience in the City of Oneonta.





Policy & Implementation

Policy Area #4 - Downtown



It is the policy of the City of Oneonta to make its defined Downtown a regionally renowned destination and a place that serves the residential, commercial, and civic needs of the community and its visitors. The health and vibrancy of Downtown has a significant impact on the city's image. Residents, businesses, and government will work together to make Downtown clean, safe, and economically viable, encouraging the strength of private businesses and the attractiveness of public spaces. Downtown can and will be a regional center of arts, commerce, recreation, social, and civic activity.



Policy Area #5 - Administration & Government



It is our policy to ensure that the government of the City of Oneonta serves the needs of the community by supplying services that promote quality of life and economic growth. The government should play an active role in administering and implementing the recommendations outlined in this Plan. Implementing this Plan will require strong leadership, more accountability, and greater regional cooperation. It will also lead to gains in efficiency and effectiveness.





Policy & Implementation

Objectives & Action Items

Each of the five Policy Statements is followed by a list of Objectives, which are then followed by a series of Action Items designed to meet those Objectives. In all there are 132 Action Items in the Plan. In order to more effectively manage this extensive to-do list, each of the Action Items is categorized as part of either a short-term, mid-term, long-term or ongoing time frame. Within the short-term time frame, the Steering Committee identified Action Items considered to be the highest priority for the community to pursue. In fact, some of these items were underway at the time of plan adoption.

The following is a list of these high-priority Action Items, broken down by policy area and in no particular order.

Destination & Image

- 1) Work with city officials and local leaders to identify constraints to achieving the desired image of the community and ways to enhance the image within each of their areas of expertise. Examples would include:
 - Recreation Office—Offer more programs focused on the 12-18 year old group.
 - Police—Increase bike or walking patrols in the City.
 - Department of Public Works—Enhance Gateway area appearances with plantings and better maintenance.
 - Community Development—Develop an annual grant application calendar for various programs that are needed to support local businesses and enhance the urban infrastructure of the community.
- 2) Develop and promote a “Business Basics” package that advocates for attractive and accessible storefronts and improves the public spaces immediately adjacent to these businesses.
- 3) Encourage the colleges to provide general neighborhood consideration policies to landlords where student housing is located in or near predominantly non-student neighborhoods.
- 4) Create a precise area plan for gateway and wayfinding signage that will enhance the city’s image as well as promote and direct people to important destinations.



Policy & Implementation

Economic Health & Revitalization

- 1) Develop and implement a wayfinding signage program that will identify available on- and off-street parking locations in walking distance of the downtown.
- 2) Develop two sub-committees, one for tourism and one for environmental technology that will define a mission statement, approach and process for attracting businesses in each market sector.
- 3) Work with the City's Downtown Developer to aggressively pursue the attraction of businesses that fill significant gaps in desired products and services. These may include small-scale grocery/convenience stores, clothing stores, tourism-based retail (sports, arts, entertainment, collegiate, etc.), and boutique/gift shops. A detailed inventory of potential properties for infill development will be necessary for this endeavor.
- 4) Identify specific sites for infill development and apply for a Technical Assistance Grant through the Governor's Office for Small Cities.

Quality of Life

- 1) Revise the City's zoning ordinance to reflect the vision expressed in this Plan.
- 2) Revise City codes to reflect yard set-backs, housing types and sizes reflective of the diversity and scale necessary to create an approved vision of neighborhoods. Utilize the results of the Preferred Development Survey to aid in codifying design standards for inclusion in an updated zoning ordinance.
- 3) Adjust the intersections of pedestrian, bicycle and motorized traffic – especially in heavily-traveled areas – to ensure the safety of each of these modes of transportation.



Policy & Implementation

Downtown

- 1) Offer incentives for Downtown building owners to update their structures to meet or exceed modern codes and occupant needs (e.g. elevators, electrical and communications wiring).

Administration & Government

- 1) Convene a Charter Review Commission with the goal of clarifying the level of accountability within and between the branches of City government. The charge to such a commission may include: examining the city's charter in an effort to give greater precision to the duties, responsibilities and powers of the city's common council, boards, commission and mayor.
- 2) Improve the documentation and communication of roles and responsibilities given to various City officials and committees.
- 3) Revise the responsibilities of the City's Downtown Developer position to reflect the updated vision and policies found in this Plan, including a more involved relationship with local businesses and commercial landlords. Select actions of the Downtown Developer should be communicated to the public to raise awareness of completed, current, and proposed projects.
- 4) Contract for continued sharing of services or additional cooperation of such with the Town of Oneonta.
- 5) Create a direct liaison between the City and Town who will attend regular meetings of important community leaders.



Future Land Use

FUTURE LAND USE

Overview

Future land use planning involves identifying how the land in a given area should look and function, if redevelopment or new development were to occur. However, it also strives to preserve essential areas of the city such as residential neighborhoods and the central business district. While land use planning plays a key role in determining the location of development, that is not the only function it serves. It also helps to create a sense of place and a common vision for the community. The manner in which people perceive their environment, organize their time and determine local interaction is defined, in large part, by how the land uses are organized within their community. The sense of connectivity, the feel of a place and the overall success of a community is indelibly tied to land use.

Future Land Use Plan

The future land use plan shown on the next page is a visual representation of the community's future approach to land use. The map includes subtle changes that will help to support the policies and objectives outlined in the Plan and serves as the basis for updating the City's zoning ordinance. The Plan also includes land use design guidelines that provide additional insight into the areas identified on the map. Guidelines are very general and a more in-depth set of guidelines should be developed as part of an update to the zoning ordinance.

It is important to realize that the future land use plan section of a comprehensive plan is primarily designed to provide guidance for future development patterns and appearances. This section of the Plan does not constitute an enforceable law, such as a zoning ordinance, but it does outline the vision for future land use and should be considered a foundation for future zoning revisions.



Conclusion

CONCLUSION

The City of Oneonta is on the cusp of change. Strategic decisions made today will impact the journey and destination of the community over the next 20 years. The 2007 Comprehensive Plan is a culmination of several years worth of review and planning and provides the foundation for this growth management. As the community enters the 21st Century, it must build upon its many assets while addressing conditions that threaten the character of the city. Oneonta has a proud history and is rich in architectural and natural beauty, and these assets must be protected and promoted. The community character could be compromised if the various challenges are not addressed in a strategic and comprehensive manner.

The vision, policies, objectives, and action items set forth in the Plan should be used to guide future actions and decision making. The future land use plan provides an additional level of guidance, identifying areas for specific land uses along with general design guidelines. The Plan is designed to be a user-friendly, working document for key City officials and staff members, community leaders and other involved community stakeholders. The activities outlined in the Plan cannot be undertaken by the City's governmental leaders alone. Over the next several years, residents need to come together to complete the tasks included in the Plan. Successful implementation requires ongoing communication and cooperation among the leaders and residents of Oneonta. Collectively, they can ensure a healthy and prosperous future for generations to come.



Historic buildings on Market Street



Monument in Neahwa Park



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