

## Town and Village of Cohocton Comprehensive Plan



Prepared by the Town and Village of Cohocton Planning Board

*May 2019*

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	3
List of Acronyms .....	4
Letter from the Planning Board.....	5
I – Introduction.....	6
About the Comprehensive Plan.....	7
Why Plan?.....	7
Regulatory Framework.....	7
Planning Approach .....	7
Observations.....	8
II – Planning Principles.....	11
Principle 1 – Protect Cohocton’s Natural Resources.....	11
Principle 2 – Maintain and Increase Cohocton’s Fiscal Stability .....	11
Principle 3 – Create a Vibrant and Accessible Village Center.....	11
III – Land Use and Zoning .....	12
Zoning.....	12
Future Land Use .....	12
IV – Priorities and Actions .....	13
High-Priority Actions .....	13
Short-Term Actions.....	13
Medium-Term Actions.....	13
Long-Term Actions.....	14
Ongoing Actions .....	14
Appendices .....	15

## **Acknowledgements**

*The Cohocton Joint Planning Board*

*The Town Board of Cohocton*

*The Village Board of Cohocton*

Prepared with the assistance of Hunt Engineers, Architects & Land Surveyors, PC and the Steuben County Planning Department

## List of Acronyms

EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
ESD	Empire State Development Corporation
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
LWRP	Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan
MSA	Metropolitan Statistical Area
NYS DEC (DEC)	New York State Dept. of Environmental Conservation
NYS DHCR (DHCR)	New York State Dept. of Homes and Community Renewal
NYS DOS (DOS)	New York State Dept. of State
NYS DOT (DOT)	New York State Dept. of Transportation
NYS EFC	New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation
NYSERDA	New York State Energy Research and Development Authority
NYS OPRHP	New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
NYS ORPS	New York State Office of Real Property Services
RHED	Rural Housing and Economic Development Program
SCIDA	Steuben County Industrial Development Agency
STREDC	Southern Tier Regional Economic Development Council
TDR	Transfer of Development Rights
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
WCSD	Wayland-Cohocton School District
ZBA	Zoning Board of Appeals

## **Letter from the Planning Board**

Our vision for the Town and Village of Cohocton is to see economic development that helps to stabilize or even increase the population and also raise the average income of the residents. This would help businesses to thrive and allow home-owners to restore and maintain the homes that exist within the community. Protecting and supporting agriculture in our community is a high priority as it is our most important industry. Protecting our natural resources including the Cohocton river is very important to all of us and working to increase access to and promoting the use of the river is also a high priority. All decisions regarding the future of these issues and all others should be made with respect to the new comprehensive plan.

## **I – Introduction**

The Town and Village of Cohocton are located in the Southern Tier of New York, in northwest Steuben County. The municipalities are located in a primarily rural setting with excellent access to nearby population centers such as Corning/Elmira and Rochester, thanks to the highway infrastructure that frames the Village center. Both I-390 and I-86 are within minutes of Cohocton's interchange; yet, since its construction in 1973, neither the Town nor the Village have been able to fully capitalize on this asset. In short, Cohocton is struggling to meet its potential.

On the flip side, Cohocton is a place of stunning natural beauty. Its geography lends itself to marvelous views and fishing streams. While many residents may work in nearby cities, they enjoy returning home to Cohocton's quiet rural setting.

In order to plan for the future growth, development, agricultural and farmland preservation, conservation of the Town's natural resources including water quality and quantity, and to assure the protection of the Town's rural lifestyle, the Town formed a Planning Board in the early 1960s. The Town prepared a complete Town and Village Comprehensive Master Plan in January 1970.

The Joint Planning Board has been taking steps to rewrite the Comprehensive Plan. This plan is the result of a town wide community survey on priorities and opportunities as well as interviews, public meetings and review of Town, County and NYS plans and programs as they relate to the Cohocton area. The results of all public outreach helped to inform the action items listed in this plan. At the same time, the Steuben County Planning Department assisted the Planning Board with a series of Town and Village maps. The Planning Board's intent in updating the Comprehensive Plan is to help guide local officials in their decision-making process as they budget and allocate resources for a variety of items ranging from recreation to economic development. The Plan will provide a direction for future development that may occur within the Town and assure that the Town's natural resources will support such growth. The plan sets forth desirable, obtainable objectives and standards to accommodate the needs of a modestly growing community. The plan attempts to anticipate future growth and give it direction. In this way, the plan is a decision-making tool and guide to give direction and scale for future growth.

From a pragmatic standpoint, it is notable that Cohocton is located within an eight-county area comprising the Southern Tier Region, some of whose funding streams are overseen by the Southern Tier Regional Economic Development Council (STREDC). Municipalities in NYS compete annually for funding through a process called the Consolidated Funding Application or CFA. In 2015, Governor Cuomo announced an additional funding opportunity, the Upstate Revitalization Initiative (URI), intended to help jump-start the economies of those regions with the most need and implementable plans. NYS awarded URI funding to the Southern Tier in December 2015, meaning that the region is eligible for up to \$500 million in additional funding for job creation (\$100 million per year for five years.) It is hoped that the projects and priorities set forth in this plan are considered as STREDC determines how to spend its URI funding in a coherent and strategic manner.

## ***About the Comprehensive Plan***

### **Why plan?**

The Town and Village of Cohocton Comprehensive Plan is a policy document adopted by the governing boards of both municipalities. It helps to establish a vision for Cohocton and provides direction as those boards make spending and maintenance decisions for years to come.

The plan is intended to simplify the local decision-making process and to navigate funding streams, which seem to change every year. To the extent possible, this plan helps to anticipate trends and changes that may impact Cohocton in the coming decade.

### **Regulatory framework**

Adoption of a comprehensive plan in New York State is voluntary. However, State enabling statutes require that zoning be in conformance with a comprehensive plan. At its most basic level, a comprehensive plan provides the foundation for local zoning laws. This comprehensive plan goes beyond that fundamental requirement. It describes Cohocton's current condition, articulates a community-defined vision, communicates guiding principles for future development and conservation and publishes a set of action items for implementing the vision.

### **Planning Approach**

In recent years, the Town and Village, under the leadership of the Joint Planning Board, have taken steps to develop the blueprint for decision-making included in this plan. This is a plan to help tie together the physical components of the Town and Village to the local fiscal condition. For several years, the Planning Board has recognized the need to update the existing comprehensive plan, which was written in 1970. The Town Board hired a consultant to guide the Planning Board through the remainder of the planning process and to assist in writing the plan.

The Planning Board, through its community survey and knowledge of Cohocton, identified the Town's and Village's most significant issues. They include protection of natural resources, a healthy fiscal condition and vibrant, mixed-use centers.

## Observations

### Natural Resources

Cohocton is rich with natural resources, particularly those that are attractive for tourism, such as the Cohocton River and the many streams that cross through the Town. The topography of Cohocton is quite hilly with many steep slopes. Cohocton is situated within the Allegheny Plateau which is glacially eroded and has rolling uplands with a series of narrow steep-walled parallel valleys running north to south. Elevations in the Town and Village range from approximately 1,250 to 2,155 feet above sea level with the highest points located in the extreme southwestern section of the Town and the lowest elevations found in the Village along the flatlands and swamp areas of the Cohocton River system and near the hamlets of Atlanta and North Cohocton.

The Cohocton River, which flows from the west and then toward the south at the hamlet of Atlanta, is the principal waterway draining the Town and Village. It flows south and eventually empties into the Chemung River at Corning. Several creeks and streams drain smaller sections of the Town. The two largest are the Kirkwood Creek in the north-central section and Reynolds Creek in the southwest. Both receive waters from smaller streams and eventually empty into the Cohocton River.

The river as a recreational amenity is underutilized and would be a prime spot for a riverside trail, if access and parking can be realized at a cost that is affordable to Cohocton residents. It is also possible to capitalize more on tourists traveling to Cohocton for various outdoor activities such as fishing, hiking, kayaking, canoeing, etc., if additional retail businesses particularly in the Village were available to provide services such as food or supplies for day-trippers.

### Housing

Most of the housing in Cohocton is single-family homes, with stock that ranges widely in quality and size. According to the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS), the Town has 1,208 housing units, 80% of which are occupied. Interestingly, 70% of the total units are single-family detached homes, 20% are mobile homes and the remainder are primarily two - to four-unit dwellings. While the vacancy rate is quite high, the availability of quality rental units is low, with few to no rentals advertised online.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of the age of housing units, just over half (52%) are pre-war construction. Surprisingly for this region, almost 25% of the units were built between 1970 - 1989 and another 13% from 1990 to the present. For the Southern Tier, the housing stock in Cohocton is relatively new. Of all occupied housing units, approximately 78% are owner-occupied and 22% are renter-occupied. The median home value is approximately \$80,000 with the majority of homes in the \$50,000-99,000 range.

Within the Village, ACS states that there are 392 housing units, 94% of which were occupied at the time of the survey. Of these, 71% are single-family homes, 16% are two-unit dwellings and 11% are mobile homes. The housing stock within the Village is older than that in the Town as a whole, with two-thirds of the units built in 1939 or earlier, 13.5% between 1970 - 1979 and only a handful built more recently than that. The vacancy rates for both owner- and renter-occupied housing are very low, indicating that

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on Zillow and Craigslist searches in July 2016.



additional housing of various sizes may be needed, perhaps including upper-story housing in the Village and hamlet centers.

## **Economic Development**

Although the Town and Village are conveniently located on an Interstate exit, they have not benefited significantly from this proximity. The Village has several blocks of downtown retail and services that, with the appropriate façade improvements and combination of businesses, could help to attract people not only from within Cohocton but also traveling on I-390. Cohocton has a handful of wholesale and retail operations, as well as large agricultural operations such as Lent Hill Dairy Farm; however, one concern that residents frequently voice is the lack of local jobs as several major employers have closed or downsized in the past several decades. Given its highway access and recreational resources, the Town may want to consider focusing its economic development efforts on incremental projects such as improving the population centers and expanding on recreational assets rather than trying to attract a large employer. Particularly given the economic climate, Cohocton has to capitalize on its strengths in order to gradually build up the property tax base and become a more resilient economy.

## **Transportation**

Cohocton is accessed by several major roadways: I-390, which runs from I-86 to the south, north to Rochester; New York State (NYS) Route 415, which runs parallel to 390 for part of its length, and NYS Route 371, which connects the Village of Cohocton on the south to the hamlet of North Cohocton to the north. Although there are no designated bicycle routes through Cohocton, cyclists use the state and local roads frequently.

## **Zoning**

The Town and Village both have zoning ordinances in place. The Town Zoning Law dates back to 1990 with updates in 1992 and 2006. The Village adopted its Zoning Law in 2008 and revised it in 2010; therefore, both ordinances are fairly current.

The majority of the Town is zoned Agricultural-Residential (AG-R). Within the Town are three other districts: Low Density Residential (LDR), General Business (GB) and Interchange Commercial (IC). The intent of the AG-R district is to preserve agricultural land and open space while permitting agricultural uses and low-density residential. Zoning also outlines the Accessory Uses and Special Permit Uses allowed in AG-R, including mobile home parks and Planned Unit Development. The LDR district is comprised primarily of the hamlets of North Cohocton and Atlanta. The intent is to permit low density or suburban residential uses with individual water and sewer facilities, with allowed uses including those similar to AG-R plus multi-family residential. The GB district is located in the hamlets of North Cohocton and Atlanta. Its purpose is to provide for convenience stores and tourist-oriented businesses. The IC district is a small area directly adjacent to the I-390 interchange whose intent is to provide for highway-oriented businesses and traveler service facilities. The Town also has a Flood Plain Overlay Zone with boundaries that align with the 100-year floodplain. Special requirements are set forth in another local law.

The Village has six districts: Adult Entertainment (AE), Agricultural-Residential (AG-R), General Business (GB), Industrial (I), Land Conservation (LC) and Residential (R-1). The R-1 district covers the largest area of land, surrounding the small Central Business District and another area adjacent to I-390. The Village established the AE district to prevent such uses from having negative secondary impacts on other areas

of the community. The AG-R district is adjacent to the Village/Town boundary and is intended to preserve agricultural uses and open space similar to the Town district of the same name. The GB district is comprised of the Central Business District at the center of the Village and another area at the northwest corner, and is intended to provide for the establishment of convenience goods and tourist-oriented retail businesses. The I district is adjacent to rail lines and is intended for industrial, manufacturing and commercial uses. The LC district is at the northern end of the Village and is intended to preserve areas with special environmental resources. The R-1 district is intended for low-density or suburban residential areas with individual sewer facilities. The Village also has a Flood Plain Overlay Zone (FP) that is aligned with the 100-year floodplain. Any uses other than open space uses must be authorized through a Special Use Permit and reviewed by the Zoning Officer.

## **Historic Preservation**

Cohocton has several noteworthy historic resources, including the Town and Village Municipal Historical Building (Larrowe House), listed on the National Register in 1989; the Rowe House, listed in 2008, and the Presbyterian Church of Atlanta, which was listed in 2010. Other buildings such as the Cottage Inn have architectural value and potential for redevelopment. The Town of Cohocton Historical Society meets monthly and maintains a Facebook page with events and photographs. The Town and Village also have a historian.

## **Community Activities/Events**

In the Village, Cohocton has a Sports Complex that hosts a variety of sporting events, and has lighting so that events can continue on after dark.

The Village also hosts a Fall Foliage Festival that has been put on for the past 30-plus years in October. Residents of the Town and Village have yard sales, vendors can set up on the Larrowe House grounds and the square at the Gazebo. There are soccer games at the Sports Complex, a parade with area High School bands and dinners put on by various organizations.

## **II – Planning Principles**

The following planning principles are a statement of the values that Cohocton residents hold dear. The action items in Section IV, which the Town and Village Boards will work to implement with their various partners, all tie back to these basic principles which this planning process has identified through surveys, conversations and general observations.

### ***Principle 1 – Protect Cohocton’s Natural Resources***

The residents of Cohocton take pride in their natural resources—the Cohocton River and its tributaries, the scenic viewsheds, and the productive tracts of farmland that provide not only jobs and tax base but also a quality of life that is important to those who choose to live here. The action items within this plan promote the protection of Cohocton’s range of natural resources from recreational to agricultural land.

### ***Principle 2 – Maintain and Increase Cohocton’s Fiscal Stability***

While the Town and Village are in stable financial condition, neither the municipalities nor their residents are immune from the pressures of high property tax. The right combination of land uses and businesses can help to support a healthy tax base. Any recommendations related to zoning, land use, residential growth and economic development will further the goal of fiscal stability. Well-planned housing and rural retail growth are two key goals that emerged from the community survey.

### ***Principle 3 – Create a Vibrant and Accessible Village Center***

Within the Town of Cohocton are three population centers – the Village of Cohocton being the primary one. The two hamlet areas are Atlanta and North Cohocton, both of which have a modest mix of retail, office and housing. While focusing on the Village of Cohocton, with its proximity to the highways and local services, the Town and Village should plan for revitalizing all three population centers. The NYMS Technical Assistance program, which results in ideas for building renovations and design guidelines and has been effective throughout adjacent Livingston County, would be a good first step.

### **III – Zoning and Land Use**

#### ***Zoning***

Both the Town and Village have conventional, “use-based” codes that regulate what is allowed or not based on certain uses – for example, residential uses in the R-1 district or industrial uses in the I district. These laws have been updated fairly frequently to respond to current planning issues and events. This plan recommends that after adoption, the Planning Board look at both zoning laws to ensure consistency between the vision and goals contained herein and the land use regulations. Currently, the Planning Board is effectively regulating development using the tools at hand.

An examination of Cohocton’s land use map (Figure 1) in comparison to the zoning map (Figure 2) shows that the land use patterns are loosely aligned with the existing zoning districts. Much of the development in Cohocton, as described in the Housing observations above, pre-dates zoning. The majority of land on larger parcels that is agricultural, residential or even classified as vacant or “no data” is within the Town’s AG-R district, which is appropriate. Within the Village and hamlet centers, the mix of uses is also reflective of the districts.

#### ***Future Land Use***

The Land Use Plan is a visual and thematic representation of the proposed physical plan of the Town and Village as represented in the previous sections of the Comprehensive Plan. This is a significant component of the plan as it will help Cohocton achieve the vision expressed at the outset of this document. Again, this document is not regulatory but provides a blueprint of how Cohocton hopes to progress. The Land Use Plan is meant to guide zoning revisions as they will be necessary to achieve the changes in land use.

## **IV – Priorities and Actions**

This plan is an acknowledgement that in order to realize the vision for Cohocton, the Town and Village have to commit to a coherent decision-making framework and allocate funds for certain actions as described below. If the goal is to retain the existing population, attract new families and convince new residents and business owners to invest in Cohocton, the public sector needs to invest, too. If implemented correctly, the plan will help to create the Town and Village that focus on the priorities described in Section III.

### ***High-Priority Actions***

The following actions should be addressed in 2019-20 shortly after the adoption of this plan.

- Review Town Zoning Law and Village Zoning Law in entirety. Some aspects to consider:
  - Review whether uses are appropriate.
  - Review Flood Plain Overlay Zone (FP) for consistency with current floodplain regulations.
  - Review parking requirements and consider eliminating or decreasing for development in the Village center or approving through Special Use Permit. High parking requirements may stifle development due to expense or site restrictions.
  - Viewshed protection.
  - Signage code – update language so that it is consistent with 2015 Supreme Court decision regarding content-based signs.
  - Update Cluster Subdivision regulation to include additional protections for environmentally-sensitive land.
  - Definitions.
- Work with potential major employers to ensure that the Southern Tier Regional Economic Development Council, Farm Bureau and state agencies are advocating for their major projects, particularly those that will result in job creation.

### ***Short-Term Actions (Initiate within 1-2 years)***

- Budget for renovations of the Town Park pool. The pool and surrounding park are some of Cohocton's most important amenities and need to be maintained to high standards.
- Consider applying for EFC wastewater study grant to analyze the feasibility of establishing sewer districts in the Village and Hamlets.
- Consider convening a working group to study the feasibility of river trail within the Town. Engage a firm experienced in trail planning to assist with the study and apply for grant funding.
- Work with the New York DEC to clear the Cohocton River, promote and support canoeing and kayaking access sites to the river.

### ***Medium-Term Actions***

- Work with Southern Tier Regional Planning & Development Board on a multi-municipal plan for Cohocton River trail. Include a linkage with regional attractions such as the Finger Lakes wine and cheese trails.
- Consider adopting laws that would provide property tax relief for building improvements.

- Adhere to any applicable New York State Codes concerning Solar Energy and Natural Gas Drilling.

### ***Long-Term Actions***

- Support reuse and redevelopment of underutilized parcels in the Village center and adjacent neighborhoods.
- Work with NYS DOT to install “share the road” signs on State routes.
- Consider possible uses for the school building if and when it is ever closed.
- Consider applying for NYMS Technical Assistance grant. Select buildings that are ripe for renovation with cooperative landlords. Encourage design guidelines that are reflective of the existing architecture including the Larrowe House and other important local buildings.

### ***Ongoing Actions***

- Maintain Town Hall.
- Maintain Town and Village water system.
- Maintain recreational facilities.
- Continue to enforce property maintenance law.
- Continue to support the Cohocton Sports Complex and the Cohocton Fall Foliage Festival

## **Appendices**

Appendix A: Implementation Plan (to come after the Planning Board approves the list of actions.)

Appendix B: Survey results.