

Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan Executive Summary

Overview

Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan 2030 is Niagara County's first-ever comprehensive planning document that is dedicated solely to the entire County and its twenty municipalities. Although the County and many communities within Niagara County have been actively involved in numerous local and regional planning initiatives in recent years, the Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan is countywide in perspective and emphasizes a multi-municipal approach to planning and informed decision-making. This countywide perspective is sometimes lacking in other plans and initiatives that are rightfully focused on addressing specific needs, projects, locations or particular opportunities within the Niagara region.

The purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to provide a framework for achieving five high priority goals:

- Encouraging desirable and appropriate growth and development
- Strengthening the local economy
- Improving the delivery of services
- Prioritizing and coordinating capital improvements
- Improving the quality of life for County residents

The Comprehensive Plan is intended to unify existing countywide planning efforts under a single umbrella document, while recognizing the important planning initiatives undertaken at other levels of government as well as by community organizations and agencies. The Plan is a guidepost to assist decision-making over the next 20 years by providing direction to County policies and the allocation of resources. It also provides further direction into ongoing and future planning efforts, including interdepartmental coordination within County government, furthering intermunicipal cooperation and public-private partnerships. The Plan also recommends various strategies and potential projects and will help in securing funding to undertake these initiatives.

Information on the Comprehensive Plan is available on the County's website at www.niagaracounty.com/comprehensiveplan.asp.

*Information on the
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and the planning
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comprehensiveplan.asp](http://niagaracounty.com/comprehensiveplan.asp)*

Previous Planning Initiatives

The intent of the Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan is to build upon previous initiatives undertaken by stakeholders at different levels of municipal government as well as local and regional agencies, groups and organizations in Niagara County. It is not the intent of the Plan to duplicate or contradict these earlier efforts or the results of a lot of hard work by many dedicated individuals and organizations. Rather the Comprehensive Plan addresses certain issues and opportunities in greater detail, such as countywide land use. Previous initiatives, such as the Erie-Niagara Counties Framework for Regional Growth, the Niagara River Greenway Plan, and the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor Plan are among several initiatives referenced and summarized within the Comprehensive Plan. These initiatives are potential starting points for further countywide dialogue and actions.

Vision Statement

The Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan is the result of more than two years of stakeholder participation through formal and informal meetings, email correspondence, website information sharing, community surveys and other public forums. The planning process has focused on current countywide issues and discovering opportunities for fulfilling the County's Vision Statement, the complete text of which is expressed at the beginning of Chapter One of the Plan. It is a vision that strives for better recognition of the unique assets and the attractive diversity of natural, cultural and social resources of Niagara County communities.

Simply stated the Niagara County Vision Statement seeks the recognition of Niagara County as:

- A world class destination
- A center of national and international commerce
- A community that values its rich natural, heritage and cultural resources
- A great place to live and raise a family

The Comprehensive Plan represents the beginning of what needs to become an ongoing dialogue among communities, governments and stakeholders working collaboratively towards fulfillment of the vision for the County. The vision includes establishing Niagara County as a model for sustainable communities and environments. In order to achieve a sustainable future a shift from short-term to long-term thinking needs to occur. The valuable resources that contribute to Niagara County's present quality of life need to be better acknowledged, locally at first and then on a national, international and global scale. As the value of what the County has to offer is more fully recognized, especially by residents and decision-makers, then sound long-term planning principles will need to be implemented to protect and enhance the County's assets and resources for present and future generations.

Plan Review and Future Updates

Too often ambivalence and negative attitudes about the ability or reluctance to change can cause inaction. The inability to act on key issues of importance to the County could result in the eventual loss of unique assets and resources that should never be taken for granted. For example, the County's prime farmlands, unique natural features like the

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Niagara Escarpment, and the quality of life in the County's urban, suburban and rural areas need to be better understood and appreciated through public education. The Plan emphasizes increased communication, collaboration and connection among all the communities of Niagara County to foster a greater sense of understanding and appreciation of local assets and resources as identified within the Plan.

The information presented in the Plan is part of an evolutionary planning and decision-making process that needs to be maintained as an up-to-date source of data on the County. Stated goals and objectives found throughout the Plan need to be flexible in order to adjust to the changing needs and conditions of Niagara County. As such, the contents of the Plan are not intended to be static. Information has been added, for example, due to the recent global economic crisis. This added information includes potential funding opportunities to implement capital improvement projects within the County utilizing Federal Stimulus monies appropriated by Congress through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

The Plan is an evolving guide that provides a foundation for a long term approach to problem solving, decision-making and for facilitating informed dialogue with the intent of resolving current issues and anticipating future countywide needs and opportunities. Good planning has no defined beginning nor should it have a defined endpoint. It simply needs to be an ongoing process to be most effective.

The content of the Niagara Communities' Comprehensive Plan is extensive and its value will be realized over time from its routine use. The Plan contains three distinct sections, but additional information can be added to it anytime in the future. Each section needs to be reviewed and updated as necessary by the County to make sure the document stays current. Periodic reviews should occur at no more than two-year intervals to identify and update information that becomes available. More substantive reviews and updates, including GIS mapping and analysis should occur at no greater than five year intervals.

Phase One – Chapters I through IV - Existing Conditions

Phase one of the planning process, which consists of Chapters I through IV of the Plan contains countywide, subregional and community-based information. For planning purposes each of the 20 municipalities within Niagara County were placed into one of five planning subregions based on location and other common characteristics such as existing land use and degree of development. Subregions include:

- The Upper River Communities
- The Lower River Communities
- The Central Communities
- The Lakefront Communities
- The Eastern Communities

Phase one provides a “snapshot” of existing conditions and current trends across Niagara County as of 2008. The first two chapters begin with a general introduction of the planning process, followed by a summary of previous planning initiatives undertaken within the County or specific communities. Chapters III and IV include detailed descriptions of existing conditions on a Countywide level and a community basis, respectively.

Chapter III provides extensive mapping that describes in detail various land uses, environmental features, demographics, public services and facilities throughout Niagara County. This is the first time that such complete mapping of existing conditions in the County

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The planning process included three distinct phases. Phase one focused on existing conditions throughout the County.

is available in one document. Chapter III introduces the concept of “Benchmarks” which are identified as values or conditions that presently exist in the County. These benchmarks are possible starting points from which measurements can be made, for example, in tracking changes in various land use categories across the County over time.

Chapter IV includes community profiles prepared for each of the 20 municipalities in the County consisting of land use maps, demographic, and employment information. These community profiles contain significant issues and opportunities identified by the communities during the planning process and can be used to supplement existing local plans or become the basis for preparing new plans. Chapter IV also includes subregional profiles that compile information according to the five planning subregions.

Phase one results provide a readily available source of information including detailed mapping of current physical features, socioeconomics and environmental resources within the County. This information is considered as baseline conditions from which future needs of the County can be determined and by which progress on resolving current issues can be monitored. Phase one chapters should be consulted frequently for important input into County and community decision-making processes.

Phase Two – Chapters V through IX - Issues, Opportunities and Recommendations

The second phase of the planning process is contained within Chapters V through IX. Each chapter addresses in some detail existing issues and opportunities identified by stakeholders during the planning process that relate to the five focus topics, also known as the five planning elements, of the Plan. These topics are listed below. The information contained within these five chapters includes issues and opportunities identified by planning subregion; strategies for dealing with issues identified in each chapter by a “Guidepost” symbol; goals and objectives for addressing specific issues and opportunities; and recommended actions to undertake for achieving those goals and objectives. Key recommendations are identified in the margins of each chapter by a “Milemarker” symbol.

The information provided under phase two provides guidance into tackling important issues and capitalizing on local and regional opportunities. It also allows for more informed decision-making by all levels of government as well as the general citizenry of the County relative to the following planning elements:

- Land Use, Transportation and Environmental Resources
- Economic Development
- County Services, Facilities and Infrastructure
- Education
- Public Health and Safety

Phase Three – Chapter X - Priorities and Plan Implementation

The third and final phase of the planning process is contained within Chapter X. This is the implementation section of the Plan. This section summarizes a series of key actions that should be undertaken to begin to “implement” the primary recommendations of the Plan identified in previous chapters. This section provides direction to responsible parties for carrying out actions.

Chapter X is an important section of the Plan because it lays out defined actions for implementing the Plan. This section of the Plan in particular requires periodic review

The second phase focused on existing issues and opportunities followed by strategies, goals, objectives and recommendations for each of the five topic areas.

The third phase is the implementation phase of the process and begins with public review and adoption of the Comprehensive Plan.

and updating as priorities change and actions are accomplished. This is especially important because it is the type of information that can be used to seek and secure possible funding to carry out important projects. For example, preparing a Countywide Parks, Recreation, Trails and Open Space Plan is considered a high priority item for which funding should be sought. Once prepared, that plan in turn can be used to seek additional funding from State and Federal sources to implement recreation-related projects.

Current County Trends

Population trends indicate that the population of Niagara County as a whole has been declining for several decades, yet land use development, particularly residential use continues to spread northward and eastward from the older, more established urban centers of the County into rural areas. This type of an expanding development pattern without actual growth in population often results in fragmented and “leapfrog” land use patterns that consume valuable farmlands, and jeopardizing open spaces and important natural resources such as wetlands, floodplains and woodlands. Concerns over undesirable development patterns like these that result from redistribution of population are being expressed throughout the County.

The conversion of land from one use to another is reflected in apparent changes in community character. Changes in community character from relatively undeveloped forms of use to more developed uses are most noticeable in rural areas. In urban areas, shifting population to suburban and rural towns results in disinvestment, blighted neighborhoods and increases in vacant and underutilized properties.

If not managed correctly, subtle changes in land use over time can add cumulative pressures for converting agriculture and other rural uses to other uses that may place significant strain on local infrastructure and increased demand for public services. Increased demand in turn puts added stress on the financial resources of the County and local governments which are expected to provide support infrastructure and services. The financing of new or expanded infrastructure (roads, sewer, water, etc.) and services (fire and police protection, schools, etc.) generally comes from increased property and special district taxes.

Stakeholders with varied interests and levels of expertise in wide ranging topics expressed interest and concern over the effects of sprawl in Niagara County. Early in the planning process it became readily apparent that stakeholders, regardless of their backgrounds and interests, were overwhelmingly concerned about the physical, environmental, social and fiscal implications of sprawl on the overall character and economic health of communities in Niagara County. These concerns were repeatedly voiced throughout the planning process. Although communities may be addressing these issues at local levels through their own municipal planning efforts and land use regulations, there is significant added value in looking at these issues from multi-municipal and countywide perspectives which is accomplished in this Plan.

The potential for sprawl and land use conflicts caused by incompatibilities in zoning along municipal boundaries can often be a point of contention, especially where communities may be developing at different rates and competition for development varies. Conflicts may present themselves for example, at village/town boundaries or along town/city boundaries. Added value to local planning can be derived from taking a larger perspective that encompasses multiple municipalities to identify common issues, visions for the future, and land use goals among communities. Value is also derived from a better understanding of the unique attributes and opportunities that each community contributes to the overall diversity and quality of life in the County.

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Identification and an increased understanding of the many unique characteristics and commonalities among communities in Niagara County is a primary focus of this Plan. A multi-jurisdictional and subregional perspective among neighboring municipalities adds to an appreciation for the things municipalities have in common and for the uniqueness assets and attributes of individual communities. This appreciation can result in greater collaboration towards more consistency in land use patterns, economic development practices, and the provision of services across municipal boundaries that will ultimately benefit all residents within the County.

Land Use, Transportation and Environment Element

Under the topic of land use, transportation and environment, several key issues and opportunities emerged during the planning process. Regardless of location in the County the issue of future land use and sprawl with its implications on farmlands, community character, transportation corridors, and the natural environment has been expressed as an important concern to communities. Managing sprawl to protect viable agriculture and existing farmlands in addition to maintaining rural character and open space resources is a considerable challenge facing communities today throughout the country as they attempt to preserve their uniqueness and identity. The issue is not limited to rural portions of Niagara County, but urban and suburban communities as well as they seek to enhance quality of life and local identity.

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Environmental issues and related opportunities focused on the importance of cleaning up previously contaminated lands and redeveloping brownfields and other underutilized properties. The County has also been host to numerous waste disposal sites in the past, hazardous and non-hazardous and the County should consider formulating policies and procedures for dealing with these issues in the future.

Management of water resources, air quality, wildlife habitats, unique natural features such as the Niagara Escarpment, and important scenic resources is also on the list of priority issues in the County. There is widespread recognition that future economic development opportunities are afforded through protection of the County's rich natural resources, waterfronts, parklands and cultural resources including the Erie Canal corridor.

Transportation issues have centered on the need for improvements and maintenance of existing roads and bridges and planning for the future needs of the County in terms of alternative means of travel and movement of agricultural goods and materials. There appears to be widespread support for multi-modal projects in urban areas and enhanced pedestrian and non-motorized trail networks throughout the County.

Addressing and analyzing the issue of sprawl and identifying the future infrastructure and service needs of the County have been a major focus of the planning process and a topic of much discussion among project stakeholders. The Comprehensive Plan recommends several strategies for dealing with sprawl and its implications relative to the future of Niagara County. Mitigating sprawl will provide enhanced quality of life benefits for County residents as well as afford opportunities for economic development and the provision of County services and public infrastructure in a cost effective manner.

The analysis of existing land use development trends and patterns on a countywide basis is an important component of the Comprehensive Plan. The analysis is presented

in Chapter Five. This information provides a countywide land use perspective that has been unavailable up to now. The overall result of the analysis is the conceptual identification of areas across the County that can be considered most suited for development and/or redevelopment at appropriate densities based on local municipal plans and land use regulations. The analysis also identifies areas that may be considered less suited to development and more suited for management, protection and conservation of important natural resources.

Chapter Five can be utilized by local municipalities as a source of information for their own detailed land use planning needs. Because the analysis is done at a countywide scale municipalities may choose to use this information as a starting point for more detailed study of land use and environmental resources at the local level. Communities may utilize the information as they see appropriate according to their land use planning needs and goals.

Strategies for managing land use emphasize the importance of directing future growth and development as well as infill redevelopment to areas within or adjacent to established centers of population in the County's 3 cities, 5 villages, and town centers where infrastructure and public services already exist. Each of the 20 municipalities in the County has areas suited for future development and redevelopment. By directing and encouraging development into these areas valuable farmlands, unique natural features, aquatic and terrestrial natural resources and local community character can be protected and enhanced for a more sustainable future.

Additional strategies beyond sustainable land use management practices include promoting concepts of enhanced "connectivity" among communities and recognition of the importance of maintaining "green infrastructure" countywide. Connectivity encourages physically connecting communities via road, trail and waterway networks that can accommodate alternative means of transportation such as walking, hiking, biking, canoeing, horseback riding, and vehicle use. Connectivity encourages less reliance on motorized transportation in favor of a healthier alternative to travel between destinations.

Maintaining and enhancing green infrastructure which includes existing natural systems and ecological functions such as wetlands, floodplains, and woodlands is a way to lessen the physical stress and associated costs of maintaining "gray" infrastructure that typically consists of traditionally engineered stormwater management, piping and drainage systems. The benefits of maintaining green infrastructure include:

- Enhanced wildlife habitats
- Water conservation and groundwater recharge
- Reduced flooding, erosion and pollutant loads on waterways
- Reduced stormwater management construction and maintenance costs
- Reduced sewer overflows in urban areas
- Improved air quality and reduced heat island effects
- Lower energy consumption
- Recreational and open space opportunities
- Enhanced property value
- Improved human health

Three overarching land use, transportation and environmental strategies need to be considered in decision-making processes in Niagara County. Implementation of these strategies along with other related principles and practices of sustainability promoted by the Plan can put Niagara County and its communities in a leadership position among New York State municipalities. These include:

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- 1.) Encouraging land use policies and related decision-making at County levels that are based on the principles and practices of environmental sustainability and smart growth. This includes practices designed to promote green infrastructure across the County as a way of better integrating natural systems and natural resource conservation into land use planning, project reviews and decision-making processes.
- 2.) Promoting transportation policies which are interwoven with land use decision-making that consider sustainable practices consistent with Federal and State agencies, as well as the regional Metropolitan Planning Organization, the GBNRTC, all of which encourage smart growth practices.
- 3.) Encouraging greater communication, collaboration, and connectivity among communities with physical linkages to areas both within and beyond Niagara County borders as a means of enhancing transportation choices for the movement of people and goods by creating interconnected systems served by both motorized and non-motorized alternatives.

Economic Development Element

Niagara County's ability to guide development in towns, villages and cities is very limited because land use decisions are largely a local municipality's responsibility under the provisions of New York State Municipal "Home Rule" Law. The County's primary land use planning function is to provide guidance and recommendations to communities about future land use as provided in the Comprehensive Plan.

The County however, does have the ability to influence land use and transportation through its project permitting decisions under Section 239 of Municipal Law when State and County facilities are affected. When it comes to economic development decisions County officials, working in collaboration with local municipalities, can also play a much more direct role in steering projects toward suitable development and redevelopment areas. The County can also encourage compact, mixed-use and transit-oriented forms of development that are interwoven with its transportation and environmental goals and policies. Similarly, the County can encourage initiatives in parts of the County considered to be environmentally sensitive.

Development and redevelopment projects typically need access to existing road, water, drainage and sewer infrastructure systems along with necessary support services to facilitate economic growth and development. System improvements and upgrades may also be necessary. Development and redevelopment should be steered to areas within the County's cities and villages, as well as appropriate fringe areas of cities and villages, suburban town centers, and existing hamlets/rural crossroads. The redevelopment and reuse of brownfields and infill development of vacant and other underutilized properties can have significant positive impact on communities and further protect rural resources and environmentally sensitive areas and should be encouraged.

Locations identified in the Plan as being poorly suited for development and redevelopment from a land use or environmental perspective may be attractive at first glance to develop for financial reasons. Land values and property acquisition costs may be substantially lower in rural areas and therefore, attractive to develop. The value to the community of developing resource areas may not be reflected in a property's market value and the true cost of development may not be realized for some time. The

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cumulative effect of development of valuable resources such as prime farmlands, wetlands and riparian corridors, may not be fully realized at first until these areas become increasingly fragmented and ultimately lose their inherent value.

In economic terms, the cumulative effect of typical forms of “leapfrog” development and conventional subdivision is an increased cost to municipal and County government for new or expanded infrastructure, added support services, such as roads, sewer, drainage systems, schools, fire districts, and increased demands on current transportation systems. These added costs translate into higher taxes on residents and property owners.

Inter-governmental cooperation and collaboration are critical to directing and encouraging development, preferably mixed-use development, into those areas of each community that are considered suitable for development/redevelopment. This will also make it easier to preserve important community characteristics, such as scenic open spaces, environmentally sensitive lands, and working farmlands that contribute to a community’s sense of identity and character.

Inter-municipal cooperation is also important in attracting and recruiting those businesses and industries that best complement the unique character of each community, whether they are urban centers, suburban communities, waterfront communities or farming communities. Economic development needs to be appropriate to the existing infrastructure and regional location of communities relative to the rest of Niagara County. For example, large industrial uses and businesses that rely on extensive infrastructure and support services should first consider locations in areas that are appropriately zoned for such uses and served by existing infrastructure; tourism-based businesses along the area’s many beautiful waterfronts should be located consistent with the Niagara River Greenway and Erie Canalway initiatives; and agriculturally-based businesses and home-based enterprises are suited to rural communities.

There must be a concerted countywide collaborative effort to prioritize improvements and upgrades to existing infrastructure, especially with regards to water, sewer and transportation systems, before consideration is given to creating new infrastructure. Obviously in cases where public health and safety are at risk, priorities must be different based on those needs.

Giving top priority to the maintenance and improvement of existing infrastructure over the creation of new systems, and directing development/redevelopment to where it already exists, is consistent with national planning principles and with New York State and regional planning initiatives. Agencies like the NYS Department of State, the NYS Department of Transportation, the Greater Buffalo Niagara Region Transportation Council, and many others have expressed their support of sustainable principles and smart growth initiatives. By focusing on improving the infrastructure that is already in place, communities can inhibit and prevent sprawling development patterns and possibly reverse the continuing migration of businesses and populations from traditional centers of commerce in the County.

When businesses decide where to locate their operations, they consider numerous factors, such as the availability of a prepared workforce, proximity to major transportation routes and markets, and other strategic advantages of a location. Quality of life factors, such as diverse housing, education, transportation alternatives, walkability and recreational opportunities can tip the scales in a given community’s favor. The ability to attract and retain employment and economic activity can be enhanced by preservation of the County’s natural and cultural assets. The recommendations contained within the Comprehensive Plan can help ensure that Niagara County’s communities can continue to both attract business opportunity and protect important quality of life factors.

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County Services, Facilities and Infrastructure Element

Niagara County provides a wide range of services, facilities and public infrastructure that contributes to the area's present standard of living. Niagara County remains committed to meeting its responsibilities to its residents, businesses and taxpayers by providing the most efficient and cost-effective services possible. It is imperative that existing services, facilities and infrastructure are maintained in a manner that retains their public investment value as well as keeping pace with the changing needs of County residents, businesses, property owners, and visitors.

The task of providing financially-effective and fiscally responsible services are increasingly complicated by changing demographics and aging infrastructure throughout Niagara County. An aging population requires new and expanded services at a time when budgets are under increased strain themselves. A growing senior population will require increased health care, affordable housing, accessible transportation and a host of other services and facilities. Aging public facilities and infrastructure also add to stress on local budgets because of increased costs for maintenance and upgrades.

In lieu of new infrastructure, continuing prioritized maintenance and replacement programs and strategically upgrading existing water, sewer, drainage, road and bridge systems needs to be a countywide priority as part of an effective management strategy. Emphasis on directing limited resources to maintain and upgrade existing systems is particularly important when such actions will help facilitate and direct development and redevelopment to appropriate areas of the County.

Opportunities for enhanced sharing of services, joint facilities, and possible consolidation of services and facilities through inter-municipal agreements between the County and local municipalities and among municipalities themselves need to be investigated further acknowledging that such arrangements already exist in some communities. Feasibility studies should be encouraged which are often supported at State levels under shared services incentive grant programs. Although some of the more obvious studies often include police, fire, shared court systems, and emergency services, some less obvious alternatives need to be explored such as inter-municipal stormwater management, joint parks and recreation facilities, shared school facilities, joint training programs, and inter-municipal subregional planning initiatives.

Education Element

During the comprehensive planning process stakeholders, including local residents, educators and service providers acknowledged that there are some significant issues related to the provision of educational services in Niagara County. Many, but not all, issues center on some common themes, including:

- Increasing school taxes on property owners at a time of decreasing population in the County;
- A need to identify additional funding sources to support education;
- A perception, and perhaps a reality, that there are redundancies and inefficiencies in services within and among school districts;
- Concerns over the escalating cost of fuel, especially in transporting students to and from dispersed locations;
- A possible time lag between the needs of employers for particular skill sets in the workforce and job training programs; and

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- A need for improved educational facilities, resources and infrastructure, such as high-tech computer software and hardware.

These issues are complex and will not be resolved quickly or easily by a single action on the County's part. It is important to remember that the Comprehensive Plan is intended to prompt discussion on these issues, and identify possible ways to resolve them, among multiple school districts, educators, and residents. It is critical that these stakeholders create and sustain an ongoing dialogue, perhaps through a joint action committee that involves all school districts in the County, including administrators, teachers, transportation officials, educators from institutions of higher learning such as NCCC, BOCES and student representatives. This dialogue needs to identify where efficiencies and cost cutting measures can be established without adversely affecting the quality of services.

It is also important to recognize that land use and development decisions can have significant effects on the need for public services and infrastructure, including educational services. Sprawling development resulting in dispersed populations particularly in rural areas tend to translate into higher transportation costs and the need to site school facilities in multiple locations according to residential development patterns. The land use and development principles recommended in the Plan provide opportunities to manage costs to taxpayers and school districts by encouraging redevelopment in areas where school facilities may already exist. Managed growth and concentrated forms of development can control the cost of providing services and related infrastructure at dispersed locations and result in smaller taxpayer burdens.

Public Health & Safety Element

One of the key recommendations coming out of the planning process with regard to public health and safety is to increase public education opportunities and communication among communities to expand citizen awareness of countywide and local efforts in preparing for potential emergencies and large-scale disasters. The lack of awareness and community input into local and County planning for emergencies was cited as an issue by residents of several communities.

Although the County has made great strides in emergency preparedness in recent years, additional collaboration and information sharing with local officials and the public may be warranted, perhaps through local public education and information sessions, community meetings, and via County and local websites. With regard to public health, safety and emergency preparedness, Niagara County needs to enhance communication and collaboration with local municipalities and other jurisdictional agencies involved in public health and safety in educating citizens, assisting in developing detailed local emergency plans, planning for disaster prevention through local land use policies to prevent occurrences like flooding, and establishing policies that facilitate recovery and redevelopment.

Land use management policies are key to preventing or mitigating the effects of natural and man-made emergencies. The County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan cites several examples, including:

- Adopting a land use management policy to promote the control of private development in floodplains at local levels of government, and to assure that County construction activities comply with State floodplain regulations
- Encouraging lending institutions to withhold funding of projects in areas prone to disasters

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- Promoting underground utility lines in new subdivisions to prevent power outages due to destruction of lines during storms
- Promoting the development of building regulations at local levels of government
- Developing compliance and enforcement programs, including designation of officials to implement policies

Implementation Plan

Implementation of the Niagara Communities Comprehensive Plan begins with its formal acceptance by each municipality in the County and adoption by the County Legislature. This formal process also includes public review and comment under the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) as required by State Municipal Law. This information is provided in detail in Chapter II of the Plan and summarized as necessary administrative actions in Chapter X.

Once adopted the Plan becomes a guide for decision-making by all levels of government including the State, regional entities, County and local municipalities. Decisions on a variety of actions by both the public and private sector should consider the contents of the Plan and determine the consistency of proposed actions with the Plan's goals and recommendations. The Plan cannot anticipate all issues and opportunities that may present themselves in the future. Therefore, the Plan should undergo periodic reviews and updates at approximately two year intervals with more extensive review and updates at five year intervals to ensure that it remains current and meets the needs of the County and its communities.

Chapter X which is the Implementation section of the Plan highlights about two dozen recommended actions to begin the process of implementing the Plan. These actions are considered high priority items for various reasons that are identified throughout the Plan. However, chapters V through IX contain detailed strategies, goals, objectives and numerous recommendations that should be considered for implementation in the future. These chapters also identify critical projects throughout the County that could be funded by the availability of recent Federal Stimulus monies and/or leveraged with other grant and funding opportunities at Federal, State, and local levels.

As projects are identified and undertaken and as funding mechanisms become known this information should be updated to maintain the usefulness and up-to-date status of the Comprehensive Plan. This is critical to an ongoing and successful planning process.

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