

SECTION 2.0

INTRODUCTION

In October of 2000, Genesee County drafted a Smart Growth Plan as a strategy for managing and controlling the extension of water services throughout the County. As a way of minimizing potential impacts this plan generally outlines what areas in the County would qualify to receive public water and the reasoning behind these decisions. Those areas that were designated to receive water are known as “Development Areas”, and were determined to meet a certain set of criteria. Examples of criteria that may make an area suitable as a Development Area include:

- Existing patterns of dense development,
- Zoning that permits higher density development,
- access to transportation networks,
- feasibility of extending water service, and
- minimal conflict with agricultural districts and State designated wetlands.

As set forth in the Smart Growth Plan, three key reasons for limiting potential connections to public water supply include:

- promoting the efficient use of land resources and infrastructure,
- encouraging revitalization of existing developed areas, and
- protecting prime agricultural soils and natural resources.

The Smart Growth Plan gives reasons for properly planning future hookups and establishes guidelines for implementing an approval process. This process calls for the creation of an administrative review committee by the County Legislature, to include representatives from various County agencies. This committee will then review requests for service connections on a case by case basis, using the criteria outlined in the Smart Growth Plan. The County Legislature may choose to delegate the authority of administering requests for service connections to the individual municipalities by entering into inter-municipal agreements. To be eligible to review requests for service connections a municipality must have a legally adopted comprehensive plan that is consistent with the principles of the Smart Growth Plan. Without such a plan, the community would not be able to review requests within their own municipal jurisdiction. In addition, by having an adopted comprehensive plan a municipality would also have a stronger position and founded reasoning for requesting revisions to Development Areas when the Smart Growth Plan is amended every two years.

For the above reasons, the Towns of Alabama, Oakfield, and the Village of Oakfield have collaborated to draft a Comprehensive Plan. None of these communities have undertaken any previous comprehensive planning efforts. Although the Smart Growth Plan and the ability to receive public water was the driving force behind the effort to create this document, there were other issues that warranted the preparation of the plan. This comprehensive plan is intended to set forth a strategy for addressing the important issues in each partnering community and for guiding future growth and development, protecting rural character and improving the quality of life. The three communities have designed this plan to acknowledge existing conditions in each community, to establish their vision for the future, and to outline how they intend to achieve their goals and objectives for managing growth.

2.1 Regional and Local Setting

The study area, which includes the Town of Alabama, the Town of Oakfield, and the Village of Oakfield, is situated directly north of the New York State Thruway (Interstate 90) in northwestern Genesee County. Located west of New York's Finger Lakes, the study area is uniquely situated at the crossroads of four counties, Erie, Niagara, Orleans, and Genesee (see Map 1). The three communities are approximately 25 miles east of Buffalo, 35 miles west of Rochester, 20 miles south of Lake Ontario, and 10 miles north of the City of Batavia. The surrounding communities include the Towns of Shelby and Barre to the north, the Town of Elba to the east, the Towns of Batavia and Pembroke to the south and the Towns of Newstead and Royalton to the west.

The population of the study area was reported at 5,084 persons in the 2000 Census, with the populations for the Town of Alabama, Town of Oakfield (excluding the Village), and Village of Oakfield being 1,881 persons, 1,398 persons, and 1,805 persons, respectively. These numbers actually show a 4.3 percent decrease in population for the study area over a ten-year period, with the largest decline evidenced in the Town of Alabama. The number of households in the three-community study area generally remained stable.

The study area is predominantly a rural/agricultural area, with small pockets of denser residential and commercial development located in hamlets and the Village Oakfield. The landscape is very typical of rural Western New York communities with the area being dominated by gently rolling hills, farm fields, pockets of woodlands, and rural homes. The rural landscape is interrupted only by the hamlets and Village where small stores, churches, and denser residential development can be found.

2.2 Reasons for Preparing a Comprehensive Plan

It is important for each community to have an effective comprehensive plan to guide future growth and development. New York State Law indicates that Town and Village planning, zoning, capital budgeting and other decisions should be based on a current comprehensive plan that represents the community's vision for its future. The goal of the comprehensive plan is to develop recommendations for future development in the Towns and Village, while recognizing each community's unique assets and considering impacts upon surrounding Towns. This Plan is intended to serve as a framework within which each community will be able to evaluate future land use and development issues. It examines the environmental, demographic, physical and development aspects of each community, and the regulatory setting that guides these factors. It addresses the issues and concerns specific to each community, based on citizen input from local residents through a variety of forums, including a community survey. The goals and objectives, recommendations and implementation actions included in this plan are designed to address each community's individual concerns, and reflect its unique and distinctive vision for its future. It is the intended that this plan be adopted by each of the three communities and become a blueprint for the region's growth into the 21st Century.

2.3 How the Plan Will be Utilized

In accordance with Section 272-a of Town and Section 7-722 of Village Law, Towns and Villages have the authority to undertake comprehensive planning and to adopt a plan to help promote the health, safety and general welfare, with due consideration given to the needs of the people of the region. The comprehensive plan is defined by these laws as such: A comprehensive plan consists of the materials, written and/or graphic,

including but not limited to maps, charts, studies, resolutions, reports and other descriptive material that identify the goals, objectives, principles, guidelines, policies, standards, devices and instruments for the immediate and long range protection, enhancement, growth and development of a municipality.

By law, (pursuant to Sections 272-a and 7-722) the adoption of a comprehensive plan has the following effect:

- a. All Town or Village land use regulations must be in accordance with a comprehensive plan adopted pursuant to §272-a.11.(a) or 7-722.11.(a).
- b. All plans for capital projects of another government agency on land included in the Town or Village comprehensive plan, adopted pursuant to Section 272-a or 7-722, shall take such plan into consideration.

Once adopted, the Town or Village should begin to implement the plan by amending its land use regulations to conform to the comprehensive plan, and consider the plan in all of its land use decisions (site plans, subdivisions, and zoning actions). Yearly, the municipality should utilize the plan in formulating its capital project plan and in helping to determine what projects and other implementation actions should be undertaken in the following year.

Copies of the adopted comprehensive plan must be filed with County and State agencies, and should be utilized by those agencies in planning projects and actions that could affect the planning community.